

# Learning Communities



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# What was the most significant learning experience you ever had?

- What were the circumstances that made it significant?
- What were the characteristics of this experience that made it significant?
- Write down your thoughts for reference later in this session!

# Session Learning Goals

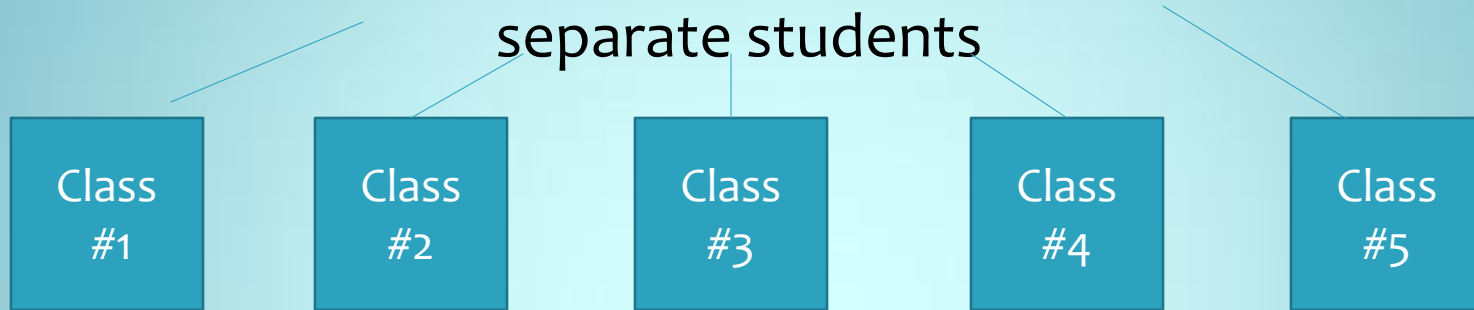
1. Discuss the **characteristics of Learning Communities** with a focus on linked Learning Communities – Palo Alto College's 2010/2011 Learning Communities Initiative
2. Discuss the **benefits of Learning Communities** for both students and faculty
3. Discuss High Impact Practices, their Outcomes, AAC&U Principles of Excellence, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Work Place Skills and how these relate to Learning Communities
4. **Listen to voices of experience** in the Alamo Colleges to get a sense of what has been tried in the past, a sense of the benefits, a sense of the challenges, and some tips for Teaching Learning Communities

# **Palo Alto College Learning Community Initiative 2010/2011**

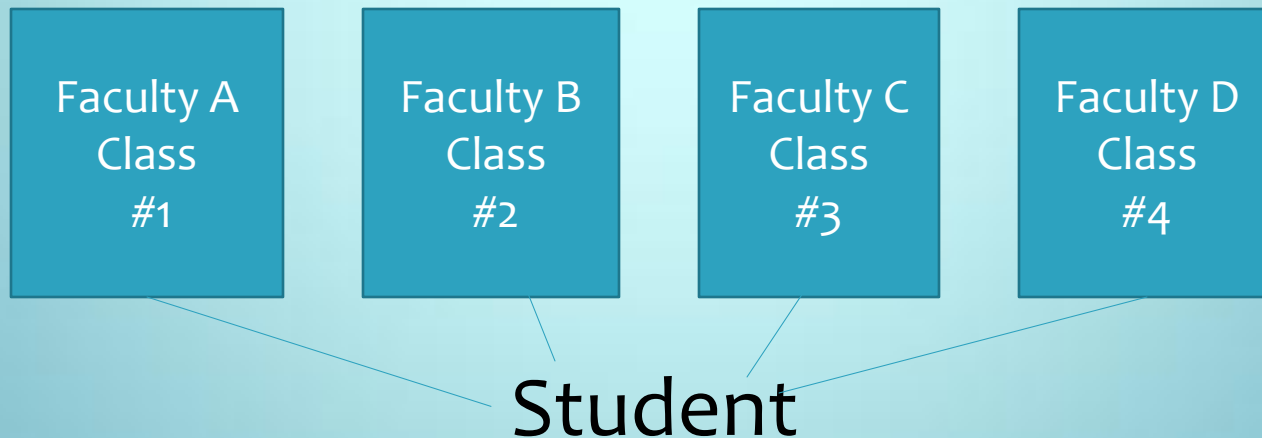
- Recruit 4 faculty teams Spring 2010 to teach “linked” learning community courses Fall 2010 and Spring 2011
- Support the faculty teams plan their linked learning community courses with a workshop/retreat June 4<sup>th</sup> and follow-up sessions Summer 2010, Fall 2010, and Spring 2011
- Compensate faculty for their time and efforts in planning and delivering the linked learning community courses \$2320 each (one time payment, Summer 2010 with the understanding that the linked courses will be taught Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 and faculty will participate in the workshop and all follow-up sessions).

# “Silo” Teaching/Learning Experiences

Faculty A teaches separate courses to separate students



and students experience their separate courses in unrelated fragments!



# What are Linked Learning Communities?

- An opportunity for students and faculty to **make connections!**
- Two courses linked (paired) – usually the classes are scheduled back-to-back
- The two courses emphasize **curricular connections and integration of ideas**
- The students' learning experiences foster **making connections** among the two disciplines

# What are Linked Learning Communities?

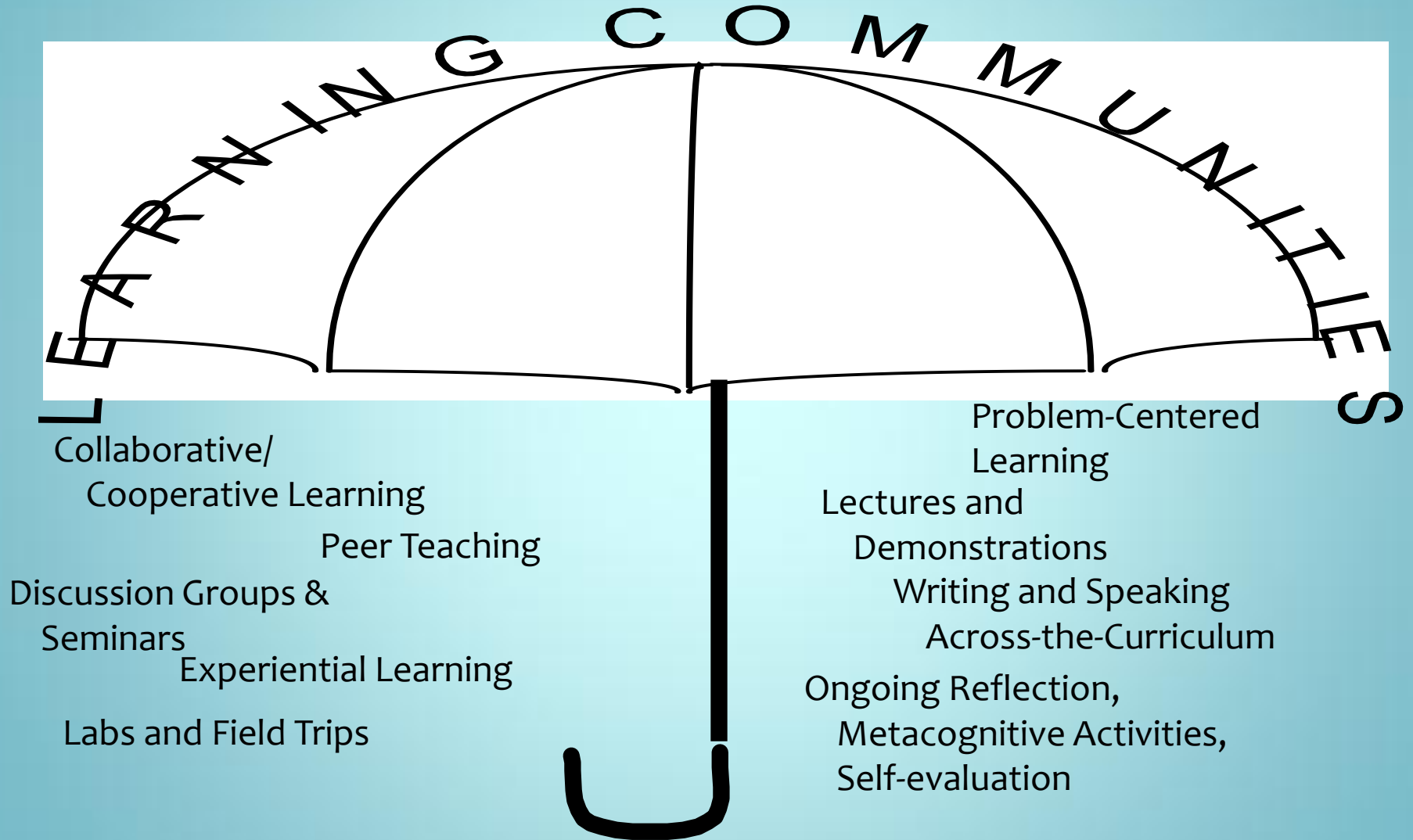
- Co-registration of students is encouraged, but not mandatory
- Faculty create some joint assignments, activities, projects, discussions, etc. and may 'guest lecture' in each others' courses in an effort to foster the integration of the two disciplines
- Students experience a rich learning environment!

# What are Linked Learning Communities?

- Faculty experience the benefits of enhanced intellectual interaction with a colleague!
- Often assignments and assessments are designed to build a community of learners among the students in both courses and the faculty
  - Group projects and presentations
  - Service Learning/Civic Engagement
  - Research



# Learning Communities Invite an Array of Pedagogical Approaches:



# Some Ideas for Potentially Effective Linked Learning Communities

- Biology/Composition
- Reading/Composition
- Composition/Interpersonal Communication
- World Religions/Sociology
- Math/Chemistry
- Math/Physics
- Art History/Western Civilization
- US History/Macroeconomics
- Psychology/Interpersonal Communication
- US History/American Literature
- Composition/Anthropology

# What are the Benefits of Learning Communities?

## Benefits for students:

- Students make **interdisciplinary connections**.
- Students experience **different view points and synthesize**
- Students **bond with other students** and make academic friends
- Students experience learning environments that **promote**
  - **Teamwork**
  - **Collaboration**
  - **Research**
  - **Experiential Learning/Active Learning**

# What are the Benefits of Learning Communities?

## Benefits for Faculty:

- Faculty are **stimulated intellectually** to make interdisciplinary connections. Learning communities create an opportunity for faculty to think about their discipline through a different lens.
- Faculty **create new supportive relationships** with colleagues.
- Faculty teams **grow pedagogically** as they try innovative learning experience approaches

# **This is all great, BUT...**

We tried this before and we had disappointing results!

Why won't this go away!!!

Father Guido Sarducci

# **Share Your Significant Learning Experiences!**

# **High Impact Practices**

## **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)**

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing intensive courses
- Collaborative assignments
- Undergraduate research
- Global learning/ study abroad
- Internships
- Capstone courses and projects

# High Impact Activities and Outcomes

Outcomes associated with High Impact Practices:

They enable students to...

- ... attend to **underlying meaning**
- ... **integrate and synthesize**
- ... **discern patterns**
- ... apply knowledge in **diverse situations**
- ... view issues from **multiple perspectives**
- ... make gains in skills, knowledge, practical competence , personal and **social development**



# AAC & U Principles of Excellence for Colleges and Universities

- Principle 3: **Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation**
  - Immerse students in analysis, discovery, problem solving, communication
- Principle 4: **Engage the Big Questions**
- Principle 5: **Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action**
- Principle 6: **Foster Civic, Intercultural, and Ethical Learning**
- Principle 7: **Assess Students' Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems**

# The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Work Place

## AAC&U Employer Survey Results

A majority of employers believe that colleges should place greater emphasis on a variety of learning outcomes developed through a liberal education, which include the following ...

- The ability to **communicate effectively, orally and in writing** (89%)
- **Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills** (81%)
- The ability to **analyze and solve complex problems** (75%)
- **Teamwork skills** and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings (71%)

# The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace

- The ability to **innovate and be creative** (70%)
- The ability to **locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources** (68%)
- Civic knowledge, civic participation, and **community engagement** (52%)
- The ability to **apply knowledge and skills** to real-world settings through internships or other **hands-on experiences** (79%)

# The Voices of Experience

Tell us about your Learning Community experience...

- What worked well?

# The Voices of Experience

- What were the challenges?

# The Voices of Experience

- Any tips to share?

# Learning Communities

... The nexus of High Impact Practices , Principles of Excellence, and the learning needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace! Let's start again together!

