



Introduction

Welcome to the Learning Community Manual!

Residential Learning Communities and Scholar Communities are designed to connect first year students who have a common major or interest and live together on the same part of a residence hall floor. Students participating in these programs take two to three courses together first semester of their freshman year. While living on the same part of the residence hall floor they have the opportunity to develop study groups and work with like-minded peers. The students also have unique opportunities to engage with the communities faculty sponsor outside of the classroom by attending campus events together, touring related organizations or businesses and traveling together as a community.

Residential Learning Communities and Scholar Communities are a joint effort sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Studies as well as University Housing. Each community is sponsored by a department or college. We hope that this manual can answer any question you have about our existing communities or help you to decide if you are interested in developing a new community. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact AnnMarie Williams.

AnnMarie Williams
Academic Learning Community Coordinator
402-472-0698
awilliams6@unl.edu

A Brief History of Learning Communities at UNL

Development of the current initiative began in the fall of 1998 when a Freshman Experience Task Force was assembled by the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Composed of 23 UNL faculty members, staff and students, the group met through the 1998-1999 academic year to examine the issue of retention, recruitment, quality of scholastic experience, and academic acculturation for first year students.

The group's work was characterized by three distinct phases; information, acquisition and assimilation, (including a visit from Dr. John Gardner of the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and the Student in Transition) the emergence of specific principles that would guide the work of the task force, and finally, three communities designed to focus on a specific dimension of the first year experience.

The following goals were established for learning communities at UNL:

“The primary goal of the University Learning Communities is to integrate the social and academic experience of students through the creation of small communities of faculty, staff and students in which all share an academic interest and participate in co-curricular activities and in which students intentionally co-enroll in at least two courses. The expectation is that these communities will enhance (a) the students’ academic achievement and retention, (b) their sense of belonging to the university, and (c) their connection of career or life goals to the educational experience.”

The report concluded:

“Each freshman community will have a structure that consists of: co-enrolled courses that meet degree requirements; a common focus which identifies the communities’ purpose; sponsorship by an academic unit, including an appropriate partnership with students affairs; co-curricular activities designed to integrate academic and social experience. Each community will function in a way consistent with the following: co-enrolled courses will be selected to further the goals of the community, co-curricular activities to involve students, faculty and staff, especially during weeks one through six, will be designed and implemented by a sponsorship team typically composed of a peer mentor-

faculty-staff; registration for co-enrolled courses will be handled centrally; recruitment will involve Admissions, Housing and sponsoring academic units.”

Staffing guidelines for the communities were designed as follows:

Admissions will assist in recruitment, Housing and General Studies will coordinate contracts and sign-up for the residential University Learning Communities; the Registrar will accommodate centralized pre-registration for co-enrolled courses; General Studies will coordinate community development and facilitate communication among communities; and sponsoring academic units, in partnership with student affairs will develop and implement the co-curricular activities.

With time and experience, the initial design of UNL’s learning communities has been modified. In 2002, the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator position was created, with the intent to strength the linkages between the Divisions of Academic Affairs and University Housing.

2008-2009 Learning and Scholar Communities

Community	Sponsoring Unit	Faculty Sponsor	Community Size
Biology	Biology Department	TBD	23
Business	College of Business Administration	D’Vee Buss & Bede Bolin	50
CEHS Advantage Scholars	College of Education and Human Sciences	Debra Mullen	30
Criminal Justice	College of Public Affairs & Community Service	Miriam DeLone & Gregory DeLone	23
Engineering	College of Engineering	Ray Moore & David Williams	70
EN Thompson International Scholars	University Honors Program	Patrice Berger & Linda Major	22
General Studies	Division of General Studies	Donald Gregorgy & Carrie Petr	46
Joint ROTC	Navy ROTC	Matt Lee	50
Justin Smith Morrill Scholars	College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	Ed Harvey	
Mass Media Perspectives	College of Journalism and Mass Communications	Scott Winter	23
Melvin W Jones Scholars	Office of Undergraduate Studies	Colleen Jones	30
Music	College of Fine and Performing Arts	Glenn Nierman	40
Natural Resources	School of Natural Resources	Sara Winn	3
Pre-Law Scholars	College of Law	Sarah Gloden	23
William H Thompson Scholars	Office of Undergraduate Studies	June Griffin & Cameya Ramirez	

For descriptions and information about co-enrolled courses for our 2008-2009 communities please refer to the attached Residential Learning Community Brochure.

Roles and Responsibilities

Faculty Sponsor/Advisory Board

Each community has a designated Faculty Sponsor or a possible Advisory Board. The Faculty Sponsor/Advisory Board is normally chosen by the department head of the academic unit that sponsors the community. This individual(s) usually will teach one of the co-enrolled courses and work with the Mentor to plan at least three events per semester.

Student Peer Mentor

The Mentor is a key person in the success of our programs. Mentors are generally sophomores or juniors who are former program participants. They live on the same floor as the current program participants and serve as a resource. Mentors will coordinate community events, facilitate study hours as needed, provide academic resources for the program participants, and serve as the primary contact for program participants. Mentors receive a cash stipend of \$650.00 per semester.

Resident Assistant

The Residential Assistants are expected to support the learning communities through programming with the mentors, providing peer-to-peer counseling, being academic role models, confronting policy violations, managing administrative tasks and paperwork, being responsive to health and safety needs, and attending learning community programs. Remuneration for this position is room and board and \$300.00 per semester

Residence Director

The Residence Directors assist with program recruitment, event coordination, and oversee the student staffing of the programs. The Residence Directors also perform the traditional tasks associated with being a hall director in a 500 student building such as; adjudicating conduct cases, personal counseling, night duty, departmental responsibilities, conference attendance, staff meetings, etc.

Academic Learning Communities Coordinator

The Academic Learning Communities Coordinator is responsible for working with the

Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Director of Housing, Associate Director of Residence Life, faculty sponsoring the communities, the Residence Directors, and the RA's and mentors who work directly with the students to see that each group has adequate information, resources, and support. S/he also coordinates recruitment, room assignments of program participants, and assists with co-enrollment issues.

Expectations of Sponsoring Academic Units and Faculty

Academic units decide how best to handle the sponsorship for their respective learning community. Prior to the start of the academic year, the unit head should contact the Academic Learning Community Coordinator, AnnMarie Williams with the learning community sponsor contact information for the upcoming academic year.

Faculty support and involvement are critical to the success of this initiative. Academic units agree to sponsor the community by appointing faculty/staff to work with the students, to offer one or more sections of the selected co-enrolled course, depending on community size, and to be in partnership with Residence Life for the development of co-curricular event planning at least twice each semester. It is recommended that:

The sponsoring faculty/staff should make contact with the community's student peer mentor(s) the week before classes begin to plan activities and establish mutual expectations.

Sponsoring faculty and staff are expected to attend a community specific opening event, generally held at the beginning of the fall semester. This will be the first opportunity students will have to meet the faculty they will be working with throughout the semester.

The academic unit and sponsoring faculty engage the learning community students in at least three co-curricular activities during the first semester. These should be academic in nature and should allow students to interact with faculty and other professionals from the discipline.

The sponsoring faculty/staff should submit to both the head of the academic unit and the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator a report at the conclusion of the academic year, that outlines activities of the community, learning outcome, and forms of measurement.

University Housing will support each Learning Community by hiring, training, and compensating a Student Peer Mentor(s). The Student Peer Mentor(s) must be at least a sophomore, have a cumulative GPA of 2.5 and be in the same academic program as the Learning Community; ideally past participation in the Learning Community is most desirable. The Student Peer Mentor(s) will:

- Maintain regular contact with the community's faculty to plan activities and establish mutual expectations.
- Offer learning community students referrals for developing study skills, time management, dealing with homesickness, etc.
- Attend activities offered by the sponsoring academic unit
- Keep in regular contact with the sponsoring faculty/staff advisor.
- Live on the assigned floor of the Learning Community.

Event Planning

The planning for events is a collaborative process involving the faculty sponsor, the mentor, the Residence Director, the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator, and of course the program participants. Each community is unique in how they handle event execution.

Normally, the ideas for programs are developed cooperatively by the Mentor and the Faculty Sponsor. Then the Mentor will then work with their Residence Director to plan event logistics. The Residence Director will work with the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator to pay for the event and arrange travel, if applicable.

Depending on the type of event, the Residence Director may or may not attend the actual event. He or she is also encouraged to communicate if attendance by his/her Assistant Director of Residence Life, Associate Director of Housing, Director of Housing, or Academic Learning Communities Coordinator is appropriate. At least one Housing professional staff member must attend community events that are outside of city limits.

Budget and Allocations

Each student pays a \$95.00 program fee to enroll in a community. The money is used to offset the cost of the program. For planning purposes the budget will be divided as follows:

Recruitment and welcoming materials	10.00
Communication with families	10.00
Administrative costs	25.00
Programming	50.00

Funding is held in an account in Student Organizations Financial Services (SOFS) office because the University Learning Communities are recognized student organization.

Accessing the funds can be accomplished in two ways:

Faculty or staff may spend their own money and provide receipts to the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator, who will work with the student organization treasurer to prepare the reimbursement.

Prior to the expenditure the purchaser can determine the exact amount of the purchase and work with the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator to have a check cut for that amount. Once the item is purchased the receipt must be returned to the Academic Learning Communities Coordinator so s/he can file it with the SOFS office.

Departments are also encouraged to seek outside sources of fund activities.

Formation or Dissolution of a Learning Community

Formation of a Learning Community

If an academic unit wishes to investigate forming a learning community, they are requested to contact AnnMarie Williams before proceeding with any plans. Learning Communities take careful thought and preparation. For proper recruitment, the Office of Admissions needs to have the information about the new learning communities by September 1, for recruitment for the following academic year. The Office of Admissions, Division of Housing and Enrollment Management Council will be notified of the unit's interest by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. It is particularly important for the field recruiters to know enough about each community to suggest what may, on the surface, not appear to be a good fit, but in fact be an excellent option.

The application process and materials are available at the end of the handbooks.

Dissolution of a Learning Community

The sponsoring academic unit has the right to dissolve an existing learning community but must provide the Dean of Undergraduate Studies with the decision to dissolve in writing by August 1 for the next academic year (for example, if an academic unit wishes to dissolve an existing learning community then the OUS needs to be notified by August 1, 2008 for AY 2009-10. The academic unit is expected to meet their responsibilities for AY 2007-08). The Office of Admissions, Division of Housing and Enrollment Management Council will be notified of the unit's decision by the Office of Undergraduate Studies.



<p>University of Nebraska-Lincoln Learning Community Application</p>

Date: _____

Proposed name of learning community: _____

Academic unit sponsoring community: _____

Faculty sponsor: _____

As you complete this application please keep in mind: The purpose of the University Learning Communities is to increase student success through connections between faculty, staff and students who share common career and academic interests, using the University as a context for nurturing both teaching and inquiry.

A. Focus of the community: The community must have an academic focus that may be linked to a specific discipline or to a variety of disciplines.

Learning outcomes:

Academic focus of the community:

Career development focus:

Interpersonal development focus:

B. Co-enrolled Courses: The community will take at least two courses together fall semester. These should be ES or IS courses that meet general requirements of the program, as our university transitions to ACE, the selected courses should meet ACE requirements. Most communities use an English composition course for one of these. The other should be a course related to the focus of the sponsoring unit. Communities are allowed to identify more than two courses and may also identify courses for co-enrollment during the spring semester as well.

Courses & Semester

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

C. Co-Curricular Activities:

The First Six Weeks

During the first six weeks of the semester faculty and residence life staff should promote integration into the University community. This is particularly important because research clearly shows this is the period when many students determine whether or not they will persist. Faculty and residence life staffs are encouraged to work together to plan an activity for each week. Note: neither group is expected to be at all activities.

Week One/Two:

Week Three/ Four:

Week Five/Six:

Fall Semester Activities:

Spring Semester Activities:

D. Recruitment:

University Housing will assist with the recruitment of each Learning Community by including program information at typical recruitment events, such as Red Letter Days, and the Learning Community Coordinator will work with the faculty sponsor to develop a plan to effectively market and recruit for the community. Please share the criteria you would be using for your community, such as area of study, ACT/SAT.

E. Letter of Support:

A letter of support for the development and sponsorship of this community should accompany the application from the chair of the sponsoring department and should be carbon copied to the Dean of the College.