

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY LEARNING COMMUNITIES BEST PRACTICES

Assessment

- Write up the mission and program outcomes of the learning community
- Think about how to incorporate meaning and purpose
- Create an assessment plan to organize your efforts throughout the year
- Survey students mid-semester to make improvements as the semester continues
- Talk about assessment practices and feedback on students' work, involvement, class participation
- Tell your story: How could you describe the impact of your learning community? Name your top questions: What are the problems facing the learning community? Does the leadership team review the overall program and its goals?*
- Send a survey to past students about advice and create a resource or include in a student panel
- Schedule student exit interviews
- Conduct focus groups to gain depth of insight into students' experiences*
- Make space to use the assessment information you gather by scheduling time twice a year to discuss the results*

*content provided by Dr. Kevin Saunders, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, Drake University

Career connections

- Plan a field trip that incorporates business tours and cultural events
- Invite industry mentors to help students feel more connected to the discipline
- Provide time for mock interviews
- Engage first-year students in discussions about short-term and long-term personal, academic, and career goals during one-on-one meetings with peer mentor, early in the semester
- Provide structure and organize activities for understanding career opportunities
- Have a professional guest speaker present at seminar class, either in person or virtually via Webex, Zoom, or other meeting platform
- Focus on résumés and internship development for LC students
- Create an assignment related to the Career Fair and encourage students to attend

- Facilitate a résumé writing night
- Discuss job opportunities in campus and in Ames community for students who may need to work during school
- Have students research a place they would like to work and identify how the company/organization demonstrates the tenets of ISU's Principles of Community on their websites whether through their mission statement, vision, values, professional opportunities, etc.; then have students present their findings and what the implications are for them as future potential job candidates

Community-Building

- Send an introductory letter to incoming students during the summer
- Create a community scavenger hunt kick-off to help incoming class learn about the CyRide bus system and Ames community
- Have an activity or event within the first two weeks of class, outside of class time, to break the ice (picnic, get together)
- Get to know all members of your learning community by name early and know some of their interests as well
- Take a photo of the large group together and share with the group to enable easier identification of the students
- Encourage Intramural teams and competitions between LCs
- Organize one-on-one meetings, and/or focus groups, to find out what types of activities are most interesting to students
- Build “chat room” time into class syllabus to enable students to discuss topics of interest (ex. “In my first 3 weeks of school so far, I ...”); some topics are predetermined while others are to be suggested by the students
- Engage in a “verbal tweet” where students each have 30 seconds to share a piece of information among large circle groups
- Use GroupMe, Microsoft Teams, or another platform to ask questions about the learning community; some LCs use group LC space while others divide into smaller sections developed by peer mentors
- Use social media for mentors and coordinators to communicate with students about upcoming activities, questions, and concerns
- Invite upper-class students to serve on Q&A panels
- Arrange “Tuesday night dinners” in the residence halls where students can use their own meal plans so there is low/no cost

- Create buttons for members of the LC that can be attached to backpacks to allow students to identify fellow students on campus
- Engage in free/inexpensive on-campus activities like programming through MU Student Engagement, the Workspace, Reiman Gardens, Cy-Bowl & Billiards, and ISU After Dark
- Encourage greater participation by hand-delivering invitations to events, send postcards, email, texts and social media reminders, and use post-it note reminders on doors in residence halls
- Hand-out “study bags,” treats plus handwritten note of encouragement for students

Curricular Connections

- Incorporate a seminar class that serves as the anchor for the learning community
- Seek routine feedback from students (what works, what doesn't, etc.)
- Tour facilities on and off campus
- Develop an English 150 or 250 link to create connections between students' major coursework and Written, Oral, Visual, and Electronic (WOVE) communication
- Discuss email etiquette
- Engage industry or alumni mentorship
- Attend a professional conference with the students
- Encourage students to think about their careers and select their own field trip activity
- Invite faculty or peer mentors to discuss upper-level coursework and how it connects to first- and second-year courses
- Collaborate with another learning community, utilize a common reading book and complete a related service-learning project together
- Involve first-year students in leadership roles as committee chairpersons for planning service-learning experiences
- Visit the studio courses and attend reviews for the students
- Assign student reflections/portfolios to assist students to move beyond technical knowledge acquisition
- Start a business together!

Faculty

- Have department faculty talk to learning teams about research

- Invite faculty to participate in learning community activities such as a trivia or board game night
- Involve faculty through creation of key assignments in other classes to be included in eportfolios
- Create a faculty panel composed of faculty who teach the larger lecture classes so students will be less intimidated when enrolling in those classes
- Schedule regular monthly luncheons where students and faculty introduce themselves, share something about their background including hometown or hobbies, as well as general and career interests
- Invite the college dean to talk to the students
- Arrange speakers to visit with the learning community, including teachers of clustered courses and industry professionals

Peer Mentors

- Ask mentors to deliver “welcome to campus” bags
- Have contact with your peer mentor weekly and make sure you clearly identify expectations
- Ask peer mentors to plan and present topical seminars
- Use peer mentors as classroom facilitators
- Have peer mentors organize mingle opportunities for the students
- Use a peer mentor coordinator
- Link mentor/mentee activities to a required course/hour each week and give mentors’ time to work with students w/in class every other week
- Hold an end-of-year retreat with current and newly-hired mentors to discuss program outcomes and plans for next year
- Have peer mentors host in-person or virtual study sessions via Webex, Zoom, or other meeting platform
- Engage peer mentors in the development of assessment surveys and discussion of results
- Give peer mentors 5-10 minutes of class time to chat with students about how class is going and listen to feedback
- Ask mentors to create journals with pages dedicated to individual student details such as a questionnaire that the students complete about their likes and dislikes

Best practices in peer mentor supervision:

- Begin the hiring process early

- Involve current mentors in the new mentor hiring process
- Identify university-wide training and professional development opportunities, as well as those specific to their work with your LC
- Meet with the mentors weekly to discuss how things are going
- Evaluate mentors around week six of each semester and provide timely feedback to make changes as needed
- Maintain a peer mentor resource manual or digital repository so new mentors can see what worked, what didn't work, and learn from previous mentors
- Utilize resources for student employee supervisors available through University Human Resources (<https://www.hr.iastate.edu/student-employees>)
- Incorporate Career Readiness Competencies into your peer mentor job description, training content, and individual meetings (<https://www.studentaffairs.iastate.edu/career-competencies>)
- Confirm fall hires prior to spring break and provide transition training with current and new mentors in April
- Provide an exit interview for each mentor as they transition out of the role