Saint Paul College

Using Learning Communities to Improve Student Persistence, Progression, Engagement, and Completion

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Introduction

For more than 100 years, Saint Paul College has been helping students succeed in high demand careers. In fact, in 2010 and 2013, Saint Paul College recently was ranked the number one community college in the nation by Washington Monthly magazine for student engagement in active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction and support for learning. The college offers forty-four associate degree programs, including the Associate in Arts degree, and seventy career certificate and diploma programs.

The campus is student-oriented, with support services that include academic support and free tutoring, computer labs, academic success services, transfer services, career services and access to free online job postings.

The Power of You scholarship program provides qualified students graduating from Minneapolis or St. Paul public schools the opportunity to attend Saint Paul College tuition-free.

Saint Paul College has a mission to provide education for employment…education for life. The strategic goals include: 1) being a comprehensive learning organization; 2) organizational innovation and development; 3) a service-centered environment for access, opportunity, and success; 4) organizational and community partnerships; and, 5) financial viability. The College's mission and goals are based on its values:

- **Excellence:** teaching and learning, career & transfer education, student-focused services, innovation, accessibility, and technology
- **Integrity:** honesty, accountability, decision-making, and climate responsiveness
- **Respect:** student-centered, cultural diversity/inclusiveness, human diversity, and collaboration

The vision of the College is to be a leader in providing comprehensive life-long learning through innovative and quality-focused strategies and services.

Project Overview

Our Luoma Action Learning Team was presented with the problem: Are learning communities, as they exist at Saint Paul College, a viable, sustainable and duplicable engagement and retention strategy? The charge of the team was to evaluate existing learning communities at Saint Paul College to determine if they, in fact, are increasing student persistence, progression, engagement and completion. We were asked to recommend ways to improve existing learning communities and provide recommendations on possible additional learning communities for Career and Technical Education programs, developmental education classes, and general education students,

with special consideration given to under-served and non-traditional students. We used several different methods for researching this information and working to find recommendations.

Common Definitions

We thought it best to offer some definitions of key terms that we will utilize throughout our report.   It's important to understand these definitions as they relate to our charge:

The following are some common definitions utilized by St. Paul College.

Persistence: Number of Students who persist from Major term to Major term (omit summer)

Progression: Students who maintain good academic standing: minimum 2.0 grade point average and 67% completion rate and who are making progress towards their intended goal (graduation or transfer)

Completion: How many students "graduate" and/or complete degree requirements and/or transfer

Engagement: Active participation of students in class related or campus related activities

Defining Learning Communities

Learning communities were identified as a High Impact Practice (HIP) in 2008 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in 2008. According to George Kuh, the author of the report, "High-Impact Educational Practices: What they are, Who has access to them, and Why they matter", HIPs share the following characteristics:

- They are effortful- demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks
- They help students build substantive relationships- demand that students interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters over extended periods of time
- They help students engage across differences- help students experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves
- They provide students with rich feedback- offer students frequent feedback about their performance
- They help students apply and test what they are learning in new situations- provide opportunities for students to see how what they are learning works in different settings, on and off campus
- They provide opportunities for students to reflect on the person they are becoming- deepen learning and brings one's values and beliefs into awareness

Kuh also shares the following about learning communities:

"The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/ or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning."

How institutions implement learning communities into their culture differs from institution to institution. Some prefer to focus on the curricular structures that make up learning communities while others prefer a broader approach that combines both curricular and co-curricular components.

The basic theory behind learning communities is that they give students the opportunity to build stronger support networks, both academically and socially. This is accomplished through the integration of course content, often coupled with access to extra support. The belief is that students who participate in learning communities will be more likely to pass their courses, persist from semester to semester, and complete degree requirements successfully to graduate.

Learning Communities in the Community College Setting

Recent studies have shown that only about a third of the students who enroll in community colleges hoping to earn a degree or credential achieve their goal within six years (Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd & Washington, 2012). For those who are not academically prepared for college and must take developmental, or remedial courses in reading, writing, or math, even fewer succeed. Many never pass all the required remedial courses and end up leaving school without a diploma or certificate.

Learning communities are a popular instructional retention strategy community colleges are implementing to help developmental education students overcome this barrier to finishing college. A standard model for developmental education learning communities includes placing small cohorts of students together in two or more thematically linked courses, including a developmental course, usually for one semester. The theory is that the relationships students form with each other and their instructors and the connections between their linked courses will enhance their engagement with school and their mastery of the subject matter, and that they will be more likely to complete their sequence of developmental courses, stay in college, and graduate.

Project Goals

The project goals were to determine if learning communities at Saint Paul College:

- increase student persistence
- increase student progression

- increase student engagement
- increase student completion

Once these items were identified, we were asked to recommend ways to improve existing learning communities and provide recommendations on possible additional learning communities for Career and Technical Education programs, developmental education classes, and general education students, with special consideration given to under-served and non-traditional students.

Approach

Our approach to this project was to conduct interviews, review various documents, and conduct some outside research to answer all of the questions and goals we were asked to determine by Saint Paul College.

Sponsor Interviews

We met with both the sponsor (Margie Tomsic) and advisor (Molly Bahneman) for this project at the beginning of this project during the Luoma Leadership Academy, via telephone, and one more time in February 2014. At the initial meeting, Tomsic and Bahneman went over their expectations and hopes for this project. Additionally, we were able to meet with Bahneman as a team on July 17 to begin the action learning process. We had previously brainstormed a list of questions and we were able to spend significant time engaging in our initial inquiry. Some key findings from this initial consult that provided direction in our project are as follows:

- Bahneman was part of the initial development and implementation of learning communities at St. Paul College. The primary purpose at the time was to help students' progress through developmental education at a faster pace and to develop a greater sense of community.
- Bahneman indicated that those who tested into developmental educations had an average reading score at the third grade level.
- She explained that initially the learning communities were established in coordination with the Power of You (POY) program. The Power of You program provides students with additional support such as specifically assigned academic success coordinators, and a mandatory orientation day. In addition to the support provided by the POY program, the learning communities for POY students included highly integrated curriculum with linked classes.
- Bahneman stated that when the learning communities were initially implemented, guiding documents had been created to aid in process, planning and implementation of new learning community initiatives. However, when non-POY learning communities were later launched, these documents were underutilized creating inconsistency in the process.

- Bahneman suggested that part of our group's work might include defining what types of learning communities the institution would most benefit from and creating standard definitions for persistence, engagement, progression and completion to enable strong and more consistent assessment of learning communities.
- She cited the following specific challenges:
  - Lack of perceived structure for how learning communities are developed, approved and implemented at St. Paul College.
  - Recommended that we consider whether a Learning Community Advisory Board might assist with providing guidance and greater oversight.
  - Challenges with registration process for learning communities and how they are coded/administered in ISRS
  - She indicated a perceived disconnect between ground-level work occurring with learning communities and outcomes written into President's work plan.
  - Stated need for standard process for utilizing best-practice strategies when designing and implementing learning communities.

We were able to meet with Bahneman again in February. Some key discussion points from this meeting are as follows:

- It is difficult to differentiate what aspects of the initial learning community model led to success: was it because of additional support provided by Power of You program or the learning community model, or a combination that led to initial success rates?
- If learning communities are to be implemented at scale, there is a need for administrative support to address needs related to marketing, administration, registration, etc.,
- Institution could benefit from implementing 2-year pilot for new learning communities that would include specific steps for pre-planning, planning, implementation and evaluation. If incentive structure is developed, it would make sense for faculty to receive incentives during planning and implementation phases. Evaluation would include a final report including assessment data to be utilized by decision-makers determining whether the proposed learning community has been of benefit to both students and institution and should continue to operate.

Outside Research

Century College

As part of our research, we conducted an interview with Kathy Matel, a faculty member in the Reading/Student Success department at Century College, who was instrumental in forming learning communities in the early 2000's. Matel began to initiate a learning community model at Century based on research indicating that the integration of skills was critical for faster gains and early college success, particularly for students who test into developmental courses.

Learning communities at Century College are largely single semester paired courses with interdisciplinary topics and themes. They do have a learning community coordinator who receives eight credits of release time per year (four per semester) to coordinate the learning communities. Matel stressed the importance of having a position dedicated to manage administrative tasks and coordinate between registration, departments and instructors.

They currently run an average of about forty learning communities a year, but they are not all the same. Some are paired courses while others offer integrated curriculum. The cost to run this program is extremely high. Each instructor who teaches in a learning community is compensated with a $250 stipend per course. They are now looking at some issues related to whether faculty who teach in paired courses should receive the same stipend as faculty who teach in LCOMs with fully integrated curriculum.

Initial data around completion, retention, and GPA indicated extremely positive results. In recent years however, data has approached more average levels. Matel indicated that they started to see their data fall off in 2008 when all students who tested into developmental reading were required to participate in an LCOM.

Matel believes the data reflects several changes that have occurred since the early years of LCOMs at Century:

1. A new Institutional Research Director at Century strongly questioned the efficacy of LCOM's based on national data, which in turn may have affected how the administration and faculty viewed LCOM's.
2. The cost to run LCOM's may have contributed to administration's position as well - Century runs approximately 40-45 LCOM's each year, at a significant cost to the college.
3. There has been a significant increase in students of color at Century (~38%), many of whom are Pell eligible (~50%) and are already considered an at-risk population.
4. As other initiatives become popular, there may be less support for LCOM's from administration and faculty. Many of these new initiatives do not lend themselves well to an LCOM structure.
5. LCOM's are just one tool for student success. More careful consideration of how and when to create LCOM's, and which students to target, should be considered.
6. LCOM's must have strong administration support, financial resources, strong faculty interest, and a paid coordinator.

Inver Hills Community College

Inver Hills Community College (IHCC) has been conducting LCOMs for many years. The former Provost, Joan Costello, was a strong advocate for LCOMs at IHCC, and under her direction, a strong program was developed. Under the auspices of a grant, a partnership was formed with Century College that involved the University of Minnesota Evaluation Center to conduct a multi-year study of the efficacy of LCOMs. They conducted research on how students

were engaging with the faculty and with one another, as well as average GPA of LCOM students and their completion and retention rates.

IHCC has also conducted multiple studies to determine the impact of various course pairings in LCOMs, comparing them to student performance in the same stand-alone courses. Most recently, IHCC has been attempting to tease out results about which students benefit most from participation in LCOMs.

The faculty working with the LCOMs in the past year worked extensively with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the IR Director to develop an ongoing evaluation plan for LCOMs, complete with metrics and targets. Additionally, student learning in paired courses will be assessed with the use of a VALUE rubric created by the AAC&U for assessment of integrated learning.

Additionally, all READ 090 (developmental reading) sections will be paired with INTS 1101 (College Success Strategies) in LCOMs to help move students through their developmental course sequence as well as exposing them to College-level work.

Faculty receive stipends for teaching LCOM courses, and release time is given to the faculty member(s) who administer the program.

Results have been similar to those seen by Century College in that early gains were seen, followed by a leveling off/dropping of results between groups. Recent research looking for trends indicate better term to term as well as fall to fall retention for nearly all groups.

Best Practices For Learning Communities

Learning communities (LCOMs) offer students at two-year and four-year colleges opportunities to succeed by offering academic and social supports. A learning community is intended to increase student retention, persistence, and completion rates. These goals are accomplished by having a cohort of students take a few courses together. These courses are often linked or have a common theme. The purpose of integrating subjects is to make content more meaningful to the students. Effective LCOMs have students actively interacting through conversations inside and outside of the classroom in cooperative groups with each other and their professors.

Recently, Lardner and Malnarich (2008) reported that learning communities are shifting towards where student need is greatest and critical transition points that occur during one's undergraduate training. For example, a learning community could be created to focus on a subset of students whose completion rates lag behind their peers. In addition, the mission and goals of the LCOM should be related to the institution's strategic plan.

According to a Research to Practice Brief (Rao, 2014) presented by the National College Transition Network, learning communities should include shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility. More specifically, LCOMs accomplish shared knowledge by having

information that is connected across courses. That is, one of the linked courses may have assignments and activities that apply the content cover in another one of the linked courses. Shared knowing occurs within an LCOM by arranging for increased student interactions. These interactions create a sense of belonging for the students participating in the LCOM. In theory, this sense of belonging will increase the likelihood the students will be successfully during their undergraduate training. Lastly, learning communities create shared responsibility across students by having them collaborate to complete assignments and other activities. In conjunction, these variables will increase the likelihood the students enrolled in the LCOM will receive the positive impact. That is, students will persist if learning is meaningful, deeply engaging, and relevant to their lives.

Findings

The culmination of our interviews, research and discussion suggests the following:

- One-semester learning communities can have long-term impact. Assessment results vary widely, but there are generally modest gains in overall credits earned by students who participate in a learning community and participation can boost graduation rates.
- Students who participate in these programs do generally feel a greater sense of engagement and develop a stronger support network amongst their cohort.
- Learning communities are very expensive to operate and require a great deal of administration support, thus making them very challenging to operate as a campus-wide effort.
- The most successful learning community programs operate at a very high level of curricular integration, making these programs particularly hard to establish and maintain without significant staff time and expense.
- If the goal is to improve outcomes for developmental education students, approaches far more comprehensive than a one-semester learning community may be required to see more dramatic changes in retention, persistence, etc.

Barriers

A difficulty for us in this project has been to identify what components of the Power of You program may have directly influenced the positive outcomes associated with the existing learning community model. We were led to ask several questions:

- Would learning communities exist at St. Paul College without the Power of You?
- Is it the current learning community model that is leading to the gains that have been seen through assessment or is it the Power of You?

The Power of You program provides additional support and resources that may not be duplicable

to scale. Further work must be done to identify which components of the Power of You program have the most impact on student success and once those are identified, which components can or should be extended to all first year students.

Things We Learned About Leadership

There are quite a few things we learned about leadership through this project. Those items include:

- Clearly set goals and objectives
- Manage time effectively
- Distance and varying schedules can make it difficult to reach objectives, but technology can be used to assist
- Ask questions continuously
- Action learning is very challenging

Action learning may have been the most challenging piece of this project. While we had great intentions to learn from asking questions and end each meeting with three summary questions (things we accomplished, things we learned, and additional action items), that only lasted for about one-half the year. The complications included people being absent from our calls, work not being completed (thus repeating action items that were from the last call), and the necessity to simply get closer to a finished project that didn't seem quite possible through asking questions.

Recommendations

All AA, AS, and AAS degree programs require Composition 1. In Composition 1, students learn writing and critical thinking skills that are important for all of the other classes they need to take. According to a survey of students enrolled in Composition 1 during spring of 2014, most students wait until they are well into their programs to take Composition 1. The Action Learning Team recommends that Saint Paul College encourages students to take Composition 1 early in their programs to improve their chances of success in their other courses.   Developing program-specific learning communities that pair Composition 1 with another course is one way to encourage students to attempt Composition 1 earlier in their studies. Such learning communities could have an additional advantage in improving overall retention: improving the passing rate for Composition 1. In a typical semester, over 40% of students fail Composition 1. A program-specific learning community that pairs Composition 1 with another course would add concrete relevance to Composition 1. Of the Composition 1 students surveyed during spring of 2014, over 70% of students do not consider Composition 1 to be very relevant.   Teaching students in a program-specific learning community, Composition 1 instructors could keep all course objectives intact while developing assignments and holding discussions that are relevant to the program. This relevance could improve the pass rate for Composition 1 by increasing student investment in Composition 1.

Unfortunately, developing a program-specific learning community that pairs Composition 1 with a program course is financially unviable in most cases. In short, the number of students who could participate in such a learning community would be too small. The best alternative is for Saint Paul College to develop division-specific learning communities. A division-specific learning community could pair Composition 1 with another general education course that all programs (within a specific division) require. In all divisions, a logical pairing with Composition 1 would be a speech course since all programs in all divisions require speech. Therefore, a Composition 1 and speech course pairing could possibly fill in most divisions. Additional learning community pairings could possibly fill in the Business, STEM, and Liberal Arts divisions. The information from Century College and Inver Hills Community College does support that learning communities work. The approach needs to be carefully planned out with specific operating procedures in place to both start and operate the communities. The college also needs to understand how learning communities fit into the overall strategic plan and how they might support the academic plan and/or mission.

Possible Pairings

Below are possible learning community pairings and enrollment analyses from Saint Paul College.

Service

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 274 students in the Service division took Composition 1 for an average of 46 students per semester. 47% of these students received a D or an F in the course. With close to 100 students taking Composition 1 in a year, a Service-division learning community that pairs ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with SPCH 1720 Interpersonal Communication could possibly fill once a year.

Computer Graphics and Visualization

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 47 students in the Computer Graphics and Visualization division took Composition 1 for an average of 8 students per semester. 44% of these students received a D or an F in the course. A Computer Graphics and Visualization division learning community could pair ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with any SPCH course; however, with so few students currently in the division, such a pairing would not fill. While a Computer Graphics and Visualization learning community would not fill, students working toward a Computer Graphics and Visualization AS Degree could join a learning community with Computer Science students. Computer Graphics and Visualization AS Degree students need to take eight DGIM or CSCI credits, and all Computer Science students need to take CSCI 1410 Computer Science and Information Systems, which is a four-credit course. Therefore, Computer Graphics and Visualization AS Degree students and Computer Science students could be part of a learning community that pairs ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with CSCI 1410 Computer Science

and Information Systems. About 70 students per year would be eligible for this learning community.

Health Science

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 501 students in the Health Science division took Composition 1 for an average of 83 students per semester. 36% of these students received a D or an F in the course. With over 80 students taking Composition 1 each semester, a Health Science-division learning community that pairs ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with SPCH 1720 Interpersonal Communication or SPCH 1710 Public Speaking could possibly fill every semester.

Trade and Technical

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 59 students in the Trade and Technical division took Composition 1 for an average of 10 students per semester. 58% of these students received a D or an F in the course. A Trade and Technical division learning community could pair ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with SPCH 1720 Interpersonal Communication; unfortunately, with so few AS and AAS students currently in the division, such a pairing would not fill. However, AS and AAS students in the Trade and Technical division would arguably benefit most from a learning community since Composition 1 passing rates are lowest for these students. Saint Paul College might want to consider offering a Trade and Technical learning community every other year. To do so would require careful planning and proactive counseling to students in the division.

Liberal Arts

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 1321 students pursuing an Associates in Arts degree took Composition 1 for an average of 220 students per semester. 40% of these students received a D or an F in the course. With over 200 students taking Composition 1 each semester, a number of Liberal Arts-division learning communities that pair ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with any SPCH course could possibly fill every semester.

STEM

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 193 students pursuing a STEM-related AS or AAS degree took Composition 1 for an average of 32 students per semester. 45% of these students received a D or an F in the course. With over 60 students taking Composition 1 each year, a STEM-division learning communities that pair ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with any SPCH course could possibly fill once a year. Of the 193 students pursuing a STEM-related AS or AAS degree, 168 students were in one of the Computer Science programs. 48% of these students received a D or an F in Composition 1. For this reason, Saint Paul College could consider creating a learning community specifically for Computer Science students. As an alternative to pairing Composition 1 with a Speech course, a Computer Science learning community could pair ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with CSCI 1410 Computer Science and Information Systems. As

mentioned above, students working toward a Computer Graphics and Visualization AS Degree could be part of this learning community.

Business

Between fall of 2010 and spring of 2013, 476 students in the Business division took Composition 1 for an average of 79 students per semester. 46% of these students received a D or an F in the course. With nearly 80 students taking Composition 1 each semester, a Business-division learning community that pairs ENGL 1711 Composition 1 with SPCH 1710 Public Speaking could possibly fill every semester.   As an alternative, since all programs in the business division require an Economics course, a Business division learning community could pair ENGL 1711 Composition 1 and ECON 1720 Macroeconomics OR ECON 1730 Microeconomics. Another alternative for a Business-division learning community is to pair Composition 1 with a course from the required business core. All programs in the Business division require the following courses: ACCT 1411 Principles of Accounting 1, BTEC 1445 Business Communications, BUSN 1410 Introduction to Business, BUSN 2470 Legal Environment of Business.   Any of these courses could be paired with Composition 1 to form a learning community.

Learning communities that pair Composition 1 with a division-specific course would inherently be focused on division-specific content. For example, a learning community that pairs Composition 1 with Principles of Accounting 1 would naturally focus on business-related content since the Composition 1 instructor would integrate his or her assignments with the Principles of Accounting 1 instructor's assignments.   As a result, business students in this learning community would find their Composition 1 assignments to be more relevant to their field of study.

Synopsis

As mentioned above, most divisions do not have the option to create such a learning community. The best alternative is to create a division-specific learning community that pairs Composition 1 with another general education course, and since all AA, AS, and AAS programs in every division require a speech course, the most logical pairing is with a speech course. To make these learning communities successful, investment by the divisions in the learning communities is imperative. Division representatives must be part of planning, implementing, and reviewing the learning communities. Furthermore, Composition 1 and speech instructors who teach in division-specific learning communities must be invested in the divisions. These instructors will need to attend division meetings and familiarize themselves with division-specific curriculum. Through cooperating with the divisions, Composition 1 and speech instructors will be able to create integrated assignments that are relevant to their students' fields of study.

Power of You learning communities have proven successful at Saint Paul College. To help division-specific learning communities succeed at Saint Paul College, Saint Paul College should

duplicate what it can. This would require a coordinator.

Learning communities are expensive to run and require a great deal of curricular integration and administration support. Furthermore, while existing data do show that learning communities help students succeed, the data do not explicitly prove the benefits in retention outweigh the costs. Therefore, the Action Learning Team suggests that Saint Paul College pilot division-specific learning communities in a single division to collect its own data. The Business or the Health Science division would be a logical choice since either division could support a learning community every semester, allowing Saint Paul College to collect more comprehensive data. Saint Paul College would need to pay attention to the persistence, progression, and completion of students in the learning communities and compare it to the persistence, progression, and completion of students in the same division who do not participate in a learning community.

To determine whether or not the financial benefits outweigh the financial costs, Saint Paul College should collect data from its pilot division for three learning community cohorts. Data for each learning community cohort should be collected for three semesters. If a learning community runs each fall and spring semester, this initial research will take five semesters. Below is an example schedule.

> Cohort 1 begins fall of 2015; data is compiled through fall of 2016
>
> Cohort 2 begins spring of 2016; data is compiled through spring of 2017
>
> Cohort 3 begins fall of 2016; data is compiled through fall of 2017

Comparing data from the learning community cohorts with the data from students who do not participate in learning communities will help Saint Paul College determine the number of students who are "saved" by participating in a learning community.

Once this number is determined, Saint Paul College can use the following simple formula to begin to determine if the financial benefits outweigh the financial costs.

> (Number of students "saved") (average tuition per term) (3) – total cost of pilot

A positive number would clearly suggest that a division-specific learning community is financially viable. However, a negative number would not necessarily suggest unviability. First of all, the simple formula does not take into account that a retained student is one who does not need to be recruited. Also, the simple formula considers only the students "saved" for all three semesters. Manipulating the formula to consider students who persist one or two extra semesters because of their learning community participation would elevate the financial benefit.

After the three-semester pilot, if Saint Paul College determines division-specific learning communities to be financially sustainable, additional learning communities should be added.

An Evaluation Plan for Learning Communities (LCOMs)

This working group was asked to determine the efficacy and the ROI on LCOMs at Saint Paul College. While there is data available on the performance of the students in the LCOMs, the program at Saint Paul College serves a largely underrepresented group of students who are receiving tuition assistance and additional services through the Power of You program. This makes comparisons to a control group more difficult, as the financial component of college attendance is not a factor. It might be assumed that the LCOM students are not working as many hours, which would theoretically allow them more time to study, leading to increased success as much as participation in an LCOM. Without the use of a regression analysis to tease out the effect of the LCOM alone, and the lack of access to raw data, it was determined that past results could not be used to determine efficacy. Therefore, we propose an evaluation plan for the future that would provide a comprehensive look at the LCOM results and provide data to inform decision-making.

Surveys:			Comparison/Benchmarking data	Cost
	CCSSE	Split results by Q8i (have you participated in an Organized Learning Community)	Compare LCOM students to rest of St. Paul College population, also to MnSCU and National cohorts on selected questions	Minimal – College is already mandated to administer CCSSE every two years.
	Evergreen	Administered to all students participating in LCOM courses	Gives local data as well as comparison data to their cohort group. IHCC may be willing to provide comparison data, also.	Low – about $200 per semester - administered online and they provide report
Institutional Data				
	Fall – Spring Retention		Compare retention rate to MnSCU cohort retention rate; split also by underrep, race, Pell, first-generation status	
	Fall – Fall retention		Compare retention rate to MnSCU cohort retention rate; split also by underrep, race, Pell, first-generation status	
	Success in LCOM courses		What is the success rate (A,B, C) for students in LCOM courses vs. general population?	

	Success in subsequent courses		If LCOM courses are pre-requisite courses for subsequent courses (dev ed?), how do the LCOM students do vs. those students who take the subsequent course without the LCOM?	
	Comparison of paired courses (LCOM) to stand-alone courses for success		If an LCOM course is also offered as a stand-alone course, how does student success compare between the two?	
	Benchmarking data		See if partnerships can be developed with other Community Colleges to use common metrics and/or instruments for comparison of results.	

Assessment of Student Learning in LCOMs

It is also the recommendation of this group that a plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes is created and implemented. The table below has recommendations based on the Evergreen Institute's Best Practices.

Task	Who
Articulate Student Learning Outcomes for LCOMs	Faculty involved with instruction in LCOMs
Identify methods of assessment (direct, indirect) and what the metrics for each method will be	Faculty with assistance from Institutional Research and/or Assessment coordinator
Identify schedule for collection of data related to assessment	Faculty with assistance from Institutional Research and/or Assessment coordinator
Identify where collected data will be held and person(s) responsible for creating assessment report	Faculty with assistance from Institutional Research and/or Assessment coordinator
Meet with all LCOM faculty at the beginning of each semester to discuss the assessment plan and provide training as necessary. (Calibrating to rubrics, for example, or entering data into a collection instrument)	Faculty with assistance from Institutional Research and/or Assessment coordinator
When report is completed each semester,	Faculty involved with instruction in LCOMs

| meet as a group to discuss results and determine what changes need to be made for upcoming semester to improve student learning. | |

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have determined learning communities, as they exist at Saint Paul College:

- are viable,
- are sustainable, and
- are duplicable if a similar structure and resources to the Power Of You program are allocated.

Additionally, the project goals were to determine if learning communities at Saint Paul College did the following:

- do/do not increase student persistence
- do/do not increase student progression
- do/do not increase student engagement
- do/do not increase student completion.

Unfortunately, Saint Paul College does not have the complete data required to be able to definitively answer whether this program does or does not increase persistence, progression, engagement, and completion. The plan we have presented would allow Saint Paul College to collect this data and determine the appropriate outcomes.

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