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The Founding of the Learning Communities Association

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The Founding of the Learning Communities Association

Abstract

Learning communities have reached the point in their growth that we now need a professional association to allow for more opportunities for participation in advancing learning communities. This is the story of the founding of the new Learning Communities Association.

Keywords

learning communities, professional association

Cover Page Footnote

I wish to thank all who worked to make the Learning Communities Association a reality.

The Founding

On November 13, 2015, in a small conference room deep inside the Westin Crown Center Hotel in Kansas City, MO, during the National Learning Communities Conference, learning community leaders held a summit meeting to discuss the desirability and feasibility of forming a learning communities professional association. During the summit, it was agreed that one was needed and the Learning Communities Association (LCA) was founded. This is the story behind the founding of the LCA.

Learning communities have a long history in higher education with well documented benefits for students and faculty. The Washington Center at the Evergreen State College; the National Learning Communities Conference, state Consortia in California, Illinois, Washington, and Texas; and regional consortia representing the Atlantic Center for Learning Communities, South Atlantic Learning Communities Consortium, and the Great Plains Learning Community Consortium are among the organizations that have worked to advance learning communities.

However, there is no national association for learning communities. During conversations at various conferences and meetings, this came up repeatedly. In particular, the absence of a professional association was lamented because there are no venues for individuals to get involved in advancing learning communities unless they happen to work in a state or region with a consortium. Additionally, many people working in learning communities lack sufficient institutional support, including access to resources necessary to attend the National Learning Communities Conference. Based on these concerns, representatives from the organizations listed above agreed to participate in the learning community summit described above.

Discussion at the summit focused on the possibility of forming some type of national association. The participants were unanimous that learning communities had arrived at a point where a national association was needed. It was noted that the association was not intended to replace any of the existing learning community supports or organizations. Rather, the goal was to create better synergy across different efforts and in particular, to expand participation opportunities. The attendees, now known as the Founders, agreed on the name, Learning Communities Association (LCA), and agreed they would spend the next year working to develop the LCA.

Over the next year the Founders, working as a Provisional LCA Council, created three task forces to work on 1) governance, 2) mission/purpose, and 3) communications. The governance structure and mission found on the webpage were developed by these task forces (www.lcassociation.org). The communication task force facilitated the work and investigated how best the LCA would address future communication issues.

After the initial work was completed, a nominations committee was formed to solicit nominations for the new LCA Council. The call for nominations was distributed on the Washington Center's listserv and the committee put forth a slate of nominees. The Provisional Council met on November 11, 2016, at the National Learning Communities Conference in Atlanta, GA to accept the nomination committee slate and complete business. On November 12, 2016, the LCA was formally introduced at a presentation for the attendees of the Learning Communities Conference, along with the founding officers and council.

The LCA Council has been busy working on the creation of the LCA website and membership recruitment. In addition, a committee is working on hosting the LCA's first professional development webinar. The initial webinars are expected to be offered in fall 2017. As well, the LCA is working on an official LCA definition of learning communities. The LCA seeks a definition that is precise and broad, so we have a clear definition of essential features, yet flexible enough to allow for the many different varieties of learning communities. We have an exciting future.

About the Learning Communities Association

Mission

The mission of the Learning Communities Association is to foster college student learning, success, and development through the production and dissemination of knowledge that informs learning community theories, policies, practices, programs, and professional development enacted by higher education faculty, staff, and administrators.

Purpose

The Learning Communities Association is committed to advancing college student learning, success, and development through networking, advocacy, research, and professional development within learning communities theory and practice.

Learning Communities Association Founders

Summit Invitees & Provisional Council

Carlos Huerta (facilitator), Cathy Bradford - Learning Communities Conference
Ana Torres-Bower, Elva Salinas - California Learning Communities Consortium
James Allen, Sarena Lee-Schott, Steven Day - Consortium for Illinois Learning Communities
Karen Weathermon - Washington Learning Communities Consortium
Emily Lardner - Washington Center
Jennifer Stephens, Laura Pipe - South Atlantic Learning Communities Consortium
Rita Sperry - Texas Learning Communities Consortium
Erin Small - Great Plains Learning Community Consortium
Pat Tooker - Atlantic Center for Learning Communities

2016 Nominations Committee

James Allen, College of DuPage
Karen Weathermon, Washington State University

Learning Communities Association Founding Council

President: Carlos Huerta, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
President-Elect: Janine Graziano, Kingsborough Community College
Secretary/Treasurer: Rita Sperry, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

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Jennifer Leptien, Iowa State University
Angela Rassmussen, Spokane Community College
Marissa Schlesinger, Guttman Community College

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Regional/State Consortia Commission: Erin Small, Briar Cliff University
National Learning Communities Conference: Darice Trout, Harper College
Honorary Past President: Emily Lardner, The Evergreen State College