Chapter 4

Teaching and Learning in Learning Communities

Most learning community advocates believe that there is much more to learning communities than simply organizing student cohorts so that groups of students take classes together and get to know each other better. Also at the core of the theory of change behind learning communities is the concept of curricular integration and a pedagogy that transforms instruction from passive, individual learning to active, collaborative learning. As Tinto puts it:

[Learning communities] change the manner in which students experience the curriculum and the way they are taught. Faculty have reorganized their syllabi and their classrooms to promote shared, collaborative learning experiences among students across the linked classrooms. This form of classroom organization requires students to work together and to become active, indeed responsible, for the learning of both group and classroom peers.¹

Tinto acknowledges that not all learning communities change the way learning occurs. Furthermore, practices that encourage collaborative learning can and do exist in classrooms outside as well as inside of learning communities. And yet, the structure of learning communities — back-to-back scheduling of two classes that share the same cohort of students — is a critical facilitating factor that may make such teaching more likely and more effective. A key goal of the demonstration was to foster a different approach to teaching that could take advantage of this structure.

In Chapter 2, a detailed discussion of the core elements of learning communities highlights how teaching and learning are expected to be different in learning communities. Put simply, if one were to walk into a class that is linked in a learning community, one would expect to see or hear different behaviors, on the part of both the teacher and the students. The teacher might make a few references to the other class in the link when giving a lecture or working with an individual student. Students in a whole-class discussion might debate a connection they see between their math class and their sociology class. The observer might notice that students are seated at small tables rather than theater-style seating and that they are working on a group project. If the observer picked up the syllabus from the class, she might see mention of an overarching theme that connects the two courses or a description of an assignment that is required in both classes. Or there may even be a single syllabus for both courses in the link.

¹Tinto (2008).
This chapter explores the challenges and strategies observed in all six colleges as they tried to bring more of these practices into their learning communities to transform the ways in which teaching and learning take place in the classroom. An important part of that story, however, was that, especially at the start of the demonstration, college leaders, coordinators, and faculty each had their own views about how or even whether teaching should change in learning communities. While some saw integrative teaching practices as a key goal, others were more focused on creating a sense of community and belonging for students. Most striking was the significant variation in how much emphasis this issue was given within each college, particularly among faculty.

To describe the instructional practices in use by the colleges, how much those practices varied, and how they changed over the course of the demonstration, the research team drew data primarily from on-site interviews with the coordinator, faculty, and students, as well as from a few brief, informal classroom observations. The experiences and perceptions collected from these interviews were not representative of all students and faculty. To supplement these qualitative data, selected results from a survey of faculty who were teaching in learning communities during the demonstration period are also reported.²

Finally, findings from an examination of syllabi that were collected from the learning communities in three colleges (Hillsborough Community College, Merced College, and Queensborough Community College) are reported.³ An explanation of how the syllabi were rated appears in Appendix B and is summarized briefly here. The research team examined each syllabus to note evidence of integrative practices and pedagogy that stressed active and collaborative learning. Evidence included mention of overarching themes, the term “learning communities,” mention of the other class, joint assignments or readings, and so on. Each reference was assigned a single point, and if both instructors in a learning community earned a point for the same practice, they were awarded a bonus point. Syllabi that showed more examples of these practices were given high ratings, and syllabi that exhibited fewer such practices were given lower ratings. Selected results from this analysis are reported throughout this chapter; the full results, as well as a complete list of indicators, appear in Appendix Table B.1.

Readers should also interpret these findings with caution. Some syllabi may not accurately reflect actual practice. For example, a learning community instructor who used a number of integrative practices may not have gotten around to changing the syllabus, and a faculty member who used few such practices may have put together a syllabus that showed more

²As of fall 2009, 162 learning community instructors across all six sites had responded to the survey. The results for select questions are given in Appendix Table A.2.
³Results from the analysis of the syllabi for the three remaining colleges are not yet complete and will be included in later reports.
practices than he or she actually used. Taken as a whole, however, this analysis is intended to provide another source of evidence that is particularly valuable when rigorous and comprehensive classroom observations were not an option.

Faculty Collaboration

The discussion in this chapter begins with the "prerequisite" for integrated practices: collaboration between faculty teaching pairs. If two faculty members who are paired up to teach in a learning community never or rarely meet to discuss how they plan to make those cross-disciplinary connections, then it is unlikely that the connections will be made at all. If they don’t meet regularly during the semester to check in with each other, the plans they do make to connect their courses may fall apart. The extent to which faculty pairs collaborated evolved and generally increased over the course of the demonstration.

Instructors and faculty at postsecondary institutions tend to do their jobs mostly alone. They may meet on occasion with other faculty at department meetings, faculty senate gatherings, or union meetings. They may even discuss curriculum, assessment, or pedagogy with other faculty. But doing so is not normally an essential or compensated part of their work.

In contrast, instructors in a learning community are not only expected to talk to each other, they are expected to meet often and at length to plan their learning community courses. Experienced faculty often spend many hours either before or during the semester collaborating on such decisions such as:

- Selecting an engaging and relevant theme and a name for their learning community, and ensuring that the name is displayed on course materials
- Coming up with shared grading system, attendance, or class participation policies
- Articulating common course goals and learning objectives
- Creating joint projects and assignments to encourage students to use content from both classes and think critically about their connections
- Determining whether or how much time each teacher should spend in the other’s classroom

Faculty pairs in learning communities are also expected to collaborate on noncurricular matters such as checking in with each other about individual student progress. This topic is addressed in Chapter 5.
The survey of faculty who had taught in learning communities showed that, by the third semester into the study, about 60 percent of those who responded reported that they met at least twice each term to discuss curriculum with other instructors. About half of the respondents agreed with the statement that “collaboration with other faculty on syllabi or course material was very important.” However, according to interviews conducted with faculty at each college, whether and how often faculty pairs met varied greatly, both within and across colleges. At the beginning of the demonstration, faculty collaboration tended to be minimal. In fact, a few pairs seemed to know little more than the name of their partner. But by the end of the first year, most instructors reported at least some form of communication with their partners.

Some of this variation was related to the challenge of scaling up the program relatively rapidly and the need to recruit faculty who had never taught in a learning community or in the specific links to be included in the program. Such faculty typically had limited knowledge of what it meant to teach in a learning community, including the expectation that they would need to meet with their partner. Others were recruited, or matched with their faculty partner, at the last minute, leaving no time to plan even if this expectation was communicated. For these faculty and others who may have felt pressed into service by their department chairs or other leaders, enthusiasm for teaching in the learning community was not particularly strong — at least initially. To make matters even more challenging, some novice faculty were paired with others as inexperienced as themselves in teaching learning communities. Finally, all six sites relied on part-time instructors (adjunct faculty) to teach the learning communities despite their relatively marginal connections with the college. The faculty survey indicates that about 42 percent of all the learning community instructors across all six colleges were adjuncts. Many adjuncts work or teach elsewhere and are only on campus during the time they are teaching. Even though many were as enthusiastic about the learning communities as full-time faculty, adjuncts (and their teaching partners) were often at a disadvantage when it came to collaboration because their time on campus was much more limited.

Some colleges already had access to a relatively large number of experienced, motivated faculty who were used to collaborating in pairs. The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), Kingsborough Community College, and Merced College had operated a relatively large number of learning communities prior to joining the demonstration, and therefore could take advantage of veteran learning community faculty and understood the expectations for collaboration. Kingsborough, for example, had run dozens of learning communities through its Opening Doors program for first-semester freshmen for several years before joining.

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5This question on the survey did not ask faculty to distinguish between faculty in general and their learning community partner in particular. For this reason, it is likely that some of the reported meetings were with faculty other than the partner.
the demonstration. Some of the faculty who were recruited to teach in the new career-focused learning communities had already taught in Opening Doors, or if they hadn't, they may have known other instructors who had. To help any faculty who were new to learning communities, Kingsborough’s paid faculty coordinator was available to meet regularly with pairs or individuals to review their plans and syllabus.

Kingsborough's approach to promoting faculty collaboration was among the most structured and well developed. Faculty pairs typically met during the six-week module prior to the start of the semester to come up with common learning objectives and to align their syllabi. If this process was done properly upfront, faculty found that they needed only quick “check-ups” throughout the semester to make sure everything was running smoothly. The most seasoned learning community faculty pairs were so accustomed to teaching in this way that they found they did not need to meet as often as the less experienced faculty.

Merced also had a relatively long history of operating learning communities and an established “culture of collaboration.” Most instructors were accustomed to working as a pair to plan, create joint assignments, and coordinate course calendars, and faculty who were getting involved with learning communities for the first time often learned about the practices expected of them from these veterans. Like Kingsborough faculty, Merced instructors invested time before the semester to plan and then needed to only “tweak” their course during the semester. Faculty pairs met at different times depending on personal preference, schedules, and experience, but all met at least once before the semester began to synchronize their syllabi. One seasoned faculty pair said that they would get together for one weekend of intense planning before the semester started, and then needed to meet only once or twice during the semester.

However, the overall trend at Merced is somewhat surprising given the relatively high level of faculty experience with learning communities. Learning communities had strong support among faculty before the demonstration began, and the program featured strong faculty collaboration, both between and across pairs, as well as a strong emphasis on integration and a tradition of professional community among faculty who taught in learning communities. This professional community, unfortunately, began to decline shortly before the beginning of the demonstration as some veteran learning community faculty relinquished leadership roles in order to devote more time to other college initiatives, funding for professional development was diminished, and the college as a whole suffered significant funding cuts and administrative turnover. Although some pairs continued to function very well together, there was less structure for newer pairs to develop their learning communities, and this may have led to uncertainty.

Opening Doors was MDRC's multisite demonstration to evaluate programs aimed at improving student achievement in community colleges. See Scrivener et al. (2008) for details on the program at Kingsborough.
about the need to spend time with each other to plan. On the whole, however, Merced faculty collaborated at a level that was among the highest in the demonstration.

As coordinators in the six colleges clarified their expectations that faculty pairs must get together and plan their learning communities, including requiring joint assignments and other activities, faculty pairs collaborated more. For example, during the first two semesters at Hillsborough Community College, the expectation that learning community faculty would offer an integrated curriculum may not have been clearly communicated, and the need for pairs to plan together was therefore less obvious. The result was that most faculty pairs spent little, if any, time collaborating with each other, which is reflected in the syllabi for the learning communities. In the first semester, only three points were awarded for syllabi that included integrated/shared assignments; by the third semester, the number grew to nine points (see Appendix Table B.1).

Even in sites with considerable experience running learning communities, variation in the amount of time that faculty pairs spent coordinating their courses was quite evident. At CCBC, for example, some instructors said that they knew they should be planning together — the college’s philosophy of learning communities and its emphasis on integrated learning and curricular coherence are stated clearly on the college Web site — but had difficulty finding time to meet with their partner. As the year progressed, however, program leaders clarified their expectations and began to require that faculty submit their syllabi for approval before receiving their stipends, a step taken to encourage more and better faculty collaboration.

Some faculty actively resisted collaborating because they did not fully embrace the idea of a learning community, at least initially. Math instructors at Queensborough Community College, for example, initially worried that if they did not focus exclusively on their own curriculum, more students would fail the math class, and failure rates were already alarmingly high. But over time some of this resistance began to fade as faculty warmed to the idea. This trend can be seen in the number of points awarded for referencing the theme of the learning community (Appendix Table B.1). In the first semester, no syllabi used by Queensborough faculty included mention of any themes, nor were themes reflected in assignments; by the fourth semester, a theme was mentioned seven times and reflected in assignments five times. On the whole, however, Queensborough faculty collaborated at a relatively low level compared with Kingsborough and Merced.

This gradual increase in collaboration at Queensborough exemplified the trend that was observed throughout the demonstration: At the start, during the rapid ramping up of the program, collaboration between faculty pairs tended to be somewhat weak. But by the end of the first year, even some of the most resistant faculty began to make time for closer collaboration with their partners and with other learning community faculty. As a long-time learning commu-
nity instructor from Merced put it, “I really think there’s a learning curve with learning communities and you really have to do the same learning community with the same partner a couple of semesters — at least two semesters, but hopefully more to really get it down.”

Moving Toward Curricular Integration

As faculty collaboration increased, more pairs began to adopt integrative practices, such as coordinating their course calendars so that similar topics were taught in the same week, and creating joint assignments. But even after one year of operation, the learning curve described by the Merced instructor above was still very much in evidence in all six colleges. Teaching an integrated curriculum is deeply challenging in any circumstance; in the context of scaling up a large program in a short period of time, changing pedagogical approaches in classrooms was particularly daunting.

At all six colleges, the coordinators were preoccupied at the beginning of the study with scheduling the links, training staff in study intake procedures such as random assignment, and marketing and filling the learning communities. Changing teaching strategies and pedagogy was given relatively low priority at first — particularly in colleges that were essentially new to learning communities and in learning communities taught by less experienced faculty. It was only after the programs began to stabilize that leaders’ and faculty’s attention could turn in earnest to this component, and most of the colleges began taking more steps to encourage faculty to use integrative practices.

The syllabi from the three colleges suggest that integrative practices increased at both Hillsborough and Queensborough, while at Merced, references to integrative practices declined slightly. References included mention of team teaching, synchronized assignments, integrative/shared assignments, assignments and reading that reflect the theme, and shared grading. The total number of references to integrative practices across all syllabi sets at Hillsborough increased from just 3 in the first semester to 33 in the third semester. At Queensborough, the number of practices also increased, from 2 in the first semester to 15 in the third semester. The number of integrative practices shown in the syllabi from Merced declined from 57 in the first semester to 45 in the third semester.

Across the six colleges, the general trend toward increased curricular integration can be understood as a reflection of increasing clarity around and commitment to the use of integrative practices; increasing participation of faculty in professional development opportunities provided by the college, often with support from demonstration funding and resources; and, in some cases, the use of incentives to further encourage faculty to adopt these practices. The colleges’ experiences using specific practices that are associated with curricular integration are discussed in more detail below.
Combining Calendars, Aligning Topics, and Synchronizing Reading Lists

Synchronizing topics and readings so that materials in both courses in the link were mutually reinforced was one of the easier changes in teaching strategies that faculty could undertake, partly because it could be done without much direct contact between partners. As can be seen in Appendix Table B.1, by the third semester of the colleges' participation in the demonstration, 10 points were awarded to syllabi at Hillsborough for referencing synchronized topics and readings, 9 points were given to Merced, and 5 points were given to Queensborough.

Seasoned faculty at Merced routinely prepared joint assignments and "combined assignment calendars" each semester — and at least one pair created a fully integrated, single syllabus for the two courses. "We have a combined syllabus, but we also have a combined assignment calendar so the students are seeing the connection between the two classes on a piece of paper," the English faculty member said. "We do this well in advance so our assignments often complement each other." But one veteran learning community instructor cautioned new faculty against trying to do too much too fast: "The calendar is not something I would recommend for a first-year learning community. But after you've taught it a while, and you know kind of what your plan is going to be ... all the assignments are on there week by week."

The story of one learning community at Hillsborough underscores the need for faculty pairs to spend time developing an integrated curriculum over several semesters. Two instructors began teaching in a learning community — a link between a developmental reading course and a student success course, like all learning communities in the demonstration at Hillsborough — with little attempt to link their syllabi or align topics. In the fall of 2007 the same group of students enrolled in their two courses, but it was as if these courses were stand-alones. In the following semester, one of the instructors teamed up with another partner, and the new pair began to collaborate in earnest. They met to combine their calendars, come up with a theme, and introduce more interactive instruction in their classes. By the third semester, the pair had completely merged their curriculum so that there was a single syllabus for the learning community with shared textbooks, fully integrated assignments, and many collaborative learning opportunities.

More typically, faculty tried to find informal ways to link their syllabus with that of their partner without spending a great deal of time actually meeting with the partner. For instance, they might try to schedule a certain lecture to occur the same week that the other instructor is teaching a related topic. At Houston, for example, one faculty member described how she thumbed through the textbook for the math course looking for ways she could align her lessons in the student success course with the math lessons.
Using Overarching Themes to Engage and Contextualize

Within one or two semesters, most of the coordinators had begun to promote the use of themes as a way to communicate the connection between the two courses. During the first semester, among the colleges whose syllabi were reviewed, themes were evident only at Merced. By the third semester, references to themes occurred 4 times in learning community syllabi at Hillsborough, 5 at Queensborough, and 16 at Merced.

Themes for learning communities are chosen intentionally to attract students’ attention, often by using a problem or experience that is common to many. One instructor at Hillsborough explained that she chose her theme “because it’s something that [the students] can see locally, that affects them.” Examples of themed learning communities in several of the colleges are:

- “Money Talks and Numbers Speak,” a math course linked with a speech communication course (Queensborough)
- “The Man Who Counted: A Collection of Mathematical Adventures,” a math course linked with English composition (Queensborough)
- “Write About Life, Learn How to Live,” a developmental English course linked with health (Merced)
- “Fast Food Nation,” a developmental English course linked with fitness (CCBC)
- A theme on censorship, linking developmental reading with a student success course (Hillsborough)
- A theme on immigration and diversity, linking developmental English with a student success course (Hillsborough)

Although many theme names were creative and compelling, only a handful of faculty took the next logical step: working the theme into the curriculum itself, in lectures, readings, or assignments. For this reason, students were often unaware that their learning community had a theme. But there were some notable exceptions.

For example, “Treating Families with HIV,” selected as a theme for the allied health link at Kingsborough, was infused into nearly everything the students learned and worked on in their link. One faculty member explained,

We design connections and that’s really important. We echo from one course to another. If one instructor talks about the immune system and HIV, then the other instructor talks about childhood stuff related to HIV. We each have a timetable
of what [the] other is teaching. We communicate. This is a big feature. We have face-to-face meetings every two weeks and e-mail and phone in between.

Similarly, a learning community in Merced that linked developmental math and English was themed around "ethno-mathematics" — the idea that different ethnicities have different relationships with numbers. Students read and wrote about different ways in which cultures approach numbers, and in the process, they learned mathematical concepts and formulas. As one math faculty member described it, "We're actually asking them to read something about Mayan mathematics — make a connection between writing about Mayan mathematics and the math class that they're taking — to change their relationship essentially to the core content."

**Joint Assignments and Project-Based Learning**

By the end of the first year of the demonstration, most colleges were encouraging faculty to experiment with joint assignments — homework or in-class work that required students to draw on material from both classes in the link.

For example, the coordinator at Queensborough encouraged faculty to develop several short-term joint assignments each semester (although these did not always show up in syllabi). In one learning community that linked Basic Math with Business Organization and Management, the students had to analyze how the price for a barrel of oil relates to its supply and demand. Faculty were also expected to develop at least two longer-term joint assignments. The following description of two linked, joint assignments comes from a sociology professor at Queensborough:

**Assignment 1**: The [math professor] and I took our students to the computer lab in the library. The [math] professor started off the class doing a review of the three types of graphs they were learning: scatter plots, bar graphs, and pie charts. I then put up [on] the smart board an Excel spreadsheet of the results of a social [science] survey I carried out with them the first day of class. We went over the responses from the survey. Then I showed the students how to organize the data in Excel, how to graph the three types of graphs, how to label the graphs, and how to calculate the percentages for the pie chart. The students then had to pick three variables and...create a scatter plot or a bar graph or a pie chart. They were then required to write a brief paragraph summarizing the results as depicted in the graphs.

**Assignment 2**: A visit to the Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side.... The math professor and I first collected U.S. census data showing the inflow of immigrants from the mid-nineteenth century until late in the twentieth century. For his part of the assignment, the students had to calculate the mode, mean, and median — topics covered in both of our classes — of European and Chinese immigrants from 1871 to 1930, the years of focus at the Tenement Museum. For me, the students took “field notes” as sociologists do when visiting a social
space, talking with people and observing how they live.... The students...have
to write up their field notes into a coherent piece of writing in paragraph form. In
it they have to discuss what they learned and found interesting about the immi-
grant experience in the Lower East Side.

Every learning community at Houston included at least one joint assignment, but some
pairs voluntarily included more. One instructor said that there were “six assignments where
information from GUST [college success courses] is delivered in math, and information from
math is delivered in GUST — just a little bit, but not too much.” Although Houston faculty
rarely met formally to plan integration, many faculty came up with other ways to link the
material on their own using techniques such as referring to the other class during a lecture or
asking students to reflect on the ways in which the content in the two classes was connected.

Integrative projects in which students worked together in teams on a long-term research
project that incorporated material from all of the classes in the link (sometimes called “project-
based learning”) were rare in the demonstration, even in the two colleges with the most expe-
rience with learning communities. The allied health link at Kingsborough again offers a strong
example of long-term, project-based, collaborative learning that pushed students to actively
search for connections, work in a team, and carry out a semester-long integrative research
project. For this project, students had to research two different occupations connected to the
treatment and care of people with AIDS in their psychology class. In the biology class, they
studied the effects of HIV/AIDS on the central nervous system. In the integrative seminar, they
learned research skills such as how to assess the credibility of resources on the Internet and how
to create a bibliography for their paper.

Student Reactions to Curricular Integration

As the discussion above illustrates, the level and kinds of curricular integration that
were observed at the sites varied widely, both across and within colleges. Interviews with
students in learning communities about their experience with integration tended to reflect this
variation.7 Many students who were interviewed in focus groups seemed to barely notice
integration. But when students did notice such efforts, they had opinions about how interesting
or helpful those efforts were — both positive and negative. Some were enthusiastic about
integration and some were less so, although the former outnumbered the latter, at least among
the students in the focus groups. One student at Queensborough described her experience when
assigned to read the book Zero, by Charles Seife, in her English class:

7Only a handful of students (no more than 50 at any college) were interviewed. Observations based on
student focus groups are illustrative only and not necessarily generalizable to the population of learning
community students.
After reading the book, you see math everywhere. It’s in nature. Something was there that I didn’t realize. At first I didn’t think I would need to know “x equals something.” I didn’t see that it applies everywhere, and now I do.

At CCBC, the student reaction was mixed. Students in one learning community reported that the connections helped them understand and retain information. They gave an example of studying the transatlantic slave trade in a history class and preparing a PowerPoint slide presentation in their reading class on the same topic. Other students, however, said that they failed to see the point of linking material in the classes and complained that hearing about the same subject over and over in their classes was boring. A student at Merced echoed this sentiment: “I thought the idea was great, but there’s no real definition to each class I’m taking. It’s just all the same thing. It’s just that these two are linked together.”

Another Merced student was disappointed that there was too little integration (despite the fact that team teaching, as described here, was relatively rare in the demonstration):

To me, both teachers don’t really sit in [on each other’s class]. There are not two instructors that help me — they’re not together all the time. They’re in there for 5 minutes or for 15 minutes. There’s no linked work. I got told stuff that I assumed was going to happen when I jumped into learning communities that wasn’t what it was told to be. It just really didn’t help me.

While the teaching and learning in the allied health link at Kingsborough, described above, represents one of the deepest and most comprehensive examples of integration observed in the demonstration, student reactions to the work were still mixed. In a focus group discussion, these and other learning community students had little to say about the integrated assignments and projects. When asked how they liked their learning communities and whether they would recommend them to a friend, one student said — and others agreed — that it “all depends on the teacher.”

Promoting Active, Collaborative Learning

If curricular integration is one hallmark of how teaching is expected to differ in learning communities, pedagogy that promotes active and collaborative learning is the second. One student at Kingsborough described her experience of this kind of learning:

The sense that each of us got from being academic learners is that we feel we can state our opinion freely with no judgments. There [are] no right or wrong answers that contribute [to] what we feel, and therefore [we] learn from each other. It encourages us to want to learn. The pace we learn at is very steady. The people remaining the same added to the learning environment. We help each other and in turn we help ourselves. In the end we are all active learners.
Learning community faculty across the colleges used a variety of practices that foster active, collaborative learning, such as avoiding “chalk and talk” lectures in favor of heavy use of group or team work, student or team presentations, peer evaluations, reflective writing, and whole-class discussions, as well as giving credit for participation and arranging field trips or other experiential learning opportunities.

Most faculty who were interviewed or who responded to the survey seemed to embrace the idea of instructional strategies that engaged students in active learning as well as shared learning. Of those faculty who responded to the survey, for example, 64 percent indicated that they “strongly disagree” with the statement that “students learn best from lectures.” About half “strongly agreed” that group work is an effective strategy for teaching. However, these active learning strategies were not exclusive to learning communities. Focus groups with faculty who were teaching stand-alone versions of the courses in the learning communities reported using similar practices.

The syllabi show that many learning communities included group work, class discussions, and work that asked the students to reflect on the material they were learning, particularly by the third semester (see Appendix Table B.1):

- 17 points were awarded to Hillsborough, 3 points to Queensborough, and 8 points to Merced for mentioning group work
- 21 points were given to Hillsborough, 8 points to Queensborough, and 18 points to Merced for mentioning class discussion
- 11 points were given to Hillsborough and Merced, and 2 points were awarded to Queensborough for mentioning assignments that asked students to reflect on their own work

As the syllabi analysis indicates, group work was a relatively common strategy in learning communities at all six colleges. At Kingsborough, group work was almost standard: tables and chairs were typically arranged to facilitate small group discussion, and when students walked into class, they automatically sat at a table with their team. Faculty stressed, however, that groups worked best when the total number of students who enrolled in the class was large enough (more than 20 students) to be divided into smaller groups of four to six. In one underenrolled class of 12 students, group work often fell apart when team members failed to show up for class.

Most students at Kingsborough and other colleges tended to talk positively about working in groups: “The intellectual benefits are you get other classmates’ opinions and views,” said one student. “We work in groups a lot and therefore we can work faster and get work done quickly.” However, a few students in several colleges complained about grading policies that
assigned a single grade to an entire team without taking into account differences in individual contributions and performance.

Some instructors at Houston who taught both learning communities and stand-alone classes reported that they liked to use group work in both settings. Collaborative learning is particularly popular for faculty who are teaching students in developmental classes. Sometimes faculty said they had learned how to teach this way in learning communities and then used the practice in their other classes; others said they had always used these strategies.

And yet, significant variation could be found in the use of these practices, even within each college. At one college, about one year after the demonstration began, researchers' observations of three learning community classes on the same day illustrated the wide variety of teaching styles that are used, ranging from lectures to highly interactive classroom discussions:

- One communications instructor had built a deep bond with his students and engaged them in active learning around social justice themes through role-playing. He asked thought-provoking questions and engaged many students in a lively class discussion.

- In another class, a well-prepared history professor mostly lectured during the class but engaged nearly all of the students in routine activities throughout the lecture, including reviewing notes, answering quiz questions, asking questions, and so forth.

- In the last classroom observation, an English instructor led students through a very routine group editing process on a sample text. The activity required little of the students; the energy in the room was low and few students appeared to be actively engaged.

**Conclusions**

This chapter examined the experience of the six colleges in the demonstration in implementing key components thought by proponents of the learning community model to be major agents of change in the classroom setting: faculty collaboration, integrative teaching practices, and pedagogy that promotes active, shared learning. The extent to which changes in the ways teaching and learning took place depended in large part on the degree to which program coordinators emphasized these key components in their expectations and responded to opportunities to train and support faculty, while at the same time coping with the challenges of scaling up the program.