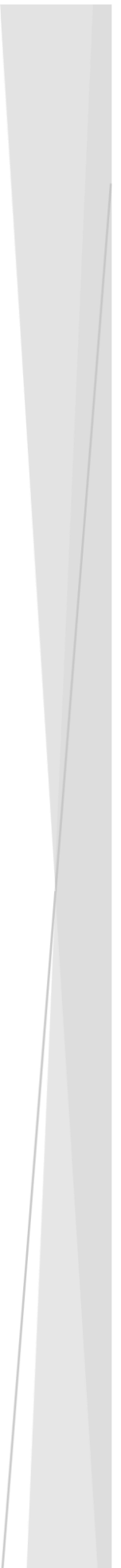


Academic
Initiative Review | LinC
Office for Curriculum and Assessment



Academic Initiative Review (AIR)

September, 2015

1. OVERVIEW OF AIR

Academic Initiatives at Valencia College are internally-led and systemically integrated. They are developed to impact student learning outside of the degree programs and disciplines and they are sustained at the college or campus level. The Academic Initiative Review (AIR) is an evaluative review process that was developed drawing on related research literature (Grayson, 2012) and prevalent tools in the field. Each year at least one initiative at the college undertakes an AIR in order to better understand the impact of the work and to inform decisions and plans being made college-wide.

The process was created with feedback from several of the directors of academic initiatives at the college within the area of Curriculum and Assessment. It was developed by Laura Blasi, Karen Borglum, and Robyn Brighton in response to initial ideas from Susan Ledlow. The draft was refined and improved in discussion with directors within Curriculum and Assessment. It was approved by the Learning Leadership Council (LLC) on Feb 4, 2015 to be piloted over the course of six months beginning in spring 2015 with an initial focus on the Learning in Community initiative (LinC).

2. INITIATIVE UNDER REVIEW

Learning Communities have been shown to be one of the “high impact” practices that contribute to student success (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2013). With Valencia’s Learning in Community (LinC) initiative, students enroll in two or more courses linked together. During the semester, the same cohort of students take both courses and experience an integrated curriculum. In most cases, LinCs are team taught by two instructors and a Success Coach visits periodically throughout the term. LinC is open to all students who are eligible to enroll in the courses being offered each term. The program components for LinC include: a certificate of completion from the LinC development course, prior to teaching a LinC, the same cohort of students in both courses, an integrated curriculum throughout the term, and a success coach. By

offering LinCs, the college hopes to develop effective and efficient pathways to learning, establish direct connections to learning support resources, and reduce the achievement gaps among groups of learners from diverse backgrounds. LinC is among the most well-established initiatives at the college, starting in 1996 and, since then, has been central to our work with Achieving the Dream (AtD) and Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) grants. Drawing from data gathered over the past 9 years and analyzed and discussed within the Academic Initiative Review (AIR) process, it is evident that LinC at Valencia College is aligned with nationally recognized core dimensions of learning communities (Roszkowski, 2013). The courses emphasize student engagement, active-learning pedagogy, and supplemental student support services.

This report will outline the strengths of the program and areas for improvement as identified by a core group of faculty and staff that gathered from spring to summer 2015 in an AIR data team. We

QUICK FACTS

~2006-2015~

- 389 LinC pairs
- 6,773 students
- \$199,272 annual budget
- \$486,786 tuition revenue

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include next steps for scaling up the work proposed in order to: (1) amplify the kinds of LinC offerings that are most effective and (2) meet the needs of special populations at the college. The college faces specific challenges that are described in this report and LinC is the solution to several of them. In conclusion, we offer a possible approach for strategically growing the program according to “areas of innovation.” The approach and areas were identified in data team work with a consultant from MDC, as we focused on research-based effective practices for scaling up programs that have been shown to support student success (Parcell, 2012).

3. EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

1. To what degree are we actually implementing the program components of the initiative?

- *Component 1#:* Same cohort of students in both courses – This component is fully implemented. LinC course requisite numbers (CRN) are linked in Banner at the course level before open registration begins for a given term. As a result, students are required to enroll in both courses that are offered in a LinC and each LinC has one cohort of students throughout the term.
- *Component #2:* Certificate of completion from the LinC development course - This component is partially implemented. Since the spring 2011 term, 69 faculty and Success Coaches have completed the course. Completion reports indicate that four faculty taught LinC without obtaining a certificate of completion from the LinC development course. When comparing two sections of a math course led by instructors without LinC training, the data team observed that in courses without the trained instructors the students were less likely to report that they learned more than they had expected ([Report 1](#)).
- *Component #3:* Integrated curriculum throughout the term - This component is partially implemented. Faculty participating in the LinC professional development course, *LinC: Integrating a High Impact Practice* develop three integrated lesson templates and a joint syllabus prior to teaching a LinC together. It is unknown to what degree faculty are implementing integrative lessons when they don't participate in the LinC development course.
- *Component #4:* Success Coach - This component is partially implemented. Since the fall 2012 term, only 40% of LinC offerings had a Success Coach. Some common reasons for not having a Success Coach include: faculty interest and cooperation, supervisor approval for staff to adjust their normal working hours, and late submission of schedule request forms to offer a LinC.

AIR ACTIVITIES

- 11 Data Team members
- Faculty survey (N=74)
- Student Focus group (N=24)
- SWOT: Success Coaches
- IR reports
- 2009 LinC report for AtD
- Dr. Byron McClenney and Dr. Theodore (Ted) Wright., AtD Leadership Coaches
- Abby Parcell, MDC consultant “More to Most: Scaling Up Effective Community College Practices”

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- *Component #5: Team Teaching* – Team teaching became an optional LinC component after SB1720 went into effect. Faculty who have team taught reported being comfortable co-teaching and adapting to one another’s teaching style. They felt that students were more likely to seek help from faculty in LinC, since they are with them for longer periods of time. Students reported that their LinC faculty were approachable, professional, and reliable. They enjoyed having them in classes together and for longer periods of time. Students felt more comfortable approaching faculty with questions in LinC than they did in their stand-alone courses ([Report 2](#)).
2. Do we have a shared understanding of the working theory, shared assumptions about the initiative, and purpose of the initiative?
 - Learning partners agree that students and faculty reported participating in LinC often state they have an easier time developing relationships with their peers in a cohort experience, resulting in a heightened connection and direction through college, which supports the working theory for LinC.
 3. How does this align with the priorities in the strategic goals?
 - The LinC initiative aims to increase students’ success and persistence through college and offering optimal learning environments for our students that need it most. More specifically, it addresses the following strategic goals:
 - i. Build Pathways: By designing effective and efficient pathways to learning and educational progress for students and implement optimal learning environments for students.
 - ii. Learning Assured: By establishing learning and learning support systems and techniques that will reduce achievement gaps among groups of learners from diverse backgrounds.
 - iii. Invest in Each Other: By strengthening Valencia’s collaborative culture through learning and leadership development opportunities in the effective use of collaborative approaches, and through regular review and evolution of our shared governance system.
 4. What students have been identified as most at-risk or in need of support at the college?
 - *Student who do not enroll twice in the first four terms or experience success in their first five courses* – Student success rates drop dramatically when they only pass four out of the first five courses they take ([Report 3](#)). As a result, students who are successful in any of their first five courses are more likely to graduate. In most cases, LinC success in courses that fall within the Front Door Alignment are higher than their non-LinC equivalent ([Report 4](#)).
 - *New students who are attending college for the first time* – “Student success is largely determined by a student’s experience during his or her first-year of college” (Upcraft, et al., 2005), Students enrolled in LinC reported having increased engagement with their faculty and peers, heightened motivation to learn, and less stress because their faculty worked together ([Report 2](#)).
 - *Students taking mathematics who have been identified as being in need of support (developmental)* – The 2015 Strategic Indicators Report found that 46% of students were successful in developmental mathematics from fall 2011 to summer 2013 ([Report 3](#)). LinC success in

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four out of five math courses was higher than its non-LinC equivalent. Including, MAC11015 (7.8%), MAT0018C (11.1%), MAT0028C (10.6%), and MAT1033C (5.3%) ([Report 4](#)).

- *Students who are among those that have shown declining rates of persistence, such as African American males* - Of the number of students who persist and graduate, African American males have the lowest rate of graduation ([Report 4](#)). According to [Report 5](#), African American males are 9.8% more likely to succeed in a LinC vs. non-LinC course.
5. What has been the impact on student learning and retention?
- Overall, students are 3.5% more successful in LinC vs. non-LinC courses. Among the top five highest enrolled LinC courses, SLS1122 (2,819), MAT0028C (1,246), MAT0018C (1,064), ENC1101 (849), and MAT1033C (826), LinC success is 7.8% higher in LinC vs. non-LinC courses ([Report 4](#)).
 - Students reported that they learned more than they expected in LinC, strengthened their ability to communicate, found the course challenging, and would recommend it to a friend ([Report 2](#)).
 - Students are less likely to withdraw from LinC because students indicate that they have special bonds with their peers and, as a result are more enthusiastic about going to class ([Report 2](#)). Also, students are required to withdraw from two courses rather than one, resulting in higher retention from the beginning to the end of each term. Students are 4.7% more likely to persist from one year to the next in LinC (Fall 2016 – Fall 2013) ([Report 7](#)). Performance data for LinC was assessed over a three year period and the average of the three years indicate that the net earnings from the additional students retained by LinC equals \$161, 502. Also, that 155% percent of initiative expenses were recouped by the additional students retained. The total expenses to run the initiative came to \$380 per FTE student for a net tuition revenue of \$486,756 from the additional students retained ([Report 8](#)).

4. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review looked at the individual program components for LinC in order to determine which variables contributed to student success and retention, in addition to their overall impact at the college. The team reviewed the measures of success and made the following recommendations:

- The college-wide faculty development course, “LinC: Integrating a High Impact Practice” addresses the need to maintain fidelity to a nationally recognized model in a decentralized structure. Faculty who complete the course can explain the theoretical basis for creating a LinC, develop a communication plan to improve their peer-to-peer collaboration, explore ways to integrate resources provided through Student Services and Learning Support, and integrate common elements of their LinC course. It’s recommended that all faculty obtain a certificate of completion from the LinC development course prior to teaching a LinC.
- Since the reorganization of Learning Support and the expansion of academic and student initiatives college-wide, it’s recommended that faculty teaching LinC be more intentional about infusing these services into their curriculum. Doing so will result in more student

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- access and direct connections of these services to course learning outcomes. A revised curriculum integration plan should be developed to include these components and completed by faculty in the LinC development course.
- Assigning Success Coaches to LinC pairs has been inconsistent across the college. Success reports show that there is no significant difference in student's ability to perform better when they are taking a LinC that has a Success Coach ([Report 9](#)). In student surveys, there was no indication that the Success Coach was neither beneficial nor detrimental to student learning. Making the Success Coach role optional can support the use of coaches, while allowing for flexibility. LinC offerings that include SLS1122 may not require a Success Coach, since Faculty Advisors embody the coaches' role.
 - Learning communities are increasingly being positioned to address problem areas in the curriculum, including "high-risk courses." An emerging trend across our nation is the development of on-line learning communities. Recommendations include identifying courses at Valencia where students are most at-risk and designing virtual learning communities around these courses. Online LinCs, particularly those that have paired developmental mathematics with Student Success, have been successful in the past and don't present the same scheduling conflicts as in-person LinCs.
 - LinC is regarded as a complex initiative and implementation can be challenging due to the number of factors involved. Coordination should be included at the campus and college-wide levels. Campus Deans of Learning Support can be influential when it comes to communication and planning efforts at their respected campuses (e.g. leadership team meeting).
 - LinC is effective at providing clear and efficient pathways through college. One way to ensure students complete the recommended listing of front door college-level courses is by offering LinC pairs, which align with AA and AS degree course requirements. Sequencing LinC pairs over the course of multiple terms may increase student persistence. Combining LinC pairs to create block scheduling, as show in the REACH model, is successful at getting more students through their first year of college. Using models like this to align courses to specific meta-majors can result in higher graduation rates.
 - The Director of Curriculum Initiatives and Campus Deans of Learning Support should collaborate to develop a marketing and strategic plan for building capacity in targeted "at-risk" areas. The plan should also communicate how LinC aligns with college-wide and campus-based goals.

5. CONCLUSION

Working within the Washington Center, a public service center at The Evergreen State College focused on the strategic use of learning communities, Emily Lardner (2014) has observed that learning communities are becoming "a strategy for implementing institutional change as well as a student success strategy" (p. 12). Based on prior documented success, an analysis of areas to improve, and relevant research in the field, the "areas of innovation" are poised to amplify the kinds of LinCs that are most successful while also serving special populations.

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The Director of Curriculum Initiatives and Campus Deans of Learning Support should develop strategies based on the recommendations provided in this report. A listing of these strategies should be presented at the next LLC meeting.

6. CONTRIBUTORS

Sponsors of this work:

- College President
- VP for Academic Affairs and Planning (Primus)

Internal stakeholders:

- Academic Affairs: Dr. Karen Borglum, Dr. Laura Blasi, and Robyn Brighton
- Academic Deans: Dr. Mike Bosley and Dr. Maryke Lee
- Deans of Learning Support: Dr. Leonard Bass, Dr. Karen Reilly, and Dr. Landon Shephard
- Faculty: Liz Earle and Valerie Woldman
- Staff: Larry Rosen and Michael Winters

External stakeholders:

- AtD Leadership Coaches: Dr. Byron McClenney and Dr. Theodore (Ted) Wright.
- MDC Program Manager: Abby Parcell

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8. EXAMPLES OF MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Percent Increase of Success in LinC vs. Non-LinC Courses (*Within limited range of front door credit courses*)

PSY2012	24.5%	(N=45)
ECO2013	12.4%	(N=94)
SPC1608	10.1%	(N=413)
SLS1122	9.1%	(N=2,819)
MAC1105	7.8%	(N=303)

Percent Successful of LinC Pairs (*Within the limited range of front door credit courses*)

SLS1122 + MAC1105	91%	(N=89)
ECO2013 + MAC1105	88%	(N=125)
SLS1122 + SPC1608	83%	(N=81)
ENC1101 + MAC1105	82%	(N=44)
ENC1101 + HUM1020	80%	(N=149)