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**Powerful Learning Communities**

*Powerful Learning Communities: A Guide to Developing Student, Faculty, and Professional Learning Communities to Improve Student Success and Organizational Effectiveness*

Oscar T. Lenning, Denise M. Hill MPA, JD, Kevin P. Saunders, Alisha Solan, Andria Stokes

Foreword by Vincent Tinto

**Reviews of the Book**

"The authors delineate various strategies institutions have employed to successfully implement learning communities and the types of commitments and partnerships that institutions, faculty, and staff have to make to see them fully implemented. In these and many other ways, Lenning and his colleagues have put into one place information and insights that we would otherwise have to glean from a wide range of resources, some more difficult to locate than others. All who are interested in developing learning communities owe them a debt of gratitude."

- *Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University*

“Oscar Lenning and his colleagues have produced a landmark scholarly and policy statement on effective learning communities. It should be read by every faculty member and administrator in postsecondary education who is concerned with maximizing the developmental potential of this powerful educational intervention for students.”

- *Ernest T. Pascarella, Professor and Mary Louise Petersen Chair in Higher Education, The University of Iowa*
"Powerful Learning Communities combines a comprehensive review of learning community structures and implementation with a consistent focus on maximizing student learning. The examination of many types of LCs across institutions reinforces the assertion that building institutional partnerships and systemically implementing LC principles are essential elements of transformative and sustainable change. The appendices provide excellent resources for the practical application of principles and research results presented in this book."

- **Anne Goodsell Love**, Associate Provost for Assessment, Wagner College

"Powerful Learning Communities is an important book that closes the gap between theory and practice. The unique, lively 'scenarios' included in every chapter tell the stories that make the research meaningful and relevant. The authors have organized an immense amount of material by anchoring current research findings in authentic academic situations that we can all recognize. This book will be a wonderful professional development resource for institutions looking to introduce or expand learning communities."

- **Nancy Shapiro**, University System of Maryland, and author of Creating Learning Communities and Sustaining Learning Communities

"Drawing on a 100-institution survey as well as their own experiences, the five authors have collaborated to create this well-organized, thorough guide. Anyone in higher education seeking to advocate for, create, or expand or refine the learning community approach at their institution will find here plenty of creative ideas and supportive data. Material is organized logically beginning with conceptual underpinnings, a typology of learning communities, and design and implementation in face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid settings. Subsequent coverage includes student success, legal and ethical issues, assessment guidelines, and potential pitfalls and how to deal with them. Lenning (emeritus, with a long list of affiliations from a long career) co-authored an earlier book The Powerful Potential of Learning Communities (1999) for which this work can be considered a sequel."

- **Book News, Inc.**
Information about the Authors

Oscar T. Lenning, PhD, is retired from academics and is now Director of Lenning Consulting Services. After 15 years of research, writing and consulting at ACT and NCHEMS—and 20 years as academic VP and dean at colleges in New York, Iowa and Oklahoma—he spent eight years leading development of innovative new programs at three different collegiate institutions. Author of 130+ professional publications, including 29 published books and monographs, his chapter on “Assessment and Evaluation” in 1981 and 1989 in Delworth and Hanson’s Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession became the standard for the student affairs profession in that area during the 1980s and much of the ‘90s.

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Publisher’s Overview of the Book & Table of Contents

Learning communities have been demonstrated to dramatically improve student outcomes by engaging students in their learning.

This book constitutes a comprehensive guide for readers who want a broad strategic view of learning communities, enabling them to identify which type of LC best meets the learning needs of their students, and the context and mission of their institution. It also provides the tools for planning, designing and implementing what the authors define as “powerful” LCs, and for understanding the assessment implications of their decisions.

The potential power of LCs is realized through effective facilitation, appropriate team-building activities, linkages, planning, and active collaboration that promotes learning of the group and the individual group members – all of which topics are covered in this volume.

This book is organized around the three themes of setting the stage, designing an LC, and building or enhancing a powerful LC, and covers three types of learning communities – student, professional (faculty, staff), and institutional LCs concerned with student learning – providing a range of tools and forms to facilitate planning. The authors also address designing and maintaining hybrid and virtual LCs.

This book is intended as a practical resource for anyone at any level in higher education who wants to champion, develop or redesign student or professional LCs, or even explore broader initiatives to develop their institution into a “learning organization”. Administrators in academic and student affairs will find guidance for setting appropriate policies and allocating resources.

The book may also serve as a textbook for graduate courses in institutional leadership and policy studies, curriculum and instruction, student affairs, or assessment/evaluation.

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What’s the Story?

Dr. Ram Singh teaches in the School of Law at Public State University. His department has received an interdisciplinary initiative grant. Dr. Singh reaches out to Dr. Eve Rose in the School of Medicine to coordinate an interdisciplinary event addressing health and ethics. Dr. Rose also introduces Dr. Singh to the head of the nursing program, and a business professor who specializes in health administration. The four of them organize a one-day symposium that is open to any students or faculty interested in law, medicine, pharmacology, nursing, and/or health administration.

At the conference, participants are divided into groups of three or four people. Each group is carefully designed to maximize diversity, especially across the different disciplines. Dr. Rose asks the participants to introduce themselves to their group one at a time. Individuals share their name, their major, and what first drew them to their major and/or the symposium. Then Dr. Singh presents each group with a complex ethical scenario and a set of questions that calls on expertise from each of the disciplines.

Discussion is lively. At the end of the symposium many participants still want to engage; some go out for food together to continue their discussions. On their way out, Dr. Singh and Dr. Rose overhear a medical student tell a law student, “Wow, I can’t believe how hard the law is. There is so much information to learn. I don’t know if I could do it.” The other student replies, “Are you kidding? You’re studying medicine. There is so much to learn about the body and disease, let alone practice medicine.”

Dr. Singh and Dr. Rose smile. They are pleased with this first symposium and can’t wait to see how they can improve it.

In what ways does this symposium represent an exemplary LC?
Powerful Learning Communities

Intelligence, it seems, is readiness for any human situation; it is the power, wherever one goes, of being able to see, in any set of circumstances, the best response which a human being can make to those circumstances.

—Meiklejohn (1932), p. 8

As alluded to in “History of LC Development” in Appendix G, available in the e-edition of this book and at www.styluspub.com/resrcs/other/PLC.pdf, Meiklejohn believes that deep learning and interdisciplinary connections occur best in a student learning community (SLC). Furthermore, he and his colleagues formed an effective professional learning community (PLC) to bring about such an SLC. Many view the Experimental College he and his associates established at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1927 to be the forerunner of today’s most effective learning organizations (LOs) in which everyone works together to help create optimal student success. Thus, Meiklejohn’s work in forming the Experimental College not only demonstrates the importance of SLCs, but also reminds us that a core part of every powerful SLC is the formation of efficient and effective PLCs and LOs to plan, implement, and maintain them.

This necessary interplay of SLCs, PLCs, and LOs is as true today as it was at the time of the Experimental College. This chapter examines more specifically current applications of SLCs, PLCs, and LOs in postsecondary education. It offers resources for design and development of each type of LC by (a) providing background; (b) presenting data from the 100-Institution Survey; (c) identifying exemplars—excellent models of practices, programs, and/or institutions; and (d) reporting suggestions for development from the LC literature.

Developing Powerful SLCs

As demonstrated in chapter 1, a multitude of SLC membership subtypes can be profitably used within any program, college, or university. In building SLCs, students can be configured into groups or cohorts according to any of the four SLC membership subtypes: curricular groups, student type, external (including residential), and course/class.

Students are likely to participate in multiple SLCs during their schooling and may even experience them concurrently. For example, a student could experience all four types simultaneously in the same term or semester by
enrolling in linked courses (curricular group); participating in a program for students from migrant worker families (student type); volunteering to tutor for a service-learning project (external); and taking part in within-class LC work, such as Jigsaw (course/class). This overlap is especially likely if the institution is functioning as a true and powerful LO. Some institutions or programs may actively structure SLCs that blend and combine SLC subtypes, such as when residential (external) SLCs are designed to coincide with curricular or student-type cohorts.

There is profound variety and interplay among and across SLC membership types. The following three sections use data from both the LC literature and the 100-Institution Survey to describe common, helpful, and/or stimulating applications of each of these SLC subtypes in more detail. The discussion provides exemplary models and suggestions to serve as inspiration, rather than offer an exhaustive list of how all SLCs ought to function.

The best LCs do not simply follow a formula used by others. Rather, most successful LCs draw on evidence-based best practices and models and then creatively tailor them—crafting, shaping, adapting, and modifying them—to optimally meet the unique needs of their particular goals, members/target populations, contexts, and institutional cultures.

A good example of such creativity that integrates not only across disparate disciplines in an effective manner but also across different types of institutions is provided by one of the authors. In the fall of 2011, Professor Denise Hill taught both the face-to-face Introduction to Health Law class at Drake University Law School and the online Legal and Ethical Issues in Healthcare course in the Master of Health Administration (MHA) program at Des Moines University. Both courses utilized SLC teams that were assigned for the term. Having a common instructor versed in LCs presented a unique opportunity to utilize SLCs to promote collaborative and integrative learning across courses, professions, and institutions.

The resulting “Partnership Projects” utilized a comprehensive health law scenario involving three clients (hospital administrator, physician, and patient). Each MHA SLC was assigned a client to role-play. A corresponding attorney was assigned to each Law SLC. There were general facts available to all participants and then clients each had individual “secret facts” only they knew.

Law SLCs conducted client intake by interviewing their assigned client teams and conducted discovery with other client SLC teams. The Law SLCs considered the case in light of facts learned, relevant laws, regulations, cases, and other relevant materials provided as part of the case (bylaws, medical
policies and procedures, credentialing reports, hospital board minutes, and contracts). The law student teams then drafted a legal memo outlining their legal recommendations for their client SLC. The client MHA SLCs reviewed the advice provided by their attorney teams and responded with a written ethical analysis of the recommendations, an explanation of what actions the client would ultimately take, and other changes the client should make to avoid future liability. The project was repeated the following term using both online and face-to-face MHA courses.

Student feedback regarding the partnership projects was very positive. It indicated that the projects provided a better understanding of the role of attorneys and clients, how to work effectively together, how the experience supported course learning objectives, and how in most cases it enhanced the overall SLC team relationships for the term.

Relevant 100-Institution Survey Revelations
The 100-Institution Survey had three items specifically on development/characteristics of their SLCs: (a) Why and how did your institution create student LCs? (b) What do you consider to be unique or innovative about your student LCs? and (c) What do you think are the most important aspects of your student LCs, that is, what makes them effective/powerful?

The “why and how” question elicited data that were interesting—for example, generally LCs were developed in order to increase student retention, academic success, engagement, and deeper learning—but not that useful in practical terms, so they are not summarized here. Initially, our intent had been to relate data provided by all three questions to pertinent information about each institution’s LCs from the institution’s website. However, information on LC web pages often was not definitive enough, whereas in other cases it was very descriptive and definitive. (In several cases, no mention of LCs could be found on the institutional website, which might indicate that some institutions no longer have any formal SLCs.) Institutional website addresses, separately for SLCs and for PLCs, are provided in Appendix L, which is available in the e-edition of this book and at www.styluspub.com/resrscs/other/PLC.pdf for readers who would like to make their own judgments.

Regarding the questions on uniqueness/innovation and effectiveness, we have organized the factors identified in the responses into broad thematic categories, as summarized in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. Some responses addressed multiple factors and thus fit into more than one category. The intent behind categorizing the uniqueness/innovation identified by each institution was
### TABLE 5.1
In what ways are your SLCs unique or innovative?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Reported as Unique or Innovative</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Remarkable emphasis on curricular integration/interdisciplinary courses</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Faculty-driven, unparalleled full-time faculty commitment to LCs</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Assessment-driven, unique commitment to data making a difference</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Major focus on learning from experiences in the surrounding community</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SLCs with a special targeted focus or for a particular student group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Emphasis on blending academic affairs and student affairs SLC efforts</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Especially active peer and faculty mentoring within SLCs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Requiring participation in SLCs in order to register and/or graduate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Students/participating faculty involved beyond the freshman year</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Enhanced counselor involvement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The variety of LC models and types of SLCs creatively used</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Focus on student research, creating knowledge, creative investigation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Grouped by majors or themes in a creative way</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Intensive outreach focus to inform about SLCs and/or bring people in</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Special training provided to LC coordinators and participating faculty</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Factors that were each mentioned by only one person as being unique</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey respondents who did not respond to this question

| Total respondents to the 100-Institution Survey                                                       | 81        | 100%       |
not to diminish the authenticity of such uniqueness/innovation. Rather, these categories can serve as inspiration; they represent areas of exploration that stimulate one’s own innovations.

Regarding Table 5.1 here and Figure E.1 in Appendix E, which provides more detail, 15 different factors pertaining to innovation or uniqueness were identified by multiple respondents. It seems clear that almost every institution was successful in depicting its SLCs as meaningfully unique or innovative in some way. One indication of this was that it proved difficult to categorize the responses. Even within the 23 institutional responses that were assigned to the first factor of integration/interdisciplinary, there was remarkable diversity, and differences within that category were meaningful.

After the classification process was completed, 53 distinctive factors mentioned by only one respondent remained. See a list of those factors at the end of Figure E.1.
Respondents appear to have had an easier time identifying factors that contribute to creating a powerful and effective LC. As can be seen in Table 5.2 and Figure E.2, nine primary factors were emphasized by multiple respondents regarding effectiveness. (This time after the classification process was completed, 43 distinct factors mentioned by only one respondent as contributing to LCs being effective/powerful remained; see the end of Figure E.2.)

With the exception of the “strategic trained peer involvement” component of Factor 3 in Table 5.2, the nine primary factors said to be related to whether an LC is effective/powerful are emphasized throughout this text; most are specifically discussed within meaningful contexts in chapters 3–5.

Given that the strategic trained peer involvement component of Factor 3 in Table 5.2 may be less clear-cut to readers and is not emphasized elsewhere, we briefly discuss it here. Faculty involved in the most powerful SLCs are oriented about effective facilitation and are committed to working well together on integrating across courses and disciplines. However, a number of the most effective LC programs also utilize well-trained student mentors. These student mentors are often past SLC participants and are excited about contributing to the success of the SLC. Some institutions—such as Brigham Young University (BYU); Eastern New Mexico University; Iowa State University (ISU), which pays its student mentors; and Pace University—have gone so far as to require that every formal SLC have an assigned student mentor.

At BYU and elsewhere, SLC faculty and student mentors have seen positive results in actively seeking out and developing academic relationships with LC members. BYU has also experimented with requiring the participation of all first-year students in one or more “mentored courses” and placing a registration hold on those students who do not have such “bundled” courses on their schedule. Other institutions have also experienced positive results through requiring first-year students to participate in LCs, but student participation in the most highly rated LCs has generally been voluntary; what is needed depends on the particular institution.

As described at http://cms.cerritos.edu/lcp, the LC program at Cerritos College has a program coordinator who oversees student development and success. The program coordinator promotes and encourages participation in success workshops, face-to-face counseling, and/or online counseling to help participating students integrate into the college culture and learn how to work in a collaborative environment as a valued member of a team. In other
words, the coordinator emphasizes well-designed and ongoing student outcomes assessment, personal attention, and community interaction processes effective in stimulating active, integrative, deep, and reflective learning.

**Exemplary SLCs of Different Types and Pertinent Suggestions**

Sixteen institutions were mentioned by multiple survey respondents (not including themselves) as having exemplary SLCs: Ball State University, Dallas County Community College, Delta College, Evergreen State College, Iowa State University, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Miami University of Ohio, Seattle Central Community College, Skagit Valley Community College, Syracuse University, University of Maryland, University of Missouri, University of South Carolina, Valencia Community College, and Wagner College. Thirty-two other institutions were each mentioned by one respondent at a different institution as having exemplary SLCs. For any reader desiring to learn about the SLCs at a particular institution, a listing of websites with information about the SLCs is provided in Appendix L (available in the e-edition of this book and at www.styluspub.com/resrcs/other/PLC.pdf) for all institutions invited to participate in the survey.

Additional information for SLCs from the 100-Institution Survey participants may also be helpful to other practitioners. Appendix M (available in the e-edition of this book and at www.styluspub.com/resrcs/other/PLC.pdf) contains examples of different types of learning community support materials that were either identified or submitted by participants in the survey as materials they believed would be helpful to other institutions. It should be noted, however, as mentioned in the introduction to that appendix, we did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of any of those materials using the guidelines/criteria presented in our book.

The following sections discuss different primary types of SLCs. For each type we identify particular institutions that we feel are exemplary in some respect, based on our survey responses, institutional website information, and the LC literature.

**Curricular Cohorts**

Most early SLCs were created to provide the students with a way to connect socially. Student services usually created these early SLCs. Later research, such as that of A. L. Brown and Campione (1996), started to examine content and curriculum and how SLCs could enhance student learning. Brown
and Campione’s SLC model was titled “Fostering a Community of Learners” (FCL). A developmental perspective helps student learning both horizontally (within the stated curricula) and vertically (across disciplines). FCL’s concentration is promotion of diversity in talents and interests within an identified content area. Most learning within this community happens cyclically based on identified themes.

Lampert, Rittenhouse, and Crumbaugh (1996) concentrate on deep inquiry learning within their structure of SLCs. This type of SLC presents a problem within the content of the course to the entire student body. Students are given approximately 20 minutes to work individually on creating a probable solution. Next, students participate in a discussion presenting ideas or models to resolve the problems posed. The intent is to increase student ability to propose sound arguments using common course language and methods. Lampert et al. follow in-class discussions and note important content or methods suggested by students. When appropriate, they add to the classroom discourse to support deeper learning.

Visher, Schneider, Wathington, and Collado (2010) identified integrative instructional practices to increase student learning. In a review of three community colleges, they identified synchronized topics and assignments, shared assignments, team teaching, and thematic instruction. Each structure provides the instructor new roles in classroom and instructional configuration.

We have selected several institutions that represent exemplary models of SLCs organized around curricular cohorts, each of which is described next.

- **Hillsborough Community College.** This college links a developmental reading course with a student success course, as shown in Figure 5.1. Synchronized topics and assigned readings help to make intentional connections between disciplines. This venue requires a

![Figure 5.1](image-url)
combined syllabus and assignment calendar to aid students in identification of common vocabulary, similar or opposing use of terminology, and transfer of information.

The intent of this community college is to share textbooks, assignments, and cross-departmental learning sessions (Visher et al., 2010) in each community. The design of the SLC aids in transfer of knowledge within the major and success courses as students increase reading skills. Although the recommendation to take developmental and student success courses occurred concurrently, the data show that students made few connections between the courses initially. The connections allow students to use information presented in both classes and function at a higher level of cognition. A reorganization of curricula to incorporate shared texts and assignments led to increased student understanding and transfer of knowledge.

- **Merced Community College (MCC).** The aforementioned synchronized assignments are not the only curricular consideration used by community colleges. MCC uses thematic connections in the development of its SLCs. Figure 5.2 identifies possibilities for linked courses to enhance learning connections (Tinto, 1995). The emphasis in this California-based community college is to create different SLCs that have unique themes and with parallel syllabi (Visher et al., 2010). This LC structure reveals intentional design to help students experience transfer of information between core course work.

One thematic choice indicated by MCC was “ethno-mathematics.” The idea was to demonstrate diverse views and relationships historically held by varying ethnicities. When learning about Mayan mathematical systems in math class, students also read and wrote about Mayan use of mathematical systems during English and reading courses. Research in communication-intensive courses demonstrated that integration reinforced methods taught within the math courses. Another integrative approach used by MCC was cross-disciplinary team teaching. The MCC model focused on student reading and

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**FIGURE 5.2**
Possibilities of linked courses to enhance learning connections.
writing skills, particularly on structuring the presentation of hard-to-grasp grammar concepts. The following excerpt explains how team teaching was used to help students understand the concept of illustration (using examples to explain an idea):

[The students] meet Tuesday and Thursday with [my teaching partner] and they meet every day with me. It was clear by Wednesday that they understood illustration. They had three days with me, they had two days with him, so I was able on Thursday and Friday to introduce verbs and have two extra days on that—whereas if this was a stand-alone class, I wouldn’t have been able do that because I would have to give my attention to both the reading and the writing. (Visher et al., 2010, p. 49)

- **Kingsborough Community College.** Another institution of higher learning that uses thematic SLC’s is Kingsborough Community College. Kingsborough has been refining the use of SLCs for 16 years. Visher et al. (2010) identify Kingsborough’s SLCs as some of the most effective college LCs to date. The base of its LCs includes general education courses or student major requirements. The college couples core courses within program areas (Figure 5.3). These two core courses are then combined with either an integrative seminar or student success course. Each course in the triad incorporates an agreed-upon theme. The structure used by Kingsborough shows student outcomes of increased social interaction and greater breadth of knowledge.

![FIGURE 5.3](image)

**Sample coupling of core courses within program areas.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allied Health</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Biology + Psychology</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Accounting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Psychology + Business Computing</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Childhood Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Psychology + Biology</td>
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</table>
Visher et al. (2010) summarize student attitudes about SLCs that incorporate integrative course work: “In general, students in Kingsborough’s LCs reported forming stronger relationships with each other than they did with their peers in stand-alone classes” (p. 40). The structure of an integrative seminar provides students with deeper learning, both personal and relevant. Furthermore, students work one-on-one with faculty in addition to participating in small groups. The active learning sessions build connections among course content, real-world experiences, and students’ personal lives and learning needs.

Kingsborough’s success in establishing LCs that support student learning has been so great that it has been offering summer workshops since 2005. Faculty and administrators across the nation attend in the hope of building more successful LCs. According to the results from our 100-Institution Survey, Kingsborough’s summer workshops focus on various themes. The contents include the nuts and bolts of integrating course curricula and assignments while creating a dynamic and active climate for learning.

In a follow-up conversation, Marcia Babbitt, co-coordinator of Opening Doors LCs, and Marissa Schlesinger, associate director of academic affairs, both pointed out that they have an “Advanced LC Program” as well as two other types of SLCs (see www.kbcc.cuny.edu/LC/Pages/LearningCommunities.aspx):

Kingsborough Community College has a long history of LCs and we are very proud of all three of our distinct programs. Our Intensive ESL LC program began in 1995 and enrolls over 100 students each semester. These students have been shown to test out of ESL faster than their non-LC counterparts, which is why all full-time, entering ESL students are now required to enroll in these LCs. Our Advanced LC Program began in 2007 and enrolls approximately 250 students each semester in LCs aligned with their major. Recent MDRC data show that these LCs are especially valuable for our large population of transfer students. Our freshman LC program, Opening Doors, began in 2003 and currently enrolls approximately 1,000 students each year in theme-based, integrative LCs. Random assignment study of Opening Doors demonstrates that our LC students complete more courses and credits in their first semester than their non-LC counterparts, and graduate at higher rates as well.
A few institutions, such as Kingsborough as well as BYU and Eastern New Mexico University, have obtained excellent results by requiring LC participation. However, based on the literature and personal experience it is generally not a good idea except in certain environments with students who are receptive. Comments from a couple of survey respondents also support this conclusion: “Be as inclusive as possible, but don’t make things mandatory.” “When I came, the residence hall lease agreement required that students must take a LC; I immediately did away with this requirement.”

Residential and Student-Type/Concern Cohorts

Lenning and Ebbers (1999) discussed exemplary residential SLC (living-learning community, or LLC) programs at Earlham College and the following universities: Maryland, Michigan, Michigan State, Missouri, Truman State, Stanford, and Yale. They identified these institutions as having well-designed LLCs based on the conceptual and design principles identified earlier. Evidence suggests that these residential SLCs have a significant positive effect on student learning. Based on the results of the 100-Institution Survey, examination of institutional websites, and reports in the literature (e.g., Peckskamp & McLaughlin, 2010), we now add Ball State University, Bowling Green State University, University of Iowa, Syracuse University, University of Illinois, and Wagner College. The latter two exemplars are addressed in more detail subsequently.

At Bowling Green, students (and faculty) for a number of the LLCs are involved in the same LLC all four years. In addition, some LLCs allow commuter students as members (e.g., Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Fresno Pacific University, and St. Louis University) or have created proxy LLCs for commuter students (e.g., Cabrini College, Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne, and University of Central Arkansas).

Even when LLCs have similar educational goals and results, they can be quite different in how they operate. For example, Jones and Lawrie (2010) compared the Leaders Emerging and Developing Program at Syracuse to the dramatically different Freshman Connections Program at Ball State. In the Syracuse program, LLC students who have similar academic or other interests live together on a residence hall floor. The institution also has curricular LCs in which students enroll in the same linked classes. In the Ball State program, students are grouped together in the residence halls according to the core classes they selected during summer registration, rather than by interest. In addition, faculty and academic advisors come into the residence
halls to interact with the students in various ways. Jones and Lawrie thus demonstrate that programs “drastically different in structure can share similar educational success” (p. 99).

- **University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign.** Providing a small liberal arts college learning environment at a large research-based institution is a goal of many universities. Schein (2005) successfully created this atmosphere at the University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign. In his article “The Zen of Unit One: Residential Learning Communities Can Foster Liberal Learning at Large Universities,” Schein outlines his community construction and the success he found.

An important consideration for residential cohorts is how to link academic and student affairs so that the cognitive and personal spheres are working as one. The residence halls for Unit One were reworked to include an intellectual component. Schein (2005) suggested that residence halls be a place for cocurricular activities where safety in sharing intellect is as evident as constructing a social network.

This involves faculty participation outside the classroom in noncredit programming. Unit One uses adjunct professors, teaching assistants, and full-time faculty to teach noncurricular or topical seminars. The intention of a mixed selection of personnel is to focus courses on student learning rather than teaching of specific content. Students are provided with avenues to explore, inquire, and participate in open exchange of ideas.

- **Wagner College.** Wagner College uses thematic residential communities that address specified course work. Residential facilitators help students to make connections. Curricular connections include taking common courses together in addition to attending meetings at the residence hall facilitated by the residential LC facilitator.

Based on Wagner’s website in March 2012 (www.wagner.edu/academics/FYPcourses#LC_1), an example of linked course work at Wagner is the combination of a theater and art course to explore the theme of “Leashed and Unleashed Animals in Art” and “Encountering Others in the Old and New World.” This second LC “focuses on cultural encounters across two bodies of water, the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. It examines the conflict and trade between Christians, Muslims, and Jews during the
Middle Ages and between Europeans and indigenous peoples of the ‘New World’ as the former began to explore and colonize it.”

Several institutions have emphasized students participating in LCs all four years of their undergraduate careers (e.g., Bowling Green, as mentioned earlier; Dominican University; and University of Texas at Arlington),4 as opposed to the traditional practice of designing LCs solely for first-year students. Wagner College has created a plan that uses three distinct types of LCs to assist students’ face-to-face interaction during different years of their learning: the First Year Experience, taken within the first 30 hours of an academic program; Intermediate LCs, taken anytime in the second or third year of study; and a Senior Program.

According to Wagner’s website (www.wagner.edu/experiential_learning/FYP) the First Year Program makes available experiential learning opportunities by providing small-group field experiences that connect with courses linked through assigned LCs. This provides students an opportunity to have some of the same experiences, discuss happenings in the field, and then relate learning in class.

The Intermediate LCs emphasize the linkage between social and interdisciplinary academic topics. The intent is to introduce and support a variety of perspectives through “learning by doing.” The focus in these LCs is effective communication through research and presentation.

The Senior Program is structured like the First Year Experience. The intent of the community is to create a place where students make connections based on four years of learning and experiences. They then share them with small and large groups.

Although studies of residential LCs are readily found in the Washington Center report, S. F. Smith and Rodgers (2005) look at Wagner’s residential LC from a new student affairs perspective. Their study explores the implementation of educational best practice theory from career service, counseling, financial aid, judicial affairs, health center, and residential life staff members. Three faculty members collaborated with the staff to help transform the university culture into a student-centered institution. Quotes from residential life and student affairs explain their commitment to involvement in the SLC. The assistant director of Greek Life states:

We firmly believe, due to the research, that students who are involved are more satisfied with their university and we have a greater chance of retaining them. And so we feel like we do what we can to not only get them involved but keep them involved in things that they want to do personally and professionally. (S. F. Smith & Rodgers, 2005, p. 478)
The Student Services and Affairs Office comments:

Students need to be engaged in meaningful experiences . . . and part of the process that we have is not only to create those meaningful experiences for them, but to help them translate those experiences into learning that they can understand and use. And the more we can engage them in meaningful kinds of activities, the more our students learn. (S. F. Smith & Rodgers, 2005, p. 478)

Course/Class as a Cohort

Most of the survey respondents addressed SLCs primarily at program levels but did not address the individual class as an LC. However, individual professors can do much to promote the learning benefits of LCs within their own classes regardless of whether their institution has program-level LCs or not. The following are suggestions for cultivating powerful course/class LCs.

J. Anderson (1995) presents a comprehensive model for the total classroom as an LC. He focuses on developing effective problem-solving and human relations skills in students and on the instructor becoming primarily a facilitator. He emphasizes the R's of reflection, responsibility, relationship, and respect. He also stresses the importance of tying into the students’ past experiences—as well as providing them with new experiences that develop their knowledge, understanding, and skills—and helping them make use of all five of their senses to support their learning. Church (2008) cites recent research that such total class community is developed through identity, familiarity, warmth and beauty, and trust. This model has implications for colleges and universities even though it was initially directed at elementary-secondary institutions.

To foster these qualities, class time must be dedicated to community development early on in the term/semester. As Chickering and Gamson (1987) note, teachers/facilitators must:

1. Create activities that promote contact between students and faculty.
2. Design opportunities to develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.
3. Encourage active learning environments to promote transfer.
4. Give prompt constructive feedback to help refinement and reflection.
5. Construct events that emphasize time on task.
6. Create a venue that presumes high expectations are shared and agreed upon.
7. Respect diversity/talents of faculty and students regardless of individual ways of learning.

As illustrated by Table 5.3, certain colleges and universities have emphasized some of these principles in the implementation of their LCs.

In addition to such principles, it is important to learn students’ names, provide opportunities for experiential learning, and use within-class LCs. Identifying what social and intellectual development experiences students bring to their college/university experience continues to be crucial. Knowing one’s students is as important as knowing one’s content.

The great variety of classroom practices across many institutions makes it too difficult to single out specific exemplary institutions pertaining to “within class” LCs. The following discussion highlights suggestions for creating effective cohorts within the classroom. Classroom cohorts have a different look and feel. Instructional practice varies as well. This type of cohort reflects teacher decision making based on homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. Types of within-class groupings and definitions and examples for the LC typology in chapter 1 are presented in Appendix I. For a recent resource that provides helpful guidelines for effectively implementing such within-class groups at the college level, see Millis (2010).

Let us now take a different focus on classroom cohorts that we trust will also be helpful. Strack and Deutsch (2004) and Sloman (1996) present the idea of a fast learning system. The system depends on recognizing interconnections among logical, verbal, and symbolic representations to assist in making judgments.

This system provides an effective methodology for remembering information. Because of the compatibility between the fast learning system and explicit attitudes SLCs (Rydell & McConnell, 2006), monitoring teacher power and role is important. One of the instructor’s main roles is to identify the purpose in creating SLCs within the classroom. The instructor also bears the responsibility of restructuring groups for desired learning outcomes as well as maximum student participation and/or engagement.

There are several ways of structuring groups and creating cohorts. Groups or cohorts can be based on topic—what is to be mastered in terms of either content skills or process skills. They can also be based on purpose—making connections either across or between fields of study. Figure 5.4 provides a visual model of this decision-making process. The first decision to make is whether the cohort will be based on topic or purpose; the left side of Figure 5.4 follows the decision process for cohorts based on topic, and the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages contact between students and faculty</td>
<td>Freshman seminar taught by senior faculty</td>
<td>St. Joseph’s College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate students joined as junior research colleagues</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creation of resource groups to help students/groups include a faculty member, peer, and two community resources</td>
<td>Sinclair Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students</td>
<td>Learning groups (5–7 students) created within large lecture classes</td>
<td>Stony Brook’s Federated Learning Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning cohorts who take the same block of courses at the same time</td>
<td>Stony Brook’s Federated Learning Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages active learning</td>
<td>Team projects</td>
<td>Brown University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-created syllabi or labs</td>
<td>State University of New York at Cortland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cooperative job programs</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gives prompt feedback</td>
<td>Entering student assessment</td>
<td>Bronx Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent advising regarding general abilities and analytical thinking</td>
<td>Alverno College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasizes time on task</td>
<td>Mastery learning</td>
<td>Matteo Ricci College</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract learning</td>
<td>Seattle University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Computer-assisted instruction</td>
<td>Empire State College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicates high expectations</td>
<td>University workshops for underprepared students</td>
<td>University of Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honors program for underprepared minorities</td>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects diverse talents and ways of learning</td>
<td>Individualized structure programs</td>
<td>University of California, Irvine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting diverse learning styles</td>
<td>University of California, Irvine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University of Massachusetts–Boston</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
right side follows the process based on purpose. The second decision for cohorts based on topic is what skills are to be learned or developed. Skills may be content specific (increasing understanding of concepts, vocabulary, theories, etc.) or process specific (developing abilities such as research methods, analysis, or critical inquiry). Content-specific topics lend themselves to cohorts with content-based skills (understanding) that are homogeneous, whereas process-specific topics lend themselves to cohorts with more process-based skills (ability) that are heterogeneous. The second decision for cohorts based on purpose is whether connections are to be made within the field or across fields.

Content-specific topics require use of common logical and verbal examples in discussions and tasks. By grouping students into homogeneous cohorts based on similar levels of understanding, members will already possess similar levels of logic and verbal complexity. Together, they can build on the foundations of that common understanding in discussions and activities to stimulate greater depth of understanding and engagement. Thus, homogeneous cohorts provide students an opportunity to share and engage
information at their highest level of academic functioning. However, if the group members have different levels of understanding, less knowledgeable students may feel confused or left behind, while more knowledgeable students may feel less stimulated by the level of discussion and cease to develop any further.

By contrast, heterogeneous cohorts work well for process-based skills, which depend more on practice than level of mental engagement. Students with stronger abilities gain metalevel insights by having to analyze their process in order to teach students with weaker skills. Weaker-skilled students gain in turn from the more intimate assistance of a peer. The interdependence of these student cohorts also builds a bridge between learners. Students in heterogeneous groupings are found to develop friendships and support systems within courses (Tinto, 2003), and intellectual and psychological development grow due to the mismatch of skills (King & Kitchener, 1994a, 1994b).

Making connections within a field of study benefits from homogeneous groupings based on common experiences. DuFour (2004) notes that homogeneous learning formats enable deeper learning by removing barriers to success. Again, the common language and logic that comes from shared and/or similar experiences within the field allows members to approach activities with greater depth and precision. By contrast, members of heterogeneous cohorts need to consider information and perspectives from peers who may have different cultural, theoretical, or disciplinary knowledge. Heterogeneous cohorts create communities of learners that can strengthen all voices within the group.

Different disciplines or fields of study are rooted in distinct belief systems and methodologies. They each view information from different perspectives, approach problems with different tools, and provide a variety of answers to solve the same problem. Interactions in heterogeneous cohorts with members from different disciplines and belief systems encourage members to look with new eyes. Zhao and Kuh (2004) found that heterogeneous groups with disequilibrium of experiences, beliefs, and personal perspectives build opportunities to recognize that there can be many “right” answers to solving a problem. Such interactions provide new contexts, develop new schema, and create open-minded, forward-thinking individuals (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999a).

Other Cohort Arrangements

The “academic program” SLCs introduced in chapter 1 are in many ways a combination of the three types of cohorts that we have discussed. For
another example of an alternative cohort, see the discussion in Appendix D about the nonselective “Organizational Management” program SLCs at Roberts Wesleyan College. Superb results have been obtained with both face-to-face and online versions of the program, at dozens of colleges and universities across the country. These are without a doubt exemplary powerful SLCs.

It should also be mentioned that some institutions have an amazing variety of successful/powerful SLCs, presumably because of grassroots stimulation. Exemplary in this respect are Iowa State University (see the following websites: www.inside.iastate.edu/2011/0519/lc.php and www.lc.iastate.edu) and Syracuse University (see Peckskamp & McLaughlin, 2010, and http://lc.syr.edu).

**Additional Suggestions for Building Powerful SLCs**

A number of suggestions for building powerful SLCs of different types, some of which are applicable across all types of SLCs, have been implied or stated directly in the previous section. Let us now focus on additional general suggestions that may be helpful.

**Identification of Social and Personality Development**

Bandura’s theory of social development and Lave’s situational learning theory provide support for creating curricula that embed context and culture within instructional design. Bandura’s theory suggests a consistent flow to and from individual and environment. Professors and peers have opportunities to support and dissect meaning by identifying student belief systems and cultural experiences instead of having a surface view of responses and suggestions.

One way to support this deeper creation of meaning and respect for others’ perspectives is to help students identify personal attributes that aid their learning while supporting their use of environmental factors or traits that could cause stress. Knowing what traits will add to or detract from groups—small or large—is key to improving student learning. It helps to foster social intelligence and enables students to participate in LCs more effectively. Awareness of differences among members can enhance communication, foster appreciation for individual learning styles, and create opportunities to find like-minded thinkers able to provide help one can understand to foster social intelligence as well as enable students to participate in LCs.

Many personality tests and other tools exist to differentiate personal orientations to the world, such as Myers-Briggs and Keirsey Temperament
Sorter. Use of such tools in LCs can help members become more aware of what they can contribute and how unique members affect one another. For example, Etools4Education provides access to an online version of such a personality test. This organization chooses to use the True Colors Personality Test (see www.online-distance-learning-education.com/personality-test.html and www.truecolorscareer.com/quiz.asp). The personality test divides people into four color groups: gold, blue, green, and orange. Students use pictures, key words, and statements to help identify “their” color. For example, Table 5.4 lists behaviors for “gold” personalities and Table 5.5 lists those for “orange.”

There are many traits that could cause people with gold personalities to be assets as well as a detriment in group function. People with gold personalities are used to planning, and they can create a group that sets goals and identifies when tasks are accomplished successfully. However, if another person in the group has orange personality traits, and through his or her lack of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors That Frustrate Gold Personalities</th>
<th>Behaviors of Gold Personalities That Frustrate Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Being irresponsible</td>
<td>• Controlling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not having a plan</td>
<td>• Being bossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not being disciplined</td>
<td>• Working long hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being lazy</td>
<td>• Being obsessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taking high risks</td>
<td>• Being judgmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaging in illegal behaviors</td>
<td>• Planning for everything</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors That Frustrate Orange Personalities</th>
<th>Behaviors of Orange Personalities That Frustrate Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Obeying rules and laws</td>
<td>• Ignoring rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Following the same routine</td>
<td>• Being undisciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting deadlines</td>
<td>• Not having a plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doing paperwork</td>
<td>• Being quick tempered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not being adventurous</td>
<td>• Thinking aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adhering to too much structure</td>
<td>• Engaging in impulse buying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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TABLE 5.4
Likes and dislikes of gold personalities.

TABLE 5.5
Likes and dislikes of orange personalities.
planning appears to deviate from the initial plan, the climate could become negative very quickly. Knowing whom one is working with and how to communicate with them sets the stage for clear and complete communication, aiding in learning and successful dialogue.

Building trust between the professor and student in conjunction with student-to-student trust is another strategy that promotes the bonding needed for academic success. Trust-building activities also assist in creating a learning environment that produces learners who are risk takers, inquirers, and problem solvers.

Development of Deep Learning Within a Community

Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) identify four characteristics that define an SLC at the high school and college levels, and activities such as “Walk Across the Room” (see Figure 5.5) support all four of those characteristics. The

**FIGURE 5.5**
Walk Across the Room.

1. Have students line up on one side of the classroom.
2. State an open-ended or divergent idea about a current event, personal belief, or political view.
3. Ask students to walk to the other side of the room if they do not identify the statement as being true.
4. Ask one student at a time to voluntarily share why he or she chose to stay put or move. As students state reasons and remind them that a justification from past experience or text must support their comments.
5. Have each side provide the rationale for placement. At the end of several comments, ask students to decide whether they have been convinced to move. If so, they are welcome to move but must provide the information used to change their mind.
6. After each category, ask students to think about who is in their group, who is not in their group, what they want people to know about their group, and what they never want to hear people say about their group.
characteristics are that each LC structure should include (a) creation of a culture in which there is diversity of expertise, (b) identification of common objectives, (c) a variety of ways to share learning, and (d) a community focus on learning how to learn. These authors also provide a checklist to aid the construction of SLCs.

Through the proposal of a divergent idea and opportunities to justify beliefs, the “Walk Across the Room” activity creates an open dialogue in the classroom while empowering student thought, inquiry, and verbal exchange. Participation in the activity produces an environment of honesty and respect leading to trust building. Categories should move from relatively safe and nonconfrontational to more challenging and uncomfortable ones. The intent of this exercise is to introduce students to a trust-building activity by providing a rationale behind people’s thinking and reactions. Starting off with a statement such as “The best flavor of ice cream is chocolate” allows students to play with this format before bringing in deeper statements.

Comparable activities for virtual delivery formats can be developed. Chapter 3 discussed how face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid LCs are alike and different. For delivery formats as they particularly apply to powerful SLCs, see Appendix J.

Developing Powerful PLCs

As discussed in chapter 1, educational PLCs are professional groups (usually of faculty, staff, or both) organized into small study, planning, and implementation groups in order to collaborate on strategies to achieve optimum student learning. For some faculty, that might include changing their focus from how they teach to how students learn.

PLCs can go by many names. Based on projects in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Huber and Hutchings (2005) discuss implementation of a PLC vision—originally envisioned by Dan Bernstein at the University of Kansas—that calls on talented college teachers to share their insights as part of a “teaching commons.” According to the authors, many times, talented teachers find ingenious solutions to problems in learning, but they may not reflect on their discoveries or share their solutions with others, both of which are important PLC learning activities. Thus, Huber and Hutchings envision the teaching commons as a space for such sharing to occur:

It is not, of course, a physical place but rather an intellectual space. . . .

The teaching commons that is now being built by growing numbers of
faculty engaged in such work makes real breakthroughs in teaching and learning more likely than ever before. In such a space, conversation about teaching and learning— informs by evidence and grounded in practice— can become the norm rather than the exception. Disciplines can engage in active trading of ideas about pedagogy. (pp. 31–32)

The authors map out the value of this teaching commons (which others have called a “learning commons”) and what it should look like. In addition, they suggest various incentives that can contribute to the creation and implementation of such entities.

Tsai, Laffey, and Hanuscin (2010) studied teachers participating in the practice of PLCs. Their data indicate positive member benefits and engagement for every PLC. However, each PLC was also found to be different from the others in some way. The authors conclude that a PLC may be expected to change over time as membership and practices change. These results might also suggest that part of the LC’s power lies in its adaptability to uniquely reflect the complex medley of its context, members, and institutional culture.

Faculty LCs (FLCs) constitute an especially important subcategory of PLCs. For a detailed conceptual discussion specific to FLCs, see materials developed by Miami University of Ohio at www.units.muohio.edu/flc/what is.php. These materials encourage the FLC program director to determine in advance whether the FLC is a cohort-based or topic-based FLC and to limit groups to 8–12 members.

Powerful PLCs in education have many benefits—to the institution, to the educational professionals who participate in them, as well as to those students whose learning is the focus of the PLC’s efforts. Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) identified the following direct benefits of such PLCs:

- Enhanced learning environment
- Synergies created
- Capabilities extended to higher level
- Knowledge and learning shared
- Insights gained from one another
- Knowledge deepened
- Innovation and expertise developed
- Cyclic, fluid knowledge developed
- Feeling of connection developed
- Ongoing interactions maintained
- Members assimilated into the group (pp. 6–7)
Despite the benefits, many institutions do not have institution-wide PLCs or they are not powerful. Regarding most PLCs operating today, Servage (2008) complains that “presently, PLCs focus their efforts on the means of teaching and not its ends” (p. 65). It should be emphasized that in our view PLCs are never powerful unless both the means and ends are a focus.

The following sections examine what the 100-Institution Survey reveals about what institutions are doing in relation to PLCs and highlight a few exemplary, powerful PLCs that serve as models of both means and ends. These model PLCs demonstrate important benefits to professional learning and development as well as student learning and success.

Relevant 100-Institution Survey Revelations

Although directed at SLC coordinators, the 100-Institution Survey that we conducted for this book does include an item on PLCs: “Does your institution have a formal institution-wide PLC that focuses on student learning? If so, please tell me about it.” Figure 5.6 summarizes answers to this question for the 81 institutions responding to the survey.

**FIGURE 5.6**
Does your institution have a formal institution-wide PLC that focuses on student learning?

- Do not have such a PLC: 37% (n=30)
- Have only institution-wide PLCs: 38% (n=31)
- Have broader institution-wide PLCs: 10% (n=8)
- Yes and no: 4% (n=3)
- No response: 11% (n=9)
Of the 37% of respondents reporting that they do not have any institution-wide PLC, a couple said developing such PLCs was a goal and several reported formal or informal PLCs not institution-wide in scope. For example: “The whole is only as great as its parts, and although there are pockets of excellence it is not institution-wide.” “We only have informal faculty circles discussing improvement of student learning; none of them are formal entities that have been charged to come up with proposals and ideas.”

A couple of the respondents, one from a public community college and one from a small private college, appeared to the interviewer to have strong institution-wide PLCs, but the respondents seemed not to recognize it. Presumably, to them SLCs are the only “real” LCs.

Of the 4% of respondents reporting “yes and no,” one referred to a “Center for Teaching and Learning” to assist faculty. Another stated: “We sort of do, through our Summer Reading Group, which for example recently read Brain Rules and participated together in workshops on learning.”

Of the 38% of respondents who reported that their institutions had institution-wide FLCs, we have selected a number of exemplary ones; they are discussed separately in the following section. FLCs were often initiated and/or coordinated by centers for teaching and learning. Other FLCs apparently were not connected to a center in this way, as indicated by this response: “Lots of things pertaining to faculty member interactions apply here; formal and informal FLCs across campus are numerous.”

Based on the survey, faculty participation may or may not be attached to incentives. In some cases, faculty participants receive stipends. For example, “Yes, we have had faculty teaching circles for about 10 years, and are now putting them online. We pay $300 per faculty member for participation in a faculty teaching and learning circle, plus provide lunch if they meet on campus.” (Also see the description for Florida Atlantic University in the section “Exemplary Institutional FLCs.”) In other cases, stipends are not provided (e.g., see the description for Wagner College in that section).

Of the eight reported broader PLCs that focus on student learning, seven involve faculty, staff, and administrators meeting regularly to discuss student learning on campus. The eighth PLC also includes students and members from the surrounding local community.

Exemplary Institutional PLCs With Broader Membership

We have selected two institutions that represent exemplary examples of an institution with broader membership. As emphasized by Huber and Hutchings (2005), “Students need to be part of the discussion about learning”
Powerful Learning Communities

(p. 118). Having students involved in PLCs along with faculty, staff, and administrators encourages student ideas and input at an earlier, more formative stage and allows professional ideas about teaching/learning improvement to be easily and naturally tested on students in a timely manner.

1. Western Washington State University (WWU). This institution includes students as well as community members in its PLCs. In her response to the survey, Dr. Carmen Werder, director of the Teaching-Learning Academy and Writing Instruction Support and Learning Commons explains:

Yes, our Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA) functions as both a PLC and an SLC. I serve as director and coordinate the dialogue groups that include faculty, staff, students, and the community. We also have a teaching writing community that I coordinate as director of Writing Instruction Support, but we . . . stay connected virtually only. We also have a teaching writing community that I coordinate as director of Writing Instruction Support (WIS) that features an annual multiple-day working retreat, a writing research fellows program (that pairs students with faculty studying writing instruction), as well as periodic development sessions with students, and we stay connected virtually.

The academy that Dr. Werder refers to provides teaching and learning resources and services that are complementary to what is provided by WWU’s Center for Instructional Innovation & Assessment (CIIA). CIIA has an Innovative Teaching Showcase that is described as follows on the university’s website (http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/showcase/default.asp):

An online publication created by the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (CIIA) as a way to highlight and share exceptional teaching practices by Western Washington University faculty. Each year, several instructors are nominated to participate, and then work extensively with the CIIA to create this in-depth resource. The Showcase is published on this website at the end of each academic year.

The CIIA also sponsors an effective FLC that is described as follows at www.wwu.edu/depts/facultygur: “The Faculty GUR Group was formed to bring together faculty from different departments across the university in a learning community that will seek to enhance each participant’s general education by relying on each other’s domain of expertise.” CIIA offers many learning resources, including teaching tips, a listing of recommended books, and links to four teaching center websites at other institutions:
• Center for Instruction, Research, & Technology at Indiana State University (www.indstate.edu/cirti)
• Center for Faculty Excellence at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (http://cfe.unc.edu)
• Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence at Pennsylvania State University (www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu)
• Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction at Maricopa Community College (www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu)

The CIIA has also made available links to possible model FLCs at other universities for use by faculty members and FLCs at WWU:

• Georgia Southern University Center for Excellence in Teaching (http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/cet/programs/flc.htm)
• University of Georgia Center for Teaching and Learning (www.isd.uga.edu/flc)
• Kent State University “Critical and Transformative Practices in Professional Learning Communities,” Teacher Education Quarterly (www.kent.edu/fpdc/learning-and-teaching/index.cfm)
• Miami University of Ohio Center for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching, and University Assessment (www.units.muohio.edu/celt)
• University of Miami (Miller School of Medicine) Educational Development Office (http://edo.med.miami.edu)
• Michigan State University Office of Faculty and Organizational Development (www1.provost.msu.edu/facdev/FLC/about.asp)
• University of Notre Dame Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning (http://kaneb.nd.edu/programs/flc/index.html)
• Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Teaching Excellence (www.vcu.edu/cte/programs/faculty_learning_communities.htm)
• Western Carolina University Coulter Faculty Commons (www.wcu.edu/7062.asp)

2. Iowa State University. Another good example of a PLC with broader membership (which may at times include student involvement) is provided by the Learning Enhancement Action/Resource Network (LEA/RN) at ISU. Dr. Barbara Licklider, professor of educational leadership and policy studies, initiated and coordinated LEA/RN for many years in cooperation with the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT).
LEA/RN consists of faculty and staff learning teams—often involving student input and participation at appropriate times—within various colleges and departments across the campus. These teams have been discussing, studying, and promoting effective student learning and LCs since the mid-1990s. CELT also does ongoing faculty development that sometimes uses teaching and learning circles.

**Exemplary Institutional Faculty, Staff, and Administrator PLCs**

The following four institutions represent excellence in their faculty, staff, and administrator PLCs:

1. **Cabrillo College.** In responding to our survey, Dr. Victoria Banales, English instructor and basic skills coordinator, stated: “Cabrillo has a Faculty Experiential Learning Institute (FELI) that provides workshops, curriculum enrichment, technical training, or practicums several times each year. In addition, faculty and staff involved in LCs are in ongoing dialogue about how to maximize student learning.”

The college’s website (www.cabrillo.edu/services/aces/ACES_Five_Year_Action_Plan.pdf) states the mission of one of those faculty-staff PLCs, called the Basic Skills and LCs Advisory Council (BSLCAC):

To provide students a community in a pedagogically rich environment to enhance the skills they need to be successful in college courses required for their career and/or transfer goals. To provide faculty and staff a community of practice that studies and experiments with pedagogies and curricula that are successful in meeting the needs of these students.

FLCs at Cabrillo are also exemplary. They are designed to support the college’s growing SLCs and are described on the college’s website (www.cabrillo.edu/services/aces/Learning_Community_Guidelines_v.2.pdf) as follows:

Faculty members will meet/communicate in person, through e-mail, or by phone approximately once a week during the semester in which the LC is being offered. The main focus of the meetings is to discuss student progress and conduct early interventions. In addition, faculty will align courses, discuss challenges and successes, problem solve, plan upcoming class activities, integrate assignments, etc. It is expected that the majority of the meetings will be conducted in person with all cohort faculty members present. Faculty will document their attendance at cohort meetings via sign-up
sheets; Cohort Leads will collect the documentation and submit monthly
attendance reports (three per semester) to the Learning Communities coor-
dinator. (p. 1)

2. St. Lawrence University. Dr. Cathy Crosby-Currie, former associate
dean of the first year and associate professor of psychology, responded to our
survey as follows:

St. Lawrence is an institution at which discussions about teaching and
learning never stop. These conversations are going on in several different
venues. We have had multiple grant projects over the years from Teagle
and the American Association of Colleges and Universities that involve
faculty/staff LCs around issues like engaged pedagogy/learning, increasing
diversity education, and addressing challenges of the sophomore year. We
also have a University Assessment Committee that encourages and coordi-
nates our student learning assessment. Finally, our Associate Dean for Aca-
demic Affairs has responsibility for our Center for Teaching and Learning
and is the co-chair of our Faculty Teaching and Scholarship Committee,
both of which offer various opportunities for faculty and staff development
including a multi-day “college” for faculty and staff at the end of each
academic year.

3. The University of Iowa. Dr. Andrew Beckett, University College
assistant dean of first-year programs, responded to our survey for the Univer-
sity of Iowa. He stated: “Since 2006 the university has utilized a Student
Success Team. Consisting of faculty and staff volunteers from various depart-
ments, the cross-functional group seeks innovative ways of helping students
succeed in their college careers.” This Student Success Team is described on
the university’s website (http://provost.uiowa.edu/work/strategic-initiatives/
docs/tfreports/SITF_Undergrad.pdf) as follows:

Through the Student Success Team, we have begun a movement of seeing
student success as everyone’s role, but are still in the beginning stages of
this effort. We need to expect more of our students, and more of ourselves,
in order to see an overall improvement in the quality of a UI education.
(p. 25)

4. University of Maryland at College Park. Greig Stewart, executive
director, College Park Scholars, stated the following in response to our sur-
vey question about PLCs:
All LLCs (Honors, Scholars, Global Communities, CIVICUS, Writers’ House, Beyond the Classroom, International House, etc.) are overseen by Provost’s Advisory Committee on Living-Learning and Special Programs, which includes faculty, administrators and staff. The following URL (http://provost.umd.edu/living_learning_programs.cfm) takes one to an announcement on enhancing living-learning programs. The bottom paragraph speaks to “strategic oversight,” that is, the establishment of the advisory committee. By positioning the oversight of LLCs in the Office of the Provost, it underscores the university’s commitment to excellence in undergraduate learning. It also ensures that when discretionary dollars are available in the provost’s office, those dollars may be funneled into enhancements or additions to LLCs.

Exemplary Institutional FLCs
The following eight institutions represent excellence in their faculty PLCs (often called FLCs).

1. Bowling Green State University. Dr. Patrick Vrooman is director of the Partners in Context and Community Learning Center, a professional development LLC for education majors interested in urban education. Although the focus of his PLC (and of many of the PLCs discussed here) is much broader than first-year programs, Dr. Vrooman stated that “the first-year programs require fairly intensive faculty involvement that extends across the university within the discipline and results in a university-wide LC.” Nine Bowling Green FLCs are described for the 2010–11 school year at www.bgsu.edu/ctl/page30860.html. One of them focuses on service-learning and is described on the university’s website (www.bgsu.edu/offices/service-learning/newsletter/10-22-2010/page87936.html) as follows:

The Office of Service-Learning in collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning initiated the Faculty Learning Communities as a way to promote the institutionalization of service-learning courses in every department, to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue, and to advance the objectives of BGSU’s core curriculum.

2. Chandler-Gilbert Community College. Yvonne Reineke of the Department of English offers the following response to our survey question: (1) “The division chairs hold retreats, off and on, called Writing, Reflection and Renewal”; (2) “Development Committee efforts in the area of critical
thinking’’; and (3) “During the last year we have developed a Faculty Network for Excellence in Mentoring New Faculty.”

3. **Dominican University.** Jodi Cressman, director of the Borra Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence (CTLE), stated the following in our survey:

Yes, the CTLE Faculty Commons provides a library with resources on teaching and learning and common space on a continuing basis for informal conversations about teaching/scholarship, browsing the library holdings and reading, and reflection or work on teaching. The space is also used periodically for university-wide workshops, presentations, seminars, etc. on teaching and learning innovations and effectiveness.

Visit www.dom.edu/fdrs/bctle/index.html for the college’s current-year listing of seminars for faculty pertaining to improving student learning.

4. **Florida Atlantic University.** Jennifer Bebergal, director for student retention in the Center for Teaching and Learning (www.fau.edu/ctl) stated:

For the last three years we have had 8 to 12 FLCs each year on a variety of topics related to teaching and learning. Faculty members receive a stipend for leading such a PLC. Members must be actively involved, and each professional LC must develop some kind of product and do a showcase.

For current-year FLCs at the university, see www.fau.edu/ctl/Faculty_Learning_Communities.php.

5. **Miami University of Ohio.** Tresa Barlage, associate director of residence life, responded to our PLC survey question as follows: “We have many formal FLCs around many topics (including student learning) and they are coordinated by our Center for Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment.”

In addition, Miami University of Ohio has taken the lead nationally on scholarship and presenting workshops pertaining to development of FLCs (e.g., see www.units.muohio.edu/celt/faculty/flcs/miami, www.units.muohio.edu/flc/whatis.php, and www.units.muohio.edu/flc/30_components/index.php). The report of a Middle Tennessee State University faculty member who attended a Miami FLC workshop (see www.mtsu.edu/ltanditc/Source Link_Fo8-for-screen.pdf) indicates the impact that these FLCs have:

*Ron Kates, English*—Last fall, I joined a group of MTSU faculty and staff who came together to investigate faculty learning communities (FLCs)
after having been inspired in a workshop led by Dr. Milt Cox of Miami University of Ohio. Generally, an FLC is an academic group with a purpose. It is composed of 6 to 12 faculty members and requires a commitment to meet, work, collaborate with colleagues on the FLC and disseminate the outcomes of the group’s work to the academic community. For several months, we researched FLC structures and outcomes from nearly three dozen schools of varying sizes, locations, and demographic make-ups, and spoke to faculty about their experiences. Finally . . . the group reached consensus: FLCs could have a transformative impact on teaching and learning at MTSU by engaging faculty in professionally and personally beneficial interactions with peers across campus.

6. **Skagit Valley College.** Jennifer Handley—English instructor, general education coordinator (main campus), and chair, District General Education Committee—responded to our PLC question as follows:

   We have an advisory committee that works closely with the General Education coordinators to suggest the kinds of faculty support that are needed. This support may come in the form of annual orientation sessions for LC faculty, workshops offered through the Center for Learning and Teaching, and districtwide retreats. In addition, new faculty members are encouraged to collaborate with more experienced LC faculty to propose new courses.

7. **University of North Dakota.** Tami Carmichael, associate professor of humanities and integrated studies, stated in response to the PLC question in our survey:

   The Office of Instructional Development is dedicated to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at the University of North Dakota. Through its various activities, programs, and resources OID promotes campuswide conversations about teaching, fosters innovation in curriculum and instruction, recognizes excellence, and encourages the continuing development of faculty as teachers. This office coordinates the Alice T. Clark Scholars Mentoring Program, an orientation and collegial support program for faculty new to UND. Its purposes are to assist faculty in developing professional and personal networks; increase faculty awareness of campus culture and resources; [and] support the professional development of faculty as teachers and scholars.

   A second-year program is offered for those who successfully complete the first-year program. Funded by the UND Foundation, the program is named in honor of retired Vice President for Academic Affairs Alice T.
Clark. It is administered through the Office of Instructional Development. . . . The program consists of two components:

a. A one-on-one mentoring relationship with an experienced faculty member

b. A yearlong series of monthly cohort meetings in which participants get a chance to meet and talk with key campus figures and to discuss topics of common interest and value to new faculty. (An out-of-town fall retreat allows for more extended conversations and group socializing.)

I [Carmichael] would like to emphasize that I do not work with the Office of Instructional Development. The director is Dr. Anne Kelsch. I only speak about the excellent programs they offer as someone who has witnessed and benefitted from them. For more information, see the website at http://webapp.und.edu/dept/oid/.

8. Wagner College. Dr. Anne Love, associate provost for assessment, stated:

Wagner College has “scholarship circles” for faculty to come together monthly to discuss ongoing scholarship, encourage one another’s work, and offer feedback in writing. Faculty members apply to be included in a circle each year, so that they can start focusing on a project prior to the start of the meetings. There is no compensation for involvement.

Exemplary PLCs Across Institutions

Effective PLCs that focus on student learning and success and the development of supportive LCs also exist across and between colleges and universities. These across-institutional PLCs can function on a national basis, such as the consortia on LCs created by the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education or the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group on Learning Science and Advanced Technologies for Learning. Or they can function on a regional basis, such as the Atlantic Center for LCs or the Dialogues in Methods of Education (D.I.M.E.) (for a description of the latter see www.mste.uiuc.edu/dime/). Some across-institution PLCs are even worldwide, such as the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Often across-institution PLC members meet electronically as well as face-to-face.

Individual educators can, and often do, belong to a number of different LCs, and this number is increasing with the continuing development of
many strictly online PLCs. Duncan-Howell (2010) identified and discussed three online communities for teachers and concluded that such online PLCs have much potential as an ongoing source of professional development for teachers. Following are six noteworthy online PLCs focusing on student learning in which higher education faculty participate as members:

1. **Inquiry Learning Forum (ILF).** “The Inquiry Learning Forum: Fostering and Sustaining Knowledge Networking to Support a Community of Science and Mathematics Teachers” was a grant sponsored by the National Science Foundation. According to the project website (www.nsf.gov/cise/kdi/tools/lrng_forum.html), the initiative is an online community of K-12 math and science teachers who work together to create, improve, and share classrooms centered on the learner. The ILF promotes inquiry-based learning, which encourages students to ask questions, to be curious about the world around them, to make discoveries, and to test those discoveries rigorously in a quest for new understanding. This process is guided by teachers.

2. **Math Forum.** The collaborative communities in Math Forum appear to have been one of the initial virtual PLCs. Shumar (2009) has taken a social theory approach to studying the impact of Math Forum’s collaborative communities on the professional development of teachers and other participants. He notes that “the collaborative community building work that Math Forum teachers do online allows them to not only form a learning community but allows them to overcome tensions around mathematical identity formation which are important for advancing one’s thinking as a math teacher” (p. 269).

3. **MERLOT.** The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (http://merlot.org) is an online learning organization that has been in existence since 1997. It has well over 100,000 members from a wide range of disciplines who are interested in evidence-based teaching and learning. Members participate online in one or more of a couple dozen different curricular discipline communities offered on the site. They network with other members and interact with guest experts in their own and other disciplines. Members can also browse a wide selection of over 36,000 curriculum materials, learning support resources, and diverse learning exercises to use with their students.

4. **Math and Science Partnership Network.** “MSPnet (http://mspnet.org) was created to serve multiple, nested communities composed of university faculty, K-12 educators, administrators, and professional developers who
are engaged in efforts to improve math and science education... launched in January 2004... funded by the National Science Foundation... [and has served] over 5,000 members” (Falk & Drayton, 2009, p. 17).

5. Tapped In. Tapped In (http://tappedin.org), launched in the mid-1990s, offers teachers and organizations virtual buildings and meeting rooms where groups can use an advanced technological environment and a suite of interactive tools to communicate and collaborate. The vision of the creators of Tapped In was to invite educational professionals “to be tenants in the TI environment and use it to help accomplish their own TPD (Teacher Professional Development) agendas... Their hope was that it would be used by many different organizations and constituencies for their own purposes; consequently, the site itself is content free” (Falk & Drayton, 2009, p. 18).

6. WIDE World. “WIDE (Wide-scale Interactive Development for Educators) World at the Harvard Graduate School of Education offers research-based online and onsite professional development (PD) programs to help educators achieve systemic and sustainable educational changes by improving student learning, teaching and leadership. Since 1999, WIDE has instructed and coached over 19,000 educators from nearly 100 countries from six continents, growing over 700% of course enrollment in five years (2003–2008)” (Joo, n.d.).

The development and popularizing of social networking online communities—Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn—may in the long term make defined networks such as the ones that we have described less relevant. Here each person creates her or his own self-defined interest community. Regarding this development, Drayton, Obuchowski, and Falk (2009) predict:

Personally centered networks will push the future of online community experience even further, as interacting individuals will create their own metasites that are not limited by community boundaries. They will rely on RSS feeds, subscription functionalities, and sophisticated notification systems to track their interests, groups, and friends across site boundaries. Further, they will track this information through integrated technologies that include and may combine laptop, PDA, phone, TV, and so on. (p. 213)

Suggestions for Building Powerful PLCs

This section traces suggestions for building powerful PLCs based on the LC literature. These suggestions come from several streams of research. The first
is the extensive, well-documented research on PLCs at the elementary-secondary level that we believe contains knowledge and ideas that are transferable to higher education. At the beginning of this project, a thorough search in a local university library revealed that the majority of recent books on LCs focus on PLCs, but that every single one of those books is targeted solely at the elementary-secondary education level. PLCs and their designs and impacts have been a prominent focus at the elementary-secondary school level since the turn of the century. For example, Hord (1997), DuFour (2004) (also see DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005), and Murphy and Lick (2005) were the prominent pioneers in stimulating implementation of face-to-face PLCs within elementary-secondary schools. Similarly, Falk and Drayton (2009) have offered recommendations for online PLCs that extend beyond individual elementary-secondary institutions and districts. Thus, PLCs at the elementary-secondary level of education provide strong, longitudinal evidence and knowledge about successful PLCs, and we should be able to generalize from these PLCs (as well as from PLCs in business and industry) to create adaptations and suggestions for optimal formation and use of PLCs focused on postsecondary education.

A second stream of research was stimulated by the extensive scholarly work pertaining to FLCs conducted at Miami University in Ohio in recent years. Since Miami began its research, journal articles and conference presentations pertaining to higher education FLCs and PLCs are becoming more common. For instance, under the direction of Milton Cox, who initially coordinated a project on FLCs funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), the university has sponsored an annual Faculty Learning Community Developers’ and Facilitators’ Summer Institute and conference that began in approximately 2000 (see www.units.muohio.edu/flc). The Summer Institute was responsible for an edited Jossey-Bass *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* monograph on FLCs (Cox & Richlin, 2004) and in 2009 initiated publication of the semiannual and peer-reviewed *Learning Communities Journal*, which focuses on this topic. There have always been various faculty, staff, and joint committees on postsecondary education campuses charged with improving some aspect of student life. However, most of these committees have traditionally focused on matters other than how to improve student learning outcomes. In addition, they—including curriculum committees—have usually thought in segmented ways and not viewed their central focus to be on optimizing student learning and development. Effective sharing and community reflection on both pertinent
research and members’ experiences in teaching and learning are key to powerful PLCs. Discussions must be lively and substantive exchanges. Participation by a variety of members must be encouraged and open-minded, deep listening to all perspectives must be stressed. After such individual and group reflection and sharing, the group needs to arrive at agreed-upon conclusions about the lessons learned, potential barriers to watch out for and avoid, and how those lessons should be applied in the future.

Such deliberations also require effective leadership, coordination, and planning, another key to helping PLCs become powerful. This will in turn require an institutional reward system that encourages serious and enthusiastic LC participation and involvement in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Rewards for such participation and scholarship could include oral or written recognition (either personal or public), release time, and reimbursement of expenses or some other kind of financial reward such as a stipend.

The most important incentive to include for active involvement in such activities by faculty is for the involvement to contribute significantly to faculty promotion/tenure. As Huber and Hutchings (2005) emphasize, that means “we must push forward with new genres and forms to document the work of teaching and learning” (p. 118). They also stress another important key for powerful PLCs: the development of an institutional infrastructure that will provide all needed support for quality PLCs and pedagogy.

It should be acknowledged that virtual PLCs have requirements for success that do not apply for face-to-face PLCs. Falk and Drayton (2009) discuss factors to consider when virtual PLCs are created, facilitated, and sustained:

The increased capabilities to combine features that optimize content retrieval, content creation, and collaboration, and to customize users’ experience according to their preferences, history, and community affiliations, have created new possibilities that must be taken into account when creating LCs for professional development. . . . There are four dimensions that strongly influence decisions on the nature of the architectural design, content, the suite of tools, expectations for dissemination, and leadership structures in any community for professional development. All of these decisions will in turn shape the nature of the participants’ experience. These dimensions are: 1. The nature of the community; . . . 2. The nature of the professional development experience; . . . 3. The nature of the audience and of the products; . . . 4. The focus of leadership and facilitation. (p. 21)
Falk and Drayton (2009) also observe that it is common for virtual PLC members to begin the relationship face-to-face with other members they know or met in the past. For example, they may meet at a conference or summer institute and get into follow-up dialogue online, and it can involve such things as sharing draft documents and asking for confidential feedback.

In addition, Cox (2004) separately discussed 30 components of a PLC; see the Miami University of Ohio website at www.units.muohio.edu/flc/30_components/index.php. Effective functioning of all 30 components pertaining to any PLC is important for a PLC to be powerful in its effect on student learning and success. Cox divided them into the following nine categories: mission and purpose, curriculum, administration, connections, affiliated participants, meetings and activities, scholarly process, assessment, and enablers/rewards. In addition, Cox identified, alongside each of the 30 components, whether the component is primarily the responsibility of an FLC facilitator, the FLC program director, or both of them.

Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2010) studied a PLC of prospective teacher field supervisors and discovered that deep dialogue about “multiple levels of shared dilemmas and the use of dialogic tools to foster critical reflection” that were modeled by the facilitator led to the supervisors moving “from simply transformative learning to transformative action” (p. 114). For more information about such tools, see Levine (2010). For an extensive bibliography pertaining to all types of FLCs that was compiled at Miami University of Ohio, see www.units.muohio.edu/flc/bibliography.php.

Cox and Richlin’s (2004) monograph deals with a number of applied topics that are important: institutional considerations in developing an FLC program, development of facilitators for FLCs, facilitation of FLCs, management of multiple FLCs, assessment of FLCs, technology in support of FLCs, development of diversity with FLCs, development of the scholarship of teaching and learning through FLCs, midcareer and senior FLCs, and FLCs for preparing new or future faculty. See Ortquist-Ahrens and Torosyan (2009) for additional details on the roles of the FLC facilitator, and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory report at www.sedl.org/pubs/change45/6.html for the importance of and procedures for assessing institutional and participant readiness for PLCs.

Miami University of Ohio provides an extremely useful set of recommendations for creating and implementing FLCs at www.units.muohio.edu/flc/recommendations.php. The following topics are covered: initiation, initial planning, application, selection, prestige, trust and safety, legacy, activities, scholarship of teaching, assessment, sharing, leadership, the role of FLC project director, compensation and rewards, and overcoming obstacles.
Developing Powerful LOs

As discussed in chapter 1, in LOs the entire institution (or a primary structural entity therein) demonstrates a clear and intentional organization-wide culture of learning supported by both the formal leadership and a preponderance of members throughout the institution. LOs can be organized to maximize learning for all members pertaining to one or more dimensions of knowledge. To reiterate, this book focuses on only one such dimension: that pertaining to knowledge and understanding of how to optimize student learning.

**Relevant 100-Institution Survey Revelations**

The 100-Institution Survey question pertaining to LOs was as follows: “A Learning Organization is an institution where everyone throughout the institution is focusing continually on innovations to improve learning. Does this describe your institution?” Figure 5.7 summarizes responses to this question.

Of the 28% of respondents reporting that their institution is not an LO, a number of them acknowledged that only small pockets within the
institutions are continually focusing on improvement of student learning. For example, one respondent stated, “Organizationally we like to think so, but in actuality there are only core pockets.” Another stated, “We wish this were true, but instead we are silos. But we are pretty good.”

A number of the respondents expressed a desire for their institution to become a true LO: “We aspire to be there, but currently have only pockets of such activity throughout the faculty.” “We would like to move there; a few faculty members are talking about this.”

One respondent referred to the state of the economy being a factor: “In such challenging economic times, I would think such institutions are rare.” Another respondent suggested that a change in campus culture currently taking place might or might not lead toward such a desired state.

Twenty-four percent of respondents reported that their institution is an LO to some extent or moving toward becoming one, and similar comments predominated, such as: “We do, but still have a long way to go, especially faculty.” “Somewhat; significant people have such a focus.” “Yes, but it takes different forms in different parts of the university.” “I would say it is happening in pockets; there is not one single effort across the campus.” “On our ‘best days’ we could be described in this way.”

Several of these respondents described developments at their institutions that may be helpful to other institutions: “Certain segments within the university can be described like this; for example, we have a Council for Student Success that meets regularly.” “We bring in speakers to support the internalization of such a campuswide philosophy and awareness of the latest trends in higher education.” “Through our campuswide LC/LLC initiative, we hope to improve learning through communal living—breaking the university up into ‘villages’ of small, themed learning labs.”

Of the 42% of respondents claiming that their institution is definitely an LO, many assumed that all educational institutions had to be “learning organizations.” Unfortunately, they were not directly asked to provide evidence or to explain why they responded as they did. Most merely answered “yes” and did not give any reason, but a few of the respondents provided unsolicited rationales that may or may not support our observation: “Absolutely; there is a master plan for the campus.” “Yes, we are always rethinking.” “Yes, given that we are a public institution continually trying to find innovative options.”

However, a number of the respondents did provide rationales suggesting that the institution is a true LO: “I think I would define what happens here as widespread examining data and brainstorming ideas to make college life
and success better for students.” “Exactly! Our university has been innovating since its beginnings. Faculty and staff here are on the cutting edge of pedagogical innovation—to the point that we simply are sometimes too busy doing too many things!” “Absolutely! The grand challenge is interdisciplinary.” Other responses providing such a helpful rationale are quoted, and the institutions identified with permission, in the following section.

**Exemplary LOs**

For some survey respondents, the question on “learning organization,” in which it was defined as “everyone throughout the institution focusing continually on innovations to improve learning,” seemed unrealistic or impossible. Therefore, we decided that this definition (which we had based on Peter Senge’s LO concept) is perhaps too much of an ideal, especially for large research universities with their semiautonomous colleges. Consequently, we now define LO in terms of there being a preponderance of people throughout the organization—as opposed to “everyone”—thinking and acting this way (see the definition for LO in the introduction and the abbreviated definition in chapter 1). Using that definition, we selected a few colleges and universities as exemplary LOs.

It should be emphasized, however, that institutions should be continually striving toward the ideal that Senge initially enunciated even though in practical terms it is not completely attainable. By staying focused on “everyone,” the successful LO recognizes and encourages the important roles and contributions of all community members, including ones who might often get overlooked or ignored. For instance, at the most basic levels, it is easier to learn in a clean and safe environment, yet often custodial staff and security staff do not get included in conversations about student learning and retention. Support staff members such as custodians, security, food service providers, housekeepers, and secretaries can and do serve in the larger institutional community’s goal of maximizing students’ success and retention—through the quality of their interactions with students and the quality of their services for students. We considered statements made by survey respondents and also looked at institutions not in our survey sample, carefully examining the website for each institution that seemed to show promise. We then used a compare-and-contrast procedure to decide which institutions should be suggested as exemplary “learning organizations” for others to examine and possibly emulate. The top 10 are listed here in alphabetical order:

1. **Alverno College.** The college’s website (www.alverno.edu/aboutalverno/missionhistory) states: “We have built a community of learning, in
which all functions of the College support our students in meeting explicit expectations.” This statement is put into operational terms by the following description at http://depts.alverno.edu/ere/community_of_inquiry/community_of_inquiry.htm:

Taking collective responsibility across a program for achieving student learning outcomes is facilitated by approaches that build a community of inquiry. Such an inquiry needs to simultaneously generate and draw on the common educational purposes. At Alverno, the outcome-oriented ability-based curriculum, with its emphasis on supporting experiential and reflective learning through performance assessment, provides a common conceptual framework for inquiry. . . .

The faculty’s collaborative inquiry into learning outcomes within and across the disciplines was a key step in initially developing the ability-based curriculum and has remained vital to improving and updating it. This kind of inquiry itself has a strong experiential and deliberative base, carried out in different groupings within the institutional community. Sharing what they are learning about learning as they constantly modify their practice in the context of a common program is one way that educators increase their knowledge about how and what learning endures. Effective collaboration across the curriculum requires faculty discourse that includes close analysis of practice, conscious reflections on the frameworks of practice and their critique in relation to student learning outcomes.

2. **Collin County Community College.** Dr. Tracy McKenzie, professor of sociology and chair of the LCs program, stated: “Absolutely; there is an environment and culture here that encourages innovative teaching. For example, in 2009, the college introduced a new program to help veterans transition from battlefields and bases to classrooms and civilian life. That spring four core classes—Government 2301, Speech 1211, U.S. History 1302 and Psychology 1301—were offered to only veterans.”

Various places on the college’s website at www.collin.edu provide other examples suggesting the conclusion that there is an environment and culture throughout the institution that encourages innovative teaching that will maximize student learning and success, including:

- “In LCs courses, professors team teach and connect the concepts of their disciplines under a common theme or question.”
- A consortium led by Collin College has been selected for a $19,998,974 grant, part of nearly $500 million in federal grants targeted for training and workforce development to help unemployed
workers who are changing careers. More than 200 community colleges around the country applied and 32 were selected by the US Department of Labor in coordination with the US Department of Education.

- Collin College’s nursing program announced that the National League of Nursing has named it a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education. Collin College’s nursing program is Texas’ first and only Center of Excellence in Nursing Education. Of the more than 1,800 nursing programs in the country, only 19 have been named a Center of Excellence.
- The faculty includes three US Professors of the Year, a Texas Professor of the Year, and five Minnie Stevens Piper Professors.

3. Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne. Gregory Anderson, associate director of First-Year Experience, stated in response to our survey question: “Yes, and key players who are innovative.” Illustrative of this point are the following statements from him and quotes from the university’s website:

- Dr. Richard Light, a Harvard professor and author, writes in Making the Most of College, “Students who are able to integrate the in-class and outside-of-class parts of their lives can reap great benefits.” Of course, the greatest benefit is graduating with a college degree. Since IPFW agrees with Light’s research, faculty members include ten activities into their LCs through a community hour; therefore, students cannot register for classes during this hour. Faculty plan cocurricular or academic activities (going to a special lecture or watching a movie), and they plan extra-curricular or more fun activities (have a class dinner or attending an IPFW event).
- The instructors pick a time to meet for one hour when the campus calendar has no other campus activity, and this occurs ten times within the semester. Ten times each semester the students get connected to the University, the faculty and each other in a special way during a time when there are no other scheduled distractions.
- Each faculty member receives $150 to buy food, etc. and promote good ideas for the community hour, for example, two recreation centers on campus are made available for such activities during these scheduled hours.
• Even though this is largely a commuter campus, 85% to 90% of the students say it is a great idea.

4. Iowa State University. Douglas Grunewald, codirector of LCs at the university, stated: “Many people throughout the institution are committed to the continuous improvement of the university.” More of his responses to questions in our survey pertaining to SLCs support that generalization:

We created LCs by allowing them to develop at the grassroots level in a decentralized manner. After a few years of experimentation we provided a centralized structure that included providing funding for individual programs. We continued to provide central services and support when it was practical (i.e., training, marketing) while leaving the details to the individual coordinators who were running each LC.

We intentionally implemented an organizational structure which created an equal partnership between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. We did much assessment to demonstrate the success of the program and developed a Request for Proposal process that required each LC to document learning outcomes. Every LC utilizes peer mentors—undergraduate students who support the program in a variety of ways based on their individual outcomes. These paid student staff positions also provide excellent leadership development for the mentors.

Most LCs are discipline-based, focused on first-year students, have an assessment plan, utilize peer mentors, and are organized by highly dedicated faculty and staff. The Registrar’s Office does an outstanding job of putting students together in classes. The Department of English is actively involved in numerous linked classes. Some LCs have residence clusters which add a positive living/learning dimension to the programs. We also have an excellent website that provides valuable resources to our staff. It is easy for students to sign up for an LC and there is no additional cost to participate.

A listing of ISU’s LC statistics (www.lc.iastate.edu/LC_15yr_success.html) demonstrates impressive positive effects of ISU’s LC efforts on student learning outcomes and campuswide perceptions at the university. These data demonstrate that widespread internalization of positive attitudes toward active learning methods and effective SLCs has over time permeated throughout the total university—including administration, support staff, faculty, and students—and resulted in a related and identifiable campus culture supportive of such ideas and approaches to learning.
It should be mentioned that during the mid-nineties, one of the authors of this book was involved in getting SLCs off the ground campuswide at ISU, and another coordinated assessment of LCs at the university for several years until 2010. As a result, they both acknowledge from personal knowledge as well as the aforementioned data that this research university is a legitimate LO as it pertains to the development of SLCs and policies across the institution intended to maximize student learning, success, and retention.

5. Kingsborough Community College. Note the following quote from a February 2011 article titled “Changing the Odds for Students: Spotlight on Kingsborough College” found at www.forumfyi.org/files/RB21%20CB26%20Issue%20Brief%20v3.pdf on the Kingsborough website:

When Regina Peruggi became President of Kingsborough Community College in 2004, the school’s graduation rate hovered at just under 25 percent, mirroring that of similar institutions nationwide. Kingsborough had a dedicated faculty and staff, and a range of supports were available on campus. Many isolated interventions had been tried. But after years of bare-bones budgets and underprepared students, college leaders, in their own words, became lulled into believing they were doing the best they could, given the circumstances. . . . When Peruggi came on board, she and her leadership team engaged faculty, staff and students; questioned long-held assumptions; and made reversing business as usual a top priority. Her leadership fostered the redesign of whole divisions and the creation of new services. Classroom practices shifted. The college revamped admissions and advising, and centralized enrollment services—moves that changed institutional culture and integrated disparate best practices into a more cohesive whole. The entire institution became focused on student success, and no part remained unchanged.

6. Syracuse University. A recent book edited by Peckskamp and McLaughlin (2010) discusses a number of innovative and successful SLCs across the campus of Syracuse University and suggests there is an institution-wide culture focusing on maximizing student learning success that is indicative of a true LO. Reinforcing this perception is the following statement highlighted on the university’s website at www.syr.edu:

Scholarship in Action is the bold vision that propels Syracuse University—a vision for education that’s not static or for its own sake, but breaks out of the traditional “ivory tower.” It drives us to forge innovative and sustained partnerships across our local and global communities. And that
makes SU a place where students become leaders, scholars become collaborators, and the community is continually energized by new ideas.

7. **The Evergreen State College.** From 1972 to 1975, starting one year after it opened, Evergreen was one of seven members of the Consortium on Follow-Up Evaluation at Nontraditional Colleges that was coordinated by the senior author of this book. At that time there was a definite focus throughout the institution on innovation to achieve maximum student learning and success. The college has been intimately involved since the late 1980s in applying what has been learned about positively impacting student learning and success through its acclaimed Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, which is still the acknowledged leader of the nationwide LC movement. The institution-wide culture emphasizing such innovation has enabled Evergreen to state on its website at www.evergreen.edu/about/changelives.htm that Loren Pope, the famous writer about education who formerly was education editor at the *New York Times*, included Evergreen in his book titled *Colleges That Change Lives*. Evergreen was the only public institution included in Pope’s earlier editions, and one of only two public institutions in his last (2006) edition. Pope (2006) highlights two factors common for all of the 40 colleges and universities selected for inclusion in his book:

These schools share two essential elements, a familial sense of communal enterprise that gets students heavily involved in cooperative rather than competitive learning; and a faculty of scholars devoted to helping young people develop their powers, mentors who often become their valued friends. (p. 2)

Elsewhere on Evergreen’s website, a concrete description of how faculty throughout Evergreen teach collaboratively is provided for prospective students. As described at www.evergreen.edu/about/curriculumoverview.htm, faculty team teach in groups of from two to four and focus on what they call “shared learning.”

8. **Villanova University.** Nancy Kelley, director of academic LCs, stated in response to the LO question on our survey: “Our lunch room—we all eat at the same place—is a ‘grist mill’ for generating ideas, sharing victories and frustrations, brainstorming on how to improve learning, etc.” This response fits with the following excerpt from www1.villanova.edu/villanova/media/fastfacts.html:
The strength of the Villanova experience comes in part from the University’s welcoming community. All members are bonded together by a shared responsibility to uphold the ideals of St. Augustine and let the principles of truth, unity, and love guide their lives. The Villanova community helps students grow intellectually, professionally, and spiritually, and challenges them to reach their full potential.

Villanova’s academic experience . . . forms an environment in which students and professors are partners in learning. Every member of the Villanova community is dedicated to providing a personalized experience that fosters every student’s intellectual and spiritual well-being.

These statements suggest that there is an institution-wide culture that encourages faculty and staff at all levels to innovate and contribute as appropriate to students’ learning and success and that such attitudes are internalized throughout the institution.

9. Wagner College. Dr. Anne Love, referred to previously, stated on our survey:

Yes. Each level of LC has a small group of faculty who coordinate the administrative aspects of the programs, and they engage in ongoing program development. As concerns or new ideas are raised they are explored, and improvements/modifications proposed and adopted. Surveys of students at each level of LC provide much of the information about program improvement.

Although her focus was strictly on LCs, Wagner’s LCs are institution-wide, pertain to all four years of college, and serve as the core of the Wagner Plan described at www.wagner.edu/academics/wagnerplan as follows:

Wagner College has developed a curriculum that unites deep learning and practical application. The Wagner Plan incorporates our longstanding commitment to the liberal arts, experiential learning and interdisciplinary education with our geographical location and enduring bond with New York City.

Beginning their very first semester at Wagner, students not only study issues and learn critical-thinking, writing and problem-solving skills, but they also see and practice what they are learning. This “practical” side of liberal education is clearly seen in our Learning Communities and Reflective Tutorials and in the investment faculty make in connecting students with the world outside the classroom.
All of the above suggests an institution-wide culture that involves the entire campus community in ongoing efforts to maximize deep learning and success for all students. So does Wagner’s leadership of the Atlantic Center for Learning Communities (www.wagner.edu/aclc), a consortium that “supports institutions in the region who are developing LC initiatives.”

10. West Valley College. Figure 5.8 presents a strategic goal approved by the College Council at West Valley College on March 8, 2007. This goal provides another exemplary example of what a college or university could perhaps become as a bona fide LO. It continued as a strategic goal after Dr. Lori Gaskin became president of the college in 2009. Unfortunately, when contacted about this goal in November 2011, West Valley officials reported that because of severe cutbacks in funding from the state of California, it is no longer in line with what they are striving to achieve.

Suggestions for Building Powerful LOs

LOs have received little attention in postsecondary education. This is true even though such a focus has been prevalent at the elementary/secondary education level over the last decade. For example, Sergiovanni (2000) states the following:

Community is at the heart of a school’s lifeworld. It provides the substance for finding and making meaning and the framework for culture building. Think of community as a powerful antioxidant that can protect the schools lifeworld, ensuring that means will serve ends rather than determine them. . . . Schools can be understood as

- Learning communities where students and other members of the school community are committed to thinking, growing, and inquiring and where learning is an attitude as well as an activity, a way of life as well as a process
- Collegial communities where members are connected to each other for mutual benefit and to pursue common goals by a sense of felt interdependence and mutual obligation
- Caring communities where members make a total commitment to each other and where the characteristics that define their relationships are moral in character
- Inclusive communities where economic, religious, cultural, ethnic, family and other differences are brought together into a mutually respectful whole
- Inquiring communities where principals and teachers commit themselves to a spirit of collective inquiry as they reflect on their practice and search for solutions to the problems they face.
FIGURE 5.8
Strategic goal of West Valley College, 2007.

1. Learning Community. We will shape a learning community which blends the traditional focus on content with the development of additional skills that learners need to contribute successfully to our contemporary, multi-cultural society by:
   • Effectively developing a sense of community
   • Encouraging collaboration
   • Making all members of the college community active partners with shared responsibility in the learning experience
   • Developing appropriate skills to promote lifelong learning
   • Supporting collaborative learning and problem solving within the classroom, across the college and throughout the district

   We will continue to support student success by:
   • Developing, evaluating, and improving our educational programs and services
   • Assisting students in setting their educational goals and evaluating progress toward them
   • Utilizing continual assessment to improve the student learning experience

   We will promote ongoing professional and personal growth by:
   • Providing orientation for all full- and part-time employees
   • Providing opportunities, resources, and mentoring

2. Diversity & Inclusion. We will foster an increasingly diverse and inclusive learning community by:
   • Communicating and building better relationships with the communities we serve
   • Decreasing systemic financial, geographic, academic, physical, personal and cultural barriers to make the campus more accessible and inviting
   • Attracting, hiring, retaining, and supporting a highly qualified, multi-faceted staff
   • Preparing and encouraging students to contribute successfully to our contemporary, multi-cultural society

3. Collaborative Leadership. We will work collaboratively, as active partners in the learning community, on behalf of the common good of the College and District. We will take responsibility, both individually and collectively, to engage in shared decision-making by:
   • Improving and sustaining an environment of mutual respect, confidence, support and trust
   • Communicating, interacting and building teams within and across constituencies
   • Ensuring timely, effective communication
   • Making intentional, conscientious, thoughtful, and timely decisions

4. Physical Resources. We will proactively and innovatively support the learning community with physical resources (buildings, grounds, learning stations, instructional space, and equipment) by:
   • Making the campus more accessible, inviting, safe, and physically attractive to a diverse population
   • Maintaining, reconfiguring, and developing classrooms, laboratories and other facilities to promote collaborative learning
   • Sharing our physical resources more effectively
FIGURE 5.8 (Continued)

- Using technologies that help us transcend the limitations of the physical environment by thinking of the community as the classroom
- Promoting the College campus as a resource to the community and viewing the community as a resource for the College

5. Fiscal Innovation. We will proactively and innovatively fund our learning community by:
   - Engaging in strategic financial planning
   - Securing appropriate alternative sources of funding
   - Allocating resources through fiscal policies, priorities, and processes that support institutional goals

Note. From www.westvalley.edu/mission.html in November 2010.

Three characteristics are important in gauging the extent to which a school forms a community: the extent to which members share common interpersonal bonds, the extent to which members share an identity with a common place (for example, my class, my space, my school), and the extent to which members share a commitment to values, norms and beliefs. (pp. 59–60)

Ideally, for the powerful potential of LCs to be achieved in postsecondary education, the entire institution needs to be involved—including faculty, staff, and students as well as others, such as governing boards, alumni, and friends of the institution. They must be organized—separately and in concert—to think about, plan for, and contribute to implementation of SLCs and optimum student learning.

To be powerful, LOs must be true LCs in and of themselves. They must play a crucial role in planning, implementation, and maintenance of LCs throughout the campus and cyberspace so that they can affect our society in a maximally positive manner. Everyone must become involved in creating a total new culture and vision for the institution in which optimizing student learning is the focus throughout. The total institution must become a true “learning organization,” as must subunits within the organization, such as the various academic departments, the admissions department, the financial aid department, the facilities and maintenance department, and student affairs.

The key to development of such an institution-wide culture and practice is charismatic and motivating leadership that inspires institution-wide loyalty and trust, provides needed incentives, and helps everyone throughout the
institution feel supported and involved. As stated on infed’s website (www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm) in October 2011, “Learning organizations require a new view of leadership. . . . In a learning organization, leaders are designers, stewards and teachers.” See the website for in-depth discussion of each characteristic.

Furthermore, for this revolution in student learning to occur, each LO must include a variety of powerful PLCs across the institution that are continually considering how SLCs and student learning can be optimized. Across-institution support from other institutions with similar goals may also be helpful. For example, there are consortiums designed for that specific purpose, such as the Consortium for Innovative Environments in Learning (see www.cielearn.org/initiatives.htm).

The Miami University of Ohio FIPSE project provides another example of across-institution support. The project was designed to help six prominent universities adapt Miami’s FLC model to transform their campuses into an effective campuswide culture for learning (see www.units.muohio.edu/flc/other_info/fipseinfo.php). Miami paired Senge’s five components of an LO that will foster close relationships campuswide (systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, and team learning) with corresponding institutional changes that are needed to become an LO (see www.units.muohio.edu/flc/other_info/becoming.php). These changes are presented in Figure 5.9.

J. S. Brown’s (1997) five core values for all LOs should also be considered:

1. All members of the organization are learners; 2. Learning is natural, healthy, and something that we all seek—making fewer hierarchical distinctions of teachers and learners; 3. Consider the learner as a complex system who is affected by many experiences over a lifetime; 4. Focus on the group of learners, not individual learners, by utilizing approaches to learning that are powerful for all kinds of learners; and 5. Set as the highest priority for institutional strength the designing of structures that require cross-discipline learning. (pp. 8–9)

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory’s emphasis on assessing readiness (see www.sedl.org/pubs/change45/6.html) before proceeding with LC development, referred to in the section “Suggestions for
### FIGURE 5.9
Institutional changes needed to become an LO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation and recovery of a common language and processes across departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and divisions; setting and honoring institutional missions, goals, actions,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for faculty to continue as experts in their disciplines, yet broaden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their scholarship beyond discovery to include integration, application, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching, particularly multidisciplinary perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change from a culture of autonomy and rewards for individual work to one of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community building; rewards for faculty contributions to institutional goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and solutions of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of departmental and disciplinary visions across disciplines;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifying joint approaches to issues such as implementing student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communities, improving student learning, integration of technology, creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of an intellectual community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges and universities with “learning communities for teaching and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with colleagues and students”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. From [www.units.muohio.edu/flc/other_info/becoming.php](http://www.units.muohio.edu/flc/other_info/becoming.php).*

Building Powerful PLCs, applies here also. All of the effort will be for naught if the institution is not ready to begin implementing such change.

Although targeted at elementary-secondary educators, perhaps the best vision of what a true LO in higher education can become, if one generalizes, is provided by Spady and Schwahn (2010). Figures 5.10 and 5.11 present the true community that they envision.

They also refer to five essential defining components of an LO and devote chapters to them as follows: (a) its collegial culture of professionalism (chapter 2), (b) its transformational philosophy and rationale (chapter 3), (c) its life-performance learner outcomes (chapter 4), (d) its empowering learning system (chapters 5 and 6), and (e) its aligned support structure (chapter 7).

Spady and Schwahn (2010) state the following about what they have called “empowering LCs”:

Perhaps the biggest paradigm stretch for your people will come . . . where we explain the whys, whats, and hows of deriving life performance learner
FIGURE 5.10
Spady and Schwahn’s view of transformational change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From education in a box</th>
<th>To empowerment paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Curriculum Subjects Box</td>
<td>The world’s ever-expanding knowledge base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Requirements Box</td>
<td>The infinite, valuable array of things to explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Time/Schedule Box</td>
<td>Today’s unlimited 24/7/365 access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grade Level Box</td>
<td>Vast differences in learning rates and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The IQ Box</td>
<td>Humans’ rich array of gifts and talents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grading/Marking Box</td>
<td>Authentic performance criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Achievement Box</td>
<td>The vast array of human abilities and accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Standards Box</td>
<td>The richness and complexity of life performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Test Score Box</td>
<td>The complex abilities required in today’s work world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ranking Box</td>
<td>But 50 percent of all people are forced into the bottom half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Access/Eligibility Box</td>
<td>Unlimited access to learning via technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Opportunity Box</td>
<td>Our “anyone can learn anything at any time” world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Program/Tracking Box</td>
<td>Ever-maturing personal capacities/abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Classroom Box</td>
<td>An unlimited array of online and experiential options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role/Control Box</td>
<td>Self-direction as an invaluable personal attribute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Excerpted from Spady and Schwahn (2010, p. 11).

outcomes. We’ll be showing exciting examples from across the world that really symbolize learning transformation and empowerment in future-focused form. And on its heels comes the heavy-lifting parts of your change process: implementing an empowering learning system . . . and building an aligned support structure. . . Expect to see what the terms “systemic” and “restructuring” really mean from a paradigm change perspective, and what the essence of a true “LC” is—in action. (p. 21)

Is it possible for higher education institutions in general to become true LOs in the manner that Spady and Schwahn have envisioned for elementary-secondary education institutions? Only time will tell. In the introduction to a very recent study, Holyoke, Sturko, Wood, and Wu (2012) emphasized that both educational researchers and college/university faculty are skeptical that higher education institutions can become “learning organizations.” Those authors’ study results do suggest, however, that there is more openness to implementing such a concept at private four-year colleges and universities than at any other types of postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, their data suggest that the best place to begin is to have institutional academic departments work toward becoming such LOs.
FIGURE 5.11
Spady and Schwahn’s view of paradigm change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From a Limiting Reformer Orientation</th>
<th>To an Expansive Transformer Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educentric Paradigm</strong></td>
<td><strong>Empowerment Paradigm</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-the-box viewpoint</td>
<td>Outside-the-box viewpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content-focused learning</td>
<td>Inner-focused learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary curriculum</td>
<td>Trans-disciplinary curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational/logical thinking</td>
<td>Divergent/lateral thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-initiated/classroom-based learning</td>
<td>Learner-initiated/life experience learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graded structure and learning opportunities</td>
<td>Nongraded structure/learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement and advancement</td>
<td>Personal development and maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission of accepted knowledge/understanding</td>
<td>Exploration of unique insights and possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External expectations, control, and rewards</td>
<td>Internal motivation, control, and fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premium on IQ learning</td>
<td>Focus on EQ development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive organizational ethic</td>
<td>Collaborative organizational ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative measures of success</td>
<td>Qualitative measures of development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-system thinking and operations</td>
<td>Open-system thinking and operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled learning opportunities</td>
<td>Flexible learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting right answers</td>
<td>Asking deeper questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults as control/evaluation agents</td>
<td>Adults as learning/performance role models</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Excerpted from Spady and Schwahn (2010, p. 15).

The Rest of the Story

Look back at the scenario at the beginning of the chapter. Dr. Singh and Dr. Rose developed an exceptionally effective LC that includes students as well as diverse faculty and staff. They expanded participation beyond their two schools and used heterogeneous groups to create deep learning from various perspectives. Dr. Rose and Dr. Singh created “real-life” scenarios that required various perspectives to be considered. Furthermore, the LC discussion really brought out commonalities across the disciplines and the value of a true interdisciplinary approach. As in many lively LCs, the interaction continues outside the formal setting—a pre-med and a pre-law student are both amazed at what the other must accomplish in his or her discipline. To take these LCs one step further, these professors could integrate the symposium as part of linking courses within the pre-med and pre-law programs. This would create a cumulative effect in interdisciplinary LCs.

Conclusion

SLCs are created for a variety of purposes, but the intent is singular: student learning. Although the framework for deep learning and student community building is important, the main purpose of LCs—to promote strategic and reflective learners who are intellectually and socially adept within society—
must never be forgotten. Curricular, classroom, residential, and student-type/concern cohorts help to assist student learning whether focusing on developmental needs or honors’ students. The collaboration—between and within disciplines and departments—helps to solidify SLCs on college campuses. Finally, choice in format should be considered. As every learner has his or her learning style, so do institutions of learning.

The intentional combination of each format will help students and faculty support the highest level of learning. Consideration of the SLC’s foundation, purpose, and format will provide answers to the following three questions: (a) How well do we promote student success? (b) How many students do our efforts reach in meaningful ways? and (c) What is our evidence?

For SLCs to achieve optimum positive effects, the entire institution and important units therein need to be organized separately and in concert. Each LO must include a variety of PLCs—made up of faculty, staff, or both—that are continually considering how SLCs and student learning can be optimized. All must be involved in creating a total new culture and vision for the institution in which optimizing student learning is the focus throughout so that an institution functions as a true LO.

For Reflection
As you create your own meaning from ideas in this chapter, begin to think about a specific LC at your institution (or at an institution you know about if you are in a governmental or other noninstitutional role) and how it can inform your work or interests. Use that LC to answer the following questions and help you reflect on practical implications of the material in this chapter:

- Which of the discussed SLC formats appealed to you? What was their foundation and purpose?
- How do those formats contribute to deep learning and student community building for the particular group of students served by your LC? What is the learning style of your institution?
- What intentional combination of each format will help students and faculty support the highest level of learning?
- Does this format combination apply equally to other student groups at your institution?
- Does your institution have talented college teachers who have found ingenious solutions to problems in learning but have not reflected on
or shared those solutions with others on a regular and continual basis? How can this situation best be corrected? What specific steps would be required?

- What legitimate PLCs are operating at your institution? How powerful are they? Which of them are FLCs and which have a broader membership? Should any of them become broader in their membership? If so, which ones?

- Based on the examples and guidelines provided in this chapter, what will it take to make each kind of PLC at your institution optimally powerful?

- Which characteristics of your institution would qualify it to be a legitimate LO as described in this chapter? Which characteristics of your institution would prevent it from being classified as a true LO?

- Is your institution a bona fide LO? If so, how can it become a powerful LO? If not, what would need to happen for it to earn that status?

Now that you have read and reflected on this chapter, you should be able to complete the following items on the Powerful LC Planning Form in Appendix C:

- Section I: #2. "Why are you doing this?"
- Section I: #3. "What are your overarching goals?"
- Section I: #4. "Purpose Statement."
- Section I: #5. "Who are the stakeholders?"
- Section I: #6. "What resources (or sources of resources) are available to support the LC?"
- Section II: #1. "What will the LC look like?".
- Section II: #2. "How will you select members for your LC?"
- Section II: #3. "What are the overarching goals of the LC?"
- Section III: #1. "How will you build community?"
- Section III: #2. "How will you develop a culture for learning?"
- Section III: #3. "What norms do you want members to follow and how will you ensure accountability?"
- Section III: #4. "What resources are needed for your LC to be successful."

Notes

1. For example, at SUNY Potsdam, SLC faculty meet weekly to integrate their SLC courses; at a number of other institutions, faculty team teach (one survey respondent stated an opinion that the use of team teaching is critical if you want to have a powerful LC).
2. For example, Catholic University of America; Charleston College, which has only full-time faculty involved (like at University of Alabama–Birmingham and University of Oregon, as well as others) and three days of special faculty training each May; Eastern New Mexico University; Harper College, which requires SLC participation for graduation; Kennesaw State University, which requires all entering students with less than 15 credit hours to participate; Medaille College, which emphasizes collaborative SLC projects out in metropolitan Buffalo, New York; Portland State University, which requires all entering students except honors students to participate; Skagit Community College, which requires every student to take at least one coordinated studies course in order to graduate.

3. They can also be different in terms of such matters as whether there is an extra cost for participation in an LLC. For example, students at the University of Illinois pay an extra fee over and above the regular residence hall cost to participate in an LLC.

4. Stonehill College designed all its SLCs for second-year students, none for first-year students. The University of Iowa has a variety of specially designed/distinctive LLCs for transfer students and separately for returning students, in addition to an array of LLCs for first-year students.

5. Each of these principles is supported by best-practice research.


7. Note that the concept of FLCs used at Miami University of Ohio limits faculty participants to transdisciplinary faculty but broadens participation to include professional staff and nonteaching graduate students as well.