

Learning Community Retreat

June 8, 2012

Action prompted by Intent and guided by vision

Purpose

The purpose of the retreat is to invigorate WCU's commitment to *Learning Communities* as an educational strategy, through a conversation among colleagues and led by a national expert. Further, the intent is to empower participants to put theory into practice by providing the follow-up support, resources, and professional development opportunities that will allow participants to act on their vision with colleagues forming their own community of learners.

Goals

Participants will

- Examine best practice models that compliment a variety of disciplinary teaching and learning strategies and outcomes in a context appropriate to WCU's institutional mission.
- Address and problem-solve historical and potential challenges to success.
- Work with a team to create learning community design (theme, components, partnerships required, etc.).
- Commit to a partnership team to act on the steps required to bring the vision to fruition and use the information and emergent ideas from the workshop to:
 - Continue a research and planning process;
 - Engage with professional development opportunities;
 - Design and implement a first-year learning community as a teaching partner – OR
 - Develop a network collaboration by which you may support learning communities in development from your divisional area.
- Continue the conversation and the work to share the vision and the 'High Impact' potential for Learning Communities at WCU.

Guiding Mission and Visions

THE WCU Quality Enhancement Plan

**the following is excerpted from: <http://www.wcu.edu/12284.asp>*

The overarching goal of the QEP is to empower students to *integrate* knowledge and skills from their academic and co-curricular experiences to become *intentional* participants in their own learning. To that end, WCU hopes to impact students' *understanding of self, intellectual flexibility and versatility, and capacity for integrated learning.*

As a result, WCU expects students to:

1. identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations;
2. modify their behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences; and
3. recognize the synthesis of their university experiences relative to their future education and career plans.

2020 Vision: Defining our Future

**the following is excerpted from: <http://www.wcu.edu/30667.asp>*

Strategic Direction 2: Enrich the Total Student Experience:

WCU is committed to working towards the best interests of the region and state through deliberately and consciously considering what it means to educate citizens. This encompasses both curricular and co-curricular elements that serve to prepare our students to become graduates who are equipped to participate in and help create a vibrant, intellectually, culturally, and economically thriving region, state, nation, and world.

GOAL2.2: Foster active citizenship among our students: The development of students as engaged citizens must happen in and out of the classroom, on campus and off. WCU should provide opportunities for students to practice citizenship, to exercise the mindset and skills necessary for life in a democratic society, be that through leadership and participatory activities and/or through engagement with the whole University community.

INITIATIVE 2.2.2: Increase the number of (Academic & Living) Learning Communities that integrate active, collaborative, and interdisciplinary learning experiences with curricular goals with appropriate logistical and administrative support

American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

**the following is excerpted from: <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>*

High Impact Educational Practice

“The following teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts....”

- ***Learning Communities***

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

- ***First-Year Seminars and Experiences***

The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members’ own research.

PLUS:

- ***Common Intellectual Experiences.***
- ***Writing-Intensive Courses***
- ***Collaborative Assignments and Projects***
- ***Undergraduate Research***
- ***Diversity/Global Learning***
- ***Service Learning, Community-Based Learning***
- ***Internships***
- ***Capstone Courses and Projects***