

PROGRAM REVIEW 2008-2011

Division: Academic Services

Department or Program: Learning in Communities (LinC)

Name and Title of Preparer(s): Edwina Stoll LinC Coordinator
Anu Khanna LinC Coordinator
Matt Abrahams LinC Coordinator

In providing responses in the following areas, **please utilize the quantitative data available in the Program Review Enrollment Data Document and the Budget Document.** For the purposes of the Program Review, both departments and programs will be referred to as “program.”

I. **Description and Mission of the Program**

Which area(s) does this program considerably address (check all that apply):

Basic Skills Transfer Career/Technical Other (describe)

A. Provide a brief description of the program including any services provided and the program’s mission.

Background

The Learning in Communities (LinC) Program at De Anza was established in 1997 as part of the modern National Learning Communities Movement created at first through a grant awarded at The Evergreen State College, Olympia Washington. The movement has grown to include over 300 colleges and universities. Twice in the last five years, the LinC program has been featured in the qualitative study of national programs.

De Anza has been involved since the inception of this movement. LinC is widely recognized nationally as a stable learning communities program. The De Anza LinC program now serves approximately 1,200 students a year who study in a variety of interdisciplinary formats created by faculty trained specifically in the learning communities’ pedagogy. Each learning community enjoys the support of a dedicated counselor as well as formative assessment which allows the faculty to make early adjustments in curriculum and process to insure the success of each student.

LinC’s program and purpose arise directly from De Anza’s overarching mission and purpose: The purpose of Learning in Communities is to promote the success of students – many of whom are under-prepared – by offering a better way to learn. The academic work of each course’s subject matter is enhanced by interdisciplinary study in which students and faculty build connections between subject matters, disciplines and ideas. Students learn naturally by making connections between different ideas and experiences. Trained De Anza faculty integrate two or more subjects to create a better and easier understanding of both. A student works with the same community of students in the linked classes, helping each other succeed and making friends along the way. With common readings and assignments, students learn more and complete more units while feeling empowered to succeed.

Mission:

To provide students with special learning experience involving integrated curriculum from two or more classes with a priority on making content and social connections via contact with trained instructors and counselors.

B. Provide a summary of the program’s main strengths.

- Student success
 - Higher persistence, retention and success for LinC than in similar courses

- High degree of reported student satisfaction in class experience (i.e., strong sense of group identity, cohesion and “specialness.”)
- Variety and breadth of offerings -- developmental through transfer
- Attention to students’ cultural, physical, emotional, and academic needs
- Curriculum and pedagogy
 - Strong environment for curricular collaboration and innovation along with pedagogical growth, resulting in a high degree of reported faculty satisfaction
 - Financial support for classroom activities
 - Team teaching augments instruction and allows for greater focus on needs of underrepresented students
 - Cutting edge pedagogical innovations and use of technology
- Infrastructure
 - Successful model and training for integrating, delivering and assessing (formative and summative) curriculum as well as learning outcomes
 - Strong national reputation for success facilitates grant attainment

C. Provide a summary of the program’s main areas for improvement.

We continuously work to improve our program. Since we place such a strong emphasis on assessment and feedback, the data and anecdotes we receive provide us with insight into what is working and what needs to be improved. Below, are the most recent areas of improvement that have been identified:

- Faculty partnerships
 - Attract a broader group of faculty across various departments and divisions
 - Reduce occasional “bad fit” of teaching partners which can lead to a potential negative experience for students
- Leadership and funding
 - Lack of Staff Development leadership because of current vacancy
 - Lack of guaranteed institutional funding
- Program infrastructure
 - Enhance systems infrastructure for scheduling and enrollment of classes
 - Acquire physical space (e.g., for storage) and administrative assistance

To address these improvements and any other issues that arise, we work collaboratively. The LinC coordinators work closely with the following: the LinC leaders team, which spans academic divisions and includes counseling; our peers in academic services; those managing various grants (e.g., BSI, IMPACT AAPI, Title III, etc.); and our colleagues in admissions and records, scheduling, and accounting. The results of our expanded team efforts often lead to creative solutions that not only enhance our program, but often improve other campus programs and processes (refer to section I part B).

D. What are your expected outcomes (such as learning outcomes, transfer, career goals, certificate and degrees) for students in your program?

The LinC program’s expected outcomes directly reflect De Anza’s desired student outcomes (as shown on the De Anza website). LinC students are expected not only to attain mastery of the concepts and practices taught in LinC classes, but they are expected to develop a sense of community and camaraderie with their fellow students. The experiences that bring about this connection to their class and peers provide students with critical thinking, effective communication, negotiation and collaboration skills.

With LinC's built in counseling component and dedicated access to a counselor, LinC students are expected to successfully complete their classes toward their career and academic goals (i.e., transfer, job, etc.), while learning how to efficaciously navigate through and maximize the advantages of organizational resources afforded them.

II. Retention and Growth

A. How has the program responded to the institutional goal of increased access, growth and retention? (Include the number of students enrolled in the program and the retention rate over the last three years.)

The institutional goals of increased access, growth and retention have long been part of the LinC program's goals. The entire infrastructure of the LinC program and the classes which are supported by it have embedded pedagogical and logistical practices as well as faculty commitment that foster these goals. For example:

- LinC has developed a very effective recruitment process, which includes marketing to targeted students and data analysis to identify classes that make sense to link together.
- LinC has developed sequenced learning communities that scaffold student learning and provide a growth path through a series of classes (e.g. CREM -- Counseling/Reading/English/Math, and LART 200/ LART 211/ TO EWRT 1A + GE Class), and ESL 272/273 to ESL 262/263 to ESL 5 + HIST 17A, B, OR C)
- LinC fosters retention in a number of ways. Instructors are trained in techniques that create open, accepting classroom climates; counselors are available and in the students' classrooms; and regular qualitative and quantitative student evaluations are conducted during the term to allow for adjustments that meet students' needs.

Total LinC Enrollment and Retention Percent

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Number Enrolled	786	1,055	1,278
LinC Retention Rate	93%	92%	90%

*We are pleased that we have maintained our high retention rate, while significantly increasing both the number of participants in our program and the number of developmental education classes being offered.

How has the program responded to the institutional goal of increased access, growth and retention specifically for the identified targeted populations of African Ancestry, Latino/a, and Filipino/a students? (Include the number and percentage of the program's enrollment that was made up of the targeted populations and the retention rate of the targeted populations over the last three years.)

According to Andrew LaManque, De Anza Institutional Researcher, who has tracked our program since 2002, enrollment in LinC classes mirrors the ethnic population of the college with two exceptions: More Asians (mainly Vietnamese) and Latinos/as enroll in LinC classes with a roughly equivalent number of black and Filipino students enrolling (see Charts A and B below). We hypothesize that the collaborative and supportive nature of these classes is found to be more comfortable by students from these populations. Our data from more than 12 years demonstrate that the benefits of learning communities apply to all student populations, especially those at the developmental level. In fact, close to 60% of students who take one LinC class take another one.

However, LinC does respond to the access, growth and retention needs of specific populations. For example, we work closely with the Puente program and have had several of their LART classes supported by the LinC infrastructure (i.e., instructor training, marketing, evaluation, etc.). Beyond Latino students, LinC success and reputation helped garner the \$2M IMPACT AAPI grant which will fund several sequential LinC classes targeting Southeast Asian and Native Pacific Islander students.

Finally, LinC is just beginning to partner with the Sankofa Scholars Program to offer our expertise and infrastructure to ensure success of this program targeting African ancestry students.

Chart A

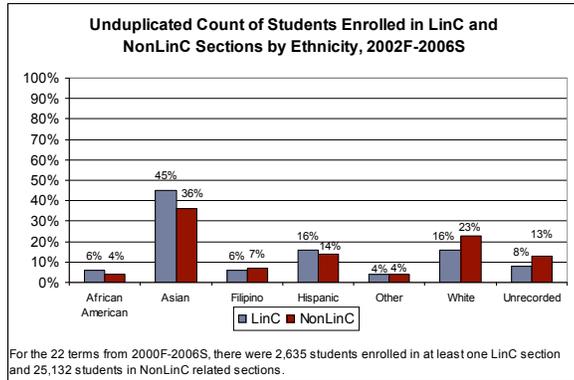
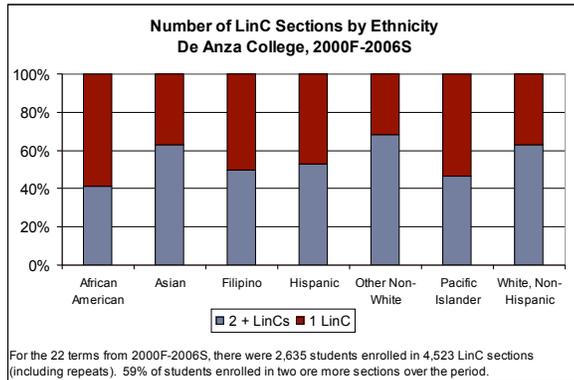


Chart B



- C. The Statewide Basic Skills Initiative defines “basic skills” as English, mathematics, reading, writing and ESL skills. In what ways does your program address the basic skills needs of students? For programs that do not directly address basic skills, how does the lack of basic skills impact student success rates for your program?

The vast majority of LinC classes are basic skills (currently in excess of 80% of classes offered which represents an increase over the last four years). Research suggests and our data find that learning basic skills in a collaborative way, supported by trained instructors and counselors, leads to success. Each quarter, LARTs (a combination of reading and writing classes at the basic skills levels) along with several ESL learning communities are offered. Additionally, this year marks the second offering of our year-long CREM (Counseling, Reading, English, and Math) class which takes students from the most basic of skills level in Reading and Math through completion of Math 114 and EWRT 1A. Finally, we have offered several LinC classes that combine a basic skills class (e.g., ESL) with a general education course (e.g., History 17); these courses offer some of our greatest student successes.

Indirectly, LinC addresses basic skills by providing training and pedagogical leadership on techniques and tools for scaffolding basic skills learners. For example, at our two-day, intensive DSILC (De Anza Summer Institute for Learning Communities) in 2008, the main focus was both on teaching content targeted at the appropriate level as well as ensuring the emotional and physical well-being of the students. Both of which have been linked to success of under-prepared students. Faculty left with directly and immediately applicable skills and awareness that should be beneficial to these students.

III. Student Equity

What progress or achievement has the program made towards decreasing the student equity gap? (Include student success rates for targeted populations compared with other students over the last three years.)

In service of addressing equity issues, LinC training has started focusing on bringing more culturally diverse content into the classroom. The result of this effort has been that in the last three years, faculty teams have adopted several culturally based topics as the themes of their learning community curriculum. Some examples of recent course titles which illustrate this point are: “Where We Belong: Building and Sharing the Cultures of our Communities,” “Right Before Your Eyes: Emerging Latina/o Leadership,” “Intersections: Our Families, Ourselves, The World,” “The Revolution will be Televised: Persopolis, The Little Chinese Seamstress and the Farming of Bones,” and “Honoring Our Stories: From the Bay Area to Southeast Asia and the Pacific.”

All state and college indicators have pointed to the fact that in the last few years there has been a shift in the population of students entering community colleges. A larger population from different ethnic backgrounds with lower skill levels, especially in English language skills, and more dramatic personal needs have begun to enter our doors.

To be responsive to our students’ needs, LinC encouraged faculty to create more LARTs (particularly at the lowest level of LART 200) but also supported faculty creating LART-like, ESL LinCs which are one and two levels below ESL 5. Looking at the data, we see an increase in the number of students being served by the LinC program from the targeted populations. From 2005-2006, the increase in enrollment in the targeted populations was 14% and in 2007-2008 enrollment increased another 29% -- combined *this is nearly a 45% increase in the targeted population in two years*. During this time, retention has remained stable (between 90% and 87%, respectively), but the success rate has dropped from 85% to 80% in 2006-2007 and another 3% in 2007-08.

The leadership team of the LinC program anticipated our success rates might drop because of the large influx of students who arrive from under-served backgrounds— as was our experience 10 years ago when we shifted our program to address an expanding immigrant population. We made a conscious effort to stay focused on the developmental education needs of the emerging campus population and we intend to fine tune our efforts to increase our success rates much like we did a decade ago.

B. In what ways will the program continue working toward achieving these goals?

As stated earlier, we are continuously seeking ways to improve our offerings and their benefits to students. To continue our efforts to decrease the student equity gap, we are working on several fronts:

- The LinC program is striving to recruit instructors from the various targeted populations to undergo our training, develop teaching teams, etc.
- LinC is working to decrease the equity gap on campus by strengthening our assistance to LART instructors who are also being supported by Title III.
- Using the IMPACT AAPI grant funded LinCs as a model, we believe our program can further benefit targeted populations. Specifically, this grant has allowed for creating LinC classes (e.g., a LART) whose themes are of interest to the IMPACT AAPI targeted audience. Further, dedicated counselors and recruitment processes help to ensure student enrollment and success.
- At our upcoming, two-day, intensive DSILC (De Anza Summer Institute for Learning Communities) during the summer of 2009, our theme will be addressing the needs of our targeted populations and identifying meaningful ways to celebrate the cultural richness the students bring to their classrooms.

C. What challenges exist in the program in reaching such goals?

We see at least three categories of challenges to achieving our goal of decreasing the equity gap:

- Addressing student needs
 - Perhaps the greatest challenge we face has to do with external pressures which this emerging population of students face (e.g. financial worries, needing to work, homelessness, no support at home to complete classes, etc.).
- Faculty and curriculum
 - Finding and retaining qualified instructors who wish to teach in LinC classes. Currently, instructors whose approach nicely matches ours are often pulled in many directions (e.g., First Year Experience, Sankofa Scholars Program, MPS, Enabled Math, etc.).
 - Managing instructor "burn out." Meeting needs of this changing population is very draining and sometimes disappointing. This year, more than any other, faculty have proclaimed their fatigue.
- Support and resources
 - Ensuring continued strong leadership in the Staff Development and Diversity Office areas -- given a previous and upcoming retirement.
 - Support from Deans and Counseling for LinC classes. Room scheduling, load balancing, counselor availability all need to be worked out for our program to be successful.

Time and time again LinC faculty go "beyond the call of duty" to meet the needs of students only to "lose the student" to the drop out list. For example, we know of a faculty member who repeatedly worked with a student who was in and out of prison --- only to lose the student; another faculty member even went to the college president to help a student who was homeless --- only to lose the student, we have had several faculty members go out of their way to provided access to needed materials (e.g., text books) --- only to lose a few students. None of these challenges is meant to excuse a decrease in student success numbers. Rather, they illustrate the changing needs of the current student population and put a different "face" on our challenges as a program to properly train faculty and support them in these unique endeavors.

IV. **Budget Limitations** (Please be specific in your responses.)

- A. Identify any limitations placed on the program based on limited funding. What increases in resources are critical to the program and what are the consequences of continued limited funding on the program?

Funding issues place a significant burden on the LinC program's ability to succeed. Budget reductions would drastically reduce the breadth and success of our offerings. To begin, initial and on-going training of instructors takes time and money. Next, the breadth of the program (i.e., recruiting instructors, assisting in curriculum integration, training, advising existing teaching partners, evaluations, marketing, scheduling, etc.) takes considerable resources to run. Administrative and technological support also suffer.

Funding release time for the LinC coordinators and monies for training are crucial to the continued success of the program. Without this funding, LinC will not be able to maintain or grow its offerings.

- B. Describe the consequence to students and the college in general if the program were eliminated or significantly reduced. Please be specific.

First and foremost, years of growing benefits to all De Anza students as well as engaged faculty would be lost. Specifically, the support and nurturing of LARTs (combined Reading and Writing classes), which have long served as the exemplar of LinC's success, would be lost. It is critical to note that student success in LARTs is a critical measure for several grants (e.g., BSI, IMPACT AAPI, Title III, etc). Finally, the College's national reputation for being at the forefront of successful learning

communities work would be jeopardized and, therefore, opportunities for outside grant funding diminished.

- V. **Additional Comments (optional):** What additional information is important to consider when reviewing the budget of your program for possible reductions? You may include any or all of the following, or other information.

De Anza’s LinC program is nationally recognized. The program has been used as an exemplar in prominent national writings, such as *Learning Communities: Reforming undergraduate education* (2004) by B.L. Smith et. al. and in three different monographs in the National Learning Communities Project series (2003-2005). LinC has helped bring in several grants totaling \$1 million. Reduction in LinC’s budget would jeopardize not only LinC’s ability to bring in grants, but the campus as a whole might find reduced justification for grants. For example, part of the reason the IMPACT AAPI grant was funded was based on success data from our LinC classes (e.g., LARTs).

- **Strategic Planning Initiatives (Community Collaborations, Cultural Competency, Outreach, and Individualized Attention for Retention):** Describe any other Strategic Planning Initiatives your program has addressed.

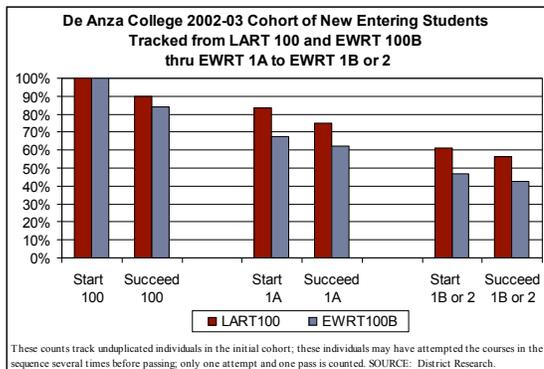
Clearly, LinC is all about collaboration within the De Anza community and externally. Several LinC classes have robust service learning components that take students off campus and into their communities. Additionally, LinC classes with their integrated counselors provide for individualized attention which assists in the retention initiative.

- **Relationships with Other Programs:** Describe any partnerships or collaborations that the program is actively engaged in, which reduce costs and/or improve service delivery.

We currently are working closely with the BSI, IMPACT AAPI and Title III grant committees. Further, we have been invited to provide guidance to First Year Experience and Sankofa Scholars Program. We look forward to helping grow these programs to be as successful as LinC has been.

- **Trends (such as enrollment, certificate and degrees conferred, transfer rates, job placement, etc.):**

We are continuing our effort to offer sequenced classes, such as our CREM (reading, writing, math and counseling), both within Language Arts and in other divisions (e.g., our IMPACT AAPI funded sequence). We are confident in this approach because a cohort analysis of LART students demonstrated that they both succeeded and persisted through three subsequent quarters at levels greater than students starting at the same levels of stand-alone English classes.



All of our data trends point to the pervasive and significant positive impact that our offerings have on students’ success and persistence.