

# The Sentinel

## Teaching and Learning in Community Promoting Student Engagement

By Colleen Stribling

Community Voices:

Spartan Consulting and the learning community have opened my eyes to see real needs that regular people struggle with. I did not know about The Literacy Connection until this class. I'm glad that I have a chance to make a difference and help people while I was earning course credit. But the most fun and exciting part about being at ECC is meeting new people. I finally feel like I am in college and doing college level course work. - *Student Reflection*

*For the first time since I started going to ECC, I felt that I belonged to the school and I felt confident to keep going forward to reach one of my goals. I have always dreamed about going to college and trying to study something and I think that I finally found what I was looking for. - Student Reflection-English Language Learner*

It is a wonderful way to meet new instructors, understand what other instructors expect from students, and ... synthesize ideas from different courses. - *Faculty Reflection*

*I noticed it helped people stay in class and not drop out. Also I developed better relationships with students and teachers, so I feel more comfortable asking for advice and questions. - Student Reflection*

For the past seven years, the Learning Community Steering Committee has worked to incubate and grow a program designed to engage both students and faculty. Currently, over 300 students are enrolled in learning community courses each year taught by 25 faculty members. As the committee continues to gain expertise in the theories and practice of learning communities, student success rates and measurements of student engagement in these sections have increased. Because of the positive outcomes for both students and faculty, the Learning Communities

Committee is inviting additional faculty to participate in a learning community.

What is a learning community?

A learning community, as defined by *Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick (2004)*, is:

- ✓ A curricular approach **intentionally linking** two or more courses **enrolling a common cohort of students.**
- ✓ Intentional restructuring of learning experiences to **build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among students and their teachers, and among disciplines.**
- ✓ Practice pedagogies of **active engagement and reflection.**

Learning communities at ECC are divided into two broad categories: Emerging Scholars and College Level. In Emerging Scholars sections, students placed in one or more developmental level courses learn as a cohort. Mathematical Expression, which combines English 098 (Alison Douglas), Math 098 (Dan Kernler), and College 101 (Gary Renn), is an example of a fall offering. Images of History, a combination of Art 115 (Mary Beth Koos) and Political Science 152 (Chris Newman), is one of the college-level combinations. Instructors in each cohort work together to create assignments that are integrated across the courses. The level of integration depends on the instructors. Teams are asked to integrate at least two assignments and to meet regularly to discuss student progress. In addition, instructors are asked to intentionally integrate student services into their classes.

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**PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE**

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings from the ECCFA Leadership Team. We sincerely wish that you are having a great semester. For the ECCFA leadership, it has been a very busy semester with the ongoing negotiation of the new bargaining agreement and the regular duties of the senators and your Negotiation Team, who are working very diligently, putting in countless hour at preparation and negotiations meetings.

As I asked in one of my previous letters to the faculty, we need UNITY, UNITY and more UNITY. Please show your appreciation to your team by displaying your ECCFA Unity signs on your office's door.

We would like to give a special thanks to all faculty members who have volunteered to



provide meals for the negotiation team and to those who have donated to the food funds.

One important event that made history in our state and the nation is the passage by the Illinois State Legislature of a law allowing same sex marriage in our state. It was way overdue and the right thing to do. Equality for all! I can't stress it enough.

Finally, and on a personal note, I want to take an opportunity to thank all of you who have been so kind with your words of encouragement and comfort, prayers and good thoughts for my mother's recovery from breast cancer. To all of you, thank you so much from the bottom of my heart.

Let's continue to do what we do best, teaching with excellence and making a positive difference in the lives of our students.

In Unity,  
**Luis Martinez**  
**ECCFA President**

**Support the ECCFA**

As the ECCFA negotiation team continues to work on settling the current contract, showing support of the negotiation team by displaying the “ECCFA Unity” sign on office doors is a small but important thing faculty can do to support the team during this period.

In fact, negotiations is not the only time unity should be shown to union and union representatives. The sign can be kept all year round as a sign of solidarity.

The sign can be downloaded from the ECCFA website, [eccfaculty.org](http://eccfaculty.org), under the Membership tab.



## Union Membership is a Family Tradition

By Ellie Swanson

*The following is a new edition to The Sentinel. It will highlight ECCFA members and the role unions played on them and their families. The goal is to emphasize the importance of unions.*

Like many others, I grew up in a union household. But it was a union household with a little different flavor. In my case my mom was the union member. She was a research chemist for the United States Department of Agriculture at its Northern Regional Research Laboratory (now called the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research) in Peoria, Illinois. The lab (as it was always called in my household) was best known for developing a practical way to produce penicillin in the 1940's. My mom worked there from 1960 through 1989. During those years she held many patents and wrote and presented many professional papers and was a recipient, in 1976, of the Inventor of the Year Award from the Association for the

Advancement of Invention and Innovation.

As the single mother of an adopted only child my mom had reason to worry about putting her job at risk. That didn't stop her from representing her fellow employees. She served for many years as the vice president of her union, an affiliate of AFSCME, the American Federation of Federal, State, County, and Municipal Employees. As federal workers the union members at the lab could not bargain for wages and could not, by law, strike or engage in other work slowdowns. This left much union representation to persuasion and force of personality. Negotiations were essentially over working

conditions like handicapped access for employees in the pre-Americans with Disabilities Act era and flexible work schedules and the installation of Braille signage in the elevators.

I remember my mom talking about a couple of instances of successful union representation. One was a situation where the handicapped access stall in the women's restroom lacked a door. This made it very uncomfortable for disabled employees to use. A member of the housekeeping staff had purchased a shower curtain as a substitute but no action to install it had been taken. My mom put on her union hat and marched into the director's office and demanded that the situation be taken care of right away. It was.

Another memorable situation involved a cost-cutting proposal in the late 1970's. A plan was developed to close some of the regional research labs. The Northern Regional Research Lab was marked for closure. The union protested and decided to send a representative to testify before a Congressional sub-committee. My mom traveled to Washington and testified successfully in defense of the lab, thereby saving the jobs of all the employees there. Even though she had been matched with a job in Iowa and so had less to lose than others she braved the sub-committee in support of her colleagues. To me that was always a prime example of what being part of a union means. It's coming together as one voice even when one is not at risk as an individual.



**Mom and me—about the time she started at the lab.**

## What Happened to CETL?

By Cindy Hutman

In the past 14 months I have fielded many questions regarding the changes to CETL. Although I have answered each inquiry as I received it, I would like to summarize what I know about the changes to CETL here.

As many of you may know, in the summer of 2012 CETL was moved from Mi Hu's division to Human Resources under Sandi Brown. I have been told that instructional administrators were allowed input on this decision. However, the administrators I have spoken to in the instructional area expressed genuine disappointment and concern about this decision. They felt powerless to stop the move. Faculty were given no opportunity to weigh in on this decision. It was a "done deal" when we arrived back on campus for fall semester 2012.

Senate was very concerned about this move. Taking CETL out of instruction means that it would become simply a branch of employee training. The emphasis on instruction and the needs of the faculty would be gone. The direct connection to concerns and initiatives in Teaching, Learning and Student Development would be gone. In addition, faculty relied heavily on the Distance Learning staff for help with instructional design, use of new technology in the classroom and updates on D2L. Distance Learning is in Mi Hu's area and so removing CETL from that area means a disconnect

assistance for faculty and the course offerings in CETL.

Early in fall 2012, Senate invited Janelle Crowley, Director of Human Resources, and Dr. Sam to a Senate meeting to discuss this. At the Senate meeting we were told that CETL had been moved to Human Resources because there had been some conflict in scheduling. CETL courses had sometimes been scheduled when other campus activities were going on.

In addition, we were told the move would mean that Teri Stein, Director of CETL, would be available more hours each week and that CETL would have more resources. We were also assured that nothing would change with CETL. All of those promises have proved false. Teri's hours were severely curtailed. She was no longer allowed to meet with faculty outside of a very rigidly set 17 hours/week. All 17 of those hours were during the day so her previous work with adjunct faculty in the evenings ended. She had to ask special permission and was often denied permission to be on campus for things like New Adjunct Faculty Orientation, which is held on Saturdays. Food for workshops was originally also cut although I believe some workshops are now getting food again. However, we were denied secretarial support for the CETL advisory committee and so minutes were no longer taken at those meetings.

Changes did occur despite the reassurance that CETL would remain the same and the changes just kept on coming. Senate appointed me to monitor the changes and work with Dr. Sam and Janelle to try to maintain CETL. However, my attempts to hold them to their promise of no change did no good.

I still hoped that even with the oversight of HR and Sandi Brown, we could maintain faculty input of CETL. My plan focused on the CETL Advisory Committee. When Teri Stein was originally hired to direct CETL she had, quite wisely, set up an advisory committee to help her review proposals for workshops and give direction to CETL. The committee was informal, and faculty on the committee were drawn from workshop presenters and attendees. I suggested that it was time to make the CETL Advisory Committee an official committee. In the fall 2012 advisory committee meeting we agreed to develop by-laws and have the union elect faculty members to the committee. A sub-committee was set up to write a draft of by-laws to be reviewed in the January 2013 advisory committee meeting. Dr. Sam even attended that meeting and we spent most of the meeting discussing and revising the draft of the by-laws. By the end of January, 2013, we had by-laws and in April 2013 for the first time, the union elected members to the CETL Advisory committee

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## THE PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

By **Cindy Hutman**

Soon after I started teaching at ECC I saw an article in a teaching journal entitled, “Teaching: the Lonely Profession.” I thought, “They got that right.” I have to say the first time I taught I didn’t feel lonely, however. I felt positively isolated and panicked. The only direction I got was a memo telling me where and when to pick up my course roster and when my final grades were due. When I asked for guidance I was told, “We hired you because we believed you could make those decisions.” I taught part-time for five years at three different institutions everything from Introductory Psychology to graduate level statistics before I was observed for the first time. By the time I was hired at ECC, I had been teaching for over 7 years and, on paper, looked like a veteran. I was still a novice. Fortunately, for me at ECC, I was surrounded by colleagues who were more than happy to answer my questions, give advice, share experiences and materials. But in the classroom, I am still alone with only the sporadic and often unreliable feedback of students. (e.g., “Show more videos.” “Cover less material.”)

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If teaching in the classroom is lonely, teaching online is solitary confinement. So when the

first notice went out that the Peer Mentor program was up and running, I responded, “Sign me up!!” I make changes to my courses every semester, but I often feel like I am groping in the dark when making changes to my online class. I saw the Peer Mentor program as a chance to get some meaningful feedback from knowledgeable colleagues and I was not disappointed.

I met with my peer mentors in January 2012, and I would describe my experience as energizing. I walked out of that meeting anxious to get home and start working on improvements. My mentors made me feel respected and valued. They gave me the confidence to move forward. I had substantive, specific ideas about ways to improve my course. I have acted on many of the suggestions they made and I am proud of my progress but I still pull out my Peer Mentor packet every semester as I prepare to start a new semester.

This is a fabulous resource we have in place at ECC. I appreciate all the effort and care my mentors put into reviewing my course and giving me feedback. If you teach online and have not taken advantage of this program—email Billie Barnett now.

### ...CETL Continued

In mid-October 2013, Luis Martinez, ECCFA President, received a phone call from Sandi Brown. In that phone conversation he was told that the CETL Advisory Committee had been disbanded. Again, faculty had not been consulted on this decision. We were simply told that CETL would no longer have an advisory committee.

So where is CETL now? It has no faculty oversight. It has no direct input from the instructional area. Faculty do not review the proposals being made for workshops or recommend speakers to bring on campus. The decisions are apparently being made by Human Resources. The goal of CETL when it was first established and as it was maintained under Mi Hu was to provide faculty with the development activities and workshops we needed. Without faculty input, CETL no longer does that. It may exist in name but as far as I am concerned, it is no longer CETL.

**...COMMUNITY CONTINUED**Why learning communities?*Student Outcomes*

Research indicates that students, especially those from at-risk populations, are more successful in supportive learning environments. Learning Community cohorts create secure peer groups which increase the likelihood that students will take intellectual risks. A number of studies have cited Learning Communities as a high impact practice. Established programs have demonstrated that Learning Communities enhance student engagement and, as a result, increase persistence and retention (Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008, & Malnarich and Associates, 2003).

Data from ECC cohorts demonstrate both higher success rates and increased engagement compared to non-learning community students enrolled in the same combination of courses. In fall 2012, 77% of LC students passed their LC courses with grades A-C compared to only 65% of students in the same non-LC courses. In addition, students participating in Learning Communities are more engaged than their peers according to results on the CSSSE. They indicate that they participate in class, interact outside of class, apply concepts from their courses to other situations, and have strong peer relationships at significantly higher levels than ECC students enrolled in the same non-LC courses.

*Faculty Outcomes*

Collaborative teaching also increases a sense of collegiality for faculty. Teaching in a learning community encourages instructors to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning. This teaching philosophy promotes new and creative ways to connect subject areas to broader ideas. Instructors state that teaching in a learning community has given them the opportunity to meet and truly learn from colleagues and to increase their teaching “tool kit.” Collaborative teaching and the reflection that accompanies it has helped faculty make their classrooms more student centered.

Want to get involved?

Participation in learning communities is stimulating and rewarding experience for students and faculty members. During their involvement, the Learning Community Steering committee supports faculty through mentorship and professional development opportunities. Faculty members have been recognized for their innovative teaching combinations and have presented professionally at local and national conferences. If you are interested in participating, the steering committee will help you with every step of the process from creating a combination, writing your proposal and locating a partner. Fall 2014 proposals are due by December 1<sup>st</sup>. Please contact Colleen Stribling – Faculty Director of Learning Communities at

[cstribling@elgin.edu](mailto:cstribling@elgin.edu) for more information.

Learning Community Steering Committee Faculty Members: Tina Ballard, Sara Baker, Alison Douglas, John Karnatz, and Colleen Stribling.

## References

- Engstrom, C.M. and Tinto, V. (2008). Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on the persistence of low-income students. *Opportunity Matters*, 1, 5-21.
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- Smith, B. L., MacGregor, J. Matthews, R.S., and Gabelnick, F. (2004). *Learning Communities: Reforming undergraduate education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Zhao, C. & Kuh, G. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2), 113-115.

**2013-2014 ECCFA Senators**

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**Sentinel  
Calendar**

**December 9**

Deadline--December 5



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**2013 Senate Meetings**

**November 20--C120**

**November 28--C120**

**December 4--C120**

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