

# Impact of Learning Communities for Under-Prepared Students: Critical Foundation for Success

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## *Research questions*

Students participating in basic-skills learning communities:

- *How do students make sense of the role of curricular learning communities (LCs) in promoting their academic success during and immediately after their LC participation?*
- *How do students understand over time the influence of the LC experience in promoting their academic success?*
- *What do students identify as key factors, over time, attributing to their success and/or struggles in college?*

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## *Participating institutions: case study*

- LaGuardia Community College (NYC)
- Cerritos College (LA)
- DeAnza College (CA)
- Cal State East Bay
- University of Texas, El Paso

# **Interviews**

*Cerritos College, DeAnza College and LaGuardia Community College*

**Fall 2003** 17 focus groups and 60 individual interviews

**Spring 2004** 77 individual interviews

**Fall 2004** 38 individual interviews

**Spring 2005** 40 individual interviews

**Spring 2006** 28 individual interviews

**Fall 2006-spring 2007** 29 individual interviews  
(9 more scheduled in June 2007)

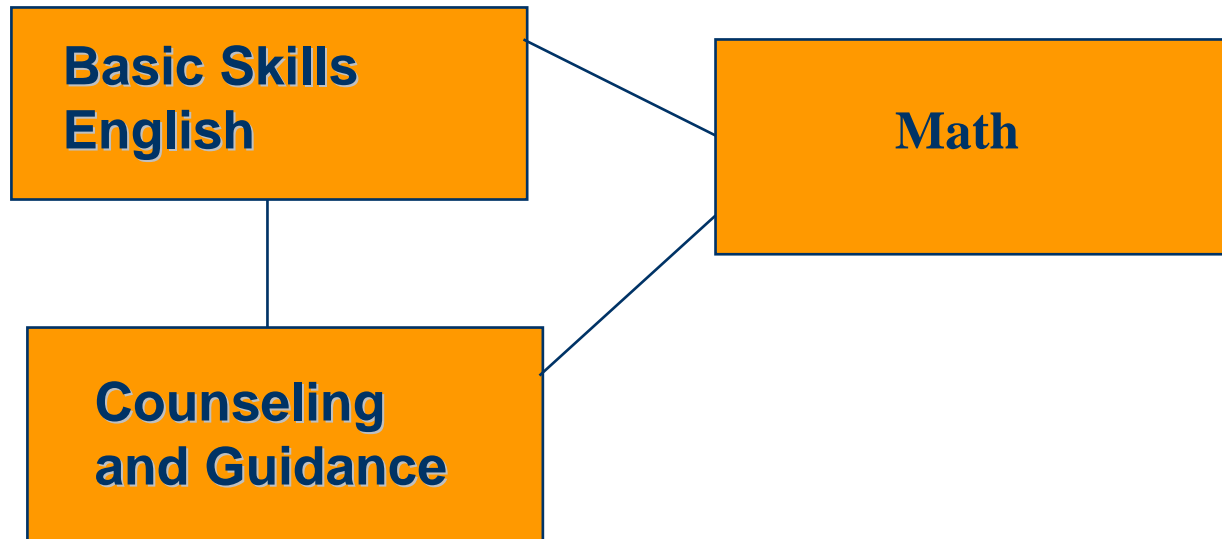
- We have been interviewing the same group of students who enrolled in a curricular LC (with a minimum of 1 basic skills/developmental class) since Fall 2003/Winter 2004.

# Participants

- Diverse in terms of age, race/ethnicity and country of origin
- First generation
- Working class backgrounds
- Some single parents
- English was not the first language for most participants

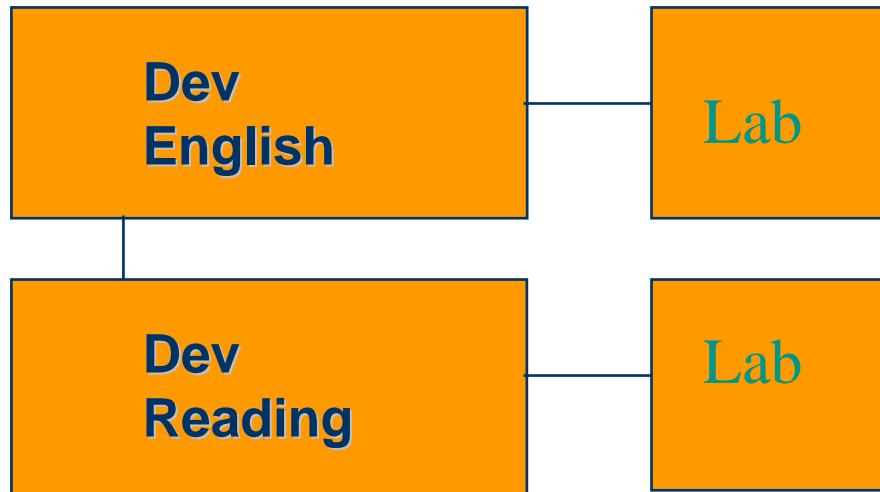
Shared view – college degree gave students and their family access to a better quality of life.

# Cerritos College: House A or B

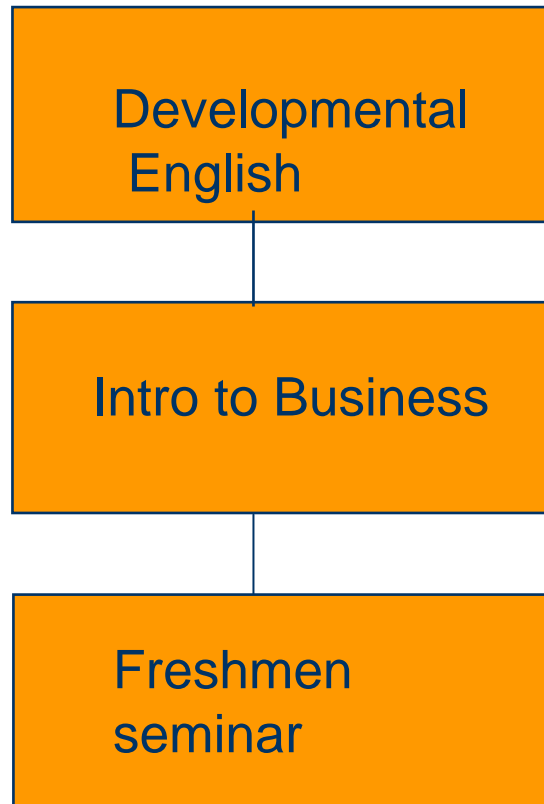


***Coordinated  
Studies***

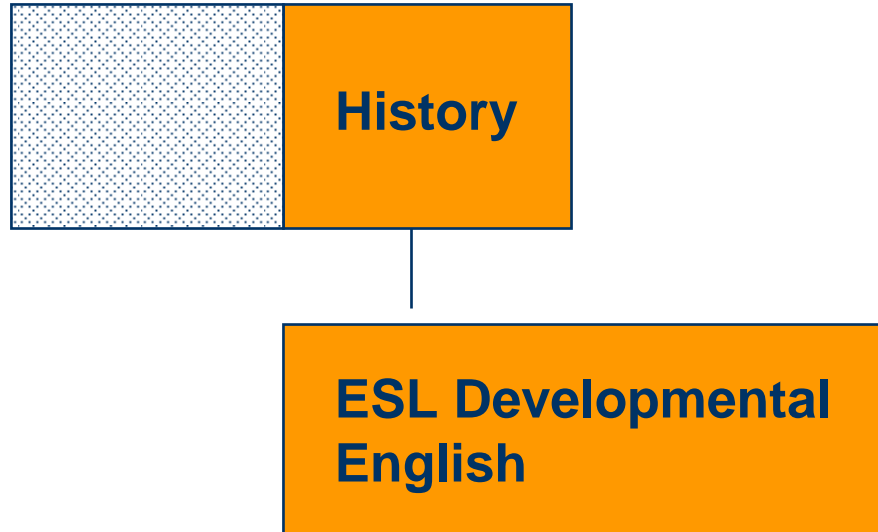
# DeAnza- Linc and/or LART



- LCC Academy



- DeAnza ESL



- LCC ESL Clusters



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graph TD; A[ESL Dev English] --- B[Intro to Accounting or Speech Comm]
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ESL Dev English

Intro to Accounting  
or Speech Comm

# LCs

*An environment for learning and belonging*

*Students can and WANT to learn....*

# LC experience

- *“My experience in the Academy (Tech) tells me to keep going. That I can do it...that I won’t fail.”*
- *“It has benefited me because I have gotten to know people...I am not alone anymore. I can walk into a lounge and just stop and talk to people. The Academy (Business) helped me feel more comfortable, more confident. The more confident I feel, the better I do.”*

## LC experience

- *“There are a lot more people in my LinC that are more serious about what they’re doing. So I mean, that helps out as far as your learning environment. Um, you can set up study groups and everybody there can get stuff accomplished. As far as high school, none of that. Its like, soon as that bell rung, I was out of there. And you don’t want to think about class at all. That isn’t the case here.”*

## LC environment

- *“I was so nervous when I came to college. I didn’t know how it was going to be. But the first day I came to an ESL class and I was very surprised. My story was similar to other students....it made me feel very comfortable, and made me feel not alone..”*

# LC environment

- *“I remember my English class for LART 3 years ago – I didn’t know anybody at all. My teachers taught me very early is to value knowledge and don’t be afraid to speak. They were very interested to hear my opinions, what I had to bring and at that time I was, I wasn’t used to it that much. So, I was very hesitant....as the quarter passed by, I noticed that it’s very important to just speak up and hear other people’s opinions...They combine individual work as well as group work because they want to hear from different people and they want the students engaged as well. It makes the class more interesting.”*

## LC environment

- *“I am told LART 100 is going to help you get into English 1A, that’s going to teach you how to write like a better person — to be a better reader, writer, and thinker. And it gives us a strong foundation to go into our next class. And you know if you don’t have the skills required to, you can’t start running before you can walk, right?”*

# LC environment

- Friendships were important conditions for fostering engagement and learning
- They now participated in class – critical condition for learning and perceived success
- Group work led to valuing the role of peers in learning (and formation of study groups)

# LC experience

- Students valued and engaged in an academic environment (within an amazingly short period of time)
- They felt as if they belonged at that college

## LC experience...

- They benefited from **structured** ways to move through basic skills and general education requirements
- Students' sense of student identity was intricately tied to their confidence, their ability to engage, and the validation they received

## LC and basic skills courses

- *ESL students exhibit enormous resiliency and patience as they seek to perfect reading and writing (and speaking). Their competency in these areas framed how they defined “being smart” and “success.”*
- *Courses seen as foundational to future success (Language Arts)*

# Faculty

- *“Being in a learning class, it’s so much more interaction with students and the teacher. I think it’s closer because I am more comfortable asking questions. It is a kind of motivation to go to class and you know your instructor more.”*

**LCs:**

***An environment for learning...  
They can and WANT to learn....***

***TEACHERS KEY TO PROMOTING TRUSTING,  
ENGAGING, LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ....***

## Faculty

- *“She is always getting personal information about me from my essays. So it’s a link between me and her. She is always trying to have a connection between the student and her. She is very, very caring.”*
- *“They encourage me, they give me more power and independence, they tell me that they know I can do it and this is very helpful!”*

# Faculty

- *“I am a special case because I am very shy in speaking. I’m afraid to make a mistake. After a while I forgot that. The teachers get us involved. I forgot that I am very shy. I say to myself, ‘I can do it.’ I can overcome that kind of thing.”*

# Faculty

- “What’s nice also is that they’ll sometimes sit in on each other’s class. That I found was very cool. Because then you really saw the classes were linked because the other teacher would sit in on the other teacher’s class on her off day, so and she would not sit there as a teacher, she would sit there as a student. She would take the opportunity to learn. ...And it was very nice, like we were just there to learn, so it made for a nice learning atmosphere. It wasn’t like we had two teacher at that time, one of the teachers was a student with us. So you really felt like they weren’t talking down to you or at you, they were talking with you.”

# Faculty

- *“They are working so hard for our benefit and it makes you feel good to know your teachers care. They work so hard for your success.”*
- *“Teachers are really into your work. They want to make sure you do it because they are concerned that we succeed. There are a lot of people giving us reassurance all the time.”*

# Faculty

- Students valued active learning pedagogies- became aware of their preferred learning styles
- PERSONALISM and validation from teachers were central conditions for learning.

# Faculty

- *Students learned better if they could relate knowledge to own personal experiences, those of their peers, and instructors*
- *Students valued team teaching- learned from diverse perspectives*
- *Faculty encouraged, connected, and sometimes required them to use invaluable resources and services (e.g. **tutoring!!!!**, **study groups**)*

## LCs

*Students value curricular integration across the classes....*

*“A better way to learn.”*

# Integration of course content

- *“The ESL teacher gave us an essay title related to business class. So I am thinking about business all the time. All the projects are connecting. We apply for example what we discussed in business ethics in an essay.”*

# Integration of course content

- *“Every class works for each other. So the writing I do for my CIS class, I also do for my English. Anything I do for English, I am doing for CIS... I had to do the portfolio in my new student seminar and write an essay that I used in my English and CIS class. I put the essay in both folders online. And in English we work on computers. Plus it reduces the amount of work we have to do.”*

# ESL Clusters- Integration of course content

- *“Relationship between accounting and ESL is helping a lot because the accounting professor is teaching us to answer questions in complete sentences. And they are in touch with each other. And we are more motivated to learn the vocabulary because it is accounting vocabulary. I am learning accounting better by learning the accounting language.”*

# Integration of course content

- They learned the material “better.”
- Perceived that work was easier, more efficient, more coherent when presented in integrated fashion.
- Could make inter-disciplinary links- required higher level critical thinking skills
- ESL students benefited from ESL basic skills courses linked with credit-bearing college credit, general ed courses (e.g. ESL and history).

- “Taking LART 100 was one stepping stone for me, ‘cause before I was just taking German classes. When I took the LART, you got sense, the feeling that they really wanted to get you off on the right foot for your college life. So they really offered you a lot of resources, not just within reading and writing and English, but they would bring in the counselors and bring in outside people. That showed us that people are interested in the students, like they brought you guys in. It was really showing us that there are resources out there helping us, and really supporting students.”

# LC experience...

- *Provided a conduit to a web of critical academic and other support services*
  - *Advisors*
  - *Tutoring, tutoring, tutoring*
  - *Study groups*
  - *Sources of financial aid*
  - *Personal support*
  - *Time management strategies*

*Time on task  
Contributed to  
development of  
college student identity*

## LCs: Critical foundation for success

- Students took many skills/competencies with them to help navigate college experience:
  - Value integrated learning experiences; look to make connections across other courses
  - Recognize importance and seek out faculty to ask questions, advice, support
  - Understand importance of sharing their views in class and recognizing wisdom of peers
  - Continue to initiate and/or participate in study groups and support services (e.g, tutoring)
  - Contribute to developing a strong sense of belonging to the campus

# Opportunities/ challenges that evolved after LC experiences

- Major plan of study
  - Which area(s)?
  - What if I don't get in?
  - Where to study?
  - Do I have the “correct” pre-requisites?
  - Can I get into required classes?
  - Should I transfer?
  - Realistic assessment of competencies/academic record

# Opportunities/ challenges that evolved after LC experiences

- Degree attainment
  - What to earn? Realistic assessment (Some didn't know they completed requirements for AA)- focus on fulfilling pre-requisites for major and general education requirements
  - Where? What do I need to do to transfer?
  - How long? Can I secure required classes?
  - Can I afford it?
  - Impacted nursing programs (lack of perceived alternatives)
  - Passing required standardized tests

# Opportunities/ challenges that evolved after LC experiences

- *Family* support (or lack of)
- Scheduling, availability (or lack) of required classes
- Need/ benefits from making connections to campus
  - More time ON campus studying
  - On-campus jobs
  - Co-curricular involvement

## Opportunities/ challenges that evolved after LC experiences

- SUSTAINED ADVISING RELATIONSHIP (or lack of)

## What have I learned? How have I changed?

- *“First of all, when I came here I was so scared. I was afraid of everything because of language. Now I am not afraid.”*
- *“I can write. I can speak. I speak more. I understand more. I feel more confident and before I was ashamed. Now I feel very good.”*
- *“I think I have gotten smarter since I have been here. I can feel it.”*

## What have I learned? How have I changed?

- “I came to the states and didn’t speak English at all. Now I’m speaking, maybe sometimes I’m speaking not very clear, not very right but I am speaking and I’m glad about this. I feel confident, I’m going to hospitals, I talk with patients, I take care of them, I ask them you know do you understand me and they say you speak very good. So I am happy. I know that I have to learn more but I feel comfortable about myself so thanks to everyone who is there, my friends and my teachers.”

- *“They (Cerritos) have every single thing you need. They bend backwards to make these programs. I hold the learning community at a higher level because I know what a dramatic impact it’s been to me. It has turned my life around. You know and making me feel so comfortable in college and making me want to do better.”*

Quote shared 2 years after LC participation