



The Joy of Learning Communities

Atlantic Center for Learning Communities Curriculum Planning Retreat

October 14-16, 2026

Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center

303 Tunxis Rd, West Hartford, CT 06107

Wednesday, October 14

4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	Check-in and poster set-up
6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Dining Room	Dinner
7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Main Conference Room; First Floor	<u>Keynote and Q & A</u> "Unlocking Growth Together: Reflections on the Joy and Impact of Learning Communities" Aurora Bautista , Bunker Hill Community College
8:00 p.m.- 9:30 p.m.	Reception and poster displays of learning community programs and best practices (following keynote presentation)

Thursday, October 15

8:00 – 9:00 a.m. Dining Room	Breakfast
9:30-10:15 Main Conference Room	Responses to Keynote Address A discussion inspired by the Keynote address, facilitated by Amy Lorenz , University of North Florida, and Pat Morelli , University of Hartford
10:30-11:30 Main Conference Room	World Café Roundtable sessions 1. <u>Collecting Wisdom: Faculty Enrichment in Learning Communities</u> , Facilitated by Jonathan Mosko & Jessica Fede, Johnson & Wales University 2. <u>How Can Co-Teachers Develop an Effective ELL–Discipline Learning Community Cluster Course?</u> , Facilitated by Jeff Ellenbird & Aurora Bautista, Bunker Hill Community College 3. <u>The Importance of Adapting and Evolving to Ensure Continued Growth of Learning Communities</u> , Facilitated by Paul Sylvestre, Johnson & Wales University
12:00-1:00 p.m. Dining Room	Lunch

1:30-2:30 p.m. Main Conference Room	Student Panel Join students as they discuss the effect learning communities have had on their successes in all aspects of the college experience.
2:30-3:30	Consultant Corners Members of the ACLC Leadership Team will be available for discussion and to advise you and your team on initiating or refreshing learning communities at your institution. Sign-up sheets for 30-minute slots will be available in advance. You are also free to simply drop in to chat with an available consultant.
3:30-6:00 p.m.	Team Time; Networking
6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Dining Room	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m. Main Conference Room Outdoor Fire Pit	Celebration of Learning Communities: Reception and Continued Conversations Campfire with Colleagues (weather permitting)

Friday, October 16

8:00 – 9:00 a.m. Dining Room	Breakfast and Check out of rooms
9:00-11:00 a.m. Main Conference Room	Consultant Corner/Team Time
11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Main Conference Room	Moving Forward: Community discussion on finding the Joy of Learning Communities work
12:00-12:45 p.m. Dining Room	Lunch, followed by departure

Wednesday, October 14

7:00-8:00 p.m. Keynote Address: “Unlocking Growth Together: Reflections on the Joy and Impact of Learning Communities”

Aurora Bautista, Bunker Hill Community College

This reflective presentation will center on the art and science of teaching and learning. To be in a Learning Community is to work in partnership with others as you design, build, execute, reflect and refine your cluster course. This conscious effort to build relationships, learn about your partner’s strengths and skills, and grow your community are the elements that bring about this joyful state. It is joyful because the partnership allows for integrating creativity, collaboration, and meaning into the classroom. We celebrate our partnership when we begin to witness the end goal of cultivating our students’ curiosity, engagement, and emotional well-being.

8:00-9:30 p.m. Poster Session and Reception

Join us for a post-keynote reception and poster session. Take some time to peruse displays showcasing learning community efforts at the various institutions represented by this year’s retreat participants. This is a great time for conversation and discovery!

Thursday, October 15

9:30-10:15 a.m. Responses to Keynote

What do we do with the challenges and ideas presented through the keynote address? How do we transform the groundwork of the keynote into a significant sense of belonging and community at our home institutions and in our classrooms? Amy Lorenz and Pat Morelli, members of the ACLC leadership team, will present their responses to the address and will then lead participants in an open discussion.

10:30-11:30 a.m. World Café

The World Café offers the opportunity to engage in discussion regarding key components of successful learning communities. Participants will be able to switch tables after 30 minutes but are also welcome to remain at one table for the duration of this session.

Option 1: Collecting Wisdom: Faculty Enrichment in Learning Communities, Facilitated by Jonathan Mosko & Jessica Fede, Johnson & Wales University

What can a police officer learn from a psychologist? What can a biologist learn from an author? This Roundtable will focus on interdisciplinary learning experiences for faculty and other professionals who are involved with Learning Communities. While the focus of LC’s is often (rightfully) placed on students’ learning experiences, in this Roundtable we will shift focus to the variety of ways that LC faculty find professional and personal enrichment through their collaboration with their professional LC partners and colleagues. Roundtable attendees will have the opportunity to share their experiences around their own interdisciplinary learning, see examples of cross-disciplinary collaboration, and discuss ideas for potential collaborations with other professionals.

Option 2: How Can Co-Teachers Develop an Effective ELL–Discipline Learning Community Cluster course?, Facilitated by Jeff Ellenbird & Aurora Bautista, Bunker Hill Community College

Co-teachers of a community college ELL-Sociology learning community will share their process for developing thematic content, aligning ELL and Sociology learning outcomes, and integrating assignments and assessments. The roundtable will invite participants to consider practical questions such as how to identify good co-teacher matches, develop curriculum and assignments that integrate English learning and academic content, and scaffold language instruction to support academic content learning. Participants will exchange ideas, challenges, and strategies for developing ELL cluster courses at their own institutions.

Option 3: The Importance of Adapting and Evolving to Ensure Continued Growth of Learning Communities, Facilitated by Paul Sylvestre, Johnson & Wales University

We all know of the positive impact that a learning community can have on a college student, especially first-year students. The benefits are well documented in terms of improving grade point averages, building sense of community and belonging, as well as having a positive impact on retention, persistence, and graduation rates. With all those positives we are still missing an opportunity by failing to look beyond the traditional combination of a course in the student's major with a general education course (e.g., English or Math). It may be prudent to connect cohorts around a major and courses in a discipline that will complement a student's academic portfolio (e.g., Criminal Justice & Psychology) that puts them in a better position to be successful and more well-rounded upon graduation. This approach will also have the ancillary benefit of improving student retention, persistence, and graduation rates, as well as creating a high impact practice for upper-level students who add minor of the complementary discipline to their academic portfolio. This approach would be an innovative way to highlight the connection between disciplines so that students have a greater appreciation for the breadth and scope of their major and industry. At Johnson & Wales University we have a first-year learning community connecting criminal justice majors with psychology. At the request of students Johnson & Wales University established an upper-level learning community Criminal Justice/Psychology cohort in the 2023-24 academic year.

1:30-2:30 p.m. Student Panel

We all know the power of learning communities, and we all know the sense of belonging that learning communities afford students: Our personal experiences as well as research and data confirm these. What do the students themselves experience as members of learning communities? What do they take from these communities? Join this session to discover personal LC student perspectives!

2:30-3:30 p.m. Consultant Corners

Seasoned members of the Atlantic Center for Learning Communities will be available throughout the main conference room to offer advice on how to begin learning communities at your institution, how to sustain learning communities, how to navigate various levels of administration as you engage in learning communities work, how to cultivate faculty and staff relationships in learning communities work, etc. Sign-up sheets for 30-minute slots will be available at the registration table. Drop-ins are also welcome, as consultants are available. Bringing your partner or your entire team to these sessions will make for an optimal experience.

3:30-6:00 p.m. Team Time!

While some campus teams will carve out time for team meetings throughout the retreat, we offer this specific block of time for team reflection and work away from the distractions of campus. We encourage those who

are solo attendees from their campus to engage in deeper discussion and interaction with solo attendees from other campuses. Feeling the need to rejuvenate and reflect on your own? This is a great time for that as well!

7:00-9:00 p.m. Celebration of Learning Communities: Reception and Continued Conversations & Campfire with Colleagues!

Join us for post-dinner conversation and a celebration of our important, continuing learning communities work at the Thursday evening reception in the Main Conference Room and at the traditional Campfire with Colleagues, hosted by George Hill, at the outdoor fire pit. Many great ideas have been shared and many friendships have blossomed at these events over the years!

Friday, October 16

9:00-11:00 a.m. Consultant Corners

Take advantage of another opportunity to confer with one of our longtime learning communities practitioners.

11:00 a.m.-12:00 noon - Moving Forward

This community discussion provides the opportunity to help us reimagine the future of learning communities and the work and mission of the Atlantic Center for Learning Communities, with a special emphasis this year on finding joy in our work as Learning Community Practitioners. Your voice and support are important: Please join us for this critical discussion!