

THE POWER OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES: CREATING A COLLABORATIVE CAMPUS CULTURE

Jennifer Leptien, PhD
Iowa State University,
Ames, Iowa

“The Learning Communities are the most impactful and dynamic program for student success at ISU. Faculty and staff involved in the Learning Communities are deeply dedicated to our students’ wellbeing.

Dr. Cinzia Cervato
Morrill Professor of Geological
and Atmospheric Sciences

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Learning Community (LC) initiative seeks to enhance our undergraduates’ experience by providing interested students with **dynamic, focused communities in which students, staff, and faculty can learn and grow together.**

WHAT IS A LEARNING COMMUNITY?

At Iowa State University, an LC is a **small group** of students who typically take a few **courses together**, share **similar academic interests**, interact with **peer mentors**, participate in **out-of-class activities**, and may live in the same residence hall.



A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP

Key to the success of this long-standing program is the strong partnership between the Division of Academic Affairs and the Division of Student Affairs, aimed at enhancing student learning and college persistence.

CAMPUS COLLABORATORS

ADMINISTRATION

- University Leadership
- LC Central Office

RECRUITMENT

- Office of Admissions
- University Marketing and Communications

ENROLLMENT

- College Administrators
- LC Coordinators
- Department of Residence
- Office of the Registrar

ENGAGEMENT

- LC Coordinators
- Instructors
- Peer Mentors

EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Enrollment Research and Analytics
- Institutional Research
- Office of Assessment, Research, and Divisional Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

Learning Communities at Iowa State University (ISU) have maintained a successful, high-impact experience for new students that has continued to grow and thrive for 30 years. The effectiveness of this program is demonstrated by enrollment growth, increased student retention, and higher graduation rates year after year. The following represents the ISU Learning Community model, a description of the administrative framework, and data validating the efficacy of this sustained campus collaboration.

METRICS

Program evaluation is ongoing, supported by systemic data collection and analysis of key performance metrics.

CORE PERFORMANCE

- Enrollment / Participation
- Retention and Graduation

LEARNING AND ACADEMIC

- Learning outcome reporting
- GPAs

ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCE

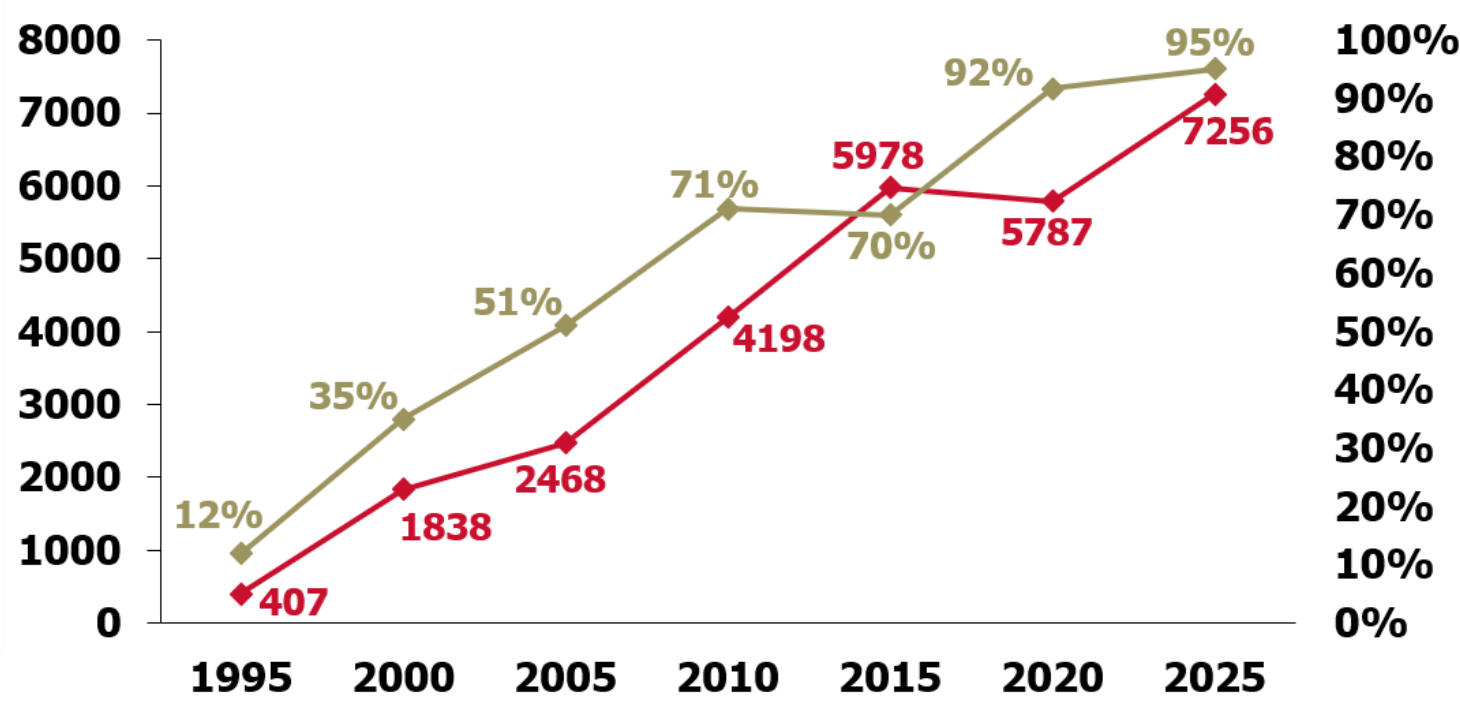
- National Survey of Student Engagement
- LC Experience Surveys
- Peer Mentor Survey
- Annual Reports

RESULTS

PARTICIPANT GROWTH

- 1995: 407 students
- 2010: 4,198 students
- 2025: 7,256 students
- 126,050 students (Fall 1995 – Fall 2025)

Total LC Students & Percent of First-Years in LCs



RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

- **89%:** One-year retention rate of NDHS LC students (for fall 2024 cohort)
 - 4.9 percentage points higher than non-LC students
- **77%:** Six-year graduation rate of NDHS LC students (for fall 2019 cohort)
 - 4.0 percentage points higher than non-LC students

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Students retained through the LC program contribute an estimated **\$3 million in additional annual tuition revenue***

KEY INSIGHTS

- Cultivate campus collaborations to build upon sustainable success
- Assess for continuous program improvements to sustain program quality
- Seek funding to support program growth
- Provide on-going professional development for LC Coordinators
- Invest in the peer mentoring program
- Maintain a flexible LC model for greater growth

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Identify populations needing additional support
- Remain open to new LC designs
- Review existing programs for necessary improvement and potential sunseting
- Engage in continuous LC scholarship

FALL 2025 LCS

- 79 LCS
- 100+ faculty and staff LC coordinators
- 600+ peer mentors

References

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