

Cox, M. D. (2019). Recommendations for effective FLC structure and operations—variations on a theme: A message from the editor-in-chief. *Learning Communities Journal*, 11, 1-4.

## **Recommendations for Effective FLC Structure and Operations— Variations on a Theme: A Message From the Editor-in-Chief**

Milton D. Cox  
*Miami University*

As the use of FLCs has spread across institutions in the U.S. and the world, recommendations for effective and sustainable FLC structures and operations have developed. This issue’s message from the editor-in-chief calls for FLC researchers and practitioners to investigate questions such as, “If this specific recommendation or these multiple recommendations are not included when building an FLC’s structure and operations, how might that change the broad nature and outcomes of that FLC?” Related studies should investigate why certain FLC recommendations are not selected by practitioners in building a particular FLC and what conditions inspired or required the elimination or alteration of that recommendation. To find the latest 16 recommendations for FLC structure and operations, see Appendix A in this issue’s article by **Cox**.

An example of an evolving FLC recommendation is found in part of recommendation 5. In its previous version (Cox & McDonald, 2017), recommendation 5 noted that FLCs should be yearlong. However, three of the articles in this issue describe effective FLCs or their equivalents that met for only one semester. Also, an additional article describes a one-semester FLC that failed to achieve some key outcomes. These findings prompt a study across current and former one-semester FLCs to determine their topics, effectiveness, and outcomes. They call for a temporary revision of recommendation 5 to read, “Meet for one or two semesters depending on desired FLC outcomes.” While reading this issue’s four articles that describe results of one-semester FLCs, note that some authors do not specify in their articles why they selected one semester instead of year-long. A conjecture is that they thought they could achieve the planned

FLC outcomes in one semester. In the future, the *Journal's* editors will ask authors for information about the one-semester time length of an FLC.

**Marchetti et al.** designed an FLC that was only one semester in length. This FLC was on the topic of improving access in diverse classrooms by developing and engaging strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The FLC had six members and met for two hours every other week (seven times) during the semester. Members felt that participation in the FLC was helpful and inspiring. Classroom strategies developed by the FLC formed the basis for a website with specific resources within the framework of UDL that addressed a wide range of learners. However, there were some disadvantages to the one-semester limit. As the authors noted, "We did discuss how to assess student change and how to tie such assessment directly to the implemented strategy, but one semester was not long enough to implement this kind of assessment" (p. 29).

The one-semester FLC described by **Guan et al.** addressed possible first-year faculty uncertainty about retention, tenure, and promotion. To address this situation the FLC involved aspects of *growth mindset* versus *fixed mindset* (Dweck, 2006). The authors analyzed the "emotional life of the teacher" as experienced across their FLC (Robertson, 2018) and found that the general tone of their FLC member reflections was progressively positive. This FLC of 11 members met for two hours six times during the semester. The authors deemed the FLC outcomes to be positive. They found that their FLC outcomes aligned favorably with those reported about FLCs at other institutions and suggest that this FLC's outcomes were beneficial, noting no disadvantages of the one-semester structure.

A one-semester transformative professional learning community (TPLC) on the topic of developing the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and the goal of transforming participants into teacher-scholars is described as a case study in the article by **Sweet et al.** The TPLC met six times over a 10-week period. By the end of the semester, the authors report that three of the 12 members had obtained institutional review board approval for their projects, two were collecting data, and one had made a presentation as a SoTL project. Also, 13 months after participation, 60% had completed their projects and had them accepted in peer-reviewed journals. The authors note that "Some products . . . may take longer than the TPLC meets (usually one semester), but participants need to be required to send the facilitator a copy of the product even if the timing exceeds the Cox (2004) one-year time limit" (p. 61). This outcome compares with those of yearlong FLCs in which all members develop and present SoTL during the FLC year (Richlin & Cox, 2004).

A topic-based FLC on teaching ethics in honors program courses

is described in the article by Cox. This FLC also met for one semester instead of yearlong. The facilitator designed the FLC of 10 members to meet every week for two hours, a design planned to accomplish the goals of that FLC in one semester. It did not, however. The members learned about ethical inquiry, but not about *teaching* ethical inquiry. Another goal not accomplished was that each member had planned to design a new course engaging ethical inquiry in his or her discipline. This FLC was compared to 37 yearlong FLCs in the same FLC program using the same FLC evaluation instrument. The comparatively low evaluation ratings for this semester-only FLC indicated its minimal impact on members in several areas.

Hallman et al. explored how to do research through a pilot study approach using a learning community structure that was not an FLC or an extended community of practice. Throughout two particular courses in the second year of an Ed.D. program, five doctoral students shared challenges with each other about the design and implementation of their pilot studies. The authors describe the replacement of the sometimes-solitary experience of doing research for the doctorate by engaging a collaborative space for learning.

In conclusion, I challenge our readers to reinvestigate what structures and operations make learning communities of faculty, graduate students, and staff work in higher education. Engage the articles in this issue of the *Learning Communities Journal* to determine how effectively these authors designed their structures and operations to match their desired and achieved outcomes.

## References

- Cox, M. D. (2004). Introduction to faculty learning communities. In M. D. Cox & L. Richlin (Eds.), *Building faculty learning communities* (pp. 5-23). New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 97. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cox, M. D., & McDonald, J. M. (2017). Faculty learning community and community of practice dreamers, schemers, and seamers. In J. McDonald & A. Cater-Steel (Eds.), *Communities of practice—Facilitating social learning in higher education* (pp. 47-72). New York, NY: Springer.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Richlin, L., & Cox, M. D. (2004). Developing scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning through faculty learning com-

munities. In M. D. Cox & L. Richlin (Eds.), *Building faculty learning communities* (pp. 127-135). New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 97. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Robertson, D. L. (2018). Emotion and professors' developmental perspectives on their teaching. In H. L. Schwartz & J. Snyder-Duch (Eds.), *Teaching and emotion* (pp. 13-23). New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 153. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.