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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY | Faculty of Nursing

FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITIES GUIDE

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Faculty Learning Communities Guide

HOW to use this guide

This guide provides a framework for the design and development of a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) and supports collaboration, learning, and knowledge generation.



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WHAT is a Faculty Learning Community (FLC)?

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”¹.

FLCs provide a structured approach to establish communities of learning characterized by shared goals, collective identity, collaboration, respectful inclusion, and safe and supportive conditions, with the goal of progressive discourse toward knowledge building.^{2,3}

FLCs fulfill both individual and group goals, and are characterized by three key elements:

COMMUNITY members “engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information”¹.

DOMAIN is “shared domain of interest”¹, “a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic”⁴.

PRACTICE is a “shared repertoire of resources, experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems”¹.

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WHY are FLCs important?

Benefits of membership within a FLC include:



Connect people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact, either as frequently or at all.



Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight.



Enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities.



Stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection.



Capture and diffuse existing knowledge to help people improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices.



Introduce collaborative processes to groups and organizations as well as between organizations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information.



Help people organize around purposeful actions that deliver tangible results.



Generate new knowledge to help people transform their practice to accommodate changes in needs and technologies.

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HOW do you build a FLC?

FLCs are dynamic social structures that require cultivation so that they can emerge and grow. The members of the community will define and sustain it over time. The organic nature of communities evolve through cyclical phases. Facilitating a FLC involves shepherding its evolution through these cyclical phases.

The 5 Phases of FLCs

The phases are meant to be flexible and include the following:

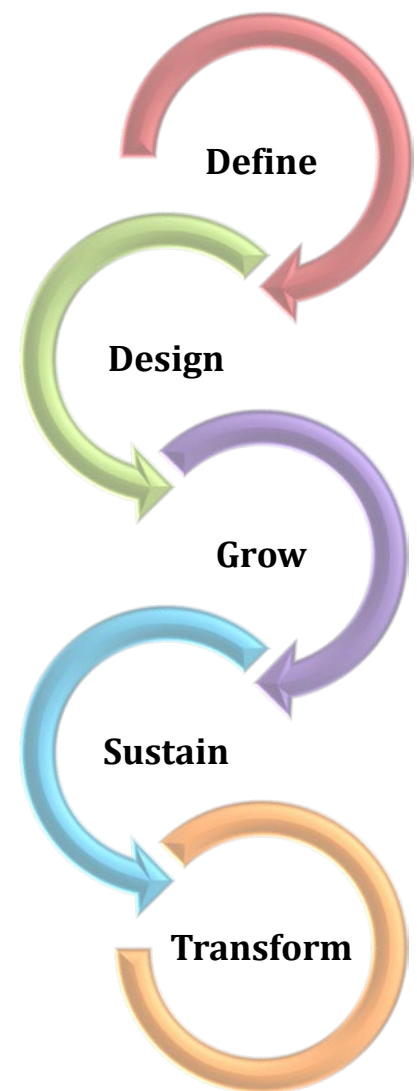
Define – this phase involves a process of exploration and inquiry where members establish their identity and define the purpose, goals, and vision for the community.

Design – this phase involves outlining the activities, group processes, and roles that will support the community goals. Your design will determine member commitment and overall community culture.

Grow – during this phase, members consider short and long term goals, and determine how success will be measured. Roll out the community in ways that engage new members and deliver immediate benefits.

Sustain – during this phase, members engage in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing activities, group projects, and events that achieve goals while creating an increasing cycle of participation. What work products can members contribute to support individual and community goals? What are the emerging benefits of community membership?

Transform – during this phase members cultivate and assess the learning, knowledge, and products created by the community to inform new strategies, goals, activities, roles, and models for the future. How will the FLC adapt or change over time?



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PURPOSES of FLCs

Successful and sustainable FLCs have focused, well-defined purposes that are directly linked to the faculty's mission. The purposes of FLCs generally falls within four primary areas.

Relationships

Build Relationships – Develop relationships of trust, mutual respect, reciprocity, and commitment necessary for strong communities.

Guiding Questions:

- How regularly are members interacting?
- To what extent do interactions have continuity and depth?
- Are members opportunistic about changes to interact in other settings (conferences, etc.)?
- Are members taking on new leadership roles?
- How much and what kind of reciprocity is occurring?
- To what extent is a shared understanding of the community's domain and approach to practice beginning to emerge?

Action

Take Action as a Community – Take purposeful action to carry out tasks and projects. Small group projects help members create personal relationships and also provide a way to produce the resources for developing the practice such as cases, effective practices, tools, methods, articles, lessons learned.

Guiding Questions:

- Are collaborative efforts beginning to emerge naturally?
- Are there community structures to support volunteering for projects and working with others?
- Are members recognized and rewarded for their contributions?

Learning

Learn and Develop Practice – Learn and develop a shared practice, based on an existing body of knowledge. Successful practice development depends on a balance between the production of 'things' like tools and documents, and deep learning experiences for community members.

Guiding Questions:

- How rich and accessible are the community's knowledge representations for existing practice? To what extent does community design support deeper learning for community members?

Knowledge

Create Knowledge in the Domain – Generate and discover new knowledge. Members go beyond current practice to explore the cutting edge of the domain, to innovate. Community may redefine its boundaries and membership and foster potential collaborations with other communities to explore emerging practices and ideas.

Guiding Questions:

- How open is the community to new ideas and leadership?
- To what extent is the community influential in its domain?
- Are community members being invited to present leading-edge ideas?

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Phase #1: Define

Define – this phase involves a process of exploration and inquiry where members establish their identity and define the purpose, goals, and vision for the community.

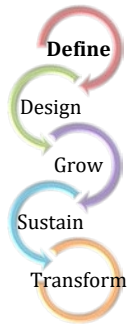
Key Questions to Explore:

Audience – who is this community for? Who are the community’s important stakeholders?

Domain – Given the intended audience, what are the key issues and the nature of the learning, knowledge, and tasks that the community will steward? What is your group’s shared interest?

Purpose, Goals, and Outcomes – Given the audience and domain, what is this community’s primary purpose? What are the benefits to the stakeholders? What specific needs will the community meet?

Notes:



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Phase #2: Design

Design – this phase involves outlining the activities, group processes, and roles that will support the community goals. Your design will determine member commitment and overall community culture.

Key Questions to Explore

Activities – What kinds of activities will generate energy and support the emergence of community presence? What will the community's rhythm be?

Communication – How will members communicate on an ongoing basis to accomplish the community's primary purpose?

Interaction – What kinds of interactions (with each other and with the content of the community) will generate energy and engagement?

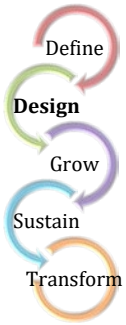
Learning – What are the learning goals of the community, and how can collaborative learning be supported?

Knowledge Sharing – What are the external resources (people, publications, reports, etc.) that will support the community during its initial development? How will members share these resources and gain access to them?

Collaboration – How will community members collaborate with each other to achieve shared goals?

Roles and Social Structures – How will the community function?

Notes:



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Phase #3: **Grow**

Grow - during this phase, members consider short and long term goals, and determine how success will be measured. Roll out the community in ways that engage new members and deliver immediate benefits.

Key Questions to Explore

Why should someone join the community? What are the benefits?

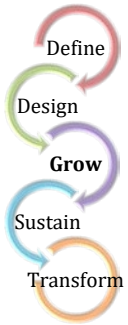
How do new members learn about the community?

What are the community norms for behavior?

How do new members become oriented to the community environment?

How will success be measured?

Notes:



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Phase #4: Sustain

Sustain – during this phase, members engage in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing activities, group projects, and events that achieve goals while creating an increasing cycle of participation.

Key Questions to Explore

What work products can members contribute to support individual and community goals?

How do members create their own community identity and presence?

What are the emerging benefits of community membership?

Notes:



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Phase #5: Transform

Transform – during this phase members cultivate and assess the learning, knowledge, and products created by the community to inform new strategies, goals, activities, roles, and models for the future.

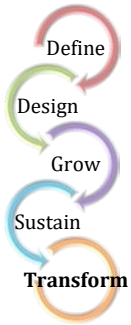
Key Questions to Explore

To what extent is the community serving its intended audience and accomplishing its stated purpose and goals? How might it do a better job?

From the perspective of each individual community member what is the perceived return on participation?

How will the FLC adapt or change over time?

Notes:



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References

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3. Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press
4. Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). Introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses. Retrieved from <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communitiesof-practice/>