

## NARRATIVE FOR ACTIVITY

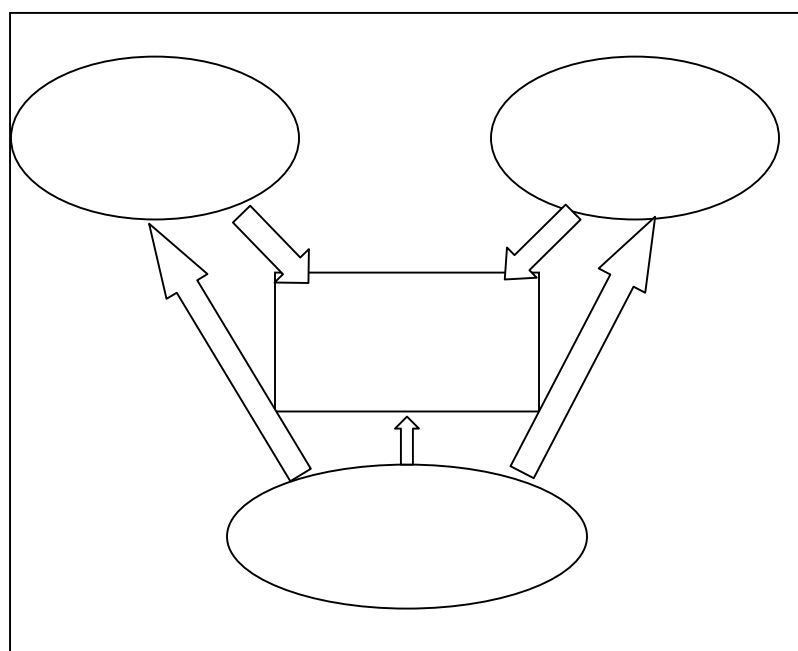
Prairie State College's proposed activity, "A Learning Community Approach to Improving Student Success and Retention," responds to the critical problems of excessively high student attrition rates and an advising system that is ineffective for our changing student population. As explained in the CDP, a rapid and dramatic increase in the number of under-prepared first-year students is posing significant challenges for our College, especially in the area of developmental education. We are vigorously rethinking how to help those students who need developmental course work in order to be successful. Our research and institutional self-evaluation have led us to embrace learning communities, supported by an intrusive advising system, as part of a two-pronged strategy to meet our institutional goals of improving student success.

As Barbara Leigh Smith (2001) explains, learning communities (LCs) involve a purposeful restructuring of the curriculum so that two or more courses, often organized around an interdisciplinary theme, are taught by a faculty team who designs, plans and often collaboratively teaches the integrated classes. The intent is to provide a supportive and engaging learning environment, which facilitates the academic and social integration of students into the college environment. LCs enroll a common cohort of students and are organized with the goals of promoting connections and coherence across courses, fostering a sense of community among students and faculty, and encouraging active and collaborative learning. It is the combination of a restructured curriculum and a commitment to a highly-interactive learning environment that works well and results in significantly higher student retention rates.

To support the effectiveness of our retention efforts for students enrolled in LCs, we are implementing an intrusive advising system whose proactive approach to student support is especially appropriate for our expanding at-risk student population. The intrusive advising (IA) approach, as Heisserer and Parette (2002) explain, is a synthesis of the prescriptive and developmental models of advising. IA employs a range of intervention strategies designed to facilitate informed, responsible decision-making,

shared responsibility for student success between advisor and student, and student engagement in the activities of the College, all of which enhance the likelihood of student success.

Our activity entails three interlocking components—*curriculum reform* in conjunction with LC design, *intrusive advising* in support of developmental LCs, and *professional development* for faculty and counselors participating on LC teaching teams (see Figure below). Curriculum reform and intrusive advising both grow out of our current commitment to rethink our developmental education curriculum. At present, the College offers separate reading and writing courses at three developmental levels (Reading 097/098/099



and English 097/098/099). As part of this activity, we plan to integrate the upper-level English and Reading 099 courses and develop a holistic curriculum emphasizing reading, writing and critical thinking. We will pilot that course and link it to a redesigned Student Success Seminar (COL 101), facilitated by one of our counselors. The resulting

course will be team-taught and employ the strategies and best practices of both the LC model and intrusive advising. The third component of our activity—intensive professional development for members of the LC teaching teams (via Faculty/Staff Learning Communities)—will provide crucial support for the other two components, giving participating faculty and counselors the necessary time and space for designing an effective LC curriculum.

GRANT APPLICATION FOR THE TITLE III, PART A PROGRAMS Title III, Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended	
Activity Objectives and Performance Indicators (ED Form 851A-2)	
<b>Name of Applicant Institution:</b> Prairie State College	<b>Activity Title:</b> A Learning Community Approach to Improving Student Success and Retention
<b>Major Objectives</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
<b><u>Year 1: 2004-2005</u></b> 1. To increase course completion rate and retention rate of students enrolled in <i>College Readiness</i> LCs (integration of ENG 099, RDG 099 and COL 101)	1.1 By September 2005, 10 percent of full-time faculty/counselors will be trained in best practices of LCs and IA (via Faculty/Staff Learning Communities, FSLCs).  1.2 By May 2005, students enrolled in LCs will have a 10 percent higher course completion rate (grade of C or better) than comparable non-participants.  1.3 By September 2005, LC students will have a 10 percent higher Spring-to-Fall retention rate than comparable non-participants.
<b><u>Year 2: 2005-2006</u></b> 1. To increase course completion rate and retention rate of students enrolled in <i>Aim for Success</i> LCs (integration of ENG 099, RDG 099, COL 101, and General Education course) and other re-piloted LCs.	1.1 By September 2006, 20 percent of full-time faculty/counselors will be trained in best practices of LCs and IA (via FSLCs).  1.2 By May 2006, students enrolled in LCs will have a 10-12 percent higher course completion rate (grade of C or better) than comparable non-participants.  1.3 By September 2006, LC students will have a 10-12 percent higher Fall-to-Fall retention rate than comparable non-participants.
<b><u>Year 3: 2006-2007</u></b> 1. To increase course completion rate and retention rate of students enrolled in <i>Moving Ahead with Math</i> LCs (integration of MATH 095, COL 101, and General Education course) and other re-piloted LCs.	1.1 By September 2007, 30 percent of full-time faculty/counselors will be trained in best practices of LCs and IA (via FSLCs).  1.2 By May 2007, students enrolled in LCs will have a 12-15 percent higher course completion rate (grade of C or better) than comparable non-participants.  1.3 By September 2007, LC students will have a 12-15 percent higher Fall-to-Fall retention rate than comparable non-participants.

<p><b><u>Year 4: 2007-2008</u></b></p> <p>1. To increase course completion rate and retention rate of students enrolled in <i>Career Exploration</i> LCs (integration of career course with ENG 101 or COMM 101) and other re-piloted LCs.</p> <p>2. To increase graduation rates for students enrolled in first two years of LC program.</p>	<p>1.1 By September 2008, 40 percent of full-time faculty/counselors will be trained in best practices of LCs and IA (via FSLCs).</p> <p>1.2 By May 2008, students enrolled in LCs will have a 15-18 percent higher course completion rate (grade of C or better) than comparable non-participants.</p> <p>1.3 By September 2008, LC students will have a 15-18 percent higher Fall-to-Fall retention rate than comparable non-participants</p> <p>2. By May 2008, students enrolled in LCs during first two years of LC program will have a 15 percent higher degree completion rate than comparable non-participants.</p>
<p><b><u>Year 5: 2008-2009</u></b></p> <p>1. To increase course completion rate and retention rate of students enrolled in <i>Critical Thinking across the Curriculum</i> LCs (integration of ENG 101, 102 or COMM 101 and 2-3 General Education courses across academic disciplines) and other re-piloted LCs.</p> <p>2. To increase graduation rates for students enrolled in first three years of LC program.</p> <p>3. To increase revenues, as result of stronger retention rates, in order to support necessary resources for institutionalization of LC initiative.</p>	<p>1.1 By September 2009, 50 percent of full-time faculty/counselors will be trained in best practices of LCs and IA (via FSLCs).</p> <p>1.2 By May 2009, students enrolled in LCs will have an 18-20 percent higher course completion rate (grade of C or better) than comparable non-participants.</p> <p>1.3 By September 2009, LC students will have an 18-20 percent higher Fall-to-Fall retention rate than comparable non-participants</p> <p>2. By May 2009, students enrolled in LCs during first three years of LC program will have a 20 percent higher degree completion rate than comparable non-participants.</p> <p>3. By September 2009, increased student retention and persistence will result in increased revenues of \$418,000 per year.</p>

### Narrative Showing the Relationship of Activity Objectives to the Goals

The activity objectives tied to our learning community (LC) initiative correspond closely to the institutional goals established in the Comprehensive Development Plan.

Major Problems	CDP Goals	Activity Objectives/Performance Indicators
Student attrition rates too high	Increase course completion, retention and graduation rates	By 2009, LC students will have an 18-20% higher course completion rate and 18-20% higher Fall-to-Fall retention rate than comparable non-participants.  By 2009, students enrolled in LCs during first three years of LC program will have a 20 percent higher degree completion rate than comparable non-participants.
Ineffective advising system	Develop and implement intrusive advising system	By 2009, 50 percent of full-time faculty/counselors will be trained in best practices of LCs and intrusive advising.
Inadequate funding for professional development	Develop stronger revenue stream from increased retention	By 2009, increased student retention and persistence will result in increased revenues of \$418,000 per year.

We expect three major outcomes from this project. First, in our efforts to lower attrition rates, especially among developmental students, we expect to see a higher course completion rate (with grade of "C" or better), a higher retention rate (from freshman-to-sophomore year), and, by the fourth and fifth year of the grant, a higher degree completion rate among LC students. Second, we expect our activity to address the problem of an ineffective advising system through the development of intrusive advising and the participation of our counselors as full members of the LC teaching teams. Third, our activity will generate the necessary resources (through higher student retention) to institutionalize our LC initiative and provide the necessary resources for intensive professional development to meet the changing needs of our student population. As identified in the Implementation Strategy and Timetable Form, the tasks we plan to accomplish over the next five years and the results of those tasks will enable our College to strengthen the academic success of our students.