

Guidebook to Faculty Learning Communities at Dawson College

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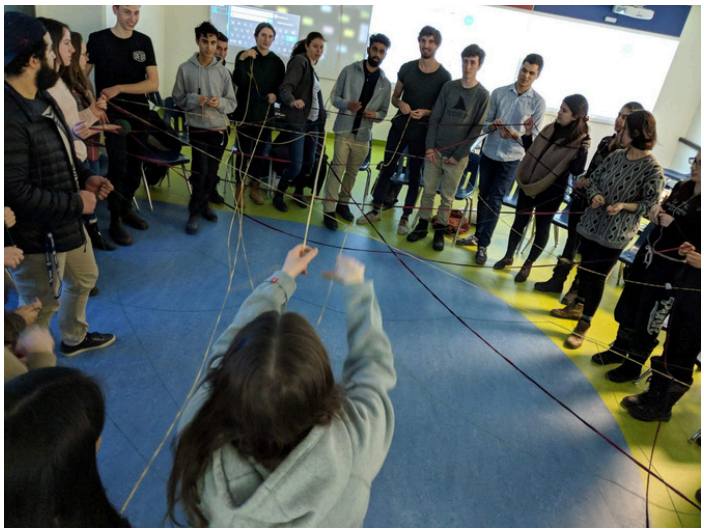
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For more information about FLCs at Dawson, please contact FLC@dawsoncollege.qc.ca or visit our website

Intro to Learning Communities

> The growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it. We grow by trial and error, to be sure--but our willingness to try, and fail, as individuals is severely limited when we are not supported by a community that encourages such risks.
>
> Parker J. Palmer

Since 2016, Dawson College has designed and offered a growing number Learning Communities classes. The Learning Communities page on the Dawson website defines these classes as "**team-taught, interdisciplinary courses** that focus on a complex theme, topic or contemporary challenge." Research suggests that the shared experience inherent in learning communities can have an enormous impact on learning. Educator and writer Ernest L. Boyer characterized learning communities as "purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative" (quoted in Cox & Richlin, 6). P. Baker explains that "in learning communities, all members of the group are learners, and the group is organized to learn as a whole system" (quoted in Cox & Richlin, 6). In the article "Why Learning Communities? Why Now?" K. Patricia Cross answers these questions by listing three reasons that learning communities work: "philosophical (because learning communities fit into a changing philosophy of knowledge), research based (because learning communities fit what the research tells us about learning), and pragmatic (because learning communities work)". A key component of learning communities is that they "[focus] on people and on the social structures that enable them to learn with and from each other" (Wegner- Trayner, Intro to CoPs, 4). In learning communities, a large part of the learning comes about as a part of a constructivist approach of constructing meaning together through shared experiences.



What is an FLC at Dawson?

> "Faculty Learning Communities are a special kind of professional development group grounded upon the cultivation of positive collegial, interpersonal, and collaborative relationships. FLCs depend for their success on countering the individualism and alienation of the academy with a balancing spirit of appreciation for the collective acceptance of others, support for all members' growth, and willingness to engage in genuine collaboration. Thus, both learning *and* community are essential outcomes."
>
> "The Role of the Facilitator in FLCs," 31

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) are small groups of faculty, professionals, staff, and students who participate in year-long explorations of specific topics related to teaching and learning. Individual and collective growth are direct byproducts of the community dynamic: diverse groups of teachers that can support, challenge and inspire one another in a spirit of exploration and discovery.

FLCs allow for focus and continuity to work on one teaching-related topic with similarly interested people over the course of an entire academic year. They are designed to be able to fit easily into a full-time teacher's workload, and to provide much-needed moments of collegiality and intellectual stimulation.



FLCs are a way to increase career satisfaction and efficiency by being part of a community, while developing techniques and materials that can have a tangible benefit to the students' success and well-being of teachers professionals, and staff to participate in each FLC.

FLC topics are driven by teacher interest and student needs. Each year there is a call for Facilitators who can propose topics. Topics could be related to any aspect of teaching: assessment, learning activities, grading, feedback, AI, Active Learning, writing, critical thinking, creativity, student engagement, etc. FLC topics and Facilitators are selected in close consultation with the steering committee, who provide support and guidance throughout the application process. Once the Facilitators and topics are selected for the following year, there is a call for faculty, professionals, and staff to participate in each FLC.

The recommended duration of an FLC is two semesters, with get-togethers typically occurring 3-5 times per semester. The frequency, length, curriculum, and format of gatherings will be determined by each group. The focus throughout will be on building and nourishing a community that can support and inspire one another. These get-togethers will also allow each member to identify and work through specific challenges in their classrooms. Each FLC will work toward developing pedagogical approaches and creating artifacts that will be shared with the larger Dawson community. These artifacts could be created collectively or individually and can take various forms: assignments, assessments, rubrics, toolkits, web sites, etc.

Each FLC culminates in an end-of-year presentation (e.g. Ped Day, or other similar event), which details the group's learning journey, the questions or problems they wrestled with, and some of the artifacts that were created.

> Participating in an FLC has enriched my teaching and learning by giving me new ideas for in-class exercises that will allow me to better evaluate my students' progress. The best thing about the FLC so far has been how it recharges my batteries and makes me excited to try out new material/ways of teaching."
>
> *Melanie Proulx, ContEd With Care:*
> *Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success*

Why FLCs?

"Creating a faculty learning community program is one approach that engages community in the cause of student and faculty learning and of transforming our institutions of higher education into learning organizations."
Milton D. Cox

They reduce burnout and isolation

One thing comes up again and again in the literature about FLCs: they are e ective ways to reinvigorate teachers: "FLCs improve the professional lives of faculty by chipping away at the stultifying e ects of burnout and isolation that can accompany the heavy teaching and service loads they carry" (Sipple & Lightner, 9). Refreshing a teacher's perspective is baked into the process as a fundamental feature. Teachers often report leaving FLCs with a renewed sense of purpose, and concrete tools to make their teaching more meaningful.

They adopt a community-driven, constructivist approach

In FLCs, the social aspects of building community are emphasized over a rigid format and structure. The goal is to learn together--to learn from each other and with each other. It is the connections you make with other participants in the group that drives the deepest learning: "An FLC program can include many bridges linking faculty to deep learning, early-career faculty to experienced faculty, isolated teachers to new colleagues, departments to departments, disciplinary curricula to general education, and faculty to students and sta " (Cox & Richlin, 18). You are there to support, challenge, question, and encourage one another.

They are driven by faculty need

Topics for FLCs are proposed by faculty. FLCs can offer professional development that meets teachers exactly where they are and can focus on their specific needs and contexts. The curriculum, frequency and length of meetings, and deliverable are all decided on by the facilitator and the participants. They offer a way for teachers to personalize their own teaching and learning journeys. Though teachers will likely make up the bulk of FLC participants, professionals and students are welcome to join, and could offer their own unique and valuable insights and perspectives.

They allow for experimentation, play, and productive failure

The collaborative process and social dynamic of FLCs foster an atmosphere where bigi deas,imagination, and risk-taking are encouraged. FLCs are judgment-free zones that adopt a "yes, and..." mentality. They aim to give participants the time and the space to experiment, to reflect, and to celebrate "failures" as invaluable learning opportunities: "They are iterative and set an expectation of practice for participants" (Haras).

They cultivate personal reflection

Most of the models of FLCs contain some element of personal reflection as an integral part of the process. Thus they allow teachers a safe space to think about the work that they're doing and the changes they're attempting. "They ask faculty to routinely reflect, a metacognitive practice that allows for deepening self-awareness and goal- setting, precondition for improved practice" (Haras).,

They foster coaching and mentoring among faculty

All teachers have their own strengths, weaknesses,area sof expertise,and blind spots. By combining forces, FLCS help promote organic mentoring and coaching relationships to develop (Haras). This can be a way to redefine professional development as a peer-centred social activity.

They bring about meaningful institutional change

FLCs can help transform colleges into learning institutions--places where lifelong learners actively engage in their own development on a daily basis. Engaging in the process of learning on a day-to-day, moment-to- moment basis can infuse energy, meaning, and lasting change into the lives of teachers, students, professionals, and the entire college community.

"FLCs provide multiple benefits for faculty, professional developers, the institution, and ultimately, students. When run well, FLCs offer a forum for effective change at a variety of institutional levels. The results of an FLC can be concrete products—research studies, classroom interventions, documents for a promotion dossier—or they can be intangible changes, such as a shift in a faculty member's perspective on active learning."

Developing Faculty Learning Communities at Two-Year Colleges, 9

For further reading



"Faculty Development as an Authentic Professional Practice," by Catherine Haras

The insights from colleagues in other disciplines, particularly the non-quantitative ones, have been especially valuable. Beyond simply the enjoyable interactions with colleagues, the best part was seeing that the challenges we face as educators are not mine alone and are quite similar even across different disciplines. The opportunity to collectively brainstorm ways to tackle these challenges was both helpful and rewarding."

Maxime Emelin, Cont Ed With Care:
Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success, 2025-26

Goals of FLC Project

- To implement a Faculty Learning Communities approach to faculty development that compliments existing and planned professional development offerings of the Offce of Academic Development.
- To nourish collaborative, multi-disciplinary, and faculty-led exploration into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.
- To collectively create and share teaching and learning artifacts that can feed into individual or program development.
- To foster more connections between faculty from different disciplines; between professionals from different offices; and between faculty and professions.
- To increase wellness and job satisfaction for faculty and professionals, which can have a positive impact on student success.

Goals of FLC Project

Miami University, which has been running a successful FLC program since 1979, lists a number of goals that have inspired the development of an FLC program at Dawson.

- Build universitywide community through teaching and learning
- Increase faculty interest in undergraduate teaching and learning
- Investigate and incorporate ways that diversity can enhance teaching and learning
- Nourish the scholarship of teaching and its application to student learning
- Broaden the evaluation of teaching and the assessment of learning
- Increase faculty collaboration across disciplines
- Encourage reflection about general education and the coherence of learning across disciplines
- Increase the rewards for and prestige of excellent teaching
- Increase financial support for teaching and learning initiatives
- Create an awareness of the complexity of teaching and learning

Building Faculty Learning Communities, 10

Becoming a Facilitator

Where To Start

Interested in facilitating an FLC, but don't know what topic you might explore? Here are some prompts to get you started

Start with a problem. What is one challenge you face in the classroom? What is one challenge your students face?

Start with a question. What's something you always wondered about? What mysterious or ambiguous aspects of teaching and learning would you like to know more about?

Start with an inspirational moment in the classroom. Did you experience something magical in the classroom? What was that about? How do you recreate that?

Start with a discouraging moment in the classroom. What went wrong there? How can you turn that discouraging moment into an opportunity for learning and growth?

Start with something you read or watched. Come across any inspirational articles, books, or videos? Something you'd like to research further?

Start with a conversation. What kinds of teaching and learning topics are you and your colleagues talking about? What is a topic that you know is of current concern to teachers?

Start with an picture. What does the idea class look like to you? What are you seeing in your head? What's standing in the way of you making that happen?

Start with this template: I have always wanted to _____ with my class, but I've never been able to because _____. Fill in the blanks!

More Prompts to Brainstorm Possible FLC Topics

Problem statement

What challenge or problem will your FLC address?

Goal

What do you hope to accomplish with your FLC? What is your objective? What do you hope to have by the end of the year?

Pedagogical topic

What aspect of teaching and learning will your FLC address? Assessment? Assignment design? Grading? Feedback? Active Learning? Creativity? Writing as critical thinking task? Writing in genres? Building empathy? This list is just a starting point!

A challenging course

Will your FLC focus on development of a specific course? What is challenging about this course? Why does it require deeper thought? (optional)

Sources

What articles, books, podcasts or videos have you read, seen, watched, or heard that have inspired your thinking? Is there a resource that might serve as the philosophical basis for your FLC?



Popular Teaching & Learning Topics

These are just starting points. Use them to fire up your imagation.

Ungrading: Explore non-traditional grading methods like contract grading, specification grading, self-assessment and more in the aim of de-centering grades, emphasizing feedback, and reducing anxiety.

Feedback: Explore ways to write student feedback that is more efficient, effective, and action-oriented.

AI/Technology: Explore how AI or other technologies can enhance learning in the classroom.

Inclusivity: Explore how to design classes, assignments, and assessments in a way that takes learner variability into account.

Writing in the Disciplines: Explore how writing can be used to foster critical thinking in any discipline.

Active Learning: Explore how learning-through-doing can lead to better assimilation of knowledge and skills.

Creativity: Explore how to design assignments, assessments, and activities that harness the power of your students' creativity and imagination.

Self-Reflection: Explore how students can design their own learning journeys through frequent reflective assignments.

Critical Thinking: Explore how to create a classroom community of thinkers who can inspire and challenge one another.

Two Types of FLCs

Topic-Based

Topic-based FLCs are centred around a particular teaching and learning topic. They can feature any interested faculty member or professional. Topics can be about any pressing issue at the college: grading; feedback; AI; technology; assessments, critical thinking, etc. Topic-based FLCs typically run for one year or one semester.

Examples:

- Beyond the Echo Chamber: Tools for Teaching Journalism and Media Literacy
- The Post Prompt Classroom. Teaching in the Age of AI
- Environmental Sustainability and Justice Frameworks across the Disciplines

Cohort-Based

Cohort-based FLCs are made up of cohorts of faculty members who have common teaching and learning needs and challenges. For example: Cont Ed or Early Career Faculty; Program Coordinators, etc. The community is centred around a group of faculty members in similar positions to discuss topics relevant to their situations. Cohort-based FLCs could be ongoing, on a yearly basis.

Example:

- ContEd with Care: Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success (for Continuing Education faculty)

The Role of the Facilitator

A balancing act

Each of the items below should be decided on by the entire group. Your responsibility is to make sure these decisions are made early on, and that everyone has an equal say.

Content:

- What will the group talk about?
- What sources will the group's discussions be based on?
- What is the scope and breadth of the discussion?

Task:

- How often will the group meet?
- For how long? What structure will meetings take?
- How will you work toward your final deliverable and ensure that it's completed on time?

Group dynamics:

- How will you create a climate where everyone feels free to express themselves, supported, heard, valued, and challenged?
- How will you encourage risk-taking?
- How will you help build a judgment-free zone?
- How can you build upon each participant's strength to add to the container of the group?
- How do ensure conversations are free enough for diversions, but tight enough to not completely veer off course?
- How do you manage the personalities of your participants, each of which is an "expert" in their own domain and mostly likely already an experienced instructor?

"The FLC facilitator plays an essential role in helping to create and sustain not only the structures but also the ethos that can foster genuine community, deep learning, and projects of significance"

"The Role of the Facilitator in FLCs," 32

For further reading:

“The Role of The Facilitator in Faculty Learning Communities: Paving the Way for Growth, Productivity and Collegiality,” by Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens & Roben Torosyan

“Guidance for FLC Facilitators: Cultivating a Thriving Community of Learners,” from Idaho State University

Everyone has something to offer and share. Whether it's developing proper assessments, grading schemes, the projects themselves or just the opportunity to express and vent at times, one feels as though they have a team supporting them. No one is alone and there is always someone to turn to. The meetings also open the door to future collaboration and, most importantly, to the development of the best possible projects for students. Thanks to the learning group, students will be able to work on projects that are well thought out, realistic in scope and fundamentally interesting.

Adamo Petosa, Designing an Interdisciplinary Science Integrative Project Course, 2025-26

Fostering community

Keeping participants interested, motivated, and energetic about your FLC is your greatest challenge as a facilitator. The best way to go about this is to nurture a supportive and nourishing community. Though the topic might get participants to sign up, it is the community that will keep them engaged.

A Balancing Act

Much of the literature on FLC facilitation suggest a light touch: leading the group and keeping it on track while allowing the participants to take ownership of the discussion, the content, and the artifacts you create. Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens and Roben Torosyan in "The Role of the Facilitator in Faculty Learning Communities" give the following advice:

> "A learning community facilitator must find ways to help establish a climate conducive to genuine inquiry, risk-taking, learning, and productivity. Such guidance requires that one note and help adjust the flow of conversation, aid members in negotiating conflict, cultivate members' sense of ownership of the experiences and the results of their work (and play) together, and encourage increasing member responsibility for the work of leading and even facilitating the group--all while participating in the intellectual life of the group, yet not imposing ideas or misusing power."

Milton Cox, one of the foremost proponents of FLCs, identified 10 qualities that are essential to their success: "safety and trust, openness, respect, responsiveness, collaboration, relevance, challenge, enjoyment, *esprit de corps*, and empowerment. The challenge for the facilitator is to model and coach the specific skills required by each of these essential qualities" ("The Role of the Facilitator," 36). Ingrid Bens, in her book *Facilitating With Ease*, says, "[f]acilitating is a way of providing leadership without taking the reins. As a facilitator, your job is to get others to assume responsibility and take the lead" (7). Ortquist-Ahrens and Torosyan add, "What remains important is that facilitating for the good of the group must remain a facilitator's number one priority, and that one's own investment in content or decision-making must take a subordinate role" (39).

Social Learning

FLCs function as a modeof social learning. In this way, you are not an expert who is transmitting knowledge to your participants. Instead, knowledge is created together: "a key element of cultivating a community of practice is for members and leaders to switch their tacit learning theory from a familiar transmission mode to one in which practitioners thrive on learning from and with each other in conversations of the 'shop talk' variety" (*CoPs Within and Across Organiztions: A Guidebook* 133). The idea of social learning is that the lessons are unknown to all, including the facilitator, until they are created by the group: "The intention of social learning activities is to create spaces for deeper and more meaningful conversation about all the nuances and uncertainties of actual practice" (*CoPs Within and Across Organiztions: A Guidebook* 133). Probably the most important thing is to "first of all, come in as a learner yourself" (*CoPs Within and Across Organiztions: A Guidebook* 134). Finally, the dynamics and particulars of the community should be decided on by the group.

"One of the most frustrating temptations in facilitating a community of practice...is striving to cultivate the ideal community according to some criteria that you have come up with, that you have read about, or that are being imposed on you. **The community is not for anyone else; it is for its members. It is the community they need, not the community you or anyone else wants**."

CoPs Within and Across Organizations: A Guidebook 134

Keeping participants on board

There are many reasons why a participant might stop participating in an FLC. Here are a few tips and tricks to retain participants if you feel energy starting to lag (taken from *Developing Faculty Learning Communities at Two- Year Colleges* 82-86).

- **Meet less often to reduce time commitments.** The most important thing is not that you meet frequently, but that you meet regularly. If you only end up meeting 4 times over the course of the year, for example, you can still get a lot done.

- **Meet somewhere off-campus.** Meeting at a cafe or restaurant nearby may make it seem less like a meeting and more like a social event.

- E**mphasize the practical teaching lessons**. Participants will feel like their time is well-spent if they leave each meeting with a concrete thing they can try in the classroom right away. "Members need to see results of their participation and have a sense that they are getting something out of it" (*Intro to Communities of Practice* 8).

- **Watch out for pressure to conform.** Encourage alternate ideas. Consider secret ballots, anonymous polls for group decisions. Be mindful of group think: "the tendency of members to value group cohesiveness and solidarity over good decision making" (Janis, 1972).

- **Be mindful of the personality of each participant** and how each person can contribute most effectively to the group.

"Essentially, create an FLC that is practical enough to attract interest, but still engaging enough to promote connectivity" (*Developing Faculty Learning Communities at Two-Year Colleges 86*)

For further reading:

"Introduction to Communiities of Practice: A Brief Overview of The Concept and Its Uses," by Etienne and Beverly Wengar-Traynor

Community of Practice Design Guide

Communities of Practice Within And Across Organizations: A Guidebook, by Wengar-Traynor , et al

Being part of the FLC has given me space to talk openly and reflect on the challenges we're likely to face when teaching a new project-based course. The FLC has been really helpful in allowing me to exchange ideas with colleagues, learn from their experiences, and get feedback that's shaping how I approach the course. The best part has been feeling like I'm not alone. It's reassuring to be part of a community of people dealing with the same challenges and to feel supported as we work through them together.

Annie-Hélène Samson, Designing an Interdisciplinary Science Integrative Project Course, 2025-26

Creating the container

Follow the steps below to ensure that all participants are on the same page, and that your group functions as a cohesive unit. The process below is taken from "The Role of The Facilitator in Faculty Learning Communities," by Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens and Roben Torosyan.

Breaking the Ice

Depending on how many disciplines are represented in your group, your participants may not know each other. In your first meeting, think of a meaningful way to get participants to open up about themselves.



Ice-breakder suggestion: ask participants how they came to be interested in the topic of the FLC.

Decision-Making Procedures

The group must decide early on how it intends on making decisions. Majority rule? Unanimous decision? Raising hands? Secret ballot? Establishing a decision-making protocol early on will save a lot of time, will help eliminate any hard feelings, and will ensure everyone's voice is heard.

Group Norms

Establishing protocols and mutual expectations early on is key to creating a harmonious group. Create a set of ground rules for logistical aspects related to meetings, sharing information outside of the group, resolving disagreements, etc. At the very least, establish a protocol for what to do when you encounter a difficult situation. You can come in with a list of norms for the group to discuss and modify as desired, or have the entire group come up with protocols from scratch.

"However informally and in whatever mode such voicing takes place, members need to deal with their differing sense of what makes a productive process, and then hold themselves and one another accountable for agreed-upon guidelines" ("The Role of the Facilitator in FLCs" 47)

Goals

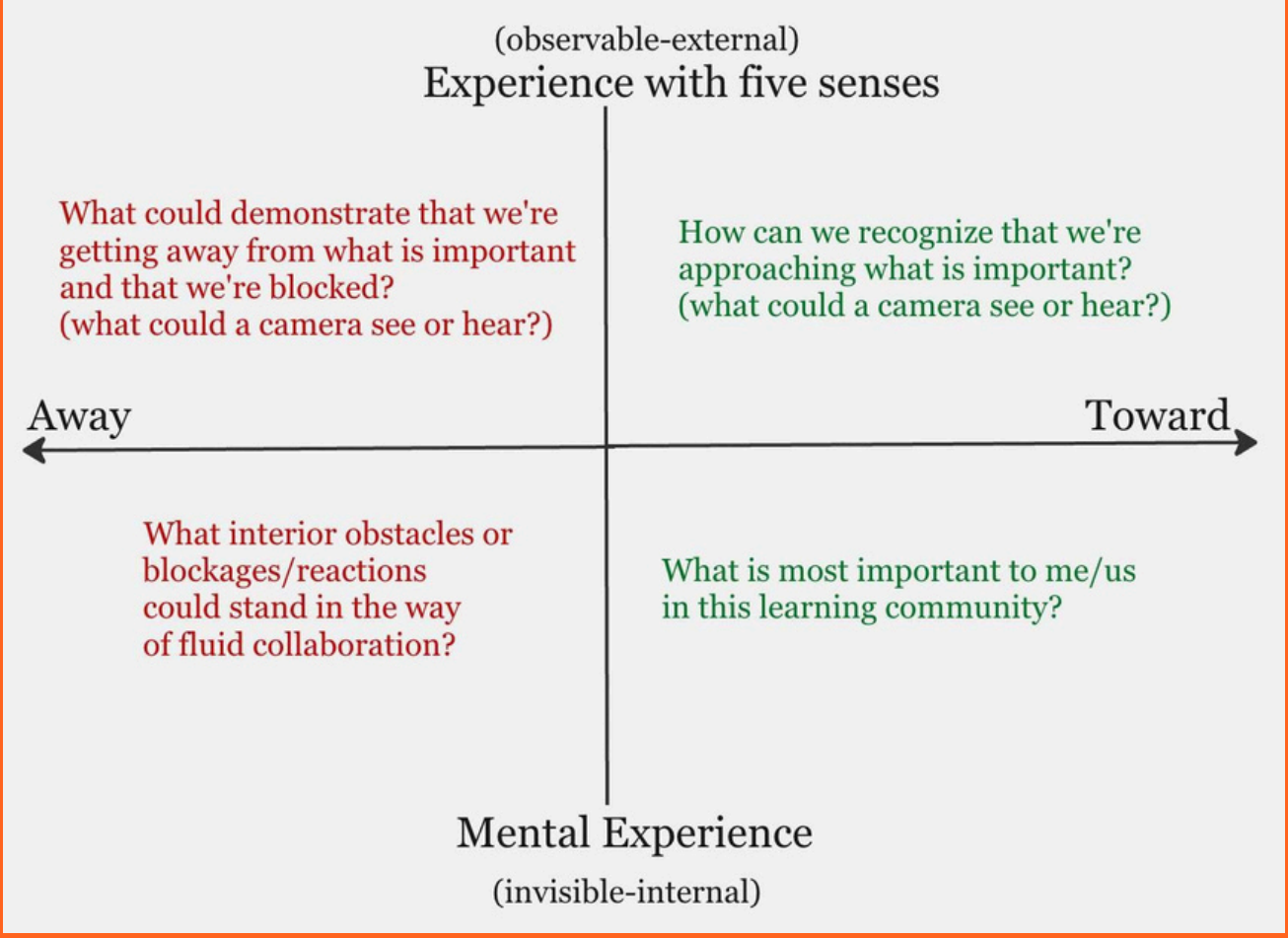
Have each individual detail their goals for the process, and come up with a set of shared goals. Here is one place you can align your group's goals with the Office of Academic Development's current professional development goals and interventions. "While only a few objectives are needed, each should be S.M.A.R.T.: Specific enough to be memorable, Measurable (whether qualitatively or quantitatively), Accountable to named volunteers, Realistic enough to get done, and Time delineated as to when exactly measures will be taken" (Role of the Facilitator in FLCs 48). Review and adjust goals periodically throughout the year.

I am glad I volunteered to join the FLC related to teaching the new Enjeux course in French. It is a great opportunity to touch base with teachers in other disciplines to learn from them and be inspired by their work. It has helped me feel more connected to my program.

Cornelia Howell, Enjeux/Thematic Issues Pilot FLC, Fall 2024

Collaboration Matrix

The matrix below,developed by Kevin Polk and adapted by the Fédérations des cégeps in their guide to FLCs, is a simple way to gauge whether your group is collaborating in a productive way that can leading to concrete results. Fill it out early on in your community's life cycle, and refer back to it regularly. It offers an observable way to measure how your group is feeling about the process you're engaged in.



Typical Challenges & Risks and Mitigation Strategies for Communities of Practice

Challenges and risks	Mitigation
Silos. A risk of a community of practice is that the very things that lead to its success can also turn it into a silo. Members become inward looking and forget to reach out across their boundaries for new members, new perspectives, and alignments.	The social learning team has an important role in identifying potential silos and looking for opportunities to create boundary encounters. A silo often means a strong identity. Respecting while also extending that identity can take sensitivity and persistence.
Groupthink. Another danger is that members stop questioning the "truths" that have been generated by the community. It becomes more comfortable to continue existing story lines than to challenge the consensus.	Make sure that newcomers are welcome, in particular when they question the unquestioned. Encourage interactions with people outside the community, including other practices, but also customers, stakeholders, researchers, etc.
A few dominant voices. If a few people constantly dominate, some members might leave the community, even if they have a lot to offer and a lot to gain.	Through the task of the community keepers, members can reflect on how their community functions as a learning partnership. They can draw attention to other voices that are silenced. Sometimes, community leaders need to talk to a dominant person in the back channel to avoid wasting precious community time.
Lack of continuity. If there is little or no continuity through shared storytelling about past events and what people have done with the learning since then, members will start treating meetings as discrete events rather than an ongoing learning partnership.	Make sure that check-in and check-out times creates continuity across meetings. Always build on past activities and follow up in due time for collective reflection, feedback, and refinement.
Too much transmission. People are so accustomed to presentations as the main learning mode that it can quickly become the default, if not enough thought is being given to activity design. Then meeting agendas start looking like a list of topics rather than activities to make progress on real challenges.	Keep presentation mode to an absolute minimum. When used, presentation should be a prelude to engagement rather than the main learning mode. Be imaginative in designing learning opportunities (see next chapter for ideas).
Community of practice as a service. The downside of having strong community leaders and social learning team is that members may start to see the community as a service rather than an opportunity to shape or steer the learning partnership themselves.	Avoid feedback forms that take responsibility for the community away from members, e.g., do not ask for a rating of how well organizers did their job. Rather, use questions that focus more on what people can do to take ownership of their community.
Operating like a project. A community is led in a project management style, perhaps by people who know how to get things done but lack the artistry needed to stimulate the imagination, inspire, seize the moment, and take risks in the interests of the learning agenda.	Not everyone is a born community leader, but everyone can learn. It is good for organizations to offer some training to those who want to develop these skills.

Content

Evidence-Based Content

Think about which resources and how you choose to incorporate them into your FLC discussions. Consider readings, videos, podcasts, and any other form of relevant media that might be accessible for your participants. You can choose to do all of the research yourself, and either summarize it for the group, or just have it underlying and framing your discussions. You can assign material to your participants--keeping in mind that they each have a full-time teaching load and have limited time. You can make readings, videos, podcasts, etc. optional. You can assign a different source to each participant and have them summarize it for the rest of the group. One idea that seems doable and can provide a coherent through-line to your FLC is to assign a short book (approx. 200-page) for the group to read and work through over the course of the year. This could add up to a small amount of reading between each meeting, but could add up to a lot of learning over the course of the year.

"Allowing members to co-determine content and workings structures can be extremely positive for instilling a sense of ownership and agency, but it can also result in overly lengthy deliberations and even a complete stalling of the sense of forward momentum and purpose, both of which can demotivate group members in the long run. On the other hand, however, having too strict an agenda or curriculum up front can make the experience feel more like a formal course and may lead participants to approach the experience passively and to view the facilitator as the leader or teacher, leaving less room for spontaneous turns in the direction of inquiry and, potentially, fostering less collaboration." "The Role of the Facilitator in FLCs," 40

Alignment with OAD

It is part of the FLC at Dawson project's mandate to remain aligned with the Office of Academic Development's goals by building on shared priorities and fostering the use of a common language around teaching and learning. Our communities are meant to compliment OAD's initiatives and aim to contribute to a shared culture of professional learning at Dawson.

Finding sources

For help in finding appropriate material for your FLC, please reach out to the FLC Project Lead, or the Office of Academic Development, or a librarian.

Schedule

Frequency of meetings

We recommend 3-5meetings per semester. You may have more than 5 meetings per semester if participants can manage it. It is a balancing act: too many meetings might discourage participation. Too few meetings make it difficult to establish community, to delve deeply into your topic, and to progress on your final deliverable. Each community will have to find its own ideal rhythm. More important than the amount of readings is consistency and coherence. As long as you meet regularly (even if not often), you will be able to establish a continuity in your discussions that should lead you to unexpected places and incite meaningful growth for participants.

Length

The recommended meeting length is 90-120 minutes. This gives participants space and time to dive deeply into a discussion topic and share what they're working on, and is manageable to fit into a weekly schedule. Again, there's no one-size-fits-all solution--choose a meeting length that fits with the needs and the size of your group.

Schedule

While you should allow for flexibility, you'll want to create a schedule that allows participants to experience a logical progression throughout the year. on the next page is an example of what an FLC schedule for one year might look like. This is just an illustration of one example meant to spark your own ideas--there are many different ways to go about this.

Sample Schedule

Fall Semester	
Meeting 1: Taking Stock & Goal- Setting	Where are you now? Where do you wish to get to by end of process?
Meeting 2: Tracking new ideas and inspirations	How are you starting to think differently about your teaching and your students' learning based on new insights from this group? How is the material relevant to your classroom?
Meeting 3: Implementation & reflection	What changes do you plan to implement? How do you plan to implement them? How is your progress aligning with goals set out in meeting 1?
Winter Semester	
Meeting 4: New classroom artifacts & look ahead to deliverable	What new assignments, assessments, learning activities, or rubrics have you created for your course? What does the group want to present as our final deliverable?
Meeting 5: Consolidating work	How will group compile work done into final deliverable? What artifact do we want to share with broader community?
Meeting 6: Reflection & looking ahead	What have you learned this year? Have you met your goals? How will you continue to grow? How will you share your knowledge with department or greater community? Final preparations for group deliverable.

Five stages of an FLC

Below is a table that outlines five typical stages for an FLC. It is from a guide to FLCs published by the Fédération des cégeps, and it is presented below in its original French version. As with everything in this guidebook, it is meant to be a suggestion, rather than a recipe you must follow. Note that steps 1-3 can all take place in the first meeting of the year. Step 4 is the longest of the steps, and will span many meetings--likely the bulk of the year- long lifecycle of the FLC.

#	Étape	But et contenu	Questions suggérées
1	Rencontre	Faire connaissance et échanger sur les motivations individuelles et collectives, en amorçant des réflexions initiales sur le domaine d'activité commun ou la thématique, ainsi que sur le ou les objectifs de la communauté	• Pourquoi sommes-nous là ? • Que savons-nous déjà ? • Que voulons-nous apprendre ? • Qu'est-ce qui motive notre participation ?
2	Clarification de la cible commune	À partir des éléments qui ressortent de l'étape « Rencontre », faire émerger, mettre en commun et documenter les intentions de développement et objectifs d'apprentissage individuels spécifiques des membres pour ensuite converger vers une cible commune	• À la lumière de notre réflexion individuelle, que voulons-nous concrètement accomplir ensemble dans le temps qui nous est imparti, en tant que communauté apprenante ?
3	Engagement collectif	Expliciter collectivement les comportements attendus ainsi que les normes et règles de fonctionnement souhaitées pour favoriser le partage du pouvoir et la collaboration	• Quelles sont les valeurs de notre communauté (ce qui est important pour nous) ? • Quels pièges pouvons-nous anticiper et idéalement éviter ? • De quelles règles de fonctionnement voulons-nous nous doter ?
4	Cycles de développement	Échanger sur le sujet sélectionné (niveau contenu) pour apprendre ensemble et produire une récolte partielle (synthèse des apprentissages pour une rencontre donnée) et clarifier le fonctionnement par itérations (niveau contenant)	• Que voulons-nous apprendre ou développer, et comment allons-nous réaliser cela ? • Comment allons-nous communiquer les apprentissages (en continu) aux collègues qui ne sont pas impliqués dans notre groupe ?
5	Bilan des apprentissages	Évaluer ensemble les apprentissages effectués, formaliser une récolte finale (synthèse globale des apprentissages effectués dans la communauté apprenante pour une période donnée, avec la possibilité d'être diffusée à un public cible) et recueillir des rétroactions constructives pour une amélioration continue	• Qu'avons-nous appris de neuf ? • En quoi est-ce utile pour notre pratique professionnelle ? • Comment peut-on, plus largement, en faire bénéficier d'autres parties prenantes (et quelles sont-elles) ?

Meetings

Agenda

Come in prepared to get-togethers with an agenda, but don't feel like you need to rigidly stick to it. Again, it is a balancing act between being flexible and keeping the conversation moving in a productive direction.

> "The role of the agenda in a community is to give an initial structure so people can engage. It acts more like a road sign than the journey itself. **The key question for a community meeting is** not whether the meeting is following the agenda to the letter, but rather **whether activities are creating value for members.**" *Communities of Practice Within and Across Organizations,* 139

Activities

It's a good idea to keep your activities action-oriented: activities that in which participants will be actively doing something *and/or* activities that give participants concrete actions they can undertake in the classroom. For the sake of maintaining energy, it might be a good idea to schedule in two or three different activities into each meeting. The next page contains a few examples of the types of activities you can do in your get-togethers. Again, these are not meant to be prescriptive--there's certainly lots of great ideas not on this list.

Activity Suggestions

- Sharing best practices, learning activities or assessments that were successful or not, discussion on why something worked or not, etc.
- Sharing new course documents that were inspired by FLC readings or discussions.
- Work on group deliverable that could be shared by greater community.
- Work on end-of-year FLC presentation to greater community.
- Discussion of readings.
- Group creation of course documents: assignments, assessments, rubrics, etc.
- Brainstorming, inkshedding, drawing pictures, role playing, dreaming, unicycling...
- Ranting and venting sessions

Generic agenda template #1

Below is a generic agenda for a typical FLC meeting. Use it if it helps you plan out meetings.

Activity	Description
Check-in	The meeting host invites any new member there for the first time to introduce themselves. Then members share stories about: What did you do with any insights you got from our previous discussions? And what happened? The idea here is to see meetings, not as separate events, but as part of ongoing learning loops. Again, enabling these loops is a key dimension of community facilitation.
Opening activity	This is a space for members to bring up any challenge or topic to other members in the community. If it is short or urgent, the community can deal with it then. If it needs a lengthy discussion or more preparation and designed interaction, it is included in the learning agenda for a further meeting or a subgroup conversation. This opening space could simply be a live poll (online or in-person) or it could be something more elaborate such as a rotating café style conversation. In a small group, it could be an opening routine that is part of the agenda.

Generic agenda template #1, continued

Social learning activities	The bulk of the meeting is spent on focused learning activities that further the learning agenda of the community or respond to requests for help by members. Some communities dedicate a good part of this time to practice groups, both for doing their own thing and for engaging the whole community in providing feedback. As mentioned before, synchronous time is precious and needs to be used to interact rather than share information, which is best left to emails, newsletters, or recordings. Examples of activities, which can be done online as well as face to face, are described in the next section. Note that these activities may take place over more than one meeting. It is a good idea to invite members to take the lead in setting and facilitating different activities. The more practiced members are at creating activities for productive conversations on the go, the easier it is to deal successfully with emerging and important issues.
Reflections	Members reflect on the current meeting and the evolution of the community of practice from their perspectives: ▪ What have we accomplished and what should we include in our shared memory? ▪ What challenges are we facing? What should we do next to push our practice forward? ▪ What's working or not in our meetings? ▪ How are we doing as a community? ▪ Who else needs to hear what we are doing? Whether meeting online or face to face, we often open a shared document like a Google doc for these moments of reflection (see *Shared reflection* at the end of section 4.6 below for more detail on process).
Check-out	Before leaving, members share their reflections on: ▪ What are some of the learning highlights? ▪ What are we going to do with what we are learning and what difference do we hope it will make? The idea of this type of check-out is to help push the learning into practice and initiate learning loops to follow up on and feed back into the community over time.

Communities of Practice Within and Across Organizations, 139-40

Generic agenda template #2

Here's another possible agenda template from the guide to FLCs published by the Fédération des cégeps, and it is presented below in its original French version. As with everything in this guidebook, it is meant to be a suggestion, rather than a recipe you must follow.

Temps	Titre	But et contenu	Durée approximative de la rencontre (%)
1	**Accueil**	• Accueillir les membres et les informer du déroulement de la rencontre (horaire, informations importantes, présences, etc.)	5 %
2	**Activation**	• Activer ou réactiver les liens sociaux entre les membres à l'aide d'une activité brise-glace (dimension affective) • Activer la participation à l'aide d'une brève activité de réflexion (dimension cognitive) : questions simples en lien avec la thématique, la dernière rencontre ou les apprentissages effectués	10 à 15 %
3 (facultatif)	**Transition**	• Si l'activité d'apprentissage du jour n'a pas déjà été définie lors de la rencontre précédente, convenir ici du sujet à aborder et de l'activité d'apprentissage à réaliser • Au besoin, ce temps de transition permet de faire le pont entre l'activation et l'élaboration (répondre aux questions en suspens, assurer une compréhension commune, valider l'alignement entre l'activité du jour et la cible commune, etc.)	5 à 10 %
4	**Élaboration (cœur de la rencontre)**	• Réaliser l'activité d'apprentissage (généralement élaborée et proposée par la personne qui anime la communauté à partir des besoins énoncés par les membres) ou poursuivre les travaux amorcés lors de la rencontre précédente • Produire des connaissances en lien avec la thématique de la communauté apprenante et sa cible commune	50 %
5	**Organisation**	• Synthétiser et organiser les connaissances produites pendant l'élaboration (surtout dans le cas des CdP), afin de formaliser une récolte partielle • Préparer collectivement la prochaine rencontre (sujet à traiter et méthode d'animation[48] à privilégier) en tenant compte des apprentissages effectués et des besoins des membres • Selon le temps disponible, la personne qui anime peut inviter une personne (ou un sous-groupe) à effectuer, entre deux rencontres, une synthèse des apprentissages qui pourra être utilisée comme objet de réflexion à la séance suivante	15 à 20 %
6	**Clôture**	• Permet un bref retour sur la séance et une activité de clôture. Par exemple, retour réflexif sur la matrice de collaboration, appréciation de la séance ou du fonctionnement général, pratique avec les journaux de pratique réflexive, etc.	5 à 10 %

Modalities

Modalities

The ideal situation to build community is to have a committed group that attend regular, in-person get-togethers. But, the reality is that, due to many factors, this might not be possible. The FLC model is meant to be inclusive and open to all, so consider how you may include any participants who can't make all meetings. Because the norms and protocols can be decided on by the group, you can say to any would-be participants that can't commit to full attendance: "Here's the program and the process that we'll be undertaking. How would you like to participate? How can you get something from the group? How can you contribute?"

Asynchronous participation

You'll want to bake in the possibility for asynchronous participation. Forums or message threads (using Teams, Moodle etc.) are effective ways to continue conversations asynchronously. Writing will allow participants the time and space to work out ideas and ask questions. It is also a great way to continue to build community between get-togethers. Encourage frequent participation in message threads. People don't need to write a lot, but they should try to contribute regularly.

Online/Hybrid Meetings

If desired by participants, consider having online or hybrid meetings. There are several rooms at the college that can accommodate hybrid meetings (they can be tricky to set up the first time--consult with IT). Or, a mix of in-person and hybrid meetings. In 2025-26, the “Cont-Ed With Care: Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success” FLC conducted in-person meetings to workshop new rubrics and course assignments, and held online “journal clubs” to discuss readings. This mix of modalities help keep things fresh, and allowed for wider participation.

“The FLC has been incredibly helpful in providing a space for me to engage with pedagogical material among peers. My teaching has also benefited from the hands-on approach we took to designing assessments and workshopping them in the FLC. As a newer Cegep teacher, the best part of the experience has been connecting with colleagues in Cont Ed, which can be a very isolating experience.

Matthew de Vries, ContEd With Care: Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success, 2025-26

Non-attending participation

You might have someone keen on participating, but who is unable to make your scheduled meeting times. Here are some ways those who can't attend meetings might still contribute to and benefit from the community:

- Participate in asynchronous discussion forums
- Complete readings and produce summaries and discussion prompts
- Record short videos to share with group
- Share resources: articles, videos, podcasts, etc.
- Use collaborate writing tools
- Share class documents (assessments, assignments, etc.)
- Give and receive feedback on class documents
- Write short essays to share with the group
- Ask them how they want to participate!

Group Deliverables

Each FLC is expected to produce artifacts that can be shared with the greater Dawson community. Each FLC will have its own Sharepoint site that will house this material. Your FLC does not need to produce a lot of material--a small amount of impactful artifacts can go a long way. Assignments, rubrics, and other class materials that can be adapted to a wide variety of disciplines are most valuable.

Here are some examples of deliverables from 2025-26 FLCs. You can peruse the deliverables on the Dawson FLC Sharepoint site.

ContEd With Care: Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success

- Slides from workshops on Feedback
- Worksheets from workshops
- Quizzes, assignments, rubrics, templates that foster good feedback practices
- Podcasts on reading discussions

Beyond the Echo Chamber: Tools for Teaching Journalism and Media Literacy

- Media Literacy Source Evaluation Framework
- Inquiry-Based Interview and Research Toolkit
- Curiosity Toolkit for Visiting Speaker

Designing an Interdisciplinary Science Integrative Project Course

- Different flavours of possible course offerings
- Design and implementation of Science IP Course Lab
- Sample library activity
- Course outlines & Design documents

End-of-year presentation

At the end of the academic year, each FLC will show a short presentation of the work that they did, and the output that they created. It is meant to be a celebration of the great work that was done over the past year, and to promote materials that can be shared among the Dawson community.

Pedagogical Day

Each FLC is expected to lead a session on their topic and present their deliverables at Ped Day in the following year.

Benefits of Participating

The intention is for you to have a transformational experience, to nourish your teaching soul, and to make friends. Here are some other concrete benefits.

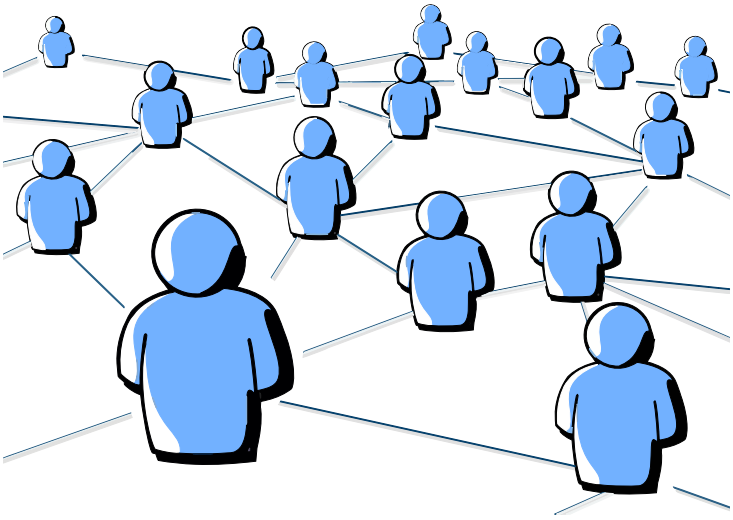
- Be part of a small group of faculty and professionals that meets regularly throughout the year.
- Forge connections with colleagues from various disciplines.
- Delve deeply into one specific topic relevant to your teaching practice.
- Read, discuss, and make discoveries.
- Gain new perspectives on your teaching.
- Participate in year-end celebration.

> Overall, my participation in FLC meetings and workshops has been crucial for the development of my teaching and is currently central to the way I am currently structuring my courses. The topics discussed in the meetings and the examples discussed and reviewed provided me with a structure from where to design assignments, select course materials, and weight evaluations. The possibility to share our experiences, to work through our individual problems with a group of colleagues facing similar challenges, allowed me to not only find solutions to these issues but to also feel supported in the effort of addressing these obstacles.
>
> *Carlos Velasquez Buritica, ContEd With Care: Feedback Tools for Stress-Free Student Success, 2025-26*

Responsibilities & Expectations

In order to ensure that you and your peers get the most out of your FLC experience, there are a few things that will be expected of you.

- Attend between 6-10 get-togethers over course of academic year
- Contribute to the design of group norms, protocols, and dynamics.
- Come with an open mind and a curious spirit.
- Participate in discussions, ask questions, support your teammates.
- Be open to sharing vulnerabilities and challenges in your own teaching practice.
- Come to get-togethers prepared by having done assigned readings and other asynchronous tasks (if there are any. Again, this is determined by the group).
- Contribute to a collective artifact to share with greater community (e.g. assignments, assessments, rubrics, toolkits, etc.).



Appendix A: Qualities Necessary for Community in FLCs

1. *Safety and trust.* In order for participants to connect with one another, they must have a sense of safety and trust. This is especially true when participants reveal weaknesses in their teaching or ignorance of teaching processes or literature.

2. *Openness.* In an atmosphere of openness, participants can feel free to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of retribution.
3. *Respect.* In order to coalesce as a learning community, members need to feel that they are valued and respected as people. It is important for the university to acknowledge their participation by financially supporting community projects and participation at FLC topic–related conferences.
4. *Responsiveness.* Members must respond respectfully to one another, and the facilitator(s) must respond quickly to the participants. The facilitator should welcome the expression of concerns and preferences and, when appropriate, share these with individuals and the entire FLC.
5. *Collaboration.* The importance of collaboration in consultation and group discussion on individual members' projects and on achieving community learning outcomes hinges on group members' ability to work with and respond to one another. In addition to individual projects, joint projects and presentations should be welcomed.
6. *Relevance.* Learning outcomes are enhanced by relating the subject matter of the FLC to the participants' teaching, courses, scholarship, professional interests, and life experiences. All participants should be encouraged to seek out and share teaching and other real-life examples to illustrate these outcomes.
7. *Challenge.* Expectations for the quality of FLC outcomes should be high, engendering a sense of progress, scholarship, value, and accomplishment. Sessions should include, for example, some in which individuals share syllabi and report on their individual projects.
8. *Enjoyment.* Activities must include social opportunities to lighten up and bond and should take place in invigorating environments. For example, a retreat can take place off-campus at a nearby country inn, state park, historic site, or the like.
9. *Esprit de corps.* Sharing individual and community outcomes with colleagues in the academy should generate pride and loyalty. For example, when the community makes a campus presentation, participants strive to provide an excellent session.
10. *Empowerment.* A sense of empowerment is both a crucial element and a desired outcome of participation in an FLC. In the construction of a transformative learning environment, the participants gain a new view of themselves and a new sense of confidence in their abilities. Faculty members leave their year of participation with better courses and a clearer understanding of themselves and their students. Key outcomes include scholarly teaching and contributions to the scholarship of teaching.

Building Faculty Learning Communities, 18-19

Appendix B: Possible Guidelines and Groundrules for FLC Discussions

1. Listen and seek to understand before speaking.
2. Ask clarifying and probing questions.
3. Assume that others speak from a place of good intentions.
4. Be willing to challenge one another's thinking and ideas.
5. Separate the impact a comment has upon you from the intent of the speaker.
6. Be discreet about any sensitive information other participants may share.
7. Provide a level of encouragement and support for one another.
8. Assume that everyone is here in good faith and has the interests of the institution at heart.
9. Be sensitive about time.
10. Do the work and take it seriously.
11. Keep focused on the goals and stay on task.

"The Role of the Facilitator in FLCs," 49

Appendix C: Norms for Constructive Disagreement

1. I am critical of ideas, not people. I challenge and refute the ideas of the other participants, while confirming their competence and value as individuals. I do not indicate that I personally reject them.
2. I separate my personal worth from criticism of my ideas.
3. I remember that we are all in this together, sink or swim. I focus on coming to the best decision possible, not on winning.
3. I encourage everyone to participate and to master all the relevant information.
4. I listen to everyone's ideas, even if I don't agree.
5. I restate what someone has said if it is not clear.
6. I differentiate before I try to integrate. I first bring out **all** ideas and facts supporting both sides and clarify how the positions differ. Then I try to identify points of agreement and put them together in a way that makes sense.
7. I try to understand both sides of the issue. I try to see the issue from the opposing perspective in order to understand the opposing position.
8. I change my mind when the evidence clearly indicates that I should do so.
9. I emphasize rationality in seeking the best possible answer, given the available data.
10. I follow the golden rule of conflict. I act towards opponents as I would have them act toward me. I want the opposing pair to listen to me, so I listen to them. I want the opposing pair to include my ideas in their thinking, so I include their ideas in my thinking. I want the opposing pair to see the issue from my perspective, so I take their perspective.

"Constructive Controversy: The Value of Intellectual Conflict," 7

Appendix D: Committees vs. FLCs

Committee	*FLC*	*Both*
Charge	Shared goal	Meet regularly
Minutes	Notes	Agenda
Mechanical, impersonal	Creative, personally meaningful, chance to explore	Outside work
Chair does work, hierarchical	All share responsibility; collaborative	Cross-disciplinary
Driven by bureaucracy	Driven by genuine inquiry and curiosity	

"The Role of the Facilitator in FLCs," 36

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