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Library as Learning Organization
Cultivating Communities of Practice

As our midsize academic library at Northern Kentucky University reinvigorated our committee structure, we saw communities of practice (CoPs) as a key feature of empowering employees and enabling organizational growth. As we shared in part one of this two-part series,[1] CoPs are one component of the committee structure at Steely Library, defined as follows: "Learning communities led by library employees and focused on topics of interest to the library. CoP proposals are solicited each spring with a limited number selected for the upcoming academic year (either for the fall semester, the spring semester, or both). CoPs allow participants to learn new skills they can apply to their role and generate a concrete deliverable that will benefit the entire library."

To create a consistent process for proposing, evaluating, and launching CoPs, the Library's Leadership Team developed an editable template for CoP proposals that includes elements such as title, description, facilitators, participant expectations, learning outcomes, deliverables, duration, and a draft CoP meeting schedule. The call for CoP proposals, Leadership Team review and finalization of CoPs, and call for employees to share their preference to join the CoP takes place over the summer, followed by CoPs starting in the fall semester.

In summer 2024, we initiated three inaugural communities of practice: a teaching and learning CoP led by Andrea Brooks; an artificial intelligence CoP led by Ryan Spellman; and a Power BI CoP led by Tommy Fix. The experiences and impacts of these CoPs are explored in this article.

Our Communities of Practice
Teaching and Learning CoP

- **Purpose and goal of CoP:** To foster strong information literacy educators across the library's departments, allowing participants to develop the knowledge and confidence to design and implement instruction in a variety of settings, including workshops, classrooms, or meetings.
- **Duration of CoP**: Participants met every other week for 60–90 minutes during the fall semester and about half of the spring semester, for a total of six months.
- **Number of participants in this CoP:** Six participants, including the facilitator.

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Meetings were usually structured around a shared reading, with opportunities to discuss and apply ideas. Guided worksheets were developed for each session, offering discussion prompts or providing activities, such as writing learning outcomes or unpacking the frames in the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Each session ended with an *I believe . . . And so I will . . .* reflection prompt.[2] These statements were used at the end of the CoP to develop individual teaching philosophies.

Outcomes

CoP participants developed shared language and practices around what it means to be an effective teacher. This yielded two planned deliverables: an instructional outline that participants developed for a class or workshop and an individual teaching philosophy statement by each participant. While sharing philosophies with one another, participants noticed patterns that emerged across the statements. This led to an unplanned deliverable as the participants crafted a set of shared teaching values that were presented to the entire library (see Figure 1).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) CoP

- **Purpose and goal of CoP:** To serve as a collaborative exploration of AI concepts, how AI might enhance library work, and how Steely Library can best support users in a landscape where AI literacy has become a crucial skill.
- **Duration of CoP**: The AI CoP had two phases: We met twice a month during the fall semester, then scaled back to one meeting per month during the spring semester with an increase in asynchronous collaborations. Overall, the group met for 9 months.
- **Number of participants in this CoP:** Eight participants, including the facilitator.

During phase one, the CoP discussed readings, talked about AI news and concepts, and shared takeaways from relevant events and new AI tools discovered between meetings. During phase two, the CoP worked asynchronously on an AI-focused environmental scan of peer and exemplary university libraries, continued to explore AI tools, and worked in small groups on compiling a final report of findings and recommendations.

Outcomes

The AI CoP's final report contained thematically organized sections on ethics, workplace applications, and student support. These recommendations have seeded many paths for the library to potentially support users and one another. For example, the report advocates for a workplace culture that supports proactive exploration and implementation of AI technologies, encourages the development of topical AI workshops for students, and calls for generative AI output to be carefully reviewed for discrimination and other unintended

> **As educators in Steely, we are...**
>
> - Inclusive
> - Empathetic and relatable
> - Intentional
> - Flexible
>
> **We accomplish this by...**
>
> - Clearly communicating
> - Integrating reflection
> - Being transparent
> - Co-creating learning experiences

Figure 1: Shared Teaching Values

consequences. There are also plans to continue some of the more casual aspects of the AI CoP, such as open discussion and AI tool demonstrations, via lunch and learn events.

Power BI CoP
- **Purpose and goal of CoP:** To develop knowledge and apply skills in using the data visualization tool Power BI to build library data dashboards.
- **Duration of CoP**: The Power BI CoP convened for four 90-minute sessions, held over three months.
- **Number of participants in this CoP:** Twelve participants, including the facilitator.

This CoP was structured as a series of trainings, as Power BI is a complicated tool that was very new to the majority of participants. The trainings covered Power BI basics, data and modeling best practices, and visualizations. The final session prioritized hands-on time to cover the issues that participants ran into with their own datasets and collaboratively develop ideas to solve their problems.

Outcomes
Each participant in the Power BI CoP was asked to work with their supervisor to establish a data visualization deliverable in advance of the CoP. The Power BI CoP is wrapping up as we submit this article, and final visualizations are still coming together. Example in-progress deliverables include tracking the "aha moments" that happen during instruction sessions; analyzing door counts for the library; and monitoring what websites are driving LibGuide traffic.

Reflections and Future Opportunities
From CoP Facilitators
Across all three CoPs, facilitators identified several benefits for embarking on this shared learning. Colleagues signed up for CoPs due to their mutual interest and got to learn with and from others from across the organization. Having a shared learning community can help to flatten the organizational hierarchy and allow participants to interact with colleagues outside their departments. The CoPs also allowed colleagues who had varying types of experiences and knowledge about teaching and learning, AI, and Power BI to work together. This helped to cultivate a shared vocabulary in each CoP and create an environment where participants could ask for help.

A final benefit was how the concrete deliverables of the CoPs helped to accelerate organizational work. Because each CoP had an agreed-upon deliverable in mind, the curriculum was built to work toward that objective. These deliverables had been approved by the Leadership Team, which ensured larger alignment with library priorities. From new lesson plans to active data visualization dashboards and new AI tools to solve problems, the deliverables helped build skills and strengthen organizational work. The facilitators identified the following elements of the CoPs that made their work successful.

- **Regular reflection.** In the Teaching and Learning CoP, participants were invited to complete *I believe [students, educators, the library] … And so I will …* statements at the end of each session. The prompt provided space for participants to reflect on their key takeaways from the session and consider practical applications. Further, the statements

proved useful when participants wrote their teaching philosophies at the end of the CoP, as the statements offered some reminders about prior conversations and insights into the participants' own values and ideas toward teaching. Whether it's an *I believe* statement or something else, a consistent reflection prompt is a useful consideration for any CoP.

- **Active participation, especially outside the CoP meetings.** Throughout the year, the AI CoP regularly shared relevant workshops, articles, videos, tools, and more with one another over Teams. This was a way for CoP participants to engage and learn from one another outside the standard meetings. To help collect all the resources, the CoP facilitator created the practice of sharing a "meeting intersession report," highlighting links shared and who shared them. Doing this allowed the CoP to celebrate that active participation and also help participants catch up between sessions.
- **Scaffolding content throughout the CoP.** Each facilitator invested time and energy to create the CoP curriculum. Breaking up the desired content into manageable chunks helped with knowledge transfer and comprehension. As experts in the topic, facilitators found that they usually reviewed what they wanted to teach and broke that content up for their audience. Having facilitators who know the content and can effectively facilitate ensures meaningful CoPs.

The facilitators also identified possible adjustments for future iterations, as noted below.

- **Share labor across participants and allow CoP participants to help guide the direction.** Across multiple CoPs, facilitators worked to find the balance between working through the prepared curriculum they created versus allowing space for participants to inform the direction toward the shared deliverable. In thinking about future CoPs, facilitators should consider where participants could lead shared discussions and how to build time into the curriculum for pivots.
- **Think critically about scheduling.** Scheduling around multiple individuals will always be a challenge; however, offering a consistent day and time to meet and placing gatherings on calendars as early as possible will help. It is also important to consider the appropriate length of time for meetings. In the Teaching and Learning CoP, meetings were initially scheduled for 60 minutes but were later adjusted to 90 minutes to accommodate robust conversations and provide time for application. Given the collaborative nature of CoPs, one hour may not be sufficient for the immersive learning and engagement taking place.
- **Dial in on the final deliverable.** Facilitators and participants need to have a shared understanding of the resulting deliverable(s). For some CoPs, like Teaching and Learning, a flexible approach allowed the group to identify a new unplanned deliverable. However, depending on the volume, this can become challenging for a single facilitator to support, as with the Power BI CoP, where each participant created a unique deliverable. CoPs should thoughtfully consider how to scope the final deliverable to ensure both feasibility and impact.

From Library Administrators

Reflecting on the impact and sustainability of the CoP model from the perspective of library administration surfaced several considerations.

- **Benefits of an established CoP structure.** Having a shared template allowed all proposals to contain the same elements and provided everyone (facilitators, participants, and administrators) access to the vision and strategy for each CoP. This alignment allowed the organization to be flexible as things changed throughout the year. When one of the facilitators slated to lead the Power BI CoP left the organization, the existing proposal allowed us to adapt the timing and approach, pivoting to successfully offer the CoP.
- **Acknowledgment of the intensive labor involved in the coordination of CoPs.** Following the call for proposals, managers have discussions with employees to explore, encourage, and prime them to submit a CoP. The Leadership Team collects, discusses, and selects proposals; employees evaluate and commit to a CoP that requires their active engagement; and, of course, facilitators lead the CoPs and take on the brunt of the work to create an engaging and impactful learning experience. Recognizing how much work this is for everyone is a reminder that we need to ensure that the infrastructure supports all roles (facilitators, participants, and administrators) and that the CoP topics, learning experience, and deliverables remain impactful.
- **CoPs are a nimble and effective vehicle for addressing emerging strategic topics while sustaining our collaborative organizational culture.** CoPs allowed us to tackle both established and emerging learning areas, filling a unique need for cross-divisional learning and application that could not be addressed through departmental work or the existing committee structure. As we continue to support CoPs, the Leadership Team will need to grapple with balancing leadership-identified topics with topics that arise organically from personnel across the organization. We see both as critically important to the overall success and impact of CoPs.

Conclusion

In the upcoming academic year, our organization will launch a new CoP focused on creating a culture of assessment in the library. We are excited about how the CoP model has allowed us new ways to accelerate library strategy, spark creativity, and build connections between library employees. We look forward to continuing to sustain and iterate on this model moving forward. ♫

Notes

1. Hailley Fargo and Brianna Marshall, "Library as Learning Organization: Reimagining Our Committee Structure," *College & Research Libraries News*, 86, no. 1 (2025): 24, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.86.1.24.

2. Nancy G. Caukin and Thomas M. Brinthaupt, "Using a Teaching Philosophy Statement as a Professional Development Tool for Teacher Candidates," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *11*, no. 2 2017), https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2017.110218.