**USG STEM Summit Roundtable Discussion: Communities of Practice – CoP**

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Roundtable Discussion: **Utilizing Communities of Practice for STEM SI Program**

STEM Initiative Goal addressed: #2 Improve performance and retention in STEM core courses and majors

**What is a Community of Practice? Have you ever been in one? Academic or non-academic…**

The initial concept of Community of Practice (CoP), a term coined by Wenger and Lave in their publication*, “Situated Learning:* *Legitimate peripheral publication”*, (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 49) argues that learning is not just receiving or absorbing information. Learning is also a social practice where members of a common group share knowledge through collective experiences and endeavors.

Wenger’s 1998 book, *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*, focuses on workplace learning. Wenger expanded upon this idea of CoP, linking how social resources shape people’s learning trajectories and their professional identity. Wenger’s notion of CoP is one of the most widely cited and influential conceptions of **social learning** to date.

**The purpose of a CoP is to provide a way for practitioners (SI leaders) to share tips and best practices, ask questions of their colleagues, and provide support for each other.**

List the top 3 challenges you have with effectively supporting your SI leaders and addressing improvements of your SI program:

1.

2.

3.

**Challenges of SI Leaders**: solitary job, lots of autonomy, needs to be part of the bigger picture, handling the ‘power’ of the leadership role, setting healthy boundaries, the challenge of leading/facilitating peers AND engaging content, place to share best practices, brainstorm, learn new collaborative techniques, stimulate participation, safe place to vent & and discuss challenges

**CoPs have 3 important concepts:**

**The Domain**: identity defined by shared interests, collective knowledge and inquiries that create common ground, inspire participation, guide learning, and give meaning to their actions.

**The Community**: members that engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, share information; this provides the social fabric for that learning.

**The Practice**: members become the practitioners and develop shared resources, experiences, tools, ways to address challenges – a ‘shared practice’.

On the back, **sketch your current Org Chart as it relates to your SI program**

Is your current structure working well?

An important aspect and function of communities of practice is increasing organization performance. [Lesser & Storck (2001](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_practice#CITEREFLesserStorck2001), p. 836) identify four areas of organizational performance that can be affected by Communities of Practice:

* Decreasing the learning curve of new employees (new Leaders have a huge learning curve!)
* Responding more rapidly to customer needs and inquiries (Leaders better equipped to address student concerns as well)
* Reducing rework and preventing "reinvention of the wheel" (sharing, reflecting, training specific)
* Spawning new ideas for products and services (once trust is built – members will brainstorm and find even more effective solutions and ways to enhance academic support)

**Our CoPs**

MAPP – math, astronomy, physics, and psychology (all heavily math and problem based)

BECK – biology, environmental sciences, chemistry, and kinesiology (all heavily concept & practice based)

MACE – modern languages, accounting, computer science, and economics (practice & theory)

**Results and Measurements**

We implemented the use of CoPs in the fall of 2015 and have used results found from our end-of-semester SI surveys to improve our program. A Qualtrics survey is distributed to our SI leaders to be answered anonymously. The images below provide a snapshot of data as well as two word clouds taken from two questions in our surveys. The feedback given by our Leaders continues to drive our improvements.

Theoretically, a CoP will provide the on-going support and camaraderie needed for the SI program and enhance our leaders’ experiences and confidence. Strong SI leaders will deliver better SI sessions; better SI sessions will address content, confidence, and clarity; content & clarity for students should produce a higher rate of course success (measured by GPA, DWF rate difference, voluntary attendance by students, affective ties).



