"A Constellation of Myth": A Freshman Learning Community

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What is a Learning Community?

- Set of 3 courses taken together by the same group of students
  - Freshman Seminar + 2 general education courses

- Explores a specialized theme under focused faculty guidance
  - Mythology & Astronomy
  - History of American West & Writing
  - Political Science & Public Speaking

Goals of a Learning Community

- Academic goals:
  - Approach material from different perspectives
  - Explicitly link the content and ideas between classes

- Student retention goals:
  - Develop a core group of peers that take multiple classes together
  - Create strong relationships
  - Build a support network of peers

A Constellation of Myth

	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI
10 AM	Astronomy	Freshman Seminar	Astronomy	Astronomy Lab	Astronomy
11 AM	Mythology		Mythology		Mythology

Students must sign up for all three courses.
If drop one course, must drop them all.

Course Themes

- Connections between mythology & astronomy
- Cultural influences on mythology & astronomy
- Historical developments in mythology & astronomy
- Using astronomy & mythology to understand our own world

Alignment of Topics

- Understanding the basics
- Creation
- How do we know?
- Heroes
- End of the world

Course Format

- Lectures & readings
- In-class discussions
- Film screenings
- Laboratory experiments
- Nighttime telescope observing sessions
- Final group project

Aligned Assignments

- Exams were carefully scheduled

- Astronomy labs were adjusted to include mythology components
Examples:
    - Tour of Planets Lab
    - Motions of the Earth Lab (zodiac)
    - Sunspot Lab

Aligned Assignments

- Final project
  - Groups chose a movie from a pre-selected list
  - Gave an oral presentation w/ PowerPoint

- Mythology:
  - Determine the hero
  - Discuss how he/she moves through the hero cycle
- Astronomy:
  - Explain scientific accuracies and inaccuracies

Results

- Tight-knit group of students
- More engaged in the content
- More willing to interact
- More likely to see interconnections
- More likely to ask for help