Summary: May 18, 2004 LTC Student Panel
Ten Ways to Turn Your Class into Community without Losing Time or Content: Student perspectives on building community

Suggestions given by the students:

Use of Names
*Learn students names and address them by name in class
  -shows students you know them as individual
  -makes it easier for student to approach you
  -helps students learn each other’s names
*Be clear on how you want to be addressed (Prof. X, first name, etc.)
  -removes any hesitance on students’ part about not wanting to call you the wrong thing.
*Encourage students to meet each other
  -introductions toward beginning of class
  -use names whenever possible

Individual Student-Professor Interactions
*Having a mandatory office hour can help encourage future office hour visits
  -makes it clear to students you have time/interest in listening to them
  -shows students where office is, that its not impossibly intimidating
  -gives student concrete reason to go into office
*Show interest in student’s background, progress, out of class interests
  -perhaps incorporate into initial mandatory office hour
  -shows that you are interested in them as an individual, fosters communication
  -allows you to bring beneficial individual interests/differences into classroom
  -helps you know where class is as far as background in subject
  -helps identify students who may be struggling earlier in term

Classroom Space
*Helps to be able to see everyone in class – particularly in discussion classes
  -chairs in a circle or similar configuration
*Where professor stands in relation to class can affect student response
  -if behind a lectern or other physical barrier, creates sense of distance
  -want to promote interaction – be part of the class
*Structural barriers (e.g. pole) in classrooms can be serious hindrance

Projects/Activities
*Field trips, movie showings and other out-of-class activities
  -help promote camaraderie among students
  -fosters “we’re in this together” atmosphere
*Group projects can be really helpful for building community
  -only works when well done
  -often helpful if individual and group components to project
Students will put more effort into projects when they seem “real”
- similar to what more advanced people in field would do
- perhaps relating (or contributing) to professor’s research

Individual projects can foster community as well
- encourage peer reviewing and other interaction between students
- foster the exchange of ideas, research, sources relevant to class

Discussion can be really great, but when it’s not:
- try to keep it student-centered – keeps students more involved

Shared resources helps foster collaboration between students
- needing to share lab, art equipment or books forces students to communicate
- promotes “we’re all in this together” feeling

Prof-formed study groups with a mix of abilities and background in subject
- great idea in principle, need to foster group work beyond simple formation

General Comments
* “We’re all in this together” feeling seemed very fundamental to fostering community
* Be sure not to discourage 1:1 tutoring
  - communication between departments and academic assistance important
  - perhaps invite tutors to introduce selves early
* Prof.s should attend student events
  - always welcome, they are a part of students’ community
* Social cliques can affect group work – need to work to break down/reach out
  - may be particularly true for minority students