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## Understanding the Attitudes and Beliefs of Faculty Members in Regards to Learning Communities at Cleveland State University

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UNDERSTANDING THE ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN  
REGARDS TO LEARNING COMMUNITIES AT CLEVELAND STATE  
UNIVERSITY

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Bachelors of Arts in English

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the intentions of faculty members' in regards to their participation in learning communities at Cleveland State University (CSU). Like many higher education institutions, CSU offers learning community courses as an option to incoming students. Research has found that learning communities lead to a number of benefits for students, including higher grades and retention. However, CSU faces a continuous challenge in being able to offer learning community courses to students, and that is an increased need for faculty participation. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was applied as a theoretical framework in order to better understand how the attitudes and subjective norm of faculty members' at CSU affects their likelihood of participation in learning communities.

In this study a survey was administered to faculty members at CSU. Participants were asked questions to assess their attitudes and normative beliefs about learning

communities at CSU. Research questions were asked to assess if other elements outside TRA affected the likelihood of faculty participation in learning communities. The results of the study provided support for the theoretical constructs of TRA. The results indicated that faculty at CSU felt that learning communities lead to benefits for students. Faculty also evaluated the outcomes of learning communities as positive. In addition, the results indicated the importance of normative beliefs in the intentions of faculty members at CSU in regards to their participation in learning communities.

Results to the research questions discovered that faculty perceived that participation in learning communities would take too much time and logistical effort. Additionally, faculty member's reported a general lack of information about learning communities and the ways that they are conducted specifically at CSU. However, the results also suggested that there is a potential to increase faculty involvement in learning communities at CSU. Sponsors of learning communities at CSU can use these results to understand faculty member's attitudes and behavioral intentions towards participation. The results of this study can also be used by those who facilitate learning communities at colleges and universities across the nation to increase faculty involvement.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Learning communities apply an innovative cross disciplinary approach to education and have had successful results in universities across the country. Cleveland State University (CSU) has utilized learning communities to help new students better adjust to college life, creating a sense of support among the students who participate in them. Learning community courses engage students in completing real world problems, allowing them to form an applicable skill set that will build up their professional qualifications before they graduate. Over the years, universities across the country have developed different formats of learning communities to find the ones that work best for the needs of the student population. At CSU alone, approximately 70 students currently participate in learning communities.

Previous research has been conducted by those who facilitate learning communities at CSU to assess the effectiveness of such programs. The educational experiences of students and the benefits they feel have been gained from participation have been measured by questionnaires given upon completion of different learning community programs. Students who participate in learning communities have expressed

a great deal of positive feedback about their experiences. Additionally, the motivating factors of students who participate in learning communities and the general student perception of learning communities have been examined. One factor that students feel is important to their decision to join a learning community is the selection of classes offered. This factor raises a challenging issue for the faculty, staff and students involved in learning communities at CSU. The selection of classes offered is often limited, and this is largely due to a lack of available faculty members to teach the courses that fulfill the requirements of students. The courses offered are determined based on what the area of expertise is among the professors who choose to get involved in learning communities. As a result, learning communities at CSU are often unable to offer the core introductory requirements that incoming students need to take. This has affected incoming student's decisions in regards to their participation in learning communities. Potentially, students who would greatly benefit from the method of education offered by learning communities may decide not to participate in them because of the lack of classes offered.

### *1.1 Purpose*

As discussed previously, the ability of learning communities at CSU to provide the courses that are desirable to new students is limited. In order for those who facilitate learning communities at CSU to offer more classes, a greater number of faculty members willing to contribute to these programs are needed. Learning communities would be of greater benefit to students at CSU if more faculty members choose to participate in them because classes could then be offered to meet their needs. The need for increased faculty involvement presents a challenge for those who facilitate learning communities at CSU. While previous literature on learning communities has examined the motivating factors

of students in joining such programs and student benefits from participation, research has yet to be conducted that examines how faculty perceive learning communities, as well as the factors that lead faculty to consider if they intend to contribute to them. Such research would help to resolve a major challenge faced by learning communities at universities such as CSU, allowing learning communities to more fully offer an engaged learning experience to students. Examining the literature on learning communities allows for an understanding of the benefits of these programs to students as a method of higher education. The research on learning communities also makes the challenges faced by those who facilitate these programs more apparent.

## *1.2 Rationale*

The innovative approach of learning communities first began to be seen in American colleges and universities around 1990 (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Learning communities are therefore a relatively new approach to higher education, but have had a high rate of success in accomplishing their goals. In 2004, the National Survey on Student Engagement found that 24% of senior students from a sample of over 700 colleges and universities had participated in learning communities at some point between the years of 2002-2004 (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007). Learning communities can be defined simply as a model of education that includes certain characteristics (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007). These characteristics include small group size, a united sense of purpose, a system that supports faculty and student interaction, a system that has faculty interact with each other across disciplines, an integrated curriculum, and a definitive group identity (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007). Learning communities were originally developed as a technique to improve retention of

freshmen students into their sophomore year (Brzovic & Matz, 2009). However, they have developed into something much more complex than a simple retention technique by focusing on offering students courses that combine academic disciplines, centering on the study of an actual problem, and requiring students to apply their knowledge (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Learning communities emphasize building strong ties among the students and faculty members who participate in them in order to help new students form a professional network to assist them over the duration of their college careers (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Students take classes as a cohort and are able to work with faculty directly (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth). Learning is encouraged outside of the traditional classroom setting, often involving field trips, or research on applied projects (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Additionally, a cross disciplinary approach to education is often utilized. Learning communities are offered in different formats; for example, in the fall semester of 2009 Cleveland State University will offer an online e-learning community, a learning community specifically for students who live together on campus, and a learning community that allows students to take classes together but does not require them to live on campus.

Learning communities have a track record of engaging students in real world projects while allowing them to adjust to academic life. They provide a basis of social and academic support for students that will assist them throughout the duration of their education (Wilcox & delMas, 1997). Studies on student evaluations of learning communities found that students perceived themselves to have a stronger connection to faculty (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007). They also reported having a stronger connection to the university, being able to work better as a team, and as having higher motivation than

students not involved in learning communities (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007). Learning communities have been found to foster academic connections across disciplines, provide greater opportunities for student and faculty interaction, result in higher GPA's and greater retention of first and second year students (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007).

Research has found that students who emerge from learning communities report having an increased confidence in the areas of verbal, written computer and mathematical skills (Wilcox & delMas, 1997). Learning communities emphasize that students collaborate on research projects that are applicable to real world problems one would encounter in the workforce (Dodge & Kendall, 2004). Research projects found in learning community courses foster collaboration across academic disciplines, teaching students to problem solve as professionals in the real world need to do (Dodge & Kendall, 2004). For example, a learning community at a Midwestern university combined elements of business and communication in a learning community course where students worked on an applied project with the executives from the Target Corporation (Brzovic & Matz, 2009). The students' helped the Target executives refine an existing program that the corporation used to recruit recent college graduates (Brzovic & Matz, 2009). The results of the students' work were used by the Target Corporation to develop strategies for recruitment and implement successful policy changes (Brzovic & Matz, 2009). Participation in the project allowed students to walk away with a portfolio of career experience that they could show potential employers.

There are noticeable benefits to students who participate in learning communities. Students experience learning outside of the traditional academic setting in a way that is more conducive to what one will experience as a professional (Dodge &

Kendall, 2004). Participating in learning communities enables students to enter the workforce prepared with leadership skills (Dodge & Kendall, 2004). However, despite the fact that there is evidence of the benefits to students who participate in these programs, universities continue to face challenges in establishing and maintaining learning communities that are effective. There are several factors that have been found to hinder the development of effective learning communities.

The innovative approach to education advocated by learning communities makes such programs difficult to design. Learning communities are comprised of courses that reach across disciplines (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Faculty members involved in learning communities must develop new curriculums, and must be able to do so working alongside instructors from other departments. This demands a great deal of time and cooperation from instructors. Learning communities are also organized so that class sizes are small, and a typical university has between a total of 50-100 students annually enrolled in all of such programs (Brzovic & Matz, 2009; Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Faculty members may perceive the cost of developing a new curriculum, working with peers from other departments, plus putting in extra time to work one on one with students, as too high as compared to the possible benefits if the program only reaches 50-100 students annually. However, faculty participation is crucial to the success of learning communities (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007). Despite the fact that faculty participation is an essential factor to the effectiveness of such programs, the literature on learning communities lacks knowledge of how to accurately measure faculty attitudes towards participation (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007).

Given that fact increased faculty involvement would make learning communities more effective, this study attempts to provide more research in the area of persuasive communication by measuring the attitudes of faculty members at CSU towards learning communities, and uncovering how these attitudes influence the likelihood of their participation in such programs. Research on faculty attitudes towards learning communities would allow university officials to realize the specific challenges that faculty members face with these programs. The goal of this study is to understand how faculty members' form attitudes about learning communities, and the influence that these attitudes have on their behavioral intentions, in order to improve faculty participation in learning communities at an institution such as CSU.



## CHAPTER II

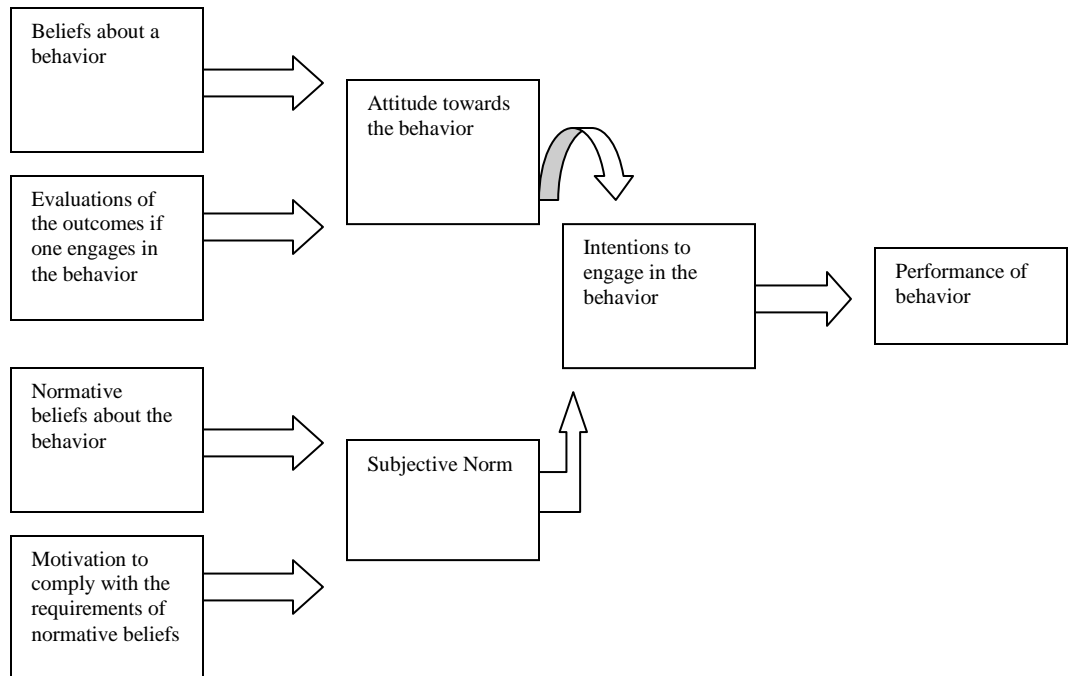
### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *2.1 Theoretical Standpoint: Theory of Reasoned Action*

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) provides a comprehensive framework that describes how the behavior of an individual can be predicted based on their behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975, and since its inception it has been utilized by numerous studies to accurately predict behaviors (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002; Slater & Kelly, 2002; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). The format of the TRA provides a comprehensive frame work that describes how an individual decides to engage in a behavior (Elwood, Carter & Greene, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). This is done in four stages, (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005), and is illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Model of the Theory of Reasoned Action*



As reflected in Figure 1, TRA describes that initially, individuals' consider their beliefs about a behavior and they also evaluate the outcomes that will occur if they engage in a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). However, during this first stage, individuals' also consider the normative beliefs of others (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Normative beliefs are defined as the perceptions that an individual feels others' hold towards a behavior (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). TRA also describes that individuals' will evaluate their motivation to comply with normative beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006).

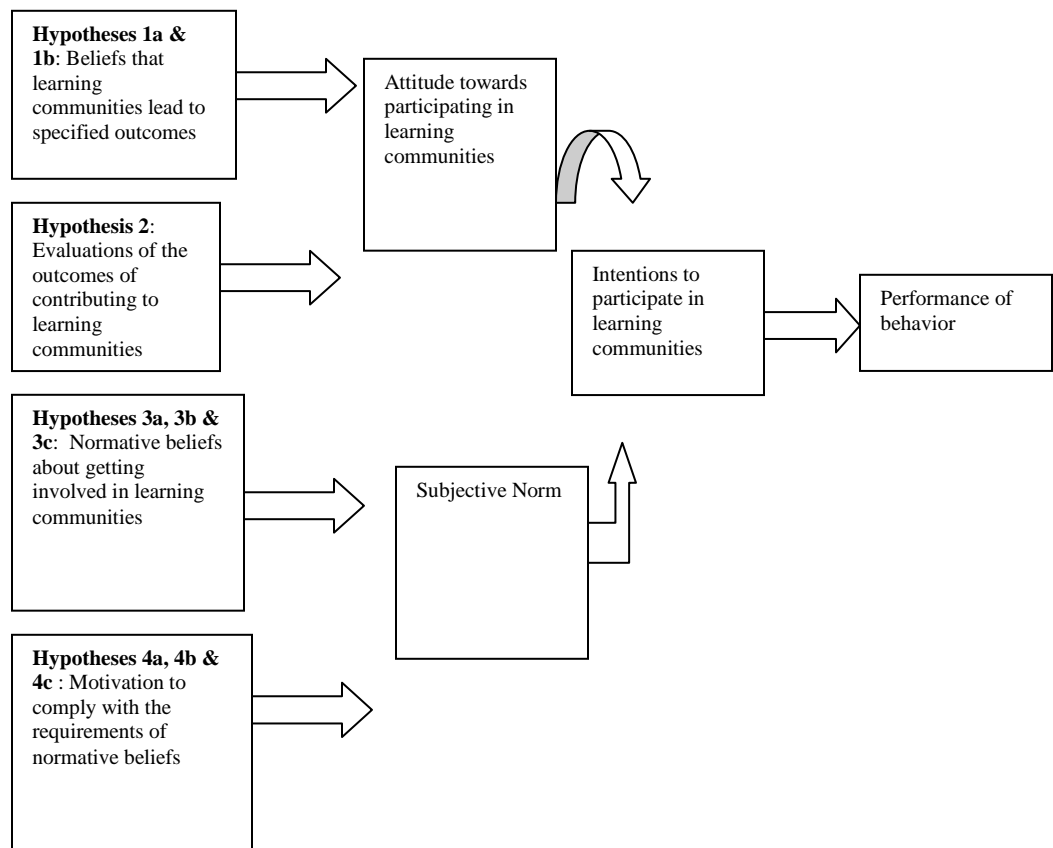
The second stage of the model leads to the formation of attitudes (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). TRA describes that attitudes are formed based on beliefs about a behavior, and the evaluation of outcomes about a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). A subjective norm is also developed at this stage; subjective norm can be defined as how much individuals' care about the perceived normative beliefs of others (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The formation of attitudes and the development of subjective norm combine together to lead to the intention to engage in a behavior (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). This is the third stage of the model illustrated by Figure 1. TRA describes that individuals' actual performance of a behavior (the fourth stage of the model) can be predicted based on their intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). There has been much empirical support illustrating how TRA accurately predicts the performance or lack of performance of a behavior, based on the conceptual elements described in the model (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006; Nabi & Hornik, 2002; Slater & Kelly, 2002). The theoretical constructs of TRA will be described next in order to illustrate how they can be usefully applied to the present study.

## *2.2 Applying the Model of TRA to the Current Study*

This study applies TRA to increase understanding of factors influencing faculty member's intentions to participate in learning communities at CSU. Figure 2 illustrates how the hypotheses for this project take into account the conceptual elements of TRA.

Figure 2

*Model of the Theory of Reasoned Action and Faculty Intentions towards Learning Communities*



For design purposes, the current project will only assess the behavioral intentions of faculty at CSU in regards to their participation in learning communities. It is hoped that these results can be used to more strategically recruit faculty members across academic disciplines to participate in learning communities, allowing more courses that are most beneficial to first year students to be offered. In order to accomplish this

purpose, the attitudes that faculty members at CSU hold towards learning communities have to be examined.

### *2.3 Attitudes and Beliefs*

TRA explains that the first component of understanding attitude formation is to examine the beliefs and outcome evaluations that one has towards a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). In describing how these beliefs and evaluations of beliefs form attitudes, TRA draws from elements of sociology and psychology (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). TRA claims that latent beliefs are often formed early in life from a variety of factors and reflect values that may be important to individuals (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Therefore, if one is trying to understand or alter individuals' attitudes towards a behavior, they first have to understand their beliefs about the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002).

Studies have concluded that latent beliefs that an individual possesses are strong, and these beliefs influence the behaviors that an individual decides to engage in (Nabi & Hornik, 2002; Nabi & Sullivan, 2001; Reichert, Kim & Fosu, 2007; Slater & Kelly, 2002; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). For example, a study conducted by Nabi and Sullivan (2001) applied TRA to examine how heavy television viewing affected attitudes, behavioral intentions and behavior. It was found that participants who viewed heavy amounts of television believed that the world was violent and dangerous (Nabi & Sullivan, 2001). Participants who viewed heavy amounts of television formed attitudes that the world was unsafe, and as a result, they engaged in protection seeking behaviors to increase their security (Nabi & Sullivan, 2001). Additional work supports the findings

that beliefs influence how individuals' decide to behave in certain situations. TRA was applied to a study that examined decisions to become an organ donor, looking at the specific behavior of signing an organ donor card (Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). A survey was used to assess beliefs and attitudes towards organ donation and results showed that participants often had beliefs towards organ donation that were incorrect (Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). Once participants were provided with correct information regarding organ donation, their beliefs about the process changed, and they reported more favorable attitudes towards donation (Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). Additionally, when participants reported a favorable attitude towards organ donation, they were more likely to sign an organ donor card (Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). These findings help illustrate the impact that beliefs have on attitude formation and behavior.

Health campaigns have often utilized TRA to understand how beliefs impact individuals' likelihood of engaging or choosing to not participate in a behavior. A study that examined anti-drug campaigns aimed at American teenagers found that beliefs that drugs are unhealthy and lead to future problems had a significant relationship with teens reporting that they did not intend to use marijuana in the future (Slater & Kelly, 2002). To apply TRA to a different health related context, a study that examined what made individuals likely to report cases of domestic violence found that strong beliefs about the negative implications of domestic violence resulted in participants indicating that they would be more likely to report such cases (Nabi & Hornick, 2002). However, in this instance, the behavioral intentions indicated by participants often did not match their actual actions (Nabi & Hornick, 2002). Still, the effect that beliefs had on attitudes and

behavioral intentions were evident (Nabi & Hornikc, 2002). TRA has also been applied to contexts outside of a health related focus, where the goal is still to change the behaviors of participants. For example, Reichert, Kim and Fosu applied TRA to an advertising context, examining how it could be applied to ads trying to get participants to join the Navy (2006). Results showed that ads portraying positive beliefs about joining the Navy (such as job security, promotions, benefits, travel, serving one's country, being a hero, etc.) lead to participants forming a favorable attitude about joining over ads that did not address the positive belief items (Reichert, Kim & Fosu, 2006).

Clearly, understanding beliefs is an essential component of understanding attitude formation. All of the studies mentioned above show that attitudes are affected by beliefs individuals' hold. Furthermore, attitudes often predicted behavioral intentions, and actual behaviors. These results can be applied to the present project. Understanding faculty members' beliefs about learning communities at CSU is central to understanding their attitudes towards them. The attitudes that faculty member's hold toward learning communities at CSU can then be utilized to ascertain their likelihood of participating in them. Based on the evidence about the importance of beliefs in predicting behavior, as discussed in TRA, the following items are predicted:

H1a: Faculty who believe that learning communities will lead to beneficial outcomes will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

H1b: Faculty who believe that learning communities are an engaging method of education will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

It is suspected that faculty members' that have positive beliefs towards learning communities at CSU will therefore have more favorable attitudes towards them; this should lead to an increased likelihood of the intention to participate in them.

### *2.3.1 Evaluations of Outcomes*

Beliefs about a behavior are not the only determinant in attitude formation. Studies applying TRA have found that although the beliefs individuals' hold about a behavior are often the initial considerations when forming an attitude, beliefs can be altered based on the outcome evaluations of the situation (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). TRA claims that an individual will evaluate the perceived outcomes of the behavior along with their belief considerations in order to form an attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Evaluation about the outcomes of a behavior has the potential to alter previously held beliefs, affecting attitudes towards a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Individuals' evaluate their beliefs with the outcome that they will suspect will occur if they engage in a behavior, and it is this process that TRA explains counts for attitude formation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Fitzmaurice, 2005). Therefore, if one is trying to understand or alter individuals' attitudes towards a behavior, they first have to understand their beliefs about the behavior, as well as how they evaluated the outcomes of the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Fitzmaurice, 2005).

To describe this process in depth, in their study of TRA and heavy television viewing, Nabi and Sullivan found beliefs that the world was violent and dangerous led to an evaluation that it was unsafe, and participants reported taking measures to protect themselves from an unsafe environment (2002). Similarly, Slater and Kelly found that



teens who believed marijuana use was negative also evaluated marijuana use as something that lead to future drug use and additional problems (2002). In applying TRA to try and increase participants' status as organ donors, Weber, Martin & Corrigan found that participants who evaluated organ donation as a positive phenomenon were more likely to sign an organ donor card (2006). In another health related context, the evaluation of condom use as something that prevented the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases made participants more likely to intend to use condoms (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003). It can be the evaluation of outcomes of a behavior that will actually determine intentions. A study applying TRA to the intent to exercise found that despite beliefs that aerobic activities lead to positive outcomes to one's health, participants reported being more likely to intend to participate in them only when they were evaluated as fun and enjoyable actions (Fitzmaurice, 2005). Evaluations of behavioral outcomes clearly impact attitudes one has towards a behavior. Based on the evidence mentioned above, the following is proposed:

H2: Faculty who evaluate the outcomes of learning communities as positive will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

#### *2.4 Normative Beliefs.*

According to TRA, understanding attitudes is but one part of measuring behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The construct of subjective norm also has to be accounted for when measuring behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The theoretical construct of subjective norm is a distinguishing aspect of TRA. In its description of how behavioral intentions are developed, TRA states that an individual will consider their own attitudes

towards a behavior, and the perceptions that they feel others around them hold in regards to their performance of the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). To understand the subjective norm held by individuals, their normative beliefs and the motivation that they have to comply with those normative beliefs have to be understood (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005).

Subjective norm is comprised of two main components, normative beliefs and motivation to comply with the behavioral requirements (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). Normative beliefs come from an understanding of sociology, and describe how individuals' interpret the beliefs of how they perceive others feel in relation to the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). When forming normative beliefs, individuals will first consider how they perceive those closest to them feel about performing the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). They may then expand their normative beliefs outwards to individuals and groups further away from them, even forming beliefs of how society in general feels about them performing a certain behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). How important individuals' perceive the behavior is will influence the normative beliefs they hold (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Normative beliefs have the potential to alter individuals' attitudes towards a behavior, so that their behavioral intentions differ from their own latent beliefs and evaluations (Nabi & Hornik, 2002; Reichert, Kim & Fosu, 2006; Slater & Kelly, 2002).

Research utilizing TRA has uncovered strong evidence of the importance of normative beliefs in the role of attitude formation, behavioral intentions and behavior

(Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Nabi & Hornik, 2002; Park, 1998; Reichert, Kim & Fosu, 2006; Slater & Kelly, 2002; Weber, Martin & Corrigan, 2006). For example, Elwood, Carter and Greene found that social norm was the most significant determinant of safe sex practices in bathhouses (2003). Even when participants evaluated the use of condoms as positive and believed that they would help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, their actual condom use was most often determined by their perceived normative beliefs (Elwood, Carter & Greene, 2003). If they perceived that others did not want them to use safe sex practices, they would not use condoms; their own attitudes outweighed by perceived normative beliefs (Elwood, Carter & Greene, 2003). In a similar health related context studying teenagers' use of marijuana, it was found that the perceived normative beliefs of friends, family, and even the community the teens lived in was the most significant predictor of marijuana use (Slater & Kelly, 2002). Participants reported using marijuana even when they believed such behavior would lead to negative consequences because of their normative beliefs (Slater & Kelly, 2002). Interestingly, while participants considered the normative beliefs of their friends, family and community, it was the normative beliefs of their friends that they cared most about when forming behavioral intentions (Slater & Kelly, 2002). Examining the reporting of domestic violence, it was found that despite participant beliefs that reporting domestic violence was important and having actual behavioral intentions of reporting domestic violence, normative beliefs were the most important factor of cases actually being reported (Nabi & Hornick, 2002). These studies provide support that normative beliefs are an important consideration when forming behavioral intentions, often outweighing individuals' own attitudes.

Normative beliefs have been found to have a strong influence in getting participants to engage in a behavior. For example, in applying TRA to advertising, Reichert, Kim and Fosu found that normative beliefs about joining the Navy had a significant relationship with intent to join (2006). Similarly, a study examining Korean students' studying habits found that normative beliefs were the most significant predictors of how participants reported their studying behaviors (Park, 1998). In trying to increase behavioral intentions towards organ donation, Weber, Martin & Corrigan found that perceived normative beliefs were a significant predictor of signing an organ donor card (2006). Normative beliefs are an essential element of understanding individuals' behavioral intentions. They can be extremely useful in predicting how individuals' will actually behave. In application to the present project, understanding faculty members' normative beliefs towards learning communities can be utilized to gauge the likelihood of their intentions towards participation.

The measurement of normative beliefs in regards to faculty member's intent to participate in learning communities at CSU has been broken into three hypotheses because it is suspected that the beliefs will change based on who the perceived others are. For example, faculty members may feel more influenced by their colleagues because they are the ones whom they interact with most on a daily basis. However, a faculty member may have stronger normative beliefs towards their departmental chair or dean of their college because of the influence those people have over them. Additionally, it may be difficult for faculty members to ascertain the normative beliefs of their departmental chair or the dean of their college because of how removed those people are from them. In light of these factors, having three hypotheses that measures beliefs towards different parties

should provide the most accurate understanding of faculty member's normative beliefs about learning communities at CSU. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: Faculty who perceive that their colleagues' think they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

H3b: Faculty who perceive that their departmental chair thinks they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

H3c: Faculty who perceive that the dean of their college thinks they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

#### *2.4.1 Motivation to Comply*

In addition to examining the normative beliefs that faculty member's hold towards learning communities at CSU, their motivation to comply with these normative beliefs also has to be understood. Motivation to comply with normative beliefs can be simply summarized as how much one cares about the perceived beliefs of others (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Motivation to comply with normative beliefs influences the strength of the beliefs and compromises the subjective norm (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005).

Factors that influence how motivated individuals are to comply with normative beliefs include perceived risk, success and perhaps most importantly of all, how much they value the opinions that they feel another holds about the behavior (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). If an individual does

not have the motivation to perform all of the requirements of the behavior, it will affect their normative beliefs and behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). A person will be more motivated to perform a behavior, despite risks, when the perceived rate of success or positive return from the behavior is higher (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Nabi & Hornik, 2002). TRA describes that once individuals have considered normative beliefs of others, and evaluated their motivation to comply with these beliefs based on the factors mentioned previously, they develop a subjective norm (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005).

Research has found evidence to support this point. For example, Slater and Kelly found that the more participants' reported caring about the perceived beliefs of others, the more normative beliefs influenced their behavioral intentions to use marijuana (2002). In a similar health related focus, Elwood, Greene and Carter found that the more participant's reported caring about how others' perceived their condom use influenced their use of safe sex practices (2003). Examining why normative beliefs had such a large influence over reporting cases of domestic violence, Nabi and Hornick found that the more an individual perceived others would care about them reporting such cases influenced their behavioral intentions and actual behavior (2002). In a different context, Park found that the more Korean students' reported caring about how others' perceived them as students influenced their studying habits (1998). These studies provide evidence that in order for the normative beliefs of others to influence one's behavioral intentions, one has to care about their opinions (Elwood, Greene & Carter, 2003; Nabi & Hornik, 2002; Reichert, Kim & Fosu, 2006; Slater & Kelly, 2002).

The hypothesis measuring motivation to comply with normative beliefs has been given in the form of three separate hypotheses for the same reason as hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c. It is suspected that faculty members' motivation to comply with the perceived beliefs of others might be influenced based on their relationship and interactions with their colleagues, departmental chair and dean of their college. Together, hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c should provide a comprehensive understanding of faculty member's' motivation to comply with normative beliefs. Based on this information, the following points are proposed:

H4a: Faculty who perceive that their colleagues care about their participation in learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

H4b: Faculty who perceive that their departmental chair cares about their participation in learning communities will be more motivated to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

H4c: Faculty who perceive that the dean of their college cares about their participation in learning communities will be more motivated to intend to participate in learning communities in the future.

## *2.5 Influencing Factors Outside of TRA*

Finally, it is suspected that the intentions of professors at CSU to participate in learning communities might be affected by other factors that are specific to the context of their experience at CSU. Based on factors outside of the predictive control of the Theory of Reasoned Action, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ 1: What factors are perceived by faculty as inhibiting their participation in learning communities at CSU?

RQ 2: How do perceived difficulties of contributing to learning communities at CSU effect intentions of participation?

RQ 3: How can the perceived difficulties of contributing to learning communities at CSU be overcome in order to increase the likelihood of faculty participation?

The research questions, along with the hypotheses, will provide a comprehensive picture of faculty members' intentions towards participation in learning communities, and shed light on any issues that faculty members' perceive they face in regards to participation.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### *3.1 Data Collection Procedures*

The method of assessment for the study was a survey that was administered to faculty members. The materials used for the project consisted of both an online version and a paper version of a survey. The survey was administered to faculty members at Cleveland State University over a six week period, during the first and second summer semesters of 2009. The survey was completed by 100 faculty members.

Participants were recruited based on their involvement as teaching instructors; all faculty members from graduate teaching assistants through tenured faculty members were included. A mixed method of convenience and anonymous sampling procedures were used. Participants were approached in person based on the fact that they were teaching during the summer semesters of 2009, and in this way the sampling procedure was convenient. However, the online campus directory was used to send the survey to faculty members across academic disciplines, making this sampling procedure anonymous. All participants, despite being contacted in person or anonymously via email, had the option of completing an online electronic or paper version of the survey.

### *3.1.1 Online Version of Survey*

Participants were able to go directly to the online version of the survey and submit their results. Additionally, they also had the option of submitting the completed survey embedded in an email message. The informed consent document was listed at the start of the electronic version of the survey, and participants were informed that completing the survey constituted an act of consent. A total of 80 faculty members completed the electronic version of the survey.

### *3.1.2 Paper Version of Survey*

Faculty members were also approached in person with a paper version of the survey. Participants who completed the paper version of the survey were approached randomly. The format of the survey was the same as the electronic version; however, faculty members approached in person were given an informed consent document to sign. A total of 21 faculty members completed the paper version of the survey. All participants were assured of their confidentiality, regardless of the version of the survey they completed.

## *3.2 Description of Sample*

The faculty members who participated reflected a sample across that was representative of the different academic departments at CSU, with a total of thirty-two different departments included. There were some academic departments not reflected in the sample; however, this was due to a limited availability to contact faculty members during the summer semesters. The sample revealed that 51% of participants were male; while 47% were female (2% did not give their gender). The average age of participants ranged between 50-59 years. Associate professors accounted for 25% of respondents,

reflecting that the greatest percentage of respondents who completed the survey were tenure track professors. Additionally, the sample indicated that most respondents had been teaching at CSU for less than a full academic year through three academic years, accounting for 30.2% of the sample. A doctoral degree was listed by 66% of respondents as their highest level of education.

### *3.3 Instrumentation*

The survey used an adaptation of the Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum's Semantic Differential Scale, described by Fishbein and Ajzen as the appropriate scale to measure TRA (1957; 2005). The scale measures the dimensions of the evaluation of attitudes, traditionally on a 1-7 point scale (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The scale has often been applied to studies of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Krosnick, Judd & Wittenbrink, 2005). Attitudes towards the behavior are measured by questions that assess beliefs about the behavior and beliefs that the behavior leads to certain outcomes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The scores of different questions that measure attitude toward the behavior are multiplied together to determine an overall score for the concept (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Krosnick, Judd & Wittenbrink, 2005). The same method is used for questions that measure social norm, breaking the concepts into two components of measurement, normative beliefs and motivations (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). After the total score of attitudes and social norms are derived, the scores from each component are added together, resulting in a prediction of intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005; Krosnick, Judd & Wittenbrink, 2005). The survey designed for the current project, assessing how the Theory of Reasoned Action can be applied to professors' decisions to join learning communities at Cleveland

State University, can be found in Appendix E. Questions from the survey will be referenced directly with their question numbers in the following section.

### *3.4 Independent Variables*

The independent variable for hypothesis 1a was belief in beneficial outcomes. Items from section 2 of the questionnaire including, Q5 (learning communities lead to higher grades for students) and Q6 (learning communities lead to higher retention rates) were computed into the single variable (beneficial outcomes), which had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .81.

The independent variable for Hypothesis 1b was belief in engaging education. Questionnaire items from section 2, including Q4 (instructing a learning community course will allow me to engage my students in real world projects), Q10 (learning communities teach students how to complete real world projects) and Q11 (learning communities help students develop relationships with professors) were computed to form the variable engaging education, which had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .67.

The independent variable for Hypothesis 2 was outcome evaluations. Questionnaire items from section 3, including Q2 (growing in my abilities as an instructor is), Q5 (educational programs that result in higher grades for students are), Q6 (educational programs that lead to higher retention rates are), Q8 (educational programs that encourage students to form relationships with instructors are) and Q15 (educational programs that teach students how to complete real world projects are) were computed into the variable outcome evaluations, which had Cronbach's alpha reliability of .69.

The independent variable for Hypothesis 3a was colleagues' thoughts. It was measured by item Q1 (colleagues in my department think I should contribute to learning

communities) from section 4 of the questionnaire. The independent variable for Hypothesis 3b was departmental chair's thoughts, derived from questionnaire item Q2 (my departmental chair thinks I should contribute to learning communities), found in section 4. The independent variable for Hypothesis 3c was dean's thoughts, measured by questionnaire item Q3 (the dean of my college thinks I should contribute to learning communities), also found in section 4.

The independent variable for Hypothesis 4a was colleagues' care, derived from questionnaire item Q4 (I care what colleagues in my department think in regards to my contributions to learning communities), found in section 4. The independent variable for Hypothesis 4b was departmental chair cares, measured by item Q5 (I care what my departmental chair thinks in regards to my contributions to learning communities) from section 4 of the questionnaire. The independent variable for hypothesis 4c was taken from questionnaire item Q6 (I care what the dean of my college thinks in regards to my contributions to learning communities), found in section 4.

### *3.5 Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable measured the likelihood of faculty members to participate in learning communities at CSU. Respondents were asked three questions from section 4 of the questionnaire, including Q7, (I intend to find out more information on how I can contribute to learning communities), Q8 (I intend to instruct a learning community course in the future) and Q9 (Do you perceive that the benefits of instructing a learning community course will outweigh the costs of participation). Scores on these variables were summed to create a new variable, (likelihood of participation in learning communities,) which had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .80.

### *3.6 Answering the Research Questions*

In order to answer the research questions, respondents were asked open ended questions. The open ended questions were found in section 5 of the questionnaire and included items Q1, (what are challenges to getting involved in learning communities at CSU), Q3 (if you do not intend to instruct a learning community course, please state why) and Q4 (what could the university do to make it easier for you to participate in learning communities). The open ended questions were coded based on thematic elements. These responses will be discussed later in detail in the results and discussion sections.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### *4.1 Analysis of Hypotheses*

Prior to the main analyses, the scale items were reverse coded as needed. Items ranged from “unlikely” to “likely” on a 7- point Likert scale, or from “bad” to “good” on a 7- point semantic differential scale. Correlations were then run on all items. In order to test the hypotheses, a series of two multiple regression analyses were conducted. For each, the control variables of age, gender and length of time teaching at CSU were entered. In the first set of regression analyses, the dependent variable was regressed on each independent variable and the control variables. In the second set of regression analyses, the independent variables measuring hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c were combined as one independent variable; similarly, hypothesis 4a, 4b and 4c were combined as one independent variable. This was done because both the correlation analysis and the initial multiple regression analysis revealed that multicollinearity could be a problem for the independent variables measuring hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c, as well as hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c. The issue of multicollinearity will be discussed in the following results section. Taking into account the issue of multicollinearity, the second set of regression analyses

regressed the dependent variable on the independent variables with the control variables, using the combined independent variables for hypotheses 3 and 4.

#### *4.2 Analysis of Research Questions*

A thematic coding analysis was utilized to answer the research questions, since the research questions were of an open - ended format and fell outside the area of TRA. The open- ended questions were coded by two graduate students at the School of Communication at CSU. Responses of each open ended question were examined and given an initial code based on their emerging thematic elements. Secondly, the codes were then grouped into primary categories based on their thematic elements. Lastly, the primary coded categories were examined based on similar elements and further combined into the final categories. The primary coded categories and the final categories were checked by both graduate students for accuracy.

#### *4.3 Correlation Analysis*

The mean and standard deviation of the independent variables, the control variables and the dependent variable can be found in Table 1. Prior to the multiple regression analysis, zero-order correlations were run to assess the association between the independent variables and the dependent variables; results are found in Table 2. The correlations showed preliminary support for hypothesis 1a. Specifically, faculty who felt that learning communities were more likely to lead to beneficial outcomes for students were more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Preliminary support was also revealed for hypothesis 1b. Faculty who felt that learning communities were more likely to be an engaging method of education for



students were also more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ).

The correlations also provided evidence of support for hypotheses 3a. Faculty who perceived that their colleagues were more likely to think that they should contribute to learning communities were more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future

( $r = .29, p < .001$ ). Similarly, the correlations also showed initial support for hypothesis 3b. Faculty who perceived that their departmental chair was more likely to think that they should contribute to learning communities were more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future ( $r = .37, p < .001$ ). The correlations also revealed that multicollinearity could be a concern for hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c. To minimize the influence of multicollinearity on the results, the correlation for the combined variables of hypotheses 3 was examined. Preliminary support was revealed for the combined variables of hypothesis 3. Faculty who perceived that others are more likely to think that they should contribute to learning communities are more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future ( $r = .38^{**}, p < .01$ ).

Additionally, the correlations also demonstrated initial support for hypothesis 4a. Particularly, faculty who were more likely to care about their colleagues' opinions towards their contribution to learning communities were more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ). Similar to these results, the correlations also showed preliminary support for hypothesis 4b. Faculty who were more likely to care about their departmental chair's opinions in regards to their contribution to learning communities were also more likely to intend to participate in the

future ( $r=.29$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In addition, the correlations showed similar support for hypothesis 4c. Specifically, faculty who were more likely to care about the opinion of the dean of their college regarding their contributions to learning communities were more likely to intend to participate learning communities in the future ( $r=.29$ ,  $p<.001$ ). However, correlations also revealed that multicollinearity was a concern for hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c. To minimize the effects of multicollinearity on the results, the correlation of the combined variables of hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c were examined. The results indicated support of the combined variables of hypothesis 4 ( $r=.29$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Specifically, faculty members who were more likely to care about others' opinions in regards to their contributions to learning communities were more likely to intend to participate in learning communities in the future. The preliminary support of this hypothesis and the hypotheses discussed previously were further evidenced by the results of the regression analyses.

#### *4.4 Results of the Regression Model*

The results of the regression model are found in Table 3. As reflected in Table 3, the regression model explains a significant 34.3% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $p<.001$ ). Additionally, the model depicts support for several of the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1a stated that faculty members who believe that learning communities will lead to beneficial outcomes for students will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities. The regression model showed support for hypothesis 1a ( $\beta= .23$ ,  $p<.05$ ). However, hypothesis 1b, which stated that faculty members who believe that learning communities lead to an engaging method of education will be more likely to participate in learning communities, was not supported ( $\beta= -.07$ , n.s.).

Hypothesis 2 stated that faculty who felt that the outcomes of learning communities are positive will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities. The regression model showed support for hypothesis 2 ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ). Likewise, hypothesis 3a, which stated that faculty members who perceive that their colleagues think they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities, was supported by the results ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ). Similarly, hypothesis 3b stated that faculty members who perceive that their departmental chair thinks they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities. The results support this hypothesis ( $\beta = .22, p < .05$ ). In contrast, hypothesis 3c, which stated that faculty members who perceive that the dean of their college thinks they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities, was not supported ( $\beta = .01, n.s.$ ).

The results did not support hypothesis 4a, which stated that faculty members who care about what their colleagues' think in regards to their contribution to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities ( $\beta = .14, n.s.$ ). Correspondingly, hypothesis 4b, which stated that faculty members who care about what their departmental chair thinks in regards to their contribution to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities, was not supported ( $\beta = .12, n.s.$ ). In addition, hypothesis 4c stated that faculty members who care about what the dean of their college thinks in regards to their participation in learning communities will be more likely to intend to contribute to learning communities. The results did not support hypothesis 4c ( $\beta = .12, n.s.$ ).

The regression model also showed that two of the control variables were factors that could influence the likelihood of participation in learning communities at CSU. These were the length of time teaching at CSU ( $\beta = -.24, p < .05$ ), and age ( $\beta = .26, p < .05$ ).

#### *4.5 Results of Regression Model with Combined Independent Variables*

In order to guard against the effects of multicollinearity on the results, an additional regression analysis was conducted. The regression analysis combined the independent variables for hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c into one variable; the independent variables for hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c were also combined into one independent variable. This was done to help resolve any issues of multicollinearity. Table 4 illustrates the results of full model regression analysis using the combined independent variables of hypotheses 3 and 4. Similar to the results of the previous full model analysis, 34.3% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables; this amount is significant ( $p < .001$ ). This regression model also substantiated the results of hypotheses 1a, 1b and 2 from the previous analysis; these results are reflected in Table 4.

The combination of hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c stated that faculty members who perceived that others' thought they should contribute to learning communities would be more likely to participate in learning communities. The results showed support for the combination of hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c ( $\beta = .35, p < .001$ ). Similarly, the combination of hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c stated that faculty members who cared about what other's thought in regards to their contributions to learning communities would be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities. The results supported the combination of hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ). In addition, the results also reiterated that the

length of time teaching at CSU was a factor influencing the likelihood of participation in learning communities ( $\beta = -.25, p < .05$ ), as was age ( $\beta = .25, p < .05$ ).

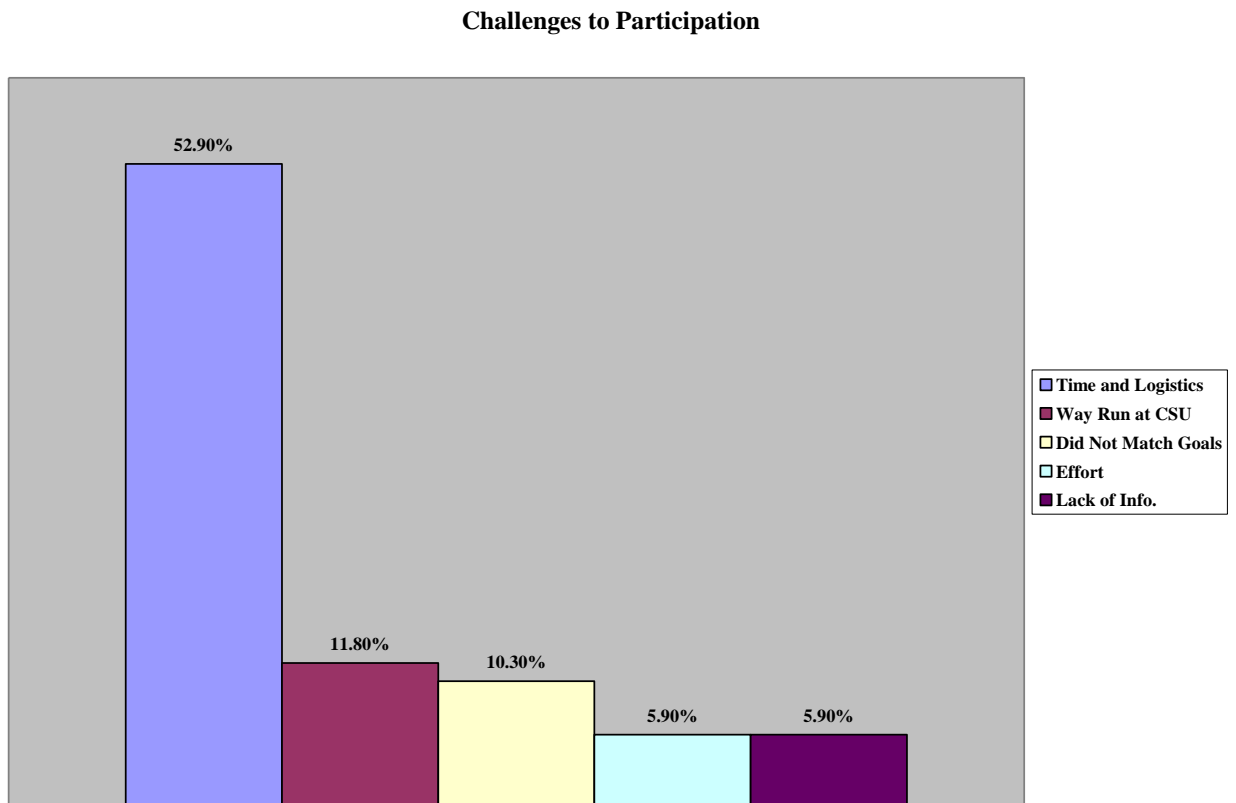
#### 4.6 Results of research questions

##### 4.6.1 Research Question 1

The first research question asked, ‘What are the challenges to getting involved in learning communities at CSU?’ Figure 3 displays the results of the first research question.

Figure 3

Results of RQ 1



The results of the thematic coding analysis showed that time and logistics were perceived by faculty members as their greatest challenge to involvement in learning

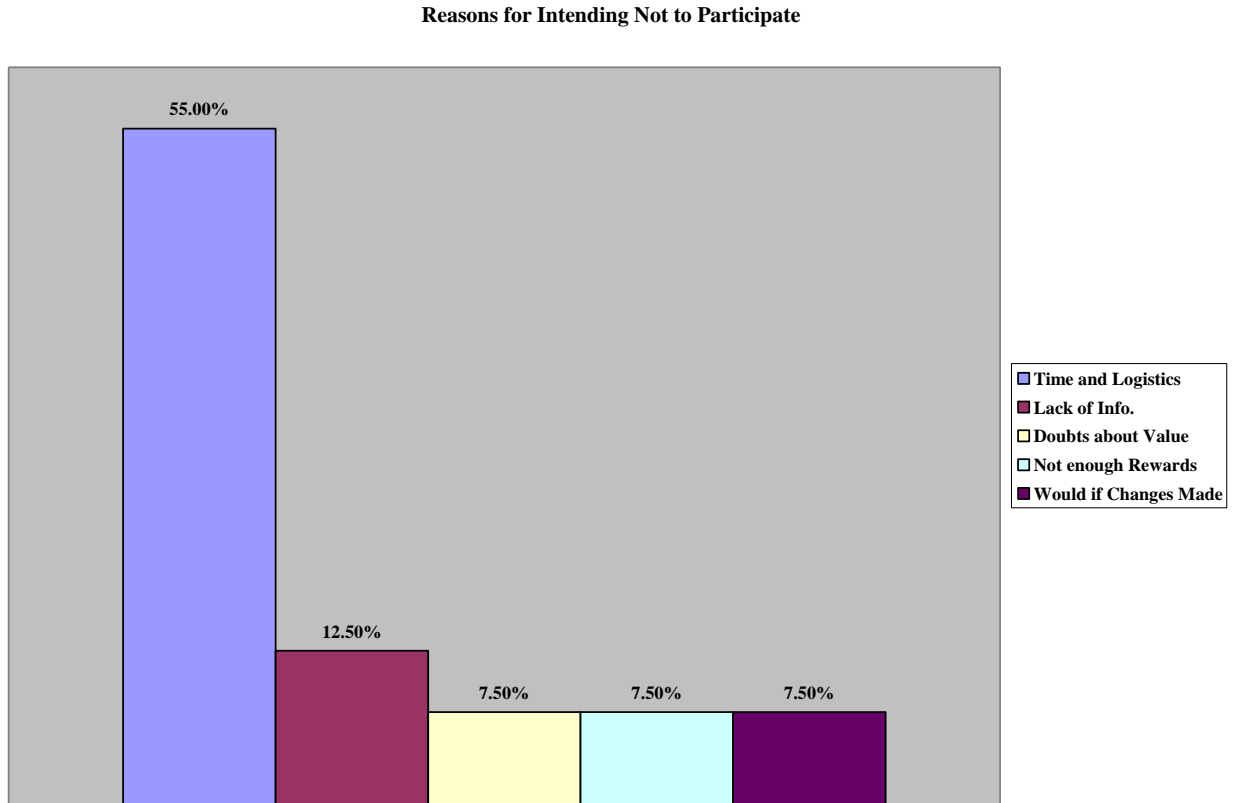
communities at CSU, accounting for 52.9% of responses. Additionally, faculty reported that the way learning communities had been developed and run at CSU challenged their involvement to participation, accounting for 11.8% of responses. Faculty members also reported that they felt challenged by the fact that participation in learning communities did not match their own goals (10.3% of responses). Effort was reported as another challenge (5.9% of responses), as was a general lack of information about learning communities (5.9% of responses). Figure 3 summarizes the results of RQ 1.

#### *4.6.2 Research Question 2*

The second research question asked, ‘If you do not intend to instruct a learning community course, please state why?’ Figure 4 displays the results of the second research question.

Figure 4

Results of RQ 2



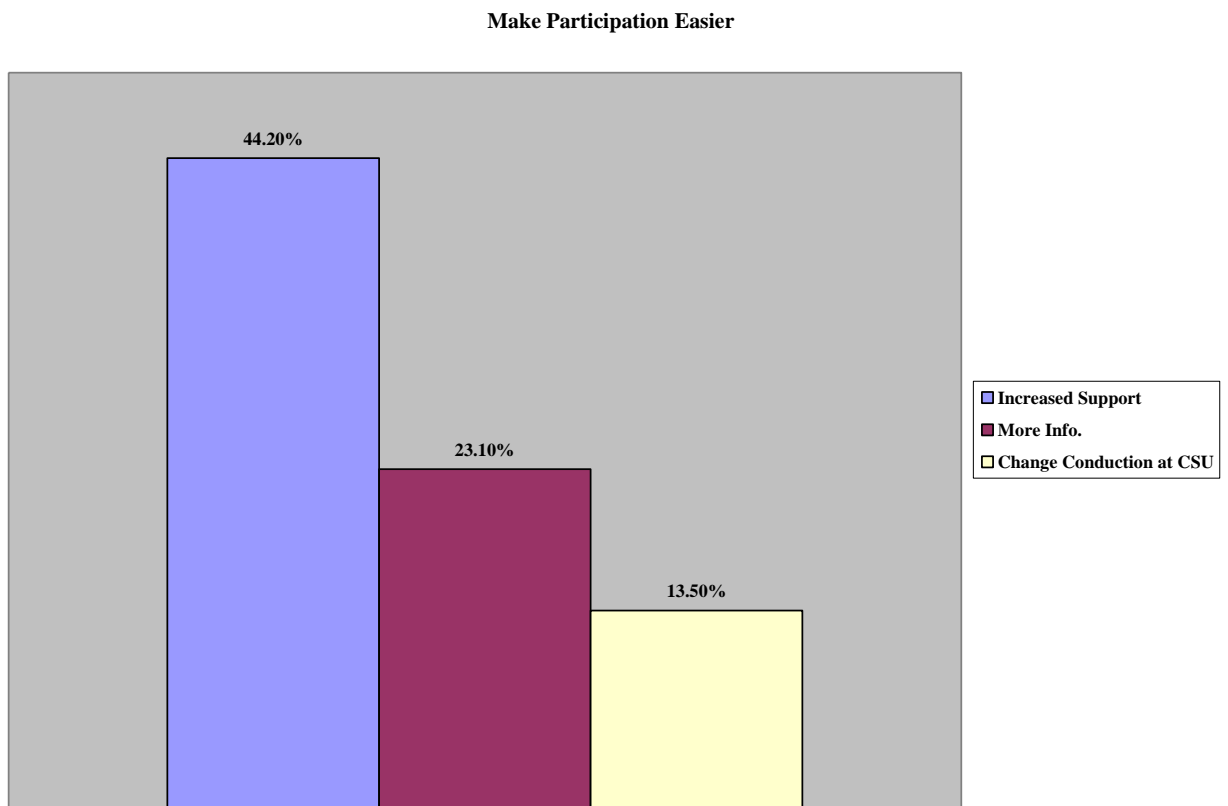
Out of the total respondents, 55% felt that they did not intend to participate in learning communities because of the time and logistical problems that they perceived would result from their participation. Other reasons given were a lack of information (12.5% of responses), doubts about the value of learning community courses to students (7.5% of responses) and not enough rewards given for participation (7.5% of responses). Additionally, 7.5% of respondents indicated that they would intend to participate in learning communities if changes were made to the way the program was conducted.

### 4.6.3 Research Question 3

The third research question asked, ‘What could the university do to make it easier for you to participate in learning communities?’ Figure 5 displays the results of the third research question.

Figure 5

Results of RQ 3



The results showed that 44.2% of respondents felt that added support from the university would make it easier for them to participate in learning communities. Increased information from the university about learning communities was reported by 23.1% of respondents as the second greatest factor that would make it easier for them to participate in learning communities. The third largest percentage of respondents (13.5%)



also indicated that changing the way learning communities were conducted specifically at CSU would make it easier for them to participate.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### *5.1 General Discussion of Study*

The present thesis was derived from the theoretical background of TRA with the goal of assisting the sponsors of learning communities at Cleveland State University. Like several colleges and universities across the United States, CSU has developed learning communities as a way to support and engage its students. However, sponsors of learning communities at CSU continue to face challenges in recruiting faculty involvement. If faculty contributions to learning communities do not increase, those who facilitate learning communities at CSU will find it difficult to offer courses that incoming students need to fulfill their requirements. The current study applied the Theory of Reasoned Action to understand the intentions of faculty members at CSU in regards to their participation in learning communities. Specifically, the attitudes and subjective norm of faculty were examined to determine factors that might lead them to intend to contribute to learning communities in the future. The results of this study provide an understanding of how the attitudes and subjective norm of faculty members at CSU can be utilized by those who facilitate learning communities to increase faculty involvement.

*5.1.1 Hypothesis 1a. Faculty who believe that learning communities lead to beneficial outcomes for students will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

The study uncovered several factors that describe how attitudes have the potential to influence the likelihood of participation in learning communities by faculty at CSU. Results of the study suggest that those who feel that learning communities lead to beneficial outcomes for students will be more likely to intend to participate in learning communities. Future recruitment efforts may wish to emphasize the beneficial outcomes of learning communities to faculty in order to increase participation. Specifically, beneficial outcomes were described in terms of higher grades and increased retention rates. Future recruitment efforts could market learning communities as a program that successfully achieves higher grades and retention rates. Student testimonials about the benefits they gained from participating in a learning community course could be featured in advertisements. Facilitators of learning communities may wish to hold presentations with faculty members using statistical findings to inform them of the positive benefits of participating in learning communities for students. This information could also be featured in flyers or emails. Advertisements that coincide with the pre-existing attitudes held by faculty members in regards to the benefits of learning community courses for students will help to strengthen their behavioral intentions towards participation. According to TRA, this should help to increase the behavioral intentions of faculty members in regards to their contributions towards learning communities.

*5.1.2 Hypothesis 1b. Faculty who believe that learning communities are an engaging method of education will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

The study did not find that the belief that learning communities are an engaging method of education influenced the likelihood of participation in them by faculty at CSU. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, this disassociation between belief and intention to perform a behavior could be interpreted by the belief that learning communities are an engaging method of education not being important to faculty at CSU (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). However, this is likely not the case because the belief that learning communities are an engaging method of education had a significant relationship with the likelihood to participate in learning communities. The lack of support for the belief that learning communities are an engaging method of education in the regression analysis could have been due to the sample size (n= 100), or to the wording of one of the questions used for the independent variable, engaging education. Specifically, Q4 from section 2 of the survey, (instructing a learning community course will allow me to engage my students in real world projects), may have been confusing for faculty members because of the word “engage”. For faculty members at CSU, this may have resulted in an association with the Engaged Learning Campaign started in the fall of 2008, and this connotation could have influenced how they responded to the question. Despite the reasoning for the lack of influence between the belief that learning communities are an engaging method of education and the likelihood of participation in them, support was still shown for how faculty members’ beliefs about learning communities leads to a greater likelihood of their participation in them. This is reflected by the results showing

that the belief that learning communities lead to beneficial outcomes for students increases the likelihood of participation in them by faculty at CSU.

*5.1.3 Hypothesis 2. Faculty who evaluate the outcomes of learning communities as positive will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

The study also examined how faculty evaluated the outcomes of learning communities. Common outcomes of learning communities were described and faculty members evaluated the outcomes that would likely result from participation. Results of the study indicated that the evaluation of the outcomes of learning community courses by faculty at CSU was a factor that significantly influenced intentions to participate in learning communities in the future. The results of the study also suggest that faculty at CSU evaluate the outcomes of learning communities as positive. Future recruitment efforts of faculty may wish to focus on their positive evaluation about the outcomes of learning communities. Following TRA, beliefs that learning communities lead to outcomes that are positive for students, along with a positive evaluation of what will occur from contributing to them, should form an overall positive attitude of faculty at CSU towards learning communities. A positive attitude towards learning communities has the potential to increase the likelihood of participation. Future recruitment efforts could be taken to increase communication among faculty members and those who facilitate learning communities at CSU. Reinforcing the positive outcomes of learning communities to faculty at CSU would help to strengthen their evaluations of the program, with the potential to increase their behavioral intentions towards participation. This could be done through the use of advertisements, featured by posters, flyers or email. Those who facilitate learning communities may also wish to directly present this

information to faculty members in person. The indication of the results that faculty generally evaluate outcomes of learning communities as positive suggests that there is potential to increase faculty involvement, and increased communication in various forms might be the stimulus needed to turn a positive attitude into a behavioral intention.

*5.1.4 Hypothesis 3a. Faculty who perceive that their colleagues' think they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

*Hypothesis 3b. Faculty who perceive that their departmental chair thinks they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

*Hypothesis 3c. Faculty who perceive that the dean of their college thinks they should contribute to learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

The results of the study provide evidence for the importance of normative beliefs in the intentions of faculty members regarding their participation in learning communities. Specifically, the results suggest that faculty who perceived that their colleagues, departmental chair and dean thought they should contribute to learning communities were more likely to intend to participate in them. Future recruitment efforts may wish to communicate to faculty that others whom they work with think they should contribute to learning communities, in order to increase the potential for participation. It should be noted that in the initial regression analyses, the normative beliefs of the dean of one's college was not found to be a significant predictor of the likelihood of participation in learning communities. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, individuals must

be able to infer the perceived beliefs of others in order to form normative beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Perhaps participants were not able to infer the beliefs of the dean of their college because most faculty members at CSU do not work directly with the dean of their college on a daily basis. However, this was most likely due to multicollinearity.

The second regression analyses, using the combined version of hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c, provided strong evidence that normative belief consideration of one's colleagues, departmental chair and dean are all important considerations in predicting faculty members' intentions to participate in learning communities. These findings show the importance of communicating to faculty members, in future recruitment efforts, that their colleagues, departmental chair and dean of their college care about their involvement in learning community courses. Advertisements could be formatted to portray learning communities as an important program that faculty members' care about, in order to show how much the university values such programs. College deans and departmental chairs can be used to endorse messages that both support learning communities, as well as communicate to faculty members that they should consider participation in them. These messages could be transmitted through posters or flyers, or directly through presentations. Emails sent directly to faculty members from their departmental chair or dean of their college could be used to increase already held perceptions that these individuals care about their participation in learning communities. Direct communication from one's departmental chair or dean might be the factor needed to convince faculty members of the importance of contributing to learning community courses.

*5.1.5 Hypothesis 4a. Faculty who perceive that their colleagues care about their participation in learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

*Hypothesis 4b. Faculty who perceive that their departmental chair cares about their participation in learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

*Hypothesis 4c. Faculty who perceive that the dean of their college cares about their participation in learning communities will be more likely to intend to participate in them in the future.*

The results of the study also found that faculty at CSU were motivated to comply with the perceived normative beliefs of their colleagues, departmental chair and dean. Future recruitment efforts can emphasize the motivation of faculty to comply with the perceived beliefs of other's that they work with in order to increase participation in learning communities. The knowledge that faculty perceived that their colleagues, departmental chair and dean of their college thought they should participate in learning communities, and their motivation to comply with these perceived beliefs indicates an increased likelihood towards participation. Sponsors of learning communities should consider the importance of normative beliefs in future recruitment efforts. Perhaps future strategies should focus on convincing departmental chairs and deans of the value of learning communities, instead of targeting the faculty body at large. The results suggest that using departmental chairs and deans to pass along messages about participation might be more valuable to faculty members than messages from those who facilitate learning communities. Since faculty members are motivated to comply with the



perceptions of their departmental chair and dean, it would be worthwhile for future recruitment efforts to persuade faculty members that these individuals would like them to participate in learning community courses.

### *5.2 Additional Factors Influencing Participation*

The results showed that two of the control variables were important for understanding the likelihood of faculty members participating in communities at CSU. These were age and the length of time one had been teaching at CSU. The results showed that the older a faculty member was, the more likely they were to intend to participate in a learning community course. However, the results also showed that the longer one had been teaching at CSU, the less likely they were to intend to participate in a learning community course. Therefore, future efforts should focus on recruiting faculty members who are older and who have only been teaching at CSU for a short amount of time.

### *5.3 Research Questions*

The research questions examined how factors specific to the experience of faculty members at CSU might affect their attitudes and behavioral intentions towards participation in learning communities. The results of the research questions can be extremely useful to others trying to understand how faculty members perceive their own involvement in learning communities.

*5.3.1 Research Question 1.* RQ 1 uncovered that faculty members at CSU feel that time and logistical issues are their biggest concerns when deciding if they will participate in learning communities. In addition, faculty members reported that they felt challenged to participate because learning communities did not match their own goals,

they did not like the way that learning communities were conducted at CSU, they perceived that participation in learning communities took too much effort, and they felt challenged by the lack of information about learning communities. Although these responses are particular to faculty members at CSU, it is likely that they are common concerns faced by most faculty members. Those seeking to facilitate faculty involvement in learning communities need to address these concerns in order to increase faculty involvement.

The results of RQ 1 showed that although faculty members hold positive beliefs about the outcomes of learning communities for students, they also perceive that there are elements preventing them from participation. Future research could apply the concerns that faculty members have in regards to participation into the model of TRA to uncover if they are actual negative beliefs about learning communities, or just practical considerations. If these concerns are in fact negative beliefs about learning communities, TRA describes that these beliefs items may prevent intentions towards participation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Facilitators of learning communities would have to identify strategies to overcome these negative beliefs. If they are purely logistical concerns, those who facilitate learning communities can come up with strategies to overcome these perceived roadblocks to participation.

*5.3.2 Research Question 2.* RQ 2 asked faculty members to account for reasons that would prevent them from intending to participate in learning communities. Time and logistics were listed as the greatest prevention to participation in learning communities. A lack of information about learning communities was listed as the second highest reason for not intending to participate. These results coincide with those of RQ1. As RQ 1 and

RQ 2 also reflect, there is still a lack of information among faculty about learning communities at CSU; perhaps a greater access to information would help to change perceptions about time and logistical concerns. Additionally, RQ 2 found that faculty members at CSU doubted the value of learning community courses, and felt that there were not enough rewards for their participation. Perhaps more information about the benefits of learning community courses would help alter these opinions. Interestingly, 7.5% of participants who answered RQ 2 said they would intend to participate in learning community courses if changes were made to the way that they were conducted. This information reveals that those who facilitate learning communities at CSU have an opportunity to recruit higher faculty involvement.

Some of the reasons identified by faculty members as preventing their participation, such as time and logistical concerns, could again reflect negative beliefs about learning communities. Future research could include time and logistical concerns could be included as negative beliefs items in the model of TRA. In addition, doubts about the value of learning community courses could also be examined in future research. This response could reflect negative beliefs about learning community courses, or just concerns that faculty members have about the outcomes of such programs due to their lack of involvement in them. Once these concerns have been identified as beliefs or as practical considerations, those who facilitate learning communities will know how best to respond to these issues. The finding that faculty members feel like a lack of information is preventing their participation can be dealt with simply by providing more information, through the use of advertisements, email messages and presentations to faculty. Additionally, the response that faculty members would be willing to participate in

learning community courses if changes were made to the way they are conducted should be addressed. Those who facilitate learning communities could open up dialogue with faculty members to identify what characteristics they think should be changed.

*5.3.3 Research Question 3.* RQ 3 directly asked faculty members what could be done to make participation in learning communities easier. Not surprisingly, the majority of responses indicated that increased support from the university was needed. This coincides with the previous research questions; faculty members at CSU perceive that participation in learning communities is challenging because of time and logistical concerns. If faculty members perceived that they had increased support from the university, they might feel like they could handle perceived time and logistical constraints. Faculty members also responded that a greater amount of information about learning communities, and changing the way learning communities are conducted at CSU, would make their participation easier. The results of RQ 3 have important implications for those who facilitate learning communities at CSU. The concerns over time and logistics need to be addressed to faculty members; once addressed, faculty members might feel like they had more support from the university. It is probable that this would increase faculty involvement in learning communities. Additionally, simply supplying more information about learning communities to faculty members at CSU has the potential to increase faculty involvement.

The results of RQ 3 could again be examined by future research and worked into the model of TRA to see if faculty members hold the belief that they will not receive support from CSU for participation in learning community courses. If results reflect that this is a belief about learning community courses, it has the potential to lead faculty

members to form a negative attitude in regards to contributions to learning communities. This negative attitude would have to be altered in order to increase faculty participation. Facilitators of learning communities at CSU could identify ways to increase support for faculty members who participate. Support could be reflected in the form of compensation or in course releases. Regardless of the types of messages that could be advertised in future recruitment strategies, the results of RQ 3 suggest that those who facilitate learning communities at CSU need to communicate to faculty members that they will receive some level of support for their participation.

*5.3.4 Summary of Research Questions.* The results of the research questions help to explain the perceptions of faculty members in regards to learning communities. Previous research has examined the motivation of students in joining learning communities (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Benefits that students gain from participation in learning communities have been described in detail by previous research (Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007; Brzovic & Matz, 2009). However, if learning communities are to develop into a permanent form of higher education, their support has to be sustained by faculty involvement. The information from the research questions shows that faculty members continue to have doubts if they have the time and capabilities to handle the logistic concerns that they perceive will arise from teaching a learning community course. More information about what is actually involved in instructing a learning community course can be utilized to change incorrect perceptions. Importantly, the current research shows that there are faculty members who think learning courses are a positive method of education, and who

are willing to teach such courses, if changes are made to the way that they are currently conducted.

#### *5.4 Limitations*

The limitations of the current research mainly center on the sample size that was used for the survey (n= 100). Multicollinearity was a concern during the analysis, and this is most likely due to the smaller sample size. Using a participant population comprised entirely of faculty members from one academic institution was ideal to examine the issue of the lack of faculty participation in learning communities at CSU. However, because only faculty members from CSU participated in the survey some of the information discussed was specific to CSU. While this was necessary to understand the lack of faculty participation in learning communities at CSU, it affects the ability to generalize the results among other colleges and universities.

#### *5.5 Suggestions for future research*

Future research should examine if the results found from this research are similar at other colleges and institutions. In particular, examining a larger sample size would be useful. Research on higher education should continue to examine how faculty members perceive the benefits and challenges of instructing a learning community course. This would help shed insight into how faculty members weigh the benefits to students who participate versus their costs for participation. Future research could also include the results of the research questions into the theoretical model of the Theory of Reasoned Action. This would provide an understanding if the results of the research questions reflected negative beliefs about learning communities in general, or just practical considerations of faculty members. Understanding faculty perceptions of learning

communities can be used by educators who develop such programs. Such research can ensure that learning communities continue to be offered as a method of higher education in future years.

### *5.6 Conclusion*

The study successfully applied the Theory of Reasoned Action to understand how faculty members at CSU form attitudes and behavioral intentions about instructing a learning community course. The results coincided with previous research on the Theory of Reasoned Action, providing additional support for how the concepts of attitudinal beliefs and subjective norm lead to a predication of behavioral intentions. The study also uncovered concerns that faculty members' face when deciding if they should participate in learning communities. Examining the perceptions of faculty members sheds light on an area that has not previously been the topic of focus within literature on learning communities. The results of this research can be used to provide added support for the accuracy of the Theory of Reasoned Action, while at the same time they have a real world value for those who facilitate learning communities at colleges and universities.

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## APPENDIX

*Table 1*

*Mean and Standard Deviations of Control and Independent Variables and Dependent Variable*

Variable	Mean	SD
Age	3.40	1.29
Gender	1.52	0.50
Time at CSU	4.09	3.29
Beliefs in Ben. of Outcomes	4.91	1.25
Beliefs in Engaging Ed.	5.16	1.06
Outcome Evals.	3.29	2.18
Colleague's Thoughts	3.80	1.10
Dept. Chair's Thoughts	3.87	1.13
Dean's Thoughts	4.11	1.10
Colleagues' Care	3.90	1.56
Dept. Chair Cares	4.30	1.63
Dean Cares	4.30	1.63
Other's Thoughts	3.93	0.85
Other's Care	4.18	1.36
DV: Likelihood of participation in LC's	4.00	1.24

Table 2

*Correlations of Control and Independent Variables and Dependent Variable*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Age	1	.05	.51**	-.18	-.04	.02	.02	.07	.11	-.12	-.14	-.14	.09	-.13	.06
2. Gender	.05	1	.10	-.16	-.20*	-.05	-.04	-.09	-.09	-.07	.02	.02	-.10	-.05	-.13
3. Time at CSU	.51**	.10	1	-.03	-.02	-.07	.02	.00	.00	-.22*	-.20	-.20	.01	-.22*	-.14
4. Benefits of Outcomes	-.04	-.20*	-.02	1	.49**	.01	-.03	.03	-.13	.15	.06	.06	-.05	.07	.22*
5. Engaging Education	-.04	-.20*	-.02	.49**	1	.03	.12	.13	.20*	.27**	.14	.14	.20	.21**	.20*
6. Outcome Evaluations	.02	-.05	-.07	.01	.03	1	.02	-.07	-.10	.12	-.14	-.14	-.07	-.05	.19
7. Colleague's Thoughts	.02	-.04	.02	-.03	.12	.02	1	.38**	.31**	.16	-.06	-.06	.74**	.06	.29**
8. Dept. Chair's Thoughts	.07	-.09	.00	.03	.13	-.07	.38**	1	.42**	.19	.25*	.25*	.79**	.24*	.37**
9. Dean's Thoughts	.11	-.09	.00	-.13	.20*	-.10	.31**	.42**	1	.29**	.08	.08	.75**	.20*	.19

<b>10. Colleague's Care</b>	-.12	-.07	-.22*	.15	.27**	.12	.16	.19	.29**	1	.45**	.45**	.28**	.74**	.42**
<b>11. Dept. Chair Cares</b>	-.14	.02	-.20	.06	.14	-.14	-.06	.25*	.08	.45**	1	1.0**	.12	.90**	.29**
<b>12. Dean Cares</b>	-.14	.02	-.20	.06	.14	-.14	-.06	.25*	.08	.45**	1.0**	1	.12	.90**	.29**
<b>13. Other's Thoughts</b>	.09	-.10	.01	-.05	.20	-.07	.74**	.79**	.75**	.28**	.12	.12	1	.22*	.38**
<b>14. Other's Care</b>	-.13	-.05	-.22*	.07	.21*	-.05	.06	.24*	.20*	.74**	.90**	.90**	.22*	1	.39**
<b>15. Likelihood of participation</b>	.06	-.13	-.14	.22*	.20*	.19	.29*	.37**	.19	.42**	.29**	.29**	.38**	.39**	1

\*p< .01

\*\* p< .001

Table 3

Full Model Regression Analysis with Individual Independent and Control Variables

Variables	b	SE	$\beta$
Age	.25	.10	.26*
Gender	-.08	.22	-.03
Time at CSU	-.09	.04	-.24*
Beliefs in Ben. of Outcomes	.23	.10	.23*
Beliefs in Engaging Ed.	-.08	.12	-.07
Outcome Evals.	.12	.05	.21*
Colleague's Thoughts	.23	.11	.21*
Dept. Chair's Thoughts	.24	.11	.22*
Dean Thoughts	.01	.11	.01
Colleagues' Care	.14	.08	.08
Dept. Chair Cares	.12	.08	.08
Dean Cares	.12	.08	.08

\*p<.01

\*\*p<.001

Total Model:

$R^2 = .42$

Adjusted  $R^2 = .34$

p< .001

Table 4

*Full Model Regression Analysis with Combined Independent and Control Variables*

Variables	b	SE	$\beta$
Age	.24	.10	.25*
Gender	-.04	.22	-.02
Time at CSU	-.09	.04	-.25*
Beliefs in Ben. of Outcomes	.13	.10	.24**
Beliefs in Engaging Ed.	-.12	.12	-.09
Outcome Evals.	.27	.05	.28**
Other's Thoughts	.51	.14	.35**
Other's Care	.24	.08	.28**

\*p<.01

\*\*p<.001

Total Model

$R^2 = .40$

Adjusted  $R^2 = .34$

p< .001

## Survey Instrument

*The following survey asks questions about Learning Communities, focusing on your beliefs about participating in Learning Communities at Cleveland State University. The survey will take around 30 minutes to complete, and your information will be kept confidential. You may discontinue taking the survey at any time if you become uncomfortable.*

*Thank You for Your Participation.*

### **Section 1**

**Please answer the following questions about your awareness of Learning Communities**

1. Are you aware of what learning community's are?

Yes

No

2. Are you aware of the way learning communities are conducted at CSU?

Yes

No

3. Are you currently in instructor in a learning community?

Yes

No



## Section 2

### Learning Communities at CSU:

Learning Communities consist of three courses are clustered around a common theme. Instructors work across academic disciplines to develop a new curriculum, and to develop applied projects for students. In fall 2009 Cleveland State University will offer three different formats of learning communities, a learning community formatted specifically for new students who live together on campus, a learning community that allows students to take classes as a cohort but does not require them to live on campus, and an online e-learning community.

**Based on the definition provided above, please answer the following questions about learning communities at CSU.**

1. Instructing a learning community course will allow me to engage my students in real world projects.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

2. Instructing a learning community course will help me grow in my abilities as an instructor.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

3. Instructing a learning community course will take too much effort.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

4. Instructing a learning community course will be too much of a demand on my time.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

5. Learning communities lead to higher grades for students.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

6. Learning communities lead to higher retention rates.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

7. Learning communities teach students how to complete real world projects.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

8. Learning communities help students to develop relationships with instructors.

(Likely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Unlikely)

### Section 3

**Please indicate the extent to which you perceive the following statements as good or bad.**

1. The opportunity to engage my students in real world projects is:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

2. Growing in my abilities as an instructor is:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

3. Educational programs that require too much effort are:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

4. Educational programs that demand too much of my time are:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

5. Educational programs that result in higher grades for students are:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

6. Educational programs that lead to higher retention rates are:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

7. Educational programs that teach students how to complete real world projects are:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

8. Educational programs that encourage students to form relationships with  
instructors are:

(Good) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (Bad)

## Section 4

Please circle the number that shows how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Some what	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree Some what	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Colleagues in my department think I should contribute to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	My departmental chair thinks I should contribute to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	The dean of my college thinks I should contribute to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I care what colleagues in my department think in regards to my contributions to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	I care what my departmental chair thinks in regards to my contribution to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I care what the dean of my college thinks in regards to my contribution to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I intend to find out more information about how I can contribute to learning communities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I intend to instruct a learning community course in the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	Do you perceive that the benefits of instructing a learning community course will outweigh the costs of your participation?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## **Section 5**

**Please answer the following questions in your own words:**

1. What are challenges to getting involved in learning communities at CSU?
2. What is your opinion of learning community courses that have been implemented at CSU?
3. If you do not intend to instruct a learning community course, please state why.
4. What could the university do to make it easier for you to participate in learning communities?

## Section 6

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. What is your age?
  - a. 20-29
  - b. 30-39
  - c. 40-49
  - d. 50-59
  - e. 60-69
  - f. 70-79
  
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
3. What is your highest level of education?
  - a. Bachelor's degree
  - b. Master's degree
  - c. Doctoral degree
  
4. What department do you belong to?
  
  
5. How many years have been teaching at CSU?
  
  
6. Please indicate your status as an instructor
  - a. Graduate Teaching Assistant
  - b. Part Time Instructor
  - c. Term Instructor
  - d. Part Time Professor
  - e. Assistant Professor
  - f. Associate Professor
  - g. Professor
  - h. Dean