Learning Community Program Evaluation: Blueprint for Success:

Report from the Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee

Learning Community Institute, May 8-9, 2000
Perspectives in Evaluation

- Funding Sources (administration, public)
  - University retention/graduation, academic performance
- Consumers (students)
  - satisfaction surveys, interest in continuing, recommendations to others
- Educators (faculty)
  - attainment of specific learning objectives
Original Plans for Evaluation

• Analyze data from multiple learning communities to address evaluative questions from each of the perspectives described.

• Report on intended outcomes and assessment plans for next year’s learning communities

• Identify examples of “best practices” in assessment of common intended outcomes
Limitations Encountered

• More than half of learning communities had no formal assessment plan beyond the Academic Environment Survey (AES) used in the residence hall system

• Our report will be limited to
  – analyses of university retention data
  – analyses of selected items from the AES
  – summary of intended outcomes for next year

• Best practices will be presented tomorrow
University Retention

- Examined LC participation and associated one-year university retention rates for all 1998-99 first-year students
- Exhaustive sample included 1114 LC participants and 2683 non-participants
- One-year retention was defined as being enrolled on the 10th day of fall 1999 classes.
Percentage of First-Year Students Participating in Learning Communities

- Total Sample: 29%
- Women: 33%
- Men: 26%
- Minorities: 30%
- Non-Minorities: 30%
One-Year Retention Rates Associated with Learning Community Participation

- Total Sample: 91%
- Women: 92%
- Men: 91%
- Minorities: 93%
- Non-Minorities: 91%

LC Participants: Orange
Non-Participants: Cyan

Percent
Issue of Self-Selection

- The greater retention rates for LC participants may be entirely due to students with higher ability and motivation self-selecting into learning communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>HS Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LC Participant</td>
<td>25.62</td>
<td>81.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participant</td>
<td>24.39</td>
<td>74.43</td>
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Analyses Controlling for ACT and HS Rank

• Retention rates for LC participants remained significantly higher than those for non-participants for the total sample, women, men, and non-minorities

• Adjusted retention rates for total sample:

  LC Participants 89.5%
  Non-Participants 83.5%
Practical Significance

• Using adjusted retention rates, 67 fewer students would have been retained

• Looking only at tuition and assuming that 67% of students pay in-state tuition:

  Approx. $350,000 lost revenue per year
Academic Environment Survey

• Most items measured attitudes and outcomes that were not specific to learning communities

• Identified 12 items tapping attitudes and outcomes that might be specific to learning communities
Analyses of Data from 273 LC Participants and 199 Matched Non-Participants

- LC participation associated with:
  - working together with other students on academic issues
  - developing a network of other students as a resource group
  - developing leadership skills
• No differences between LC participants and non-participants in:
  – identifying an activity to join or do
  – developing an interest in working with students from different backgrounds
  – gaining a better understanding of career options
  – connecting with students who have similar academic goals
  – developing a social network
  – learning cooperatively in groups
  – interacting closely with faculty
Critical Need to Carefully Assess Intended Outcomes

• Have largely been able to only assess unintended outcomes

• Effects on variables such as retention are important and impressive, but we should detect much larger effects on intended outcomes
Example from the WISE LC

• One-year university retention was 95% across three separate cohorts of first year students
• This contrasted to 90% one-year university retention for the control group
• Although it is very impressive that the participation in the WISE LC could improve on an already very high retention rate, this was not an intended outcome
• The intended outcomes were decreased social and academic isolation and increased retention in a scientific or engineering major

• Retention in science/engineering discipline:

  WISE LC Participants  85%
  Non-Participants       69%
Assessment Subcommittee’s Future Plans

- Develop a new survey for those who have used the Academic Environment Survey in the past
- Find ways to be more available and useful to learning community coordinators
- Assist in the development of sound assessment plans to measure intended outcomes
At the institute:

- Summary of intended outcomes for next year’s learning communities will be presented next.
- Section on assessment during the 3:15 “Consultants in the Round”
- Section on best practices in assessing common intended outcomes tomorrow at 9:30 and 10:20
Planning for Success
Purpose

• To examine the methods used by learning communities to assess learning outcomes.
• Identify the specific learning outcomes of learning communities.
• Provide a broad look at intended learning outcomes of learning communities at ISU.
Learning Community Intended Outcomes . . .

. . . describe the kinds of things that students know or can do after participating in the learning community that they didn’t know or couldn’t do before (Adapted from Huba & Freed, 1999).
Classes of Outcomes

- Communication skills
- Group / team problem solving
- Knowledge & skills related to discipline
- Global, multicultural awareness & skills
- Orientation & transition skills
- Learning skills
- Retention & GPA
Communication Skills

• General communication skills
• Writing
• Speaking
Communication Skills – sample outcomes

Participants will be able to...

• “...communicate effectively in a variety of professional settings.”
• “...communicate clearly & work effectively with others in the many disciplines of horticulture.”
• “...demonstrate effective written communication of discipline specific content.”
Group / Team Problem Solving

- Social skills, interdependence, group/team work skills
- Critical/analytical thinking & problem solving skills
- Ethical decision making skills
Group / Team Problem Solving - sample outcomes

Participants will...

• “...develop analytical & evaluative strategies as approaches to solving problems in academic & real world problems.”

• “...work effectively in a team situation in defining & solving problems.”
Knowledge & Skills Related to Discipline

• Knowledge of the discipline
• Technical skills
• Interest in and acclimation to the discipline
• Awareness of career choices & options
Participants will...

• “...increase their knowledge of political & women’s issues & develop career interest in public service, public policy & administration.”

• “...gain awareness of career choices related to the study of foreign languages.”
Global, Multicultural Awareness & Skills

- Multicultural awareness
- Sensitivity to other cultures
- Awareness of international concerns
- Skills in intercultural communication
Global, Multicultural Skills - sample outcomes

Participants will...

• “...heighten their sensitivity to moral, social & humane values that mold our land.”

• “...develop appreciation & acceptance of cultural differences.”

• “...develop a sharper perspective on issues in education & culture between the US & non-western countries.”
Orientation & Transition Skills

• Understanding of how the department, college & university function
• Sense of belonging in an academic community
• First year transition skills
Orientation & Transition Skills - sample outcomes

Participants will…

• “…make connections with other 1st year students and their peer mentor thus having more connections with their major and the university.”

• “…interact with faculty & staff from their department on a more frequent basis.”
Learning Skills

- Study Skills
- Understanding own learning style
- Time management
Learning Skills - sample outcomes

Participants will…

• “…learn & practice strategies for success such as goal setting, problem solving, teamwork, study skills & time management.”

• “…better understand their learning style & know strategies that will help them learn more easily.”
Retention & GPA

- Retention or persistence
- Scholarship
Retention & GPA - sample outcomes

Participants will…

• “…define, formulate & implement goals that will govern & regulate their academic success during their tenure at ISU.”
• “…achieve a 2.33 GPA or better in their first semester coursework.”
• “…persist to and beyond degree attainment.”
Assessment Is...

The process of gathering & discussing information from multiple & diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, & can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning (Huba & Freed, 1999, p. 8).
Plan for Success

• Develop intended learning outcomes
• Develop & implement curriculum & interventions
• Identify who will use the results & how they will be utilized.
• Measure your success - how well have you met your outcomes?