Retention Rates for First-Year Learning Community Participants and Non-Participants with an Estimate of Additional Revenue Attributable to Increased Retention for Participants, 1999-00 to 2009-2010

Executive Summary

- Iowa State University consistently tracked retention rates of learning community and non-learning community participants from 1999 to the present.
- The total of additional tuition and fees attributable to higher learning community participant retention from 1999-2010 is slightly over $30 million.
- On average, the one-year retention rate for learning community participants is 8% higher compared to non-participants.
- On average, the four-year retention/graduation rate for learning community participants is 11.6% higher compared to non-participants.

Introduction

Iowa State University continues to document the one- through four-year retention rates associated with participation in a learning community. The initial study and methodology was conducted in 2000 by Doug Epperson, updated initially by him and Mack Shelley, and updated subsequently by Mack Shelley, Don Whalen, and Kevin Saunders. Replications of the study occurred in 2002, 2003, and 2007. This 2010 summary provides two sets of results:

- one- through four-year retention rates for entering first-time, full-time students comparing learning community participants and nonparticipants for each cohort year from fall 1998 to fall 2008, and
- additional tuition and fees attributed to higher retention rates associated with learning community participation.

Retention Rates

Table 1 provides participation rates and Tables 2 through 5 compare yearly retention/graduation rates (1 year through 4 years) for the cohort years. In Tables 2 through 5, the first four columns provide retention information for students who were enrolled at ISU the
following fall semester (or graduated). Percentage comparisons as well as statistical comparisons are provided for all students and subgroups (i.e., gender and minority) using chi square analyses. The analysis in the last four columns controls for differences in high school rank and ACT composite scores.

Tables 2 through 5 demonstrate that learning community participants have a significantly higher retention/graduation rate compared to nonparticipants \( (p < .05) \), and that this retention/graduation rate is consistent both across cohorts (different entering years) and across time (one-year through four-year retention). The tables also demonstrate consistent differences in retention when controlling for high school rank and ACT composite scores.

Additional Tuition and Fees

The second analysis summarizes additional tuition and fees that can be attributed to the higher retention rates associated with learning community participation. This analysis estimates the number of additional students who are retained as a result of learning community participation. Additional students attributable to increased retention from learning communities were calculated by multiplying the difference between adjusted learning community and adjusted non-learning community retention proportions for any specific year by the number of students participating in learning communities for each cohort. Use of adjusted retention (controlling for high school rank and ACT scores) provides a conservative estimate of additional students attributable to increased retention. Additional tuition and fees dollars attributable to enhanced learning community retention were calculated by first allocating the number of additional students using the proportion of resident/nonresident students overall and then multiplying the resulting additional number of students times the appropriate tuition and fees (resident/nonresident).

The overall total shown on the first page of this analysis indicates that the grand total of additional tuition and fees attributable to increased learning community participant retention from 1999 to 2010 is $30,094,124. The line graphs presented at the end of the document provide a visual of the consistent increases in differential revenues over time. The increases over time are associated with several factors including higher retention rates for learning community students, increased participation rates in learning communities, increased enrollment, and increased tuition
and fees. The decreases in differential revenues for the 2004 and 2005 cohorts are influenced by decreases in overall student enrollment during those years.