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
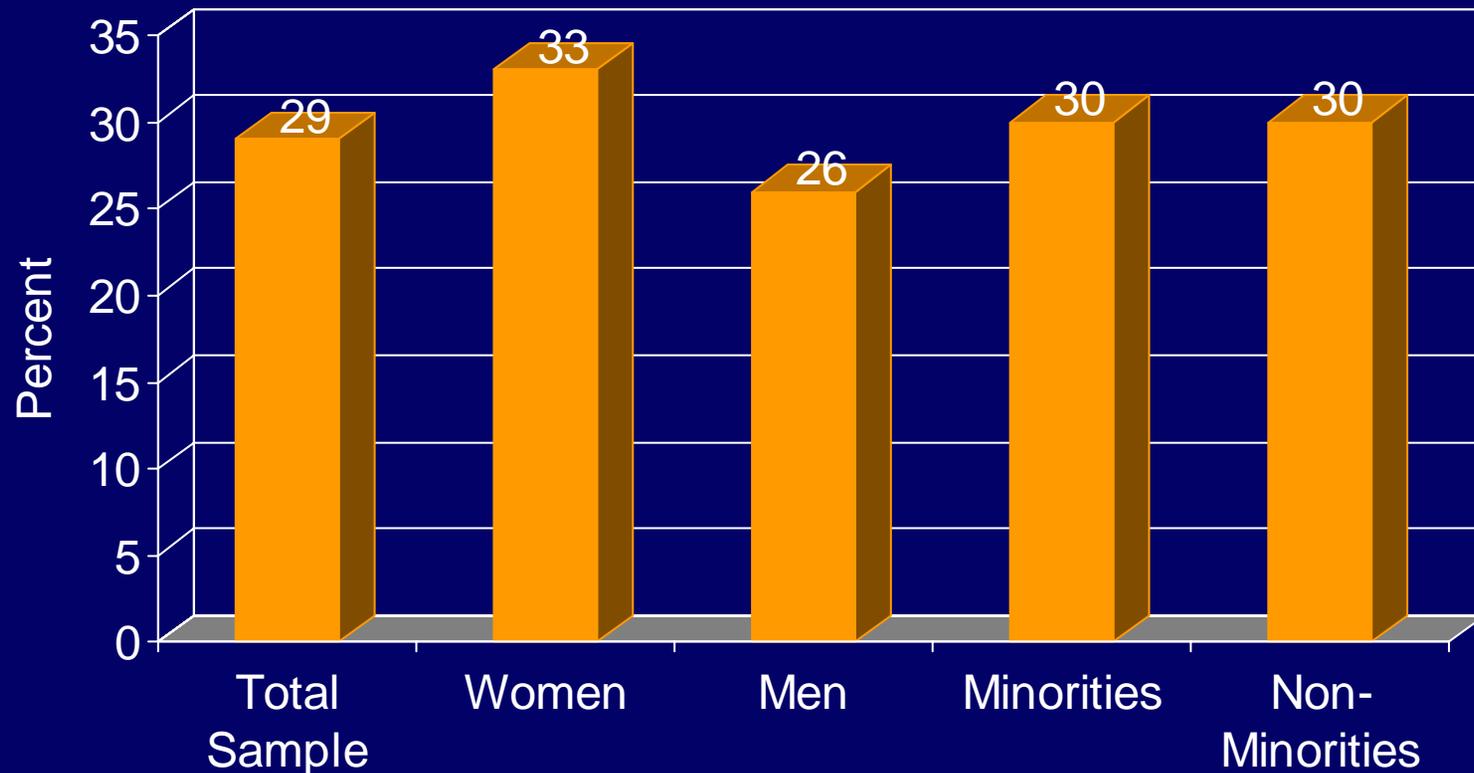
One-Year Retention Rates Associated with Learning Community Participation
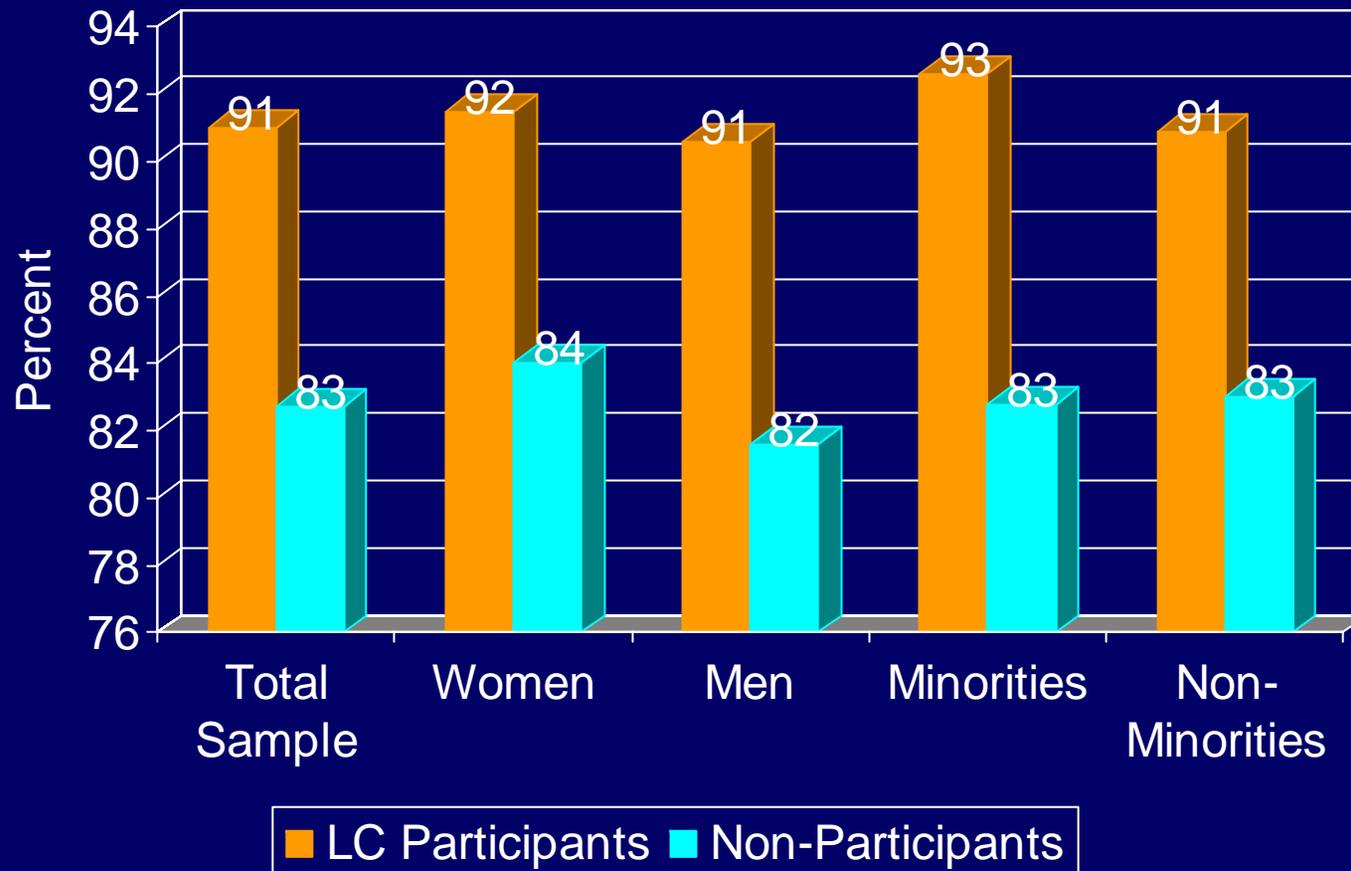
Issue of Self-Selection

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

	ACT	HS Rank
LC Participant	25.62	81.68
Non-Participant	24.39	74.43

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 <u>only</u> 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
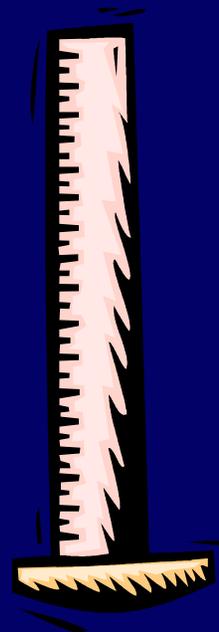
Purpose

- 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
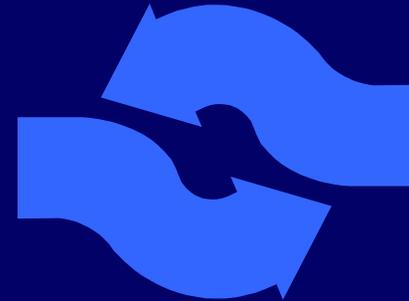
Communication Skills – **sample outcomes**

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

Knowledge & Skills of Discipline- **sample outcomes**

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
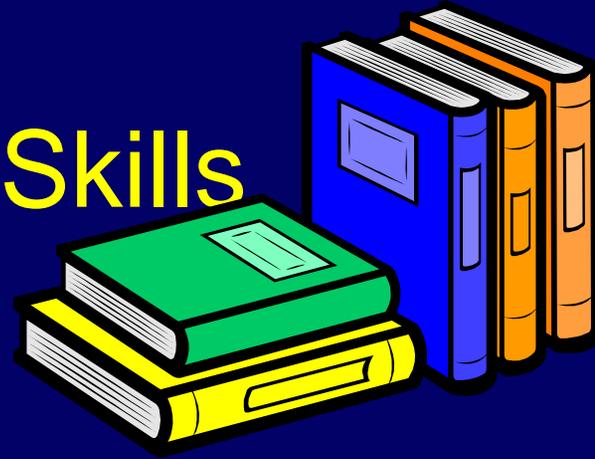
- First year transition skills
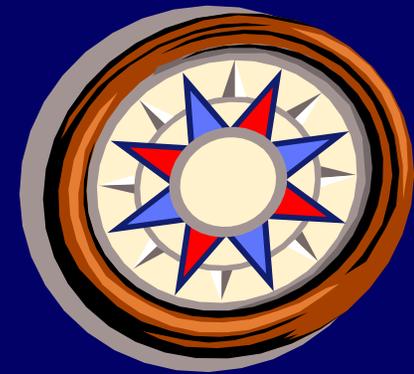
Orientation & Transition Skills - **sample outcomes**

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."

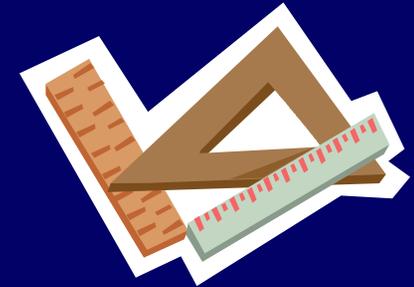# Retention & GPA

- 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?