

SURVEY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2013-14 SURVEY ADMINISTRATIONS
AUGUST 2014

During the 2013-14 academic year, 30 institutions of higher education—20 colleges and 10 universities-- administered Washington Center's *Online Survey of Students' Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities*. Students from two-year colleges accounted for 54% of the 4,252 responses.

Survey respondents were enrolled in a variety of learning communities (LCs): 74% in college-level LCs; 10% in pre-college LCs; and 16% in a learning community that combined pre-college and college-level courses. The majority (83%) were enrolled in a learning community that combined two or more classes while 17% were enrolled in a program that shared a common experience, such as a course, seminar, or project.

Faculty activities or behaviors reported by students that happen "often" or "very often" in their LC classrooms included the following:

- 89% reported that their teachers encouraged them to ask questions in class.
- 87% reported that their teachers made students feel comfortable about participating in class activities.
- 86% reported that their teachers encouraged them to discuss assigned work in class.
- 84% reported that teachers made the goals, objectives, and vocabulary of learning communities clear.

These percentages were similar to [findings from 2012-13](#).

Notable student outcomes or behaviors (responses of "often" or "very often") included the following:

- 90% reported their participation in a learning community helped them develop their ability to take responsibility for their own learning.
- 86% reported that in their learning community they were required to think critically and analytically often (38%) or very often (48%).

A substantial majority of the respondents indicated that their participation in the LC "helps me develop my ability" to "be successful in future courses and programs" (88%), "persist when faced with academically challenging work" (82%), and "work effectively with others to complete assignments or projects" (82%).

A number of the survey questions relate directly to integrative learning. The 2013-14 survey results are similar to results from prior years. They indicate that 76% of the respondents often or very often "work on connecting or integrating ideas, strategies or skills from classes (disciplines) included in the learning community," and "reflect on how these connections lead to new insights or understanding." In addition, over three-quarters of the respondents reported that their instructors often or very often

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demonstrated “how to integrate concepts and skills from different classes in a meaningful way” and a similar percent reported that their instructor often or very often assigned work “that asks me to connect concepts and skills from different classes to reach new understanding and/or applications.”

When students compare their LC class experience with other classes, 32% reported that they spent more time in their LC memorizing facts and figures—a surprising outcome worth further inquiry at a local level. And, by contrast, over half also reported that they spent more time in their LC analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, integrating, and applying what they learn to practical problems or new situations. The percentages are up slightly from the prior year.

A [breakdown by two-year and four-year schools](#) of the “often” or “very often” results for all survey categories is also available.

In the 2013-14 survey administration, as with previous years, close to half the students reported that they sometimes (33%) or never (12%) “work with classmates outside of class on course assignments, homework, or projects,” and 43% reported that they only sometimes (31%) or never (12%) “peer review my own and others’ work during class.” 46% of the respondents reported they sometimes (41%) or never (5%) “ask questions in class,” an improvement over the prior year. This is an interesting contrast to the 89% reporting that their teachers encourage them to ask questions in class, and may be worth examining at the institution level.

Note: The data reported does not account for the longevity of the LC program, i.e. whether programs are well-established or just getting started. Results may also be influenced by differences in the content or disciplines included in the learning community, information not included in the survey database.

The online *Survey of Students’ Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities* is available again for administration in 2014-15. If you are interested in getting data for your learning communities for the upcoming academic year, contact Rachel Burke at washcenter@evergreen.edu