

ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES' STUDENT SURVEY
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WINTER/SPRING 2010 NATIONAL SURVEY
JULY 2010

In fall 2009, the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education and Skagit Valley College's Institutional Research Office field tested the *Online Survey of Student Learning in Learning Communities*. After making modifications to the survey, based on feedback from the field test participants, a revised survey was made available to colleges and universities for the 2010 winter and spring terms.

Twelve two- and four-year institutions participated in the winter/spring 2010 survey. A number of these institutions had also participated in the fall pilot. The winter/spring survey administration generated 1221 responses from students enrolled in a variety of learning communities: 10% in pre-college learning communities, 70% in college-level, and 20% in learning communities which combined pre-college and college-level courses. The majority of respondents (68%) were enrolled in common-cohort learning communities, that is, where the students were enrolled in two or more classes together. Thirty-one percent (31%) were enrolled in a program that shares a common experience, such as a course, seminar or project. One percent reported they were enrolled in another type of learning community.

The areas reported by students to occur most "often" or "very often" include the following:

- **90%** of the respondents reported that their ability to take responsibility for their own learning increased as a result of their participation in the learning community.
- **87%** of the respondents reported that their participation in the LC helped to develop their ability to think critically and analytically.

At the other end of the spectrum:

- **15%** reported they never worked with classmates outside of class on course assignments, homework, or projects.
- **10%** said they never participated in a peer review of their own or another's work during class.
- **8%** stated they never presented their work, or work done as part of a group, to the class.
- **8%** reported that they never discussed ideas from the learning community with family members, co-workers, or other students.

Other encouraging results included those about instructor behaviors. Over 80% of the respondents reported that the faculty in their learning community:

- encouraged students to ask questions in class (**87%**)
- encouraged them to discuss assigned work in class (**86%**)
- made students feel comfortable about participating in class activities (**84%**)
- made the goals and vocabulary of learning communities clear (**81%**)

- encouraged students to seek out support resources on campus (**81%**)

Less encouraging results, however, are that **28%** of the students reported that their instructors “never” or “sometimes” assigned work that asked them to connect concepts and skills from different classes to reach new understanding and/or applications.

Consequently,

- **30%** of the respondents reported having “never” or “sometimes” worked on connecting or integrating ideas, strategies, or skills from classes or disciplines included in the learning community.
- **30%** of the students reported having “never” or “sometimes” reflected on how these connections lead to new insights or understandings.

The differences between student behaviors by level of learning community (pre-college, college-level, or combined pre-college/college-level) are intriguing. For example, students in pre-college-only learning communities were significantly more likely than their counterparts to report that they:

- Work on reading, writing and/or problem-solving assignments during class — **47%** reported doing this “very often” compared to **26%** for pre-college/college level and **27%** for college-level.
- Work with other students to solve problems or examine complex issues during class **42%-31%-28%**
- Peer review my and other students’ work during class **33%-31%-20%**
- Work with other students on group projects during class **36%-30%-25%**

They were, however, less likely to work with classmates outside of class on assignments, homework, or projects.

One of the important next steps of this work is to create professional development modules based on survey results. The modules will likely include:

- Annotated references on integrative learning for faculty inquiry groups and/or LC program institute
- Facilitator notes for workshop on designing integrative assignments using heuristic
- Examples of integrative assignments for different levels, instructors’ reflective comments, and assignment revisions
- Related teaching practices drawn from collaborative learning strategies and Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS)

The *Online Survey of Student Learning in Learning Communities* will be available again for administration in fall 2010. If you are interested in getting data for your learning communities, please contact washcenter@evergreen.edu to find out how you can participate.