

ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES' STUDENT SURVEY
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2010-11 SURVEYS
JULY 2011

The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education and Skagit Valley College's Institutional Research Office expanded the national *Online Survey of Students' Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities* during the 2010-11 academic year. Twenty-two (22) colleges and universities across the country participated—with many administering the survey in multiple terms—resulting in 3,706 responses. The respondents were enrolled in a variety of learning communities, with 63% in college-level, 10% enrolled in pre-college learning communities, and 27% in a learning community that combined pre-college and college-level courses. The majority of respondents (82%) were enrolled in common-cohort learning communities, that is, a learning community that combined two or more classes. Eighteen percent (18%) were enrolled in a program that shared a common experience, such as a course, seminar or project.

Faculty activities or behaviors that were reported by students to happen often or very often included the following:

- 89% reported that their teachers encouraged them to ask questions in class.
- 88% of the respondents 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.
- 80% of the respondents reported that teachers made the goals, objectives, and vocabulary of learning communities clear.

Exceptionally high student outcomes included the following:

- 92% of the respondents reported that they were expected to take responsibility for their own learning often or very often in the learning community.
- 89% reported that in their learning community they were required to think critically and analytically often (38%) or very often (51%).

At the other end of the spectrum, 53% of the respondents said they sometimes (35%) or never (18%) "work with classmates outside of class on course assignments, homework, or projects." Forty-six percent (46%) reported they sometimes (41%) or never (6%) "ask questions in class." Forty-two percent (42%) reported they sometimes (34%) or never (8%) "present my work, or work done as part of a group, to the class."

Several survey questions relate directly to integration. The 2011-11 survey results indicate that 75% of the respondents often or very often work on connecting or integrating ideas, strategies or skills from their classes/disciplines included in the learning community and a similar percent "reflect on how these connections lead to new insights or understanding" often or very often. Three-quarters of the respondents

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

As noted in the table below, compared to their other classes, students in learning communities reported that they were more likely to use analysis, synthesis, evaluation and integration, and were more likely to apply what they had learned to practical problems or new situations.

“In my learning community, compared to other classes, I spend more, less or about the same amount of time:”

	% Reporting “More”
Memorizing facts and figures	37.9
Analyzing elements of an idea, experience, or theory	59.8
Thinking through my assumptions	58.8
Synthesizing ideas, experiences, or theories	58.2
Evaluating information, methods, and arguments	59.8
Integrating ideas, strategies, and skills from multiple sources	59.5
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or new situations	55.2

Students who were enrolled in pre-college-only learning communities rated a number of items higher than their counterparts enrolled in learning communities that involved only college-level courses. For example, students in pre-college-only learning communities rated items related to college readiness skills significantly higher than those in college-level-only, including seeking out campus resources, planning next educational steps, and identifying effective learning strategies. Students in pre-college-only learning communities reported more collaborative activities, such as working with other on projects, making presentations, and participating in peer reviews. These students also reported that faculty were significantly more likely to “help me figure out how to use my background knowledge and experiences, both from other courses and life,” “show me how to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in my work as a basis for improvement,” “assign work that asks me to connect concepts and skills from different classes to reach new understanding and/or applications,” and “demonstrate how to integrate concepts and skills from different classes in a meaningful way.”

The *Online Survey of Students’ Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities* will be available again for administration in 2011-12. If you are interested in getting data for your learning communities for the upcoming fall term, contact Rachel Burke at washcenter@evergreen.edu