

## Washington Center's Learning Community Assessment Tools Survey April 2014

In May 2013, Washington Center surveyed learning community coordinators across the country about how they assess their learning community programs. That question grew out of a previous Washington Center project focused on assessing student learning.

**Background:** From 2006-2009, the Washington Center led a national action research project to assess student learning in learning communities. The *Assessing Learning in Learning Communities* project was grounded in empirical work done by Veronica Boix-Mansilla and her colleagues at Project Zero (Harvard Graduate School of Education) on the nature of interdisciplinary understanding. Campus teams participating in the project used a common protocol to assess student work. That examination of student work led to an intensive focus on designing assignments that prompted students to demonstrate their interdisciplinary and integrative understandings.

Results from that project have been widely disseminated-- in the form of an integrative assignment heuristic with multiple adaptations to various campus and learning community program contexts, a collaborative assessment protocol, and a special edition of the *Journal of Learning Communities Research* (<http://www.evergreen.edu/washingtoncenter/about/monographs/jlcr.html>).

Assessing student learning will always be a central focus for learning community programs, particularly formative assessments that lead to better teaching and deeper learning. Simultaneously, however, as learning communities grow and take root on campuses, they are asked to demonstrate their value as programs. This survey was intended to help describe where we are as a field now, in terms of program assessment, and to suggest some potential directions.

**Origins of the survey:** The Assessing Student Learning in Learning Communities Project was organized around important tools for assessing and designing integrative and interdisciplinary learning. The field of learning community program assessment is much broader. Campuses have identified different kinds of outcomes, and for those outcomes, campuses have a range of tools they use. The first step in a national action research project focused on program assessment would necessarily be learning more about existing practice. In 2012, at both the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities and the National Learning Community Conference, learning community leaders were consulted about the design this initial survey.

**Survey Design:** the LC Assessment Tools survey had two parts. The first asked questions about the learning community program—types of LCs offered, focus of the LCs, size of the LC program. The second part of the survey asked about three big sets of program outcomes: student outcomes, faculty/staff outcomes, and institutional outcomes. Participants were asked whether they assessed the item, and whether they would if they could—if they had a good tool. They were also asked to describe how they used the assessment results.

*Outcomes associated with students:* The survey asked whether campuses looked at measures of student progress, including course completion rates, pass rates, GPA, degree attainment and certificate attainment. They were asked if they assessed student engagement, and integrative and interdisciplinary learning.

Most learning community programs use measures of student progress to assess themselves. Some programs also assess student engagement, and some are starting to assess integrative and interdisciplinary learning as well. We wanted to discover whether campuses were including engagement and integrative/interdisciplinary learning in their assessments, and whether a lack of shared assessment tools or protocols was a barrier for them in doing so.

*Outcomes associated with faculty/staff:* The survey asked whether learning community programs associated any or all of these four outcomes for faculty and staff participating in the program:

1. Expanded pedagogical strategies
2. Increased knowledge of other disciplines or fields
3. Increased intellectual engagement in teaching
4. Increased collaboration among faculty/staff

In asking questions about faculty/staff development the survey was reminding leaders in the field of our shared history. Early on, one of the most compelling reasons to launch a learning community program was because of the assumed professional benefits for those teaching in it. With the upsurge in interest in student outcomes, the focus on benefits for faculty was staff was lost. Those outcomes are hard to measure, and we wondered how campuses that are looking them were doing that.

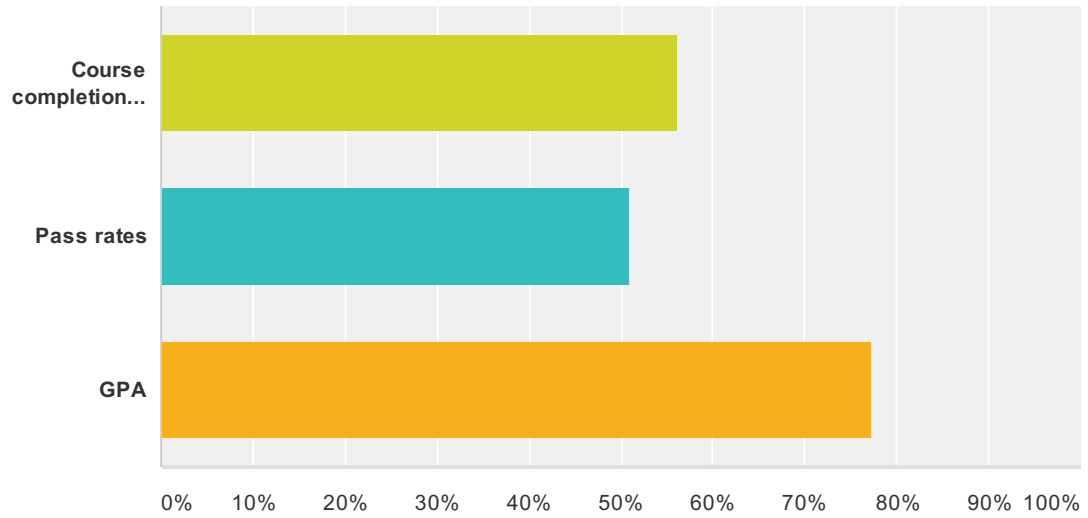
*Outcomes associated with the institution:* The survey asked participants about the relationship between the learning community program and the institution overall. In particular, it asked whether the LC program contributed to a shared focus on student success, increased collaboration between student services and academic affairs, a shared focus on student learning tied to effective teaching, and/or a shared understanding of the campus vision, mission and/or purpose.

In asking about the impact of the learning community program on the institution, we were building on what's known now about effective scaling efforts. Programs that get to scale, that matter for students, are aligned with and reinforce the mission or the vision of the institution.

**Survey Administration:** the Learning Community Assessment Tools survey was sent to learning community coordinators, campus teams that had participated in the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities, teams that had registered in the online learning community directory, and the learncom list serve. We received 61 complete surveys, and an additional 27 partial responses.

### Q13 Which measures do you track?

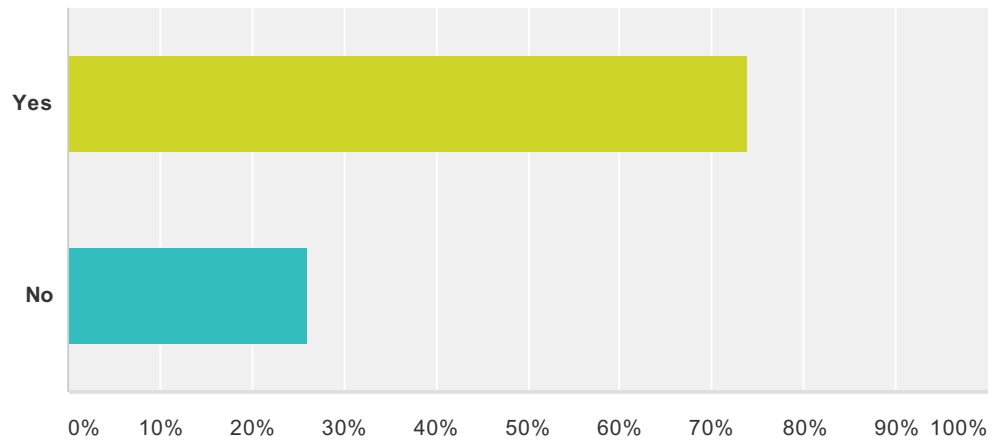
Answered: 57 Skipped: 32



Answer Choices	Responses	
Course completion rates	56.14%	32
Pass rates	50.88%	29
GPA	77.19%	44
<b>Total Respondents: 57</b>		

### Q23 Do you assess the engagement of students participating in learning communities?

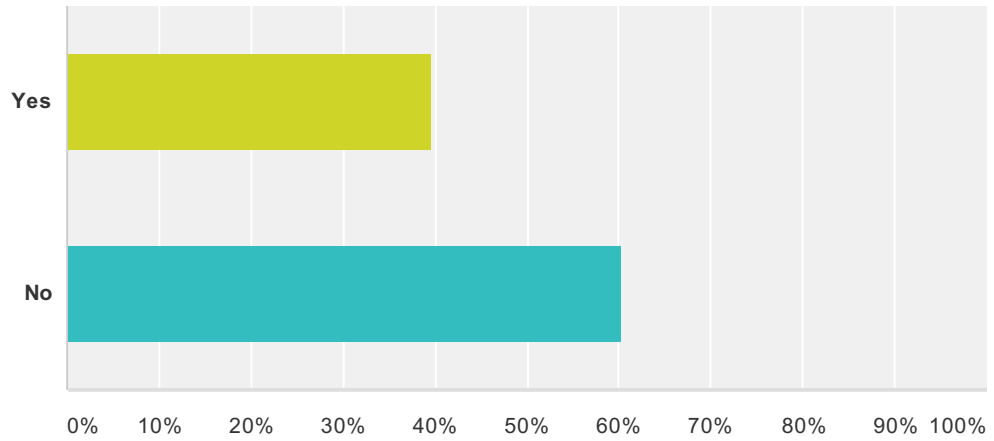
Answered: 69 Skipped: 20



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	73.91%	51
No	26.09%	18
<b>Total</b>		<b>69</b>

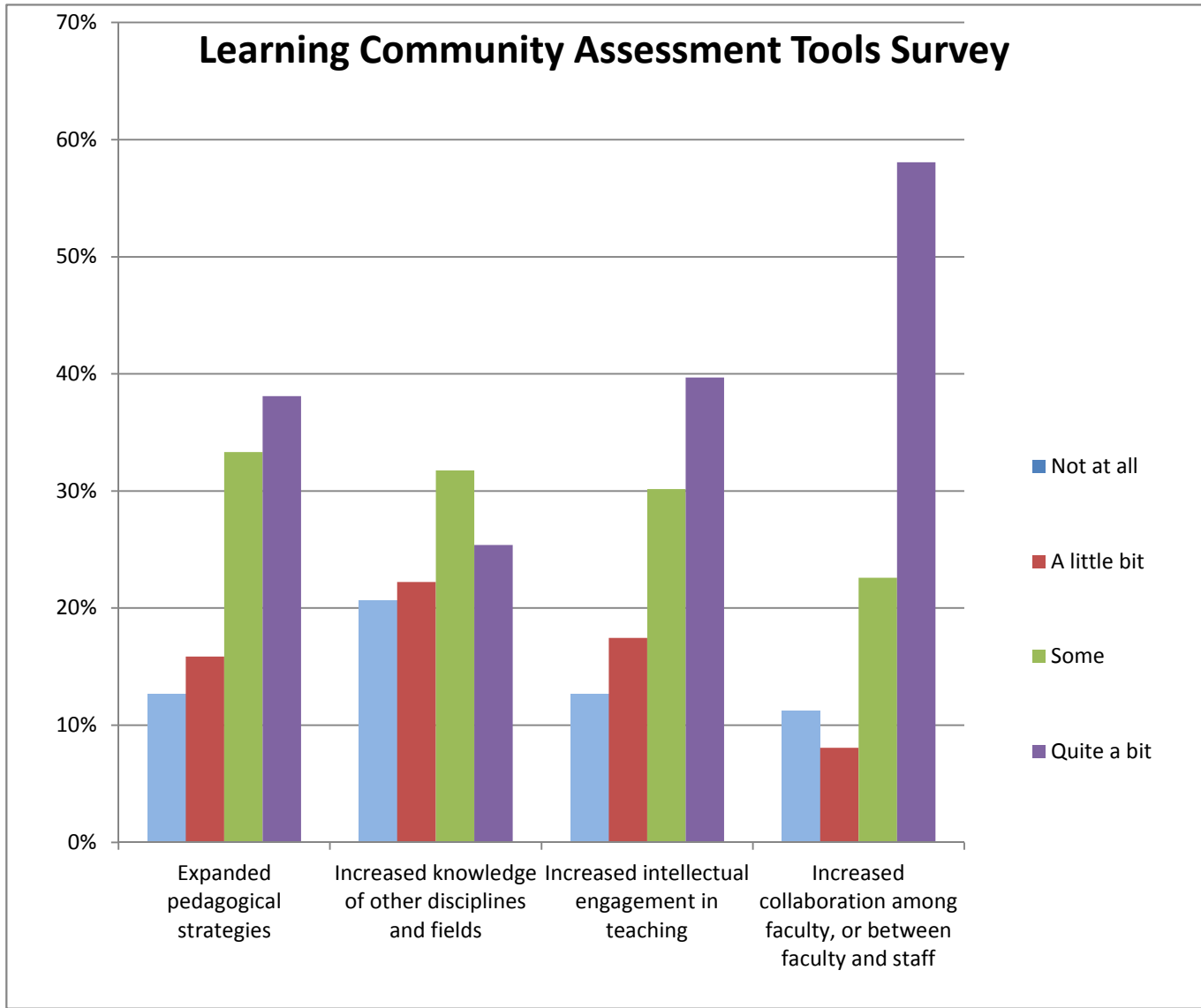
### Q27 Do you assess students' integrative or interdisciplinary learning while they are enrolled in learning communities?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 21



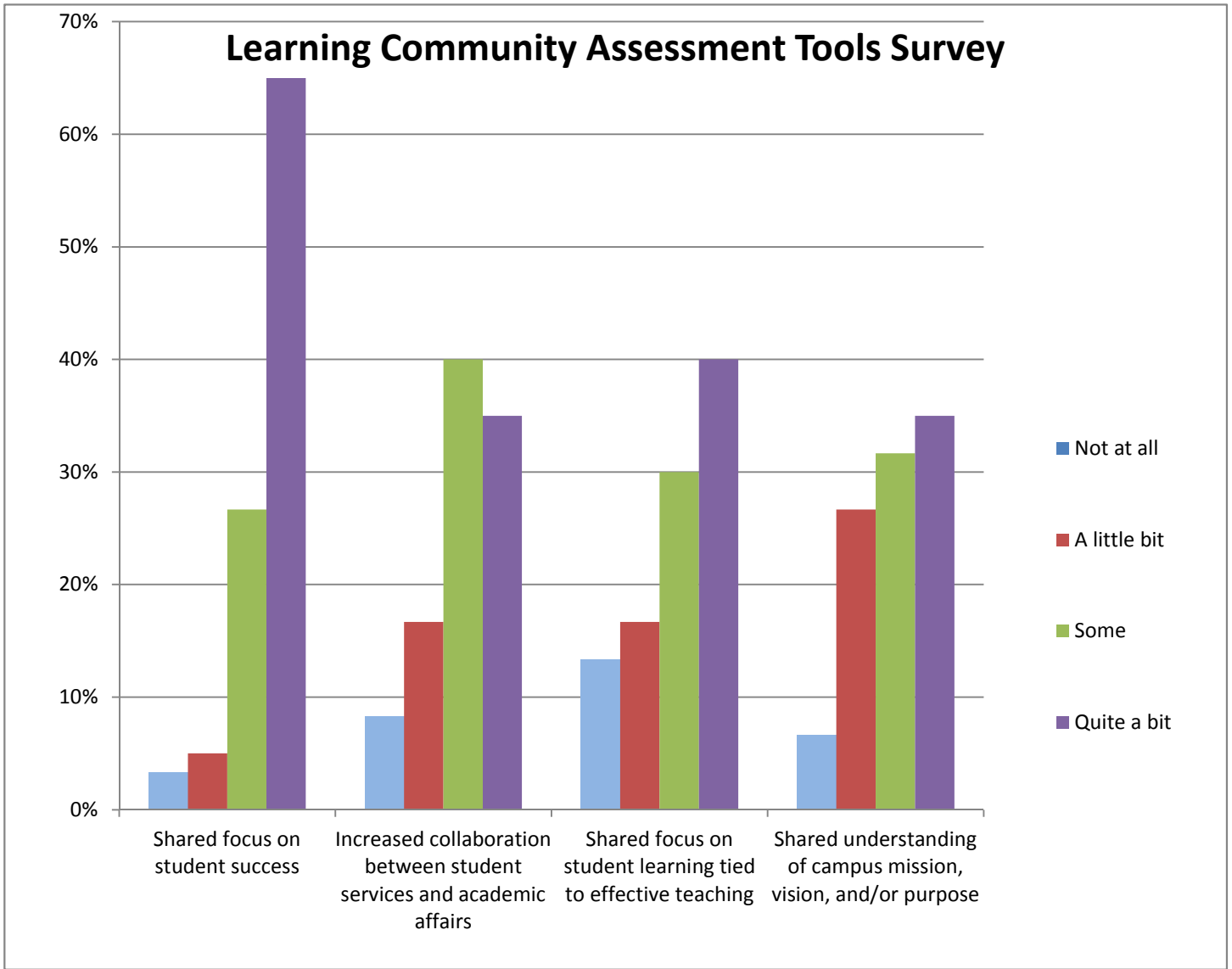
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	39.71%	27
No	60.29%	41
<b>Total</b>		<b>68</b>

Q35 To what degree are any of these outcomes associated with faculty and staff teaching in learning communities?



	Not at all	A little bit	Some	Quite a bit	Total
Expanded pedagogical strategies	12.70% 8	15.87% 10	33.33% 21	38.10% 24	63
Increased knowledge of other disciplines and fields	20.63% 13	22.22% 14	31.75% 20	25.40% 16	63
Increased intellectual engagement in teaching	12.70% 8	17.46% 11	30.16% 19	39.68% 25	63
Increased collaboration among faculty, or between faculty and staff	11.29% 7	8.06% 5	22.58% 14	58.06% 36	62

Q40 To what degree does you learning community program contribute to the following institutional outcomes?



	Not at all	A little bit	Some	Quite a bit	Total
Shared focus on student success	3.33% 2	5.00% 3	26.67% 16	65.00% 39	60
Increased collaboration between student services and academic affairs	8.33% 5	16.67% 10	40.00% 24	35.00% 21	60
Shared focus on student learning tied to effective teaching	13.33% 8	16.67% 10	30.00% 18	40.00% 24	60
Shared understanding of campus mission, vision, and/or purpose	6.67% 4	26.67% 16	31.67% 19	35.00% 21	60