IV

Notable Assessment Reports

Notable Assessment Reports

The notable assessment reports are categorized into five groups: General Education Learning Communities, Freshman Learning Communities, Academic Major Learning Communities, Living/Learning Communities, and Developmental Education. The headings describe either the area of curricular focus or the nature of the learning community structure.

A synopsis of each report describes the learning community initiative, assessment approach, and major findings, and highlights qualities of the report that made it stand out. Table 3 lists the institutions represented in the seventeen reports; the number after each institution's name corresponds with the number of the report listed in the summary matrix (Appendix D) and bibliography (Appendix F).

Table 3. Notable Reports At A Glance

Category	Institution
General Education	American University of Paris (2)
	California State University, Hayward (14)
	University of California, Los Angeles (12)
	The Evergreen State College (28)
	University of North Dakota (70)
	Stony Brook University (97)
Freshman	Iowa State University (46)
	University of Northern Colorado (76)
	Temple University (98)
Living/Learning	University of Massachusetts Amherst (57)
	University of Michigan (60)
Academic Major	University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (54)
	Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology (81)
	University of Texas at El Paso (103)
	Western Washington University (107)
	University of Wisconsin-Madison (113)
Developmental Education	LaGuardia Community College (51)

General Education Learning Communities
American University of Paris

It is a real question whether the faculty who determined interdisciplinarity to be one of the main objectives of the Learning Communities (although secondary to "discipline-based models") had a clear idea of what they meant by this term and whether they had a common idea (that is, whether there was a shared understanding of what everyone had in mind). (18)

Description of the Program

The American University of Paris (AUP) clustered two general education courses with a Reflective Seminar to form FirstBridge, a learning community required of all first semester freshmen. The Reflective Seminar was designed to teach writing, public speaking, and information literacy skills, and to explore the interdisciplinary dimensions of the learning community. AUP offered seven pairs of linked General Learning Community courses and two pairs of linked Intensive English Program Learning Communities in the inaugural, fall 2001 semester of FirstBridge. One example of a General Learning Community was "The Sounds of Music," a combination of an English course entitled "Hot and Cool: Jazz and Literature" and a music course entitled, "Music, Culture, and Language." Approximately 20 students enrolled in each cluster. Each faculty member taught a Reflective Seminar, and acted as academic advisor to the ten students in the seminar.

Assessment Approach

The five faculty members who comprised the program assessment committee collaboratively evaluated the first semester of the program and produced a comprehensive internal report. They used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze eight outcomes identified in the program's vision statement, goals, and objectives. Those outcomes included retention, community building, student advising, interdisciplinarity, intellectual content/quality (student work), information literacy, writing, public speaking, and the Reflective Seminar/program structure and integration.

Findings

Retention. The program "did not hurt retention." At an institution where fall-to-spring retention averaged an enviable 87% over a six-year period, the slight increase in retention (from 90% to 91%) after the first semester of FirstBridge was acknowledged without fanfare.

Community Building. The report discusses three ways community was defined by FirstBridge: (1) emotional bonding between students and between students and their advisors, (2) introduction of students to the facilities of the university, and (3) tools to help students "construct their own intellectual communities that foster real and exciting learning" (e.g., writing skills, critical reading, research, teamwork, public speaking, computer literacy, problem-solving, analytical and critical evaluation, and intercultural awareness). Student responses to the impact of FirstBridge on developing community, collected through questionnaires and a focus group, were very positive.

Advising. Students were more enthusiastic about the advising structure than were the faculty, who felt that the advising responsibilities demanded considerable time, in part because they were integrated in the Reflective Seminar, and in part because the frequency of student-teacher contact made it easier for students to pursue advising time with the faculty outside of the Reflective Seminar.

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Interdisciplinarity. In a sentence that captures the humor and voice of this distinctive report, interdisciplinarity is depicted as a "problem child in the largely successful family of FirstBridge" (17). Discrepancies in the ways faculty and students viewed this program goal (only one of the thirteen faculty members thought he had succeeded in this goal; students in the focus group never even mentioned it) provide the impetus for a reflective discussion about "strong interdisciplinarity" (where students gain sufficient understanding of each of the linked course disciplines to think critically about how those disciplines do and could relate to one another) and "weak interdisciplinarity" (where students can make a meaningful connection between the subject matters being taught). The authors speculate about whether "strong interdisciplinarity" is a reasonable goal for first-semester freshmen. The reflective tone of this discussion is notable, as it uses the assessment results to explore implications and set the stage for a larger dialogue.

Intellectual Content/Quality (Student Projects and Final Assignments). The assessment committee reviewed samples of student work to get a sense of their breadth and quality, but relied on the faculty to make comparisons between the quality of work they received from freshmen in the FirstBridge program to the quality of work they received from freshmen in similar, individual courses. Faculty felt that FirstBridge student work was "a little superior to what they've experienced before" from other students (22). Anticipating a common concern, the committee also pursued the question about whether the emphasis on skills as well as content "dumbed down" the curriculum. On the whole, the answer was no. One faculty respondent is quoted, "A lot of what gets perceived of as 'infantilizing' in FirstBridge isn't really. It's just the focus on process. And process needs to be attached to advanced work" (23).

Information Literacy. The library staff was responsible for developing the information literacy tools made available to students through the Reflective Seminar, special sessions, and Blackboard course software. Almost half of this 67-page report is a description, through colorful graphs and text, of the process and outcomes of implementing the program's information literacy objectives. This extensive documentation of student practice and acquisition of information literacy skills is impressive for its clarity and thoroughness.

Writing and Public Speaking. A slight majority of students (52%) reported through a questionnaire that their writing experiences in FirstBridge were positive; a larger percentage (63%) spoke highly of their public speaking experiences. The report acknowledged that without more information than these numbers, the committee couldn't speculate credibly about the reasons students rated their experiences in these ways.

Reflective Seminar/Program Structure. This aspect of the program was problematic, with faculty perceiving that the Reflective Seminar tried to do too much. The authors report the faculty's feedback and call for ongoing dialogue about restructuring.

What Makes This Report Notable

This extraordinarily thorough, 78-page internal report stands out for several reasons. It incorporates multiple methods of assessment, including interviews,

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questionnaires, observations, and document review to look at the many dimensions of FirstBridge. Goals and outcomes are explicitly aligned. The vision statement, in the report's appendix, is a manifesto of good practices and idealism. The self-reflective tone captures the spirit of an assessment approach that genuinely seeks to improve, as well as prove; the discussion of implications pushes the reader to think about the complexities. Perhaps this is because the authors' goal is to "encourage a dialogue about how FirstBridge might be run next time around rather than to issue Olympian edicts about it" (64). Extensive use of quotes and commentary allows the voice of the authors and participants to shine through, and makes for an engaging read. Finally, the report is the product of a successful, ad hoc collaborative assessment committee who themselves became a learning community. "It was our fortune, as a committee, to gain as much insight from one another as we have gained from examining the curriculum and various aspects of FirstBridge" (5).

Finally, the report is the product of a successful, ad hoc collaborative assessment committee who themselves became a learning community.

California State University, Hayward

After two years of cluster program implementation, students and faculty involved in General Education seem to have divided into two roughly equal sized camps: those that fervently support the program, and those that are adamantly opposed . . . If the integrated learning model for General Education were abandoned, it would certainly gratify large numbers of instructors and students; however, there is no guarantee that anything else would please them better. A more constructive approach might be the modification of the program . . . (32)

Description of the Program

In 1998, California State University, Hayward (CSUH) introduced a freshmen integrated learning model for General Education that consisted of yearlong clusters of courses organized around a central theme. In 1999-2000, CSUH offered to sophomores 24 clusters from the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences. From faculty submissions, the clusters were selected by a general education subcommittee. The three courses in the cluster had to be from different departments. Each student was required to enroll in two clusters, and took one course each quarter from each cluster. For example, if a student enrolled in the social science cluster, "Conflict and Conflict Resolution," she would have explored that theme through a political science course in the fall, an anthropology course in the winter, and a speech and communications course in the spring.

General education program outcomes were clearly defined and included: integrated curriculum and learning; ability to work with others in groups (collaborative learning); creation of learning communities (of faculty, of students, and of faculty and students); respect for diversity; lifelong learning; connecting to campus resources; and enhanced retention. These were in addition to general, cognitive skill-based outcomes (written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, information competence, quantitative reasoning), as well as outcomes specific to different areas of knowledge (e.g., natural sciences, humanities, etc.).

Assessment Approach

CSUH took a primarily quantitative approach to assessment, combining standardized instruments, institutionally designed surveys, and available institutional data (student grades, retention information) to analyze the impact of the program. The assessment approach was designed to "measure achievement in program goals as well as in cognitive skills" (28). Standardized instruments included the Academic Profile, Writing Skills Test, and College Outcomes Survey. Although it was hoped that the entire sophomore cohort would complete the instruments, only a sample of students actually did so. A faculty/staff survey was administered to collect perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the cluster program, extent of collaboration among faculty, extent of faculty/ student interaction, and perception of student attitudes toward the cluster program. About one third of the cluster faculty returned the survey.

Findings

The report contains 11 pages of detailed results, complete with statistics and charts, and divided into two sections: Results pertaining to the acquisition of cognitive skills and results pertaining to program goals. Some of the program results included the following perceptions from a representative sample of students:

Integrated Curriculum Experiences. Over half (55%) of the students strongly agreed or agreed that General Education (GE) courses helped them build a framework to organize their learning within and across areas of study; 72% strongly agreed or agreed that the cluster courses were tied to the theme.

Ability to Work with Others in Groups. Almost two thirds (61%) of the students thought they had made very much or much growth in becoming an effective team or group member; 56% felt they had made very much or much growth in learning to be adaptable, tolerant, and willing to negotiate.

Creation of Learning Communities. Sixty-five percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they liked being in classes with the same students; 72% strongly agreed or agreed that they made friends in the cluster; 50% strongly agreed or agreed that cluster classes create a positive learning environment.

Respect for Diversity. Forty-four percent of the students were very satisfied or satisfied with the campus atmosphere of ethnic, political, and religious understanding.

Lifelong Learning. Sixty-five percent of the students strongly agreed or agreed that GE courses helped them become more independent and self-directed learners; 42% felt they made very much or much progress in broadening their intellectual interests.

Connecting to Campus Resources. Forty-two percent of the students felt they had made very much or much progress in further developing their study skills.

Enhancing Retention. Ninety percent of the respondents stated they intended to return to CSUH in fall 2000.

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Twenty-one of the 70 faculty responded to the faculty survey. Slightly more than half (52%) of those responding were from the social sciences. One third were from the humanities, and 14% were from the natural sciences. Some of their perceptions included the following:

Extent of Cluster Faculty Collaboration. Thirty-three percent reported very extensive collaboration; 43% reported moderately extensive collaboration.

Extent of Faculty-Student Interaction. Thirty-three percent reported very extensive interaction; 62% reported moderately extensive interaction.

Perception of Student Attitude toward the Cluster Concept. Almost 48% of the cluster faculty perceived the student attitude toward the cluster program to be favorable.

Program Strengths. The most commonly mentioned strengths were the opportunity to work collaboratively and creatively with other faculty, and teaching and learning out of the ordinary discipline constraints.

Program Weaknesses. The most commonly mentioned weaknesses were problems with scheduling classes, student behavioral problems and the lack of upper-class role models, poor student preparation and motivation, and lack of resources to facilitate the necessary collaboration and preparation.

What Makes This Report Notable

Because this 2000 report is presented as a *continuation* of the 1999 Assessment of the New General Education Program report, it builds on the content of the initial document. As such, it reflects on the actions taken as a result of prior recommendations, and documents the continuing assessment of the program. The environmental context of the learning community is thoroughly presented, giving the reader a clear sense of what the program is attempting to accomplish, and how. Cognitive and program outcomes are aligned with the multiple methods of assessment, although the report acknowledges that much work is still to be done for assessment to become a genuine tool for improving instruction, rather than to be an imposed external activity. As indicated by the quotation at the beginning of this summary, the report uses the assessment results to give voice to the prickliness and contradictory views inherent in curriculum change. Discussions like these about the challenges of assessment add a reflective component that makes this 32-page internal report stand out.

University of California, Los Angeles

It was a great experience in teaching—both seeing how different faculty approach a subject as well as their teaching styles.

Teaching Assistant, UCLA (37)

Description of the Program

University of California, Los Angeles established in 1998-99 four yearlong clusters of team-taught, interdisciplinary general education courses for a freshman cohort. For example, one of the clusters was entitled "The Global Environment: A Multidisciplinary Perspective" and was organized by faculty from civil engineering, geography, atmospheric sciences, history, and biology. By

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faculty teaching two clusters in the residence halls, a living/learning connection was created. Each cluster was "grounded in a set of intellectual principles that emphasized the importance of general knowledge, integrative learning, citizenship, cultural diversity, primary works, and basic skills" (1). During each of the first two quarters, students enrolled in a five-credit lecture course taught primarily by tenured or tenure-track faculty. They also enrolled in the accompanying discussion section taught by a graduate student instructor (TA). In the third quarter, students took a five-credit seminar designed to engage them in intensive research, collaborative work, discussion, and debate. Either a faculty member or a TA taught the seminar. Seventeen faculty members taught the four cluster courses and 18 graduate students participated as (TAs) and seminar instructors.

The work group focused on seven target areas: incentives; workload; intellectual development; community; productivity, progress, and achievement; enthusiasm and intellectual excitement; and recognition and external rewards.

Assessment Approach

A faculty and staff work group used student records, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and informal meetings to gather information about the experiences of students, faculty, and TAs who participated in the cluster. The work group surveyed students in both the winter and spring quarters, and interviewed a sample of students who withdrew from the cluster after the fall quarter. The committee also conducted focus groups with the TAs and met twice with the faculty coordinators of the clusters. The work group focused on seven target areas: incentives; workload; intellectual development; community; productivity, progress, and achievement; enthusiasm and intellectual excitement; and recognition and external rewards. A limited comparison group of non-cluster freshmen helped the work group understand what characteristics differentiated cluster and non-cluster students.

Findings

Incentives (Reasons for Participation). "Freshmen, TAs, and faculty were drawn to the clusters by a combination of intellectual and tangible benefits" (42). Students took the classes because they were interested in the subjects and wanted the general education credit; few enrolled because they were attracted to the unique characteristics of cluster courses, such as their interdisciplinarity, three-quarter sequence, or team-teaching environment. TAs appreciated the stable, yearlong work and were attracted to the opportunity to develop the seminar course during the spring quarter. Faculty competed for the opportunity to teach the clusters, drawn by the interdisciplinary and team-teaching opportunities, as well as the summer funding and release time.

Workload. Students, TAs, and faculty concurred that the workload was heavier in cluster courses compared to other general education courses. TAs invested an average of 27 hours per week, and noted the additional time required for preparation, lectures, and weekly team meetings.

Intellectual Development. The work group collected student self-report data on the ways the cluster courses affected skills in writing, analysis, library research, understanding current events, quantitative reasoning, and understanding those different from themselves. More than two thirds of the students reported a

positive impact on their writing and analytical skills, and more than half reported increases in their library research skills and understanding of current events. TAs reported in focus groups that the cluster courses promoted their intellectual development through exposure to new materials and ideas, top faculty, and the experience of teaching first-year students. Faculty members were not assessed on this topic.

Students reported that the cluster was more effective than other courses in promoting critical thinking and offering intellectual stimulation.

Community Building. Students were generally satisfied with the community building aspects of the clusters, although more so with the opportunities for interaction with peers and TAs than with faculty. Fifty-three percent reported that the cluster courses had a greater sense of community than non-cluster courses. TAs sought opportunities to be more fully involved in course design and planning. Academic coordinators identified five factors that enhanced community among faculty: (1) the number of faculty on a team, with three to four considered optimal; (2) sufficient time devoted to planning and team building; (3) reconciliation of differences in teaching styles; (4) learning how to integrate different perspectives and disciplines into a coherent whole; and (5) agreement about how to interact with one another in the classroom.

Productivity, Progress, and Achievement. The committee determined that insufficient time had elapsed to draw firm conclusions about this outcome. That said, freshmen who enrolled in cluster courses completed more units, on average, over the academic year than freshmen not enrolled in cluster courses. TAs and faculty "expressed some concern that the time commitments associated with participation in a cluster slowed their academic or career progress" (44).

Enthusiasm and Intellectual Excitement. "Students and TAs felt engaged in and enthusiastic about their cluster courses. Although this issue was not explored in depth for faculty, all four (academic) coordinators expressed an interest in teaching a cluster in the future. Students reported that the cluster was more effective than other courses in promoting critical thinking and offering intellectual stimulation. Most felt they learned more in the cluster than in other courses they had taken. Fully three-quarters considered the cluster a more rewarding experience than other courses taken during the freshman year. TAs also reported high levels of engagement in the course and intellectual stimulation" (44). Although only two-thirds of the students reported they were satisfied at year-end with the integration of material from different professors and the clarity of course themes, 93% expressed satisfaction with the spring seminars.

Recognition and External Rewards. This category considered whether the distribution of grades in cluster courses were about the same as other general education courses, and whether faculty and TAs received recognition from their departments for teaching a cluster course. "Students received about the same grades in their cluster courses as in other courses during fall and winter. They received slightly higher grades in their cluster course than other courses during spring" (45). TAs *believed* that their participation in a cluster "would enhance their marketability." Discussions with faculty coordinators did not pursue this issue.

What Makes This Report Notable

This internal report stands out in part because it very deliberately documents the learning community experience from multiple perspectives: students, faculty, and TAs. Unlike many reports, inputs and investments are presented in detail, including descriptions of student, faculty, and TA characteristics, as well as details about program administration and budget. There is a carefully-designed assessment framework, aligned to the program goals and outcomes, that delineates the guiding questions the committee sought to answer. Multiple approaches are used to collect information. The 45-page report is well-organized and very readable, making good use of tables and summaries to guide the reader.

The Evergreen State College

Overall, the study describes success: By this measure [intellectual development], the college is accomplishing its mission by providing an alternative model of collaborative, student-centered learning that works as well as, and apparently even better than, traditional educational systems to foster cognitive development. (2)

Description of the Program

The curriculum of The Evergreen State College (TESC) is almost entirely represented by interdisciplinary, team-taught, usually full-time and yearlong coordinated studies programs. Although students can engage in advanced work through independent contracts and internships, learning communities are the "norm," and experienced by almost all students at this liberal arts institution. At the conclusion of every program, students write a narrative self-evaluation that becomes part of a portfolio of materials that comprises their official transcript.

Assessment Approach

This retrospective longitudinal study by a faculty member who was part of the institution's Assessment Study Group focused on students' cognitive development, in an attempt to ascertain whether exposure to liberal arts curriculum within the context of a coordinated studies learning community structure helped students think in more complex ways. The study used William Perry's model of intellectual development as a theoretical framework, and employed the rating system developed to assess essays written for the Perry-based Measure of Intellectual Development to examine student self-evaluations for evidence of cognitive development. Self-evaluations were reviewed for all graduates in the classes of 1986-88 who were admitted to TESC as freshmen and graduated after four years—a total of 165 sets of records. The self-evaluations were submitted in random order to an independent rater who scored them. Mean ratings by class (e.g., freshman, sophomore, etc.) were compared against aggregate data collected nationally by the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development.

Findings

"The study shows that Evergreen students differ from students elsewhere in the complexity of cognitive structures which they employ at matriculation, in

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their development during the freshman year, and in their level of cognitive development at graduation. It provides a 'value added' measure, a gain in Perry rating from the freshman to the senior year; and it explores the magnitude and distribution of this kind of value added. It finds that most gain occurs in the freshman and senior years [a senior surge], and that freshmen who rank lower in cognitive development are likely to overtake those who initially rank higher. [What the study characterized as a tortoise and hare phenomenon.] It indicates that TESC tends to serve different demographic categories of students equally, and that all of TESC's modes of study contribute equally to cognitive development. Initially, gain in complexity of thought is fostered by interdisciplinary coordinated studies programs; but in the third year of coordinated studies, there is a point of slight diminution of returns, and more gain in cognitive development tends to accrue from advanced work in the contract mode (independent study and internships)" (1).

The program was designed to help students make progress toward five general education goals: critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, recognizing relationships, and recognizing and evaluating choices.

What Makes This Report Notable

This 83-page internal report stands out in large part because it is a well-written assessment study of a general education outcome (intellectual development) that was infrequently assessed among the 119 studies we looked at. In addition, this assessment study looked at intellectual development over the four-year span of students' undergraduate careers. Among those reports that studied intellectual development, most relied primarily, although not exclusively, on Likert scale items that asked students to self-report the extent to which they developed a particular skill, such as critical thinking. By contrast, this author submitted student writing to external ratings, and engaged in an in-depth, thoughtful analysis of the meaning and implications of the findings for the institution.

University of North Dakota

It may not be possible, or even desirable, to make Integrated Studies the mode of general education for all students; nonetheless, this study suggests that it can be an excellent place to learn about teaching . . . (41)

Description of the Program

The University of North Dakota (UND) established the Integrated Studies Program in 1986 as a means for students to fulfill their general education requirements. Faculty worked together to organize a cluster of three to five courses around a central theme. For example, faculty from biology, humanities and philosophy, and English organized a cluster entitled "Science and Myth" in the academic year covered by the assessment report. The program was designed to help students make progress toward five general education goals: critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, recognizing relationships, and recognizing and evaluating choices. Five major program activities included program meetings, book seminars, cooperative learning units (small group meetings related to the program theme), science/science labs, and writing workshops.

Assessment Approach

The four-member assessment committee took a qualitative approach to determine the kinds of activities, experiences, and opportunities that helped students experience growth in the UND's general education goals. Through analysis of student focus groups, interviews with faculty and staff, and student essays written expressly for this assessment project, the committee explored participants' perspectives. Each student focus group, which took place during regular class time, honed in on one of the five general education goals. Faculty and staff interviews, conducted individually, probed for background information on the program and insight into curriculum development and implementation. The essays were part of a midterm assignment that asked students to describe materials in their portfolios that provided evidence of the five general education goals, and to identify the opportunities in Integrated Studies that had contributed to their growth in those five areas. In addition to this work, the committee formally critiqued its own assessment process to analyze the effectiveness of its methods of inquiry.

Findings

The vast majority of students, faculty, and staff considered the general education goals to be threaded throughout the program. Each group could identify specific activities that contributed to individual goals; each group could also cite activities that addressed more than one goal. Although the activities are idiosyncratic to the Integrated Studies program, many are applicable to other learning community initiatives. For instance, students cited particular books that they had read and discussed in the book seminar when discussing experiences that had contributed to their ability to think critically or creatively. Or they talked about the value of an "I-Search Research Paper"—an investigative paper that asks students to tell the story of their search for information and investigation of a topic—that assisted with their ability to make progress toward the general education goal of communication. In the report's executive summary, the committee concluded that the Integrated Studies Program facilitated students' growth toward each of the five goals of General Education. Students attributed their growth to several factors: developing personal relationships with instructors and peers, expressing opinions and learning to respect the opinions of others, engaging in a variety of writing assignments with opportunities for revision, using literature to examine issues and ideas from a broad perspective, being encouraged to take risks, and being allowed an opportunity to assume responsibility for their own learning.

With respect to the critique of its process, the committee determined that the midterm essays worked well. Students received copies of the general education goals, along with guiding questions; students were given several days to develop their ideas and write their papers; and the essays were assigned in the context of the course and with the expectation that they would be evaluated by the faculty and included in the students' portfolios.

The committee also found that despite the fact that analysis of the student group interviews proved to be much less time-efficient than analysis of the essays, that limitation was offset in part by the richness of the data. The

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interviews were effective in eliciting information about activities that occurred after the midterm essays were written. In addition, the format allowed for group interaction, modeling a characteristic typical of Integrated Studies and providing opportunities for expansion and clarification of information. Two factors—conducting the interviews during class time and under condition of anonymity (students were assured that individual responses would not be identified by name)—may have helped boost participation and forthrightness.

Two factors—conducting the interviews during class time and under condition of anonymity (students were assured that individual responses would not be identified by name)—may have helped boost participation and forthrightness.

What Makes This Report Notable

This 45-page internal report excels at describing the environmental factors that define the University of North Dakota's Integrated Studies Program. There is voluminous detail about the program components: how it is taught, weekly schedules, book lists, and specific examples of the kinds of activities students engage in. By employing multiple methods (in this case, written essays, focus groups, and individual interviews) and by eliciting perspectives from student, faculty, and staff participants, a holistic picture of the program is generated. Implications of the findings, not only for the Integrated Studies Program, but also for general education and for teaching practices in general at UND, are explored. Finally, the report stands out because it is, in part, a meta-analysis that reflects upon the assessment process, a critique of the effectiveness of the approaches selected to meet the committee's goals.

Stony Brook University

Perhaps the least equivocal measure of the success of an academic program is that it increase the academic achievement of students as measured by course grades . . . A tendency for [learning community] students to achieve higher grades in their courses than other students is documented by data collected for 1999-2000 freshmen and for several semesters of large enrollment Social Science courses. The result for these large enrollment Social Science courses is particularly noteworthy. These courses are delivered in a lecture format and recitation sessions, where students would have the opportunity for discussion, are not provided. The Learning Communities linking seminar provides opportunities for discussion and integration with other courses. We believe, that as a consequence of these seminar-based discussions, which often continue outside of class, that [learning community] students achieve higher grades in these large enrollment courses. (9)

Description of the Program

Stony Brook University built each learning community around a cluster of three to five general education courses anchored by a linking seminar. The linking seminar helped students to develop learning skills and make connections across courses and disciplines. Each learning community enrolled a cohort of 25-30 freshmen who took the courses together. Faculty collaborated in the development and delivery of their courses, and met together twice a month to coordinate their work. Over the five-year period (1998-2003) discussed in the report, 19 thematic learning communities were supported. For instance, the fall

courses for a learning community built around the theme "Business in a Global Society" included Business in the 21st Century, Introduction to Psychology, and a Writing Workshop.

Assessment Approach

Stony Brook used quantitative methods (surveys, student evaluations, grades, retention rates) to collect information each semester about the general education learning community program. The assessment approach was designed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and to monitor its effectiveness in achieving the seven program objectives: (1) provide small class experiences and common courses, (2) link courses to each other and to a relevant societal context, (3) provide collaborative research experiences, (4) develop learning abilities in key areas, (5) promote collaborations among faculty and students, (6) develop interactive pedagogy that grants students ownership of their education and engages them in learning, and (7) guide students regarding academic requirements, the resources and opportunities of the university, their social and academic responsibilities, academic requirements, and their future careers.

Comparative data between learning community and non-learning community students was explored in a variety of ways. For instance, student growth along psychological, social, and experiential variables was measured by pre- and posttests that were administered twice to the same group of learning community and non-learning-community students. Student performance on chemistry quizzes, tests, and workshops was compared. Math Placement Examination scores, shown historically at Stony Brook to be correlated with academic achievement, were used to predict the performance of learning community and non-learning-community students.

The assessment approach was designed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and to monitor its effectiveness in achieving the seven program objectives . . .

Findings

The program's summary of major successes and key challenges, taken directly from the report, follow.

Summary of Major Successes
a) Achievement in course work for learning communities students generally was higher than predicted by MPE scores and higher than comparison groups of students.
b) Retention from fall to spring the first year and to the second year was higher than for other freshmen as was retention in specific course sequences, e.g., CHE 131, 132, 321.
c) Personal development was greater in a direction generally associated with better students who take control over their education.
d) Students claimed more positive educational experiences, faster integration into the university, and greater growth and personal development.
e) Students reported that the learning communities environment made it easy for them to make friends quickly, study together, and help each other.
f) Students recognized that linking courses to each other and to a relevant societal context improved their understanding of the issues.

g) Students appreciated having a linking seminar instructor who helped them be successful in all their courses by providing advice, supporting a collaborative learning environment, and helping them to develop essential learning skills.

h) Students identified that a student-centered classroom structure, which actively engaged them in learning, was more beneficial than a lecture format.

Summary of Key Challenges

a) The block schedules did not suit everyone: course meeting times occasionally had conflicts (primarily with jobs, sports, and personal preferences), the number of elective courses that a student could take was reduced, and it was perceived that opportunities to meet students outside the learning community were limited. Block schedules also required considerable time and effort to implement administratively on Stony Brook's registration system.

b) Instructors found it very time consuming to make connections among courses in the cluster and too often were discouraged by the lack of interest and participation by other instructors in the cluster.

c) A major challenge was involving faculty as linking seminar instructors. While many whole-heartedly supported the concept, they found teaching a linking seminar to be much more difficult and time consuming than teaching a standard course in their disciplines because of the multiple objectives given to the linking seminars. Consequently, 90% of the linking seminars were taught by outstanding graduate students. These graduate students generally were in the last year of their doctoral work, and most had won awards for excellence in teaching from their departments or from the university.

d) Only 50–75% of the students continued in a learning community from the fall semester to the spring semester. While essentially all of these students reported that they had a very positive experience and that a learning community was the way to get started at Stony Brook, they found the course clusters to be too constraining and sought more options, room for electives, and opportunities to meet others. It therefore is essential for the course cluster and linking seminar to have a high perceived value because students feel they have sacrificed their freedom of choice in schedules and courses to participate.

What Makes This Report Notable

This 26-page document is a final report to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which partially funded Stony Brook's learning community program. Perhaps because it was written for an external audience, it provides considerable detail about the context for the learning community, the nature of the students and how they compared to non-learning-community students, and the results of the various assessment measures. Data are clearly presented, with occasional graphs and tables enhancing the information. Goals and outcomes are carefully

aligned with the assessment approach. Implications of the work are detailed in a section that describes the impact of the learning community program on the larger Stony Brook community.

Freshman Learning Communities
Iowa State University

Because of the President's $1.5 million allocation in 1998 to support the development of learning communities over a three-year period, we felt that our assessment should address "bottom-line" accountability issues related to funding—Did the expenditure pay off? Were the results worth the cost? . . . (In those three years), the university realized $2.5 million in tuition savings associated with the higher retention rates of learning community participants, a 167% return on the original investment. (11-13)

Description of the Program

The learning community program at Iowa State University (ISU) began in the 1990s with residence-hall-based initiatives to support academic programs. Growth began in earnest when the university's president allocated $1.5 million to develop learning community programs, assess their impact, and formulate future plans. Three types of learning communities were developed, primarily for first-year students: course-based, residential, and course-based residential. Course-based learning communities were varied, often linking two or three courses, with an English course frequently included. One example of this configuration for students in Health and Human Performance included Health and Human Performance Orientation (1 credit), Anatomy and Physiology Lecture (3 credits of Zoology), and Introduction to Sociology (3 credits).

Course-based, residential learning communities were varied as well. For example, the Cross-cultural Learning Community brought together 10 students from the United States and 10 international or U.S. students whose first language was not English. Its purpose was to increase understanding and appreciation of human diversity and help students prepare for a global career. Students lived near each other in the residence halls and took the following courses together: Introduction to Music Listening (3 credits), Cross-Cultural Learning Community Seminar (1 credit), and Dialogues on Diversity (1 credit). In fall 2002, 46 learning communities were in place. Approximately one-third included a residential component.

Assessment Approach

An assessment subcommittee of the Learning Community Advisory Committee provided leadership for learning community assessment. This 12-15 person subcommittee was led by two faculty members with expertise in assessment and evaluation, and included representatives from the Department of Residence, the Office of the Registrar, and Institutional Research, as well as other interested parties. The subcommittee met roughly five times during a given semester.

The subcommittee developed a conceptual framework that included both summative and formative assessment components. Surveys assessed learning

community outcomes: communication skills; group/team problem solving; knowledge and skills related to the discipline; global, multicultural awareness and skills; orientation and transition skills; study skills; and retention/GPA. Surveys also assessed students' perceptions of their abilities in the following areas: career awareness, knowledge of the discipline, teamwork, time management, critical thinking/problem solving, written communication, oral communication, leadership, and diversity. In addition, comparisons were made of first-term GPAs, and one-, two-, three-, and four-year retention rates.

Findings

Locally-designed surveys were administered to first-time, full-time freshmen in the learning communities and in non-learning-community comparison groups. In the fall semesters of 2000 and 2001, a pretest-posttest design was used. Pretest results showed students from the two groups were more alike than different. For this reason, in the 2002 fall semester, a posttest-only design was used. In all three years of the survey, learning community students were more likely than control group students to report earning high grades, having professors with high expectations, understanding the nature of their anticipated major, having experiences that helped them reach their goals, and receiving prompt feedback about their progress.

They also were more satisfied with their opportunities to interact closely with faculty; receive support and advice from faculty; participate in clubs, organizations, and government; participate in study groups; practice their skills; and apply learning to real world problems. They spent more time studying in groups and in participating in community service/volunteer work. They reported greater satisfaction with the overall quality of their classmates and their overall experience at ISU.

By fall 2002, learning community students were more likely than the comparison groups to see connections among classes, and between personal experiences and class learning. They were also more satisfied with opportunities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. This finding had not been true in the earlier two years. There was *no* evidence to suggest that learning community students may have experienced greater learning gains than the comparison group in their perceptions of their abilities to perform in designated skill areas.

First-term GPA. First-term GPA was significantly higher for each of the three learning community cohorts than for the comparison groups, even after controlling for ACT scores and high school rank.

Retention and graduation rates. One-, two-, three-, and four-year retention rates were consistently and significantly higher for students who participated in the learning community classes. By the fourth year, 41% of learning community students in the 1998 cohort had graduated from ISU, compared to only 25% of the comparison group.

What Makes This Report Notable

This 31-page internal report stands out in part because it very methodically presents an overview of the history and development of learning communities at

First-term GPA was significantly higher for each of the three learning community cohorts than for the comparison groups, even after controlling for ACT scores and high school rank.

the institution. Its comprehensive review commits the initiative to institutional memory, and makes explicit its infrastructure. The report focuses on the process of developing and refining the assessment design, which gives the reader insight into the thinking that took place in selecting the methods. Also distinctive about this report is that it details the subcommittee's efforts to initiate a process of faculty development to help the faculty design effective assessments to facilitate student learning. A document called "Guidelines for Best Practice in Learning Community Assessment," which was prepared to make clear the importance of linking learning outcomes with assessment strategies, is appended to the report. Finally, the subcommittee's clear explanations of their efforts to quantify the savings realized by the greater retention rates of students in the learning community is instructive for other institutions seeking to document return on investment.

Its comprehensive review commits the initiative to institutional memory, and makes explicit its infrastructure.

University of Northern Colorado

Assessment data have been used in many ways to improve UNC's learning communities. The Program Review prepared by external evaluator Tompkins was especially important. It is likely that an initial purpose of this mandatory assessment, performed during a time of tight budget constraints, was to reduce resources allocated to these programs. Instead, Tompkins' comprehensive report resulted in the learning communities gaining much needed space, staff and funding, not to mention the credibility and respect that often come from endorsement by an outside expert. (43-44)

Description of the Program

The University of Northern Colorado (UNC) supported learning communities designed for five different groups of students. Each learning community co-enrolled students in two small (25 students or fewer) classes, or two small classes and one or more larger, linked general education classes. The two small classes were English and a one-credit, elective first-year seminar that was considered the "linchpin" of the learning communities' success because it held "all the other learning community elements together in a connected and stable whole" (24). The seminar was intended to help students adjust to college through extended orientation activities and topics. It also provided a forum for thematic or pre-professional activities related to the larger content classes.

Learning communities were designed for the following groups: conditionally-admitted students (*Freshmen Challenge Program)*, fully-admitted students *(Cluster Program)*, less well-prepared students—in the lowest 20% of admitted students *(Academic Advantage)*, students in the pre-professional health sciences *(Ascent)*, and students planning to become elementary teachers *(Class Act)*.

Assessment Approach

Over the 10 years of learning community implementation, a variety of assessment measures provided both formative and summative feedback about the program. Open-ended surveys of students and faculty were administered every

fall. Questions were revised somewhat each year, but focused on responses to program goals and specific activities. A computerized program evaluation questionnaire was developed and administered for the first time in fall 1999 to supplement the qualitative data elicited from the open-ended surveys and to provide quantitative data about student satisfaction with their first semester experience. In addition, retention and graduation rates were tracked.

Interviews and focus groups were used occasionally. For instance, in 1997, an outside evaluator conducted interviews and focus groups with faculty, administrators and students. Then, in 2001, as part of a class assignment, doctoral students conducted focus groups with current (freshman) and former (upper division) learning community students.

Over the years, retention rates have been higher from fall to spring and from fall to fall for learning community students vs. non-learning-community students.

Findings

Student perspectives on program benefits. Over the years, students repeatedly mentioned the following benefits of learning community involvement: (1) making friends and adjusting to college, (2) getting needed classes and good schedules, (3) getting to know professors, friends, and study partners, (4) understanding interdisciplinary connections, and (5) receiving help with major and career planning, and scheduling. In the quantitative analyses of the 2001 program evaluations, the perceptions of students enrolled in the five learning communities were significantly more positive than non-learning community students in their responses to twelve Likert-style questions related to their first semester experience.

Faculty perspectives on program benefits. Faculty "appreciated the relationships formed student to student, professor to student, and professor to professor" and the intellectual challenge of planning and working on interdisciplinary themes. Frustrations centered on administrative issues (e.g., students registering for the "wrong" cluster) or individual student concerns.

Retention rates. Over the years, retention rates have been higher from fall to spring and from fall to fall for learning community students vs. non-learning-community students. For instance, in fall 2001, the retention rate from fall to spring was 92.8% for all learning community students and 87.3% for non-learning-community students. Fall-to-fall retention was 72% for learning community students; 66% for non-learning-community students. These trends have held even for those freshmen admitted with the lowest academic index scores. Minority student retention was not significantly impacted by learning community participation.

Performance rates. Average grades for learning community students were only slightly higher than for non-learning-community students. The mean GPA for all learning community students in the fall 2001 cohort was 2.9, compared to 2.83 for the non-learning-community students. Students in learning communities were less likely to be placed on academic probation (e.g., 11.5% of learning community students in the fall 2001 cohort were placed on academic probation in spring 2002, compared to 13.1% of the non-learning-community students.)

Graduation rates. Four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates vary by learning community program. Regardless of admissions index scores, students enrolled in the *Cluster* learning community graduated at higher rates than non-learning-community students. Over five cohort years, the differences between the six-year graduation rates of *Cluster* students vs. non-learning-community students ranged from a 4.3% to 24.7%. Students enrolled in the *Advantage* program fared less well. Over four cohort years, six-year graduation rates for *Advantage* students ranged from 17.4 percentage points *lower* to 1.2 percentage points *higher* than for non-learning-community students. Given the *Advantage* students' lower index scores, the report characterized these results as demonstrating that "this group actually does quite well" (42). For the one cohort of *Ascent* students that six-year graduation rates could be tracked, 51.9% of *Ascent* students graduated vs. 47.7% of non-learning-community students. Only one cohort of *Class Act* students could be assessed for graduation rates at the time of the report. The four-year graduation rate for *Class Act* students was 44.9%, compared to 26.8% for the non-learning-community students.

All the professors and graduate assistants we interviewed reported that teaching in a learning community had affected their pedagogy and/or their perspective on teaching and learning in some way . . .

What Makes This Report Notable

This 52-page internal report is a very readable, thorough description of the evolution of UNC's 10-year learning community initiative. It describes the development and institutional investment into the program, and provides descriptions of each type of learning community that help someone unfamiliar with the program to understand the intent and structure. Activities of the first-year seminar, a common denominator among all the learning communities, are outlined in detail. The assessment design incorporates multiple methods of assessment, and clearly aligns goals and outcomes. The report discusses the benefits of bringing in an outside evaluator at a critical point in the program's life cycle. It also provides ample evidence of the ways assessment feedback was used to improve the program, while at the same time addressing the challenges in difficult budget times of maintaining a program that summative data suggests has been successful on many levels.

Temple University

All the professors and graduate assistants we interviewed reported that teaching in a learning community had affected their pedagogy and/or their perspective on teaching and learning in some way . . . Professors, with more teaching experience and a longer term commitment to Temple, were particularly energized by the experience; it seemed to provide an opportunity and an impetus to reinvent aspects of their teaching. (Executive Summary)

Description of the Program

Temple University introduced learning communities in 1993 in three different schools/colleges: Business and Management, Communication and Theater, and Arts and Sciences. The purpose of the learning communities was to improve freshman students' first semester experience and to enhance retention. While the basic, linked-course structure of the learning community was similar in

all three schools, there were distinct differences in the kinds of courses linked, the extent to which students shared majors/interest, the ways the Freshman Seminar was used, how the learning communities were linked to other school-wide initiatives, and the degree of school or department-wide coordination. For instance, the School of Business and Management was the only school to link the Freshman Seminar to the learning community classes so that the same group of students attended the three courses (lecture, writing course, and Freshman Seminar) together. In the School of Communications and Theater, students were required to take the Freshman Seminar, but they did not take it with the same students who were in their two linked, learning community courses (lecture plus writing course). Similarly, the Freshman Seminar was not linked to the learning community courses (lecture and/or psychology recitation course plus math course) taken by students in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Assessment Approach

Because the learning community program was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Temple contracted with an outside evaluator to conduct an assessment of the program's implementation. The evaluator designed a qualitative approach that involved observations of all three learning communities; shadowing of, and in-depth interviews with six students; focus groups with students; and in-depth interviews with the nine learning community faculty and with 21 university administrators.

Findings

Findings are organized into four different areas: shape and supporting structures of learning communities; student experience, faculty, and institutional interrelationships. Some of these findings follow:

Shape of learning communities. In addition to noting differences in how the learning communities were structured in the three schools, the report also addressed the differences in the structure of the Freshman Seminar and its connection to the learning communities. The topic of interdisciplinarity in the learning community drew many varied opinions. The report noted that "interdisciplinary connections between learning communities are valued very differently by different program stakeholders, with most prioritizing other program features" (7). When the evaluators asked the LC faculty about the learning community goals, only two mentioned interdisciplinary collaboration.

Student experience. The report profiles two students' experiences, one a residential, the other a commuter student, to describe the variety of needs and experiences with which students enter and leave the learning communities. It uses those profiles to set the stage for a set of four broader observations: (1) many students enter the learning community with minimal awareness of its potential value, although most eventually come to value the experience; (2) commuters face more barriers in realizing the full benefits of learning communities (e.g., building social connections, becoming active in campus organizations, feeling part of the campus community); (3) students identified

group work and caring faculty as two factors that helped them to engage academically during their first semester, and (4) students felt learning communities helped them connect socially with other students.

Faculty. The report details seven findings about the faculty and graduate assistants (GAs).

a) The learning community structure allowed sufficient flexibility for faculty to integrate their own interests and priorities.
b) All the faculty and GAs reported that teaching in a learning community had affected their pedagogy and/or their perspective on teaching and learning in some way.
c) Faculty identified "helping students successfully make the transition from high school to college" as a key goal of the learning community.
d) Faculty thought the learning community students were more connected to their peers than non-learning-community students, and cited a variety of outcomes of these connections, including speaking out more, having greater confidence to ask questions, and being more receptive to group work. A down side to those connections was a concern that students were more likely to unite in resistance to academic work.
e) Faculty reported difficulty in scheduling out-of-class social or academic activities.
f) Although the extensive use of GAs in learning communities has the potential for supporting their growth and development as teachers, the status disparities among GAs and faculty "affects the possibilities for what learning communities can be and do" (33).
g) Faculty involvement in learning communities is hindered by the culture of commuting, requirements that work against faculty choosing to teach smaller classes, and pressure to invest time in research rather than teaching.

Institutional supports/structures. Generally, faculty spoke positively about the accessibility, commitment, and support provided to them by the learning communities office and staff. Administrators, even those only marginally familiar with the learning community effort, backed the learning community initiative and saw it as supporting their own work.

Administrators, even those only marginally familiar with the learning community effort, backed the learning community initiative and saw it as supporting their own work.

What Makes This Report Notable

This 44-page report to a granting agency is notable because it is a qualitative study that looked in-depth at the success of an initiative from multiple perspectives: faculty, graduate assistants, administrators, and students. Although one primary program goal was to improve retention, this is not a retention study. Rather, the study uses multiple methods (interviews, focus groups, shadowing, observation) to gather information about the second program goal: to improve freshman students' first semester experience. The report clearly states the themes that emerged from the study and provides ample quotes within the narrative to add a strong sense of voice. It points up both the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and makes many recommendations about future directions.

Living-Learning Learning Communities
University of Massachusetts Amherst

These results clearly suggest that a variety of fairly humble learning community models can have a number of positive effects on the first-year student experience. These positive effects are not limited to those models that are highly coordinated or have extensive faculty involvement, nor are they dependent upon selective student enrollments. (609)

An institutionally-designed survey administered at the end of the first semester elicited students' perceptions about their academic and social integration at the college.

Description of the Program

The University of Massachusetts Amherst supported three different types of living/learning communities for first-year students. More than 700 students enrolled in a *Residential Academic Program (RAP)*, which enabled students to live in a common residence hall and enroll in a common writing course. Students could also enroll in general education courses that were taught in the residence hall. By contrast, the *Talent Advancement Program (TAP)* was a "selective learning community that invites students with specific majors to enroll in a learning community program designed by their major department" (8). The 300-plus *TAP* students took at least two courses and a freshman seminar together. The third program, the *Honors College Learning Community*, was open only to those students admitted to the *Honors College*. Students enrolled in thematic learning communities and in two honors general education courses per semester.

Assessment Approach

The author used quantitative methods to compare the characteristics and experiences of students *across* the three types of living-learning experiences, and *with* students not taking part in living-learning experiences at all. Longitudinal data documented students' entering characteristics and academic preparation and tracked their academic performance and enrollment patterns through the first year. An institutionally-designed survey administered at the end of the first semester elicited students' perceptions about their academic and social integration at the college.

Findings

The study compared the four groups of students (those in three learning community programs and those not in a learning community) by entering student characteristics, academic performance and one-year retention, and social and academic integration experiences at the end of first semester.

Entering Student Characteristics. As expected due to the selective nature of the *TAP* and *Honors* learning communities, high school GPA and SAT scores were higher for students in those two communities than they were for students in the *RAP* living/learning program or for students not enrolled in a living/learning program. In general, fewer students of color were in the learning communities than in the non-learning-community group, and more women were in the *RAP* program than in any of the other groups. Other characteristics considered included in-state/out-of-state status, enrollment in special support academic and social programs, and academic major affiliation.

Academic Performance and One-Year Retention. Each living/learning program had a statistically significant, positive effect on first-semester GPA even after all entering characteristics were taken into consideration. Students in the learning communities had higher first semester GPAs than students not in the learning communities. Retention patterns were more complex. Learning community students in the 1999 cohort, in all three programs, were significantly less likely to leave after their first year than non-learning-community students. In the 2000 cohort, patterns were similar for two of the learning community programs (*TAP* and *RAP*), but not so for the *Honors* program. Voluntary withdrawals and academic dismissals for students in the learning communities were lower than they were in the non-learning communities.

Social and Academic Integration. Learning community and non-learning-community students had few differences in their perceptions of their general social adjustment to college. Students in learning communities reported significantly less exposure to racial and ethnic diversity (perhaps because there were fewer students of color in the learning communities). Within the learning community programs, students in the *Honors* program reported significantly more exposure to diversity in values.

More differences were apparent with students' academic integration experiences. Students in learning communities reported significantly greater opportunities for academic work with peers and group projects. They were significantly more likely than their non-learning-community peers to report acquiring positive academic behaviors, spending more hours studying, experiencing a positive learning environment, and engaging in more coursework that required integration of ideas. Within the learning community programs, students in the *Honors* program were more likely to report positive academic behaviors. Students in the *TAP* program reported they spent more hours studying than students in the *RAP* program. *TAP* program students also reported more academic work with peers and more group project work than students in the other two learning communities.

There were no significant differences in the amount of faculty contact reported for students in the learning community and non-learning-community programs, nor were there significant differences in faculty contact reported among students in the three learning community programs.

What Makes This Report Notable

This report is written by the director of assessment and submitted as an article for publication. Because it was prepared for a formal, external audience, it adheres to the format and standards of the intended publication, and includes sections (e.g., literature review) that might not typically be part of an internal assessment report. Inclusion of the literature review provides a rich context and background that clarifies the importance of the study, raises important issues in the field, and defines to all audiences (including those at the home university) how the on-campus programs "fit" with current thinking in higher education. Inputs, in the form of entering student characteristics, are described thoroughly,

They were significantly more likely than their non-learning-community peers to report acquiring positive academic behaviors, spending more hours studying, experiencing a positive learning environment, and engaging in more coursework that required integration of ideas.

and sufficient information is provided about the living/learning programs to understand the environment. Data analysis is robust; goals and outcomes are clearly aligned. The discussion throughout the report is rich and reflective, and uses the data to provide answers while allowing it at the same time to illuminate complexities.

The discussion throughout the report is rich and reflective, and uses the data to provide answers while allowing it at the same time to illuminate complexities.

University of Michigan

The title of this report, "A Tide on Which All Boats Rise" is a direct reference to a quote by Claude Steele and associates (1996) and alludes to the fact that living-learning programs seem to improve the outcomes in all *types of communities and beyond. (26)*

Description of the Program

The eight living-learning programs at the University of Michigan were categorized into three broad areas: four-year academic programs, transition programs, and academic initiative programs. The four-year academic programs, including the Honors Program and Residential College, consisted of programs students could participate in during all four years of their college careers. The transition programs that served first- and second-year students focused on first-year retention and achievement, as well as general issues of transition to college. Academic initiative programs (e.g., the Women in Science and Engineering Residence Program) provided opportunities for a subset of students enrolled in non-residence-based academic programs to have a living/learning experience. Among the 8,674 students who lived in the university residence halls, 1,568 chose to participate in living/learning programs.

Assessment Approach

University of Michigan used a quantitative approach to study the impact of its living-learning programs. By administering an institution-designed survey to all residence hall students, the university was able to compare the academic, intellectual, social, and environmental outcomes for living-learning vs. non-living-learning participants. In addition, the university compared outcomes among the different types of living-learning programs.

Findings

Results comparing the perceptions of living-learning and non-living-learning students were categorized under six topics: transition to college, interpersonal communication, interactions with faculty, residence hall perceptions, extra-curricular involvement, and academic and intellectual outcomes. Where differences were noted, the differences were statistically significant.

Transition to college. Both living-learning and non-living-learning participants reported an equal amount of ease in making social transitions to college. Living-learning participants reported greater ease in managing new responsibilities (time, money, etc.).

Interpersonal communication. Living-learning and non-living-learning participants were almost equally likely to discuss academic issues with other

students, but living-learning participants were more likely than non-living-learning participants to discuss societal and cultural issues with their peers. Non-living-learning students who lived in a residence hall with a living-learning program discussed sociocultural issues more frequently than those students who lived in halls where there were no living-learning programs, suggesting that "a living-learning presence in a hall seems to have an effect on *all* students' discussions about social issues" (52).

Interactions with faculty. Living-learning students interacted more frequently on a face-to-face level with faculty members outside of class than did non-living-learning students. Living-learning and non-living-learning students interacted with faculty through e-mail communication at about the same rate.

Residence hall perceptions. Living-learning participants were more likely to perceive their residence halls to be socially supportive and tolerant and academically supportive than their non living-learning peers.

Extra-curricular involvement. With the exception of intramural or intercollegiate athletics, living-learning students were more involved in extra-curricular activities than non-living-learning participants.

Academic and intellectual outcomes. Living-learning participants self-reported higher mean college grade point averages than non-living-learning participants, and were more likely than their non-living-learning counterparts to indicate that they liked taking courses and learning course materials that helped them learn more about themselves. They were also more likely to report that they "prefer cognitive complexity and challenging existing beliefs."

What Makes This Report Notable

This 63-page internal report stands out because it was very deliberately written for two purposes: to inform the University of Michigan community about the impact of its long-standing living-learning programs, and to contribute to what the author characterized as a "surprising" lack of published research about the effectiveness of living-learning programs. The report contains extensive information about the characteristics of the students, with differences between the living-learning and non-living-learning groups analyzed carefully. Each living-learning program is described so the reader has at least a cursory understanding of how each program works. Data are clearly presented, and limitations (particularly the need for additional cohort and longitudinal data to establish trends over time) are duly noted. Implications and recommendations are put forth for consideration. Inclusion of the complete survey in the appendix makes the instrument easily accessible.

Academic Major Learning Communities
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
We knew that faculty members were going to be suspicious of the assessment effort. To ensure credibility, it was assigned to people who did not work in the College of Engineering . . . Even before the pilot began, a great deal of effort was put into finding appropriate comparison groups and being careful to understand the statistical limitations associated with the modest population sizes in the pilot as well as the traditional program. (2)

Description of the Program

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth introduced in 1998 an integrated, first-year curriculum that "dramatically changed 31 credits across two semesters." The IMPULSE (Integrated Math, Physics and Undergraduate Laboratory Science, English and Engineering) program was intended to help students improve learning in the fundamentals, teamwork skills, communication skills, cross-disciplinary problem solving, and attrition rates, particularly among women and minorities. The faculty deliberately built into the curriculum the following elements: integration of multiple subjects (particularly calculus and physics), required teamwork among students and faculty, active and cooperative learning, formation of a learning community of students and faculty, and rigorous assessment to evaluate and improve performance. Faculty met each week during the semester to coordinate the integrated aspects of the subjects.

Assessment Approach

The assessment approach was designed with an eye toward the types of issues and concerns faculty were likely to raise. For this reason, matched comparison groups were created on the basis of test scores (Calculus Placement Test, SAT Math and Verbal), and high school GPA. Concerns about potential differences in the characteristics of volunteers vs. non-volunteers were allayed by randomly selecting the IMPULSE students from the population of all first-time, full-time calculus-ready engineering students. All students selected opted to take the program. Quantitative measures were used to determine differences among the groups in attendance, credits earned in the first semester, and learning performance, as measured by final exam scores, pre/posttests such as the Force Concept Inventory, and pre/post writing samples.

Findings

IMPULSE students earned more credits in their first semester than students in two matched comparison groups (15.8 vs. 10.6 and 12.5). Their calculus exam scores were on average one and a half letter-grades higher on common exam questions than those of students in a matched comparison group. Only 4% of IMPULSE students did *not* take the calculus final exam, compared to 28% of the students in the control group.

Similarly, only 2% of IMPULSE students did *not* take the final exam in physics, compared to 40% in the comparison physics class. Comparisons of gain scores on the Force Concept Inventory (FCI) were complicated in part because the IMPULSE program brought about changes in the ways the comparative, traditional physics courses were taught. Introduction of active learning techniques and hands-on exercises into the traditional classes diluted, in effect, some of the distinctions from the IMPULSE program courses. Furthermore, fewer of the students in the comparison courses were freshmen. That said, during one semester, the FCI normalized gain scores for the IMPULSE physics course were slightly lower (30%) than the traditional class (32%). No significant differences were found in common final chemistry exam scores.

This six-page conference paper is a well-written, succinct description of the nature and impact of a significant reform. Goals and outcomes are aligned, and the assessment measures carefully document the student outcomes. This paper is distinctive because a good portion of it is dedicated to a description of the controversy evoked when the assessment data suggested that change could be good. Reflections about the faculty's reactions to the prospect of "sudden and dramatic change" address the import of "working myths." The latter half of the report describes the approaches adopted to respond to the myths, and to the underlying concerns that prompted their fierce defense.

Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology

There appears to be universal agreement that students who have participated in IFYCSEM have not, on the average, been hindered in their subsequent academic careers. This conclusion is important because faculty, in general, are pleased with the traditional curriculum and are concerned that significant changes may hurt students. (4)

Description of the Program

The Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology invested seven years in implementing and refining an Integrated First-Year Curriculum in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics (IFYCSEM) to help graduates integrate knowledge, improve problem-solving strategies, and work and learn better in teams. Each quarter, students took 12-credit courses which integrated concepts across the three disciplines. Specifically, the yearlong curriculum integrated concepts across calculus, mechanics, engineering statics, electricity and magnetism, general chemistry, computer science, engineering graphics and engineering design. An eight-member interdisciplinary faculty team taught the IFYCSEM to 90 students in three sections.

Assessment Approach

Rose-Hulman used multiple methods to collect both summative and formative assessment data. Summative data included statistical analyses of grades and persistence data, as well as "posttesting at the sophomore and senior levels on selected performance and attitudinal characteristics." In a blind study that compared students from the IFYCSEM program, the matched comparison group, and students chosen at random from the same entering class, faculty rated 10 students from their class on five attributes: (1) develops ideas to their appropriate conclusions, (2) relates new experiences and concepts to prior knowledge and experiences, (3) communicates ideas effectively and easily, (4) demonstrates an attitude which is appropriate for learning, and (5) integrates the use of the computer for problem-solving. In addition, faculty were asked to predict the type of scientist or engineer they projected the student would become. Faculty used a variety of methods to elicit formative data from students, getting feedback at informal meetings; at scheduled, biweekly meetings of a student-elected IFYCSEM Council with IFYCSEM faculty; and through end-of-quarter evaluations.

This report summarized six years of retention and academic success data that compare IFYCSEM students with those in a matched comparison group. Students who completed the IFYCSEM program had significantly higher persistence rates at the institution and higher grade point averages in upper-level courses.

On the ratings of the six attributes, faculty rated IFYCSEM students significantly higher than students in the matched comparison group and students chosen randomly from the entering class.

What Makes This Report Notable

This seven-page conference paper succinctly presents information about the nature and impact of a significant reform. Goals and outcomes are clearly aligned, and there is sufficient background about the environmental context of the curriculum innovation to understand its key elements. Statistical analyses for retention and GPA are presented in table form so that it is easy graphically to see the trends over the years. The blind study of student attributes contributes to the multi-method approach and adds a layer of complexity to what otherwise would be a relatively straightforward retention and GPA study. The emphasis on formative and summative approaches and the accompanying discussion of program changes underscore the institution's efforts to collect data for the purpose of improving and proving the impact of the program.

University of Texas at El Paso

Based on the stability of one-year retention rates across five years, we claim that the entering students program can prevent students from leaving the university or STEM after the first year. (13)

Description of the Program

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) was one of six minority-serving institutions funded by the National Science Foundation in 1995 to develop models for undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education that would: (1) increase student persistence, graduation and success, (2) improve the quality of STEM programs, and (3) increase diversity in STEM professions and graduate programs. In response, UTEP developed the Circles of Learning for Entering Students (CircLES) program for all entering students in the Colleges of Engineering and Science. The CircLES program included participation in a one-week summer orientation and enrollment during the first semester in a three- or four-course cluster consisting of a math course, English course, science- or engineering-oriented freshman seminar, and (for most) an introductory course in their chosen major. Student advising activities were held throughout the year.

Assessment Approach

UTEP administered questionnaires to students at the end of the fall semester to elicit their perceptions about the impact of classroom activities and

Goals and outcomes are clearly aligned, and there is sufficient background about the environmental context of the curriculum innovation to understand its key elements.

pedagogical strategies upon their learning, the frequency with which activities occurred, and the overall impact of the program.

Retention data for CircLES students were tracked for four years and compared to a fifth, baseline year. CircLES students were those who had declared a major in STEM, participated in the one-week orientation, and enrolled in the clustered STEM learning community. Students in the baseline year did not take part in the CircLES program. The retention data was disaggregated by mathematics placement, ethnicity, gender, and college.

Findings

Students in the three cohorts evaluated reported that "about half the time" or "more than half the time" participation in clustered courses "provided them with opportunities to interact with professors, encouraged them to work with other students to complete a project, encouraged respect for others, encouraged respect for diverse ideas, increased confidence in their ability to do well in math, and increased their interest in STEM." Trend data over three years suggested that student perceptions about the usefulness of cluster activities (such as writing papers, using e-mail and the Internet) or outcomes (such as working effectively with others, managing time) "increased as the program matured."

One-year university retention. The combined, one-year retention rate (80%) for four cohorts of CircLES students was significantly higher than the one-year retention rate (68%) of students in the baseline year.

One-year retention in STEM. The combined, one-year retention rate (71%) in STEM disciplines for four cohorts of CircLES students was significantly higher than the one-year retention rate (56%) in STEM disciplines of students in the baseline year.

One-year retention for students in developmental mathematics. Retention of students enrolled in a CircLES cluster that included developmental mathematics was significantly higher than for students enrolled in developmental mathematics during the baseline year. The percentage of students retained varied 75–79% over each of four CircLES cohort years. By comparison, 63% of the students were retained in the baseline year.

One-year retention for students in pre-calculus and calculus. There were no significant differences in retention for students in a CircLES cluster that included college-level pre-calculus and calculus mathematics courses, and for students enrolled in those courses during the baseline year.

One-year retention for students by gender. Retention of male students enrolled in a CircLES cluster was significantly higher than for male students in the baseline year. The percentage of male students retained varied 77–81% over each of four CircLES cohort years. By comparison, 67% of the male students were retained in the baseline year. There were no significant differences in retention for female students.

One-year retention for students by ethnicity. Retention of Hispanic students enrolled in a CircLES cluster was significantly higher than for Hispanic students in the baseline year. The percentage of students retained varied 79–81% over each of four CircLES cohort years. By comparison, 69% of the students were

retained in the baseline year. There were no significant differences in retention for non-Hispanic students.

One-year retention for students by college and gender. Retention of female engineering students, male engineering students, and male science students enrolled in a CircLES cluster was marginally significantly higher than for students in the baseline year. There were no significant differences in retention for female science students.

Multi-year STEM retention. The combined, two-year retention rate (55%) in STEM disciplines for three cohorts of CircLES students was significantly higher than the two-year retention rate (41%) in STEM disciplines of students in the baseline year. Similarly, the combined, three-year retention rate (47%) in STEM disciplines for two cohorts of CircLES students was significantly higher than the three-year retention rate (32%) in STEM disciplines of students in the baseline year.

What Makes This Report Notable

The UTEP report stands out because it describes the impact of a learning community initiative on different groups of students over time. Because the institution serves a large population of Hispanic students, this study is one of the few that looks at the impact of learning communities on large numbers of students of color. As a retention study, the goals to increase student persistence and improve academic performance are clearly aligned with the outcomes studied. The 18-page conference paper contains many tables and charts that make the five-year trends easy to access.

Western Washington University

The project has been successful, confirming our belief that pre-law education can be made a more effective vehicle for increasing the representation of traditionally underrepresented communities in the legal profession. Our work on the project and the subsequent evaluation of the project have confirmed most of the choices we made at the inception of the program, for example, the cohort learning model and the interdisciplinary, skills-intensive curriculum and led us to new ways to better serve our students. (30)

Description of the Program

"The Law and Diversity Program was designed to help increase the representation of minority communities in the legal profession by developing a pool of non-traditional students applying to law school" (4). Fairhaven College, an interdisciplinary college at Western Washington University (WWU), developed a two-year, cohort-learning model where students took classes together and met each week for an Integrative Seminar. In response to law school suggestions that the curriculum focus on developing the skills needed in law school, courses were selected for their intellectually challenging content and for their emphasis on critical thinking, learning, reading, writing, research, analytical, and verbal skills. For instance, in their first quarter in the program, students took five-credit courses in the American Legal System and American Political System,

The project has been successful, confirming our belief that pre-law education can be made a more effective vehicle for increasing the representation of traditionally underrepresented communities in the legal profession.

in addition to the five-credit Integrative Seminar. During their last quarter, students completed an internship designed to give them work experience that would enable them to apply the skills developed in the program.

WWU committed one FTE to the program, which enabled two faculty members to coordinate the program and teach the core program classes. The program received additional support from a FIPSE grant. A master learner (a faculty member who took classes with the students and helped them integrate the courses) took part in the first quarter of the program, but funding constraints forced this component to be abandoned.

Assessment Approach

Multiple assessment methods, some qualitative and some quantitative, were used in the program. Qualitative data included student self-evaluations, written each quarter; writing portfolios to track the development of writing skills over time; video documentary to explore students' experiences; focus groups with faculty and students to identify program strengths and needed areas of improvement; and interviews of program graduates and law/graduate school faculty and staff to provide opportunities for reflection about program impact and to recommend improvements. A total of 29 focus groups or individual interviews were conducted in 1995-96.

Quantitative data included retention statistics, grades, and a comparison of final LSAT scores with diagnostic practice scores collected prior to the start of a commercial LSAT preparation course.

Findings

The report assessed specific components of the program, including the cohort learning model and experience with fellow students; faculty; personal support services, including financial and counseling support; curriculum, including the Integrative Seminar; use of self-evaluations instead of grades; LSAT preparation course; pre-law and other post graduation advising; opportunities to meet lawyers, and judges and to visit law schools and the courts; and the internship experience. Findings related to three of these components are described below.

Cohort learning model and experience with fellow students. All 29 alumni felt that the overall experience was positive, based on group support, learning to work with others, and appreciation for people from diverse backgrounds. At the same time, they identified some negative aspects: conflicts within the cohort, the intensity of the two-year experience, the lack of new points of view, and difficulty experienced by people who did not want to be part of the group.

Curriculum, including the Integrative Seminar. Feedback about the curriculum centered largely on flexibility to allow students opportunities to take more electives. The Integrative Seminar was regarded positively, and cited for its usefulness in "tying courses together, helping to highlight points made in other classes, focusing on skill development, . . . providing a forum for handling housekeeping tasks for the program, group bonding and conflict resolution" (22). It was criticized for lacking structure and discontinuing the practice of including a master learner.

Self-evaluation vs. grades. Students acknowledged benefits and drawbacks to the practice of self-evaluation. All alumni felt that the self-evaluations had a "very positive impact on their educations because they gave students the skills to evaluate themselves in future endeavors and not rely on outside assessments, focused their attention on learning instead of grades, provided faculty narrative responses which gave them a good idea of their strengths and what they needed to work on, and better reflected actual effort and learning" (23). Nevertheless, students worried that the narrative evaluations would negatively impact their applications to grade-driven graduate schools, although there was little evidence to support that fear. Sixteen of the 29 alumni applied to law school; 12 were accepted. Two students entered graduate programs. Most of the remaining alumni sought employment in lieu of going immediately on for more schooling.

What Makes This Report Notable

This comprehensive 264-page final report to a granting agency is prepared in two volumes, with the second volume consisting entirely of appendices. FIPSE funding helped to support the extensive, multi-method assessment approach, and much of the data (including transcripts from interviews) are included in the report. Although the sheer size of the report is intimidating, the first 30 pages synthesize clearly the characteristics of the students, program goals, curricular environment, assessment approaches, and results of the Law and Diversity Program. Moreover, the report describes both the strengths and limitations of the program, and comments throughout on how the results were used in formative ways to make needed changes.

University of Wisconsin-Madison

The (Women in Science and Engineering–Residential Program) WISE–RP had a surprisingly large effect on student drinking behavior. WISE women reported relatively high levels of alcohol abstinence and low levels of binge drinking . . . This unanticipated result suggests communities' subtle power to reinforce positive values, which may also be affecting both immediate academic and long-term career outcomes. (10)

Description of the Program

The University of Wisconsin-Madison created the Women in Science and Engineering–Residential Program (WISE–RP) in 1995 to increase the persistence of women in science and engineering careers. Students who elected to participate in the program: (1) lived with other science and engineering majors, (2) took foundation chemistry courses together, and (3) attended a series of special events (e.g., group attendance at plays, concerts; lectures by women in science and engineering careers, etc.). Although the program was designed for freshmen, some WISE–RP students continued to live together in the same residence hall during their sophomore year and participated in the WISE–RP programming. Generally, about 60% of the students were interested in biology and 25% in engineering; the rest expressed interest in other science or math disciplines.

All alumni felt that the self-evaluations had a "very positive impact on their educations because they gave students the skills to evaluate themselves in future endeavors and not rely on outside assessments, focused their attention on learning instead of grades . . . "

The institution emphasized formative assessment during the first two years of the program, relying on informal interviews and e-mail surveys to improve the program. During the third year, when features of the program "were no longer in constant flux," more formal, summative assessment procedures were put into place. Two surveys, a satisfaction survey and an institution-designed Learning Community (LC) Questionnaire, were administered. The LC Questionnaire was administered to WISE–RP participants and a control group of freshman women to collect information about "family educational background, intended college major, professional ambitions, life goals, values, interactions with faculty and fellow students, residence hall and campus life, and alcohol use and its effects." In addition, quantitative data such as high school rank, ACT scores, college grades, course enrollment data, and average class grades in chemistry classes were analyzed.

Findings

Some of the findings from the surveys and data analyses are presented here. The report contained only highlights from the LC Questionnaire, indicating that a more comprehensive analysis would be published in another document.

First semester GPA. In each of three years, WISE–RP students earned significantly higher grades than students in the control group, after controlling for differences in entering ACT scores. For example, mean WISE–RP grades in the third year were 3.39, compared to 3.07 for the control group. WISE–RP grades were higher despite reports on the LC Questionnaire that WISE–RP students and control group students spent similar amounts of time studying.

Grades in chemistry. Mean grades for students in the WISE sections of the chemistry courses were significantly higher than the mean grades for students in the non-WISE sections and the mean grades for WISE students *not* in the WISE sections. For example, mean grades in the first semester chemistry course were 3.55 for WISE–RP students and 2.71 for students in the control group.

Satisfaction. WISE-RP students reported high levels of satisfaction in general, and were significantly more likely to report satisfaction with their choice of UW-Madison.

Academic and Social Integration. A much higher percentage (64.5% vs. 30.8%) of students in WISE–RP vs. the control group reported that they had studied or discussed courses four or more times with other students in their residence hall during the two weeks prior to the administration of the LC Questionnaire. WISE–RP students were also significantly more likely to have participated in campus-wise student activities, and to have received "helpful academic feedback from a faculty member" in the previous semester.

Alcohol use. WISE–RP students were significantly more likely than students in the control group to abstain from drinking and to report less binge drinking behavior. For example, 46.7% of WISE–RP students reported that they had not consumed alcoholic beverages on more than one occasion since arriving at the university, compared to 12.3% of students in the control group.

Perhaps because this 13-page article was written for an external audience, it provides important context for the development of the WISE–RP initiative—why it was developed and what problems it was attempting to solve. Additional program inputs (characteristics of the students, institutional investment) are given, not in great detail, but enough to understand the basic structure of the program. Information about the program's funding sources is helpful. The table that describes the conceptual structure of the WISE–RP, with one column identifying the problem and the second column identifying the interventions that addressed that problem is particularly effective. Although many of the results present WISE–RP in a favorable light, the authors take care to address challenges and unsolved problems, and to interpret the data cautiously.

Pedagogical approaches included collaborative learning in all courses, computer-assisted learning in writing courses, and improvisatory theater in speech courses.

Developmental Education Learning Communities
LaGuardia Community College

The program theme, "Relationships," proved so successful that faculty were able to increase course workloads because students became so involved in the issues that they wanted more materials for discussion. (20)

Description of the Program

LaGuardia Community College (LGCC) initiated in 1991 its New Student House Program for vocational education students with basic skills needs in reading, writing, and speech. LGCC designed an integrated experience for 65-75 students, divided into three sections, who worked with the same three-person faculty team in all their reading, writing, and speech courses. A counselor who assisted faculty in assessing and addressing students' academic and social problems was also a member of the core group. Courses were collaboratively planned and thematically linked, with interrelated assignments. Pedagogical approaches included collaborative learning in all courses, computer-assisted learning in writing courses, and improvisatory theater in speech courses. Special events, such as field trips and whole-group meetings were routinely built into the program.

Assessment Approach

LGCC assessed the impact of the New Student House Program with five measures: pass rates, grades, retention rates, the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) pre- and posttests to measure differences in attitudes toward learning and perceptions of specific study skills, and a Likert Scale questionnaire surveying student reactions to the program. An additional measure, graduation/transfer rates, was to be implemented to assess long-term benefits, once the program had been in operation for three years. Where feasible, performance in the New Student House Program was measured against comparison groups.

Findings

Grades. Grade distribution spreadsheets are included in the report's appendix, with percentages delineated in each of nine grade categories.

Generally, there were higher percentages of students in the control group whose grades fell in the three categories considered by the college to be failing. Table 4 summarizes this information.

Table 4. Percentages of Students Earning Failing Grades in LaGuardia Community College's New Student House and in Control Group

Course	New Student House (NSH)	N of NSH	Control Group (CG)	N of CG
Basic Speech Communication	4.8%	63	24.3%	37
Basic Writing (6 hr. version)	52.6%	19	50.0%	12
Basic Writing (4 hr. version)	30.2%	43	35.0%	40
Essentials of Reading I	8.7%	23	16.6%	12
Fundamentals of Reading II	10.0%	40	29.4%	17

Pass rates. More students passed their courses in the New Student House Program than in the control group. Table 5 summarizes this information.

Table 5. Percentage of Students Passing in LaGuardia Community College's New Student House and in Control Group

Course	New Student House (NSH)	N of NSH	Control Group (CG)	N of CG
Basic Speech Communication	93.6%	63	75.7%	37
Basic Writing (6 hr. version)	47.4%	19	50.0%	12
Basic Writing (4 hr. version)	67.4%	43	57.5%	40
Essentials of Reading I	91.3%	23	83.3%	12
Fundamentals of Reading II	86.5%	40	70.6%	17

Retention. Preliminary retention results tracking students from Fall 1992 to Fall 1993 indicated that 69.8% of students in the New Student House Program were retained, compared to 62.5% of students in the control group.

Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) results. Pretest LASSI results for students in the three sections of the New Student House Program revealed scores below the 50th percentile on six of 10 scales (Attitude, Motivation, Anxiety, Selecting the Main Idea, Study Aids, and Test-taking). Students scored above the 50th percentile (but no higher than the 65th percentile) in Concentration, Time Management, Self-testing, and Information-processing. Posttest LASSI results showed improved student scores on all 10 scales, with the

greatest gains on Attitude (from the 40th percentile to the 60th percentile), Motivation (from the 35th percentile to the 60th percentile), Anxiety (from the 25th percentile to the 40th percentile), Concentration (from the 50th percentile to the 65th percentile), and Study Aids (from the 30th percentile to the 40th percentile).

Program Evaluation. Students were asked to evaluate the impact of the program on their academic skills and to provide feedback about specific program features, such as group work, working with a counselor, and program meetings. Ratings for the 20 Likert Scale items were very high, with the majority (usually more than 80%) reacting positively to the acquisition of skills (e.g., 84% believed their ability to speak in public improved over the term; 89% thought they had improved their reading skills) and to the program features (e.g., 86% thought working in the large group helped them understand connections among reading, speech, and writing; 91% enjoyed working with other students in class).

What Makes This Report Notable

This 30-page internal report is a comprehensive guide written to document the history and operation of the New Student House Program. The explicit identification of a target audience—both the internal audience of the college as well as the faculty, staff, and administration of other colleges—signals the authors' awareness of, and preparation for, the document's potential readership. For this reason, it provides considerable detail about the structure and pedagogy of the learning community program. The report is a combination "how to" guide and assessment report. The "how to" portion describes syllabi, scheduling, program organization and administration, and lists faculty advice on a variety of topics, including attitude, meeting schedules, and practical planning hints. Assessment results are appended to the document.

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