

2010 Strengthening Student Success Conference Changing Instructional Practices and Structures

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COLLEGE OF MARIN

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What happens when SLO data describe:

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- A specific class that is showing poor performance where the instructor could be identified
- A course within a sequence that is showing poor performance, weakening the sequence where the instructor/s could be identified
- An experimental program or intervention that shows poor performance compared to the control classes where the instructor/s could be identified

Positive Use of SLO Data

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- Our goal is to use student performance data to make improvements to instructional practices, academic structures, and operations.
- How can we do this in a safe and trusting environment that does not cause others to feel defensive?
- This is especially a challenge when faculty try to improve student performance using experimental interventions.

College of Marin

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- The College of Marin is a two-year college in Northern California
- We served 7,420 credit students in 2009 in transfer, degree, certificate, ESL/basic skills, and lifelong learning programs
- Over the past nine years, we have noticed changes in the ethnic ratio of our student population.

Ethnicity Changes

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	Fall 2000	Fall 2001	Fall 2002	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009
Am. Indian	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%
Asian	8.7%	8.5%	8.5%	9.1%	8.8%	9.0%	9.3%	9.7%	9.2%	8.6%
African American	3.4%	3.9%	4.6%	4.7%	5.4%	4.7%	4.7%	5.0%	5.7%	5.5%
Hispanic	9.5%	10.9%	10.8%	11.7%	11.6%	12.5%	12.2%	13.0%	14.4%	13.8%
Other/Unknown	8.2%	8.0%	8.1%	8.7%	9.0%	8.7%	8.5%	8.1%	9.2%	12.0%
White	69.5%	68.2%	67.5%	65.2%	64.6%	64.6%	64.9%	63.8%	61.1%	59.7%

Our Challenge

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- Rise in the number of students who had not passed English 98
- Enrolling in Social Science courses
- Many of them are second language students



- Dropping the course
- Receiving low or below passing grades.

Our Strategy

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We paired an English 98 class with a History 117 class following a learning community model.

- Students registered in the English course also registered for History 117
- Students were expected to work together on assignments and in the English/writing lab
- The English instructor worked with the history instructor
 - ✦ to develop English assignments that supported and supplemented the history assignments
 - ✦ to rewrite course materials for English-learners, better gear lectures to English-learners, and to re-evaluate what students were likely to know, and not know, when entering the class.

Our Research Question

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English/History Learning Community

Will History 117, paired with English 98 in a Learning Community, improve student success rates?

- *English 98 is pre-college English*
- *History 117 is U.S. History from Pre-Colombian to the Civil War*

Effect of the Strategies (1 of 4)

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English 98

● 345 students

(non learning community)

● 117 students

(learning community)

History 117

● 201 students

(non learning community)

● 114 students

(learning community)

Took these two courses during the same semester!

Effect of the Strategies (2 of 4)

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English 98

● Non learning community

- Retention rate 88.7%
- Success rate 52.8%

● Learning community

- Retention rate 91.5%
- Success rate 61.5%

History 117

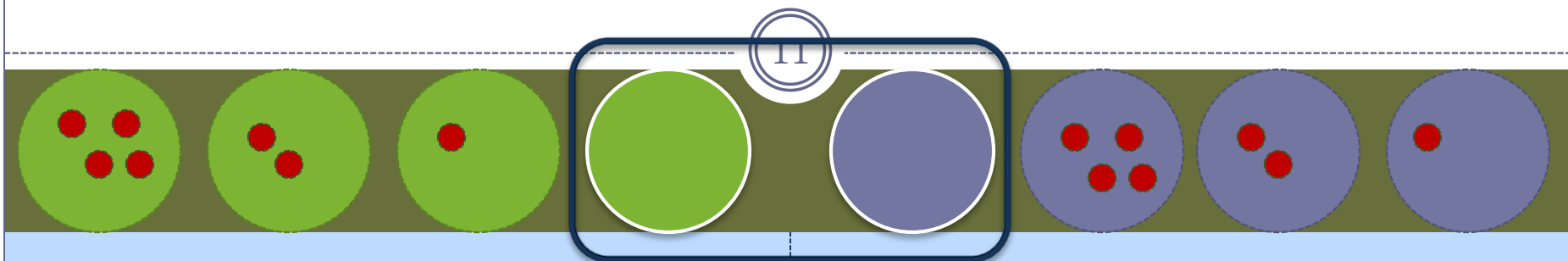
● Non learning community

- Retention rate 93.5%
- Success rate 78.6%

● Learning community


- Retention rate 91.2%
- Success rate 54.5%


Effect of the Strategies (3 of 4)





English 98

History 117

 7 students
(non learning community)

 7 students
(non learning community)

 117 students
(learning community)

 114 students
(learning community)

Took these two courses during the same semester!

Effect of the Strategies (4 of 4)

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English 98

History 117

 Non learning community

 Non learning community

- Retention rate 100%
- Success rate 70%

- Retention rate 100%
- Success rate 70%

 Learning community

 Learning community

- Retention rate 91.5%
- Success rate 61.5%

- Retention rate 91.2%
- Success rate 54.5%

Summary

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- **English 98**
 - Slightly positive impact of the learning community on student retention rates
 - Some positive impact of the learning community on student success rates
- **History 117**
 - No direct impact of the learning community on student retention rates
 - No direct impact of the learning community on student success rates

There seemed to be no differences in student success rates between non learning community and the learning community.

Reflection

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There were more questions raised than answered:

1. Are retention rates or success rates the best way to measure the effect of a learning community?
2. If so, are our results caused by an ineffective history teacher?
3. If not, how can we better measure the effect of a learning community other than retention or success rates?

Even More Questions

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1. Given the goal of a learning community, are we looking at the wrong data?
2. What is the goal of a learning community, anyway?
3. Did we have enough staff development on learning communities and pedagogical strategies in order to implement the concept effectively?

5 Basic Learning Community Models

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- **Linked courses:** Students take two connected courses, usually one disciplinary course such as history or biology and one skills course such as writing, speech, or information literacy.
- **Learning clusters:** Students take three or more connected courses, usually with a common interdisciplinary theme uniting them.
- **Freshman interest groups:** Similar to learning clusters, but the students share the same major, and they often receive academic advising as part of the learning community.
- **Federated learning communities:** Similar to a learning cluster, but with an additional seminar course taught by a "Master Learner," a faculty member who enrolls in the other courses and takes them alongside the students. The Master Learner's course draws connections between the other courses.
- **Coordinated studies:** This model blurs the lines between individual courses. The learning community functions as a single, giant course that the students and faculty members work on full-time for an entire semester or academic year.

At the student level, assessments examine:

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- learning
- satisfaction
- engagement
- retention
- time to degree
- involvement in campus and community activities

Conclusion

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- First we looked at performance data for History 117 compared to all other History 117 classes
- Second we looked at the Learning Community instructor's other History 117 classes as a control
- What else could we have looked at?

References

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 - <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/currclum/cu3lk22.htm>
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 - <http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html>
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- How do we assess?
 - <http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/acl/index.html>
 - <http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/acl/iic.html>