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THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

WHAT ARE "LEARNING COMMUNITIES"?

1) **Co-Enrollment**: Groups of about 25 students are co-enrolled in two or more courses.

2) **Instructor Collaboration**: Instructors collaborate on curriculum and helping students.

3) **Curricular Integration**: Courses are thematically linked and include joint syllabi and assignments.

4) **Additional Supports**: Students get enhanced academic support and/or counseling.
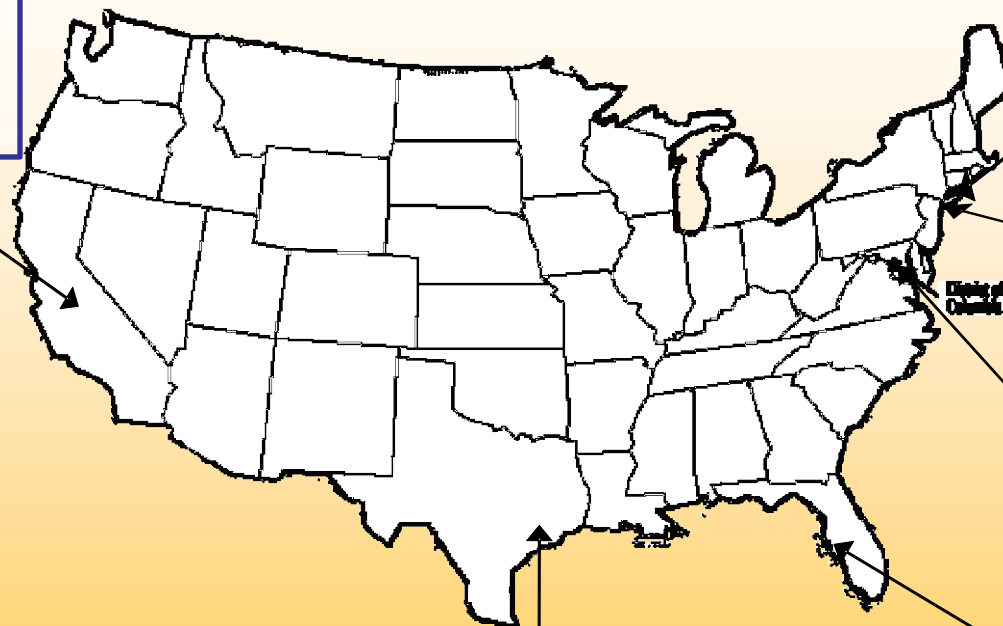
THEORY OF CHANGE

- Students form stronger relationships with each other and instructors

- Students become more engaged through inter-disciplinary learning

- Students benefit from extra support

SIX PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Merced College:
Linked developmental English and a variety of courses

Queensborough Community College:
Linked developmental math with a college-level course

Kingsborough Community College:
Linked English with a college-level course and a student success course

Community College of Baltimore County:
Linked developmental English, a college-level course, and seminar

Houston Community College:
Linked developmental math with a student success course

Hillsborough Community College:
Linked developmental reading with a student success course

RANDOM ASSIGNMENT USED TO ESTIMATE PROGRAM EFFECTS

Target

Consent & Data

Random Assignment

- Recruited students in need of developmental English or math
- Randomly assigned over 1,000 students at each college
- Followed up students for three semesters at most sites
- Conducted implementation study and cost analysis

5

IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

- Program components were implemented with reasonable fidelity, but with considerable variation in how tightly courses were integrated.
    - Variation *within* colleges more than variation *between* colleges

- Programs operated at a fairly large scale:
    - Over 170 learning communities in the study
    - Nearly 7,000 students participated in the study

- Average cost of learning communities about $500 per program group member, above base costs.
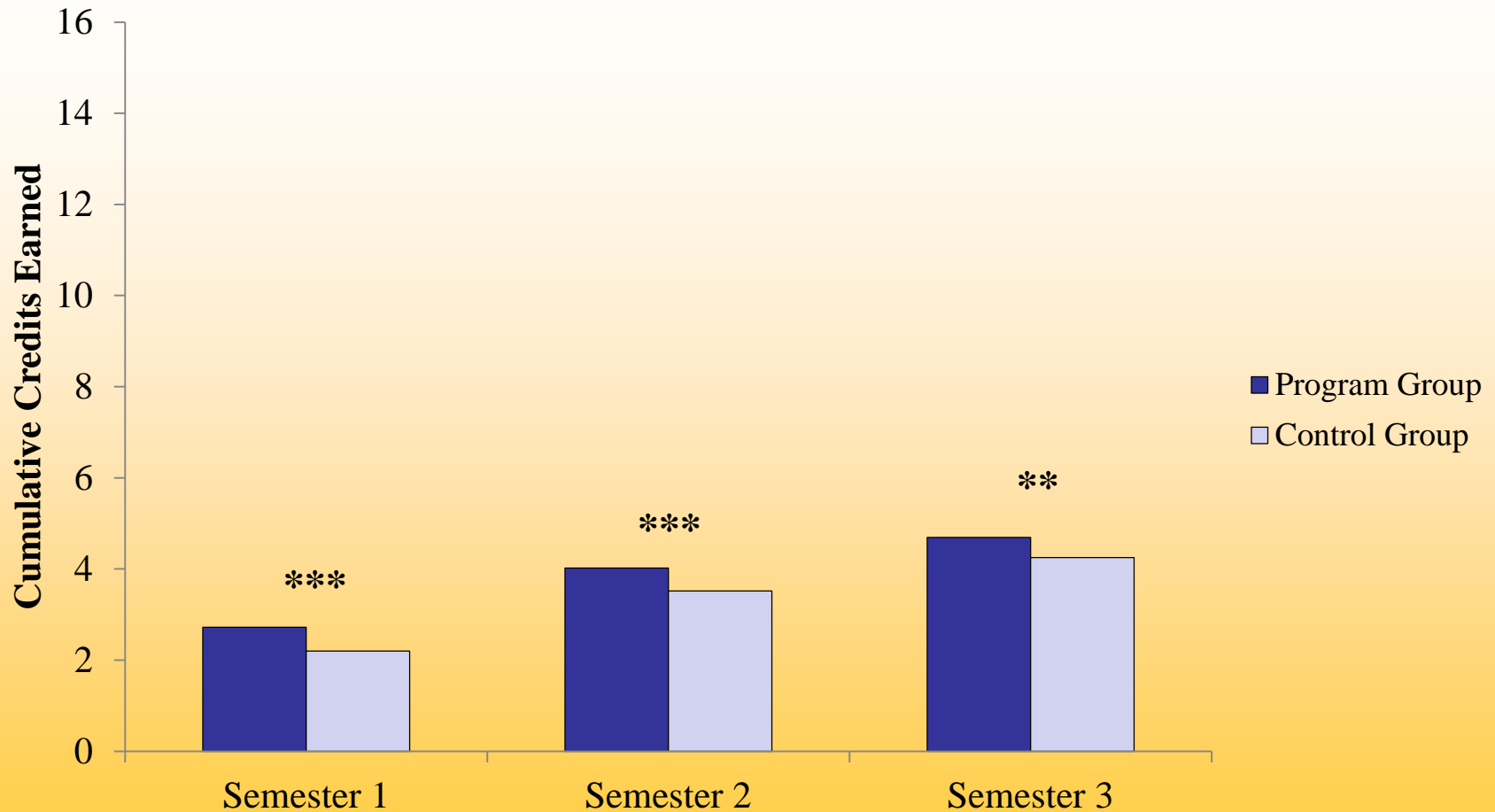
AVERAGE IMPACTS ACROSS THE SIX COLLEGES

Single-semester learning communities led to :

- A gain of half a credit on number of credits earned in the targeted subject area (English or math)

- A gain of half a credit on number of total credits earned
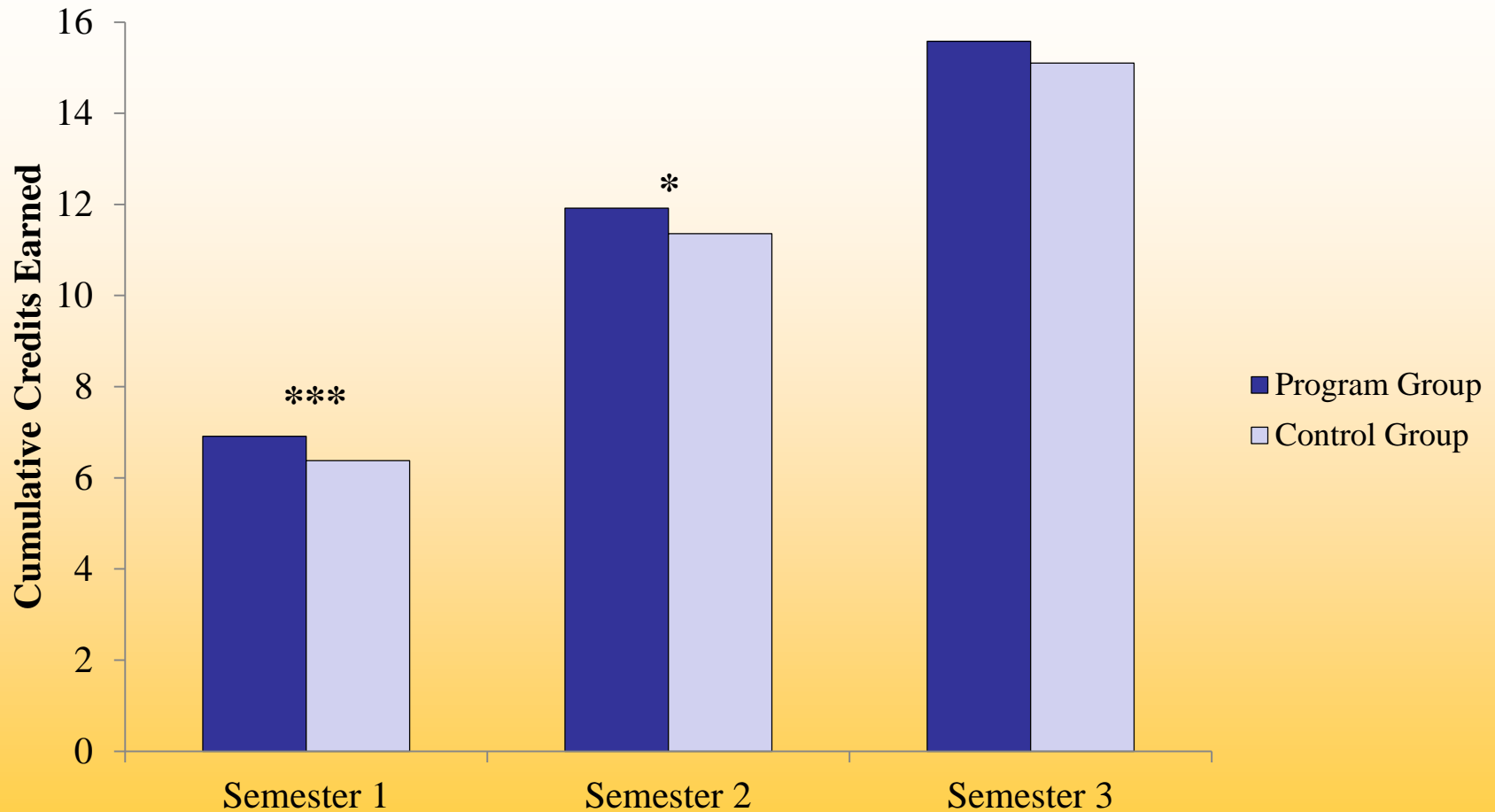
- No impact on persistence

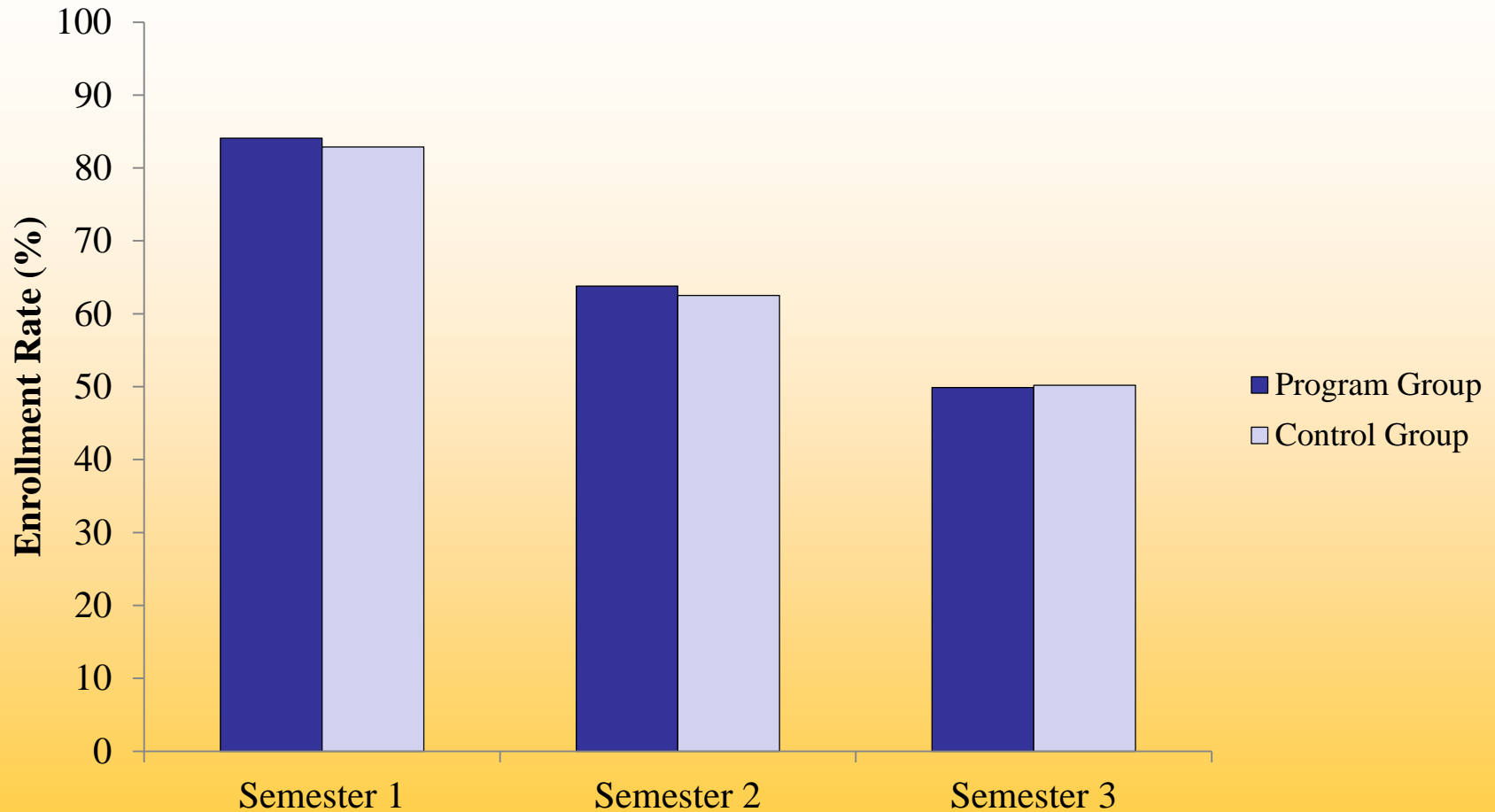# CUMULATIVE CREDITS EARNED IN THE TARGETED SUBJECT (MATH OR ENGLISH)

TOTAL CREDITS EARNED (CUMULATIVE)

# ENROLLMENT IN PROGRAM AND POST-PROGRAM SEMESTERS (PERSISTENCE)

LONG-TERM EFFECTS: KINGSBOROUGH PROGRAM

Six years after entering the study, compared to the control group, students in learning communities:

- Earned 4.0 more credits; and

- Were more likely to earn a degree (an impact of 4.6 percentage points)

Cumulative Credits Earned by Kingsborough Opening Doors Students
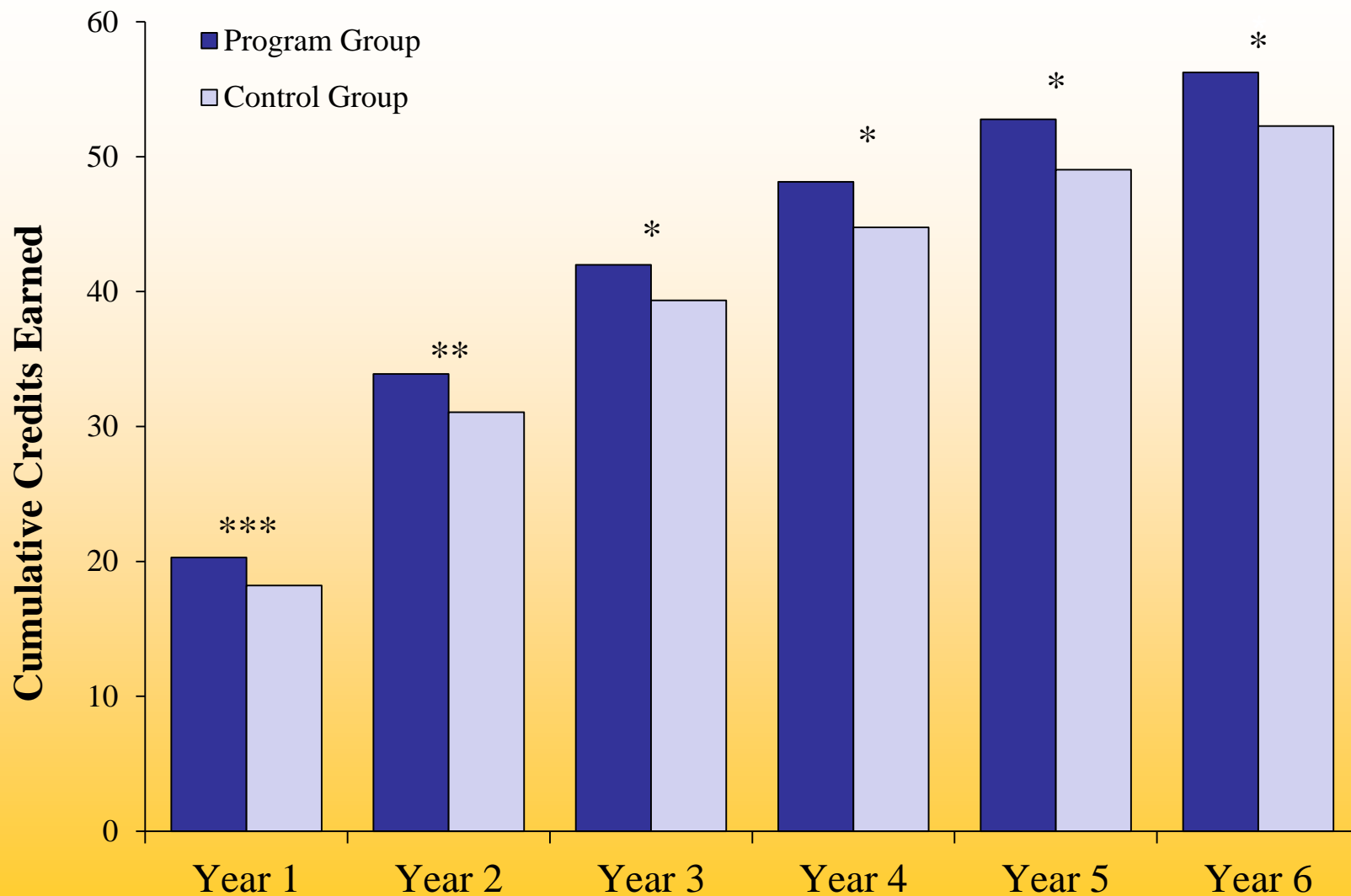
WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE KINGSBOROUGH PROGRAM?

- Created early momentum in accumulating credits from 3-course links and inter-sessions

- Included students in college-level as well as developmental English

- Built in strong academic and counseling support

- Gave out book vouchers

- Received strong support of college leaders

CONCLUSIONS

- Learning communities – <u>as typically operated</u> – are not likely to produce large or sustained effects on persistence or credit accumulation.
- The Kingsborough findings suggest ways learning communities could be strengthened:
  - Offer LCs to "college-ready" students too
  - Encourage continuous enrollment
  - Offer more credits in the link
  - Enhance student services
  - Foster strong support from college leaders

MORE INFORMATION

Download event materials and learn more at

www.PostsecondaryResearch.org