Learning Communities: Rigorous Research and the Real World

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Some of the findings in this presentation are preliminary: Please do not cite.
Learning Communities

- What is a Learning Community?
- Why might a Learning Community work?

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Demonstration Sites and Links

Hillsborough Community College
  Developmental reading and success course

Houston Community College System
  Developmental math and success course

Queensborough Community College
  Developmental math and college-level course

Community College of Baltimore County
  Developmental English and a college-level course

Merced College
  Developmental English and a variety of courses

Kingsborough Community College
  Two college-level courses and a seminar

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Similar implementation stories…

Recruiting and retaining faculty was a challenge;
A coordinator and committed leaders are essential.

Students reported strong social and academic networks;
Deep curricular integration was not implemented consistently at any college;
Programs tended to strengthen over time.

Learning communities varied greatly within colleges.

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Key Questions for Student Success

Over and above how students perform with standard courses and college services, do learning community students experience:

1. Higher rates of completing the developmental course and sequence?
2. Greater semester-to-semester persistence?
3. More credits and credentials?

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Random Assignment Design

1. Targeted students invited to participate in study
2. Students give consent
3. Baseline data collected
4. Random Assignment
   - Program group: Enrolled in learning communities
   - Control group: Received regular courses and services

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Program Impacts on Full Sample:

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![Bar Chart]

Figure 1
Percent Passed Dev Ed Course in Program Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough (Reading)</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensborough (Math)</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston (Math)</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Impacts on Full Sample:

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Program Impacts for Full Sample:

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Program Impacts for Full Sample:

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Students assigned to learning communities passed more courses and earned more credits in the program semester but effects faded with time.

More likely to pass the English “exit” tests, required for graduation and transfer.

Not initially more likely to persist, but at the end of the follow-up period, slightly more program students were still enrolled in college.
The Impact Story so far…

- Basic learning communities often have significant effects on taking and passing developmental courses in the program semester, but…

- Developmental course impacts generally fade within one or two semesters.

- There are generally little or no impacts on persistence or cumulative credits earned.

- Stay tuned – Findings at other colleges and longer follow-up may change the story.

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Learning Communities at CCBC

- Reading and English paired with gen ed
- Deep learning with integrative assignments
- Contextualization and acceleration
- Deep professional development
- Scaling issues
- Other models that capture the important elements

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Learning Communities at Merced

- Learning communities as a pathway into teacher inquiry
- Learning communities as an opportunity to mentor students in a more meaningful way
- Learning communities as part of a strategic plan to “fast-track” developmental students

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Questions for Discussion: With these findings in mind…

- Are these impacts on student success promising, discouraging, or somewhere in between?
- What can you do differently to strengthen your learning communities?
- What could you do *outside* of learning communities to build on the impacts of your learning communities?
- Are there benefits of learning communities at your college *in addition* to any direct impacts on students?
- What are the costs ($ and other) of learning communities? How do you know if they are worth the benefits ($ and other)?

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Further Reading on Learning Communities Impact Studies

- Scaling Up Learning Communities: The Experience of Six Community Colleges
- Learning Communities for Students in Developmental Reading: An Impact Study at Hillsborough Community College
- A Good Start: Two-Year Effects of a Freshmen Learning Community Program at Kingsborough Community College
- Learning Communities for Students in Developmental Math: Impact Studies at Queensborough and Houston Community Colleges (forthcoming)

Available for download:
www.mdrc.org/subarea_index_36.html

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Learning Communities Demonstration

The Learning Communities Demonstration is being conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Research (NCPR), a partnership of MDRC, CCRC, the University of Virginia, and faculty at Harvard University. NCPR was established by a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education.

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For more information on MDRC and NCPR’s work, go to:
www.mdrc.org
www.postsecondaryresearch.org

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