Institutional Effectiveness, Research & Planning

Research Brief

Spring 2013 Learning Communities Evaluation Results from Students in the STEM Program

Prepared by Lorena Guadiana

Purpose of Brief:
This brief examines the data from the Spring 2013 Learning Communities (LC) Student Evaluation completed by 47 STEM students.

Summary of findings:
- 80% or more of the respondents "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" with the following evaluation statements:

  o I would recommend joining a learning community to other students.

  o I am satisfied with my learning community experience.

  o Participating in a learning community helped me develop connections with faculty and staff.

  o Participating in a learning community helped me develop connections with other students.

  o I felt comfortable asking questions and making contributions in class discussions.

- 28% of the respondents were Hispanic and 53% were Caucasian.

- 57% of respondents were male and 43% were 19 years-old or younger.

Overview
The HSI STEM grant at Crafton Hills College facilitates students in the STEM program with the opportunity to participate in Learning Communities (LC). In Spring 2013, students in the STEM program who participated in a LC evaluated their respective LCs at the closing of the semester.

Methodology
Figure 1 and Tables 1 and 3-6 illustrate the results from the **Spring 2013 Learning Communities (LC) Student Evaluation from students in the STEM program.** Table 2 illustrates student demographics disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and age. Responses to the evaluation were submitted by STEM students who participated in the following LCs:

- **MATH 095/CHEM 101**
- **BIOL 100/ENGL 015/CHC-099X4**
- **ENGR 101/CHC-099X4/ENGL 914**

Respondents were provided an evaluation where they were asked what LC they were enrolled in and to rate ten statements about their experience in their LC. Respondents rated their level of agreement with the statements on a Likert five-point scale, 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Disagree; 2=Strongly Disagree; 1=Not Applicable (see Table 1). "Not Applicable" or "missing" responses were removed in Tables 1 and 2. Respondents were also prompted to provide open-ended comments about their definition of a LC, what they liked best about participating in a LC, what they would change about their LC, and to add any other comments in Tables 3-6. The names have been removed in the open-ended comment tables and replaced with "[Name]" to protect identities.

Table 1. Responses to statements about the Spring 2013 Learning Communities at Crafton.

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
I would recommend joining a learning community to other students.	13	28.9	23	51.1	8	17.8	1	2.2	**45**
I am satisfied with my learning community experience.	14	31.8	25	56.8	4	9.1	1	2.3	**44**
Participating in a learning community helped me develop connections with faculty and staff.	16	36.4	20	45.5	6	13.6	2	4.5	**44**
Participating in a learning community helped me develop connections with other students.	19	42.2	22	48.9	4	8.9	0	-	**45**
Being part of a learning community made me feel more supported in my coursework.	13	29.5	19	43.2	10	22.7	2	4.5	**44**
Being part of a learning community made me feel more supported in my choice to go to college.	17	40.5	16	38.1	7	16.7	2	4.8	**42**
Being in a learning community has helped me see connections among my classes (for example, learning in one class supported or expanded on what I learned in another class).	13	31.0	18	42.9	9	21.4	2	4.8	**42**
I felt comfortable asking questions and making contributions in class discussions.	21	48.8	18	41.9	3	7.0	1	2.3	**43**
I worked with other students in my learning community outside of class.	15	34.1	15	34.1	13	29.5	1	2.3	**44**
The instructors in my learning community planned assignments together.	18	40.9	20	45.5	4	9.1	2	4.5	**44**

Note: Responses to a "non-applicable" point scale were omitted in this table and some respondents did not answer all the questions.

Student demographic information in Table 2 includes a side-by-side comparison of STEM students in STEM Learning Communities and the general student campus demographics in the Spring 2013. Hispanic and Caucasian students were the largest ethnicities in both the general student population and in the LCs. Also, the majority of the general student population was female; conversely, most students were male in the LCs. The general student population was largely 20-24 years-old and 19 year-old or younger in the LCs.

Table 2. Learning Community Student Demographic Information.

Ethnicity	STEM LCs		Spring 2013	
	#	%	#	%
Asian	4	8.5	298	5.5
African American	5	10.6	409	7.5
Hispanic	13	27.7	2197	40.5
Native American/Alaskan Native	0	-	105	1.9
Caucasian	25	53.2	2415	44.5
Total	**47**	**100**	**5424**	**100**
Gender	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Female	20	42.6	2832	52.0
Male	27	57.4	2609	48.0
Total	**47**	**100**	**5441**	**100**
Age	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
19 or younger	20	42.6	1408	25.8
20-24	18	38.3	2454	45.0
25-29	5	10.6	725	13.3
30-34	2	4.3	313	5.7
35-39	1	2.1	173	3.2
40-49	1	2.1	241	4.4
50 and above	0	-	136	2.5
Total	**47**	**100**	**5450**	**100**

Note: Any "missing" data was omitted on this table.

Tables 3-6 illustrate open-ended comments provided by students in response to four prompts about their experiences with learning communities. **When prompted to define what they thought was a Learning Community, students generally responded that Learning Communities were combined classes or a group of people/students working together.**

Table 3. Open-ended comments about respondents' definition of a Learning Community.
• A class designed to help new college students figure things out.
• A class designed to help students focus on their academic and studying skills.
• A class in which students come together and help each other/ be helped to be more successful in college and with their academic skills.
• A class in which students work together with instructors to complete assignments.
• A class that focuses on student learning abilities
• A cohesive group of individuals, mainly students in most cases, that strive to learn from each other's similarities and differences alike.
• A course that teaches the skills to be successful in the class it is directly tied to as well as any other classes that are being taken.
• A created connection between subjects.
• A group of people helping to make the best results
• A group of people sharing with one another with one purpose: to learn new things.
• A group of students that are instructed in a way to form better study skills and habits.
• A group of students who share an experience in becoming more educated.
• A learning community is a few different classes that are limited and have a common theme.
• A learning community is a group of students who share the same classes and have the same schedule.
• A learning community is a way to link classes together to show how they are dependent upon the other. Ideas from one class work with the other class.
• A learning community is basically linked classes that support each other in the learning

- process.
- A learning community is exactly what it sounds like- a community of people learning skills and techniques which will help them in life and their education.
- A learning community is linked classes where students share classes together to make sense of real world problems with class work.
- A learning community is something a class that helps with studying and other academic issues a student would be having issues with.
- A place to go to get help with college.
- A place where everyone can collaborate on their work.
- A place where students get used to college, talking to other students, and a place to succeed.
- A place where you can talk, plan, and learn more about your career and goals.
- Allows for greater degree of networking between students and instructors, and link disciplines.
- Basically a set of students that share more than two classes together.
- Classes that are connected and the same students in all of those classes.
- Combined classes with overlapping subject matters with the same students in both classes.
- Combining concepts of different classes to better comprehend.
- Connects two courses.
- Having the same students in more than one class.
- Having two classes that are linked, all the students have the two classes together and the classes relate to each other.
- It is a class designed to help and support students in their academic life.
- Learning community is a class that will help you prepare for university.
- Learning with friends.
- Students learning together.
- To me, a learning community class is a class that is intended to help you by providing helpful study tips or procedures to help other courses.
- Two classes that co-join with each other.
- Where I want one class but can't have it without the other.
- Where two classes are linked and correspond with one another.
- Where two classes hooked up and learn
- Where two classes joined, somehow together, there is a link between them.
- Where you have linked classes with the same students to help out with your work.
- You take two different courses with a connection to each other. Also, you take it with the same people.

In Table 4, students were prompted to provide feedback about what they liked best about participating in Learning Communities. **Students provided various comments in Table 4 in response to the prompt, but students frequently mentioned that they found it beneficial to have the same classmates in their LC.**

Table 4. Open-ended comments about what respondents liked best about participating in a Learning Community.

- Class discussions.
- Connecting with classmates is what I appreciated the most from the learning community.
- Easily functioning with the teachers and fellow classmates.
- Everything about it was good.
- Friendships
- Getting to connect with students in three different classes.

- Getting to know my classmates better.
- Getting to know others to do work outside of class.
- Having a counselor as a professor.
- Having the same people in both classes.
- Having the same students in both my classes.
- I had the same classmates in both classes.
- I liked having the same people in my class.
- I liked how involved the professors were and they were very anxious to help.
- I liked that the learning community helped me to stop procrastination with my future academic life.
- I liked the kind of in-depth personal questions we were asked about ourselves in quizzes and personality tests to help us learn about ourselves.
- I met other students and helped each other out.
- I really liked the time it allowed me to reflect and grow, both as a person and a student as well as the bond I was able to create with co-students.
- I was able to have confidence in speaking with my peers, and asking my professors questions.
- I was able to take Chem because a new section was available. It also made the math in Chem much easier while taking a math class.
- It helped me focus on my goals.
- It is very comfortable to be involved in
- Made friends that would work together outside of class.
- Meeting and interacting with new people in unique new ways.
- Meeting new people and developing.
- Meeting students, working together.
- Nothing, I'm indifferent about it.
- People participating
- Seeing the same students and making connections. Also, the really amazing teachers.
- Setting up my goal plan for my future.
- That I feel comfortable seeing the same students again and again.
- That I got to meet really nice people and getting help from them since we were in the same classes.
- That the classmates are the same. It's easier to study and communicate the course with your classmates.
- The advice on studying and studying techniques
- The connection with other students.
- The experience of being able to enjoy my first semester in college with such a great group.
- The fieldtrips.
- The friendships I have made
- The reserved counselor.
- The teachers paired were perfect.
- This learning community helped me in regaining focus and organizational skills.
- UCR fieldtrip.
- What I liked about the class is when we would receive study tips on note-taking and reading from textbook material.

Respondents provided diverse suggestions about what they would change about Learning Communities in Table 5. **Some comments included "Structured test study," "This class would have been much more beneficial if it had helped us with the engineering class and not included the random busy-work," and "More linked assignments."**

Table 5. Open-ended comments about what respondents' would change about their learning community.

- Deeper discussion on relevant topics. Focus more on student personal responsibility.
- Have less writing assignments.
- How things get scheduled together.
- I believe that the learning community class would have been more beneficial and influential to all if it were more closely correlated to the engineering class.
- I enjoyed it; I would leave it the same. I wish more joint projects had been assigned; it would have affected other classes.
- I would change the time for Chemistry. It's too early in the morning and it's hard to concentrate.
- I would have liked if the learning community focused more on engineering specifically.
- I would like it to cover the information from the ENG class.
- I would make more linked assignments.
- I would use this class as support for ENG 101
- I wouldn't change anything.
- I wouldn't know.
- Later start times.
- Make it not required, have more fieldtrips, more guest speakers, not have essays.
- Maybe the class needs more focus on helping students make sure their majors are right for them, since this is a 101 class.
- More community specific assignments would be a good idea.
- More engineering based instructors.
- More focus on engineering (notes, lectures, studying, etc.)
- More interacting.
- More linked assignments.
- More presentations, talking about yourself in class.
- Nothing
- Nothing really.
- Nothing, it's a good section.
- Nothing, more of them.
- Nothing.
- Nothing. Everything seems well organized.
- Spreading the schedule out through the week.
- Structured test study.
- The environment
- The link between them if you drop one you drop the other.
- The only thing I would change would be adding a little more time for studying with fellow students on actual engineering work.
- The SMART goal project. It's a good idea but it just was (unintelligible) busy work.
- This class would have been much more beneficial if it had helped us with the engineering class and not included the random busy-work.
- To be honest I would recommend no changes.

Respondents provided few comments in the additional open-ended section (see Table 6). **Students commended LCs because they provided opportunities to bond with their peers and learn new skill sets. Students praised instructors and liked that the course sequence facilitated enrolling in the grouped courses. Comments suggesting improvements included, "Although being in a learning community has many benefits, it still bothers me because I might be taking another class I don't need for my pre-reqs," and "I learned a few helpful tips for studying and note-taking, but I hoped this class would help me more with engineering instead of using so much time doing journals and**

reading articles."

Table 6. Additional open-ended comments provided by respondents about learning communities.
• Although being in a learning community has many benefits, it still bothers me because I might be taking another class I don't need for my pre-reqs. • Great teachers, both of them. I wish next semester I have them again. • I don't like having to take a class I didn't want to because I wanted the math instructor. • I enjoyed participating in the learning community. • I feel this was a very helpful course and taught many necessary skills needed to succeed. Would strongly recommend to other students. Great professors, very helpful. • I learned a few helpful tips for studying and note-taking, but I hoped this class would help me more with engineering instead of using so much time doing journals and reading articles. • I like this program because sharing classes with the same people in a bonding experience. • N/A • None what so ever • Nothing • Thanks [Name] and [Name] for all your help and support. • Took an English/bio learning community last year and enjoyed taking one this year. Will look for more in the future. • What a student gets from the learning community is what the put into it. If a student doesn't take college seriously, the community can serve as a wake-up call. But if the student has it together, then the community is a waste of time. • With these classes being linked it allowed me to get classes I wouldn't have been able to take either if they were not linked.