



First-year Experience at MSU

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M I D W E S T E R N S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y



First-year Experience (FYE)

Overview

- Strategic Initiative 3 of MSU's Strategic Plan (2017-2022): "Creating a Destination Residential University."
- Strategy 3b: create "signature first-year experience."
- Defined as deliberate and strategic programming that ties academic work with student activities and support resources in order to help first-year students acclimate to college.

MSU's Model

- Fall **Learning Community**: a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort between two (or more) faculty who link first-year courses and develop three assignments that integrate content from the two courses.
- Spring **Academic Seminar**: additional curriculum added to an existing core course that already emphasizes a basic research skill.
- Undergraduate **Peer Mentors**: assigned to LC and AS to supplement academic instruction with study and life skills support.



Fall Learning Community

- Fall 2016
 - 15 Learning Communities
 - 308 students, 22 faculty
- Fall 2017
 - 16 Learning Communities
 - 299 students, 27 faculty
- Formats
 - Single: paired courses with the same cap
 - Multi: a higher-volume course (60 students) paired with 3 sections (20 students each) of a lower-volume course
 - Partial: a higher-volume course (100 students) linked to 1 section (25 students) of a lower-volume course

Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of Learning Communities

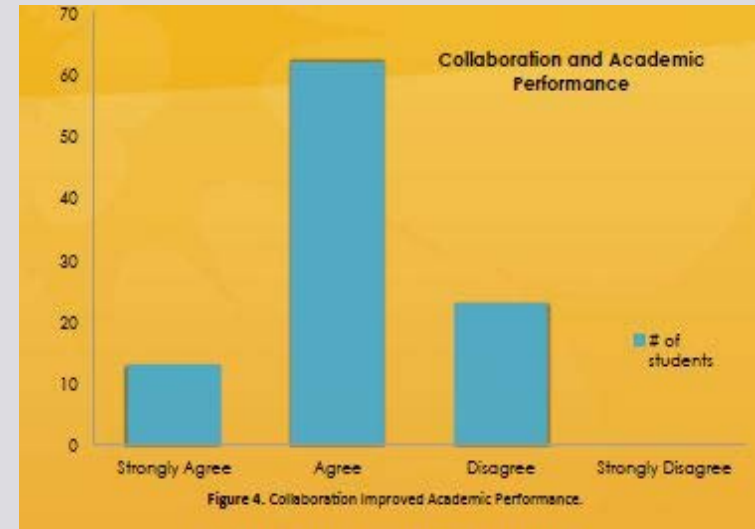
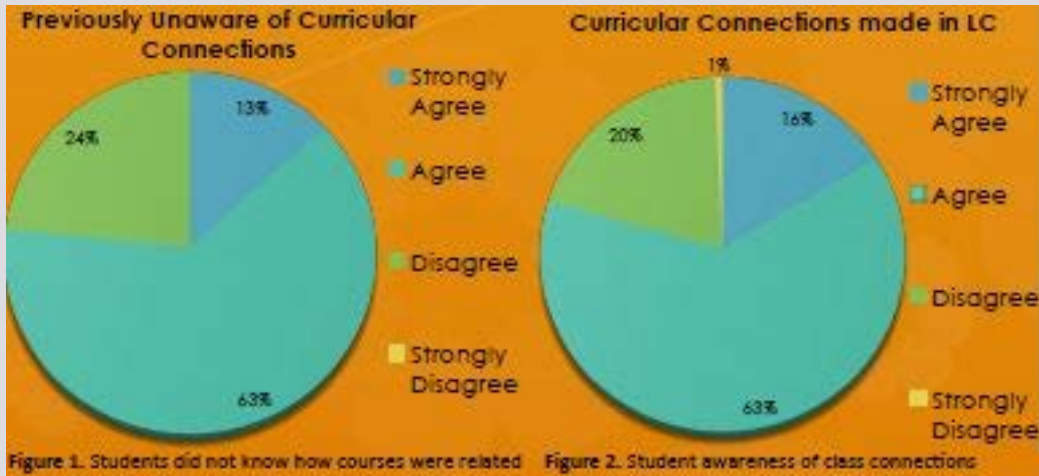
Adding Value to Student Learning Experiences

Laura Sorge & Francine Baron
Kym Acuña, Ed. D – Faculty Mentor



- A 47 question student survey administered to 5 learning communities.
- Academic and social benefits.
- Total of 107 surveys answered out of 319 total freshmen taking LC's (33.5% return rate).
- Observations of 2 courses, 3 times each.
- 10 student interviews.
- Faculty surveys.

→ Students were previously unaware of relationships of course content.



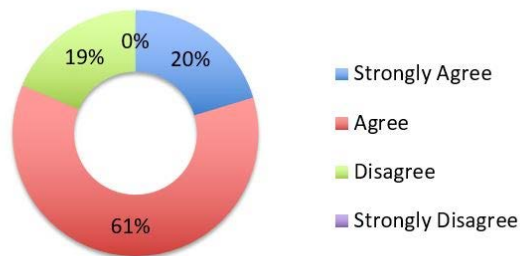
→ Students enjoyed working with peers, felt comfortable doing so and felt that it improved their academic performance.

→ Students reported paying attention in class, participated in class discussions and asked and answered questions regularly.

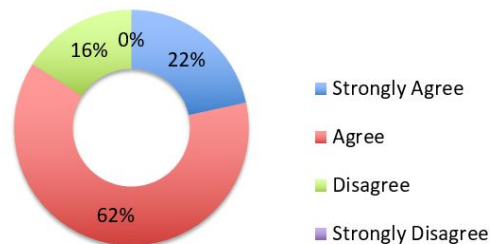
89% of faculty agreed that the students were more lively & energetic because they knew each other

→ Students understood the purpose of learning communities, were satisfied with their implementation and looked forward to their learning community courses.

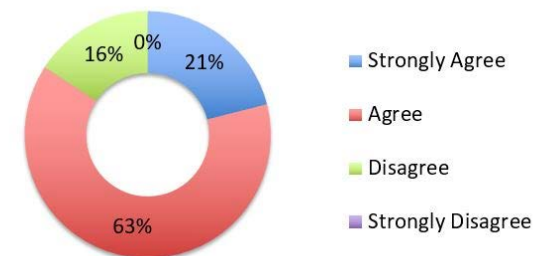
Understood Purpose of LC



Satisfied with Implementation of LC



Looking Forward to LC



→ While the students did not feel the workload was lighter in the learning community courses, they did feel it was appropriate.

- Students were able to make meaningful connections and build relationships with classmates.

“It’s difficult to make friends in a new environment and I’ve already made quite a couple that I am going to see both in class and out of class.”

- Scheduling was not an issue for students in the LC.

- Students recognized that they were asked to use higher order thinking skills in LC coursework.

- Students felt professors were positive, worked together and were more accessible to them because of the LC.

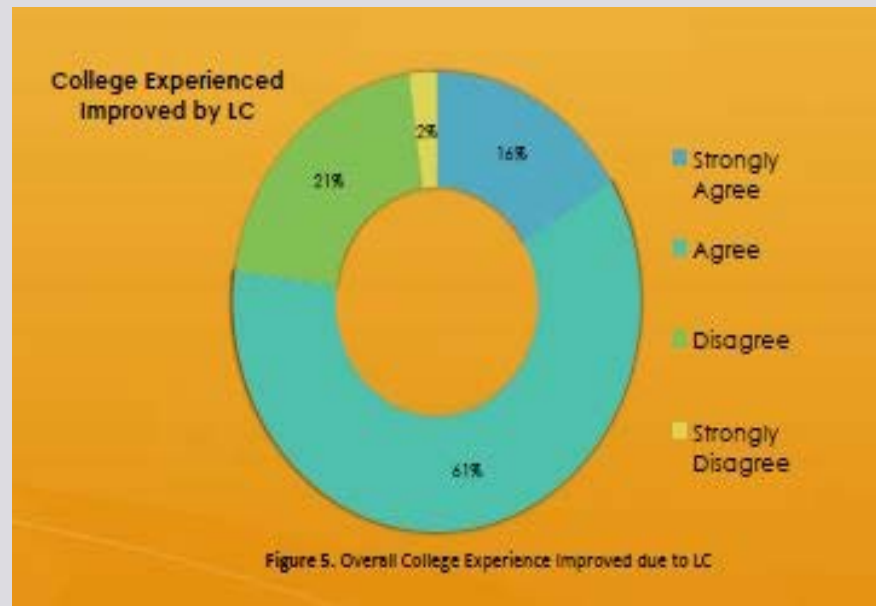
“She’s constantly looking for anyway to help me...”

“LC professors tend to know what’s going on in the other class, more so than the other teachers so they plan around that as far as tests go”

- Students felt the campus was providing them academic and social support so they might be more successful.

“Probably to help college kids adjust to the...to college lifestyle. And it is nice to know people you are gonna see twice a week... or twice a day in our case.”

→ Overall college experience was improved due to LC.



Discussion

Students in LCs report improved social relations, academic engagement, and a recognition of the effort of the university to help them to be successful.

Professors found that students were more engaged and that the use of LCs is a sustainable initiative which contains noticeable benefits.



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