Understanding the Efficacy of Learning Communities Using the National Survey of Student Engagement

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NSSE User’s Workshop
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Session Outcomes

• Understand how NSSE data might be used to better understand the efficacy of learning communities in general

• Understand some ways NSSE data can be utilized in different ways to help faculty and administrative audiences observe the strengths and weaknesses of learning communities by view learning community NSSE data in different ways, using varying modalities

• Understand how NSSE data relating to learning communities might spark meaningful conversations about how to make learning community experiences more impactful and meaningful for participating students
Learning Communities

• 4 types:
• Curricular: Students are co-enrolled in two or more courses (often from different disciplines) that are linked by a common theme
• Community Building: Cooperating learning techniques define pedagogical approaches
• Residential learning communities: Organized on-campus learning arrangements where students take two or more courses together, maximizing probability of out-of-class interactions
• Targeted groups: underprepared students, historically underrepresented students, honors students, etc.
  – Source: Lenning & Ebbers (1999)
Learning Communities Impact…

• Academic and intellectual experiences
• “Prosociality”
• Educational and personal growth
• Diversity
• Benchmark scores
Academic and Intellectual Experiences

• Experiences that impact student learning:
  – Preparing drafts of papers
  – Working on papers requiring the integration of ideas
  – Giving class presentations
Prosociality

Activities that suggest that students are inter-relating with other students

- Working with others outside of class
- Working with other in class
- Discussing projects with students outside of class
- Co-curricular activities
- Working effectively with others
Educational and Personal Growth

- Writing clearly and effectively
- Speaking clearly and effectively
- Thinking critically and analytically
- Analyzing quantitative problems
- Understanding yourself
Diversity

- Understanding people of different racial backgrounds
- Conversations with people of different races and ethnicities
- Conversations with people of different religious backgrounds, etc.
Mental Activities

• Memorizing
• Analyzing
• Synthesizing
• Making judgments
• Applying
Benchmark Scores

• Levels of academic challenge
• Active and collaborative learning
• Student faculty interactions
• Enriching educational experiences
• Supportive campus environment
Other Ways to Use the NSSE to Assess the Effects of Learning Communities
Things to remember before running an analysis

• Look at the amount of time students took to complete the NSSE; consider some decision rule that enables you to exclude some response if you feel students did not take the survey seriously

• Run validity and reliability tests—factor analyses, Cronbach’s alpha’s, etc.

• Consider taking transfer students out of the analysis if you wish to contrast first-year and senior students
Tip 1: Run Frequencies

- In SPSS, SAS, or some other program, run simple frequency stats (or crosstabs);
- For your audience, it is probably best to run frequencies and percentages only
Tip 2: Run t-tests and Compare Scores

- For us, we found that those participating in learning communities scored significantly higher than those who had not participated in learning communities, on almost all questions.
Run Deeper Analyses

• Go to NSSE syntax library, we allows you to:
  – Dichotomize variables
  – Create demographic and other variables immediately
  – Use scales and scalets to observe impact on general education, etc.

# Example: Nature of Learning Communities

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## Logistic Regression—FY Students

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Other Studies Might Include

- Deep Learning Scales
- Reflective Learning Scales
- Integrative Learning Scales
What We Have Done at Binghamton

• We shared frequency information with key individuals involved in managing learning communities
• Discussed these in committees, and with “faculty masters”
• Sought feedback about what they believed to be issues
Results

- Heighted morale; information was encouraging, especially since it came from an “independent source”
- Increased sense of accountability
- Sparked further conversation
- Enables better collaboration and added to a sense of shared governance
Questions? Comments?