

PENNSSTATE



Center for the Study of Higher Education

Learning Communities

Robert D. Reason

Assistant Professor and Research
Associate

What is a Learning Community?

- Shared, collaborative learning
 - Common courses
 - Common co-curricular experience
- Connected learning
 - Theme of courses
- Purposes
 - Facilitate active over passive learning
 - Encourage collaboration over competition
 - Facilitate community over isolation

Format

- Paired courses
 - Two related courses
 - Back-to-back scheduling
 - Small class sizes
 - 1 is normally “basic”
- Clustered courses
 - 3 or 4 related courses

Format

- Specific populations
- “New Student House”
 - LaGuardia Community College
 - Basic skills for non-traditional students

Other Formats

- Cohorts in larger courses
 - Recitations with skilled facilitators
- Team-taught programs
 - 2 to 5 courses around a larger theme
- Residence-based / Living-learning

Outcomes

- Learning
 - Self-reported gains
 - Increases in problem solving, reading
- Learning-related activities
 - Increased academic involvement
 - Library use, writing, course engagement
 - Interactions with faculty
 - Peer Interactions
 - Intellectual content of peer interactions

Outcomes of Learning Communities

■ Persistence

- Positive into 2nd semester and 2nd year
- Increases of 5 to 12% in persistence
- Indirect through other activities
 - Classroom experiences

Other Outcomes

- Increases in faculty satisfaction
 - Relationships with colleagues
 - Relationships with subject matter
- Greater integration of curriculum

Recommendations for Success

- Assess from the beginning
- Be collaborative and take risks
- Senior leadership

Recommendations for Success

- Professional Development & Support
 - Support acquisition of new pedagogical approaches
 - Cultivate academic partnerships
 - Create structures to encourage faculty involvement
 - Meet regularly