

Selected Results: Enriching High-Impact Experiences

Learning Communities

Participating in a learning community (LC) is associated with a variety of desirable learning and personal development outcomes, but not all students take part. Adult learners and first generation college students were less likely to participate in a LC; students who live on campus, full-time students, and members of Greek organizations were more likely (Table 4, p.18). After controlling for various background characteristics, the LC experience is positively correlated with both deep learning and gains in a number of areas (Table 3, p.17).

Because LCs take different forms, it is difficult to know which of their features is most effective. In 2007, NSSE developed a set of experimental questions to obtain additional information about learning communities where students take two or more classes together. About 2,800 respondents from 39 colleges and universities answered these questions.

Learning Community Characteristics and Student Engagement

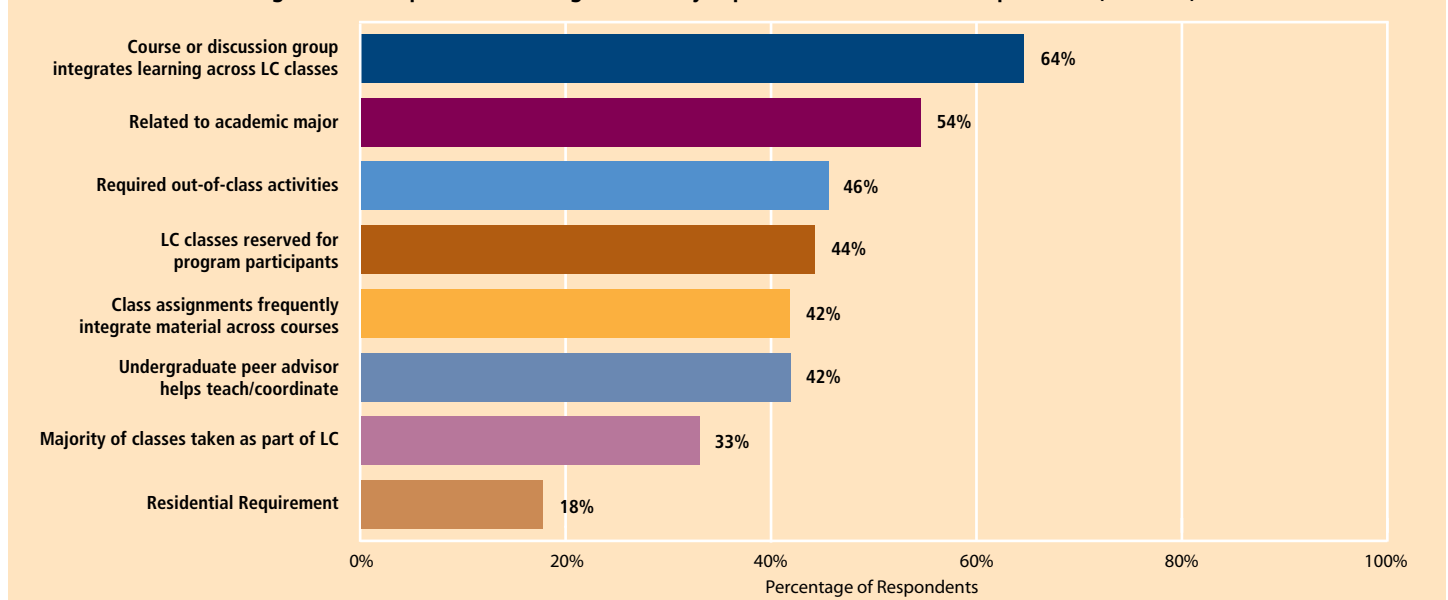
- Two thirds (64%) of the students said their LC included a course or discussion group designed to help integrate their learning across the LC courses (Figure 3).
- Students in LC programs that integrated material across courses—either by discussion group or class assignments—had higher scores on all five NSSE benchmarks.
- First-year students in LCs with undergraduate peer advisors reported more supportive campus environments.

Self-Reported Gains Attributed to Selected Learning Community Features

- When the LC included discussion groups and class assignments that frequently integrated material from LC classes, students reported gaining more across the three outcome domains, more frequently used deep approaches to learning, and reported an enriched social life.
- Requiring out-of-class activities as part of LC requirements for first-year students was related to substantial gains in self-understanding, deep learning, and an enriched social life.
- Assigning an undergraduate peer advisor to the LC instructional team was linked to greater gains in vocational skill development and an enriched social life.
- All things being equal, requiring first-year LC participants to live together on campus had a positive effect on the quality of social life and student-faculty interaction, but no discernable effects on engagement measures and the other selected outcomes.

These results, summarized in Table 1, p.15, suggest that LC faculty and staff should design structures and other program features that will maximize the chances that the LC experience will have the desired effects. For example, reserving classes only for students in the LC may not always be the desired effects.

Figure 3: Description of Learning Community Experience for First-Year Respondents (N=1,373)



Selected Results: Enriching High-Impact Experiences (continued)

Table 1: Learning Community Features and Selected Outcomes

	LC classes reserved for program participants	Majority of classes taken as part of LC	Courses or discussion group integrates learning across LC classes	Assignments frequently integrate material across courses	Undergraduate peer advisor helps teach or coordinate	Required out-of-class activities	Residential requirement
Student Engagement							
Academic Challenge ^a		--	++	+++		++	
Active & Collaborative Learning ^a			++	+++		+++	
Student-Faculty Interaction ^a	-	--	++	+++		+++	++
Enriching Educational Experiences ^a		--	+++	++		+++	
Supportive Campus Environment ^a	--	---	+++	+++	++		
Deep Learning ^a	-		+++	+++		+++	
Social Life ^b (Social opportunities, making close friends, and campus connectedness)	--	++	++	++	++	+++	++
Selected Outcomes							
General Education ^b (Writing, speaking, thinking critically)			+++	+++		++	
Understanding Self & Others ^b (Understanding diverse peoples and the development of values)	--		+++	+++		+++	
Vocational Skills ^b (Working with others, solving real-world problems, leadership skill development)	--		+++	+++	+	++	

^a Model controlled for all programmatic structures in addition to full-time enrollment, on-campus, age, gender, race/ethnicity, major, first generation college student, transfer and Greek.

^b Model controlled for all programmatic structures

^c One indicator signifies "trivial" effect sizes, two indicators signify "notable" effect sizes, and three indicators signify "substantial" effect sizes; "+" or "-" signs indicate either a positive or negative relationship between LC features and scales.