2010 Strengthening Student Success Conference
Changing Instructional Practices and Structures

COLLEGE OF MARIN

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What happens when SLO data describe:

- A specific class that is showing poor performance where the instructor could be identified

- A course within a sequence that is showing poor performance, weakening the sequence where the instructor/s could be identified

- An experimental program or intervention that shows poor performance compared to the control classes where the instructor/s could be identified
Positive Use of SLO Data

- Our goal is to use student performance data to make improvements to instructional practices, academic structures, and operations.
- How can we do this in a safe and trusting environment that does not cause others to feel defensive?
- This is especially a challenge when faculty try to improve student performance using experimental interventions.
The College of Marin is a two-year college in Northern California. We served 7,420 credit students in 2009 in transfer, degree, certificate, ESL/basic skills, and lifelong learning programs. Over the past nine years, we have noticed changes in the ethnic ratio of our student population.
### Ethnicity Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Fall 2000</th>
<th>Fall 2001</th>
<th>Fall 2002</th>
<th>Fall 2003</th>
<th>Fall 2004</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
<th>Fall 2007</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
<th>Fall 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Am. Indian</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
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<td>0.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Challenge

- Rise in the number of students who had not passed English 98
- Enrolling in Social Science courses
- Many of them are second language students
- Dropping the course
- Receiving low or below passing grades.
We paired an English 98 class with a History 117 class following a learning community model.

- Students registered in the English course also registered for History 117.
- Students were expected to work together on assignments and in the English/writing lab.
- The English instructor worked with the history instructor:
  - to develop English assignments that supported and supplemented the history assignments.
  - to rewrite course materials for English-learners, better gear lectures to English-learners, and to re-evaluate what students were likely to know, and not know, when entering the class.
Our Research Question

English/History Learning Community

Will History 117, paired with English 98 in a Learning Community, improve student success rates?

- English 98 is pre-college English
- History 117 is U.S. History from Pre-Colombian to the Civil War
Effect of the Strategies (1 of 4)

Took these two courses during the same semester!

English 98
- 345 students (non learning community)
- 117 students (learning community)

History 117
- 201 students (non learning community)
- 114 students (learning community)
Effect of the Strategies (2 of 4)

English 98
- Non learning community
  - Retention rate 88.7%
  - Success rate 52.8%
- Learning community
  - Retention rate 91.5%
  - Success rate 61.5%

History 117
- Non learning community
  - Retention rate 93.5%
  - Success rate 78.6%
- Learning community
  - Retention rate 91.2%
  - Success rate 54.5%
Effect of the Strategies (3 of 4)

Took these two courses during the same semester!
Effect of the Strategies (4 of 4)

English 98
- Non learning community
  - Retention rate 100%
  - Success rate 70%
- Learning community
  - Retention rate 91.5%
  - Success rate 61.5%

History 117
- Non learning community
  - Retention rate 100%
  - Success rate 70%
- Learning community
  - Retention rate 91.2%
  - Success rate 54.5%
Summary

- **English 98**
  - Slightly positive impact of the learning community on student retention rates
  - Some positive impact of the learning community on student success rates

- **History 117**
  - No direct impact of the learning community on student retention rates
  - No direct impact of the learning community on student success rates

There seemed to be no differences in student success rates between non learning community and the learning community.
Reflection

There were more questions raised than answered:

1. Are retention rates or success rates the best way to measure the effect of a learning community?
2. If so, are our results caused by an ineffective history teacher?
3. If not, how can we better measure the effect of a learning community other than retention or success rates?
1. Given the goal of a learning community, are we looking at the wrong data?
2. What is the goal of a learning community, anyway?
3. Did we have enough staff development on learning communities and pedagogical strategies in order to implement the concept effectively?
5 Basic Learning Community Models

- Linked courses: Students take two connected courses, usually one disciplinary course such as history or biology and one skills course such as writing, speech, or information literacy.
- Learning clusters: Students take three or more connected courses, usually with a common interdisciplinary theme uniting them.
- Freshman interest groups: Similar to learning clusters, but the students share the same major, and they often receive academic advising as part of the learning community.
- Federated learning communities: Similar to a learning cluster, but with an additional seminar course taught by a "Master Learner," a faculty member who enrolls in the other courses and takes them alongside the students. The Master Learner's course draws connections between the other courses.
- Coordinated studies: This model blurs the lines between individual courses. The learning community functions as a single, giant course that the students and faculty members work on full-time for an entire semester or academic year.
At the student level, assessments examine:

- learning
- satisfaction
- engagement
- retention
- time to degree
- involvement in campus and community activities
Conclusion

- First we looked at performance data for History 117 compared to all other History 117 classes
- Second we looked at the Learning Community instructor’s other History 117 classes as a control
- What else could we have looked at?
References

- Professional Learning Community
  - http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/lcfaq.htm
  - http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/curriculum/cu3lk22.htm
  - http://www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/
  - http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html
  - http://www.allthingsplc.info/tools/samples.php

- Learning Community Models

- How do we assess?
  - http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/adl/index.html
  - http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/adl/iic.html