

**Learning Community Student Persistence Report
Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 Cohorts
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Background and Methodology

Learning communities have been in operation at San Joaquin Delta College as linked-enrollment courses for several years. However, the learning community program was restructured when the College received a Title V grant in fall 2005, which included funding for a more structured learning community program and a part-time program coordinator position.

In fall 2007, the first of the Title V learning communities were advertised to students as first-year experience courses. Two learning communities were offered primarily for first-year students who assessed two levels below college-level in math, composition and reading, and one learning community was offered for students assessing one level below college-level in composition and math.

In spring 2008, one learning community was offered to students assessing two levels below college-level in reading and composition and a second learning community was offered to transfer-level composition students as part of the College's AFFIRM program.

The major goals of the learning community program are to foster student success, to make students more aware of campus resources, to build a sense of community among students and faculty and to increase student engagement. Previous studies conducted by the College's Office of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness have shown that, although learning community students are about as likely as their non-learning community peers to succeed in a course, learning community students experience major gains in terms of engagement and positive perceptions of the campus climate. In light of this, a study was undertaken to examine learning community student persistence for the program's first two cohorts of students.

The goal of the study was to examine whether learning community students were more likely to persist to the subsequent semester and to the following year than similar non-learning community students. Student enrollment data was obtained from the College's System 2000 database for students enrolled in all linked learning community course sections in fall 2007 and spring 2008. Preliminary analyses revealed that learning community students were primarily first-year students in both terms, and the majority of learning community students in both terms initially assessed at Level 1 in reading, composition and mathematics.

In order to obtain an appropriate comparison group, all students enrolled in fall 2007 and spring 2008 were stratified by first-year student status and initial assessment levels. Comparison students were then randomly selected according to the distribution of first-year students and Level 1 students in the learning community cohorts. Crosstab/chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if learning community students were more likely to persist to 1) the subsequent term or 2) the next year than comparison students. The results of the analyses are provided below.

Results

✓Fall 2007 Cohort

In all, 99 students enrolled in linked learning community courses in fall 2007. A stratified random sample of 100 students was selected as the comparison group for the fall 2007 learning community cohort. Results of the chi-square analysis are provided in Table 1a.

Table 1a. Fall-to-Spring Persistence for Fall 2007 Learning Community and Comparison Students

Group	Did Not Persist		Persisted		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Comparison Students	36	36.0%	64	64.0%	100	50.3%
Learning Community Students	29	29.3%	70	70.7%	99	49.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>32.7%</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>67.3%</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Note: Differences were not statistically significant

As the table shows, fall 2007 learning community students were somewhat more likely (71%) to persist to the next semester (spring 2008) than comparison students (64%), but the difference was not statistically significant. Table 1b provides the fall-to-fall persistence rates for fall 2007 learning community and comparison students.

Table 1b. Fall-to-Fall Persistence for Fall 2007 Learning Community and Comparison Students

Group	Did Not Persist		Persisted		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Comparison Students	54	54.0%	46	46.0%	100	50.3%
Learning Community Students	52	52.5%	47	47.5%	99	49.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>53.3%</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>46.7%</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Note: Differences were not statistically significant

Learning community (48%) and comparison students (46%) were equally likely to persist to the following fall term. Table 1c illustrates fall 2007 to spring 2009 persistence rates for fall 2007 learning community and comparison students. Again, learning community (44%) and comparison students (47%) were equally likely to persist to spring 2009.

Table 1c. Fall 2007-to-Spring 2009 Persistence for Fall 2007 Learning Community and Comparison Students

Group	Did Not Persist		Persisted		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Comparison Students	53	53.5%	46	46.5%	99	50.3%
Learning Community Students	55	55.6%	44	44.4%	99	49.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>54.5%</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>45.5%</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

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Note: Differences were not statistically significant

✓ **Spring 2008 Cohort**

In spring 2008, just 36 students enrolled in all linked learning community courses. A stratified random sample of 36 students enrolled in spring 2008 was obtained, and crosstab/chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if learning community students were more likely than comparison students to persist to the following fall term and the following spring term. Table 2a illustrates spring-to-fall persistence rates for learning community and comparison students.

Table 2a. Spring-to-Fall Persistence for Spring 2008 Learning Community and Comparison Students

Group	Did Not Persist		Persisted		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Comparison Students	19	52.8%	17	47.2%	36	100.0%
Learning Community Students	17	47.2%	19	52.8%	36	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>50.0%</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>50.0%</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Note: Differences were not statistically significant

Learning community students were slightly more likely (53%) than comparison students (47%) to persist to the next semester, fall 2008. Differences between the groups were, however, not statistically significant. Table 2b illustrates the spring-to-spring persistence rates for learning community and comparison students. Learning community students were somewhat more likely (64%) than comparison students (56%) to persist to the following spring term, but again differences were not statistically significant.

Table 2b. Spring-to-Spring Persistence for Spring 2008 Learning Community and Comparison Students

	Did Not Persist		Persisted		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Comparison Students	16	44.4%	20	55.6%	36	100.0%
Learning Community Students	13	36.1%	23	63.9%	36	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>40.3%</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>59.7%</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Note: Differences were not statistically significant

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the present study was to examine whether learning community students were more likely to persist to the following semester and following year than similar, non-participating students. The results of the study showed that learning community students were slightly more likely to be retained to the following semester and following year, but perhaps partially due to inadequate sample size, differences between learning community and comparison students were not statistically significant. Based on the study’s findings, it appears that learning community students are equally likely to persist to the following semester as their non-participating peers.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted with caution. A major limitation of the present study was the relatively small number of students who participated in learning communities during

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the first year of the program. For example, in spring 2008 just eight students were enrolled in both AFFIRM learning community course sections. These small figures make differences in persistence rates difficult to detect. In addition, many factors may contribute to student persistence, and only learning community participation was examined in the present study. Future studies should examine persistence for learning community students in the larger, more recent cohorts of students and in the context of multiple factors related to student persistence.