Background:

Learning Communities were piloted at Buffalo State during Fall, 2001 for incoming freshmen. Three LC’s were constructed: ROPE (Sociology 100, Economics 101, African-American Studies 189, English 101), American Experience (History 106, English 101, English 140, Art Education 200) and Wasn’t That a Time? (Music 206, Communication 103, Sociology 100, English 101). Each LC consisted of a series of courses connected through a common theme and 1 additional integrated hour. In addition, students who resided on campus and were in a learning community were all housed together in the dormitory. In total, 69 freshmen participated in this pilot program.

At the end of the semester, 50 students in the learning communities completed an evaluation of the program for a response rate of 72%. The results reported below are compiled from that evaluation.

Retention:

Learning Communities have been instituted widely primarily because of the research that shows a positive impact of LC’s on retention of freshmen. The pilot program at Buffalo State yielded a one-semester retention rate of 94.2%. The college retention rate for the same time period was 92.1%.

Program Evaluation:

Students were asked to respond on a 4 point Likert-type scale to the following:

Members of my Learning Community:

- Discuss material covered in classes 1.24
- Encourage each other to go to class 1.86
- Have built positive relationships 1.88
- Expect to remain in contact after the semester is over 1.92
- Study together on a regular basis 2.10
- Share my academic goals 2.16
- Attended events on campus together 2.32

The integrated hour:

- Has helped me feel comfortable with my teachers 1.58
- Should be continued as part of the LC program 2.00
- Was useful to help me make connections among my classes 2.40

* 1=Strongly agree, 2= Agree, 3= Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree
The Learning Community Program:

- After this semester is over, I would feel comfortable approaching at least one of my current teachers for advice or help 1.30
- I am happy with my decision to participate in a LC 1.46
- I would recommend the LC Program to an incoming student 1.48
- The access to Porter Hall was a positive aspect of being a member of the LC 1.72
- The extra-curricular activities were a positive aspect of being a member of the LC experience 1.76
- The course work in the learning community was appropriate for an incoming student 1.78
- The learning community theme and the connections among classes were clear and integrated 1.88

Written Responses:

Students were also asked to respond to several open-ended questions:*  

“One thing I especially liked about my Learning Community was…..”

Overwhelmingly, students cited the closeness of their relationships with other students and how well they got to know their teachers as the most positive aspects of LC’s. Other positives cited were class size, getting into classes they needed, being helped with problems and the connections between courses.

“If I could change one thing about my Learning Community, I would change…”

Eight students wouldn’t change anything. Of the rest, comments included: the integrated hour (9) not have long breaks between classes (5), change living arrangements in dorms (5), inconsistent attendance policies in LC courses (3), class time/choice (3)

“One thing I especially liked about the integrated hour was…..”

The most common response was that it provided informal time to interact with teachers (11), it was a comfortable time together/no tension (7), discussions (15), food (5) and one person who liked nothing about it.

“If I could change one thing about the integrated hour, I would change…”

Six students wouldn’t change anything. The most commonly cited need for change was in the area of organization/structure (10), time (7), usefulness/topic of discussion (4), food (2), everything (1).

“What did you expect to gain from participating in a learning community? Did the program meet your expectations?”

Only 2 respondents indicated that the LC did not meet their expectations. Expectations for learning communities centered around easing into college/adjusting to college/comfort with college (14) and making friends/close relationships/meeting new people (15). Also cited were expectations for gaining knowledge/education/studying (7), small classes (4) and close relationships with professors (4).

* See attached for compilation of all written responses.
“Did you feel being in a learning community helped you in your first semester at Buffalo State? If so, how?”

Only 4 respondents felt that LC’s were not helpful and one was neutral. Everyone else described LC’s as helping them adjust to college (6), be comfortable with college (5), develop positive relationships with teachers (3), become confident (3). Interestingly, 3 respondents noted that LC’s made registration at Buffalo State easy.

“What do you have other thoughts about the Learning Community program that you would like to communicate?”

Positive remarks about LC’s centered around the fact that they were fun and a great experience. Most of the suggestions for improvement included not having the same people living together and in classes together. Also, one person suggested that having a learning community include a larger lecture class would be good so LC members could meet other students and get used to larger lecture type classes.

For more information about Learning Communities, contact Kerran Sanger, Director Interdisciplinary Studies Center, BA 122, 878-3093, sanagerkl@buffalostate.edu

For more information about this report, contact Rosalyn Lindner, Senior Advisor for Assessment, 102 Bulger Communication, 878-6939, lindnera@buffalostate.edu