Rethinking Our Learning Communities in an Era of Scarce Resources

31st Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience
San Antonio, Texas
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Roundtable Participants

• Richard Nimijean, Assistant Dean (Recruitment and First-Year Programs), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Carleton University

• Jennifer Rockwood, Assistant Dean and Director, First Year Experience, College of Innovative Learning, University of Toledo
Roundtable Participants

• Barbara Schneider, Associate Dean, College of Innovative Learning, University of Toledo

• Greg Smith, Assistant Dean (Director of First-Year Interest Groups), University of Wisconsin-Madison
Why This Roundtable?

• Carleton context
  – We knew we had to change the program, but were not sure how
  – Those inside the program could say what worked (or didn’t), but didn’t necessarily understand the nature of LC’s
  – Those outside the program concerned about issues such as cost, small class size, workload / instructor equity, etc.
• Had to go outside: FYE listserv and conferences
  – Was referred to Greg Smith, whose program and our extensive discussions (by email!) provided crucial support for implementing major changes to our program
• But this is not new – we all experience this
• We all have similar stories (information on our programs included at end of slides)
Our goals

• After brief discussion of experiences at University of Toledo and University of Wisconsin – Madison:
  – Guided breakouts to share experiences and explore opportunities
  – Group discussion
  – Possible strategies and recommendations for action
  – Post-conference follow-up
Guiding Questions

- What difficulties or obstacles have you encountered? Why?
- What strategies have been successful in gaining support?
- Who are your campus allies?
- Is there anything you would do differently?
- What resources – financial or otherwise - do you need?
University of Toledo
Living Learning Community Occupancy

• ARTS 65 – Ottawa East
• BUSINESS 30 – Parks Tower
• EDUCATION 72 – Parks Tower
• ENGINEERING 151 – Academic House
• ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 68 – Academic House
• HONORS 28 – Academic House
• SEE 51 – Parks Tower
• HEALTH PROFESSION 220 – Carter Hall
• POLITICS, LAW, SOCIETY 45 – Parks Tower
• LEADEERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE 42 – MacKinnon
• GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION – 20 Crossings
Two New Living Learning Communities Planned

• AFRICANA STUDIES
• DIVERSITY IN STEM

• 2 COIL learning Communities (non residential)
  • Life Connections
  • Sustainability
Residence Life Learning Objectives

• Goal 1: Improve academic success.
  o Objective 1.1: Students who participate in LLCs will have statistically significant higher GPA than students who are not involved in LLC’s by the end of the spring semester.

• Goal 2: Improve students’ sense of well being.
  o Objective 2.1 Students who participate in LLC’s will report statistically significant higher levels of social connectedness than those who do not by the end of the spring semester.

• Goal 3: Increase retention rates.
  o Objective 3.1 Students who participate in LLC’s will have statistically significant higher retention rates than those who don’t by the end of the spring semester.

• Goal 4: Increase participation rates in LLC’s
  o Objective 4.1 the number of students who participate in LLC will increase 10% biennially.
COIL attributes

- The material and human resources based.
- Grades and credit are awarded on the basis of achievement. Curriculum in COIL is "blended":
- Time and space are adjusted to the requirements of learning, and not the other way around. Lectures can be important, but most people learn by doing things in collaboration with others outside of a classroom.
- Curriculum in COIL is "challenge based": Challenge-based learning emphasizes discovery, collaboration, and creative problem-solving.
- Learning in COIL is a matter of working with others to find the right questions and potential solutions. Faculty in COIL is "guides," "co-learners," and "facilitators":
- The focus is on student learning and the guided development of expertise. Online modules allow the students to interact with others online, move at their own pace and choose the kinds of assignments that meet their learning objectives.
- Associated with COIL are organized around "Learning Communities." Learning Communities coalesce around interests, projects, academic programs. Assessment in COIL is outcomes
First College coming in August though COILS

- Each LLC will have faculty and monetary support,
- All first college students will be placed in learning communities
- All first college students will be enrolled in 7 units of UTFC curriculum, integrated and theme based
- All students will participate in a 3 day pre college session on campus before school begins and get a head start (at no extra cost)
- All First College students will participate in FC interim, where they will discuss their progress, engage in service learning, get intrusive advising, participate in seminars and showcase what they have done thus far
- All first Year students will participate in ceremony acknowledging their participation in First College and their success at completion.
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – Including Challenges

- Sustainability
- Management
- Chain of command
- Trying holistic approach
- Collaborating with residence life and student affairs
- Curriculum design
- Staffing
- Faculty involvement
- Budgetary constraints
- Assessment
Contact

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FIRST-YEAR INTEREST GROUPS AT UW-MADISON

- Create social-academic connections
- Promote broader general education goals of the campus
- Provide integrative learning experiences for students
Structure of UW-Madison FIGs:

- Each FIG enrolls 20 students in 3 linked courses (9-12 credits).
- Each FIG is designed and led by a faculty member who teaches the “synthesizing course.”
- The instructor of the “synthesizing course” integrates material from the collateral courses.
- Faculty collaboration is encouraged but not required and can occur in a variety of ways.
FIGs Assessment Plan

- Student Performance: comparisons of academic profiles, semester and cumulative GPAs, grades in specific courses, and retention rates of FIGs and non-FIGs cohorts
- Student Satisfaction: focus groups and individual interviews, end-of-semester surveys, senior year surveys, faculty surveys and interviews
- Course syllabus assessment: learning goals, content integration, etc.
- Classroom observations, artifact collection
- Faculty Satisfaction: focus groups, formal FIGs faculty meetings, informal discussions
- FIGs “Partners”: informal follow-up with colleagues in Housing, Library, Registrar’s Office, academic departments, student support programs, etc.
FIRST SEMESTER GPAS: FIGS AND NON-FIGS

Cohort Year
PLANNED GROWTH OF FIGS

2001 – Pilot of 4 FIGs enrolling 75 students
2002: 13 FIGs, 256 students
2003: 24 FIGs, 470 students
2004: 25 FIGs, 480 students
2005: 24 FIGs, 435 students
2006: 28 FIGs, 508 students
2007: 28 FIGs, 534 students
2008: 29 FIGs, 539 students
2009: 32 FIGs, 598 students
2010: 52 FIGs, 933 students
2011: 66 FIGs, 1,198 students
Visit: figs.wisc.edu

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AMBITIOUS BUT VERY GENERAL GOALS

Launched in 2005, the program embodies our rearticulated goals of a liberal arts education within a large institution...

To help students

• Develop sense of purpose and direction in their studies
• Develop sense of engagement with university
• Promote development of intellectual curiosity and intellectual skills
• Have a rewarding and successful educational experience

And provide faculty with collaborative teaching opportunities
ORIGINAL ARTS ONE
CLUSTER

100 students taking “clusters” of classes together, organized around a theme

- 3 year long lecture-based courses (September-April)
  - All 100 students
  - 2 hours + 1-hour tutorial groups
- 1 first-year seminar (chosen from a selection of 4)
  - 25 students

Offered 4 to 6 annually
THE ORIGINAL MODEL
WHY CHANGE?

Despite some success (notably in GPA, DFW rates and retention):

- *Low levels of high-impact student activities*
- Students: some confusion about program, and wanted more choice
- *Difficulty in reaching registration targets (100 per cluster)*
- Pressures on Chairs and Directors
- Scheduling challenge
- *Lack of guidelines for instructors*
  - Faculty collaboration could be greater
- Lack of success criteria
- Costly (due to size)
NEW GOALS

More active and collaborative teaching teams
More engaged and satisfied students
  • Continued success in GPA, DFW, and retention rates for ArtsOne students
Smaller clusters – centred in FYSM
Higher – and clearer – expectations placed on students
Outline support
Simplified registration system
Hope to develop “alumni” after first year
Vision statement

http://www1.carleton.ca/artsone/vision/
THE CURRENT MODEL

“Modified” F.I.G. started in 2011-12

- Most clusters still feature 2 or 3 FYSM’s
- Fewer limited enrollment lecture courses

Application process for faculty
Registration option for students
7 clusters planned for next year

http://www1.carleton.ca/artsone/current-clusters/

Early assessment: more engaged faculty and students

http://www1.carleton.ca/artsone/activities/
CHALLENGES

Provincial government finances are not good – affects university budgets and creates budgetary uncertainty

Retention into 3rd year needs to improve
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