EVOLUTION OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Mara Sidman, Lindsay Bruce and Janine Bradley
University of Massachusetts Boston

Learning Community: defined

" a purposeful restructuring of the curriculum to link together courses so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning and increased interaction with faculty and fellow students"

--Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990

Components of a Learning Community

- Purposeful Restructuring
  - Non-developmental curricula
  - Smaller class sizes
  - Community specific courses
  - Themed curricula
  - Student driven learning outcomes

- Increased Interaction
  - Social emotional development
  - In class/ small group advising sessions
  - One-on-one advising
  - Smaller class sizes and increased faculty interaction
  - Co-curricular programming inside and outside the classroom

UMass Boston is:

- The only public university in Boston
- Part of the UMass system (4 campuses and a medical school)
- 16,000 students (approx. 12,000 undergrads)
- No on-campus housing available; many opportunities for active involvement
- 60% of students are transfers
- Average student age = 25
- Most diverse student population in New England
- 40% attend part-time
- 8 degree granting colleges

Institutional Priority:
Improve Retention & Graduation Rates

- 75% retention overall

- 6-year Graduation rate below 40%

- First-time, full-time freshman enrollment on the rise

- Increasing Student Demand for more traditional college experience

Success Community History

- Part of retention initiatives

- Modeled for "traditional" freshman population

- Goal of increased graduation rates

- Different models have been developed to suit various college requirements

- Exist in three large colleges: College of Science and Mathematics; College of Liberal Arts; and College of Management

Shared Elements of all UMass Boston Communities

- Focus on first-time, full-time freshmen

- Orientation to recruit and register students

- 5 day/week academic schedule

- Intensive, Intrusive Professional Advising/Outreach

- Upper-class Mentors

- Connection to University Resources through workshops, classroom visits, class requirements, etc.

- Integration of Social Student Activities

- Build commonalities in marketing & communication plans

CSM Freshman Success Communities

❑ **Piloted 2009**

❑ **Maximum of 24 students per community**

❑ **Organized by major/ program of study**

❑ **Eligibility based on Math Placement**

- **(Pre-Calculus or higher)**

❑ **Rapid Growth**

- Began with 2 pilot cohorts in 2009-10 (46 students)
- 6 communities for 2010-2011 (125 students)
- 7 for 2011-12 (150 students)

FSC Program Structure

- Co-enrolled in the introductory courses for their major and a Science Gateway Seminar
- Sections reserved exclusively for them
- Flexible in Structure
  - Grouped courses range from 5 down to 2

- Biology FSC Course Enrollment: 17-18 credits
  - Science Gateway Seminar
  - Biology 111 (lecture and lab)
  - General Chemistry 115&117 (lecture, discussion, lab)
  - Pre-Calculus or Calculus (student choice)
  - English 101 (student choice)

Science Gateway Seminars

☐ Taught by tenured CSM faculty

☐ 2-credits each semester for full academic year (normal FYS is one semester, 4 credits)

☐ Emphasis on critical analysis and communication in the context of science

☐ Heavy use of technology for ease of asynchronous group collaboration

Initial Success

FSC Academic Outcomes, Year 1 vs. Year 2		
	2009-2010	2010-2011
Number of Communities	2	6
Number of Students	46	123
Retention	87%	90%*
≥ 25 Credits Completed	79%	65%
≥ 30 Credits Completed	61%	41%
GPA ≥ 2.5	75%	50%
GPA ≥ 3.0	59%	30%

* Data will not be finalized until October 2011, after add/drop period.

Looking Ahead

- Continue data-driven approach

- Keeping FSC Alumni Connected

- Balancing Faculty Driven Program with Student Development Needs

- Helping ALL FSC students succeed

- Incorporating new elements
  - International Exchange
  - Student Research

CLA First!

- Piloted in Fall 2010
- For students in any CLA major or undeclared
- Courses fulfill general education and/or major requirements
- Completion of all cohort courses fulfills First-Year Seminar requirement
- Membership increased from 40 to 71 students for second year, and cohort number increased from 2 to 3
- For 2010/11, 60% retention after first year
- Implementation of Start Smart! program to provide academic and social support and connections

CLA First!

- <u>Courses offered first semester:</u>

  All students take English 101 and Humanities course

  Either: Psychology, Anthropology or Sociology

  Either: Art, Music or Philosophy

  One additional course (not part of cohort program)

- <u>Courses offered second semester:</u>

  All students take English 102

  Either: Psychology, Anthropology or Sociology

  Either: Art, Philosophy or Economics

  Two additional courses (not part of cohort program)

Looking Ahead

- Continue collecting data on impact on retention and graduation rate

- Connecting CLA First! alumni with new opportunities

- Continue to see buy-in from academic departments to possibly develop major based cohorts

- Work more closely with faculty to develop in- and out-of-class offerings for students

- Helping ALL CLA First! students succeed

Management LEAD

- **Piloted in Fall 2011**
  - 43 students enrolled
- **4 semester program**
- **Cohorts by math placement**
  - College Algebra
  - Pre-Calculus
  - Managerial Calculus
- **Umbrella course MGT 130**
  - Dedicated class time with students
- **Open to any incoming student with less than 30 transfer credits**
- **Co-curricular programming from Peer LEADers**

Management LEAD

☐ 4 semester program

Freshman Year Fall Courses (15 credits)	Freshman Year Spring Courses (15 credits)
MGT 130 Introduction to Business ENGL 101 Freshman English I * ECON 101 Introduction to Microeconomics * A math course leading up to MATH 134, Managerial Calculus, as determined by the math placement exam (MATH 115, MATH 129 or MATH 134)* First Year Seminar of student's choice	MSIS 110 Introduction to Computers & Information Systems ENGL 102 Freshman English II ECON 102 Introduction to Macroeconomics MATH 129, Pre-Calculus for Management, or MATH 134 or a selected General Education course General Education course of student's choice
Sophomore Year Fall Courses (15 credits)	**Sophomore Year Spring Courses (15 credits)**
AF 210 Financial Accounting MSIS 111 Managerial Statistics BC 230 Fundamentals of Business Communication & Critical Analysis or BC 290 Professional Written Communication & Critical Analysis * Selected General Education course General Education course of student's choice	AF 211 Managerial Accounting MSIS 212 Managerial Decision Making BC 290 or Non-Business Elective of student's choice Selected General Education course General Education course of student's choice * These courses require a placement exam

Looking Ahead

- Unifying course for future semesters (MSIS 110)
- Connectedness of students/cohorts in second year
- Peer LEADer recruitment
- Management of first and second year students in one program
- Success rates
- Retention results

Freshman Success Partners

- ❑ **Meet regularly to discuss challenges and successes; brainstorm for program growth**

- ❑ **Work together to advocate for needs for the communities to the larger campus community**

- ❑ **Streamline institutional communication about success communities**

- ❑ **Collaborate on peer mentor training and other programs**

Brainstorming

Individually complete the worksheet thinking about your own institution.

What are some of the ideas and initiatives you came up with?

What are some of the challenges to implementing this on your campus?

What suggestions do others have to help with implementation?

Small Group Work

Individually complete the worksheet thinking about your own institution.

In small groups:

- Share ideas developed for learning community initiatives on your own campus
- Discuss what are some of the foreseeable challenges or anticipated constraints/barriers to implementation?
- If you already have communities on your campus what strategies did you use to succeed in implementation?

Contact Information

We'd love to hear from you!

- College of Science and Math Success Communities; Lindsay Bruce
  lindsay.bruce@umb.edu

- College of Liberal Arts CLA First!
  Janine Bradley
  janine.bradley@umb.edu

- College of Management LEAD
  Mara Sidman
  mara.sidman@umb.edu