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C4: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Improving Retention with Developmental Students

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Title: *C4: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Improving Retention with Developmental Students*

Abstract:

In this session, we describe an interdisciplinary learning community program designed to improve retention among freshman students with three developmental placements. We will discuss how a similar program could be developed at other institutions and emphasize issues of transferability and scalability in the context of declining resources and retention.

Session Description:

The C4 (Cross Curricular Career Community) Scholar Program at Ferris State University (MI) is a learning community for incoming freshman students with developmental placements in English, mathematics, and reading. The program's creation was motivated by a persistent gap in the freshman-to-sophomore return rate between freshman developmental students and the University's overall freshman class.

The C4 program is a collaboration between the University's Retention and Student Success unit and the departments of English, Literature, and World Languages and Mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences. To support transferability and scalability, rather than have integrated or linked courses, the program encourages interdisciplinary connections via shared course policies and the program's framework (Connors & Smith, 2014). As a means of providing interdisciplinary coherence, the framework focuses on the development of a transferable professional mindset centered on accountability which is offered by Connors, Smith, & Hickman (2004).

C4 students are accelerated in English and math (Jaggers, Hodara, Cho, & Xu, 2015). This leads to cost savings equivalent to seven credits and the potential for reducing time-to-degree. The program promotes the use of often under-used support services (Bremer et al., 2013), such as math tutoring and writing support, which the University provides through annual base-budgeted funding. Students also receive more intensive academic advising to increase retention and guide them in their academic goals (Bahr, 2008; Boatman, 2014). Implementation of this perspective has provided a potentially transferable means of connecting academic progress with vocational success, which aligns with the historical mission of the University.

On the basis of our experiences with this program, we will consider how a similar interdisciplinary program could be developed at other institutions (Lipka, 2010). In this discussion, we will emphasize issues of transferability and scalability in the context of declining resources and retention.

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Keywords

developmental education, retention, interdisciplinary programming, learning communities, professional mindset