August 31, 2012

Educational Support and Administrative Review

Learning Communities

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Director

Overview of Department

Brief overview of department/area:

Learning Communities were first implemented at the University of North Alabama fall 2005. Results from this pilot program indicated that they had the potential to impact retention and were effective in aiding the adjustment to university life of first-time freshmen. Each fall since that time Learning Communities have been offered to incoming freshmen as part of our regular course offerings. Feedback from students continues to illustrate the positive impact of the program. To date 96.8% of all students who have participated in a learning community have indicated that they would recommend a learning community to an incoming freshman. Approximately 98 percent have recommended that UNA continue to offer learning communities to first time freshmen.

At UNA, two different courses are paired together, such as English and History, and a one hour Learning
Community seminar course is added to create a learning community.

Mission statement for the department/area:

To create structures that foster students' transition to college level learning and enhance the interactions and connections between and among students and teachers. Specifically, Learning Communities are designed to help students develop academically, socially, and professionally throughout their undergraduate education.

Goals and objectives of the department/area:

- To promote faculty/student as well as student/student interaction among first-time entering freshmen.
- To positively impact the academic success of first year students.
- To positively impact the retention rate for first year students from the freshman to sophomore year

Governance structure of the department/area:

Oversight for Learning Communities at UNA is the responsibility of the Learning Communities Coordinator who reports to the Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs within the division of Academic Affairs. Clerical support is provided by the Administrative Assistant assigned to the Honors Program, Learning Communities, and the Writing Center.

Brief description of the national status of the department/area (including emerging issues and trends.)

Learning Communities continue to be a viable tool for universities to address student integration into the university community and retention. The Washington Center's National Learning Commons

Directory has over 250 learning community initiatives in colleges and universities throughout the nation (http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/Directory.asp).

Department/Area Evaluation

Description of the means of assessment of department/area goals. [Means of assessing outcomes should be based on typical and/or accepted assessment measures within the department/area]

Two primary sources of data have been collected to assess the outcomes for Learning Communities.

1) Data Collection, student surveys – student survey administered annually to all learning community participants assessing satisfaction with program and perceived gains.
2) Measuring Program Impact/Successes – data provided annually by the Office of Research, University of North Alabama on retention and graduation rates of learning community participants.

Summary of the results of the assessment/s:

Results from the annual student survey for 773 Learning Community participants indicate that the above goals are being achieved. Results are as follows:

Percentages indicate agreement.
Do you feel that your participation in a learning community has:
63.9%….Benefited you academically
82.5%….Impacted your adjustment as a freshman
88.7%….Allowed you to meet other students
77.1%….Allowed you to form friendships
90.8%….Allowed you to get to know your professors
63.1%….Improved your grade in the LC courses
33.0%….Improved your grades in all courses
70.1%.....Increased knowledge of the advising process

Table 1. Student Survey Responses 2005-2011.

How beneficial was your participation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very beneficial	461	59.6	62.2	62.2
	Somewhat beneficial	269	34.8	36.3	98.5
	Not at all beneficial	11	1.4	1.5	100.0
	Total	741	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	32	4.1		
Total		773	100.0		

Table 1. Cont.

Benefited you academically

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	494	63.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	279	36.1		
Total		773	100.0		

Impacted your adjustment as a freshman

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	638	82.5	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	135	17.5		
Total		773	100.0		

Allowed you to meet other students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	686	88.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	87	11.3		
Total		773	100.0		

Allowed you to form friendships

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	596	77.1	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	177	22.9		
Total		773	100.0		

Allowed you to get to know your professors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	702	90.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	71	9.2		
Total		773	100.0		

Improved your grade in the LC courses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	488	63.1	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	285	36.9		
Total		773	100.0		

Table 1. Cont.

Improved your grades in all courses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	255	33.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	518	67.0		
Total		773	100.0		

Increased advising knowledge

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	542	70.1	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	231	29.9		
Total		773	100.0		

Data provided by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment on an annual basis identifies the retention rates for Learning Community participants in comparison to the total population. High school GPA, ACT, and yearly UNA GPA are also provided for both groups. When examining the overall impact of the program for Learning Community cohorts the following has been noted:

- Fall 2006 Learning Community students had approximately the same grade point averages for subsequent semesters but experienced significantly higher retention.
- Fall 2007 Learning Community students experienced higher grade point averages and greater retention for spring 2008 than the general population.
- Fall 2008, fall 2009, and fall 2010 Learning Community cohorts have experienced higher retention rates than the general population for all subsequent periods that have been examined.

Table 2. Retention Data Comparing Learning Community Participants to General Student Population, 2005 – 2011.

FALL 2005 Learning Community N=60 ACT=20.32 HSGPA=2.97	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Returned		39	30	25	17	5	2
Not Enrolled		9	7	9	10	10	11
Transferred		12	23	26	27	27	27
Graduated		0	0	0	6	18	20
Retention Rate		**65.0%**	**50.0%**	**41.7%**	**28.3%**	**8.3%**	**3.3%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**10.0%**	**30.0%**	**33.3%**
Transfer Rate		**20.0%**	**38.3%**	**43.3%**	**45.0%**	**45.0%**	**45.0%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.85	3.01	2.65	2.80	3.05	2.64	2.24

FALL 2005 UNA Freshmen Cohort N=982 ACT=20.56 HSGPA=2.	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		662	509	438	264	98	42
Not Enrolled		191	203	211	255	229	217
Transferred		129	270	331	355	386	396
Graduated		0	0	2	108	269	327
Retention Rate		**67.4%**	**51.8%**	**44.6%**	**26.9%**	**10.0%**	**4.3%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.2%**	**11.0%**	**27.4%**	**33.3%**
Transfer Rate		**13.1%**	**27.5%**	**33.7%**	**36.2%**	**39.3%**	**40.3%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.62	2.81	2.85	2.91	2.91	2.77	2.74

Table 2. Cont.

FALL 2006 Learning Comm. N=94 ACT=20.67 HSGPA=2.63	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		61	47	44	32	6
Not Enrolled		19	21	20	21	27
Transferred		14	26	30	33	33
Graduated		0	0	0	8	28
Retention Rate		**64.9%**	**50.0%**	**46.8%**	**34.0%**	**6.4%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**8.5%**	**29.8%**
Transfer Rate		**14.9%**	**27.7%**	**31.9%**	**35.1%**	**35.1%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.74	2.96	2.60	2.78	2.63	2.43

FALL 2006 UNA Freshmen Cohort N=1019 ACT=20.78 HSGPA=2.96	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		647	489	393	279	86
Not Enrolled		223	264	295	354	2621
Transferred		149	266	330	374	388
Graduated		0	0	1	112	284
Retention Rate		**63.5%**	**48.0%**	**38.6%**	**27.4%**	**8.4%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.1%**	**11.0%**	**27.9%**
Transfer Rate		**14.6%**	**26.1%**	**32.4%**	**36.7%**	**38.1%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.61	2.71	2.75	2.95	2.83	2.60

Table 2. Cont.

FALL 2007 Learning Community N=181 ACT=20.12 HSGPA=2.81	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		123	95	79	53
Not Enrolled		26	43	42	43
Transferred		32	43	60	63
Graduated		0	0	0	22
Retention Rate		**68.0%**	**52.5%**	**43.6%**	**29.3%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**2.2%**
Transfer Rate		**17.7%**	**23.8%**	**33.1%**	**34.8%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.67	2.43	2.88	3.07	2.7

FALL 2007 UNA Freshmen Cohort N=1023 ACT=20.99 HSGPA=2.93	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		648	482	444	267
Not Enrolled		211	299	270	277
Transferred		164	242	309	353
Graduated		0	0	0	126
Retention Rate		**63.3%**	**47.1%**	**43.4%**	**26.1%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**12.3%**
Transfer Rate		**16.0%**	**23.7%**	**30.2%**	**34.5%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.55	2.77	2.85	2.94	2.81

Table 2. Cont.

FALL 2008 Learning Community N=163 ACT=20.65 HSGPA=2.89	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		122	99	82
Not Enrolled		17	25	28
Transferred		24	39	53
Graduated		0	0	0
Retention Rate		**74.8%**	**60.7%**	**50.3%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**
Transfer Rate		**14.7%**	**23.9%**	**32.5%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.69	2.51	2.58	2.88
FALL 2008 UNA Freshmen Cohort N=988 ACT=21.15 HSGPA=2.92	**Fall 2008**	**Fall 2009**	**Fall 2010**	**Fall 2011**
Enrolled		705	565	503
Not Enrolled		138	200	198
Transferred		145	223	287
Graduated		0	0	0
Retention Rate		**71.4%**	**57.2%**	**50.9%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**
Transfer Rate		**14.7%**	**22.6%**	**29.0%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.51	2.68	2.76	2.95

Table 2. Cont.

FALL 2009 Learning Community N=196 ACT=20.37 HSGPA=2.77	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		140	104
Not Enrolled		35	47
Transferred		21	45
Graduated		0	0
Retention Rate		**71.4%**	**53.1%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**
Transfer Rate		**10.7%**	**23.0%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.54	2.34	2.71
FALL 2009 UNA Freshmen Cohort N=1064 ACT=21.07 HSGPA=2.89	**Fall 2009**	**Fall 2010**	**Fall 2011**
Enrolled		694	544
Not Enrolled		217	263
Transferred		153	257
Graduated		0	0
Retention Rate		**65.2%**	**51.1%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**	**0.0%**
Transfer Rate		**14.4%**	**24.2%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.45	2.47	2.83

Table 2. Cont.

FALL 2010 Learning Community N=186 ACT=21.17 HSGPA=2.99	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Enrolled		134
Not Enrolled		30
Transferred		22
Graduated		0
Retention Rate		**72.0%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**
Transfer Rate		**11.8%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.63	2.90
FALL 2010 UNA Freshmen Cohort N=961 ACT=21.81 HSGPA=3.08	**Fall 2010**	**Fall 2011**
Enrolled		681
Not Enrolled		147
Transferred		133
Graduated		0
Retention Rate		**70.9%**
Graduation Rate		**0.0%**
Transfer Rate		**13.8%**
GPA for Enrolled Students	2.59	2.88

2.2 Recent improvements based on the results of the assessments

Learning Community enrollments over the past 3-5 years have remained fairly stable. As a result it was determined that increased enrollment might occur as a result of a more aggressive marketing plan (see Table 3). During 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 a number of actions were taken to develop an effective marketing strategy to increase participation of first-time entering freshmen in Learning Communities. The Learning Communities Coordinator worked with the Director of Communications to identify avenues for the marketing of Learning Communities to this population. A Learning Community Brochure was developed to be delivered electronically to all SOAR participants. SOAR email addresses were utilized to disseminate information about Learning Communities to in-coming students.

In sum, to increase the number of students participating in a Learning Community the following marketing initiatives have been implemented:

- Placement of learning communities banner in GUC during SOAR periods
- Presentation on Learning Communities to all incoming freshmen during SOAR
- Presentation on Learning Communities to parents of incoming freshmen during SOAR
- Email sent to all incoming freshmen prior to arriving on campus for registration
- Brochure developed and distributed to incoming freshmen/parents at SOAR via email.

Based on the data presented the assumption is that overall student retention will continue to increase as the number of participants in learning communities increase (See Tables 1 and 2).

Table 3. Learning Communities 2006—2012.

YEAR	# LC's	#STUDENTS	#FACULTY	#DISCIPLINES
2006	11	93	21	17
2007	13	168	24	15
2008	14	156	20	9
2009	12	199	21	12
2010	14	201	20	14
2011	11	147*	19	10
2012	11	171	19	9

*Note: linkages in Banner to specific labs impacted participation

2.3 Appropriate documentation to support the assessment of departmental/area goals

Tables 1 and 2 provide documentation and data to support assessment of area goals (see above).

2.4 Brief analysis of those areas in need of improvement and an action plan for improvement in these areas

- Focus needs to be continued on increasing the number of participants in Learning Communities each fall. This will be achieved by 1) continuing to work with University advisors to encourage students to select a Learning Community during the registration process and 2) increased marketing of the program to incoming freshmen.

- Work with Ad Hoc Committee on First Year Experience to incorporate Learning Communities into the first-year experience structure.

1. <u>Facilities and Resources that address the adequacy of resources and support services to support the goals and objectives of the department/area</u>

3.1 Equipment – the current level of support for equipment is adequate.

3.2 Space – the current level of support of space is adequate given current levels of participation. If participation increases available classroom space for the LC 100—Learning Community Seminar may be an issue. Future use of residence halls for implementation of Residential Learning Communities.

3.3 Staff – the current level of support staff is adequate.

3.4 Other – N/A

2. <u>Achievements</u>

- Revised pairing and timing of courses to increase the potential number of participants (e.g., time restrictions for band members and student-athletes).
- Increased awareness of Learning Communities through expanded marketing.
- Fall 2007 Learning Community students experienced higher grade point averages and greater retention for spring 2008 than the general population.
- Fall 2008, fall 2009, and fall 2010 Learning Community cohorts have experienced higher retention rates than the general population for all subsequent periods that have been examined.

3. Responses to Previous Review Recommendations

N/A

4. Vision and Plans for the Future of the area

Goal: to integrate a student's living and academic environments. According to Shapiro, et. al, the educational programming in residence halls centers around the belief that not all learning occurs in the classroom. Smith (1993) distinguishes a residential college model from a living learning environment by noting that,

> "a living-learning center is typically defined as student living space with intentional academic programming and services, such as in-hall tutoring, ongoing lecture series, and academic advising. It is also common for living and learning programs to feature academic courses taught in the residential facility."

Anticipated Outcomes:

In an article by Gary Pike (1997) Enhancing the Educational Impact of Residence Halls: The Relationship between Residential Learning Communities and First-Year College Experiences and Persistence," it was noted that residential learning communities did not improve students' academic achievement and persistence directly, but did indirectly improve students' success by enhancing their incorporation into college. However, when looking at the outcomes for residential learning communities versus traditional residences halls it was found that students in residential learning communities "had significantly higher levels of involvement, interaction, and gains in learning and intellectual development than did students in traditional residence halls" (Pike, 1999). Apparently, participation in a learning community directly impacted the students' overall involvement and interaction with others and indirectly impacted their integration into the university structure.

5. Unit Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for changes, which are within the control of the department/area, if appropriate.

1. Increase advising/registration in Learning Communities by SOAR advisors.

7.2 Recommendations for changes that require action at the Vice President, Provost, or higher levels.

1. Implementation of Residential Learning Community.