

Public Abstract

First Name:Michael

Middle Name:B.

Last Name:Wood

Adviser's First Name:Dr. Cynthia

Adviser's Last Name:MacGreggor

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title:THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN A CURRICULAR LEARNING COMMUNITY ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS, ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION, INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT, AND PERSISTENCE OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this study, using the first-year student as the unit of analysis, was to explore the impact of participation in a curricular learning community (CLC) on the academic success, academic and social integration, institutional commitment, and persistence of first-year students at Missouri State University (MSU), a Midwest, public, four-year university. Additionally, the researcher explored pre-existing differences in students who elected to enroll in a CLC, as compared to those who do not.

This quantitative study examined a sample of 471 first-semester students at MSU to answer four research questions which pertained to students' academic success and persistence to the second semester of studies. The single-stage, convenience sample (Creswell, 2007) included students enrolled in general education courses in fall 2011. Two groups were compared; those enrolled as part of a curricular learning community (CLC), and students enrolled in stand-alone courses (non-CLCs). Additionally, the researcher utilized a modified version of Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) Institutional Integration Scale (IIS) to measure several constructs associated with increased academic and success, such as (a) peer group interactions, (b) interactions with faculty, (c) faculty concerns for student development and teaching, (d) academic and intellectual development, and (e) institutional and goal commitment.

The findings of the study revealed no significant differences between the CLC and non-CLC groups on any subscales measured by the IIS. Moreover, no significant differences were found between the CLC and non-CLC groups in demographic measures, suggesting the two groups were indeed similar. The only significant difference found between the two groups on any measure was revealed on a math ACT subscale, which was significantly lower for the CLC than the non-CLC group. The results reinforce the notion that students who elect to enroll in CLCs are as academically prepared (with the exception of Math) than those who do not.

Implications for practice suggest a need for additional professional development for participating faculty members. Efforts should focus on greater integration of curricular and co-curricular content. Furthermore, adequate resources and personnel should be allocated to further develop, administer, and evaluate these programs to create CLCs which would positively impact students' academic success and persistence.

Recommendations for further research include a mixed-methods design to obtain a better understanding of the subtleties of students' experiences in the CLCs. In addition, a longitudinal approach is recommended, since persistence is typically measured from fall-to-fall, rather than fall-to-spring as in the current study. Finally, future research should examine MSU's benchmark institutions that have CLC programs to obtain a broader understanding of programs and their impact in similar institutions.