First Generation Cohort Program: Success Over Time

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY AT NEWARK

Campus Profile:

- Open-access regional campus

- Offer some four-year degrees

- Most students transition to Columbus campus

Student Profile:

- 2,536 total students

- 54% Women, 30% minority

- Average ACT score 22

- 1,268 first-year students, of which 497 are first-generation or 39%

DETAILS OF LEARNING COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Participants

The Buckeye Generation Learning Community (BGLC) was created in Autumn 2012 for 80 first-generation students. Students are invited to submit an online application. Diversity within the program is 44-51% and 61-74% women. BGLC students have an average ACT score lower than that of other FGCSs and non-FGCSs.

Engagement

Students are required to engage in social and cultural activities within the learning community cohort as well as within the broader campus community.

Academic Support

Students receive tutoring support for learning community courses facilitated by peer coaches using the method of supplemental instruction. This method works most effectively when the peer coaches sit-in on the courses with the students. Peer coaches participate in an accredited tutor training program, which allows them to advance to a professional tutor level if they choose. BGLC staff collaborate with faculty to support students in the program.

Common Classes

Students take three common courses in the fall, which include two general education courses and a first-year introductory course. The first-year course meets for twice the normal time to allow students to acquire learning, team-building, and leadership skills as well as personal success strategies. In spring semester the students take only one general education course together, which allows them the opportunity to take math, science, or major specific courses.

Peer Coaches

Each student is assigned a peer coach who provides academic and social support. Peer coaches undergo specialized training in coaching, leadership, suicide prevention, diversity, and tutoring.

Financial Support

Learning community students receive a $300 book stipend in fall to be used in our campus bookstore. The students must achieve a 2.2 GPA in fall in order to receive another $300 book stipend in spring semester.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
NEWARK

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Impact of Learning Community:
Outcomes and Data

CUMULATIVE GPA

BGLC students had higher cum GPA their first-semester than other FGCSs and comparable GPA to non-FGCSs. They also had higher cum GPA their second autumn semester as well:

BGLC = 2.87, other FGCSs = 2.78, non-FGCSs = 2.83

RETENTION RATES

Cohort Year	BGLC	Other FGCSs	Non-FGCSs
2012-2013	54.7%	48.9%	60.3%
2013-2014	57.9%	56.8%	64.2%
2014-2015	62.5%	55.4%	65.1%
Average retention rate	58.4%	53.7%	63.2%

*Average retention rate after second autumn (for 3 cohorts).*

BGLC students were retained at higher rates across cohorts compared to other FGCSS. In addition, BGLC students were retained at higher rates across time:

BGLC = 40.6% compared to other FGCSs = 29.9%

AU 2012 cohort retained after AU 2015.

GRADUATION RATE

The ultimate success of the program can be found in the increased four year graduation rate of BGLC students compared to other FGCSs who started at Ohio State Newark.
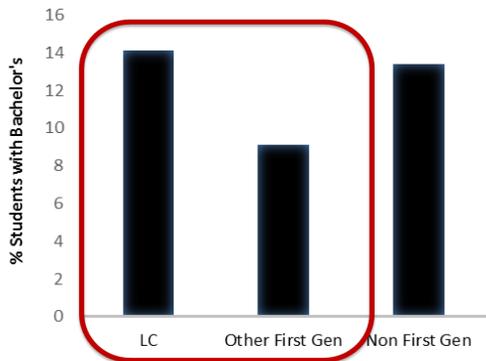
SP 2016 graduation rates for AU 2012 cohort.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Students who participated in the learning community had a greater understanding of campus resources, improved time management skills, and a greater sense of community and support.

"love being able to be accepted and being a part of a group"

"LC was a family"

"BGLC is a really great program. It's making me feel more like a person versus just a number at a bigger college. I can't wait to see what the rest of the year leads to."

POSSIBILITIES FOR REPLICATION

There are many possibilities to replicate a program like this at other institutions, even with little to no funding available:

- Peer mentors
- Social and cultural activities
- Academic support through tutoring, common classes, and collaboration with faculty
- Priority consideration for housing

In addition to foundational research on student development and retention, much of the program structure was created based upon research, some of which included:

D'Amico, M. M., & Dika, S. L. (2013). Using data known at the time of admission to predict first-generation college student success. *Journal of College Student Retention, 15* (2), 173-192.

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Laufgraben, J. L. (2005). Learning communities. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, B. O. Barefoot, & Associates, (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first-year students: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 27-46). San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Zhao, C. M., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(2), 115-138.