

Impact of Blugold Beginnings on Student Learning Outcomes and Retention of Participants



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Purpose & Introduction

Purpose: The goal of this research is to assess the effectiveness (learning outcome attainment and retention) of a pilot program at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Blugold Beginnings Learning Community (BBLC)

Background:

- There are large achievement gaps between minority students—in particular African American students—and white students (Borsuk, 2007).
- National data reveals that students connected with institutions, other students, and faculty have a higher rate of retention than unconnected students (Shih, et al., 2009).
- From 2001-2006, average GPAs for multicultural students were significantly lower than average GPA for white students (Shih, et al., 2009).
- Learning communities are linked to heightened academic performance, increased competence and knowledge, and satisfaction of college experience (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).
- Research on the Freshman Learning Community at Georgia State University demonstrates that students who participated in the LC have an increase of GPA from their first semester and none of the students (over a four year period) were placed on Academic probation (Hotchkiss, Moore, & Pitts, 2006).

Method

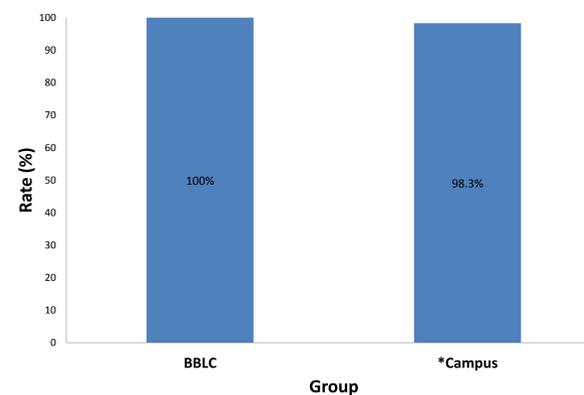
- Participants agreed at the beginning of the year to have their academic progress and activity participation tracked.
- 12 students (54.5%) took part in the Jumpstart Summer Orientation (students came to campus one week prior to other freshmen students moving in and participated in community-building activities. They also gained access to campus resources and were able to become more familiar with college life and ask questions to mentors.
- Students voluntarily participated in a number of activities on campus including academic skill building, artist forums, and other teambuilding events aimed at building a sense of community within the cohort. They also had the option of taking three different classes so that they were with students they already knew in these introductory classes.
- Participants were also invited to join The Latehomecomer Reading Seminar, with the goal of introducing students to a cultural appreciation of the Hmong culture.
- In April, a survey was sent to participants using Qualtrics. The survey included questions about participants' experiences in the program and how positively they viewed different aspects of the program.
- The survey consisted of 28 questions in the form of statements. Each participant rated their agreement level to the statement on a four point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with an option of "Not Applicable".
- Examples of questions include:
"Coming to campus early helped prepare me for the college environment."
"Meeting with my college coach has given me guidance and support in college career."
"I have acquired many useful study skills, note-taking skills, and time-management skills."

Learning Outcomes Assessed

- Achieve academic and personal success
- Effectively learn and apply various college learning strategies
- Gain efficient time management and organizational skills
- Connect with the broader campus community
- Utilize available campus resources
- Develop individual strategies to assist their learning and decision making
- Understand importance and value of diversity

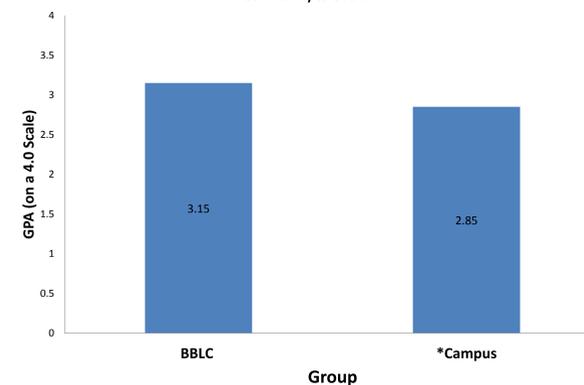
Results

Retention of Students in the Blugold Beginnings Learning Community Compared to Overall Retention of Multicultural Students on Campus



* All multi-cultural freshmen students at UWEC

GPA Comparison of Students Enrolled in the Blugold Beginnings Learning Community to Overall



Discussion

- Two students in the original cohort of 22 students are no longer in the BBLC program
- 100% of students who attended the Jumpstart orientation rated positively about their experience; they all agree that after orientation, they were more confident about starting college. On the other hand, only 66% of students rated positively about their experience with a college mentor; the other 34% disagreed that their college student mentor had helped with making their transition into college a lot smoother.
- Fall semester GPAs ranged from 1.13 to 3.75 with a mean score of 3.15. Fall credit load ranged from 12-19 credits with a mean credit load of 15.2.
- The mean fall semester GPA of BBLC students is 3.13, compared to the mean GPA for all multi-cultural students on campus of 2.85.
- Retention rate from fall to spring were 100% within the BBLC cohort, as compared to the UWEC rate of 98.3 % (all multi-cultural freshmen students).
- The attendance rate for activities range from 4 to 25 activities per student (out of 39 available activities) with a mean of 16.1 activities.

Conclusion

- Overall, students reported a positive experience in the BBLC, and had a higher GPA, credit load, and retention rate than the general population of multicultural students on campus.
- It's difficult to say at this point if the BBLC had a positive effect on students or if the students who joined the BBLC would have had similar scores and credit loads regardless of being in the program.
- The next steps for conducting research on this program involve following a control group of multicultural students along with the BBLC cohort. Along with the addition of this control group, random assignment of students from the general UWEC multicultural student population to the BBLC would allow for higher generalizability of the results of this research to the multicultural student population on campus.

What's Next?

- Continuing research will help in the enhancement of the BBLC program.
- Results will be included in grant report and presented to the Chancellor's Cabinet and the Enrollment Management Team
- Research will be utilized to obtain future external grant funding opportunities.

References

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