This edition of the “Student Survey Brief” draws from the Freshman Academic Experience Survey administered in Spring 2007. This was a collaborative effort with Robert Hanneman and Martin Johnson from the UCR Survey Research Center. This survey focuses on entering freshmen and their participation and “engagement” in learning communities. For a full report on this study please visit http://irue.ucr.edu/reports.html

This report is meant to raise more questions than they answer. Contact us with follow-up questions at: junelyn.peeples@ucr.edu and guadalupe.anaya@ucr.edu or Martin Johnson at martin.johnson@ucr.edu.
THE IMPACT OF
FIRST YEAR LEARNING COMMUNITIES

UCR has created a number of educational programs intended to enrich the experience of first-year students through “learning communities.” About 46% of the respondents to the Freshman Academic Experience Survey reported that they had participated in one or more of these programs.

The survey asked whether there are notable differences in the levels of scholarly “engagement” enjoyed by students participating in learning communities as compared to those who did not. The findings reported here rely on analyses that control for demographic and academic performance differences among students.

SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT

STUDENT-FACULTY CONTACT

Respondents were asked how frequently they met with faculty in office hours, on a scale from 0, indicating “never,” to 7, indicating “several times a week.” First Year Learning Community (FYLC) participants reported more contact (2.4 versus 2.2, a difference that is statistically significant at the 10% level).

Respondents were also asked how many faculty they had met with in office hours. FYLC participants reported a larger number of contacts (3.1 versus 2.5, statistically significant at the 1% level).

When asked whether FYLC classes were better, worse, or no different from non-FYLC classes in terms of helping students get to know faculty members, 36% reported better and only 9% reported worse.

ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

Respondents to the survey were also asked about their engagement with their classes. The survey asked whether students had a number of different experiences in the context of academic work. These included experiences like “learned something that has changed the way you think about the world around you” and “found a course so interesting that you did more work than was required.” The response scales for these items ranged from 0 (never did this) to 5 (did this very often).

Participants in FYLC programs and classes consistently reported higher levels of engagement with their coursework, controlling for gender, on-campus residence, high school GPA, transfer units, and enrolled units. The results appear in figure below.

![Engagement with coursework: Adjusted Means](image)

*statistically significant

**PEER INTERACTION**

ACTIVE/COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

And finally FYLC students reported that they were more likely to have worked on a group project (69% versus 61%, a difference that is statistically significant at the 5% level). However, program participants were significantly less likely to participate in spontaneous study groups (29% versus 39% for non-FYLC participants, statistically significant at the 5% level).

When asked whether FYLC classes were better, worse, or no different from non-FYLC classes in forming engagement with other students, 61% reported better and only 8% worse (statistically significant at the 10% level).

Among FYLC students, 59% reported that their classes were better for forming a sense of community in the class, and for making friends and finding study partners than other classes (all statistically significant).

![Percent using learning support programs, among those aware of them](image)

*statistically significant

**CAMPUS RESOURCES**

FYLC programs also have a goal of making students more aware of supplemental learning and tutoring resources.

FYLC programs are more likely to know about these resources. Across the four supplemental resources on which we surveyed (drop-in tutoring, study skills workshops, peer mentor, and residence hall-based tutoring), on average 89 percent of FYLC students said they were aware of each, compared to 82.3 percent of non-FYLC participants.

Among respondents who were aware of these resources, FYLC participants were significantly more likely to report using them (with the exception of residence hall tutoring). The results appear in figure below.