During the fall 2009 semester, we had 43 students in the Learning Community consisting of CRJ 101wr, CRJ 103, TRS 105 and COS 101. This was the first semester that the “reading prerequisite” was in place for incoming CRJ students. We will track some statistics about the reading because this is the first semester of the prerequisite’s implementation.

BACKGROUND: The process of making reading instruction a prerequisite stretched over a period of 18 months. The Law & Criminal Justice Department had initially requested that any student with a label of “reading recommended but not required” be included in the prerequisite. The Testing and Placement Committee wanted a definite number on AccuPlacer. Seventy nine was suggested, but more research was requested. Finally a study was completed showing that an AccuPlacer score of 73 on the reading portion of the test would give a student a 50 - 50 chance of passing CRJ 104. Later the Testing and Placement Committee reduced that figure to 71. This meant that CRJ student would have to take a reading course either in the first or second semester to progress to CRJ 104.

PLANNING FOR IMPLEMENTATION: The two departments (Law & Criminal Justice and Transitional Studies) worked closely together to implement this prerequisite. Debbie Watson worked closely with us to design a tracking instrument to tell which students needed reading and whether they were enrolled in a reading course or not. This focus study can be used throughout the semester. We worked with Andy Morris to design sections of REA 098 that would be exclusively for CRJ students. This system was implemented through Banner. It was hoped that the actual texts used in CRJ 101 and CRJ 103 (or in CRJ 104 for second semester students) would be used in the REA course sections.

FALL 2009: The enrollments in the reading courses for CRJ students lagged well behind the number of students that needed reading instruction. While I know that both departments were well prepared, other parts of the college seemed unaware or confused about the prerequisite. It should be noted here that this is the first time in the history of MCC that a department has mandated reading. The CRJ reading sections did not fill and were closed, so students were placed into other sections of REA. Later in the semester, we discovered that the “focus study” needed some fine tuning, and that is occurring now.

As of 09/03/09, there were 104 students needing reading instruction. As of that same date, only 28 were enrolled in a reading course. This illustrated the enrollment lag mentioned earlier.

THE LEARNING COMMUNITY: In the learning community, there were 25 students who were mandated to take a reading course. We can study the impact of the reading instruction here because there are fewer variables to deal with in this cohort. They all have the same instructors for CRJ 101 and CRJ 103. (Those not in the LC could have different instructors and hence different grading patterns. This is particularly true for CRJ 101 because those sections in the LC are wr - writing intensive. Other sections of CRJ 101 taught by different instructors are not writing intensive.)

SUCCESS RATE: There were 25 students in the LC that were mandated to have a reading course. Fourteen were in a reading course and eleven were not in a reading course. So we can pose the question: how did these two groups of students fare in their two CRJ courses (CRJ 101wr and CRJ 103)? What percentage in each group was able to pass both CRJ 101wr and CRJ 103? Both of these are entry level courses required before progressing to higher level CRJ courses.
RESULTS:
The group enrolled in a reading course had a pass rate in CRJ 101wr and CRJ 103 of 85.7%. This means that they passed both courses.

The group that should have taken a reading course but did not enroll in one had a pass rate of 27.2%. This meant that they NOT pass both CRJ 101wr and CRJ 103. They either failed one or both of these courses.

CONCLUSIONS:

We can see a significant difference in the pass rate for these two cohorts. Both cohorts were in a learning community and had access to all the support that a learning community has to offer. They shared the same professors with the same texts, assignment tests and grading standards. Although the group is small (and below the number of 30), it does provide a valuable insight into student performance and achievement.

Hopefully in the future:
1. More students will enroll in the reading course during their first semester in college.
2. This would enable dedicated sections of REA to fill and run.
3. The focus study is being enhanced as this report is being written.
4. Hopefully better mechanisms can be put in place to enroll more students in reading as they first enter college - especially those NOT in the Learning Community. The majority of students (about 75%) needing reading are NOT in the Learning community.

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Michael P. Nolan
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