

## The Relationship between Reasons to Attend College and Learning Community Participation

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### Overview

- A. Introductions
- B. The Study
- C. The Findings
- D. Model of the Relationship between Reasons and Participation
- E. Implications
- F. Conclusions

### Introductions

- Types and sizes of institutions represented
- Types of learning communities at your institutions
- What do you most want to learn about this morning?
- Jennifer Hodges, Ph.D. from Michigan State
  - Assistant Dean of University College, University of Akron
  - Professional Life - Primarily Academic Advising
  - Graduate School - Assessment and Research

### MSU's Lyman Briggs School

- Part of the College of Natural Science (CNS)
- 1 of 10 living-learning programs (LLPs)
- 1 of 2 degree-granting LLPs
- 625 first-year students in Fall 2006 (40% of first-year CNS students)
- Classes held in Holmes Hall (residence hall)
- Faculty offices in Holmes Hall
- Faculty appointments are 75% in LBS, 25% in dept.
- Marketed to students interested in "studying the natural sciences and their impact on society"
- Large portion are pre-med students

### Research Questions

- What relationship, if any, exists between Michigan State University College of Natural Science students' reasons to attend college and whether or not they participate in the Lyman Briggs School, a residential learning community?
- A. What are the profiles of reasons for attending college among first-year students enrolled in the College of Natural Science at Michigan State University?

### Research Questions continued

- B. Are there differences between those students who chose to participate in the College of Natural Science's residential learning community program, the Lyman Briggs School, and those who chose not to participate in terms of their reasons for attending college?
- C. Through what processes do students develop their reasons for attending college?
- D. How do students perceive the impact learning community participation will have on their ability to achieve their reasons for attending college?

## Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

- "If you build it, they will come"
- Self-Produced Environmental Experiences (Astin, 1993)
- Human Ecology Model of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 1995)
  - Person, Process, Context, Time
  - Developmentally Instigative Characteristics (DICs)
  - Ecological Niches
- Learner Disposition – perceptions of and approaches to learning (Bloomer & Hodgkinson, 1997, 1999, 2000)
  - Beliefs about the nature of knowledge
  - Views about the purpose of higher education
  - Value placed on particular learning experiences
  - Self-assessment of academic abilities

## Related research

- Developing an empirically based typology of attitudes of entering students toward participation in learning communities
  - Jones, Levine Laufgraben, & Morris (2006)
  - Reasons why students enrolled in LC's
  - How students perceived usefulness of activities in LC
  - Found that reasons for registering influenced how students perceived the helpfulness of the LC experience
  - Recommended awareness of the impact that student goals and reason for registering can have on outcomes of LC participation

## Why do students choose to participate in Learning Communities?

- Convenience of scheduling
- Inclusion of required courses
- Interest in learning community topic
- Opportunity to build connections with other students
- Support for the transition to college
- Additional support for difficult courses
- Recommendations of advisors or peers

(Dabney, Green, & Topalli, 2006; Jones et al., 2006; Light, 2005; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Smith et al., 2004)

## Research Design – Mixed Method

- Survey Content
  - 30 reasons to attend [based primarily on Côté and Levine's (1997) *Student Motivation for Attending University* (SMAU) Scale]
  - Six point scale from 'Not Important' to 'Essential'
  - Participation plans
  - Demographic data
- Survey Data Collection
  - Distributed in intro chemistry classes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> weeks of classes
  - 26% return rate for CNS 1<sup>st</sup> year students
  - 383 usable surveys

## Research Design – Mixed Method

- Interviews
  - Semi-structured; focused on reasons to attend college, how to accomplish those goals, and perceptions of the value of a variety of learning opportunities
  - Conducted between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> weeks of classes
  - Participants recruited via email from the survey participants
  - Conducted in a convenient location (most in the students' residence halls)
  - 30-45 minutes, audio taped and transcribed
- 23 Interview Participants
  - All interviewees were first-year CNS students
  - 15 learning community participants, 8 non-participants
  - 15 women, 8 men
  - 14 White, 7 Asian, 1 Hispanic, 1 other

## What are the profiles of reasons for attending college among first-year students enrolled in the College of Natural Science at Michigan State University?

- Survey items factored into 5 components
  - Individual Development (9 items)
  - Civic Leadership (7 items)
  - Personal Connections (6 items)
  - Default-Indifferent (4 items)
  - Expectation-Driven (3 items)
- Individual Development – combination of items traditionally categorized as Career or Intellectual in focus
- Survey – the top five reasons marked as Essential or Very Important by the largest percentage of respondents were all from the Individual Development category

## Individual Development

- To achieve personal success (87.4%)
- To get into an interesting and satisfying career (87.2%)
- To develop an in-depth understanding of a specific field of study (76%)
- To learn more about things that interest me (75.7%)
- To be able to make more money (72.4%)
- To prepare for graduate or professional school (72.3%)
- To achieve a high GPA (58.2%)
- To achieve a position of higher status in society (52.2%)
- To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas (51.5%)

Percentage of Essential or Very Important

## What are the profiles of reasons for attending college among first-year students enrolled in the College of Natural Science at Michigan State University?

- Preparing for Life after College
  - Determining a Calling
  - Learning to be an Adult/Growing Up
  - Acquiring Knowledge for Life after College
  - Getting the Credential Necessary for Their Chosen Career
  - Learning Specific Skills or Knowledge
- Broadening Horizons
- Meeting New People
  - To make new friends
  - To develop life skills
  - As a strategy for success
  - As a mechanism for broadening horizons
- Taking Advantage of the Opportunity in order to be a Role Model

## How do students perceive the impact learning community participation will have on their ability to achieve their reasons for attending college?

- | LBS participants   | Non-participants   |
|--|--|
| ■ Prestige   | ■ LBS would stifle their college experience  |
| ■ Educational Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Focus on science</li> <li>□ Like-minded peers</li> <li>□ Best of both worlds</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Location on campus</li> <li>□ Like-minded peers</li> </ul>  |
| ■ Logistical Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Smaller classes</li> <li>□ Convenience</li> <li>□ Floor-mates in classes</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Course Requirements                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Difficulty level</li> <li>□ Extra courses</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Lack of understanding/knowledge of the opportunity</li> </ul> |

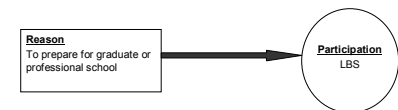
## What relationship, if any, exists between Michigan State University College of Natural Science students' reasons to attend college and whether or not they participate in the Lyman Briggs School, a residential learning community?

- Formulas for Being a College Student
  - Social Integration
  - Academic Integration
  - Millennials
  - Transition Awareness
- Formulas for Preparing for Graduate/Medical School
  - Grades and Specific Coursework
  - Personality Traits and Skills
  - Service and Leadership Activities
  - Hands-On Experience

## Model of the Relationship between Reasons to Attend and Participation

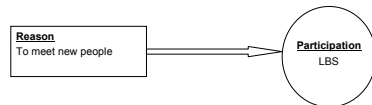
- Reasons can lead to participation but also to non-participation
- Reasons can be Amplified by certain factors
  - Formulas
  - DICs
  - Environment
- Reasons can be Diminished by certain factors
  - Formulas
  - Cognitive Development
  - Finances
- Some factors impact Participation independently
  - Environment
  - Previous Experience
  - Interests

## Julie's participation in LBS



- Julie's choice to participate in the LBS was also directly related to her career goals, "I figure to get into medical school, it's probably beneficial to stay in the same major, especially Lyman Briggs."

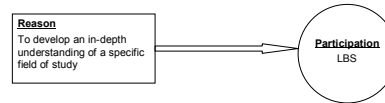
## Drew's non-participation in LBS



Drew decided against participating in the LBS because of his focus on meeting new people:

- I didn't really like the fact that Lyman Briggs was centered in one hall, classes where you are just in that hall. Basically it's like saying your classmates are the people that you know in your dorm. I'd like to meet more people and all. Rather than just stay with the same routine.

## Bryan's non-participation in LBS

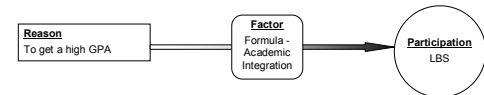


Bryan's reason for not participating in LBS was directly related to his desire to study mathematics in depth:

- I looked at it [LBS]... From what I heard it's not as "math-y."... Lyman Briggs felt like I was going to be going through – well, you're in this great science program, but that's not what I wanna do. I don't wanna be a scientist. I wanna be a mathematician. And it's a very fine line, but if you're – if you just love math, you know where it is, and that Lyman Briggs was barely on the other side of that, you know.

## Maggie's participation in LBS

*Amplifying Effect of Formulas*

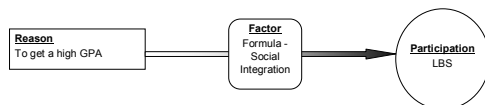


Maggie commented:

- Holmes isn't a huge party atmosphere... And I think I kind of like that better because I get all my school work done and I don't – you know, and that's what I was also afraid of because at Michigan State, I hear it's like the big party school and I didn't want that to distract me from my classes. So, I think it helps that I'm in Holmes, rather than in some other dorm where everyone's loud and just wants to party all the time.

## Kathie's participation in LBS

*Amplifying Effect of Formulas*

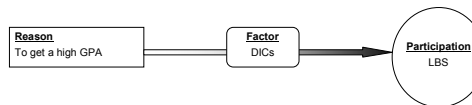


Kathie's decision to participation in the LBS was amplified by her concern about feeling comfortable in the social environment of college:

- Just, basically, the whole small school atmosphere, I thought that I would be more comfortable in that, because I'm kind of shy, so I thought that I would do – do better in a smaller environment, but after talking to some people, you kind of get the small environment within the larger one, here, especially at Lyman Briggs.

## Maggie's participation in LBS

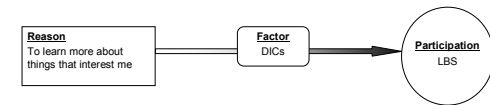
*Amplifying Effect of DICs*



- LBS courses are perceived as more academically challenging than non-LBS courses. Maggie welcomed this challenge, "I did hear that it was a little bit harder than the regular university, but I was willing to challenge myself and I was willing to go through with it."

## Mingmei's participation in LBS

*Amplifying Effect of DICs*

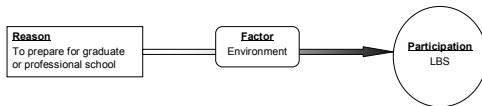


Mingmei chose to participate in LBS even though she did not have a strong background in science:

- I looked at what it [LBS] was about, and I thought it was cool, because it also included many different areas, but it kind of focused on the science, even though I'm not exactly sure about that either. But I didn't have a lot of science experiences in my secondary education. I guess, because throughout elementary school, we just had science classes and electives, and then I had two years in middle school, and my high school – their English program was very – English history was very strong, but not so much the sciences, so –

## Maggie's participation in LBS

### Environment and Participation



Maggie's decision to participate in LBS because it would help her prepare for graduate school was amplified by the information she received:

«When I came in the summer, for like, a tour type thing... I just happened to go to Lyman Briggs, and then they started talking about how it would be a good place to go if you were going in a pre-professional program, so then I figured that I should probably be a part of Lyman Briggs, it would probably help me out.

## Ildi's non-participation in LBS

### Environment and Participation



For Ildi, the environment was the sole influence on her decision not to participate in LBS. Her decision was not directly connected to her reasons for attending college:

«I did look at it [LBS] but I talked to people who were in the program and they said for a pre-med major it — you end up dropping it after two years because you're required to take some courses that don't really apply to the major I guess. So I was advised not to.

## Implications – Promotion of LCs

- Availability of LCs does not necessarily translate into participation
  - Centralized coordination vs. decentralized
  - Know the whole variety of offerings on your campus
- The same characteristics of the program can both encourage and discourage participation
  - Discipline specific programs
  - Residential programs
- Program coordinators should investigate how their programs are perceived by both participants and non-participants
- Marketing implications of the availability of LCs (particularly in states with similar types of competing institutions)
- Consistent communication with students during periods in which they can select these programs

## Implications – Design of LCs

- Connect programming to students' reasons for attending college so they will perceive the opportunity as worthwhile
- Connect programming to students' formulas
- Millennials – create opportunities for engagement later in the experience
- Availability of LCs for Sophomores

## Implications – Assessment of LCs

- Little difference between participants' and non-participants' initial reasons for attending college
- Use of Reasons for Attending as an input variable
- Students' initial perceptions regarding the value of the LC learning experience should be considered in designing assessment of LC outcomes
- Include "Value the LC learning opportunity" as a student learning outcome

## Implications – Academic Advising

- Survey and/or advising discussions about reasons for attending college provide opportunity for learning and reflection
- Help students understand their own reasons and connect and engage with pertinent learning experiences
- Model could be used as a tool in advising sessions
- Focus on students' perceptions of the value of learning opportunities and not only on the availability of those opportunities

### Implications – First Year Programs

- Balance between providing formulas for academic success (e.g., time management, study skills, etc.) and encouraging the development of complex ways of making meaning of their college experience
- Formulas can both amplify and diminish participation

### Areas for Future Research

- Different types of institutions
- Different disciplines
- Different types of involvement
- Refining the survey and the Reasons for Attending College scale
- Explore the Formulas
- Explore the Perceptions of the Value of Learning Communities and other learning opportunities
- Longitudinal exploration of how reasons and perceptions shape outcomes

### Discussion Points

- Is the combination of Careerism and Intellectualism items a function of the sample being made up of science students?
- Does an increase in academic preparedness lead to similarity of opinions about reasons to attend college?
- The information age – online sources of information and cable television
- The state of Michigan – two large, public, research institutions and a not-so-great economy
- The Millennials – technologically savvy, constantly connected, service-oriented, over-scheduled
- How the interviews shed light on the survey answers