



Learning Communities for undecided students: required or not? Absolutely required!

Doug Orr

Director, University Experience Course

Joni Wadley

Associate Director, Institutional Research

Wendy Merb-Brown

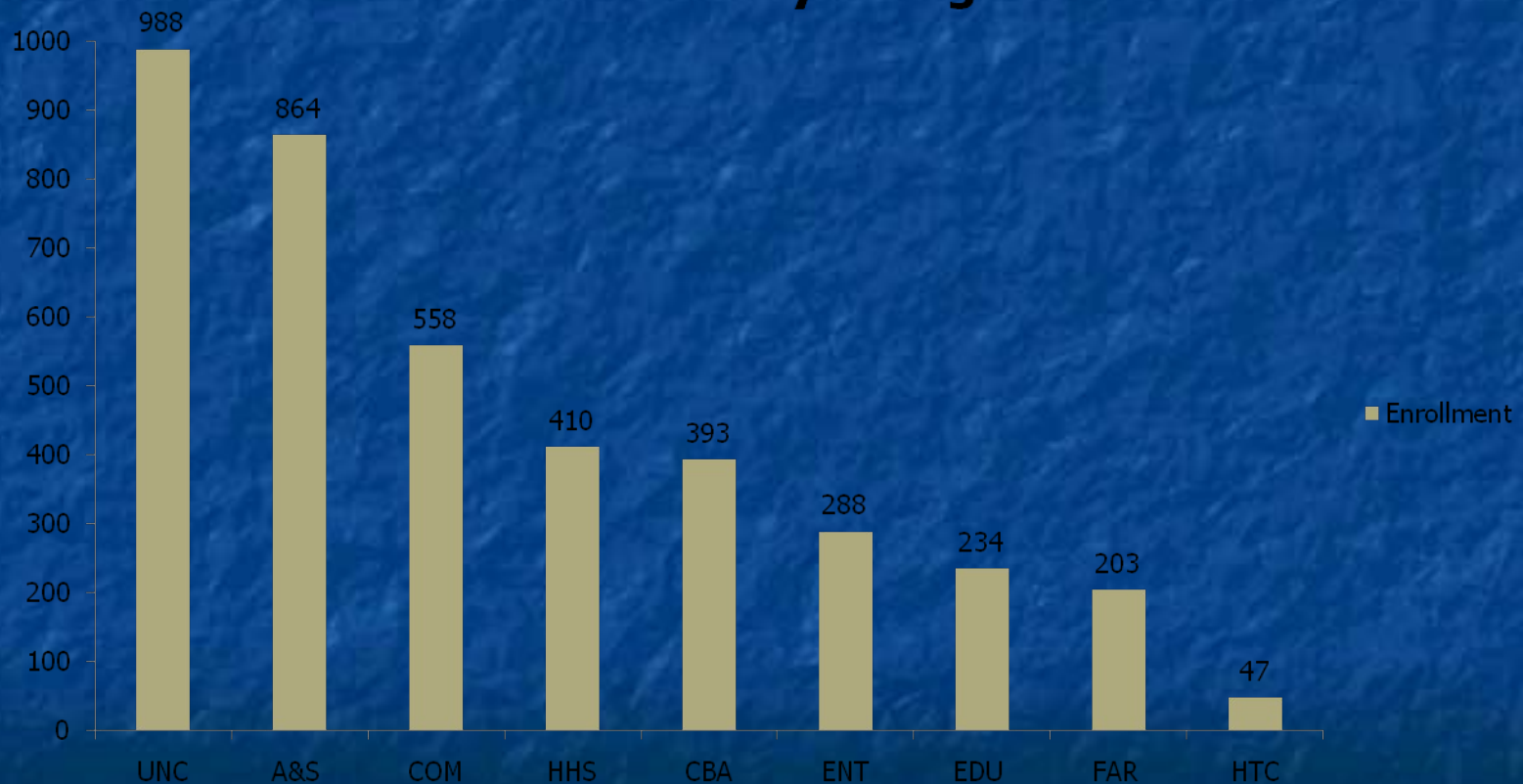
Director, Learning Community Programs

Ohio University

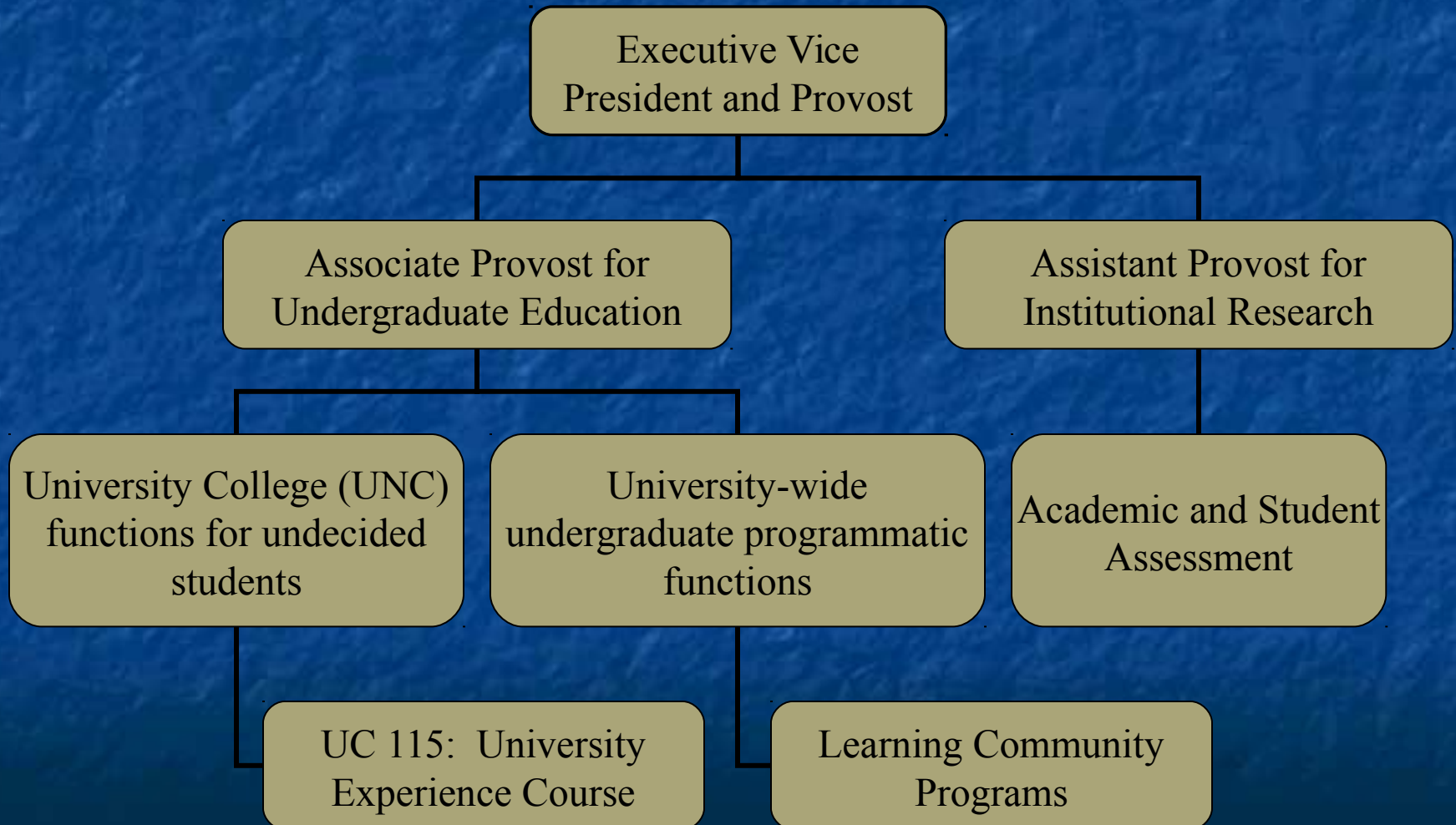
- 4-year, Public, est. 1804
- Research Institution
- Residential campus located in Southeastern, rural, Ohio
- 20,537 students enrolled at main campus
- 277 undergraduate degree majors in nine undergraduate colleges
- Quarter system
- @4000 first-year students each Fall
- The mean ACT score of first-year undergraduate students is 23.7
- First-year retention rate is 80%
- 71% of undergraduates enrolled at the Athens campus graduate within 6 years (the 2nd highest graduation rate in the state of Ohio)

Colleges at Ohio University

Fall 2008 First-Time Full-time Degree Seeking Freshmen by College



Organizational structure



Office of Institutional Research

- Report directly to Provost
- Seven staff members
- IR Office with an emphasis on assessment

Learning Community Programs

- A learning community (LC) is a group of students who take a common set of courses together or share a common experience around their academics.

Learning community goals

- Create learning-based peer networks
- Improve the academic success of first year students
- Improve student retention from the freshman to the sophomore year
- Increase student satisfaction with Ohio University
- Increase student/faculty interaction outside of the classroom

Learning community model

Learning Communities, MacGregor and Smith, 2004

A small cohort of students enrolls in a **cluster** of larger classes that faculty DO NOT coordinate. Connections and community-building often take place in an additional integrative seminar.



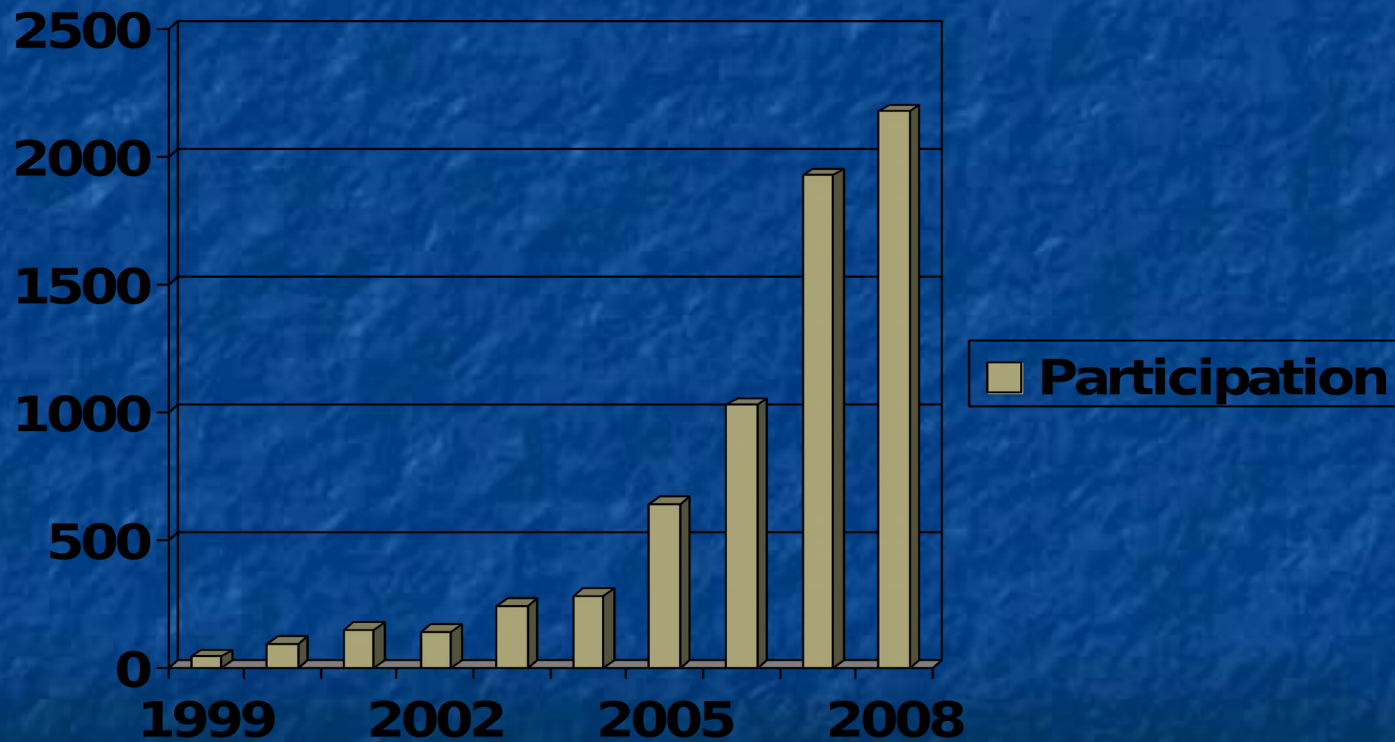
 shading represents the student cohort

	Cluster Call #	PFX/NUM Section	Courses	Instructor of Record	Original Call #	Times	Location	Credits
(20)	07595	RLAA 000 A01 (11 hrs)	ANTH 101 A04	Ciekawy	00748	MW 3-5:30pm	136 Bentley Hall	5
			PBIO 103 A01	Ballard	05166	MWRF 9-10am	145 Walter Hall	4
			UC 115 A22	Oberlin	07513	TR 3-4pm	213 Gordy Hall	2

LC model at OHIO

- Each LC has no more than 25 students
- *Cluster courses* are chosen based on programmatic needs and/or general education requirements
- Core course a UC 115, UC 190 or similar introductory course
- Peer mentor involvement, coordinated by LC Programs.
- Programming dollars available through LC Programs

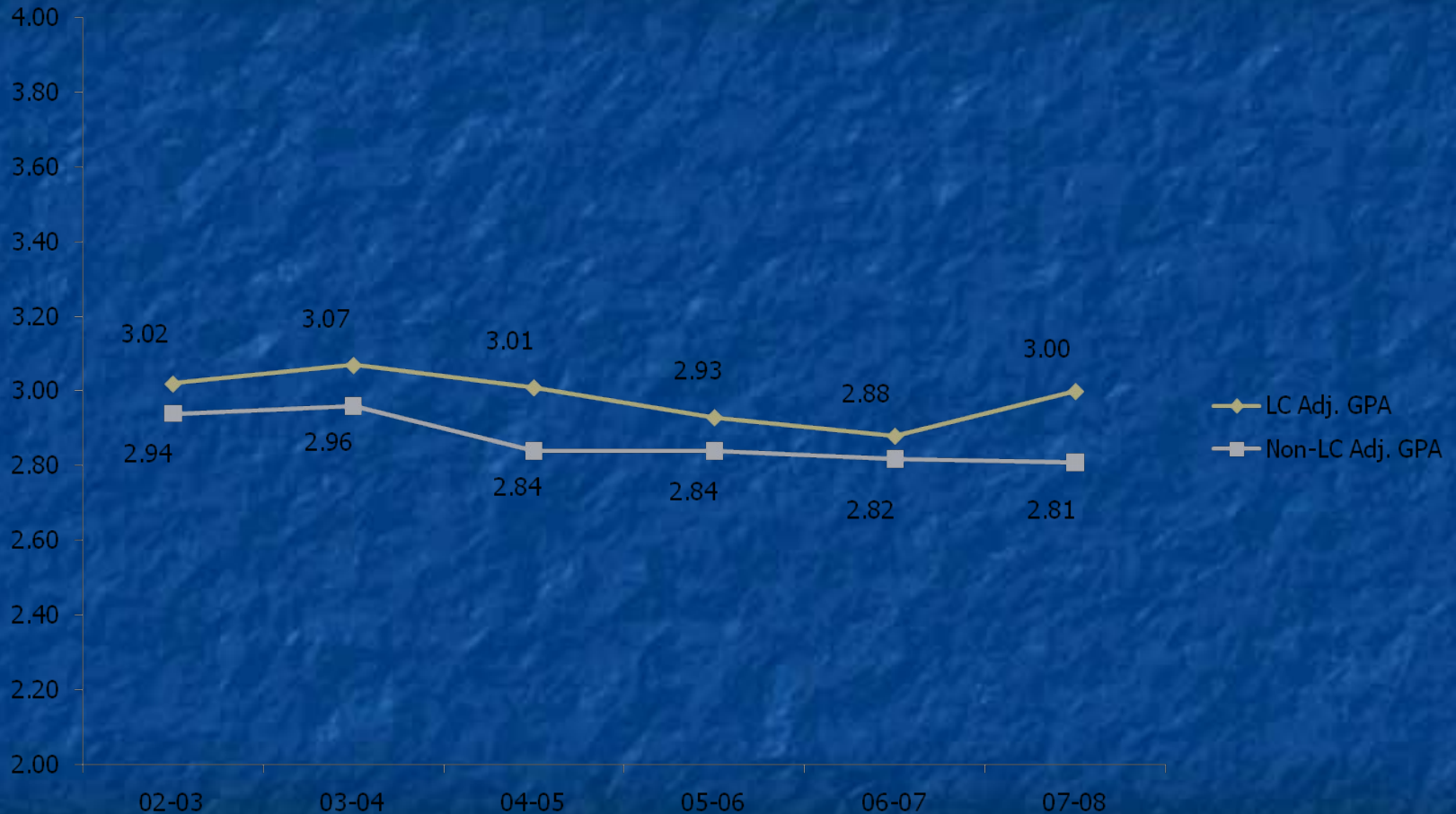
LC growth in ten years



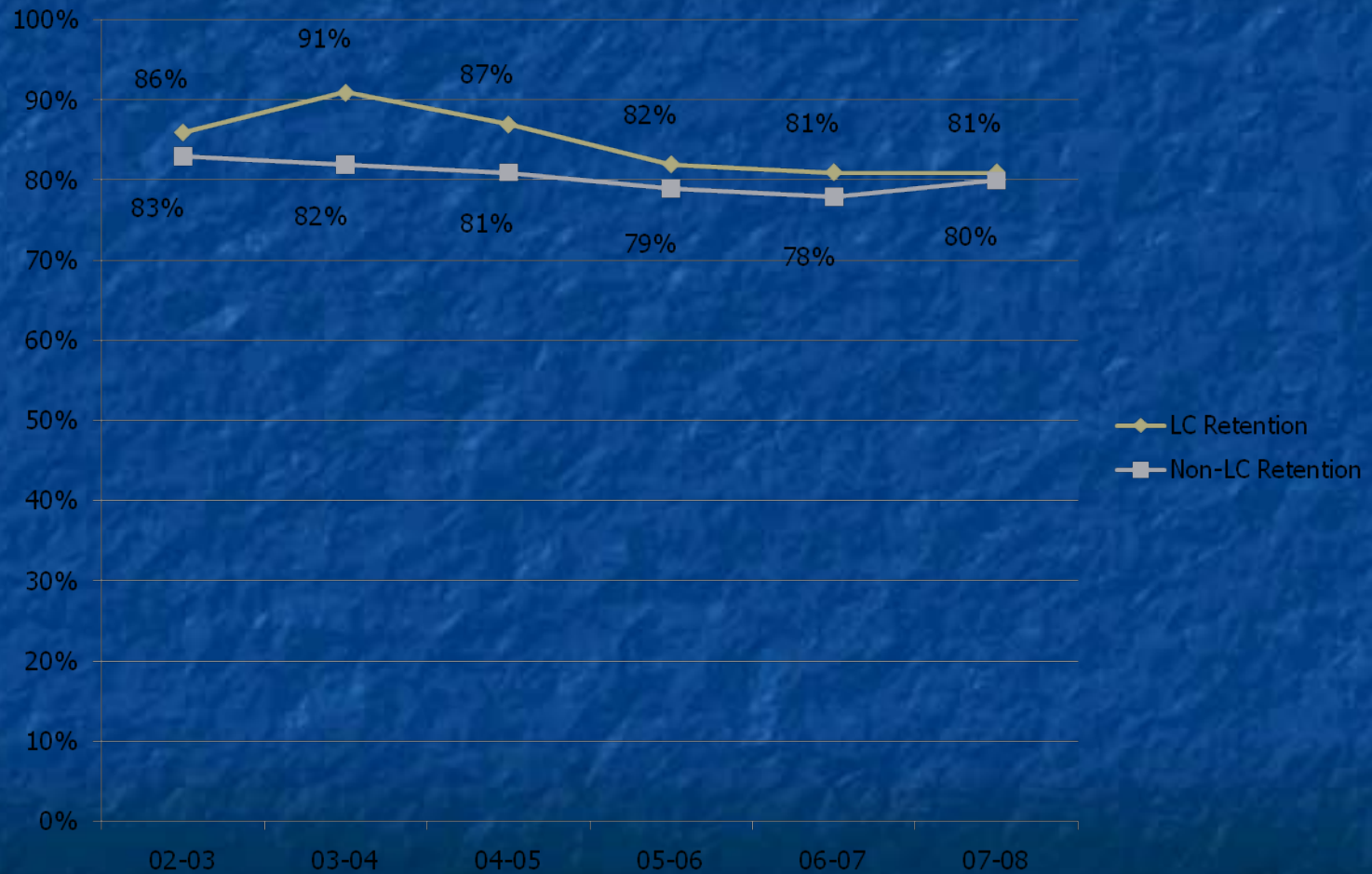
LC highlights

- Base funded beginning Fall, 2008
- Part of Vision Ohio, Ohio University's strategic plan
- Two professional staff, 3 GAs, 150 PMs
- Collaboration with every college office and administrative support unit on campus (shared service)

LC assessment - GPA



LC assessment - retention



LC assessment (cont.)

Ohio University NSSE Study 2003-04

How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution? (Scale:1=*poor*, 2=*fair*, 3=*good*, 4=*excellent*)

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Non-participants</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
3.33	3.21	.12	

If you could start over again, would you go to the SAME INSTITUTION you are now attending? (Scale:1=*definitely no*, 2=*probably no*, 3=*probably yes*, 4=*definitely yes*)

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Non-participants</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
3.59	3.35	.25	*

Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.) (Scale:1=*never*, 2=*sometimes*, 3=*often*, 4=*very often*)

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Non-participants</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
1.71	1.36	.35	*

Quality: Your relationships with faculty members (1=*unavailable, unhelpful, unsympathetic* to 7=*available, helpful, sympathetic*)

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Non-participants</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
5.59	5.23	.36	

LC evaluation results

Fall, 2008 (n 1737, strongly agreed/agreed)

- Being in a learning community helped me to meet other students 91.7%
- I have gotten to know the students within my LC 89.8%
- My LC experience has been a rewarding one 82.2%
- Being in a learning community has been a positive experience 87.3%
- I am glad that I participated in a learning community 81.9%
- Being in a learning community has helped me understand resources and services on campus 87.2%
- I have participated in out-of-class activities with my LC 84.7%
- I sat with my fellow LC members in our linked courses 83.9%
- I have studied for classes with other members of my LC 74.6%
- I would recommend a learning community to an incoming first year student 84.4%

UC 115 course: background

- Approved by Curriculum Council in 1981; elective from 1981-2006
- Extended Orientation First Year Seminar with focus on process of choosing a major
- 2 credit hour course meets twice a week
- Students earn a letter grade
- 15 to 20 students per section
- Instructors are mix of UC staff, Student Affairs, other staff, Faculty, GAs

Transition to requiring learning communities and UC 115

- Academic Year 2005-06: OHIO participates in *Foundations of Excellence* self study
- Fall Quarter 2006: UNC students chose one of three different experiences:
 - 30% elected LC
 - 30% UC 115 stand-alone
 - 40% chose neither

Transition to requiring learning communities and UC 115

- Dec 2006: UNC staff meet
- UC 115 data over many years showed a positive treatment for students
- Learning communities data was extensive
- **Question** we asked ourselves: “If we have consistent and conclusive data demonstrating that being in a Learning Community with UC 115 has the best outcomes for students, why are we not requiring it?”

Transition to requiring learning communities and UC 115

- **Decision**

Require all entering first year students in University College to join a Learning Community with UC 115 as the core course starting with Fall Quarter 2007

Our goals for the UNC model

- Enhance the academic success of our first year students
- Increase student commitment to OHIO
- Create a more intentional and consistent first year experience
- Increase student support during their first quarter transition
- Assist students in declaring a major

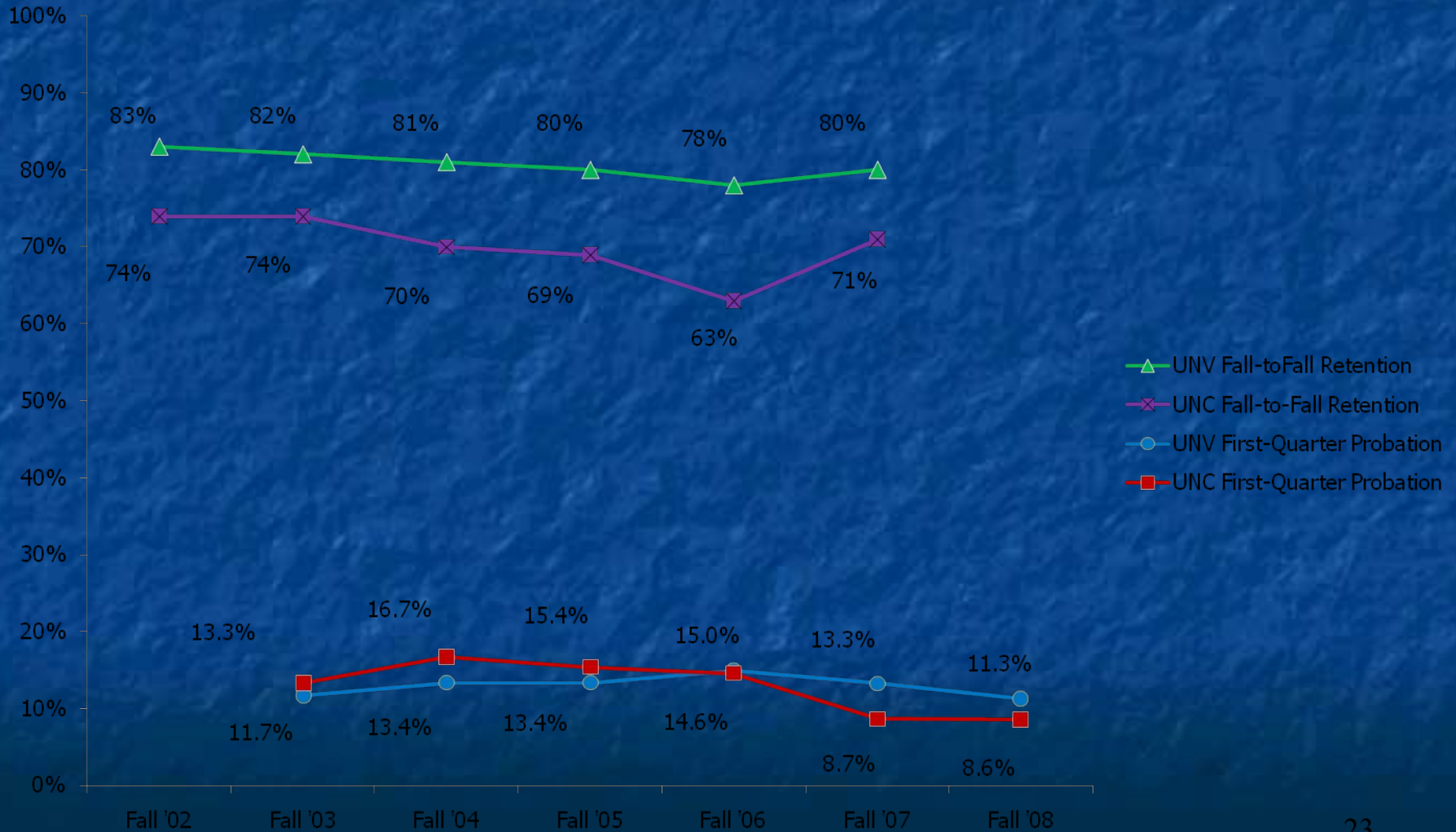
Redefined UC 115 course

- Primary role is now as the core course of UNC Learning Communities; taught as stand-alone course only by exception
- Fall 2006: 599 students enrolled in 34 sections (half the sections are stand-alone)
- Fall 2007: 942 students enrolled in 53 sections (only one section stand-alone)

Redefined UC 115 course

- Limited the class to “undecided” students only
- Revised syllabus, assignments, learning outcomes
- Adopted a new textbook
- Began paying instructors
- Improved instructor development and instructor support
- Improved course evaluations for students and instructors

First indication...UNC



UNC comparisons

(by entry college)

	Fall 2006 Cohort	Fall 2007 Cohort
N		
LC Participants	295	962
Non-Participants	738	37
Adjusted GPA - ACT used as covariate		
LC Participants	2.73	3.04
Non-Participants	2.65	2.56
Retention		
LC Participants	73%	79%
Non-Participants	72%	68%

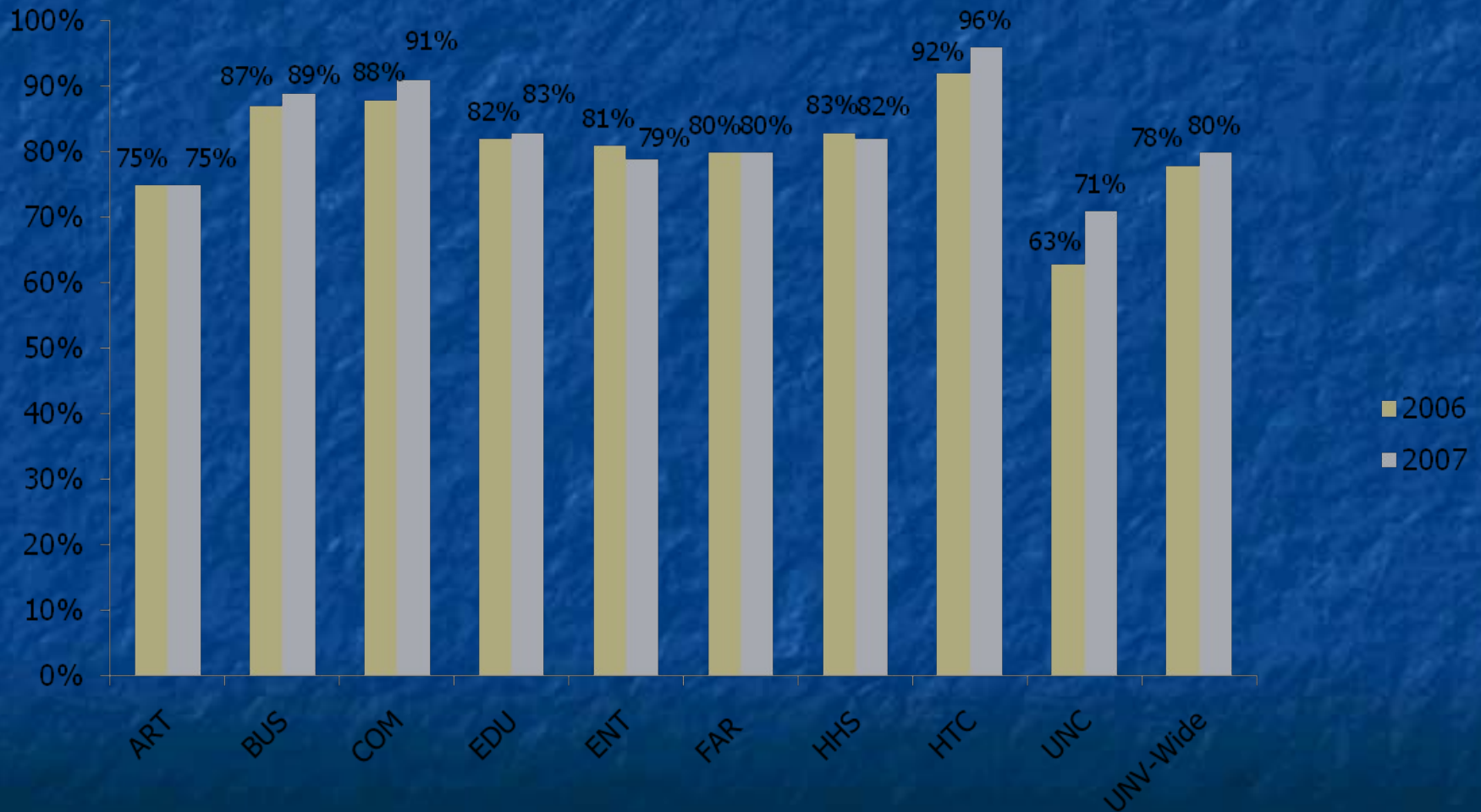
UC 115 study with LCs

UNC students only

(including transfer students <30 hrs)

	LC (No UC 115)		LC with UC 115		UC 115 Stand Alone		Non-Participants	
	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007
	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants
N	10	24	288	932	311	10	490	96
Adjusted GPA (ACT used as covariate)	2.23	2.97	2.76	3.06	2.81	2.70	2.71	2.36
Retention (fall to fall)	60%	71%	73%	80%	73%	80%	72%	73%

Retention Rates by College



Assessment – by college

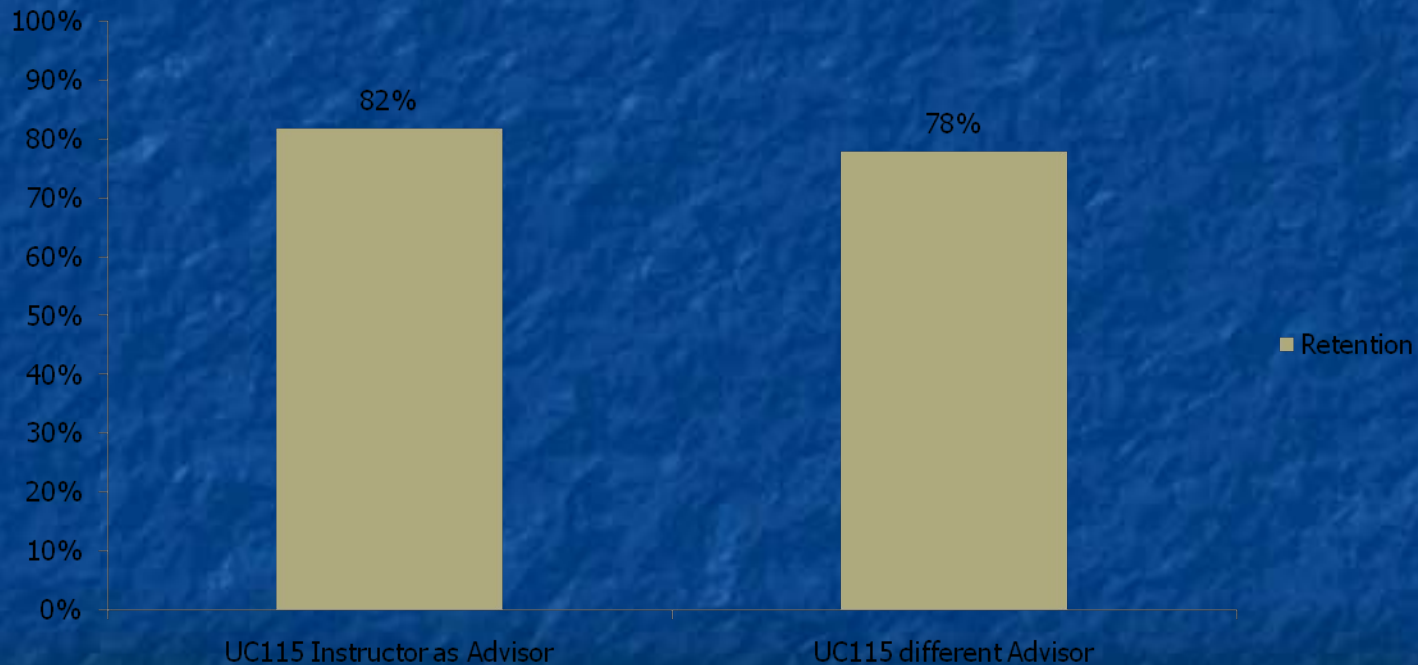
(see handout)

- College data comparisons
- Entry college vs. last college enrolled
- Movement into/out of colleges

LC comparisons into majors

Last College Enrolled	Entered UNC			
	Fall 2006		Fall 2007	
	TOTALS		TOTALS	
	N	%	N	%
Arts & Sciences	85	11%	98	12%
Business	70	9%	101	13%
Communication	29	4%	32	4%
Education	19	3%	23	3%
Engineering	16	2%	17	2%
Fine Arts	12	2%	4	1%
Health & Human Services	90	12%	83	11%
Honors Tutorial	1	0%	0	0%
University College	427	57%	429	55%

UC 115 instructor also serving as academic advisor Fall 2007



Summary of advantages of requiring learning communities with UC 115 for undecided first year students

- Enhanced academic success (higher GPA's, lower probation)
- Increased student commitment to OHIO (higher retention)
- Increased speed and confidence of students in choosing a major (fewer sophomores in UNC)
- Happier parents preparing for students to enter OHIO: they see we have a structure & plan in place to receive their student
- Smoother registration at orientation: students pick a learning community and 1 or 2 other classes and are finished

Planned improvements

- Increase the number of UC 115 instructors that are also the academic advisor
- Require all first year undecided transfer students with 30 or less quarter hours to join an LC & take UC 115
- Continue to assess to improve all aspects of the UC 115 course and the LC Programs

First Year Experience

Orientation

Learning Communities

Welcome Weekend

UC 115

Instructor

Advisor

Small

Course

STUDENTS

Peer Mentor

Course Content

Clustered Courses

Out of class activities

Student Affairs Activities

Concluding thoughts

- Consistent and conclusive data collection and analysis that demonstrates outcomes is imperative for improving our programs for first-year students.
- Assessment = continuous improvement!



Learning Communities for undecided students: required or not? Absolutely required!

Doug Orr

Director, University Experience Course
orr@ohio.edu

Joni Wadley

Associate Director, Institutional Research
schallej@ohio.edu

Wendy Merb-Brown

Director, Learning Community Programs
merbw@ohio.edu