

## Youngstown State – Current Investigations Model

Youngstown State University currently uses *Investigations into Economic Class in America* as the core course of a learning community offered for credit through the College of Health and Human Services.

Students are selected based on placement test scores. The hypothesis is that a high proportion of students with language resources (reading and writing) in the remedial range come from under-resourced backgrounds, a hypothesis that seems to be true in practice. Or, a college might use the Expected Family Contribution on the Federal Application for Student Assistance as criterion for selection.

As cohorts, students take Investigations, the remedial reading and composition courses, and a general education requirement—in this case, Intro to Sociology. Writing and reading assignments can easily be integrated with Investigations content, and there are numerous connections to the sociology course as well.

Learning communities are a method of creating social support among cohort groups of students who take the same set of courses together during their first semester (for example, composition, psychology, and an orientation course) and perhaps beyond.

Through learning communities, the strategies of team teaching, teaching across the curriculum, and project-based assignments may further integrate curricula and increase faculty-to-faculty interaction, as well as faculty-to-student interaction. Some learning community programs try to keep students together for at least two courses for a second term. In a follow-up term, a service learning component would offer the opportunity to put theory into practice.

### Results to Date

#### Academic Achievement and Retention

- Spring 09 cohort: 60% retention through Fall 10; GPA 2.3
- Fall 09 cohort: 80% retention through Fall 10; GPA 2.2
- Spring 10 cohort: 100% retention through Fall 10; GPA 2.1

#### Student Engagement

- Fall 2009: Formed the Bridges Out of Poverty Student Union
- Presented at the National Bridges and Circles Conference in Indianapolis
- Presented workshops on building social capital to raise funds for national conference
- Became ambassadors to the administration on behalf of under-resourced students
- Won a Student Diversity Award
- Volunteering at women's shelter

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