





- Student Success
- "The Student Experience"
- Learning Communities
  - ▶ BIOME Online Community
  - ▶ First-Year Learning Communities



- Develop intellectual and academic competence.
- Establish & maintain interpersonal relationships.
- Explore identity development.
- Consider program and career goals.
- Maintain health and wellness.
- Reconsider and internalize beliefs and values.
- Develop an awareness & appreciation of diversity.
- Develop community & civic responsibility.

From M.L. Upcraft, J.N. Gardner, and B.O. Barefoot's Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004.











# Community.

- (Biology) An association of organisms having mutual relationships among themselves and to their environment and thus functioning, at least to some degree, as an ecological unit.
- A group of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting with each other.

# "Sense of community."

## Membership

 boundaries; secure; emotionally safe; sense of belonging; personal investment in the group

## Influence

- members have some influence in the group; some influence by the group on its members also needed for group cohesion
- Integration and fulfillment of needs
  - members feel rewarded for participating
- Shared emotional connection
- the "definitive element for true community"; includes shared history and shared participation

McMillan and Chavis (1986)

### Source for previous slide:

- James Fraser, Physics, Queens University Building community in the first year science classroom. First Year in Focus Conference, Carleton University, Feb. 2008.
- D.W. McMillan and D.M. Chavis. 1986. Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14: 6-23.
- J.J. Summers and M.D. Svinicki. 2007. Investigating classroom community in higher education. *Learning and Individual* Differences, 17: 55-67.
- T.M. Freeman, L.H. Anderman and J.M. Jensen. 2007. Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75: 203-220.

## Cohort.

A well-defined group that has a common experience.











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## What is <u>NOT</u> acceptable to post.

- Racist, misogynist or homophobic remarks
- Foul language
- Inflammatory remarks directed towards others
- Using someone else's account
- Disclosing confidential information
- Hate literature and pornographic materials
- · Harassment, including sexual harassment







## Advantages of membership.

- Help others... get help... 24/7, anywhere
- Meet people... create study groups, make friends, sit with in class, get notes, socialize...
- Get advice from upper-year students
- · Relieve stress, entertaining
- Learn about opportunities, programs, profs...
- See that there are other people just like me
- Interesting discussions
- Great resource for large classes!



- Cliquish... domineering people, let others "in"



"BIOME gives us a sense of friendship and community no matter where we live. It allows students from Oshawa to Mississauga to Thornhill to all stay connected!"



"BIOME is like going to an extra tutorial: being able to read posts at your own pace, and discussing only topics that interest you."







## What is it?

A small group of students who come together to create a community of learners. The 24 students in each learning community take two or three courses in common, belong to the same college or program, and meet regularly from Sept. to April. Meetings are facilitated by an upper-year student peer mentor, under the guidance of a staff and faculty advisor.

## Why join?

First-Year Learning Communities (FLCs, "flicks") make it easier to find your way around, make friends, form study groups, develop skills, and succeed academically. FLCs enhance the way you learn and help you connect to your university community.



- Help new students succeed at U of T (St. George)
- Meet classmates, develop friendships, form study groups, and develop academic and personal skills
- 2005-06: 260 life science students taking large classes, not living in residence, 11 mentors
- 2007-08: 440 students, 48 mentors
- 20-24 students per group





- Facilitated by student peer mentor, under guidance of a staff and faculty advisor
- Meet 90 minutes, weekly at start, then bi-weekly (15 sessions, Sept. to April)

























## Assessment.

- glad I participated... 97%
- I made new friends... 97%
- learning to be a successful student... 82%
- peer mentor effective... 95%
- recommend FLC to friends... 98%
- want to be involved on campus next year... 97%
- wish there were SLCs next year... 89%

Life Science FLCs (Mar/Apr 2006)











...Overall, FLC gave me the best peer mentor, friends, and staff and faculty advisors, who made life easier that if I had not joined FLC. Joining FLC was one of the best things I ever did!"



## What is a LC ?

- a cohort of students who take at least two courses together (block scheduling)
- regular mandatory meetings in small groups
- advisor(s)
- academic and social interactions
- curriculum integration across courses: none  $\rightarrow$  high

## Benefits for participation.

- better understanding of self and others
- · learn about expectations of college
- college success skills taught during LC time
- establish academic & social support networks
- · increase connection with college
- learn "how to learn..."
- greater satisfaction with college life

# Educational outcomes of LCs. course completion higher academic achievement, better grades

- retention: re-enrol in subsequent terms at higher rates
- graduation

Learning communities enhance student success.



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Students are ultimately responsible for their own success.

The role of faculty is to teach as well as to help students learn.

It is the institution's responsibility to create an environment that both challenges students and supports their success.

