

Compass Community vs. Non-Compass Community Focus Groups



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Overview of Undeclared Students



- One of the largest “majors” at Longwood
- Offered specialized major/career exploration programming
- Enroll in Longwood Seminar (LSEM) for Undeclared students
- Receive academic advising from Undeclared Advisor in the Office of the Registrar

Overview of the Compass Community



- Longwood University's only living-learning community
- Application process for admission to the community
- Comprised of no more than 24 fulltime, first time, undeclared students
- Live together in same residence hall
- Enroll in General Education Courses (3 Fall, 3 Spring)
- Receive academic advising from Longwood Seminar (LSEM) instructor
- Offered specialized major/career exploration programming
- Offered field trip and “bonding” experiences
- Purpose: to provide meaningful educational opportunities that bridge in and out of class learning and ease transition to college
- Remain in Compass Community for the duration of their first year

Previous Assessment & Current Objectives



- Previously, no formal assessment of the Compass Community conducted to evaluate effectiveness of initiatives
- This project is first step in understanding the differences between Compass Community students and experiences of Non-Compass, undeclared students.
 - Ability to recognize cross discipline coursework
 - Ability to identify campus resources for academic success
 - Development of connections with other students, faculty/staff
 - Engagement in activities that enhance academic/social experiences
 - Ease of transition to college

Methods & Participants



- Questions aimed at having students share their experiences during first year and current social/academic involvement
- Students received email invitation followed by phone call invitation to participate
- Initial random selection, ultimate inclusion of all previous Compass and Non-Compass Undeclared students
- Conducted a series of focus groups (Compass & Non-Compass Undeclared students)
 - Of 68 Compass students, 5 students participated
 - Of 269 Non-Compass Undeclared students, 2 students participated

Compass Community: Key Themes



- Decided to join Compass Community at request of parent/family
 - Find friends
 - Feel comfortable, would not “fall between the cracks”
 - Opportunity to explore majors/careers
- Positive experience in the Compass Community
 - Described as feeling like family, fun, and comfortable
 - Provided familiarity in an unknown place
 - Quote: “Was my favorite part of freshmen year.”
- Actively involved on campus
 - Compass was “catalyst”- encouragement of advisor, Peer Mentor and other Compass students
 - Provided networking opportunities: Compass students knew other students

Compass Community: Key Themes



- Living & taking classes together influenced academic success strategies
 - Opportunity to build connections with other Compass students
 - Formed study groups
 - Provided attendance accountability
- Enjoyed “getting off campus”
 - Hull Springs Farm & Ropes course
 - Quote: “It [Hull Springs Farm] created fun memories right off the bat.”
- Faculty/Staff Engagement
 - Enjoyed getting to know faculty/staff outside the classroom
 - Increased understanding of how to interact with faculty
 - Increased comfort with asking questions and seeking resources

Non-Compass: Key Themes



- **Actively involved on campus**
 - Using involvement to build skills for future
 - Friends/hallmates encouraged involvement
- **Development of a social network**
- **Experiences in LSEM influenced academic success strategies**
 - Understanding of resources at Longwood
 - Effective study habits
 - Interacting with faculty

Non-Compass: Inconsistencies



- **Benefits of being Undeclared:**
 - Student A: Being undeclared gave the ability to explore strengths, weaknesses, majors and job opportunities. Being undeclared showed the student to determine what he didn't want to do. Had the opportunity to focus on different majors and what they had to offer.
 - Student B: Being undeclared had no benefits.
- **Benefits of special programs targets at Undeclared students:**
 - Student A: Identified the Majors Fair and the opportunity to learn about majors and relevant jobs. It gave students the ability to meet students and professors within the major.
 - Student B: Doesn't remember anything. Quote: "If they were optional, I didn't go."

Limitations



- **Pilot study**
 - Learning outcomes and objectives difficult to measure quantitatively
 - Initial set of questions, revise as appropriate
- **Lack of participation**
 - Unable to determine cause and effect of Compass Community learning outcomes
 - Unable to generalize experiences across groups (specifically Non-Compass Undeclared students)

Discussion



- **Continue with Compass Learning Objectives:**
 - Provide “Field Trips:” Hull Springs Farm
 - Continue enrollment in General Education courses
 - Provide bonding opportunities (students, faculty & staff)
 - Encourage involvement in campus activities & student organizations
- **Considerations for Change/Improvement:**
 - Greater residence hall staff engagement
 - Provide additional opportunities to explore majors/careers
 - Incorporate previous Compass students/alumni into programming and planning
- **Implications for future research:**
 - Increase participation in focus groups
 - Compliment focus groups with student survey
 - Incorporate data from other sources (ex: NSSE or BCSSE) as appropriate

Questions?



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