Chapter 3
Connecting First Year Students to Formal and Informal Learning Experiences

Melissa L. Johnson
University of Florida, USA

Laura A. Pasquini
University of North Texas, USA

Michelle R. Rodems
University of Louisville, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The changing landscape of technology, information, and communication is challenging higher education to rethink its approach to learning. With current developments in educational technology, formal and informal learning communities have tremendously enhanced peer-to-peer connections, knowledge sharing, social learning, and critical thinking for first year students (Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray, & Krause, 2008). A prominent advantage is that emerging technologies create a new dynamic for learning beyond the traditional classroom experience. Online resources are social and collaborative, which impact the academic realm. Although online learning has been present in higher education, the shifting technological trends have altered how and when this learning occurs, specifically amongst first year students.

This case study, an honors first year seminar from the University of Florida, USA, demonstrates the benefits and challenges of these developments in education. The case expands the definition of formal, informal, and online learning communities in the context of a first year seminar.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Introduction to First-Year Experience

In the US context, First-Year Experience (FYE) programs are designed to help transition students from high school to college/university. Typical program varies between institutions of higher education; however, the first-year experience program can include summer orientation programs, first year seminars, living learning communities, designated housing assignments, and themed learning environments. Although first-year students have been the focus of programmatic efforts in higher education for some time, educational contexts have shifted, as have expectations of college students today. One type of program that has spanned the changing contexts of the first year experience is learning communities.

Learning Communities

Traditionally, learning communities "purposefully restructure the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students" (Gabelnick, et al., 1990, p. 41). Learning communities were first utilized as a programmatic effort in the early 1900s. As the college student population grew in 1920s and 1930s, there was an increased focus on the first-year of higher education (Dwyer, 1989). In an effort to intentionally adjust the curriculum, Alexander Meiklejohn, sought to help students connect the formal in-class learning with outside-of-class experiences (Gabelnick, et al., 1990). This "experiment," based on the "great books" program designed for those in primary education, emphasized the necessity of connected learning. Although it was not a long-standing success, it was the first real challenge to the traditional structure of the curriculum, and paved the way for a learning community curriculum.

   As college students came to be regarded as "whole students" who could contribute to their own learning, their co-curricular experiences of community, acclimation to the university, and development of academic skills gained attention. The new focus of the modern learning community became to "purposefully engage faculty, staff,

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/connecting-first-year-students-formal/68230

Related Content

An Automatic Data Warehouse Conceptual Design Approach
Jamel Feki (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 110-119).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/automatic-data-warehouse-conceptual-design/10807

Context-Driven Decision Mining
Alexander mirnov (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 320-327).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/context-driven-decision-mining/10839

Multiple Hypothesis Testing for Data Mining
Sach Mukherjee (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 1390-1395).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/multiple-hypothesis-testing-data-mining/11003

Text Mining Methods for Hierarchical Document Indexing
Han-Joon Kim (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 1957-1965).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/text-mining-methods-hierarchical-document/11087

Pattern Preserving Clustering
Hui Xiong, Michael Steinbach, Pang-Ning Tan, Vipin Kumarand Wenjun Zhou (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 1505-1510).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/pattern-preserving-clustering/11019