

GDCB SEMINAR

4:10 p.m. • Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021 • 1414 Molecular Biology Building

“A Sense of Belonging — Impacts of a Learning Community on Student Development”

Abstract: Given the current funding realities for Iowa State University, student success and student retention are areas of potentially high strategic impact. Learning communities are widely adopted and proven support structures that increase student engagement, academic success, retention, and graduation rates. Since fall of 2015, The Sky is the Limit learning community has been an option for LAS students who enrolled at ISU without a declared major. These students represent a wide student demographic, all with a common need to develop and chart paths to a degree that aligns with their interests. There is great value in providing a supportive learning community that welcomes these students and enables them to succeed in their academic pursuits. In this seminar, the impacts of this learning community will be presented. Overall, one-year retention rates were higher for learning community participants, with the greatest increases in retention being observed for academically low-performing students and underrepresented minorities. In addition, a higher percentage of students in the learning community declared an initial interest in learning science and in science careers and maintained this interest at the end of their first semester. Focus groups revealed that students benefitted from participating in targeted interventions and activities, and from the support provided by peer mentors in the learning community.



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Starting in the spring of 2021, learning community resources targeting the success and retention of biology and genetics majors will be available to second and third semester students. Using the knowledge gained from our work with undeclared students combined with input from biology and genetics student services staff and students, we will offer courses designed to meet the needs of our students: helping them explore career options and think about powerful combinations of majors and minors, as well as providing needed support and guidance if they start to question whether they should remain in biology or genetics.

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