

The MDRC KCC report has been featured in two public policy blogs: "The Quick and the Ed" and "Inclusionist."

From the Quick and the Ed (<http://www.quickanded.com/>)

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

The **QUICK** and the ED



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Learning Communities

[Kingsborough Community College](#) is a typical two-year institution of higher education, in the sense that it enrolls a lot of students (nearly 15,000), most of whom are eligible for need-based financial aid, its mission of helping first-generation and working students is tremendously important, and unless you happen to live nearby (Brooklyn, in this case), you've probably never heard of it before.

According to a [new report from MDRC](#), Kingsborough is also doing some interesting work to improve the quality of education it provides. Researchers randomly assigned 1,500 students to either regular classes or "learning communities," in which students are assembled in small groups (25 in this case) and take a sequence of multiple courses together. The idea is that students greatly benefit from having academic relationships with other students, which often doesn't happen when you commute to school, sit in class, and then leave for your job or family. The study found that the students in the learning communities were more engaged, were more likely to pass developmental English courses, and more likely to earn credits and pass courses in general. The positive effects faded, however, when they went back to the normal regime. Two- and four-year colleges have been experimenting with learning communities for a number of years and the results have generally been positive, but I'm not sure there's been any evidence this definitive and grounded in randomized assignment design.

It's also worth noting that one hardly ever hears news of such education-focused research or results coming from selective four-year institutions, because--unlike community colleges--they have other, apparently more important things on their minds.

■ Posted by Kevin Carey at 11:40 AM

From Inclusionist (<http://www.inclusionist.org/>):

inclusion
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MDRC: Learning Communities Are Working

MDRC has an encouraging update of its expansive study of learning communities at a Brooklyn community college. Learning communities are essentially study groups and then some, and they're intended particularly to help non-traditional and low-income students succeed in college. MDRC found that they're making an impact.

The program improved students' college experience. *Students in the program group felt more integrated and more engaged than students in the control group.*

The program also improved some educational outcomes while students were in the learning community program, but the effects diminished in subsequent semesters.

Program group students, for example, attempted and passed more courses and earned more credits during their first semester.

The program moved students more quickly through developmental English requirements.

Students in the program group were more likely to take and pass English skills assessment tests that are required for graduation or transfer.

The evidence is mixed about whether the program increased persistence. *Initially the program did not change the rate at which students reenrolled. In the last semester of the report's two-year follow-up period, however, slightly more program group members than control group members attended college.*

In the House-passed version of the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization, setting up learning communities is one way colleges can use a Student Success Grant. House and Senate negotiators are still working out the details of the final version of the HEA, but they'd be wise to include a program that's demonstrated such positive results. If you're interested in pushing for learning communities and programs like it, see [this post](#).

Submitted by Matt Lewis on 11 March, 2008 - 16:23.