

Students' Experiences in Mason's Linked Courses

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I. About GMU Linked Courses

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Linked Courses connect two or three courses for the purpose of enhancing learning and community among students and among students and faculty. Specifically, during fall semester 1997, sections of [English](#) 101 were combined with [Anthropology](#) 114, [Biology](#) 103, [Economics](#) 103, [Government](#) 132, [History](#) 121, [Psychology](#) 100, [Sociology](#) 101 and Psychology 100 with e-mail mentoring in two-way linkages. Two-way links without an English component were created by combining [Communication](#) 101 and [University](#) 100, Government 103 and Communication 100, Government 103 and [Philosophy](#) 111, and Psychology 100 and University 100. Three-way course linkages were formed by combining English 101, Government 103 and Philosophy 111 and English 101, Sociology 101 and University 100. The following significant differences were found among students enrolled in two- and three-way linked courses:

* Students in three-way linked courses reported a significantly closer relationship with linked course faculty than students in two-way linkages ($p \leq .03$).

* Students in two-way links without an English component had a significantly higher expectation for "curricular connections" than other linked students ($p \leq .03$).

* Students in three-way linked courses were more likely than other linked students to say that curricular connections had been made ($p \leq .008$).

II. Surveying & the Response Rate

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Of the 565 students enrolled in the linked courses during Fall 1997, 342 students were in class and completed the survey at the end of the semester. A survey response rate of 61% was achieved. Results from the end of course questionnaire are shared in this report.

III. Choosing a Particular Linked Course

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As identified in the introduction of this report, there were many linked course combinations and sections available to students. When asked why they chose a particular course, students overwhelmingly (82%) said because of interest in the subject matter (44%) or because the linked course was a required course for their major (38%).

Others reported that their first choice course was filled (7%), that they expected some difficulty and wanted help with the subject matter (6%) or they enrolled for the opportunity of community service (5%).

IV. Academic and Social Community

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Students agreed that a number of the basic tenants or goals of the linked courses were achieved. Eighty-three percent agreed that social community developed in the courses and that students experienced a closer relationship with linked faculty than with faculty teaching other courses (67%). Regarding faculty-student contact, one student said, "Getting to know the professors and feeling comfortable talking with them" was the one best aspect of the linked courses. (See Table 1.)

Sixty-nine percent said that the linked courses helped make the transition to college easier, that they were more comfortable in their larger non-English class as result of the link (57%) and a majority (53%) reported that an academic community formed between students. Writing about the transition from high school to college one student wrote, "The Linked courses helped me with the transition to college from high school. These courses helped me adapt to larger lecture courses."

Table 1. Academic and Social Community in Linked Courses

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Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
A "social community" developed in my linked courses.	40%	43%	83%
It was easier to achieve a sense of community in my English class.	33%	45%	78%
I experienced a closer relationship with linked faculty than with faculty teaching other courses.	33%	34%	67%
An "academic community" formed among students.	17%	38%	55%
The linked courses helped make the transition to college easier.	26%	43%	69%
As a result of the link, I was more comfortable in my larger, non-English course(s)	21%	36%	57%
A sense of community carried over to my non-English class.	19%	44%	63%

V. Linking the Course Content

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Connecting the content of the English and non-English courses is a primary goal of the linked courses program. Indeed, students overwhelmingly agreed (83%) that they had an expectation of curricular connections when they enrolled in the links. Nearly three-

quarters of students (72%) agreed that these connections were made and 64% said the number of curricular connections were appropriate. One student wrote, "The best part was that what we worked on in sociology was continued in English. We could perfect our writings for both classes in English." Over one-third (37%) said that because of their linked experience, they started to make connections in other non-linked courses.

Table 2. Curricular Connections in Linked Courses

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Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
When I enrolled in the links, I expected a great deal of curricular connections between the courses.	39%	44%	83%
Faculty opinions and views may differ depending on their academic discipline.	25%	53%	78%
My linked course did make curricular connections.	26%	46%	72%
Curricular connections helped me see subject matter/educational relationships.	17%	48%	65%
The number of curricular connections between the courses was appropriate.	18%	46%	64%
Because of the links, I have been able to make curricular connections in other, non-linked courses.	10%	27%	37%

VI. Most Appealing Aspects of the Linked Courses

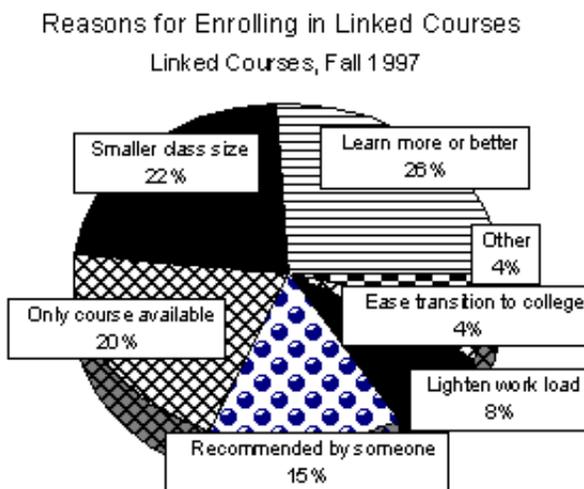
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Students were asked to write about the most appealing aspects of their linked courses. The highest proportion of comments received (27%) noted the strong academic or social community in the courses and a similar proportion (25%) said that the links supported learning. A report listing students' verbatim comments is available upon request.

VII. Why Students Enroll in the Linked Courses Program

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Students reported a variety of reasons for enrolling in the Linked Courses Program. Anticipating learning more or better (26%), smaller class sizes (22%), being the only courses available (20%), or a recommendation (15%) were reasons four-fifths of the students enrolled. Additional reasons are highlighted in the pie chart below. Commenting on class size, one student wrote, "I liked having a small English class with students that were all in the same Psychology class so we could discuss things together."



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Reference: Masterson, John T. "[Learning Communities, the Wizard, and the Holy Grail](#)," *AAHE Bulletin*, Vol. 50, No. 8, April 1998.

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