

# CASTL Fellowship Report

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## I. Lisa R. Hunter

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## II. The Intellectual Development of First Year Freshmen

## III. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of participation in a learning community on the intellectual development of First Year Freshmen.

Research questions that guided this project include:

1. Does a significant relationship exist between the intellectual development (MID scores) of learning community participants and non-learning community participants upon entrance into college?
2. Does a significant relationship exist between the intellectual development (MID scores) of learning community participants and non-learning community participants after one semester of college?
3. Is there a significant difference between change in intellectual development of learning community participants and non-learning community participants after one semester of college?

Additionally, surveys assessing students' self perceptions of themselves and their educational experience at Buffalo State College were also administered. Data were analyzed to determine if there were any significant differences between group membership and survey items.

## IV. At this time, a preliminary statistical analysis of data has been conducted. The information below illustrates the current status of the two main instruments used for data collection: Self-perception Survey and Measure of Intellectual Development.

A self-perception survey (focused on knowledge and abilities that may signify various stages of intellectual development) was administered to each student in a pre/post test format. The survey has been submitted as an appendix to this report. Each question on the survey has been analyzed to determine whether or not there was a significant difference between the pre/post test answers on each item. A significant difference was found for items 2, 3, 4, 6, 16, 17, 18, and 24. An analysis of frequencies has determined that even though significance was not found for each item, the general trend seems to be that for the majority of items, students' answers moved to a stronger reply, documenting that students in either a learning community or general freshmen increased in their knowledge and general abilities, according to their self perception. Additional statistical analyses will be conducted to determine whether or not there was a significant difference between groups regarding survey answers.

The Measure of Intellectual Development consisted of an open-ended essay in response to an essay prompt administered in a pre/post test format. Professional raters from the Center for Intellectual Development scored each essay. The data was returned to me with two ratings for each essay as well as a reconciled rating for cases where the raters did not agree. The data is being analyzed as categorical data where I will report the frequencies of students in each stage of intellectual development. In addition, the data is also being analyzed as continuous data where I will report any significant difference between pre/post essays as well as between groups. Due to the complicated nature of the way the data is reported, I am unable to deliver a more thorough analysis at this time. I am working with the Scholarship Support Center to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis. Thus far, I can report that most students were rated as being somewhere in position two of the intellectual development model on the pre-test. It appears that some students did either begin to shift positions or fully shift to position three throughout the course of the semester. However, at this time, I am unable to report whether or not the changes were significant.

If first semester freshmen at BSC are generally in the second position of intellectual development when they enter college, it will be helpful for professors to understand the implications. Position two is characterized by dichotomies and dualism: right or wrong, good or bad etc. According to Moore (1997), students in this position may require assistance if a teacher chooses less structured learning environments, such as cooperative learning activities. Position three is characterized by some acknowledgement of uncertainty. Thus, students may be able to recognize that some things are not yet known. In order to facilitate transition from position two to position three, professors may foster structured disagreements regarding class content to foster these critical questioning skills.

Upon further MID analysis, I will not only report the significance and means, I will be able to extract qualitative data from the essays that will provide further understanding of the intellectual development positions and the differences between learning community and non-learning community freshmen.

- V. I believe my project has already had an impact by providing language and a method of assessment for intellectual development. Several faculty on campus have approached me about gaining a deeper understanding and assessing intellectual development. In addition, the Dean of Arts and Humanities is currently pursuing a collaborative international education project. One of the assessment majors in consideration is the Measure of Intellectual Development. I think that increasing awareness about intellectual development is beneficial for all faculty.

I will present my CASTL project at the BSC Faculty and Staff Research and Creativity Celebration in October 2009. I will also work with the Dean of University College to present project results in conjunction with the Learning Community Conference in December 2009. In addition, I have been accepted to deliver a primary presentation at the Society for Music Teacher Educators National Conference in

September 2009. I intend to pursue journal publication with several follow-up articles.

VI. The professional benefits I have experienced as a result of this fellowship are many. One tremendous benefit to me has been the network of colleagues I have encountered that believe in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Prior to this fellowship, I felt quite isolated in my research. I have found the network of colleagues to be inspirational and supportive as we work to actively impact the academic environment at Buffalo State College.

As I have traveled to present at conferences in my discipline, I have found that my CASTL fellowship has interested others in similar scholarly pursuits. I have found others who have been actively involved in CASTL work; however, I was not aware of their involvement until I received my fellowship. These connections have served to strengthen the promotion of the scholarship of teaching and learning in my discipline at the national level.

The final professional benefit I would like to discuss is the contribution this fellowship has made to my advancement from assistant professor to associate professor. As I underwent promotion and tenure review in February – June 2009, I found that my CASTL work was highly regarded by the members of my department committee, my respective Dean, the Provost, and President. In each report, my CASTL fellowship was directly cited as an area of distinct accomplishment.

In addition, the fellowship served as a platform in which my colleagues could become involved in my research. Because of the prestige of a fellowship, my colleagues seemed motivated to actively participate in my study. In the past, it has been difficult to garner support in the form of participation with unsponsored research projects.

Involvement in the CASTL Fellowship program has been an extremely rewarding experience. I look forward to publication of articles related to this project. I would also like to pursue a follow-up study in the future.