

**Title:**                    **Undergraduate Academic and Social Integration in Higher Education**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session learning Outcomes**

Colleagues will be able to:

- Reflect critically on the value of and reasons for introducing pedagogic learning communities early in the student experience of Higher Education.
- Explore the features of a learning community which support student integration and enhance student experience of studying at university.
- Identify factors which enable the successful implementation of projects to support social and academic integration into higher education.

#### **Session Outline**

The widening participation agenda has led to an increase in students accessing higher education and institutional practices which encourage students to be independent learners from the outset. Modular degree programmes may contribute to the social and academic isolation (Malcolm, 2000). Malcolm suggests that strategies such as online lecture notes and resources may exacerbate students' feelings of isolation because it reduces opportunities for human interaction. Tinto's model of student retention (1975) recognises that successful integration into the social and academic life at university is vital in keeping students engaged with academic study. Thomas (2002) supports this emphasising that successful integration relies on social interaction and the development of meaningful relationships. Thomas goes further than Tinto offering 5 spheres of integration namely: academic, social, economic, support and democratic. It appears that successful undergraduate integration is accomplished through the establishment of meaningful 'connections' with other human beings, resources and knowledge. Fowler and Zimitat, (2008) introduced the concept of 'common time' to support Australian undergraduates and employed activities which focused on improving opportunities:

- for students to work together on subject content
- for students to gain informal feedback on learning
- to meet department academic and support staff on an individual basis.

This workshop based on a pilot project at the University of Worcester to support students with the transition to higher education through a structured learning programme over their first academic semester. The main aim was to provide weekly social and academic activities within specific departments. Individual and informal group activities were developed by the departments concerned and sessions facilitated by course tutors and support staff.

## Session Activities and Approximate Timings

### Presentation

A brief overview of the aims of the widening participation agenda and how institutional practices may contribute to poor student retention during the first year of higher education study. Reflection on the role the educational development and professional practice lecturer in supporting change in institutional practice **(10 minutes)**.

### Activity one

Small Group work: Factors which support the transition to Higher Education. Cards with written statements about intuitional and individual factors which support social and academic integration will be discussed and agreed by group members. Chosen statements will be used to focus the second planned activity **(10 minutes)**.

### Activity two

Small Group work: the aim is to develop shared ideas and recommendations for implementing a learning community project with first year students in your own setting. Group Participants will be asked to write down their ideas/experiences about developing an informal learning community on the cards provided **(10 Minutes)**.

### Activity three

Large group discussion: the aim is to develop shared ideas and recommendations for implementing a learning community project with first year students in your own setting using the text examples provided from the previous group activity. **(15 minutes)**.

## References

Fowler, J. Zimtat, C. (2008) Common Time: embedding the concept of academic and social integration across cognate degree programmes.

*Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 45, 1, February, pp 37-46.

Malcolm, J (2000). Joining, invading, and reconstructing: participation for a change? In Thompson, J (Ed) *Stretching the Academy. The politics and practice of widening participation*. Chapter one, pp12-23. National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE): Leicester.

Tinto, V. (1975) Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45. pp 89-125.

Thomas, E.A.M (2002) Student retention in Higher Education: The role of Institutional habitus. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 17, 4, pp423-43