



# Experiences of Academic Engagement and Classroom Community in Learning Communities

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# Campus Context





# Campus Context: Kansas State University

- Kansas State University
- Campus Culture
- Brief History of FYE at Kansas State
- K-State First



**K-STATE 1 FIRST**

# K-State First: Programs



• CAT Communities: *Learning Communities*



• First-Year Seminars



• KSBN: Common Reading Program



• GPS (Guide to Personal Success): One-on-One Mentoring Program



## K-State First: Area for Expansion

- ***Residential Learning Communities***

- Growth of CAT Communities at K-State:

Fall 2010: 6 = 2 Residential | 4 Non-Residential

Fall 2012: 14 = 2 Residential | 11 Non-Residential | 1 Study Abroad

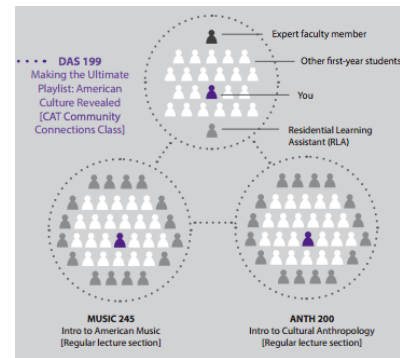
Fall 2014: 23 = 6 Residential | 16 Non-Residential | 1 Study Abroad

Fall 2015: 36 = 21 Residential | 15 Non-Residential | 2 Study Abroad

- 4 of this year's RCCs supported by grant from Suder Foundation

# Residential CAT Communities: Structure

- Two linked general education courses
- One small interactive connections course
- Multiple co-curricular events
- Built around area of student interest
- Located together in same residence hall
- Led by faculty member, who teaches connections course & one gen ed course
- Co-led by peer mentor (“Residential Learning Assistant”)
- CAT Community leaders are trained and compensated



# CAT Communities: Learning Outcomes

- Critical Thinking
- Communication Skills
- ***Community Building***
- Application of Learning






## CAT Communities: Performance Highlights

- Better First-Year Persistence: 87.4% versus 81.9% (2013 cohort)
- Better GPA's: 2.99 versus 2.92
- Better Teaching Evaluations: 4.4 average on 5.0 scale (77% above IDEA Database average)
- Average ACT scores of CAT Community students and non-participants are virtually identical (~24.5).





## Residential CAT Communities: Performance This Past Semester (Fall 2014)

- Better First-Semester Persistence: 98.8% versus 93.3%
- Better First-Semester GPA's: 3.27 versus 2.95
- Better Teaching Evaluations: 4.88 out of 5.0 (86%): half were perfect 5.0/5.0, another one-third were at 4.9/5.0
- ACT Scores: 23.3 (RCC students) versus 24.6 (non-participants)



# Learning Communities





## What is a Learning Community (LC)?

- Integrated comprehensive programs in which transformative learning takes place through community process as students develop professionally, civically, and ethically (Brown & Dettinger, 1998).
  - Usually linked in terms of a theme or subject areas (or area of student interest)
  - Designed to support the integration of academic content
  - Designed to provide social relationships



## What do LCs do?

- Fosters a Sense of Community (Lichtenstein, 2005)
  - Promotes personal connection through shared intellectual experience
  - Promotes engagement and knowledge integration through collaborative learning
  - Facilitates student-faculty interaction inside and outside the classroom
- Provides a support network and engages students more fully in academic life at the institution (Tinto, 1997)
- Promotes personal connection through shared intellectual experiences, engagement and knowledge integration through collaborative learning (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008)



## How do LCs affect students?

- **Enhanced academic performance** (Lord, Coston, Davis, & Johannes, 2012; Zheng, Saunders, Shelley, & Whalen, 2002)
  - GPA & Study Habits
- **Increased student engagement and involvement, satisfaction with college experience, and better career preparation** (Engstrom & Tinto 2007; Lord et al., 2012; Rocconi, 2012; Stassen, 2003; Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, & Lindblad 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004)
- **Allows for friendship formation and greater sense of community** (Jaffee, Carle, Phillips, & Paltoo, 2008)



# Study 1



## Study 1 Research Question

- Do learning community participants experience a sense of community in the classroom?



## Study 1 Method

- Students completed a measure of classroom community
  - During the first and last meetings of their class in the Fall 2013 semester
- 83 students were enrolled in learning communities
- 384 students were enrolled in first-year seminars



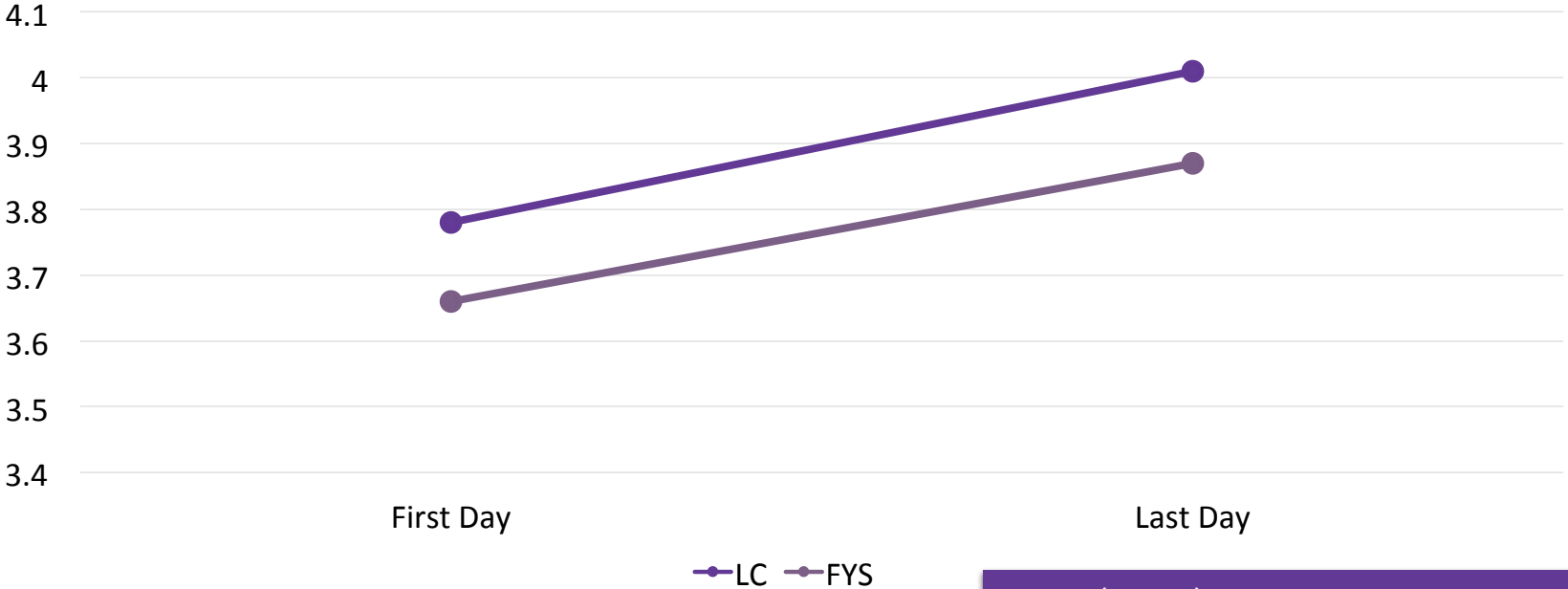


# Classroom Community Measure

- Classroom Community Scale (CCS; Rovai, 2001)
- 20 items, response scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)
- 1. Perceived “Connectedness” in the course
  - E.g., *I feel connected to others in this course*
- 2. Perceived “Learning” in the course
  - E.g., *I feel that I am encouraged to ask questions*
- 3. Overall Classroom Community



# Overall Community Results



Time:  $F(1, 465) = 41.45, p < .001$   
Class:  $F(1, 465) = 10.07, p = .002$   
TxC:  $F(1, 465) = 0.10, p = .752$



## Study 1 Conclusions

- Learning Community students reported levels of classroom community:
  - At relatively high levels on the first day of class
  - At significantly higher levels on the last day of class
  - That were significantly higher than those reported by FYS students
- Learning Community students are experiencing a community



# Study 2



## Study 2 Research Question

- Do learning community participants experience community and academic engagement differently in their learning communities than in other courses?

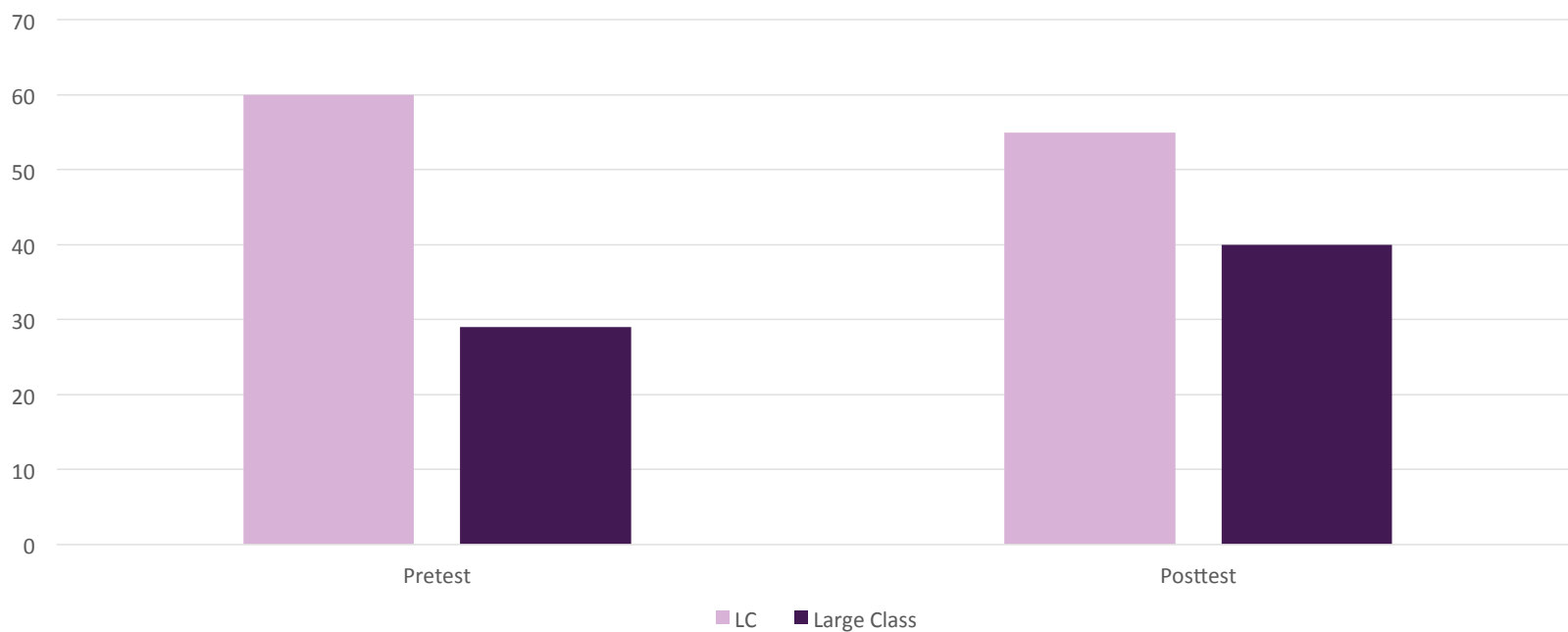


## Study 2 Method

- Students were invited to complete measures of classroom community, academic engagement, etc.
  - About one month into the Fall 2014 semester
  - About two weeks prior to the end of the Fall 2014 semester
- 69 students were enrolled in learning communities
  - Five different LCs were represented
  - Offered measures for both their LC and a large (interconnected) course
- 364 students were not enrolled in learning communities
  - Offered measures only for the large course



# Participation Rates





# Classroom Community Measure

- Classroom Community Scale (CCS; Rovai, 2001)
- 20 items, response scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)



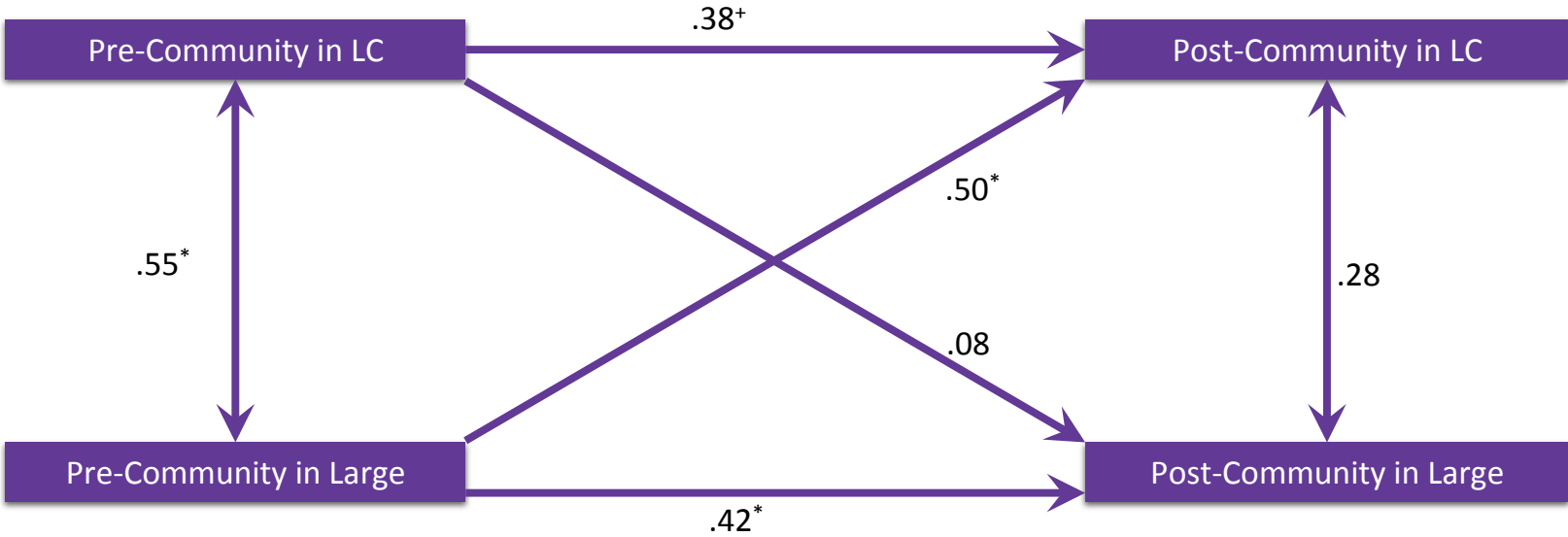


## Academic Engagement Measure

- Academic Engagement Scale (Rupayana & Fullagar, 2008)
- 16 items, response scale of agreement from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*)
- 1. Intrinsic Motivation
  - E.g., *I feel good when doing work for this class*
- 2. Absorption
  - E.g., *I am very absorbed in my work for this class*
- 3. Dedication/Challenge
  - E.g., *I often felt proud of the work that I did for this class*
- 4. Vigor
  - E.g., *I often feel energized by the work in this class*
- 5. Overall Academic Engagement

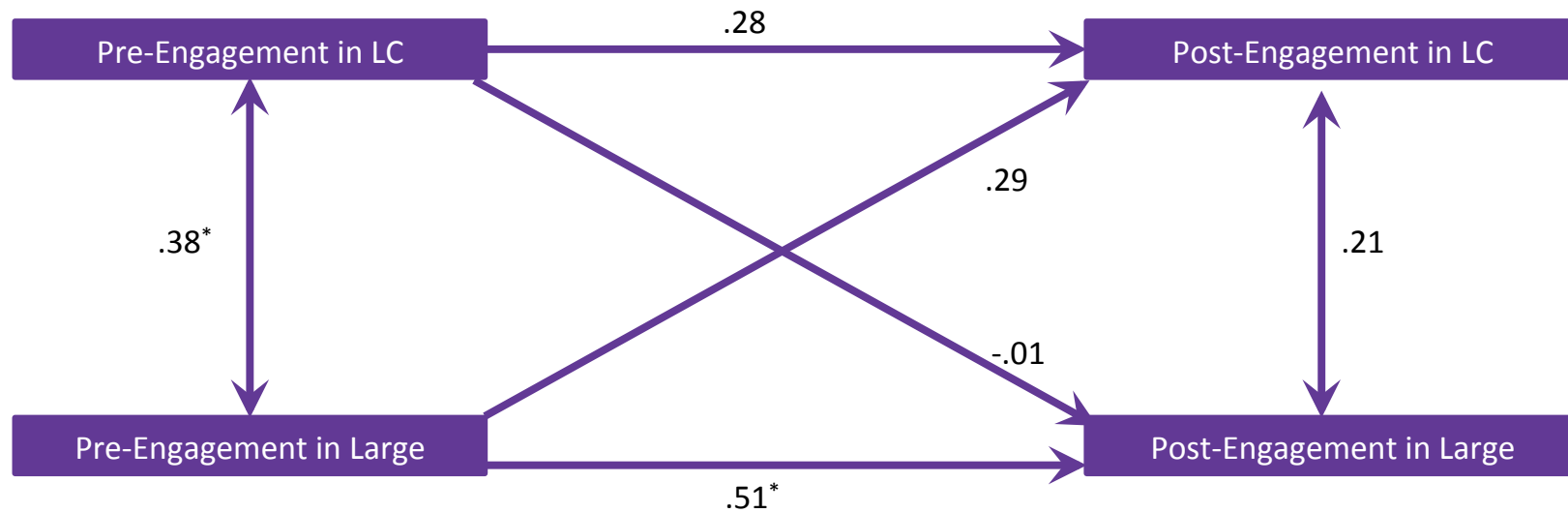


# Community Relationships



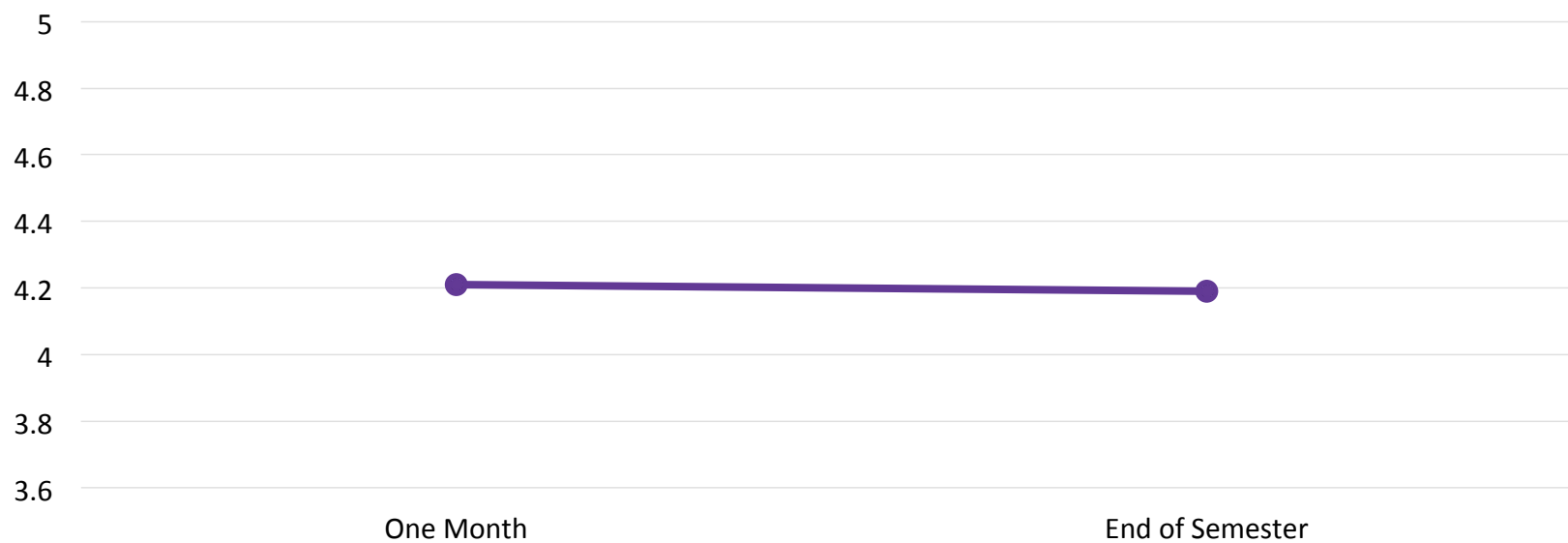


# Engagement Relationships





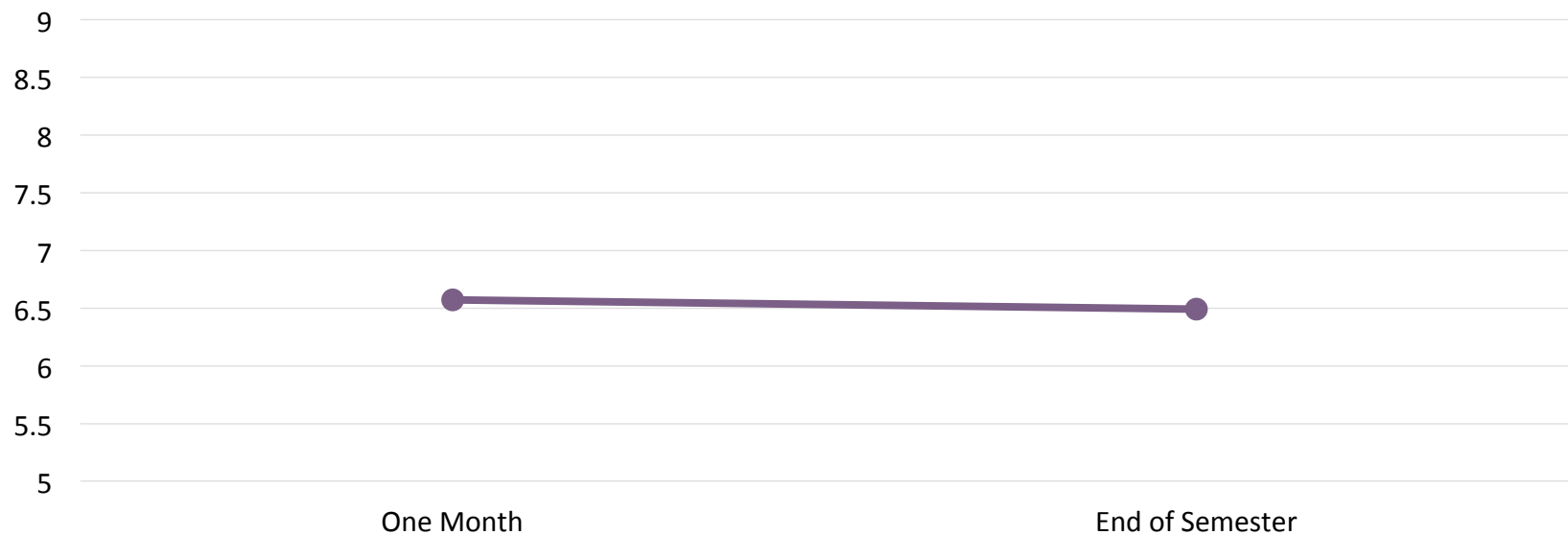
# Community in LC



CCS:  $t(26) = 0.17, p = .868$



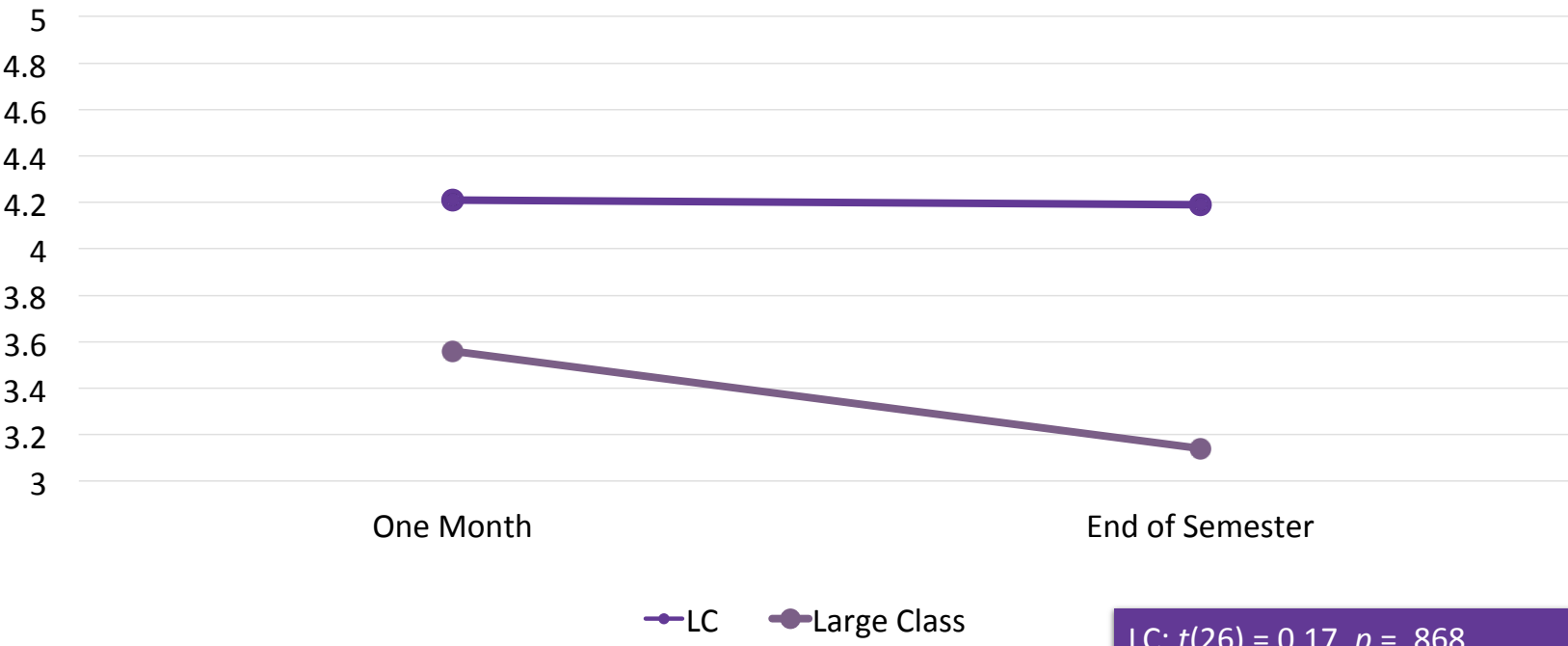
# Engagement in LC



Engage:  $t(26) = 0.28, p = .786$

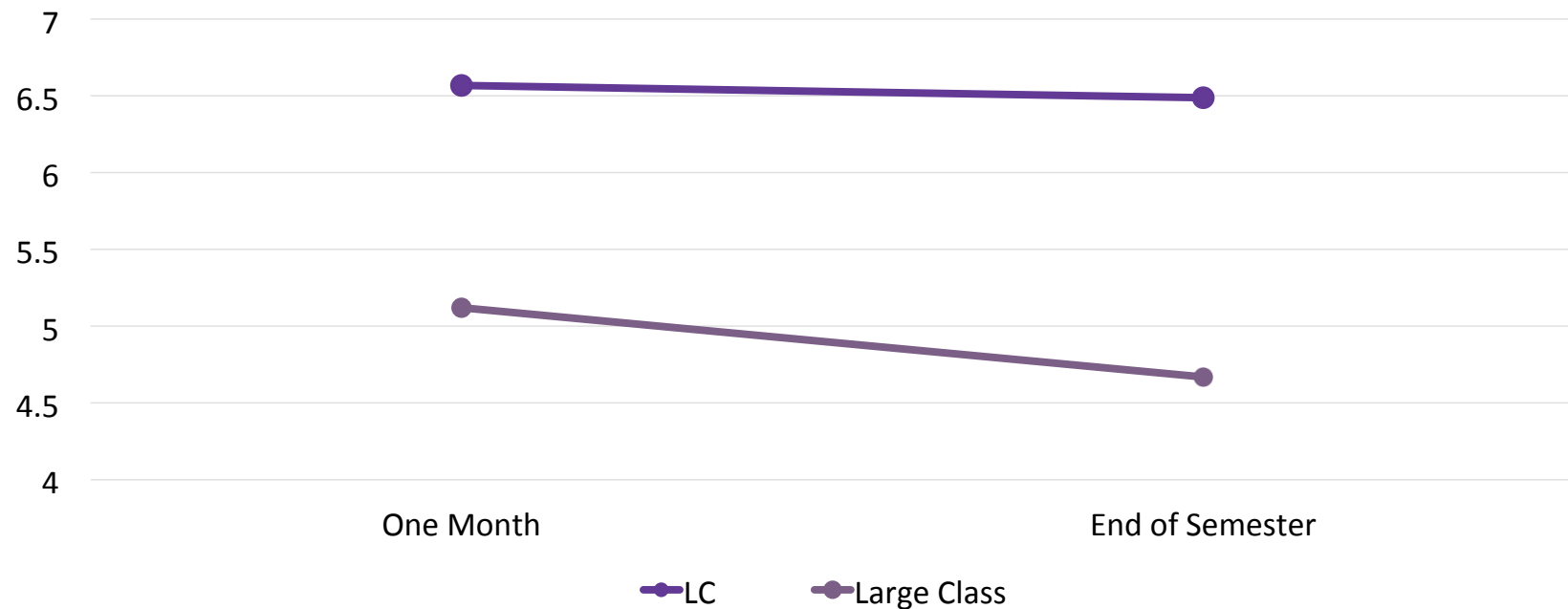


# Community in LC versus Large Class (LC Students)



LC:  $t(26) = 0.17, p = .868$   
Large:  $t(22) = 3.11, p = .005$

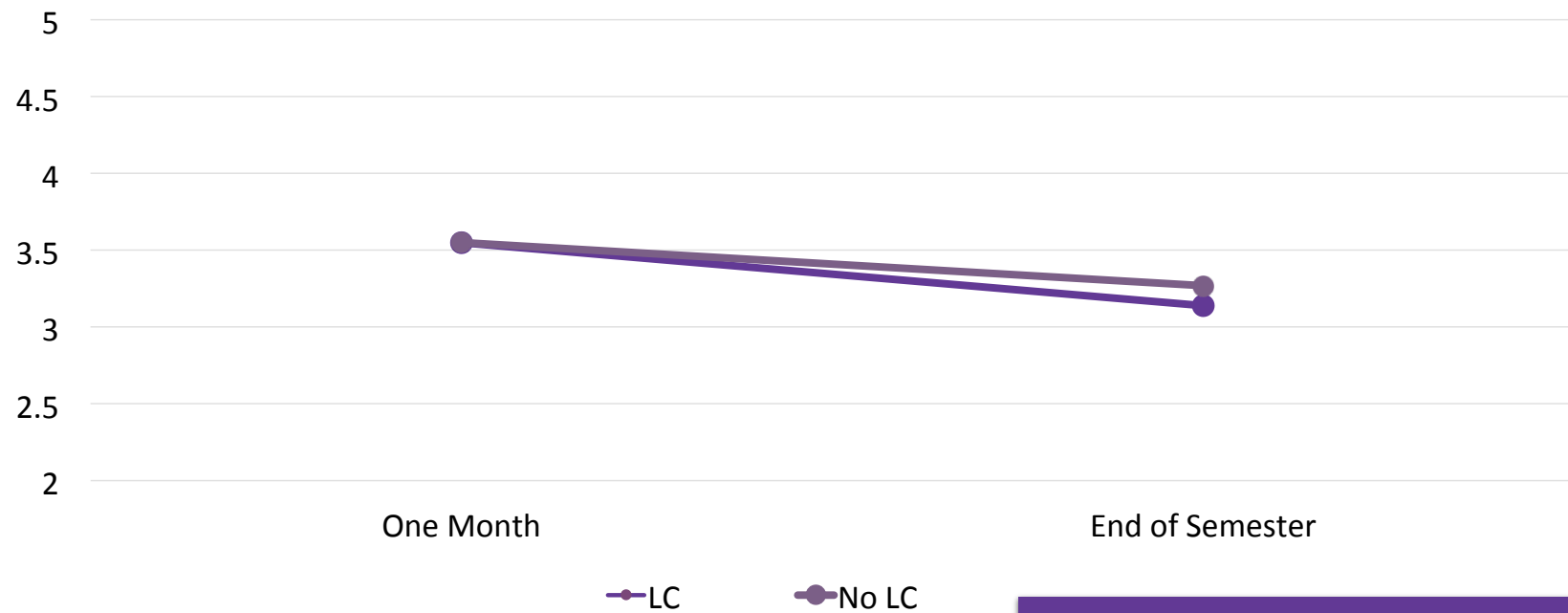
## Engagement in LC versus Large Class (LC Students)



LC:  $t(26) = 0.28, p = .785$   
Large:  $t(22) = 3.20, p = .004$



## Community in Large Class (LC versus No LC Students)

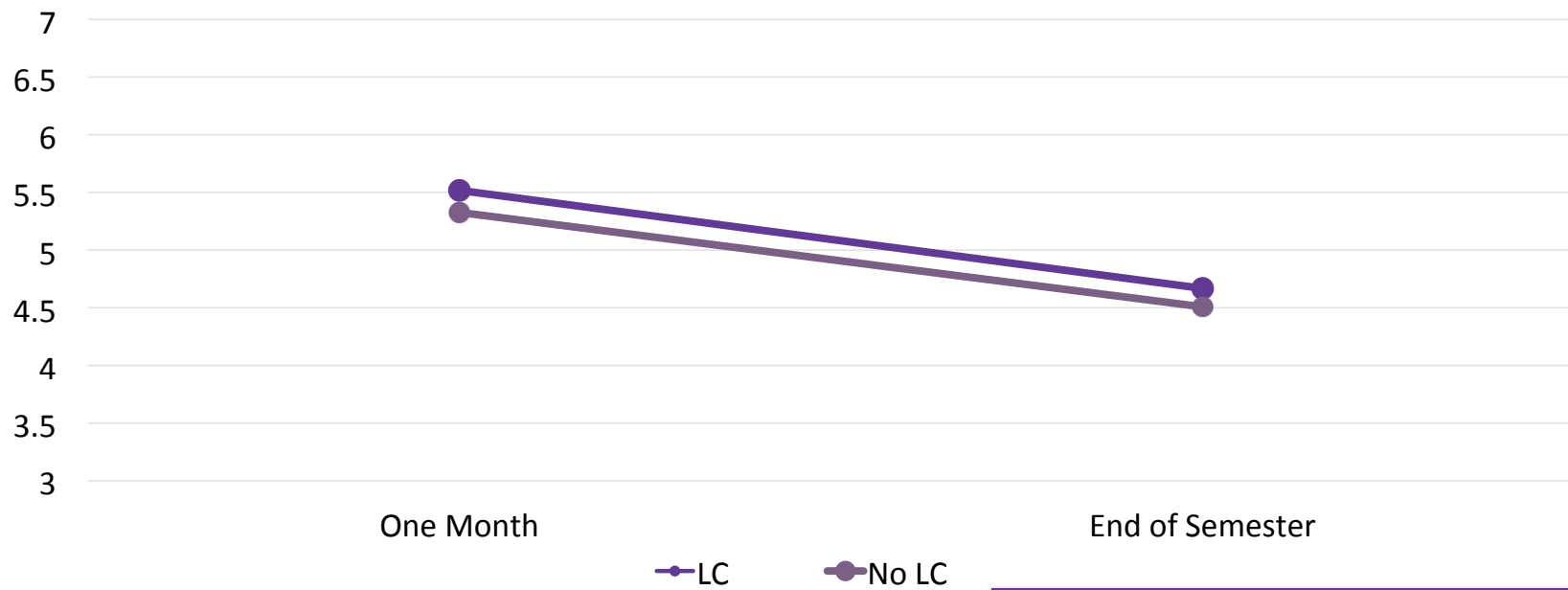


Time:  $F(1, 78) = 28.24, p < .001$   
Time X LC:  $F(1, 78) = 1.18, p = .281$





## Engagement in Large Class (LC versus No LC Students)



Time:  $F(1, 81) = 25.04, p < .001$   
Time X LC:  $F(1, 81) = 0.01, p = .935$

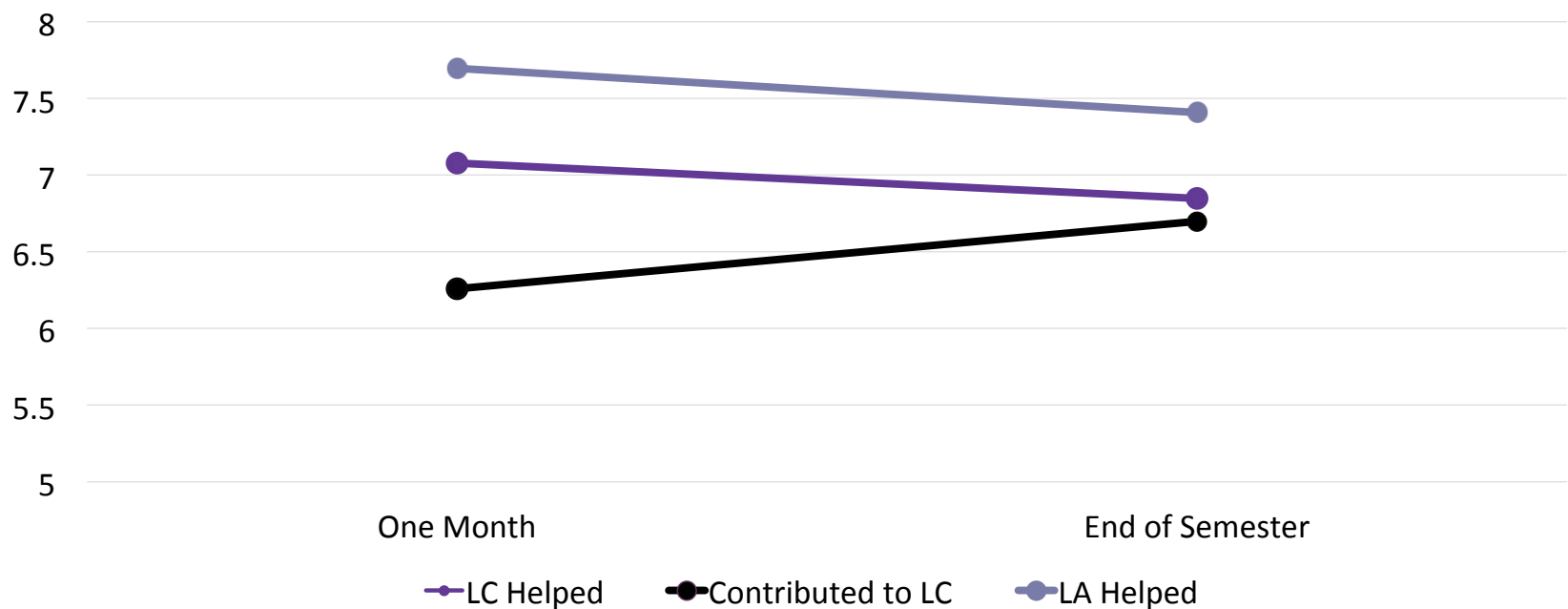


## Additional Items


- 3 items, response scale of agreement from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*)
- Do you feel like being a part of your CAT Community helps you to achieve your educational goals?
- Do you feel like you have contributed to your CAT Community?
- Do you feel like your Learning Assistant has helped create a positive learning community?



# Additional Items



LC Helped:  $t(25) = 0.65, p = .523$   
Contributed to LC:  $t(26) = 1.89, p = .069$   
LA Helped:  $t(26) = 1.40, p = .175$




## Do you feel like being a part of your CAT Community helps you to achieve your educational goals?

- *It provides me with many resources and people to go to if I need help or have any questions that I need answered and I would not be able to access these resources without the CAT community.*
- *Being a part of my CAT Community helps me achieve by helping me connects several topics together. It's a place where we can discuss certain issues more in depth. The CAT Community is also great place to find people that can help you in your classes.*
- *It allows me to open up and stay organized. I can apply this in other courses*



## Do you feel like you have contributed to your CAT Community?

- *We all contribute to our community by helping each other with questions or concerns and having each other's back whenever they need it.*
- *I keep the conversations going; I spark interest in what we learn. I try to be as supportive as possible when we get together as a group.*
- *We created a very strong community and we each had our own roles in creating that community... just being friendly and open to others was my way to help create a strong bond between all of us.*



## Do you feel like your Learning Assistant has helped create a positive learning community?

- *Our Learning Assistant provides us with many resources to help us succeed at college and she is very passionate about our education.*
- *Our learning assistant has helped make our group more of a community.*
- *They have contributed by making us feel comfortable and connected and really valuing what everyone has to offer.*
- *She has helped us get and stay connected.*

## Academic Performance in Large Class

<u>Performance Domain</u>	<u>Comparison</u>	<u>Significance</u>
• Final Grade (%)	LC (89.7%) > No LC (84.1%)	**
• Comprehensive Final (%)	LC (86.5%) > No LC (83.8%)	+
• Exam Average (%)	LC (86.5%) > No LC (83.6%)	+
• Chapter Quizzes (%)	LC (91.8%) > No LC (86.6%)	*
• Fieldwork	LC > No LC	+
• Extra Points	LC > No LC	*
• Attendance	LC > No LC	*



## Study 2 Conclusions

- Learning community students experienced more community and engagement in their learning communities than in the large course
- These experiences did not transfer to their experiences in the large course
- However, learning community students outperformed students not involved in learning communities on several academic performance areas in the large class





## Study 2 Conclusions

In our students' own words:

- *It taught me many valuable skills needed to go through some of the other classes I had.*
- *They make me want to do better in everything I do.*



# Conclusions



## Overall Conclusion

- Learning communities are associated with students' experiencing greater levels of classroom community and academic engagement
- Further, these experiences of community and engagement in learning communities help to foster students' success both within and beyond the learning community classroom



## Put Simply and Generally

- Fostering a sense of community and engagement in your own classroom will benefit your students beyond your four walls



## Our Next Steps and Next Questions

- Building on strengths of residential, faculty-led learning communities
- Preparing faculty to lead learning communities
- Examining the future impacts of learning community involvement
- Identifying and measuring the processes that drive these impacts



# Thank you!

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