*Mentored Learning Communities
to Impact
E-Learning Student Success*

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Challenges and values

- Wide variance in student technology capacity, access, skills, comfort, etc.
- Faculty resistance to fully online program
- Wide geographic spread among students
- Importance of relationships in SW practice
- Value of relationships for presence and engagement in the learning environment
- Faculty desire for "eyes on the ground" with students – for better feedback and monitoring

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Cohort, Learning Community, & Mentor Model

- One <u>cohort</u> of students admitted every year
- Each cohort is divided into regional <u>learning communities</u> of 4-6 students that meet regionally for ITV class sessions
- Each learning community is assigned a faculty <u>mentor</u> who is with the students for the duration of the program and serves as field liaison during 2nd and 3rd year of program.

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Mentored Learning Community Model
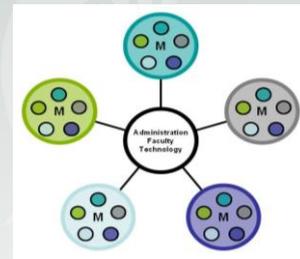
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Specifics of the Mentor-led Learning Community (LC) Model

- Annual 4-5 day in-person Summer Institute on campus where all students and mentors participate
- Once per month (Saturday) simultaneous local meetings all LCs linked together and connected with Faculty through videoconference technology
- Approximately 80% of course content online
- Mentors' role course-support-only in Year 1, course-support plus field liaison Years 2 and 3
- Learning communities established their own patterns for connecting between face-to-face meetings

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Results and challenges

- MSW Program completion rates of 90-100%
- Learning outcomes greatly exceed benchmarks…….
BUT
- Variance in faculty use of mentors
- Variance in mentor engagement, group skills, impact of personalities in groups
- Issues in identifying and preparing mentors
- General drift from the "ideal" model

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Student and Mentor Surveys

- Summer, 2014
- Involved all mentors and students
- Conducted through SurveyMonkey
- Good response rates:
  - Mentors – 15/15
  - Students – ranged from 39 to 91% for the three different cohorts

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Survey results from mentors

- Enjoyed watching students develop
- Many learning communities bonded well
- Played an important role in the field program
BUT
- Some LCs did not bond well with the mentor
- Personality conflicts and personal stressors
- Sometimes unclear about roles and expectations

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Survey results from students

- Generally felt positive about mentor roles
- Definitely helped with field issues (liaison)
BUT…..
- Questioned mentor commitment (e.g., not engaging during class, little contact between sessions)
- Did not handle student issues and group dynamics well
- Field integrative seminars could be improved

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Lessons and next steps

- Clearer training and support for mentors
- More explicit expectations for faculty on how they use mentors and learning communities
- More explicit expectations for students and mentors regarding behavior in Saturday sessions and contacts between sessions
- Increased resources for field seminars
- Increased effort to identify a pipeline of future mentors (our alums?) and recruit faculty

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Questions and comments?

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