Sophomore Interest Groups for College of Business & Economics

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Introduction
As an extension of the positive impact First Year Experience Learning Communities have upon retention and graduation rates, our goal is to expand the impact by establishing a Growth Mindset-driven Sophomore Interest Group (SIG) in the College of Business and Economics. CoBE was selected for the pilot project due to its strong ongoing participation in First Year Learning Communities.

The SIG will serve as a UWW sophomore-to-junior retention intervention grounded in proven High Impact Practices. See the “Sophomore Slump” box and the graph illustrating UWW retention rates to the right.

Literature Review
Data suggest that the Growth Mindset students engender will have a direct impact upon growth outcomes as early-career professionals (Dweck, 2017; Education Week Research Center, 2016). The collective wisdom of engaged faculty, staff, and campus resources will nurture and encourage connection between students and respective professional organizations. This will help students to start to think of their coursework as an integral part of their professional formation process and in turn, help students to develop beginner’s mind and form an identity as future business leaders in-training.

Assessment
The most effective assessment is still being determined. However, it is anticipated that after the completion of the first pilot year for SIGs, the project may be assessed in three possible ways:

• Survey of student satisfaction and perceived learning gain with different parts of the initiative, before and after the experience.
• Interviews of individual students and/or focus groups.
• Data analysis to illustrate the retention rates and DFW rates in ECON and ACCOUNT classes of students in the SIG vs. regular CoBE classes.

Acknowledgements
Thanks to Bob Schramm and the CoBE academic advising office for their advice and support in developing the course progression.

Thanks to the LEAP project for providing the impetus to create this plan.

Implementation
The SIGs will be implemented for the first time in the fall 2019-spring 2020 year.

Coursework
We have designed two tracks of the pilot SIG – one for general business majors and one for IT majors. The core activities would be taking certain classes in a cohort model:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2019</th>
<th>Spring 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEINDP 288 – Career Information</td>
<td>ITSCM 280 – Intro to Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEINDP 290 – Business Writing</td>
<td>ECON 201 – Principles of Microeconomics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECON 202 – Principles of Macroeconomics</td>
<td>ACCOUNT 244 – Intro to Managerial Accounting</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACCOUNT 249 – Intro to Financial Accounting</td>
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Seek out professional organization relevant to student’s major and plan their involvement

Active involvement or leadership role in professional organization

It is anticipated that BEINDP 288 and 290 will be the strictly-required “core” classes for students to take as a cohort, since some students may take the ECON or ACCOUNT classes either in their freshmen or junior years, depending on other factors. Thus, the teacher of 290 (since that is the full-semester course – 288 is only an 8-week course) will serve as the coordinator, the primary point of in-person contact with the SIG cohort, similar to the New Student Seminar teacher for the First Year learning communities.

The ECON and ACCOUNT courses were included in the cohort model in hopes to effect more positive outcomes, as these classes have typically high drop/fail/withdraw (DFW) rates.

The inclusion of ITSCM 280 in the spring semester should enable ITSCM majors to be enrolled in a special “tracked” section that, according to ITSCM chair Andy Ciganek and team member Roger Yin, will enable them to explore more advanced technology applications earlier in their college career.

Student organization involvement
Beyond the classes, we will encourage every student to research student organizations (e.g., ISACA and AIS for the IT majors) in their fall semester and plan how to become actively involved throughout their sophomore year. Since many CoBE student orgs tend to draw their most active student involvement and leadership from juniors and seniors in their relevant majors, SIG students would then be well-poised to take more active participation or leadership roles in their student orgs earlier in their classmates. Earlier involvement would prove beneficial both for student orgs and the students.

Professional Development Program
Finally, the CoBE advising office is already offering a Professional Development Program as a way to track students who participate in a certain number of PD activities throughout the year – things like visiting a career advisor, career fair, mock interview, etiquette dinner, networking event, or other speaker. As these are already offered, participation would be strongly encouraged, although not required.

Addressing the “Sophomore Slump”
Data suggest a “sophomore slump” endemic in American higher education (Hunter et al., 2010; Sanchez-Leguelin, 2008; Sterling, 2018; Webb & Cotton, 2018).

At UW-Whitewater, while there is an approximately 81.6% retention-rate from the freshmen to sophomore years, this decreases to 71.4% from the sophomore to junior year (UW-Whitewater Institutional Research & Planning). See trends in graph below.

We are mindful that the “slump” for many sophomores begins during the second semester of their freshman year as their level of engagement begins to wane. We will thus target this time (spring) to strategically promote the SIGs.

Current UW-W Retention Rates

- Freshmen to sophomore retention—Sophomore to junior retention

90% 80% 70% 60% 50% 40% 30% 20% 10% 0%


References


