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Abstract

A common assumption about Freshmen Learning Communities (FLCs) is that academic relationships contribute to students' success. This study investigates how students in learning communities connect with fellow students for friendship and academic support. Longitudinal social network data across the first year, collected from 95 Dutch students in eight FLCs, measure both social and academic relational choices within and beyond the FLCs. Using stochastic actor-based models, the study tests two competing hypotheses. The alignment hypothesis states that students connect with their similar-achieving friends for both academic and social support, leading to an alignment of both types of networks over time. In contrast, the duality hypothesis states dissimilarity between academic support networks and friendship networks: students should connect with better-achieving fellow students for academic support and to more similar peers for friendship. The data support the alignment hypothesis but not the duality hypothesis; in addition, they show evidence of achievement segregation in FLCs: the higher the students' achievement level, the more they connect with other

06.4.2026

students for both academic support and friendship, relating in particular to peers with a similarly high achievement level. The results suggest that lower-achieving students are excluded from the support provided by higher-achieving students and instead ask similar lower achievers for support. They thus cannot benefit optimally from the academic integration FLC offer. The article concludes with recommendations of how to support students in an FLC so that they can reach optimal achievement potential. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Brouwer, Jasperina, E-Mail: jasperina.brouwer@rug.nl