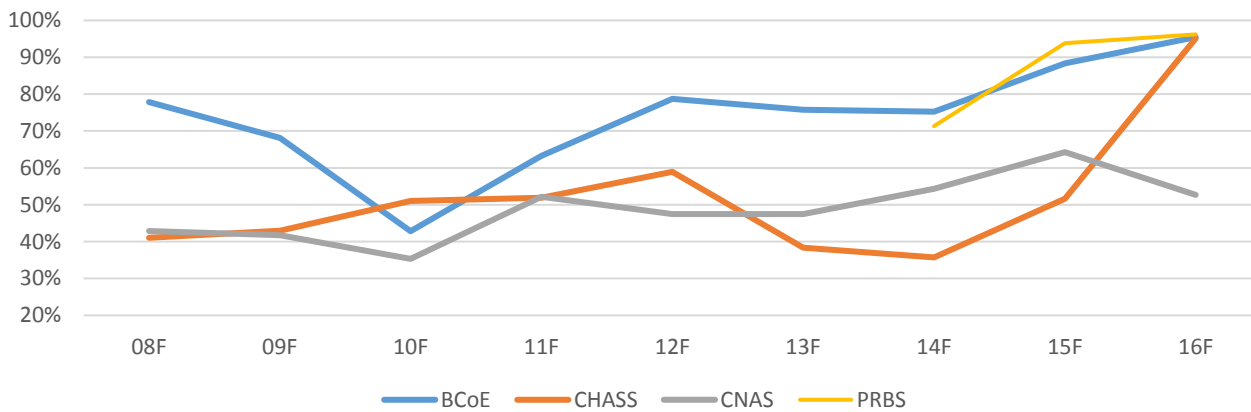## Student Success: First-Year Learning Communities

First-year learning communities (FYLCs) were established at the University of California, Riverside in the fall of 2002, with 200 students in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS). FYLC's have grown to include freshmen in the College of Natural and Agricultural Science (CNAS) and Bourns College of Engineering (BCoE) and, most recently, for pre-business (PRBS) students headed to the School of Business Administration (SoBA). Although the specific design of these programs varies by college, learning communities create clusters of students who take the same set of courses together in their freshmen year. The purpose is to promote a sense of community, facilitate academic engagement and increase retention rates.

Over the period from 2008 to 2016, participation in FYLCs has increased. By the fall 2016, a total of 4,265 freshmen were enrolled in a first-year learning community accounting for 79% of all incoming freshmen, including more than 90% of students in BCoE and CHASS, while over half of CNAS (53%)[1]

FYLC Participation Rates, 2008 to 2016 by college

First year retention rates for learning community participants are consistently higher than those of non-participants. In 2008, one year retention for all learning community participants across was 88 %, while one year retention for non-participants was 85.27%. As of 2015, it was 92% for all participants and 89% for non-participants. These figures vary by college, with CNAS freshmen participants being retained at the highest percentages. In recent years, nonparticipants in BCOE and CHASS have higher retention rates, these are very small groups of students. Other evaluations of FYLCs find that participation increases student retention.[2]

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[1] For CNAS, the decline in percentage from 2015 to 2016 is due to a large freshman class for 2016, although the absolute numbers of students that participate remained similar.

[2] Full reports of past evaluations by the Office of Evaluation and Assessment can be accesses online, under the heading for First Year student success; summary of evaluations by CNAS are also available online.