# Student Use of a "Check My Activity" Tool in the Course Management System Blackboard to Increase Awareness of their Performance and their Academic Success

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Science 100 (SCI100) at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) is an introductory, interdisciplinary non-majors laboratory course with approximately 300 students enrolled each semester. The course has a significant on-line component using Blackboard (BB), and students are expected to participate regularly in course discussion boards as well as to use BB for downloading lecture and lab materials on a weekly basis. Given that BB is a critical component of SCI100, and that students also routinely use BB to check their grades in the course, we conducted a preliminary study during the Fall 2008 semester to see how students use a "Check My Activity" (CMA) function in BB to compare their course activity anonymously to that of their peers, and whether or not such activity helps students at risk of failing to improve their grade. Previous work (1) has shown that students who receive a grade of D or F are 35% less active on-line than their peers earning a C or higher. In a survey asking about CMA tool usage, 28% of the students responding were surprised at how their activity compared to that of their peers and 54% of the students said they would be more likely to use the CMA tool before future assignments were due if the instructor posted grade distributions for prior assignments. The benefits to students using a CMA tool in BB are: students are able to determine their progress in the course relative to their peers at any time; they have a starting point for discussion with the professor about their progress if needed; the more information students at risk of failing have, the better a chance of successful intervention in the class. Additionally, the prevailing sense of several students in SCI100 is that they do not feel confident of their ability to learn or to do science. As part of a broader question examining students' attitudes towards science, we are also interested in whether or not student access to, and feedback from, the CMA function will shift their perception of their ability to succeed in a science class as well as improve their actual grade.

## Literature Cited

(1) Caruso, Judith Borreson and Gail Salaway. 2007. The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology: Key Findings. Educause Center for Applied Research. http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERS0706/EKF0706.pdf