

2014

The Perceived Benefits of Participation in Living and Learning Communities: The Student Perspective

Sally Adams

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Adams, Sally, "The Perceived Benefits of Participation in Living and Learning Communities: The Student Perspective" (2014). *Masters Theses*. 1273.

<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/1273>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

THESIS MAINTENANCE AND REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

An important part of Booth Library at Eastern Illinois University's ongoing mission is to preserve and provide access to works of scholarship. In order to further this goal, Booth Library makes all theses produced at Eastern Illinois University available for personal study, research, and other not-for-profit educational purposes. Under 17 U.S.C. § 108, the library may reproduce and distribute a copy without infringing on copyright; however, professional courtesy dictates that permission be requested from the author before doing so.

By signing this form:

- You confirm your authorship of the thesis.
- You retain the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the original research, creative activity, and intellectual or artistic content of the thesis.
- You certify your compliance with federal copyright law (Title 17 of the U.S. Code) and your right to authorize reproduction and distribution of all copyrighted material included in your thesis.
- You grant Booth Library the non-exclusive, perpetual right to make copies of your thesis, freely and publicly available without restriction, by means of any current or successive technology, including but not limited to photocopying, microfilm, digitization, or Internet.
- You acknowledge that by depositing your thesis with Booth Library, your work is available for viewing by the public and may be borrowed through the library's circulation and interlibrary departmentst or accessed electronically.
- You waive the confidentiality provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) with respect to the contents of the thesis, including your name and status as a student at Eastern Illinois University.

Petition to Delay:

I respectfully petition that Booth Library delay maintenance and reproduction of my thesis until the date specified and for the reasons below. I understand that my degree will not be conferred until the thesis is available for maintenance and reproduction.

Date:

Reasons:



Author's Signature

5/5/24

Date

This form must be submitted in duplicate.

The Perceived Benefits of Participation in Living
and Learning Communities: The Student Perspective

(TITLE)

BY
Sally Adams

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

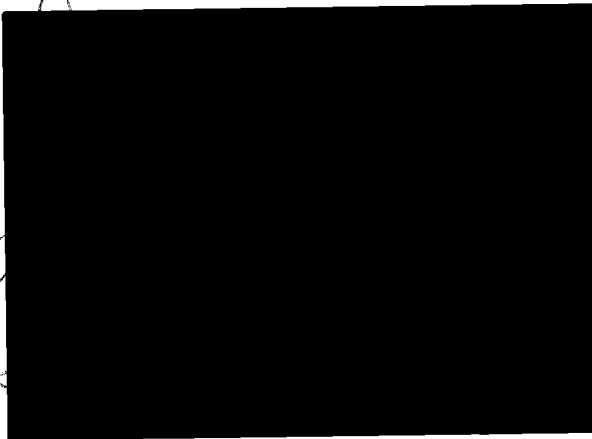
Master's of Science College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

Spring 2014

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE



DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL CHAIR
OR CHAIR'S DESIGNEE

5-5-14

DATE

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

DATE

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

DATE

RUNNING HEAD: Perceived Benefits of Participation in Living and Learning
Communities

The Perceived Benefits of Participation in Living and Learning Communities: The
Student Perspective

By:

Sally M. Adams

Committee Members
Dr. Dianne Timm
Dr. Jenny Sipes
Mr. Jody Stone

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to a mentor and good friend of mine that has taken the time to support me in the profession, in life, and throughout this journey. Without you, I would not be the person that I am today. I would have never thought that this would be possible. Thank you so much for your continuous support and guidance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my family and friends for supporting me throughout this process. I would have never thought that I would have been able to complete a thesis and write this many pages. I found my passion and just ran with it. Through all of the ups and downs, I have had the opportunity to learn who I am as a student and future professional. Most importantly, this taught me what I can achieve if I just continue to work at it. I often reminisce with a good friend and say, I should have listened and taken your word for it. However, now I am never looking back.

I have really enjoyed working with my faculty and thesis committee to accomplish this task. I would like to personally thank my thesis advisor and faculty mentor Dr. Dianne Timm. She has pushed me to complete this undertaking and do it with high quality. Even though I had missed several deadlines, she continued to believe in my work ethic.

My family has been my rock and support throughout my life and during this process they never let me down. My fiancé especially has been very supportive throughout my time continuing my education. I want to thank Safarali Saydshoev for his patience and continuous support. During the long nights of writing, we might have missed a few phone call opportunities but I think we would both agree it was well worth it. I would not be here without my mentors in the profession. It is they who continue to push me to be better and work harder. Thank you for taking the time to believe in my abilities and for developing me into the person I am today. Thank you to everyone who assisted me in the process, especially the institution of study.

ABSTRACT

Students' experiences outside the classroom are important to their overall growth and development. Living learning communities (LLC) play a big role in helping to support these areas of growth. Students residing in an LLC are aware of the benefits of the LLC experience and can articulate how their residential environment can help them develop. Non-LLC members find it difficult to define the LLC experience and are not receiving the same benefits. Institutions and residence life often struggle in evaluating and assessing these communities because of the lack of direction and outcomes not clearly being stated. If institutions work to clearly define and create outcomes for evaluation, students, faculty, and staff have a better understanding for the LLC experience. Clear definitions also help in marketing the LLCs. Special focus needs to be given toward developing clear definitions of the LLC experience to better support and assess the needs perceived by the students.

Key words: Living learning communities, residence life, learning outcomes, student affairs

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Appendixes.....	vi
Chapter I-Introduction.....	1
<i>Purpose of Study</i>	4
<i>Research Questions</i>	5
<i>Significance of Study</i>	6
<i>Limitations</i>	7
<i>Definitions of Terms</i>	8
<i>Summary</i>	10
Chapter II-Review of Literature.....	11
<i>Residence Halls History</i>	11
<i>Purpose of Living Learning Communities</i>	13
<i>Types of Living Learning Communities</i>	14
<i>Admission, Enrollment, and Persistence</i>	15
<i>Campus Environments</i>	17
<i>Institutional Mission Statements</i>	21
<i>Learning Objectives</i>	21
<i>Summary</i>	24

Chapter III- Methodology.....	25
<i>Introduction</i>	25
<i>Design of Study</i>	26
<i>Participants</i>	27
<i>Location</i>	30
<i>Data Collection</i>	32
<i>Data Analysis</i>	32
<i>Summary</i>	33
Chapter IV- Results.....	34
<i>Defining Living Learning Communities</i>	35
<i>Students Perceived Benefits of Participating in a LLC vs. non-LLC</i>	36
<i>Aligning the Six Learning Objectives of the Housing and Residence Life</i> <i>Department</i>	43
<i>Impact/Influence on Admission and Application to the University</i>	47
<i>Summary</i>	48
Chapter V- Discussion.....	50
<i>Discussion</i>	50
<i>Limitations</i>	55
<i>Recommendations</i>	55
<i>Suggestions for Future Research</i>	57
<i>Conclusion</i>	59
Reference List.....	61
Appendixes.....	68

List of Appendixes

A. Student Interview Protocol.....	68
B. Initial Email to Students.....	70
C. Consent to Participate in Research.....	71
D. Initial Student Survey.....	73

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Communities have been a part of higher education for many years, dating back to the 1800's at Oxford and Cambridge universities (Blimling, 1993). In the beginning of higher education, students studied with a faculty member in a small community having the same set curriculum provided by the university (Cohen, 2010). In the early 1920's, John Dewey began the idea of students studying the same subjects and sharing common curriculum to meet their needs or interests. The cohort model plays a significant role in students' success over students studying in non-communities (Cox, 2004). The idea of the whole student has been looked at by education professionals, and the philosophical postmodernism idea developed where education takes place inside, and outside of the classroom (Siegel, 2007). In 1949, the *Student Personnel Point of View* stated that student affairs professionals needed to help in the initiatives of instructing students to provide more opportunities and experiences and to build learning communities (Komives, & Woodard, 2003). The Student Personnel Point of View (1949) said the following:

As educators our attention should be focused upon the social forces of the institution itself, which also provides learning experiences for the student. For example, the relationships among the various groups on the campus affect such social development. If faculty and students, and faculty and administration work closely together in achieving common objectives, curricular, and co-curricular, the learning of socially desirable process is thereby enhanced. (p. 20-21)

Living together and studying together, known as a living learning community (LLC) program, was first implemented in 1927 at the University of Wisconsin as an

experimental college (Blimling, 1998). The idea of students living together in residence halls and having interactions outside of the classroom with faculty took shape and institutions such as Yale and Harvard started to develop similar models (Rogers, 1952). In the 1960's, large institutions started to adapt the idea of living learning communities to create smaller cohesive units so the campus would not feel as big (Smith, 2001). Living learning communities had existed for decades; however they became more defined in the 1980's as institutions formalized their definitions of these communities (Borst, 2011). Living learning communities are still a developing concept with a relatively low number of institutions implementing such a program (Borst, 2011). As institutions identify ways to implement such programs they may have slightly different set-ups, but the overall purpose is the same. Students of the community can have similar classes, major, or interest area. Some institutions place the students within a floor, portion of a hall, or the entire hall.

The main purpose of living learning communities is to create a cohesive learning experience for students, staff, and faculty through immersive trips and planned programs (Cox, 2004). A cornerstone of the living learning communities is the connection students make with faculty and staff (Tinto, 2003). Tinto (2003) stated the following:

To be effective, learning communities require their faculty, that is the academic and student affairs professionals who staff the learning community, to collaborate on both the content and pedagogy of the linked courses. They have to work together, as equal partners, to ensure that the linked courses provide coherent shared learning experiences. (pp. 4-5)

Having that strong relationship and buy-in from student affairs and academic affairs professionals can provide a holistic view of the student with capabilities to better support their needs. An example of this can be seen at the University of Richmond (<http://www.news.richmond.edu>):

As part of a new Sophomore Scholars in Residence (SSIR) Living-Learning community, 'Leadership and the Common Good,' they traveled to Copenhagen and Madrid this month to learn about achieving collective goals and see different models of leadership in practice. We're trying to create an integrated learning experience over the whole year where the trip is the centerpiece but reinforces what we're doing in class, said leadership studies and religion professor Douglas Hicks. (para. 3)

Research has shown that learning communities present valuable social interactions, academic success, and personal gains for participating students (Eck, Edge, & Stephenson, 2007; Schussler, & Fierros, 2008; Wawrzynski, & Jessup-Anger, 2010; Zhao, & Kuh, 2004). Students in communities form groups to support each other outside of the classroom. Tinto (2003) identified that students who spend more time together outside of the classroom create a supportive network, hold each other accountable, and are more likely to continue through college (Tinto, 2003). The benefits of a living learning community (LLC) through the perceptions of the students are minimal throughout research. Asking what the students understand as the benefits of the community is different than what the administration and department perceive to be the benefits. Institutions set objectives or goals in order for students to gain from the experience. It is difficult to measure the growth of the student through the environment

they reside in, however this study looked to measure the perception and objectives met from the student's perspective.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify what students perceived as the benefits to participating in LLCs. The experience outside of the classroom is becoming more recognized and notable with the overall developed qualities of the individual student being important. Students are looking for a meaningful experience in college not just from the classroom, but from their living environment and extra-curricular activities. Living learning communities enhance the college experience by combining both the academic and co-curricular into one program.

The focus of the study was to identify, from the student perceptions, the benefits of the overall experience and if the LLC's objectives are aligning with the learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department. This study also sought to identify if LLCs had an impact on student admission. The study was done at a midsized Midwestern state university. The study looked at the following learning objectives, developed by the department of university housing to determine if LLCs helped meet the established goals of the department.

1. Students will express thoughts in a clear, concise, and respectful manner.
2. Students will incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their understanding of the world.
3. Students will respect their environment and individuals within it.
4. Students will establish healthy interdependence.

5. Students will constructively demonstrate their societal rights and responsibilities.
6. Students will explore their values.

This study looked to identify if the learning objectives set by the department of housing were referenced by the students. This research also sought to identify if changes needed to be made to the learning objectives. Knowing the benefits of the communities from the perceptions of the students is just as important. An additional purpose was to understand what the students identify as the benefits of living in such a community, and how these benefits align with those identified by the department. Knowing this will help other institutions that want to create a living learning program understand why LLCs are beneficial from the students' perspective.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions.

1. What do students perceive to be the benefits of participating in an LLC verses a non-LLC?
2. Is what the students perceive to be the benefits and experiences of living in the residence halls aligning with the six learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department?
3. In what ways do living learning communities impact/influence admission and application to the university?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in emphasizing the importance of setting strong objectives for living learning communities and taking students' perceptions into consideration.

Outcomes do not delineate what you are going to do to the student as part of your program, rather they describe fairly specifically how you want the student to demonstrate what he or she knows or can do as a result of participating in your programs. (Bresciani, 2013, p. 20)

Student learning and student development outcomes need to be differentiated and clearly articulated. It is crucial to regularly assess and reevaluate outcomes to gain insight into their effectiveness. Institutions should align their departmental outcomes with the institutional outcomes. "Such an approach allows for a highly organic and collaborative way to articulate learning outcomes and potentially assess them" (Bresciani, 2013, p. 21). This study provides insight into understanding what the students perceived to be the benefits and if that aligns with the objectives of the institution.

Living learning communities create a cohesive learning experience for undergraduate students through immersive programs within the residence halls (Cox, 2004). The concept of living learning communities is continuing to evolve each year with new programs being developed at institutions across the United States (Borst, 2011). These types of programs are said to create academic success, social interaction, and numerous personal gains for the students in these communities; however, not enough has been done to fully understand how these communities are meeting the goals set by the institution (Eck, Edge, & Stephenson, 2007; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010). More

research needs to be done on understanding what objectives the institution and communities have set and if the students feel their needs are being met by those communities and the institution.

This study is important in determining the impact of living learning communities on admission. Admission into higher education has become more difficult to obtain whether that is because of financial resources, motivation, or competition. This study will provide a greater understanding of the impact that living learning communities can have on students' pursuit and admission to the institution.

Limitations

I, as the researcher, resided in a living learning community for one year as a freshman in college. I took classes with students living on the floor and in the hall. As a sophomore, I lived in a residence hall that was also a living learning community; however, I did not take classes with the students living in the hall or major in the same discipline as the rest of the students. During my junior and senior year, I lived in a theme based hall rather than an academic based community. As an undergraduate, I never lived in a traditional non-LLC. I have not had the experience of living off campus in non-campus housing, nor did I live in a non-living learning community as an undergraduate student. I am aware of this bias towards living learning communities, and I utilized strategies to remain unbiased which included having other researchers and a thesis chair read through the data collected for authenticity. Students of non-living learning communities as well as students not interested in the communities were questioned to gain both perspectives.

Only one institution was studied, and within that institution a limited amount of LLCs were studied. Not all of the institution's living learning communities were included because of the size and amount of communities and time of the researcher. The location of study was not in close proximity to the current institution of the researcher. The amount of time and cost of the research was limited. The amount of time on campus and face to face communication was also limited. I did not have access to all of the data and needed to utilize the community coordinator, resident directors, and the assistant director to communicate with participants.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms that are important to understanding the study.

Faculty. Faculty are typically tenure track higher education professionals that educate the university students on preferred subject matter. They are the gateway for students' education as leaders to teach, provide scholarship, and be servants to their society. Faculty mentor and advise students as well as set standards and requirements based on the culture of the institution. Faculty are present to help develop students and prepare them for their future (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Learning Objectives. Learning objectives are used for the mission of the program or process to evaluate or assess its means. The purpose is to acknowledge what needs to be instilled or desired by the end of the process. Learning objectives need to be clear, measurable, and meaningful goals intended for assessment (Bresciani, 2001).

Living Learning Communities (LLC). A living learning community is an intentional group of students that live together in a residence hall around a specific theme

or academic area. For the purpose of this study, LLCs also included students who take classes together, experience learning opportunities outside the classroom, and have specific areas of interest or themes in common. To be considered a LLC, the community must have a similar theme for students, connect with the academic program or faculty, and create learning opportunities that pertain to the theme outside of the classroom. The students have to be taking similar classes or have similar interests as well as live within the residence hall of their interest to be considered as an LLC (Texas A&M University, 2012).

Residence Hall. A residence hall is a building facility of sleeping quarters for a group of university students. Halls were often referred to as dormitories, however now they are considered residence halls because the space is more than just a place of rest for students, now encouraging education and purposeful learning experiences outside of the classroom (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004). Residence halls are typically made up of single or multiple occupancy rooms, with some being co-educational.

Community. Community is the atmosphere built among the set of students that reside on the floor. This is considered the sense of belonging and collective environment that is created by the hall staff, whether that is positive or negative perceptions from the student.

Floor. A floor is considered a section or wing of the residence hall building, which can be made up of a single sex, or both sexes. A floor can often be considered its own community.

Residence Life Staff. Residence life staff is typically made up of student affairs professionals and para-professionals that seek to provide support to the students residing

in the residence halls. This can be through monitoring appropriate behavior, providing programs and educational experiences, and providing purposeful learning opportunities outside of the classroom.

Hall Director. A hall director is a staff member typically with a bachelor's degree or master's level education that provides support to the university students, supervises undergraduate staff, and oversees day to day operations of the hall and other delegated administrative tasks.

Resident Assistant (RA). A resident assistant is an undergraduate student that lives on the floor with their peers in order to be a resource and first line of communication for the needs of the resident population. Their tasks are typically to have meaningful interactions with the residents, program events based on needs, and perform safety checks of the residence hall.

Summary

Chapter one contains the general information of the proposed study, including research questions, definitions of terms, and an introduction to the topic. This information provides the foundation for the chapters to come and provides a basic understanding of the material to comprehend the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a detailed review of the literature on the admission of students, enrollment and persistence of students, campus environments, and institutional mission statements. Going more in depth, an overview of learning objectives will be covered along with the history of residence halls and information about different types of living learning communities and their purpose. The following provides insight into the understanding of the researched material.

Residence Halls History

The Continental university did not consider the student outside the classroom; however Oxford and Cambridge Colleges came along in the 1800's and began developing a student first emphasis. "They were designed to bring the faculty and students together in a common life which was both intellectual and moral" (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004, p. 41). American poverty during that time limited the elaborate design of dormitories. In America, dormitories did not have that tight well developed community as produced by the English colleges. First known as dormitories, they started to look like military barracks with rooms right next to each other in smaller areas with a few bunk beds (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004). In the 1800's elaborate residence halls were opposed. As Brubacher and Rudy (2004) explained, "In Cutler's view, such halls were too often the secret nurseries of every vice and the cages of unclean birds" (p. 41).

Supervision of the residence halls was also a concern at this time as well as the location of the halls on campus. According to Brubacher and Rudy (2004), dormitories got the reputation in the nineteenth century of being where students slept, ate, and

studied. Faculty members were asked to enforce policy and hold the students accountable for any disciplinary action, which did not allow for a productive relationship to form among the students and professors. Faculty considered the students enemies. It was difficult for the students to see faculty in another light until halls were staffed by other non-academic professionals (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004). For 200 years, dormitories in America developed a reputation of being a lazy hang-out for students to participate in a socially active lifestyle. Dormitories were the reason for student rebellion (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004).

Eventually Americans felt a need for money to be spent elsewhere beyond providing a place of festering evil and destruction, so for financial reasons the dormitories were no longer an affordable cost for students (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004). Privatized housing outside the campus became more of an option; fraternity and sorority houses for large groups as well as off-campus housing was more affordable (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004). Dormitories started to be considered for the wealthy and rich. With this change to the use of dormitories, institutions felt that it was time to make more elaborate living spaces for students so the “Gothic Age” emerged (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004, p.122). This luxury look on the outside led to a change for the inside as common areas and dining halls were built. By 1962, over two billion dollars had been loaned under the Congress passed bill authorizing long-term housing loans to colleges and universities for the construction of dormitories (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004). This led to a housing boom on campuses across the country. One can still see many of these buildings from the 1960’s today (Brubacher & Rudy, 2004).

Today, residence halls have many students housed in the space. Residence halls have evolved with the needs and wants of the students. Many look like hotels, having kitchenettes in the common rooms as well as suites with personal bathroom spaces. In the early 2000's, some public institutions allowed rooms to be shared by the opposite sex (Novotney, 2011). Today, many floors and communities are separated by sex, with some institutions slowly moving to co -educational floors and spaces (Schackner, 2007). Institutions will continue to construct these environments to meet the needs of their populations.

Purpose of Living Learning Communities

Understanding the impact of LLCs on students, we can conclude that there are many positive outcomes from these types of communities. There are stronger gains in students' ability to comprehend material and critically think about their environment and those around them (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005). These types of communities impact the students significantly whether they live among similar students, in a building, on a floor, or in a classroom. The ways the faculty are involved included social relationships among students, intellectual growth, immersive learning, and exploration to meet the needs of the students. These needs include maintaining students' physical, mental, and emotional levels of ability. Mentors, faculty, and other staff can help bridge the gap, creating involvement for positive student experiences and engagement. Student perceptions were that students were engaged with other students and had the chance to build community, and then engage with school, including faculty which was an important part of the experience (Rocconi, 2010). The experience in this instance means living in

the residence hall, specifically a living learning community. Ultimately it's about creating a seamless integrated learning environment.

The academic performance of students that live together and study together is a selling point for the communities. Research on communities consistently shows significantly higher GPAs of students living in specialized communities and studying together (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000; Eck, Edge, & Stephenson, 2007). The main purpose of students at college is to study and get a degree; the more academic support and appropriate environments are provided, the more students can succeed.

Types of Living Learning Communities

Inkelas et al. (2007) identified the first type of living learning communities which consisted of 26 different themes at 34 different institutions, and today there are 17 categories with several subcategories of living learning programs. The National Study of Living Learning Programs 2007 (NSLLP), identified research one institutions that consistently had the same type of communities on their campus. The study was conducted to gauge a better understanding of their academic initiatives and educational programs occurring outside of the classroom. NSLLP identified the main living learning programs seen throughout institutions.

There are many different themed living learning programs (LLP), as well as major based programs. Themed communities include several service based groups, outdoor groups, leadership communities, and religious affiliated communities that might not take similar courses, yet have activities and excursions of interest planned. Other offered programs are classified major communities where students take similar basic courses together which include culinary, business, communications, and education communities

as well as many more. The communities not only can be separated by building or hall, but there are many variations of community living. The communities can be separated in each of the residence halls, such as at Georgetown University where communities are separated by floor (<http://reslife.georgetown.edu/lc.html>).

Many institutions including University of Oregon (2013), Cedarville (2013) and University of Mississippi (2013) allow students to take responsibility for their living space and are self-selected at the beginning of the year. Students fill out their contract and select a community based on major they would like to be a part of during the year. Depending upon roommate choice, the assignments can be tricky. The main purpose in these situations is to retain the student and keep them on track to graduate within four years. Having the LLC experience, students are able to explore their career or area of interest through trips and immersion programs. This helps students decide if they are in the right program or on the right path so they do not waste several years deciding what degree they would like to pursue.

Based on the results of the study by the NSLLP (2007), most students participating were classified as freshmen, with only 20% considered upperclassmen. The purpose identified was for students to explore their major and to socialize with students of an interest area to declare a major. Most of the students' self-reported GPAs were considerably high; only one group classified themselves below a "C" average (NSLLP, 2007).

Admission, Enrollment, and Persistence

Universities and institutions are looking to fill their classrooms with students. Now with the media technology, institutions are starting to sell themselves online, as well

as holding several admission days for prospective students. Staff and faculty will use a variety of strategies to persuade the student whether that is the small classroom size, cost, financial benefits, or certain programs. When looking into their college admission experience, students place value on what the institution has to offer in terms of education, cost, and surrounding location. Universities have started to change and modify their language and marketing strategy just to attract students (Chapman, 1981). The model in Chapman's (1981) work showed many influences on students' choice to attend a certain institution. Three major categories that influence the student are significant people, fixed college characteristics, and colleges' communication (Chapman, 1981). Significant people include parents, friends, and high school personnel. Fixed characteristics include cost, programs, and location. College communication includes campus visits, written information, and admission. Social economic status (SES), aptitude, high school performance, and level of educational aspiration are other characteristics of the student that influence his or her entry to college (Chapman, 1981). Much of the research focuses on the marketing plan and strategies of the institution to help attract students that are not driven to seek out college or are hindered by one of the characteristics mentioned above (Chapman, 1981).

The retention of students after admission to the university is also important. There is no consideration for the term "dropout." The focus of higher education is on graduation. After conducting research on college student retention, Tinto (1975, 1993) devised a student retention model which suggested that retention is related to the student's ability and actions to become an involved actor in her or his institution. If the student and college are a good fit academically and socially, there is a greater probability

of the student persisting until graduation. Bean (1990) took Tinto's model a step further indicating students' beliefs and perceptions shape their experiences. Retention data and information is on the rise. Retaining students can now indicate the amount of funding the institution receives. The difficult task is defining retention. Excluded students from this measure include transfer students, part-time students, enrolled students not working toward a degree, students entering middle semester, and students undeclared in major. With this being said, a large indication of retention holds strong to the institutions' reputation and academic success (Seidman, 2005).

Campus Environments

In understanding the college experience, the overall campus environment is important. Environmental theory is effective in understanding what needs are important and which influence the students' educational experience (Strange, & Banning, 2001). According to Strange and Banning (2001), there are four elements to the constructed environments and they include the physical environment, human aggregate, organizational, and constructed environment. The physical environment includes the basic layout and overall feel for the campus. This can include where pictures are hung, what pictures are displayed, the interior color, and weather during an on campus visit, and attitude of the student established (Strange & Banning, 2001). The human aggregate has a lot to do with the psychosocial elements of the institution, such as the demographic of students, their personalities, age, culture, and the power of influence and overall "fit." The organization is more of a structural understanding about department offices, programs, residence halls, authoritatively the means to an end of achieving the overall objectives. The last of the elements of environmental influence includes the constructed

environment, or the perceptions, behaviors, or influences. This is the human element within one-self and the overall feeling achieved at the institution (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Understanding the college environment helps provide a view into student development and learning. The university's success is based off of the students' experience and whether the institution is able to meet the needs of the population (Fleming, Howard, Perkins, & Pesta, 2005). Three settings are preeminent to the education of the students, and they are peer interaction, classroom environment, and physical environment (Fleming et al., 2005). Fleming's et al. (2005) study concluded the following:

Not only is the classroom environment important also, learning experiences provided outside the regular classroom setting (most often residence hall programs) allow individuals to investigate their opinions and stances on issues seen in the media or experienced in their own lives. These out-of-class experiences give students the opportunity to hear other students' opinions, which may be different from their own. (p.1)

The environment has to do with the fit of the student and influences the successful transition of the students into college. Tinto (1975) supported Astin's (1968) research that the student must form a supportive bond and relationship with the institution in order to avoid feelings of loneliness and alienation, and to support achievement and high self-esteem. "This integration results in a person's normative and structural integration into the academic and social systems, leading to the successful career of a student at the post-secondary level" (Fleming et al., 2005, p. 2).

Peer interaction is another major factor of students' success on college campuses. The more roles students play throughout their time in college, the greater the impact on their experience as well as others. "Because of the close proximity of college buildings and small communities developed within campus residence halls, peer to peer interactions have the greatest influence, positive or negative, on students in the college environment" (Fleming et al., 2005, p. 3). Students are interacting with one another across diverse cultures and backgrounds, with different value systems. It challenges the students to learn more about themselves as well as others while trying to become acquainted with their surroundings (Fleming et al., 2005). Tinto (2003) provided a lot of data on successful learning communities including his study on two institutions in New York and Seattle which looked at students' perceptions from the experience of residing in an LLC. The results of this study showed that students formed their own supportive network; students spent more time together outside of the classroom, gained social skills through interactions, and felt an enhanced quality of learning (Tinto, 2003). Additionally, students saw themselves as more intelligent, more socially engaged, had greater motivation to continue in higher education, felt an increase in responsibility, along with helping hold others accountable in the learning process (Tinto, 2003). Students enjoyed their experience and wanted to continue to pursue their education because of the environment and learning opportunities. This present study will help bring further understanding of what students perceive they are learning, and what the department wants them to learn, and identify if the students and the department have the same conceptualization of the LLC experience.

Residential areas are extremely important because that is where students spend most of their free time. Students are able to study, interact, and sleep, and if the halls are not able to meet their needs, students' health and well-being will be affected. The distance of the residence hall from the classroom matters as well (Fleming et al., 2005). Campuses are starting to build living space and classrooms, along with faculty offices and administration in the same location. The goal is to help create a cohesive learning environment for student and faculty (Fleming et al., 2005).

The transition of students into higher education and onto a new campus is essential. According to Banning and Kaiser (1974):

Although an element of truth is contained in each perspective, none speaks sharply to the issues of institutions changing, institutions adjusting, or institutions growing up, or more importantly, to the relationship between students and their environment. (p. 371)

Everything must be conducive to the students' needs, from the number of laundry facilities, to the location of the dining centers. It must adhere to the students' wants and interests in order for them to enjoy their experience and be able to function in the environment. Strange and Banning (2001) determined the following:

Colleges and universities establish conditions to attract, satisfy, and retain students for purposes of challenging them to develop qualities of the educated person, including a capacity for complex critical reasoning, communication, leadership, a sense of identity and purpose, an appreciation for differences, and a commitment to lifelong learning. (p.2)

Institutional Mission Statements

In the mid 1990's, many institutions were re-evaluating and adjusting their mission statements to fit their institutional philosophy of education (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). A lot can be told about the institution through the basic understanding and underlying meaning of their mission statement (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Typically each department under the institution will provide a mission statement as well. It takes a lot of time and resources to put together the frame of the institution; however, it is a symbol of the organization's success if done properly (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Mission statements provide character and instruction to those involved, however many scholars have identified the statements as nothing but unrealistic blocks of phrases with little ideology (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Many say they fail to follow through, are vague, and contain no true meaning (Chait, 1979; Davies, 1986; Delucchi, 1997; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Most of the statements of institutions address similar items in a different way with the same fashion with little function (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). There is much controversy because many professionals view the statements as symbolic artifacts that need be preserved, yet are considered to some as nothing but vague words and phrases.

Learning Objectives

Learning objectives are used to measure the success or intended outcome of the program or event (Bresciani, 2002). With program competition and statistics, there has to be an intended goal that is measurable in order to base the level of success and room for growth. Bresciani and Maki (2002) provided an iterative systematic assessment cycle to help comprehend the concept of meeting learning outcomes. There is a purpose behind

everything that is done. The continuous movement throughout the process of gathering data, interpreting the material, and providing methods and ways of improvement are constantly working towards the achievable outcomes and missions. The objectives should be understood by all parties involved; they should be manageable, meaningful, inclusive, flexible, and truth-seeking (Bresciani, 2002). Bresciani (2002) stated that one purpose of assessment was to “reinforce or emphasize the mission of your unit, improve programs and/or performance (formative), compare a program’s quality or value to the program’s previously defined principles (summative), inform planning, and inform decision making” (p.13).

Higher education’s main focus is on how academic and non-classroom opportunities produce learning outcomes and how well those are being achieved (Bresciani, 2006). The field of student affairs wants and has always been about developing the student and the learning process. Learning objectives are the key to understanding if students have gained what professionals assume they gained from their intentional programs and services (Dale, 2003). The question is how often student affairs professionals focus on student based learning practices. In recent studies, there is evidence that the development of student theory is being practiced more than the measurements of how much the students are learning (Dale, 2003). Assessment is needed to understand how the students’ needs are being met in addition to measuring their learning. According to Bresciani (2001), outcomes measure whether the program has been completed as well as affectively understanding what was learned.

Role of Resident Assistant

The resident assistant (RA) is more than just a student worker assigned to a building in order to retrieve free room and board, discounted books, or other perks. They play a significant role in the development of the student, through mediating conflicts on a floor, providing tutoring tips and resources, and keeping the residence hall safe (Purnell, 2013). RAs are often utilized to help students with their transition to college. They provide planned programs and events to help students become acquainted as well as acclimated to the institution (Purnell, 2013). Many staff members are seen as academic role models as well as leaders on campus. Other concerns that resident assistants address are roommate conflicts, crisis concerns, and discipline issues. They are in the community to provide support to struggling residents and recognition for residents' achievements (Purnell, 2013).

There are many leadership opportunities and skills that can be learned from the position. RAs are asked to complete paperwork and build administrative skills and accountability through timely deadlines. They work as a staff team to understand group dynamics and the importance of communication. They develop time management skills through attending programs, classes, meetings, and sometimes working desk hours. RAs are often asked to educate as well as plan programs and implement events on diversity, multiculturalism, or other educational opportunities (Western Kentucky University, 2013). Resident Assistants are asked to facilitate and help develop the students personally, academically, and socially (Hamilton Residence Life, 2013).

Resident Assistants are required to participate in a training session before students arrive to campus. They are often asked to participate in the orientation making sure that

newly arriving students understand the institution and resources provided (Hamilton Residence Life, 2013). Staffs are typically trained to deal with mediating a group or students in conflict. The policies and procedures of the department is a focus of the training process for RAs. Collaboration between other departments is also a main part of the training with other offices providing information, and these include the Campus Counseling Center, University Police, and Student Standards.

Summary

Although there have been several studies done on living learning communities, information about student perceptions and experiences is lacking. Data is presented on LLCs from a quantitative method, however much of the data does not focus on the individual students and their knowledge of the communities that they are a part of and residing in. It is important to research and gauge the feelings and attitudes of students that are a part of the living learning communities. In performing a qualitative study, the researcher hoped to bridge the gap of information and evaluate the data based on the students' understanding.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The focus of this study was to determine the perceived benefits of Living Learning Communities (LLC) by students in Non-LLCs verses LLCs. The students' perceptions and experiences were then coded to see if they aligned with the learning objectives set by the Housing and Residence Life Department. Another area of interest was the impact of living in living learning communities on student admission. The study looked at learning objectives to determine if LLCs helped meet the determined goals of the department from the perspective of the students residing in these communities. These are the objectives of the institution used in the study. The learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department are as follows:

1. Students will express thoughts in a clear, concise, and respectful manner.
2. Students will incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their understanding of the world.
3. Students will respect their environment and individuals within it.
4. Students will establish healthy interdependence.
5. Students will constructively demonstrate their societal rights and responsibilities.
6. Students will explore their values.

The purpose of this study was to identify if the learning objectives correlated to the perceived benefits stated by the students. It was also to determine perhaps why they are not being met and if changes need to be made to the learning objectives. Findings

from this study can be utilized to help other institutions determine if learning objectives set by the department can be used as a fair assessment of the students' experiences and perceived benefits.

This study specifically sought to answer three research questions. First, this study wanted to understand what students perceive to be the benefits of participating in an LLC versus a non-LLC. The study focused on what the students perceived to be the benefits and experiences of living in the residence halls in alignment with the six learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department. Finally, the study questioned if living learning communities impacted or influenced admission and application to the institution.

Design of Study

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is done to better understand students' perceptions and gain valuable data (Maxwell, 1996). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research gains a better understanding through face to face interaction (Maxwell, 1996). Qualitative methods are used to help understand data that cannot be quantified, much like students' perceptions of living space and experiences in their environment. For the qualitative study, the investigator utilized questions designed to help create more adaptable ways of understanding the students' experiences and perceptions much like the data that was presented in researched studies (Hayes, 2004; Schmidt, 2011). There were approximately twenty questions (Appendix A) that pertained to the students of the communities focusing on their experience, from what they found valuable, and how they learned from their experiences living on campus.

Participants

The researcher sought out upperclassmen that had lived and currently live in living learning communities and non-living learning communities to understand their overall growth and perceptions. The investigator surveyed and interviewed students in the early Fall 2013 semester. Students in the non-living learning community and living learning community were randomly selected from a list provided by the Housing and Residence Life Department and utilized for this study to provide consistency in data collection. Second or third year students from each community were interviewed because of their previous admission to the institution along with their involvement in a living learning community or non-living learning community. Many student participants had time living in the different environments and had been through at least one year in the residence hall community. This was done so that participants would be able to reflect on their experiences and share relevant information. These students have been enrolled at an institution for at least two years and have an understanding of their reasons for admission.

The participants were contacted via their school email accounts. The researcher was granted access to a list of students within the communities to send out an invite email (Appendix B) to Non-LLC Prop Hall (n=450) and LLC Tate Hall (n=450).. The initial invitation included a survey link to gather initial data and invite students to voluntarily participate in an interview. An additional list was received from a living learning community LLC Nash Hall (n=600) to gain more interest in the study. Residence Hall Directors were asked to identify random students for participation. The students were asked to provide informed consent (Appendix C) to continue with the study upon clicking

to further participate in the online survey as well as at the beginning of the interview. After the students consented to the study, they were asked to provide demographic descriptions, answer a few questions about their living experience, and provide an email address. The survey (Appendix D) was computer based and took no more than 5 minutes to complete. At the end, if students were interested in speaking more about their living environment and experience, they were asked to provide an email for the researcher to contact. The researcher contacted students from the LLC Tate Hall (the names of the actual residence halls has been changed to protect the identity of the institution and the participants) and students from the Non-LLC Prop Hall, as well as LLC Nash Hall. All responses were collected and kept confidential. Most students were interviewed separately with the interviews lasting about 15 to 20 minutes. Interviews were recorded for accurate transcription and coding. There were three students interviewed in a group setting. The students were made aware of all of the possible risks and their specific involvement before participation in the interviews occurred. The only foreseeable risk associated with the participation was possible mild discomfort in answering questions. The students had the option of opting out of the survey and interview at any time. There were no repercussions for opting out of the survey or interview at any time. The participants helped to further the base of knowledge about students living environments on campus and the Housing and Residence Life Department learning objectives. Participants of the study are listed below. Participants with the letter "A" indicate that they were not a part of the LLC, and participants listed with the letter "B" are currently living in an LLC.

Non-living learning community participants.

Participant 1A lives in a non-living learning community. The student is a transfer student from another institution, so it is not her first semester of college. It is, however, her first semester at the researched institution. The participant is a Caucasian female who is 20 years of age. The participant is involved in her residence hall council.

Participant 2A lives in a non-living learning community. The student is a second year student at the university. The participant is a Caucasian female, who is 19 years old. The student is involved with her residence hall council and lived in a living learning community during her first year at the institution.

Living learning community participants.

Participant 1B lives in a living learning community. The student is in her second year at the university. She has lived in the learning community for three semesters and is currently a Resident Assistant. The community in which she resides is major based. The participant was a resident of the LLC prior to being a staff member. The participant is a 19 year old Caucasian female.

Participant 2B lives in a living learning community. The student is in her second year at the institution. The student has lived in the learning community for three semesters and is currently the Academic Peer Mentor for the community. The community in which she resides is major based. The participant was a resident of the LLC prior to being a staff member. The participant is a 21 year old Black/African American female.

Participant 3B lives in a living learning community. The student is in her second year at the university. She has lived in the learning community for three semesters. The

community in which she resides is major based. The participant is involved with her residence hall council. The participant is a 19 year old female who identifies as bi-racial Caucasian and Black/African American.

Participant 4B lives in a living learning community. The student is in her second year at the researched institution. She has lived in the learning community for three semesters. The community in which she resides is major based. The participant is involved with the residence hall council. The participant is a 19 year old Caucasian female.

Participant 5B lives in a living learning community. The student is in their third year at the institution. She has lived in the community for three semesters and is currently a Resident Assistant. The community in which she resides is major based. The participant was a resident of the LLC prior to becoming a staff member. The participant is a 20 year old female who identifies herself as Black/African American.

Participant 6B lives in a living learning community. The student is in his third year at the university. He has lived in the living learning community for five semesters and is currently involved with his residence hall council. The community in which he resides is interest based. The participant is a 21 year old Caucasian male.

Location

The study was conducted at a public, four year, mid-sized, Mid-Western university with a city population of about 117,660. The institution was given a pseudonym to protect its identity and provide confidentiality to participants. Cowell University is located approximately 60 miles away from a major metropolitan city. The university population consists of 21,000 students with 6,000 of those students being

located in on-campus housing. The institution has 12 known LLCs within its residence halls. The first community on Cowell's campus was an honors college set up to assist students who were high achievers academically. In developing these communities, partnerships between the faculty and student affairs staff were necessary. Listed below in table 4.1 are all of the communities located at Cowell, with the approximate population of each provided in addition to the common courses for each community.

Participants from each community that were looked at have approximately 450 to 600 students located in the buildings. As the students of each community were contacted about interviews, the interviews took place in the buildings' multipurpose or study rooms. The areas were secluded from the general student population.

Table 4.1

Living Learning Communities at Cowell University

Community Title	Size	Common Courses
Business	450	English, Micro Computer Application, Pre-Calculus, Calculus
Communications	450	History, Media, Fundamental Public Communication, English
Design	300	Interior Design, Visualization, Fundamentals of Design, English
Discover	450	Major Career Quest Test
Elementary Education	80	Education in Society, Human Growth and Development, Introduction to Media
Honors	150	Seminar, Honors Courses
International and Language Studies	500	English, Math, and Philosophy
Media	500	English, Math, and Web Design
Nursing	400	Organic, Biochemistry, Math, Health Science
Social Sciences	450	Criminal Justice, English, Introduction to Criminology, American National Government, Psychology, Sociology
Students United to Remain Free	120	English, Human Health, Math, Environment and Society

Data Collection

The researcher utilized the institution's Assistant Director of Housing to help gather information specific to the institution. The Assistant Director helped provide a list of students for the halls of interest and met with the researcher on occasion to provide additional insight for the study. The instruments were designed by the researcher in order to gain the objectives of the research questions. Each question was formulated to gain the perception of students and their experiences, as well as to understand if the learning objectives could correlate to the responses. Some of the students' values and understanding of themselves was measured in order to understand if the objectives aligned. The students' responses determined the flow of the interview. The full set of questions is provided in appendix A.

Students were asked to participate in confidential interviews that were recorded for transcription. The audio was transferred onto a password protected computer and then onto a flash drive. These materials were kept in a locked apartment with limited access. All documents will be kept for the duration of time required by the Institutional Review Board and then deleted after use.

Data Analysis

All interviews were fully transcribed with all identifiers removed. Once the data was collected and transcribed, triangulation was used to analyze the results. Triangulation is the method in which the data is reviewed by multiple individuals to reduce bias and allow for a better analysis (Maxwell, 1996). In this study, the data was reviewed by the primary researcher, the researcher's thesis chair, and one additional graduate student. In analyzing the information, all reviewers were directed to categorize

information and make connections to various themes with the data (Maxwell, 1996). The data was coded to facilitate comparisons and connections.

The data was kept in a password protected file. The survey distributed was kept in a password protected system called Qualtrics. All data was stored on an external drive which only the investigator could access. All responses were kept confidential. All data collected will be kept for five years and then deleted and destroyed.

Summary

The researcher took a qualitative approach to gain insight into the students' perceptions and experiences of their living and learning environment. All materials gained from this process are published anonymously and confidentially. The research was used to gain understanding into what the students perceive to be the benefits of each community and if they align with the objectives set by the department. The questions were asked as dictated by the interview protocol. The participants that consented to the research were upperclassmen that have an experienced perspective of their communities. All data was important and accurately reviewed in order to use the data for future reference.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following research questions were presented to gain a better understanding of the benefits and overall objectives of the department, with the main purpose being to guide this study. Interview questions were then formulated around these research questions to engage the participants in following the parameters of the research.

RQ1: What do students perceive to be the benefits of participating in an LLC versus a non-LLC?

RQ2: Is what the students perceive to be the benefits and experiences of living in the residence halls aligning with the six learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department?

RQ3: In what ways do living learning communities impact/influence admission and application to the university?

The participants were broken up into two separate groups when analyzing and reporting the data. Participants in the “A” group are currently in a non-living learning community. Participants listed in group “B” are currently in a living learning community. The participants from the living learning communities were gathered from three separate communities, the Nursing community, Communications community, and the Health and Wellness community. The research questions are listed below with the common themes identified, correlation to the six objectives set by the institution, as well as thoughts on admissions. Each research question will be summarized along with the general responses from the data collected. The first section of defining living learning communities was

taken from the online survey submitted by participants and followed up on within the interviews.

Defining LLCs.

Since the study is centered on LLCs, the students were first asked to define what an LLC is in their own words. This was not one of the research questions, however it was important to gain insight in to how the students perceived and defined this environment. When non-LLC members were asked to define a LLC, participant 1A responded that he/she had no idea of what an LLC was or provided. Participant 2A defined LLC as, “being surrounded and living with people that share similar majors of study or interests. This type of community is designed so there is more social interaction outside of the classroom.” The focus for the students not living in an LLC centered around the purpose of LLCs promoting social interaction outside of the classroom.

The definitions provided by the students living in LLCs appeared to be more closely tied to the actual definition stated by the institution. Participant 1B, a second year RA, defined a LLC as an organized group of students that study the same field in hopes that collaboration takes place in order to be successful in their choice of study. Participant 2B, a member of a major based LLC, defined an LLC as, “A community is where a group of individuals with the same intended major live in order to be a help to one another.” Participant 3B, who also lives in a major based LLC, defined an LLC as students living together who have similar academic opportunities. Participant 4B defined living learning communities as a place of living and interacting with people of similar majors. Participant 5B, currently an RA, defined a LLC as, “It is when you can have peers to familiarize yourself with in both residence halls and classes.” The definition of

living learning communities from the student in an interest based LLC (Participant 6B) was, “A living learning community is a place where students with common interests can connect and build off of these connections to learn more about their interests and themselves.” It is noticeable that there is no real consistent definition among the participants; however, students living in the LLCs stressed the importance of academics.

The LLC students did not really mention the social aspect, yet clearly stated the purpose of the LLC was to be academically or interest focused. The definition provided by each participant exemplifies their lived experience in their specific environment. Some responses, such as the one made by participant 3B, made the academic connection a focus point; however, participant 6B, a member of an interest based LLC, encompassed more of the common interest connection, while a non-LLC student, such as participant 1A, was not able to define LLCs at all.

Students perceived benefits of participating in a LLC vs. non-LLC.

Students were asked various questions to understand the benefits of their experience. The students living in an LLC identified their social interactions with peers and faculty were stronger than other students in their same major living off campus. Another benefit to the environment was the amount of academic support particularly in peer mentorship and accountability. Participants also talked about their involvement and acclamation to the institution. Many felt better knowing that they shared similar experiences and struggles with their peer group. Following listed is an in-depth description in detail of the participants’ perceived benefits.

Social interaction. The participants that had lived or are currently in a living learning community stated the main benefit to be intentional social interaction. This

interaction appears to occur on two different levels. The first one is the social interaction with the peers they live and attend classes with, and how this helps with the transition to college. The second is in their exposure to programs and academic opportunities through their connections to faculty and staff connected to the LLC.

Interactions with Peers. The data collected indicated that students found it motivating and easier to transition to college life in a LLC. Their peer groups were already in place for them and getting involved was easy. Participant 1B stated, “The living learning community was like the first thing that I was a part of I guess. They had events right away within the first couple of days as a freshman. That was really kind of cool.” The common bond that they share is an added bonus bringing them much closer together.

The people they live with have similar courses, and the participants shared that they spend a lot of time together inside and outside the classroom making it easier to socially connect and meet new people. Participants 1B and 4B stated these similar feelings toward the community. Participant 2B stated, “The main benefit for myself is to get to know the RAs on a more friend like base level and then getting to know your peers which is always a good benefit.” Participant 3B stated:

I have met quite a few people and met lots of friends, people that live on my floor, in my building, and in my classes. You see a lot of familiar faces so it is nice. I have noticed in some of the other dorms, people just don't seem quite as involved. They don't necessarily go to their hall events. They just kind of live there. They don't really interact with the people they are living with as much.

LLCs provide residents with a similar talking point upon meeting for the first time related to major or interest in an area, and residents are able to make better connections.

Participant 4B, who had lived in the Communications community previously, indicated that the community this year was a lot more friendly and peers were willing to become more engaged in the community. Participant 6B, a member of the Health and Wellness community, mentioned the social aspect as a benefit in his response:

I think the greatest benefit you get is to see and meet a lot of people that are interested in similar things as you and you can connect with them and kind of build a relationship on that. I was not too outgoing in high school, and in college I came in not knowing a lot of people at the college, so it forced me to get a little bit more active. I think the living learning community helped me in part to get more active, and I am definitely more willing to be social and get more active.

Participant 1A, a resident in a non-living learning community, during the interview indicated that she had to do a lot of the leg work to meet new students in the community.

Participant 1A said:

The RD asked me what one thing I would like to see change and I said my answer is still going to be the same, the social aspect of it, but you can't really tell people to keep their doors open. If your door is open, I am going to walk in the room and say hi to you. I am going to introduce myself.

Living in a non-LLC, the student found it more difficult to connect and interact with peers. There is no shared commonality among the non-LLC halls. When asked about the difference in experience, Participant 2A said that it is quieter in the non-living learning

community because it is not a freshmen dorm, and there is not as much interaction.

However Participant 2A also said, “You get to interact with people that you live with.

That is always a positive.”

Interactions with Faculty. Forming a close bond with faculty is important to keep students engaged and focused on learning in and outside of the classroom. Many participants talked about interactions with faculty as being a normal part of their experience. Participant 5B, a member of an academic based LLC, stressed the importance of the faculty connection. “They [the faculty] will come over and do events with us and really try to get to know the residents’ names, follow them on social media, and promote the academic programs or events. So it is really nice to have them interact.” With the LLCs tied so closely to the academic majors, buy in from the faculty seemed to be a common theme from the participants in the LLC. Participant 3B, from the Communications LLC, said, “I had really good experiences with the faculty and going to meet them in their office hours, getting advice and help from them outside of the class.” Participant 6B said:

Earlier on you form a higher bond with faculty and staff because in the living learning communities they are a little bit more active. They are working with the students, they do more activities with students in those communities, and more variety in activities. I know in other communities they have closer bonds.

Interest based ones usually don’t unfortunately.

Participants noted that academic supported events in the LLCs are very strong.

Participant 6B living in an interest based community identified that he does not have as strong of a bond with faculty because the academic consistency is lacking.

Academic support. The greatest benefit stressed from the participants' responses seemed to be the academic support and networking opportunities with peers as well as faculty. Participating in a living learning community, the academic support is a constant. This was seen throughout several responses by the participants. Participant 4B, who lives in the Communication LLC, stated:

You have more opportunities here living in this learning community to get involved in class because our Academic Peer Mentor really is involved in the academic clubs; they always help us get involved. Having people that are familiar with it and they are available to you because you live here and it is based here, I think that it is an advantage that others are lacking.

Students also noted that they have a different access to resources provided within their LLCs because of the course commonality. Students can seek help among their peers because they have similar classes, programs, and events hosted specifically for the community and faculty connection. A member of the Communication LLC (Participant 3B) said:

Having people that are in the same classes, especially if it is a class that I am not the most enthused about, it motivates me to go because I know that we can sit together and help each other out. This is probably from my perspective one of the best communities to live in as a freshman because not only do you meet a lot of people and have a lot of the same classes, I feel it provides a support group at least on an academic basis. For hall council, one of the girls that goes to it was in my history class. We found out that we had a huge lecture so we hadn't bumped into each other. We were talking and that is when we started sitting by each other.

Now we help each other study for the test and so I would say that is really beneficial. This is the social aspect and how that can lead to other parts of your life like academics. I was just really drawn to the communications academic program and they have these immersive learning program with the school being on the smaller side it has a draw to it because you can get more involved.

These specifically stated stories from the participants help bridge the understanding of how motivating and supportive peers can be for overall academic success.

Participant 1B, who is a member of the major based LLC, also shared these responses:

But it was just really nice to have someone right next to me or someone down the hall that I could go to and those were the first friends I made here on campus. I could always turn to my neighbors and say what do I study for this exam, how did it go for you, or do you want to study together, or I forgot an assignment do you remember what it was. Overall I think my academics are probably better living in the community than if I had lived somewhere else. Being close to a lot of people that are in the same major as you provides the quickest tools and easiest access to them. Living in a nursing community it was really nice to always have that support because I could always turn to my neighbors and say my gosh what do I study for this exam, how did it go for you, or do you want to study together, or I forgot an assignment do you remember what it was? Overall I think my academics were probably better living in that community than if I were to have lived in another residence hall.

Participant 6B, from the Communications LLC, indicated that the living environment had a positive effect on his academics:

I believe that involvement in your community has a positive correlation to working with academics and definitely within living learning communities. They try to encourage academic success, and I believe that the Academic Peer Mentor and the RAs do in the communities.

This statement defines that academic support comes from more than just peers in the classroom, but peers in a clearly defined role to support and promote academic achievement and success, in addition to the faculty.

Social events and programs. Another benefit identified by participants was the special events and programs where they were able to learn and participate outside of the classroom. Many participants stated that they were given advantages in participating in programs and opportunities their peers missed out on because they were not a part of the LLC. Participant 1B, a Resident Assistant in the Nursing LLC, stated:

I didn't really think of it as I was getting any extra added benefit but just talking to my friends who weren't in the community we definitely got the upper-hand when it came to knowing what they wanted in our program applications and we were told from day one exactly what we need to be doing. We definitely got the advantage on that. Definitely being close to a lot of people that are in the same major as you, seriously, the quickest tools and easiest access to them. Different programs and events that always went on we were notified first about it if we were the only ones notified about it at all.

Students found the LLCs to be an advantage because of events and programs that catered to their needs. They were informed first and had specifically addressed topics supporting their overall learning experience. In the non-LLCs, many of the programs would be less

focused on a specific topic and outcome. Participant 2B who resides in the Nursing LLC stated:

A lot of my friends live off campus and so they don't have the same resources as they would if they lived on campus within a living learning community. I have four friends in the program that live off campus, but they never know what is going on with the program because they are not here.

An Academic Peer Mentor and member of the Nursing LLC, Participant 2B, talked about this added benefit of living in the LLCs and the easy access to academic support not shared by peers that do not live in the community.

Aligning the six learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department.

The department of residence life set learning objectives as guiding principles for the staff to understand what and if the students in the residential communities are learning. The six learning objectives state that students will express thoughts in a clear, concise, and respectful manner, students will incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their understanding of the world, students will establish healthy interdependence, students will constructively demonstrate their societal rights and responsibilities, and students will explore their values. The participants responded to the questions asked related to their experiences and these were then connected to the learning objectives of the Housing and Residence Life Department. However, the participants were not made aware that their answers were being evaluated on the departmental learning objectives. Many connections can be seen in their responses to questions that relate to the objectives. Some points made by the participants do overlap and connect with more than just one set objective.

Express thoughts in a clear, concise, and respectful manner. In the interviews, participant's responses were presented in a clear and concise manner. During the interview sessions, they were polite, respectful, and provided good overall perspectives. Examples of this can be seen throughout their answers to specific questions. Participant 6B, a member of the Healthy Living LLC, talked about being able to get to know other individuals on the floor through working together throughout the year on service projects and forming a bond with fellow community members beyond the academic experience. The participant spoke to understanding and articulating the different experiences college brought to his life. Many of these examples can be seen in how participants answered questions on the topic of diversity and peer interaction.

Participant 2B, who resides in the Nursing LLC stated:

I have learned to accept difference among other people and I have really learned to stick with my own values and which ones are more important to me, which ones I feel is what I stand for and nothing will change that. I have got a better sense of myself and about being in college in general.

Students are able to take ownership in their own experiences and articulate what they want out of the college experience in a clear, concise, and respectful manner.

Incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their understanding of the world.

Some participants understood the meaning of incorporating diversity into their communities and learning about others different from themselves. A member of the Healthy Living LLC, Participant 6B, talked about the challenges of living with individuals that had different views and the ability to learn to overcome those differences: "Sometimes people's views are a little bit at odds and it's learning to overcome those

differences.” Others talked about intentional and unintentional programming, Participant 2B made this point about diversity:

I am more accepting of diversity actually because, being from a small High School, I felt like I was really closed minded when it came to diversity. So in meeting people from different backgrounds other than myself, it is like oh well you are not like that. I feel like everybody has a stereotype, but being around different ethnicities and origins helps you really realize everyone is not how people portray them to be. One of my other nursing majors that lives here, I think she is from Pakistan, maybe I think that is what she told me. It is just different because we have cultural dinners here and it is really nice. You get to learn about them and where they came from.

Respect their environment and individuals within it. Living together in a community of several unique people can be a challenge, yet participants expressed the respect for community built within the LLCs. Participant 4B, a member of the Communication LLC, said,

I don't think my values really changed. I still do a lot of the same things as I did growing up in high school and everything, it's just I feel like I am open to understanding other people's values I guess is the way to say it.

Participant 6B, a member of the Healthy Living LLC, explained:

I got to be involved with them and be a social peer to them. I think that there are a lot of people that come from different backgrounds within the community. Certain communities I think have a little bit more, or some have a little less but I feel like they come from a broad range of the spectrum throughout the urban,

throughout the ethnic backgrounds. I feel like there could be a little bit more diversity in certain areas, but I feel generally diverse or trying to become a more diversified community.

Participants of the living learning communities had a better understanding of diversity and the diverse environments in which they lived. Participant 2A talked about diversity on the floor being that there are both men and women living among each other. “Yeah there is a girl from New Zealand; I think she is so fun to talk to.” When asked to describe the non-LLC environment the student was unsure, pausing for a long period of time and eventually talking about how quiet the community was.

Establish healthy interdependence. Few participants talked about the communities encouraging them to grow and understand the full experiences. Participant 6B said:

I would say the living community tries to encourage students to live a healthy lifestyle here and it is a community that encourages services within the community and it is an interested based community that is trying to encourage them to become better, better socially, emotionally and mentally.

Establishing a healthy interdependence was hard to evaluate based on the participants’ responses.

Explore their values. The learning objective coincides with the objective above concerning incorporating a variety of viewpoints into understanding the world.

Participant 6B expressed that being more open and trying to engage in conversation with others was a big part of this concept. “I would say a little bit more openness to people, more trying to engage people proactively I would say would be the major themes. I

definitely think that I became more open to different people's views and stuff."

Participant 5B, who lives in a major based community, said, "I didn't expect to learn anything because I just felt like I was so diverse because I moved around a lot, but I did change a little bit." A member of the Nursing LLC (Participant 1B) stated, "I think that is what is so cool about college is you find things out about yourself that you did not even know were there." Participant 2B shared:

So in meeting people from different backgrounds other than myself, it is like, oh well you are not like that. I feel like everybody has a stereotype everybody stereotypes somebody but being around different ethnicities and origins and all that it helps you really realize everyone is not how people portray them to be.

The common theme throughout the participants' responses was that they were close-minded in high school and began to realize that there was more to the world and difference in people through living and participating in an LLC. There was no difference to responses from LLC members and non-members in regards to exploring values.

Impact/influence on admission and application to the university.

Many of the participants indicated that they were not aware that living learning communities even existed before applying and enrolling at the institution. When asked if living environments made an impact on their admission decision, many participants indicated that it was not a factor in their decision. However, one participant mentioned that she would have enjoyed seeing the LLC that they could possibly be living in even though it was the older style residence hall. On the tour, Participant 4B, a member of the Communications LLC, was shown the fancy residence hall, however she never had any intention of living there and was not ever placed in that space. Participant 1B's overall

decision was based on residential communities when choosing what institution to attend, however living learning communities did not play a direct factor. Participant 6B stated this about the living environment having an impact on her decision to pursue the institution:

I wouldn't, and it didn't at first. I wouldn't say that it was the overriding factor that made me decide to come here compared to elsewhere; but definitely once I got here it was a benefit to me. My parents really liked what they saw of it, but wasn't so sure exactly what it was but it seemed to be interested in the type of living community. I got signed up for one and I did not really realize what I signed up for until I came in.

Overall, participants that were living in a LLC stated that they were not fully aware of what the living learning communities were prior to arrival and did not get a full understanding of LLCs until experiencing them first hand. Non-LLC participants concluded that housing was not a factor, but appreciates the special amenities included. A current non-LLC student had previously lived in an LLC and explained that the experience was not what he/she expected at all. She explained that she did not meet with many faculty and did not attend as many classes with her peers as she would have liked. She chose to live in the non-LLC because it was a quieter environment which was more conducive for her studies.

Summary

Most of the participants were from living learning communities. Many of the participants talked about their experience of building connections with peers and being able to form academic support systems in their living environment. A participant in the

non-LLC talked about her interest in more quiet, private, less community style environment. Having both the non-LLC and LLC environment seems beneficial because of the uniqueness of students and their living interests. There was indication when aligning the six learning objectives that some areas of learning were more noticeable than others. Some of the participants' answers showed overlap when aligning the objectives such as students being able to explore their values and understand a variety of different viewpoints around them. Looking at the admission and application portion of the study, participants consistently indicated that LLCs had very little influence on their decision to attend the institution. Some participants suggested they had prior knowledge of LLCs before attending the institution, but students were not fully aware of the experience they were pursuing as a part of an LLC.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter will pull together the research that was initiated and the thoughts of the researcher based on the results. It will summarize the findings and then conclude with thoughts about what the data can mean for the institution and living learning communities in the future. Discussed in more detail will be how the definition of living learning communities among the participants was considered to be inconsistent. The stated perceived benefits will be touched upon to summarize the participants' understanding as well as explain the importance of shared reality and the commonality among LLC participants. Conclusions about the study are made along with future recommendations and suggested research. The impact that this study had on the department, residence life, and students affairs will be further explained in the chapter.

Discussion

The study focused on understanding, from the students' perspective, what it was like to participate in a LLC. Students were asked about what they became involved with in the residence hall, including programs or events that helped relate their experience to the benefits of membership in the LLC or residence hall. The participants were also asked questions to gauge whether the learning objectives set by the department were being met. Students were also asked to identify if living learning communities had an effect on their admission to the institution.

Defining LLCs. Many of the participants responded to the question about defining LLCs with comments related to major or academic support. Those students living in a major based LLC explained that the purpose of the LLC was to support and

promote strong academics. All LLC students spoke less about the social interaction in the definition, but explained in great detail the social support throughout the interview questions. The non-LLC student shared the perspective that the social interaction was a main part of the LLC experience, concluding that there is less intentional interaction among peers living in a non-LLC. One student in the non-LLC struggled to come up with a definition. Responses indicated that LLC students had some general knowledge and understanding of what an LLC was and what they were getting out of the experience, even if they weren't able to specifically define the community experience. Participants that stressed academics lived in academic major focused communities and had strong connections with peers and faculty through their educational experience. Research tells us that the main purpose of a LLC is to create intentional social interactions and provide an academic environment that supports the whole student (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Zhao and Kuh (2004) specifically discussed how these communities are designed to support students in and out of the classroom:

The second connection is the linking of students through ongoing social interactions afforded by being with the same students for an extended period of time. As a result, students become members of a community focused on academic content, which allows them to further develop their identity and discover their voice as well as to integrate what they are learning into their worldview and other academic and social experiences. (p. 117)

The participants in this study did not identify the LLCs as having a direct impact or influence on all aspects of the learning experience. LLCs and college in general have too many indispensable variables to directly correlate any one students' learning process. I

cannot say that LLCs directly impacted the views and values of a student, however there appears to be a connection and benefit to participation in these communities. It is seen to enhance the students' experience at college, but did not appear to have a direct impact on how students socialize or learn.

Overall there was not a consistent definition from the non-LLC students or LLC students. This seems to be a common concern in reviewing various living learning communities' definitions at institutions around the United States. Some institutions call them learning communities and provide a living component, while some living learning communities are student self-selected clusters, and still others may be theme-oriented with no clear connection to an academic major or program. It was evident even in this study that there is not a lot of consistency in the LLC options at this institution. Thus, it is no surprise that students were not able to articulate a clear definition.

The institution does not provide a clear foundation for what students or faculty will gain from the experience. The objectives are provided to staff, and displayed, however they are not communicated to those that might be most interested in learning what can be gained from participation. Telling parents, students, faculty, and staff the clear definition, goals, objectives, and outcomes are crucial to creating a developmental LLC program. Making sure to set the foundation and lay the ground work can help sustain the LLC programs throughout their time as new students come in and out of the institution. Creating a consistent vision and definition can help provide a stronger overall experience for all involved, but most importantly the students. It also makes them more easily marketable.

Social role. Residing in a LLC was found to have an influence on the social interaction and development of the students. Participants shared that they were more able to get involved and found it easier to meet new people than their peers in non-LLCs. The community forced interaction, in that some students discussed having classes together and living together which appeared to create a more interactive and supportive environment. This is an aspect of living learning communities that plays an essential role in the development of the students. Overall, combining the academic and social environments forms a strong bond among peers, and helps with a student's overall development (Astin, 1968). Participants in the LLC stated that there were multiple interactions with fellow peers and others within their community like Academic Peer Mentors, Resident Assistants, Welcome Week Leaders, faculty, and professional staff. This was not evident with non-LLC members.

Academic support. It was very clear that the students in the LLC had an advantage over non-LLC students when it came to academics. Students that were in LLCs of major interest had common courses, more interaction with faculty, and identified that they were ahead of the game when it came to academic program requirements. This was most evident in the students that were a part of the Nursing Community who were able to clearly state the values of their academic program. Nursing is considered one of the more difficult majors, according to the students in the program, and students articulated that they were able to seek out their peers for support, and gained additional knowledge from the events held in the community compared to non-LLC members.

Shared Commonality. LLCs support and create a shared commonality and experience among participants. This provides the opportunity for close bonds and

relationships to form. Much like a cohort, LLCs create an environment to experience growth and development together. Cohort models support a number of benefits such as networking, academic motivation, and peer interaction. (Seifert & Mandzuk, 2004). According to data and reference to the shared reality theory, we all have a need to share fundamental unity (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009). If students understand that they are working to achieve a common goal and working through similar struggles, there is a greater benefit to achieving the outcome and learning from the experience. The cohort model is a perfect example into understanding the concept of living learning communities.

Learning objectives. The learning objectives set by the department were developed several years ago and are broad enough that they cover all LLCs, in addition to non-LLCs. In the interviews, students were asked questions to identify if the learning objectives had been met in the communities. These questions centered on the topics of understanding diversity, peer to peer interaction, conflict management, growth, and development. Participants of living learning communities were able to talk about their experiences in some areas better than others. Because the objectives were general and somewhat vague, students' responses could be connected to various objectives. With the same objectives being set across all of the communities, there is not a clearly stated distinction in outcomes from one living learning community to another. Creating clear outcomes for each unit allows them to become more distinct and for the department to fully assess whether the outcomes are being met (Bresciani, 2013). To determine the efficiency of the communities is hard to measure because the objectives are vague. Setting well-defined outcomes could provide a greater understanding and knowledge into

the impact of LLCs on participants. Designing specific living learning outcomes would help faculty and staff involved in the LLC feel more connected to the programs they are providing. If each LLC had its own specifically designed set of learning outcomes, universities would be able to better market the expected experience to perspective students.

Limitations

While the participants were very willing to talk about their experiences within their perspective communities, it was very difficult to solicit participation. Several attempts were made to get participants, including utilizing several professional staff members at the institution, which led to some challenges in gaining diversity in participants. They are all heavily involved in their communities. Some participants were student staff members in their hall, so the lens in which they view their community would be different than that of a traditional student.

There is not an abundant amount of data on the creation and implementation of the objectives. The department overall has the objectives placed throughout residence life. It is not designated to one community or building. It was difficult to effectively measure the learning objectives specifically for each community and for the students' experience because of the vaguely created objectives. More specifically created outcomes would have been easier to measure and assess the effectiveness of the communities.

Recommendations

LLCs are an important resource for connecting students to the institution in a unique and important way. Those working with LLC programs need to work on publicizing the LLCs to future students in a way that accurately describes the benefits and

experiences they will gain. There is no clear definition regarding what an LLC is.

Providing a clear definition would aid in the understanding of the LLC experience before arriving. Once clear definitions are in place, these communities could be more attractive to the prospective students.

Often times the student voice is not heard; however, this may be due to professionals not taking the time to gauge students' experience and needs. Students in this case identified and understood the experiences they were receiving from the LLCs as beneficial. The opportunity to take advantage of allowing the current students to market the benefits to other students would help with those looking for this type of experience at the institution. Taking the time to set specific learning outcomes for each community to accurately evaluate and assess the overall needs of students in the communities would be beneficial to their future success. Even though the learning objectives seem to be aligning with what the students consider to be the benefits of the community, detailed data can be supported by further in depth outcomes and comprehensive assessment. Setting objectives and outcomes that are measurable and attainable can support evidence of effectiveness.

Many institutions feel that it is important to show students the brand new residence halls on tour during preview or visit days. Students referenced the importance of experiencing where most freshmen will live, or experiencing the LLC building tour. Even though these buildings are not the newer facilities on campus, students want a realistic perspective before arriving to campus on move in day. This would provide incoming students the opportunity to gain a perspective of the community they would more likely be residing in and help them gain a more realistic view of their future

expectations. Students, once in the communities, seem to understand the community aspect which takes precedent over the older facilities.

There are several examples seen throughout residence life that provide us examples of inconsistencies in the language used from institution to institution. For example, the basic term Resident Director can now be found to incorporate a wealth of titles such as Community Coordinator, Area Coordinator, Development Coordinator, and so on. When reviewing the literature related to the different types of LLCs offered there is an inconsistent set of definitions and types, and it provides evidence that a more consistent set of definitions needs to be created for understanding LLCs. There is ambiguity among higher education which could cause concern for students, faculty, and parents trying to find basic understanding of operational knowledge of residence life. Creating clear and consistent concepts can provide understandable environments and experiences to navigate through. If there is a foundational understanding, more participants are likely to be fully engaged in the experience.

Suggestions for future research

Looking at the research that has already been conducted, specific recommendations can be made to understand the marketing and promotion of the LLCs. More research can be done on how to fully engage students and help them understand the LLC experience before participating in an actual community. Future research can be done with high school seniors to see what they are looking for and possibly what they know about LLCs. Understanding where they learn about these opportunities or how they learn about them is important to the admission and marketing process.

Suggestions would be to focus on the marketing and promotional tactics to help utilize LLCs as a selling point to the institutions enrollment and admission. Setting clear outcomes and assessing the outcomes could also be an area to assist in marketing and future study. The students unfortunately were never asked if they were aware of the learning objectives. An in-depth study could be formulated around the learning objectives set by the department and how they help define the mission and vision for the staff and students. Looking more closely at evaluating and understanding the learning objectives and how each is being met is great for future assessment. Starting to look more specifically into setting outcomes for each community to better evaluate and assess productivity is essential to the growth and development process.

Finding the right students to answer the difficult questions is something that this research is lacking. All of the participants of the study were involved students in their community. Students that were not involved were not accessible for participation in the research. To gain a greater perspective on both communities, equal participants from non-LLCs and LLCs as well as a wide a range of involved students is suggested.

Impact. The study does not take into consideration other factors that may cause students to explore their values or understand diversity along with the six other objectives. One participant stated this very clearly, “I don’t think the actual living learning community changed my values, I feel like just being in college changed it and being around different people all of the time.” LLCs are not the only factor that influences students’ understanding on a college campus.

Conclusion

It is imperative that student affairs staff continue to create environments in which students feel supported in their growth and development as students and people. A way to help students achieve this growth is through providing living learning communities, an environment that students find beneficial. The LLC participants with an enthusiastic shine spoke of the wonderful opportunities and benefits of the community. It is understood that not all students thrive in an environment that pushes them to be involved, however students gain a knowledge and appreciation that is beyond their capacity of understanding. Even the students in non-LLCs identified the community they resided in as not as connected and open. LLCs are innovative environments that push students to learn and develop. Even though the participants might not have clearly stated the six learning objectives, they could speak about their diverse experiences from living in such an environment. Students understand that living in the LLCs can support their overall academic and social success.

Selling this experience is crucial. New students do not understand the benefits LLCs provide with the transition into college. Helping students to understand the knowledge that they will gain before living in the community will provide greater motivation and participation. Living learning communities are not new concepts; however, if there is a marketing strategy, this would put the idea into young students' minds before arriving to college. What most do not understand is the extensive time and effort that goes into making the living learning communities effectively support the participants' academic and social development. Planning and program implementation is also a key element into the success of the students' participation. This study can be

utilized to better understand what students deem to be the benefits of living in a non-LLC vs. and LLC. Further research needs to be conducted to determine the application and admissions portions of the study.

Reference List

- Astin, A. (1968). *The college environment*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Astin, A. W. & Astin, H. S. (2000). *Leadership reconsidered: Engaging higher education in social change*. University of Montana: Volunteer Action Services.
- Baker, S., & Pomerantz, N. (2000). Impact of learning communities on retention at a metropolitan university. *Journal of College Student Retention, 2* (2), 115-126.
- Banning, J. H., & Kaiser, L. (1974). An ecological perspective and model for campus design. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 52*, 370-375.
- Blimling, G. (1993). The influence of college residence halls on students. In J. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research 9*, 248-307. New York, NY: Agathon.
- Blimling, G. (1998). The benefits and limitations of residential colleges: A meta-analysis of the research. In F. K. Alexander & D. E. Robertson (Eds.), *Residential colleges: Reforming American higher education* 39-76. Murray, KY: Murray State University.
- Borst, J. A. (2011). *Evaluating academic and student affairs partnerships: The impact of living-learning communities on the development of critical thinking skills in college freshmen*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Iowa Research Online (927).
- Bresciani, M. J. (2013). Developing outcomes. In D. M. Timm, J. Barham, A. Knerr, and K. McKinney (Eds.) *Assessment in practice: Assessment in Practice*, (19-29). Retrieved from

http://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=csd_fac

Bresciani, M. J. (2002). *Assessing student learning and development* [PowerPoint slides].

Retrieved from

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/StudentRetention/files/Assessing%20Student%20Learning%20and%20Development.pdf>

Bresciani, M.J. (2001). Writing measurable and meaningful outcomes. *NetResults*,
October 16

Brubacher, J. S., & Rudy, W. (2004). *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities* (6th ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Cedarville University. (2013). Residence Halls. Retrieved from

<http://www.cedarville.edu/Student-Life/Residence-Life/Residence-Halls.aspx>

Chait, R. (1979). Mission madness strikes our colleges. *Chronicle of Higher Education*,
18, 36.

Chapman, D. W. (1981). A model of student college choice. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 52(2), 490-505.

Cohen, A. & Kisher, C. (2010). *The shaping of American higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cox, M. D. (2004). Introduction to faculty learning communities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 97, 5-23.

Dale, P. (2003). A journey in becoming more learning centered. *NetResults*, November 11.

Davies, G. K. (1986). The importance of being general: Philosophy, politics and

- institutional mission statements. In J. C. Smart (Ed.). *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. New York: Agathon Press
- Delucchi, M. (1997). "Liberal arts" colleges and the myth of uniqueness. *Journal of Higher Education*, 68(4), 414-426.
- Echterhoff, G., Higgins, T. E., & Levine, J. M. (2009). Experiencing commonality with others' inner states about the world. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4 (5), 496-521. doi:10.1111/j.175-6924.2009.01161.x
- Eck, J. C., Edge, H., & Stephenson, K. (2007). Investigating types of student engagement through living-learning communities: The perspective from Rollins College. *Assessment Update: Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education*, 19(3), 6-8.
- Fleming, W. B., Howard, K., Perkins, E., & Pesta, M. (2005). The college environment: Factors influencing student transition and their impact on academic advising. *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, 1-9.
- Georgetown University (2013). Living differently. Retrieved from <http://reslife.georgetown.edu/lc.html>
- Hamilton College (2013). Residential Life. Retrieved from <http://www.hamilton.edu/residentiallife/ra-information/resident-advisor-contract>
- Haynes, C. (2004). *Benefits for faculty and staff members involved in residential learning communities*. MA Thesis. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- Inkelas, K. K., Brower, A. M., Crawford, S., Hummel, M., Pope, D., & Zeller, W. J. (2004). *National study of living-learning programs: 2004 report of findings*.

College Park, MD: Author.

Inkelas, K. K., Szelenyi, K., Soldner, M., & Brower, A. M. (2007). National study of living-learning programs: 2007 report of findings. University of Maryland

Komives, S. R., & Woodard, D. (2003). *Student services: A handbook for the profession*. (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Designing a qualitative study: An interactive approach*. University of Michigan: Sage Publications.

Morphew, C. C. & Hartley, M. (2006). Mission statements: A thematic analysis of rhetoric across institutional type. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(3), 456-471.

Novotney, A. (2011). Coed versus single-sex ed: Does separating boys and girls improve their education? Experts on both sides of the issue weigh in. *American Psychological Association*, 42 (2), 58.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*, vol. 2. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Purnell, H. (2013). *All about Resident Assistants*. Retrieved from <http://www.collegeview.com/articles/article/all-about-resident-assistants>

Rocconi, L. M. (2010). The impact of learning communities on first year students' growth and development in college. *Research Higher Education*, 52, 178-193.

Seidman, A. (2005). *College student retention: Formula for student success*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Seifert, K., & Mandzuk, D. (2004). *How helpful are cohorts in teacher education*. Retrieved from <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~seifert/cohorts.html>

- Siegel, H. (2007). Philosophy of education: Encyclopedia of Britannica, 1-11.
- Schackner, B. (2007, February 27). CMU allows men, women to share rooms: University joins about 30 others in nation to try gender-neutral housing plan. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/news/education/cmu-allows-men-women-to-share-rooms-473977/>
- Schmidt, K. E. (2011). *Freshmen perceptions of academic support in the residence halls*. MA Thesis. Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois.
- Schussler, D. L., & Fierros, E. G. (2008). Students' perceptions of their academics, relationships, and sense of belonging; comparisons across residential learning communities. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 20(1), 71-96.
- Smith, B. L. (2001). The challenge of learning communities as a growing national movement. *Peer Review*, 3(4), 2-4.
- Strange, C., & Banning, J. (2001). *Educating by design: Creating campus learning environments that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Strauss, V. (2012, April 4). Some 2012 college admissions rates hit new lows. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/some-2012-college-admissions-rates-hit-new-lows/2012/04/03/gIQA5EIIuS_blog.html
- Student Personal Point of View. (1949). Retrieved March 1, 2013, from <http://www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/1949.pdf>
- Texas A&M University. (2012). What is an LLC? Living Learning Communities.

Retrieved from <http://reslife.tamu.edu/housing/llc/what.asp>

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Education Research*, 45, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). 2nd Edition. *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2003). Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on student success. *Higher Education Monograph Series*, 1, 1-8.

United States Census Bureau (2012). Delaware County, Indiana. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/18/18035.html>

University of Mississippi. (2013). *Application Info*. Retrieved from http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/stu_housing/First_time_fall13spr14.html

University of Oregon (2013). Residence Halls. Retrieved from <http://housing.uoregon.edu/reshalls/apply.php>

University of Richmond, (2011, January 14). The Common Good: Trip overseas gives living-learning community an opportunity to explore how societies pursue collective goals. *Newsroom*. Retrieved from <http://news.richmond.edu/features/article/-/4553/the-common-good-trip-overseas-gives-living-learning-community-an-opportunity-to-explore-how-societies-pursue-collective-goals.html>

Wawrzynski, M. R., & Jessup-Anger, J. E. (2010). From expectation to experiences: Using a structural typology to understand first year student outcomes in

academically based living-learning communities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(2), 201-217. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0119.

Western Kentucky University. (2013). Applying for WKU Housing. Retrieved from <http://www.wku.edu/housing/apply/>

Zhao, C., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Adding Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2), 115-138. doi: 0361-0365/04/0300-0115/0

Appendix A

Student Interview Protocol

Reflecting on your previous year...

1. Which community do/did you live in?
2. Tell me about your experiences living in the learning community?
 - a. Tell me about your experiences living in the non-living learning community?
3. What do you find most enjoyable about living where you live?
2. What do you find challenging about living where you live?
3. Describe your interactions with your peers, faculty and staff? (How did that differ from peers not living in that community?)
6. Living where you live, what impact does this have on your academics?
7. How well do you interact with peers now compared to in high school?
8. How has your selected group of friends changed since high school? (In what ways?)
(What role did being part of that community play in this?)
9. How have your values about life changed? (can you tell me more)
10. Tell me about your interactions with others in the place where you resided?
11. How many people do/did you know in your living environment?
12. Tell me about the diversity in your community? In what ways has your perspectives on diversity changed? In what ways did living in this community change/influence you perspectives? How many diverse people did you know in your environment?
13. If you had to describe your community to prospective student what would you tell them?

14. Have you seen your floor cause discipline issues? How were issues handled on your floor – conflicts, policy violations, etc? Who played in roles in how this was handled?
15. How often do you participate in activities in your Residence Hall?
16. What would you say are the greatest benefits to participating in a living learning community?
17. What would you say are the greatest benefits to participating in a non-living learning community?
18. What was it about the institution that made you want to attend and pursue a degree?
 - a. Did living environments have anything to do with your decision?
19. What were your perceptions about living learning communities before coming to college?
 - a. Was that appealing?
 - b. What about it was appealing or wasn't?
20. What impact did the living environment have on your decision to come to this institution?
21. How many institutions did you consider?

Appendix B

Initial Email to Students

Subject Line: Student Survey

Hello _____ Resident,

I as an alum and previous undergraduate student myself am asking students to participate a research study required for my master's degree in college student affairs. I am conducting this research through Eastern Illinois University where I am a student working under the direction of Dr. Dianne Timm. The research being conducted is related to your experience and perceptions in the residence hall environment. Please click on the link below to take the survey, and at the end of the survey if you are willing to speak further about the topic please include your email address.

You are being asked to participate in a research study which seeks to examine students' perceptions of the residence hall. The survey is computer based and should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. All responses will be kept confidential with no clear indication of identifying information. The only foreseeable risk associated with your participation is possible mild discomfort in answering questions regarding your living experiences. Your honesty in responding will be greatly appreciated. However, you may skip, in whole or in part, any question you are uncomfortable responding to. You may elect to opt out of this survey at any time with no repercussions. By participating you will help to further the base of knowledge about the student residential experience. Your participation is greatly appreciated and again, all responses are confidential.

Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Assessment of Perceived Students Needs Based on Living Environments

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sally Adams from the Counseling and Student Development Department at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to understand the differences in learning environments and how the students identified benefits align with the objectives set by the institution. This will benefit future students and institutions with living learning programs.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a 15-20 minute interview today asking about your current living environment and perceptions of certain situations within that category.

All interviews will be audio/video recorded and only the researcher interviewing you and thesis advisor will have access to the audio/video of the interview. Transcripts will be developed with your name and other identifiers removed. All information will be shared with researchers on the project.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks or discomforts to participating in the study.

• POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The benefits to you as a member of the study are limited to none. Your participation in this study will provide a better understanding the Housing and Residence Life Department as well as future living learning programs. With your knowledge we can provide better service to future students like you.

• CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding. Each participant will be assigned a Number and a Letter. The Letter represents living environment and the Number represents the participant. Only the interviewer will know the name of the participant.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

If there are any questions or concerns about the research, please contact:

Principle Investigator: Sally Adams (217-581-7702, smadams4@eiu.edu)

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix D

Initial Student Survey

1. By clicking continue you are consenting to further participate in the study.
2. Which Residence Hall do you live in?
3. Describe your current level of satisfaction with your currently living environment?
4. Define living learning community?
5. What living learning community do/did you reside in?
6. What Residence Hall planned activities or events have you participated in?
7. How many people do you know by name that live within your Residence Hall?
8. Indicate your class standing?
 - First year student
 - Second year student
 - Third year student
 - Fourth year student
 - Fifth year student
9. Indicate how long you have lived in your current Residence Hall?
 - One semester or less
 - Two semesters
 - Three semesters
 - Four semesters
 - Five or more semesters

10. Race
 - Caucasian (white)
 - Black/African American
 - Latino/Latina/Hispanic
 - Asian American
 - International
 - Other: Please specify
11. Sex
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other: Please specify
12. Age
 - 18 or younger
 - 19
 - 20
 - 21
 - 22+ years of age
13. Please provide your email address if you are interested in further discussing this topic.