Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

11-16-2015

Leading and developing a first year learning community for opportunity program students

Penny E. McPherson
Rowan University

LEADING AND DEVELOPING A FIRST YEAR LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM STUDENTS

by
Penny E. McPherson

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
April 26, 2012

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.

Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my heroes, my two children, Troi Alexis Barnes and Mekhi Terrell Barnes, for their love, patience, and support. I offer this effort to show them that life has no limits except for the ones you make. To my loving parents, Wilmer McPherson, Sr. and Helen McPherson, for their support and many sacrifices. A special thanks and many blessings to my dearest friends and colleagues who pushed me when I could not see the end of the tunnel. I would like to thank the Educational Opportunity Fund/Maximizing Academic Potential program for giving me the access and opportunity to receive an education as well as helping me realize my full potential. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my students of the 2009 S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program for their willingness to go through this journey with me.

Acknowledgments

My sincerest thanks and greatest appreciation to my doctoral committee:

Dr. James Coaxum, III, as my Chair, for his leadership, guidance, and patience;

Dr. MaryBeth Walpole for her knowledge and passion for education; and

Dr. Charles Tantillo, my mentor and an example of a true leader.

Abstract

Penny E. McPherson
LEADING AND DEVELOPING A FIRST YEAR LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR
OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM STUDENTS
2011-2012
James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

Opportunity programs have utilized the learning community model through summer bridge programs for many years. First year learning communities have proven to be successful tools in retaining students and improving the overall college experience for students (Buck, 1995; Garcia, 1991; Gold, 1992). As opportunity programs seek ways to increase retention for first generation, underrepresented students, this study combines the successful communal relationships developed from the summer bridge program with the added academic and social support from multiple campus partners to create a comprehensive living learning community for opportunity program students in their first year.

Students from low-income families, first-generation college students, or who are underprepared are considered at risk and have more challenges transitioning into the university setting. Many times the increased transitional needs of this population are typically not met by the university (Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004; Terenzini et al., 1993).

Results from this action research study show the unintended consequences of a living learning environment (Jaffee, 2007), while simultaneously showing the positive academic and social attitudes developed by the students, leading to an overall enhanced first-year academic experience through increased self-efficacy in their own learning.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

*Due to the confidential nature of subjects in this document, the university and the people in this document are all pseudonyms.

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Problem Statement

Introduction

The first year of college represents an extremely difficult time for freshmen as they attempt to successfully transition into college. The first year is full of social, academic, and emotional stressors that can affect students' persistence through the first year and graduation. The first year is also important as it sets the foundation for academic success and persistence for future semesters; it is the year in which most students make the largest gains in critical thinking skills (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006).

Institutions of higher education find the first year to be very important administratively because of the low retention rate of first-year students. Freshman year, of all of the subsequent college years, is the time when most attrition occurs (Tinto, 1993). American four-year colleges and universities lose a quarter of their new students before they start their second year and attrition is even higher among low-income and historically underrepresented students (Reason et al., 2006).

Students from low-income families who are first-generation college students or who are underprepared are considered at risk and tend to have a more challenging time transitioning into the university setting. Many times, the increased transitional needs of this population are typically not met by the university (Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004; Terenzini et al., 1993). At-risk students have difficulty connecting to the new university community, which increases the likelihood of failing out or dropping out. For these reasons, colleges and universities have spent many years strategizing ways to promote social and academic integration into the college community to increase retention, academic performance, and student satisfaction for first-year students (Hotchkiss, Moore,

& Pitts, 2006; Jaffee, 2007; James, Bruch, & Jehangir, 2006; Tinto & Goodsell-Love,

1993). Much of the effort from colleges and universities, although valuable, fails to

integrate the academic and social experiences needed to create a powerful learning

environment through active and collaborative learning experiences (Astin, 1993; Kuh,

Kenzi, Shuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005).

Social and academic integration inside and outside of the classroom has been

linked to increased persistence (Tinto, 1998a). Research on college student development

shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is

the single best predictor of their learning and personal development (Kuh, 2001).

Universities have sought multiple approaches to developing educational support

programs to enhance student learning and help students transition to college, such as peer

mentoring programs (Colvin, & Ashman, 2010); summer bridge programs (Thayer,

2000); and first year seminar courses (Barton & Donahue, 2009). One other way in which

several institutions have successfully developed programs that involve active and

collaborative learning for first year students are through learning communities (Cross,

1998; Folger et al., 2004; Goodsell, 1993; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, &

Leonard, 2006; James et al., 1993; Kuh, 2001; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2002;

Tinto, 1998b; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Learning Communities

Tinto (1998a) describes learning communities as supportive settings that require

students to share the experiences of learning with others. In collaborative learning

experiences, students play a significant role in integrating course information with

personal experiences, which increases the desirability of student learning. Learning

2

communities have been designed with a variety of educational strategies that encourage students and teachers to work together actively and share the responsibilities for teaching and learning (Goodsell, 1993). Some of the creative strategies within learning communities are linked courses or course clustering, and residential components. As described by Kellogg (1999):

> Linked courses put together a cohort of students with two common courses. One course is typically content-based (science, math) and the other is an application course (writing, speech). The faculty of each course may teach independently or together and coordinate syllabi and assignments so that the classes complement each other. (p. 1)

Linking courses together ensures frequent and regular contacts with their peers, making it easier for them to study together (Kuh et al., 2005). This increased amount of time spent together help students form and build community. In addition, the linked courses provide opportunities for the teaching faculty member to demonstrate learning in and out of the classroom (Hotchkiss et al., 2006).

When institutions include a residential component within a learning community, it is considered a living learning community, in which students who are enrolled in the same courses live in the same residential hall. This technique helps create a community environment based on students' educational experiences, which is heightened by the social interactions experienced outside of the classroom. The living learning community creates an opportunity for students to become more actively involved with course materials in and outside of the classroom (Kuh et al., 2005).

The benefits of learning communities and peer involvement on freshman success are evident based on several studies (Folger et al., 2004; Goodsell, 1993; Hotchkiss et al., 2006, Tinto, 1997). Astin (1993) posits that cooperative learning can be used as an effort to capitalize on the power of the peer groups to enhance student learning. In addition, he found that any form of student involvement in the college experience has a beneficial value to learning and student development. Astin defines student involvement as the "physical and psychological time and energy the student invests in the educational process" (p. 3).

High levels of involvement have been demonstrated to be an important predictor of learning gain. Such sharing can occur in learning communities in which the same group of students are enrolled in two or more courses with the same intent and purpose, which can help students build a strong foundation for success (James et al., 2006), or small groups of students within a single class may be formed, such as a study group preparing for an exam. Moreover, evidence has shown the benefits of learning communities and their positive effects on retention rates and academic performances (Folger et al., 2004; Jaffee, 2007; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). In addition, students considered at risk, who have participated in a learning community have shown definite increases in overall adjustment to college, satisfactory academic progress, and persistence (Jaffee, 2007; James et al., 2006; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Tinto, 1998bs; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The needs of at risk college students make learning communities a viable strategy to engage them in building their academic confidence through the support of the faculty and their peers.

Students at Risk

  Underprepared college students. The term underprepared refers to students in need of remediation, arriving to college with some form of developmental need in reading, math, and writing (Tinto, 1998a). Underprepared students require additional academic assistance to aid them in building their skills to be successful in college, which has caused some debate about their fit for four-year colleges and universities (Tinto, 1998b). Many colleges and universities use standardized assessments to determine college readiness, which have been criticized for not being reliable indicators of student performance in college (Armstrong, 1999; Byrd & Macdonald, 2005). These scholars believe that attitude, self-esteem, and self-regulating behaviors play a greater role.

  As the number of underprepared students applying to attend college increases, so has the number of low-income students, and these increases brings concern of providing additional resources. Critics believe that the cost to assist underprepared students outweighs the benefit and recommend that these students' needs be met at community colleges (Haycock, 2006; Tinto, 1998b).

  Underrepresented students. Underrepresented students, racially and ethnically diverse students, or minority students face challenges accessing higher education, and once enrolled, face additional challenges persisting and graduating (Muraskin, Lee, Wilner, & Swail, 2004). Prior to arriving at college, many underrepresented students are faced with academic, social, and economic disparities. In a study by Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, and Suh (2004) of underrepresented high school students, it was noted that underrepresented students were not "tracked" or identified as college bound, whereby,

these students were not being prepared for college, mentored, or encouraged to attend college tours.

Once underrepresented students begin to consider college, they are faced with yet another challenge. Most universities use standardized test scores as admission criteria, which have been documented to be historically and culturally insensitive, misinterpreting their readiness for college (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005). The obstacles continue if students are attending predominately White campuses, as some ethnically diverse students reported experiencing racial discrimination, anxiety, and isolation (Allen, 1992; Carter, 2006; Turner 1994).

Although there has been an increase in underrepresented students attending college over the past 10 years, there continues to be a lag in comparison to their White counterparts persisting through graduation (Chen & DesJardins, 2010). In a recent study by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, researchers found that White, non-Hispanic students earned 70 percent of all degrees conferred in 1999-2000, while only 21 percent of all degrees were awarded to minority students.

The barriers faced by underrepresented students are many; one of which is the ability to afford to attend college. Several studies verify that African American and Hispanic students have a much higher financial unmet need than White students (Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Mortenson, 2011; Muraskin et al., 2004). Not having the ability to pay for college increases the likelihood that underrepresented students will not attend; further disenfranchising this population by limiting their opportunities to change their position in society (Bowen, 1997).

Low-income college students. Historically, students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds have had an upward battle when it comes to access, opportunity, and funding higher education. Often times low SES students are also educationally disadvantaged due to the resource poor communities and school systems from which they come, making it difficult for them to meet the admission requirements of colleges and universities (Muraskin et al., 2004; Walpole, 2003).

Another challenge faced by low SES students is the likelihood that they will receive less information and support to attend college from families, teachers, and counselors in comparison to their privileged peers. Due to the inferior academic preparation of low SES students, they tend to have limited college choices and limited financial aid opportunities above grant funding. Many low-income students work to financially assist their families and are not able to afford the expense of college or decrease their work hours to attend college (Muraskin et al., 2004). As with many underrepresented and first generation students, low SES students admitted into colleges or universities continue to be faced with financial, academic, and transitional needs that make retention and graduation difficult to achieve (Astin, 1993; Muraskin et al., 2004).

First generation college students. A growing population on college campuses is first generation students. These are students whose parents never attended college. As admirable as it is that these students are the first to attend college, it comes with significant innate challenges and obstacles, which typically reduces the likelihood of them completing college.

In 1995–96, 34% of students entering four-year institutions and 53% of students starting at two-year colleges were first-generation students (Choy, 2001). As this

population has continued to grow, university officials are beginning to track their retention progress and researchers are identifying several challenges faced by these students and potential strategies to assist them.

Similar to the low-income student, the likelihood of first generation college students attending or completing college diminishes because their parents did not attend college. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) state:

> Compared to their peers, first generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school. (p. 250)

First generation college students have also been described as having more difficulty than their peers, whose parents are college graduates, with transitioning to the college environment and connecting themselves to the university and other students. In addition to all of the typical transitional stressors of first year students, first generation students also struggle with significant cultural, social, and academic transitional issues (Folger et al., 2004; Rendon, 1992; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Tinto, 1998a).

Due to the obstacles faced by this population, Pascarella et al. (2004) continue to suggest that:

> First generation students are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of the first year, less likely to remain enrolled in a four-year institution or be on a

persistence track to a bachelor's degree after three years, and are less likely to

stay enrolled or attain a bachelor's degree after five years. (p. 250)

Recognizing the challenges faced by this population, one strategy that many

colleges and universities have invested in to assist at–risk students academically,

financially, socially, and emotionally is opportunity and summer bridge programs.

Similarly, learning communities have documented success with this population as well

(Dodge & Kendall, 2004; Jaffee, 2007; Tinto, 1998a).

Opportunity and Summer Bridge Programs

Opportunity programs were established in the late 1960s through federal policy to

address the need for equity and access to higher education for low-sincome,

underrepresented men and women. This federal policy recognized that students with low-

income faced significant barriers preventing them from accessing higher education, such

as the lack of financial means to pay for college and the lack of academic readiness to

compete in higher education (Mortenson, 2011).

The federal government began to develop programs to address the needs of low-

income, first generation students by developing financial assistance support such as

grants, work-study, and loans and academic support programs such as Upward Bound

programs. These initiatives quickly grew to include multiple programs under the federal

TRIO program designed to identify and provide services for individuals from

disadvantaged backgrounds. From this federal policy and increasing incidents of civil

unrest due to racial and economic injustices, several states began to develop their own

policies and programs to provide special assistance to young men and women from

economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (McElroy & Armesto, 1998; Mortenson, 2011).

An initiative that grew out of the development of opportunity programs to further prepare underprepared, underrepresented, low-income students for higher education was the summer bridge program (Buck, 1985; Giuliano & Sullivan, 2007; Gold 1992; Strayhorn, 2010). Summer bridge programs are a type of learning community, typically for at risk students who are low–income, underprepared, underrepresented, and/or first generation students. These highly structured summer programs have been used as alternative admission programs designed to provide an opportunity to build academic skills and gain access to higher education for at-risk students who are capable and motivated but who lack adequate preparation and/or financial means for college. Summer bridge programs have been found to increase the enrollment of minority student populations on college campuses, significantly increase retention and graduation rates, assist students in developing networking relationships, and promote community building (Fletcher, Newell, Newton, & Anderson-Rowland, 2001).

During summer-bridge programs, students receive assistance in developmental course work, academic course work, supplemental instruction, interpersonal skills, and leadership skill development. The structure of the program is designed to give underprepared students a head start on transitioning to college by exposing them to the campus culture, residential living, college level course work, and resources to help them succeed. Students have an opportunity to develop close mentoring relationships with their peers, the staff, campus faculty, and administrators, which will aid in their success upon entering in the fall semester (Fletcher et al., 2001).

10

Typically, at the end of the summer program, each student's academic, interpersonal, and cognitive learning skills are evaluated and used to determine matriculation into the university or denial of admission to the university. The students who successfully complete the summer program will participate in a culminating ceremony to celebrate their success and admission to the University. In the fall semester, the intensive, structured programs provided during the summer months are replaced with less structured academic and personal support provided by opportunity program staff to aid in their retention. This decreased level of support, although beneficial, leaves students vulnerable when they face the transitional challenges of being on a college campus without the daily, consistent guidance of their counselors and comfort of their peers from their previous summer living community environment.

Universities have committed to developing and supporting first year experience initiatives such as course clustering, peer mentoring programs, mentoring programs, first year seminars, and learning communities, which have proven successful (Barton & Donahue, 2009; Fletcher et al., 2001; Muraskin et al., 2004; Tinto, 1998b; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Although these programs have demonstrated success, there continues to be a need for innovative programs to assist underrepresented and underprepared students adjust and persist through their first year of college.

Significance of the Study

The first year experience of college is very challenging for first generation, underprepared, underrepresented college students due to transitional issues and financial and academic barriers. As universities continue to increase their tuition and decrease developmental remedial courses in an attempt to raise their academic standing, these

students will continue to need additional sources of support at the university level to ensure their persistence and academic success (Tinto, 1998b).

Although comparing at-risk students to regular admission students is like comparing apples and oranges, the large gap between these populations requires some attention. This study is important because the first-year retention rate for the past five years for students enrolled in the UO/AS program at Alexis University has been between 77% - 85%, which is 5 - 9% lower than the rate of regular admission students. The persistence of UO/AS students beyond their first year is substantially lower than regular admission students. The six-year graduation rate of UO/AS students is 43% as compared to 76% for regular admission students.

Some of the reasons students in the UO/AS program do not persist on this campus are their inability to maintain the university's policy of satisfactory academic progress, which includes maintaining a 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale, successfully completing 70% of attempted credits, and completion of developmental coursework by the third semester. Other factors affecting UO/AS students are their inability to meet the institutions' financial obligations, personal and family stressors, and their overall adjustment to the University.

The UO/AS program staff continuously develops multiple initiatives to address some of these concerns; however, I have identified a gap between the summer bridge program support and their adjustment in their first year. The summer bridge program is highly structured and regimented from the first day of the program through the end of the program, six weeks later. During the summer bridge program, tutors, peer counselors, professional counselors, and staff were available 24 hours a day to tell the students where

to be, how to act, and what time to go to bed. Upon the students arriving to campus on the first day of the fall semester, they are still seeking the same level of support and structure; however, there is no structure. Students are expected to utilize the academic, time management, and adjustment skills learned during the summer immediately upon arriving in September (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013).

During the academic year, freshmen are required to meet with their UO/AS counselor once per month and attend a few workshops; other than that, they are free to make (we hope) wise choices, based on all of the information provided to them over the intense six weeks of summer. The dramatic decrease in structure and support has a serious impact on the first semester of their freshman year. Although they have been warned and advised about study habits, time management, relationships, parties, alcohol, and drugs, many of them tend to fall victim to their new found independence and fail miserably, either academically or socially, which has a significant impact on the rest of their college experience.

I found overwhelming support in the research literature for the implementation of learning community programs to increase the retention of first generation students and to provide opportunities for first generation students to develop positive lasting academic and social experiences at the university level (Dodge & Kendall, 2004; Stassen, 2003; Tinto, 1998b). Learning communities provide students with the opportunity to actively involve themselves in their education and to learn together as connected learners (Tinto, 1998a). This is quite the opposite of the traditional teaching methods in which the burden of student learning is primarily the professor's responsibility. In collaborative learning experiences, the overall strategy for student success is to have students play a significant

role in integrating the course information with their personal experiences, which increases the desirability of student learning.

Astin (1993) found that almost any form of student involvement benefits learning and student development. Peer support was also a frequent indicator of success when developing models to support first-year student experiences. A frequently quoted theme through the research was Astin's theory that the single most powerful source of influence among college students is peer support.

Many times learning communities incorporate strategies using small groups of students working toward a common educational goal, such as study groups preparing for an exam or small groups providing feedback to each other on their assignments. Other strategies for learning communities consist of large groups of students registering for a select group of courses team taught by professors that include small group discussions of campus life experiences (Tinto, 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Collaborative learning strategies suggest that by encouraging students to share their experiences through classroom discussions, students will gain and create knowledge as an active social process (Bruffee, 1984). Some learning community programs incorporate campus wide activities and small group events to develop relationships among the participants.

Purpose of Study

During my first week as the Program Director of the Unlimited Opportunity/ Academic Success (UO/AS) program at Alexis University, I had the opportunity to observe exit interviews of the pre-freshman students eagerly awaiting their academic fate. As I sat there quietly, I watched student after student speak passionately of their six week summer bridge experience as "life changing," "an opportunity to gain over a hundred

14

new family members," "an opportunity that prepared them for college life," and "the chance to develop relationships with faculty and staff." As I sat and listened, I wished I could capture all of their feelings and put them in a bottle to ensure the continuation of those experiences to aid in a successful college experience. From that point, I began researching the challenges faced by first-year students and best practice solutions.

The purpose of this study was inspired by my experience during my first week as the Director of the Alexis University UO/AS program. I had the opportunity to listen to students comment about their summer bridge experience, and was overwhelmed with the consistent themes of a sense of community, support, and "family" which they attributed to their success over six weeks together. The students spoke of the high level of commitment from the summer bridge staff, faculty, and tutors who were dedicated to their success; they appreciated the lessons learned from living together and the friendships and bonds that were developed from this experience. Many students felt that if it were not for the structure and support provided by the program, they would not have been successful.

As the memories of my first exposure to the summer exit interviews remained in my mind, I learned of the purpose and the successful implementation of collaborative learning groups that had been the answer for many colleges and universities across the country (Jaffee, 2007; James et al., 2006; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Tinto, 1998a; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). I sought strategies to provide the academic and non-academic support needed to assist students transitioning to college, to become engaged in the college community, to persist through graduation, and to increase their grade point

averages, I learned that those were the essential goals of learning communities (Folger et al., 2004; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

The purpose of learning communities has been described as a way to socialize, integrate, and retain new college students, (Jaffee, 2007); to support at-risk freshman as they move from high school to college (Folger et al., 2004); and to share the curriculum and learn together (Tinto, 1997). The core value of learning communities is the "shared knowing," and the "shared knowledge" gained from their shared experiences (Tinto, 1998a). Through the design of learning communities, students will spend the majority of their time with someone in the learning community, either in an academic, residential, or social setting. As Astin (1993) and Tinto (1997) suggest, the biggest impact on a student's college experience comes from student involvement; the purposeful nature of the involvement of faculty and peers in a learning community increases the likelihood of students developing as college students and sharing in the knowledge gained from their college experience.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the impact of a first-year learning community for underprepared, underrepresented students completing a summer bridge program, and to explore my leadership development through the process. Although retention and persistence is not a part of this study, I will seek to determine if the academic and social support through this learning community has a positive impact on the first-year experience of the students, which has strong indications for retention. Based on the students and faculty perceptions of the impact of the learning community experience, in combination with the results of the students' first semester grades, this

study will serve as a resource for developing learning communities for opportunity program students.

As the director of an opportunity program, the Unlimited Opportunity/Academic Success program (UO/AS) at Alexis University, I am continually researching retention and graduation solutions for underprepared and underrepresented students. The UO/AS program is a comprehensive program designed to provide access to higher education as well as financial assistance and support services to students who otherwise might not have the opportunity to attend, or the support to persist and graduate from college.

UO/AS students have typically fit the description of being most likely to leave college before graduating. They have been described as low-income, first generation, historically underrepresented students who are not connected to their goals, the community of other learners, or the university community (Folger et al., 2004). In addition, intention, commitment, adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation are several other factors that affect the likelihood of students persisting through graduation (Tinto, 1993). To add to the challenge, the majority of the students participating in the UO/AS program enter the summer program with low levels of reading, writing, and math skills. However, their motivation and determination to succeed make up for many of the obstacles faced by these students. To this end, I have researched the factors affecting this population to develop a learning community that will aid in retaining at-risk students, such as those in the UO/AS opportunity program.

Research Questions

This action research study sought to answer the following questions about the UO/AS learning community and my leadership development:

1. In what ways has the residential, social, and academic components of the learning community impacted the first-year experience of UO/AS students?

2. In what ways has participating in the UO/AS learning community assisted students in adjusting to college during their first year?

3. In what ways has my leadership impacted the design of the learning community?

4. How has my leadership developed and changed through the development and implementation of a learning community for first-year opportunity program students?

Conclusion

More than ever, colleges and universities need to develop innovative pedagogical methods to address the transitional and academic needs of students, but more specifically, at-risk students. To assist students in adjusting to college, universities must provide an engaging curriculum, an inclusive environment, adequate financial assistance, and strong peer and administrative support (Carter 2006). Several researchers have provided pearls of wisdom, that when combined, have the potential to answer one of the mysteries in higher education: how to improve the overall adjustment experience of college students to ensure persistence and graduation. Tinto (2003) has researched and reported the importance of social and academic integration; Terenzini et al. (1993) have shared factors affecting persistence and outlined the key components for successful institutional environments; Astin (1993) has shared the value and power of peer influence, to name a few.

Researchers have documented the multidimensional approach to learning through learning communities results in students' success (Cross, 1998; Damminger, 2004; Gablenick, MacGregor, Mathews, & Smith, 1990; Muraskin et al., 2004; Strayhorn, 2010; Tinto, 1998a). Although several colleges and universities have successfully implemented learning community programs, I recognize that they have not been developed without challenges (Jaffee, 2007). As I prepared to develop and implement the learning community program for opportunity program students, I did so anticipating many rewarding moments, as well as prepared for several challenges.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

At-Risk Students in College: The Challenges and the Possibilities

In addressing the issue of persistence, the students most likely to leave college have been described as at risk: low-income, first generation, historically underrepresented students, and students who are not connected to their goals, to the community of other learners, or to the university community (Folger et al., 2004). In addition, intention, commitment, adjustment difficulty, incongruence, and isolation are several other factors that affect the likelihood of students persisting through graduation (Tinto, 1993).

Due to the unique needs of at-risk students, many learning community programs have been designed to assist with their needs (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Jaffee, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004). At-risk students have unique needs that are typically not met by traditional university support services. Traditional university support services are available to students as needed. At-risk students tend to need a more relational, intentional, and intrusive support. The services cannot merely exist; the university has to be willing to reach out to students to aid in their comfort in utilizing the support available. In addition, the university must be willing to identify and develop innovative services that may be unique to this population to invest in their success. At-risk students tend to fail or drop out when they cannot discover a meaningful connection between themselves and the university community (Folger et al., 2004). These students are described as needing assistance in developing relationships with other learners and with the university.

Researchers have compared the characteristics of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school to students considered at-risk of dropping out of college and found several similarities. Some of the factors are related to family background and school experiences, such as being in the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile, coming from a single parent family, having an older sibling drop out of high school, changing schools two or more times, averaging C grades or lower, repeating one or more grades by the eighth grade, and having parents who did not attend college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000). Due to their background, this population has increased obstacles, making it increasingly difficult for them to successfully graduate from high school. In addition, it decreases their odds of enrolling in college, and more specifically, persisting through graduation.

Nationally, in 2013, only 47%-58% of at-risk high school graduates enrolled in college, compared to 65% of high school graduates with no risk factors (National Student Clearinghouse, 2014). This low number has much to do with the risk factors, but also with the ability to make it through the five steps necessary to enroll in college. Those steps are (a) to aspire to a bachelor's degree early enough to take the necessary preparatory steps, (b) to prepare academically to a minimal level of qualification, (c) to take admissions examinations such as the SAT/ACT, (d) to apply to a four-year college, and (e) to gain acceptance and enroll (Choy et al., 2000). I would add a sixth, addressing the affects of personal finances on student persistence (Pascarella et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993).

Personal finances of students and their families have a clear effect on at-risk students' ability to attend college and to persist through graduation (Tinto, 1993).

Decreasing the financial burdens through financial aid for low-income students helps increase their probability of persisting through college to levels similar to higher income students who do not receive aid. Although financial aid is a major contributor, it does not decrease all barriers faced by at-risk students. Pascarella et al. (2004) state,

> The weight of evidence from researchers suggest that compared to their peers, first generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about post-secondary education, level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school. (p. 250)

At- risk students also have a more difficult transition from secondary school to college than their peers (Terenzini et al., 1996). Students may have a hard time separating from the familiarity of their local high school and peer groups and their home community and family. It may be difficult to adjust to the new environment, to a residence away from home, and to the university wide campus culture (Tinto, 1993).

Compared to students whose parents are college graduates, first generation students from families where neither parent attended college are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of the first year, whereas students with college educated parents are more likely to have higher rates of persistence and degree completion (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). Additional areas that impact the ability of at-risk students to get acclimated to college are the lack of cultural capital and social capital (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Cultural capital is the familiarity and comfort level one has in and around dominant environments. Social capital is relationships people have with others that are in position to produce opportunities, information or additional

resources that can prove beneficial. College educated parents are equipped with cultural and social capital, which provides an advantage over those first generation students. Generally, first generation students cannot rely on their parents for past connections, relationships, or experiences to help them make decisions or navigate the challenges and benefits related to college because it is an unfamiliar experience for them (Pascarella et al., 2004). Therefore, the development of peer social groups, supportive academic services, and mentoring opportunities for underrepresented students can provide a means to accessing social capital while at college (Smith, 2007).

Studies show that at-risk students, compared to their peers, tend to complete fewer credit hours, complete fewer arts and humanities courses, study less, participate in fewer honors programs, perceive faculty as unconcerned about students and teaching, and make smaller first-year gains on a standardized measure of reading comprehension (Ternzini et al., 1996). The development of programs, such as summer bridge and learning communities programs, which takes into consideration all of the challenging characteristics faced by at- risk students, has demonstrated progressive strides in making a positive impact on the success rate of those students.

Summer Bridge Programs

Academic preparation is a key factor of student success in college (Strayhorn, 2010). For underprepared students attempting to attend college without assistance in developing their academic skills, the outcome can be dismal (Giuliano & Sullivan, 2007). To that end, many colleges and universities have supported summer bridge programs on their campuses as a form of supportive academic programming to assist first generation and at-risk students with the transition from high school to college.

Summer Bridge programs which typically take place over six weeks during the summer after high school graduation and before their first semester at college, are designed to provide a strong curricular component which aids in developing students' basic skills and improving academic performance in preparation of their college enrollment (Muraskin et al., 2004; Strayhorn, 2010).

The summer bridge experience also provides underprepared students with necessary skills to be successful in college, such as navigating the campus environment, learning how to communicate with faculty and campus staff, and utilizing the campus resources (Buck, 1985). Through workshops and small and large group sessions, students also learn test taking, time management, and study techniques, as well as, leadership and critical thinking skills.

Programs at Georgia State University (Gold, 1992); University of California-San Diego (Buck, 1985); and California State University (Garcia, 1991) have evaluated the impact of their summer bridge programs, and have found them to have had a positive impact on student retention, as well as, noted a marked increase in student involvement in campus activities during the academic year (Muraskin et al., 2004; Walpole et al., 2008).

Many summer bridge programs have a residential component, which assists students with developing friendships and learning how to live among others on a campus environment prior to their first semester (Kuh et al., 2005). Upon successfully completing a six-week summer bridge program, the students continue to receive support services as they matriculate into the fall semester, and are assigned a counselor to provide systematic and comprehensive academic support services, such as assessment and remediation, mentoring, tutorial services, intrusive advising, and monitoring of student progress,

which helps students adjust to college, persist through college, and successfully merge into the larger community of university learners (Ackermann, 1990; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Higher Education Living/Learning Communities

The implementation of collaborative learning groups or Freshman Learning Communities (FLC) has been the answer for many colleges and universities to provide the academic and non-academic support needed to assist students transitioning to college, becoming engaged in the college community, persisting through graduation, and increasing their grade point averages. The purpose of learning communities has been described as a way to socialize, integrate, and retain new college students (Jaffee, 2007); to support at-risk freshmen as they move from high school to college (Folger et al., 2004); and to share the curriculum and learn together (Tinto, 1997).

Many schools have identified successful intervention strategies through the implementation of freshman learning communities. Folger et al. (2004) conducted a study of 53 first generation freshmen who met weekly as a group, which was co-facilitated by Freshmen Empowerment Program (FEP) staff members and students for six weeks. During these meetings they discussed academics, college resources, adjustment, relationships, and other issues of concern to the students. Students used each other as support systems and participated in social activities outside of the group meetings. Facilitators noticed that the group members became more engaged and began holding each other responsible academically.

Participation in a collaborative learning group is one method that enables students to develop small supportive communities of peers, which helps bond them to the broader

social communities of the college while also engaging them more fully in the academic life of the institution (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). These communities of peers provide support for students and encourage their continued attendance and class participation, in and out of the classroom.

Studies have shown that when issues, topics, debates, and concepts are discussed in class and reinforced outside of class, there is a greater likelihood that students will develop a deeper understanding of the content and material (Jaffee, 2007). When students are actively engaged, they tend to be more successful because they are able to develop a better understanding of the academic content and more meaningful relationships with students and faculty. In addition, students who share their academic and social experiences together are more likely to persist and have higher overall satisfaction with their college experience (Tinto, 1998a).

There is a strong belief among researchers that learning communities established in the first year can be valuable because they provide the social support, the development of critical thinking skills, and the ability to get students actively involved in their education, which greatly impacts the outcome of the students' remaining years (James et al., 2006). In addition, involving students in a small community early in their academic career will improve students' performance and could potentially increase retention due to enhanced development of students' self confidence and their social integration in the college community (Hotchkiss et al., 2006). Through learning communities, students learn more as they spend time together outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1998a). An intended consequence of learning communities is the formation of bonds of friendship,

networks, cohesiveness, and unity among the cohort of students (Jaffee 2007; Tinto, 1997).

Many researchers have conducted studies on learning communities for at-risk and/ or first-generation students, and despite the varying designs of the programs, the research consistently showed the underlying benefits for the students and the schools and were all deemed as a successful type of persistence intervention (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Jaffee, 2007; James et al., 2006; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Each program emphasized the impact of peer involvement and collaborative relationships with faculty.

Research shows that there are several different models of learning communities (Fraizer & Eighmy, 2012; Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 2003,). Students can voluntarily enroll together in several courses that are tied together by a unifying theme specifically for first-year freshmen students on campus (Tinto, 1997), or they can participate in programs that provide on-line learning communities for students in specific academic majors (DiRamio & Wolverton, 2006).

However learning communities are designed, the primary aim of collaborative learning is to get students actively involved in the learning process. Although there are several types of learning communities structured to fit the needs of the institution, James et al. (2006) suggest that five key elements should be incorporated to ensure an effective program: (a) establish clear expectations for being part of a learning community, (b) create opportunities for process-based learning, (c) develop opportunities for students to be teachers, (d) create a challenging multicultural curriculum with academic footholds and scaffolding, and (e) give attention to both affective and cognitive ways of knowing. Tinto (1998a) believes to have effective programming, the planning must be institution

wide, and institutions should consider a complete reorganization of the first-year experience of college students directed at practices designed specifically for persistence as well as the reorganization of faculty communities to support students' needs.

Many institutions have FLC programs with similar goals but various methods of implementing the programs. The Freshman Empowerment Program (FEP) at Central Michigan University was designed to support at-risk freshmen as they move from high school to college (Folger et al., 2004). The purpose of the program was to develop these students as active engaged thinkers by providing them with the necessary skills to understand the need to be self directed and become full participants in the academic community while maintaining a strong connection to family and home. While Georgia State University has a Freshman Learning Community (FLC) and Seattle Central Community College has a Coordinated Studies Program (CSP), both programs assist college freshmen in developing a small community of peers who share common interests (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Tinto, 1997). In addition, students enrolled in both of these programs took the same courses during their first semester and participated in extracurricular activities as a group. The programs developed a community of peers where topics such as the college environment, communication, and leadership were discussed.

Using students to assist as co-facilitators is another beneficial method in collaborative learning programs. The Freshman Interest Group (FIG) at the University of Washington conducts group meetings facilitated by upper class peer advisors to discuss class subjects, providing each student with a small community of peers to help with the transition to college (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

At Georgia State University, first semester freshman students who voluntarily elected to participate in the Freshmen Learning Community (FLC) were placed in groups of a maximum of 25 students. The FLC participants were enrolled in the same five courses with FLC students and non-FLC students (Hotchkiss et al., 2006). Two of the courses were designed exclusively for FLC members: New Student Orientation and English Composition classes. The researchers found a disadvantage to the program in that the new student orientation course required by FLC members only counted toward the students' grade point average but not toward the course hours needed for graduation, furthermore, that course was not required for non-FLC members. Professors of the FLC classes collaborated and discussed how students' learning styles in each class can complement and build on their learning in each of their other classes. The empirical model used in this study evaluated the impact of FLC participation on academic performance and retention and also evaluated the impact on students based on race. The study concluded that the type of students who volunteered to participate in FLC were more likely to do worse than average students, and that belonging to an FLC raised students grade point average from three quarters to one full letter grade for Black students, but did not have a significant impact on White students.

A qualitative and quantitative study of University of Washington's freshmen interest group (FIG) was conducted to determine whether and how collaborative learning programs enhance student achievement (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The FIG members participated in a one credit FIG group meeting facilitated by an upper class peer advisor, similar to co-facilitation of the FEP study by Folger et al. (2004). In the meetings they discussed issues of the classroom and college related topics. Through group

discussion students were able to help each other with the transition to college and share their classroom experiences with a consistent set of peers.

As with the Seattle Central Community College program, Tinto (1997) noted that the program helped to combine social and academic elements of the college experience, which may not have otherwise been experienced by freshman students. FIG students saw each other as more supportive, the campus climate as more hospitable, and themselves as more involved in the life of the university than did non-FIG members. This program did not alter the curriculum or faculty teaching methods (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The results of participants in the FIG program indicated that they had a persistence rate of 99.2 % and earned higher grade point averages than that of students not enrolled in the program. This was true even after controlling for self-selection issues. FIG proved to be a significant independent predictor of performance and persistence.

A longitudinal study focused on student outcomes and how students are affected by college environments, specifically, through three categories, academic development, personal development, and satisfaction (Astin, 1993). In this study, 25,000 freshman students participated, indicating that "the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group" (p. 4). Student to student interaction had its strongest positive effects on leadership development, overall academic development, and self-reported growth in problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness.

Moreover, another study found student relationships to be significant. A study of 18 four-year colleges and universities in 15 states across the country included 3,331 first-year freshman students who were selected randomly to participate in the National Study

of Student Learning (NSSL), a longitudinal study of college student experiences and outcomes (Pascarella et al., 2004). This study showed, among many other factors, that although many first generation students may not be involved in extracurricular activities or non-class events, these students gained significantly stronger positive benefits from these involvements than other students. Extracurricular activities had positive effects on critical thinking, degree plans, and goals for academic success for first-generation students. The study showed the importance of first generation student engagement with the institution's social and peer network. It also supported the theory that the social capital gained through extracurricular and peer involvement during college may be a particularly useful way for first generation students to acquire the additional cultural capital that helps them succeed academically and benefit cognitively (Pascarella et al., 2004).

The learning community programs, although cited as having many positive outcomes, also have several challenges. To develop a critical framework for his experiences and interpretations of his observation of an FLC, Jaffee (2007) wrote of a few unintended consequences of the FLC, which included unruly student behavior, student resistance to learning, and student faculty conflict. He also mentioned that the sole purpose of developing a homogeneous atmosphere and building relationships among peers was to promote the community affect; however, he reported learning communities have the potential to have an adverse effect because of the amount of time the students spend together. He experienced an environment of excessive socializing, misconduct, disruptive behavior, and the development of cliques. He stated that the most significant intended consequence of FLCs is the formation of a peer cohort.

Challenges of Learning Communities

Although there are many studies on the positive outcomes of learning communities, there has been far less literature on the challenges of learning communities. Jaffee (2007) has been a leader in documenting the negative consequences of freshman learning communities.

Jaffee (2007) explains the theory of homophily to be, "people with similar traits, attributes, and demographic characteristics will be more likely to associate with one another" (p. 8). He asserts that the very homophilious attributes that create the possibility of a positive experience also create negative attributes in a learning community.

Jaffee (2007) also suggests that the amount of time students spend together creates an environment for the groupthink (Janis, 1982) phenomenon, whereas students develop mutually reinforcing views and perspectives. The symptoms of groupthink are evident in freshman learning communities when a majority of the students in a group believe that their collective point of view is more valid than any other. If the group's points of view do not align with the professor's perspective, it can create a challenging relationship between student and professor. Another limit to the effectiveness of learning communities is that some students do not like learning with others and some faculty have difficulty collaborating with other faculty members (Tinto, 2003).

Another unintended consequence cited by Jaffee (2007) and James et al. (2006) is the heightened sense of agitation and arguing professors experience among the learning community participants. The authors posited that due to the length of time spent together, student behaviors might resemble high school more than college, although being a part of

the group tended to keep the learning community students connected to the group when it appeared that they were losing interest.

Characteristics of Learning Communities

Peer influences. Peer influence was a common denominator in several articles on learning communities. As suggested throughout the literature, the strongest single source of influence on the development of the student is the students' peer group (Astin, 1993). Choy et al. (2000) acknowledged peer influence during high school years in that the strongest predictor in college enrollment was high school students having friends with college plans. Choy et al. continued that if most or all of their friends had college plans, the students were four times more likely to enroll in college.

The significance of peer influence continues during students' college experiences, which is the integral part of the learning community. The ability to meet other students in the same classes allows students to feel comfortable in those classes and enables them to build a network of peers. This network can function as both an academic and social support system by providing study partners, sources of class notes, and help with homework and class assignments. Through peer support, students begin to hold each other accountable, notice absences more, and provide a more supportive environment (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

Forming friendships and bonding. Through learning communities, students learn more as they spend time together outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1998a). An intended consequence of learning communities is the formation of bonds of friendship, networks, cohesiveness, and unity among the cohort of students (Jaffee 2007; Tinto, 1997). A quantitative and qualitative study conducted by Tinto (1997) of Seattle Central

Community College attempted to address the student classroom experiences through the development of the Coordinated Studies Program (CSP). His study sought to determine the affects of learning communities and collaborative learning strategies on student learning and persistence. The results of the study was that participation in collaborative or shared learning groups enable students to develop a network of support, a small supportive community of peers that help bond students to the broader social communities of the college while also engaging them more fully in the academic life of the institution, (Tinto, 1997). He found that CSP supported students and encouraged their continued attendance and class participation both in and outside the classroom through study groups and informal meetings. Further, the collaborative learning settings assisted students in connecting academics with their social life.

Supportive Environments

Many studies have been conducted to address the issue of persistence, such as the Foundations of Excellence in the First Year Project (Reason et al., 2006), a two-year national research and development effort to increase understanding of the various, connected factors that influence academic success and persistence among first-year college students. This study of 6,700 first year students and 5,000 faculty on 30 four-year campuses nationwide focused on academic competence as it relates to student engagement. The study was a cross-sectional, *ex post facto* survey design (Reason et al., 2006). The study showed that the most significant predictors in the model were the students' responses to the need for supportive environments in which faculty and staff provided the academic and non-academic support they needed (Reason et al., 2006).

An important factor in student persistence is the social and academic involvement of students with other students and faculty on college campuses (Kuh et al., 2005). Students in the Visions of the Future learning community found that their participation in the learning community program provided them several supportive environments. The program gave some students an opportunity to know students, establish friendships, collaborate with faculty and peers academically, and create relationships with professors and staff that cared about their learning and success (Damminger, 2004).

Student to Student/Student to Faculty Relationships

The lack of student to student and student to faculty contact is a major cause of student's voluntarily withdrawing from school (Tinto, 1993). The amount of out of classroom contact students have with their professors has been described as an important element in student persistence (Tinto, 1993). According to Rendon (1992) as cited in Terenzini et al. (1996), it is important for faculty and staff members to actively engage with first-generation students and assist with changing policies and practices to assist with the academic and social integration of students in the institution to ensure their academic success.

From this, we can conclude that one way to address persistence is through the implementation of programming that provides a supportive environment while integrating students academically and socially. Although the sophomore year is a significant year of student attrition (Tinto, 1997), most students tend to leave college by the end of their first year (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004), which is why early involvement is crucial. The greatest impact on persistence is student involvement; therefore, students should be immersed in social and academic programming within the

first 10 weeks of school when the transition to college is still very fresh (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 1998b).

Participation in a collaborative learning group is one method that enables students to develop small supportive communities of peers, which helps bond them to the broader social communities of the college while also engaging them more fully in the academic life of the institution (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). These communities of peers provide support for students and encourage their continued attendance and class participation, in and out of the classroom.

Group Meetings Within Learning Communities

Folger et al. (2004) conducted a study of 53 first-generation freshmen who met weekly as a group, which was co-facilitated by Freshman Empowerment Program (FEP) staff members and students for six weeks. During these meetings they discussed academics, college resources, adjustment, relationships, and other issues of concern to the students. Students used each other as support systems and participated in social activities outside of the group meetings. Facilitators noticed that the group members became more engaged and began holding each other responsible academically.

Residential Experiences

Research shows that environmental factors also have a significant impact on students' college experience (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 2005). Students who live on campus are reportedly retained at higher rates because of the increased opportunity to meet students and get involved in campus life (Astin, 1984). On campus housing is convenient for students because it is central to the campus buildings, on campus employment, and resources, the rooms are maintained by university personnel, and is

staffed with Residential Advisors (RAs). RAs are upper class students living in residential halls who are responsible for encouraging student participation in university activities, and who are trained to provide conflict resolution, academic, cultural, and transition programming to create a successful living-learning environment. Living together in residential halls aids in building bonds and community building for students (Kuh et al., 2005).

Classroom Engagement

Studies have shown that when issues, topics, debates, and concepts are discussed in class and reinforced outside of class, there is a greater likelihood that students will develop a deeper understanding of the content and material (Jaffee, 2007). When students are actively engaged, they tend to be more successful because they are able to develop a better understanding of the academic content and more meaningful relationships with students and faculty. In addition, students who share their academic and social experiences together are more likely to persist and have higher overall satisfaction with their college experience (Tinto, 1998b).

Such sharing occurs in learning communities in which the same groups of students are enrolled in two or more courses to help students build a strong foundation for success (James et al., 2006), or small groups of students are formed within a single class for small group projects or to prepare for an exam. Sharing that occurs in learning communities have shown their positive effects on retention rates and academic performances (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Jaffee, 2007; James et al., 2006; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

Collaboration Between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs

A commitment by the institutions to design programs from both the academic and student services departments addressing persistence is also integral to the success of college students. Many institutions have not gained full support from the academic departments to create effective programming. Many times the responsibility for retaining students is left to the student affairs division through the development of study groups, tutoring, clubs, and activities. However, the academic experiences of students are equally or more important to the retention of students than the social experiences (Tinto, 1998a).

As learning communities have grown in popularity due to the positive academic and retention outcomes, more collaborative efforts have been developed between student affairs and academic affairs. Organizers of learning communities work with residential housing staff to coordinate the living learning component, faculty are seeking other interested faculty to co-teach, and the university administrators are finding funds to support the extra-curricular activities.

Collaboration between student affairs and faculty is vital for the success of learning communities. The research indicates that persistence should be an important goal supported by all departments of the institution and developing opportunities to improve persistence must be considered one of the institutional goals.

Conclusion

The research reinforces the idea that student involvement and relationships are key to a successful first year. Astin (1993) showed through his research that almost any form of student involvement benefits learning and student development. Peer support was also a frequent indicator of success when developing models to support first-year student

experiences. A frequent theme through the research was Astin's theory that the single most powerful source of influence among college students is peer support. In addition, Tinto (1993) stated that the amount of out of classroom contact students have with their professors has been described as an important element in student persistence. These findings were the basis in which I developed the learning community to assist students of the UO/AS program.

In developing the UO/AS learning community, I sought support from the administration and the academic side of the institution. It was my responsibility to communicate the importance of university support and the benefits of embracing the UO/AS learning community to gain the assistance of key departments and administrators in formally structuring a first year learning community and recognizing the need to place more support and emphasis on intentional programming, pedagogy, and the delivery of instruction for opportunity program students (Astin, 1993).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Colleges and universities have struggled to meet the needs of first-year students and more specifically, the needs of the increased number of first-year students attending college with limited academic skills (Tinto, 1998a). Learning communities at many colleges and universities have become a mechanism to combat the high attrition rates of first-year students by enhancing academic and personal development experiences, building a supportive community network of peers and faculty, and developing purposeful social and academic programs. Scholars have found that supportive programs for at-risk students, such as learning communities, have demonstrated student success (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; James et al., 2006; Tinto, 1998a; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

Learning communities are based on research that identifies the factors contributing to student learning and academic success (Tinto, 1998a). One key factor that continues to resonate in the research is that the likelihood of student persistence and learning is associated with the level of student involvement in the social and academic life of an institution (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1998a). It has been cited that providing opportunities to integrate in class and out of class room experiences aid in the development of an authentic learning experience for students (Chickering, 1974).

This action research study sought to determine if opportunity program students who participated in a year-long learning community would experience an enhanced first-year experience, such as a sense of community through living in the same residence hall and participating in classes with their learning community peers; increased level of

engagement in activities and in the classroom; and greater faculty and peer interactions (Inkelas et al., 2006; Shapiro & Levin, 1999, Tinto & Goodsell, 1993; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Through this study I sought to determine whether the shared knowledge gained from the residential, academic, and social components experienced by the students, and whether the shared knowing gained through the intimate interactions with peers and faculty as a result of the learning community assists students (Tinto, 1998b). My goal in this action research project was to determine in what ways has the residential, social, and academic components of the learning community impacted the first-year experience of UO/AS students, to determine if as a result of participating in the UO/AS learning community, students felt more engaged and informed on campus during their first year, to determine in what ways my leadership impacted the design of the learning community, and to evaluate how my leadership developed and changed through the development and implementation of this learning community.

Research Questions

This action research study sought to answer the following questions about the UO/AS learning community and my leadership development:

1. In what ways has the residential, social, and academic components of the learning community impacted the first-year experience of UO/AS students?

2. In what ways has participating in the UO/AS learning community assisted students in adjusting to college during their first year?

3. In what ways has my leadership impacted the design of the learning community?

4. How has my leadership developed and changed through the development and implementation of a learning community for first-year opportunity program students?

Action Research Design

In establishing a learning community for students in the Unlimited Opportunity/Academic Success program, I followed an action research design. The action research process is appropriate for this study because it provides the investigator an opportunity to improve a practice through cycles of planning, implementing an action, observing and evaluating the findings, and reflecting on the process and outcome to determine the next phase of action (Glesne, 2006).

Action research is described as "a tool for practitioners or administrators who want their practice to be more effective and is used to reflect on how effective the person is and how he or she might improve" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 221). As the program director of the UO/AS program, I have the unique role of being a participant researcher (Hinchey, 2008). I am directly connected to the program and the success of the research is a personal and professional goal.

This five-cycle study took place over a 10-month period. Data collection began in the spring of 2009. The assessment of the learning community occurred during the 2010 and 2011 academic semesters. Cycle One was the planning cycle for the learning community, which began in the spring of 2009. Cycle Two was the recruitment phase of students during the summer of 2009. Cycle Three, fall of 2009, included the implementation of the first semester of the learning community and collecting data. Cycle Four included conducting analysis of the data on the residential, academic, and social

components of the learning community. Cycle Five included the assessment of my leadership development through the development and implementation of the learning community.

Through action research, I was able to observe, implement, evaluate, and reflect by systematically analyzing the results through a cyclical process. This process allowed me to determine whether the learning community was perceived by UO/AS students and the faculty of the linked courses as an effective tool to improve the first-year experiences, and if so, why it was effective, and if not, determine the areas in need of revision, and create a new action to improve the next cycle (Hinchey, 2008).

Within the action research framework, I used qualitative and quantitative research methods for data collection for this study. This method was used to gain a true understanding of the impact of the learning community from the perspectives of those involved and to aid in the development and subsequent changes to the community to be an effective method of retention. My philosophy for developing this learning community relates to Glesne's (2006) claims that action research should reflect the needs of the environment with the sole purpose of creating change to address student success.

As a participant observer I took part in the learning community experience by sitting in the classroom to observe the student-to-student and student-to-teacher dynamics; met with students several times a month, individually and collectively; met with the faculty individually and collectively; visited the students and conducted programs in the residential halls; and interacted with the students and faculty during social events. The multiple opportunities to engage students and faculty at various levels allowed me to get to know them and build trusting relationships, which provided me with

opportunities to frequently observe and document my interactions with them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Collection Strategies

      Qualitative data. For my study, I found the qualitative research approach provided for several strategies that share similar characteristics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), such as interviewing, photographing, observing, collecting artifacts, and journaling. I used interviews and focus groups by meeting with the participants to gain an understanding of how they felt, their perceptions, expectations, and thoughts on their learning community experience (Glense, 2006). The qualitative data approach was selected as one of my methods for collecting data because the information obtained from researching the learning community was not numbers driven, but rich in people, places, and conversations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As I developed this learning community, I monitored my leadership development and the impact my leadership had on the learning community through journal writing.

      I gathered qualitative data by immersing myself in the learning community in multiple ways: as a participant observer sitting in the back of the class and as a group facilitator. I conducted student and faculty interviews, surveys, and focus groups to develop and monitor the impact of the learning community on the students.

      Pictures. I took pictures of events; of student-to-student, and student-to-professor interactions; and of classroom and group setting environments. These pictures served as a way to document and manage data, and will remind me and the study participants of the learning community experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I took pictures of the students

and faculty in the classroom, the residence hall, and at their community service events, which helped provide a descriptive, subjective form of data (Bogdan &Biklen, 2007).

Artifacts. The artifacts that I collected served as a mechanism to validate my observations (Glesne, 2006). Some of the artifacts collected as documentary evidence for my research were course syllabi from both the writing course and the literature course; flyers, agendas, and sign-in sheets from the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings, and brochures from the end of the semester trip to New York.

Journal entries. Throughout this research project, I kept notes of my thoughts and feelings to recognize and monitor my own subjectivity throughout the research process (Glesne, 2006). These notes were written in a journal, on calendars, in notebooks, or on small pieces of paper as I reflected on my experience developing the learning community. I maintained a journal to capture and document my leadership journey through the development of the learning community. Journaling assisted me with reconnaissance: taking the time to reflect on my beliefs, and purpose through self-reflection, description, and explanation (Mills, 2005).

As I look through my journal entries, I appreciate the opportunity of this technique to aid me in being open and honest about my experiences during my research. Subjectivity was difficult to maintain because of my dual role as S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. facilitator and researcher. There were times I had to restrain myself from intervening in situations because I needed to allow the interactions to play out without my involvement so that I did not shape the results of the situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Quantitative data. For the quantitative portion of my research, I collected data from Banner, Alexis University's student database system, to document grades, and course selections, and I surveyed study participants (Appendix A) to gather a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time and to assist me in finding emerging themes of attitudes, perceptions, characteristics, learning, or behavior (Creswell, 2003). This survey was cross-sectional, as I collected the information at one point in time (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

Coding. Upon completion of the interviews, I typed the transcripts, read over all of the field notes and interviews, and began developing emerging themes from reoccurring instances. I then created a matrix to assist in organizing the data and categorizing the information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). From this I found several themes to be overwhelmingly present in my data: classroom engagement of students, student-to-student relationships in class and out of class, and instructor /student relationships. For the purpose of triangulation, I reviewed all data: interviews, artifacts, and observations to determine the emerging themes. I utilized color markers and color-coded matrices to assist with determining the themes that emerged from the data. This coding mechanism was done to ensure validity and to utilize as many sources as possible to create an understanding of the data. As Glesne (2006) notes, the richer the data, the more believable the findings; I attempted to provide multiple sources of data to ensure a wealth of information to support my findings.

Context

This research study was conducted at Alexis University, a medium-sized public university. The students in the study were all members of the Unlimited Opportunity and the Academic Success programs (UO/AS), two of Alexis University's special admission programs. They are both alternative admission programs designed to provide access to higher education for underrepresented and underprepared students who are capable and motivated, but lack adequate preparation for college study.

The UO program has a financial aid component to assist students who are also economically disadvantaged as well as educationally disadvantaged. Helping students succeed and graduate, UO supports a wide array of campus-based outreach and support services at Alexis. The UO program was established as a response to the need for equity and access to higher education for underrepresented men and women in the 1960s. This state funded opportunity program provides financial assistance and intrusive personal, academic, and career counseling to students of the program. The UO program is available to qualified residents of this state and is available at 41 other colleges and universities across the state for those residents who are capable and motivated, but lack adequate preparation for college study. Helping students succeed and graduate, the UO program supports a wide array of campus-based outreach and support services at Alexis University.

Alexis University has two separate UO programs: one on the residential campus, and one on the commuter campus. Although the two programs collaborate on some events and activities, each program has its own program director, staff, budget, and

procedural operations. This action research project focuses on the UO program at the residential campus.

The UO program conditionally admits students through an alternative admissions process who otherwise might be shut out of a college education because of their lack of funds and limited academic preparation. In addition to being state residents who meet certain academic and financial requirements specified by the Alexis University Admissions Office and the state's Educational Commission office, UO applicants must demonstrate motivation, determination, and the potential to succeed at the university level during an admission interview, and, if selected, successfully participate in and complete the summer bridge program.

Upon successful completion of the summer bridge program, UO students are officially admitted to Alexis University and sign a contract of participation. Students receive financial assistance through the state UO grant, ranging from $575 for commuter students to $700 for residential students, and the Alexis UO scholarship of $1,000 per semester. The UO state grant and the Alexis UO scholarship are renewable annually, based upon continued eligibility.

Throughout their undergraduate academic career at Alexis, UO students are assigned an UO/AS counselor, and also receive support services such as counseling, tutoring, and developmental course work. UO students who pursue their graduate degree at Alexis are able to receive a financial award through the UO graduate grant.

The AS program is an Alexis University special admissions program designed for highly motivated students who do not meet Alexis University's regular admission criteria. To be considered for the AS program, students must submit the standard Alexis

University admissions application with supporting documentation. Although there are no financial eligibility criteria for the AS program, students are encouraged to complete the Free Application to Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Admission officers review the admission information, identify potential candidates, and conduct student interviews with UO/AS counselors to determine admittance. Both AS and UO students are conditionally admitted to Alexis University and must participate in, and successfully complete the summer bridge program to be offered full admission to Alexis to matriculate in the fall semester.

Upon successful completion of the summer bridge program, AS students sign a contract of participation, are assigned an UO/AS counselor and receive academic and support services throughout their academic career at Alexis. AS students do not receive any additional financial aid support other than what they are eligible for through federal and state funding.

UO/AS students at Alexis University have SAT scores that disqualify them from regular admission to the University. Whereas the average SAT scores for regular admission students total 1,170 (Reading/Math), UO/AS students' average scores are 850. Alexis University is a predominately White institution, with a minority enrollment of 22.6%; of which approximately 10% are admitted through the UO/AS program. The 2006 six-year graduation rate for White students is 75.6%, whereas the graduation rate for African American students is 52.3% and 52.7% for Latino students. The first-year fall-to-fall retention rates for UO/AS students in comparison to regular admission students over the past five years are significantly lower as well, between a 5%-9.9% gap. The substantial gap in SAT scores, as well as campus racial demographics, and

socioeconomic status play a significant role in the retention and graduation rate at Alexis University.

In 2010, the university president commented on the impact race, socioeconomic status, financial aid, and SAT scores of UO/AS Black and Hispanic students compared to regular admission White students have on the graduation gap at our institution:

a. A significant gap in SAT scores of Black and Hispanic students at Alexis in comparison to White students is in part due to the fact that from 75 to 80% of Black and Hispanic students at Alexis are in the UO/AS programs, and the mean SAT for UO/AS is almost 300 points lower than the mean SAT for regularly admitted students.

b. Moreover, regularly admitted Black and Hispanic students, on average, have lower SAT scores than do regularly admitted White students, a reflection of the fact that White students in general come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than do Black and Hispanic students.

c. Because so many Black and Hispanic students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, their financial base is weaker, and they are more inclined to drop out for financial reasons (thereby negatively affecting retention and graduation rates).

d. In order to maintain federal financial aid, students must maintain "satisfactory academic progress." Roughly 600 students each year are denied a continuation of financial aid because they are not showing "satisfactory academic progress." About 80% successfully appeal, and have their financial aid restored, but it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the students

initially denied aid are from lower socioeconomic groups and are disproportionately Black or Hispanic.

e. Anecdotally we have learned that a number of Black and Hispanic students are uncomfortable with the fact that there is often "no one like me" in their classes. (Preliminary Report to the BOT Student Affairs Committee on the "Graduation Gap," Nov. 3, 2010)

Among many conclusions, he posited that the graduation gap at Alexis is not so much a function of race as it is a function of different socioeconomic levels (and SAT scores) between Black and Hispanic students on the one hand, and White students on the other.

These barriers faced by UO/AS and minority students at Alexis University are starting to be discussed from the Board of Trustees and the University Administration. It is unknown if any plausible structural, policy, or resource changes will be provided by the university to address these issues; however, the development of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. was one way the UO/AS office could contribute to creating a supportive environment that encourages UO/AS students to excel despite the odds against them.

As mentioned earlier, every year, Alexis University conditionally admits approximately 140 UO/AS pre-freshmen. Each participant is required to attend a six-week summer bridge program, which provides an opportunity for the students to get a head start on transitioning from high school to college by participating in campus activities, leadership seminars, living in residence halls, enrolling in remedial and college level classes, and gaining information about the services and resources available to them to succeed. The students have an opportunity to develop close, bonding relationships with

their peers, the UO staff, campus faculty and staff, which aids in their success upon entering in the fall semester. Upon completion of the summer program, each student's summer experience and academic progress is evaluated by the UO/AS staff to determine the likelihood of success as an Alexis University student. Successful students are granted admission in the fall semester and remain enrolled in the UO/AS program until graduation.

During the academic year, the UO/AS office provides services to approximately 400+ UO/AS students. The office of UO/AS is structured with all full-time staff: the Program Director, responsible for the overall leadership and supervision of the program; four Assistant Director/ Counselors, responsible for the day to day outreach, counseling and support of the UO/AS students; one Assistant Director of Mentoring and Academic Enrichment responsible for the mentoring program and the tutoring and academic coaching program for UO/AS students; and two Administrative Assistants, responsible for the office and budget management, and scheduling of activities and appointments for the office.

Alexis University currently has eight learning community programs all designed to assist students with the transition to college. Seven of the learning communities are based on majors: Engineering, Communications, Biological Sciences, Art, Computer Science, History, and Math. The seventh learning community is designed for students with special needs. Throughout my research I communicated with several of the coordinators of the existing learning community programs on campus to aid in the development of the UO/AS learning community.

Participants of the Study

For the UO/AS learning community research project, 143 UO/AS students were provided the opportunity to participate, of which 45 students applied, and 17 students were admitted during the fall 2009 semester. The maximum amount of students I could accept was 20 due to the class and designated residence hall location. The criteria for the selection of the 17 students was based on the eligibility of students to enroll in the College Writing course, based on their successful completion of the summer remedial writing course, interest in enrolling in the African American Literature course, and their willingness to commit to the out of classroom learning community activities, as described in the course guide.

Change Framework

As an educational leader, with goals of successfully transforming the retention and graduation rates of the UO/AS students, I recognize that change is a difficult process; more importantly, I understand that it *is* a process that takes time and careful implementation (Evans, 2001). I approached the development of the learning community with optimism, I was keenly aware that I must anticipate and properly address obstacles as they arose. Throughout my change project I expected and encountered several challenges and some resistance and I was prepared to work through it. After mapping out the action research cycles, it became clear that Kotter's (1996) eight-stage process of creating major change would aid me in successfully preparing for and implementing the learning community.

The retention and graduation rates, as well as the overall adjustment challenges faced by UO/AS students in their first year indicated to me that the UO/AS program and

the University had a serious problem that needed attention. Kotter (1996) suggests that to gain the needed cooperation to implement a successful change, establishing a sense of urgency is crucial. In order to raise a sense of urgency for our stakeholders, which include UO/AS students and staff, faculty, and administration, I frequently communicated the obstacles faced by UO/AS students, as well as informed them of the low graduation and retention rates of UO/AS students to indicate that a change must occur. I shared the results of the literature on the positive impact learning communities have at multiple institutions for students deemed at-risk. This information provided the much needed sense of urgency to further evaluate the program, develop services and resources, and increase the commitment level needed to begin to make changes to increase retention and graduation rates among students in the program.

Kotter (1996) suggests that identifying and recruiting a select group of respected organizational members can guide me through the change process of leading the learning community. I was careful in selecting this "guiding coalition," ensuring they were people within the organization who see, understand, and are fully committed to the need for change and possess the knowledge, skill, and power to help build a consensus for change. I was successful in securing support for the organizational change from the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Associate Vice President of Residential Learning/Dean of Students, the UO/AS staff, the Director of the Career Center, the Registrar, several faculty members, and most importantly, the students.

A key point made by Fullan (2001 was that one must determine "what motivates people to invest their energies in making improvements and working collectively with others" (p. 48). I believe it is very important and key to the success of any program to

have a team of people who are passionate and invested in making a difference in the lives of students. Working with low-income and underprepared students adds another level of consciousness that I must have when selecting people to be a part of this learning community project. Everyone who is a professor is not fit to teach all students.

Although the students in the learning community had a desire to learn, they also required additional support, patience, care, and understanding as this first-year experience was very challenging because they lacked some college readiness skills. Therefore, it was my responsibility to select the best guiding coalition members to work with the learning community. The faculty and staff working with the students were those who respect each student for who they are and with the challenges and supports they present. I was fortunate to have faculty and staff who treated students with dignity and respect and aided in developing supportive relationships, and motivated students to succeed. I maintained a dialogue with each person in the guiding coalition to help develop a cohesive team and one that was committed to the necessary time, resources, and social capital to assist in making the learning community work.

Kotter (1996) suggests that the guiding coalition has to help describe a vision for the change. The shared vision for the UO/AS was simply to build a supportive environment in the classroom and outside of the classroom to enhance their first-year experience. This goal of improving the first-year experience is shared by everyone in the guiding coalition because a successful freshman year can improve the chances of students being retained. A key step in the process was communicating the vision.

The vision was communicated consistently, frequently, and widely through several mechanisms, such as through displaying the UO/AS mission statement,

discussing retention and graduation strategies at staff retreats and meetings, and sharing the vision with the UO/AS students at group meetings. The vision was shared as new and innovative programs and services were introduced and implemented, and the vision was evident through the increased development of collaborative relationships with university departments, designed with the specific purpose of developing a support network for freshman.

As a part of my democratic and transformational leadership style, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5, my goal has always been to get buy-in from everyone to make the changes work, which aligns well with Kotter's (1996) fifth step of empowering others to act on the vision. I encouraged the UO/AS staff, S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students, and faculty to be creative in experimenting and coming up with new activities and services that address the learning community students' needs. I provided additional information and literature to the faculty to aid in meeting the goals of the learning community.

Through all of this, I demonstrated my willingness to be open and supportive for the students and staff to take risks through acting on their feedback and suggestions, allowing involvement or implementation of a new programs and ideas, and making a conscious and public effort to remove obstacles and barriers to the vision (Kotter, 1996). The best way I could demonstrate a community experience for the students was to surround them with a community environment of professionals with a true value for student learning and shared meaning of people working together (Fullan, 2001).

Kotter (1996) states that major change takes a lot of time and to sustain the effort and to build credibility for a change project, short-term wins must be communicated widely. As the changes progressed, I shared the short-term wins with the students, staff,

and the guiding coalition to show that the learning community was producing expected results in a reasonable time frame, and shared the challenges which gained additional support and built additional collaborative relationships to further benefit the learning community.

I believe the best way to anchor change is when students and staff believe in the vision and they become the communicators of the vision. Kotter (1996), as well as Evans (1996), suggest that second order change occurs when new behaviors are rooted in the shared beliefs, values, and norms of the organization. The success of this change project will be sustained by continuing a relationship with this first cohort of learning community students to aid in telling their stories of their experiences, gains and challenges as a result of participating in the community. I have also enhanced my relationships with faculty members, the registrar, the Career and Academic Planning Center staff, and the Residential Learning and University Housing staff, which will result in my ability to improve, grow, and develop the program in the future.

Establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the culture has headed off errors that would have undermined my change efforts. As I moved through my change project I closely monitored the effectiveness of Kotter's (1996) change model and was willing to adjust my change framework as necessary, as I will discuss further in Chapter 5.

Developing the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Framework

To develop the framework for the learning community, I began by sharing my vision with stakeholders during the fall 2008/spring 2009 semester. I met with the UO/AS staff, the Interim Vice President of Residential Learning/Dean of Students, the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Director of the Career and Academic Center, the Registrar, and the coordinator of the undeclared majors' learning community. This group of leaders was an "essential part of the early stages to restructure, reengineer and retool" this environment conducive to academic success (Kotter, 1996, p. 52). During this time I also met with the department chairs to discuss the learning community program and requested the participation of carefully selected faculty to teach the courses. I requested faculty support to begin the course offerings in the fall semester of 2009.

Developing S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

I developed the learning community to enhance the first year experience for opportunity program students. It was my intention that students participating in the learning community would receive valuable lessons of interdependence necessary to be successful throughout their academic career. I developed specific student learning and program outcomes to guide me in the development and implementation of the goals of the learning community.

When thinking of a name for the learning community, I recognized that language is important so I selected the name and acronym in an attempt to be forward thinking; to begin to change the language of how UO/AS students are identified or how they identify themselves; special admit, low-income, underprepared, disadvantaged, etc., I wanted them to believe and see themselves as highly motivated, educated students: as Scholars.

The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. (Students Connecting and Helping Others Learn, Achieve, and Reach Success) program is an exciting opportunity for students in the UO/AS program to continue the academic and social support networks gained through the Pre-College Institute. This collaborative living learning experience integrates the support of students, faculty, and the UO/AS program staff to inspire academic excellence and enhance the overall first year experience for students.

The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program has three components: residential, academic, and social. The living learning community increases interaction between students and faculty, which helps them to build a strong support network, learn in a comfortable engaging classroom environment, and work together in and out of the classroom.

The residential component. Living in a campus residence has positive effects on retention due to the vast amounts of time students spend on campus, which provides a lot of opportunities for involvement in all aspects of college life (Astin, 1999). Living on campus provides students the opportunities to increase contact with other students, professors, and college staff. Students enrolled in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community will reside on the same floor of a coed residential hall. The group living experience will provide additional academic and social support for students. Study sessions and group activities will be held in the residential hall lounges.

An upper-class UO/AS student was hired as a Residential Assistant (RA) to live in the learning community residential hall with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students. I selected a UO/AS upper class student as my assistant because of his similar background to the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., familiarity with the transitional issues that occur during the freshman year, and his ability to be a role model and resource for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. As the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant, he was responsible for assisting me with communication with the students and assisting with the learning community students' transitional needs to the university. The learning community student advisor assisted me with coordinating study sessions, one on one meetings, and small group extracurricular events. Professors visited the students and the student advisor for small group discussions in the residence hall.

The academic component. Students who participated in the learning community were enrolled together (linked) in two general education courses during the fall. The purpose of the linked courses was to encourage students to work together, build community, and to develop a strong student-faculty relationship to enhance the in class and out of classroom experience.

The linked courses for the fall 2009 semester were College Level Writing I, and African American Literature to Harlem Renaissance. The professors who taught the linked learning community courses were encouraged to collaborate on student assignments and to work closely with the students and the learning community coordinator to aid in their academic success.

The selected learning community linked courses were open to all majors and fulfilled the Communications, Multicultural, Global or History/Humanities/Language, and/or Social and Behavioral Science academic requirements. Students in need of remedial coursework (Basic Reading and Basic Math) were also required to enroll in those courses during the fall and/or spring semesters as well. As a student in the UO/AS program, the learning community students were also required to participate in the UO/AS

First-Year seminar non-credit course and structured study hours with the rest of the

UO/AS students.

      The social component. Extracurricular activities and events are provided for

students in the learning community to increase social interactions among students,

faculty, and members of the community. Students were encouraged to engage in fun,

interactive experiences to build friendships and support networks at Alexis University.

The engagement of students in activities that lead to learning experiences, leads to

student success (Kuh et al., 2005).

Description of Cycles

      Cycle One. The purpose of Cycle One was to introduce the concept of this action

research project and to solicit support and assistance from the faculty, staff, and

administrators in the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Divisions. I met with the Vice

President of Student Life, the Associate Vice President of Residential Learning and his

staff, the Registrar, and the Department Chairs of Writing Arts and History.

      During these meetings I discussed the learning community concept and began to

convey the sense of urgency needed to move this project into action by sharing the

graduation and retention rates of Unlimited Opportunity/Academic Success students in

comparison to the regular admission population which indicated that in six years, 76% of

regular admission students graduated; whereas only 43% of UO/AS students graduated.

      I shared the research on learning communities which posits that students in

learning communities build strong peer support groups, become more actively involved

in learning, and have a stronger sense of awareness of their own responsibility for

learning and helping others learn (Tinto, 2003). Although learning communities are not a

cure-all, these factors have been noted to enhance student learning and persistence. I received positive responses from each administrator, which began the support for implementing the learning community.

I also used this cycle to research the first-year experiences of sophomore UO/AS students, by reviewing their transcripts, past survey result on the UO/AS First-Year Seminar, and conducting a survey on their freshman year experience. This information assisted me in developing the framework for the first year students in the learning community.

Transcript review. I reviewed the academic transcripts of 2008 UO/AS freshmen upon completing the summer bridge program to determine the academic course levels needed to create the linked courses for the learning community. I found that 72% of the students required basic algebra, 23% required basic writing, and 68% required basic reading. During the summer, the UO/AS students are enrolled in a basic writing course, of which the majority of students pass into College Level Writing for the fall. When the Career Center registers the UO/AS students for their fall classes, they are registered for general education courses and any remaining required remedial courses. I decided that I would use the College Level Writing course as one of the courses that would be offered as a learning community course linked with a general education course.

Sophomore UO/AS first-year experience. I evaluated the non-academic factors of sophomore UO/AS students contributing to the students' success or lack thereof. To gain this information I provided a questionnaire (see Appendix B) to 11 sophomore UO/AS students, followed by a discussion with the students about their first-year experience. I reviewed the results and provided a summary in the Figure 1 chart.

Sophomore UO/AS Responses

How did each area impact your first year experience, positively and/or

negatively?

Academics	Residential	Peers/Social
"Great professors"	"Amazing, it's like a new family	[peers]"Opening my eyes and introducing me to a diverse culture"
"The teachers I had helped me tremendously with my schoolwork."	Living in dorms made me focus better than home.	"We never hesitated to help each other"
"I slowly learned having a positive relationship with them, they were more understanding."	"Almost impossible to get anything done in my room."	"My peers helped me realize that I am not going through the trials and tribulations of being a new student alone. It gave me confidence that I can make it."
"I was able to connect with the faculty/staff on a personal level."	"Helps get used to living with each other and sharing."	"You can use each other for support."
"I really didn't talk to my teachers."	"Didn't like it."	"Very few peers helped me."

Figure 1. Results of Sophomore UO/AS First Year Experience Questionnaire

In summary, the majority of the students found great connections with professors, valued their residential learning experience, and found their peers to be a source of support.

UO/AS first-year seminar survey. During the fall semester, the UO/AS program requires first-year UO/AS students to participate in a First-Year Seminar. This seminar is held once a week and is facilitated by a UO/AS counselor. The 2008 freshman seminar course was carefully designed to provide important information to aid students in successfully navigating Alexis University. During the seminar, UO/AS students have the opportunity to discuss their first-year experience with their peers and the UO/AS staff facilitator, and listen to guest speakers from various campus programs present valuable

information and resources. At the end of the seminar, the students have an opportunity to evaluate the seminar.

I reviewed the 2008 UO/AS First-Year Seminar evaluation (Appendix A) to gain feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the course from perspective of the 2008 freshmen class. This information would provide insight as to the needs of UO/AS freshman. The 4-question survey was provided to139 UO/AS students. Of the 139 UO/AS students enrolled in the UO/AS First-Year Seminar class and provided the survey, 61 UO/AS students (40 female and 21 male) completed the survey (43% response rate).

The survey scale was Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. The survey also offered students the opportunity to comment on the benefits of the seminar and recommendations for improvement. All respondents felt the speakers and workshop topics were Excellent or Good, 29 students added additional comments stating that the speakers gave valuable information; 50 students commented that they desired the seminar time later in the day.

Based on the results of the survey, the students gained valuable information from the First-Year Seminar. My staff and I determined that the schedule of speakers and topics would remain the same; however, we would encourage more interactive sessions and refreshments from time to time. The transcripts, sophomore first-year survey, and the First-Year Seminar results from the 2008 UO/AS freshman class provided useful data to consider in preparation for implementing the S.CH.O.L.A.R.S. learning community.

Cycle Two. Cycle Two focused on recruiting learning community members, recruiting and preparing selected faculty, and developing the curriculum with the selected faculty. I used three opportunities to inform the students of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program. I began by creating a brochure (Appendix C) describing the purpose and components of the learning community to inform the pre-college UO/AS students of the program. This brochure was a part of the acceptance package mailed out to 143 students during the end of May and first week of June, prior to their arrival to the summer program.

On June 27th, 2009, the day of arrival to the summer program, while conducting a power point presentation on the summer bridge program, I briefly shared information about the opportunity to participate in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. to 143 UO/AS students and 180 of their parents and family (Appendix D).

My third attempt at recruiting students for S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. occurred in July, during the summer program. I conducted a 45-minute power point presentation to the entire group of 143 students to introduce them to the program with more specific information than what was in the brochure, and to offer them the opportunity to ask questions. At the conclusion of the meeting I asked the students four questions to gain insight into the effectiveness of my presentation and their interest in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. (Appendix E). This served as the third attempt at recruiting students for the program.

In Cycle Two I continued to communicate with faculty and Department Chairs to solidify the academic component of the learning community. I held a meeting with the two professors who agreed to teach the linked courses to ensure they were aware of my goal to have each component of the learning community complement one other. During

the meeting, both instructors discussed their teaching styles, course curriculum, and ideas to collaborate on assignments. The professors agreed to participate in informal discussions with the students in the residential hall during the semester and to assist with an end of semester field trip.

During this cycle, I provided applications to students interested in participating in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. (Appendix F). I received 45 applications and was intrigued by their responses as to why they were interested in the learning community, such as wanting to get involved in campus organizations, receive help from others, help others, build their academic skills, and meet new people.

After reviewing all of their comments, I noted in my journal that I was proud the learning community project was generating this type of interest from students. I also felt a strong sense of nervousness and anxiety about the success of the program. I noted how I felt challenged by the number of interested students. My goal was to bring in approximately 20 students due to the residential hall space and the classroom capacity at Alexis University. I had not yet determined the criteria for acceptance; it is a voluntary program.

During this cycle, I also worked with the Residential Learning and University Housing Office to develop a community building experience for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. candidates. The Assistant Director was more than willing to assist. He suggested the learning community students assist with planting trees around one of the residence halls. He provided all of the supplies and met us at the site to provide instructions, and to assist the students as they worked together planting trees.

During the final week of the summer bridge program, when the summer grades were submitted, I finalized the linked course schedule with faculty and called a meeting to inform the 17 students who were eligible and still interested in participating in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community for the fall semester of 2009.

Cycle Three. In Cycle Three I implemented the learning community for the first time during the fall 2009 semester, with 17 students living in the same residence hall, on the same floor and a Resident Assistant, which I selected during the end of the spring semester. For the Resident Assistant position I sought an upperclass UO/AS student with a GPA of 2.5 or above and a demonstrated history of working with UO/AS students. I learned that a UO/AS student, Brian, desired to be a Resident Assistant and had previously worked in the UO/AS summer program as a peer tutor. During the summer that Brian worked, he received positive feedback from students and staff pertaining to his work ethic and ability to connect with students. I met with Brian to discuss the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program and my interest in him being the Resident Assistant for the program. Brian was enthusiastic about the program and agreed to participate in the study. This cycle lasted from September 2009 through mid-December of 2009. The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. consisted of 5 males, and 12 females, of which 8 of the students were Hispanic, and 9 were African American.

During this cycle I used several data collecting techniques totaling 32.5 hours. I spent six hours in the classroom, 10 hours facilitating the morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings, six hours during the Pizza with Professors, 12 hours with the students and the African American Literature professor on the New York Bus trip, one 90-minute focus group, and three hours conducting individual interviews. In addition, I spent time

transcribing my notes from recordings and written notes from S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings and discussions at Pizza with Professor meetings, took pictures of students and professors in the classroom, in the residence halls, and during S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. activities to visually document events, and conducted a mid-semester focus group discussion (Appendix G) to gain a better understanding of the impact of the learning community from the student and faculty perspective.

The data I collected from students and faculty in their residence halls and classrooms gave meaning to their experience in the learning community and provided me with an indication of the students' and faculty's satisfaction with the program, allowing me to gather recommendations for future improvement (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Cycle Four. The purpose of Cycle Four was to conduct final assessments of the impact of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community on the students, faculty, and S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant. At the conclusion of the semester, I conducted a focus group session and final interviews with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. participants (Appendix H), interviewed both learning community professors (Appendix I) and the resident assistant (Appendix J), and reviewed the fall 2009 academic grades for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

Upon completing the analysis of the data collected, I reflected on all three cycles and documented suggested improvements for the following semester and future learning community programs. Based on the feedback I received, I modified several aspects of the spring semester learning community to improve the program. I presented my findings to the guiding coalition to ensure they were informed of the challenges and any inconsistencies throughout the process. The guiding coalition and the students' input and involvement were important as I needed them to continue to be advocates of the program.

I concluded my study with implications for future cohorts of the UO/AS learning community program.

Cycle Five. The purpose of this cycle was to respond to my research questions: In what ways has my leadership impacted the design of the learning community; and How has my leadership developed and changed through the development and implementation of the learning community for first-year opportunity program students?

As I developed and implemented the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S learning community, I was keenly aware that my leadership would play a significant role in the outcome of this project. My espoused leadership theory is that I am a transformational leader with democratic, social justice, transactional, and servant leadership traits. All aspects of my espoused leadership traits were evident throughout the research project; however, I believe I displayed more transactional leadership than any of my other traits.

To help me assess my leadership during the research project, I documented my thoughts to reflect my actions, frustrations, fears, challenges, and successes; and used the Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI), a web based leadership assessment tool, which helped me respond to my research questions, understand how my supervisor, staff, and colleagues view my leadership; and provided me with insight into ways I can become a better leader.

Ethics and Confidentiality

To ensure that I acted in the most ethical manner, I successfully completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Web-based training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants," and completed the Human Research Review application to gain IRB approval. A part of the Institutional Research Board's (IRB) approval process

required that I create an informed consent document (see Appendix K) to ensure that the students agreed to participate in the project, explained why the study was being conducted, what methods would be used, how confidentiality would be assured, and how a participant who changed his/her mind may withdraw from the study (Hinchey, 2008).

The participants' identity in this study was kept confidential, which was stated in the informed consent document. To ensure confidentiality I referred to all participants by using the initials and the name of the institution has been changed.

Validity

In collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, I have ensured the integrity of my study in several ways. Upon completing interviews, I typed the transcript and soon after provided it to each interviewee who requested to review the transcript and made any necessary changes. I used member checking to ensure that my data reflected the ideas of my interviewees accurately (Glesne, 2006). I used a constant comparative method for my research, which allowed me to consistently compare the empirical data to determine what was working and what needed to change based on the views of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2003). For the purpose of triangulation, I collected data from several sources: interviews, pictures, surveys, artifacts, documents, and observations. Regarding data analysis, I coded my data by utilizing color-coded matrices to assist with determining the themes that emerged from the data (Hinchey, 2008). This was important to my study to ensure validity and to provide evidence that as the researcher, I have thoroughly sought to understand and report accurate data that will lead to more believable findings (Glesne, 2006).

Chapter 4

Findings

Cycle One: January – May 2009. Research and Development

The Unlimited Opportunity/Academic Success programs are two alternative admission programs at Alexis University. The Unlimited Opportunity program is a state-wide grant funded program that has been providing services for low-income, first generation, underrepresented students at Alexis University since 1969. The Academic Success program is an Alexis University initiative, initially established in the early 1980s to increase enrollment of minority students who are not classified as low-income. Students enrolled in the AS program are not financially eligible for the state financial aid award. In 2004, the University changed the mission of the AS program from increasing minority students to enrolling first generation students after the landmark Grutter v. Bollinger case in 2003, forbidding race to be an overriding factor for admission programs; however, the program continues to enroll predominantly minority students. The programming, services, and resources are the same for students in both the UO and AS programs, except for the state financial aid assistance.

The UO/AS program is under the Student Affairs Division of Alexis University. I am the director of the UO/AS program, responsible for the overall supervision of the program, monitoring the compliance with the grant regulations, and day-to-day operations. There are four UO/AS counselors responsible for providing academic, financial, and personal support to a caseload of assigned students from their freshman year through graduation. Each summer, approximately 145 students are selected to participate in a six-week, residential summer bridge program, designed to assist students

with the transition to college through a myriad of programs and services. The UO/AS

students are enrolled in academic and remedial courses; participate in tutoring, study

skills and time management workshops, leadership development seminars, and

community building activities to assist with their acclimation to the college environment.

Cycle One of this action research project began in January of 2009 with the

introduction of the learning community concept for UO/AS students and garnering

support from my supervisors, staff, and colleagues. This cycle was also used to gather

data from past UO/AS students on their academic history to determine the appropriate

courses for the learning community; on their perceptions of the various factors which

impacted their first-year experience to further understand the needs of first-year students;

and to review data from the First-Year Seminar to evaluate the value of workshops and

information provided in preparation for the development of the learning community

meeting agenda.

Soliciting support for the learning community. Prior to conducting any

research, my first responsibility was to get permission and gain support for the

implementation of the learning community from my superiors; the Dean of

Students/Associate Vice President for Residential Learning and the Vice President of

Student Affairs. During my one-on-one meeting in January with my direct supervisor, I

shared my thoughts and plans with the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President for

Residential Learning, who was very familiar with living learning communities and was

excited about the concept for UO/AS students. He shared that the living learning

philosophy is how he is designing and changing his department; first through a name

change from Residence Life to Residential Learning, and second through redesigning the

mission and purpose of the housing office, and modifying the Residential staff training, and third by providing more student centered resources and academic support services in the residential halls. The Associate Vice President then asked if I had thought about developing the learning community for the entire UO/AS freshman class of approximately 145. I shared that I had thought about it, but that my goal for the research project was to have a group of 20 students participate, and through this study I would be able to determine the strengths and areas for improvement before considering such a large number of students. I then shared my desire to have a Residential Assistant work with the learning community, preferably an upper class UO/AS student, and if possible, I would like to have input into the selection of the RA for the learning community floor. He agreed and stated that once I determined who I would like as my learning community assistant, I should have that student apply to be an RA and then we can go from there. He also encouraged me to set a meeting with the Director of Residential Learning to begin planning for the residential space that I would need in the fall of 2009.

Soon after my meeting with the Associate Vice President, I met with the Vice President of Student Affairs and shared my earlier conversation with my direct supervisor. The Vice President was familiar with learning communities in higher education and stated she was fine with my intention to implement the program for the incoming class of UO/AS students.

Excited about the support I received from my supervisors, I decided to introduce the concept of this action research project to the counselors of the UO/AS program at a staff meeting in February. My staff was aware that I was in the doctoral program at Alexis University, but this was the first time I shared my idea about developing the

learning community for the UO/AS students as my dissertation topic. During the meeting, I shared the research on learning communities, and why I believed a learning community for UO/AS students would be beneficial for our students. Upon finishing my comments I asked my staff, their thoughts. To my surprise, I did not receive any questions about implementation or any comments other than, 'that sounds good.' I felt a little deflated by their lack of enthusiasm, and continued on with rest of the agenda items. As I continued to try to understand the response by my staff, I documented my thoughts in my journal:

> I wonder why they were not as excited as I am for the learning community?… maybe they are and I'm overanalyzing and personalizing their lack of enthusiasm because it is MY research project. Maybe they feel like there isn't anything for them to do…maybe I should have presented it in a different way, showing them how they can get involved with it so they feel included.

To ensure that the UO/AS staff understood that I welcomed their participation in the learning community, I decided that I would reiterate my desire for their input and encourage their suggestions for program ideas, and involvement in activities during the individual meetings with staff. During one of my individual meetings, I experienced resistance. As I began to suggest ways to be a part of the learning community, a UO/AS staff member stated that she was not going to be a part of "doing my homework." Despite sharing the research on the benefits of the learning community and the state of UO/AS students on this campus, this staff member looked at this project as something additional for her to do, and not as an initiative to assist students. I was not surprised by her response as she has verbalized her feelings about past doctoral candidates "using

college students as guinea pigs." Although, I did not receive additional input at the time, the rest of the staff appeared to be supportive of the concept.

My next goal was to solicit support and assistance from the Director of Residential Learning, and the Director of the Career Center. I was pleased to received positive feedback and offers of assistance. I first met with the Director of Residential Learning in his office, sharing my early thoughts on the learning community plan and reviewing my conversation with the Associate Vice President for Residential Learning. He began to discuss which residential halls would be available to use for the learning community and suggested that he may have an activity for them that we could discuss at a later date. The Director advised me to let him know who I was interested in for the UO/AS learning community residential assistant, and shared that some of the expenses for the learning community could be charged to the RLUH office, as creating a living learning experience is a part of their mission.

I then met with the Director of the Career Center to discuss the learning community and to get information about properly advising students, I received this email later that day:

> Congratulations on establishing a formal learning community. It is evident that you put a lot of thought and time into this [UO/AS] initiative. As you are aware, the [UO/AS] Program has been a learning community since its inception. [Linda], Director, Career Center

2008 UO/AS freshmen year academic history. To develop a framework for the academic component of the learning community, I began reviewing the academic history of the 2008 freshman in the UO/AS program. I found that by the end of the summer

program, 72% of the students were required to enroll in basic algebra, 23% were required to enroll in basic writing, and 68% were required to enroll in basic reading for their fall semester courses.

Recognizing that all Alexis University students are required to complete a college level writing course to graduate, and 77% of the UO/AS freshmen were eligible for college level writing in their fall semester, I determined that one of the linked courses would be the first level of college writing with a lab. At this time, I had not determined what other course I intended to link the Writing course with, however, I knew that it would need to be a general education course to ensure that regardless of the major, it would count towards graduation.

2008 UO/AS non-academic freshman year experiences. On March 2nd and 3rd, I began to collect information on the non-academic factors contributing to the students' success or the lack thereof. To gain this information, I asked the sophomore UO/AS counselor to assist me by informing her caseload of UO/AS students that I was interested in getting their feedback on their first-year experience and if they were interested in participating to come to the UO/AS conference room at 3pm. During the two days, she met with 19 students, 11 students volunteered to participate. The questionnaire consisted of three questions and took 10-15 minutes to complete (Appendix B). On March 2nd, I met with five students and on March 3rd, I met with six students in the UO/AS conference room. I explained that the purpose of the questionnaire and focus group was to gain insight on their experience as freshmen to assist me in the development of a learning community designed for first-year UO/AS students. When the students completed their

questionnaire, I reviewed each question and asked them if they would like to share their experiences and expand on their comments.

My research sought to determine information that sophomores were aware of, that would have helped them as freshmen. I found it helpful to know whether they felt their professors and peers impacted their freshman year, and if so, how, and whether, they were involved and engaged on campus as freshmen, and if so, what influenced them to get involved.

Impact of peer influence on freshman year experience. Alexander Astin (1993), suggested that the peer group is the most important environmental influence on student development. Based on the students' responses to the question about the impact of their peers on their first-year experience, the students overwhelming felt that their peers had a positive impact on them in multiple ways. They told me:

"We [student and his peers] would walk in and out of each other's dorms having a good time. We never hesitated to help each other."

"My peers reminded me of all the high schools I attended. People will be people, so I had a positive and negative experience with them. In the end, honestly everything came out good for me."

"My peers positively impacted me by opening my eyes and introducing me to a diverse culture. Previously I was not very open-minded or educated on others. My peers benefited me by giving me an awareness to others."

"My peers impacted my first year experience because I realized that I'm not going [through] the trials and tribulations of being a new student alone. It gave me confidence that I can make it."

"I feel like a lot of my peers helped me step further out of my comfort zone, but they also applied negative pressure to do things I didn't feel comfortable doing."

Peer relationships of all types help students grow and develop as they adjust to the college environment. Based on the students' responses, it is clear that the positive interactions with their peers made students feel supported, understood, motivated, and connected.

Impact of academic courses on freshman year experience. Muraskin et al. (2004) suggest that the quality of instruction is a critical element in the college experience of students. From the survey and focus group responses, the students were keenly aware of their academic deficits and the impact appropriately selected classes had on their first year college experience as indicated by their responses:

"Although the courses were fairly difficult, I learned from the skills I learned during the summer [bridge program]."

"All of my classes were fine. I did not like taking college level writing, but it's required."

"It [summer bridge] prepared me for college level because it gave me the courage to actually raise my hand in class and speak up more and taught me to inform my professor if I need help. It [summer bridge] taught me to balance my work load and study skills."

"[My] Academic courses helped me a lot [e]specially to realize what my career choices were overall."

"My first semester was full of demanding professors in the long run that hurt me."

"I do believe that high school did not prepare me well enough for several courses. I am thankful for [Basic Writing Course] during the summer program, because it improved my writing."

Although proper selection of courses are important for all students, additional consideration for course selection and teaching style is important when considering classes for UO/AS students, as they face additional challenges, arriving at college less prepared than their regular admission counterparts. The responses from the students stress the benefit of the summer bridge support in preparing them for their first semester and the importance of selecting courses appropriate for their academic ability to ensure a successful first year experience in the college classroom.

Impact of faculty/staff on freshman year experience. Astin (1993) suggests that positive student-faculty interaction has a significant impact on students' personal growth, behavior outcomes, grade point averages, career outcomes, and overall satisfaction with their college experiences. Similarly, Seidman (1991) suggests that counseling and encouragement by academic advisors help students set goals, and positive experiences with advisors have shown a positive correlation to retention. When students were asked about the impact of the faculty and staff on their freshman year experience, it was apparent that they felt a sense of connection and genuine concern from the faculty and staff:

"I was lucky enough to have great professors. No Complaints!"

"I really didn't talk to my teachers a lot. I slowly learned that having a positive relationship with them …they were more understanding, even the sticklers."

"I was able to connect with the faculty/staff on a personal level. It allowed me to reach out for help much easier."

"The faculty/staff were helpful and some tried to influence me to continue working hard although I didn't feel like it."

"I enjoyed faculty and staff, I felt that they were very interactive when I needed help; at least my freshman year was like that."

"Staff helped me every time I encountered an issue regarding my classes, financial aid and other personal issues."

"Some of the faculty and staff were really good mentors for me. They helped me become a more successful student."

"The teachers I had helped me tremendously with my school work. However, I had some teachers that could not care less if we did the work, sleep in class, not show up or got good grades."

"I am very thankful for all the advisors and [UO/AS] counselors. They motivated me in many ways. They also showed a lot of support through all my endeavors."

"It is a relationship I have with the faculty/staff in a way… as like family but it taught me to be respectful of staff and faculty and keep in mind that they are here to help and guide me as well as push me."

Many times students perform poorly, not because of their academic ability, but due to non-academic factors such as stress, isolation, lack of motivation and goals. From the responses, it is clear that actively engaged faculty and staff make a significant impact on the students' experience at college. If they are able to share their concerns and feel

comfortable asking for assistance with academic and personal areas affecting them, it can aid them in their ability to handle academic and personal responsibilities.

Impact of involvement in clubs and organizations during the freshman year. Another area connected with student success is the amount of energy students spend on their overall academic experience (Astin, 1993). The UO/AS students' participation in clubs and organizations, and living in the residence halls demonstrated the level at which the students interacted with other students and developed a sense of purpose through their experiences (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996) as indicated by their responses when asked about the impact of clubs and organizations on their first year experience:

"Being involved in clubs and organizations helped me network."

"I got involved very quickly with the Black Culture League, Council for African American Studies, Freshman Class Vice President, and then started an interest group for a Greek organization not on campus. Freshman year is the year to be involved."

"I was more involved in a couple of mentoring programs. I felt that I was held to a higher standard. It made me feel like I owed it to the organization to excel."

"Although the organizations I involved myself with exposed me to great things, they affected my academics because I stretched myself to thin."

"Being involved with clubs and organizations always gave me something to do. I felt important because I was a part of something. It also keeps you out of trouble."

In one extended response, one student said,

Honestly, my freshman year was not about getting involved because I wanted to make friends and choose a major. However, I do wish I would have gotten

involved earlier, because now, as a sophomore, I am an active member of three organizations/clubs which gave me a better perspective on my major and the campus itself.

Getting involved in clubs and organizations benefited the students in multiple ways, such as providing a sense of responsibility to do well and a sense of value as a member of an organization. Engagement in campus activities helped students feel more connected to their peers and the university, making their first year an enriching experience.

Impact of university sponsored workshops on freshman year experience. Alexis University faculty and staff provide workshops on personal, academic, career, and social topics throughout the year as a means of providing important information and resources to students. UO/AS students are required to attend two workshops each semester to ensure they take advantage of the resources available to them. Some students found value in attending the workshops; while others felt they were not helpful.

"I truly never found them [workshops] to be interesting."

"Workshops always made clear places and people I could go to whenever I needed help."

"I got some valuable information out of it. It made me aware of what was going on."

"Honestly, the workshops never helped me at all, and, therefore I saw it more as a homework assignment rather than an experience."

"They weren't as effective as I expected. Although the ones I have attended recently seemed to be very helpful, the ones during the first year were not."

"Workshops are annoying because they're requirements for all UO/AS students. However, at the end of the day they are beneficial."

Many times students will not take advantage of resource available to them if they are not encouraged or required to do so. Although some of the students did not find value in the workshops they attended, they are aware that workshops exist and are available to them as a resource when needed.

Impact of residential living on freshman year experience. Most UO/AS students live on campus during the academic year, many choosing to live with their fellow UO/AS peers they met during the summer bridge program. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1994) suggest that living on campus maximizes the opportunity for increased involvement in social, cultural, and extracurricular activities, positively impacting the overall experience of students. Living in the residence halls does not appeal to everyone; however, most students surveyed found it to be a rewarding experience personally and academically:

"[Living in the residence hall was] Amazing! It is like a new family"

"Living in the dorms made me focus better than I would if I was living at home."

"I lived in a clean residence hall with great people and a great RA. My RA was always helpful and always there when I needed her. In addition, living with another person was fun because you weren't by yourself. However, sometimes, privacy is a good thing."

"The residence halls almost forced me to go to the library and get work done, because it was almost impossible to get anything done in my room."

"Didn't like it [living in residence hall], now as a sophomore I live off campus."

83

"My experience within the Residence Halls wasn't that bad. My roommate respected my things and I did the same."

"Helps [people] get used to living with other people and sharing a room."

As reflected in the comments from the students, the interpersonal relationships developed due to living in the residence halls made an impact on their freshman year. Several researchers suggest that social integration improves the persistence of students due to the vast amount of opportunities to engage with peers, and to engage in purposeful activities through their residence hall (Astin, 1985; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella et al., 1994).

Information and resources desired by UO/AS students in their freshman year. During the focus group discussion, the students were very eager to provide suggestions on information and resources they would they have appreciated knowing earlier to help them navigate their first year on campus:

"[I would like to have] learned more about financial aid, residence life, and registration."

"I wish I knew when the fair was for careers and clubs/organizations because I would have joined clubs earlier. In addition, I wish I knew the timings of each computer lab, so I knew which were open and which weren't. Lastly, I wish I networked with people in my major and other majors to see the pros and cons."

"That being involved in many organizations would help build my resume but can negatively affect your grades if you don't know how to balance the work."

"To always keep in contact with your professor especially if they are hard graders, just to let him or her know that you're serious about your class."

84

"That during midterms and finals; all the work studying is crammed in at once."

"I feel declaring and researching your major or minor is very important to knowing how to do your first year."

"More writing tutors to revise and help me construct writing assignments. More and better time management workshops."

"One of the main resources that would have assisted me in my first year would be the Library Database."

As I listened to many of their comments, it was interesting to hear the students recommend information that was provided to them during the summer UO/AS program, and throughout their first year UO/AS seminar, as if they were never informed, such as: "I wish I would have known the importance of going to every class." It became apparent that there are some things that can be taught and some things that students must experience on their own to learn. As one student suggested, "Every resource was readily available. It's just up to the individual to take advantage of it."

As the research suggests, the majority of the students found support in their peers, from their professors, living in the residence halls, and from engaging in campus activities (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The sophomore experience surveys provided me with a sense of how their peers, residential experience, and faculty involvement affected their first year experience. I later used this information to develop my agenda topics for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings throughout the semester.

UO/AS 2008 First-Year Seminar evaluation results. As a part of the Unlimited Opportunity/Academic Success (UO/AS) program, students are required to attend a non-credit UO/AS First-Year Seminar. This course is carefully designed to provide important

information to aid students in successfully navigating Alexis University. I decided to review the content of information provided during the seminar to ensure information was not duplicated during the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings. I also wanted to gain feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the course, and thus began reviewing the 2008 freshman seminar course curriculum and questionnaire response (Appendix A).

The first part of the evaluation was to rate the speakers and topics. The resupts are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

UO/AS First-Year Seminar Survey Results

Speakers/Topics:	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor
Academic Success Center (tutoring, Disabilities, Veteran Affairs)	17	36	8		
Student University Programmer & Multicultural Affairs	24	27	8		
Counseling and Psychological Center	15	36	9	1	
Drug & Alcohol	28	29	4		
Study Abroad	32	23	6		
Learning Styles: LCI	15	31	10	2	1
Healthy Relationships	32	24	5		1
Career Center	12	32	12	1	
Financial Aid & Money Management	13	22	13		1

The 2008 UO/AS First-Year Seminar questionnaire consisted of a survey to rate the speakers, followed by 3 open-ended questions. The survey was completed by 61 students out of 139 students (43% response rate), of which 40 were females and 21 males. The scores ranged from Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. The majority of the topics/speakers received Excellent/Good ratings.

In the open-ended question section, students were asked to make suggestions to improve the First-Year Seminar program. The majority of the suggestions were "[to have] more lively speakers," "provide breakfast," and "[that the seminar not] start so early in the morning."

The second open-ended question asked what the students liked most about the First-Year Seminar program. A few students commented that they enjoyed their "peers coming together," and the majority of the respondents (29) stated that the speakers gave valuable information and listed the topics they enjoyed such as study abroad, multicultural affairs, drug and alcohol, career center, and learning styles workshops.

The final open-ended question asked their least favorite part of the seminar. An overwhelming number of students (50) reiterated their earlier comment, that they did not like the seminar time "so early in the morning."

Based on the responses from the survey, I learned that although they did not enjoy getting up for an 8am non-credit course, the students appreciated receiving information pertinent to their college experience. The students would like to be engaged by "lively" speakers and the sessions to be held later in the day.

From the review of literature and from my Cycle One research, I gained valuable information, which helped in the development of a cohesive in and out of class experience for students in the learning community. From the review of the past freshman fall academic history, I was able to determine what type of courses I would select as the linked courses for the learning community. The sophomore first-year experience survey provided insight into factors that influence a student's first-year experience; and the First-Year Seminar questionnaire informed me of the type of information and resources the students valued; as well as their preferred way of receiving the information: lively, engaged discussions, after 8am.

Identifying S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. courses and faculty. During the spring semester, I attended a committee meeting for the new Africana Studies major, and a major part of the discussion was a concern for the lack of minority enrollment in the Africana Studies major. I was asked if I could share information on the new major with the students of UO/AS during the summer bridge program to generate interest and hopefully increase enrollment. At that moment it occurred to me that an opportunity to collaborate could exist with the Africana Studies program. I explained that I was in the process of developing a learning community for the UO/AS freshman and needed to determine a general education course for the program, and would be interested in collaborating with the department to develop one of the linked courses.

The committee members were excited about collaborating, because they felt that the UO/AS program was a natural fit for the Africana Studies recruitment goal as the UO/AS program enrolls a large minority population. This collaboration provided the Africana Studies department the opportunity to expose UO/AS students to the Africana

Studies major, while fulfilling the multi-cultural/global general education requirement required of all Alexis University students. The History Department Chair, Dr. John Smith, offered to assist me in developing the learning community.

I held several meetings with Dr. Smith to discuss the components of the learning community. Through our discussions, I stated specific guidelines necessary to move this project along, which were: the selected course needed to be a general education eligible course for the students; the professor of this course must be one who believes in the mission and purpose of the learning community, and is interested in working with the professor of the second linked course and participate in informal discussions or activities with students in the residence hall; and the professor should be familiar with the UO/AS program or working with an underprepared, underrepresented population.

In these meetings, he also shared his experience with the development of the history learning community, which he was instrumental in designing, and roadblocks and obstacles he faced. Dr. Smith explained the process of requesting the Registrar to "block" the linked courses, which prevents non-learning community students from registering for the linked courses, and how the Registrar will place the selected students in the linked courses upon notification. During our conversation he requested that I work with the Career Center to have them discuss the Africana Studies program as a coordinate major to help increase enrollment.

During one of my meetings with Dr. Smith, we discussed several potential faculty members for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community general education course, and selected Dr. Tara Coleman, an African American female English professor to teach Introduction to African American Literature through Harlem Renaissance since 1865 for

fall 2009 semester, as the general education course. I was in support of his recommendations as Dr. Coleman was a member of the Africana Studies major committee, had worked with UO/AS students in the past, and when contacted to request her participation, was eager to work closely with UO/AS students in the learning community.

I was excited about this achievement and then found that the African American Literature course would not count as a general education requirement, which would deter students from participating in the course. I contacted the Chair of the English department, and shared my concern and the purpose of the learning community. She responded by email,

> Yes; it isn't given the designation of gen ed "lit" because it isn't a 100-level course, but I could give letters to the students to take to their advisors giving my permission for them to accept the course not only as a multicultural/global course but as a "lit" course.

I was pleased that she made this accommodation to make the African American Literature course a general education course for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students.

I then contacted the Chair of the Writing Arts department to discuss the learning community project and to request a specific professor to teach the College Level Writing I course, who was familiar with UO/AS students, as she has tutored UO/AS students in the past. I was excited because the Chair was very helpful and eager to assist in reviewing the preliminary course assignments to see if this professor would be teaching on the main campus for the fall semester. By the end of our meeting he provided me with a section number and the days and times of the learning community course to be taught by the

faculty selected. He informed me that the classroom cap for the writing course was 18 students. I reached out to the professor to begin discussing the course, but was concerned as my calls were never returned.

A few weeks later I learned that the professor that I was informed would be teaching the College Level Writing I course was not coming back to the University and the Chair had assigned the learning community to a professor I did not know; someone new to the campus. I then asked another professor, Ms. Kelly Brown, a White female Writing Arts professor, if she would be interested in teaching the course. Ms. Brown had taught UO/AS students through the summer bridge program for the past two years and has received positive reviews from students, in turn, she has appreciated working with the UO/AS students as she told me she "notices an eagerness to learn with this population of students as opposed to an entitled attitude of the regular admission students." She kindly agreed, but stated that it would be up to the Chair to determine if it could be possible.

I was very disappointed that my first choice professor was not returning and that the Writing Chair did not contact me to inform me of the change – or even to ask my opinion in determining a replacement faculty member. I quickly emailed the Chair to inquire about the change, inform him of the importance of the criteria for the new faculty member, as mentioned in our earlier discussion, and to request Ms. Kelly Brown as a replacement to teach the writing course. Soon after, I received an email from the Writing Chair stating, "My apologies- I should have kept you in the loop from a much earlier point."

He also informed me that he would make the change to allow Ms. Brown to teach the course. I was pleased that with the help of the History Department Chair and the

Writing Arts chair, I was able to secure two professors that I felt would be an asset to the learning community, who I felt comfortable working with, and who I felt had the best interest of the students at heart. I began to think about my next step in preparing for the learning community: finding an equally committed partner, the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. resident assistant.

Identifying a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. resident assistant. My next task was to secure an assistant to live and work with the students in the residence hall. Schroeder, Mable, and Associates (1994) posit that an upper class student serving as a peer educator enhances the academic and social success of residence hall students. I reached out to Brian, a Hispanic, upper-class UO/AS high achieving student and discussed the learning community concept, and the role of a S.CH.O.L.A.R.S. assistant to see if he was interested.

I knew Brian was attempting to be a Resident Assistant (RA) and he worked in the summer bridge program in the past as a tutor and was hired to work in the 2009 summer program. I felt Brian would be a perfect fit because he would have developed a relationship with the students over the summer, which I believed, would make it easier for the students to see him as a resource during the academic year. I explained that as a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant he would be a liaison between the students, myself, and the faculty, living among the students on the same floor to assist them with adjusting to campus, and to be a resource for them.

Brian was excited and willing to assist in any way possible. I then contacted the Associate Vice President of Residential Learning and University Housing to inform him that I was interested in this young man as the RA for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. floor. A few

weeks later, I was informed that Brian received the position and would be assigned to the learning community floor in the Terrell hall.

Conclusion. By the end of Cycle One, I shared information about the purpose and university-wide value of implementing a learning community for Unlimited Opportunity/Academic Success program students at Alexis University and received a great deal of support from multiple colleagues, administrators, and faculty. Through research and collecting data, I was able to begin the framework for developing the learning community. Finally, through building relationships and collaboration, Professors Coleman and Professor Brown agreed to participate in the learning community as professors for the linked courses, and Brian was secured as the residential assistant.

Cycle Two: May – August 2009

The purpose of Cycle Two was to recruit learning community members, develop the linked courses with the selected faculty, develop the residence hall meeting agenda, and coordinate a summer community building experience.

Recruiting S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. I began by creating a brochure describing the purpose and components of the learning community (Appendix C). The purpose of the brochure was to generate interest in the learning community and to detail the benefits and student learning outcomes of the learning community. The brochure states that as a result of participating in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program, students will be able to:

Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate decision-making skills.

- Identify behaviors that contribute to healthy choices.
- Employ effective time management and study skills.

- Identify five campus and community resources available to aid in their adjustment to Alexis University.

- Build academic and social networks that support student learning.

- Engage in residential, campus, and/or community activities that benefit the students' overall adjustment to Alexis University.

I used pictures of past UO/AS students working collaboratively, and wearing commencement robes to project the images of a sense of community and academic success. My first recruitment attempt was to mail the brochures in the admission packet to the pre-freshman summer bridge students in June 2009 to pique their interest while they awaited the beginning of the summer program in July.

On the first day of the summer bridge program, June 27, 2009, during the orientation for students and parents, I showed a slide in the PowerPoint presentation (Appendix D), and briefly announced that the UO/AS program had a living learning community as a way to remind the students and their parents of this opportunity and told them that additional information and the application would be provided during the summer program. In July, 2009 I conducted a 45-minute presentation to the entire group of approximately 143 students to further introduce the program, which served as a third attempt at recruiting students for the program. Throughout the presentation I engaged students in a discussion on their expectations of their first-year experience, the transitional challenges of first-year students, and more specifically, the retention and graduation rates of first generation, underprepared students.

I shared the current graduation and retention rates of UO/AS students (Figure 2) and the purpose and goals of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S learning community. I then began

connecting the literature of Tinto (1998a) on the benefits of social and academic

experiences, Astin (1993) on learning and development, and Buck (1985) on the benefits

of learning communities.

Alexis University Retention and Graduation Data

Institutional Research and Planning, 2008
IRP:\RESOURCES\Resource Book\ResourceBook 2008\Table 37

('06) Fall 06 to Fall 07 Retention Rate — Regular Admit 87%, U/A 83%

('06)Fall 07 to Fall 08 Retention Rate — Regular Admit 83%, U/A 68%

6 year Graduation Rate ('02-'08) — Regular Admit 74%, U/A 52%
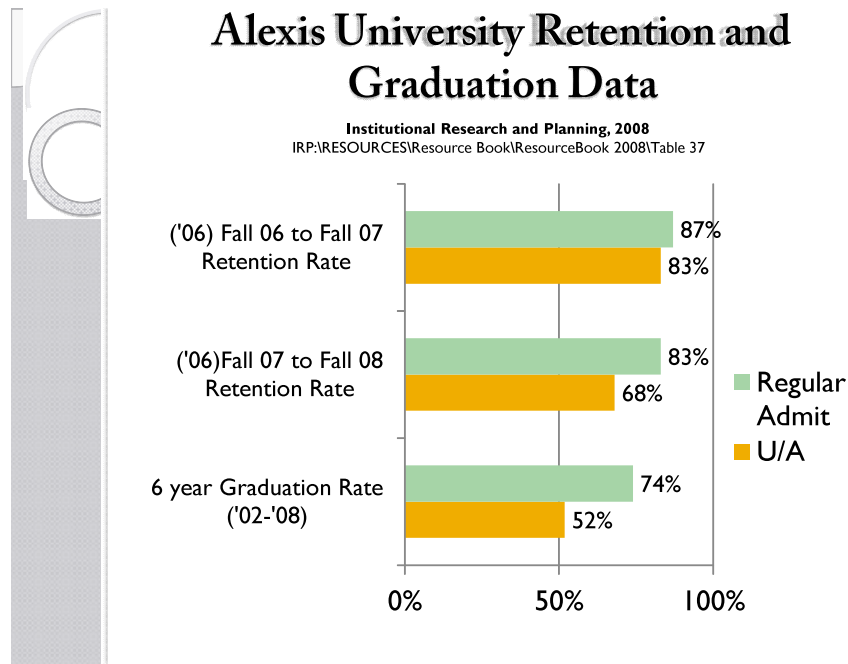
Figure 2. Graduation and Retention Rates of UO/AS Students

During the presentation I provided the students with information on the linked

courses, the residential hall, the freshman seminar agenda, and the students'

responsibilities, which were to attend all classes, and participate in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

events. I explained the benefits of participating in the learning community, shared the

student learning outcomes for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program and encouraged the

students to consider participating.

At the conclusion of the presentation I provided an opportunity for the students to

ask questions and I asked the group three questions (see Appendix E) to determine if the

brochure piqued their interest in the program, if they felt the presentation was informative, and what additional information they would like to receive. The students were excited that the learning community would be in Terrell Hall because it "did not have community bathrooms."

The students' response to why they may not be interested in joining the learning community was that they were concerned about being distracted from their schoolwork and getting along with their peers. One student stated, "I want to get my academics straight, no outside influences" and "What if you don't relate to people in the learning community?"

Some responded that they found the information about S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. linked courses and retention rates helpful; one student commented, "The retention rates are depressing, but I appreciate that you didn't sugar coat it."

When asked what types of information they would like to receive as a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. participant, they stated that they would be interested in receiving information on loans, scholarships, internships, and campus jobs. This information, along with the 2008 UO/AS information assisted me in developing the agenda of topics for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S meetings in the fall meetings (Appendix L).

On July 15th, 2009 Brian and I handed out S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. applications for those interested in participating in the learning community and requested they be returned within 5 days (Appendix F). The application requested information on their reasons for wanting to join S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., their living plans for the fall semester, and their signature stating their commitment to participating in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. by attending all classes and S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S events, and working to their ability. We also provided the

students with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Program Course Guide (Appendix M) which outlined the 2009 fall linked course requirements, the Pizza with Professors meetings, S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings, and Harlem Renaissance trip information to give them an idea of their expected participation during the semester.

By the fifth day I received 45 applications. This was exciting, but a bit of a challenge because the College Level Writing I course was capped at 18 seats. I shared this information with the students and that I would not have a definitive list until the end of the summer program as I needed to review each application and final summer grades to determine which students were eligible for S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. The next few weeks were filled with students making sidebar requests, begging, and pleading to be accepted in the program. One evening during the summer program I had 3 UO/AS young men approach me asking, "Ms. Barnes, I know the application deadline is over but can I be placed on the waiting list?"

I was excited that the learning community was highly sought by students. I later learned that a large part of the motivation for the students was the location of the residential hall for the learning community. Terrell Hall was considered a prime location for freshmen students because it was the building where they lived during the summer program, and Terrell Hall does not have community bathrooms, as do many of the other freshman residence halls. Nevertheless, I was excited.

Summer community building experience. In an effort to create a community building experience among the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. candidates, I accepted an offer from the Residential Learning and University Housing Office to have the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assist with planting trees around campus. Although the final candidates for the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. had not been selected, I felt that it was important for the students to have an opportunity to participate in an activity together prior to the beginning of the semester. As the summer program was in its fourth week, I realized that if I did not take advantage of the tree planting activity there would not be enough time to have a team building activity before the fall semester began. Therefore, the 45 applicants eagerly participated with shoveling, patting down dirt, and planting trees. I took pictures showing them working together, laughing, and helping one another (Appendix N). Upon finishing the project, one of the students suggested that we all hold hands and say a prayer for the trees, S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., and our future.

Selecting S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. In the last week of July, I reviewed the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. applications, eager to read the students comments as to why they wanted to join S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. As I reflected on the students' responses, I noticed a consistent theme of the students wanting to be in an environment where they could get help, and would be able to help others. Consistent with the research on learning communities, Damminger (2004) suggests that freshmen learning communities create the type of environment students desire. The ability for the students to personally, socially, and academically interact substantially impacts the first-year experience for students. This was evident from their comments on why they were interested in joining S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.:

"I believe that the SCHOLARS program is a great opportunity to get involved as well as a great way to receive help. This program will help me become successful."

"I am interested in participating in SCHOLARS because of the help that is close by if needed."

"To gain knowledge and help while adjusting and facing obstacles during my year."

"To keep my grades up, and to be a part of something"

"To gain knowledge with positive peer and receive guidance which will help me stay on track."

"I believe this will give me a greater chance to succeed in college by not only having the support of my [UO/AS] family, but my learning community as well."

In an extended comment, one wrote,

I am interested in participating in the SCHOLARS learning community because I believe it will help me enrich myself academically. I will have many support channels that will guide me throughout my freshmen year experience. It would be a great opportunity for me and I would be honored to be accepted.

During the first week in August, the final week of the program, the UO/AS students went to the Career Center to register for their fall classes. That week I received four requests for students to withdraw their names from S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. because the linked courses conflicted with the times of the courses they wanted to take in their major. As the final summer grades came in, I created an excel spreadsheet to document the students' application information and their summer basic writing grades to make sure they were eligible for College Level Writing in the fall. Of the remaining 41 interested students, 24 did not pass the summer basic writing course, disqualifying them from participating in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., as one of the required linked courses was College Level Writing. This left 17 participants for the learning community.

I called a meeting with the students who signed up for S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. to announce the accepted candidates and to meet individually with those who I found did not pass out of the writing course to inform them why they were not accepted. I found it difficult to tell students they would not be able to participate in a program designed to assist them as they were not yet made aware that they failed the writing course.

Participants of this study. There were 17 students in the fall 2009 S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. cohort: 5 males and 12 females, of which 9 students were Hispanic, and 8 African American. The average age was 18 years old. The students came from families with a wide distribution of income, with UO students' family income averaging $44,000 for a family of four, to AS students' family of four income of more than $75,000 a year. The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. were interested in various majors; (2) English, (1) Communications, (6) Education, (1) Psychology, (3) Law and Justice, (1) Business Management, (1) Engineering, and (2) Undeclared.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. registration and housing. Over the next few weeks in August, I spent a lot of time working with the Registrar and the Office of Housing to finalize the students' course schedule and room assignments. Mostly through email, I communicated with the Registrar to adjust the accepted students' schedules to ensure they were enrolled into the fall 2009 linked courses, College Level Writing and African American Literature through Harlem Renaissance since 1865, and that they did not register for any courses during the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. residential meetings held on the third Wednesday of each month as indicated below:

August 6, 2009

[Dina/Jeff], Below are the students for the learning community. Please drop any courses conflicting and add the following classes:

Afr. Amer. Lit   T,Th 10:50-12:05
College Level Writing
M,W 1:45 -3pm & F 10:50-12:05
Thanks, Penny

By this time in the summer, the Residential Learning and University Housing

(RLUH) office had already randomly placed the UO/AS students in the freshmen

residence halls. I sent a list of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students and their preferred

roommates to a staff member at the RLUH office to begin assigning the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. to the learning community floor in Terrell Hall. I received the

following email in return.

> August 12, 2009
> Hi Penny
> I have finished making the changes. All the students are placed on the 2nd floor of
> Terrell Hall-B side. Their specific housing assignments are listed below. I tried
> my best to place them all with their roommate requests and I think it all worked
> out. Please let me know if there is anything else that you need.
> [Rene]

Preparing faculty for S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. As the summer weeks began to quickly

fade away, I began making phone and email connections with the two professors of the

fall 2009 linked courses in preparation of the beginning of the learning community.

Professor Coleman was out on sabbatical, therefore she was unable to communicate

much with me; however, I sent an email to keep them both informed until we could all

meet together:

> 8/3/09
> Hello All,
> We are coming close to the beginning of the first semester of the UO/AS learning
> community and I want to first thank you for your participation in its development
> and second share with you an update on the status. I was pleased to have an
> overwhelming response to my presentation on the purpose and value of the
> learning community. We only have space for 18 and have over 40 students signed
> up to participate. They are very eager and excited to be a part of the learning
> community. The learning community group already participated in their first

community building project, tree planting at Mull Hall. I have informed the Career Center to discuss Africana Studies as a coordinate major as an option for those interested. I have attached the program brochure, course program guide, and the presentation I made to the students. I hope in the beginning of the semester or right before we can meet to discuss the collaborative efforts between the two linked courses in the fall. At the end of the semester I would like to take the class to New York for a Harlem Renaissance tour. Please let me know when you are free to meet. Feel free to contact me at any time. Again, thank you and I look forward to working with you in the fall.
Penny

A few weeks later I received an email response from Professor Coleman:

8/17/09
Hi Penny,
The information on the LC looks great. I'm a little behind on emails with the wedding, vacation, and the move but things are slowly calming down. My schedule is open in the couple of weeks we have left before school. Once the semester starts, W and F will be the best days for me.
Thanks, [Professor Tara Coleman]

Professor Brown responded by email a little over a week later:

8/27/09
My schedule is really tight on Wednesday when I teach four classes. But I am free anytime on Monday. I'm glad we're going to meet because I am really excited about this class.
[Professor Kelly Brown]

As the fall semester was quickly approaching, I began to get nervous about our ability to meet and develop opportunities to collaborate on out of class activities and linked courses collaborative curriculum. I sent a final email to confirm a date and reiterate my goals for the meeting:

8/27/09
Hello, First Congratulations [Tara] on your wedding. In an attempt to meet before classes begin I wanted to check with both of you to see if you are available anytime on Monday, If not, anytime on Wednesday. I wanted to meet briefly to discuss the learning community and ways the two courses can collaborate through assignments and activities, if possible. I would also like to discuss your availability to meet with the students in the residential halls throughout the semester for light conversation, class discussions, and study sessions over pizza and to get your suggestions/ideas for the community. As a culminating event, I

would like the 3 of us to take the students on a Harlem Renaissance tour in NY. During our meeting we can discuss possible dates and planning suggestions. Looking forward to hearing from you both. Penny

Purpose of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. On August 31, 2009, I held a meeting with the selected fall faculty, Professors Brown and Coleman, and Brian to begin discussing the learning community and to provide an opportunity for everyone to meet. I took detailed notes and tape-recorded the session. Upon the completion of the meeting I transcribed my notes and the recording.

During the meeting I introduced everyone and provided each attendee with a folder, which included an agenda (Appendix O), the email from the English Department Chair in reference to approving the literature course as a multicultural/general education requirement, literature on learning communities, the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. brochure, the Africana Studies brochure, pictures of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students, their major, explanation of why they wanted to be a part of the learning community, and the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program description.

I shared with the group the purpose of the learning community, where I was in my dissertation research, the learning outcomes, goals, and expectations for the learning community, and my desire for the professors to collaborate on a shared curriculum. I asked if there were any questions. At that time there were none, but Ms. Brown spontaneously stated, "I am excited to work with this group." I shared with the group the research literature on common features of learning communities which I would like demonstrated through S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., such as shared knowledge, which is gained by students taking linked courses together connected through a central theme; shared knowing, which is gained by the intimate relationships built through spending additional

time together and working collaboratively in academic and social settings; and shared responsibility, which is gained by a sense of responsibility to each other as members of the learning community (Tinto, 2003).

I also shared the potential for unintended consequences of unruly and overly engaging behaviors of the group because of their familiarity with each other, which can make managing this group a challenge (Jaffee, 2007). Ms. Brown commented, "Yea, I'm looking forward to working with these students, I can be sure they will answer me when I ask a question."

I shared the process of how the students were selected and provided them with a spreadsheet of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. information. I reintroduced them to Brian and explained that his role with the learning community would be the student assistant, and Resident Assistant on the floor of their building, to assist with activities, tutoring, and event planning. I asked Brian to say a few words. In a shy voice he began with a giggle,

> I don't know what you want me to say. I'm looking forward to working with the learning community and I am also in the African American literature class with the students so it will be good so we can study and work together. Ms. Brown, I wanted to tell you that I don't have class on Friday's so I can come to your Friday class and help you if you need anything and if you need me to get information to the students you can just call me or email me.

I commented to the faculty, "See why I asked Brian to assist me- he is always willing to help."

Developing the out of class S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. experience. During the meeting with faculty I shared the research, which states that successful living learning

communities build a sense of community, provide opportunities for faculty to engage with students outside of the classroom, and support students academically and socially. (Barefoot, 2000; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Tinto, 2003).

I went on to explain that I wanted the students to study together and to have fun in the residential hall. Having Brian there to be a mentor will aid the students in receiving support during the evening hours. I continued to state:

As I mentioned before, I hope that there are times that you both can come into the hall for follow-up class discussions, informal discussions, pizza, movies or games so the students can interact with you outside of the classroom.

They both agreed that they would find time to come to the residence hall. We continued to discuss days and times for the meeting. "I'm good on Monday evenings," says Ms. Brown. I informed the group that I would look at the students schedule to see if Monday evenings would work. "What about you Tara?" I asked. "Yea, Monday's are fine for me as well" Professor Coleman responded. "What do you think, once a month?" I asked. "Yes, that sounds good," said Brian, "but I might not be able to be there but I can see if I can secure the lounge." I mentioned that I would like to take the students on a trip to the Harlem, NY at the end of the year to culminate the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. experience. Both professors were eager to assist with planning and attending the trip. I was pleased with the early spirit of teamwork and collaboration from both professors and Brian.

Curriculum development. I informed the faculty members that one of the goals that I had for the learning community was to see if there were ways for Professors Coleman and Brown to collaborate on assignments, such as reading assignments in one course and writing about it or discussing it in the other. Tinto (2003) encourages cross-

105

subject learning, as it connects courses with a theme, giving meaning to being linked. It is further suggested by researchers that linked courses promote shared, collaborative learning experiences requiring students to work together resulting in them becoming active, responsible learners (Gablenick et al., 1990; Tinto, 2003).

I suggested we take a moment to learn more about their ideas for the semester. Professor Coleman began, "I am presenting from the perspective of Thwarted, the American Dream- What it means to the racial minority."

She mentioned an author, Bezere Smith. I ask Professor Coleman if she could provide me with her syllabi, she stated that she would. She continued to share ideas on ways that her curriculum can support the College Level Writing course and the learning community co-curricular activities, "because we are taking them to N.Y., I will tweak my syllabus to relate the discussion to the trip." Professor Brown commented,

> I see many similarities with the two courses. I will have them read a chapter from Richard Rodriguez on what a high school day is like from 11th graders. They are all personal essays- [on the topic of] what high school means from the different groups. Then I am going to move right into the book *Freedom Writers*.

Brian joined the conversation, stating, "I love that movie! We showed that to them [UO/AS students] this summer." Professor Brown commented,

> Yes, the movie is great, they are going to watch the movie and read the book. That scene from the movie when they met the lady from Anne Frank and the student says 'you're my hero,' and she looks at the girl and says, 'no *you're* my hero.' I love that part. We are going to discuss what is a hero?

Professor Brown continued to say,

> One of the books is *And Still We Rise* by Miles Corwin. It is about gifted students
> in the inner city and profiles two White teachers, who teach from different
> pedagogy. The discussion is steeped in [analyzing] one's own culture-
> questioning the value of the class they are teaching.

Professor Coleman stated,

> I see a lot of connections – I can see the connection to the American Dream. Do
> we believe in the American Dream? I found a lecture on-line about Barack
> Obama and his American Dream. How as a bi-racial person has he manifested the
> American dream through his life and politics?

Professor Brown adds, "Education is so important to discuss in relation to the American
Dream and cultural concepts."

I wrote in my notes, "good, good," as I watched both professors share ideas with
excitement about the learning community and discuss how they think their topics will
work well together. The professors continued to discuss how they planned their classes to
run during the semester, "The first class I am going to use to get to know the students.
The schedule is all wacky because of Labor Day," says Professor Brown. "Yes," adds
Professor Coleman, "this will be the first class I am teaching in a year," laughing, she
continued, "I was on sabbatical so I'm a little nervous to teach the first day. Brian, you
shouldn't be hearing this, cover your ears," she says as she laughs.

Professor Brown suggests, "Once you get through the first class, it'll be good."
Professor Brown attempts to comfort Professor Coleman with a story about her friend;
"My friend Beth worked at the University of Pittsburg for 18 years, has been teaching at

Carnegie Mellon for 11 years, and still feels anxiety." Professor Coleman continued, "My

class ends with the Harlem Renaissance so it will be good to have the field trip in the

middle of the semester to start the discussion around the trip." I agreed and added, "Yes,

and the middle of the semester is better because of the poor weather in the later part of

the semester."

Professor Coleman was very excited and offered to help plan the trip:

I would want to go to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and

the Apollo theatre. I have to look it up but there are beautiful brownstones in an

area called Sugar Hill, an upwardly mobile area. I think if we tour those areas we

will cover cultural, historical, music, and literary references.

The three of us continued to discuss the trip, possible dates, and potential

expenses. From that conversation we began to discuss multiple opportunities to engage

the students in and out of the class. Professor Coleman suggested, "There is a

documentary on Zora Neal Hurston, I don't know how much it cost, but can we get it?

We can watch it on the Monday night in the residence hall."

Conclusion. During the meeting the faculty members shared their teaching style

and their syllabi. They discussed ways they could collaborate and decided on the days

and times they would be able to come to the residence hall for Pizza with your

Professors, an informal evening once a month to eat and talk about their classes, campus

life, and to get to know each other outside of the classroom. I encouraged the faculty

members to work closely throughout the semester to make any adjustments in the

curriculum needed to support the students. Everyone stated that the meeting was very

productive, whereas both instructors were excited to participate in the learning

community and had many ideas on how they could support the students and each other's course objectives. I informed them that I would be sitting in a few of the class sessions to observe and would need the students and faculty to sign a consent form to participate in the research project.

Although I had accomplished a lot at this point in developing the learning community, I noted in my journal that I had so much more to do and not enough time. With a very active summer program, not to mention administrative duties for the university, I sometimes wondered how all of this would come together.

Cycle Three: September 2009 – December 2009. Implementation and Action

The purpose of Cycle Three was to implement the learning community for the first time with 17 students living in the same residence hall, on the same floor with Brian as their S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Resident Assistant.

The learning community began in the fall semester of 2009, which included two linked courses, College Level Writing I and Intro to African American Literature through Harlem Renaissance since 1865, monthly S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings in the residence halls; monthly Pizza with your Professors gathering with Professors Brown and Coleman in the residence halls; residing in the same residence hall, on the same floor with a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant; mid-semester focus group; and an end of semester field trip to New York.

My goal during this cycle was to observe and document the experiences of the students, RA, and faculty, inside and outside of the classroom. The data used during this cycle were observations, interviews, group discussions, and pictures.

On the students first day back for the fall semester I stopped by the residence hall to visit and see if they had any questions. They were all very excited to be back on campus and to be reunited with each other. I provided the students with the schedule of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings for the fall semester (Appendix L) and informed them that I would see them the next day in class.

Linked courses. One the first day of the writing class I met the students early to provide them with the Informed Consent form (Appendix K). I read the Informed Consent document aloud, explaining the nature of my study, assuring them that their participation was voluntary, and that there were no risks involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I asked the students to let me know if they had any questions, if not, to sign and return. The students did not have any questions. I reminded them that as a part of my research I would be in several of their classes, observing, and taking notes and pictures.

Throughout the semester I observed the students in the African American Literature class and the College Writing class for a total of 6 hours and 15 minutes. The number of students varied in each class. My role in both settings was as a participant observer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I sat in the back of the classroom observing the physical environment, teacher-to-student, and student-to-student interactions. I only spoke when spoken to by the professor or the students, as I did not want to influence the natural occurrences of the classroom. The field notes were handwritten and then transcribed. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe, field notes are, "written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (p. 108).

Upon transcribing my classroom observations, the following emerging themes became prevalent throughout the data:

- Professor/Student interactions

    o Professors talking comfortably with students

    o Students comfortably talking to/asking questions with professor

    o Students engaging in classroom discussion

- Student to Student Interactions

    o Students talking, laughing, working with each other

- Challenging Behavior in the Classroom

Professors – student interactions. A large part of a successful academic experience is directly related to the interactions between the student and professor in a classroom (Astin, 1993). Within a learning community, the professor-student relationship is elevated due to the in and out of the classroom interactions. In a successful learning community environment, knowledge is generated from teacher to student, student to student, and from student to teacher (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Throughout my observation of the faculty/student interactions, I recognized the professors practiced several principles of Chickering and Gamson's (1999) *Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, such as encouraging student-faculty contact, encouraging cooperation among students, and encouraging active listening.

Encouraging student-faculty contact. Chickering and Gamson (1999) suggest that frequent in and out of class involvement is important in motivating students and keeping them involved. In addition, the researchers suggest that knowing the students

well and showing concern for students helps them persevere through difficult times and encourages students to think about their academic commitment, values, and future plans.

From the very first class, I noticed both professors referencing the learning community with enthusiasm throughout their discussions. The African American Literature professor, Tara Coleman, stated, "Because this is a learning community, we can do this [work on a blog] outside of class. I will be with you sometime in our meetings outside of class." I observed Professor Kelly Brown, College Writing, on a few occasions dancing and snapping her fingers, singing, "I'm so happy to have this class."

The professors inserted themselves in several discussions, allowing the students to get to know their personality and personal history. When providing initial introductions, Professor Brown clearly wanted to break the ice, stating, "Ok, I'm Kelly Brown, you can call me Miss Brown or Miss Kelly, I'm not married, never been married; don't marry me off unless it's to a hot guy." This comment made the students laugh. Professor Brown proceeded to have brief individual dialogue with each student as they introduced themselves stating that she either had them in class during the summer bridge program, or recognized them from seeing them around campus.

In a discussion with students about their fears of writing, Professor Brown stated, "I'm not a perfect writer; I always thought my writing is horrible. I can't spell; I get confused just like everyone else. We are together in this- I'm not a dictator." In another conversation with students, Professor Brown teared up as she explained that teaching is a way of giving back what wasn't given to her as a child. To that comment one of the students blurted out, "I love you Ms. Brown."

In addition to the professors being open and sharing information about themselves, the students appeared to be comfortable sharing personal information with their classmates, as well as with the professors. The students openly confessed their fears about their writing ability and of falling behind in class, admitted to being ADHD, and possibly losing interest in schoolwork.

There were frequent displays of humor and laughter outbursts between the professors and students. Whether the students were snapping their fingers in delight after hearing a poem read by their classmates, or a student getting caught finding an answer to a question on his laptop, but pretending to know the answer all along, the students and professors had several light moments in their classes.

Encouraging cooperation among students. Another practice of Chickering and Gamson (1999) I observed was encouraging cooperation among students. The authors suggest that students learn better when they learn together, that collaborative learning increases involvement, improves thinking, and deepens understanding.

Both professors engaged the students in discussion during every class that I attended; however, I observed Professor Brown frequently putting students in small groups or making sure the classroom seats were in a circle. She would walk around the room offering assistance or having general conversations with them. However, I did not observe group work in Professor Coleman's class. She assisted students learning to understand African American literature with emotion and inflection in their voices, and assisted students struggling to pronounce unfamiliar words. I observed the students frequently volunteering to read and participate in both classes.

Encouraging active learning. The third principle noted during my observations was that of encouraging active learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1999). This principle suggests that students need to talk and write about what they are learning, as well as relate it to past experiences and apply it to themselves.

Throughout my observations I noticed many students were engaged in the classroom conversations without being prompted. Both professors informed the students that the grade included participation. Ms. Brown commented to the students, "I don't think we will have a problem in this class, you guys are pretty vocal." In contrast, Dr. Coleman had to quiet her students down from getting too engaged with the discussion, "You all are in rare form today, is that because Ms. Penny is here?"

The students, as well as the professors, appeared to be very comfortable commenting about race in both classes. When the students asked Dr. Coleman what sparked her interest in African American literature, she commented, among other things, "because I'm Black."

During another occasion on the topic of race, one student stated, "In my high school I didn't feel like I belonged. I wanted to come to college 'cause I wanted diversity." During this same class, while playing a game to get to know one another, the students and Ms. Brown, wrote something about themselves anonymously on a paper and they all had to guess who wrote it. On one paper it stated 'used to be in a band.' A student called out, "Karen," and Karen denied that it was her. Professor Brown acknowledged that she was the person who used to be in a band. This same student commented, while laughing, "Should have known, the only white girl in the room." Many of the students' mouths opened or they gasped in surprise by his comment.

Professor Brown responded, "no, it's ok," and continued with the game. Her reaction appeared to put the students at ease as they continued sharing throughout the class.

Student to student interactions in the classroom. Alexander Astin (1993) suggests that "the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group" (p. 4). The literature on student development in college suggests the amount of time peers spend together have a significant impact on all areas of student learning and development (Kuh et al., 2005; Terenzini et al., 1995). However, Jaffee (2007) and James et al. (2006) suggest that the peer group is susceptible to conflicts due to the amount of time students spend together, and because of this, predicted their behavior might resemble high school more than college.

It was clear from the first session of both classes that the students were familiar with each other through their frequent whispering, side bar conversations, teasing, joking, and openly sharing personal information about themselves. Although it made for a very engaging class, it was evident that high school behavior was a part of their recent history.

The camaraderie was noted by one of the professors when asking the students to pair up with people they did not communicate with on a frequent basis. When two of the students paired up, Ms. Coleman stated, "Antonio, I don't want you to pair up with Alex 'cause you high fived him." Antonio responded, "But I'm like that with everyone." Another time one student blurted out to another student, "Robin, what are you walking around for? Sit down!" To that, the student responded, "Sara, it had to be Sara. I was talking to Ms. Brown, not just walking around."

It was truly evident that the students were at ease around each other and felt quite comfortable bantering with one another in the presence of the professor. Although they were listening to the professor, I could see students discretely playing with other students' notebook, paper, or hair. Anytime there was a break from the professor speaking, a conversation would ensue among several students; if a student shared a funny story, others added comments, or the class as a whole laughed.

I observed just about all of the students talking to each other from time to time. There did not appear to be cliques among the students, as they sat in different seats each time I came to observe the class. In Professor Brown's classes I observed the students working in groups and helping one another. On one occasion, when arriving early to observe the African American Literature class, I witnessed several S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. sitting together studying.

Throughout my classroom observations, the most frequent distraction I recorded was students talking to one another, although quietly, while the professors or other students were engaging in class discussions; and group conversations any time the professors were not talking. Other distracting behaviors were passing notes, a cell phone rang, several instances of texting, and frequent late arrivals to class.

Although I recognized that these behaviors were typical of a college student, especially a first year student, I questioned whether this behavior was specifically due to their comfort level with their peers and the professors. I worried that students were possibly not taking the class seriously because they knew that these professors were dedicated to working with them in the learning community, and wondered if they exhibited some of these same behaviors in their non-S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. courses.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. in the residence hall and the resident assistant. A common challenge within learning communities is the unintended consequence of students being too comfortable with each other, the professors, and the RA, resulting in boundaries being crossed as to what is appropriate behavior or taking relationships for granted (Jaffee, 2007). This common challenge was evident in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., resulting in several instances of frustration felt by all involved, including this researcher.

The first semester of college for most students brings academic, social, and adjustment challenges as they transition into the university (Tinto 1999; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). As with other students trying to adjust and find their place in this new environment, the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. had their fair share of problems in the residence halls, such as roommate conflicts, discussing each other's personal information, and residence hall rule violations such as loud music, slamming doors, etc.

The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students lived in the same residence hall on the same floor along with Brian, their RA, which, in theory was designed to encourage a community living environment, in which students would have easy access to one another to study or socialize. During the fall semester, it was evident that the close living arrangements for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students was presenting more of a challenge than a positive opportunity.

Brian was selected as the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant and the RA for the learning community floor because he was an upper class UO/AS student, with a strong leadership background on campus. I purposely wanted someone who was familiar with the challenges UO/AS students faced, as well as someone the students could relate to because

of similar backgrounds. Brian was a tutor during the summer bridge program and worked closely with all of the UO/AS students prior to the fall semester.

Although the selection and involvement of Brian with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students was intentional, the familiarity of Brian as the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant/RA was challenging. An additional challenge faced by Brian was the adjustment of managing his time with his new responsibilities of being an RA and a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. assistant.

I met with Brian many times throughout the semester. At times he would call me very late in the evening with frustrations with the learning community students or to discuss how he should resolve a conflict between some of the members. During one conversation Brian stated, "There were moments where the floor seemed to have bonded and then moments later they could not stand the sight of each other." It became increasingly challenging as the conflicts the students experienced with one another outside of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. programming interfered with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. programming as students did not want to work together in class or in the groups.

Brian complained that the students would get upset with him if he would write them up after giving them several warnings for violating the rules of the residence halls; expected him to do some of the required work for the class that they shared; missed appointments he scheduled with them; and called on him all hours of the day and night for various non-emergency reasons. Due to the comfort level of the students, at times, they did not respect Brian's role as an RA, expected him to look the other way when they violated the rules, and did not appreciate him holding them accountable. Brian stated that having a prior relationship with the students through the summer bridge program made it difficult for the students to differentiate his role as an authority figure from friend.

After several complaints from Brian and some of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students, I found myself considering dismissing two of the students who appeared to be the source of many of the problems with the other students. I met with both students to discuss their commitment to the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program and the problems with the other students. They accepted responsibility for some of the situations, but felt that they were blamed for some things because they were misunderstood. They stated that they wanted to continue with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. and were willing to openly communicate with their peers pertaining to the problems the learning community was facing. We agreed to address the concerns at the next S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. gathering.

Morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings. During the fall semester, I met with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students every two weeks, totaling 10 hours, in the Terrell Hall community lounge. At each meeting the students were required to sign in, I provided food and we would start off the meeting checking in with the students, in which the students and I openly shared how we were doing and highlighted any good news or shared general frustrations.

For the very first meeting I arrived very early to surprise the students by cooking breakfast in the community kitchen for them. They all arrived, some in their pajamas and head wraps. Throughout the discussions, the students were sitting comfortably on the couches and chairs, some cuddled next to one another. They were very engaged in the conversations, eating, and easily socializing with their peers.

During this meeting we also discussed being homesick, and the residential, academic, and social adjustments to campus. The students stated that being on campus was "relaxing and overwhelming at the same time." We reviewed the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

program requirements and expectations, and I announced the dates, and the purpose of the monthly meetings for Pizza with your Professors.

At this meeting, students stated that the writing course was moving at a slow pace and that having the same professor from the summer was good and bad because she did not seem to challenge them very much. They stated that the African American Literature course was boring and felt that the professor did not show passion and that they did not quite understand the materials.

We discussed strategies to get the most out of the classroom experience, such as reviewing syllabi, reading in advance, and asking questions of the professor. As they continued to share it was evident that the students, at this time, found living together to have a positive impact, stating that knowing people helps them get acclimated to college, if one forgot their homework, others can assist, when going out to parties, "we stick together and watch out for one another."

Midway through the semester, during one of the meetings, I thought it was important for the students to reflect on their own goals, successes, and challenges faced throughout their first semester. I thought it connected perfectly to a summer bridge program activity that the students participated in, where they had to write and submit their personal mission statement, which focuses on their character, achievements, contributions, and values (Covey, 2004). I presented the students with each of their mission statements that they completed during the summer, and asked them to think about the goals they set for themselves and to reflect on whether they were satisfied with their progress toward their goals. The first student commented,

Yes, I am. I have joined clubs, met new people and all around getting a lot from

college. I have had problems that have made me have breakdowns but I have

learned. I am starting to accept others more for them being themselves. All around

I'm pretty content with my college life.

After the first student commented, others joined in the conversation:

"I am satisfied with my progress toward my goal because I will never give up.

Though I must admit I haven't worked as hard as I should."

"Yes, since I have been on campus I have kept myself busy and focused. I

worked, joined a dance team, I have a math tutor and I find the time to study. I would like

to be a part of another organization."

"I'm somewhat satisfied because I know I am not doing bad, but I think I could be

doing a lot better."

"I think that I could do a lot better than progressing towards my goals. I have

started to get on track and have work towards many of them, but believe that I have more

to give."

"It's a slow process, I believe and a difficult ride. I believe it is too early to see if I

have made progress or not."

When I asked the students to identify obstacles that have interfered with achieving

their goals, they identified being home sick, problems with friends and roommates,

socializing, adjusting to new found freedom, learning how to manage school and friends,

long distance relationships, financial stress, and lack of motivation to stay focused on

goals. The students seemed to see their challenges as learning opportunities and

welcomed the learning process. One student commented, "[One of my problems is] not

knowing how to say no, but it's a learning process. I feel as if I'm growing each and every day."

The students were able to identify resources and tools they have learned or utilized to help them finish the semester strong, such as continuing to study with peers and professors, using the library, tutors, managing time, conflict resolution, and setting priorities.

The students and I continued to meet monthly and I shared resources to find jobs on campus and off campus and upcoming important dates. We discussed adjusting to campus life, communicating with professors, networking, applying for scholarships, preparing for spring course registration, selecting community service activities, opportunities to get involved on campus, test taking and study skills, campus resources, and planning a trip to New York.

Mid-semester focus group. Midway through this cycle, during one of the morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings, I conducted a mid-semester focus group (see Appendix G) to gain a sense of their satisfaction with the program, gather any recommendations for improvement, and determine if any changes could be made for the remainder of the semester. The central theme of the students' comments centered around the residence halls, the linked courses, and their interactions with their peers.

Living with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. When asked to describe their learning community experience thus far and how they feel it has impacted their experience, the overwhelming response was that the program was not what they expected. The students found living together in the residence hall was most challenging:

The residential hall has made a huge impact on my first year. It has had both negative and positive. The positive aspects of my residential hall are that I can study with people in my class. One negative aspect of my residential hall is the fact that everyone feels like they can be involved in your personal life.

The residential hall experience made me realize that in college not everyone has the same upbringing or living habits that I have had. I have learned not to scream at the top of my lungs in the middle of the night, but some people have not. I do not regret living in the residential hall or participating in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., I just regret living in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. hall.

They continued to share their frustrations with living on the same floor in the residence hall with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.:

"[Living in the residence hall] has not been the most peaceful thing ever, but I've learned to deal with it."

"The residential hall experience made my first semester a little stressful due to being surrounded with people who already knew each other and the lack of communication."

"I think living together has hurt the program. Maybe if we didn't see each other all the time it would have been better. Also there were many personal conflicts, with mainly the girls, that interfered with the program."

It was clear that the students wanted the program to work and thought of ways the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. living arrangements could be better:

I find being in the same hallway is least helpful. I feel that if we all lived in the same building that would be better than being in the same hallway. If we were

dispersed amongst the whole building we could meet more people who are not in our class but still have people that are in our class in the same building.

Whereas one student found living in the residential hall to be beneficial, "Being able to live on campus is extremely helpful, and I love it. I plan to live here next year also."

Linked courses. When asked what part of the learning community was most helpful, the students unanimously agreed that having S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. in their classes was beneficial. "I found that having people I could discuss assignments with, peers, useful in case I needed help," and "I find having a roommate in two out of five of my classes very helpful. If one of us gets confused on an assignment we consult each other for help." Another student shared appreciation for working in groups:

> The most helpful part of the learning community was being able to talk to my peers about assignments. This was extremely helpful because my other classes it is hard to talk to peers that I do not know or ask for help. Also, when we get together as a group it is helpful.

The students also appreciated the courses being linked:

> The linked courses are having a positive impact on me thus far. I like the fact that both of my teachers know about each other's course and that they both cover history that is rarely talked about in predominately White schools.

One student did not feel the linked courses were a benefit to her, stating "Linked courses did not really have an impact on my experience." While one student had mixed feelings about the impact:

The courses that I have are both good and bad. The English class was good but I
did not like the literature class. The classes that we had together made us all feel
as though we had to be in competition with each other with grades.

Peer relationships. Schroeder et al. (1994) suggest that learning communities
with a high degree of involvement emphasize supportive interactions, with students
naturally helping one another with personal and academic problems. I found mixed
results of students feeling that the relationships they were developing with their peers
were challenging, "My peers have made it a little stressful my first semester," while some
found it to be a helpful experience:

It [S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] is a hard but refreshing learning community. I have learned
many things, living with people that I know; now I know how to handle
situations. I am grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of this community.

Most [of my peers] have had a positive impact on me. A few have had a negative
impact on me and left a negative impression on me. But I'm not perfect either so
hopefully they can work through things just as I am.

They have made it interesting for me. In many ways it was easy to adapt to
college life but it was also hard because I did not branch out to many other
students that were not in my learning community or the UO/AS program.

Many S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S…. I do not hang out with outside of class. Some are rude,
disrespectful, and only cares about their self. Some did work well with me and I
have gotten closer to others in our program.

The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. and I continued to discuss why they thought they were
having a difficult time working with one another. One student stated, "It

[S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] is like a family, they get on your nerves, but you still love each other." We discussed how the familiarity that the students have with each other may have made some situations worse than if they occurred with strangers.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. recommendations and accepting responsibility. When I asked the students for suggestions for the learning community, they unanimously suggested the living arrangements to be changed, as two students commented, "I suggest that students in the program live in the same dorm, but they don't stay in the same hallway. It makes for a better and more authentic college experience," and "living in the same building- but not the same floor would be better, also, making sure that everyone could attend all group meetings, making it mandatory so that we all get the same information and can work on living with each other best."

For the other areas where the program struggled, several students took on a lot of the responsibility for how it was turning out:

"Only S.C.H.OL.A.R.S. can make the community work or fail. Their motivation is key for the community to succeed."

"[To] find people who actually want to help make S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. succeed."

"I wish S.CH.O.L.A.R.S. was working out better for you and me. I think you are doing everything you could possibly do for the program. Unfortunately, many people in the program gave up the first week the program started."

At the conclusion of the mid-point focus group discussion, I was disappointed to learn that the living arrangements were not successfully working; however, I was pleased to learn that the students found the learning community helpful overall. Although they experienced challenges, they accepted them as a learning experience. Unfortunately, the

biggest area of concern by the students, the living arrangements, was impossible to change in the middle of a semester, other than the students initiating individual room changes with the Office of Housing, of which I made them aware.

During our next few meetings we adapted the sessions to cover conflict resolution and communication skills in a team building to discuss some of the concerns of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. I determined that the students needed team building exercises, and to continue activities surrounding communication and conflict resolution skills to improve the remaining weeks in the semester.

The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings were well attended; students were consistent in coming to the meetings unless they had a scheduling conflict. As the semester progressed, I could tell when there was tension among the students by the body language and the lack of discussion among the members. Schroeder et al. (1994) suggest that student affairs and academic affairs personnel be able to "teach students how to disagree with grace and dignity" (p. 125) as a way of preparing them to live a productive life after college.

When those situations occurred I would attempt to address the elephant in the room, but realized sometimes the students needed to resolve conflict in their own way and time. We discussed conflict resolution techniques and I made them aware that I was available to help them work through their conflicts if they were interested.

Pizza with professors. The purpose of the Pizza with your Professors meetings was to build the out of class relationship between the students and the professors through informal gatherings in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. residence hall. Throughout the course of the semester, there were four sessions, totaling six hours.

The first Pizza with Professors meeting was held one month into the semester. By this time, the climate in the residence halls had begun to change with some of the students' behavior. Unfortunately, I needed to use this meeting to be able to address those concerns, as many of the students were not speaking to each other and it was affecting the learning community. With the help of Professor Brown, I conducted an exercise where we would revisit the reasons everyone joined S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. and ways we could get the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program back on track.

Upon asking why they joined S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., the students responded that they all wanted to be a part of a group that was responsible and would help each other get better, gain a close bond with each other, as well as with the professors, encourage each other to respect the residence rules, to be supportive of Brian and to develop friendships and study groups.

When asked what they needed to do to get the program back on track, the students suggested that they needed everyone to get together and be adults and talk about the tension, plan events outside of school together to get to know each other better, reach out to everyone and support one another because, "we all in this together," figure out what each of their strengths are so they can work together, and find common times to study together in the library.

Several students acknowledged their errors in communicating with their peers, some did not participate in the conversation. It was good to see many of the students openly discussing their concerns and willing to work through the conflicts. Schroeder et al. (1994) describe a good learning community as one that establishes a climate in which people feel free to disagree when their experience warrants telling their truths.

From this discussion we concluded the meeting with a discussion on how we wanted to move forward with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Everyone committed to do better with communicating their frustrations, and then we discussed everyone's availability to determine times for students to study together, which Brian agreed to assist with by coordinating. We discussed attending campus activities together such as mentoring program activities and sporting events to get students to spend social times together.

During another Pizza with Professors meeting, Professors Brown and Coleman asked the students how things were going in the classroom. Several students took this opportunity to share, particularly with Professor Coleman, their dislike of the structure of her class. The students complained about the "amount of reading, the boring materials, and not understanding the assignments." Some of the students suggested introducing the materials using technology, movies, videos, stating the delivery and the information was "dry" and incorporating other technologies would help them become more interested.

One student was bothered by the suggestions to change the class and commented, "This is college, stop trying to dumb down the course." During this time I could see a look of discomfort on Professor Coleman's face as she began to explain to the students why the class was structured in the way that it was. She reminded students that they have not taken advantage of her on-line support or office hours, and encouraged students to break up the readings instead of waiting to the last minute to try to read and comprehend the material.

During this discussion with the professor, I was conflicted as a participant and a researcher on whether to interfere with the dialogue, because I could tell Professor Coleman was uncomfortable. I was conflicted between not allowing this event to turn

into a bitch session with the students so forthright in complaining, and allowing the conversation to go uninterrupted, as one of the goals of these meetings is to have open dialogue between the students and professors. I compromised, allowing the conversation to continue, but reiterated the recommendations of the professor. A few days later I followed up with Professor Coleman to ask how she felt about the meeting. She stated that she was surprised by the students' comments and was not expecting to hear anything like that because they had not voiced these concerns previously. I explained why I did not interfere with the dialogue and apologized if she was hurt or offended by the meeting. She stated that she is used to teaching upper class students and she was thinking about other techniques to incorporate in her class.

The remaining Pizza with Professor meetings were more of the format initially designed. The students and faculty ate food, mingled with each other, had general conversations with professors, watched a documentary of Zora Neale Hurston with Professor Coleman, and discussed the end of the semester trip to New York.

Harlem renaissance trip. The final activity of the fall semester of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. was a trip to Harlem, New York. During the initial planning meeting, the learning community professors and I discussed having a culminating event at the end of the semester and thought that it would be a good idea to tie in the Harlem Renaissance course discussions with a tour of Harlem, New York. With the assistance of Professor Coleman, and funding from the Residential Learning and University Housing (RLUH) office, I was able to secure a tour company to take us on a walking/bus tour of the historical landmarks of Harlem. Professor Coleman made sure many of the areas discussed in class were a part of the tour (Appendix P).

Professor Coleman, the Director of RLUH, and 12 learning community students attended the bus trip. During the tour we were able to see Harlem's Sugar Hill neighborhood, the Apollo Theatre, Louis Farrakhan's Mosque, speakeasies, jazz clubs, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the Dark Tower, a property previously owned by Madame C. J. Walker. Throughout the 12-hour day we all mingled, laughed, and learned together. It was an excellent ending to a long semester.

After returning from the trip I received several thank you notes stating how much everyone enjoyed the trip, including one from the administrator from RLUH:

> Dec. 12, 2009
> Penny,
> I wanted to follow-up and thank you for including me in the trip to Harlem this weekend with the Learning Community students. It was an amazing experience for me, and a very positive introduction for my first trip into New York City. I also very much enjoyed and   appreciated the opportunity to get to know the students as we interacted throughout the day. They were a great group!
> Thank you!
> Director, for Residential Learning

Conclusion. In December, at the end of the semester, I was proud to have implemented the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community. The linked courses, morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings, residential living component, Pizza with the Professors activity, and end of year trip to New York occurred as planned. Throughout each aspect of the learning community, the students, faculty, resident assistant, and I faced challenges; however, as I began to assess the data, I also found that each of us gained something from the learning community experience that would assist us individually as we moved forward.

Cycle Four: December. Assess and Reflect

The purpose of Cycle Four was to conduct final assessments of the impact of the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community on the students, faculty, and S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

assistant. At the conclusion of the semester, I conducted final interviews with six

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. participants and a focus group discussion with five S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

participants using the same questions (Appendix H). The goal of the interviews and focus

group was to get their overall perspective of the impact of the learning community in

their first year. I interviewed both learning community professors (Appendix I) to gain

their perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the learning community and to

ascertain their perception of the impact of the learning community on enrolled students. I

interviewed the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. resident assistant to learn of the challenges and

rewards of his responsibilities, and reviewed the fall academic grades for the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. to determine if there were any implications of influence from the

learning community (Appendix J).

End of semester student evaluations. At the end of the semester I offered

students the choice to be interviewed or participate in a focus group to get an overall

assessment of their experience in the learning community (see Appendix H). Five

students participated in a 90-minute focus group, which was held in the Terrell Hall

lounge. Six students participated in individual interviews, held in the UO/AS conference

room, which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each. All of the students were asked the

same questions.

Why S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.? Initial expectations. I asked the students their initial

reasons for deciding to participate in the UO/AS learning community. The majority of the

students stated that they wanted to live in Terrell Hall as their initial reason for joining the learning community; however, one young lady commented, "Once I read about what S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. was about I realized it would have been good for me." Other students had similar comments about their purpose for applying, "I wanted to stay with my UO/AS family," "I thought it would be easier to pass if all of us were together in one class," and "I pictured S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. being more like people I could kind of go to when I needed help because I figured I didn't know what the workloads would be like."

I asked the students to explain how they felt the learning community met, or did not meet their expectations. The majority of the students felt that it met their expectations: "It met my expectations when we had extra time to meet with professors, and living in the hall we could all meet in one room to talk about class," "It was about what I expected - what I didn't expect was the outside drama," and, "I expected the classes and the meetings even though some meetings were tedious but I expected it."

Student perspective: Sense of community, "Togetherness." I started my question focused on whether or not their involvement in the learning community helped them build a sense of community through interacting academically and socially with the learning community members and how it impacted their first year. Despite all of the conflicts, most students felt that that there was a bond between them, academically and socially. A few students agreed that the learning community met their expectations of "togetherness," a term the students coined while sharing their thoughts, but that conflicts interfered with achieving that expectation. One student commented,

Um, I feel like togetherness definitely, I wanted to have a group of people I could

turn to, I felt like we should be a family but with the fall [semester] I felt like we

were all just kind of attacking each other, not really caring.

Other students commented,

I did connect to my S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. group not only 'cause they were in my

class, but because they are all [UO/AS]. Academic wise- it's a little iffy 'cause I

know these students so well I wasn't able to concentrate. I was able to relax.

Um, definitely, living around the people and all of us having the same

assignments. I think just living around each other…. yea, it feels like we are part

of a community 'cause we are always around each other. Other people are

alone and we have each other.

"I guess I like the fact that we were with each other so much it kind of forced us

to bond together."

Since we live together it's easier to have access to everybody. Like if you want to

go to eat you can just knock on someone's door and go to eat. At the end of the

hall is the event board and everyone in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. knows about

the information and will go together. Like the criminal justice workshop

everyone was there. We go to parties together.

I don't know I mean we all, from then to now, I see us all getting a little closer

together, help each other out more, speak our thoughts where before we were not

talking, or talking about each other, not helping one another, everything we said

to each other was a criticism in a way, I don't know, I just feel like we got a little

bit better [by the end of the fall semester].

134

Yea, I see it like a family- you don't have to like me but I feel like know you love

me and I love them. I feel like didn't like a lot of people in scholars, but I loved

them, like I did things for them and I cared about them- sort of like a family to me

or to them.

While others shared their challenges;

"We all took stereotypes and ran with it. We all judged each other and it was that

way all fall semester."

"Um, first semester I think it was kind of like tough cause we were all like

judging when we were all coming in, seeing everything, who was coming in cause I kind

of felt like…nosey."

"I didn't spend any time with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.."

"Socially, it was just like I couldn't tolerate a lot with everybody, it was just like

even if you don't care or like each other you just put on your game face."

"Socially, I definitely didn't want anything to do anything with the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. whatsoever, so I kept myself away from them on purpose and I stayed

with my friends outside of [UO/AS]. I made sure to stay away."

Student perspective: Residential living experience. I then began to ask about the

impact of the residential hall experience in their first year. The students' comments were

mixed, some positive:

One thing - I trusted them [S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S]. It all brings me back to [UO/AS].

[Be]cause I know them- I knew how they would act during the semester. I

worried that someone would come into my room and steal things. We had study

times and study hours. Just having [Angela] as my roommate helped.

It gave me more comfort on campus- [be]cause you meet more people on campus.

I just about know everyone on campus and it's because of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S..

Some people on our floor are friends with others now I have a big social life on

campus. I didn't think I would know so many people on campus.

While others did not have such a positive experience:

Living with them – it was too much for me cause it was like too many

preconceived notions and like attitudes with people. I just feel like it would be the

same in any first semester when you live with people.

The fall semester was the worst, but I feel as though I had a lot of anger

management [issues] 'cause I learned how to deal with people and live with

people...we were forced it to talk it out – deal with it one on one or get over it

'cause we knew we were going to see each other so much, so it was like a positive

and a negative.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. residence assistant: Brian. Throughout the semester, the

students and Brian had a trying relationship. I thought it was important to gain a better

understanding of their assessment of Brian's role, which by the comments, despite their

frustration with him felt he was invaluable;

It helped in a good way and a bad way. A good way cause we could talk to him

and open up. A bad way um just cause we knew him. Well I noticed that a couple

of students did not take him seriously. Like noise violations; just [be]cause they

knew him that well, they took advantage of him.

I feel it as indifferent. He had a large impact on me. He took the same class,

African American History and he stayed on top of me 'cause I'm a procrastinator.

Definitely knowing him before hand is helpful because he knows our tendencies

and he is easy to approach because he is Brian.

Us knowing him from the beginning, he just was like too much like nagging and

like just because he knew us he expected certain things because we knew him

personally. I think it…..it was a good thing because he was easy on us sometime

because we knew him.

He [Brian] was too much since he knew us already he thought he could say

anything or do anything, but also because he knew us he helped us A LOT. He

was also like a help too, if we needed him to find something he knew where to

find it.

It's more so that everybody went to [Brian] as the middle man. If they had a

problem with somebody it would be the littlest thing- they would go to [Brian].

Student perspective: Linked courses and the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. professors. I

asked the students to comment on the impact of the linked courses and their connection

with the professors of these courses. Several students commented that they felt at ease in

an environment where they knew the professors and the students intimately:

"Academically, I felt the same way because I knew the people; I could definitely

be more free with what I said."

Academically, in the classroom it was easier, I guess [be]cause we lived together I

didn't have a problem talking in front of them or debating a subject or being

wrong. In classes I don't know a lot of people cause I don't want to be wrong or

them to look at me like she's crazy. So academically, it helped a lot, like just

knowing who I was in class with [be]cause I could be more outspoken on a subject.

When commenting about the professors, the students had mixed feelings about both professors:

"Networking with professors really helped me a lot."

Being in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., professors seem more lenient, they would let us get away with things like 'I know you didn't read so you can read next week'- I didn't like that. I paid all this money I expect to learn.

[We were treated] like we were special, poor students coming to college, and I didn't like it. Coming out of high school was no excuse, like we were mature enough. Like they were treating us like we, I don't know, like we were less than the regular student. When it came to classes, I don't know about you guys but I felt like we were treated a little extra because we were "S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S." like we were Special Ed or something. The teachers kept pointing that out like 'you are S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. you should know better.'

Professor Coleman. The student's comments for Professor Coleman were mixed as well. Many students appreciated being challenged, while others felt she lacked the ability to make a connection with the students:

"I loved that class, I learned soo much. I got to like, speak, talk a lot, argue a lot."

"…that class was like made for me. I learned so much I loved that class."

"[Dr. Coleman], I love her."

"She cared without being a push over – she helped a lot. She cared without us getting over and that's what I liked."

A fifth student responded:

> [Dr. Coleman] was a little different on the positive side; her enthusiasm and
> knowledge of the subject. If we didn't know it she would get a little irritated. She
> was a good teacher- her perspective of poems was so different it made you think
> about things differently. It was pretty cool.
>
> She was like the opposite of [Ms. Brown] I loved that class, and the teacher
> [Professor Coleman] it was kind of hard with the readings, but that's like- what I
> came to college for. That's what I was expecting and she did it, and I was like,
> 'yea, I'm going to college.
>
> There were several students who did not like her teaching style, "I liked the

course and all but I didn't like her that much. I don't know I just don't feel like she did

anything for me." Other students shared their frustrations with the Professor Coleman:

> We just wanted to like just go at her [Coleman], fight with her all the time, cause
> we just had that fighting mentality, but toward the end of that, we,
> S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. started to get together, off in small groups like, maybe, like
> [with] a roommate, or a suitemate.
>
> She [Ms. Coleman] was something – an acquired taste. You either like her or
> you don't and me personally, I didn't like the fact that she didn't have patience for
> us. She had to understand that we were freshman, like we were expecting hard
> work and having to do that stuff.
>
> Like [Coleman], she was used to teaching seniors and juniors so when it came to
> teaching freshman, she didn't have patience, and toward the end it got better but
> in the beginning, she was just very horrible.

Well that class- I think it was more personal for me. I got a B in that class but I didn't enjoy that class at all. I was just bored in that class. It was [Ms. Coleman], she didn't help that. She didn't make it appealing. It was 'just take this and learn it. Like I would expect a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. teacher to. She seemed to be close in our age which may have affected it. She tried sometimes. The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meeting helped that situation. When we explained it to her she adjusted her syllabus and it got better - it wasn't all bad.

Kuh et al. (2005) suggest, "recognizing students' talents and preferred learning styles empowers them and also make it possible to raise standards for academic challenge (p. 205)." Prior to Professor Coleman recognizing the needs of the students, she and the students were struggling to make the teacher student relationship work. Once Professor Coleman recognized the needs of the students' and adapted her teaching style to their learning style, the classroom dynamics improved.

Professor Brown. The majority of the students felt that Ms. Brown was a "push over," and "too easy." Although they enjoyed her as a person, some stated she treated them as if they were not capable of handling the work: "She thought we were slow- like we couldn't write at all." Several more students had similar comments:

"She [Professor Brown] should be like a kindergarten teacher or something."

"I felt like I was in a remedial class –her class was a drag."

"It [Writing Course] made me mad 'cause it was a easy class but it's a writing course and me being an English major you're not preparing me for nothing at all, nothing at all."

One student stated, "I feel like [Professor] Brown is a push over too." Others joined in laughing, "Yea we'd tell her to do something and she would do it." She went on

to demonstrate an example of what she meant: "uh. [Ms. Brown] we don't want to have class tomorrow, 'ok guys.'" The student continued;

>If we didn't want to hand in a paper we wouldn't hand it in or tell her we didn't want to do it and she would just keep pushing back the date until we felt like handing it in. I really did feel like she was treating us like we were slow – she's a very nice person, awesome lady. I love her to death- she's just a really bad teacher for me. I did not get information on what I did wrong or an explanation how to fix it.

Another student commented on his experience in Professor Brown's class,

>Negative, um, I felt that if I didn't write the way she did I would get a bad grade. She would tell me to write anyway that I wanted. She would revise my papers. I would give it back and she would revise it again. How many times does it take to revise a paper? It's like if you didn't write like [Ms. Brown]-it's wrong. She wants you to write just like her. If you don't write this way you are going to get a bad grade. I think that was one main reason that led me to fail. I have heard other students say that.

Whereas one student comment on how much Professor Brown helped his writing,

>[Ms. Brown's] class was definitely great for me. Her teaching was definitely great. I got a B+ in her class she just teaches the right things - she teaches more appealing things. She teaches interesting things we were able to write about our personal experiences which helped out a lot of students. My writing definitely improved by far. That class definitely raised the bar with my writing.

Morning meetings. I then asked the students how they felt the morning

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings impacted their first semester. The majority of the students

felt the morning meetings were beneficial and added a sense of community:

"It [morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings], helped me, the morning meetings,

gave me information like scholarships."

"It [morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings], was like in a comfort zone,"

"It [morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings], was a good transition."

I liked that [morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings] I thought it was cute that we all

came together. Although some people didn't come down or had some other things

to do; we had time together.

I think they [morning S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings], were helpful. The reason why

they [other students] felt it was over kill cause of the drama. When you [the

researcher] taught us about jobs on campus and scholarships - all of that was

helpful and of course the breakfast.

Whereas one student felt that students were not being true to themselves at the

meetings or were using the meetings to complain. "It was like fakeness. One time the

group would say things at the meetings some things they wouldn't say in front of you [the

researcher]."

General comments on S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Throughout the interview, several

comments were made in reference to the UO/AS staff, me, as the researcher/facilitator,

and other areas that were not consistent enough to create a theme; however, I thought

they were worth mentioning.

You [researcher] always kept us in line, told us things we needed to do. After the

semester began we were running around like chickens with our heads cut off. But

you and [Mr. White] with your presentations helped us stay straight.

The classes that you picked for us helped me get the classes that we

needed out of the way. When we had to meet to pick our classes and the advisors

were glad we got the writing class out of the way. The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

professors were helpful and easy to approach for the most part. Most people

that weren't a S.C.H.O.L.A.R. wished they were. It was like an extra support

with staff and students. If I'm thinking about not doing an assignment he

[pointing to one of his peers] makes me feel bad if I don't do it.

That's one of the most important things to have- having someone to actually help

you and not only do you have someone to help you but show you a different

perspective. I couldn't talk to Angelo [be]'cause he wasn't in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

but I could talk to everyone else in my hallway.

[In S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] I get more academic support. I don't know how

everybody learns but everyone knows I am a procrastinator. Like [Ms. Brown]

would require me to turn in my papers early… and the social aspect of college

life - it gave me support in that too. 'Cause as S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S you're already

tied into other programs socially.

One student had a unique perspective on the adverse benefit S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

that I thought was interesting:

I'm the type that I don't like to get my way - to get spoiled like that, as far as

college, cause I know [in] my junior, senior year I'm just gonna have to just go

along with the work. [Be]cause with most of my classes I'm with kids I don't know; with teachers not paying me any mind individually – so I want to get prepared for that. I don't want to get comfortable with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. and have this group gathering our freshman year then [here] comes my sophomore, junior/senior year and I don't have that to depend on. I need to be like challenged – I guess everyone saw it differently.

Most students found the learning community concept of linking peers, classes, and professors together as a positive experience; however, this student saw it as an unrealistic college experience. She did not feel that it accurately reflected a typical classroom/college experience; as if the learning community provided a false sense of security, setting her up to struggle in her later years when she no longer had the in and out of class support provided by the learning community program.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. perceived value of the 2009 First-Year Seminar. My next question focused on the First-Year Seminar. All UO/AS students were required to participate in a First-Year seminar, facilitated by a UO/AS counselor. Based on the students' comment, it appears that the UO/AS program was successful in providing valuable information to the students as indicated by one of the comments, "We learned a lot. It should stay a requirement 'cause you learn a lot: Sex Ed, Greek; very helpful information. [The early time] was a bit stressful."

Pizza with professors. During the semester, faculty from the linked courses joined the students in the residential hall to eat pizza, salad, and soda, and to socialize with the students. This informal meeting with the professors occurred once a month. The students felt that the Pizza with the Professors was helpful because it gave them the

opportunity to communicate with their professors in a relaxed environment. "It was a good experience. Not only do you get to say here are our thoughts from professors, but there are our thoughts from students. Those meetings were actually beneficial," and "It helped because the students were able to talk about the class and if anything needed to change. Students had a chance to talk to their professors. It was helpful-especially the one with [Dr. Coleman]."

During one of the pizza with the professors meetings, several students verbalized concerns over the amount of reading and the type of assignments provided by Professor Coleman. Those students who spoke out did so as if the entire group had the same feelings, which was not the case, as indicated by the following comments by a student:

> I just felt S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. complained too much. I mean, like people wanted movies instead of reading. We're in college, like, we don't have the ability to tell professors, like you want to watch movies. I don't know; it was like they were like babies. Different environment, different homes, I just felt like people in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. were just like babies.

Harlem renaissance end of semester trip. During the semester, the professors and I planned a trip to New York to tour areas specific to Harlem Renaissance era. This trip served as an educational activity, as well as a culminating activity for participating in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. During the trip, all of the students appeared to enjoy the day. I wanted to see how they felt it impacted their first year experience. One student commented, "It added to my learning community experience. I liked what I learned at the Apollo. It did actually help with my art class I had to send pictures to get extra credit." Another student added, "I did learn from the Schomburg institute. I thought the Harlem trip would have

had more to do with the Renaissance piece but it helped with the learning community, we all had fun."

The Harlem Renaissance trip was a fun and successful activity which allowed the students to spend time with their peers, as well as with one of their professors, Dr. Coleman, and with a University administrator, the Director of Residential Learning and University Housing (RLUH). Throughout the day, everyone was engaged in the tour and I watched the students consistently communicate their comments about the tour experience with Dr. Coleman and the Director of RLUH.

Impact of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. on students' transition to college. I asked the students if they felt the learning community assisted with their transition to the campus environment. For the most part, the students all felt a sense of support by being in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., which aided to their adjustment in the first semester:

> Absolutely, um, it sort of like paved our way. Help from S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. helped me adapt to my environment and in this world you have to learn how to adapt to things. They gave us the information and we do what we want with it.
>
> Yes, I don't think if I was living anywhere else I would be the same person. I wouldn't come out so much. If I was living by myself or with people I didn't know I would be in my room and not very sociable. You just don't feel like you're alone. A sense of community there.
>
> College, in general, has so many things that can distract you from doing well. Support from my counselors, positive friends, seeing others go through situations helps you decide what you want to do or the way you want things to end.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. student self reflection. Most students face transitional challenges during their first year at college. Through the challenges, students grow and reflect on their situation (Pascarella et al.,1994). I wanted to know what the students felt they learned about themselves as a result of being a part of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.,

> I learned not to have other people make decisions for me. I learned to get myself out of different situations before they get out of hand, I learned to um. I guess, turn negative situations into positive. That [my decisions] not only affects me at the moment, but in the future.

> Learned that I had bad time management, learned that I have to take time to make decisions. Learned to show more drive or follow up with my classes and in my life. Also, learned that I have to make a to- do list of what needs to be done. [I] also learned that I am easily influenced.

Will the journey continue? Plans for returning to S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S in spring 2010. I wanted to know how many students were planning to continue participating with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S in the spring semester. Fourteen out of the seventeen students commented that they would continue in the spring, "Yes, I liked the program and the two classes that were picked are the kind of classes that would count toward graduation. I want to help keep the program [S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] running."

One student shared why he decided he would not continue with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. in the spring:

> No, I will not participate. I am not in the same building anymore, moved out. Academic wise, classes and courses I wasn't taking it seriously [be]cause I knew everyone in the class. Now that I won't be taking classes with my peers, it will be

easier now to take things serious. You meet new people presentations and group projects it's easier for you to learn when you don't have many distractions.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. recommendations. Having participated in the first UO/AS learning community, I wanted to find out what the students would recommendation to improve the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community:

"Morning meetings should be more in the evening, Pizza with the Professors more structured; more set time when everyone can be there. The one thing that upset me was non- S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. on our floor and I think they shouldn't be on our floor."

"Inform the professors that students are not slow- that they want a challenge."

"More classes with other people; not just S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S."

"Take one class together."

"Live on the same floor - but not suite mates."

Resident assistant end of semester interview. At the end of the semester I wanted to get feedback from Brian, as he spent the majority of the time with the students in class and in the residence hall. We met over lunch and talked for 90 minutes. Upon interviewing Brian, he had a few general comments to share:

I think that the residents focused too much on the drama instead on what the whole focus of the living arrangements were for. Instead of using each other as resources, they continuously worried about gossip, which in turn affected the floor. In my view, it made the experience a negative one for the residents, but they have only each other to blame.

Overall, Brian felt that engaging in the linked courses could be beneficial. He stated:

The idea of having friends to count on if you need them is amazing. As for this group, the linked courses only made them look like slackers. This group lacked the motivation to succeed to their full potential. I still agree with the idea of having linked courses, but am just worried of how students portray themselves. This happens in any class, with anyone in the summer bridge program or even regular admits, but when you are all in one class, they must be that much more cautious of how they are perceived.

I wanted to know what Brian observed about the learning community students in comparison to non-learning community students? He stated:

In the beginning it seemed that they were different, every floor is the same - drama. Some people aren't going to click. As the semester moved forward - less drama, but realized all floors have difficulties. Even though students expected to have less it is the same, regardless. I expected some drama - but I thought who they were [S.CH.O.L.A.R.S], we wouldn't have as much. The drama happens - but it happens everywhere.

I then asked him to explain his thoughts on the impact the academic component of the learning community had on the first year experience of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.? He felt that those who wanted and sought help asked and received it, those that came to the program focused, stayed focused. He suggested that maybe because it was the students' first semester they were just focused on themselves.

I asked Brian to explain the impact the residential component had on learning community students.

[S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] started off well - about one month - then a lot of drama and stress came. They [the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S] were loud, noisy, and rude. They [the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] thought it was specific to S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., but realized all floors had drama. I do see them knowing each other as a benefit. Going in each other's room, it was also a setback 'cause they didn't want to reach out to others [non-S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.].

Brian felt that the students utilized each other for support in some ways and that true friendships were created by their involvement in the program. He felt that the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. utilized him as a source of support in many ways: help in the library, with registration, "they could come to me for anything." Brian felt that he became good friends with several of the students because they had an easy time talking. He stated that he felt like the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. needed someone "they can relate to," as he was aware that other RAs "were scared of my floor." He went on to state, "I understand where they [UO/AS students] come from and how to work with them. Other RAs would not be able to handle my floor."

I asked Brian if he felt the students utilized the linked professors for support. He stated that he would always hear that they utilized Professor Brown. Brian was in Professor Coleman's class and he had difficulty working with her himself:

For [Coleman], I feel like we tried to reach out but she was unclear. I tried to reach out and she flat out told me 'it wasn't good enough.' She didn't have a connection with many of us and we started not to care. She didn't seem like she was there to help us - she wanted us to think she was there to help but there was no connection.

150

One of the important topics Brian and I frequently discussed with the students was making healthy choices and advocating for themselves. I asked Brian if he felt the students' involvement in the learning community impacted their ability to make healthy choices and further advocate for themselves. He felt that it impacted them to some degree, that when the students went out, they went as a group and they looked out for each other; however, as far as advocating, he didn't feel as though they took advantage of all of the resources available to them.

Brian believes the learning community had a positive impact on the students' ability to adjust to their first year on campus because many took the opportunity to get involved outside of the residence hall, they had connections with the floor, and he helped them with information they had not received from other sources. Socially, Brian felt that it took time for the students to adjust. He felt that the living conditions made things challenging. He felt that the S.CH.O.L.A.R.S. were intimidated by the racial divide in the residence hall.

> They [the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S] said they tried to get involved but didn't feel comfortable. So the floor helped them have a place they felt comfortable, but it may also have inhabited their ability to go branch out to others…. People in the dorm ask 'why don't your floor come to the lounge' – some tried to branch out, but it's slow. I would tell them they have to get to know other people. They came to a meeting like a gang and then stuck together. No one approached them to get to know them, and visa versa.

> I asked Brian if his experience working with the learning community met his expectations:

I can honestly say I was excited in the beginning and all the drama drained me out so I was in their face during last semester. Next semester I am taking more time for myself…. They have my number if they need me. I'm not going to waste my time 'cause they didn't show up when I would set up study time or time to get together. You can't force them. I feel like the students didn't make an effort to make the relationship work.

With that being said, I wondered if this experience had damaged his desire to work with the learning community again in the future, he stated, "I actually would [be an RA in a learning community again]. There are other things I would put ahead of it. Time is my reason I can't return."

Brian felt one of the strengths of the learning community experience was the bond they created that other residential floors did not have. He felt that having an RA that the students know and can trust, assigned to the learning community helps make their transition easier. Brian suggested that having all S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. live on the same floor, if used wisely, could be helpful for accessibility purpose but due to the conflicts and challenges he faced, suggested that having the floor equally represented with students from regular admission, which would decrease the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. feeling suffocated by each other, and would assist them in meeting new people and further appreciating diversity. "Academically, having teachers they [S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] can connect to and different course selections…. would not recommend the Africana Studies course. It's just not something everyone is interested in; it bothered them a lot."

I asked Brian what lessons he is taking away from this experience, he stated, "[I learned] how to balance being a friend and an authority figure with students, a lot of patience and understanding of people and their differences, and time management."

I thanked Brian for his patience and dedication to assisting me with the implementation of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community and for being a valuable resource for the students.

Prior to the end of the semester Brian sent me an email as he reflected on his semester long experience:

> Dec. 19, 2010
> Penny, I just wanted to let you know something:
> Today the last resident checked out from my floor. I told myself that it would NOT be an emotional moment for me when they checked-out. However, as I began setting up for next semester (yes, ALREADY lol) and all the memories the floor and I shared came back to me. They sure did give me a run for my money, but it was worth it al it- the stress, tears, anger...along with the fun/relaxing nights, smiles, and laughter. Nothing comes easy, and this definitely showed me just that. I'm not going to say that I am ready for next semester, but I am more ready than I was this past semester. I always wanted to give up, and you were always there to help. I am glad that I decided to do the [UO/AS] learning community, for a selfish and selfless reason (both at the same time). I think it's safe to say that it's a 50/50 chance when placing [UO/AS] students together. At times I think its working and at other times it seems to all crumble so fast. As for my part in it, I am glad that I am the one helping them. No matter what drama they have amongst each   other, I always want them to know they at least can talk to me about it...and I think they realize that. It makes me appreciate my job that much more, and I have you to thank for. I definitely want to thank you for always being there for me.
> I hope you have a great break and enjoy your holidays. See you soon!
> Brian

End of semester faculty evaluations. At the conclusion of the semester, I interviewed both learning community professors to gain their perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the learning community, and to ascertain their perception of the impact of the learning community on enrolled students. I met with both professors individually for approximately one hour each, asking them the same questions (see

Appendix I). I met with Professor Coleman in her office and I met with Professor Brown in the UO/AS conference room. Upon completing the interviews their comments were transcribed.

It was interesting that both professors had different points they focused on throughout the interview. Professor Brown had a lot of comments pertaining to the sense of community; whereas, Professor Coleman focused her comments on the students' learning style. Both professors noticed a difference in teaching the learning community students as opposed to non-learning community classes, with negative and positive outcomes. Professor Coleman and Professor Brown were very open and forthright about their experience with the learning community and the personal impact the learning community had on them.

Sense of community. Professor Brown recognized the sense of community among the students early and frequent. She stated, "With S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. there was a sense of community/accountability. When people were absent, I would say something about it and discussion would start in class." She continued to state:

They [S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.] already had a sense of communication, whether good or bad. They already knew each other, whether problematic or helpful. Because they already had a sense of community, they didn't feel the need to do team building [activities]. [UO/AS] students tend to be like that anyway. The downside of that may be distractions or not maintaining appropriate classroom behavior.

As Jaffee (2007) suggests, an unintended consequence of learning communities occurs because students get comfortable with one another and become too comfortable

with their behavior in the classroom, creating a classroom management challenge for professors.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.: A different style of learning. Prior to teaching the learning community class, Professor Coleman was familiar with teaching upper-class students, mostly literature majors. Not having had experience teaching freshman, or teaching in a learning community environment, she experienced several challenges throughout the semester as the students verbalized their frustration about the structure of her class.

I noted in my journal that although Professor Coleman may be aware of the mission of the UO/AS program and an advocate for UO/AS students, I realized that she was not familiar with teaching a classroom of UO/AS freshman, or of the academic challenges faced by these students. I realized that I should have spent more time discussing the UO/AS student's academic needs with her prior to her beginning the fall semester. She shared how she realized and addressed working with the UO/AS learning community students:

> Many students I teach, none of them have a strong English background, not a strong literature background, but what I found with the learning community students they learned in a different way. They enjoyed the hands on better; were better communicators orally. They enjoyed activities that allowed them to be creative. That being said, their writing skills were not as strong as others [non-learning community students]. Their writing skills were lower than in my other classes and usually I would have these students spread out in several classes instead of all in one class.

Professor Coleman further commented on how she was not expecting the students to be so verbal in expressing their concerns with the classroom structure and having their own set of expectations for the course.

The learning community class was genuinely concerned about the amount of work required of them. It could be that they were freshman and usually I may have one freshman who would not verbalize their concern. That stood out to me as well. The amount of work or reading that was required surprised them.

Professor Coleman experienced a change in her classroom dynamics after she modified her teaching style and coursework expectations based on the input of the students and her recognition that the students were not engaged.

What I did to make up for the skill level and different kinds of levels is I changed; gave different kinds of assignments. I gave one on one conferences, they wrote their paper in stages – [I] provided feedback; I don't normally do that with regular classes." [I] changed the assignments, dropped a paper grade and gave an active assignment, a debate about Booker T. Washington and Dubois. They had to look up things on the internet. They did very well, they really liked it. I kind of made adjustments to accommodate their learning style. The way that I found out they needed the help was a shock. I had to go in the next day and had to regroup and rethink how the class comes across for non-English majors. If I had any indication that they had difficulty it would have turned out different. That evening [the night after Pizza with Professors] I wondered how to get them more involved and curious to non-English majors. Is it too hard or too much reading? It's not just

about the learning community it made me more aware of how I present to non-English majors.

Professor Brown was familiar with working with UO/AS students; having taught them during the summer bridge program, she wasn't surprised by their behavior:

[The students experienced] Some bumps in the road but overall they were on track academically as I would expect all freshman. Similar issues with freshman, I always expect in the first semester some kids that will always flake out 'cause of adjustment issues and it happened with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. It was quite clear that the majority of them wanted to do well.

Classroom engagement. Cooperative and collaborative learning, a group based teaching method, is an effective way to break down barriers between students and faculty. This teaching strategy encourages student participation and responsibility for their own learning. Actively engaging students through class discussions, group activities, and problem solving activities resolve issues of classroom authority and teacher –student relations (Bruffee, 1993; Patterson, 2010).

Professor Brown reflected on the classroom dynamics in her class:

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. were such a fun class they were always ready to talk, Boom, I come to class, they are talking. When we started the Freedom Writers book many students came to class saying "[Ms. Brown], I hope you aren't mad if I read past the section you told us to." They were really ready to go. My other class didn't read a page.

Peer to peer relationships in the classroom. Professor Brown and Professor Coleman noticed a difference in the peer-to-peer relationship by the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. as oppose to non-learning community students. Professor Brown commented:

> This group you definitely know the story. There were some factors that definitely played out in class. It was clear that what went on outside of class showed in class. If there were screaming and yelling in the halls, I knew because there was tension in class. If they had to work together, they did, but clearly with resentment and tension. Interestingly, and still fascinating, how distracting the boys were - distracting each other and the girls.

Professor Coleman commented:

> In terms of interacting, they were much more interactive with each other than I'm used to. On a level of classroom management they were very, very chatty about things going on outside of the class. Some students clicked with others more than others. At the end of the semester, they became more withdrawn. Like [Annabel], she seemed like she pulled further away from the group at the end. Then I saw a huge transformation in [Ada] who came in as very confrontational, but as she became more comfortable and used to being on campus and her surroundings, she became one of my best students. She tried, not to always getting it but she gave her best.

Faculty perspective: Expectations vs. experience. I asked the professors if their expectations of working in S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. met their experience. Professor Brown thought the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. would have been able to function more as a unit:

I didn't expect the animosity they experienced because of living together. I thought they would be one big happy family but they weren't. I thought they would be able to work together better and work together better academically. Even as friends they didn't work together. Not that level of cooperation. On the other hand, I expected it would be a lively class, and a fun class that I would be able to challenge, and they would exceed them. That's exactly what happened. The progression in their work was pretty amazing.

Whereas, Professor Coleman expected to have a better co-teaching connection with Professor Brown:

Honestly, this is my first time doing a learning community, but I did expect to have a better connection with the co-teacher. I thought the assignments would translate better. That aspect I wish would have connected better. How the two classes connected; I was disappointed that [Kelly] and I couldn't have our syllabi aligned. Maybe planning ahead of time; more time is needed. [The learning community would be better] working with professors with similar styles - styles that are more alike. I found that when I had students in class and would discuss thesis and thesis statements the students didn't know what I was talking about. If we were co-teaching we would have discussed when [Kelly] would be teaching lessons on writing design and I knew when I could expect them to know how to do the assignment. Even vocabulary, we were using different terminology to describe the same terms. That was disappointing and could have been stronger.

Strengths and weaknesses of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. When asked their opinion of the strengths and weakness of the learning community, Professor Brown suggested that the strength is in the sense of community:

> [The strengths are] that they do know each other, that they participate more in class; more interaction between each other [than her other classes]. It's nothing worse than a classroom full of silence. Maybe bad in some sense - but they can be who they are. Even if they don't work cohesively as a group they all have their little buddies which shows in their participation and work. [Be]cause at the end of the day they all know how each other are doing.

Professor Coleman commented on the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. programming:

> I thought that the kind of networking activities in the learning community were a real asset. I liked the NY trip; it seemed to be the exact kind of learning that they enjoy. I liked the structured study. I would have liked the faculty to be involved with the study sessions. I would like it being on their schedule. I like to be able to see them in their social structure. I like the idea of the two classes; theoretically it could have worked well together. I liked the pairing of the two courses, maybe one syllabus.

I then asked the professors what they felt were the weaknesses of the learning community. Professor Brown commented that the conflicts between the students were the worst part of the program; "The whole issue with the strife with various contingents and each other. Maybe living together in the same building, on the same floor was too much. But I see that in many learning communities that I teach in."

Whereas Professor Coleman felt the lack of cohesion between the two courses was the weakest part of the program:

> The linked component; the execution. Part of that could have been helped with pre-planning, deliberate planning to work together. Also too, after, if that would have happened, maybe the students having issues with work load might not have happened. If classes were more aligned the less you have to adjust during the semester.

Future interest in teaching in a learning community. Jaffee (2007) explains that groupthink (Janis, 1982) can occur within learning communities. This was evident with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., whereas the students developed their group identity and began to operate as if everyone in the group shared the same feelings and that they could voice their opposition to assignments, and the evaluation of the faculty member. This created negative consequences for the student-faculty relationship between Professor Coleman and her students and further concerned the instructor about the type of performance evaluation she would receive from the students. When asked if she would teach in a learning community again, Professor Coleman responded:

> I would, but not until after tenure. That is because even though I think I accepted my responsibility about what was going wrong in class I don't know if they accepted responsibility for their actions; that being my evaluation came back lower than usual, unrealistic expectation of their own responsibilities. I don't think they are really ready for that lesson and professionally I can't afford to take that hit.

She continued to add:

> The things that went wrong with the linked class - I didn't have time to devote to
> fixing... it requires time. My biggest concern is it requires time to give it the
> justice that they deserve. Post tenure – I could dedicate the necessary time. To do
> it again, if the components worked better together, I would do it.

Professor Coleman further commented,

> Despite the troubles – it's the group of students I care about the most. They
> challenged me and I got a chance to work with them. Overall, it was a wonderful
> experience. I have no regrets. I see the students on campus and it is great 'cause
> they update me on their progress.

> Professor Brown commented on her desire to teach in a learning community in
the future, "Absolutely because of a sense of community that is already established it
suites my teaching style. I don't take a dictator approach. I'm pretty laid back. I would
definitely work with this population any chance I get."

> ***Recommendations from faculty.*** The professors had specific recommendations
they felt would benefit the program. Professor Brown felt that the students should not live
so close together; that giving them space in their living environment could help with their
communication with each other. Professor Coleman felt that additional planning before
the summer program would enhance the out of class support for students.

> Maybe some pre-step pre orientation toward the end of the summer bridge
> program there is a couple of sessions to explain the purpose of the learning
> community. Doing work, reading before the actual semester starts. Where there
> are meetings with professors before the semester begins, some evening times.

Structured study [can be] considered an extension of the class, a free hour or two

another day where they are following up on the two linked classes.

Professor Coleman went on to make additional recommendations for Pizza with

Professors, and student relationships:

I understand the concept of the Pizza with Professors, I didn't know what was

meant for them to do, I don't know if it was skill building or relationships, but

maybe more structure [so] when we do meet with them it will be more purposeful

meetings. Not sure if this is particular to the learning community, the Pizza with

the Professors - [can] give students an opportunity to voice their concerns on

campus life, classroom etiquette, that students know how to approach their

professors - when to approach their professors - that could be done before

semester starts or during evening sessions. Socially, if they have time to spend

together but then they can go their own separate ways, it doesn't provide for a

forced relationship.

The comments from both professors were very helpful in understanding their

experience teaching in a learning community with UO/AS students. Their insights aided

me in developing recommendations for an improved S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program.

Review of 2009 fall course grades. The final evaluation of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

experience consisted of me reviewing the 2009 fall semester grades. I found that the

students who failed at least one learning community course also failed a non-learning

community course. All of the students who passed both learning community courses

passed the rest of their classes (see Figure 3).

2009 SCHOLARS Fall 2009 Grades					Updated 1/7/10		
First Name	Male/Female	Sum 09 GPA	Fall 09 GPA	Fall 09 cum	College Writing	A.A.Lit.	Non L.C. Course Failed/Fall 2009
A	M	3.65	2.4	2.8	B	B	
B	M	4	2.7	2.95	C+	B+	
C	F	3.35	3	3.1	B+	B-	
D	F	3.3	3.2	3.2	B-	B+	
E	F	3.7	2.56	2.85	IN	C-	
F	F	3.3	1.1	1.6	F	D-	Sociology
G	F	3.85	2.3	2.7	C+	B-	
H	F	2.7	2.619	2.6	C	B	
I	F	3.7	2.68	2.8	B-	B-	
J	M	4	2.19	2.46	B+	B	
K	F	3.3	2.18	2.39	C+	B-	
L	M	3.35	0.9	1.68	F	C+	Calc T/A
M	M	4	2.85	3.06	C+	B+	
N	F	3.35	2.93	3.08	C+	B-	
O	F	3	3	3	B-	C	
P	F	4	2.7	2.9	C-	B+	
Q	F	3.15	0.9	1.74	F	B	Char. Of Knowledge

Fall 09 Semester		
GPA	2009 fall semester grades (# of students)	2009 fall cumulative grades (# of students)
4	0	0
3.0-3.99	3	5
2.0-2.99	11	9
1.0-1.99	1	3
0-.99	2	0

Figure 3. 2009 S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Fall Grades

From this I am concluding that those students who took advantage of the support they received in the learning community reflected on the other areas in their college experience. The majority of the students achieved a C average or better, which is a positive outcome of the program.

Reflection and Recommendations

As I concluded this study, I reflected on the information gained from my own observations and the comments from the students, faculty, and RA assistant to assist in preparing for future S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program planning and implementation. In developing the future S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community program, I have used

Schroeder et al.'s (1994) four "I" principles as a foundation: Involvement, Investment, Influence, and Identity.

Involvement. Schroeder et al. (1994) suggest that, "a true learning community encourages, expects, and rewards broad based student involvement (p. 175). One way I intend to incorporate the principle of involvement is by ensuring students are available and in attendance at S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings and through the increase of team building exercises. The S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. meetings will be held bi-weekly and will be a part of the students' academic schedule to ensure attendance. The meetings will consist of open discussions focused on academic, social, and adjustment topics, as well as scholarships, employment, classroom etiquette, conflict resolution, and communication skills.

Barefoot (2000) asserts that first year seminars and learning community programs in residence halls are successful ways of achieving unity. Team building exercises will be a central theme throughout the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. experience from the summer through the end of the spring semester in their first year. It was assumed that because the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. were a part of the UO/AS 6-week summer bridge program, that they would not need a lot of team building activities; however, it was discovered that many of the students did not really know one another, and some did not like each other before the program began. Team building activities will help foster a more cohesive relationship between the students, dispelling many of the preconceived stereotypes and judgments that are formed prior to the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program beginning.

Investment. Schroeder et al. (1994) further suggest that psychological ownership, or investment, demonstrates that students care about one another and the group. In the planning of future S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. programming, the students will be encouraged to take a leadership role within S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. to help develop ownership of the program. A community service component will be added as a part of their required participation. The students will be responsible for developing and planning the community service project, which adds to their teamwork opportunities and a sense of commitment to each other and the program.

Influence. Schroeder et al. (1994) suggest that in successful learning communities, boundaries and guidelines are developed by students, and interactions among members are frequent and conversations are gentle, rather than confrontational. Through this principle, students feel important, valued, and needed as a part of the group. During the first meeting at the beginning of the semester, the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. will discuss developing a covenant among the group. The students will determine the expected behaviors and responsibilities of each member to the group, such as their expectations for confidentiality, respect, listening, attendance, commitment to the programs and events. The early establishment of ground rules will set the foundation for the communication among the students to be productive and congenial.

Identity. Schroeder et al. (1994) suggest that learning communities, which have some type of symbolism based on commonalities and values, help them identify themselves based on their common purposes and unity. Currently the symbol that I have used for S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. publication is a graduation cap. In the future, I will charge the group with developing a symbol that represents the mission and intent of the

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program: Students Connecting and Helping Others Learn, Achieve, and Reach Success. This activity will provide a symbol created by the students and the development of the symbol will serve as a team building activity and develop a sense of ownership.

Another way in which I viewed Schroeder et al.'s suggestions for identity is the importance of communicating who the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. are to the linked course professors. As I move forward with the learning community, I will go into great detail with the instructors, discussing the dynamics of the UO/AS learning community, the benefits of a collaborative teaching model, the importance of challenging the students, and holding them accountable. By sharing this information, the professors will be aware of the needs, challenges, and benefits of the UO/AS population prior to the beginning of the semester.

To ensure specific opportunities are developed for the two linked courses to collaborate on course activities, I will facilitate and schedule meetings instead of leaving it to chance that it will occur outside of our discussion. Through these discussions, we will also determine specific topics for meetings with professors in the residence halls.

Selection of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. resident assistant in the future. The selection of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Resident Assistant (RA) will continue to be an upper class UO/AS student, but one who has not worked in the summer bridge program of the current UO/AS freshman class. The intention for this is to improve the respect level for the RA while maintaining a connection through their common background and UO/AS experience.

Residential living assignments in the future. The residential living assignments will be to keep the students in the same residential hall to provide a living community environment; however, assign them to multiple floors among the other campus students. This will provide the students space away from each other while exposing them to other campus freshman who they may otherwise not engage.

Academic classes/linked courses. The linked courses for the learning community students will have a mixture of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. along with regular admission students. This will allow the students to remain connected with their S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students, while meeting and engaging with other university students. With the inclusion of regular admission students, it is my belief that the high-school-like behavior may decrease because they will be among students they do not know. This will also decrease the amount of time the students are solely all together, making their time together more appreciated than regretted.

Guiding coalition: Future of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. I have shared the results of the 2009 fall learning community initiative with those I considered my guiding coalition; the UO/AS staff, Vice President for Student Affairs, the Dean of Students, the Director of Residential Life and University Housing, the Director of Career Center, Professor Brown, and Professor Coleman. I have continued to receive offers of assistance from my colleagues by way of financing activities, modifying housing needs, and future collaborative opportunities.

I am pleased to say that the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community continues to be a part of the UO/AS experience. In 2010, 23 students volunteered to participate in the program, and now, in its third year, 22 students are participating. The UO/AS staff has

become more actively engaged in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program by attending and
participating in the meetings and activities. In the fall of 2011, the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.
program was completely facilitated by the UO/AS freshman counselor. The program is
now a part of the UO/AS freshman counselor responsibilities and has been added to their
job description.

Conclusion

The development of the UO/AS learning community has provided underprepared
underrepresented students with an opportunity for shared learning opportunities, bonding,
and an overall enhanced first-year academic experience through increased self-efficacy in
their own learning. The faculty had the opportunity to be directly involved in the
successful transition of students through in class and out of class learning opportunities
and by collaborating to find multiple ways to support students in their first year. Through
the implementation of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S., I have been able to share the benefits and
challenges of developing a learning community, and the value of working collaboratively
with students, members of the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs departments, as well
as inform my own leadership.

It is my intention for this study to be a resource for universities to evaluate the
benefits and challenges of developing a learning community for opportunity programs on
other campus. Although the results are not generalizable to all opportunity programs or
universities because they are specific to my study, there may be components of the
learning community other opportunity program administrators find useful.

Chapter 5

Leadership Reflection Through S.C.H.O.LA.R.S.

Introduction

One of my most rewarding leadership experiences has been the development and implementation of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community. Throughout this project, I monitored and reflected on my leadership growth and development. It was my goal to make S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. a model learning community for opportunity program students, and I am aware that my ability to lead had a direct impact on the outcome of this project.

I have learned many valuable lessons about myself, my leadership style, and my personal values that have developed me into the leader I am today. My leadership journey has been filled with many challenges and rewards, and I have approached each opportunity with a moral purpose of being concerned with direction and results, accepting change, building relationships, and making a difference in the lives of others (Fullan, 2001).

My espoused leadership theory is that I am a transformational leader with democratic, social justice, transactional, and servant leadership traits (Greenleaf, 1991, 1996; Woods, 2005). I used my skills to cultivate and lead this program by developing the leadership abilities in the students, staff, and faculty that participated in the program (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Transformational/Transactional Leadership

As a transformational leader, I function best through relationship building and have seen the benefits of how this type of leadership can affect the followers, when accomplishments are experienced by all involved. However, due to my responsibilities,

personally and professionally, I have come to appreciate transactional leadership as it has

allowed me to make exchanges for the things that were needed (Burns, 1978), while

taking the time to develop and grow new leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). As stated in my

journal:

> The summer program is quickly approaching and I am struggling with balancing
>
> all of my duties. I have begun to assign my staff new tasks based on the needs of
>
> the program, while utilizing their strengths and interests. I will meet with my staff
>
> individually on a bi-weekly basis to provide guidance and support as they take on
>
> new initiatives.

Prior to the learning community beginning, my personal and professional

responsibilities increased, requiring me to be extremely efficient with time. As a

transformational/transactional leader, I spent time training staff to take on new

responsibilities to make sure the UO/AS office ran effectively (Burns, 1978). I

communicated my new responsibilities with my staff about the time I would be out of the

office conducting observations and participating in the residential meetings and activities

with S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.:

> August, 31, 2009
> Good Afternoon,
> I wanted to alert you to my research obligations for this semester and next
> semester as you both will be adjusting/adding to my calendar. To document the
> progress of the SCHOLARS learning community program I have to observe about
> 30 hours of activities with the community throughout this semester and a few
> hours at the beginning of the next semester. You will notice when you look at my
> schedule I have scheduled times when I will be in a class, conducting a workshop
> or in the evening spending time with the students. Although my late day is
> documented, I will most likely be in early to maintain my workload as well as
> staying late, (like tonight) to get work done. If there is a scheduling conflict with
> one of the l.c. events, that cannot be adjusted, let me know. I have overbooked
> myself to ensure I will have enough hours just in case adjustments are needed.
> Thank you both in advance for your assistance and support. Penny

Servant Leadership

According to Greenleaf (1991), it is the desire of servant leaders to serve first and then a conscious choice that brings us to lead. I believe servant leaders are caught off guard when put in leadership positions, because a position of leadership is not what drives a true servant leader, but the tireless desire to serve others in need is primary.

Robert Greenleaf's (1996) description of servant leadership resonates with how I feel, with who I am, and with how I have come to lead.

> It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. (p. 1)

When I decided to create the learning community for the UO/AS students, my thoughts were not focused on me, or how I would accomplish it, but on how the learning community can help UO/AS students. I realized later the amount of work involved in accomplishing this goal, however, it did not matter, because I visualized the students having the same positive comments about the impact of the learning community as they did when I witnessed them speak about the impact of the summer bridge program two years prior.

> The way I envision the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S program, I see rising GPAs, retention and graduation rates of students in the UO/AS program. I see students working together on class assignments, attending activities together and being a source of support for one another as they navigate their first year of college. I see student's comfortably engaging S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. faculty in discussions in and out of the classroom. If any of this becomes a reality it will be worth the work.

Social Justice

Throughout my professional career I have been fortunate to work in programs that were aligned with my personal values, one of which is a concern with others, equality, equity, and fairness (English, 2005). The very purpose and mission of the UO/AS program is to provide access and opportunity to students who are capable and motivated, but lack adequate preparation for college study; it provides less fortunate students an opportunity for an education. With my concern for equality, I have found that it is necessary to use my voice to advocate for the students we serve.

In addition to my duties with the learning community I participate on multiple committees and task forces, many times to ensure the needs of at-risk students are being considered prior to new policies being instituted. A recent example of the need to use my voice occurred while participating on a remedial course task force, I witnessed a department Chair make cruel, judgmental, and insensitive comments about the students enrolled in remedial courses. During the meeting, among other rude comments, he stated,

> Students who do not come through regular admission have more problems [than
> regular admission students], and I would like them all to get toxology reports and
> psychiatric evaluations because they have something wrong with them. I want
> to know how much weed they smoke before coming to class.

In disbelief, I asked him if he was serious, and stated that his comments were absurd, he reiterated his comments. I announced that the meeting was cancelled and I filed a complaint detailing his behavior throughout the meeting, concluding the letter with the following comments:

> This is the second meeting I have experienced with the Chair being rude and
> difficult. My concern is that the Chair's personal philosophy, opinions and views

of students who need additional academic support is not aligned with the values of the [Alexis] University. I am concerned for the students he has, and will continue to teach in his classes. His ignorance, lack of empathy and compassion for students, and lack of cultural sensitivity should not be tolerated or excused by the University.

In response to my complaint, the committee members and I received the following apology letter,

> Ms. Barnes wrote a letter to the Dean concerning my views and behavior at these meetings. It is remarkably accurate. I was unprofessional, angry, rude, dismissive and obnoxious. For that, I am sincerely apologetic. I have explained the reasons for my views in depth with the Dean. I will not go into them here because that is no excuse for my behavior. I will no longer serve in any capacity in the Task Force. I will also have no impact on its decisions. For other reasons, I have resigned as chair of the department.

Social justice is a deliberate intervention that requires a moral use of power to challenge structures and systems that represent the values and culture of the dominant society (Bogotch, 2000). Most everyone that attended the meetings felt the same way, and would come to thank me for standing up to him, but because he was the chair did not feel comfortable addressing him. I reminded them that we are here to serve students and we are the voice for the voiceless (Goodman, 2001) in situations like this.

This is just one example of some of the insensitive, oblivious people I have encountered when discussing the needs of opportunity program students. Each time, I walk away feeling frustrated; however, resolute in that I will not hold my tongue when there are clear biases and unjust treatment of students occurring.

Assessing My Leadership

Throughout the process of developing and implementing the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community, I found myself reflecting on my experiences, expanding my thoughts on events, evaluating my reactions, and comparing them to past experiences and

my espoused leadership theories to answer my research questions: In what ways has my leadership impacted the design of the learning community; and, how has my leadership developed and changed through the development and implementation of the learning community for first-year, opportunity program students?

To help answer these questions, I occasionally took time to document my thoughts onto scrap paper, a journal notebook, a calendar, or a post-it note, and I monitored and assessed my leadership style through the use of Kouzes and Posner's *Leadership Practice Inventory* (LPI)). The Kouzes and Posner's *Leadership Practice Inventory* (LPI), is a web based leadership assessment tool consisting of 30 questions reflecting Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

In December of 2011, through the LPI, I assessed myself, and elicited the help of 10 observers to assess my leadership, of whom 8 responded; my supervisor, identified as (M) manager on the LPI assessment; 6 staff members; identified as Direct Reports (D 1-6); and one colleague, identified as Co-worker (C1). With the exception of the manager, all of the observers' feedback was anonymous. Through this examination I was rated on the frequency with which I engaged in each of the 30 leadership behaviors using a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) Almost Never, to (10) Almost Always. The assessment took each participant 8-10 minutes to complete. I have included data from two of the five practices that I felt closely aligned with the development of the learning community.

Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Kouzes and Posner (2007) theorize that there are five practices in which effective leaders engage: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable

others to act, and to encourage the heart. Each principle is described by two commitments, or ways one demonstrates the principle. Through the five practices I will share parts of my journey to examine my leadership by disclosing the challenges, fears, rewards, and concessions I experienced along the way.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest that good leaders model the way by not forcing their views on others, but working tirelessly to build consensus on a set of common principles. As leaders set examples by aligning their personal actions with shared values, their constituents become willingly engaged in following their example.

The researchers further suggest that leaders who inspire a shared vision have the ability to envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities and effectively gaining support for their ideas and plans through sharing a common vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Throughout my leadership journey I have reflected and modified my approach to become a better leader. The LPI responses from my supervisor, colleagues, and staff reflect that from an overall leadership perspective, I "very frequently" model the way and inspire a shared vision (Table 2, Table 3); however, from the perspective of developing the learning community, it did not come without minor challenges. As *modeling the way* suggests, building consensus on common principles is key to being a successful leader. One of my espoused theories is that I am a democratic leader; I attempt to get feedback, ideas, and suggestions from my staff and colleagues with the goal of coming to a consensus on how to move forward before making major decisions that affect students and staff (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

Table 2.

Model the Way Data Summary

Statements	Self	Avg	M	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	C1	C2
1. Sets a personal example of what is expected	10	9.6	10	10	10	10	10	10	7	10	9
6. Makes certain that people adhere to agreed-on standards	8	9.3	10	8	9	10	10	10	9	9	9
11. Follows through on promises and commitments	9	9.6	10	9	10	10	10	9	9	10	9
16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance	7	8.3	10	6	9	9	10	9	9	6	7
21. Builds consensus around organization's values	10	9.8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8
26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership	9	9.9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8

Key: Self= my ratings; Avg= averages of all observers ratings, M= Manager, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6 = Direct Reports; C1, C2= Co-worker.
*Rating scale: F*rom 1 to 10: 1=Almost Never, 2= Rarely, 3=Seldom, 4= Once in a while, 5=Occasionally, 6=Sometimes, 7=Fairly, 8, Usually, 9= Very Frequently, 10=Almost Always

Table 3.

Inspire a Shared Vision Data Summary

Statements	Self	Avg	M	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	C1	C2
2. Talks about future trends influencing our work	10	8.7	10	9	9	9	10	10	7	6	8
7. Describes a compelling image of the future	10	8.8	9	10	9	9	10	9	9	6	8
12. Appeals to others to share dream of the future	9	9.8	9	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10
17. Shows others how their interest can be realized	7	9.4	10	9	10	9	10	10	10	10	7
22. Paints "big picture" of group aspirations	9	9.8	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	9
27. Speaks with conviction about meaning of work	10	9.7	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	8

Key: Self= my ratings; Avg= averages of all observers ratings, M= Manager, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6 = Direct Reports; C1, C2= Co-worker.
*Rating scale: F*rom 1 to 10: 1=Almost Never, 2= Rarely, 3=Seldom, 4= Once in a while, 5=Occasionally, 6=Sometimes, 7=Fairly, 8, Usually, 9= Very Frequently, 10=Almost Always

Kouzers and Posner (2007) describe leaders who effectively challenge the process experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experiences. I have found that challenging the process is second nature to me because I am not one to follow status quo. I thoroughly enjoy trying new, innovative ideas, evaluating the results, and making improvements. My highest average ratings in the *Challenge the Process* practice (Table 4) is reflected in the statements, "challenges people to try new approaches," which speaks to my transformational leadership, and "searches outside organization for innovative ways to improve," which is reflected in my ability to develop relationships with other departments and offices to provide support and service to the students in the UO/AS program.

Table 4.

Challenge the Process Data Summary

Statement	Self	Avg	M	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	C1	C2
3. Seeks challenging opportunities to test skills	8	9.2	9	9	10	9	10	10	8	10	8
8. Challenges people to try new approaches	10	9.6	10	10	10	10	10	9	8	10	9
13. Searches outside organization for innovative ways to improve	7	9.6	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	8
18. Asks "what can we learn?"	10	9.4	10	9	10	9	10	10	9	10	8
23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set	9	9.4	9	8	10	10	10	10	10	10	8
28. Experiments and takes risks	7	8.6	8	10	9	6	10	10	8	9	7

Key: Self= my ratings; Avg= averages of all observers ratings, M= Manager, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6 = Direct Reports; C1, C2= Co-worker.
*Rating scale: F*rom 1 to 10: 1=Almost Never, 2= Rarely, 3=Seldom, 4= Once in a while, 5=Occasionally, 6=Sometimes, 7=Fairly, 8, Usually, 9= Very Frequently, 10=Almost Always

In the *Enable Others to Act* survey, Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggest that a

strong leader fosters collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships, and

strengthens others by increasing self-determination and developing competence. My

highest two ratings were treats people with dignity and respect and develops cooperative

relationships (Table 5). I found these traits similar to Goleman et al.'s (2002) description

of a resonant leader as one who knows when to be collaborative, naturally nurtures

relationships, and values those they lead.

Table 5.

Enable Others to Act Data Summary

Statement	Self	Avg	M	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	C1	C2
4. Develops cooperative relationships	9	9.9	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	10
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view	9	9.8	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	10
14. Treats people with dignity and respect	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
19. Supports decisions other people make	10	9.6	10	10	9	9	10	10	9	10	9
24. Gives people choice about how to do their work	10	9.7	9	10	9	10	10	10	10	10	9
29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs	10	9.4	10	10	9	10	10	10	9	10	7

Key: Self= my ratings; Avg= averages of all observers ratings, M= Manager, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6 = Direct Reports; C1, C2= Co-worker.
*Rating scale: F*rom 1 to 10: 1=Almost Never, 2= Rarely, 3=Seldom, 4= Once in a while, 5=Occasionally, 6=Sometimes, 7=Fairly, 8, Usually, 9= Very Frequently, 10=Almost Always

I believe I scored in the Very Frequent range for the categories under *Encourage the*

Heart (Table 6) because of my verbal praise, however, I believe that could do better in

this area. Although I have made several attempts to show my appreciation for my staff's

excellent work, such as public praise, group congratulatory emails, and acknowledgement

of the positive impact their work has made in their re-contracting documents, I do not feel

179

I have been as creative as I could be. Everyone needs and deserves to feel appreciated.

Kotter (1996) suggests that good leaders motivate people by satisfying basic human

needs such as recognizing and rewarding success.

Table 6.

Encourage the Heart

Statement	Self	Avg	M	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	C1	C2
5. Praises people for job well done	9	9.7	10	10	9	10	10	10	9	10	9
10. Expresses confidences in people's abilities	10	9.4	10	10	9	10	10	9	10	10	7
15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions	5	9	10	8	9	9	10	9	10	8	8
20. Recognizes people for commitment to shared values	10	9.4	10	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	7
25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments	6	9.2	10	8	9	10	10	9	10	10	7
30. Gives team members appreciation and support	10	9.8	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	10	9

Key: Self= my ratings; Avg= averages of all observers ratings, M= Manager, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6 = Direct Reports; C1, C2= Co-worker.
*Rating scale: F*rom 1 to 10: 1=Almost Never, 2= Rarely, 3=Seldom, 4= Once in a while, 5=Occasionally, 6=Sometimes, 7=Fairly, 8, Usually, 9= Very Frequently, 10=Almost Always

I was pleased to find that my perception of my ability to demonstrate democratic

leadership traits was close in range to the observers, as indicated by statement 16; "Asks

for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance." I rated myself a 7,

whereas my colleagues rated me at 8.3. In addition, my score for question 21 was .2

higher than my colleagues when asked if I "build consensus around organizational

values." I rated myself a 10, whereas my colleagues rated me at 9.8. As I reviewed my

scores, I was reminded of a time when introducing S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. to the staff that I

needed to reflect on my democratic leadership style.

180

Understanding the magnitude of creating S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. from inception to completion, and the potential challenges I faced in accomplishing this, I knew it was most important for me to share this project with as many of my colleagues as possible. Although I believe I attempted to demonstrate democratic leadership traits, at times, I felt there were areas I may have lacked because within democratic leadership, engagement of the followers is a key aspect (Cronin, 1995).

During the initial development of the learning community, I presented the learning community to my staff. I was excited, as I had been working on developing the brochure and wanted their feedback, as indicated by my journal entry:

> April 20th, 2009
> Today I wrote up the info for my brochure - it is starting to come together. I am going to discuss it with staff, [Joanne, John Smith] and the Career Center to get any feedback on the wording and academic component.

After presenting to my staff, I was very disappointed that I did not receive any feedback, other than, "looks good." I did not want to move the project along without their input so I reiterated my desire for their input and suggestions, and to ensure that they at least reviewed the brochure, I sent it around a few days later asking for them to place a check mark on the brochure indicating they read the information. Greenleaf (1996) states that the "only test of leadership is that somebody follows - voluntarily" (p. 31). I was looking for someone to eagerly volunteer to give constructive feedback, and when the staff did not respond, I took it personally. I felt disappointed that I had to prod them for their feedback. I was most confused by the lack of input from my most enthusiastic employees, which made me reflect on what I could be doing to contribute to their lack of engagement. During this time, I was experiencing the first stage of Situational leadership (Hershey & Blanchard, 1993), where the group had little knowledge or experience with

learning communities so their response was tentative and insecure. I realized that through

modifying my expectations and leadership, and giving them time to better understand the

program, they would perhaps be more engaged in the giving feedback about

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

As I reflected on it, I realized that there were probably a couple of dynamics

occurring, one of which I penned in my journal:

> I am so excited but nervous about S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. A lot of people want it to
> work but then I feel like some people expect it to fail. I haven't received much
> input from [UO/AS] staff. They don't seem to know what to say about it. I think
> either they feel like it's nothing they can say because it is my dissertation project
> and I am the director so it is going to happen regardless of their comments, or
> they don't want to offend me by doubting it. Not saying anything offends me
> more- makes me feel like they don't think it will work. It feels a little lonely to
> move this along without their honest input. I keep asking for their comments
> while trying not to show my nervousness about the outcome because they might
> think I don't believe in my own idea.

I typically receive more support when discussing other new initiatives; I believe

the awkward silence occurred, specifically, because this was my research project. By that

I mean, I think that I was being careful through my communication not to impose my

research project on them, which may have given them the impression that I did not want

or need their input. As this was my research, I was conscious that it was my responsibility

to develop, and implement it from the beginning to the end; however, I realized that it

was not about me needing them to do anything, it was me needing them to be excited, the

way I was about the learning community and what it could mean for the UO/AS students.

I have one staff in particular that has a history of not being a team player. In

addition, she has a longstanding belief that the purpose of research projects is to "use

students as guinea pigs." During one of my discussions with her about the learning

community, she stated that she "is not going to do my research." I discussed the

supporting literature and stated that I could have selected any project but chose one that would not only be "my research" – but research that can aid us all in improving the experiences of our students. I made her aware that it is not my goal for anyone to "do my research," however, if the program proves to be successful, it may be an initiative of the office. I inquired as to why she felt that way. She did not have a response, but gave me a look like she still was not convinced that this project was not self-serving. I realized then that my energy would not be best spent attempting to inspire her to imagine exciting and ennobling possibilities, as she was not willing to be a part of the change.

As I reflect on this situation, I realize that this is a leadership issue for me that I had seen in the past. Before I judged silence as a lack of enthusiasm for the project, I needed to reflect on my expectations. For me, it is evident when people truly care by the way that they make those around them feel because of the time, words, and genuine concern they exhibit through their interactions; however, I learned that instead of complaining that someone does not care, I am reminded of a question posed to me by one of my professors, "Who am I to say that they don't care?" I just may not understand their priorities, values, and their way of communicating "care." I realized that I have to take a broader view of others' perspectives, a balcony approach (Bolman & Deal, 1997), when faced with approaches that are different than my own.

As I continued to evaluate this leadership challenge, I reflected on several aspects of the change process. Evans (1996) suggests that participation and collaboration brings benefits to effectuating change. Perhaps I should have communicated my vision earlier in the process and allowed the team to help with the development of the concept, even the name of S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. (Kotter, 1996). Using a bottom-up model and getting their

input at the developmental planning stages may have created a sense of collaboration and buy-in throughout the project (Evans, 1996). Reflecting on this brought me to review my LPI results, and one of my lower scores was in the *Inspires a Shared Vision* category, specifically the statement, "Talks about future trends influencing our work." Although the very purpose of the UO/AS program is to retain and graduate students, I found that I may have taken for granted the need to create a sense of urgency, believing that the staff had a clear understanding of our retention and graduation status as opposed to a general understanding. By spending more time reviewing the data on UO/AS success rates and developing specific goals for improvement, I might have communicated a sense of urgency to create the learning community program (Kotter, 1996).

A part of me also believes that there may have been issues of challenges to my competence, specifically from the older staff who, on occasion, have verbalized, "if it ain't broke don't fix it," which demonstrates their desire to continue with the old system and their reluctance to adapting to the new system (Evans, 1996).

I reflected on another possible answer to my response to the lack of enthusiasm shown by my staff. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggest that we tend to treat adaptive challenges as technical challenges – the boss does all of the work to move the change project forward. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) continue to suggest that people tend to rely on the expertise of the leader to make a change project work instead of supporting the leader. I may have felt the pressure to make the project work on my own, running the risk of being labeled an overachiever, unqualified, poor leader, or manager if it failed.

A successful example of my ability to model the way and inspire a shared vision occurred when sharing information about the learning community with the Africana

Studies Major committee. At the meeting, I was able to share the purpose and mission of the learning community which aligned with the committee's desire to expose the same population of students to Africana Studies as a major or concentration. The discussion from the meeting turned into a partnership that aided me in securing a professor for one of the linked courses, as well as gaining a mentor through Dr. Smith, the Chair of the History department, due to our shared values. I found the skill of followership (Kelly, 1988) valuable as I welcomed the advice, support, and guidance I received from Dr. Smith as he shared documents he created for the History learning community, suggested wording for the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. brochure, and brainstorming ideas to name the learning community, as indicated by his email response to me requesting his opinion:

> Hi Penny,
> Sorry this took me so long.
> (1) I think SCHOLARS is very good.
> (2) I would change the language in the academic section to read like this:
> "Students interested in how the learning community courses might fit into majors they are considering may discuss the matter with the appropriate advisor in the specific department, or the advisors in the Career Center."
> Regarding the quotes, I think all are excellent. You might consider adding one by Frederick Douglass, "A little learning, indeed, may be a dangerous thing, but the want of learning is a calamity to any people." Also, perhaps this one by Malcolm X, "Without education, you're not going anywhere in this world," or maybe, Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." Best, [John]

Inspiring a Shared Vision & Servant Leadership

Inspiring a shared vision of what S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. could be was also challenging at times, while working with the students because they were facing their own set of challenges outside of the learning community: transition challenges, roommate issues, personal crises, family, and financial stressors. As a servant leader, I value serving first, devoting myself to people with a genuine interest in helping them (Greenleaf, 1991).

Despite the students and I having a common vision and goal of what we wanted the learning community to do and be, as indicated by their reasons for joining, many of them were facing all types of concerns that lessened the importance of fully participating and engaging in the learning community as we all initially intended. An example of this occurred during one of the weeks in the semester when several students came to my office to meet with me to discuss the multiple challenges they faced:

Oct. 1, 2009
Met with [Sara] to discuss her behavior, rumors, and my expectations of her [in the learning community]. She agreed that she needs to adapt to her new environment and that she doesn't want people to be intimidated by her.
Met with [Nigel], he began to cry as he sat down and stated that his mother lost her job due to poor performance. He doesn't have books for class and still owes money to Alexis. He felt like giving up. We discussed solutions. I will get his books and his UO/AS counselor will look into his financial aid. I encouraged him to continue with his education, he is concerned about his moms living arrangements.

Oct.2, 2009
[Tasha] missed her appt. I called her, she is having personal problems.
[Quinton] and [Ron] came to ask about switching rooms. I spoke to them both about being responsible with their academics.
[Nigel] stopped by and worked out books and financial aid issues.
Met with student after class and told them to remember why they are here at [Alexis].

Oct. 6, 2009
Met with [Amy], she said S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. is stressing her out. She doesn't know if she wants to continue because some students are not taking it seriously. I asked her if she thought the [Pizza with the Professors] meeting the night before might help. She thought it might and said she would decide whether to continue with the learning community later.

I function mostly in the human resources frame, how situations affect people are important to me (Bolman & Deal, 1997). I believe that my ability to take other people's concerns or situations into consideration allows me to be effective in handling difficult

situations. As a servant leader, I desired to serve first, making sure that the students'

needs were met and that they grow as students (Greenleaf, 2002).

At the beginning of the semester, the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. had perfect intentions of

participating in a learning community, which proposed to help them adjust to their first

year of college. In spite of the challenges they faced on campus, at home, or in the

learning community, I am positive that the students learned and grew from their

experiences, as I did working with them and leading them through these challenges.

Conclusion

The characteristics and qualities I believe aided me in having an influence on the

learning community program development were to be collaborative, present, and the

ability to reflect on my leadership and make changes to my approach. In addition, I

believe my purpose in most of my interactions is to serve others. I strive to be a great

noble leader through being a good listener, encouraging creativity, and leading with

integrity (Jaworski, 1996). These traits have allowed me to positively influence others in

the past and guided my interactions when I developed the learning community. I believe

that being "present," as Jaworski states, is important for the staff and students I serve.

Being present to me is to be an excellent listener, make time to assist others, and be

interested and engaged in the lives of others.

Although my leadership journey has been uncomfortable at times, I have learned to

allow myself to be more vulnerable; to be able to honestly look at who I am and how I

think and function; to allow others to see my good qualities and my flaws by trusting that

this process will help me become a better leader. My leadership journey has affected my

worldview on leadership and challenges me to look at myself, people, and organizations through many different lenses.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) ask a very interesting question: Why lead? With all of the dangers, why lead? For me, I have found leadership to be a constant challenge, a puzzle that I cannot walk away from. The process of finding solutions to problems is difficult but exciting, working in a team environment is personally and professionally enjoyable and challenging, developing initiatives that impact and improve the educational experiences for students is priceless. There are days when I would love to only be responsible for myself, but as I tell others, if not us, then who? If not me, then who? I believe I have the ability to lead, the passion to make a difference, and the desire to continue to learn and grow in my leadership in spite of the dangers. It is important for me personally to be aware of the dangers to protect myself and to be effective as a leader to help improve the lives of others.

References

Ackermann, S. P. (1990). The Benefits of Summer Bridge Programs for Underrepresented and Low-Income Students.

Allen, W. R. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review, 62*(1), 26-43.

Allen, W. R., Bonous-Hammarth, M., & Suh, S. A. (2004). Who goes to college? High school context, academic preparation, the college choice process, and college attendance. In E.P. St. John (Ed.), *Readings on equal education* (pp. 71-114). New York, NY: AMS.

Armstrong, W. B. (1999). The relationship between placement testing and curricular content in the community college: Correspondence or misalignment? *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College, 7*(1), 33-38.

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. Journal of college student personnel, 25(4), 297-308.

Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college? *Liberal Education, 79*(4), 1-13.

Astin, A. W. (1985). *Achieving educational excellence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education.

Barr, R. B., & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to learning: A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change, 27*(6), 12-15.

Barton, A. & Donahue, C. (2009). Multiple assessments of a first-year seminar pilot. *The Journal of General Education*, *58*(4), 259-278.

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Barefoot, B. O. (2000). The first–year experience: Are we making it any better? *About Campus, Jan-Feb,* 12-18.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Bogotch, I. E. (2000). *Educational leadership and social justice: Theory into practice.* Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration, Albuquerque, NM.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1997). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bowen, H. R. (1997). *Investment in learning: The individual and social value of American higher education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bruffee, K. A. (1984). Collaborative learning and the conversation of mankind. *College English, 46*(7), 635-652.

Bruffee, K. A. (1993). *Collaborative learning, higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Buck, C. B. (1985). *Summer bridge: A residential learning experience for high risk freshman at the University of California, San Diego*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on the Freshman Year Experience, Columbia, SC.

Burns, J. M. (1978). Transactional and transforming leadership. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages.* (pp. 100-101). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Byrd, K. L., & MacDonald, G. (2005). Defining college readiness from the inside out: First generation college student perspective. *Community College Review, 33*(1), 22-37.

Cabrera, N. L., Miner, D. D., & Milem, J. F. (2013). Can a summer bridge program impact first-year persistence and performance?: A case study of the New Start Summer Program. *Research in Higher Education, 54*(5), 481-498.

Carter, D. F. (2006). Key issues in the persistence of underrepresented minority students. *New directions for educational research* (pp. 33-46). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chen, R., & DesJardins, S. L. (2010). Investigating the impact of financial aid on student dropout risks: Racial and ethnic differences. *The Journal of Higher Education, 81*(2), 179-208.

Chickering, A. W. (1974). *Commuting versus resident students: Overcoming the educational inequities of living off campus.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1999). Development and adaptations of the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 80*(Winter), 75-81.

Choy, S. (2001). Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment. In J. Wirt, et al. (Eds.), *The condition of education* (pp. XVIII–XLIII). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Government Printing Office.

Choy, S. P., Horn, L. J., Nunez, A-M., & Chen, X. (2000). Transition to college: What helps at-risk students and students whose parents did not attend college. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 17*, 45-63.

Colvin, J. W., & Ashman, M. (2010). Roles, risks, and benefits of peer mentoring relationships in higher education. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 18*(2), 21–134.

Covey, S. (2004). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cronin, T. E. (1995). Leadership and democracy. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages* (pp. 303-309). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Cross, K. P. (1998). Why learning communities? Why now? *About Campus*, July-August, 4-11.

Damminger, J. K. (2004). *Transformative learning and leading through a comprehensive learning community experience for undeclared freshmen.* Doctoral dissertation, Alexis University, UMI 3133631.

DeBerard, M. S., Spielmans, G., & Julka, D. (2004). Predictors of academic achievement and retention among college freshmen: A longitudinal study.College student journal, 38(1), 66-80.

DiRamio, D., & Wolverton, M. (2006). Integrating learning communities and distance education: Possibility or pipeline? *Innovative Higher Education, 31*(2), 99-113. Springer Science +Business Media.

Dodge, L., & Kendall, M. E. (2004). Learning communities. *College Teaching, 52*(4), 150-155.

English, F. W. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of educational leadership: Advances in theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Sage Publications.

Evans, R. (1996). *The human side of school change: Reform, resistance, and the real-life problems of innovation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Education Series.

Evans, R. (2001). *The human side of school change: Reform, resistance, and the real-life problems of innovation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fletcher, S. L., Newell, D. C., Newton, L. D., & Anderson-Rowland, M. R. (2001). *The WISE summer bridge program: Assessing student attrition, retention, and program effectiveness.* Proceedings of the American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference & Exposition. American Society for Engineering Education.

Folger, W. A., Carter, J. A., & Chase, P. B. (2004). Supporting first generation college freshmen with small group intervention. *College Student Journal, 38*(3), 1-5.

Frazier, W., & Eighmy, M. (2012). Themed residential learning communities: The importance of purposeful faculty and staff involvement and student engagement. *Journal of College and University Student Housing, 38*(2), 10-31.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gablenick, F., MacGregor, J., Mathews, R., & Smith, B. L. (1990). Learning communities: Creating connections among students, faculty, and disciplines. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 41*(Spring), 5-89. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Garcia, P. (1991). Summer bridge: Improving retention rates for underprepared students. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 3*(2), 91-105.

Giuliano, B., & Sullivan, J. (2007). Academic wholism: Bridging the gap between high school and college. *American Secondary Education, 35*(3), 7-18.

Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Gold, M. (1992). The Bridge: A summer enrichment program to retain African-American collegians. *Journal of the Freshmen Year Experience & Students in Transition, 4*(2), 101-17.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Goodman, D. (2001). *Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Goodsell, A. S. (1993). *Freshman interest groups: Linking social and academic experiences of first-year students.* (Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1993). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations database. (Publication No. AAT9401680).

Greenleaf, R. K. (1991). Servant leadership. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages* (pp. 18-23). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1996). *On becoming a servant leader.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Greenleaf, R. K. (2002). Essentials of servant-leadership. In L. C. Spears & M. Lawrence (Eds.), *Focus on leadership: Servant-leadership for the twenty-first century* (pp. 19-26). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Haycock, K. (2006). Promise abandoned: How policy choices and institutional practices restrict college opportunities. *Education Trust, August,*1-27.

Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. (2002). *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1993). Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources . Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Hinchey, P. H. (2008). *Action research primer.* New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Hotchkiss, J. L., Moore, R. E., & Pitts, M. M. (2006). Freshman learning communities, college performance, and retention. *Education Economics, 14*(2), 197-210.

Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z. E., Vogt, K. E., & Leonard, J. B. (2006). Living-learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(4). doi: 10.1007/s11162-006-9031-6.

Jaffee, D. (2007). Peer cohorts and the unintended consequences of freshman learning communities. *College Teaching, 55*(2), 65-71.

James, P. A., Bruch, P. L., & Jehangir, R. R. (2006). Ideas in practice: Building bridges in a multicultural learning community. *Journal of Developmental Education, 29*(3), 10-18.

Janis, I. (1982). *Groupthink* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Jaworski, J. (1996). *Synchronicity: The inner path of leadership.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Kellogg, K. (1999) Learning communities. ERIC Item 430152. Retrieved from http://ehostvgw7.enet.com.

Kelly, R. E. (1988). In praise of followers. In J. T.Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages (*pp. 193-204). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kouzes J M, Posner B Z (2002), The Leadership Challenge, 3rd Edition, Jossey-Bass

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2007). The leadership challenge (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D. (2001). *The national survey of student engagement: Conceptual framework and overview of psychometric properties.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Shuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McElroy, E. J., & Armesto, M. (1998). TRIO and Upward Bound: History, programs, and issues past, present, and future. *Journal of Negro Education*, 373-380.

Mills, G. E. (2005). *Action Research: A guide for the teacher researcher.* Boston. MA: Pearson Education.

Mortenson, T. (2011). *Trio supportive services: 1965-2010* (No. 234). Oskaloosa, IA: Postsecondary Education Opportunity.

Muraskin, L., Lee, J., Wilner, A., & Swail, W. S. (2004). *Raising the graduation rates of low-income college students.* Washington, DC: Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.

National College Progression Rates For high schools participating in the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker service, 2014.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*(3), 249-284.

Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T., & Blimling, G. S. (1994). The impact of residential life on students. In C. C. Schoreder & P. Mable (Eds.), *Realizing the educational potential of residence halls* (pp. 22-52). San Fransico, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patterson, H. S. (2010). Learning communities: A structural overview. In T. Peckskamp & C. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Building community: Stories and strategies for future learning community faculty and professionals* (pp. 18-20). Syracuse, NY: The Graduate School Press of Syracuse University.

Reason, R. D., Terenzini, P. T. & Domingo, R. J. (2006). First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(2), 149-175.

Rendon, L. I. (1992). From the barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American "scholarship girl." In L. S. Zwerling & H. B. London (Eds.), *First – generation students: Confronting the cultural issues* (pp. 55-64). New Directions for Community College, No. 80. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schroeder, C. C., Mable, P., & Associates. (1994). *Realizing the educational potential of residence halls*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Seidman, A. (1991). The evaluation of a pre/post admissions/counseling process at a suburban community college: Impact on student satisfaction with the faculty and the institution, retention, and academic performance. *College and University, 66*(4), 223-232.

Shapiro, N. S., & Levine, J. H. (1999). *Creating learning communities: A practical guide to winning support, organizing for change, and implementing programs.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, B. (2007). Accessing social capital through the academic mentoring process. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 40*, 36-46.

Stefanou, C. R., & Salisbury-Glennon, J. D. (2002). Developing motivation and cognitive learning strategies through an undergraduate learning community. *Learning Environments Research, 5*, 77-97.

Stassen, M. L. A. (2003). Student outcomes: The impact of varying living-learning community models. *Research in Higher Education, 44*(5), 581-613.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2010). Bridging the pipeline: Increasing underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. *American Behavioral Scientist, 55*(2),142-159.

Terenzini, P., Rendon, L., Upcraft, L., Millar, S., Allison, K., Gregg, P., & Jalomo, R. (1993). *The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Institutional Research, Chicago, IL, May, 1993.

Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education, 37*(1), 1-22.

Thayer, P. B. (2000). Retention of students from first generation and low income backgrounds. Opportunity Outlook. 2000 May: 2–8. ERIC ED446633.

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

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education, 68*(6), 599-623.

Tinto, V. (1998a, January). *Learning communities and the reconstruction of remedial education in higher education.* Paper presented at the Conference on Replacing Remediation in Higher Education, Stanford University, California.

Tinto, V. (1998b). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *The Review of Higher Education, 21*(2), 167-177.

Tinto, V. (1999). Taking retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *The Journal of the National Academic Advising Association*, *19*(2), 5-9.

Tinto, V. (2003). Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on student success. In *Promoting Student Success in College, Higher Education Monograph Series* (pp. 1-8). Retrieved from http://www.nhcuc.org/pdfs/Learning_Better_Together.pdf

Tinto, V., & Goodsell-Love, A. (1993). Building community. *Liberal Education, 79*(4), 1-8.

Turner, C. S. V. (1994). Guests in someone else's house: Students of color. *The University of Higher Education, 17*(4), 355-370.

Walpole, M. (2003). Social mobility and college: Low SES students' experiences and outcomes of college. *The Review of Higher Education*, *27*(1), 45–73.

Walpole, M., Simmerman, H., Mack, C., Mills, J., Scales, M., & Albano, D. (2008). Bridge to success: Insight into summer bridge program students' college transition. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 20*(1), 11-30.

Woods, P. (2005). *Democratic leadership in education.* Thousand Oals, CA: Sage.

Woosley, S. A., & Shepler, D. K. (2011). Understanding the early integration experiences of first-generation college students. *College Student Journal, 45*(4), 700.

Zhao, C. M., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(2), 115-138.

Appendix A

UO/AS First Year Seminar Survey

Your evaluation is essential information for future planning. Please mark the box that

most closely reflects your opinion.

Did the speakers below share valuable information?

Speakers/Topics:	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Fair	Poor
Academic Success Center					
Student University Programmer & Multicultural Affairs					
Counseling Center					
Drug & Alcohol					
Study Abroad					
Learning Styles: LCI					
Healthy Relationships					
Career Center					
Financial Aid & Money Management					

What suggestions do you have for UO/AS Freshmen Seminar?

1

What was the best part of UO/AS Freshmen Seminar?

What was the least favorite part of UO/AS Freshmen Seminar?

Appendix B

Sophomore UO/AS First Year Experience Questionnaire

UO/AS Learning Community
Spring 2009

This questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The information provided will be kept confidential. The resulting data will be used to plan activities and programs to enhance the first-year experience for freshman students. Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

1. Describe how each area below impacted your first-year experience, positively and/or negatively:

A. Peers

_____

_____

B. Academic Courses

_____

_____

C. Faculty/Staff

_____

_____

D. Involvement in clubs and organizations

_____

_____

E. Workshops

_____

_____

F. Residence Halls

_____

_____

2. What information do you now know that would have helped you in your first year?

_____

3. What resources would have assisted you in your first year?

_____

Appendix C

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Brochure

"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."

Malcolm X

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Helen Keller

<u>**Additional Information:**</u>

Enrollment into the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program will occur during the Pre-College Institute summer program.

<u>**Information Session:**</u>
During the UO/AS Pre-College Institute, students can participate in an information session.

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. website:
www.rowan.edu/eofmap.scholars

Penny McPherson-Barnes,
S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Coordinator,
Assistant Dean of Students,
UO/AS Director
barnesp@rowan.edu
856-656-4086

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

Do you want to be a part of a phenomenal learning experience?

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

Learning Community

Students Connecting and Helping Others Learn, Achieve, and Reach Success

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome."

Booker T. Washington

What is S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.?

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. is an exciting opportunity for students in the Unlimited Opportunity/ Academic Success (UO/AS) program to continue the academic and social support networks gained through the Pre-College Institute that has proven to be an integral component to students' success. This collaborative living/learning experience integrates the support of students, faculty, and the UO/AS program staff which inspires academic excellence and enhances the overall first-year experience for students.

"Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year. It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow. Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest and the playtime."

W.E.B. DuBois

Program Components

Residential

Students enrolled in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. learning community will reside on the same floor of Evergreen Hall, a coed residential hall. The grouped living experience will provide additional academic and social support for students. Study sessions and monthly group activities will be held in the residential hall lounges.

UO/AS Student Comment:
"Living in the dorms made me focus better than home."

Academic

Students participating in the learning community will be enrolled together (linked) in two general education courses during the fall and spring semesters. The linked courses allow students to work together and build community. The professors teaching the linked learning community courses will collaborate on student assignments and will work closely with the students and the learning community coordinator to aid in students' academic success in and outside of the classroom.

UOAS Student Comment:
"The teachers I had helped me tremendously with my schoolwork."

Social

Extracurricular activities and events will be provided for students in the learning community to increase social interactions among students, faculty, and members of the community. Students will be encouraged to engage in fun, interactive experiences to build friendships and support networks at Rowan University.

UO/AS Student Comment:
"My peers helped me realize that I am not going through the trials and tribulations of being a new student alone. It gave me confidence that I can make it."

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Learning Outcomes

As a result of participating in the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. program, students' will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate decision making skills.
- Identify behaviors that contribute to healthy choices.
- Employ effective time management and study skills.
- Identify campus and community resources available to aid in their adjustment to Rowan University.
- Build academic and social networks that support student learning.
- Engage in residential, campus, and/or community activities that benefit the students' overall adjustment to Rowan University.

Monthly S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. group meetings

Once a month fun, interactive and informative group meetings will be held in the residence hall with the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. students, coordinator, professors, and the learning community student advisor. Topics will range from involvement in campus clubs and organizations to graduate school.

UO/AS Arrival Day Power Point Slide

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S

Students **C**onnecting and **H**elping **O**thers
Learn **A**chieve, and **R**each **S**uccess

Exciting opportunity for students in the
EOF/MAP program to continue in a living/
learning community designed to continue the
academic and social support networks gained
through the PCI program.

This community encourages academic
excellence by integrating the support of
students, faculty, residential learning, and
EOF/MAP staff.

Academic: 2 general education linked courses,
collaborating professors

Residential: reside on the same floor in
residence hall, study groups

Social: Extra curricular/group activities, field
trip, community service

Appendix E

Initial Student Presentation Questions

UO/AS Learning Community
Summer 2009

Moderator Introduction:

Good afternoon, my name is Penny Barnes and I would like to thank you for taking the time to join me to discuss the UO/AS learning community presentation. As we go through our discussion I will moderate and record your comments. I invite you to speak openly and freely. Your comments are completely confidential.

The UO/AS learning community is designed to assist new students with their transition to Alexis University. It is our goal to provide an experience that is educational, informative and rewarding. The purpose of this focus group is to get honest feedback that will be used to improve future presentations about the learning community. To ensure everyone's comments are accurately recorded, as a formality, it would be helpful if you raise your hand to comment after the moderator asks a question.

1. As you reflect on the presentation, how would you describe your interest in participating in the UO/AS learning community?

2. What information did you find most helpful?

3. What information did you find least helpful?

4. What additional information would you like to receive about the learning community?

I would like to take this time to thank you for your participation. Before we depart, was there anything that was not covered during this focus group that you would like to be included in the planning of future presentations?

Appendix F

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Learning Community Application

Summer 2009

Date:_____

Name:_____   Banner #:_____

Home Address:_____

Home Phone: _____Cell Phone #_____

Intended Major:_____

Are you willing to live in Magda Hall? ____Y ____ N   Commuter:_____

Why are you interested in participating in the UO/AS learning community?

_____

_____

As a participant in the UO/AS learning community I will:

Participate in all learning community activities

Attend all classes and work to my ability

_____

Signature   Date

Appendix G

Fall 2009 Mid-Semester Focus Group

UO/AS Learning Community

Moderator Introduction:

Good afternoon, my name is Penny Barnes and I would like to thank you for taking the time to join me to further discuss the UO/AS learning community. As we go through our discussion I will moderate and record your comments. I invite you to speak openly and freely. Your comments are completely confidential.

I would like to thank you for participating in the UO/AS learning community. It is designed to assist new students with their first year transition to Alexis University. It is my goal that your experience in the learning community is educational, informative and rewarding. The purpose of this focus group is to get honest feedback that will assist me in making improvements to this learning community and future learning community programs. To ensure everyone's comments are accurately recorded, as a formality, it would be helpful if you raise your hand to comment after the moderator asks a question.

1. Describe your learning community experience so far?
2. Explain how the residential hall experience has impacted your first year?
3. What part of the learning community do you find most helpful? How/Why?
4. What part of the learning community do you find least helpful? How/Why?
5. What impact have your fellow UO/AS learning community peers had on your first year?
6. What impact are the linked courses having on your first-year experience?
7. What suggestions do you have to improve the learning community for the future?

I would like to take this time to thank you for your participation. Before we depart, was there anything that was not covered during this focus group that you would like to be included in future discussions?

Appendix H

End of Semester Student Questions

UO/AS Learning Community
<u>Fall 2009</u>

This interview will be used to report students' feelings on the UO/AS learning community. The data will be used to by the UO/AS program to design a more effective learning community experience for UO/AS students in the future.

1. What were the reasons you decided to participate in the UO/AS learning community?
2. Explain how you feel the learning community met or did not meet each of your expectations?
3. Tell me how, or how not, your involvement in the learning community helped you build a sense of community through interacting in academic and social environments with the learning community members?
4. Explain how living in the same residential hall with the learning community members impacted your first year?
5. What did you like most about:
   a. The residential hall
   b. Learning community assistant
   c. The linked courses
   d. Professors of the linked courses
   e. The learning community meetings/social events
   f. Study sessions
   g. First year seminar
   h. Other
6. What did you like least about:
   a. The residential hall
   b. Learning community assistant
   c. The linked courses
   d. Professors of the linked courses
   e. The learning community meetings/social events
   f. Study Sessions
   g. First year seminar
   h. Other
7. Of the learning community experience, what did you find most helpful?What did you find least helpful?
8. Please identify three academic and/or personal resources, offices and services you have learned through your participation in the learning community?
9. Explain the support you utilized from your peers, selected faculty, and staff to aid in your academic success?
10. Do you believe the learning community assisted with your transition to the campus environment? Why or Why not?
11. Please describe a time you sought assistance and guidance from peers and university offices for your academic or personal needs?
12. Explain how your involvement in the learning community has or has not assisted you in developing appropriate decision making and coping skills to aid in handling difficult situations and making healthy choices?
13. Explain how you feel you have developed resources to aid in your overall success?

14. What information would you have liked to receive during your first semester that you did not receive?
15. What recommendations do you have to improve the residential, social and academic components of the UO/AS learning community?

Appendix I

End of Semester Professor Questionnaire

UO/AS Learning Community
Fall 2009

1.   What did you observe about the learning community students?
        _____

2.   What do you feel were the strengths of the learning community?
        _____

3.   What do you feel were the weaknesses of the learning community?
        _____

4.   How did the learning community students' social adjustment compare to other freshman
        groups that you have taught? Please give examples.
        _____

5.   How did the learning community students' academic adjustment compare to other
        freshman groups that you have taught? Please give examples.
        _____

6.   How did your experience compare to your expectations?
        _____

7.   Would you teach a linked course in a learning community again?
        Yes_____ No____ Why?
        _____

8.   What do you recommend could be done differently to improve the community
        experience?
        _____

Adapted from Transformative learning and leading through a comprehensive learning

community experience for undeclared freshmen, Damminger, J.K. (2004).

Appendix J

End of Semester Resident Assistant Interview Questions

1. What did you observe about the learning community students in comparison to non-learning community students?
2. Explain your thoughts on the impact the academic component of the learning community had on the first year experience of the S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S..
3. Explain the impact the residential component had on learning community students.
4. Did the students utilize the linked professors for support?
5. Did the students' involvement in the learning community impact their ability to make healthy choices and further advocate for themselves?
6. Did your experience meet your expectations of being a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Resident Assistant?
7. What lessons are you taking away from this experience as a S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Resident Assistant?
8. Would you work with a learning community again in the future?
9. What would you say are the strengths and weakness of the program?
10. Additional Comments, recommendations, suggestions?

Appendix K

Informed Consent Form

Fall 2009 UO/AS Learning Community

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Alexis University and the Assistant Dean of Students/ Director of the Unlimited Opportunity /Academic Success (UO/AS) program. I am conducting research as part of my doctoral dissertation to explore the impact of a learning community on UO/AS students enrolled the 2009 fall semester and to explore my leadership development through the process.

By signing below you agree to participate in this study and be interviewed and participate in an assessment of the UO/AS learning community conducted by Penny McPherson-Barnes and the UO/AS program at Alexis University. The assessment may include the use of your student information from the Alexis University Banner system, interview transcripts, and the results of any surveys completed with the UO/AS learning community program. Based on the success rates of students participating in the learning community, this study will serve as a resource to understand how to integrate learning communities in opportunity programs and students' first year experience. The data collected in this study will be utilized to improve the program in the future. It will be combined with data from future groups for ongoing evaluation and redesign. It may be submitted for presentation at a conference or publication in a research journal.

All data gathered will be confidential. Any information obtained from this study may be used in only a way thought best for publication or education. There are no risks involved in this study, and you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Alexis University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If you have any questions or problems concerning participation in this study, please contact Penny McPherson Barnes at (856) 256-4086 or e-mail at barnesp@Alexis.edu. If you have any questions about this research and how it will be used you can call or e-mail my advisor at Alexis University, James Coaxum in the office of Educational Leadership at (856) 256-4706 or coaxum@alexis.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Associate Provost for Research at: Alexis University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research 201 Mull Road Greenville, NJ 08068-1701 Tel: 856-556-5550.

I give Penny McPherson Barnes permission to interview me, review my transcripts and use the contents of this information in the manner described above. I acknowledge receiving a copy of this form.

_____   _____
Participant's signature   Date

I agree to the use of my photograph while participating in the learning community program. Photographs will be strictly used for brochure advertisements, presentations and educational materials.

_____   _____
Participant's signature   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix L

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Meeting Agenda Fall 2009

Wednesday, Sept. 16 10:50-11:50 am S.CH.O.L.A.R.S. Meeting
- Surprise! Breakfast/ A Beautiful Day!!!
- Check in
  - Adjustment (emotional, physical, home etc..)
  - Residential
  - Academic (Study Sessions/Books/Professors)
  - Social
- Scholars overview
- Monthly Monday/Pizza with your Professors : Monday's: October 5 , November 2, December 7
- Jobs on Campus
  - http://www.alexis.edu/open/wsjobs/
- Community Service/Select a Project by 10/21
  - RU Service Learning and Volunteerism
    - Big Brothers/Big Sisters
    - Teaching Assistants for J. Harvey Rodgers Elementary School
    - Tri-County Head Start Reading Enrichment Program
    - Mentoring @ Glassboro Child Development Center
    - After School Program @ Brighten Up
    - Alexis University Clean & Greens
    - Junior Achievement Citizenship Lessons & Kindle School in Pitman
    - Activity Pals @ Post House Assisted Living Center
    - Other ideas?
- Harlem Trip: Saturday – mid semester
- What would you like to discuss during the future monthly Wednesday Meetings???
  - Internships/ Scholarships/ Graduate School
- Upcoming Events/Important Dates/Announcements
  - Mentoring Program President's Breakfast
  - Structured Study Behavior

October 21, 2009 Meeting 10:50-11:50am S.CH.O.L.A.R.S. Meeting
- Checking In
- Communication Skills
- Spring 2009 Semester/Registration
- COMMUNITY SERVICE FALL 2009
- Registration
- Christmas Activity in December
- Harlem Trip
- Mission Statement/Reflections

Monday, November 16th   6pm-8pm   Pizza with Professors
- Zora Neale Hurston - Video
- Upcoming Information

Wednesday, November 18th   10:50am-11:50am   S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. mtg
- Check –in
- Applying for Scholarships
- Mid-point evaluation

Pizza with Professors: Game Night Monday, December 7th   6pm-8pm

Harlem Renaissance Trip New York Friday, Dec.11th/Saturday, Dec. 12th, 8am-6pm

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Mtg Wednesday, December 16th   10:50 – 11:50   Final Evaluation

Appendix M

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Learning Community Course Guide

Fall 2009

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thurs	Friday
8:00-9:15a		Freshman First year			
10:50 – 12:05		Afr. Amer. Lit	SCHOLARS Mtg. 3rd Wed Each Month	Afr. Amer. Lit	College Writing
1:45-3pm	College Writing		College Writing		

Fall 2009 Course

College Writing I
- Fulfills the writing requirement with additional writing support to ensure successful completion.

African American Lit Through Harlem Renaissance
- Examines African American Literature from its beginnings in the Colonial Period through the Harlem Renaissance.
- Close readings of seminal vernacular, autobiographical, poetic, creative, and critical texts, exploring
- the relationship between literary expression and the highly charged American social, cultural, and political histories that form its context.
- African American writers, including Phyllis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Frances Harper, W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Charles Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Jean Toomer.
- *This course can be a Multicultural, Global or History/Humanities/Language course: Not a Literature requirement.*

Learning Community
- Group discussions in the lounge with professors (dates to be announced)
- SCHOLARS Meetings once per month
    - 9/16, 10/21, 11/18, 12/16
- Community Service Activities/Extracurricular Activities
- Harlem Renaissance Trip, NY

Appendix N

Campus Tree Planting

2009 S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Candidates Community Building Experience

Receiving instruction from the Director of Housing

Planting Trees

Praying for the trees and for S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S.

UO/AS 2009 S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Candidates

Appendix O

Faculty Meeting Agenda

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. Learning Community
August 31, 2009

- Welcome and Introductions
- Learning Community/Dissertation Overview
- Learning Outcomes/Goals of the program
- Selection Process/Who are the SCHOLARS
- Why students selected scholars/majors
- SCHOLARS Assistant
    - Brian Castil, Junior, UO/AS student
    - Email: castil@students.alexis.edu
    - Terrell: Rm 269
    - Phone: 609-333-3335

- Residential Component
    - Living/Learning/Fun
- Academic Component
    - African American Literature through Harlem Renaissance
    - Dr. Cati Park: Will approve course not only as a multicultural/global course but as a gen ed. literature course (email 8/6/09)
    - College Writing I
    - Opportunities for Collaboration
    - Course Syllabi
- SCHOLARS Meetings
    - Dates/Location/Topics
- Africana Studies Major/Concentration
- Harlem Renaissance Trip
    - Date
    - Locations
    - Costs

Harlem Renaissance Trip Flyer

S.C.H.O.L.A.R.S. PROGRAM

Saturday, December 12, 2009
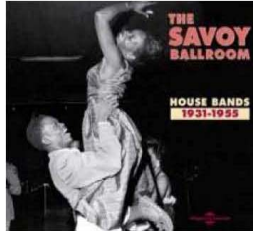
Harlem Renaissance Tour!
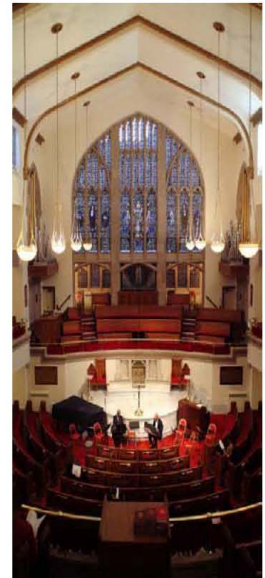**7:15 a. m.** depart from Student Center
9:30a.m Arrive in NY

10:00 am– Tour
3:15 pm - On your Own
4:30 pm - Get on the bus
6:45 pm - Arrive Back @ Alexis

Some of the sites include:
Sugar Hill and Striver's Row Neighborhoods, Jungle Alley (Cotton Club, Connie's Inn, Nest Club, Barron's Club), Abyssinian Baptist Church, Savoy Ballroom, Dar Tower (Madam C.J Walker's literary salon), Historical Restaurant, APOLLO THEATRE, and More!!!