Living-Learning Communities: Balancing Academic and Co-Curricular Programming

Custom Research Brief • September 25, 2008

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I. METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Sources

- Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.advisory.com) research libraries
- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) http://www.eric.ed.gov
- Internet, via search engines and multiple Web sites

Research Parameters

- While the Council recognizes that not all of these universities are direct peers of the requesting member, these institutions were selected because their living-learning communities are considered strong models.

- Given the limited selection of universities, this brief is not intended to explore all models of living-learning communities, but instead to provide an overview of how several universities structure this residential life initiative.

- Each university profiled has a system of multiple distinct living-learning communities that are often operated differently from one another. In this case, the Council profiled the most robust living-learning community offering on campus and then provided an overview of the other communities on campus.
## I. Methodology & Research Parameters

### A Guide to Universities Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Duke University</th>
<th>Emory University</th>
<th>University A</th>
<th>University B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>South</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>East</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Classification</strong></td>
<td>Private; Very High Research</td>
<td>Private; Very High Research</td>
<td>Public; Very High Research</td>
<td>Public; Very High Research</td>
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<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>13,373/6,330</td>
<td>12,338/6,646</td>
<td>26,160/21,004</td>
<td>36,014/25,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endowment</strong></td>
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<td>$4,347,880,952</td>
<td>$102,480,041</td>
<td>$334,627,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Year Persistence Rate</strong></td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Graduation Rate</strong></td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Project Challenge
A public research university located in the South approached the Council with the following question:

How do other universities implement living-learning community models that successfully balance academic and co-curricular programming? Specifically,

1. How are living learning communities structured? What are the requirements for student participation?
2. What role do faculty and housing staff play in living learning communities? How do faculty and staff collaborate?
3. How are living learning communities implemented and marketed to students and faculty?
4. What are the learning objectives of living learning communities, specifically as they relate to Residence Life?
5. How are the themes living learning communities reviewed and the success of the communities assessed?
6. How does participation in LLC’s affect student retention?

Introduction
In general, living-learning communities are a way of breaking down the university experience into smaller communities of students, faculty, and professional staff. Living-learning communities are optional and allow students the opportunity to explore topics and themes, typically interdisciplinary in nature, that reach beyond their regular course of study. At many institutions, student interest often drives the focus of LLCs. Below are some common themes:

- Business/Entrepreneurship
- Civic Engagement
- Honors Programs
- Language House
- Leadership
- Living in a Global Society
- Sustainability
- Wellness

Key Observations

- **The structure of living-learning communities, including curricular components and requirements for participation, vary between and within universities.** While all communities have co-curricular programming, some also have academic courses to compliment the theme of the community. In general, when an academic component exists, it is required; however, participation for co-curricular programming is typically made optional. Contacts note that optional programming often attracts students who have the time and interest to fully devote their attention to the topic, making for more successful events.

- **Typically living-learning communities are led by faculty and supported by Residence Life; however, collaboration between the two groups is integral to living-learning community success.** A strong partnership and frequent communication between Academic and Student Affairs staff throughout the life of a living-learning community is essential to ensure that student needs are met both in and outside the classroom. The role of Residence Life staff in supporting living-learning communities is to provide and maintain the physical space for each community, while simultaneously supporting the faculty and university staff who coordinate academic offerings or related programming. As such, faculty organize programming that is relevant to their field and applicable to one or more living-learning communities. In addition, depending on the model of living-learning communities, faculty may develop and teach classes that are specific to a particular living-learning program.
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations (cont.)

- To ensure student participation and sustain interest, administrators should solicit student input regarding LLC themes or specific academic-related programming. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways but is typically initiated via student surveys and focus groups.

- To market living-learning communities, universities provide students with promotional and educational materials throughout the application and matriculation process. Generally, information is disseminated through the new-student welcome packet and on-campus housing application. All universities profiled also publish information on their Web site outlining the themes and goals of each campus community. Communities that have selection criteria, such as Honors Programs, solicit qualified students (based on GPA, for example) therefore negating the need for broader promotional materials.

- Residence Life and the faculty involved in initiating specific living-learning communities act as ambassadors of the initiative and encourage participation from all faculty. At most institutions, faculty are solicited to coordinate programming on an ad hoc basis, typically when their academic field coincides with the theme or specific programming that is offered through an LLC. At some institutions, however, the effort to garner faculty support is strategically coordinated. For example, contacts at Emory explain that they use a development model to encourage faculty participation that includes forming and fostering relationships and proposing specific ways that a given faculty member can contribute to an LLC.

- Living-learning communities are developed with the goal of enhancing students’ academic and co-curricular experience and therefore learning outcomes are linked to this objective. Examples of learning outcomes include:
  - Achieving academic excellence through the development of interdisciplinary knowledge
  - Developing an understanding of diversity among peers and within the broader community
  - Acquiring skills that will be applicable beyond students’ undergraduate experience

In addition, universities create outcomes related to the themes of specific communities such as the development of public speaking skills, involvement in civic life, and knowledge of green practices.

- Few universities have comprehensive assessment plans in place and instead rely on general student achievement data (i.e. retention rates, graduation rates, GPAs) to review programs. Our contacts indicate that although most programs have developed and defined student learning outcomes, they lack the staff and financial resources to support learning outcomes assessment. University B is one exception; the College Scholars living-learning community has developed an annual program-assessment plan that involves student portfolios and program director reviews (see page 27).
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations (cont.)

- In general, there is not a formal process by which residence life reviews the themes associated with the living-learning communities. Instead, existing communities are reviewed when membership experiences a significant decrease, or when possible new themes arise and require the reorganization of existing communities. In part, the lack of formal procedure stems from the relative infancy of many of the living-learning programs profiled in this brief, and it is likely that as communities mature and universities expand LLC initiatives, that Student Affairs leaders will more concretely define procedures for assessment.

- Research suggests that living-learning communities can help to increase student retention, particularly from the freshman to sophomore year. Providing students with a small community within the larger university, living-learning programs give students increased access to faculty and support staff (e.g., academic advisors and career services staff) which is often linked to a decrease in attrition. Because not all universities profiled in this brief collect data to assess this correlation, the Council has provided additional reading resources for further information (see Appendix A).
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Duke University</th>
<th>Emory University</th>
<th>University A</th>
<th>University B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interdisciplinary Programs</strong></td>
<td>The Focus Program</td>
<td>First-Year LLCs: Living Green, Citizenship</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Multi-Disciplinary Communities: College Scholars, University Honors, Beyond the Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(not affiliated with particular academic unit)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themed Communities:</strong></td>
<td>Baldwin Scholars, Wellness Communities, Performing Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Second-Year LLC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Themed Houses/Halls:</strong></td>
<td>Including the Spanish House, Outdoor House, and Arts Hall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic-Affiliated Programs</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Themed Communities: Civicus, EcoHouse, Gemstone, Language House, Women in Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(linked to specific department or school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic-Based Learning Communities:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LCs are coordinated around one to three academic classes. Participants also engage in extra and co-curricular programming)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“N/A” indicates that the information is not applicable.
# II. Executive Overview

| Components of Living-Learning Communities at Four Universities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Category** | Duke University | Emory University | University A | University B |
| **Student Membership** | All Undergraduates | All Undergraduates | Primarily First-Year Students | All Undergraduates |
| **Mandatory Participation** | No | No | No | No |
| **Initiating Office** | Provost’s Office | Residence Life | Provost’s Office, Student Affairs | Provost, Residence Life, & Admissions |
| **Currently Administered** | Provost’s Office | Residence Life | Provost’s Office | Provost & Residence Life |
| **Faculty Role** | • Coordinate co-curricular programming  
• Teach related courses  
• Provide informal mentoring | • Coordinate co-curricular programming  
• Sit on planning board | • Initiate learning community  
• Teach courses  
• Coordinate extra and co-curricular programming  
• Administer assessment  
• Participate in LC Advisory Committee | • Serve as program directors  
• Coordinate co-curricular programming  
• Teach related courses |
| **Staff Role** | • Support implementation of new LLCs  
• Provide programmatic support  
• Maintain physical space | • Support implementation of new LLCs  
• Provide programmatic support  
• Maintain physical space | • Participate in LC Advisory Committee  
• Provide and maintain residence hall space dedicated to LCs | • Provide programmatic support  
• Maintain physical space |
| **Assessment Plan** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
Introduction to Learning Communities at University A

University A has a wide variety of ‘learning communities’ (LCs) that are all linked to a specific academic department and/or college. Participating students, primarily first-years, take anywhere from one to three courses together and depending on the community may reside on the same hall. While only some LCs have a residential component, all communities offer co-curricular programming including:

- Study groups (informal or formal meetings with classmates)
- Career exploration (field trips, guest speakers, etc)
- Experiential learning
- Service-learning and community service events
- Social activities (sporting and arts events, dinner with professors, speakers, etc)

The LC program is co-directed by a faculty and Student Affairs representative, who coordinate the approval of new learning communities and oversee the LC Advisory Committee (see below for further information). Individual learning communities are initiated and led by a faculty member and/or a departmental academic adviser. Currently, nearly 50 percent of all first-year students and a small percentage of second and third-year students participate in one of the following communities at University B:

**Agriculture and Life Sciences**
- Agricultural Business
- Agricultural Community
  Encourages Success
- Agricultural Education and Studies
- Agricultural Systems Technology (Technology LC)
- Agronomy
- AGPAQ
- Animal Science/Dairy Science/Pre-Vet
- Biochemistry & Biophysics
- Biology Education Success Teams
- Biology Third Year
- Environmental Science
- Food Science & Human Nutrition
- Horticulture
- Industrial Technology
- Microbiology
- Natural Resource Ecology & Mgmt
- Secret of Life

**Business**
- Business Learning Teams
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation

**Design**
- Design Collaborative
- Design Exchange
- Traveling Savanna Studio

**Engineering**
- Aerospace Engineering
- Agricultural Engineering
- Chemical Engineering
- Civil Engineering Keystone
- Computer Engineering Learning Teams
- Construction Engineering Cornerstone
- Electrical Engineering
- Industrial Engineers Are Leaders
- Leadership through Engineering Academic Diversity
- Materials Science & Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Learning Teams
- Undeclared Engineering
- Undeclared Engineers (Community Living for Undeclared Engineers)
- Undeclared Engineering Residential

**Human Sciences**
- Adult Non-Traditional Students
- Apparel, Educational Studies and Hospitality Mgmt (Directions)
- Common Threads
- Food Science & Human Nutrition
- Human Development & Family Studies
- Kinesiology

**Liberal Arts & Sciences**
- Biochemistry & Biophysics
- Biology Education Success Teams
- Biology Third Year (B3)
- Computer Science
- Connections
- Earth, Wind and Fire
- Environmental Science
- Music (Esprit de Corps)

**Additional Options**
- Advancing Citizenship Together
- Carver Academy
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Freshman Honors Program
- Hixson Opportunity Awards
- Multicultural Learning Community
- Multicultural Vision Program
- Student Support Services Program
- WISE (Women in Science and Engineering)
- WISE Sophomore Success
- WISE Transfer
Implementation/Marketing of Learning Communities

To initiate new learning communities, faculty and/or academic advisers submit proposals to the LC Advisory Committee. Proposals are submitted one year prior to intended implementation and must include the following information:

- Courses that all members of the community will take (and faculty teaching each course)
- Learning outcomes/Goals of the community
- Corresponding department/college outcomes
- Specific LC experiences which promote outcomes
- Co-curricular components including, student-faculty interactions and partnerships with Student Affairs units (e.g., Multicultural Affairs, Residence Life, Dean of Students, etc)
- Use of peer mentors (see below for more information)
- Budget
- Assessment tools

Due to a restricted budget, the LC Advisory Committee cannot fund all proposed LCs; however, in these limited instances, faculty may still implement initiatives that are not approved (however, they will not be considered part of the Learning Community Program). The Advisory Committee looks to fund programs that:

- Foster an integrated curriculum that connects course content and encourages participant interaction.
- Build strong, collaborative partnerships between academic and student support services.
- Promote innovative pedagogy and collaborative curriculum development that may incorporate service learning, interdisciplinary teams, cooperative learning strategies, out of class learning connections, and other curricular innovations.
- Have a specific, comprehensive assessment plan that addresses clearly articulated, intended learning outcomes for students.

In order to encourage faculty and/or academic advisers to submit proposals for LCs, the program co-directors initiate conversations with faculty and departmental administrators (e.g., department chairs) to discuss the opportunities for new LC development. In particular, co-directors tend to target schools or departments where there are few existing LCs.

Role of Academic Affairs and Residence Life Staff

Academic Affairs

Funding for the Learning Community Program comes from the Office of the Provost, but is coordinated by both Academic and Student Affairs. This joint structure is reflected in the leadership of the program with one co-director selected from each office. The co-directors oversee the LC Advisory Committee which is composed of leaders from across the university including, faculty, the dean of students, academic advisers, Residence Life staff, and other Student Affairs professionals (e.g., staff from Student Activities, Multicultural Affairs, and Career Services). Meeting monthly, this committee not only reviews proposals but with the help of subcommittees manages the following components of the program:

- Assessment
- Curriculum and faculty development
- Marketing and communications
- Peer mentoring
- Second-year and transfer student initiatives

With the support of the Advisory Committee, faculty and academic advisers, called learning community coordinators, manage the daily operations of individual LCs. Any number of faculty and departmental
III. UNIVERSITY A

academic advisers may be involved (typically one to three) in a single LC. In some cases, advisers initiate communities and teach orientation courses but must partner with faculty who teach the other associated courses. Responsibilities of LC coordinators include:

- Defining LC goals and learning outcomes
- Selecting and teaching associated courses
- Coordinating extra and co-curricular activities
- Supervising peer mentors
- Managing assessments of LC success

Aiding coordinators in the daily implementation of LCs, every community has a group of peer mentors composed of former LC participants. Peer mentors provide academic and social support help to students in their LC by coordinating extra and co-curricular programming such as organizing study groups, participating in orientation courses, meeting with students one-on-one, and advertising upcoming events. In addition, peer mentors may live on the hall with students in the LC.

Residence Life:

Through their involvement on the LC Advisory Committee (see above), Residence Life staff contribute to overseeing the Learning Community Program. In addition, they ensure that LC residential needs are met through the provision and allocation of housing space. In the instances where LCs have peer mentors living with their student group, residential assistants work with mentors to coordinate programming and support the goals of the LC.

Learning Objectives and Assessment of Learning Communities

When developing an LC, each faculty and/or adviser must outline proposed learning objectives for the community. The university allows faculty and academic advisers great autonomy to develop individual learning outcomes as they relate to their specific community. All outcomes must be measurable and identify specific markers that allow students to see if they are achieving the attended outcome. In general, outcomes fall under the six following categories:

1. Civic responsibility
2. Practice competence
3. Intrapersonal development
4. Interpersonal development
5. Knowledge acquisition
6. Complex cognitive skills

All LCs must have an established assessment plan to measure the extent to which learning objectives are achieved. Typical forms of assessment include student surveys, focus groups, or student portfolios. Every year the LC coordinators are responsible for administering the assessment tool and reporting results to the Advisory Committee for review. In addition, deans and departments receive results of the LCs under their purview.

The Advisory Committee review assessment reports and identifies strengths and weaknesses of each LC as it relates to stated learning objectives. The co-directors then work with LC coordinators to address weaknesses. Contacts note that reviews rarely result in the discontinuation of an LC and instead LCs only dissolve when coordinators leave the university or take on other responsibilities and do not designate a replacement.
Retention

University A continuously assesses the effects that learning communities have on first-year student retention and finds that students who participate in an LC are more likely to persist between freshman and sophomore year. Assessing the correlation between living communities and first-year persistence rates has been a priority for the Advisory Committee because this encouraging data demonstrates to university leaders the need for continued and increased LLC funding. Below is a graph illustrating this correlation:

Source: Office of the Registrar and Office of Institutional Research, University A
Introduction to Living-Learning Communities at Emory

Currently, Emory has a system of non-mandatory living-learning communities that extends to all undergraduate students. Currently, there is one LLC that first-year students can apply to participate in (a second LLC for first-year students will open in fall 2009) and there is one LLC dedicated to second-year students. In addition, upperclassmen have the option of joining the theme houses/halls that were implemented on Emory’s campus approximately 20 years ago and continue to operate today under the LLC umbrella.

Living-learning communities (LLCs) are structured around the three guiding principles:

1. A particular theme that is interdisciplinary
2. Staff directly allocated to that community
3. Space allocated to that community

While the LLCs work to connect residence life with academia, limited housing space restricts participation to only a set number of students. To ensure that all first-year students (not just those in one of the two LLCs) are given proper support in all facets of university life, Emory established the First-Year at Emory (FYE) program. All first-years are enrolled in this program regardless of where they live on campus (in a first-year LLC or in a “regular” residence hall). Those freshmen who are also in a first-year LLC enjoy both the benefits of their LLC as well as those afforded by FYE.

Similarly, Emory developed the Second-Year at Emory (SYE) program to provide second-year students with access to, and support from, campus entities that are most important to them at this stage in their undergraduate experience (e.g., Study Abroad Office, Academic Advising). However, unlike the FYE, this is not mandatory for all sophomore students and there is no distinction between this program and the second-year LLC. Thus, all students who opt to participate in the SYE also elect to participate in the Second-Year LLC.

Summary Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optional</th>
<th>First-Year LLC</th>
<th>SYE/Second-Year LLC</th>
<th>Theme Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>To allow students to live in a community that is focused on a particular area of interest</td>
<td>To give sophomore students support and access to the campus entities that are most important to them (e.g., Study Abroad Office, Academic Advising)</td>
<td>To further connect students with academic areas of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>Interested first-year students apply; Admission is on a first-come, first-served basis</td>
<td>Interested sophomore students apply; admission is on a first-come, first-served basis</td>
<td>Interested upperclassmen apply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First-Year Living-Learning Community

Overview:

First-year LLCs at Emory are not based on academic majors. Instead, using a common application, interested first-years apply to participate in an LLC and, in doing so, indicate their preference for which community they would like to join (in fall 2009, there will be two first-year LLCs). As previously discussed, first-year students who participate in an LLC enjoy the same FYE programming as other freshman students; but, they also may participate in additional programming coordinated around the theme of their community.

Starting in fall 2009, Emory will offer two first-year LLCs:

1. **Citizenship: Your Passport to Emory**: Explores the idea of citizenship from political, economic, and social angles, allowing students to understand “what it means to be a citizen in different communities.”

2. **Living Green**: Students learn about and discuss the political impact of sustainability.

Learning Objectives:

Learning objectives are based around the specific theme of each living-learning community as opposed to having general objectives for all living learning students. Thus, objectives are framed loosely with the ultimate aim of encouraging students to delve into the broad subject of their community and finding specific areas that interest them most. Programming coordinated around each community supports this objective. Below is an example of the programming offered through Emory’s “Living-Green” community:

**Living Green- An example of Freshman Living-Learning Community:**

Programming in the ‘Living Green’ LLC revolves around exploring and implementing a sustainable future. The two dorms that house ‘Living Green’ students are energy efficient, environmentally friendly buildings that are LEED Certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). These buildings include features such as photovoltaic cells, which power a rainwater runoff recycling system and energy efficient fixtures. While participation in LLC-specific programming is never mandatory, the following programs have been established as signature programs for the Living Green FYE program:

- **Eagle Excursions**: Students have the opportunity to travel with fellow residents and select faculty and staff. For example, trips to the Georgia Aquarium and hiking in the North Georgia Mountains teach students to appreciate and understand what it means to live green and be proactive in helping us create a sustainable future.

- **Green Gatherings**: Discussions focus on “what it means to ‘Live Green.’” Specifically, faculty, staff, and students share stories about making strides to live green. Participants actively discuss topics such as “how they treat themselves and others, how politics influence decisions, and how they can contribute to the human race.”

- **Green Pages**: ‘Living Green’ students read a common book and have the opportunity to join their hall mates in programs, discussions, and other activities surrounding the text.

While these programs act as a cornerstone of the community, in general, for this LLC and others, programming is coordinated in an ad hoc fashion as faculty members - specifically those on the steering committee (see page 16) – identify opportunities to bring academic programming into the residence hall. For example, “Cartooning for Peace” is a program sponsored by the Institute for International Affairs that brought award-winning political cartoonists into the Citizenship LLC to discuss current events and draw cartoons representing different topics. This program was originally developed specifically for students in...
the Institute for International Affairs, but a faculty member saw the value of bringing it to the Citizenship LLC and coordinated the effort.

**Second-Year at Emory (SYE) Program/Living-Learning Community**

**Overview:**

Upperclassmen have the opportunity to participate in the Second-Year at Emory. The theme of the SYE program is "A Focus on Second-Year Students" and facilitates opportunities for sophomores to connect to the campus constituents who are most valuable to them – the Career Center, Study Abroad Office (half of all juniors at Emory study abroad), and Academic Advising (access to advising is especially important when declaring a major). Additionally, SYE serves to continue the support that students benefited from under the FYE program. Contacts note that the administration wants to make sure that SYE students are "feeling the pull from the first year."

Initially, SYE was developed as an LLC for sophomore students with specific dorm space set aside for this community. However, demand for the SYE program exceeded housing capacity and thus, participating students are split between the SYE residential facility and regular dormitory facilities. Specifically, there are 460 residential students and an additional 450 students who are a part of the program, but do not live in one of the two SYE designated buildings.

**Learning Objectives:**

The objectives of SYE are to best support students as they transition from their first-year at Emory to their second year. The following programs have been established to support this goal:

- **Academic Advising:** Academic Advisers from the Office for Undergraduate Education present programs about deadlines for dropping, adding, and switching classes. These programs are designed to create awareness about deadlines and assist students with any academic advising questions. The Academic Advisors show students how to access and use individual “On-Line Degree Audits” so that they can quickly assess degree requirements and course completions. Assistance in academic support areas such as time management, organizational skills, and study skills is also provided by staff from the Emory Pathways to Academic Success for Students (EPASS) office. In addition to these programs, academic advisors hold drop-in advising hours in sophomores’ dorms.

- **Faculty Dinner Series:** Each dinner focuses on an academic area, including the following: Sciences and Pre-Med, Business and Economics, English and Journalism, Social Sciences, and International Issues. Dinner invitations are extended to fifteen sophomore students, five Emory faculty, and two academic advisors. The students and faculty invited represent the academic focus area being featured at the dinner. Informal interaction prior to the meal occurs and students and faculty have interspersed seating arrangements during dinner to promote dialogue and questions regarding the discipline and career field.

- **Career Series:** Sponsored by the Career Center, pre-preparation programs are offered for Health/Pre-Med, Law, and graduate school, with coursework, involvement, and the application process for these different areas explained. Internship programs are presented twice each semester, stressing the value of the internship experience in the academic portfolio.

While SYE is clearly different from FYE, contacts note that, “The model that pulls together both FYE and SYE is the proactive academic advising.”
Theme Houses/Halls

Overview:

Offered as a residential option to upperclassmen, theme houses/halls were implemented approximately 20 years ago and house between 4 and 20 people each. Linked to a specific academic department or center, examples of theme houses/halls include the Spanish House, Outdoor House, and Arts Hall.

Learning Objectives:

While theme houses/halls are not directly linked to an academic department and programming is not mandatory, each house/hall develops informal programming that connects participating students to the theme of their house. For example, contacts indicate that the faculty in the Spanish Department spend a considerable amount of time interacting with students living in the Spanish House and therefore create a strong link between a student’s residence and academia.

Implementation/ Marketing of Living Learning Communities

Program Implementation of LLCs:

Each Living-learning community was formed differently but contacts note that it is important to recognize that LLCs were not formed solely by Residential Life. Instead, all LLCs were developed and implemented through a partnership with another unit on campus and, in most cases, the unit was an academic department or division.

When implementing the first-year and second-year LLCs, the university formed a steering committee to develop the concepts behind the communities. The SYE and the two FYE themed communities each have separate steering committees made up of about 15 people who represent the different stakeholders on campus (e.g., faculty, administration, Student Affairs). After the Steering Committee chooses a focus for the LLC, additional committee members representing expertise in the area of focus are brought on board. As previously mentioned, this formalized steering committee is involved in initiating and coordinating programming for their affiliated LLC.

Marketing:

Due to robust student participation, the university has not developed an extensive marketing campaign to attract the interest of students. Similarly, faculty involvement has grown organically and has also not required a substantial marketing effort.

- **Students:** Living learning communities are introduced to students throughout the application process (e.g., on campus tours) and in welcome packets sent to students upon acceptance to the university. In addition, Residence Life’s Web site contains detailed information about the various communities and the application process.

- **Faculty:** As contacts explain, Residence Life staff use a “fundraising model” to recruit faculty participants. Staff spend time identifying prospects, cultivating relationships, proposing ways that faculty can become involved, and then stewarding their involvement. In addition, Residence Life developed several educational publications aimed at encouraging faculty participation as well as a comprehensive Web site that outlines faculty engagement opportunities.
III. EMORY UNIVERSITY

Over the course of developing and implementing living learning communities at Emory, Residence Life staff found, based on conversations with students, that the verbiage “living-learning community” does not resonate with students who felt that they were already “living and learning” and therefore do not need an additional program to facilitate this process. For this reason, Residence Life refers to this system as “themed communities” where students have the opportunity to further explore pre-existing interests. Thus, the traditional LLC is marketed as a fun, enriching experience where students are not expected to "do more." (For the purposes of this brief and for the sake of clarity, the Council refers to Emory’s system using the phrase “LLC.”)

Role of Faculty and Residential Life Staff

Faculty:

Emory’s faculty do not live in the residence halls, although some faculty members elect to be closely affiliated with themed housing (e.g., Art Center director to the Art Hall or a Spanish professor to the Spanish House). As previously discussed, the role of faculty is primarily to coordinate programming when they see opportunities to do so.

Residence Life Staff:

Primarily, the role of Residence Life staff is to support the Living-Learning Communities by working with Academic Affairs to form the concept behind new communities and then to coordinate and oversee the physical space for the communities. Additionally, Residence Life staff oversees upperclassman theme housing and works with students to coordinate the implementation of new theme halls/houses.

In recent years the Residence Life staff has made LLCs a priority by lowering the ratio of professional staff to students (contacts indicate that aside from the construction of the residence halls to house communities, the addition of more staff has been the largest investment in growing the LLC system). In recent years, Residence Life staff has increased from about 4 or 5 staff who are dedicated to the LLC system to about 15. Specifically, the goal is to have a staff-to-student ratio of 400 to 1 for the SYE and 350 to 1 for the FYE (the original staff-to-student ratios were approximately 800 to 1).

Assessment of Living-Learning Community Themes

First-Year and Second-Year Living-Learning Community:

Faculty and administrators chose themes for the first-year living-learning communities that are relevant to today’s student and thus a review of these communities will presumably come when such topics are either no longer relevant or when more engaging themes emerge. The focus on the second year, which serves as the theme for the second-year living-learning community, will most likely continue indefinitely as this is an area of perpetual relevance. For these reasons, Residence Life does not have a formal procedure for reviewing the relevance of the theme. These polices will emerge as the need arises.

Theme Housing:

Since implementation, themes of the houses and halls have vacillated over the years based on student interest. For example, Emory just launched a Middle Eastern theme hall in response to a student proposal. Contacts note, however, that changing the themes of halls has political implications because departments often do not want to give up their “hall,” and thus must be dealt with in a sensitive manner.
III. Emory University

Student Assessment and Retention

Residence Life administers several surveys throughout the course of the academic year including both internally developed and national surveys. However, due to the relative infancy of these programs, comprehensive results are not yet available, including those that touch upon the effects that the living learning communities have on retention. Surveys administered include:

Internally Developed:

- Survey of ‘Citizenship’ participants: Administered each semester
- Survey of SYE participants: Administered annually

National Surveys:

- National Student Living Learning Survey: Administered annually
- The Educational Benchmarking Survey: Administered annually

Contacts note that there is approximately a 25-30 percent response rate on each assessment.

Additional Information

Funding:

While Residence Life is often the primary funder of LLCS, other campus entities contribute to these communities:

Theme Houses: Typically funded by the associated academic department. For example, the Spanish and Portuguese departments contribute significant funds to the Spanish House.

First-Year LLC: Funded largely by Residence Life but specific departments will contribute funds for programming coordinated by their office.

Second-Year LLC: Although a non-traditional funder, SYE has a great deal of financial support from the university’s dining service. This company that provides dining service staff and support feels that financial contribution to the SYE is one way that they can "give back to the community."
III. DUKE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Currently, there are two types of living-learning communities at Duke: The Focus Program and themed living-learning communities.

The Focus Program: Is an intensive (but optional) living-learning experience for freshmen that shapes their fall course schedule and first-year residential experience. Incoming freshmen who are interested in participating apply to one of nine interdisciplinary seminar clusters, which are created and team-taught by three or four senior faculty members from different academic departments.

Themed Living-Learning Communities: Also optional, these communities offer all undergraduate students the opportunity to partake in intentionally designed living-learning communities that incorporate the residential component of an undergraduate college experience with other academic and social experiences. Specifically, there are three themed communities: Baldwin Scholars Program, Wellness Community, and Performing Arts.

The Focus Program

Overview:

Approximately one-fifth to one-fourth of the incoming first-year class participates in The Focus Program (of approximately 1,600 total freshmen). Students in each Focus cluster live in the same residence hall but are also fully integrated into the broader first-year living experience on campus. Contacts describe individual Focus cluster living experiences (a total of nine) as a “family of 30, in which students share the excitement of the engaged, collaborative learning while taking part in a close-knit intellectual and social community.” Clusters include topics such as “Between Europe & Asia: Explorations in Culture, Law, & Cognitive Science;” “The Genome Revolution & Its Impact on Society;” and “Medieval & Renaissance Worlds: Memory & Invention.” Students in each Focus cluster live in the same first-year residence hall, where they are encouraged to form close friendships and study groups and to initiate social events with Focus faculty.

Students in each Focus theme choose two (out of four) seminars, which are taught by regular rank faculty from different departments across the university. In addition to their two Focus seminars, students participate in a weekly interdisciplinary discussion course (IDC) where they share dinner with the group of faculty that teaches in their particular Focus cluster. Beyond their Focus courses, students must take two non-Focus courses of their choosing (based on other academic interests, graduation requirements, prerequisite needs, etc.). Focus seminars are designed to fulfill multiple general degree requirements for both the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering.

After participating in Focus, students are encouraged to pursue extended research or creative projects with Focus faculty, funded through the Stay In Focus Follow-up Grant. A faculty committee reviews the proposals of student-faculty partners and distributes grants of $200-$500 per project. (Projects are not awarded in conjunction with Independent Study credits.) Student-faculty partners who receive the grant are expected to participate in the annual undergraduate research symposium called “Visible Thinking,” which consists of either poster or oral presentations of the project.  

1 Building on the success of the Focus Program, two Focus clusters are now offered in the spring semester and are open to sophomores as well as freshmen. However, due to the fact that sophomores are housed separately and freshmen are placed in housing in the fall, spring Focus clusters do not have a residential component.
III. DUKE UNIVERSITY

The residential component of Focus fosters informal late-night discussions and study groups based on Focus courses. Further, having students living in a centralized location makes it more convenient for faculty to host social or academic events within residence halls, many of which are equipped with classrooms and all of which have large common areas and study rooms.

Learning Objectives:

The program was designed to accomplish the following goals:

- To nurture students’ intellectual curiosity and sense of academic adventure through courses that cross disciplinary boundaries
- To foster comfortable interaction in small groups between first-year students and Duke’s most distinguished professors
- To facilitate discussion and scholarly exploration among Focus students through a residential component, while allowing students to participate in the greater East Campus living experience
- To encourage students to venture beyond Duke’s campus into the community through field trips, travel, community service, and research

Themed Living-Learning Communities

Below is a description of each themed living-learning community on Duke’s campus:

1. Baldwin Scholars Program – A prestigious four-year program for undergraduate women involving academic seminars, a residential experience, an internship component, and mentoring opportunities. Freshmen women apply to the program in early fall and are selected near the end of the semester. Sophomore Baldwin Scholars live together in one of the West Campus quads, and junior/senior Baldwin Scholars may elect to remain in the Baldwin Scholars “section” to serve as informal mentors to sophomore residents.

2. Wellness Communities (East and West Campus) – A community to support students interested in living in a substance-free living environment that supports academics, including quiet hours each evening from midnight to seven in the morning. Students in the community have the opportunity to participate in programs that support lifelong health and well being, focusing on academic adjustment, nutrition, physical health, mental wellness, and personal expression. Students in the communities are expected to refrain from the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs both within and outside of the physical community. They are also required to attend three community meetings per year and are encouraged to establish personal goals each semester that embrace the Wellness philosophy.

More structured activities are planned for the first-year Wellness LLC on East Campus, including yoga, Pilates, dance, self-defense, and martial arts classes; speakers on topics such as the benefits of sleep and how to maintain a balanced diet while eating on campus; a dance; live music performances in conjunction with the Performing Arts Community; and a peer tutoring program.

3. Performing Arts Living-Learning Community – A community on East Campus designed for first-year students interested in music, dramatic performance, and artistic expression. LLC activities include:

- Regular performances in the residence hall by campus groups (e.g., a cappella groups, dance groups, etc.); in-house performances by distinguished visiting artists, followed by discussions
- Community service projects such as a performance at hospital or teaching dance lessons to a class at an elementary school

Performing Arts Living-Learning Community (cont.d)
Free tickets and transportation to area artist venues several times per semester
Performance opportunities

Implementation/ Marketing of Living-Learning Communities

Due to robust student participation, the university has not developed an extensive marketing campaign to attract the interest of students. In general, Living learning communities are introduced to students throughout the application process (e.g., on campus tours) and in the welcome packets sent to students upon acceptance to the university. In addition, Residence Life’s Web site contains detailed information about the various communities and the application process.

The Focus Program:

The Focus Program was founded in the late 1980’s by the Arts and Sciences Committee on the Freshman Year and is administered and funded through the Office of the Provost, although the residential component requires a close partnership with Student Affairs staff.

Themed Living-Learning Communities:

Contacts note that the Residence Life unit intends for the creation of new communities to be student-driven, rather than “artificially” created by staff. Groups of first-year students have already expressed interest in a social justice-focused LLC and an international cultures/cooking/food-themed LLC. In addition, contacts predict that some of the student groups that are currently considered “selective living groups” (such as the Languages House, Prism Multicultural House, or Arts Theme House) will decide to seek faculty advising and become an official themed living-learning community.

Role of Faculty and Residential Life Staff

Faculty:

Faculty involvement varies depending on the program (Focus versus one of the four theme-based communities). For example, in addition to on-campus teaching responsibilities, Focus faculty plan outside-the-classroom experiences for students, including service projects in the greater community, field trips to relevant local sites, speakers from outside the institution, and social events to encourage informal faculty-student interaction. In the theme-based communities, faculty roles range from teaching to informal mentoring to helping to coordinate co-curricular activities.

Residence Life Staff:

According to strategic planning documents, two main goals of the Residence Life and Housing Services unit at Duke are:
- Increasing engagement with faculty in ways that advance the academic mission of the university
- Utilizing the advantages of a residential campus to enhance formal and informal learning

In addition, Residence Life staff supports students who express interest in a new theme by assisting them to gain administrative approval, obtain housing space on West Campus, and recruiting a faculty advisor.
III. DUKE UNIVERSITY

Assessment of Living-Learning Community Themes
The Focus Program as a whole is evaluated through a survey distributed electronically to all Focus students at the end of the fall semester by the Office of Assessment. Individual courses are assessed through the standard university course evaluation, which are collected and reviewed by the academic department of the professor teaching the course.

Student Assessment/Retention
Students who participate in the Focus Program are expected to demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

- Apply knowledge, concepts, principles and/or theories from diverse disciplines to specific situations or problems
- Evaluate the relative merits of ideas and competing claims
- Integrate lived experiences with classroom learning
- Learn to make claims in public space with confidence

Retention: Duke has not tracked the effects that living learning communities have had on retention, however, with an overall graduation rate of 94 percent, attrition is not of significant concern to the university.

Additional Information

Funding:
Funding for the Focus Program is provided through the Office of the Provost.
III. UNIVERSITY B

**Introduction to Living-Learning Communities at the University B**

Living-learning communities are specialized residential programs initiated by and having direct connections with faculty and specific academic units/departments within Academic Affairs. In partnership with Residence Life staff and other student services staff at the university, these faculty and academic administrators link the curricular and residential experiences in ways that create opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of classroom material. University B has 12 living-learning communities that encompass a number of different subjects and focus areas.

The Office of Residence Life collaborates with the dean of Undergraduate Studies for three living-learning communities due to the wide academic scope of the programs:

- **University Honors Program:** The Honors Program is a four-year program for students with exceptional academic talents. Students participate in honors seminars and honors versions of regular campus classes that encourage discussion and foster innovative thinking. The small class sizes and close relationships with faculty provide a small college atmosphere with the opportunities of a large university.

- **Beyond the Classroom:** Beyond the Classroom (BTC) is a two-semester interdisciplinary living-learning program designed to prepare students professionally for life beyond college. Students participate in internships, community service, and civic learning experiences to develop educational and professional leadership skills.

- **College Scholars:** The Council identified the College Scholars program as an exemplary living-learning community and is profiled in more depth below.

In the remaining nine programs, Residence Life staff partner with the related academic unit(s) to manage the programs:

- **CIVICUS:** CIVICUS is a program for students dedicated to involvement in the campus and local community centered around five tenets of civil society: citizenship, leadership, community building in a diverse society, scholarship, and community service-learning. Students take core classes together during their first two years and participate in common service projects and internships with non-profits. (Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences)

- **EcoHouse:** Founded by students, the EcoHouse is a program for second and third year students dedicated to preparing for a “green future.” The program brings together students from the humanities, social and natural sciences, architecture, and business for multidisciplinary courses and out-of-classroom experiences. (Environmental Science & Policy Program, Department of Environmental Science & Technology, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources)

- **Gemstone:** The Gemstone Program is a multidisciplinary four-year research program for selected undergraduate honors students of all majors. Teams of students design, direct, and conduct significant research, often exploring the interdependence of science and technology with society under the guidance of faculty mentors and Gemstone staff. (School of Engineering)

- **Global Communities:** Global Communities brings students together from more than 30 countries and the United States, representing a variety of cultural backgrounds. The goal of the program is to prepare students for a multi-cultural environment and global workplace by building bridges of cooperation and understanding between cultures. (International Programs Office)
III. UNIVERSITY B

- **Hinman CEOs:** Hinman CEOs is a living-learning entrepreneurship program for both technical and non-technical students designed to foster an entrepreneurial spirit, create a sense of community and cooperation, and develop ethical leaders. Students participate in a number of entrepreneurial events, competitions, and learning experiences. (*Technology Enterprise Institute, School of Engineering*)

- **Honors Humanities:** Honors Humanities is a two-year honors program for talented beginning undergraduates with interests in the humanities and creative arts. The program offers small seminars, special events, and close contact with distinguished faculty across the disciplines of the University. (*College of Arts & Humanities, University Honors Program*)

- **The Writers' House:** The program offers students of all majors and years a literary center for the study of creative writing across cultures and languages. Through colloquia, journal writing, and other outreach activities, faculty and advisors work with students to hone their literary skills in English, Spanish and other languages. (*Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Department of English and the College of Arts and Humanities*)

- **The Language House:** Open to second-semester freshmen and above, it provides students the opportunity to develop language fluency and cultural understanding through daily language and cultural immersion in an organized study environment. Students participate in informal daily contacts, annual Language House events, and supplemental coursework in the target language. The ten language clusters available are: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Russian, and Spanish. (*School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures*)

- **Women in Engineering:** The Women in Engineering (WIE) Program is dedicated to promoting the role of women in the field of engineering. The focus of the community is to recruit and retain female engineering students by providing a positive and supportive living-learning environment. (*School of Engineering*)

**College Scholars Program**

**Overview:**

The College Scholars Program (CSP) is a two-year living-learning program for a select group of high-achieving first- and second-year students to explore one of twelve interdisciplinary subjects in a collaborative and supportive community. Each program of 70-90 students has its own academic focus and is led by faculty from a related academic department. Students take a series of interdisciplinary courses focused in the program subject area that generally count towards CORE (general education) or major requirements. During the second year of the program, students complete a Scholars practicum, a semester long experiential learning project related to the program topic.

Students are housed together by program in the Scholars residential community and have opportunities to interact and collaborate with students within and across programs. Active learning experiences outside of the classroom are a key component of the Scholars Program and are facilitated by both residential life and program staff. Some examples include: field trips to relevant sites (i.e. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Chesapeake Bay, Philadelphia Art Museum, Wall Street), study abroad opportunities (i.e. Life Science trip to Australia and Belize; Earth, Life & Time’s trip to the Galapagos Islands), team-oriented projects (i.e. leadership workshops, business strategy competitions, cultural events), and publication development (i.e. “Undwind” arts and entertainment guide; Science, Discovery & the Universe’s webzine, “Blank Space”).

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The twelve Scholars programs and the sponsoring colleges are:

- Advocates for Children (College of Education)
- Arts (College of Arts and Humanities)
- Business, Society, and the Economy (College of Business and Management)
- Cultures of the Americas (College of Arts and Humanities)
- Earth, Life, and Time (College of Computer, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences)
- Environmental Studies (College of Computer, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences)
- International Studies (College of Behavioral and Social Sciences)
- Life Sciences (College of Chemical and Life Sciences)
- Media, Self, and Society (College of Journalism)
- Public Leadership (College of Behavioral and Social Sciences)
- Science, Discovery, and the Universe (College of Computer, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences)
- Science, Technology, and Society (School of Engineering)

**Learning Objectives:**

The goals of the College Scholars are to:

- Promote academic excellence, integrity, critical thinking, and creativity through the development of interdisciplinary knowledge, skills, and perspectives.
- Foster the development of a supportive and inclusive community of diverse students, faculty, and staff.
- Enhance the students’ intellectual and personal development through service, experiential learning, and innovative curricular and co-curricular activities both on and off campus.
- Create an environment that enhances student development as life-long leaders, citizens, and scholars.

The mission of the College Scholars Program states that Scholars students, faculty and staff will do the following:

- Strive for academic excellence, commitment, and integrity
- Value curiosity, creativity, and persistence
- Encourage critical and constructive thinking
- Celebrate the lasting joys of learning and scholarship
- Welcome all scholars, novice and practices
- Accept success and failure as inspiration for chance
- Respect individual differences and multiple perspectives
- Model honest, ethical, and responsible behavior
- Participate as active members of the community
- Respect one another and the living environment
- Seek challenges and take risks to accomplish our goals
- Learn to serve, to lead, and to act so that one can make a difference in the world
Implementation/ Marketing of the College Scholars Program

In 1993, the Dean of Undergraduate Education, Director of Residence Life, and Director of Admissions met to discuss the addition of a living-learning community program that would attract students from the middle of the accepted student pool academically. University B’s leaders recognized that students of ‘medium quality’ yielded at a significantly lower rate compared to students at the top and bottom of the accepted student pool. The lower yield rate for students in the middle of the accepted student pool was attributed to their competitive options – private schools or other institutions offering more of a liberal arts experience with small classes, etc. High-achieving students are attracted by the invitation to participate in the University Honors Program, an academically rigorous living-learning community that offers small class sizes and high faculty access. For low-achieving students with fewer college choice options, University B is often the most attractive choice.

The university launched CSP in 1994 with 450 students across four different programs. Faculty in the sponsoring schools were tasked with developing the program curricula and the residence life staff allocated space and staff to support the program. The living and learning programs were a success with the students and faculty involved and, as a result, three additional programs were added the following year. Over the next decade, CSP grew to twelve programs sponsored by eight different undergraduate schools and now brings in around 900 first-year students each year (20-25 percent of the freshman class).

Incoming freshmen students do not apply to CSP, but are instead selected by the program staff during the admissions process based on their GPA, test scores, and other academic criteria. The selected students (about 2,700 from a pool of 8,500) are notified of their invitation to the program in their admissions letter and receive additional information about CSP and the individual program options under separate cover. Students are generally drawn to the program for its academic rigor, small class sizes, high interaction with faculty, and experiential learning component.

Role of Academic Affairs and Residential Life Staff

Academic Affairs:

CSP community falls under the purview of the provost and dean of Undergraduate Studies along with two other living-learning communities, the Honors Program and the “Beyond the Classroom” program. There are 10 staff members that manage the administration of the program, including the executive director, director of Admissions and Registration, director of External Relations and Development, and director of Student Affairs. The individual school deans are also involved in their associated program administration by providing funding, reviewing program curriculum, and appointing program leadership.

Program Directors and Faculty

Each program has a program director and anywhere from one to three additional faculty members and/or teaching assistants that lead the program courses and activities. Program directors are appointed by the college deans sponsoring the program. Faculty that are involved in CSP typically fall within four categories according to CSP’s director.

- Senior faculty nearing retirement eager to give back to the next generation
- Newly appointed associate professors eager to refocus on students after focusing so intently on research and obtaining tenure.
- Well plugged-in faculty, who like making connections between CSP students and faculty elsewhere around campus.
- Lifetime associate professors, who are interested in exploring alternative pedagogies.
One of the main incentives for faculty to teach in the College Scholars Program is the exemption of CSP courses from the university’s Programming and Curriculum Committee (PCC), a University Senate committee. The PCC reviews all other courses and academic programs and is considered a major headache for faculty members. Most three-credit courses taught through the CSP are reviewed instead by the Vice President’s Advising Committee and the Undergraduate Studies Office through a more informal process.

The Director of the College Scholars Program hosts a monthly 90-minute meeting with all of the individual program directors to dispense administrative information and discuss matters facing the program as a whole (i.e. study abroad requirements, internships, assessment review).

College Scholars Faculty Advisory Council

The Faculty Advisory Council for the College Scholars Program meets two to three times per semester and consists of faculty from around campus in colleges represented in the programs. In the program’s early years, the Council played an instrumental role, championing the program to the provost. Recently, the council led efforts to integrate student learning outcomes assessment into the program and is in charge of the program’s annual review.

Program Faculty Advisory Councils

Individual programs also have their own Faculty Advisory Councils to aid with program development and review. Programs vary on the number of faculty that serve on the individual councils, but may have up to eight to nine faculty as members. The council works closely with the program director on the student learning outcomes assessment plans, study abroad programs, and instruction for the sophomore colloquium.

Residence Life:

The Office of Residence Life (housed under Student Affairs) is responsible for the infrastructure support of the living-learning community. The office is responsible for maintaining the buildings and common space and staffing the halls with Residential Assistants (RAs) and a Residence Director. Typically, RAs are former College Scholars and are responsible for coordinating events, often in collaboration with the program directors. The residence director and CSP staff work together to address student issues and concerns and collaborate on out-of-classroom programs and activities.

Assessment of the College Scholars Program

In the fall of 2002, the CSP Faculty Advisory Council designed and began implementing an assessment of each of the twelve Scholars programs. Throughout CSP’s history, Scholars students have had consistently high retention, graduation, satisfaction rates as well as grade point averages, but program leaders decided a more in-depth review of student learning outcomes was necessary to properly assess and validate the program.

To initiate the assessment process, program directors prepared self studies based on an array of questions and prompts. An assessment team, made up of Faculty Advisory Council members and Scholars staff reviewed the reports and gathered additional data about the programs from current and past students, sponsoring college representatives, and residential life staff. The team met with program directors to report on their findings and recommendations and discussed best practices and methods for improvement.
Assessment Rubric

During the initial assessment process an attempt was made to articulate student learning outcomes for the College Scholars program as a whole, but leaders realized that individual programs could articulate outcomes more precisely if done independently. As a result, CSP established an assessment rubric for program directors to assess program-developed learning outcomes. The rubric is as follows:

1. **Knowing:** Students will articulate what they learned in Scholars, as prompted by their Scholars program “big question.” Based on Ken Bain’s concept of ‘the big question,’ each program director has developed a big question that prompts students to reflect on their Scholars experience in holistic, meaningful ways.

   **Measure:** Narrative that addresses the specific program’s “big question”

   **Criteria:** Narratives will be reviewed based on evaluation rubric developed by program director

2. **Understanding:** Students will be able to articulate the value of their Scholars experience, as it relates to their junior and senior years, even beyond their undergraduate experience.

   **Measure:** Narrative that addresses impact of Scholars experience

   **Criteria:** Narratives will be reviewed based on evaluation rubric developed by program director

3. **Doing:** Students will be able to provide concrete evidence of their Scholars learning.

   **Measure:** One or more of the following artifacts accompany the Scholars Narrative in the student’s portfolio:
   - Resume
   - Academic Showcase Poster
   - PowerPoint presentation (and/or video of oral presentation)
   - Video or other artifact documenting artistic or other learning outcomes
   - Internship supervisor evaluation
   - Other (as mutually agreed upon by the student and his/her program director)

   **Criteria:** Each program will set criteria for acceptable portfolio artifacts and provide feedback to each student, based on those criteria.

Assessment Schedule

The simultaneous assessment of all twelve programs, although necessary to initiate the process, was very time-consuming and labor-intensive for the Faculty Advisory Council, program directors and Scholars staff. To alleviate the pressure on program faculty and staff, CSP initiated a two-tiered assessment plan that includes an internal annual review and a Faculty Advisory Council review every three years. The plan balances continual assessment with the Faculty Advisory Council’s capacity for comprehensive program review and is summarized below.

1. **Internal Review:** Annually, all twelve program directors review narratives and evaluations of second-year students. They then write up a two-page analysis and submit it to the Scholars Executive Director and the program’s sponsoring dean that includes the following:
   a. How well the cohort achieved the articulated learning outcomes
   b. Major contributions to learning within the curriculum and co-curriculum
   c. Recommendations for curricular and co-curricular modifications to the program
   d. Recommendations for appropriate adjustments to future portfolio artifacts
2. **Faculty Advisory Council Review**: The Faculty Advisory Council review occurs on a three-year cycle and examines three to five programs each year. For the review, program directors submit the following to the Faculty Advisory Council:
   a. A sample of narratives and portfolio artifacts from each of the past three years
   b. The previous annual internal review reports
   c. An executive summary addressing the impact of implementing the annual recommendations.

   The Council reviews the materials and submits a written report with observations and recommendations to the program director, the Scholars Executive Director, and the program’s sponsoring dean.

**Additional Information**

**Retention:**

The retention rate for College Scholars students from the first to second year was slightly higher than the rate for the entire first year class in 2007 at 96.4 percent, compared to 93 percent. Leaders of the College Scholars Program are hesitant to attribute the higher retention rate to the positive effects of the program since the students that qualify for the program are generally not at risk for attrition.

**Funding:**

The College Scholars Program is funded mainly by the Provost’s Office and the dean of Undergraduate Education. Each school that sponsors a program is responsible for contributing 15 percent of the program’s budget to provide for TAs, for co-curricular funding, or for buying-out faculty’s time. The Office of Residence Life provides the infrastructure for the program – the physical plant, including dorms and common space, and the Residential Assistants that live and work with the students.
The articles and references listed below provide further information on the link between living-learning communities and student retention.


*This article suggests that Freshman Interest Groups and First-Year Experience courses may be more effective than living-learning communities in increasing retention.


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