LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITIES:
RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS?

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study describes how first year students perceived the impact of living within a living learning community by giving voice to students who wished to not only describe their living experience, but also have this description heard. While living learning communities are not new to Residential Life departments on college campuses, the studies of such programs have predominantly been large scale quantitative studies conducted to assess the overall satisfaction that students feel with living in such a program or to ask one very specific question, typically related to drinking patterns or academic successes.

Through the studying of one particular academic living learning community at a specific mid-Atlantic, urban university, I was able to delve deeper into the lives of students and develop a detailed holistic picture of the student experience specifically through the use of student interviews. My small sample, and immersion in the field, permitted an in depth understanding of all aspects of their residential and academic life related to their living learning community experience. The residents took advantage of the research as an opportunity to speak freely about issues that more macro researchers had not considered as potential impacts of student life within a living learning community.

The research took place in one residential hall over an entire year. The data was gathered from a series of in-depth interviews and almost daily observations. Studying a select number of students within the community for a full academic year provided the opportunity to ask the same questions on numerous occasions and study how the

students' responses changed or remained the same over time. This year long endeavor also permitted my immersion into the community and attendance at programs and events held within the living learning community allowing me to discover five themes relating to the student perspective of living learning communities: The Importance of Family, Social Activities as Opportunities to Bond, Accountability with Regards to Academics, Sense of Exclusivity, and the Importance of Personality on Perception of LLC Success.

Through these themes, this study provides one of the few rigorous insights into life in a living learning community from the student perspective directly through the use of student voice, allowing for higher educational leaders and planners to take this individualized perspective into account in the organization, implementation, funding, and assessment of future living learning community endeavors.

DEDICATION

To my Mom,

who studied with me every night

for twelve years and endured the phone calls

with the tears for so many years after.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation truly began from the moment I first started school and will continue on even once the last word is written. The pages were certainly not written on their own and I cannot take full credit for what was produced. I must take the time to acknowledge and thank those that helped me throughout this undertaking.

Educationally and personally, I must first thank Dr. Corrinne Caldwell. When I first entered my doctoral work, I was a History student with six and a half years of History studies behind me. After one meeting with Dr. Caldwell, I knew Education was where I needed to be. To be inspired so quickly takes a truly amazing person and Dr. Caldwell is just that. Through the course work, the papers, and the stress of writing a dissertation, Dr. Caldwell remained a calm advisor, always pushing me to do my best and have confidence in my work. Without her insights and true wisdom this dissertation would never have been able to come to fruition.

Dr. Pankratz was the first professor to have true faith in my abilities when I was an eighteen year old freshman, truly out of my element. Through his guidance, honesty, and care I learned what it means to be a scholar and gained an academic role model.

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continued motivation, reality check, and sounding board throughout all the academic and personal "crises" that came up throughout this process. My fiancée, was truly the rock upon which this dissertation was completed and the largest motivation to complete it on time.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

This study provided an opportunity to give voice to students within living learning communities in an attempt to inform administration about the successes and shortcomings of the program, through the use of in-depth observations and one on one interviews. Although no single definition exists for explaining such a community, for the purpose of this study a living learning community is a section of a residence hall, a floor or a wing, in which the residents, under the direction of a Resident Assistant, attempt to combine academics within the social and living environment. They are a part of a larger family of learning communities designed to integrate students' knowledge and strengthen their learning (Lenning and Ebbers, 1999).

Living learning communities, as a whole, are not a new idea of Higher Education and Residential Life. The modern concept has existed for nearly one hundred years, with its earliest origins stem from English colleges including Oxford. These programs were initially begun as a reaction to increased disciplinary specialization that led to a fragmentation of the undergraduate curriculum. This integration of curriculum and college life were designed to help students explore the idea of democracy and foster faculty and student interaction (Stassen, 2003).   In the late 1980s the purposeful activities of educational based communities outside the classroom became the precursor to the modern learning communities which continue to grow and change today (Zhao and Kuh, 2003).

As living learning communities continue to expand the need increases to study these arenas and their relation to first-year students and numerous factors including

academics, socialization, and retention. Today, even with many publications surrounding living learning communities there remains a lack of first hand evidence and recording of the student experience within these programs.

The overall goals of this study were: 1.) To add to the already existing literature and research which primarily describes overarching characteristics and successes of living learning communities, 2.) To give voice to the students, through the study of one particular living learning community 3.) To discover how students described the impact of living within a living learning community.

Statement of the Problem

Living learning communities have been proffered as a solution to the increasing fragmentation of the curriculum, division between, faculty and staff, and as a response to the increasing mental health issues, including alcohol and drug related problems, of college students. Many strategies have been tried to combat these challenges, but little research has been conducted to see if living learning communities, in the students' opinions, are effective in easing the transition to college (Pascarella and Ternzini, 1991). Research shows that students do better when engaged, but little research has been conducted to know if living learning communities create engagement at Maple University. This study allowed the opportunity to provide insight and understanding into living learning communities and their impact on engagement through the use of student voice, rather than an overall survey of the community. This study looked to the students' own opinions and thoughts to answer questions and provide feedback.

At Maple University, the site for this study, situated in an urban environment in the Mid-Atlantic region, prior to this study, there was still no first hand evidence from the students' perspective of the effects, benefits, or drawbacks of participation in a living learning community. As living learning communities continue to proliferate, the research conducted on these communities continues to be mainly descriptive, utilizing large surveys and concentrating on the impact on retention, and Maple University was no exception. This study concentrated on the gaps with this research, by hearing directly from the students involved in the community and looking at students' perceptions of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, value, and detractors in determining the overall impact of a living learning community.

Also, as living learning communities are only open to a limited number of students in the residence halls, administrators must determine if these communities are providing a benefit to only a specific number and therefore denying benefit to all except these select individuals. Further research was necessary to determine whether these communities are creating inclusion of some while excluding others within the residence halls.

With specific regard to Maple University, at an institution of 35,000 students and housing 5,500 residents, a program that requires over seven hundred beds is a major enterprise. There was a lack of evidence about the effectiveness of these communities specifically at Maple University. More firsthand evidence was necessary, to determine, first if such a program works and second, how to make ensure that these communities offer open access to all who wish to participate.

To better understand Maple University's resources, it is important to note that at the time of this study, the Residential Life Department utilized the efforts of one Assistant Director and eight Resident Directors including living learning communities within their portfolios and twenty-seven Resident Assistants and twelve peer mentors who worked directly with these communities. In addition to the Residential Life Department each of the thirteen communities also mandated a faculty or staff member to act as the administrator of the program. With so many professional and student staff members spending time and energy on such programs, research providing valuable information about any benefits from the student's perspective was definitely necessary. The Residential Life Department had no research capacity at this time to implement their own research pertaining to student satisfaction and living learning communities, but plans to implement some assessment this year in light of the recent economic crises occurring within higher education demanding that programs provide research about the effectiveness of programs that utilize university resources. At the time of this study, the university allocated an additional $18,000 a year, on top of those expenses needed for the staff and space, of student money specifically for programming within these communities without any evidence of the effects. While the need at Maple University was glaring, more generally all institutions must determine the specific needs of the students and how, if at all, living learning communities respond to these needs.

Purpose of the Study

This study looked at a single academic based living learning community of approximately eighty first-year students, interviewing eleven of these members, to see if living in such an area made a difference in students' own perceptions of the benefits from living in a living learning community. Rather than relying on data found through surveys, the purpose of this qualitative study was to truly capture the student's view about the impact of living in such an area by gathering and analyzing the perceptions of those participants who wanted to be interviewed. Rather than acting as the voice for the entire community, what this study set out to do was to allow self-selected students the opportunity to speak about their own experiences and give the researcher and opportunity to know more about the community through their individual thoughts. As this was a small qualitative study of one living learning community designed to provide the most comprehensive view of these students' perceptions about this program, this study was not meant to act as impetus for change for all living learning communities across the nation. However, insights gathered from this study may indeed provide a foundation for other sites to determine the impact of their similar programs. The outcomes of this study provide information on a broad scale. Universities seeking to know the importance of student voice can utilize this study as a comparison and starting point for their own research. While computer questionnaires and surveys are extremely helpful, institutions must desire to collect and analyze students' actual words and observations in determining their own perceptions of participation in such communities. While studying one living learning community, on one particular campus will not offer overarching changes and

remedies, such a study provides more information as to how students view their living arrangement.

Research Questions

The primary questions in this study were:

1. How do first year students perceive the impact of participating in a living learning community respecting:

    a. Academic success?

    b. Social activity?

2. How do students describe their engagement in college due to participation in living learning communities respecting:

    a. Other students?

    b. Faculty?

    c. Residence life staff?

Definitions

Most of the terms within this study are universally understood within Higher Education. However, some terms used are specific to Maple University and are described below.

Living Learning Communities - Although no single definition exists for explaining such a community, for the purpose of this study a Living Learning

Community is a section of a Residence Hall, a floor or a wing, in which the

residents, under the direction of a Resident Assistant, attempt to combine

academics into both the social and living arrangements. They are a part of a

larger family of learning communities designed to integrate students' knowledge

and strengthen their learning (Lenning and Ebbers, 1999). They have intentional

coordination with students' residential environments. Although the focus of

Living Learning Communities vary greatly across institutions, most share a set of

common characteristics: participants (a) live together on campus, (b) partake in a

shared academic endeavor, (c) use resources in their residence hall environment to

which other students do not have access, and (d) have structured social activities

in their residence environment that stress academics (Inkelas, et. al., 2004).

Delimitations and Limitations of this Study

While this study has the potential to be recreated at other universities it

specifically focused on one particular living learning community, at one specific campus.

These logistics are the first limitation of this study. This project studied one group of

people at a specific time and a specific place. It showed the specific views and findings

of a particular population through a thorough description of one community at one

University. It can be repeated at other universities by following the methodology, but the

study would yield results specific to those universities and therefore may not be

representative of any other living learning community. However, without making an

overall generalization, when considering the results they can be used to inform others

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working within residential life by utilizing the insistence on student voice to make decisions or create their own studies. Also, the study answered the research question posed about this particular institution as it offered the best description possible of the particular place and community being studied. Another limitation of this study was the time limitation, as the study only encompassed one academic year and it may have been helpful to study the impact over several years. However, as stated above, it answered the research questions about this particular institution and time and therefore stands on its own and is valuable in itself.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for several reasons. The first reason, which also qualified as a rationale for performing a qualitative study lies in the potential of this study to find deeper meaning and understanding of living learning communities through the use of student voice. In previous studies, by leading living learning community researchers, a great deal of time and energy was given to looking at large numbers of students and comparing GPAs, observed involvement in school, and other larger issues, rather than looking to individualized questioning and interviewing allowing students to speak directly about the effects of living within a community. Martha Stassen is one such researcher and her article "Student Outcomes: The Impact of Varying Living-Learning Community Models," speaks directly to the above point. Stassen studied 830 students over a one year period and observed the academic and social effects of living in a living learning community by observing the students and comparing GPAs (p. 592). She does

not include individual interviews or questioning of the students but rather urges that future researchers take up this project. Another researcher Christopher Neil Chafin was also curious about the impact of living learning communities on retention and GPAs. In order to study these two variables, Chafin studied living learning community students to see how they scored on an Emotional Intelligence test at the end of their first year (Chafin, 2006). Neither of these studies interviewed the students directly or immersed themselves into the living learning communities. Rather, these studies can be seen as representative of many other researchers' work who study very large numbers of students living in such a community through the use of questionnaires and online surveys looking to answer specific questions about student engagement, academic success, or decreased behavioral problems. This study helps to broaden the existing research, even though it was particular to this institution, to include characteristics that the students themselves find important. Whereas other researchers often went into their studies with a particular focus, I allowed the student voice to create and rank the outcomes, therefore allowing students to prioritize from their perspective both the positive and negative attributes of living within a living learning community. Additionally, this study has importance because recently living learning communities have become popular topics on college campuses (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). Recently, more and more schools turn towards these programs to help any problems they may be having within residential life and also as a selling point for residential students. With many authors and conferences offering living learning communities as a focal point to the residential life experience, it would be difficult to find an institution that has not implemented such a practice. However, many

of these schools have not assessed whether these programs work, rather they assume that because other schools have implemented these programs, they must be beneficial.

As is seen in the literature review in the following chapter, living learning communities continue to take on new identities, incorporate new ideas, and grow at an accelerating rate. While living learning communities have their roots at Oxford and Cambridge, they also grew with the expansion of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s (Inkelas and Brower, 2004 p. 2). During the last twenty five years the partnerships created amongst student affairs and academic affairs throughout institutions have created an even faster growth of these programs bringing conferences, journals, etc. but often little evidence of their effectiveness (Inkelas and Brower, 2004, p.2). The National Study of Living Learning Programs was founded in 2001 to review living learning programs, survey students, and compare the long term effects of living learning program participation on students compared to traditional students at the same universities. The Study's information shows the difficulties in determining the exact number of living learning communities throughout the country. When clustering living learning communities into sub categories there are programs based around courses, first year experience programs, themed housing, and the list continues on (Inkelas and Brower, 2004). The National Study of Living Learning Programs looks specifically at residence based learning communities, as does this study.   In 2004 the National Study of Living Learning Programs looked at 34 institutions and 297 living learning communities. Within three years, by 2007, the number of institutions with living learning communities increased to 46 institutions with 617 living learning communities. While this number may

appear low, the Study looked solely at programs that fit into the residential living

learning community definition rather than at residential colleges, thematic living options,

and basic learning communities (Inkelas and Brower, 2004). This study acts as the most

comprehensive analysis of specific living learning communities, such as the one within

this study, but still looks towards a quantitative analysis with a large number of

respondents, rather than focusing on the student voice.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of the Review

The topics presented below provide an overview of the strengths and gaps in the literature pertaining to this study including: a historical perspective and overview of residential life, living learning communities, business students, and college students. After exploring the history of each, the current state of each topic is also explored. The second section of this review looked at a conceptual framework of the theories developed to provide an understanding of how each of the above topics fit in to the idea of college student growth and relationship building, including community development and student identity theories. These frameworks provide a useful foundation to the historical and conceptual aspects of the study.

The overview and frameworks serve as a lens from which to establish the foundation of college student identity formation about growth and its impact on relationship building within a living learning community. The purpose of this study was to develop a greater understanding of living learning communities. This summary includes analysis and synthesis across references in an attempt to better understand where this study is situated in the already existing literature.

History of Residential Life

The role and scope of residential life has always been controversial. From the early housing problem during the Middle Ages, through the establishment of residential

colleges, to *in loco parentis*, and student rebellions, residential life has had its share of drama and debate. Even today, as colleges and universities place millions of dollars into refurbishing the dilapidated buildings that were hastily erected forty or fifty years ago, the architects, designers, and college administrators continue to find their work veiled in this controversy. It is only through the understanding of the history of residential life and the hurdles it faced, that one can truly come to appreciate and understand what it has become today.

Perhaps the most well known and comprehensive historian of residence halls is William H. Cowley. Writing in the 1930s, Cowley was one of the first to produce an extensive history of residential life. To begin his history, *History of Residential Housing*, Cowley attributes residence hall origins to the housing problem created during the Middle Ages by the hundreds and thousands of wandering students who attended universities in Bologna, Paris, and Oxford but had no means of shelter during these early years (Cowley, 1934). Other historians followed in Cowley's footsteps and began to trace the origins of residence halls back hundreds of years to the Middle Ages when professors lectured to thousands of students, nearly doubling the population of local towns in Bologna, therefore creating the grave problem of housing these young men (Thompson, 1946).

Gregory S. Blimling in his book, *The Resident Assistant, Applications and Strategies for Working with College Students in Residence Halls*, now in its 7th edition, published in 2010, provides further explanation into the history of residence halls stating that, "In time, students moved from living with schoolmasters and townspeople to rented houses that became known as 'hostels' in Bologna, 'paedagogies' in Paris, 'halls' or

'colleges' at Oxford, and 'Bursen' at German universities. For the most part, the residents of these houses were self-governing. However, by the mid-1400s, these houses had come under the control of university authorities" (p. 3). As colleges and universities continued to admit poor students from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries, endowed hostels appeared at universities such as Cambridge and Oxford, only to vanish in the 1800s with the emergence of the more thoroughly established residential colleges and dormitories (Blimling, 2010).

Blimling goes on to explain, "The United States, attempted to follow the same residential system as Oxford and Cambridge, focusing on creating both a scholar and a gentleman, offering faculty as both models and mentors (p. 5). However, the United States system had some difficulties in establishing this same system as Cowley (1934) states it, "In America the faculty member living in the dormitory became the student's natural enemy. Circumstances made him a martinet, if he conscientiously lived up to his responsibilities. The results are well known. Student riots and rebellions against the faculty have bespattered the historical records of every college up until the inception of athletics and extracurricular activities in the last decade of the nineteenth century" (p. 709).

Many other historians have reaffirmed Cowley's findings from the 1930s. John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy in their 1997 book titled *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American College and Universities* look to this time prior to the Civil War as a tough period for residential living on college campuses. While the authors state that, "For two hundred years, the dormitory system remained entrenched in the American

college, it did not follow in important details the same line of evolution as the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, the dormitory came under increasingly heavy fire" (p. 121). Brubacher and Rudy (1997) asserted that this criticism spawned from the charges that dormitories helped to "foster student riots," modeled the "outmoded remnant of medievalism" and "led to evil habits and disorderly conduct" (p. 121). Many of the faculty at the time believed that men should be mature enough to provide for their own housing while at college, moving further and further away from advocating for university run housing projects. (Brubacher and Rudy, 1997). Frederick Rudolph also shares the belief that the dormitory style of the 1800s was not without its flaws. Rudolph (1962) writes, "For the dormitory also brought into close proximity, under the harshest of conditions, young men on whose time the intellectual purposes of the colleges placed too few demands. It also became a place where tempers tightened until they snapped, where in quiet desperation plots were hatched, and where what may have begun in innocence often ended in tragedy and misfortune. The dormitory helped to create an atmosphere that invited frustration, argument, and crime" (p. 97).

From this frustration came a period of rebellion as described by Rudolph (1962), "The rebellions documented the failure of the colleges to provide altogether suitable 'rites of adolescence,' satisfactory outlets for quite normal animal energy and human imagination. At least for certain they proved that in the United States, at least, the dormitory was in a sense a tactical error. For the dormitory, by concentrating students in barracks like structures, actually facilitated rebellion" (p. 98-99). Blimling describes how

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colleges made changes to dormitories during this time by regulating student behavior and mandating strict rules. However with the passing of the Land Grant College Act and the gradual dissolution of religious affiliation of universities, such as at Harvard and Yale, there was a lessening of controls. (Blimling, 2010) Blimling points out that this helped in understanding student behavior, "The rigid codes of obedience and hours of compulsory chapel were replaced by conduct regulations that granted students greater freedoms. With the lessened concern for student welfare and a freeing of students from the control of clerics, much of the violence associated with student behavior vanished" (p. 7).

Due to rebellions and changes associated with secularization, the debate over whether housing should be provided for men would continue throughout the remainder of the 1800s and would leave the residential facilities at most colleges dilapidated and nearly unlivable by the end of the nineteenth century as faculty and administrators pondered this question and showed little concern for the facilities (Blimling, 2010).

The revival of residence halls occurred sporadically throughout the twentieth century. Blimling credits Yale with the beginning of this revival stating, "The rebirth of interest in student housing started at Yale, where an adherence to 'the English philosophy that the communal life of students as high educational value' remained" (p.8). However, a researcher cannot overlook the role that Women's Colleges had in the revival of these buildings. "Women's colleges such as Vassar, Smith, and Mount Holyoke all were founded in the late nineteenth century, and all were strictly residential. In addition, this sense of community responsibility could be realized through such activities as learning the social graces, exercises in hospitality, participation in some charity, interest in the

affairs of the university, and cooperation in a common interest such as setting quiet hours for the house or determining how Sundays should be observed" (Blimling, p. 10-11). As administrators were forced to think about the needs of women, specific and separate from men, schools and universities saw little choice but to erect residence halls for these specific needs. Further, roles such as the Deans of Men and Women helped spark and ultimately entrench this revival, as well as clubs and organizations that offered extracurricular activities to the everyday student thus leading to another connection to the campus outside of the classroom.

As faculty moved out of the halls and solely into the classrooms, concurrently with residential life and student affairs emerging as a profession, the very make up of these buildings changed. No longer was academic affairs fully entwined in outside the classroom activities, by the end of the nineteenth century student affairs was slowly becoming a profession. James J. Rhatigan in his article "A Brief History of Student Affairs Administration," published in *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration*, presents the history of this profession stating,

> It had a small but important beginning in the nineteenth century, but for the most part is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Several factors influence the early evolution of our field, including the development of land-grant institutions and the rise of public colleges and universities; expanding enrollments and the accompanying increase in the heterogeneity of student populations; social, political, and intellectual ferment in the United States; the rise of coeducation and the increase in numbers of women entering educational institutions the introduction of the elective system in higher education; and an emphasis on vocationalism as a competitor to the traditional liberal arts (p. 4).

With the emergence of student affairs as a profession, the belief in a holistic approach to the development of students was continued. Dormitories slowly became residence halls,

as the buildings became more than simply a place to live and instead became a place of socialization, development, and growth.

Bliming describes the changes that continued to occur, "The next wave of change came during the 1960s as the National Defense Education Act of 1958 came into full effect and the number of college students and federal involvement increased at institutions throughout the country…Specifically of importance to the development of residence halls was the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, which gave institutions access to low-interest government loans meant to help in the construction of residence halls and many of the high-rise residence halls that are noticeable on college campuses today, were built during that time" (p. 21).

Perhaps even more important to the 1960s was the sense of rebellion rampant amongst college students. Colleges and specifically residence halls moved away from operating under the terms of *in loco parentis* or operating as surrogate parents to students. As Beverly E. Ledbetter states in her article "Legal Issues in Student Affairs," also in *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration*, "Until the mid-1960s, colleges and universities functioned much like parents, exercising extensive control over students and their behavior. Challenges to the broad exercise of authority and control led to a reduction in the institution's power and thus to the demise of *in loco parentis*" (p. 512). As Blimling states, "Most students did not like life in the halls with their rules and polices…Sentiment against the Vietnam War was strong and students questioned the value of traditional education and sought approaches more 'relevant' to the issues of the day" (p. 22). These issues did not include adhering to the strict rules and regulations

imposed by the residence halls and their live in staff. Due to these student rebellions the

rules, expectations, and approach by staff members within the buildings would drastically

change by the 1970s as personnel went from parents to professionals.

Rhatigan describes the changes within colleges during this time, stating, "Much of

what we know as the contemporary practice of student affairs evolved during the 1970s

as a direct result of the social upheaval of the preceding decade. Not the least of these

developments was the emerging prominence of a new position: the vice president of

student affairs" (p. 5). Not only were residence halls affected by these changes, but a

new entity within the university was created.

Residential Life Today and the Challenges of Today's Students

Each decade of the twentieth century had its own obstacles to overcome with

regards to residential life as Blimling and other historians detail within their writings.

The twenty-first century has also experienced difficulties, and as these programs continue

to grow, the research continues to look for further explanation and understanding of what

makes a residential program, and even a specific student residential building, successful.

The importance of the history of residential life is evident in the creation of programs

such as living learning communities, implemented to help residential life be more

impactful, as researchers aim to assist residential life in taking a lead in student

development on college campuses.

In reality, higher education institutions, like Maple University, are faced with a

perplexing issue relating to the connection between student affairs and academic affairs.

On the one hand these institutions wish to use residential life as a means to help meet the recruiting and retention goals of the university. For example, Maple University's division of student affairs recently created a departmental philosophy captured in three words…engage, develop, and retain. For the residential life department, each of these three words is of utmost importance to the daily interactions with students. However, on the other hand, housing is only offered to 5,200 of the college's 30,000 students due most basically to a lack of space in an urban environment and the expense to live on campus.

This conundrum is best expressed when one looks to the overall issues that face college students today. While the ever expanding debt is of grave concern, once the students are on campus the problems of substance abuse and mental health is seen as one of the most concerning to student affairs and academic affairs alike. In 2010 the American Psychological Association produced an article titled, "The State of Mental Health on College Campus: A Growing Crisis." This article details that, "In the 2010 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors, respondents reported that 44 percent of their clients had severe psychological problems, a sharp increase from 16 percent in 2000" (American Psychological Association). Academic and student affairs professionals recognize the needs of students emotionally and behaviorally and see how both these needs affect students academically. On-campus housing is often seen as a solution to these needs, however, many institutions cannot offer housing to all students and most shy away from making housing mandatory, even for first year students, as this can lead to an enrollment decline.

For Maple University, an urban institution, even if buildings could be erected, the larger issue is recruiting students who are prepared to pay for room and board versus living with parents, friends, or off campus at a more affordable residence. While the above outline of residence life offers a history of the program and the changes it has undergone in order to make itself more appealing to students, there is still a great deal of work to be done. The idea of residence life, whether meaning to or not, creates a small minority of privileged people who can afford to live on a college campus on top of affording attend college in the first place. For my own research, living learning communities also presented an opportunity for the privileged. The living learning community in this study was solely for students who wished to participate in the college's business school. Therefore, it created opportunities only for those that were within this major.

When thinking about Maple University, it must be understood that while this is a large urban institution, it is not located in an area of the city with thriving resources and a safe environment. Rather, the students who choose to attend Maple University have chosen a campus which prides itself on remaining safe, while still located in one of the most dangerous sections of a large city. Those students who cannot afford to live on campus, who are no longer first and second year students, or whom do not want to follow the still strict laws of residence halls could find themselves living at home, living in the city, or living in an area little better than slums, all with the same academic expectations. These expectations, and lack of equitable resources, could be supporting the increase in mental health concerns and behavioral problems. While the history of residential life

paints a picture of helping in the development of students, such a description is not complete without the understanding that not all students have the same options.

Focus must no longer be on the basics of residential life or its separation from academic affairs, rather there is now a need to focus on developing the whole student both within and outside the classroom. Realizing that residential facilities can act as a means of support for educational initiatives the focus is now on student growth. Today, residential life programs and researchers look for a means of better understanding how the overall structure of residence halls affects that development. One of the major issues remains the lack of thorough research in this area. For example, in their article, "Students' Out-of-Class Experiences and their Influence on Learning and Cognitive Development: A Literary Review," Patrick Terenzini, Ernest Pascarella, and Gregory Bliming, point out that a large majority of the research in this area is "dominated by studies of White, traditional-age, full-time students attending four-year residential institutions" (p. 611). While the importance to these studies is the impact of residential programs, comparison is nearly always conducted against those students who commute to a residential school, rather than looking at the growth of students at a non-residential college. Also, with a lack of inclusivity, the broader understanding of residence hall impacts cannot be discussed.

Secondly, this research is often lacking in understanding about the overall structure of the buildings and the sense of belonging that students find within residence halls. Millions of dollars are spent every year at colleges and universities on residential life programs and more specifically residence halls. In a study conducted in 2000, Robert

Godshall found that, "On an unprecedented scale, U.S. colleges and universities have been examining the quality of their residential facilities. As a result, residence halls—once some of the simplest buildings on campus—are becoming some of the richest and most complex in scope and purpose. And because up to 50 percent of all campus facilities are devoted to student residential life, recognizing this transformation in residence hall design is critical to a school's success" (p. 150). The question now becomes how is student satisfaction within the residence hall measured, as Godshall states, "retention could be correlated to the quality of physical spaces on campus" (p. 150). If so much money and success of an institution is tied to residence halls, they will no doubt continue to receive scrutiny about how funding is spent and most basically which floor plan is most successful. As Stephanie Clemons, James Banning, and David McKelfresh, 2004, state, "The residence hall challenge is to provide a marketable housing facility with a comfortable environment. The environment should be one that meets the greatest percentage of student needs, yet stays within an acceptable budget, and one that attracts the new student but retains the upper-class student" (p. 13).

With so many questions it may appear as though the researcher today has discovered little, but this is not the case. Rather they have discovered where the gaps in research lie and can attest to the need for further study in all aspects of residential life, specifically the make-up of residential communities. Dorothy Paine (1997) in her doctoral dissertation found that, "The latest review indicates that many of the gains associated with living on campus may be indirect rather than direct due to the increased opportunities or social interaction provided when students live on campus. Much of the

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research on place of residence has focused on increased persistence and graduation rates

on-campus residents while other studies have focused on academic and cognitive

outcomes." (p. 19). In their own study, Nancy G. Christie and Sarah M. Dinham (1991)

look at the literature on college student drop outs after the first year of schooling.

Noticing that too often decisions were made based upon numbers and statistics, these

researchers conducted a five year longitudinal study that focused not only on statistics but

also on interviewing the students to hear firsthand what impacted these numbers. "The

interviews revealed that living on campus enhanced the students' opportunities for

integration into the college social systems in four ways: meeting other students,

developing student friendships, gaining information about social opportunities on

campus, and shifting away from high school friends" (p. 419).

Researchers continue to realize the opportunity provided within the residence

halls and also state the challenges inherent in such programs. In their book titled,

Realizing the Education Potential of Residence Halls, Charles C. Schroeder, Phyllis

Mable, and Associates (1994), state that, "The challenge for residence halls is to place a

renewed emphasis on promoting student learning through integrating residence hall

learning opportunities with the goals and priorities of undergraduate education. To

address this challenge, residence educators must overcome the traditional gap that has

existed between academic affairs and student affairs" (p. 15).

As many other researchers agree, this lack of understanding between academic

affairs and student affairs has led to many of the shortcoming within residential life. In

the section that follows, the history and current state of living learning communities are

explored and perhaps it is through the implementation and execution of these programs that the this disconnect between the two fields will be corrected.

History of Learning Communities

In its most basic form a learning community consists of students who truly form a "community of learners." These students are linked together through courses at the university level and often begin at the first year of study with students attending two or more lecture classes together and then joining to discuss in smaller groups such as an interest group or seminar (Tinto, 2000).

The beginnings of learning communities within the United States, date back to the late 1920s, when Alexander Meiklejohn introduced the idea of the "Experimental College" at the University of Wisconsin. Initially begun as a reaction to increased disciplinary specialization that led to a fragmentation of the undergraduate curriculum, this project integrated curriculum in order to help students explore the idea of democracy and foster faculty and student interaction (Stassen, 2003). Originally seen as a radical experiment it was meant to be an extremely small program for on-campus students to utilize during their first two years of college. Meiklejohn hoped to use his theory to create an experimental community that would help students gain intelligence "in the conduct of their own lives" (University of Wisconsin Books, 2009). While Meiklejohn's initial theory proved to be too controversial for its time, as it developed to disregard many college requirements such as lectures and testing, and instead favored a unique student and faculty relationship, it would later become the basis for the modern learning

community which led to the formation of living learning communities (University of Wisconsin Books, 2009).

By 1969, learning communities continued to develop and change. Joseph Tussman experimented with learning communities at the University of California at Berkeley. Much like Miekljohn his experimentation was criticized as the number of topics and students included in the learning community was limited (Tinto, 2000).

Learning Communities Today

For years, these learning communities continued to grow and develop and recently underwent major changes. Tinto describes the change in learning communities as a response to a series of reports in the 1980's by various academic associations, scholars, and institutions urging for a change in educational practices in order to more actively engage and involve the students in learning within the classroom (Tinto, 2000).

Anne Goodsell-Love describes the changes and impact that the 1980s and 1990s had on learning communities. She explains that focusing on common characteristics of learning communities, rather than an all encompassing definition, helps in understanding this concept due to the many variations and uniqueness of each learning community. Goodsell-Love (1999) points out that the majority of learning communities accomplish eight goals. Learning communities: "provide an opportunity to integrate courses in an interdisciplinary manner, increase student involvement, improve student performance, impact student retention, provide opportunity for faculty development, shift the focus to student learning outcomes, allow educators to rethink the ways by which students are

taught, become a lens through which the experiences of a student at a particular college can be understood" (p. 2-4). Goodsell-Love also provides an explanation for the resurgence of learning communities today stating that the increase has been fueled by the ever changing financial status of the nation and institutions of higher education. She attributes the changes to the mid-1980s when administrators were faced with shrinking budgets and led to look towards programs that keep students at the institutions. This focus on retention propelled administrators to begin to looking at both old and new programs, including living learning communities and their promise for increasing retention in these difficult times (Goodsell-Love, p. 6).

George D. Kuh and Chun-Mei Zhao further expand the idea and description of learning communities by describing how they help foster success in students in their article, "Adding Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement." Their research studied three hundred and sixty-five four year institutions and describes the engagement of both first-year students and senior students (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). They found that fostering the connections provided within learning communities are the most important feature. The classroom fosters social and intellectual connections, however, it is the continued bond cultivated outside of the classroom in these communities that help to truly transform the students (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). They found that students who became members of the learning communities focused more on academic content allowing them to develop their identity and integrate what they had learned into the real world of their social experiences (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). Further they believe that learning communities have helped immensely in bridging the gap between academics and

student affairs but have not forced such a change. Rather they believe that it is the students' initiative and understanding that the real world exists outside of the classroom which helps to bring about this change. Without originally intending this outcome, the learning communities became a powerful educational component for real life situations and issues.

Taking this one step further, in order to understand learning communities Kuh and Zhao make clear throughout their writing that while student participation is of utmost importance, the responsibility of creating an interdisciplinary and interactive environment falls to the administration. Through the use of data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), measuring the degree of student participation in educational practices, Kuh and Zhao studied 80, 479 randomly selected first-year and senior students to measure the degree of student engagement (p. 119). From this sample, Kuh and Zhao formulated their findings of learning communities and the importance of administrators in effecting overall student engagement today. The most glaring fact in their findings was that learning communities must be preplanned to allow and foster diversity and critical thinking (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). While other researchers saw an importance in faculty involvements, Kuh and Zhao pointed out that faculty involvements in planning is imperative in order to ensure the success of these communities in creating overall engagement. While Kuh and Zhao looked at the NSSE's data from 2002, through their own research and comparisons they found that the purposeful activities of educational based communities outside the classroom in the late 1980s became the precursor to the

modern learning communities which continue to grow and change today (Zhao and Kuh, 2003).

Anne Goodsell Love and Kenneth A. Tokuno (1999) in their chapter within *Learning Communities: New Structures, New Partnerships for Learning*, also reiterate the need for the continued high levels of faculty involvement in order for a learning community to be successful today. They emphasize that this characteristic is crucial to survival of a community, however they also point to the benefits that faculty can garner from their involvement. They state, "Learning communities also make it possible for colleges and universities to reorganize faculty work and to restructure the curriculum allowing the faculty, as well as the students, to cross disciplinary and departmental borders that traditionally divided them" (p. 16). Their findings help to not only show the importance of faculty, but what faculty can gain from their own involvement.

Martha Stassen, who is a leading researcher of living learning communities, began first by studying researchers of learning communities and their findings regarding the positive effects these communities have on student development (Stassen, 2003). However, through her studies, explained later in this chapter, she points to the often overlooked fact, that making generalizations about the successes of learning communities is difficult due to the large number of varying models of these communities today. (p. 584) Stassen's research provides a good basis for understanding the complexities of studying both learning communities and living learning communities.

History of Living Learning Communities

Living learning communities are different from learning communities for several reasons but most obviously in nearly all living learning communities the students have the opportunity to reside together on campus as well as participate in academic endeavors. The history of living learning communities cannot be fully explained nor understood without looking to the residential colleges and communities that emerged with the founding of Cambridge and Oxford University. While the history of these two universities may best be explained in an overarching history of residential life, noting some of the components helps to understand the foundation of living learning communities today. While these universities were established over 800 years ago, they still act as the primary focus for many of the residential communities of today. Residential colleges place students into a residential setting in which they are learning with other students who share common interests but also learning and residing with faculty (Ryan, 1992). Originally, Oxford and Cambridge housed students together by discipline with faculty, mentors, and students who shared the same educational interested and could thus provide support to each other, while also engaging in the social environment of the residence hall (Chaddock, 2008).

By 1700, American universities saw the value in residential communities. The building of residence halls in the United States was modeled after Oxford and Cambridge. Residence halls were erected with the belief that they could merge learning and living together and keep academics at the forefront of the college experience (Schroeder et al., 1994). Initially, Harvard University in an attempt to develop a

residential experience similar to those found in England began residential communities. A few years later, Yale and Princeton established similar programs with the idea of joining the classroom experience to out of class experiences. These institutions did so within the residence halls in an attempt to bring faculty and students closer together and offer an opportunity to discuss coursework with faculty and peers in a more intimate setting (Education Encyclopedia).

This was the emergence of the modern day living learning community in the United States with some modifications. Looking back to Mieklejohn and Tussman, one sees how intertwined residential colleges and learning communities became in the United States. Modern theorists and educators noticed the value of learning communities, but also realized that faculty and staff were less and less likely to choose to live in a residence hall as a residential college mandated and today we recognize the same conundrum. In an effort to rectify this problem, while still offering many of the same benefits of residential colleges, living learning communities emerged with a mixture of both residential community and learning community roots.

Living Learning Communities Today

Today, institutions participate in national studies in order to assess the effectiveness of these learning programs throughout the United States. The National Study of Living-Learning Programs' website states it purpose as "assessing how participation in living-learning programs influences academic, social, and developmental outcomes for college students. This organization administers surveys annually with both

cross-sectional and longitudinal components. It is the only national outcome assessment

of these programs" (National Study of Living Learning Programs, 2007).   This

organization uses these data to show the impact of such programs and hope to help to

increase the use of living learning communities throughout the nation in order to better

benefit students (National Study of Living Learning Programs, 2007). Research into

living learning communities greatly increased in the past decade as professionals began to

see a correlation between what students do in their time outside the classroom and how it

affects their time within the academic environment. In her article, "Why Learning

Communities? Why Now?", K. Patricia Cross looks to the recent emergence of living

learning communities and provides a basic reasoning behind why they continue to

reemerge and why they developed such recent currency in the academic arena. Cross

(1998) describes the reasoning behind the recent draw to living learning communities

stating that both academic administrators and student affairs professionals see the

promise that learning programs offering a more holistic and integrated learning

experience for students (p. 4). Cross also provides three reasons behind why learning

communities continue to raise interest: "they fit into a changing philosophy of

knowledge, they fit with what research tells us about learning, and because learning

communities work" (p. 4). With an emergence of holistic development of the student,

living learning communities provide an arena for academic endeavors both inside and

outside the classroom.

Martha Stassen, one of the leading researchers in the realm of living learning

communities, further emphasizes the future direction of these programs, in her article,

"Student Outcomes: The Impact of Varying Living-Learning Community Models." This article centers around her desire to fill in the missing research about intentional living learning communities. Her own study looks into the effectiveness of retention of varying models of living learning communities. Uncertain if various models play a role in the impact and value that living learning communities offer, Stassen surveyed students participating in three living learning communities at one institution. Stassen studied approximately 830 students between 1999 and 2000 both within the living learning communities and non-participants to see their experiences over their first-semester both academically and socially (p. 592). After accounting for the differences at the onset, such as the fact that the living learning communities were selective with regard to their admittance, and hold that constant throughout the duration of the study, Stassen presents her findings that in direct comparisons students in all three living learning communities had higher first-semester GPAs than non-participants. She also found that students in these programs were more likely to have contact with peers around academic work, engagement, and positive academic behaviors (p. 602). However, Stassen emphasizes the importance of future research that still must be conducted in order to see the impact of living learning communities on a broader scale. She realizes that research must begin to look at the full range of living learning community models and garner data from each type. Stassen's (2003) own hypothesis is that living learning communities can play a useful role in "facilitating academic and social integration in a residential learning environment" (p. 586). Stassen's study concludes by strongly making the case for the need for additional research about living learning communities as a way to foster a better

first year experience for students. Stassen is not asking institutions to start over with

assessment, but rather to look at what is right in front of them, strengthen these already

existing mechanisms and use them to the benefit of the students.   Stassen's research

concludes that students clearly do benefit from living learning communities, but she also

asserts that only research can solidly confirm her conclusions.

Christopher Neil Chafin takes this research one step further and studies the

emotional implications of living learning communities in his article, "The Impact of a

Living Learning Community and Inquiry Guided Learning on First Year Students'

Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement." The basis for Chafin's research

emerges from the alarming statistic that 33% of all first-year college students in public

institutions will drop out before their second year and an additional 20% will not receive

their degree (Chafin, 2006). Chafin points to recent studies that show that high levels of

emotional intelligence can predict academic success and retention rates. Through this

observation, Chafin offers another area in which research about living learning

communities is sparse noting that research about whether a connection exists between

living learning communities and the production of higher levels of emotional intelligence

is non-existent (Chafin, 2006). For his own study, Chafin surveyed 503 first-year students

from 2003-2004 to see if participants in a living learning community would score higher

on a posttest of Emotional Intelligence (p. 63). While his study did not find any

significant difference in the level of emotional intelligence between living learning

community students and non-learning community students, he still urged the necessity for

more research in order to fully come to a conclusion about living learning communities

and asserted that this research must be done over a longer period of time. Chafin points out that research into living learning communities is far from conclusive and must continue to be broadly conducted if student affairs professionals are to fully come to understand the importance and problems associated with such communities.

Another article which urges the study and proliferation of living learning communities is "Honors Living-Learning Communities: A Model of Success and Collaboration," in which Eric Daffron and Christopher Holland describe the importance of the coordination between academic affairs and student affairs, rather than acting as separate entities. They claim that academic affairs can promote a student's growth in the classroom, and student affairs can foster their personal growth, but in order for higher education to graduate students who can truly survive in the real world, a world of collaboration and working together; these two separate fields must meet (Daffron and Holland, 2009). Their ideal place for such a meeting comes from living learning communities where programs treat students both as individuals and as members of a community from within the halls.   Daffron and Holland first point to the difficulty in creating successful living learning communities within the residential environment and are some of the first to do so. Then secondly they argue that qualified and passionate individuals are necessary to take on such a task. Third living learning communities need adequate funding to be successful. This funding is needed for guest lectures, specific programs, and to simply ensure that the organization of the living learning community runs smoothly (Daffron and Holland, 2009). They believe the biggest challenge to living learning communities remains the gap between academic affairs and student affairs.

While a living learning community falls under the direction of University Housing, it cannot be academically successful or sound without the help and support of an institution's faculty (Daffron and Holland, 2009). University Housing must work collaboratively with the faculty if they expect a living learning community to be successful.

Another article about the issues revolving around living learning communities is "The Role of Living Learning Programs in Students' Perceptions of Intellectual Growth at Three Large Universities," in which Inkelas et. al. add to the existing literature on living learning communities by studying and comparing three different institutions. Inkelas et. al. begin their study by first providing a basis for performing such a large study by stating that with regard to previous living learning studies they tend to use "varied empirical methods and idiosyncratic research questions that prevent comparisons among the studies. Thus, living learning research is disconnected and limited in representativeness" (p.117). The study focused on three Midwestern public research institutions with relatively selective enrollment and nationally recognized living learning programs with retention rates of 93% to 96%, admittedly high for these types of institutions (p. 120). With the above stated goal of expanding the comparison research on living learning communities, all living learning participants at the three institutions were studied as well as a random selection of students who were characteristically similar to the living learning community participants by characteristics, with a total number of participants numbering 4,058 students (p. 121). The method of study used to perform the research was a survey of 57 questions asking about transition to college, academics,

social experiences, and development, sent out via email and completed online. Through

their research Inkelas et. al. (2006) found "living learning students at all three campuses

tend to be statistically significantly more like than traditional residence hall students to

find their residence environments to be academically and socially supportive" (p. 127).

More generally the researchers also found "that living learning programs effect students'

intellectual growth differently at different institutions, and that the impact of the living

learning programs on students' perceptions of their cognitive growth is less influential

than on their perceived growth in liberal learning" (p. 1). This study provides an

understanding as to how students perceive they learn both inside and outside of the

classroom, but also demonstrates the need for my qualitative research.

Venturing away from just academics and retention Kuh and Zhao in "Adding

Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement," study another benefit to living

learning communities, showing that students who participate in living learning

communities are not only strengthening their own self image, but also helping each other

with peer relationships through, "higher levels of academic effort, academic integration,

and active and collaborative learning" (p. 124). The data source for their study was the

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which is an annual survey of first-year

and senior students measuring the degree to which students participate in educational

practices are linked to valued outcomes of college (p. 119-120). Kuh and Zhao's findings

claim that living learning community students often create the most stable and supportive

peer groups throughout campus as they extend far beyond the classroom into co-

curricular activities and into the daily lives and routines of other students. Aside from

simply living together, they are also working together to help each other succeed (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). They state that "learning communities are positively linked with more frequently interacting with faculty members, engaging in diversity-related activities, and having classes that emphasize higher order thinking skills" (p.124).

During the last twenty five years these partnerships created amongst student affairs and academic affairs throughout institutions has created an even faster growth of living learning programs bringing conferences, journals, etc. but often little evidence of their effectiveness (Inkelas and Brower, p.2). The National Study of Living Learning Programs was founded in 2001 to review living learning programs, survey students, and compare the long term effects of living learning program participation on students compared to traditional students at the same universities. The National Study of Living Learning Programs speaks to the idea of student learning in living learning communities by explaining that students learn not only within the classroom, but they also responded as learning more about themselves through "self-understanding, deep learning and an enriched social life" due to the benefits of living in a learning community. With all other factors being equal, first year learning community participants living together on a college campus had a higher success and quality of social life and student-faculty interaction. One of the greatest benefits of this study is that it is a nationally normed survey. Therefore and differences found could be considered true differences amongst the participants, accounting for influences outside of the study (National Study of Living Learning Programs, 2007).

Perhaps more importantly, this Study's information helps illustrate the difficulties in determining the exact number of living learning communities throughout the country today. When clustering living learning communities into sub categories there are programs based around courses, first year experience programs, themed housing, and the list continues on (NSLLP – powerpoint – Inkelas).   In 2004 the National Study of Living Learning Programs decided to focus specifically on residence based learning communities and looked at 34 institutions and 297 living learning communities. Within three years, by 2007, the number of institutions with living learning communities increased to 46 institutions with 617 living learning communities. This Study looked solely at programs that fit into the residential living learning community definition rather than at residential colleges, thematic living options, and basic learning communities (NSLLP – powerpoint – Inkelas). This study acts as the most comprehensive analysis of specific living learning communities while still addressing the difficulty of generalization amongst these programs.

This difficulty in generalization was one of my major concerns with the overall literature available regarding living learning communities. While generalizations are often difficult to produce, it is the overall insistence by nearly all of the researchers studied above that more and more research must be conducted before any true decisions about living learning communities can be made. While this can be seen as cautious, it also brings to light the question of whether or not researchers can truly urge study and the proliferation of living learning communities without the research to back such a recommendation. Without a study that truly shows the impact of living learning

communities, the most repeated finding of researchers is that more research must be conducted.

While agreeing that more research is necessary, I believe the nature of the research must change if the findings are to be strengthened. In nearly all of the research presented previously, the effects of living learning communities were studied from an academic perspective within the college experience. Living learning communities must be studied beyond academia, focusing on social experiences, growth, and development. While nearly all of the above research stated that the study of living learning communities had just begun it did not state in what in what direction this research needed to be taken. The study of the connection between student life and academic life may offer the best starting point for such a continuation. However, this research is impeded by the lack of connection between academic affairs and student affairs in the professional realm, as outlined earlier in the difficulty with having faculty live in residence. This difficulty and lack of research, however, was very seldom addressed and no solutions appeared evident in the research.

Finally, the majority of the research on living learning communities centers on large public institutions with great numbers of students. While a small liberal arts school may be seen as a living learning community in itself, these schools and any living learning programs they may have, were not addressed throughout the research.

Theoretical Base

This study drew on two theoretical frameworks toward the inception of the research questions and creating an overall study design -- Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984) and Chickering's Theory of Identity Development (1969). These theories provided explanations about both the involvement of the individuals in a residence hall living learning community and the overall context of the community.

Astin's Theory of Involvement

In 1984 while working for the University of California, Los Angeles, Alexander W. Astin first published his theory of student involvement. Since then, Astin has published this theory in many different iterations and venues, often rewriting sections to change with the needs and observations of the times. In 1999, one of Astin's updated articles pertaining to and explaining student involvement was published in the *Journal of College Student Development* titled, "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education." Astin begins by providing an overview of the basic elements of the theory first explaining that "student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, p. 518). He explains that involvement is very similar to Freud's concept of cathexis which is the belief that "people invest psychological energy in objects and persons outside of themselves. People can cathect on their friends, families, schoolwork, and jobs" (Astin, p. 518). From here, Astin has created the five basic postulates of the involvement theory.

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1.) Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects.
2.) Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a give object.
3.) Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.
4.) The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5.) The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (Astin, p. 519).

Putting each of these components together, Astin goes on to present his findings that, "The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (Astin p. 519). Also that the "effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement" (Astin p. 519).

In respect to the this study, Astin's theory of student involvement reiterated that students make decisions and react to situations within their environment and that "college administrators are constantly occupied with the accumulation and allocation of fiscal resources; the theory of student involvement, however, suggests that the most precious institutional resources may be student time" (Astin, p. 522). When considering retention from first to second year and even retention through graduation, Astin proposes that if administrators spent more concerning how their current students were spending their time, they would need to worry less about these types of retention. Astin states, "Administrators and faculty members must recognize that virtually every institutional policy and practice can affect the way students spend their time and the amount of effort

they devote to academic pursuits" (Astin, p. 523). Although this theory was written in

the 1960s, it has constantly been rewritten and quoted by hundreds confirming that it still

remains the gold standard of student development theories. The use of student

involvement theory was used for its predictive capacity within this study, showing the

importance that living learning communities would play in the overall involvement and

success of participants, as a large majority of a student's college career is spent outside of

the classroom.

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development

The second theory was Arthur W. Chickering's theory of identity development.

While it was first introduced in Chickering's book *Education and Identity*, published in

1969, many of its findings remain pertinent today and relate to this study. Written during

a time when in loco parentis was being questioned and fought against, Chickering looked

to the changes that occur as a student spends four years within the college atmosphere,

becoming a part of the social situations (Chickering, 1969). Chickering was able to

identify the "seven major developmental vectors for the young adult: achieving

competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, establishing identity, freeing

interpersonal relations, clarifying purposes, and developing integrity" (Chickering, p. 19).

One researcher, Paul Joseph Chebator (1995), examined Chickering in his own

dissertation to better formulate how involvement in co-curricular programs helped in the

development of students, but his research also helps in better explaining Chickering:

Chickering's theory offers a means of understanding the impact of involvement by providing a detailed view of desirable student development outcomes. Chickering's theory indicates that growth along the seven vectors is somewhat sequential, being generally accepted that individuals must have made some progress along the initial vectors before significant movement can occur. The developmental changes expected of first year students will generally be along the initial vectors (Chebator, p. 6).

Aside from looking at the changes occurring within students, Chickering also studied the institutions, to see what practices made a difference in students' overall development (Chebator, 1995). Even more specifically, Chickering spent a chapter discussing housing programs and the relationship they play in student development. Chickering believed that "because the college can control housing arrangements and the placement of students within the houses, it can create conditions that more effectively contribute to the freeing of interpersonal relationship and to the development of integrity" (Chickering, p. 221). In this study, Chickering's theory was used because the findings, specifically the influence of housing on students, provided a starting theoretical foundation for studying living learning communities within the study. While Chickering's own research may not have been extremely popular at the time, it has now gone full circle with the new adult literature and the changes occurring within college students' lives.

Current Studies Utilizing Astin and Chickering

In this study Astin's and Chickering's provided some potential predictive capacity as to how student involvement and development could potentially provide a framework for understanding student responses to the experience of participating in living learning

communities. Several other studies have also used Astin and Chickering as a basis for their own work. In "Unmasking the Effects of Student Engagement on First-Year College Grades and Persistence", George Kuh, Ty Cruce, Rick Shoup, and Jillian Kinzie (2008) merged student-level records from 18 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities that administered the National Survey of Student Engagement at least once between 2000 and 2003 and examined the links between student engagement and academic achievement and persistence (Kuh, etc. p. 543). Including 6,193 students in their study the authors looked at predictors of first-year GPA and retention. What the authors found was that "student engagement in educationally purposeful activities had a small, compensatory effect on first-year GPA of students who entered college with lower levels of academic achievement. Also student engagement in these same activities had a positive effect on persistence, even after controlling for other factors." (Kuh, etc. p. 549-551). This study grew from Astin's and Chickering's models of involvement and development. While these studies looked at large numbers of first-year students across hundreds of institutions, these theories also have some predictive power for this small qualitative study. As this study utilized the same definitions of involvement and development, it was possible that the students could describe their own levels of development throughout the first year of their college experience. Also the living learning community had the potential to act as a meaningful educational activity, but also act as just the opposite as the study attempted to discover.

Returning to Chebator's research, stated above, more thoroughly defined, this study looked to "examine the effects of participation in three different types of co-

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curricular programs on the success and self confidence of college students at one institution" (Chebator, p. 2). Through his study Chebator brings up one of the glaring difficulties with assessment in student affairs as he quotes Mines (1985), "the difficulty in measuring student development. Unlike the traditional curricular approach to assessment, which largely measures cognitive growth and development, assessment in student affairs requires the measurement of student growth in the affective realm." Chebator's own study was meant to "establish a link between these theories (Astin and Chickering) by assessing the impact of involvement on first year student's growth along the first two of Chickering's development vectors" (Chebator, p. 6). Chebator looked at "forty-eight students in the Emerging Leader Program, fifty-two in academic/community service, and one hundred and thirty-nine non-scholarship student athlete. In comparison to a group of three hundred and ninety seven sophomores" (Chebator, p. 9). Using Astin's and Chickering's theories as a basis, Chebator found that in fact those students who were involved had a higher persistence rate than those that did not. As for this study, utilizing Chebator's intertwining of Astin and Chickering may proved helpful in better understanding how a living learning community student is impacted by their living environment.

In their article, "Adding Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement," George D. Kuh and Chun-Mei Zhao utilized Astin's research to help fill in the gaps amongst current researchers. Their research differed slightly from prior research as they studied three hundred and sixty-five four year institutions and marked the engagement of both first-year students and senior students (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). They found that it

was the connections which learning communities foster which are most important. Social and intellectual connections, can be fostered within the classroom, however, it is this continued bond cultivated outside of the classroom in these communities that help to truly transform the students (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). What Kuh and Zhao found was that students who became members of the learning communities were more focused on academic content allowing them to develop their identity and integrate what they had learned into the real world of their social experiences (Kuh and Zhao, 2003). These men truly believe that learning communities have helped immensely in bridging the gap between academics and student affairs but have not forced such a change. Rather they believe that it is the students' initiative and understanding that the real world exists outside of the classroom which has helped to bring about this change. Stretching their findings even further, Kuh and Zhao's research helped to show that students who participate in learning communities are not only strengthening their own self image, but also helping each other with regard to peer relationships. Through the use of student voice in this study, the residents of the living learning community had the ability to speak to these relationships, helping to better explain or negate what years of mass surveys has concluded.

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CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

A qualitative study provided the most effective vehicle for addressing the research questions posed in this study, and allowed the use of student voice to describe their perceptions about participating in Living Learning Communities. Merriam (2009) says, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p.5). Rather than asking questions through a survey or questionnaire, and looking for statistical analyses of the responses, a case study allowed the students to describe in detail their personalized reactions and set their own priorities rather than using forced choices. This type of study also allowed the researcher to understand the underlying meaning behind the students' responses by following up and encouraging respondents to provide additional information. The student also had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions should they not understand what the researcher was asking.

A qualitative study allowed for deeper insights than statistical results. This study was specifically interested in understanding the students' affective response to the living learning experience in their lives as first year students at one institution. "The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam 2009, p. 14). Asking more probing questions and encouraging students to elaborate helped with validation and in giving meaning and understanding to the students' perspective of their experience.

Role of the Researcher

My position within Maple University, as a full-time administrator within University Housing and Residential Life allowed me to be both familiar with the processes of the university, while also understanding the students who attended the institution. Also, it is important to note that I did not directly oversee any of the students or employees involved in this study, nor did I have any authority over these students. Therefore, while I understood the practices of the institution I was not invested in the overall outcome of the study, other than to further the understanding of how living learning communities are viewed by residents and therefore did not feel pressure when reporting my findings. This was an ideal position for conducting qualitative research as I was able to be sensitive to the needs of the students as well as knowledgeable about their daily experiences.

While I had four years of Residential Life experience, these experiences had provided the opportunity for daily interactions with students, which were beneficial in helping participants to feel comfortable in my presence. During the past four years, I had spent time in the living environment of students, interacting with students, helping developmentally with students, and most intensely working to fulfill the basic needs of students. Therefore, I was able to relate to the participants in this study, and established trust early on in the research process due to the ease with which I could enter the observation site.

Due to my position within the university, there was a possibility for personal biases. This was one of the main reasons why I had chosen to study a population outside

of my supervision, to help lessen those personal biases. Knowing that I was most at risk of any ethical issue, as the information garnered could potentially upset administrators if it went against benefitting students, I was still willing to conduct the study. Also, by making it known that this study was looking at student voice and student opinion, I believe that my own biases and ethical issues were lessened.

Study Population

This study looked at one academically based co-ed living learning community in order to study social and academic interactions and the impact that living in such a community had on this population. The reason for choosing an academic based living learning community over theme based was because at Maple University, those students residing in academic based living learning communities must register and participate in a one credit first year seminar based around their community's major. For the purposes of this study, a business living learning community was studied and therefore observations occurred within the classroom as well as the residence hall. Aside from the first year seminar, these students also took a variety of other first year business classes together, throughout both the first and second semesters, which added an extra opportunity for observing student interactions in a variety of environments. The Peer Mentor and Resident Assistants within the business living learning community were also members of the business school and therefore provided a different perspective about their interactions with residents than a themed based living learning community.

Further, the study took place in one particular residence hall looking at a floor of approximately eighty first year residents, with about two thirds participating in the living learning community. To qualify as a living learning community participant, the student must have specifically signed up to live in the community and fulfill the requirements throughout the year in order to stay in the community. These requirements included participating in the first year seminar, attending programs sponsored by University Housing and Residential Life and their school, and checking in with the Resident Assistant and living learning community Academic Program Administrator throughout the year. Other students, non-living learning community participants, were placed into the community once bed spaces were not filled. For this study, the living learning community was comprised of two wings with about forty residents on each wing. Out of those eighty residents about two thirds were members of the community. Rather than leaving vacant rooms or beds within a residence hall, University Housing backfilled all spaces not filled by the living learning community. These students resided in the same area and were invited to the same programs, but they were not necessarily the same academic major and did not have to participate completely in the community. The final members of the community include two Resident Assistants and one Peer Mentor, all chosen by the University Housing and Residential Life Department of the University. Each of these students applied to be a part of the community. The overall position for Resident Assistants meant free room and board, for Peer Mentors it offered the opportunity for upper-class students to live on campus. They were hired as Resident

Assistants and Peer Mentors and then it was determined that they fit more specifically into the living learning community and were therefore placed in that area.

The selection of a co-ed floor permitted the study of both males and females to determine the impact of gender, if any, in student perceptions. This also reduced the attributing of results to a group based on gender rather than a wider range of characteristics. For the purposes of this study the students were studied for an entire year and their participation was studied over that time to see if their attitudes changed throughout the year regarding their interactions and perceptions of the community.

Data Collection

As stated earlier, this study aimed to provide an opportunity to give voice to students within living learning communities in an attempt to inform administration about the successes and shortcomings of the program, through the use of in-depth observations and one on one interviews. Aside from the interviews of the students, the Peer Mentor, and the Resident Assistant the other sources of evidence included: artifacts, field notes, note from the interviews, and participant observations both within the hall and inside the classroom.

Interviews

Interviews allowed a deeper understanding of the students' attitudes toward the living learning community, as expressed directly through them. Through the interview process the students were given the power to describe their own experiences, reactions,

and feelings to certain situations and the environment in which they live and learn. The interviews were structured to semi-structured in nature as a protocol was used. However, based upon responses and my observations to these responses the flow of each interview was determined. Most of the questions were open-ended inviting the student to speak about the impact of the experience as well as the feelings behind their answer.

This study occurred over one full academic year, from August through the end of May, with interviews occurring in September, December/January, and April/May. The first interview gauged the students' attitudes towards the living learning community before they immersed themselves into the program and classes. The second interview helped in the understanding of what the students had learned throughout their first semester and to see if they understood what the living learning community was and how it had impacted them. The final interview, allowed a clearer understanding of what impact the students felt living within this residential community for the entire year and express any possible long term impact.

Interviews included all types of participants of the living learning community—the residents, Peer Mentor, and Resident Assistants. While initially the interviews asked background and demographic questions, the remainder of the questions asked about interactions amongst the students. The protocol included questions about interactions both within the social environment as well as academics. The students were asked about their relationships and interactions with their roommate, with the Resident Assistant, Peer Mentor, and the rest of the community. They were also asked about their overall academics and their study skills. Each of these questions aimed to uncover how the

students felt the living learning community had impacted their social and academic lives. Finally, the questions shifted to their plans for the following year. In order to best utilize the individual time spent with the students, notes were also written up after each interview to speak to the overall demeanor of the student and any body language that could not be seen through the tape recording.

Field Notes and Artifacts

Throughout this study interviews acted as the primary source of data, due to the desire to give voice to the students participants in the living learning communities. However, Yin (2009), states that in data collection, "no single source has a complete advantage over all the others. In fact, the various sources are highly complementary, and a good case study will therefore want to use as many sources as possible" (p. 101). Therefore, several other types of data collection occurred in this study.

Since this study took place in the natural setting of the students, their living environment and the classroom area, direct observations occurred to better understand the interactions amongst the students. These direct observations allowed for more intense involvement and the opportunity to more thoroughly answer the proposed questions. This time was spent primarily within the study and social lounges of the wing observing the interactions occurring between the students during a typical day. These immersions provided the opportunity for field notes, meeting minutes, program descriptions, and observation rubrics, to garner information Finally, attendance at programs within the community sponsored by the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor on the floor helped

show how the participants interacted with each other in specific situations. Notes from these observations were then referenced throughout the interviews to ensure that the students agreed about the conclusions the researcher had drawn.

Finally, artifacts were also used throughout this study. These artifacts included handouts from the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor as well as hand outs within classes. Also throughout the year often University Housing and Residential Life provided publications and updates about their communities including websites, posters, and mailings. When these publications were released about the specific community at Maple University, they were also used as data in the study.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the Constant Comparative Method for Data Analysis was used. Barney G. Glaser (1965) who first implemented this method stated that, "The purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory more systematically than allowed by the other approaches by using the explicit coding and analytic procedures. At the same time, it does not forestall the development of theory by adhering completely to one approach who is designed for provisional testing, not discovering, of hypotheses" (p. 437). Two years later, Glaser and Strauss would again define this method stating that it "is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems" (p.104). What Glaser and Strauss were arguing in favor of was finding themes within the collection and comparing data back to these

themes. In the proposed study coding will be used to analyze and prepare the data for comparison with the rest of the collection – comparing new data with all others in a systematic way.

Taking this even further, Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that the constant comparative method assists in the creation of complex "theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interaction [that] correspond closely to the data since the constant comparison forces the analyst to consider much diversity in the data" (p. 113-14). In order to ensure that this comparison happens, after each interview, transcription occurred and each student's response was recorded along with field notes about the interview.

The means of organizing this data occurred through the use of ATLAS.ti software. Each of the thirty one interviews, two students only attended two interviews, were transcribed and then uploaded into the program, creating a separate document for each transcript. Coding occurred after reading through each interview twice and gauging a better understanding of what was important from each of the interviews. Coding did not occur until all of the interviews were complete. The codes were not predetermined, but rather came from the interviews themselves, looking for commonalities that somehow appeared important. Thirty-four codes were used during this process and from these codes themes emerged. Most of the themes were a combination of the codes. When creating both the codes and themes, the research questions were not considered, rather I considered the students most frequent and strongest emphasis and common pieces throughout many of the interviews. After the coding and the theme creation, comparison

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was conducted within the themes themselves and the responses were systemically placed in a continuum of two opposite extremes pertaining to the same theme. Through analysis and linking of these responses to each question a chain of evidence can be established and a picture created that gives more meaning than a minimally descriptive study or analysis.

Methods of Verification

Merriam (2009) states that, "All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people's lives" (p. 209). The author will go on later in the chapter to explain the difference between external and internal validity and its relation to qualitative research. This study was concerned with ensuring internal validity as this specific type of validity "deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (Merriam, 2009 p. 213).   For qualitative research this can be achieved as a goal and not as a product (Maxwell, 2005). Within a qualitative study the implementation of a series of detailed safeguards and procedures helps ensure internal validity is established. On the other hand, external validity has less importance in a qualitative study, as it is "concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 2009 p. 223). As stated earlier this study was more focused on expressing the outcomes and findings of this particular living learning community, at this specific institution, at this particular time and therefore generalization was difficult. However, this is not to say that

without external validity this qualitative study was unimportant, as it still has the potential to influence future studies and best capture the needs of the current research participants.

Intensive, Long-term Involvement

This study looked at the participants for one full academic year, August through May describing the overall impact of living within a living learning community through their own words. Within that year interviews occurred with the participants on three occasions.

Immersion by the researcher into the setting also occurred through visiting the living learning community on a regular basis to make observations about the state of the community. Attendance at programs sponsored by the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor provided the researcher the opportunity to observe how the participants interacted with each other in specific situations, as well as observations performed during classes.

Collection of Rich Data

Much of the rich data comes from the intensive, long-term involvement, observations, and interviewing. Through voice recording the interviews and then transcription, rather than simply jotting notes as the participants answer the questions, rich data began its development in the study. Rich data is also established through specific, well thought out questions within the interviews. The same interview protocol was used for each student, but there was also an understanding that the participants could answer the questions in their own way, thus altering the protocol with each interview. Through analyzing the data to ensure that all responses were collected, rather than

concern over asking the questions in a specific manner, the most accurate and thorough

data was collected. Finally, the researcher followed up on responses during the

interviews by asking clarifying questions ensuring that the most comprehensive answers

were given.

Use of Respondent Validation

During the interviews, questioning of responses was imperative to ensuring

thorough comprehension. However, for further validation this step can be taken a step

further. In this study the participants were given the opportunity to see the transcribed

interviews and provide feedback on what was written. This not only ensured that what

was written is true, but also provided the chance for further explanation and data. When

considering observations of the community and the programs on the floor, Residential

Life already had a feedback process in place which was utilized to make sure what was

seen and noted was actually how the residents feel and self report about the community.

Triangulation

This concept described by Merriam (2009) as, "using multiple sources of data

means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different

times or in different places, or interview data collected from different people with

different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people" (p. 216) easily

became part of the study. First, interviews included three different participants—

students, Peer Mentors, and Resident Assistants. Second, interviews occurred three times

throughout the year. Finally, the observations included various sites—classrooms, study

lounges, and social lounges. Through each of these means data was garnered from

multiple sources and a clearer and more encompassing idea of what it was like to live within the community occurred and helped to establish triangulation.

Timeline

The study occurred over one full academic year from August through the end of May the following year. Interviews occurred once in August, once in December or January depending on the student, and again in April or May. This allowed to first gauge the students' attitudes towards the living learning community before they had truly been immersed into the program. The second interview helped to understand what they had learned throughout their first semester and see if they understood what the living learning community was and how it operated as compared to when they first started. The final interview showed the impact that the students felt living within the residential community for an entire year. It also allowed the asking of questions about whether the student was coming back to the university, living in residential housing the next year, and what their major would be into the future. During this academic year the researcher also attended programs and events occurring on the floor or wing to ensure an understanding of the interactions that the residents experienced as well as the overall attitude of the living learning community.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the qualitative data analysis of the lived experience of eight participants of a specific living learning program and the three student leaders also residing in the community. These experiences were recounted through the students own voices as well as through a yearlong submersion into the study site. The discussion and understanding of these experiences will come through the use of the theoretical lens of Astin and Chickering in Chapter 5.

The chapter will be dived into two sections: participants and findings. Each participant in the qualitative interviews will be briefly described. Secondly, the findings of these interviews will be explored through the use of themes and sub-themes that emerged through the transcription and coding.

Overview

The purpose of this study was to look at a single academic based living learning community to see if living in such an area made a difference on the students' own perceptions of the benefits from living in a living learning community by gathering and analyzing the opinions of the participants through the use of interviews and intensive immersion into the space. The study was not meant to act as an example for the entire community, but specifically the individual experiences of each study participant. More specifically, this study aimed to answer the research questions regarding the perceived impact and engagement due to participation in the community.

Description of Sample/Characteristics of Respondents

The students surveyed in this study were each members of a specific single academic based living learning community. A total number of eighty students live within the two wings in a specific residence hall which makes up this community and each of these residents were given the opportunity to participate when the initial consent form was distributed and the study explained at the first floor meeting for each wing. Assurance was given to the participants that participating in the study was voluntary and that they could opt out at any moment without their decision impacting their place of residence or their participation in the living learning community. This fact was reinforced several times throughout the study time period, but most clearly when the consent form was given, signed, and returned by each participant.

From the eighty students living in the two wings about half signed the consent form to be studied and from those forty, after emails sent to all, eleven (N=11) were willing to participate in the year long interview process. Of those eleven, eight (N=8) were first year students participating in the living learning community and three were upper-class student leaders hired by Residential Life to serve as Resident Assistants (2) and a Peer Mentor (1). While an attempt was made to have an equal number of male and female participants, after asking for volunteer seven women and four men were studied. Pseudonyms were given from the outset for these students so as to keep their interviews and observations confidential.

Pseudo.	Hometown	Major	Gen.	Ethn.	Reason for LLC
Amy	NY	International Business	F	Cauc.	Mother & Tour
Carey	NY	Actuarial Science	F	Afr. Am.	Did not want a worse hall
Riley	NJ	International Business	F	Cauc.	Mother & Tour
Ryan	NJ	Hospitality Management	M	Cauc.	Parents and Better Hall
Mary	CT	Accounting	F	Cauc.	Ran out of housing.
Colin	PA	Undeclared – Business	M	Cauc.	Had signed up for it, but forgot.
Dylan	PA	Entrepreneurship	M	Cauc.	Wanted to be in honors, got placed in Business.
Dina	PA	Undeclared	F	Afr. Am.	Ran out of housing.
Lily	PA	International Business	F	Cauc.	Peer Mentor (Employee)
Mike	PA	Actuarial Science	M	Cauc.	Resident Assistant (Employee)
Ashley	PA	Accounting	F	Afr. Am.	Resident Assistant (Employee)

Participants

Participant One: "Amy"

Amy was a first year, Caucasian student, studying Business and Law and hoped

that this major would help with her dream job of working in the fashion industry as a

lawyer. Amy was a cheerleader for the football team and also from New York and those

two identities filled Amy's conversation. As a cheerleader Amy had very little time in the beginning of the year to take part in the living learning community activities and therefore did not participate in the early arrival process. As the year went on, Amy made up for her lack of presence in the very beginning and became a known face on the floor.

Amy was the student who coined the term "family" when talking about the community and often spoke of the friends she had made on the floor, specifically her best friend and roommate, Riley. She always spoke highly of the living learning community and the many benefits she had found from it.

Participant Two: "Carey"

Carey was a first year, African American, Actuarial Science Major from New York. The majority of interactions with Carey focused on her extreme dislike of her roommate due to racial issues which could not be overcome. By the middle of the year, Carey switched rooms within the suite so that she could live with another African American and the two Caucasians could also live together, which appeared to have cleared up the issues.

While she was a declared Actuarial Science major, Carey had dreams of becoming a dancer and often spoke of wanting to audition, but her father had talked her out of those ideas. When asked why she selected the living learning community, Carey admittedly stated that she had very little idea about what was entailed in the program, other than knowing she would not receive the worst hall assignment so she signed up.

Participant Three: "Riley"

Riley was a first year, Caucasian, International Business major who also wanted to go into law so that she could be roommates with. Amy, her current roommate, "forever." She was definitely much quieter than Amy and also less popular as she stayed to herself for the majority of the interactions that were observed. Being from New Jersey, Riley admitted that she spend some of her first weekends at home rather than on campus, visiting high school friends and family.

Participant Four: "Ryan"

Ryan was a first year, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management major, who was not in the business school, but still truly enjoyed the living learning program. He attended almost every event, program, and outing run by either of the RAs. It appeared as though he got along with everyone and he mentioned that this was a good reason as to why he enjoyed the living learning program so much.

He did not, however, get along with his roommate, so he moved out of the community and across the hall in to another wing in the building. However, with his outgoing personality, he stated many times that he was practicing for his future goal of becoming a hotel manager and travelling, he stayed close with the majority of the community and it was difficult to remember that he had even left.

Participant Five: "Mary"

Mary was a first year, Caucasian student, studying Accounting. Mary was from Connecticut and hoping that coming to a larger city would help her find a career in the music industry. Mary had very little patience for the business school as their staff

continued to try and convince her that she needed to place more emphasis on getting a job with the big four accounting firms, rather than a career in the music industry, and also could barely tolerate the majority of the floor she lived on.

While interviewing Mary it became apparent that she had a lot of personality and she was not afraid to show it. She self identified as not fitting in to the community as she did not fit the typical business student mold and she was unwilling to change her ways to better fit in. She spent a large portion of her time downtown looking for jobs and also for older people to hang out with as she described her current floor mates as young and immature.

Participant Six: "Colin"

Colin was a first year, Caucasian student, who signed up for the living learning community during the housing selection process, but then forgot he had done so and was surprised with his placement. Although surprised, he was also quite happy about it. He instantly became friends with nearly the entire community and whenever asked about the benefits of residing in the community he spoke of the other students who were also there.

Colin was from a nearby town and initially went home on the weekends, but this did not impede him from making friends or becoming one of the dominant personalities on the floor. Colin also had a strong relationship with the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor.

Participant Seven: "Dylan"

Dylan was a first year, Caucasian student, majoring in Entrepreneurship. He was extremely disappointed when he found out that he had signed up for the business living

learning community as he had hoped to be a part of the honors living learning community and had checked the incorrect box on application process.

After less than two month, Dylan moved out of the business living learning community and over to the honors living learning community. It became apparent that this was exactly where he saw himself residing and was a much happier student. However, many of his weekend friends continued to be those students from the business living learning community.

Participant Eight: "Dina"

Dina was a first year, African American student, who entered the living learning community because the university had "run out of housing." She was an undeclared major and not certain if she wanted to entered in to business at all, by the end of the year she was leaning toward Communications.

Dina was a very quiet student and stayed to herself, in observations she was never at an event or interacting with the rest of the community. Dina lived in the city and had travelled only a short distance to come to school, so she often went home on the weekends and had a job right off campus which kept her very busy as well. When Carey moved out of her room due to racial disagreements, she moved in with Dina.

Participant Nine: "Lily"

Lily was a sophomore, International Business major who switched to Risk Management and Human Resources Management by the end of the year. As the Peer Mentor for the floor, Lily's main role was to create a bridge between the students' academic lives and the social components of the residence hall program. Lily had been a

member of the living learning community the year before and therefore requested to be the Peer Mentor. As compensation for the position Lily received a free room on the floor and also was able to move in early. Lily was a strong advocate for all things business and often brought in instructors, teaching assistants, and advisors to help the living learning community.

Participant Ten: Mike

Mike was a junior studying Actuarial Science and this was his first year as a Resident Assistant. He self described himself as being able to help with the business side of things, but struggled in helping the students on the personal level. Most of the programming that occurred on the floor was not originated by Mike, as he liked to collaborate with Lily and Ashley, the other Resident Assistant. By the end of the year, Mike was amazed at how great of a community he had helped to create and was looking forward to doing so again next year as a returning RA to the living learning community.

Participant Eleven: Ashley

Ashley was a junior studying Accounting and she was a returning Resident Assistant to the floor and community. Ashley initiated most of the programs on the floor with the help of Lily and also showed Mike exactly how to figure out the best programs to hold for the residents. Ashley prided herself in ensuring that her residents were ready for their next steps in their business careers and life in general. Her programs centered around professionalism, etiquette, and navigating through the business field.

Overview of Themes: Student Perception of the Impact of Participating in a LLC

Next, I will provide an overview and analysis of the themes that emerged from the interviews and observations to determine how and why living in the living learning communities impacted the student's life. Each interview provided an individual description and perception of the experience of living in this living learning community. Through analysis of the data as well as methodical coding, five themes emerged from my analysis of the data: (1) Importance of Family, (2) Social Activities as Bonding Agents, (3) Sense of Exclusivity, (4) Accountability with Regards to Academics, (5) Importance of Personality to Perception of LLC Success.

Theme One: The Importance of Family

The first theme permeated the findings in a wide range of both anticipated and unanticipated ways. In almost all of the participants' interviews they mentioned family in some way. Early in the study, as the students were just leaving their permanent families at home, many of the participants spoke of their families influence in deciding to enter Maple University and then on deciding to participate in the living learning community. As the study continued, and the participants became closer and closer to the students holding leadership roles on the floor, the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor, the gender specificity of these roles along with familial roles took shape. This would then lead to a "replacement" of the permanent family through the members of the living learning community as many participants began to speak of the community as a sort of family and identifying the roles that each person played n that microcosm.

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Family as a Factor

Early in the study the students were each asked "Why did you choose Maple University?" and then further "How did you choose to live on campus?" and "How did you choose a living learning community?" Each of the students interviewed, including the Peer Mentor and Resident Assistants gave their own open ended responses. Some of the students spoke about the ranking of the school and the programs that it has to offer, while others spoke directly of family involvement in the decision making process. Riley was able to speak to both of these reasons when asked why she chose Maple University, " Um that it's close by to my house, and I know they are ranked number nine for International Business." Riley would later go on to speak about how being close to her house was helpful in allowing her to see family. On numerous occasions during observations Riley was not present on the floor, and upon asking her Resident Assistant or Peer Mentor, it was found out that she did often go home. While this does not necessarily mean that she is close to her family, it was a reason behind choosing the school and she did utilize her home as a resource during the school year. Lily, who lived further away and acted as the Peer Mentor for the floor, spoke of a slightly different reason for choosing Maple University, "I am a business major and I was very impressed with the program and it's rankings and I also came to Maple and I got that warm fuzzy feeling that people get when they are close to someone." When asked to describe this in more detail Lily spoke of, " knowing I belonged here and that I was excited to be here and I felt a part of it." Lily would speak many times about this "fuzzy feeling" and how important it was to her decision making process.

After the decision to come to Maple University was complete, the students still needed to choose to live on campus and in a living learning community and many of the next interview questions focused on how these decisions were made. Several of the students again credited family, mainly parents, with help in the decision making. When asked how she chose to live on campus Amy's response was straight forward, "Um well my mom really wanted me to do the LLC instead of like living off campus. She wanted me to have friends in my major especially to do homework with and going to class with because of other than doing stuff with the cheerleaders and hanging out with the cheerleaders it is something to give me friends." Colin felt much the same way about being influenced by his family, "Ah between my brother he actually commuted his first year at Drexel and he had a miserable time and everybody told me you gotta live there and get the experience." And Dina, a native of the city in which Maple University was located, spoke highly of the experience that her sister in law had while at Maple University and her influence on deciding to live on campus, "Because I know people from like my sister in law. She graduated from here and got her Master's from Arcadia and she told me that if she could go back she would live on campus."

This parental intervention began before the actual selection process occurred and several students spoke of their parents' assistance in the college visit process. When asked how they came to find out about the living learning communities Amy and Riley, who would later become roommates stated very much the same thing. Amy, "Um, through one of the tours with my mom." And Riley's response to the same question, "Ah. When I came with my parents for an open house." Dylan had much the same

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experience and spoke of hearing about the LLC, "through like an open house or one of those times I visited with my parents." Ryan's response was one step further as he stated, "The school was very good at communicating about emails and my parents kinda forced me because I am lazy."

When the students spoke of their decision to live in an academic based living learning community, several credited their parent's intervention in this decision as well. Amy was very upfront about her answer, "Um well my mom really wanted me to do an LLC." Ryan had some confusion with his housing selection process but would also credit his parents, "Originally I signed up for a better hall and then I ended up getting into a worse one and then my parents told me to go join LLC." He is later quoted as saying, "The LLC was a really great idea. I am glad my mom told me to do it."

On the opposite end some students did not credit their families or credited them with persuading them to move away, when asked why she chose to live on campus, Carey responded, "I wanted to get away from my parents. I didn't want to stay home. I have been home for 18 years. I had to go." At first this may seem like a "typical" response but as the questioning continued and many of the other students spoke about parents and family and their influences, the response seemed extremely important to how Carey would transition into the floor. When asked about her floor connection later on in the interviews Carey responded, "I don't really talk to them." Mary described very much the same feelings, "[My town] it's small as in like we are very…our town is like bubble-ish, it really is. I classify our town as elitist. It's really bad. I don't like it at all. That's

why I left." When questioned later about her experience in the living learning

community Mary would respond,

> I really don't like the living learning community so much, just cause like the fact like I would have liked to meet kids from other majors maybe like art majors or something like that because I am, going for business but I don't want to necessarily work in business. So in like that sense it's hard because everyone is in business so that's it. There is not much room to move.

In the next section when speaking about the replacement of family through the LLC,

these same students will have difficulty speaking about any sort of connection with to the

living learning community.

Replacement of Family Through LLC

When asked to describe the floor dynamic of the business living learning

community many of the participants that were interviewed spoke of the family like bonds

they had created in the nine months that they had been there. At first the closeness

started with the roommates as several of the participants described how close they had

become to those they shared a room with. Amy was perhaps most excited to answer the

question about whether she felt like she was getting along with her roommate,

> We are the same person. Because my roommate is also an International Business major and then she also decided she wanted to go to law school too. So like we are going to be roommates for the next eight years. We are like really close. We like complete each other.

Colin mirrored many of the same sentiments, "O yeah we are all getting along really

well, happy I have good roommates. Ya we definitely trust each other we are friends

working up to being close friends. We are going to be living together next year."

As the year went on, the participants were asked about their feelings in relation to

floor dynamics. Again, Amy was perhaps most excited to explain the "family like"

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atmosphere that had been created on her floor. When asked about floor dynamic her

response was,

> I love my floor, this side at least. We all hang out. Me, my roommate and two
> girls all the way at the other end of the hall like on that wing we are all going to
> be rooming together next year. Like we all hang out all the time, we are like best
> friends these two hallways. Loud, happy, silly, funny, it's actually become a
> mini-family. It's just cause Valerie who like lives over there, we joked around
> and said she was like my mom cause she has that personality that motherly
> personality and I am just the little baby out of everyone. Then we joke around
> Mark over there is like the dad. Then the other day it was Jules who also lives
> over there and is our friend, we were like they are brother and sister and then it
> was Riley is the cousin. It was literally in the past two weeks. Like it was a joke
> but now they're all like, that's the uncle, that's the family friend, and on and on.

At first this statement might appear an outlier, but looking at the students who had stated

how important their parents were in their decision making process a parallel emerges –

many of these students then begin talking about their living learning community acting in

family like ways. Amy's roommate Riley states, "I feel like we get along really well.

We have become like a little family type unity. It's fun."

However, those students who had spoken of wanting to leave family behind when

asked how they chose Maple University and their desire to live on campus had a different

sentiment about their floor and in some cases their roommates felt the same way. When

asked what kind of connection she felt towards the rest of her floor, Carey who had stated

wanting to get away from her family, answered very briefly and quickly, "I don't really

talk to them." Upon asking her roommate what connection she felt and if she would

describe them as friends Dina stated, "It's a regular connection, like neighbors, like a

regular town, whatever. Acquaintances." Mary had also spoken about the desire to leave

Connecticut so she could travel further away from her family. When asked what type of

connection she felt to her floor her response was, "I personally don't. No. I feel very secluded. I honestly think it's just cause I don't put up with all their crap. Ok so yeah and it's just like a maturity thing."

The leaders on the floor, however, did not mention the disconnect as they spoke about the family-like atmosphere that was found on their floor. Lily stated, "I have never seen them like really get into a fight with each other. They're all like best friends. Even if they do get into a fight they are like a family. They forget about it." Mike took some credit for the community that had been created stating, "They're still freakishly close…that hasn't changed and I am kinda surprised sort of I mean. They are just like, next year they are living with other people from the LLC. I think some other RAs would struggle with bringing their floors together like I have and that makes it like fun. They're a family that's all." Ashley would also talk of this community building, " My hallway is way friendly. Like they have been friendly since day one. There is still like that respect and we still building that community." This perception would later be justified as the residents spoke of the importance that the RAs and Peer Mentor played in their community.

Gender Specific Roles of RA

While the students interviewed do not go so far as to label Mike "Dad" and Ashley "Mom," throughout many of the interviews gender specific roles are discussed specifically with comparison between Mike and Ashley and Lily. Amy, who has shown excitement about the possibility of a family on the floor describes her relationship with Ashley, "Um, she comes in and does like whatever…the little announcement things, gave

us candy for Valentine's Day. We were all her valentine. Her boyfriend came and I am friendly with him. I love my RA." Several of the other participants described Ashley in much the same way, speaking of constantly being invited out or included in anything that she may be doing. Ryan states, "She would always knock on my door, always be really friendly. Hey we are going to do this and come here." Colin mirrors these thoughts stating, "She has been great. Very helpful, she is there if you have any questions and she actually just had cooked us all dinner last week.   She put us in the study lounge and we had a spaghetti dinner, I mean what RA does that?" Ashley also describes her interactions on a individual level, "They're pretty personable. Only because like we built that bond since the beginning of the year and right now they're like in tears. I got a note from someone that was going to make me cry and a card. I was gonna cry. I was getting all emotional." Ashley's residents not only mention the individual attention that she gives to them, but Ashley speaks of how important this is to her own development of the community.

However, seldom did a participant ever mention Mike or the impact that he has on the community, even though the entire community shared the two Resident Assistants and the Peer Mentor. Mary describes her relationship with Mike versus Ashley, "No. My RA Mike, he's like secluded himself pretty much a lot. I mean like whatever. Ashley on the other side of the hall, I mean I go to her activities more because she has more activities then day does." Mike also describes this disconnect with his residents as he states that personal conversations are not really his style, rather he enjoys speaking with the residents about academics and things which are business related. Asked when

they come to him for personal conversation Mike states, "Occasionally a few of them do. Not all of them." And what of his interactions with the Peer Mentor? "It's good. She takes care of some of the other personal issues that the students have. Like we divided up the duties, not intentionally it's just how it happened and that has worked really well for us." Perhaps important to note that Mike and Lily started dating about halfway through the year and have continued dating since.

Lily is not forgotten when the residents speak of the importance that female leaders play on a personal level on the floor. Carey admits, "Um it is good to know you have somebody to go to just in case you can always go to your RA, but having a peer mentor is a little better it is a little more personal. Especially because she is a sophomore and she relates to us a little bit more." Colin reiterates this point, "My Peer Mentor is right across the hall from me. She is always available and talking and doing stuff and creating events for us to go to. I would say the Peer Mentor is definitely an interesting aspect. I like it. I am glad she is there.

Conclusion

Whether positive or negative, the family started as a pivotal point for the selection of Maple University and the decision to live in a living learning community for many of the participants. As the year progressed, the importance of family continued as many of the students looked to temporarily replace the family they had left with the community in which they were now living. Living in a unique situation where the residents had both a male and female Resident Assistant helped to contribute to the continuation of family even through the impact of the leaders on the floor.

Theme Two: Social Activities as Opportunities to Bond

As the study progressed the second theme of social activities as opportunities to bond amongst the participants truly began to take shape. These activities were described by the students as contributing to their own transitions by providing opportunities for making friends, a very important goal for them. Many of the participants spoke of study lounges acting as social spaces and venues for weekend activities with the floor and community members. When asked about academic challenges, many of the students spoke of wanting to have fun and gossip with members of the community over wanting to complete their assignments.

Study Lounges versus Social Spaces

The majority of the interviews in this study were conducted within the labeled "study lounge" on the floor. The floor was actually a combination of four wings, A,B,C, and D. C and D were located in the front of the building and were where the LLC was located. The separate of the AB from CD occurred through a sort of open space hallway that housed the actual "social lounge" on the floor which contained a foos ball table and a few sofas and chairs. C and D were separated by the "study lounge" itself so this lounge was meant to be used solely by C and D, as the A and B wings had their own study lounge separating them. Out of nearly thirty interviews conducted in this room over an entire academic year, only five occurred while others were within the room studying. The other times, students were either socializing or the room was empty. However, these interviews typically occurred during the hours of 10am to 4pm, while the evening hours

were filled with observations that also occurred in the study lounge. These observations were of programs, as well as the occasional studying.

During most of my time in the "study lounge", little studying occurred. In reality the "study lounge" functioned more like a recreational space as students were engaged in conversations, watching movies, and playing music within the room. Ashley, Mike, and Lily utilized this space for spaghetti dinners, game nights, and movie viewings. The students used it to have conversations about the day, prepare for going out on the weekends, and even shoot videos. Throughout the interviews, Ashley was able to capture the difficulty associated with maintaining the "study" nature of the study lounge. When asked about whether her residents study, Ashley stated,

> Yeah, yeah, all the time. Like they usually study in here (study lounge) but what I find out…so I know the beginning of the first semester we were having problems. Like this was nicknamed the drunk tank because everyone was always in here acting crazy. But I guess the second semester me and Mike made up a rule. Okay if it's the weekends no one can be in here until like after 12 if they're gonna be in here, if you guys wanna be socializing in here. Or just during the week, just use the other study lounge. And everyone is pretty respectful like that even if there is like one person in here studying they will be respectful.

Others also commented on the difficulty with utilizing the study lounge as the study lounge, but rather used the space as an opportunity to socialize and bond with each other. When asked about the studying Ryan states, "Yeah well here (study lounge) it's a little different because on this side (of the hallways) the business school is more social. So they like to um, they don't do homework in here necessarily. Um the benefit is everyone is able to work together and everyone is able to have friends and just get along really well." Observations further showed this bonding amongst the students. When working on group projects the study lounges were used for conversations and planning. Other

times the lounges were used as places of gossip holding as many as ten to fifteen at a time to simply chat and discuss their plans for the evening.

Lily, who attempted to have a more academic bond with the floor, spoke of their sometimes studious nature and stated that she did see them using the lounges for the described purpose, "Yeah. They study together a lot. I mean the other night it was like one o'clock in the morning and they were all in the study lounge, and I was like what are you all doing here? They were working on a paper. So they definitely utilize the whole learning part of it." However, Lily also stated that their bonds created within the living learning community were causing some problems within the classes that they took together. Referencing their first year seminar, Lily stated, "Sometimes I've heard they have not done that (studying) in their seminars or they misbehaved." When asked to expand more upon "misbehaving" Lily talked in depth about their noise levels and level of respect that they showed the instructor and showed concern through the year towards their studying habits.

> They're all very friendly. Best friends. Something I am a little concerned with at the moment because I don't think it has hit them yet that they are in college and they need to start buckling down and studying because they will be out in the hallway until 3 or 4am just talking because they are so close.

Lily's concern for her residents did take a toll on her and she shared that her grades had actually slipped while she was a Peer Mentor. A great deal of this struggle Lily contributed to feeling like she had to help the residents,

> Sometimes I will come home and I am exhausted and there will have like 15 questions that I have to answer. And I try to keep a positive attitude because I don't want to come off negatively and then they won't wanna come to me because I always want them to feel like they can come to me.

Ryan was one of the participants who answered most bluntly about the community's relationship to studying, "Um we don't really do so much work together. When we are studying in the study lounge, we like to talk. But we really like to go out and it is more social. Really being in an LLC is very social." Riley also spoke about the lack of studying that was occurring within the LLC, "Um, disadvantages I guess would be like distractions because your friends distracted you."

When watching their interactions it was evident that the students were close to each other and had little problems speaking to one another and much preferred hanging out over studying. Observing their business law class also confirmed that they sit together in class, sometimes being disruptive. Several of the participants mirrored these sentiments about the study lounge being more of a social space or a place for making plans.

Weekend Activities as an LLC

When making these plans, several of them revolved around weekend activities and the students were more than willing to talk about their adventures. These outings usually included other members of the community and often occurred outside of the residence hall. It is important to note that the residence hall had an alcohol free policy that the students were expected to uphold. As the interviews continued this would later be brought up regarding weekend activities.

Several of the participants discussed their weekend activities as an opportunity for them to further hang out with other members of the community. When asked about how the community assisted with the transition to college, Ryan stated,

I get along with everyone on my floor pretty much. We all party together. We all hang out together and I love talking to them and that is why I don't want to move out of this floor. The benefits from meeting everybody you are living with. The wing really connected cause they all, you know, live right across the hall. We are always in each others' rooms hanging out. You know going out on Friday and Saturday nights together.

Colin's response to the same question was very similar saying, "The rest of my floor, we all know each other and we are all friendly with each other and doing stuff together on weekends, like watching movies and playing games, going out to eat, and all that." Amy also seemed to agree with the two above mentioned participants as she talked about her interactions with her floor versus those with the cheerleading team during weekend activities, "Well during the season like I would come back from a practice that was three hours long with them and I would see them every day and not wanna hang out with them. So but I would come and hang out with my floor, and go out."

Dina also spoke of the weekend activities stating, "It can be loud on weekends and stuff like that but that's only because it's crowded." When she was asked if she hung out with the members from the community, Dina had previously stated that the members were more like "acquaintances" or "members of a town" rather than describing them as friends or people that she would choose to hang out with. While Dina offered a varying opinion of what occurred on the weekend, the students agreed on how they did not spend their weekends, no student in this study spoke of studying or getting work done.

Important Social Roles of RAs and Peer Mentor

While the Resident Assistants were not permitted to plan parties on the weekend, or hang out with the residents as they went out, the students still spoke to the overall social nature of the RA role. When asked about the connection that the residents felt to

their RAs and Peer Mentor, many spoke of their social aspects and programs. This importance on social activities to the participant's transition was apparent as they strove to make friends and build relationships.

The participants were asked most basically, "What sort of connection do you feel with your RA?" Ryan's response was overarching and captured many of the other participants' sentiments, "I see Ashley all the time. She always knocks on my door. Always really friendly, 'Hey we are going to do this. Or come here.' So on a social level, yes. More than that I wouldn't. I would say no." And when asked if he was more close to any of the leaders on the floor over the others, "I would kind of say right in the middle, because I really only talk to them when I need to." Colin further expands upon Ryan's statement as he gives exact details about what Ashley has done in order to make sure that the floor is social, "Yes, she has set up quite a lot of events from First Fridays to stuff in here (on the floor). Whatever she can do to get us all connected and doing stuff together. She does anything we need. If we need help she is there." When further questioned if he had approached her about academics, "No, not really." However, as the semester went on, during the third set of interviews, Colin's statements began to change, even though he was still more focused on the social aspect first,

> I see her (Ashley) on a daily basis. She had a little picnic for us last week too. We were out there all day with people and with our RA, Mike, playing wiffle ball and capture the flag. She got some food for us and all that. And especially around when I was scheduling all my classes. She was a big help in explaining everything, like what course she thought would be better for us to take and explaining some of the professors that she has had.

Colin also begins to realize that what he is receiving from his RA is different from some of his other friends in other hallways, "All of my friends that are in the regular dorms don't have any of that. Like they know who their RA is, but they're not talking to them. They are not having events planned for them. The whole floor it's kind of just like a free for all."

Mary was somewhat in agreement with Colin as she spoke about the social activities of Ashley. When asked about her interactions with her RA she stated, "My RA, Mike? He's secluded himself pretty much a lot. Ashley the other hall RA, I mean I go to her activities more because she has more activities then Mike does." However, Mary did not elaborate on interactions that occurred due to her attendance at these events, but did notice that Lily also cares about programming, "I know our Peer Mentor does a lot of stuff and I feel like she pushes for like a lot of activities, which is cool."

Riley was on the opposite end of the spectrum, and while she hung out with her roommate Amy all of the time, she seemed slightly oblivious to the work that the leaders were putting into the floor. "Like in the hallway every now and then I will see her and I will say hi, but I never really had like an engaging conversation. But, no I do like her." Later when asked if Riley used the RAs or Peer Mentor as a resource during course selection she stated, "No, I went to my, what are they…advisors."

Dylan, who transferred out of the LLC in order to live in an apartment with a kitchen, acted as a good comparison between the two communities. When asked if he had the opportunity to connect with his RA, Dylan stated, "

Um, not really. I met him a few times and he is a nice guy, but I think like most of the people I think on this floor are upper classmen. My roommate and myself are the

only freshmen so we don't really need like the RA. The RA doesn't really need to be as involved as they get in a freshmen dorm. So I think that is why I haven't really established a relationship with him. I guess I knew the older one better and I saw her (Ashley) more frequently and she did more like interactive things with us. But like I said she was catering to the audience.

Later when Dylan was asked about whether this arrangement contributed to his making

friends he stated,

> Um, I made a few friends from other rooms. And um it's not like a real social area I guess. Um, at least not for me. I guess I haven't really made too many different friends from the floor yet. There is usually people in the hallways, but yeah the doors are usually closed.

Conclusion

In the next section, the relationship between the LLC and academics will be explored, but with the social nature of the community it was of utmost importance to many of the participants, specifically those who had previously mentioned that they desired assistance with their transitions. Whether it was through interactions in the study lounge, weekend outings, or attendance at RA programs, many of the students appeared to have found the social interactions that they desired through their participation in the LLC.

Theme Three – Accountability with Regards to Academics

Theme three was the most closely related to the perception of academic success through involvement in the living learning community, but even within this theme, academics was not always strictly the topic and it was difficult to truly identify the direct impact on academic success. In many instances the participants spoke of their

roommates, floor mates, and Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor holding them accountable in getting to classes and completing homework. Throughout the interviews many of the participants cited this motivation as a means for overcoming the difficult transition between high school and college and the difficulties that often accompany these changes. What was missing from the responses was any mention to specific academic success, such as a high grade on a paper on being extra prepared for a test. Also, no student mentioned any interaction with faculty members or the academic programs which the RAs and Peer Mentors had planned. Nevertheless, the students did believe they were held academically accountable by their Peer Mentor, Resident Assistants, and other community members, as will be further shown, but it was Colin, perhaps, who captured this accountability best when he was asked after the first semester if living in the LLC had affected his transition to college. Colin stated, "Yeah, I would say so. I think it helped a lot. Between staying on track with my courses, going to programs, with all that. Between going to classes instead of staying and watching tv or whatever. There is always someone saying, 'Hey. Let's go to class.'"

Peer Mentor as a Resource

When reading over the job description for the Peer Mentor position from University Housing and Residential Life at Maple University there are numerous references to fostering the "connection between academics and social activities and after observing for an entire year, it is quite apparent that Lily executed these responsibilities. When asked to describe her position in the community Lily stated, "So I feel like my role is academic as well as mentoring on personal problems. So I guess that's a little bit about

everything." Lily attempted on numerous occasions to conduct programs that would

foster and academic atmosphere within the community and she often described these as

successful, good student attendance and apparent interest:

> I know probably my most popular program was the one with John. There was like
> thirty of them here for the review session for class and for the second exam, they
> have two exams and a final, the second exam I talked to John again see if he could
> come in again but he couldn't because he had an internship and he was really
> busy that week. Um and they asked me 'Oh, is John coming in?' and I was like I
> already asked him and he can't. And you know I felt bad, so I asked him again.
> And he was like I really, really can't. But, um, like they reached out to me and
> bugged me about it. And I am a part of their group chat like they kept texting
> 'Lily we got like twenty people interested like people from other floors tell him to
> come!' I was like guys he can't he has stuff for like himself to do.

Having attended the first study review session it was easy to see that there was certainly a

need for the Teaching Assistant to come in to the community and review the lectures in

preparation for the exam. Nearly thirty people were in attendance and all chairs were

filled. People were sitting on the floor taking notes at John reviewed questions that could

possibly be on the exam. This first review session was set up entirely by Lily. When

asked if the students had approached her asking her to have one, Lily stated that she was

actually friends with the TA and thought it might be beneficial so she decided to try it

out.

Something that was often forgotten was that Lily was still a student herself, a

sophomore. When she was asked if she believed the community affected her academics,

Lily spoke about a different type of accountability – that of time management:

> Um I don't know. It hasn't negatively affected it. If anything it has taught me
> more about time management and helped me in my opinion. Like I don't know if
> there is a definite positive or I mean my G.P.A. was down a little bit but I am also
> taking harder classes, it just comes with that kinda of stuff so I don't think it has

anything to do with the LLC. But when they need me, I have to be there for them, and balancing my time is now so important.

Other students spoke of Lily as being a resource, specifically because she was a sophomore student within their major or at least their college of study. Carey was able to capture this sentiment when she was asked if she had had the opportunity to connect with her Peer Mentor:

> Um, it's good to know you have somebody to go to just in case. You can always go to your RA, but having a Peer Mentor is a little better. It is a little more personal. Especially because she is a sophomore and related a little bit more to us more. Lily's focus is really for us. She is my buddy. That is like; if you really need something that is the first person I would go to. I do talk to Ashley like a regular person. I don't see her as often.

Other members of the community also spoke of Lily as a resource, specifically when it came time to scheduling classes and picking professors. Colin was one such respondent, "Yeah, especially around when I was scheduling all my classes. She was a big help in explaining everything, like what course she thought would be better for us to take and explaining some of the professors that she has had." Colin was asked to elaborate on this statement and asked he had also connected with his advisor during this time, "I tried but wasn't really helpful. I got an email back saying 'whatever'."

A final comment was made by Amy when asked about whether or not she had interacted with her Peer Mentor. Amy stated, "She's just like another year like older so she has more experience in that. She had the same teacher I had too. We asked her questions about things like scheduling and certain classes. Things like that." However, when asked to expand upon her relationship with Lily, Amy commented that there was a sort of divide between whom Lily was closest to, "But she's, I think, an accounting major

so like it's not like, she's bonded really quickly with the other accounting majors um in our hall, so you know." What is most interesting about this is that Lily was an International Business major. However, it does show that the students noticed who the leaders on the floor were closest too.

Outside of the interviews, one observation was conducted while Lily held individual advising meetings with the students. She had an index card with information for each student and also a printed version of all the courses that were necessary or their major versus what they had already taken. She set up approximately twenty minute appointments with any of the students who had wanted her assistance. Aside from Colin stating that Lily helped during course selection time, no other student spoke of this assistance, even though more than half of the community attended these meetings and several of these attendees were respondents in this study. As noted above, they spoke of the social activities that Lily, Ashley, and David put on but rarely spoke to the academics, even when prompted.

RA as a Resource

Although the Resident Assistants specific job responsibilities were more about building community, ensuring that residents adhered to the code of conduct, and help with transition, the RAs within the living learning community were also focused on assisting academically and tried to hold their residents accountable throughout the entire year through programs, conversations, and checking in on them.

Ashley spoke most about her role with the academic component within the community but also spoke of the unique relationship that she felt with her residents due

to also learning from them. When asked if she believed she felt an academic impact from

living in the community she stated:

> I think it helps a lot. Like I have had classes with some of my residents, like the
> Gen Ed classes and sometimes they are helping me rather than me helping them.
> So I think it helps me a lot with my, I guess, academic success and my
> professional development. Cause like I did an etiquette dinner and with me
> researching all that stuff for them it is helping me also. So even with the
> programs I'm still learning something while I am teaching them something.

Later on in the semester she continued to expand upon this connection of growth within

herself and her residents:

> I think, I think it affects me a lot when I bring in certain people to do
> presentations for them. Like we did a study abroad presentation and that right
> there, I was learning the stuff for some of these trips I can take. So I think when I
> make programs, when I invite people, when I do basically these programs and
> when I live with certain people, I don't necessarily know all of them . I just try
> and take the experience I have and share it with them, but they are also teaching
> me at the same time. Like they open up opportunities for me. I am helping one of
> my residents get a job, at the same time some of my residents already have a job,
> and they are like you can work here with me. Open up things. One of my residents
> does taxes. I am an accounting major and I don't know how to do taxes. So its
> things like that. They are teaching me just as I am teaching them.

Ashley also found it important to talk specifically about the way that she helped make her

students responsible for their own actions through networking within their majors and

joining organizations, even in the beginning of the year:

> Well, I think the best thing that I could do is to give them a better resource to talk
> to. So I persuaded a lot of them at the beginning of the year. I told them all to go
> to the student SPO (Student Professional Organization) fair. And that was just all
> of the organizations within the school of business. So it's organizations for
> everything, even public speaking, and I had three people in my hallway that
> wanted to do accounting but weren't very sure and I told them to come to my
> organization and obviously they thought it was for black people and I was like no
> we are based off of black people. And I think when they get to meet actual
> professionals and actually get to talk to them, whose job it is that's when they can
> better understand and see myself in this career and I think it's better when I

actually lead them somewhere to talk to people because I don't know anything about actuarial science, so I would send them to Mike. I don't know anything about entrepreneurship, so I would send them to someone else. I think its better when I send them to someone who can give them way better information then I can. Because they already had that experience they are already doing the profession.

Mike reiterated a great deal of what Ashley had to say regarding how he held the students within the community responsible through their own successes through networking:

One of my residents expressed an interest in the RISK department, which my major is a subset of, so I scheduled a meeting with him and the head of the RISK department to get an interview, I think they needed it for a class. And now the head of the RISK department talks to me at meetings every time I see him in the hallway we talk about something and it's really cool. But they also they messed up one of my grades I had a self study risk management course last semester and he knows me by name and got it switched.

Mike also talked about the basic questions that he was able to help with stating that, "A lot of them come to me with questions about majors and classes and professors and I always, I think, I give good advice and they usually take it and they are usually happy with it so, like I said, it's good advice." As Mike continued to explain the advice that he gave, it continued to focus on "general things" revolving around being a business major.

Although the RAs had a great deal to say about their academic relationships with students, the students also contributed to this conversation. Amy was the most vocal in stating how Ashley helped her with coursework and staying on track. Amy stated, "Yeah, we had our GenEd together last semester so we would always like go in the morning. She helped me like figure things out because it was like my first big lecture. She helped me with homework and stuff and when I did the research paper because she

lives next door to me." Dina also echoed this feeling of being helped, even though she did not have any specific classes with either of the RAs, stating, "Yeah, she offers help and I go to her with questions or help with assignments." Ryan also stated that he would go to Ashley or Mike for assistance stating, "They answer questions for me and always just being there. They will be like, 'Oh, that class is really hard, or it's easy just do it, or look here where to go.' Things like that. So they definitely, on an academic level, they definitely influenced me."

After the participants were interviewed for the entire year, those three quotes were the only three specific quotes about how the RAs connected with the residents academically. The larger question revolved around whether or not the living learning community, in any way, affected the participant academically and only those two students mentioned the RA.

Community as an Academic Motivator

While the students in the study sometimes had a difficult time describing the academic importance of the Resident Assistants, they had very little difficulty in realizing that their peers could act as motivators in ensuring that they not only finished their work, but also strived to be the best that they could be academically.

When asked if the living learning community affected their academic endeavors several of the participants gave examples of how the other students specifically helped them. Dina was able to articulate the motivation that she felt in one short sentence stating, "Yeah, because, you know, you're motivated that everybody has the same goals, so work gets done here." Colin also shared in Dina's response talking specifically about

the motivation that he feels through living in the LLC stating, "They kinda of drag me to do better just because you know, it makes you feel, you know, kinda bad about yourself when you're sitting there watching TV and everybody else is studying or doing homework or whatever. You can't really skip it and not do it. It kind of forces you to do it. There is always someone saying, 'Hey, let's go to class.'"

Amy was even more grateful for being in the living learning community as she attempted to navigate between being a cheerleader and being a student. When asked if the living learning community affected her academic experience, Amy realized just how big of an impact her decision to live in the community had on her academics,

> Yeah. It helped a lot last semester, when I was cheerleading, because then I came home and she (her roommate) was like, she grabbed my computer and I am exhausted she pulled up this and was like, 'Here these flash cards for the test we have tomorrow morning.' And was like this is how you are going to study. Like just do these.

Other members of the community believed that their greatest benefits came from simply having classes together and being able to rely on each other or even share books throughout the semesters. In response to how the LLC affected her academically, Riley stated, "My roommate is also in International Business and we have some of the same classes so we can like study together and prepare for our quizzes and test." Colin agreed with Riley when he was asked about the affects stating, "There are so many people around with the same classes. So the group studying helps." The RAs noticed this studying as Mike puts it:

> This, this study lounge is filled, like you can tell when there is a test in one of the classes they have together because the tables are filled with their computers and they are helping each other. I know in Econ they were helping each other because they made flash cards and they were doing a game in Law. We had the Law TA

come in for their class and they wanted him to come in again but he couldn't because of conflicts in his schedule and they studied together for it.

Mike expanded upon this observation as he mentioned the assessment cards that the RAs had to give out at the end of each of their programs and a general questionnaire at the beginning and end of the year. As he was typing up the cards he mentioned that they asked, "What is a benefit of the LLC? Most of their answers were 'you have people to go to help. Because you are in the same classes together so you have resources with you.'" Ryan articulated this even more as he answered the question regarding how the LLC affected his academics stating, "Yes, because we all are similar so we all study together. Even though I am not a business major I have to take Macro Economics and I have to take Human Resources Management – all these different classes they had to take. So when I have questions about it I definitely go and knock on their doors and be like 'Hey how do I do this?'"

On the other hand, some of the students who were in the LLC and were not business majors had a difficult time studying with other members of the community. When asked if the LLC affected his academic performance Ryan could see some positives, but regarding studying, he stated, "No. Not at all. I am the only STHM major so I am the only one in my classes.

Although she was a business major, Mary also had difficulty studying with other members of her floor as she did not like being associated with them on most occasions. When asked about the business class that the majority of the community attended, Mary was quick to state that she did not sit with other members of the community stating, "Oh yeah! They're like a cult. I sit with one other girl; she's actually my suite mate. We

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actually sit in the front. They sit in the middle center. You can't miss them." Carey and

Riley were similar in their notions about studying and interacting with the rest of the

community. Carey and Riley were suitemates and later roommates and asked about their

studying habits both spoke of being "easily distracted" and "needing to study on their

own." However, if they did have a question they admitted that they went to their other

suitemates rather than venturing out onto the floor and asking for help.

Others mentioned the community helped by getting them more involved and

pushing them to network with others. Colin stated:

> Definitely, um it got me involved in a lot more stuff. It got me meeting a lot more
> people I wouldn't necessarily meet otherwise and it got me doing stuff like SPOs
> and all that. It kept me on top of my course work as well because everyone else
> was like 'Hey we go this test to do, let's get a study group or let's get this
> homework knocked out and stuff like that.

Lily also noticed how the community helped in networking when she was asked how she

believed the LLC was doing:

> Um, they definitely have networked a lot through each other like found
> opportunities because they are all a part of those business professional
> organizations. And I don't know, they get talking about it and they're like, 'Oh I
> forgot about that, you know like when did you hear about that?' Like if someone
> missed something. So they definitely had opportunities like that. Um they learn
> about general things in the business school that's going on. So like they got to
> take an exam before they take a class and they're like, 'Oh, I know someone that
> took it.' So they get together or they talk about what they should study based upon
> someone that took it.

Conclusion

Whether through flashcards, studying, going to class, reminders, or answering

questions many of the participants spoke of the motivation that they felt throughout the

entire year while living with the community. While some of them struggled, it is

important to note that those that were business majors and those that appeared passionate about their majors seemed most vested in allowing the community to act as a motivator. For the most part, these students had taken the initiative to sign up for the community as a means of getting to know business majors and jumpstart not only their transition into college, but also preparation for the business world.

Theme Four: Sense of Exclusivity

Theme four emerged later in the study as the students had an opportunity to truly bond with each other. The students' overwhelming sense of exclusivity, positive or negative, is perhaps one of the best examples of the creation of a community amongst the participants. Both socially and academically, the students found numerous occasions to answer the questions allowing the researcher to know that they thought of their community as better than others and that they prided themselves on this belief.

Choice of LLC

While the majority of the references to elite status amongst the LLC were focused after the students had been in the community for a period of time, the beginnings of this exclusive mentality actually began quite early in the study, and perhaps even before the students had come to live in the hall. One of the first questions asked why the students had chosen to live in a living learning community, and as above described, many of the responses focused around attending Open Houses and familial influence. However, some

students were not shy in offering that they chose the LLC as a last resort, after a less than favorable residence hall was offered to them.

Carey was perhaps most direct in stating her dislike for her other options, "Well it was between the living learning community and living in the worst dorm on campus. I could not do that. So I said, 'Oh well. Let me try it.' I mean it won't hurt." Ryan also spoke of the possibility of getting a worse living arrangement and the confusion that was a part of the selection process stating, "Originally, I signed up for a better hall and then I ended up getting in to a worse one. And then my parents told me to go join an LLC and they did not have one for STHM (School of Tourism and Hospitality Management). So I joined the business one and here I am." Finally, Dina was able to also capture the notion that the living learning community, at least the accommodations were much nicer than some of the other residential options. When asked about some of the benefits she experienced by living in the LLC, Dina stated, "Well its benefits…I can't really explain it compared to living in M&T." M&T were two first year buildings set up in a traditional style, with approximately fifty students sharing a communal bathroom on the floor, as opposed to the LLC in which the students lived in suites and therefore only shared a bathroom with three other suitemates. When the other students were asked to further explain their convictions about wanting to live in a "better dorm" all spoke about the need for privacy and wanting a bathroom to themselves. The comparison between the living arrangements did not bring up safety, security, academic resources, or anything of that nature, but rather the amenities that one hall could offer over another.

Us vs. Them Mentality

The comparison between halls was only the beginning of the exclusive mentality, which became evident as the study progressed. Many of the students felt a sort of pride to being in the LLC and saw those who were not as inferior. The leaders on the floor were generally the first to notice this mentality and attempted to make those members of the community who were not part of the LLC feel more included through specific programs and personalized invites to events. These actions seemed to have little effect as the larger community did little to make the "others" feel included.

Ashley would mention this issue as one of the drawback of the LLC stating:

The only drawback that I do see just in the LLC not including the LLC, it's mainly the hallway because some people are not in the school of business and they got it hard because they feel like they are not in the community and it's usually in my half of the hallway. I have most of the LLC and then Mike's hallway is like half of the people are not so they don't really feel as discluded.

When asked to further elaborate on how this was making her residents feel, Ashley stated:

So I think those people are kinda, not necessarily shunned, but kinda shunned. It's like they have that one thing in common to start off with and that's why they are able to build relationships, so like if you are a student it's like it's not as easy for you to get into that relationship because you don't have that one common thing.

Mike also saw this happening throughout the LLC and commented on the selective nature of his residents when asked about the drawbacks of living in the community, Mike said:

Some drawbacks, you don't get to really see Maple outside of the business school. They stick together. Like if that's the one downfall of an LLC, like everything else is awesome that is though you get that instantly separate them and they like it they go it makes them feel special. So there is a little contempt I would say.

Lily showed more emotion as she spoke of the segregated nature of her community and

as she spoke of the drawbacks it was apparent that she was truly upset about the way that

the community interacted with each other. As she looked down at her hands and had a

true look of frustration or defeat on her face, Lily stated:

> The majority, they're really good friends, but that is also a drawback. I feel like
> that is probably the negative, even though they are such good friends, they aren't
> maybe as willing to branch out and meet other people. They are really welcoming
> because like other people come on the floor, but still it's like they have their
> group of friends, they are content with that.

She would go on to state:

> I really think we are like a family but um I feel bad for those residents that aren't
> in a LLC because I definitely, I know they don't feel a part of the group so I don't
> know. I'm glad that it's like moving towards their trying to get the entire LLC to
> be just business students because I feel bad for those that aren't part of it.

Aside from the leaders on the floor, the residents also noticed how segregated the

floor could become. Unfortunately, only those students who were officially a part of the

living learning community were interviewed for this study, so it is difficult to understand

whether or not students outside of the LLC felt the disconnect as the RAs and Peer

Mentor believed, but one student who definitely noticed the divide and spoke about it

from the first interview was Mary. Mary was quick to express her feelings as she stated:

> It's just segregated. I feel like we don't do enough. I mean I know some kids
> from different floors cause they like walk by, and hang out with a couple art
> students, and engineering students, they live in the same room, and there is like
> another student that lives with them and I'm like the art student. But around here,
> we are only supposed to be friends with the business majors.

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Dylan, who would transfer out of the LLC due to wanting a more private room and the ability to cook his own meals with the addition of a kitchen in another residence hall, shared his frustration with the state of the community as he said:

> Some of the benefits is having similar interest with all the people. But for me, all my classes are honors, so I don't have any classes with anybody on this floor. But like a lot of people, my roommates have three classes together. I think like the benefits of the LLC is that you're like living with people that are like in all of your classes and I wasn't in any classes with them so I didn't necessarily fit in with any of them.

Amy also commented on how the commonalities of many of the community members could be seen as a drawback stating:

> Benefits people are in the same classes as you, um same majors. Like they can help you with what you need. Same address same generally that kind of stuff. Drawbacks, if you're looking to meet different kinds of people I guess. There are not different kinds. We are all business students. We all think the same way. But if you are looking for somebody who is really artsy, and crazy, and hipster, and that kind of stuff you are not going to find them in the business LLC. You have to explore to make different friends with different interest like that.

Floor Dynamic and Building Connection

Other students who described their experience in highly favorable ways, did notice that one of the major drawbacks to the community was the exclusive nature, that they had helped to create, specifically within the building itself. The building was divided into four floors with four wings on each floor, except for the first floor which only had three. The community was only two wings on the third floor. When asked in his final interview about the drawbacks which he experienced throughout the year Colin stated:

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Some of the drawbacks is having your own little community. You don't really go outside of it too much. You aren't forced to make many friends outside of it because everybody is right there for you. Probably just because we are all in the same area we are not going all over the building to get to know people.

Mike was very much aware of the issues between his LLC and the rest of the building and was able to talk about it freely during his interviews stating:

If there is one downfall of the LLC it instantly segregates your group from the rest of the building and regardless of what you are going to say they get in their mind we are the business LLC, we are awesome, everyone else is different. They stick together. Like if that's the one downfall of an LLC, like everything else is awesome. Though you instantly separate them and they like it. They go it makes them feel special. Not that is really better but it's different from a certain view point, completely different, people that go to the art school are completely different they the people that go to the business school.

Riley reiterated Mike's sentiments when asked what kind of connection she felt to the rest of the building. Riley stated:

Not so much. I mean like a "hi" or a nice gesture maybe but not more like we are friends or something. Um, like I know like some people like on the second and the first floor I guess, and I'll hang out with them sometimes but not really, majority of the third floor is where I hang out with.

Conclusion

As the semester went on, the possibility of students outside of the business school bonding with students within the LLC became less and less, even as they continued to occupy the same space. Observations of events and programs continued to show the same students attending these functions, nearly all of whom self-identified as business majors and members of the LLC. Ashley, Mike, and Lily continued to talk about the

need to include the other students, but attempts at knocking on doors to give personal invites did not appear to work as the students continued not to take advantage of the programming opportunities. Some of the students within the LLC noticed this divide and commented upon wanting to make friends in various majors. Several of those interviewed spoke of the divide, stated it was a drawback, and then spoke of how lucky they were to be part of such a close knit group of individuals who all had the same classes and were able to help each other at all times. The development of community amongst these individuals was evident throughout their interviews and community observations.

Theme Five - Importance of Personality on Perception of LLC Success

Finally, theme five emerged throughout the entirety of the interviews, as the students not only shared their thoughts about the living learning community, but also shared their individual stories of their pasts, hopes for the future, and displayed their personalities in a variety of ways throughout the interviews and even more so in the observations. The observations, which were conducted within the same time frame as the interviews, allowed for a more nuanced and less self-conscious look at their personalities and their impact on their relationships with each other. As the participants became more and more comfortable with the researcher, opening up and sharing more about themselves the importance of their personalities' influence on their ability to benefit from the community became more evident.

Personality and Experiences

The researcher's first interaction with the community occurred when asking for permission to interview through the signing of consent forms during the RAs' first floor meetings. Even during this time, which was approximately 10-12 hours after the students had first moved in, it was easy to see that many of the students were at ease with each other. The students were sitting in the middle of the hallway holding numerous conversations, laughing, and being noticeably loud. Amy and Riley were at the first meeting sitting next to each other, talking and laughing loudly and even pointing at others on the floor. They were positioned close to Ashley's door and were also attempting to include her in their conversations. Lily was standing over the crowd, as if to show her authority, she was actually the one who quieted the group down for the meeting to begin. Mike was not present, as he was the RA for the other side of the LLC. After this first meeting, the researcher also attended Mike's meeting which was very different from Ashley and Lily's meeting. Ashley and Lily seemed excited about the ice breaker, smiling and showing enthusiasm, while Mike was hurriedly attempting to finish. Mary was loud from the start. She was talking to nearly everyone on the floor and showed no signs of being shy. She was laughing and smiling throughout the entirety of the ice breaker.

When handing out the consent forms about half of the students agreed to be interviewed, and the others just turned in blank papers, several of them mumbling about how they did not want someone knowing everything they did their first year. The students were informed that the researcher would be conducting observations throughout

the entirety of the school year at various times and in various locations, but that interviews would be selected out of those students who had agreed to help.

After that point, those that had consented to help were emailed and asked for availability within two weeks of that first interview and thirteen students responded. Setting up times with the students was easy, as the interviews were recorded right in their community. During the interviews it became apparent that the students had widely varied personalities even as they were all members of the same community and the majority was business majors.

Outgoing Personalities and Positive Experiences

When first interviewing Amy her focus was entirely on cheerleading. Amy spoke of missing community bonding in the beginning of the year due to constantly needing to be at practice and therefore the majority of her friends were on the team, at least at first. After about a week, Amy's thinking about her friendships changed. Yes, Amy was still a member of the team, but she had friends elsewhere. Even though she had missed the initial bonding experiences, Amy had classes with many of the members of the LLC and she worked with them to finish homework and study, but also primarily Amy could be seen on Friday and Saturday nights getting members of the community to go out with to parties around campus, specifically her roommate Riley. While several of the other students interviewed talked of a lack of communication within the building Amy was one of the few who spoke of friendships throughout. When asked about the connection she felt to the rest of the building Amy stated, "I have a bunch of good friends that live on the second floor and one of the cheerleaders lives on the fourth floor too, so I know someone

on pretty much every floor." Further, when asked how she made friends after having missed the initial bonding, Amy replied, "We recently discover this, but um a lot of the times the kids on our hall will be sitting outside and we will just randomly have a movie night and we will run back and forth in our hall and smile and talk to everyone and make sure everyone gets invited." Amy had no problem being the one to run up and down the hall inviting others to go out and have fun. Amy was rarely seen in the study lounge preparing for a test, but during game nights and on Friday and Saturday nights, Amy was a presence in the hallway. She did note that if you were looking to make friends from other majors, you would not find them in this business LLC. However, she did state that, "The benefits are definitely that you have classes with these people. It's easier because you're in those giant lecture halls and they can be so awkward with so many people in them. But when you walk in with such a large group, you own it."

Ryan had a very similar experience to Amy, without being involved in an outside activity. From day one, Ryan spoke of being the only School of Tourism and Hospitality Management majors within the community and how this major was not a part of the business school, but that he believe it could still be a good fit. When asked how he planned to make friends Ryan talked about wanting to someday run a hotel and how he valued the interactions that he hoped to experience within college while learning how to take on that life goal. Throughout the observations of events within the community, aside from the review session, Ryan was there and usually one of the centers of attention. He appeared to know everyone on the floor, even though he did not have classes with him. Ryan reiterated his thoughts of the floor on numerous occasions stating it was, "An open

door policy to everyone. I get along with everyone on my floor pretty much. We all party together. We all hang out together. I love talking to them." When asked why he believed that he had such an easy transition Ryan spoke of "knocking on people's door right from the bat" and making sure to introduce himself to everyone because he knew that he could make a lot more friends that way. He spoke on several occasions about how his future goals helped to guide him to be more and more outgoing as it was practice for the career path he had chosen. Ryan mentioned over and over the importance that he placed on meeting people that he would not normally meet by taking advantage of the programs and events that the Peer Mentor and Resident Assistants held on the floor, stating that these were a great opportunity for him to learn about things around campus, but also to make more friends.

Colin was also similar to Amy and Ryan and showed how his outgoing nature helped with the transition into the community, but also how the community helped to make it easier for him. Colin stated, "I went to that SPO (Student Professional Organization) fair right at the beginning of the year during welcome week. I joined them and stuck with them." As he was asked throughout the semester about his involvement he consistently spoke of how it helped him to meet people and learn more about his major. He also attributed some of the ease of his transition to the community itself saying, "Our hall is really living the Living Learning Community. We are all a lot friendlier with each other." Colin would describe his technique at making friends as completely dependent on his outgoing personality. He stated that, "Without going up to people and saying hi, this year wouldn't have been as great as it was."

Adverse Personalities and Seclusion

Not all of the community members were so openly outgoing. These were mainly the students who saw this as an opportunity to get away from parents and begin their own "grown up" lives. These same students often categorized the community as full of cliques, fostered by immature relationships which they did not wish to be a part of.

Mary stated from the beginning that she had moved so far away, originally from Connecticut, so as to distance herself from her parents, not that she disliked them, but she was eighteen and she was ready to grow up. Physically, Mary believed that she did not look like the other members of the community. To a researcher, she looked like a typical college student, but to Mary her desire to remain relaxed caused her to stand out on the outside as she did not like to dress up. She typically wore oversized clothing, did not bother to spend time on hair or make up and rarely cared if her clothing matched. As Mary continually talked about the differences on the floor, she was asked to explain what she meant by these differences. Mary explained, "It's just the kinda of person I am. I don't dress nice every day. I'm wearing a cardigan today and I was very proud of myself. So like, I mean, there's like a really huge difference from me and the kids in my hallway. Like it's just an aesthetic difference. Just like business wear and then me.

Mary also felt judged for her career choice. Mary was a business major like most of the rest of the community, however she did not want to go the traditional route expected of a Maple University business student and this caused inner conflict within Mary. Mary stated:

> If I had known the business school pushed big four on accounting majors so much
> I wouldn't have come here. I love where Temple is, like I love this city. It's a

downgrade from New York City, like a major place I applied. But the whole way they're like 'well you're going for a business major and you're going for accounting so like obviously you're going to work in big four.' No. Cause it's like you don't know me because you don't ask me like questions. Just because you want better ranking doesn't mean I necessarily want to do what you want me to do. Like you're not my mom. I mean and the like living learning community wise, I probably would not have I tried living in an apartment with just like random kids but like if I did the whole roommate sync search**,** like whatever that was, I probably would have gotten more of an artsy student to live with. Oh, we are all prepared for our futures. I'm like business and I'm still relaxed.

Mary would go into further detail pertaining to how her views on business created chasm between herself and the rest of the floor. When asked to elaborate on how she felt about the community in general Mary stated:

Yeah I don't know. I kinda really wanna stay here. I like it. It's just again like the whole people thing that I haven't like found a niche yet. Um yeah, I really wanna stay here it's just hard. Like back home I have such a like, not so much close because it's really big I guess really close knit fiends and stuff. And work was like my second family. Like if I wasn't at home I was there. They are like my parents. So that was like really hard for me to leave. I didn't realize how bad it was until I got here, in the sense like I don't miss it so much like I want to go home every weekend but like when things happen like I wanna go home.

As the semester went on and Mary's disconnection continued she also continued to talk about it stating explicitly that she "felt secluded." When asked why she felt this why Mary could only guess that it was because, as she put it, "I won't put up with their crap." Mary stated that, "It's just like a maturity thing. And like the disrespectful pranks that they do up on the floors." As the year continued to move forward Mary decided to sign a lease for a single apartment off campus because she could not stand to be in the same sort of community again another year in a row. As she reflected on the benefits of living in the LLC, Mary would state that as the year went on things got better as she took

the initiative to step out of the community and make friends of varying majors, even if she would not have chosen to live in the community again.

Carey mirrored some of Mary's sentiments about feeling excluded and not bonding with the majority of the building. However, whereas Mary was sometimes seen at programs and events sponsored by the LLC; Carey did not attend the programming that was provided for her. Rather, Carey stated that she worked best alone or in her room and that the community was not going to change that. However, Carey had a moment of clarity during one of her interviews as she stated:

> The drawbacks of it (LLC) is that you get to learn from and get to draw connection with people in your room but not really people in the rest of the community. Like I don't really talk to the rest of the people in the community. That's a drawback if you don't. If you don't participate you can't really get as much as you want out of the community. I can't blame it on the community.

Carey had roommate issues during the first semester of school and would then switch within her suite so that she could be with Dina as a roommate. This only led to further seclusion as the two friends no longer needed to be with the community, but rather could spend the majority of their time within their own room. At the end, as Carey was asked about the benefits of living within the LLC, she would give no response and moved on to the next question.

Conclusion

While the students within the LLC did not necessarily agree on their feelings towards the LLC it became apparent that the personalities of the students factored in to these feelings. In many of the cases, those students who had self selected to be part of the community had gone in to their living arrangement with a sort of positivity and desire get

the most out of their experience within the community. While other students, primarily those who had chosen on campus living as a means to get away from their families and start life on their own, saw the community as just another obstacle to overcome. Whether or not the students were outgoing or introverted did not seem to have any bearing on their overall feeling toward the community and its members, rather the largest determinant was how they felt about being a business major and the actions of the other students within the community.

Summary of Themes

As the themes emerged from the data one thing was very certain, the success of the living learning community depended largely on the individual and their views towards not only the community, but what they defined as success. Throughout the first theme it remained important to remember that the community was not made up of complete equals, but rather by students and leaders who needed to work together in order for the community to be successful. The second theme pointed to the true success that was found socially amongst the community and added in the transition of the first year students, something that was definitely seen throughout the research.   The third theme that of academic accountability showed that those students who wished to utilize the community to help with their academics had the opportunity to do so, even if not in a conventional manner. While there may have been little mention of GPAs or even faculty members, the determination that the community showed in helping each other academically cannot be discounted. As the research continued the fourth and fifth themes emerged almost together as the students, for positive or negative, began to realize that

their community was actually an opportunity at being elite amongst the rest of the

building and the campus as a whole. While some of the members were hesitant about

what repercussions might result from such exclusivity, the majority of those interviewed

seemed to enjoy the idea of being an exclusive community. This division was also

apparent in the fifth theme. As the personalities of the participants began to shine

through more and more, it became apparent that these personalities, which developed

long before the LLC, were as important as the people living there.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

In this study, I have focused on students' perceptions of the impact of participation in a living learning community, specifically by the use of student voice. Through studying one particular academic living learning community at a specific university, I was able to delve into the students' lives and descriptively portray and analyze their experiences, interactions, and opinions. The students were given the opportunity to speak freely about their experiences pertaining to the living learning community in general, and also with a specific focus on academics and social activities. The goal of this study was not only to show the effects on the individuals at this particular site, but also to add to the existing literature on living learning communities with the inclusion of student voices. The findings presented in the previous chapter will be further explained below in response to the research questions and the literature and theory presented in chapter 2. Once the explanations have been presented implications for practice and recommendations for further research will be presented.

Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

As noted in the Chapter 1 this study garnered responses and observations for analysis in answering the following research questions:

1. How do first year students perceive the impact of participating in a living learning community respecting:

   a. Academic success?

      b. Social activity?

2. How do students describe their engagement in college due to participation in

    living learning communities respecting:

      a. Other students?

      b. Faculty?

      c. Residence life staff?

Question one, the responses to the interview questions and the numerous observations show that the participants were impacted by the living learning community. Looking first to academics, the "traditional" impact was not seen. Students did not focus on GPAs, faculty relationships, or even retention specifically. Rather, the findings show that through the building of relationships within the community the impact academically was a sense of accountability. While researchers and administrators are often looking for quantitative findings as to how they can specifically show that a program or initiative is working for this study, my questioning was open ended and did not focus specifically on GPAs, but rather asked how they perceived the LLC to impact their academics. This research helps show a very personalized impact on academics. If a participant felt strongly about their major and about interacting with the other residents, then they were more likely to feel this sense of accountability which led to going to class, completing assignments, and preparing for tests. While those members who had a strong sense of personal understanding appeared to achieve more, even those students who had a difficult time fully acclimating to the living learning community were able to articulate this

feeling of accountability arising from the other participants truly pushing them to achieve academically.

Through programming, the residential life staff members were able to impact the students academically as they held study sessions and other academic based programs. The members of the community noted this as unique to a living learning community as the other residential options that they knew of did not have such programming. What they did not mention were specific grades, faculty interaction, or even successes related to academics. The answers to the questions and the observations were dismissive of academic success, even as they talked about learning.

Even after spending an entire year in the space, and observing at various times throughout the day and night, no actual studying was observed. As noted above, through the building of relationships academics became more of a social endeavor. Many did not individually prep for classes, rather the students spoke of studying together, completing homework together, and walking to class together. The students, who were more introverted in their academics, were also the ones who rarely participated in the living learning community or who did not speak highly of the benefits of living in such a space, but instead spoke of the need to study alone in their room or sit by themselves in a class. The motivation that the students felt living in the community was tied closely to the interactions that they had within the community rather than the desire to receive a specific grade. However, what cannot be discredited was how this motivation contributed to many participants taking advantage of opportunities that were connected to career focus. Many of the students spoke of joining clubs and organizations at the

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insistence of the student leaders on their floor or connecting with other students in hopes of helping with internship preparation. The emphasis on career preparation was highly visible in the community and the members continually held each other accountable in this regard. All of this aside, one must remember that a great deal of the impact of the living learning community was dependent on the individual's own prior perceptions about living in the community that led to their opinions and openness towards the other members of the LLC.

For social relationships, much of the "success" of the living learning community was again dependent on the students' personalities prior to moving in to the community. Students who desired assistance with their transitions and actively looked for a network of friends appeared to work to do so and articulated how these people helped with their own transition. However, as the year went on, these attitudes slowly led to an elitist attitude which caused divisions amongst the community as some members attempted to make new friendships or look outside of the major for companions. While some members of the community saw themselves as special because they were part of the business LLC, others desired these outside interactions. This caused a division amongst the community itself, as some saw the community as slowly becoming a family and others wished that there were more varying personalities within the space. As some members formed bonds through social events, both inside the community and out, for some of the participants this caused a divide. As relationships formed, the participants were very self aware of where they fell in relation to the "inner" circle. While all the

members of the community shared a common academic major, their varying personalities and expectations at arrival would play a pivotal role in the transitioning process.

The students' overall perceptions were that the living learning community did affect them both academically and socially, some more positively than others. However, when looking over the findings it becomes apparent that the students spoke more to the impact that they felt socially from participation in the community, as they saw the community as more of a social environment, than one truly tying academics to everyday living. While academics did play a large part in their daily lives, the community that they created easily lent itself to the creation of a social atmosphere. While the intended outcome of the community, by administrators, may have been to create an academically based space, what was created was more of a "family." There was no definitive evidence that the community acted to improve grades, but rather the social nature of the space allowed for interactions that helped to make the students, at least those who felt connected, more responsible for their academics.

Question two explores how the student participants described engagement with faculty, other members of the community, and residential life staff due to participation in the community. The first part of the question, relating to faculty, was the easiest to answer, as the students never specifically or even indirectly spoke of their relationships with faculty. While the RAs and Peer Mentor repeatedly spoke of the importance of getting to know professors, the students did not speak of interactions with faculty members at any time during their interviews. Also, during observations, aside from those within the classroom, no faculty members were visible. While the community was meant

to have an administrator, no faculty member spent time at programs or even inside the living learning community.

In comparison, the participants continually spoke of other students throughout their interviews. The idea of creating a family was something that many of the participants valued, avidly describing their close interactions. As the students searched for a place to fit in and assistance with transition to college, they were able to lean on each other, and truly create a community. However, as the year progressed, the possibility of students outside of the business school bonding with students within the LLC became less and less as the business students started to predominantly engage with each other. Again the exclusive nature of the community moved to the forefront as even those within the community began to feel segregated due to varying ideas or beliefs. Carey explained this throughout her summary of benefits and drawbacks of the community. When asked about some of the drawbacks, Carey stated that she had the opportunity to bond with those in her specific suite early on, but because she did not take the time to get to know the rest of the community in the LLC she felt as though she never truly had that experience because they had already created that family and were not so welcoming. Their personalities played a large part in the engagement opportunities, as those students who most felt at ease talking to others became the leaders on the floor. Students who preferred to be alone, ultimately became the outcasts, whether due to others or due to their own perceptions. As stated above, Carey chose from the beginning to spend the majority of her time within her room, due to her own issues with one of her suitemates. Mary also had a difficult time transitioning, as she stated, "I don't put up with their crap.

It is a maturity thing." While an outsider might see this exclusion and base it on the community, after a year of immersion, one can see that many of the divisions were mutual, or self-inflicted. While Carey and Mary believed that they did not fit in, no one else mentioned this belief, again pointing to the importance of personality and personal feelings within the community and its impact on engagement.

Finally, in when thinking about the leaders of the community, in some ways the LLC was built around the interaction with the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor. Having both male and female leads on the floor, who upheld their traditional gender specific roles, meant that students in the living learning community were able to bond with these leaders based on what they felt that they needed from them. Due to the close nature of the community the female leaders became somewhat motherly figures as they asked about the participants feelings and were there to help with personal situations. On the other hand, the male RA acted as a resource for academics. The Peer Mentor's unique situation of being only one year older than the community helped make others feel comfortable in coming to her with issues or problems. Due to specific programming, open door policy, and genuine interest in their residents the students within the community were able to truly engage with the leaders on the floor, many of whom believed this was special to a living learning community.

Findings in Relation to the Literature and Theory

As stated above, one of the main purposes of the study was to place the findings in the larger picture with relation to the current literature and theoretical perspectives.

The two theories utilized as a basis for this study were Astin's Theory of Student

Involvement and Chickering's Theory of Identity Development. They were chosen for

their potential predictive capacity. These two theorists provided a framework for both

developing and understanding the responses to the interview questions and the

observations.

Much of the results of this study upheld Astin's Theory of Student Involvement,

as the students spoke of investing time and energy into their academics with the help of

participation in the living learning community. This investment supports one of Astin's

basic components of the involvement theory that, "The effectiveness of any educational

policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase

student involvement." (Astin, p. 519) As the living learning community could be seen as

an educational policy or practice, there is importance in noting that according to Astin,

participation in the LLC should certainly increase student involvement in their academics

and for many it did.

For other students in this study, the theory was as predictive for other reasons.

Firstly, when looking back to the findings, the living learning community lacked many

components necessary to make it a truly effective educational practice. While the student

leadership and community members held others accountable, there was a lack of faculty

involvement and even business school involvement with the program. Instead, this

educational program challenged Astin's theory as the influence of individual personalities

or motivation of students within the LLC played a major role in overall involvement.

Secondly, Astin's theory failed to account for how a student could devote time and

energy to their academics while also devoting time to their social activities.   As the

students continued to devote time to their social endeavors these seemed to be what was

most impacted by the living learning community. While the purpose of the living

learning community was to increase student learning, this could only be done if the

students were willing to take some initiative. Thirdly, the impact of the living learning

community was dependent largely on student's perceptions and excitement prior to

entering the school year. Students' personalities factored greatly in to whether or not they

would choose to be involved. While the living learning community attempted to offer

effective educational programs, these policies could only be as effective as the

willingness of the participants. True involvement was very much an individual decision,

rather than a communal decision, and it was usually decided prior to the programs,

events, or community was even created.

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development differs from Astin's theory as it is

not so concerned with involvement but rather the changes that students experience as

they begin to mature. These changes in the students occurred at varying levels often

without uniformity in the level and degree of changes, socially and academically. Those

students who wanted assistance with their transition found numerous outlets for doing so.

They were aided in transition by student leaders and other members of the community.

For many, this transition included making friends, who would become like family,

finding a place to fit in on weekends, and even creating an exclusive community.

However, this study shows that while students were maturing within the community

socially, the living learning community provides an example of the inadequacy of a

policy or practice that does not provide specific means for students to engage with their professors. Students appeared unable to initiate these interactions independently. As college freshmen, the students appeared more prepared to construct an identity and become autonomous outside of the classroom, but not within. Chickering's theory predicted the findings of this study. He asserts that more specific programming must occur to assure student development and a higher level of confident autonomous initiative. As stated previously, Chickering believed that "because the college can control housing arrangements and the placement of students within the houses, it can create conditions that more effectively contribute to the freeing of interpersonal relationships and to the development of integrity" (Chickering, p. 221). Chickering's theory failed to account for the impact of specific activities, social endeavors, and personalities prior to engagement.

One of the goals of the literature review was to provide insight into gaps that could be filled by this study. At the completion of this study, the goal of adding student voice to the literature was achieved. The students themselves spoke of their connection to the living learning community academically and socially. As Kuh and Zhao found in their 2003 study, connections fostered in social and intellectual environments help to truly transform the students, and these connections can happen outside of the classroom. However, these two researchers believed that learning communities truly helped to forge a bond between student affairs and academics. In this study, the participants placed a much greater emphasis on the social aspects of truly living and developing as young adults within the community, rather than the academics involved in student learning.

Students expressed more concern and interest about where they fit in, who was part of their social network, and what was occurring on the weekends, over actual studying. While the idea of academic accountability continued to permeate the responses it was not as prevalent as the social aspect of the community.

Secondly, what many of the other researchers failed to mention or touch upon was the sense of exclusivity and the seclusion that other members of the floor, wing, or building could feel by not being members of the living learning community. This exclusion could also be felt within the community itself as members left majors or did not necessarily click with other members of the LLC.

Third, this study directly address the question of the quality and assignment of residence spaces as many of the students stated that they chose the living learning community based on the amenities that they would receive. With this knowledge, institutions must evaluate how students choose to live in a living learning community but also how the institution places an LLC within a hall. As has become apparent from this study, residence hall accommodations are of utmost importance to satisfaction of students.

Finally, much of the literature points to the need for a stronger connection and partnership between academic affairs and student affairs in order for living learning communities to succeed. The findings of this study confirm this need. No matter how much training and support the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor could provide, without the support of faculty and administrators, the success of the program will continue to be lopsided in favor of the social aspects of transition.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study can aid professionals when planning for future living learning communities. While more research must be done in order to delve further into the understanding of such communities, this study provides some insight into how to create more effective living learning communities. First, one of the components of the living learning community that the participants spoke of from their first interviews throughout the year was their relationship with the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor. Knowing that the participants attribute their smooth transition and many of their social successes to these leaders, more training is certainly necessary to ensure that these students realize the importance and value, and hence expectations, of their jobs.

Secondly, as the participants do look to these leaders for guidance in all areas, much greater coordination and interaction with the faculty within the business school should be undertaken. This research clearly demonstrates the need for an expanded role for the faculty. However, this role expansion cannot occur without explicit expectations and training for faculty members. Also in stating this need for faculty interaction there is a realization that this may be very difficult to achieve, especially with tenure track faculty members in a research university that does not provide any incentive or reward for extracurricular student interaction. This entire academic aspect of the LLC must be considered and reconfigured if the administration continues with the expectation of greater academic integration. Without opportunities being presented to them in some form, whether with faculty or administrators, this study continued to show that early adults will not seek out the opportunity to interact with the faculty. If one of the goals of

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the living learning community remains increasing student and faculty relationships, then more explicit and systemic faculty involvement will be necessary. Even after extensive training, the student leaders on the floor cannot act as a substitute for administrator and faculty involvement. Even as the Peer Mentor attempted to bring in Teaching Assistants, they were still other students and not professors. The university administration would have to commit to creating policies and practice to expand the role of faculty members to create greater interaction and reduce the perception of the figure-head standing in the front of the class, if they hope to impact the students on a personal level, or even if they simply wish to influence their lives.

Thirdly, residence hall placement must also be reconsidered by administrators. Many of the students said that they had chosen the community because they had heard about it from their campus visits and their parents believed it could be a good fit. However, others stated that they did not want to live in a worse dorm and therefore put their name in for the living learning community. Knowing this disparity, the housing office must work to fill the bed spaces with students who actually want to be a part of the living learning community. This more effective assignment could support the community in numerous ways. As the students are living in 4 person suites, if only two of the suitemates are part of the community, it is hard to for them to all benefit from each other. Second, those students who are living in the community, but are not part of the LLC, are forced to deal with the segregation that the community creates. The LLC, although creating a welcome inclusiveness for its membership, has the unintended outcome of excluding non-members, certainly undesirable in a suite or even a hall.

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On the other hand, many of the students stated that they would like to have interaction with more varying types of students and not just business majors. This is another issue that the housing office must address. While it seemed as though the business students were happy, for the most part, with living with other business students, it did appear as though they wanted more opportunities for interaction. Again, if not provided the opportunity it appears as though the students will not seek it out independently. Unless the student leaders or administrators provide opportunities for mingling, the students are not taking their own steps to integration.

The above recommendations do not touch upon the financial commitment involved with the LLC program. At Maple University, additional staff and resources are provided to the living learning communities to help foster success, and these require additional resources. However, these resources may not be as important as the characteristics that the students brought to the community. Established personalities, ability to transition, openness in forming relationships all came to be just as if not more important than the resources that the housing office provided. While the student staff on the floor played a pivotal role in the transitioning of the residents, their success remained dependent on the students' willingness to interact with the leaders. No amount of

financial resources could compensate for a self-imposed sense of segregation. Administrators and professional staff must look toward these findings to help decide how to move forward with establishing best practices, trainings, and resource allocation.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this study did have limitations, many recommendations for future research can be made to enliven and expand the conversation about living learning communities, specifically because of the importance they play in the connection between student affairs and academic affairs.

After looking at first year students and their perceived impact and engagement within living learning communities, it became apparent that the space itself, as well as the residents, played a key part in the transition and satisfaction that the participants experienced. A question for future researchers to ask is whether or not there can truly be a space in which living and learning coexist. Future research is needed to compare the satisfaction between living learning community residents and residents on other floors within the same building versus other building types. Do students all have the same desire, to fulfill their basic needs of living and once that is satisfied then they will begin to think about learning? Several of the participants stated that they "chose" the living learning community due to the nicer accommodations than other housing options. Further research is needed to compare suite style, apartment style, and traditional style residence halls to see if a living learning community's placement is as important as the residents within it.

Secondly, this study focused on first year students, as does much of the literature pertaining to living learning communities. Upper-class students who participate in the living learning communities provide another component for researchers to study. As

upper-class students struggle less with transition issues and can begin to focus more on academics and career choice, could living learning communities affect these students in a different way? Also second year students would have the opportunity to know more about what a living learning community truly entails and select their roommates, unlike the first year students who signed up because of a lack of housing or parental pressures.

Another component that is lacking from much of the literature is how students who live in the communities, but do not identify as members of the community, are impacted by the LLC. While this study recognized that these students existed and the Resident Assistants and Peer Mentor spoke to the difficulty of including these students, no effort was made to speak directly to these residents and see how the community was affecting them. Knowing that the living learning community is meant to act as an aid for students, if it is excluding some and making them feel out of place in their own living environment, this is certainly something to examine in greater depth.

Finally, this study was based solely on an academic based living learning community. In many other cases living learning communities are thematic, such as leadership, sustainability, etc. but they also provide the students the opportunity to take classes together and often are part of similar majors or colleges. Knowing that the other students acted as academic motivators, but not necessarily indicators of academic success, further research may be necessary to see if students participating in communities based around passion areas have a different level of success or engagement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on how the findings of this study reflect the literature, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future research. More broadly, this study adds to the already existing literature by expanding the conversation to include student voice when considering the impact of living learning communities on students. This study also showed that while the interactions with student staff and other students could help academically, by holding student accountable, the overwhelming consequence of the living learning community was the development of social ties and thus effectiveness. Finally, when thinking of this living learning community as a relationship builder, much of the relationships built were dependent upon previous personalities, willingness to open up and be communal, interaction with the staff on the floor, and ability to take initiative – all by the individuals involved rather than the community acting as a unit. Further the study showed that no amount of resources could force the students to make connections with absent faculty members and instead, when given the option, they decided to bond socially rather than academically with each other.

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