

Living Learning at BHSU

Recommendation:

BHSU should implement three Living Learning Communities (LLCs) for the Fall 2020 – Spring 2021 academic year.

Why:

With all of the recommendations from this subcommittee, there is a significant emphasis on integrating academic components into various educational experiences that take place outside of the traditional classroom environment. The integration of academic and social components into a student's academic life, increasing a sense of academic and social belonging, significantly increases the likelihood of retaining students (Tinto, 1993 as cited in Connolly, 2016).

“Living–learning programs are thought to “(make) possible the integration of the social, cultural, physical, spiritual, and intellectual growth of students in such a way that each complements the others”

(Adams, 1974, p. 89 as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011).

Living Learning Communities focus on integrating the different types of learning students engage in while in higher education, combining the academic, in-class education with the social learning and development happening outside of the classroom. An LLC is a residential community intentionally designed to bridge student's academic and non-academic lives, address specific learning foci, and ultimately enhance their university experience through community development, interactions with faculty, and fellow students (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990 as cited in Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). Student in LLCs have shown gains in the development of support systems outside of the classrooms and are more actively involved in learning outside of the classroom (Tinto, 2003). Learning communities engage students academically and socially to promote cognitive development, encourage new and different ways of thinking, and encourage a sense of shared responsibility (Spanierman, Soble, Mayfeild, Neville, Aber, Khuri, & De La Rosa, 2013; Tinto 2003). Learning communities ask students to take responsibility for their learning as well as their peers (Tinto, 2003), “being surrounded by ‘bright people’ and having the support to study promoted their academic success” (Spanierman et al., 2013, p. 322). LLCs continue to contribute to the university's support of marginalized students who benefit from supportive peers with understand and work collectively to overcome common challenges (Spanierman et al., 2013)

This integration of academic and social components provides students with opportunities to engage in more in-depth learning activities, “learning communities do more than co-register students around a topic. They change how students experience the curriculum and the way they are taught” (Gabelnick et al., 1990, as cited in Tinto 2003; Tinto, 2003). Students participating in LLCs have reported higher confidence in their critical thinking skills and increased enjoyment of in academically challenging work (Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006).

Almost all learning communities share one commonality, shared knowledge, seeking to connect shared social and curricular experiences to promote higher levels of cognitive complexity, which is hard to accomplish in unrelated courses (Tinto, 2003). Integration between the social and academic pieces of the student experience is vital to an LLC; the connections made and desire to integrate into the academic community are integral to a student's desire to remain at an institution (Tinto, 2000, 2012, as cited in Samuelson, Litzler, Staples, Smith, & Amelink, 2014). A direct link can be drawn between the implantation of LLCs and a student's transition and retention at the institution. LLCs provide space for students to engage with both faculty and subject matter actively and collaboratively, often combining different learning styles and approaches (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011).

Inkelas and Soldner (2011), in conjunction with data collected in 2007 by through the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP), identified 17 primary categories of LLCs. The list ranges from academically centered, to civically minded, to purely interest-based, to blended typologies. Within these 17 typologies, each category can be subdivided by size:

- Small, limited resources, with a significant residential life emphasis
- Medium, moderately resources, student affairs/academic affairs component, and
- Large, comprehensive resources, student affairs,/academic affairs collaboration (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011).

It should be noted that the authors of the study did point out that "bigger is not always better" (Inkelas & Soldner 2011). No difference was found between the large and small clusters of LLCs, but both the small and large clusters outperformed the medium-sized groups (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). Regardless of their programmatic and thematic structure, all LLCs are residence hall based programs.

To establish and maintain successful LLCs, there is seven principles, or best, practices educational institutions should consider carefully:

- Establish a clear vision and objectives – New LLCs should identify common goals, learning outcomes, and a clear mission for the learning environment.

Living-Learning Community
Program Themes:

- Civic and social leadership
- Disciplinary
- Fine and creative arts
- General academic
- Honors
- Sophomores only
- Cultural
- Leisure
- Political interest
- Residential college
- Research
- Upper division (juniors or seniors only)
- Reserve Officers' Training Corps
- First-year transition
- Umbrella (many themes under one banner)
- Wellness or health
- Women

(Inkelas & Soldner, 2011)

- Solicit campus leadership and support – Successful LLCs need the support of senior campus leadership, *champions* representing academic and student affairs divisions. Support should not stop ideologically and should include physical and financial support.
- Form academic and student affairs partnerships – Organizational structures should provide equal support (physically and financially) from academic affairs and student affairs. Shared values and mutual support should extend beyond the *champions* into upper-level administration.
- Seek and maintain faculty involvement – Faculty involvement can come in many forms, course facilitation, a residential position, shared governance, academic advising, student mentoring, are but a few examples. What is important is their presence, involvement, and level of enthusiasm, the success of an LLC often hinges on faculty involvement.
- Facilitate peer interaction, and a healthy residence hall climate – “LLC students’ perceptions of their academic and social residence hall climates were consistently one of the strongest predictors of several outcomes, including sense of belonging, the transition to college, and civic behaviors” (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011, p. 20).
- Integrate and access LLC activities – continuous improvement and success requires continued, and regular assessment (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011)

Researchers (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011) have extensively documented the positive effects of LLC participation in several areas vital to the student's experience and overall collegiate success. Several outcomes are present in those who choose to participate in LLCs.

Academic Performance

Stassen (2003, as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011) and Pasque and Murphy (2005, as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011) found that participation in LLC had a statistically significant positive impact on a student's first semester GPAs over those of their non-participating peers. While evidence about the positive effects of LLCs are numerous, there is research that has found little or no positive (statistically significant) effects on participation. These studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pike 1997; Purdie, 2007) focused on controlling for demographic traits as opposed to those who controlled for traits such as pre-college preparation and post-entry interventions (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011)

Academic Persistence

The conventional wisdom surrounding LLPs suggests when creating institutional environments, aimed at assisting students in navigating and integrating both academic and social experiences and creating strong bonds within campus community (Hummel et al., 2008; Schoem, 2004 as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011) are those conditions traditionally related to student persistence. While scholarship in the area suggests that participation in LLCs does not contribute to student persistence (Edwards & McKelfresh, 2002; Pike, 1997, Stassen, 2003 as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011), others have concluded that participation in LLCs allow students to access

resources, faculty, peer study groups, and other factors that contribute to overall student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Hummel et al., 2008 as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011).

Freeman and colleagues (2007) found that a sense of belonging in the classroom is associated with increased engagement in-class activities, positive perceptions of course content, and higher academic self- efficacy. Among a sample of second-semester students, Pittman and Richmond (2007) reported that campus belonging was linked to better academic performance, as well as increased self- worth. Both a sense of community and belonging have been associated with academic engagement and active learning among engineering students (Wilson, Spring, & Hansen, 2008). These, as well as other factors, point to social and emotional components that help build a sense of belonging and purpose for first-year students, making their large and often impersonal environments smaller and more intimate (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011).

Degree Attainment

Research indicates that participation in LLCs have a significant influence on the level of degree attainment of participants. Beckett (2006, as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011) controlled for factors that contributed to student success and participation in an LLC; when all factors remained constant, except the LLC participation, data shows a significantly positive relation between LLC participation and graduation. Similarly, in a secondary analysis of the data, Beckett (2006) limited the definition of attainment to “degree attainment within four years;” this analysis yielded almost identical results, showing a significant relationship between LLC participation and graduation. To further his results., Beckett (2006) analyzed LLC participation with “at-risk students.” His results indicated that LLC participation by at-risk students is more helpful than those without these risk factors.

Intellectual Development

Analysis of the literature is clear, no matter what aspect of intellectual development is examined, those who participate in an LLC report greater gains in intellectual development than their non-participating peers (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). In two different investigations, Inkelas and associates (Inkelas 2006a, 2006b) reported greater self-reported growth in the areas of critical thinking ability, application of knowledge, enjoyment of challenging pursuits, developing a personal philosophy, and personal knowledge.

Faculty and Peer Interaction

Studies suggest that those who participate in LLCs report greater interactions with both their peer groups and institutional faculty. When examining faculty interactions, several researchers reported findings that LLC participants report greater faculty involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pike, 1999 as cited in Inkales & Soldner, 2011), Even going as far as reporting that LLC participants report greater interactions when making appointments with faculty, asking course-related questions of their faculty, and having informal interactions with faculty before and

after class times (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003, as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). Examining peer interactions, Pike (1999) reported that LLC participants are statistically more likely to interact with their peers, those who are “like them” and those who are “different than them.”

College Transition and Campus Life

Researchers have shown that participation in LLCs help eases the transition to college. Students reported higher scores on transition scales, which include “ease of communicating with instructors outside of class (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). As previously mentioned, LLCs help provides students with a sense of belonging.

A large component contributing to a student’s sense of belonging is living in a residence hall, students have reported that residence halls were the most important place for them to start, build, and maintain this sense of community (Cheng, 2005). Residential student reports a greater sense of community and belonging than those who live off-campus (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996). Residence Halls provide students with opportunities to access on-campus resources and participation in extracurricular actives (Cheng, 2005). Research suggests that emphasizing hall programming and encouraging informal peer interactions (i.e., social interactions and eating together) increase a student sense of belonging in residential living communities (Spanierman et al., 2013)

The research is clear; LLCs can help students succeed in the collegiate environment. “Living–learning programs are thought to “(make) possible the integration of the social, cultural, physical, spiritual, and intellectual growth of students in such a way that each complements the others” (Adams, 1974, p. 89 as cited in Inkelas & Soldner, 2011).

What Should BHSU Do:

Introduce Three (3) Living Learning Communities:

Business LLC Thomas Hall, 3 rd Floor	Honors LLC Heidepriem Hall, 3 rd Floor	Outdoor Adventure LLC Humbert Hall
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Suggested Structure:

- Students living together centered around a common interest
- Students opt-in while applying for housing. Application is reviewed before placement is made
- Roommate assignments can be chosen or assigned
- Clustered class enrollment for FA and SP Semester (Comp I and II; Math; Biology; GS 100; General Education) (Tinto, 2003)
 - Two courses together – a writing course and/or current social problems (Tinto 2003)

- Course schedules and course offerings need to be confirmed with academic/faculty *champion*
- All course offering should be coupled with study groups (formal and informal)

Honors	
Fall Semester	Spring Semester
GS100	

Business	
Fall Semester	Spring Semester
GS 100 Speech (SPCM 101); Survey of Business (BADM 101) OR Tourism and Hospitality Management (THM 100)	ECON 201 HIST 112 (civic engagement) BIO 101 and Lab or Chem 101 and lab

Outdoor Adventure	
Fall Semester	Spring Semester
GS 100 HIST (Civic Engagement) Psych 101 OR Soc 101	Speech (SPCM 101) Into to MC (MCOM 151) BIO 101 and Lab OR Chem 101 and lab

- Residential Programming themed to coincide with interest group
 - Tied into the weekly themes for Orientation and GS 100 Curriculum
 - Implement a Residential Curriculum Model for programming

Suggested Staffing:

To be successful, LLC's require an academic faculty member and a student affairs professional working together in both content and pedagogy of the linked academic material (Tinto, 2003).

- Residential Staff
 - Hall Director
 - Resident Assistant
 - Coordinates with FC on programming
 - Peer mentor/upperclassmen involvement
 - Schedule study sessions – Integration of Course Content

- Registering students
 - Consult with Faculty Champion (1 meeting/month)
 - Compensated with meal plan (~\$110/week; 10-12hours/week)
- Faculty Champion(s)/Mentor
 - Two Champions/Community
 - Professor from one of their core, clustered class
 - The Champion is not responsible for the program/community but should have some buy-in
 - Assists with coordination of the first 6 weeks of programming with RA and HD

Honors	Business	Outdoor Adventure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Honors Orientation • Guest Speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Orientation • Guest Speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Orientation • Outdoor/Camp Fire Cooking • Ghost Town Tour

Challenges and Limitations

- Enrollment/Recruitment/Participation
- Specific Registration
- Students opting out - Landing pad for those who want to leave the LLC?
- Secondary LLCs to phase in after 1st year
 - At-Risk population (First Generation/Low-income)
 - Education
 - Elementary
 - Secondary
 - Fine Arts (photography/theatre/art)
 - Equity and Inclusion
 - Sustainability (connection to academics?)

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