

STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM: Committee on Living Learning Communities

Final Report

December 2014 – June 2015

Co-Chairs:

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Committee Charge:

1. Assess the University's current structures for living-learning communities. To the extent possible, this assessment will rely on already collected evidence.
2. Determine current strengths and areas for improvement in how the LLC's are supporting student success.
3. Determine current strengths and areas for improvement in how the LLC's are maximizing opportunities for collaboration and partnership across academic and student affairs.
4. Recommend changes in policies, practices, and programming to enhance the LLC program moving forward.

I) Assessment of Current Structures for Living-Learning Communities

a. Summary of Structure of LLCs at Iowa

- i. All Residence Hall and leased apartment spaces are designated as one of over 30 LLCs.
- ii. Currently 32 LLC's exist, with over 100 campus and community partners. Several new LLCs are in planning stages.
- iii. Current Structure / Types
 1. Department LLCs: LLCs that are linked to an academic department or program. Designed for students who have or will declare a major/minor in that department. This type of LLC provides a space for students to be a part of a community that will serve as their academic cohort during their years at Iowa. Current examples in People in Engineering, Journalism and Mass Communication.
 2. Niche LLCs: LLCs that are focused around narrowly defined interests. Designed for students who have clear and distinguishable interests, hobbies, and/or goals for their college experience. This type of LLC provides an extracurricular experience with a small classroom feel. Current examples include Iowa Writers, Honors.
 3. Inclusive LLCs: LLCs that are focused around broadly defined topics. Designed for students who are unsure of their interests, looking for a more traditional university experience, and may be less likely to participate in LLC activities. This type of LLC offers a curriculum of college success for a larger group of LLC students. Current examples include Hawkeye Pride.

- iv. Create supportive communities in which “academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular involvements are mutually reinforcing” and that reinforce the Iowa Challenge. (Phase Two Report, 2007, page 4-5).
 1. Ease students’ transition to college through small, focused communities that facilitate students’ social and academic integration into the larger collegiate community;
 2. increase student engagement in educationally purposeful curricular and co-curricular activities;
 3. increase student-to-student and faculty-to-student interaction on educationally purposeful activities;
 4. communicate to students the Iowa Challenge—UI expectations;
 5. help students build the foundational academic skills and acquire the habits and behaviors necessary to succeed at the college level;
 6. introduce students to campus resources that can support them;
 7. promote the development of collaborative learning and teamwork skills;
 8. increase student interaction with faculty and faculty interaction with students through both formal and informal venues;
 9. help students make cross disciplinary connections; *and*
 10. increase opportunities for the development of peer leadership
 - v. Outcomes
 - i. The *Phase Two Report of the Task Force on Learning Communities at the University of Iowa* (2007) defined outcomes as follows:
As a result of participation in LLCs students will:
 - (Know)
 - Be aware of University resources available to them
 - Understand college level study strategies and skills
 - Understand how college expectations are different from high school expectations
 - Learn how to form effective study groups
 - Be able to articulate the IOWA Challenge
 - (Do)
 - Actively participate in the LLC’s educational and social events (e.g. help plan or participate)
 - Collaborate with other students in the LLC to master material by working together outside of class on course assignments and by attending peer-led study groups
 - Discuss ideas from readings or classes with other LLC students
 - Establish social connections with other students in the LLC by participating in LLC social activities and events
 - Apply college-level study strategies and skills (e.g. time management, note taking) to their academic coursework
 - Interact with LLC faculty in formal (e.g. office hours) and/or informal venues.
 - Interact in positive ways with diverse students
 - Use campus resources as appropriate
 - Demonstrate the Iowa Challenge through their daily actions
 - ii. We have prioritized the following outcomes for all LLCs at Iowa to achieve:
 - Students will be aware of University resources available to them.
 - Students will be able to articulate the IOWA Challenge.
 - Students will collaborate with other students in the LLC to learn class material by working together outside of class.
 - Students will interact with faculty and staff in formal and informal venues.
 - Students will form social connections with other students in their LLC.
- b. What we know
 - i. Over 65% of students reported choosing their LLC because theme was related to academic or personal interests. Only 30% of students make their housing choice based on building/location, not LLC. (MAP Works)

- ii. 56% of students reported they met people with similar interests through the shared course associated with their LLC. (Spring 14 Survey)
- iii. 55% of students reported an increased sense of community through the common course (common course survey)
- iv. In focus groups when asked how the LLC increased their sense of belonging students reported the LLC shared course, LLC activities, and common interests with peers.
- v. Roughly 1400 students are pre-enrolled in a class with others from their LLC. 17/32 LLCs have a class associated with it.
- vi. The LLC selection and room assignment process can be intimidating and confusing for incoming students
- vii. RAs are crucial to making the LLC work. RAs who feel overburdened or do not have buy-in are a detriment to an LLC's success.
- viii. There are many partners across campus that want to be involved in the LLCs.
- ix. Residence Education and Sponsoring Units must work as a team.
- x. The various structures of LLCs make creating a program of one size fits all a challenge.

II) **Strengths and Areas of Improvement in How LLC's Support Student Success & LLC's Maximize Opportunities for collaboration and Partnership Across Academic and Student Affairs**

a. Strengths

- Provides opportunities for students, including RAs, to interact with faculty outside of classrooms.
- Develop interest based friendships beyond 1st year
- Shared courses model – shared experience
- Amount data collection
- Staff (human & financial capital)
- Fit with UI (smaller communities)
- Students move off campus but years later are friends with first year LLCs
- Peer support for each other
- Less alcohol because they are policed by their friends/community
- Protective factor (peers)
- Financial capital – everyone is expected to participate and we do not charge students to participate in LLC
- Positive change in the RA selection
- The academically based LLCs are giving the students the experience they need
- Lots of partners want to participate
- Retention to major
- Persistence to 2nd year students
- Students in the Arts tend to be arts participators and attend arts events
- There is a connectedness to the University
- Front loading event at the beginning of the academic year engages students and gets them involved and forms a community
- Connection with first year seminar helps with communication skills (Arts)
- Welcoming community for LGBTQ students (Arts)
- Students expect it will be an opportunity in their 2nd/3rd year for those who live on campus

b. Areas of improvement

- Limited housing so 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students cannot be in LLC – there is a desire for 2nd year students who want to stay in an LLC
- No systematic mechanism for partners to provide feedback regarding:
 - RA Selection
 - Who should be able to return to LLC in 2nd year
 - Programming model

- Structurally we do not have a strong staffing model that allows for communication between partners and residence education. Academic departments would like additional staff members who have time to commit to the LLC. Most often they mention a Graduate Student.
- Relationship between RA – sponsoring unit critical
- To some RAs, programming can be seen as an “add on” to their job
- Expectations and collaboration are missing
- Explaining to students what it means to be an LLC is fuzzy
- Are we too narrowly focused vs. too broad
- Forcing people to choose an LLC hurts the participation at events
- There are too many LLCs and it is hard to manage
- We are not strong in helping students with ADA issues
- Lack of vision and structure have hurt the LLC experience
- Push to apply to housing very early
- Marketing/message – we need to market it well
- Assessment is not always integrated in a timely manner – we need to make decisions using the data
- Staff need to begin work starting from the shared mission and vision
- Some LLCs don’t have a champion – i.e., a faculty/academic based partner that wants it to work

III) **Recommended Changes in Policies, Practices, and Programming to Enhance the LLC Program Moving Forward**

a. Recommendation: Create an Advisory Board

- i. Establish a regular advisory board, which includes LLC partners to have a shared-governance voice. This would serve as a way to better maximize collaborative opportunities through strengthened communication, as well as create an environment that supports a formal assessment plan. Formation of an executive committee was previously recommended in the Phase Two Report (2007, p.17) At this time we recommend membership include: UH&D Residence Education Assistant Director for Community Development, Admissions, Contract and Assignments, at least one academic partner, at least one non-academic partner, University College Assistant Dean, Academic Advising Center, an RA and a student from Associated Residence Hall.
- ii. The advisory board would review new LLC proposals and review LLCs that have low participation or are not meeting outcomes to see how the LLC can be improved or recommend it is discontinued. Additionally, the advisory board would share experiences with residence education and recommend possible improvements to the LLC structure. Residence Education will share all assessment data with the advisory board. The advisory board can recommend additional or improved assessment ideas. Residence Education would keep the advisory board informed of changes in housing that impact the LLCs.

b. Recommendation: Improved Communication Between Partners and Residence Education

- i. Have each LLC team work together to review outcomes and set any specific LLC goals based on the outcomes above. The purpose of this is not only for assessment but to guarantee all parties are working to the same outcome.
- ii. Host quarterly meetings to share developments with partners and campus interested parties and listen to concerns. Residence Education Coordinators should share best practices across LLCs. Possibly, create a monthly electronic update of what is happening across LLCs.
- iii. Create a method to evaluate LLCs and method to determine if they should continue or be disbanded.

c. Recommendation: LLC Expectations and Toolkit for Partners

- i. In recognizing the large numbers of LLC partners, and that those partners are not static and cannot all serve on the advisory board, creation of a concise and informative tool kit would benefit all involved with LLC’s. The tool kit should include:
 1. Roles, expectations, and responsibilities
 2. Mission, goals and objectives of LLCs

3. History of LLCs
 4. Student assignment process cycle
 5. Funding Info
 6. Res Ed Structure – where LLCs are and who are staff working with each
 7. Past assessment data and expectations for participation in and support of assessment of outcomes.
 8. Outcomes of LLC Program.
- d. Recommendation: Assessment Plan
- i. Continue to collect and utilize regular assessment data collected through Housing and University College. Housing, in conjunction with the LLC advisory board should define what data points are used in the annual assessment plan in reflection upon LLC learning outcomes.
 - ii. The Phase Two Report (p.15) provides recommendations for assessment that can be used as well.
 - iii. Advisory group shall review all data and suggest improvements as needed. Use 2012 data as baseline.
 - iv. Encourage individual communities to do own assessment on LLC and applicable community specific outcomes.
- e. Recommendation: Marketing messaging
- i. Follow through on the recommendation from the Phase II Report, “marketing is critical”; marketing more effectively and setting clear and accurate expectations for incoming students. It is important to craft a marketing message that supports open majors, while also appealing to students who may already be career-focused.
 - ii. Create a connection between academic programs and niche and inclusive LLCs whenever possible
 - iii. Improve the communication to new students about selecting LLCs and room selection. It is confusing and unclear to many. This causes a negative opinion of LLCs.
- f. Recommendation: Strengthen RA role as Important in LLC success
- i. Educate LLC partners on RA selection process and explore opportunities for collaboration. Focus group and survey feedback indicate that good RA’s make a difference in the success of an LLC.
 - ii. Create ways to involve partners in the selection process.
 - iii. Review and modify the residence education programmatic model to balance the LLC work with other RA responsibilities. Some partners feel the RAs are too busy to successfully create LLCs. The requirements for RAs need to be measured in time to see if what is expected is too much.
 - iv. Create a feedback mechanism for partners on RA performance.
- g. Recommendation: 2nd Year Experience
- i. Do further exploration to find ways to build a bridge from first year LLC’s to the 2nd year experience, in support of student success.
 - ii. Possibility of using participation for ability to return to campus housing.
- h. Recommendation: Add Diversity Engagement as Learning Outcome/Goal for LLC’s
- i. This was seen to be a gap in the scope of the learning outcomes by our committee. Current goals and outcomes are in the Phase Two Report (pp. 5, 14)
- i. Recommendation: Additional Resources Needed to Support Student Success and Maximize Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration
- i. Faculty Incentive, recognition to be able to recruit faculty for each LLC. This could be release from teaching load or monetary incentives.
 - ii. Graduate Assistants for sponsoring departments funded by the provost’s office/university college.
 - iii. Contracts and assignments in UH&D need adequate staffing and resources to market the LLCs. Staff in UH&D should be reviewed to insure they are staffed to accomplish the marketing and assigning of LLCs. As this report is being submitted staff changes are happening, so an assessment in the future is recommended.
 - iv. Look at process of LLCs/space assignment to assure students are assigned to LLCs that fit interest and academic goals. Prevent students who simply want to be in a building from being placed in an LLC they will not participate in. How to manage this needs more discussion and examination from UH&D Contracts and Assignments staff.

- v. Leadership and Strengths initiative. This committee met with the other SST group. We would recommend training on strengths be provided to partners. Leadership competencies should be linked to LLCs whenever possible.
- vi. Tie as many LLCs to academic department sponsors as possible. While it is recognized that students do not want all LLCs to be tied to majors, finding academic sponsors for LLCs whenever possible is desired so outcomes of interaction with faculty can be achieved.