

Thriving in Residential Learning Communities: An investigation of student characteristics and RLC types

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Session Outline

1. Introduction / Context
2. Institutional Profiles
3. Learning Communities and HIPs
4. Thriving
5. Research Questions
6. Methodology
7. Results and Findings
8. Implications for Practice
9. Limitations
10. Future Research
11. Conclusions
12. Questions







Intro/Context





Our Team:

- Residence Life and Academic Affairs Professionals
- Faculty in Residence
- Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice, a multi-institutional research initiative hosted by Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES

Institution Name	Institution Type	Number of students	Number of first-year students	First year living on campus requirement	Number of RLCs	Live-in Faculty in RLCs	Faculty Involvement in RLCs (not live-in)
Elon 							
WashU 							
The U of South Carolina 							
Rutgers 							

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Elon 	Mid-level Private University	6,196	1,698	Yes	32	8	70
WashU 	Mid-level Private, Research 1	14,049	1,812	Yes	10	11	50
The U of South Carolina 	Large Public, Research 1	34,731	5,851	Yes	21	1	7
Rutgers 	Large Public, Research 1	43,354	6,602	No	16	3	16



Intro/Context

Our Research Questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of RLCs that lead to student success and thriving in college?
- (2) What students within the RLCs are, or are not, associated with these desired outcomes?



High Impact Practices

High Impact Practices: Why do they matter?

- Can increase active engagement
- Can increase integrated learning
- Can result in gains in desired outcomes
- Can increase student success, persistence, satisfaction, retention



Examples of High Impact Practices

First-year seminars and experiences	Common intellectual experiences	Learning communities	Writing-intensive courses
Collaborative assignments and projects	Undergraduate research	Courses or programs that examine "difficult differences"	Service- or community- based learning
Internships	Study abroad	Capstone courses and projects	<i>From AAC&U's High Impact Practices (aacu.org/leap/hips)</i>



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Learning Communities

“Learning communities are high-impact instructional practices that engage people to work together toward a common goal—students working with students, faculty working with faculty within the same discipline or from different disciplines, or students working with faculty.” (Giesen, 2015)





Characteristics
of RLCs

Defining Residential Learning Communities:



Characteristics of RLCs

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- Participants live together on campus in a dedicated space



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Characteristics of RLCs

Defining Residential Learning Communities:

- Participants live together on campus in a dedicated space
- Learners share an academic or co-curricular experience
- Learners engage in structured activities in their residence that encourage faculty/peer interaction
- RLCs may have a topical or academic theme



Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) and Student Success

Research shows RLCs:

- Support students' ability to comprehend material and think critically
- Offer shared knowledge, shared knowing, shared responsibility
- Enhance student learning and persistence
- Actively involve students in the learning process in a collaborative (not competitive) manner



Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) and Student Success

Students involved in RLCs:

- Report higher levels of informal faculty mentorship
- Report a stronger sense of belonging & more academic/professional self-confidence
- Show shorter time to degree completion and enhanced intellectual development and critical thinking skills
- Have smoother transitions (academic/social) to college



Thriving in
College

What words or phrases do
you associate with
thriving?

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Thriving in College

Expanding the role of higher education to include student well-being (Schreiner, 2016)

- Holistic approach to student success
- Students being “fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally in the college experience” (Schreiner, 2010, p. 4)
- Sense of community and emotional connections help students thrive



Thriving in College

Students who are thriving in college ...

- Are much more likely to persist to graduation, perceive the tuition they pay as a worthwhile investment, and earn higher grades (Schreiner, 2013)
- Are more likely to be civically engaged and benefit the greater good and take actions that promote social justice (Schreiner, 2010)



Schreiner (2010) Thriving Model

Three key areas that contribute to student thriving and success in college





Schreiner (2010) Thriving Model

5 factors of Thriving

- **Engaged Learning:** focused attention in the learning process; making meaning in and outside the class
- **Academic Determination:** self-regulated learning, effort, time management and goal-directedness
- **Positive Perspective:** students' optimism
- **Social Connectedness:** positive relationships and friendships on and off campus
- **Diverse Citizenship:** appreciation of differences, making contributions to a community



Thriving Quotient (Schreiner, 2010)

- TQ - Validated Instrument
- 40 Likert Scale Items
- Demographic Questions
- Open Ended/Short Answer Questions
- Five Clustered Factors within three themes -- Academic, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal
- Approx. 20-30 minutes
- Distributed to over 7,000 students
- Approximately 3,000 responses amongst 4 institutions



Research Questions

(1) What are the characteristics of RLCs that lead to student success and thriving in college?

(2) What students within the RLCs are, or are not, associated with these desired outcomes?



Methodology

- Mapping Inventory Survey completed by 4 Participating Institutions
- Thriving Quotient survey Administered to 7,000+ students
- Linear Regression to determine correlation between RLC characteristics and thriving



Institutional Mapping Survey

- Institutional Mapping inventory survey utilized Inkelas's typology to categorize LLP themes e.g. academic, fine arts (Inkelas et al., 2008) -- 17 Program themes
- 87 RLCs at 4 institutions
- Various questions pertaining to characteristics of RLCs



Characteristics
of RLCs at your
Institutions

What 3 characteristics of your campus RLCs do
you think are important for
positive student outcomes?
(e.g Budget, Faculty Involvement, etc.)

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Institutional Mapping Survey

Leadership SA/AA and Funding

of Students

Budget \$\$\$\$\$

Incentives for Faculty

Live-In Faculty

Faculty Involvement

Student Staff Support (in addition to RA) Live in or Live

Staff Involvement

Student Composition

Spaces in RLC (academic, classrooms, maker space)

Course Linkages (co-enrollment, exclusive)

Co-Curricular (encouraged or required)



Results

- 3100+ responses across four institutions
- **Dependent Variables**
 - Background: Sex, Race/Ethnicity, First Gen, International
 - RLC: Budget/Student, Size, Faculty, Composition, Curriculum
- **Independent Variables**
 - 5 Thriving Factors: Engaged Learning, Academic Determination, Social Connectedness, Positive Perspective, Diverse Citizenship



Results

	Engaged Learning	Academic Determination	Social Connectedness	Diverse Citizenship	Positive Perspective
Female	++	++		++	++
First Generation	+	++	--	++	++
International	++			-	
African American				+	
Hispanic/Latinx					
Asian	--	--			--
South Asian	--	--			
Native					



Results

	Engaged Learning	Academic Determination	Social Connectedness	Diverse Citizenship	Positive Perspective
Faculty Involvement	++	++		+	
Opt-In Selection	--	++	-	-	
First Year RLC		++	++		++
Second/Third Year RLC	+	++			++
\$/Student	++		++	++	
Curricular / Co-curricular					
Physical Space	--				



Findings

Who is Thriving? Female and First Generation Students

- Strong positive correlations:
 - Engaged Learning (EL)
 - Academic Determination (AD)
 - Positive Perspective (PP)
 - Diverse Citizenship (DC)
- Consistent with existing literature (Ames et.al., 2014; Bowman, 2010; Enochs & Roland, 2006)
- RLC contribution to finding unclear



Findings

Who is not Thriving? Asian/South Asian students

- Strong negative correlation
 - Engaged Learning (EL)
 - Academic Determination (AD)
 - Positive Perspective (PP)
 - Overall thriving
- Research reveals problematic college experiences for Asian students (Poon et.al., 2015; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Wong & Halgin, 2006)
- RLC contribution to finding unclear



Findings

Faculty Involvement correlates with higher Thriving

- Strong positive correlations
 - Engaged Learning (EL)
 - Academic Determination (AD)
 - Diverse Citizenship (DC)
- Confirms existing literature on faculty interaction (Inkelas et.al., 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2004)
- Faculty construct: incentives for participation, involvement rating, live-in



Findings

Curricular/co-curricular aspects are uncorrelated with Thriving

- No Thriving factors correlated with links to RLC-linked courses/co-curricular experiences



Findings

Financial investments are related to higher Thriving

- Positive Correlations:
Engaged Learning (EL)
Social Connectedness (SC)
Diverse Citizenship (DC)
- Dollars spent per student is primarily program budget (e.g., food, community building, events)



Implications for Practice

- Nature of faculty involvement vs. Teaching Courses
- Financial resources matter
- Pay Attention to special populations:
Asian/S.Asian
First Gen/Women



Limitations

- RLC composition based on class year
 - Contrasting institutions
 - Add more institution types
- Mixed results for international students
- Limited in scope to thriving within residential learning communities
- Limited to 4 institutions, all of which have at least one residential college



Opportunities for Future Research

- Demographics of faculty leadership - impact of gender, race, and/or academic discipline of the faculty and influence on specific populations
- Deeper dive (faculty, resources) with qualitative studies
- Focus Groups with targeted populations (students, faculty, student affairs)
- Include non-RLC students for baseline
- Include more institution types



Conclusions

- Faculty involvement matters for students' well-being, even more than teaching a course for the RLC
- Faculty involvement is more successful with proper funding and/or recognition
- Investment in RLCs (in terms of budget) leads to increased thriving among certain demographics
- RLCs differ significantly and can personalize the navigation path for thriving



Thank You!

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References: <https://tinyurl.com/RLCreferences>



Questions?