Residential Learning Communities: 
What We Know 
(and More Importantly) What We Have Yet to Learn

2019 Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice
Center for Engaged Learning | Elon University

Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, PhD
Principal, Hereford Residential College
Founding Principal Investigator, National Study of Living-Learning Programs
A note of gratitude...
A little about me

• Former Principal Investigator of the National Study of Living-Learning Programs

• Currently Principal of Hereford Residential College
Outline of remarks

• Current state of residential learning communities (RLCs)
• Impact of RLCs on students
• Recent trends in RLC conceptualization
• Where to next?
Current state of RLCs

- How many RLCs exist?
- Profile of RLCs (using the 2007 NSLLP)
How many RLCs exist?
Depends on who you ask!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>617 RLCs at 46 Universities in the US</th>
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<tr>
<td>L/L Programs Survey</td>
<td>ACUHO-I RLC Database</td>
<td>Residential College Society</td>
<td>Collegiate Way International</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...undoubtedly, all of these figures are underestimates
Profile of RLCs using the 2007 NSLLP
Data source:
National Study of Living-Learning Programs (2007)

4 sources of data:

• Baseline survey, 2004 & 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>LLCs</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>23,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>22,258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Longitudinal follow-up, 2007

• 4 campus case studies, 2008

• RLC survey, 2007

RLC survey:

• Questions regarding general information about RLCs

• Completed by RLC staff

• Includes 617 RLCs

• Note: data is over a decade old
NSLLP 2007
Typology of RLC themes

• Civic & Social Leadership (4 types)
• Disciplinary (12 types)
• Fine & Creative Arts (2 types)
• General Academic
• Honors
• Cultural (3 types)
• Leisure (3 types)
• Political Interest
• Residential College
• Research
• ROTC
• Sophomore
• Transition (4 types)
• Umbrella
• Upper Division
• Wellness/Health (2 types)
• Women’s (2 types)

Note: Based on NSLLP data on over 600 LLCs
## Size and configuration of RLCs

### Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th># of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median size of program</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal size of program</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with over 1,000 students</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Configuration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Configuration</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entire residence hall</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portion of 1 residence hall mixed with non-RLC students</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portion of 1 residence hall mixed with students in different RLCs</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across several residence halls</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (most common answer: sprinkled around res hall)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RLC funds and budget sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funds</th>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programming budget</td>
<td>$21,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming budget</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLCs with no budget</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLCs with budgets</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under $1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NSLLP 2007
RLC oversight

- Housing/Residence Life: 46%
- Combination Student & Academic Affairs: 31%
- Academic Unit: 15%
- Other: 8%
NSLLP 2007

Is RLC selective?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific major</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSGPA or standardized test scores</td>
<td>14-15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NSLLP 2007

Top 5 RLCs goals/objectives

1. Experiencing a smooth academic transition to college 56%
2. Feeling a sense of belonging to the institution 54%
3. Demonstrating openness to views different than one’s own 52%
4. Learning about others different than one’s self 50%
5. Experiencing a smooth social transition to college 50%
Faculty involvement in RLCs

- 23% had no faculty involvement at all
- 64% included only 1-3 faculty members
- 52% of RLCs did not offer any academic coursework

Most common forms of faculty involvement were:
- Teaching
- Conducting workshops
- Mentorship
- Academic advising
Residence hall staff involvement in RLCs

- 85% utilized residence hall staff in some way

- Most common forms of staff involvement were:
  - Administrative tasks
  - Living in community
  - Attending social events
  - Supervising student staff
  - Handling community and/or disciplinary tasks
NSLLP 2007

Co-curricular activities in RLCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required:</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Group projects</th>
<th>Team building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optional</th>
<th>Cultural outings</th>
<th>Multicultural programs</th>
<th>Study groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However...

• The NSLLP data is over 10 years old

• How many RLCs exist today, and what do they look like?
Impact of RLCs on students

• Astin I-E-O model
• Student outcomes associated with RLC involvement
• Student environments: RLC vs. comparison sample
• 2 new studies (NSSE & ACREO)
RLC research

Astin’s I-E-O model
# Student outcomes associated with RLC involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student outcome</th>
<th>Published work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>Stassen (2003); Purdie (2007); Hurtado, et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Pike, et al. (1997); Purdie (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual development</td>
<td>Pike (1999); Inkelas, et al. (2006a, 2006b); Kohl (2009); Mayhew, et al. (2018)*; Hurtado, et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty interaction</td>
<td>Garrett &amp; Zabriskie (2003); Inkelas, et al. (2006b); Hurtado, et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer interaction</td>
<td>Pike (2009); Inkelas, et al. (2006a); Hurtado, et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Authors in orange text utilized NSLLP data; * mixed positive & negative results*
Student **outcomes** associated with RLC involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student outcome</th>
<th>Published work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition to college</td>
<td>Inkelas &amp; Associates (2004); Inkelas, et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence hall climate</td>
<td>Inkelas &amp; Weisman (2003); Inkelas, et al. (2006a, 2006b); Johnson, et al. (2007); Hurtado, et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced binge drinking</td>
<td>Brower, et al. (2003); Brower (2008); Mayhew, et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity appreciation</td>
<td>Inkelas, et al. (2006a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student environments: RLC versus comparison sample
(From the NSLLP 2007 data)

Discussed academic issues with peers
Discussed socio-cultural issues with peers
Faculty mentoring
Course-related faculty interaction

All mean differences $p < 0.001$
Student *environments*: RLC versus comparison sample
(From the NSLLP 2007 data)

### Residence Hall Resources

- Use of academic advisors
- Attendance at seminars/lectures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RLC sample</th>
<th>Comparison sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1x or more per week</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Perceptions of Residence Hall Climate

- Climate is academically supportive
- Climate is socially supportive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1x or more per term</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1x or more per month</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All mean differences *p* < .001
However...

• Strongest student outcomes were related to traditional activities most closely associated with being a new college student:
  ✓ Reducing binge, or excessive, alcohol consumption
  ✓ Interacting more with fellow peers and faculty
  ✓ Establishing a sense of belonging to the institution

• Positive, but low effect sizes, for other outcomes with loftier goals:
  ✓ Intellectual development
  ✓ Diversity appreciation
  ✓ Love of lifelong learning
Study using NSSE data:

Hurtado, Gonyea, Graham, & Fosnacht (2019)

• Utilized 2018 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data

• 76 four-year institutions

• Over 21,000 first- and second-year students
  • 17% participated in an RLC

• Definition of RLC: took at least 1 class together and participated in common educational and social activities

RLC contributions to student outcomes  
(Hurtado et al., 2019; NSSE 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective &amp; integrative learning</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions with diverse others</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-faculty interaction</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of interactions</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive environment</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived gains: Co-curricular</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived gains: Academic</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing impact: Academics</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported grades</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=12,104-12,355; Model controlled for several student inputs and environments

** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$
## Student environments: RLC versus non-RLC sample
(Hurtado et al., 2019; NSSE 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>RLC sample</th>
<th>Non-RLC sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended a class</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with faculty member</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with academic advisor</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used academic support services</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studied/worked on project with students</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended social or co-curricular activities</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended diversity-related activities</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended health &amp; wellness activities</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in none of the above</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All differences $p \leq 0.001$; all small to moderate effects
Study using ACREO data

Mayhew et al. (2018)

• Utilized 2017 & 2018 Assessment of Collegiate Residential Environments & Outcomes (ACREO) data

• 8 four-year institutions

• Over 13,119 students (22% response rate)

• Study included broad rage of academic programming in residence halls, classified as Academic, General, or Theme LLPs

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/588b8364579fb3ba0282970e/t/5bbb7073e5e5f0f20c6dedc2/1539010677702/2018+ACREO+Report.pdf
Major findings from ACREO

**LLP students overall:**

+ Sense of belonging
+ Campus civic engagement
- Binge drinking
+ Intervene in bystander situation

**Specific LLP types:**

**Career self-efficacy:**
Academic LLP > General or Theme LLPs

**Major self-efficacy:**
Theme LLP > Academic LLP

**Self-reported critical thinking:**
Theme LLP > Academic LLP
Major takeaway from ACREO

Difference between programs and perceptions:

*Not enough to provide RLC programming--*

*RLCs must create a positive climate*
### Summary of RLC impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The good news</th>
<th>The bad news</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **• RLCs contribute to positive student environments & outcomes**  
  - 2007 NSLLP, 2018 NSSE, & 2017/2018 ACREO data | **• Most effect sizes small, inferring that RLC impact is not strong** |
| **• RLCs most effective on outcomes related to first-year experience** | **• ACREO data suggests that RLC programming not as influential as RLC perceptions created by climate** |
Recent trends in RLC conceptualization

- Distinguishing different types of RLCs
- Different professional associations attended
- What is an RLC?
Different types of RLCs beginning to distinguish themselves

- ACUHO-I Living-Learning Conference  →  ACUHO-I Academic Initiatives Conference
  Distinguishes residential academic support, living-learning programs, residential colleges, residential curriculum, tutoring, peer mentoring programs, etc.

- Study of Living-Learning Programs (SILLP)  →  Assessment of Collegiate Residential Environments & Outcomes (ACREO)
  Analyzed data by 3 types of programs: Academic, General, and Themed LLPs
Different types of RLCs beginning to distinguish themselves

• Two organizations for Residential Colleges:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential College Society</th>
<th>Collegiate Way International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Residential College Society seeks to transform higher education by providing a learning network for faculty and student affairs educators to share knowledge, build community, and advance scholarship about the residential college experience. (Mostly US institutions)</td>
<td>Collegiate Way International (CWI) is a worldwide association of university colleges. It was founded in Durham, UK in 2014. Its mission is to support university colleges around the world and promote the collegiate way of interdisciplinary scholarship, academic integrity, civic awareness and humility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those who work in RLCs do not attend the same professional conferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACUHO-I Academic initiatives</th>
<th>Collegiate Way International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primarily student affairs practitioners</td>
<td>Mostly faculty directors or principals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is an RLC?

RLC
- Residential College
- Residential Academic Support
- Residential Curriculum
- Etc.

< OR >

- Residential College
- Residential Academic Support
- Residential Curriculum
- Etc.
Where to next?

- How many RLCS exist?
- What is considered to be an RLC?
- What are next steps for RLC research and assessment?
- How to continue to pursue research-informed practice?
How many RLCs exist?

- Can we work toward a more comprehensive registry?

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- Can we work across professional interest groups more collaboratively?
But this begs the question:
What is considered to be an RLC?

Are RLCs one broad family of different types of residential programs?

Or, are RLCs one distinctive type of residential program?
What is considered to be an RLC?
How does the answer affect research and practice?

- How are RLCs defined?
- What distinguishes an RLC from other types of residential programs?
- What objectives/student outcomes characterize RLCs?
- How should RLCs be conceived and run?
- What relationships should be forged or remain separate?
- And, of course, how to bridge the academic & student affairs divide?
What are next steps for RLC research and assessment?

• Is it time for another large-scale research study devoted specifically to RLCs?
  • Work to expand ACREO?
  • If so, what do we want to examine on a national scale?

• How to learn from single- and multi-institutional studies
  • We can start this right here!
How to continue to pursue research-informed practice?

Living-Learning Communities
Best Practices Model

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

- **Physiological**
  - breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion

- **Safety**
  - security of body, of employment, of resources, of morality, of the family, of health, of property

- **Love/Belonging**
  - friendship, family, sexual intimacy

- **Esteem**
  - self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, respect by others

- **Self-actualization**
  - morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts
A LLC “hierarchy of needs”
Living-Learning Communities
Best Practices Model

**INFRA-STRUCTURE**
- Clear goals & objectives

**ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT**
- Courses for credit
- Faculty advising
- Academically supportive climate
- Academically supportive climate
- Housing

**CO-CURRICULAR ENVIRONMENT**
- Study groups
- K-12 outreach
- Career workshops
- Visiting work settings
- Theme-related activities

**Pinnacle**
- Intentional integration

**Mortar between the bricks = assessment**

Additional detail
LLC Best Practices Model is: RESEARCH to practice

In real life: research to PRACTICE
### Persistent challenges and lessons learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BPM Component</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear goals &amp; objectives</td>
<td>• RLC staff probably cares more about this than the students (e.g., why is the cookie order always wrong?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Collaboration between Academic Affairs and Housing | • The two areas speak different languages. As a result:  
• HRL has extremely low expectations  
• Academics come off as aloof or extremely uninformed |
| Adequate resources                                 | • Less about funding (although important!) and more about how to manage expectations based on funding  
• Also, try more inter-RLC programming               |
# Persistent challenges and lessons learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BPM Component</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Courses for credit**        | • Oh, how this vexes me!  
• Motivation for 1-credit course low  
• Students may be interested, but already carrying full course load |
| **Faculty involvement**       | • Difficult to get faculty—even those who care—physically into the community and getting involved  
• Offering “win-wins” has been somewhat successful:  
  • Undergraduate researchers  
  • Pots of funds for events |
| **Academically & socially supportive climate** | • One place where research and practice align:  
  • Single most important component of the model that affects all other activities. Work hard to reinforce values of community. |
## Persistent challenges and lessons learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BPM Component</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Co-curricular activities| • Tough balance between offering activities that will gain student interest and are also educationally enriching  
                          | • Wind up spending most amount of time encouraging, cajoling, pleading with students to participate |
| Intentional integration | • Very difficult to keep everyone informed, and not everyone reciprocates, especially students (see figure) |
| Assessment             | • Critical not only for continuous improvement, but also for justification for why you did or did not make a certain decision (extra example) |
Hereford (HRC) communication networks

Diagram:
- HRC Students
- HRC Student Senate
- HRC faculty fellows
- Housing & Res Life
- Dean of Students
- HRC staff

Connections:
- HRC Students to HRC Student Senate
- HRC Student Senate to HRC staff
- HRC staff to Housing & Res Life
- Housing & Res Life to Dean of Students
- HRC Students to Housing & Res Life
- HRC Students to HRC faculty fellows

Return to presentation
What’s (literally) next

Looking forward to learning more about:

Residential Learning Communities as a High Impact Practice
Conference Sessions

• Development of items to measure student learning

• Assessment of specific types of RLCs (particularly STEM RLCs)

• Student characteristics (including student-athletes) and RLCs

• Student & Academic Affairs collaborations

• RLCs and diversity
Final lessons learned

✓ Students are the biggest source of inspiration and frustration

✓ It’s exhausting work, but it’s fulfilling work
Thank you!

- Karen Inkelas
- karen.Inkelas@virginia.edu