

Academic Success and Social Orientation of first year students in a Living-Learning Community (Tesla House)

Dr. Meg Reitz
Coordinator of Residential Education

Outline

- Philosophy behind Learning Communities (LCs)
- Learning Communities and the Residence Halls
- Geneseo's Residential Programs
- Geneseo's LLC – now called Tesla House
- Assessment Goals
- Focus Group and Washington Center survey
- Results and Future Work

Learning Communities

- Movement began in the 1920s at the University of Wisconsin; “Experimental College”
- A reaction against increased disciplinary specialization and fragmentation in undergraduate curriculum
 - Integrated Curriculum
 - Actively explore values and idea of democracy
 - Facilitate faculty-student interaction
- Goal: to “create a seamless interface between the living and learning environments” (Smith, 2001)

Learning Communities

- Resurgence occurred in the 1980s, with a focus on retention and persistence, which have been found to be most often determined by student success
- Studies then tried to answer the question: What increases student success?
 - Active engagement in the life of the institution (Tinto, 1993)
- Astin (1993)'s multi-institutional study to understand factors of student engagement
 - Students' interactions w/ peers and faculty
 - Social and Academic
 - Quality and Quantity

Geneseo and the LC Movement

- Geneseo has a highly engaged student population
- This engagement occurred, not through intentionality of administration, faculty, and staff to increase engagement, but through the mission and values of the college
- This national conversation and movement has affected Geneseo in two important ways:
 1. Documenting and publicizing what it is we already do
 2. Paying attention to our students who slip through the cracks and being more intentional about reaching those students

Learning Communities

Groups of people engaged in intellectual interaction for the purpose of learning

-K. Patricia Cross, "Why Learning Communities? Why Now?"

Groups of people

Learning

Intellectual Interaction

Learning Communities

Three basic types LCs (MacGregor et al., 1997):

1. Student cohorts in larger classes – perhaps cohorts are engaged in an integrative seminar
2. Paired or Clustered Classes – faculty collaboration, linked assignments, common theme, etc.
3. Team-Taught Program – all students in the cohort take the same 4 classes and the classes are integrated extensively

Common Dimensions of LCs

1. Student Collaboration
 - Classroom, Study Groups, Collaborative Assignments
2. Faculty Collaboration
 - How much do faculty discuss issues of teaching and learning?
3. Curricular Coordination
 - Linked classes, Problem-oriented, not discipline oriented
4. Shared Setting
 - Space is set aside (lounge/library/residence hall)
5. Interactive Pedagogy
 - How is content delivered?

Geneseo's Residential Programs

1. Student Collaboration
2. Faculty Collaboration
3. Curricular Coordination
4. Shared Setting
5. Interactive Pedagogy

- Dante House
- Writers House
- EcoHouse
- Nassau Arts Community*
- Tesla House**

Geneseo's LLC

- Started in Fall 2013 as a community of 80 first year students (Physics, Biology, and Education/Writing students)
 - Main goals: learning communities within each discipline and integrative learning between the disciplines (done through INTD 105)
- In Fall 2014, this community was again 30 Physics, 30 pre-Biology, and 20 Education/various majors
 - Main goals: provide support (academic and social); enhance learning through peer education; encourage integrative learning and problem solving with multiple perspectives
- We ran focus groups with both LLC cohorts to identify experiences that both cohorts shared as well as experiences that were unique to each community

Set Up of Assessment

1. Focus Groups of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 LLC cohorts
2. Quantitative survey of first year students in various INTD 105 courses (a fraction of the sample for the survey were in the 2014-2015 LLC cohort)
3. Nationwide survey of Students' Experience of Learning in Learning Communities was also give to the 2014-2015 LLC cohort

1. Focus Groups

Guiding research question:

In what ways does the LLC (now Tesla House) impact student and faculty interactions?

Academically

- One-on-One time with faculty
- Study Habits
- Group problem solving
- Reflection on material outside of the classroom/applicability to life

Socially

- Making friends
- Working with friends
- Adjusting (homesickness, etc.)
- Finding and exploring passions outside the classroom

2. Washington Center Survey

Guiding research questions:

1. How does learning in a Learning Community compare to “traditional” learning?
2. How does our Learning Community compare to 4-year institutions nationwide?

Part I: “In my learning community, I...”

Part II: “Teachers in my learning community...”

Part III: “My participation in this learning community helps me to develop my ability to...”

Part IV: “In my learning community, compared to other classes, I spend more, less, or about the same amount of time...”

Part V: Geneseo specific questions

Focus Group Results

We ran 5 focus groups (2014-2015 academic year); 31 students participated (10 from 2013-2014 and 21 from 2014-2015)

Major Themes:

1. Transitioning to College
 - a. Academically
 - b. Socially
2. Living in Tesla House
3. Access to Academic Support

Transitioning to College

“I feel like I don’t see my teachers in college. In high school, you can’t help but run into them and they’re around all day to ask questions.”

“Professors have other things to do.”

“Similar interests make it so much easier to make friends and talk to people you don’t know.”

“[The Tesla House] decreased the awkward for me.”

“Professors don’t spoon feed you information. You have to sort through it and figure out what to do with it.”

“The fact that [the Tesla House] mixes academic friends with social friends makes the relationships stronger and deeper.”

“I lost a friend during the first week of the [spring] semester. And, at college, there’s no family or high school friends around. I was having a really tough time and it was so beneficial to have such strong support from the [Tesla House] community.”

“I learned I’m not alone. It’s extremely comforting to know that other people are struggling with the same things you are.”

Living in Tesla House

“I really appreciated being in an environment where everyone cared about school. I didn’t feel bad going to a hall lounge on a Friday night to study because other people in my hall would already be there!”

“Being around other people who valued studying helped me to value it too, to feel like it’s okay.”

“I like the environment and the atmosphere. People are focused on academics without being unsocial. It’s a great balance.”

“We got really concentrated in this building. I didn’t know people from other buildings. It got redundant and sometimes I needed to get out and be around different people. It was refreshing to get out.”

“It’s not competitive between people, but it’s hard not to feel competitive since you’re all doing the same thing.”

Access to Academic Support

“The professors came to you here. Usually, the only normal way to meet professors is to go seek them in their offices on their time.”

“It was encouraging to have [my professor] call me by name in [a 200 person, introductory] lecture.”

“Being able to ask for help from your neighbors is one of the greatest advantages. On south side, you’re lucky if one person on your hall has the same major as you, much less is in your class.”

“The resources [in the Tesla House] were the best. Learning from the tutors and from my peers is what helped me the most and it’s better than anywhere else on campus.”

Structural changes in Tesla House led to one major difference between the two cohorts

- 2013-2014 cohort touted the academic benefits (indeed many made connections with faculty and engaged in summer research), while acknowledging the highly competitive and isolating nature of the LLC
- 2014-2015 cohort touted the social benefits and told us camaraderie and support wasn't given enough credit, while acknowledging that no connections with faculty were due to the program

Washington Center Survey Results

1. Tesla House is 10-20% less effective than other institutions in the following:
 - a. Integrating concepts and skills from other classes
 - b. Connecting learning to the local community
 - c. Helping students explore their ideas
 - d. Encouraging discussions about the next steps in their education

2. Tesla House is as successful as other LCs at:
 - a. Group work focused on complex issues
 - b. Developing friendships based on LC experiences
 - c. Teaching students about other campus resources
 - d. Providing students with the ability to take responsibility for their learning and persist when academically challenged.

3. Tesla House courses are, however, 10-15% more effective than “non-LC courses” at:
 - a. Applied learning, integrative learning
 - b. Critical thinking, synthesizing data and ideas

Improving Residential Communities

Underpinning all of the research initiatives stated above, is the desire to find out if and how/why the program is beneficial to our students

- In what ways can we improve the program for Tesla House students and faculty in the future?
- How can we encourage social acceptance, integrative learning, and peer education in all residential communities?

Tesla House: 2015-2016 and beyond

20 Geology, 20 Physics, 20 Childhood Education

1. First Year Experience seminars for each set of majors – regenerate the connections students had with other majors and research opportunities
2. Integrative Spring Project – all 60 students enrolled in a 1 credit, semester-long course where they pursue small projects/solve problems related to science education (Monroe and the eGarden provide easy and many opportunities)
3. Pre-Semester Trip – up to 15 students have the opportunity to camp, learn, and conduct research in Letchworth State Park

Questions? Comments? Thoughts?

THE RESEARCH FOUNDATION OF STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

P.O. Box 9 Albany, New York 12201

FINANCIAL REPORT
F208-0377

		Date	01/28/16
Fixed Price: X Automatic Payment: Cost Reimbursable:		Sponsor #	N/A
Association of American Colleges and Universities		RF No:	66857
Interim:	Final: XX	Report Period From: 01/01/14	To: 01/31/16
Title of Project: The Well-Being of Students in Living-Learning Communities			
Under Direction of: Dr. Monica E. Schneider		Award Period From: 01/01/14	To: 01/31/16
Award Authorized for Expenditure		-Cash Reconciliation-	
Award	\$6,000.00	Total Award Authorized For Expenditures	\$6,000.00
Authorized Transfer From: Previous Year	\$0.00	Less: Cash Received To Date	\$6,000.00
Total Award Authorized For Expenditures	\$6,000.00	Balance	\$0.00
-Expenditures-		Unexpended Award Balance	\$3,623.41
Salaries and Wages	\$1,226.25		
Employee Benefits	78.45	Unexpended Cash Balance Disposition: Refund to Sponsor	\$3,623.41
Consultant Services	0.00		
Equipment	0.00	CASH DUE "THE RESEARCH FOUNDATION OF SUNY"	\$0.00
Supplies	42.93	Comments:	
Travel - Domestic	0.00	Final Financial Report	
Tuition and Fees	0.00		
Professional Services	0.00	Cost share total expenditures \$5,000.00	
Subaward	0.00		
Conference & Training	373.96		
General Services	655.00		
Miscellaneous	0.00		
SUBTOTAL DIRECT COSTS			\$2,376.59
Indirect Costs:			
	0.00%		0.00
TOTAL			\$2,376.59
Expenditures Previously Reported	0.00	I hereby affirm that the foregoing report is true in all respects and that all the expenditures and obligations indicated above have been made within the provisions of the grant or contract. <i>Susan Messenger</i> @ Susan Messenger, Sr. Fiscal Specialist (518) 434-7142	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	2,376.59		
UNEXPENDED AWARD BALANCE	\$3,623.41		