



Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) Grant Proposal

Project Directors

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Project Title: The Impact of Residential-Based Learning Communities (RBLCs) on Student Outcomes

Project Dates: December 1, 2019 – December 31, 2020

Project Checklist

Letter of Support: Dr. Eric A. Weldy will send a letter of support to Dr. Linda Houser on Monday, October 28, 2019.

Budget: Details are available toward the end of this proposal.

IRB Approval: The project directors are willing to obtain IRB approval for this project if the proposal is selected.

Purpose of the Project

Across the United States (U.S.), living learning programs (LLPs) have been widely acknowledged as a service Residence Life provides collaboratively with members of academic units to support student retention and enhance essential learning outcomes for student success. Brower and Inkelas (2010) define living learning communities as “residential housing programs that incorporate academically based themes and build community through common learning”. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) classified learning communities as a high-impact practice. Nationally, research has been done to investigate the diversity and impact of LLPs through the National Study of Living Learning Programs, which occurred in 2007. Inkelas et al. (2018) developed a comprehensive research-based model for residential-based learning communities (RBLCs) that synthesized the experiences of multiple campuses from the National Study of Living-Learning Programs. This model is not only helpful for designing and delivering LLPs, but it also provides valuable insight into assessing the status of those communities on campuses in the U.S., and can be utilized as a framework for program review.

At IUPUI, LLPs, named RBLCs, have been a part of HRL for more than 10 years. Our RBLCs range from loosely thematic to enhanced cocurricular experiences. Past data analyses revealed that RBLC students living on campus at IUPUI were 2.2 times more likely to graduate than their non-RBLC peers, though this data is slightly dated. A more recent analysis of the RBLC experience has begun this fall semester. Focusing on the **fall 2018 full-time bachelor degree-seeking beginners who resided in one of the RBLCs**, we found their **1-year retention rate at any IU campuses is 91.3 percent** compared to **69.7 percent** among those who did not reside in an RBLC. This represents a difference of 21.6 percentage points. The **1-year retention rate at IUPUI among the fall 2018 full-time bachelor degree-seeking beginners who resided in one of the RBLCs was 88.7 percent vs. 66.6 percent** among those who did not reside in an RBLC. This represents a difference of 22.1 percentage points. These results do not account

for self-selection bias and other confounding factors, so we will use a statistical technique called “propensity score matching” to hone in on more details about student retention. We will also analyze the first fall term and cumulative GPAs of RBLC versus non-RBLC students and run t-tests to determine if the differences in GPAs are meaningful. Further assessment, review, and evaluation must be done about **why** there is such a wide gap in the retention rates, in addition to what impacts these RBLCs have on students **beyond** retention and GPAs. Information uncovered in this assessment plan will allow the department to:

- 1) Celebrate successes with our academic unit partners
- 2) Identify areas of growth for specific learning communities using nationally-benchmarked data while still adopting an institution-specific approach
- 3) Communicate a more meaningful story about the value-added experience of choosing to live in an RBLC
- 4) Triangulate our current practices against Inkelas’ (2018) researched-based best practices to articulate a systemic and strategic plan for improvement

Furthermore, as the Division of Student Affairs and HRL pursue joint strategic planning efforts, the Division’s focus on student learning, development, and outcomes, and HRL’s focus on improving the quality of services provided to students, this period represents an opportune time to articulate the return on investment as well as communicate a clear path for forward progress.

This grant proposes a mixed methods research approach to analyze the current state of IUPUI’s RBLCs as a collective group and as individual programs. The evaluation and analysis will take place in the form of a nationally-benchmarked survey tool, focus groups, and interviews. ***See timeline and budget at the end of the report.***

Nationally-Benchmarked Survey Tool (ACREO):

“The Assessment of Collegiate Residential Environments and Outcomes (ACREO) assesses the influence of residential environments and academic, intellectual, and social outcomes of college students” (<https://www.acreosurvey.org/>). The multi-institutional study explores relationships between institution structures, engagement types, and student academic, intellectual, and social outcomes, and is specifically able to compare outcomes and engagement between RBLC and non-RBLC students. Many of the outcomes measured align with outcomes associated with the Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success (PLUS) (see Appendix 1).

It also provides insight on how residential living type influences student outcomes, which will be exceptionally illuminating as HRL continues to consider further opportunities for housing arrangements. Another major benefit to administering this survey for IUPUI on-campus residents would mean that we could understand more clearly what student outcomes are contributing to our current retention numbers.

Furthermore, the study allows for national and peer-level benchmarking. Information from the 2018 report, which compiled data from all participating institutions, can be found at <https://www.acreosurvey.org/>. The study’s current sample includes 20,000 students from 19 institutions. Using Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome model, the assessment tool seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do student experiences differ by residential environment?
2. How do student outcomes differ by residential environment?
3. Which experiences influence which outcomes?

Analysis: After participating, the ACREO service provides a cleaned and conditioned data set and a written report that includes cross-tabulations of respondent demographics and residential environment. It also includes the mean scores on all academic, intellectual, and social outcomes by

residential environment, percentages on outcome scales by residential environment, and benchmarking against peer, aspirational, and national samples. IUPUI representatives will synthesize the report into key findings to share with internal and external partners.

Focus Groups:

IUPUI HRL currently hosts 14 RBLCs for students in a variety of academic and thematic-based floors from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to social identities. Thirteen of these RBLCs will be returning for the 2020-2021 academic year. The focus groups will include questions specifically related to why students believe their RBLC has contributed to their long-term success at IUPUI, cocurricular learning opportunities, and student outcomes (aligned with ACRESO's as well as RBLC's homegrown intended outcomes, which are aligned with the PLUS). Focus groups will be incentivized by providing gift cards to participants. Focus groups will be coordinated for individual RBLCs as well as a focus group with representatives from all RBLCs. Intentions of individual RBLC focus groups will hone in on multiple perspectives on specific experiences that occurred in that RBLC. The focus group with representatives from all (or many) of the 14 RBLCs will allow us to identify outliers and establish consistencies and differences across RBLCs. Having focus group participants hear about other participants as a comparative practice will contribute to multiple results.

Analysis: Unlike the survey, focus groups will delve into **how** RBLCs have supported retention and achievement of outcomes instead of **what** outcomes are achieved (Shuh, 2016). After focus groups are completed, information will be coded for themes using Inkelas et al.'s (2018) Best Practices Model as a framework.

Interviews:

Interviews with current RBLC liaisons (staff or faculty in academic units that support the implementation of the community's theme) will be conducted as an opportunity to dig into the perceived success of each RBLC from the staff's perspective. These will occur after student focus groups

have been coded for themes and will integrate focus group themes into the conversation to illuminate structural elements of the RBLC. This will also help us to understand if the experience is implemented with fidelity.

Analysis: After focus groups are completed, information will be coded for themes using the same 2018 Best Practices Model to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth. These opportunities for growth will be compared across RBLCs and will turn into a growth plan for individual RBLCs as well as housing and academic units' areas in need of improvement.

Evaluation

As far as evaluation and communication of results, dissemination will occur through a written proposal shared with the PRAC committee and RBLC stakeholders in both Student and Academic Affairs. Furthermore, a presentation opportunity will be developed to share with key stakeholders in the Division of Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs, so that RBLCs can be improved collaboratively as well as marketed and supported effectively by champions in multiple divisions. A session proposal will be submitted for the Fall 2020 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, in addition to other relevant conferences such as the National Learning Communities Conference hosted at IUPUI or the Association for College and University Housing Officers – International Academic Initiatives Conference.

Results will be directly applied to RBLC practices for the next academic year by housing staff, and unit staff will apply specific RBLC practices, as needed. Furthermore, systemic improvements will be integrated into the HRL strategic plan. Focused improvement for individual RBLCs may be a factor in continued partnerships with HRL, as well as potential increase in beds or movement in housing environments.

Timeline

- **By December 1st** | Coordinate with ACREO to purchase basic package
- **Throughout spring semester** | Continue to analyze the 1-year retention rates and GPAs of RBLC versus non-RBLC students
- **Throughout spring semester** | ACREO administers survey
- **By end of April** | Conduct and analyze student RBLC focus groups
- **By end of May** | Conduct and analyze RBLC liaison interviews
- **By end of June** | Prepare and share results, pending ACREO data report completion

Budget

Topic	Cost	Brief Justification
ACREO survey – Basic package	\$2,200	Well-established survey to establish more robust, quantitative understanding of residential experience on student success
Focus groups: \$10 each gift cards	\$1,300 + \$260 <hr/> 1,560	Thirteen (13) themed RBLC focus groups of no more than 10 students each. Two (2) focus groups of all RBLCs with no more than 13 students each. May be supplemented with food from the Housing and Residence Life budget.
Interview refreshments	\$200	Liaisons are busy individuals across campus navigating multiple projects and needs. Small refreshments as a small incentive for contributing to the study would be appreciated. No more than \$15 per interview.
Registration fees for the Assessment Institute and the National Learning Communities Conference	\$600 for the Assessment Institute \$399 for the National Learning Communities Conference	Registration fee for two staff to attend the Assessment Institute. Sonia Ninon receives a complimentary registration to attend the Assessment Institute since she serves as the Student Affairs track leader. Registration fee for only one person for the National Learning Communities Conference
Total	\$4,959	

Appendix 1: Intersections with the PLUS

RBLC Outcomes ACREO and the PLUS

	ACREO Outcomes	The PLUS
RBLC students will be able to interact more frequently and directly with faculty and staff.	Campus engagement Campus sense of belonging	Communicator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships • Listens actively • Conveys ideas effectively
RBLC students will be able to network with peers who share similar interests and classes.	Campus engagement Campus sense of belonging Binge drinking habits Bystander intervention intention, Bystander knowledge, bystander reporting intention	Communicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships Problem solver <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks critically • Collaborates Community contributor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds community • Respectfully Engages Own and Other Cultures • Behaves Ethically • Anticipates Consequences
RBLC students will be able to identify leadership opportunities available on campus.	Campus engagement Campus sense of belonging	Communicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluates Information • Listens Actively • Builds Relationships Problem solver <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzes, Synthesizes, and Evaluates
RBLC students will be able to identify resources necessary for academic success.	Academic confidence Major persistence intention	Communicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluates Information • Listens Actively Problem solver <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzes, Synthesizes, and Evaluates
RBLC students will be able to demonstrate transferable skills developed while participating in academic area or theme community activities.	Career attitudes Learning integration Critical thinking disposition Intention to innovate Financial literacy	Communicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluates Information • Listen Actively • Conveys Ideas Effectively Problem solver <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks Critically • Analyzes, synthesizes, and evaluates, Perseveres Innovator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates/Design • Makes Decision Community builder <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds Community

ACREO to the PLUS (Beyond RBLC Mapping)

	Communicator	Problem solver	Innovator	Community contributor
Academic confidence	X	X		
Major persistence intention		X		
Career attitudes	X	X		
Critical thinking disposition	X	X		
Learning integration	X	X		
Intention to innovate	X		X	
Financial literacy	X	X		
Campus engagement	X	X		X
Campus sense of belonging	X	X		X
Binge drinking habits	X	X		X
Bystander intervention intention	X	X		X
Bystander knowledge	X	X		X
Bystander reporting intention	X	X		X

References

Astin, A. W. 1993. *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Brower, Aaron M., & Inkelas, K. K. 2010. *Living-learning programs: One high-impact educational practice we now know a lot about*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Inkelas, K. K., Jessup-Anger, J., Benjamin, M., & Wawrzynski, M. (2018). *Living-learning communities that work: A research-based model for design, delivery, and assessment*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Schuh, J.H., Biddix, J.P., Dean, L.A., & Kinzie, J. (2016). *Assessment in student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.