Developing Living-Learning Centers at the University of British Columbia

AMS Student Society of UBC Vancouver
Vice President, Academic & University Affairs
Vpacademic@ams.ubc.ca

Prepared by Selena Shannon, Campus Development Commissioner
2009 - 2010
Table of Contents

Page 3: Project Vision

Page 3-6: Initial Research

Page 7-8: Project Process

Page 8-9: Living-Learning Center Visit

Page 10: Current State

Page 10-11: Future Recommendations

Page 11: Conclusions

Page 12: Sources Cited

Page 12-19: Appendix I & II
**Project Vision**

The idea of bringing a living-learning concept to University of British Columbia residence began with inspiration from the Velocity project at Waterloo University\(^1\). Velocity is a program that pairs engineering students in small groups in residence environment and then gives them the support necessary to work on projects, ideas and innovations for the duration of the semester, the result of which have been innovative and ingenious technology projects\(^2\). The idea of bringing learning and living concepts together in the University residence setting isn't a new one, in fact it is a long-standing tradition practiced in many residence halls in many universities and colleges across North America and Europe. With this path of success paved, the AMS began a project with UBC Housing and Student Development to both study successful models and launch a pilot project in UBC residence.

**Project Analysis**

**Initial Research: JULY TO SEPTEMBER**

The first step of the project was to study a variety of living-learning projects that had been successfully applied in universities of a similar size and scope to UBC.

In this initial stage of research, consultation occurred various with faculty and staff working on the first year experience at UBC. Meeting with the directors and professors from Science One, Coordinated Sciences Program, Arts One, Coordinated Arts Program, Student Housing Staff, the senior director of Student Development, and various faculty members. The goal of which, was to alert faculty and staff to the concept of a living-learning program at UBC, as well as seek project advice and support.

Consultation also occurred with participating students and faculty at Columbia University, Guelph University, University of Toronto, Dalhousie University, University of Western Ontario and McGill University, to gage previous successes and to work to avoid issues that had plagued other programs.

\(^1\) [http://velocity.uwaterloo.ca/](http://velocity.uwaterloo.ca/)

\(^2\) [http://velocity.uwaterloo.ca/](http://velocity.uwaterloo.ca/)
The following is a summary of successful models that were considered while working towards a pilot project at UBC. During research, several complementary in-residence changes were also uncovered, such as dons in residence and issuing an improved placement questionnaire during room assignments, these models are also included in this summary.

**Research Summary:**

- **Living Learning Programs**
  - Housing Clusters
  - Themed Floors
  - Integrated program spaces
  - Dons in Residence
  - Improved Housing Questionnaire

**Proposed Structures:**

**Building on Successes at Other Institutions:**

From 2001-2007, The National Study of Living-Learning Programs has been assessing the success of living-learning centers at 52 Universities and Colleges across the United States. While each University had different living-learning structures, ranging in sizes from only several dozen students participating, to thousands of students participating, the study showed overwhelming success from the programs. According to the study, students who lived in living-learning centers were more likely to interact with their respective faculties, find their residence hall climate to be supportive, have an easier transition from high school to University, binge drink at lower levels, were more likely to go to honors programs, and be more engaged with the University community as a whole.

**First Year Programme at Kings College:**

At King's College, all students participate in the First Year Programme (FYP), akin to UBC's Arts One. While studying an equivalent program to first-year in English, history, philosophy and sociology, students in the FYP also live together in residence, blurring the lines between

---

3 (Brower)
4 [http://www.ukings.ca/kings_2844.html](http://www.ukings.ca/kings_2844.html)
the classroom and the living space. Residence at King’s College also becomes an area of instruction when class discussions are run by professors in residence common areas, and additional classroom support is offered in residence.

**Student’s Response:** Molly Shepley, First Year Student, King’s College:

“Living in residence, the academic and the social come together ... There’s a real sense that you’re hanging out, but you’re also studying.”

David Jerome, Fourth Year Student, King’s College:

“King’s, because of the kinds of programmes it offers, attracts people who just like to think and philosophize, so you always walk by interesting conversations or end up starting an interesting conversation.”

**Cluster Housing:**

Building upon housing pairings that would bring together students in the same academic program, students could be placed in cluster systems that engage different programs in discussion and allow them to create bonds outside of their programs while maintaining an academic environment within residence. Each cluster would have a cluster leader, who would work with the other cluster leaders within the house to develop educational, recreational and social programming to engage and support students.

**Themed Living Spaces:**

This option involves establishing a specific theme for each residence floor or area. These could range from Healthy Lifestyle floors to Visual Arts floors. The idea of these floors is to put like-minded students together, and if feasible to run thematic programming to accompany the floor theme. Such programming could range from educational sessions in residence, to group outings and trips.

**Examples of Existing Programs at the University of Western Ontario**:

**Global Village Floor**

_The global village floor will present you with the opportunity to meet people from different_

---

5 http://www.residenceatwestern.ca/
cultures and backgrounds, and learn more about the world you live in. Activities include international movie festivals, language lessons, exchange program information sessions, and volunteer opportunities with the International Students' Office.

**Volunteer and Service Learning Floor**

Service learning is a form of experiential education that allows students the opportunity to serve their communities, while reflecting on what the experience has taught them. Whether you are someone who volunteers regularly or has never volunteered before, this floor will help connect you with the resources you need to get involved at Western and in the London community. You will also have the option to travel internationally as part of the Alternative Spring Break program.

**Healthy Lifestyle Floor**

You will have the chance to participate in intramural sports, nutrition workshops, residence-wide football games, and more! Healthy lifestyles floors are available in all of our first-year residences.

**Student Response:** Yvonne Su, Eco House Resident, Guelph University⁶:

“This University never feels like a big, scary place,” says Eco House resident and second year environmental-science student Yvonne Su, who also makes use of Guelph’s student learning program, through which she gets weekly help preparing for tests and midterms. “At Guelph, I feel comfortable asking questions, and comfortable being who I am.”

**Dons In Residence**

In order to integrate academic support into UBC residences, a Don program could be instituted. Each residence would have a team of PHD or Masters Candidates in a variety of fields live and also hold office hours within the residence. This service provides onsite academic assistance to students could be struggling with anything from a math midterm to

---

⁶ http://www.housing.uoguelph.ca/page.cfm?id=9267b0a9-f8c7-4c19-880b-41e06235da68
an English paper. Dons also provide guidance and support to students in their academic programs as well as with personal issues.

**Student Response:** Clara Rozee, First Year Student, Trinity College at The University of Toronto:

“The dons system is amazing addition to Trinity- they're a group of twelve PhD candidates who live in the college with us and can give us help with school work or personal issues. They are an excellent resource that I took advantage of a many times (I went to the English Don for advice on my papers, for example)"

**Improved Residence Questionnaire**

Add a variety of questions to further enhance residence placement, especially when it comes to roommate and quad-mate selection. Attached are questions that may prove to be beneficial if like integrated into the housing questionnaire that both address common interests, living habits and personality traits. By enhancing the roommate and floor mate selection processes, students will be placed in environments that will allow them to better succeed academically and socially in University (Shanley). (Appendix I)

**Project Process: SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER**

During this period of the project, all faculty and staff with whom our office had initially developed contact with were revisited to work into greater specifics a strategy that would be best for UBC. The models that had proved the to be of greatest success in the past and got their direct commentary.

From these discussions, the following models were to developed, to be considered at UBC:

**Integration with the First Year Gateway Programs:**

**Pros:** This unique program allows students to be together in small, integrated classes, working around a common theme in their chosen discipline of arts or science. The program offers a significant opportunity to extend its reach into the university residence setting. With faculty that is already intimately connected to a small group of students, the transition to offering in residence programming would not be as great of a stretch. Furthermore, as students in these classes are continuously working together on projects, living near by to
one another would make it ultimately easier for them to work on projects. Furthermore, by being given additional academic support in residence, it will allow for the scope of these projects to grow and students academic success to flourish.

Cons: Students in these programs are already currently very integrated, both with their fellow students and their faculty. Various faculty members in these programs have raised concern, that these students would lose the opportunity put forth in residence to meet a variety of people, outside of ones program. Additionally, their was concern that commuter students who took these programs, would be separated from those who lived on campus, and while commuter students would still be invited to in-residence events, it would be more challenging for them to take part in all living-learning activities.

Floors around a specific theme (i.e. Sustainability):

Pros: The thought behind such a floor, summarized above, is that students who have a particular interest, their faculty notwithstanding, can work together on projects, attend lectures and fieldtrips, and work with faculty members throughout the year. As a result, students will have a lot of opportunity, as well as the resources to delve into their theme, adding an additional layer of engagement to their first year experience. If the proper academic contacts could be made and a faculty member, or faculty team would be willing to spearhead this program, it would be a great success.

Cons: The theme floor has several attributes that are of concern. Firstly, if the theme cannot be easily tied to one or two academic programs at the university, it may prove difficult to develop the faculty support necessary to provide the academic content. The same concern arises, with pairing students together that are from programs that are too similar, or isolating students to one group in residence.

Floors around a specific academic program (i.e. Science, Commerce):

Pros: Floors around specific academic programs have been quite successful in other institutions, especially when paired with an academic program that benefits from continuous group discussion and work. It also helps to strengthen bonds between students who are in a similar academic program and will be working together for the next four years. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity for students in the same faculty, to easily work on
extra curricular projects around their academic program. This model also has the distinct advantage of being directly tied an academic program, which would make it easier to gain faculty support, as well as recruit interested in-residence advisors.

**Cons:** Noted concern for such a program were similar to the two other proposed strategies, including concern for commuter students, concern for isolating students from one program together, as well as giving students who live on such a floor an unfair advantage, in terms of having additional resources.

**Living-Learning Center Visit: Columbia University**

During this time frame, the Campus Development Commissioner visited a highly successful living-learning center at Columbia University if New York City. There a meeting occurred with Scott Helfrich, the director of this learning center to discuss with him both the piloting of this program at Columbia, and the steps they have undertaken in order to run a successful program. The following is a summary of my takeaways from that meeting, which I believe will prove extremely beneficial in the development of a program at UBC:

- **Start small:** The program at Columbia was initially launched through the faculty of Engineering, with 60 beds being dedicated to a themed program. The program was given the additional support of two spearheading faculty, a team of four specialized residence advisors, and a live in faculty member. However, there were initially too many events scheduled, too many requirements, and too many students for a successfully launch. Students became despondent with the program, as they grew overwhelmed with the varying obligations. When Scott took over the program, he paired down the requirements to a project a term, a meeting a week, and an optional dinner engagement with a faculty member, alumni, or visiting speaker, that was limited to ten participants. He also reduced the participating group to 25 students and grew from there. Scott found this model to be entirely successful, and as news of the program success spread, he was able to launch three other themed programs in the same residence hall, and has had overwhelming demand in each year.

- **Think big:** By not limiting the program to a certain academic year, Columbia was able to
integrate a variety of students, allowing them to reach into a variety of different social networks they would have not had the opportunity to integrate into before. This step alone would certainly help in limiting the isolation of a themed floor, and instead allowing its participants to meet and work with a variety of students.

-Variety, variety, variety: Scott who previously worked at Cornell, had practiced in a variety of different living-learning concepts. He reports that the greatest success he saw was in programs that did not just offer the same kind of programming on a weekly basis. By integrating social, active and academic events into the schedule, students were better able to work together and be engaged in the living-learning center. This is important to keep in mind, because we do no want the programs to become so that students feel they are simply an additional burden to their schoolwork.

-Key resources: At Columbia, they had a plethora of resources that allowed them to stage a variety of living-learning centers, however at UBC we are not in the same position in terms of physical space within residence halls (for example, to house faculty in-residence) or initial financial support. This however, can be overcome by engaging key faculty that are passionate enough to see the program through to fruition, and bring in contacts who can also provide support to the programs. Also, by engaging student leaders who will be willing to work as in-residence support in the roles of specialized residence advisors, there will develop a dedicated staff to each program.

Current State: JANUARY TO MAY

The third stage of this project has seen consultation with key faculty members who have provided interest in leading a living-learning community. We have also been working directly with Janet Teasdale, Senior Director, Student Development and Services and Janice Robinson, Director, Residence Life Student Housing and Hospitality Services to work on the practical administrative aspects of this project, from the perspective of housing and student services.

Presently, a floor around a specific academic program is currently being negotiated through the faculty of Science, for a September 2010 start date. A floor around the theme of sustainability under the faculty leadership of Dr. Erica Frank, is also being proposed for the
The next two years will be the final development stage for this pilot project, as we see it into action. The following is a list of recommendations for the program structure in the next two years.

**Science Theme Floor**

**Year One, September 2010:** Have 20 students, 2 Specialized Residence Advisors, and 2 Faculty Coordinators committed to the program in either Totem Park or Place Vanier

**Suggested Format:**

- One weekly dinner or panelist discussion with up to ten students
- One weekly discussion or event around a specific subject, rotating in the various forms
  - Large group of all interested students (in-residence and commuter)
  - 20 students living on the themed floor
  - Two groups of 10 students
- Two field trips per semester, including all participating students, as well as any interested commuter students
- One semester-long group project, advised by faculty and residence advisors, done in groups of 2-6
- Once a semester presentation and group advising night

**Complete Study:** Both at the half way and end point of the project

**Year Two, September 2011:** Grow program to 40 students, 20 in Place Vanier and 20 in Totem Park

**Sustainability Theme Floor**

**Year One, September 2010:** Hold bi-monthly events (such as discussion events, faculty visits, hands on events, etc...) sponsored by in-residence elected sustainability leaders in both Place Vanier and Totem Park, in coordination with Dr. Erica Frank to garner interest
and project support

**Year Two, September 2011:** Build on findings from year one of the Science theme floor, and work to develop a floor with twenty students located in either Place Vanier or Totem Park.

**Conclusions**

As the first year of this initiative comes to a close, it has been exciting to see the progress made and the connections that have been built with faculty and staff at UBC. The next best step for this program is simply to put it into action, and learn what will best suit UBC, with the goal of adding value to the first year experience of incoming students. By learning from other institutions, and adding in the expertise and experience of the faculty and staff at UBC, while working with engaged and excited students, this program will develop into another way the UBC campus community can inspire learning and ignite creativity.
Sources Cited:


References:

**The Colleges at Cambridge University:** http://www.cam.ac.uk/colleges/

**Housing Cooperatives, Stanford University:** http://www.stanford.edu/group/coop/cgi-bin/wiki/doku.php?id=stanford_cooperatives

**Kings College, Dalhousie University:** http://www.ukings.ca/kings_2844.html

**Living Learning Centers, Guelph University:**
http://www.housing.uoguelph.ca/page.cfm?id=9267b0a9-f8c7-4c19-880b-41e06235da68

**Live-Learn Study:**

**Themed Floors, University of Western Ontario:** http://www.residenceatwestern.ca/

**Themed Living Spaces, University of Pennsylvania:**
http://www.collegehouses.upenn.edu/resprog/index.html

**Trinity College, University of Toronto:**
http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Students_Applicants/Residence/

**Velocity at Waterloo University:** http://velocity.uwaterloo.ca/
Appendix I:

Enhanced Residence Questionnaire:

The following questions would be scaled on a points system ranging from 1-4, one being the least and four being the greatest:

How outgoing are you?
How involved do you plan to be in Residence Life?
Do you plan on working out regularly (4-6 workouts per week)?
How tidy are you?
How are you going to watch a lot of movies/television?
Do you plan on staying in Residence during the weekends?
Will you study in the library often?
How loudly do you listen to your music?
Do you sing when listening to music?
Are you an early riser?
How accepting are you of other cultures?
Do you ski or snowboard?
Have you lived with a roommate before?
Will you have a part-time job?
Do you want to live on a floor with people from your faculty and/or program?
Do you plan on going to the beach?
Do you like to socialize?
Will you drink frequently?
How up to date are you with world affairs?
Do you frequently use the Internet to socialize?
Do you like quiet study areas?
At what temperature do you like the room?
When do you go to bed on weekends?
Do you do most of your schoolwork on the weekends?
Would you like a roommate from outside of British Columbia?
Would you like a roommate from outside of Canada?
Do you read materials this not course related in your spare time?
Appendix II: Contract from successful living-learning centers

**RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL 2010-2011**

*JMU first year Residential Learning Communities...where learning is lived.*

**Mission**
Residential Learning Communities support first year students’ adjustment to the intellectual, academic, social and civic life of the University by integrating coursework with residential experiences under the collaborative direction of faculty and student affairs professionals.

**Definition**
A first year Residential Learning Community is a small group of students who take one or more classes together and live in the same residence hall. Each community has a special theme and is facilitated by at least one faculty member who works with other involved faculty and residence hall staff to integrate class work and create related intentional interactions outside the classroom. Residential Learning Communities will assess accomplishment of the following goals to determine the effectiveness of aiding students’ adjustment to college: increase students’ intellectual engagement, increase students’ academic success, increase students’ civic responsibility, increase students’ social competence.

**Approval Process**
If you are planning to develop a new Residential Learning Community, please pay special attention to each of the following steps of the approval process:

1. Begin by contacting Kathleen Campbell in the Office of Residence Life (campbekl@jmu.edu or 568-4767). Kathleen will provide you with a history of Residential Learning Communities at JMU, an overview of the Residential Learning Community approval process and an overview of how approved Residential Learning Communities are implemented. Kathleen can also connect you with faculty who have taught or are currently teaching in a Residential Learning Community at JMU.

2. Contact your College Curriculum and Instruction Chair and your Academic Unit Head very early in the process to discuss how your proposal fits into your unit's (or college's) plan for curriculum and resource allocation. Talk with each of them about resources, about curriculum compatibility and to get their support for this type of involvement. It is very important that you share your ideas with your College C&I Chair and your Academic Unit Head early in the process.

3. Complete the Residential Learning Community proposal. Submit the completed proposal to the Office of Residence Life by January 15th, 2010. Please keep in mind that
submitting a completed proposal with the appropriate signatures is not a guarantee that a Residential Learning Community will be approved (please see #4 below for more information).

4. Completed proposals will be reviewed by the Residential Learning Communities Advisory Board. This advisory board will make recommendations to accept or deny proposed Residential Learning Communities. Considerations taken into account by the Residential Learning Communities Advisory Board will include, but are not limited to: how well the proposed Residential Learning Community matches the goals and vision of the overall Residential Learning Community program; available residence hall resources (including staff and space); and finally departmental support from your academic area.

5. If your proposed Residential Learning Community is to run for several years, be sure your proposal is supported by the department and is not person-specific. This will better ensure sustainability.

6. Please keep in mind that developing and implementing a Residential Learning Community is a rewarding albeit complex process. It is essential that faculty interested in developing a Residential Learning Community communicate early and often with the constituents listed above.

7. Questions? Contact Kathleen Campbell in the Office of Residence Life at campbekl@jmu.edu or 568-4767.

**Faculty Expectations**

If a proposed Residential Learning Community is accepted, Residential Learning Community faculty will be expected to:

- Submit final course title(s), course number(s), class number(s) and section number(s) for Residential Learning Community courses as soon as they are available.
- Provide a description of the Residential Learning Community for the website and other publications.
- Participate in the student selection process in May and June, by reviewing applications and ranking applicants for the Residential Learning Community.
- Provide an orientation session for the members of the Residential Learning Community during 1787 (August Orientation), to prepare them for the Residential Learning Community experience. 1787 will take place August 18 – 22, 2010.
- Work with other involved faculty and residence hall staff to integrate class work within the Residential Learning Community and to create related intentional interactions outside the classroom. It is important that there are periodic out-of-class components to the students' experience.
- Facilitate periodic reflection with the support of the Office of Residence Life staff. Reflection is an expectation of community membership and will serve to
connect the intellectual experiences of the classroom with the living experiences outside the classroom. Reflection can take place in and/or out-of-class.

- Emphasize civic responsibility through in and out-of-class activities and reflection.
- Support assessment efforts of the Office of Residence Life.
- Develop your own assessment method(s) as needed.
- Communicate regularly with department head on progress of community.
- Spend time in the assigned residence hall community.

The Office of Residence Life Expectations

Faculty can expect the Office of Residence Life to:

- Provide readings and resources to assist with the development of the Residential Learning Community.
- Facilitate the selection and placement of first year students into the Residential Learning Communities in May and June. This includes participating in the student application process, residence hall placement, and facilitating the course registration process.
- Provide opportunities for faculty to connect with and learn from other faculty who have prior Residential Learning Community experience.
- Assist faculty in preparing students to participate in the Residential Learning Community through an orientation session during 1787 (August Orientation).
- Assist faculty in creating related intentional interactions outside the classroom (e.g. service-learning, field trips, and other activities outside of class).
- Assist faculty in providing students with on-going opportunities to reflect on the experience.
- Assist faculty in assessing the Residential Learning Community experience.

Current JMU Residential Learning Communities

There are 7 first year Residential Learning Communities at JMU for the 2009-10 academic year. Go to [http://www.jmu.edu/orl/involved/learningcommunities.html](http://www.jmu.edu/orl/involved/learningcommunities.html) to learn more.

**JMU Residential Learning Community PROPOSAL 2010-2011**

This proposal should be completed jointly by all faculty who will be working with the Residential Learning Community. One faculty member must serve as the faculty coordinator. The faculty coordinator will serve as the main contact person for the Residential Learning Community.

Residential Learning Community Name: _______________________________
Section 1:
Faculty Coordinator's Name:
Email:
Department/School: MSC:
College: Office Location:
Phone Number: Fax Number:

Section 2:
Please include all contact information below for all other faculty who will be working with the Residential Learning Community.

Additional Faculty Name(s):
Email:
Department/School: MSC:
College: Office Location:
Phone Number: Fax Number:

Section 3:
Respond to the following questions:
1. Do you have any prior experience with Residential Learning Communities? Yes/No
   If yes, please describe.

2. Who is your target audience (students from a specific major, students interested in community service, students interested in a specific topic/issue, etc.)?

3. What is the targeted number of students who will be in the Residential Learning Community?

4. Please provide the following information for each course that students will be taking together as members of the proposed Residential Learning Community:
   Course Number:
   Course Title:
   Class Number:
   Section Number:

Section 4:
Attach a brief statement responding to the following:
1. Provide a description of the Residential Learning Community.

2. In the implementation of your Residential Learning Community, how will you address the following goals of the Residential Learning Community program?
   • Increase students’ intellectual engagement.
   • Increase students’ academic success.
   • Increase students’ civic responsibility.
   • Increase students’ social competence.

3. Will the content and/or delivery of the course(s) change as a result of being taught in a Residential Learning Community? If so, how?

4. If your Residential Learning Community includes co-requisites or a series of courses offered by several faculty members, is there an expectation that faculty will engage in any of the following? If so, please provide a brief explanation for each of the following that may apply:
   • Integration of course content among the co-requisite or series of courses
   • Utilization of common or shared pedagogy
   • Team teaching of courses in whole or part
   • Regular meetings to discuss academic and/or other matters affecting the Residential Learning Community.
   • Using any other means to create related intentional interactions among/between the courses

5. How do you plan to integrate out-of-class experiences into the Residential Learning Community experience?

6. How do you plan to integrate reflection into the Residential Learning Community experience?

7. How do you plan to recruit for the Residential Learning Community (CHOICES, College visitation days, Take a Look days, etc)?

Section 5:
Please obtain the signatures below. If the Residential Learning Community will involve classes from more than one college or department/school, you must obtain signatures from each college and/or department/school.

In signing below, I grant approval for the faculty named in Sections 1 & 2 of this proposal to implement the proposed Residential Learning Community (if the proposed Residential Learning Community is approved by the Residential Learning Communities Advisory Board). In granting this approval, I have taken into consideration the appropriate college and/or departmental/school resources.

Academic Unit Head Signature: ______________________________ Date: ____________

College C & I Chair Signature: ______________________________ Date: ____________

(C & I = Curriculum and Instruction)
Section 6:
Please read and sign:
I/we have read, understand, and agree to maintain all of the expectations for Residential Learning Communities as articulated in the Residential Learning Communities program description.

Faculty Coordinator Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

Other Faculty Signature(s) (if applicable) ________________________________ Date: __________

Other Faculty Signature(s) (if applicable) ________________________________ Date: __________

Please submit this proposal to Kathleen Campbell in the office of Residence Life campbekl@jmu.edu, Huffman C103, MSC 2401, fax - 568-6280 by January 15, 2010.