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Community Engagement Living-Learning Programs: Build it Well and They Will Come

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Community Engagement Living-Learning Programs: Build it Well and They Will Come

Abstract

Objectives for this presentation were: (1) overview the literature on benefits and models of living-learning programs; (2) describe the components of VCU's new community-engagement living-learning program, VCU ASPiRE; (3) introduce a theoretical model for building high-quality community-engagement living-learning programs; (4) facilitate discussion amongst participants to exchange ideas and to begin strategic problem-solving that will create high-quality community engagement, living-learning programs; and (5) provide living-learning program online resources.

Keywords

community engagement, community, living-learning, service-learning, residence hall, dormitory, dorm

Disciplines

Higher Education

Comments

Presented at the Gulf South Summit Annual Conference, Louisville, Kentucky.

Community Engagement Living-Learning Programs: Build it Well and They Will Come

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Overview

Goals for today's presentation include:

- ◇ Overview the literature on benefits & models of living-learning programs,
- ◇ Describe the components of VCU's new community-engagement living-learning program, VCU ASPIRE,
- ◇ Introduce a theoretical model for building high-quality community-engagement living-learning programs,
- ◇ Facilitate discussion amongst participants to exchange ideas and to begin strategic problem-solving that will create high-quality community-engagement, living-learning programs on your own campus.
- ◇ Provide living-learning program on-line resources.

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First Things First—Definitions

Living-learning programs are residential housing programs that incorporate academically-based themes and build community through common learning.

- ◆ Living-learning programs range from a handful of students living together because they share common academic interest to a four-year, degree-granting “college-within-a-college”.

Non-residential learning communities intentionally link together courses or coursework to provide greater curricular coherence, more opportunities for active teaming, and interaction between students and faculty.

(Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Shapiero & Levine, 1999; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews & Gabelnick, 2004)



Campus-Specific Definitions

It is critically important for campus stakeholders to use the same definitions for different types of residential programs. At VCU we have developed the following campus-specific definitions for residential programs:

- ◇ A **living-learning program** is a residential experience that provide students with a distinct academic certificate and/or minor concentration upon the completion of an *integrated program* of both curricular & co-curricular requirements. Initiated by the provost and president.
- ◇ A **program in residence** is a residential experience that offers students who are enrolled in an established academic major, minor, or certificate program the opportunity to live together in a dedicated residential area. Initiated by academic departments, may or may not include a curricular component.
- ◇ A **themed floor** is a residential experience that offers students who have special interests or life style preferences the opportunity to live and study together. Initiated by Student Affairs and/or students, no curricular component.



So...

**What do we know about
the structures of
living-learning programs as they
currently exist on university and
college campuses in the United
States?**

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National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP)

2004-2008 funded study of 24,000 students, 611 different LLPs on 34 campuses

- ◇ **Size:** 52 students is the median size
- ◇ **Level:** 80% are freshman-level programs,
20% are upper-level undergraduate.
- ◇ **Configuration:** 71% housed within one discrete
portion of a residence hall,
18% encompass entire residence hall
- ◇ **Oversight:** 47% residence life/housing only,
15% academic dept./affairs only,
31% combination stud./acad. affairs

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National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP)

2004-2008 funded study of 24,000 students, 611 different LLPs on 34 campuses

- ◇ **Curricular:** 52% did not include any required coursework,
28% offered 1 course,
14% offered 2 courses.
- ◇ **Co-curricular:** 23% required co-curricular activities
- ◇ **Faculty involvement:** 23% had no faculty involvement
64% included 1-3 faculty members
- ◇ **Student Affairs involvement:** 85% utilized student affairs staff.
- ◇ **Typology:** 27 % of programs were devoted to Civic Engagement and/or Social Justice



What benefits do living-learning programs provide to students?



Outcomes for LLP Students¹

Benefits include

- ◆ more positive interactions with peers & faculty
- ◆ more peer diversity interactions
- ◆ easier transition to college
- ◆ lower level of binge drinking
- ◆ higher intention to participate in community service & do research with a professor
- ◆ higher intention to study abroad and to complete a capstone or thesis.

No differences found in

- ◆ growth in cognitive complexity, liberal learning, or personal philosophy
- ◆ diversity appreciation
- ◆ risk of dropping out of college

¹compared to non-LLP students. As a group, LLP students in this study (NSLLP 2004-2008) had better high school grades and standardized test scores.

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Learning Outcomes for LLP Students

LLP environmental elements that predict selected student learning outcomes (Brower & Inkelas, 2010)					
LLP Environment	Critical Thinking	Application of Knowledge	Commitment to Civic Engagement	Smooth Academic Transition	Smooth Social Transition
In peer study group			X	X	X
Academic/vocational discussions with peers		X	X	X	X
Social/cultural discussions with peers	X	X	X		
Course-related faculty interaction	X	X	X	X	
Academically supportive residence hall climate	X	X	X	X	X
Socially supportive residence hall climate		X	X	X	X

What are the lasting benefits of living in an LLP? According to the NSLLP (2007) results, students who had lived in an LLP during their first year in college had higher levels of academic self-confidence, were more likely to be a mentor for other students, and remained more committed to civic engagement *three years later*. Since the living-learning programs captured by the NSLLP ranged across the entire continuum from those considered high-quality to those that were not, these lasting impacts are even more remarkable.



What about benefits to the community?

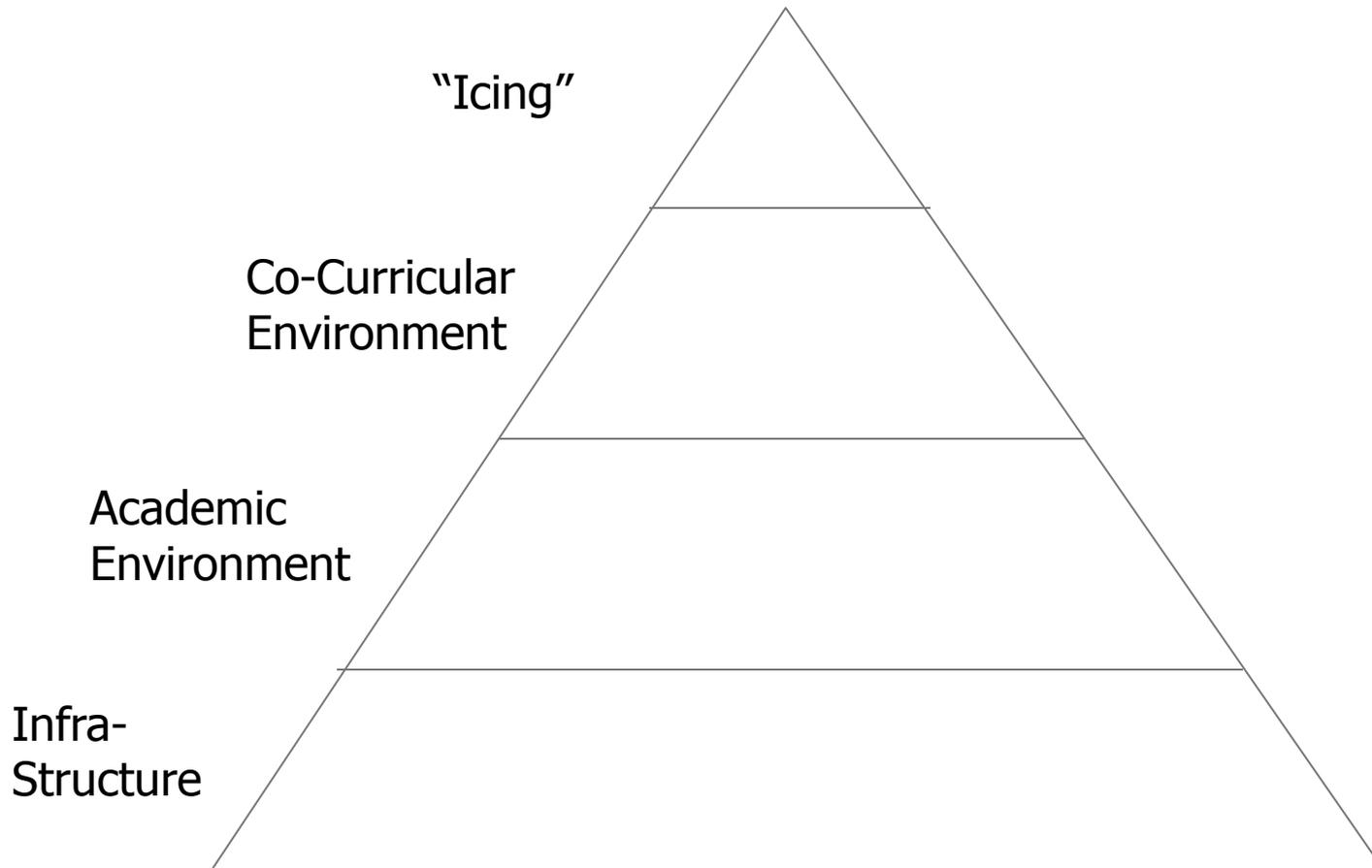
(These are not yet known.)



**Based on research findings,
what are the “active ingredients”
in community-engagement
living-learning programs
that maximize positive outcomes
for students & the community?**

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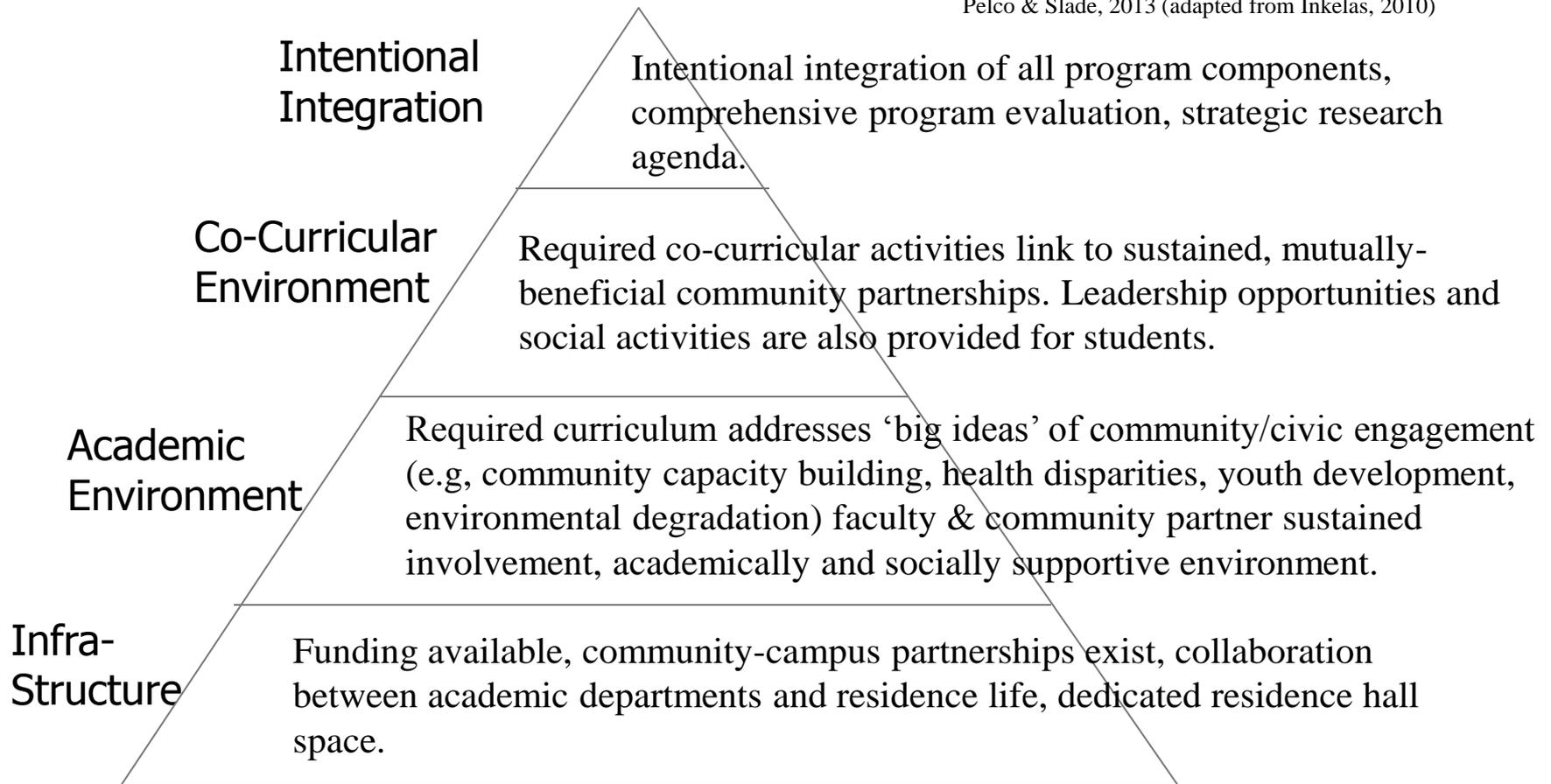
Living-Learning Program “Hierarchy of Needs” Inkelas, 2010



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Community Engagement Living-Learning Program “Hierarchy of Needs”

Pelco & Slade, 2013 (adapted from Inkelas, 2010)



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VCU ASPIRE

ACADEMIC SCHOLARS PROGRAM IN REAL ENVIRONMENTS

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V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y

VCU ASPIRE

Academic Scholars Program in Real Environments

Program Mission

To enrich and deepen undergraduate students' understanding of their capacity to create positive change in communities through coursework, co-curricular activities, and a vibrant residential experience.

Program Structure

Civic engagement-focused living-learning program for upper-level undergraduates (sophomore, junior, & senior). Program requirements include 24-month residence hall commitment, 9-credit hour curriculum, and 100 hours of integrated co-curricular activities. Students receive Civic Engagement Certificate upon successful program completion.

Program Enrollment

Dedicated 5-floor, 450-bed residence hall opened in 2012. First student cohort (2012-2013, n=142) fills 2 of 5 floors. Program enrollment target is 450 by 2015. Current cohort is 100% sophomore-level; 71% female; 47% African American/28% Caucasian/13% Asian American; and represents 30 majors.



www.aspire.vcu.edu

VCU ASPIRE: Academic Scholars Program in Real Environments

Intentional Integration

Daily intentional integration of all program activities, co-located staff. co-curricular activities engage staff & faculty and include reflection, *sustained partnerships* with community organizations that address community-identified needs; robust program evaluation & research agenda involves faculty, staff, community partners, & students.

Co-Curricular Environment

Required co-curricular activities (100 hrs for certificate) across 3 domains (learning, leadership, civic engagement); these activities address community-identified needs & involve reflection; program-sponsored social activities; career/scholarship workshops.

Academic Environment

9-credit required curriculum across 4 semesters culminates in Civic Engagement Certificate & includes 3-credits of general education (GER) courses and 3 service-learning (1-credit) courses, in-house advising, involves ≥ 20 faculty members from multiple disciplines and community partners as co-instructors.

Infra-Structure

New centrally-located residence hall, 6,000' 1st-floor classroom/office space, 450-beds in apartment-style suites, 5 full-time program staff members (3 from academic affairs/2 from student affairs), existing positive community partnerships through Division of Community Engagement & >70 service-learning classes.

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Workshop Activity

Moving your own campus'
community-engagement
living-learning program
“up the hierarchy”

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Moving up the LLP “Hierarchy of Needs”

University Name: _____

Intentional Integration

Program purposefully integrates curricular & co-curricular; living & learning; faculty & staff, campus & community; academic & student affairs; research & teaching...

We have/need...

Co-Curricular Environment

Program includes required co-curricular activities that involve students with sustained community partnerships that address community-identified needs & build students' leadership, career, and civic engagement skills.

We have/need...

Academic Environment

Program includes required curriculum that addresses 'big ideas' in civic engagement; sustained faculty & community partnerships; study, internship, & advising support for students.

We have/need...

Infra-Structure

Program has dedicated space, sustained campus-community partnerships & fiscal resources.

We have/need...

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Our Top 3 “Moving Up the Hierarchy” Goals for 2013-2014

Goals	Strategies we will use to achieve each goal	Who will be responsible for completing each strategy?	Target date by which we will achieve each strategy
Goal #1	a.	a.	a.
	b.	b.	b.
	c.	c.	c.
	d.	d.	d.
Goal #2	a.	a.	a.
	b.	b.	b.
	c.	c.	c.
	d.	d.	d.
Goal #3	a.	a.	a.
	b.	b.	b.
	c.	c.	c.
	d.	d.	d.



Resources

VCU ASPIRE: Academic Scholars Program in Real Environments

<http://aspire.vcu.edu>

2007 National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) Report of Findings

<http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/8392/1/2007%20NSLLP%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Brower, A. M. & Inkelas, K. K. (2010). Living-learning programs: One high-impact educational practice we now know a lot about. *Liberal Education*, 96(2)

www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-sp10/LESP10_Brower.cfm

Association of College & University Housing Officers (ACUHO) Living-Learning Programs Conference

<http://www.acuho-i.org/EventsbrPrograms/2012ACUHOIbrLivingLearningbrProgramsConference/tabid/1070/Default.aspx>

Learning Communities Research & Practice Journal (Vol 1, 2013)

<http://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrpjournal/>

The Washington Center at The Evergreen State College

<http://www.evergreen.edu/washingtoncenter/index.html>

LEARNCOM listserv

<http://www.evergreen.edu/washingtoncenter/listserve/listserve.html>

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