Unintended Consequences of Collegiate Living-Learning Community Programs at a Public University

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David Buchanan Smith
May 2015

Copyright © David Buchanan Smith

All rights reserved.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who believed in me. Specifically, I dedicate this work to the late Dr. E. Grady Bogue, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, whose encouragement, expectations, and love motivated me to persist even in the face of great challenges. I miss him daily. I also dedicate this work to my family: my wife, Noelle, and children, Reagan and Emma, who inspired me with the drive to complete this project; and my parents, Oscar Smith and Patricia Smith, who have continually put my needs before their own. I love each of you.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my major professors, Dr. J. Patrick Biddix, Associate Professor of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and Dr. E. Grady Bogue, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, for guiding me through this process. Their encouragement and wisdom provided me with the motivation necessary to see this project through to completion. I am grateful for their belief in me and my work.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Gary Skolits, Associate Professor of the Educational Psychology and Counseling Department, Dr. Ernest Brewer, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and Dr. David Schumann, Professor of Marketing of the Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management. Their input and guidance were critical in the success of this project. I am honored to have studied under their direction, and I am grateful for their willingness to serve on this committee.

I wish to thank my family for their support and faithfulness during the last six years. My wife, Noelle, and children, Reagan and Emma, endured my erratic and tiresome schedule. They supported me during this process and gave me the love and encouragement necessary to persevere. Likewise, my parents, Oscar Smith and Patricia Smith, supported me in this quest to further my education. They believed in me when I doubted myself. I am and have always been thankful for their love and support.

Heartfelt thanks to the faculty members, colleagues, and friends who contributed to this project directly by providing me with assistance, guidance, and suggestions. In particular, I owe much to Dr. Margaret Sallee who provided me with suggestions and feedback from the onset of

this project through completion. I am also grateful to those who contributed indirectly by comforting me with friendship and support.

Finally, I am forever indebted to those who participated in this research project. Without your contributions, this study would have been impossible. Thank you for your insight and candor.

Abstract

The current body of living-learning community (LLC) research primarily documents programmatic impact relative to intended outcomes such as social integration and improved academic performance. Conversely, few published studies address potential unintended consequences of LLCs. Just as intended outcomes often result from purposive action, unintended consequences may also occur when intentional programming produces unforeseen results. Evidence suggests LLCs—particularly those serving first-time freshmen—may contribute to unanticipated outcomes because of the complex social process occurring within peer groups of post-adolescent students (Jaffee, 2007). Despite evidence that LLCs may produce unforeseen outcomes, the impact of unintended consequences on LLCs remains relatively undocumented in the research literature.

This qualitative comparative case study uncovered and documented unintended consequences related to participation in two well-established LLC programs at a large public university. Study participants included students, staff, faculty, and administrators who participated in multiple data collection procedures. The findings of this study revealed that unintended consequences occurred when relationships between program stakeholders eroded over time. In the absence of programming to sustain group cohesion, LLC cohorts became susceptible to an array of destructive social practices including social marginalization, insularity, risky behavior, rebellion, and conflict. Findings further illustrated the importance of faculty members and administrative personnel associated with LLCs in establishing and maintaining a sense of community among program stakeholders. Implications for practitioners and recommendations for future research are included.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Background and Context 1
Statement of the Problem 7
Purpose of the Study 8
Research Questions 8
Conceptual Framework 8
Significance of the Study 9
Assumptions of the Study 11
Limitations of the Study 12
Delimitations of the Study 13
Definitions 13
Organization of the Study 16

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature 18
History of Collegiate Learning Communities 18
From West to East: The Influence of Evergreen 24
Contemporary Learning Communities: What the Literature Reveals 32
Practices and Models 33
Linked courses model 34
Learning clusters model 35
Freshman interest group 36
Federated learning communities 37
Coordinated studies 39
Residential learning community programs 40
Infinite Possibilities 41
Learning Community Research Findings 42
Academic integration and performance 43
Social integration and sense of community 46
Interdisciplinary learning 49
Retention and persistence 51
Learning Community Criticism 54
Peer Cohorts in Collegiate Settings 58
Cracks in the Foundation 62
Conceptual Framework 65
Homophily 67
Primary Group Formation 70
Social Class Theory 73
Summary of Review of Literature Chapter 76

Chapter 3 Design and Methodology 79
Research Design 79
Site Selection 82
Trailblazers Living-Learning Community 86
Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community 89
Data Collection Timeline and Procedures 91
Interviews 93
Individual interviews 95

Focus group interviews 96
Observation 98
Document Analysis 99
Data Analysis Plan 101
Trustworthiness of Data 103
Ethical Considerations 105

Chapter 4 Presentation of Findings 107
Results 108
Case Study 1 – Trailblazers Living-Learning Community 108
Unintended consequences themes 111
Social stratification 111
Insularity 120
Risky behavior 123
Negative views of faculty and associated curricula 126
Rebellion 128
Summary of unintended consequences themes 133
Case Study 2 – Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community 134
Unintended consequences themes 137
Social stratification 137
Insularity 149
Risky behavior 153
Conflict 155
Financial reciprocity 158
Summary of unintended consequences themes 160
Cross Case Analysis 161
LLC Outcomes Across Cases 161
Unintended Consequences Themes across Cases 162
Social Stratification 164
Insularity 165
Risky Behavior 165
Negative Views of Faculty and Associated Curricula 166
Rebellion 167
Conflict 168
Financial Reciprocity 169

Chapter 5 Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations 170
Summary of Findings 172
Unintended Consequences Themes of Collegiate LLCs 172
Social Stratification 173
Insularity 174
Risky Behavior 175
Negative Views of Faculty and Associated Curricula 175
Rebellion 176
Conflict 177
Financial Reciprocity 178
Discussion 178

Homophily, Intergroup Bias, and the Social Class Divide 181
Social Stratification between Faculty and Administrative Staff 184
Learning Community Insularity 186
Primary Group Formation 187
  Emergent Primary Groups 188
Consequences of Primary Group Formation 189
  Acts of Defiance 189
  Risky Behavior 190
  Conflict 191
Positive Unintended Consequences 191
Conclusions 193
Implications for Practice 195
Recommendations for Future Research 198
References 201
Appendices 218
Vita 231

List of Tables

Table 1. Field research timeline.....92

Table 2. Occurrences of data collection procedures involving human subjects.....93

Table 3. Entering Trailblazers Living-Learning Community outdoor skills profile 110

Table 4. Summary of LLC outcomes.....161

Table 5. Summary of unintended consequences themes 163

List of Figures

Figure 1. Trailblazers Living-Learning Community social classes 113

Figure 2. Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community social stratification.....142

Chapter 1

Background and Context

Collegiate learning community programs have become a popular method for institutions of higher learning to address an array of issues ranging from retention to social integration (Gabelnick, MacGregror, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004). In their earliest incarnations, learning communities existed to cultivate intellect and introduce students to the foundational principles of democracy. Such programs helped students understand the interrelated nature of democratic citizenship and the academic pursuit of truth (Smith, 2001). When compared with their early predecessors, today's collegiate learning community programs have changed dramatically. For example, contemporary learning communities often function as themed cohorts and freshman experience initiatives (Soldner, Lee, & Duby, 1999-2000; Marchand, 2010). College and university officials frequently rely on these learning communities to supplant the age-old lecture-based model of classroom instruction (Smith et al., 2004). Many educators and administrators utilize learning communities to offer a "more holistic integrated learning experience for students," peers, faculty, and support staff members (Cross, 1998, p. 4). For the purpose of this study, a learning community will be defined as an intentional collegiate program that "link[s] or cluster[s] two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enroll[s] a common cohort of students" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 20).

Given its ever-expanding presence, the contemporary learning community model seems poised to reform American higher education (Smith et al., 2004). Consider the proliferation of the learning community movement evidenced by the more than 500 campuses that host learning community programs (p. 56). These programs have proven as diverse as the institutions hosting

them, and they typically feature attractive incentives for participants and sponsors like early access to residence life, preliminary coursework opportunities, and elaborate social integration interventions (Jaffee, 2007, p. 65). Some learning communities cater to specific populations such as first-generation college students, whereas others function as discipline-specific cohorts. In an age where colleges and universities enroll larger numbers of students, learning communities provide opportunities for participants to enjoy personalized, intimate educational experiences regardless of the size of the host institution (Tinto, 1993).

The successes of learning community programs have been widely publicized since the 1980s (Andrade, 2007-2008; Crissman, 2001; Cross, 1998; Brittenham et al., 2003; Dunlap & Pettitt, 2008; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Johnson, 2000-2001; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Smith et al., 2004; Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, & Lindblad, 2003; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994; Tinto & Love, 1995; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). As the learning community movement gained momentum, scholars lauded the benefits of learning community initiatives. During the last decade alone, numerous studies validated claims that learning communities improve retention (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Daffron & Holland, 2009; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Hotchkiss, Moore, & Pitts, 2006; Johnson, 2000-2001; Keup, 2005-2006; Logan, Salisbury-Glennon, & Spence, 2000; Raftery, 2005; Sommo, Mayer, Rudd, & Cullinan, 2012; Stassen, 2003; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Tokuno, 1993; Tokuno & Campbell, 1992; Wright, 1989; Yockey & George, 1998), promote social integration (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Barbatis, 2010; Franklin, 2000; Goldberg & Finkelstein, 2002; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003), increase faculty-student interaction (Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Crissman, 2001; Franklin, 2000; Inkelas & Wiseman, 2003; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Zhao & Kuh,

2004), foster rich learning experiences, and contribute to students' overall satisfaction with the collegiate experience (Baker & Pomerentz, 2000-2001; Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Johnson, 2000-2001; Raftery, 2005; Stassen, 2003; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2002; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994; Yockey & George, 1998). While the scholarship advocating the benefits of learning communities remains substantial, researchers have yet to exhaustively document learning community outcomes beyond quantitative inquiries (MacGregor, 1991). For example, a negligible amount of scholarship has examined learning community programs through qualitative inquiry (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Johnson, 2000-2001; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993; Tinto & Love, 1995). Consequently, criticism that could explore potential pedagogical shortcomings of the learning community model remains most notably absent from the literature.

Learning community criticism has largely addressed programmatic design flaws and implementation failures through editorials and commentary (Browne & Minnick, 2005; Jaffee, 2004, 2007; Mendelson, 2006). For example, Smith (2001) warned that an alarming number of learning community programs were operating without a clear purpose or mission, noting that "too many learning communities are little more than block registration devices, with little alteration of the teaching and learning environment" (p. 4). Smith's concerns echoed what she described as a recurring but often undocumented sentiment that learning community sponsors sometimes inhibited program success by failing to develop them further once implemented. Too often programs were instituted and then left to wither when successes were not immediate. Predictably, evidence of programmatic shortcomings began to appear in scholarly journals as studies and critical analyses suggested some learning communities were failing to achieve intended results (Goldberg & Finkelstein, 2002; Pike et al., 1997; 2010; Potts, Schultz, & Foust,

2003-2004; Visher & Teres, 2011; Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, & Wathington, 2012; Walleri, Stoker, & Stoering, 1998; Weiss, Visher, & Wathington, 2010), promote social integration (Maxwell, 1998), or foster collaborative learning environments (Mendelson, 2006). The most unfavorable of criticism lambasted learning community organizers for curricular negligence (Browne & Minnick, 2005). Though warranted, these criticisms typically exposed specific localized challenges in that their rectification required individual programmatic adjustments (Smith, 2001). However, scant research addressed what was likely the greater threat to the learning community movement: the potential for social discord among participants. While implementation and curricular inadequacies threatened to derail individual programs, learning community advocates failed to recognize budding organizational weaknesses that could adversely affect countless programs (Jaffee, 2004, 2007).

Until Jaffee (2004, 2007) raised concerns about unintended consequences of learning community participation, negligible research addressed weaknesses of the learning community model. In the July 9, 2004 edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jaffee—a professor of sociology at the University of North Florida—penned an article about the dichotomous nature of learning communities as both cohesive and divisive programs. Citing specific drawbacks that could undermine varying types of learning community programs, he warned that residential learning communities held the potential to "produce unanticipated problems" (p. B-16).

Jaffee's concern regarding the learning community model lay rooted in the sociological principle of the law of unintended consequences which posits that purposeful social action produces intended and unintended consequences (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). In light of the law of unintended consequences, Jaffee (2004) suggested that as homogenous peer groups learning communities are susceptible to the inadvertent creation of "conditions that potentially retard

participants' academic development" (B-16). He cited students' vulnerability to groupthink, adversarial interactions with faculty, and social discord as potential undesirable outcomes of learning community participation. To bolster his claims, Jaffee recounted his own experiences as a learning community director where he bore witness to varying degrees of social discord amidst the programs he facilitated. Realizing his own experiences were not necessarily indicative of a universal problem, Jaffee drew comparisons between the learning community model and that of educational peer cohorts—which research had shown to sometimes produce negative, unintended consequences (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010; Radencich et. al., 1998; Reynolds & Herbert, 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Schribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997).

Indeed the peer cohort literature substantiates Jaffee's claims as various studies confirm integrated learning programs' susceptibility to the law of unintended consequences as evidenced in Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott (2001). Their research found that students participating in a teacher-education cohort experienced a range of "powerfully positive" to "disturbingly negative" outcomes (p. 362). Likewise, Scribner and Donaldson (2001) found that groups of professional educators participating in a graduate education administration cohort adhered to social norms that impeded meaningful learning. These studies and similar publications (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Radencich et al., 1998; Tinto, 1993) illustrated the peer cohort's vulnerability to social discord.

Jaffee's (2004, 2007) warnings did little to rival the avalanche of favorable learning community research findings, but his writings drew attention to a void within learning community research. He specifically noted that most of the learning community literature remains "couched in the language of theoretical intention rather than practical consequence" (B-

16). To date, most scholarly publications on collegiate learning communities have explored the movement's philosophical underpinnings rather than the consequences of their practical application. Furthermore, on the occasion when researchers did study specific programs, most inquiries lacked depth simply because they solely assessed quantifiable outcomes such as retention and academic performance (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Borden, Burton, Evenbeck, & Williams, 1997; Daffron & Holland, 2009; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Johnson & Romanoff, 1999; Keup, 2005-2006; Maxwell, 1998; Potts et al., 2003/2004; Stassen, 2003; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2001; Walleri et al., 1998; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Though important to the expansion of the learning community knowledge base, these quantitative studies captured limited data. Even Jaffee's own research on learning community programs came in the form of quantitative inquiry when he and fellow researchers examined the impact of learning community participation among three cohorts of students at a regional university (Jaffee, Carle, Philip, & Paltoo, 2008). Though the study addressed a gap in the literature, it also revealed the limitations of quantitative inquiry in illuminating the nuances of social interaction within a learning community.

Researchers have yet to provide the rich information necessary to determine the qualitative impact of learning community program outcomes on the lives of participants. For example, what specific problems do students face, and how do problems impact students' commitments to their respective learning communities? Jaffee et al. (2008) noted that future research must "consider the full range of potential consequences that can emerge" from the assembly of a group of students (p. 67). In light of the present learning community research, future inquiries should indeed determine how learning community facilitators might construct and implement programs less vulnerable to potential negative consequences. Therefore, to

contribute to the existing knowledge base this study examined specific programs to understand how unintended consequences shaped the experiences of learning community students.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars have cautioned learning community facilitators to understand the sociological implications of assembling homogeneous groups of students—those of similar demographic characteristics and level of education—within a community designed to promote social integration and collaborative learning (Jaffee, 2004, 2007). Considering that peer cohorts have proven vulnerable to social dysfunction and unanticipated problems (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010; Radencich et al., 1998; Reynolds & Herbert, 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Schribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997), research in higher education might investigate the intricate peer group interaction that contributes to learning community outcomes. While it is known that learning community programs often positively influence retention and academic performance (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Daffron & Holland, 2009; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Hotchkiss, Moore, & Pitts, 2006; Johnson, 2000-2001; Keup, 2005-2006; Logan, Salisbury-Glennon, & Spence, 2000; Raftery, 2005; Sommo et al., 2012; Stassen, 2003; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Tokuno, 1993; Tokuno & Campbell, 1992; Wright, 1989; Yockey & George, 1998), evidence also suggests that learning communities produce unintended outcomes—some of which may negatively impact students, program staff, and faculty (Jaffee, 2004, 2007; Jaffee et al., 2008; Mendelson, 2006). However, the extent to which the consequences of learning community participation "both advance and undermine the objectives of [a learning community] program" is not fully known (Jaffee, 2007, p. 66). Consequently, research should determine how learning community facilitators might construct and implement

programs less vulnerable to unintended consequences—especially consequences that threaten to undermine programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify and examine unintended consequences of collegiate living-learning communities (LLCs).

Research Questions

Research questions were developed after analyzing extant learning community scholarship and related literature to identify areas lacking sufficient research. Furthermore, the development of research questions and subsequent fieldwork were informed by four sociological constructs. These constructs—the law of unintended consequences, homophily, primary group formation and interaction, and social class conflict—provided a lens through which the researcher could understand the phenomenon under study. The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What are the unintended consequences of living-learning community participation?
2. How are the institution's living-learning community stakeholders affected by these unintended consequences?

Conceptual Framework

As proposed by David Jaffee (2007), Professor of Sociology at the University of North Florida, the conceptual framework guiding this inquiry was informed by Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1954) law of unintended consequences in conjunction with three sociological principles that parcel the effects of peer group formation. These principles—homophily, primary group formation and interaction, and social class conflict—provide a lens with which to evaluate

and explain the social interplay that fosters, if present, unintended consequences. Each of the sociological principles is explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

As is characteristic of educational cohorts, the dynamics of peer group interaction directly influence productivity and behavioral climate (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Consequently, the unique social circumstances created through learning community programs foster an array of potential outcomes that may contribute to or limit desirable outcomes (Jaffee et al., 2008). Well-established research has revealed that serious difficulties arise among educational cohort groups similar in organizational structure to learning communities (Greenelee & Karanxha, 2010; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Therefore, researchers should consider the extent to which learning community students encounter both enriching and challenging experiences. Unfortunately, investigation of potential negative consequences of learning community participation remains all but absent from the higher education literature. However, an exploratory comparative case study of freshman-experience learning community programs stands to enhance the present literature by thoroughly documenting students' learning community experiences. Therefore, this study chronicled participants' experiences in two living-learning community (LLC) programs at a single public research university. Each learning community was distinct from the other in order to establish variation between the programs and their respective populations.

Significance of the Study

Existing higher education literature offers little insight into the complex social processes occurring within learning community programs. Consequently, this study generated a wellspring of data documenting and describing the social behaviors of two distinct learning community peer groups at a single institution (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). As qualitative inquiry typically

produces rich information on research subjects, this study sought to broaden the current knowledge base by generating a narrative chronicling learning community experiences (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Learning community facilitators will benefit from the findings presented in this study because the information documents stakeholders' perceptions of the consequences of learning community participation. Consequently, the data reported in this study is useful in the construction of future programs or modification of existing learning community initiatives. By gaining insight into students' experiences, program facilitators may better understand potential strengths and weaknesses of the learning community model (Tinto, 1998). In particular, the identification of detrimental outcomes could reshape the manner by which programs facilitate social integration and active learning (Jaffee et al., 2008).

Students stand to benefit from this research as well because they are the individuals whose educational experiences are most affected by learning community involvement—particularly LLCs. While research has shown that participants typically make academic gains when enrolled in a learning community, little is known regarding the individual social and psychological impact of program participation (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Daffron & Holland, 2009; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Minkler, 2002; Potts & Foust, 2003-2004; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Therefore, gaining a better understanding of individuals' unique experiences promises to inform learning community recruits of the potential advantages and challenges of program participation.

Successful learning community initiatives hold the promise of reimagining the way students grow socially and intellectually. College and university administrators and student affairs personnel can gain critical information from this research regarding the manner in which

institutions may support learning community programs. Understanding programs' strengths and deficiencies empowers learning community practitioners with knowledge of how to best cultivate programs that match the needs of their respective campuses. After all, prosperous learning community programs contribute to student satisfaction and intellectual development—both of which remain at the heart of many institutional missions (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Smith et al., 2004; Tinto, 2003). A stable learning community program often contributes to improved performance and retention, so institutional leaders must devote special attention to the development and maintenance of their respective learning communities (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Daffron & Holland, 2009; Johnson, 2000-2001; Minkler, 2002; Potts et al., 2003-2004; Tinto, 2003; Tinto & Love, 1995; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010).

The data presented in the study provides researchers with a foundation on which to construct future qualitative inquiries that focus on LLCs in particular. The majority of the existing collegiate learning community literature measures quantifiable program outcomes such as retention and academic performance (MacGregor, 1991; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1995). Few studies focus on the individual student's learning community experience; therefore, this study captures the unique experiences that contributed to overall student perception of two LLCs—a phenomena heretofore largely absent from the higher education literature.

Assumptions of the Study

Assumptions are components of a study that the researcher accepts as true or plausible (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). For the purposes of this study, the researcher made the following assumptions:

1. Reality and meaning is constructed by individuals, thus study participants including the researcher "develop subjective meanings of their experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p.

20). Therefore, the researcher approached the inquiry from a social constructivist paradigm by seeking to document participants' views of their experiences within the contexts in which [they] live" (p. 21).

2. Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1954) law of unintended consequences that purposive action creates unanticipated outcomes applies to implementation of learning communities.
3. Research participants contributed to the inquiry by providing honest input reflective of their opinions and worldviews.

Limitations of the Study

Research is subject to the inherent limitations of specific methodological approaches. As with other qualitative studies, in achieving depth of the phenomenon under study, this inquiry remains restricted in scope. Therefore, certain conditions or restrictions limited this study. As with all qualitative research, generalization beyond the findings of this study may not be possible, and thus the generalizability of the research may remain relevant only to the institution under study (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Likewise, another limitation of the study is its reliability. Since the findings are unique to the researcher and the environment under study, replication is not assured in the event future researchers model a study after this inquiry (Merriam, 2009). Finally, in crafting a narrative of students' experiences, the study relies on individual perceptions and recollections of events. These experiential accounts were dependent upon subjective interpretation of past occurrences. Therefore, individual accounts of past happenings were vulnerable to students' personal biases (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations of a study provide boundaries for the research project. Principle delimitations of this study related directly to design constraints that maintained the project's focus. The selected LLCs at the study institution serve as a primary delimitation of the research project. While the institution hosts twenty-two learning community programs—sixteen of which are LLCs— two of the host campus's most robust programs share a similarity in that they have existed several years. As this study sought to explore unintended consequences of LLC participation, the project focused solely on these two well-established LLC programs.

A second delimitation of this study related to the limited scope of the research project. Therefore, findings regarding learning community program consequences are unique to program participants and may not be applicable to other learning communities and their host institutions.

Finally, Jaffee's (2007) conceptual framework provides an appropriate lens with which to examine unintended consequences of learning community participation; however, this framework may not have captured the full extent of learning community outcomes given the parameters of the study. Nonetheless, by providing qualitative data regarding learning community outcomes, the conceptual framework established a foundation on which future studies may build.

Definitions

For this study, a variety of terms require definition in order to familiarize researchers with language associated with learning community programs, collegiate cohorts, and associated pedagogical practices. Definitions of relevant terminology follow:

- Cohort–an intentional grouping of students to build continuity of experience and foster collaborative learning environments. Student cohorts typically "begin programs

of study together" and share a "series of common learning experiences over time" (Maher, 2004).

- Collaborative learning–instructional pedagogy that emphasizes active learning where students engage one another through joint class assignments, discussions, and research projects. Students typically work together in small groups thereby promoting deep, meaningful learning (Smith & MacGregor, 1992).
- Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education–a framework for describing institutional diversity among the United States' institutions of higher learning. The Carnegie Classification system consists of basic categorizations followed by sub-categorizations related to Undergraduate and Graduate Instructional Program classifications, Enrollment Profile and Undergraduate Profile classifications, and Size & Setting classification (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2010).
- Master's/L: Masters Colleges and Universities (larger programs)–institutions that awarded at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2010).
- Federated learning communities (FLC)–a complex variation of the FIG learning community model designed to provide students at larger universities with personalized, intimate learning opportunities (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).
- Freshmen Interest Groups (FIG)–groups of freshmen students who have elected to participate in a cohort program related to their interests in a specific discipline. FIG programs typically link three or more courses that are necessary in advancing study in a specific discipline (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

- Homophily–A theory positing that people who share intrinsic similarities are more likely to associate with one another than with those who are different (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954).
- Learning community–For the purpose of this study, a learning community is an intentional collegiate program that "link[s] or cluster[s]two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enroll[s] a common cohort of students" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 20).
- Learning cluster–a variation of the linked course model whereby students enroll in three or more courses during an academic year. This curricular model provides students with a shared cohort experience in that students typically take the majority of classes in a given semester with the same group of students. Instructors teach courses autonomously but cluster courses are typically linked by a common theme (Smith et al., 2004).
- Linked course model–a simplistic learning community model linking two courses through interrelated assignments and classwork where instructors teach courses autonomously but coordinate assignments and projects to establish coherence in students' educational experiences (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).
- Living-learning community (LLC)–For the purpose of this study, a living-learning community is a type of curricular-based peer cohort that affords students an opportunity to live together during the course of the first and often second semesters of their first academic year of enrollment at an institution (Smith et al., 2004).
- Primary group formation and interaction–a component of two classic distinctions between the types of groups within which people interact. Primary groups form when

people are assembled together within environments that cultivate "personal, intimate, and enduring socioemotional bonds and relationships" (Jaffee, 2007, p. 67; see also Cooley, 1962).

- Social class conflict–Derived from the Marxist theory of social class formation (Marx & Engels, 2012). Student cohort groups bond together in a manner that produces a "high level of class consciousness" whereby groups function as "mobilized alliance[s]" sharing a "common interest" (Jaffee, 2007, p. 68).
- Unintended consequence–as originally defined by Merton (1936), unintended consequences of purposive social action are those solely the result of a specific action or the "interplay of the action and the objective situation" (p. 895). Unintended consequences are not inherently positive or negative; rather, they are merely unanticipated results of a specific purposive action.

Organization of the Study

This research project is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the learning community concept and the unexplored potential outcomes of learning community participation. Furthermore, the introduction establishes the context of the study in light of previous learning community research. In sum, chapter one details the study's statement of purpose, research questions, limitations and delimitations, and the work's guiding conceptual framework. Chapter 1 concludes with definitions of relevant terms. Thereafter, Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the research and literature on learning community history, pedagogical practices, and integrated learning experiences. The review of literature also provides information on findings pertaining to sociological principles relating to peer group formation within collegiate educational settings. Chapter 3 specifies the methods and procedures to conduct this comparative case study including the design, population, and methods for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 offers a

presentation of research findings, and Chapter 5 concludes the study with discussion, analysis, and implications for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this case study is to identify and examine unintended consequences of living learning communities (LLCs). In order to establish the context in which this study occurred, the review of literature provides a history of the learning community movement, tracing its meager beginnings through the current widespread proliferation. Thereafter, an analysis of current learning community practices reveals the extent to which the model has evolved. By exploring the differing categorizations of learning community programs, this review of literature documents the diversity of learning community programs by identifying current program models. Upon establishing varied ways in which learning community programs exist, a brief review of the use of cohorts in higher education details the manner in which cohort groupings have contributed to and detracted from students' educational experiences. Finally, this profile of cohorts segues into a broader discussion of sociological principles relating to group dynamics. More specifically, the review establishes the applicability of the sociological principles of homophily, the role of primary group formation, and social class theory in relation to learning community programs.

History of Collegiate Learning Communities

To appreciate the emergence of contemporary learning community initiatives, one must first understand their origin. The learning community concept owes much to John Dewey and Alexander Meiklejohn for advocating that students' educational experiences center on collaborative ventures with faculty and peers (Smith et al., 2004). Dewey championed the idea of valuing student individualism as critical in shaping one's educational endeavors. Likewise, he felt that students deserved personal attention because their needs varied. However, this

individualism did not mean that students should learn apart from others. In contrast, he felt that students' individual experiences should contribute to others' learning as well as their own (Dewey, 1974).

Dewey saw learning as an "inherently social process" dependent upon the exchange of ideas among people engaged in a mutual process of discovery (Smith et al., 2004, p. 26). Dewey claimed this mutual discovery results when students and teachers share in an awakening to new ideas and perspectives. While the instructor guides students on a path of discovery, he or she also participates as part of the group by facilitating debate, posing complex problems, and giving voice to dissenting ideas. Dewey maintained that such intellectual discourse serves a dual purpose. First, students expand their own understanding of others by availing themselves of different perspectives. Second, students learn how to give voice to dissenting opinions. In turn, these characteristics promote the foundational principles of democratic society. Consequently, the sharing of ideas promotes responsible and active citizenship that encourages students to become active participants in democracy (Dewey, 1974).

As an opponent of lecture-based instruction, Dewey felt such teaching practice prohibited students from participating in their own learning. He maintained that teachers should assume less authoritarian positions in favor of adopting roles akin to group leaders where they actively engage each member of a class. Dewey argued that only teachers who deliberately and actively know their pupils could determine how best to shape students' educational experiences. This intentional awareness meant that teachers collaborated with students to encourage individual discovery (Dewey, 1974).

Though John Dewey did not implement learning communities *per se*, his advocacy of student interaction as preparation for civic engagement was instrumental in influencing early

learning communities. Alexander Meiklejohn, however, actually pioneered what most regard as the first intentionally structured learning community. Like Dewey, Meiklejohn shared in the concern that students were not sufficiently engaged in collaborative scholarly pursuits (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

As a philosophy professor at the University of Wisconsin in the 1920s, Meiklejohn sought to address what he perceived as the erosion of general education. He was concerned that the American research university was eroding interdisciplinary learning opportunities where students gained the necessary skills to actively engage in a democracy. Meiklejohn felt that as universities grew larger and less engaged in general education curricula, students were increasingly unaware of their democratic responsibilities as citizens. To combat this trend, he wanted to integrate learning and living by requiring students to participate in an "Experimental College" where students' first two years of coursework concentrated on a general education curriculum related specifically to democracy and citizenship (Smith et al., 2004, p. 28). Students were to engage in active learning opportunities that involved close interaction with faculty who were "seen as facilitators of learning rather than as distant figures on a lectern" (Smith, 2001, p. 2).

An inimitable and ambitious project, Meiklejohn had trouble from the outset maintaining support for his learning community program. Faculty resisted the learning community concept because the majority typically preferred the autonomy of institutional departmentalism. Nonetheless, Meiklejohn insisted that faculty participating in the Experimental College collaborate across departments and disciplines to jointly guide students through coursework. Gone were professorial titles in favor of the less authoritarian denotation of advisor. As advisors, faculty members enjoyed freedom to explore new methods for guiding inquiry; they were

charged with helping students "learn how to think, not what to think" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 30). This collaboration with students meant that faculty members engaged in a unique form of team teaching, thereby leading the direction of their courses but not mandating specific learning benchmarks as measured by final examinations. Instead, students were to have a greater responsibility for their own learning. Consequently, formal grades were absent from the program until its conclusion. Therefore, Experimental College students were free from the oppression of grade obsession so they could focus their intellectual energies on assignments, seminar discussions, and research opportunities. Though students earned grades only at the conclusion of the program, assignments—especially Meiklejohn's six-week writing projects—provided necessary "structure and accountability to the learning process" (p. 31).

Despite the innovation of the Experimental College, Meiklejohn battled constant opposition from various facets of the university. Predictably, some administrators and faculty never warmed to his learning community vision. For many at the University of Wisconsin, Meiklejohn's learning community model posed a direct threat to the long-held routines of the academy, so the proposition of change evoked an entrenched response. Likewise, the Experimental College faced adversity from within; building community among students proved difficult in some instances given distractions that pulled at students' loyalties. Other campus organizations and social offerings regularly undermined Experimental College students' commitment to the community. Opposition from faculty and student self-interest eventually eroded Meiklejohn's efforts to the point where the University of Wisconsin terminated the Experimental College after a mere five years of operation (Smith et al., 2004).

Despite the Experimental College's demise, Meiklejohn's quest to create a "seamless interface between the living and learning environment" proved remarkably influential (Smith,

2001, p. 2). In the years following, the Experimental College model began to appear at other institutions. Most notably, Joseph Tussman, a former student of Meiklejohn's, successfully revived the learning community concept at the University of California-Berkley during the early 1960s. Once again, the intent of a learning community centered on the concept of an individual's responsibility to engage in "democratic citizenship" (p. 3).

Tussman's role in the advancement of the learning community model is particularly noteworthy because he emphasized three practices that eventually became hallmarks of many learning community programs (Smith et al., 2004). For one, Tussman (1997) adhered to Meiklejohn's mantra that a learning community should contribute to the betterment of society. Similar to his mentor, Tussman used learning communities to awaken students to their social obligations. This meant more than mere awareness of civic duty; Tussman expected students to engage in the current political and moral dilemmas of the time so as to become an active agent of change. Tussman's insistence on civic engagement required that participating faculty and staff organize the program around a theme pertaining to democracy. In turn, this adherence to a theme unified students, faculty, and support staff through interrelated activities and philosophical inquiry. Consequently, programming for Tussman's learning community spawned a greater sense of collaboration among participating faculty members because no one administrator or scholar was solely responsible for developing or delivering the program. As a cross-discipline venture, the learning community curriculum required the input from all involved in the program (Smith et al., 2004).

A second way that Tussman influenced the learning community model relates to building community among students through residential programming. What might seem inconsequential actually served to deepen a sense of togetherness among learning community participants as

Tussman arranged for his learning community to share living space in a stand-alone house next to campus. Having a physical location for learning community participants to live and engage in scholarly activities helped them better identify as a group united in quest for self-discovery. By living and learning in an environment of cooperation, students were afforded the opportunity to comingle the academic and social realms of the collegiate experience. As a result, students were less likely to compartmentalize their campus experiences; instead students' social and scholastic endeavors intermingled creating a continual learning experience (Jones & Smith, 1984).

A signature distinction of Tussman's learning community was his insistence on an open admission policy. Tussman maintained that his program was intended for all students—not a program that stood apart from the general population as a privileged group. Tussman sought students willing to commit to the program and its ideals because he believed in the transformative power of the learning community. Therefore, he felt strongly that irrespective of academic credentials, admission into the learning community should be available to any Berkley student willing to commit to the program (Smith et al., 2004).

While Tussman's learning community program certainly proved remarkable for its unique components, it too failed to survive beyond the experimental stage. Two cycles were the extent of the program's existence at Berkley. Much the same with Meiklejohn's Experimental College, the University of California-Berkley's entrenchment in its established routines of classroom instruction did not allow for the survival of a learning community that thwarted the institutional status quo. Even Tussman conceded that the sustained difficulty of fighting to keep a learning community afloat in an environment not accustomed to or welcoming of change was more than he could bear: "I felt the seductive charm of 'normal' academic life…I missed it, and I shrank from the thought of giving it up for the unremitting intensity of life in the [learning

community] program" (Tussman, 1997, p. 43). Though Tussman's learning community program did not endure, the impact of its short existence proved nothing short of revolutionary in the coming years. Tussman's program—as well as those of other like-minded scholars—influenced enough people to inspire a national learning community movement (Jones & Smith, 1984).

The 1980s ushered in a revival of learning community initiatives because several institutions launched curricular innovations fashioned after Meiklejohn and Tussman's original programs. These institutions brought the learning community concept to national prominence by demonstrating the effectiveness and feasibility of their models. Most influential, however, were the institutions that subsequently adopted the learning community model and began to proclaim their programs' influence on student retention (Smith, 2001). Many educators and administrators offered anecdotal evidence suggesting a connection existed between student successes and learning community participation. Eventually respected scholars like Tinto (1993), Astin (1994), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) confirmed these claims by reporting correlative links between learning communities and student satisfaction (Smith et al., 2004).

From West to East: The influence of Evergreen.

While the contemporary collegiate learning community bears a resemblance to its forbearers, the model has evolved to the point that learning communities take a variety of forms. This universality of the learning community philosophy owes much to the founding faculty at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Evergreen holds the distinction of reimagining the undergraduate experience by structuring the undergraduate curriculum around the learning community concept (Smith et al., 2004).

The Evergreen State College was established in 1970 as an alternative institution where students could experience an integrated learning opportunity like none that had ever been offered

in the United States. One of the institution's founding deans, Mervyn Cadwallader, had family ties with Tussman and was an acquaintance and protégé of Meiklejohn's. As a charismatic advocate for integrated studies programming, Cadwallader had successfully established learning community-styled programs at San Jose State College and later at the State University of New York-Old Westbury. Cadwallader so believed in Meiklejohn's tenets of interdisciplinary educational opportunities, he often participated in speaking engagements to raise awareness of their benefits. He firmly believed that the innovative restructuring of the undergraduate experience would take root at other institutions if key administrators and faculty knew about the benefits of the integrated studies model. Just as Cadwallader predicted, one such institution—Sonoma State College—embraced the interdisciplinary model by founding the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies which thrives to this day (Smith et al., 2004).

Cadwallader's efforts to raise awareness of early learning community initiatives gained the attention of fellow academicians. Consequently, when legislators allowed for the establishment of The Evergreen State College, Cadwallader was among the first founding deans hired to institute an innovative undergraduate curriculum (Smith et al., 2004).

Simplistic yet revolutionary, Cadwallader believed that collaboration based on mutual trust between faculty and students cultivated a transformational educational environment. Therefore, in establishing the curriculum at The Evergreen State College, he sought to abandon what King (1993) termed "sage on the stage" instructional practices by completely reinventing the undergraduate experience (p. 30). Thus, Cadwallader and his Evergreen colleagues devised an undergraduate program that gave all students an opportunity to participate in year-long coordinated studies programs intended to bridge the gulf between faculty and students. Accordingly, faculty members were not granted titles, rank, or departmental affiliations. Instead,

faculty members were charged with sharing their expertise with students and colleagues alike in a joint educational venture where all participants sought a greater understanding of self within society. The resultant interdisciplinary communities of scholars allowed for professional experiences unlike any other within the academy. Furthermore, the pedagogical emphasis of the programs accentuated "team teaching, seminars, narrative evaluations instead of grades, writing across the curriculum, cooperative education, and experiential learning" (Smith et al., 2004).

Despite some enrollment challenges in its formative years, The Evergreen State College proved an ambitious and ultimately successful reinvention of the baccalaureate college. While Evergreen stands apart from fellow institutions within the academy, the college's influence has permeated a variety of institutions great and small through the adoption of learning communities. The Evergreen State College curriculum demonstrated the adaptability of the learning community concept in that programs could vary in a number of ways including adherence to theme, enrollment of specific student populations, and the blending of living and learning environments. These innovations among others would prove easily transferable to even the nation's most traditionally rigid institutions (Smith et al., 2004).

Ironically, the nation's smaller less influential institutions were the forerunners in widespread implementation of learning communities. While few favored overhauling their entire campuses by following Evergreen's model, several institutions radically adopted the learning community concept and made it their own. Principal among these was New York's LaGuardia Community College and the State University of New York-Stony Brook. Both of these institutions were instrumental in crafting learning community programs that established models easily incorporated at other institutions. At LaGuardia Community College, Associate Dean Roberta Matthews honed the learning community model into a more adaptable structure to meet

the needs of her institution. This restructuring represented a pinnacle achievement in the learning community proliferation because it spawned a distinctive learning community model. At LaGuardia Community College, Dean Matthews introduced what has since become a common incarnation of the learning community concept known as learning clusters or paired courses (Smith et al., 2004). This model enabled LaGuardia's learning communities to personalize commuters' experiences by linking established courses through themes and interrelated content. This linked concept allowed faculty to work together but not necessarily share teaching duties in a stand-alone curriculum. Instead, the cluster model emphasized the linking of courses with themes that advanced aspects of the same concept in each of the cluster classes. For example, typical clusters were anchored by a basic composition course where students could complete writing assignments that related to content covered in the other cluster courses. Therefore, a humanities themed cluster might advance students' understanding of history and sociology. Students would then complete assignments in their composition and research classes that related to the concepts covered in the aforementioned classes (Smith et al., 2004).

The establishment of the cluster learning community was no small achievement. Dean Matthews and her associates had masterfully constructed a learning community program that linked students' academic and social pursuits on a commuter campus. In providing a collaborative learning environment where peers were encouraged to associate with one another, faculty found that students were more engaged with one another and better invested in the content of their courses as compared to the control group. Subsequent data began to show that LaGuardia's clustered course offerings impacted students' social integration and retention—both of which would become hallmarks of the learning community movement. Furthermore, data

showed that learning community students earned better grades in their coursework than did students in the comparison group (Smith et al., 2004; Tinto & Love, 1995).

In establishing a variation of the learning community concept, LaGuardia Community College ushered in a new era of integrated learning opportunities that would draw the attention of campus administrators across the nation. At the same time, Patrick Hill, Professor of Philosophy at State University of New York-Stony Brook, is credited for using Meiklejohn's term *learning community* to denote programs such as those at LaGuardia, Evergreen, and eventually at his own institution. Hill shared Meiklejohn's disenchantment with the departmentalism characteristic of the contemporary university. He felt that the traditional campus structure, particularly at large research institutions, encouraged isolation and dysfunction. In the research university, Hill saw a disparate entity that seemed to undermine the engagement necessary for interdepartmental scholarship:

> [The research university was] not the kind of community Hill envisioned. He thought these were elitist communities, resting on social relations that fostered dominance and dependency, not the communities of inquiry needed in contemporary society. He also saw deep problems in these communities as a result of mismatched expectations, between research-oriented faculty themselves (and also their administrators), and between the university and the larger society. (Smith et al., 2004, p. 50)

Like Meiklejohn, Hill wanted to restructure undergraduate education, so he sought inspiration by visiting other institutions that offered innovative curricular designs. The Evergreen State College was among the institutions Hill visited, and he was taken with the manner by which the faculty collaborated to provide students with immersive educational experiences.

Consequently, Hill came away from his visit convinced that he could incorporate aspects of the Evergreen model in a large university setting (Smith et al., 2004).

Professor Hill's primary goal was to bridge the divide that resulted from the compartmental structure of the university. Hill never sought to eradicate departments; rather, he intended to establish collaboration between departments in a way that personalized the campus for students and faculty. Consequently, his resolution for solving the campus divide came through what he termed as federated learning communities (FLC). The federated learning community model would promote interdepartmental cooperation among faculty members and expose students to thematically linked cross-disciplinary coursework. Students who participated in federated learning communities would enroll in a series of existing classes as well as a stand-alone seminar. Enrollment in a set of predetermined classes would mean that the federated learning community participants would take courses as a cohort embedded in classes with other students not affiliated with the learning community. Moreover, the seminar course would then serve to link concepts covered in those classes. A faculty member would agree to devote 100% of his or her time to the learning community by instructing the seminar course and attending the other classes as part of the embedded cohort. The attending faculty member or 'master learner' assumed responsibility for facilitating scholarly discourse (Smith et al., 2004, p. 51).

The success of a federated learning community depended upon the skills of the master learner who was responsible for breaking the compartmentalized learning to which students and faculty had become accustomed. Hill felt that the master learner must not rely on a text or pre-designed course content to guide the seminar; instead, the master learner must nurture students' curiosities and intellectual interests as they developed in the classes in which the learning community cohort was embedded. The master learner would encourage students to use their

creative impulses to link assignments from different classes or engage in intellectual exchanges with one another. By grappling with intellectual dilemmas, Hill believed students would gain a greater understanding of the interrelated nature of knowledge and the value of multiple perspectives (Smith et al., 2004).

Both Matthews and Hill's learning community initiatives gained significant exposure in higher education circles where similarly minded scholars were convinced that curricular reform was long overdue. Progressive administrators and faculty members were intrigued by the advantages learning community curricula posed. Matthews and Hill's learning community models were first introduced in the early and mid-1970s, respectfully, and by the early 1980s, several notable institutions—particularly on the east coast—offered learning community programs. Among the institutions to incorporate learning communities into their curricula were sizable research universities such as the University of Maryland, the University of Nebraska, and the University of Tennessee. These institutions implemented programs similar to the models at Evergreen, LaGuardia, and SUNY-Stony Brook, and as the learning community movement gained momentum additional institutions soon followed suit (Smith et al., 2004).

Housed at The Evergreen State College, the establishment of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education marked a significant step forward in collaborative exchanges between institutions that supported learning community programming. First developed as a state initiative in 1987, The Washington Center—as it is currently known—eventually came to national prominence as a consortium for learning community practitioners. The center's formation grew out of collaborative efforts between faculty at Seattle Central Community College and the Evergreen State College who wanted to create a "seamless learning community experience for Seattle Central students interested in eventually transferring to

Evergreen" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 54). The center facilitated a faculty exchange program between the two institutions, and this practice morphed into a statewide initiative for learning community faculty.

In the early 1980s, Evergreen State College hired Patrick Hill as provost for the institution; thus Hill's move west to the Evergreen campus provided a link between the learning community movements on both the east and west coasts. His presence and influence at Evergreen's Washington Center established a national linkage between learning communities, and by the mid-1990s The Washington Center had grown from a state organization to a national think-tank for the development and support of learning community programs. The Washington Center operated on the premise that campus learning community initiatives should reflect their host institutions, and therefore support for program designs must consider the unique characteristics of a campus's mission, "student needs, and faculty intentions" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 55). This philosophy of programmatic diversity encouraged experimentation, so an array of new learning communities emerged that stretched the parameters of the early models.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the learning community movement had grown from a localized challenge to lecture-based instruction at select institutions to a national movement promising to reshape the way colleges educate students. As research emphasized retention and social integration, scholars suggested that learning communities could enhance students' educational experiences in a way that encouraged them to persist through graduation. Consequently, retention and student satisfaction became yet another measure by which many argued learning communities improved educational experiences. Notable scholars such as Alexander Astin (1993), Vincent Tinto (1994), Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini (2005) lent credence to the learning community movement with their advocacy. While some programs

faltered, many initiatives enjoyed robust enrollments and prosperous incorporation into their host campuses. With over 500 institutions fielding learning communities in the United States, the resistance that Meiklejohn and Tussman fought to overcome eventually succumbed to the learning community phenomenon. Today the learning community movement stands poised to reform higher education in a way that holds great promise (Smith et al., 2004).

Contemporary Learning Communities: What the Literature Reveals

Learning communities are highly unique entities as individual programs reflect the character, population, and mission of their respective host institutions. Nonetheless, Tinto (1998) asserts that most programs feature two commonalities: "shared knowledge" and "shared knowing" (p. 4). These program characteristics serve as unifying components of what one might characterize as collaborative learning opportunities. Learning communities offer shared knowledge by "construct[ing] a coherent first year educational experience" through academic themes and linked courses (p. 4). Furthermore, learning communities foster "shared knowing" through experiential learning whereby program participants and faculty members become closely acquainted through formal and informal association as they "share the experience of trying to know or learn the material of shared courses" (p. 4). These facets of the collegiate learning community model afford institutions a wide array of programmatic design opportunities. Thus college and university personnel enjoy the freedom to design highly unique learning communities to meet the specific needs of their student populations (Smith et al., 2004).

The adaptability of the learning community concept has made it appealing to educators wishing to enhance students' and faculty members' intellectual endeavors. However, many scholars agree that learning communities must adhere to some general tenets. For example, Lenning and Ebbers (1999) maintain that traditional collegiate learning communities should be

"site-based" and "involve primarily physical, in-person interaction" (p. 15). Moreover, the initial goal of a learning community program should involve interdisciplinary inquiry relating to a pre-determined academic theme. Within these communities of scholars, students and faculty ideally share intellectual pursuits in order to promote deep learning. Furthermore, this shared inquiry must extend beyond the boundaries of typical classroom lecture and activities by encouraging intellectual exchanges in residential and social settings. These methods of scholarship contribute to a shared experience that, when compared to conventional modes of instruction, more effectively engage students and faculty (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Practices and models.

Evidence suggests that the majority of learning communities at American colleges and universities serve freshmen (Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, & Lindblad, 2003). This phenomenon occurs primarily as the result of what Levitz and Noel (1989) term "frontloading" whereby institutions devote an array of resources to freshmen in an effort to ease their transition from secondary education to higher education (p. 79). Thus the learning community model enables institutions' personnel to construct programs that meet the needs of a variety of populations such as those who are underrepresented, interested in specific programs of study, or academically gifted or deficient. While the diversity in learning community design seems limitless, most programs fall within one of five learning community categorizations as identified by Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990): linked courses, learning clusters, freshman interest groups, federated learning communities, and coordinated studies (p. 19). These five categories illustrate the range of ways institutions may implement learning community programs.

Linked courses model.

The linked courses model stands as the most basic of learning community programs (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Linked courses learning communities involve the enrollment of a cohort of students who take two or more courses together. Curricular programming involves minimal coordination between faculty members. Typical linked courses involve pairs or triads of stand-alone but thematically linked classes where faculty members do not engage in cross-course collaborations beyond the coordination of select assignments. In many instances, linked courses learning communities pair related courses where the content covered in one course often advances knowledge in the other course(s) (Smith et al., 2004). For example, the University of Washington's Interdisciplinary Writing Program links composition courses with a variety of writing-intensive lecture classes. Cohort students taking an introductory psychology course may then compose essays that meet the writing specifications of their composition courses while exploring specific psychological concepts (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

Linked courses learning communities promote general education goals in that students gain an appreciation for the interrelated nature of knowledge. Though simplistic, the linked courses model effectively encourages scholarship by allowing students to advance understanding of one discipline through the skills acquired in another. Furthermore, the linked model fosters an environment of collaboration where students are provided opportunities to work on assignments in pairs or groups. These opportunities promote shared learning because cohort participants develop a group identity born out of common academic pursuits. Students engage in debate and discussions while grappling with challenging concepts—the result of which often positively contributes to students' aptitude and overall course satisfaction (Weber, 2000).

Learning clusters model.

The learning clusters model differs only slightly from the linked courses model. Both adhere to the same concept of student cohorts enrolling in a predetermined set of classes (Gabelnick et al., 1990). As with the linked courses model, learning cluster classes are typically linked by theme. While courses may share some content and assignments, classes remain stand-alone offerings where faculty collaboration with fellow learning community instructors is minimal. Learning clusters, however, require a much greater commitment on the part of students. Whereas linked courses typically involve two, sometimes three distinct classes, a learning cluster usually consists of four courses. Furthermore, learning clusters commonly appear as themed cohorts consisting of students who elect to study a particular topic over multiple courses.

Common learning cluster themes involve democracy, human nature, and justice. Therefore, a learning cluster may comprise a majority if not all of a student's academic course load during a given semester (Smith et al., 2004). This feature distinguishes the learning cluster as a more intensive undertaking because the program requires greater commitment than a linked courses model. The assumed benefit is that by spending greater amounts of time working with a specific group, learning cluster participants enjoy deeper learning opportunities and greater potential for social integration (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Tinto & Love, 1995). An example of a longstanding learning cluster program exists in the New Student House learning community at LaGuardia Community College. The New Student House or NSH initially served underrepresented, academically deficient students; however, over the years, the cluster evolved to serve underrepresented English as a Second Language (ESL) students (Smith et al., 2004; Tinto, 1998). This latter incarnation of LaGuardia's learning cluster program seeks to connect students with those of similar ethnic heritage who need assistance in developing English

language proficiency. Thus, the New Student House learning community clusters three courses related to writing, language development, and reading to better prepare students for future coursework at the institution (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Smith et al., 2004).

Freshmen interest group.

The Freshmen Interest Group (FIG) learning community model purports to personalize students' collegiate experiences—especially at large campuses where students often attend general education courses with hundreds of other students. Like learning clusters, Freshmen Interest Groups typically require students to take a majority of semester courses with a cohort of students. These cohorts, however, are typically embedded within classes (Gabelnick et al., 1990). This model benefits students by providing opportunities to interact with a consistent group of peers. Thus, the large lecture becomes much more intimate in that an embedded group of students have the opportunity to engage one another regarding class topics and assignments (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). Furthermore, FIG cohorts often have a faculty advisor and/or peer mentor who provides the group with activity programming tailored to the group's needs or academic interests. In most cases, FIG cohorts are designed to further interests in specific academic disciplines. For example, the University of Oregon—the institution that originated the Freshmen Interest Group model—offers FIG cohorts in pre-law, journalism and communications, art and architecture, and pre-health sciences (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Beyond social and academic integration, FIG cohorts provide students with opportunities to learn more about majors of interest. Like the previous two learning community models, FIG cohorts often involve minimal collaboration between instructional faculty other than the sharing of assignments and select course content (Smith et al., 2004).

The faculty advisor or peer mentor distinguishes the FIG from other learning communities because the individual serving in this role establishes a link between students and

the institution that might not otherwise occur (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Consequently, the mentor's role is critical in the success of Freshmen Interest Groups; the mentor anchors the group by affording students an avenue to address concerns or explore scholarly curiosities. In most cases, FIG advisors or mentors also provide support for students as they adjust to the demands and challenges of college life (Smith et al., 2004). As Tinto (1993) suggests, students' institutional commitment is most vulnerable during the first weeks of enrollment. Therefore, the FIG advisor or mentor is charged with helping students cope with common difficulties such as homesickness, social integration, adjusting to a new environment, and balancing the demands of a collegiate lifestyle (Smith et al., 2004).

Federated learning communities.

As previously established, Patrick Hill introduced the Federated Learning Community (FLC) model when he was a professor at State University of New York-Stony Brook. As was the case when the first Federated Learning Communities debuted, FLCs are designed to help students and faculty alike to "overcome the isolation and anonymity of a large research university…by [federating] diverse courses around an overarching theme" (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 26-27). In contrast to the FIG model, Federated Learning Communities do not aim to advance a specific discipline or major. Rather, FLC programs promote deep learning opportunities across a variety of disciplines. For example, a Federated Learning Community at SUNY-Stony Brook addresses the theme of world hunger through the varying lenses of science, economics, and history. Faculty who instruct FLC cohorts are not necessarily required to coordinate assignments, but they are asked to frame course content within the context of the overarching theme (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

The most unique component of the Federated Learning Community concept relates to the cohort's designated Master Learner. The FLC model depends upon the involvement of a Master Learner who is a faculty member responsible for instructing the cohort in a seminar course to link concepts covered in the FLC-linked classes. This Master Learner also bears the responsibility of attending all cohort-related courses with the FLC students. In order to meet these requirements, institutions typically free the Master Learner from any other faculty responsibilities so he or she may devote full attention to FLC duties. This faculty member also completes all assignments and course requirements in order to gain the full breadth of students' experiences. However, as a disciplined educator, the Master Learner serves the unique role as student and teacher by encouraging FLC participants in their quests to understand difficult material and grapple with ideas that challenge personal beliefs. Ultimately, the success of a FLC depends upon the Master Learner's ability to unite students by inspiring a desire to stretch their intellectual boundaries (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Smith et al., 2004).

Though the FLC model promises immeasurable learning gains for students and faculty alike, the commitment of a faculty member to serve as a Master Learner entails a financial burden for the host institution (Gabelnick et al., 1990). While fulfilling obligations as a Master Learner, the faculty member does not perform other duties; therefore the institution must absorb these responsibilities by redistributing them among other faculty members or hire additional personnel to temporarily assume those duties. As many institutions struggle with financial difficulties, instituting a FLC is often cost-prohibitive (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Coordinated studies.

The most radical learning community program model mirrors the original initiatives proposed by Meiklejohn and Tussman (Smith et al., 2004). A coordinated studies learning community necessitates a complete restructuring of course offerings and student/faculty discourse. Similar to the Federated Learning Community, coordinated studies programs link courses by theme. These programs are distinct because they require full commitment on the part of students and instructional faculty alike. Whereas faculty members retain instructional autonomy in other learning community models, those participating in a coordinated studies program commit their professional duties solely to its advancement. Therefore, faculty members participate in all classes whether course content falls within their areas of expertise or not, and in many cases classes are team-taught so that topics may be explored through varying disciplines. Furthermore, students and faculty interact by collaborating on joint projects and assignments (Smith et al., 2004).

Coordinated studies programs typically require that students and faculty members devote an entire quarter, semester, or in some cases a full academic year to the learning community (Smith et al., 2004). This commitment frees involved parties from distractions unrelated to the program. Faculty members are not burdened with teaching or research responsibilities beyond what occurs within the coordinated studies program, and students are free of outside coursework that might diminish devotion to learning community obligations (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

The complexity in implementing a coordinated studies program demands commitment on the part of faculty and administrators (Smith et al., 2004). Given the interrelated nature of coordinated studies learning communities, faculty members sacrifice the independence they enjoy through traditional instructional practice because they must cooperate with each other

regarding all aspects of instruction. However, a benefit of the coordinated studies learning community model is that if affords flexibility in programming. While programs adhere to a pre-determined weekly schedule, the times at which specific course lectures occur varies depending upon topics under review. The Evergreen State College coordinated studies learning community, for example, fields programs where weekly schedules vary and include combinations of seminars, lectures, labs, and study days. As a result, Evergreen creates customizable educational experiences that encourage creativity among students and faculty alike. The adaptability of the schedule allows for more creative uses of instructional time and less adherence to rigid course structures where students are only exposed to a singular instructional pedagogy. Faculty members craft upcoming lectures, seminars, and other activities to best suit the needs of the group without conforming to the inherent limitations of a traditional class schedule (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

Residential learning community programs.

Some scholars suggest that residence-based learning communities constitute a separate model because they often "include a deliberate link to residential life that goes beyond students living in a shared space" (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 37). While intentional programming may indeed serve as the hallmark of a residential learning community initiative, these attributes alone do not necessarily differentiate residential learning community programs or LLCs from the aforementioned models. Of the five learning community models listed, all could exist as residential programs or LLCs. Therefore, denotation of a LLC might best serve to simply explain the level of commitment on the part of students and the host institution. Consequently, a LLC program may be defined as a purposeful "integration of students' living and academic

environments" to facilitate immersive intellectual development among all aspects of a one's existence (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 36).

Irrespective of learning community model, LLC programs demand collaboration among students, faculty, and staff more so than their non-residential counterparts. For instance, consider that residential programs pose the greatest curricular challenges in that the overall mission of a LLC is to blend the academic and social components of the collegiate experience (Stassen, 2003). In other words, students participating in a LLC share both academic and daily living experiences in an integrative manner not possible within non-residential cohorts. This means that faculty and staff collaborate with students by offering programming in residential living spaces in addition to classrooms. Doing so directly challenges the often disparate institutional entities of academics and student affairs because they must work together to ensure programs succeed. This commitment might entail providing classroom space within a residence hall or allowing faculty members access to residents' living spaces (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Infinite possibilities.

The characteristics of any learning community initiative seem limitless (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Smith et al., 2004). Programs may exist as simplistic clusters or immersive residential coordinated studies programs. Engstrom and Tinto (2008) argue that irrespective of program type, the learning community experience should promote scholarship through collaboration, active learning, and regular interaction with campus support services. Moreover, the common goal of any learning community program should reflect a commitment to providing an interdisciplinary educational experience that reveals the interconnected nature of knowledge. Therefore, a well-implemented learning community program requires the devotion of its

stakeholders to ensure that the initiative adheres to a specific academic mission reliant upon collaborative input from all (Smith et al., 2004).

Learning community research findings.

Since learning communities came to prominence in the 1980s, research has typically affirmed the positive effects of learning community participation (Andrade, 2007-2008). The emphasis on overcoming campus fragmentation provides a singular focus on creating shared experiences that help students acclimate to college life (Hill, 1985). Brittenham et al. (2003) note that "these shared experiences [should] build program identification; create cohesiveness, and help students develop productive and collegial relationships with one another, with faculty members, and with representatives of the university support services, all of which serve as an aid to student success" (p. 18). Consider Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, and Lindblad's (2003) synthesis of 119 single-institution learning community initiatives that are as unique and varied as their host institutions. Their findings revealed that participants as well as associated faculty and staff of these varied programs generally perceived their respective learning communities as contributing to academic progress, social integration, and retention. Similarly, Zhao and Kuh (2004) mined National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data to assess learning community program effectiveness at 365 four-year institutions of higher learning. Findings confirmed much of the theoretical assumptions of learning community programming previously reported in Gabelnick et al. (1990), Lenning and Ebbers (1999), Tinto and Goodsell-Love (1993), and Tinto and Russo (1994). In general, Zhao and Kuh (2004) found that learning communities resoundingly contribute to positive educational experiences and student success by directly and indirectly improving academic performance, integration into the campus community, and perception of higher education.

Evidence further suggests that the least structured learning community programs often contribute to an array of learning and integration gains as programs often redefine the manner by which students experience post-secondary education. For example, Stassen (2003) reported that learning communities of "more humble resources" positively contribute to learning outcomes in much the same manner as more structured programs (p. 587). Stassen studied three less structured programs adhering to a linked courses design at a large research university. Each of the programs served a large volume of students and offered less structured programming than their programmatically expansive counterparts like federated learning communities or coordinated studies programs. Even with less programming, all three learning communities showed positive effects on academic integration, academic performance, and persistence. Moreover, the least structured learning community of the three represented in Stassen's study produced the most consistently positive outcomes.

Though structurally diverse, learning community program outcomes reported in the literature fall under one or a combination of four distinct themes: academic integration and performance, social integration and sense of community, interdisciplinary learning, and retention and persistence (Andrade, 2007-2008; Hill, 1985; Taylor et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998; Visher, 2012). A synthesis of learning community research findings as related to the aforementioned categories follows:

Academic integration and performance.

Research supports claims that learning community programs contribute to improved academic integration and performance (Smith et al., 2004; Stassen, 2003). Quantifiable outcomes data in the form of learning community participants' overall grade point averages (GPA), specific course grades, academic standing, and graduation rates provide evidence of programs'

impact (Brittenham et al., 2003; Butler & Dawkins, 2008; Gordon, Young, & Kalianov, 2001; Hotchkiss, Moore, & Pitts, 2006; Sommo, Mayer, Rudd, & Cullinan, 2012; Stassen, 2003; Tinto, 1998; Tokuno, 1993; Tokuno & Campbell, 1992; Yockey & George, 1998; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). However, the literature also focuses on "experiential outcomes" such as "peer interaction around academic work, faculty interaction outside the classroom, positive academic behaviors, and positive academic climate"—all of which have been found to positively affect learning community students' academic integration and performance (Stassen, 2003, p. 602).

In many studies, learning community participants' performance measures are compared with a control group that shares similar demographic, socioeconomic, and academic characteristics (Brittenham et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2003). For example, Gordon, Young, and Kalianov (2001) found that students participating in freshmen learning community programs earned significantly higher grade point averages than their non-learning community counterparts. Likewise, recent findings of a longitudinal study of a freshmen learning community at Kingsborough Community College showed that after six years students who participated in the program had earned associates degrees at greater rates than their non-learning community counterparts (Sommo et al., 2012).

The pattern of improved academic performance also holds true in cases where academically disadvantaged students participate in learning community programs. As early as 1994, research findings suggested that academically at-risk students participating in learning community programs at LaGuardia Community College came to value learning opportunities more so than "non-remedial peers" (Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994, p. 12). More recently, Hotchkiss et al. (2006) reported that students electing to enroll in learning community programs at the study institution were academically deficient and most at risk of "perform[ing] worse than

average" (p. 203). Yet those at-risk students participating in the institution's federated learning community programs actually saw increases in grade point averages from "three-quarters to one full letter grade" when compared to a control group (p. 205). Likewise, Yockey and George (1998) published similar findings noting that a majority of students enrolled in learning community programs they studied were considered "at-risk," yet those same students earned higher grades and matriculated at significantly greater rates than non-LLC control group students (p. 61).

Brittenham et al. (2003) published the most notable findings to-date of a learning community program comprised solely of developmental students. The study found that students with the greatest academic deficiencies—as evidenced by simultaneous enrollment in remedial math and English courses—who participated in a linked courses learning community performed significantly better academically than the control group. Furthermore, these learning community participants who represented the least academically prepared students performed at higher statistically significant rates than the entire population of campus freshmen who were required to take at least one developmental course—a population far better prepared for college academics than the learning community students.

While declines in academic performance among learning community students are generally not evident in the literature, several studies reported no significant differences between learning community participants and their traditionally enrolled counterparts (Goldberg & Finkelstein, 2002; Logan, Salisbury-Glennon, & Spence, 2000; Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997; Visher & Teres, 2011; Weiss, Visher, & Wathington, 2010). However, with the possible exception of Visher and Teres (2011), these studies still suggest a positive academic impact of program participation. For example, while Logan et al. (2000) reported that students

participating in Penn State University's LEAP program failed to surpass the academic performance of non-program participants enrolled in the same courses, further investigation suggested learning community participants were enrolled in at least one course where non-program participants also enrolled in the same course were considered academically advanced. Therefore, earning comparable grades to the seasoned and academically advanced non-learning community students represented a learning gain for LEAP students—even if their course grades were not statistically different from their non-learning community classmates.

Similarly, Weiss, Visher, and Wathington (2010) reported that the learning community program for developmental reading students at Hillsborough Community College did not have a "meaningful impact (positive or negative) on students academically" (p. 45). This finding, however, should be viewed with caution considering that in the three years of program operation, the third cohort of students began to show slight academic gains on learning community participants' credits earned. Therefore, the initial lack of program impact might be explained by the evolution and growth of a developing program. As faculty and administrators gained experience implementing the learning community, students' learning outcomes began to grow suggesting a correlation between program longevity and the amount of credits program participants earned. Despite such substandard performance indicators as evident in Weiss et al. (2010), a larger body of evidence supports claims that learning community programs contribute to academic integration and performance (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Brittenham et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2003; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Social integration and sense of community.

Establishing communities of scholars has long been a principle component of learning community initiatives. Bonding together through shared academic experiences suggests that

learning community participants and associated faculty have greater opportunities to integrate socially than their non-learning community counterparts (Hill, 1985; Tinto & Goodsell, 1993; Spanierman et al., 2013). According to Tinto (1993), the impact of social acclimation enhances the likelihood of students persisting from one academic year to the next. Engstrom and Tinto (2008), for example, found significant differences between learning community members' engagement with their peers when compared to students not participating in learning communities noting program participants were more likely to establish social bonds. Therefore, even if learning communities have no measurable impact in improving academic performance, as evidenced by Gordon et al. (2001), programs remain viable in fostering social integration.

Emphasis on social integration remains critical as research confirms the potential of learning communities to ease students' transitions to independent living at college. Similar to Gordon et al. (2001), Pike et al. (1997) reported that residential learning community participants' academic performance showed no significant gains but program membership did indirectly contribute to success by facilitating enmeshment into the college community. Comparable results were also found among first-generation students in Goldberg and Finkelstein's (2002) study at DeVry College of Technology where learning community students showed no significant differences in academic performance when compared to the control group. These students were, however, notably different in terms of their perception of and commitment to the institution. When compared to the control group, learning community students felt a greater sense of belonging to the college and expressed greater comfort in that environment.

Social integration consistently arises as a feature students value regarding their learning community experiences (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Barbatis, 2010; Franklin, 2000; Goldberg & Finkelstein, 2002; Spanierman, 2013). Helping students adjust to living on their own

or making decisions for themselves often places the burden of program success squarely on the backs of program faculty and staff. Therefore, peer mentors and faculty alike often work in unison to foster innovative, collaborative learning practices that build rapport among program participants (Crissman, 2001; Inkelas & Wiseman, 2003). Schroeder et al. (1999) illustrated the unique and complex role of upperclassmen peer mentors who serve learning communities as live-in participants. In many instances, the success or failure of a learning community program rests with the peer mentor who must coordinate social activities and facilitate academic exercises within the residence halls. These peer mentors ultimately help foster feelings of cohesion and solidarity among participants by helping them navigate both academic and social adjustment challenges.

Purposeful programming affords students with opportunities to establish connections with their peers that might not occur in a conventional classroom (Franklin, 2000). As students collaborate on assignments or engage in social activities, they establish bonds of friendship that deepen their commitment to scholarship, the learning community, and the institution as a whole (Crissman, 2001; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). In light of the connectedness and institutional loyalty cultivated through learning community programming, many institutions offer themed LLCs designed to "cater to students' interests" (Marchand, 2010). The intent of such programming remains social integration but also the promotion of healthy social activities. Accordingly, research affirms the positive behavioral ramifications of participating in a LLC. In 2003, Brower, Golde, and Allen found that students who participated in LLCs were significantly less likely to engage in episodes of excessive alcohol consumption. Moreover, learning community students were significantly less likely to experience negative consequences of their own alcohol consumption or that of others. Similar studies confirmed these findings and noted that same-sex

LLCs—especially those for women—resulted in significantly fewer incidents of heavy alcohol use (Boyd et al., 2008; McCabe et al., 2007). Instead of engaging in destructive social rituals such as alcohol use and other risky behaviors, learning community students have an outlet to facilitate entry into the campus culture in an interactive but positive manner (Brower, Golde, & Allen, 2003).

Acceptance into the campus community entails far more than building relationships with peers. Learning community participants are more likely to interact with faculty members in non-classroom environments, thus increasing students' perception of faculty members acceptance of them as valuable components of the campus community (Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Crissman, 2001; Franklin, 2000; Inkelas & Wiseman, 2003; Schroeder et al., 1999). This faculty-student interaction proves particularly helpful for those with academic deficiencies as previous educational experiences often discourage remedial students from communicating with class instructors (Hardin, 1988). Brittenham et al. (2003) found that developmental learning community participants were far more likely to interact with course instructors due to perceived faculty accessibility. By engaging students individually, collaborating with them on projects, and bonding socially, faculty members established rapport with students thereby "engendering their success" (p. 24).

Interdisciplinary learning.

Overcoming the campus "fragmentation of the disciplines and departments and people" entails a purposeful restructuring of the manner by which institutions enable student-faculty engagement (Hill, 1985, p. 5). To counter fragmentation, researchers maintain that collaborative learning opportunities provide students and faculty ideal circumstances to engage in interdisciplinary learning (Tinto & Russo, 1994). A common finding in the learning community

research pertains to emphasis on shared learning experiences. By focusing on intellectual common ground, learning communities steer students and faculty away from the segmented learning promulgated through institutions' "buffet models of general education" (Brittenham et al., 2003, p. 24). Several studies' findings suggest that connecting students with faculty from multiple disciplines improves students' capacity to apply knowledge to other disciplines throughout their educational careers (Brittenham et al., 2003; Crissman, 2001; Dunlap & Pettitt, 2008; Franklin, 2000; Scharff & Brown, 2004; Schroeder et al., 1999). Research findings also suggest that acquisition of knowledge in one course even loosely linked to another furthers learning in both courses (Stassen, 2003). For example, Dunlap and Pettitt (2008) found that linking a writing course with a "second discipline reinforced learning in both" (p. 142).

Given the gains evident from loosely linked courses as shown in Dunlap and Pettitt's (2008) research, more structured learning communities offer exponentially greater opportunities for intellectual development (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Tinto and Russo (1994) found the coordinated studies learning community program at Seattle Central Community College enabled a deeper learning experience. The coordinated studies model proved particularly strong in placing students and faculty in intellectual exchanges that nurtured the construction of knowledge. Students benefited from witnessing faculty "grapple with and analyze their own content and synthesize it with the content from other disciplines" (p. 22). Therefore, a desirable outcome of these enmeshed learning opportunities is that students gain an experience far different from what they have witnessed previously in their educational careers. Instead of singularly focusing on mastering course content, students learn to integrate ideas across disciplines.

Retention and persistence.

While the learning community concept's origins remain rooted in academic pursuits, the promise that learning communities contribute positively to students' campus experiences makes them attractive interventions for college and university personnel seeking to curb attrition (Tinto, 1993). The literature supports assertions that learning communities improve retention and persistence (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Hill & Woodward, 2013; Johnson, 2000-2001; Keup, 2005-2006; Logan, Salisbury-Glennon, & Spence, 2000; Raftery, 2005; Sommo et al., 2012; Stassen, 2003; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Tokuno, 1993; Tokuno & Campbell, 1992; Wright, 1989; Yockey & George, 1998). As colleges and universities heightened efforts to retain students, learning community programs gained favor as a method to better students' campus experiences—especially during the freshmen year (Smith et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2003).

Of the learning community gains listed in the literature, most directly or indirectly influence retention (Gablenick et al., 1990; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Smith et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993). Consider Barbatis' (2004) developing model of factors that contribute to persistence. Of the factors related directly to campus environment—"student life activities, peer interaction, faculty, campus resources, time management, and self-reliance/independence"—all are consistently addressed through learning community programming (p. 18). Granted academic success, social integration, and interdisciplinary learning promote persistence from one academic year to the next whether the result of learning community participation or not (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). However, learning communities offer a holistic experience designed to facilitate the aforementioned gains; learning communities serve as

"revitalizing agents" by generating enthusiasm for learning and a desire to remain enrolled in a post-secondary program-of-study—the results of which often prove extraordinary (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 91). For example, Schroeder, Minor, and Tarkow (1999) reported a particularly strong rate of retention for the Freshmen Interest Group program at the University of Missouri-Columbia noting that program participants had statistically significant higher one-year retention rates (87%) when compared to non-participants (81%). In similar fashion, Johnson (2000-2001) illustrated starkly different results when assessing two-year retention rates of learning community participants when compared to those only exposed to an institution's less-structured retention programming; results showed that students who participated in learning communities returned at significantly higher rates than did the comparison population (p. 233).

Learning community impact on retention and/or persistence exists across a variety of student populations and academic institutions. For those entering college with strong academic credentials, research confirms a positive impact on retention among students participating in honors learning communities when compared to honors students not affiliated with a learning community program (Daffron & Holland, 2009; Stassen, 2003). Moreover, evidence exists that learning community participation propels average students to earn higher graduation rates than those with above average aptitude (Wright, 1989).

While gains remain evident among academically prepared students, learning communities have also proven to increase retention and persistence among at-risk populations such as first generation, low-income students and those entering college with academic deficiencies (Barbatis, 2010; Brittenham et al., 2003; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Hill & Woodward, 2013; Johnson, 2000-2001; Raftery, 2005; Rodriguez & Buczinsky, 2013, Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1994; Yockey & George, 1998). In particular, Engstrom and Tinto (2008) conducted a longitudinal

study of learning communities focusing on "academically under-prepared, low-income students in thirteen community colleges across the country" (p. 5). They found that these at-risk students who participated in learning communities were "significantly more likely to persist from freshmen to sophomore year than comparison group students" (p. 11).

While Engstrom and Tinto's (2008) findings consisted of numerous institutions from across the United States, previous single institution studies also netted similar results. In 1998, Yockey and George found that at-risk students who participated in the Freshmen Transition Seminar at the University of Idaho had significantly better rates of retention over four semesters than similar students in a control group. Similarly, Johnson (2000-2001) reported retention outcomes of two learning community initiatives at the University of Southern Maine. Results of her study indicated that both learning communities' overall persistence rates outpaced the institution's other retention efforts—even when solely examining persistence rates of the institution's conditionally admitted students who participated in a learning community program.

Learning community participation has also been shown to positively impact the scholastic endeavors of minority students. For minority students, finding acceptance among the campus community is critical in furthering their educational pursuits (Smith et al., 2004). Given that minority and first generation students often enter college with a "need for validation" and affirmation that "they belong in college," the opportunity to participate in a learning community may make the difference as to whether a student persists or not (p. 99). Borden and Rooney (1998) found learning communities as a powerful factor in improved student retention and persistence among African-American males—a group particularly vulnerable to attrition. More recently, Hotchkiss et al. (2006) found that participation in a federated learning community improved the probability that African-American males and females would remain enrolled in

post-secondary education one year after matriculation from the program. In both instances, learning community opportunities helped create an atmosphere of belonging for minority students that Engstrom and Tinto (2008) characterize as a "safe and supportive environment in which to learn" (p. 12).

Learning community criticism.

In contrast to the number of studies reporting positive outcomes, few publications provide criticism of learning community initiatives. However, instances of less-than-desirable learning community program outcomes exist, and their findings present cause for concern. Learning community criticism ranges from evidence that programs provide no significant social or academic impact (Goldberg & Finkelstein, 2002; Pike et al., 1997; Visher et al., 2012; Visher & Teres, 2011; Weiss, Visher, & Wathington, 2010) to editorials detailing philosophic shortcomings of program design (Browne & Minnick, 2005; Jaffee, 2004, 2007; Jaffee et al., 2008; Mendelson, 2006; Smith, 2001).

Pike, Schroeder, and Berry (1997) were among the first to publish notable research findings revealing mediocre impact of a LLC initiative. Their work, while not entirely critical of learning community programming, illustrated the detachment between program goals and outcomes. They found that program participation had minimal impact on students' academic performance and persistence. Likewise, Goldberg and Finkelstein (2002) found similar results at a technical college where a learning community initiative focused on a commuter student population. In this study of students at DeVry Technical College, the learning community program had "no effect on actual student academic behaviors and outcomes" (p. 235).

The aforementioned instances could represent anomalies when considering the body of learning community research. However, two more recent longitudinal research studies raise

cause for concern in the same manner as Pike et al. (1997) and Goldberg and Finkelstein (2002). These new studies represent findings from a collaborative research effort between the National Center for Postsecondary Research and the U.S. Department of Education. This collaborative effort, known as the Learning Communities Demonstration, purports to offer a full perspective of six institutions' learning community programs and their impact in affecting positive change. Overall findings suggest the impact of learning communities might register far less significant than previously thought. This finding, however, encompasses data gathered from all six participating institutions (Visher et al., 2012). Upon evaluating the individual studies, findings at two institutions in particular—Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, Florida and Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York—better illuminate instances of learning community ineffectiveness (Weiss et al., 2010; Visher & Teres, 2011).

Findings detailing the impact of Kingsborough Community College's Career-Focused Learning Communities program provide learning community advocates with the greatest cause for concern. Over the course of a three year period of data collection on Kingsborough's ambitious learning community initiative, minimal evidence suggests the program contributes to academic gains or persistence (Visher & Teres, 2011). Data suggest the program has no "meaningful impact on students' academic outcomes" nor does it impact students' enrollment for the semester following the conclusion of the program (p. 48). However, one modest gain in credits earned for transfer students—the designated population of the Career Focused Learning Communities—did offer evidence the program might contribute to success. Taken as a whole, these findings represent potential evidence of learning community failures that might guide future research.

Similar to the learning community program at Kingsborough Community College, Hillsborough Community College identifies a specific population for enrollment in its learning communities. Unlike Kingsborough's career-focused program for transfer students, learning community students at Hillsborough enter college requiring remediation in at least one subject. Weiss, Visher, and Wathington (2010) studied learning community students at Hillsborough who required remediation in reading and were participants in a linked courses learning community where students took a developmental reading course paired with a college success course. Results of the study suggest that overall the program fails to provide "meaningful impacts on educational outcomes during the program semester" nor does the program affect persistence (p. 37).

Only during its third year of operation did Hillsborough's developmental reading learning community produce positive results on credits earned. However, the researchers suggest that positive impact may have been the result of program growth and better overall delivery of services to students. Therefore, improvements in the program structure hold the possibility of greater positive impact over the course of time (Weiss et al., 2010).

In recent years, scholars issued general criticism concerning the increasing adaptation of the learning community concept (Browne & Minnick, 2005; Mendelson, 2006; Smith, 2001). The principle grievance shared among those who criticize the proliferation of learning communities arises from what some view as institutional neglect in implementing curricular reform. Mendelson (2006) asserted that too often institutions' administrators and faculty champion learning community programming but subsequently fail to offer the support necessary for program success. Likewise, Barbara Leigh Smith (2001), a learning community proponent and scholar of the National Learning Communities Project, articulated similar concerns noting

that distinct challenges threaten to undermine the potential achievements of the learning community movement. Principle among Smith's concerns was that too often learning communities serve merely as tools to register students for clusters of courses. The general tenor of her criticism reflected a concern that institutions and their respective personnel often adapt the learning community model to fit their needs but do so without establishing associated programming. Learning communities must, in her estimation, involve intentional curricular reform that engages students in the classroom, their living space, and in social settings.

Outright criticism of the learning community pedagogy remains nil. While some scholars like Smith (2001) and Medelson (2006) critiqued what they perceived as paltry attempts to establish learning community programs, the literature offers little in the way of philosophical criticism. However, David Jaffee (2004, 2007) along with fellow researchers (Jaffee, Carle, Phillips, & Paltoo, 2008) single handedly addressed shortcomings of the learning community model. Though explained later in greater detail, in short Jaffee (2004) suggested that the learning community design encourages negative outcomes that may diminish intended outcomes of program participation. His primary concern centers around the social structures that develop within peer cohorts—especially among like-minded young adults. In 2007 and again with three fellow researchers in 2008, Jaffee articulated the propensity of learning communities to produce both intended consequences (improved retention, academic success) and unintended consequences (divisive social structure, hostile and segregated peer subgroupings).

While Jaffee (2007) and Jaffee et al. (2008) confirmed the occurrence of unintended consequences of learning community participation, the research suggested the need for further inquiry to better identify what factors contribute to unintended consequences—particularly those that create strife among program participants. As early as 2004, Jaffee speculated that problems

may arise within the social structure of a learning community program that does not receive the full support and development of associated faculty and administrators. Similar to Smith (2001) and Medelson's (2006) argument that loosely implemented learning communities become most susceptible to problems, Jaffee offers evidence that suggests inadequate programming may produce disastrous results (Jaffee, 2007; Jaffee, et al., 2008).

In establishing context for research involving unintended consequences of learning community participation, Jaffee (2007) suggests that as peer groups, learning communities function in much the same way as higher education cohorts. Furthermore, he suggests that investigating potential problems arising from learning communities must begin with a review of research on peer cohorts in higher education. Jaffee et al. (2008) furthered this argument by noting that the existing research on higher education peer cohorts illustrates the inherent challenges of programs similar to learning communities.

Peer Cohorts in Collegiate Settings

As indicated in Chapter 1, learning communities adhere to what has come to be known in higher education as cohort grouping or structuring where students take a combination of courses as a group (Brighton & Phelps, 2012; Jaffee, 2007). Therefore, any learning community inquiry should review pertinent literature pertaining to cohort curricular models in higher education. While research has scantly addressed potential unintended consequences of learning community participation, researchers evaluating cohorts—particularly in the field of education—have documented the potential negative consequences of cohort membership (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Potts, Schultz, & Foust, 2003-2004; Radencich et al., 1998; Reynolds and Hebert, 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Schribner &

Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Therefore, an awareness of the drawbacks of cohort modeling promises to illuminate learning community research (Jaffee et al., 2008).

Broadly defined, a higher education cohort is a "group of students who engage in a program of studies together" (Yerkes, Basom, Norris, & Barnett, 1995, p. 3) More specifically, Barnett and Cafarella (1992) identify cohorts as groups of students ranging from 10 to 25 individuals who complete a "series of common learning experiences over a one- to two-year period" (p. 1). However, scholars caution that generalizing the cohort concept as a mere organizational tool minimizes the rich learning opportunities available when institutions carefully implement cohort programming. For example, Basom, Yerkes, Norris, and Barnett (as cited in Teitel, 1997) argued that viewing "cohorts simply as a method of course delivery, as a vehicle for socialization, as a convenient scheduling design, or as a fashionable approach to program delivery, is to do the cohort structure a great injustice" (p. 76).

Similar to the rise of learning community programming, the 1980s ushered in widespread reliance on the cohort concept to offer students innovative curricular offerings at the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels (Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, & Wright-Porter, 2011). As education reformers called for new approaches to classroom instruction, many institutions saw cohorts as an effective mechanism to build rapport and continuity between students and faculty. Interdependence became the defining feature of the cohort structure given its adherence to predetermined course sequencing. As evident in a host of previously cited learning community studies, cohort models offered a familiarity of experience and peer continuity to ease students' transitions to college by providing a support structure and promoting collaborative learning. As an adaptable model, cohorts began appearing at a variety of institutions and programs. They sometimes existed as rigid, lockstep incarnations or, conversely,

as flexible and open entities in which students could enter and leave as they wished. Furthermore, cohort programs varied in terms of obligation. Some cohort programs required as little as a semester commitment whereas others lasted for the duration of a student's tenure in a program (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998).

In light of the variety of cohort programming possibilities, further categorizations more accurately delineate the specific goals or parameters of cohort models in relation to structure, student commitment, and curriculum. A review of higher education literature reveals three basic cohort models or subgroups: closed, open, and fluid (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010). The closed cohort model is the most rigid because students take a predetermined sequence of courses with a set group of students; the sequence of courses might last for as little as a semester or as long as an entire program-of-study, and students are not permitted to enter the cohort once coursework has begun (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998). In contrast, the open cohort model features a rolling admissions component and allows for more diversity in course selection (Harris, 2006-2007). While open cohort participants take a select number of courses as a group, students have room in their schedules to enroll in classes unrelated to the cohort. In these cases, non-cohort courses may fulfill elective requirements or individual student interests. Likewise, the fluid cohort model offers students flexibility in course selection. Of the three models, the fluid cohort is the least rigid in that students may enter at different times based on individual needs. Each of the three models offers advantages for students and faculty alike. In general, the cohort concept promises to enhance students and faculty members' experiences by providing opportunities for rich learning experiences (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010).

Scholarly research has identified an array of benefits as well as some drawbacks of cohort programming. Overall, higher education cohort literature affirms previous research citing the

importance of academic and social integration previously established by Astin (1993), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Tinto (1993). For instance, Barnett and Caffarella (1992) explain that cohort programs develop the seemingly opposing characteristics of group cohesiveness and individual learning skills. They maintain that cohorts create a unique educational environment where students gain a shared sense of trust and purpose that affords greater confidence in pursuing individual scholarly interests (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). Teitel (1997) further suggests that mutual trust is not an automatic consequence of purposeful groupings of students who share similar academic responsibilities. Rather, cohorts foster trust as a result of programming that "encourages interaction which results in high emotional involvement in learning" (Yerkes, Basom, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). Given the strong interpersonal bonds that typically develop between cohort members, students report that trusting peer relationships inspires the confidence needed to seek individual learning opportunities. When functioning as a supportive group, cohorts provide students with reflective learning experiences that help them gain understanding when confronted with difficult material that challenges previously held beliefs (Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001).

Studies suggest positive outcomes of cohort programming extend beyond building group cohesion and spurring scholarly interests. Research has shown that cohorts offer students opportunities for deep, transformative classroom learning through seminars, discussion, and research. Consequently, these transformative experiences result in the development of greater analytical skills by broadening students' awareness of multiple perspectives (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006; Teitel, 1997). Furthermore, cohorts—particularly those aimed at preparing students for professional careers—build relational skills necessary for successful entry into the professional ranks (Hill, 1995;

Peterson, et. al., 1995). Students gain experience nurturing collegial relationships that may serve their needs as professionals (Lei et al., 2011). Likewise, cohorts offer students greater understanding of the tenets of civility by affording them opportunities to build social capital (Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010).

As with the learning community literature, retention and improved academic performance dominates much of the scholarship regarding the benefits of cohort programming. A variety of studies have shown that students participating in cohort programs show greater motivation and commitment to fulfilling their educational pursuits when compared to non-cohort students. Consequently, these cohort students persist from one academic year to the next at greater rates than their non-cohort counterparts (Harris, 2006-2007; Hill, 1995; Reynolds & Hebert, 1995).

Cracks in the foundation.

For all the accolades cohort programming generates, research remains inconclusive regarding certain aspects of the cohort model. For example, Barnett and Muse (1993) lauded structural benefits of cohort course sequencing noting that in regimented closed cohort programs students take courses in a lockstep pattern thereby ensuring a sequentially calculated mastery of critical concepts. Conversely, Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, and Norris (2000) exposed perceived inflexibility of such rigid course sequences. They noted that students' inability to take courses outside of the cohort sequence sometimes contributed to a singularity of experience that fostered interpersonal conflict and narrow intellectual focus.

Faculty assessment of cohort programs remains mixed as well. Those who advocate cohort-based curricula typically cite the opportunities for deep learning and collaboration with students as primary benefits (Barnett et al., 2000). Furthermore, faculty members often note that close working relationships with cohort students allows for better communication regarding the

courses and program planning. Conceptually, faculty members could elect to make programmatic adjustments or address student concerns as they arise. On the other hand, faculty members also report that these close student relationships sometimes give rise to an inflated sense of empowerment among students (Barnett et al., 2000; Lei et al., 2011). Cohort students may erroneously feel they can make demands of faculty members if they do not like the direction or content of a course. This behavior typically manifests as a mob mentality driven by groupthink where dialog with faculty is cast aside in favor of threats and irrational complaints (Teitel, 1997).

Criticism reveals that cohorts are susceptible to various maladies that may undermine purpose and inhibit intellectual growth (Barnett et al., 2000; Lei et al., 2011; Maher, 2004). For example, the rigidity in course sequence sometimes produces interpersonal conflict that threatens to weaken group solidarity. Principal among difficulties reported with cohorts is group insularity and the formation of cliques (Maher, 2004; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Chevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). While most student groups face personality conflicts or other types of discord, some cohorts have been marred by extraordinary strife between members. For instance, Teitel (1997) noted that cohort participants who felt victimized by intragroup conflict expressed despair at being trapped with a specific set of students for the duration of their academic program.

Schribner and Donaldson (2001) noted the discomfort of students who never fully gained acceptance in their cohorts. Those students suffered isolation and often contributed little in the way of scholarship. Their marginalization relegated them to outcasts whose individual talents and ideas were unwelcome. For example, on the occasion that open and flexible cohorts gained new members—either temporarily or permanently—incoming students often found gaining

acceptance difficult. Existing group members sometimes shunned new entrants as they struggled to find their own place within a cohort. This group insularity had a demoralizing effect by creating an atmosphere of discord where select group members' contributions were unwelcome (Radencich et al., 1998; Teitel, 1997).

Even some functional cohorts fail to utilize the talents of all members when those with domineering personalities drown out input from more reserved group members (Lei et al., 2011). By inadvertently or purposefully silencing others, those who expressed their opinions fervently overshadowed the individual contributions of fellow participants who could have potentially enriched learning opportunities (Maher, 2004). Often cohorts become little more than task-oriented groups whose focus shifts from intellectual pursuit to assignment completion. The outcome of this task orientation typically results in non-learning where individuals complete necessary opportunities for course fulfillment but gain little in the way of reflective or transformative learning (Hill, 1995; Maher, 2004; Radencich et al., 1998; Schribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997).

Research has also documented instances where cohort programs function as planned but marginally contribute to intended outcomes. For example, Reynolds and Hebert (1998) found only minor improvement when comparing cohort students' academic performance with their traditional-student counterparts. Performance comparisons between the two groups suggested that the cohort under study did not contribute to improved academic performance or retention. Similarly, findings of a more recent study on a cohort group within the College of Business and Economics at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls suggested the program did not increase academics or retention (Potts, Schultz, & Foust, 2003-2004). Both of the aforementioned instances showed evidence of positive impacts, but as a whole the programs failed to achieve

intended results. While these cases and similar studies may not counterbalance the research showing benefits of educational cohorts, they do suggest their fallibility.

Like the majority of learning community research, scholarship on educational cohorts remains largely positive (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Greenlee & Karanxha, 2010; Ross et al., 2006; Schribner & Donaldson, 2001; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). However, in contrast to much of the learning community literature, cohort scholars have identified weaknesses in the cohort model, and they have documented instances when consequences of cohort participation have been unintended and negative (Lei et al., 2011; Teitel, 1997). By operating as an entity patterned similarly to the cohort model, learning communities likely face similar vulnerabilities (Jaffee, 2007). Therefore, present learning community research should examine the full spectrum of program outcomes in order to gain understanding of the consequences of participation.

Conceptual Framework

As evidenced in the higher education cohort literature, the dynamics of group membership, norms, and roles contribute to a greater understanding of the benefits and potential drawbacks of cohort membership. Furthermore, notable publications such as Astin's (1993) work on student persistence have indicated the significance of one's peer group in influencing a student's "academic and personal development" (p. 7). While researchers could feasibly explore a variety of sociological theories to illuminate the learning community experience, scholars are best served focusing on the role of peer interaction in shaping the overall consequences of learning community participation. As Tinto (1993) noted in *Leaving College*, students' peer affiliations enable them to bind with the "fabric of student culture" and undergo an initiation into the "informal character of institutional life" (p. 165). This entry into the culture of student life

primarily occurs upon students' first weeks of enrollment at an institution. Therefore, learning community programs for first-time freshmen are critically important in shaping a student's perception of an institution through formal and informal experiences. Furthermore, even seasoned students long past their initial entry into an institution undergo a similar initiation period upon enrolling in a learning community program because cohorts typically possess unique cultures in which students must assimilate. It is this process of assimilation and later membership that produces the social context in which learning community research is presently lacking. Understanding individual student experiences will help scholars and educators refine the learning community concept so that continued improvement of the various models will contribute to greater experiences and learning outcomes.

Institutions frequently market advantages of enrolling in learning communities by emphasizing the development of interpersonal relationships and assistance acclimating to campus culture. For example, the University of Tennessee offers incoming freshmen seven learning community options crafted around a variety of academic disciplines. In advertising these learning communities, the university's webpage markets the programs by touting their advantages in "provid[ing] distinctive opportunities to connect with classmates, develop valuable skills, become involved in campus life, and ultimately enjoy success as a student." Programs like those at the University of Tennessee and many other institutions throughout the United States frequently emphasize community as a selling point for the advantages of learning community participation. This distinction of community is, as Jaffee (2007) suggests, one intended to promote the "networks and bonds of friendship, cohesiveness, and unity" (p. 66). This concept of community is based on the homogeneity of the individuals in the group given their similarity in age, academic aptitude, and intended major. Yet it is this homogeneity that may well produce

unintended consequences—some of which threaten to undermine any notion of community building. As with other educational cohorts, learning communities by design are susceptible to groupthink, fractured social structures, cliques, and suppression (Jaffee et al., 2008).

In order to document the social and structural implications of learning communities, the conceptual framework guiding this inquiry as conceptualized by Jaffee (2007) was informed by Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1954) law of unintended consequences in conjunction with three sociological constructs that provide a lens for assessing the consequences of program participation: homophily, primary group formation and interaction, and social class conflict. Each of these constructs offers a foundation on which researchers may examine the interplay between cohort dynamics and unintended consequences.

Homophily.

The theory of homophily posits that individuals who share similar beliefs are more inclined to associate with one another (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, p. 415). Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) initially coined the term homophily "to signify a tendency for friendships to form between those who are alike in some designated respect" (p. 23). Kandel (1978) further elaborated on the phenomenon suggesting that homophily results from two distinct processes: purposeful selection and socialization. Both facets of homophily stress the influence of similarity in forging bonds between people. In the case of selection homophily, individuals' affiliations are based on the degree to which others share one's social and behavioral characteristics. In considering the formation of friendships, for example, Kandel (1978) asserts that individuals establish connections based on shared traits ranging from attitudes and behavior to demographic characteristics. Conversely, homophily by association results when individuals who have no previous relationship come to share beliefs though the influence of regular contact

and interaction. Such circumstantial interaction frequently occurs as the result of interpersonal contact within a profession or other organization. This facet of homophily suggests that individuals gravitate toward one another through consistent social interaction "irrespective of prior similarity" (p. 428). While not as outwardly linked to the influence of shared traits as evident in purposeful selection, homophily by association likely also emanates from some intrinsic connection that spurs interaction.

By sharing "sociodemographic, behavioral, and intrapersonal characteristics" through homophilous social relationships, individuals limit their worldviews in ways that welcome familiarity and sometimes reject unfamiliar influences (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, p. 415). In light of the social dynamics at play within educational cohorts, homophily relates directly to learning communities because most if not all program models are founded upon a certain sameness of characteristics between members. For example, learning communities' inherent homophilous design begins with the recruitment of students. Most learning community programs enroll students of similar age, major, and/or academic experience. In this respect, learning communities are not necessarily socially diverse. Therefore, a learning community's homophilous characteristics both influence and limit its members' "social worlds" (p. 415).

The opportunity for interaction among culturally diverse individuals has often been a selling point to encourage students to enroll in learning community programs. While culturally diverse individuals may converge in a learning community environment, the theory of homophily suggests that single mindedness and the formation of cliques likely poses barriers to group cohesion. Within the context of a learning community program, "similarity breeds connection;" therefore, individuals typically associate with those in the group who share "attitudes, values, and personality traits" (Kandel, 1978, p. 428). Jaffee (2004, 2007) suggests

this group dynamic is similar to that of a high school environment in that students are purposefully placed in homogenous groups—whether by age, academic discipline, or another organizing feature. This group homogeneity often results in the creation of an environment that ironically undermines the integrative and collaborative facets of the learning community design because groups are predisposed to limited worldviews. The potential for social stratification is reminiscent of the rigid groupings in place throughout secondary schools. Jaffee et al. (2008) elaborate on this point by noting that the learning community structure, especially in the case of freshman interest groups,

> …resemble[s] the high school classroom [where] students…employ high school behavioral scripts and norms. Ironically, then, a structural arrangement designed to prepare and socialize students for the transition to college life may inadvertently create conditions that can retard that process. (p. 58)

This illustration poses a fundamental challenge that faces learning community initiatives by emphasizing programs' vulnerabilities to the interplay of social forces.

While homophily is not necessarily synonymous with dysfunction within cohort programs, its influence likely shapes the outcomes of individuals' learning community experiences. In some instances, the broad, integrative experience students hope to gain from a learning community program may succumb to a stronger current of conformity thereby limiting opportunities for learning. As evident in the previously cited cohort literature, learning communities are vulnerable to insularity and groupthink. "Normative and behavioral conformity" are associated with homophilous relationships in that individuals seek acceptance by adopting what the group deems as acceptable conduct (Jaffee, 2007, p. 67). In situations where disruptive behavior and social marginalization are the norm, learning communities could embody

the characteristics of a dysfunctional, intolerant cohort rather than a diversely unified collection of budding scholars.

Primary group formation and interaction.

Whereas homophily denotes a purposive grouping of like-minded individuals, the concept of primary group formation and interaction illuminates the distinction between differing types of social groups as relevant to the unique circumstances created through learning communities. Jaffee (2007) suggests that learning communities align closer to what sociologists label as primary groups versus those of secondary groups with which most college classes align. Therefore, understanding the concepts of primary and secondary groups allows for better insight into the roles individual students play within a learning community.

Charles Cooley (1962) established the concept of primary groups in his influential work *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*. Cooley's concept of group formation distinguished between primary and secondary group membership. Cooley defined the primary group as "consisting of intimate, face-to-face interaction and relatively long-lasting relationships" (Andersen & Taylor, 2010, p. 129). Though he initially only considered family and childhood peers, Cooley's concept of primary groups came to encompass a range of relationships in which people engage.

The distinguishing characteristic of primary group membership pertains to individuals making emotional connections as opposed to experiencing casual social affiliation. Primary group interaction impacts one's "personality or self-identity" in that the nature of a primary group relationship directly influences behavior (p. 129). For example, relationships between spouses or parents and children represent primary group interaction because of the degree to which these individuals influence one another. While marriages and enduring friendships are representative of primary group interaction, so too are the bonds formed between prisoners, gang

members, and soldiers. Ultimately, primary groups serve expressive or socioemotional needs by sharing in one's successes and failures. Moreover, primary groups are also the stimulus driving individuals' personal preferences, behavioral views, and values. Therefore, understanding that primary group formation is not exclusive to familial interaction allows for a greater awareness of its impact in a variety of interpersonal relationships (Andersen & Taylor, 2010; Jaffee, 2007).

Secondary groups differ from primary groups based on the degree of intimacy characteristic of their relationships. Much broader and more common than primary groups, secondary groups are typically more utilitarian than personal. Secondary group membership results from common or shared interests that unite people in achieving a specific goal or benchmark. Secondary group membership often manifests through one's profession or educational endeavors. However, religious groups, sports teams, neighborhoods, or even a collection of passengers on a plane all embody the characteristics of secondary groups. According to Andersen and Taylor (2010), secondary groups meet "instrumental needs" which are typified by the necessity in completing specific tasks. These groups, however, may assume the attributes of a primary group when subjected to a unifying event such as a crisis or tragedy, but such unity typically proves short-lived.

College student groups normally embody the characteristics of secondary groups particularly in regard to classroom dynamics. Contrary to the rigid groupings in place throughout elementary and secondary institutions, colleges and universities are far less stratified by age and in some cases ability. Since class rosters vary by course, individuals could feasibly attend courses with completely different groups of students—particularly at larger institutions. As Jaffee (2007) suggests, these "students occupy a common classroom location, but level of interaction, communication, and [group spirit] is minimal" (p. 67). Therefore, the traditional

classroom structure lends itself to the formation of secondary groups simply because the interaction between students typically does not continue beyond classroom boundaries.

As opposed to the secondary traits exhibited in traditional college classrooms, cohort groups such as learning communities align much more closely with primary groups because of the more personal associations between students. Since learning community participants undergo an intentionally structured course sequence that often includes residential programming and social integration activities, participants are more likely to form intimate bonds. This development of close interpersonal relationships, while certainly beneficial in general, also serves as a source for conflict and tension because "students are more likely to look to the group to shape and validate their self-identity" (Jaffee et al., 2008, p. 59). When conflict arises between an individual and his or her primary group, one is likely to comply with the collective values of the group for the sake of validation and acceptance. The overall effect of this compliance is that groups become more susceptible to groupthink as individuals elect to suppress dissenting views. Moreover, tensions that arise within a learning community are likely to impact all facets of a program. For example, the "conflicts and tension that emerge [sic] in one classroom, or in the residence hall, can contaminate the overall learning environment" (p. 59).

Another way primary group formation poses problems for a learning community arises through adversarial relationships with program faculty members. Student/faculty conflict can be acutely painful within cohorts when, for example, the collective will of the group clashes with that of a faculty member. In these cases, students likely face social pressure to adhere to group norms by siding with the will of the student majority. Failing to adhere to group norms may isolate the individual who elects to support the opposing faculty stance. This dilemma stems from role conflict in that students must balance competing allegiances. As budding scholars and

members of a presumably tight-knit primary group, students face a difficult task of serving the will of two masters. Unfortunately, the prevalence of this type of conflict is well known as aforementioned publications have detailed the existence of adversarial relationships between students and faculty members within cohort-style programs (Barnett et al., 2000; Jaffee, 2007; Jaffee et al., 2008; Maher, 2004; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). The overall effect of such strife is a weakening of students' and faculty members' academic experiences and an undermining of the program in general. While learning communities promote cohesion and shared learning, a divisive or dysfunctional group might well serve to inhibit the very growth the program intends to inspire (Jaffee, 2007).

Social class theory.

A final consideration in Jaffee's (2007) framework for learning community evaluation borrows from the Marxist theory of social class formation. Jaffee suggests that unintended consequences of program participation may result from "intra-cohort communication" designed to build relationships between peers (p. 68). While collaborative learning opportunities and social integration activities promote group cohesion, so too might these unifying efforts enforce a divisive concept of class stratification whereby students view themselves as a distinct group apart from faculty.

Maher (2004) accentuates the positive ramifications of student unity within cohort groups noting that they can collectively solve problems and affect change by taking "ownership in the workings of [the] program" (p. 21). In a case Maher studied, cohort students addressed a perceived problem with a program instructor, and they were able to resolve the matter proactively. The resolution to this problem, however, came about in part through the efforts of a faculty member who facilitated dialog between disgruntled students and the faculty member with

whom they disagreed. This collaborative problem-solving effort embodies a desirable exchange of ideas within a learning community environment. However, research has shown that cohort programs occasionally devolve into warring factions where collaborative problem-solving remains elusive as students and faculty engage in entrenched struggles. In cases where cohort participants collectively resist faculty wishes, students commonly perceive themselves as owing an allegiance to one's peers by uniting against the opposition—irrespective of the validity or correctness of the opposing stance (Barnett et al., 2000; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). In such instances, cohort faculty members often report the difficulty they face in resolving issues given the adversarial position students maintain (Jaffee, 2007).

Though student/faculty tension is a common occurrence on college campuses, the learning community concept could unintentionally heighten the likelihood of conflict between the two. Jaffee (2007) suggests that the Marxist framework of social class structure provides an appropriate framework through which researchers might better evaluate the potential division between learning community students and program faculty. Furthermore, a Marxist evaluation of cohorts allows for a clearer understanding of how homophily and group formation can bring about intended consequences of program participation. By applying the Marxist theory of social classes to students and faculty members, the emergence of conflict between the two seems plausible given the homogeneity of cohort groups and a developed solidarity between students.

Marx's concept of class consciousness stems from the opposing interests of the proletariat (working class) and the bourgeois (ruling class). These opposing factions, in terms of social structure, remain locked in a struggle "based on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes" (Marx & Engels, 2012, p. 29). For the proletariat to overcome oppression at the hands of the bourgeois, it must first develop a collective unity that enables them to bring

about revolutionary reform. This unity or class consciousness is known as a "class-for-itself" in that individuals share a "clearly defined…common interest" (Jaffee, 2007, p. 68). Once the proletariat has embraced a singular vision for reform, only then may they act to bring about social change.

A Marxist view of the social structure of the college classroom places students in a subservient role much akin to the proletariat or working class. Faculty members, on the other hand, represent the bourgeois or ruling class. Jaffee (2007) suggests the conventional authoritarian college classroom may heighten and promote a type of class struggle between faculty members and students. Yet, this struggle remains largely weighted in favor of faculty rule given the general lack of unity among the disassociated collection of students typically populating conventional college classrooms. The faculty/student struggle may escalate, however, when students participate in a cohort. The influence of primary group formation becomes much more significant when considered in the context of Marxian social classes. As a secondary group, unaffiliated students enrolled in traditionally populated classes do not necessarily share an intimate connection that collectively bonds the group; thus an organized solidarity between students is less likely. In contrast, as cohorts align more closely with the characteristics of a primary group, students develop a natural collective loyalty and shared sense of purpose that amplifies a sense of "class consciousness" (p. 68). This collective unity can bind students in a way that emboldens their own sense of power and control in wielding influence against the faculty.

By applying the concept of class consciousness to the cohort-structured college classroom, one can gain a clearer perspective of the potential for class struggle between students and faculty. As cited in previous research (Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-

Olcott, 2001), cohort faculty members have reported struggling with collective resistance from their students. In some cases, students lobby for decreases in workloads or fewer assignments, but in more extreme cases students attempt to uniformly "redirect learning objectives" (Jaffee, 2007, p. 68). While definitive answers as to the source of this resistance may prove elusive, the mere appearance of students collectively aligned against faculty members begs further investigation. The potential for diminished learning outcomes threatens to weaken the impact of learning community programming; therefore, further research should consider the possibility of student cohort groups' development of class consciousness. In the event research identifies class struggles between program faculty and students, further inquiry should explore the extent to which the cohort structure may contribute to division between students and faculty.

Summary of Review of Literature Chapter

Heretofore the literature on learning communities and related educational endeavors illustrates the powerful impact such programs have on students and faculty participants. Specifically, learning communities and cohort programming in general have shown to contribute positively to collaborative learning, better scholastic performance, increased engagement with faculty, and improved retention. These successes are often attributable to the programmatic structure of learning communities and related cohort designs.

In contrast to conventional course delivery, learning community participants gain exposure to collaborative learning opportunities through diverse programmatic designs. The variety of learning community programming options indicates the adaptability of the model. Host institutions may offer programs tailored specifically to their campuses. Whether incorporating basic learning community designs through linked courses and learning clusters or

offering complex initiatives such as coordinated studies programs, learning communities appear poised to reshape the way institutions provide instruction and engage students.

Benefits of the learning community model are well documented, but the literature on similar collegiate cohorts suggests that learning communities are vulnerable to specific threats that may weaken their intended impact. Unfortunately, a variety of unintended consequences have diminished if not sabotaged the educational gains of students participating in collegiate cohort programs. Researchers have found that the cohort model—to which the learning community concept adheres—sometimes fosters negative behavior in the formation of cliques, insularity, groupthink, and non-learning. While cohort research has documented these programmatic difficulties, the learning community literature has remained virtually silent on similar incidences. However, one scholar, David Jaffee (2004, 2007), has suggested further inquiry should investigate the extent to which problems cited in the cohort literature manifest within learning communities.

Jaffee's (2007) development of a conceptual framework to evaluate the social processes within learning communities proved informative in identifying potential unintended and negative consequences of program participation. The framework principally relies on the theories of homophily and primary group formation to illuminate the sociological exchanges that contribute to students' learning community experiences. These theories offer insight into the interplay of social forces within the context of a learning community. The theory of homophily, for instance, posits that individuals participating in groups are more likely to associate with those whose personal characteristics are much like their own. Armed with an awareness of homophily, researchers could gain perspective on the confluence of social pressures and peer relationships within a defined group such as a learning community. Furthermore, understanding the formation

of primary and secondary groups further explains how individuals identify with certain individuals while rejecting others. When viewed together, homophily and primary group formation provide insight into the social processes that contribute to consequences of program participation.

Within months of Jaffee's conceptual framework gaining publication, a subsequent study first documented a learning community producing negative, unintended consequences (Jaffee et al., 2008). Unfortunately, the research offered little explanation as to the origin of these program detriments; while informative, the study lacked breadth and depth in chronicling the manner by which unintended consequences resulted from learning community programming. Instead, the study concluded with recommendations for improving the learning community design and delivery of services. Though the work fell short in determining the processes by which unintended consequences of program participation arose, the research raised awareness of a need for further inquiry. Evidenced by the gap in learning community literature, researchers remain faced with a challenge to explore the manner by which learning community programs produce both intended and unintended consequences.

Chapter 3

Design and Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify and examine unintended consequences of participation in collegiate living-learning communities (LLCs). This study will contribute to the present learning community literature by chronicling students' LLC experiences at a single institution recognized under the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as large Masters Colleges and Universities. The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What are the unintended consequences of living-learning community participation?
2. How are the institution's living-learning community stakeholders affected by these unintended consequences?

This chapter provides a description of the research design and methods employed to address the research questions. The following information also provides a justification for using a case study methodology, a rationale for employing a conceptual framework to guide the inquiry, and a subsequent description of the procedures used to conduct the study. Furthermore, profiles of the LLCs under study are provided in addition to details regarding the manner in which data were collected. The chapter concludes by addressing data trustworthiness, limitations, reliability and validity, and precautions taken to ensure appropriate ethical conduct.

Research Design

The subject under study characteristically directs the selection of a methodology best suited to capture data (Yin, 2009). In the case of learning community research, most existing studies have relied on quantitative methods for program analysis (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000-2001; Borden et al., 1997; Daffron & Holland, 2009; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Inkelas & Weisman,

2003; Johnson & Romanoff, 1999; Keup, 2005-2006; Maxwell, 1998; Potts et al., 2003-2004; Stassen, 2003; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2001; Walleri et al., 1998; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). As noted in Chapter 1, few researchers have opted to explore the qualitative components of the learning community experience (MacGregor, 1991; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1995). However, given the rich experiences students undergo as learning community participants, an abundance of information potentially awaits researchers willing to explore the experiential consequences of learning community involvement (Jaffee et al., 2008). By detailing individuals' learning community experiences, this research project holds the potential to identify causes and implications of unintended consequences of learning community participation, and thus illuminate deficiencies in the learning community design heretofore unaddressed (Creswell, 2007; Jaffee et al., 2008).

Since this learning community inquiry intended to document the interplay of social forces that contribute to overall experience within a LLC, a qualitative methodology best enabled the researcher to gather data in the phenomenon's natural setting (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the researcher elected to approach the investigation from a constructivist perspective by maintaining emphasis on understanding the LLC phenomenon from the multiple perspectives of study participants. To further guide the inquiry, the researcher employed a conceptual framework to facilitate exploration of social dynamics within the study LLCs. As conceptualized by David Jaffee (2007), this framework consisted of four sociological constructs related to social interaction and its consequences. These constructs—the law of unintended consequences, the theory of homophily, primary group formation and interaction, and social class conflict—served to inform data collection by guiding the researcher's understanding of the realities perceived by LLC participants in this study.

In light of the aforementioned research questions, a case study design provided an ideal approach for this qualitative LLC inquiry. To accurately and thoroughly document the complex sociological dynamics of the learning community experience, a case study design best positioned the researcher to capture data and subsequently gain contextual understanding of the consequences of learning community participation (Tucker, 1999-2000; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Specifically a case study design best suited the goals of this research project for two distinct reasons:

1. Qualitative case studies provide structure for conducting on-site data collection on a bounded system or systems that a researcher or researchers study over time (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, case studies contribute to the heuristic value of the research in that they may "bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend…experience, or confirm what is known" (p. 44). As case studies typically document complex and highly idiosyncratic phenomena, such an inquiry necessitates the gathering of multiple sources of data. Accordingly, diverse data-gathering tactics such as interviews, document analysis, observation, and focus groups offer the potential to yield a distinctive representation of the inner-workings of learning communities through multiple perspectives. Since case studies characteristically addresses "how" or "why" a particular phenomenon occurs, such a methodological approach best enables the researcher to discover the manner by which unintended consequences occur as a result of learning community participation and how or why those consequences occur (Yin, 2009).
2. Specific learning community programs qualify as distinct and delimited entities suitable for case study research because they exist as bounded systems. Merriam

> (2009) notes that the "unit of analysis" dictates the applicability of a case study methodology to a specific research inquiry (p. 41). Therefore, as a unit of analysis, learning community programs constitute socially complex "bounded system[s]" or cases that provide researchers an opportunity to examine programmatic functioning (Merriam, 2009, pp. 40-41). Thus, a case study approach provides a fitting methodology through which researchers may illuminate others' understanding of the learning community phenomenon.

To investigate unintended consequences of learning community participation, this case study adhered to a single case, embedded design to examine the phenomena as evident in two programs at the study institution. This approach enabled an investigation of the study institution's learning community programming as a whole as well as smaller embedded units representing specific programs (Yin, 2009, pp. 50-52). This methodological approach afforded a unique and potentially insightful portrait of the learning community experience at one institution by "strengthen[ing] the precision, the validity, and the stability of findings" within and across programs (Merriam, 2009, p. 50).

Site Selection

To assess the sociological influences within learning community programs, this research project focused solely on LLC programs that adhered to the linked courses or the learning cluster cohort model. Therefore, in an effort to identify an "information-rich" case for this study, purposeful sampling guided the selection of research site and population (Patton, 1990, p. 169). To facilitate this process, a National Resource Center for Learning Communities database available through The Washington Center at The Evergreen State College enabled a nationwide search for learning community programs that could serve as appropriate cases for this project

(Creswell, 2007, p. 125). This database allowed the researcher to identify learning community programs matching specific criteria relating to institution type, undergraduate enrollment, program longevity, and type of learning community program (Washington Center, 2013).

In selecting a program appropriate for the investigative purposes of this study, a variety of criteria were used to identify a potential LLC program or programs from the more than 500 institutions hosting collegiate learning communities. Initial queries eliminated institutions with learning community programs in operation for less than two years. Research suggests that newly instituted learning communities take up to two years to develop as functional entities (Weber, 2000). By instituting a two-year operational minimum, potential programs considered for this research project would have conceivably outgrown early developmental challenges and subsequently refined the program design.

Subsequent queries to identify coeducational learning community programs adhering to an academic theme or focus further restricted the pool of potential institutions eligible for this study. Upon imposing these search limitations, slightly less than 200 institutions met the aforementioned criteria. However, the list of eligible institutions was again paired down as this project focused solely on residence-based programs.

Since LLCs emphasize social integration as a component of the program experience, the potential to gather data regarding the social dynamics within the group is greater with residential programs versus their non-residential counterparts. Consequently, eligible programs must also house participants in spaces specifically designated for learning community participants. Attaching a residential component to a cohort program increases the amount of time students engage fellow cohort members and experience a variety of social encounters (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). Consequently, the context in which the researcher may collect data is rich with potential

exchanges that promise to further understanding of the learning community experience. Of the academically structured, coeducational learning communities remaining in the pool of programs, less than 100 adhered to a LLC model.

A final characteristic in selecting potential institutions eligible for this study related to undergraduate enrollment and Carnegie Classification. Reliance on the Carnegie Classification system enabled a criterion-based sampling strategy to identify an institution of higher learning that sponsors similarly-designed but distinct residential LLCs (Merriam, 2009). Previous scholarship suggests that LLCs offer uniquely personalized experiences for students attending medium to large sized, public universities (Andrade, 2007-2008; Boyd et al., 2008; Brower et al., 2003; Franklin, 2000; Gordon et al., 2001; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Johnson, 2000-2001; Johnson & Romanoff, 1999; Keup, 2005-2006; Logan et al., 2000; Pike et al., 1997; Schroeder et al., 1999; Soldner et al., 1999-2000; Stassen, 2003; Tinto & Goodsell, 1993; Tokuno, 1993; Yockey & George, 1998; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Therefore, institutions considered for this research project were limited to those categorized by Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as large Masters Colleges and Universities or higher.

According to the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education, when restricting searches for learning community programs to large public institutions (defined as those with greater than 10,000 undergraduate students), less than 90 institutions currently host LLC programs. However, further screening eliminates colleges and universities that solely sponsor non-academic LLCs such as those catering to interests in particular hobbies, sports, or social affiliations. A total of 27 institutions hosting academic-based LLCs remained eligible for potential site selection for this study. From the remaining list, typical case sampling enabled the researcher to select an institution hosting LLC programs representative of "normal" or common

learning community characteristics such as: academic theme or curricular focus, admission requirements, co-educational structure, linked or clustered courses design, defined residential living space, freshmen enrollment availability, structured social integration activities, and presence of peer mentors/faculty or staff facilitators (Patton, 1990, p. 173; see also Gabelnick, 1990; Jaffee, 2007; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Smith et al., 2004; Tinto; 1993, 2003). Ultimately, this strategy facilitated the selection of a large, public Carnegie-classified Master's L institution (Master's Colleges and Universities [larger programs]) situated in a mid-sized town in the southeastern United States.

Upon identification of an institution for conducting this project, chain sampling at the study institution enabled the selection of two programs that held the potential to reveal in-depth information yet "differences or different perspectives" about the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007, p 126; see also Patton, 1990, p. 176). For inclusion in this study, programs had to adhere to a specific curricular focus. Though programs were not considered based on specific academic affiliations, they had to have been linked by an academic focus or discipline. This curricular stipulation ensured that programs were, at a minimum, conceptually grounded with a scholarly purpose. Moreover, the requirement ensured that the population under study engaged in collaborative learning opportunities, thereby improving the researcher's likelihood of gathering data to accurately reflect the learning community "phenomenon within its real-life context" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40).

The study institution hosts over 20 LLC programs, each of which is governed by the institution's Department of University Housing and then sponsored by other university entities—many of which are academic departments whose associated disciplines advance the intellectual mission of a specific LLC. In consulting with what Patton (1990) terms "well situated people" to

gain an understanding of the institution's LLC programs that might best yield "information-rich…cases," two programs emerged as representative cases for inclusion in this study (p. 176).

University officials with direct oversight of the institution's varying LLC programs provided insight into the enrollment, activities, academic direction, and residential components of all potential cases for this project. Upon evaluation of program-specific documents such as advertising, information publications, program applications, Web sites, academic curricula, and enrollment data, a clearer understanding of each case's representativeness of a typical residential, academically-focused learning community emerged. From these analyses, two of the more than twenty programs were found to be uniquely distinct yet representative of a typical LLC program as previously described—both of which featured the following traits: adherence to an academic theme or curricular focus, admissions requirements, co-educational membership, linked course design, existence within a defined residential space, freshmen enrollment availability, structured social integration activities, and presence of a peer mentor or faculty/staff facilitator (Patton, 1990).

Trailblazers Living-Learning Community.

Of the two learning community programs considered for this project, the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community requires the greatest amount of commitment on the part of student participants. The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community has been in existence at the study institution since 2006, and its mission is to develop or enhance participants' skills as related to outdoor activities such as hiking, backpacking, and a general appreciation of the outdoors. Particular emphasis in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community pertains to development of leadership skills and exploring career opportunities in outdoor recreation. There are no required

skills for those who apply to participate in the program, but applicants selected for participation in the LLC are expected to participate and engage.

The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community typically accommodates 20-25 students in a given cohort. Any incoming student may apply to participate in the program irrespective of intended major; however, the LLC is sponsored by two distinct factions of the university: the Department of Recreation Management and Physical Education and an outdoor activities-focused division of the institution's Division of Student Development. Therefore, participation in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community does advance students toward meeting major-specific graduation requirements for degrees in recreation management and physical education. Thus, the 2013-2014 Trailblazers Living-Learning Community cohort consisted of a majority of students (16 of 24) who planned to major in recreation management, physical education, or related field.

The leadership team for The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community consisted of a mixture of university staff, faculty, and two administrators. Two faculty members—one from the Department of Recreation Management and Physical Education and the other an adjunct faculty member who teaches *First Year Seminar*—participated in the leadership team along with two university administrators—one a Coordinator of Academic Initiatives and the other an Assistant Director in the Department of Recreation Management and Physical Education. Two university staff members participated in the leadership team as well; one served the institution as a full-time residence life coordinator and the other served as undergraduate student resident assistant who resided with The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community participants.

Trailblazers Living Learning Community participants were required to enroll in two curricular offerings—one of which was a section of the *First Year Seminar* (a course all

incoming students must complete) specifically designed for the LLC. The second course in which students were expected to enroll was a Recreation Management-specific course entitled *Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation*. The aforementioned courses were taught by faculty members who agreed to participate in the LLC leadership team and coordinate or take part in some of the group's co-curricular activities.

In addition to the two required courses in which Trailblazers Living-Learning Community students must enroll, they were also expected to participate in an immersive four-day backpacking trek known as *Into the Wild* which occurred during the week prior to the beginning of fall semester classes. *Into the Wild* required a $250 fee to cover the expense of gear rentals and instructional staff who led the venture. The impetus for requiring all students participating in The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community to complete *Into the Wild* was to provide them with an immersive experience that bonded the group when they first arrived on campus. Moreover, during *Into the Wild* students were to learn fundamentals about backpacking, minimizing one's impact on the environment, navigational skills, and general outdoors survival skills.

Finally, Trailblazers Living-Learning Community participants were expected but not required to actively engage with their LLC-associated peers and faculty/staff members. University Housing officials believed engagement revealed students' commitment to the LLC program. Furthermore, students were expected to contribute to the continual development of the current LLC by "planning the future of the community." The undergirding theme guiding the evolution of The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community pertained to the improvement of the residence life experience.

Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community.

The second LLC program selected for inclusion in this study is a popular learning community initiative affiliated with the institution's acclaimed psychology department. The Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community program began in 2010 and has grown to become, along with the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, one of the institution's signature LLCs. As advertised in promotional materials, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community "was created for students who want to know more about why people act, think, and feel the way they do."

As with most of the institution's discipline-based LLCs, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community provides students with opportunities to not only explore the associated discipline—which in this case is psychology—but to connect with faculty members, peers, and graduate students in the sponsoring department. This emphasis on engaging with members of the sponsoring department is intended to provide prospective psychology majors with information about a variety of academic concentrations within the department as well as information pertaining to careers in psychology and behavioral sciences.

Similar to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community is open to any freshman interested in the program. Students must indicate on the housing application an interest in the university's LLC programs, and then they can choose to apply to specific programs. The Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community typically accommodates 20-25 students but can house up to 40 participants, so space is limited. As is usually the case, by the summer preceding the fall 2013 semester there were more applicants for the program than available spaces, so students were selected based on the quality of their

applications including expressed interest in the field of psychology, academic achievements, and order in which the application was received.

The Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community was and remains jointly sponsored by the institution's psychology department and the Department of University Housing. Faculty members from the psychology department bore the responsibility for coordinating and arranging curricular offerings associated with the LLC. Conversely, University Housing provided a small budget to fund events and activities for the group. Furthermore, University Housing provided the community with a dedicated resident assistant who lived with the participants to facilitate programming and serve as a peer mentor. Accordingly, students were grouped together in a wing on one floor of a residence hall so they could interact as a community. While other non-LLC students lived on the same floor, the wing of the floor that housed the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community was solely reserved for members of that group.

As with other LLCs on campus, a leadership team comprised of faculty and staff work together to ensure the success of the program. This leadership team included a senior faculty member who shouldered the primary responsibility of crafting the curricular and co-curricular components of the community. To assist with these responsibilities, the senior faculty member—who for the Mind Odyssey group was a well-respected and long-serving professor at the institution—coordinated with fellow leadership team members to plan activities and events. In addition to the senior faculty member, the leadership team included three other psychology faculty members and three university housing employees—one of which is the resident assistant who lived with the Mind Odyssey participants. This team initially met routinely to plan events, evaluate students' progress, and address any concerns that might have arise in relation to the LLC.

Cultivating a community of scholars requires that students commit time and invest intellectual energy in advancing the LLC. Thus, expectations for the Mind Odyssey participants were similar to other LLC programs on campus. During the fall semester, students enrolled in a special section of the institution's *First Year Seminar* course led by the leadership team's senior faculty member. This linked course provided students with a general introduction to the institution, cultivation of scholarly habits, and an introduction to the psychology discipline.

Additional expectations of Mind Odyssey participants involved active engagement in the program. While participation in events was not mandated, leadership team members viewed students' involvement in program-specific events as evidence of commitment to the program. Therefore, students were expected to honor their commitments to the LLC by actively participating in program events. Furthermore, program participants agreed to share the responsibility of "support[ing] the academic success of community members." The desired outcome for Mind Odyssey participants was that they enjoy "an academic learning experience [that extended beyond] the classroom in a fun educational setting."

Data Collection Timeline and Procedures

The researcher relied on a variety of data sources and collection methods to accumulate a wealth of information for analysis and reporting. To gain access to data, the researcher acquired consent from the appropriate review boards and program personnel at the study institution. Furthermore, the researcher sought the participation of learning community stakeholders including faculty members, administrators, staff, and students.

Prior to data collection, the researcher submitted requisite documentation and forms to the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon gaining University of Tennessee IRB approval of the study in July, 2013, the researcher collaborated with IRB

representatives at the study institution to ensure approval there. Upon gaining permission to conduct research from the study institution IRB, the researcher collaborated with IRB personnel at both institutions to construct an Informed Consent Form to distribute to each research participant to review and complete prior to partaking in the research project. To further ensure adherence to appropriate research standards, the researcher informed participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they could at any time exercise the option of withdrawing from the project. Furthermore, the researcher assured participants that their identities would remain concealed as pseudonyms would be used in place of the institution, institutional locations and organizations, and individuals' names. Finally, all data gathered through interviews, observation, and document analysis would remain secured in a locked cabinet located in the researcher's office at room 115 of Annie Hogan Byrd Fine Arts Building at Tusculum College.

Field research began upon obtaining IRB approval from the University of Tennessee and the study institution. Data collection procedures included a variety of tactics that took place over twelve months which included the 2013-2014 academic year (AY 13-14) as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Field Research Timeline

AY 13-14	*Jul*	*Aug*	*Sept*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Mar*	*Apr*	*May*	*June*
Interviews	X		X	X	X	X		X			X	
Focus Groups				X					X			
Observations			X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Doc. Analysis	X	X	X				X					X
Reflection								X			X	

Involvement of the aforementioned program stakeholders entailed a variety of data-gathering techniques such as interviews, observation, and document analysis. The researcher interviewed stakeholders and reviewed publications and other public documents as well as internal documents shared among the respective institution's learning community programs. The researcher also reviewed course syllabi and yearly programming agendas as well as other documents pertinent to the implementation of the learning community programs. The number of occurrences of each data-gathering method involving human subjects is illustrated in Table 2 below, and further explanation of all data collection methods occurs in the following sections:

Table 2

Occurrences of Data Collection Procedures Involving Human Subjects

Subject	*Interviews*	*Focus Groups*	*Observation*
Students	28	4	12
Faculty	8	0	9
Staff	5	0	7
Administrators	5	0	0
Total	**46**	**4**	**28**

Interviews.

To gain access to interview participants, the researcher worked with LLC leadership team members who served as gatekeepers to events and participants. For both groups, leadership team faculty members introduced the researcher to participants during a linked course class session. These faculty members provided a general explanation for the researcher's presence and then

provided the researcher with an opportunity to explain the broad purpose of the research project and then take questions. Thereafter, the researcher was invited over the course of two weeks to join the groups at informal gatherings such as dinner in the residence hall for the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community and a career exploration question-and-answer session for the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. Consistent presence at informal events helped the researcher become a familiar fixture at events, and thus his presence became routine rather than out-of-the ordinary. The researcher typically visited the study institution once every two weeks but sometimes more frequently dependent upon events, interviewees' schedules, and monthly leadership team meetings (to which the researcher was invited across the entire academic year).

In crafting what Merriam (2009) characterizes as "good questions" for case study interviews, the researcher conducted pilot interviews with a panel of students, faculty, and administrators who are familiar with learning communities but are not intended subjects in the research project (p. 95). The purpose of these pilot interviews was to assess the quality and effectiveness of the proposed interview questions through feedback from panel members. The results of pilot interviews revealed "which questions [were] confusing and needed rewording, which questions [yielded] useless data, and which questions [should have been] include[d] in the first place" (p. 95). The resultant pilot interviews proved informative in helping the researcher refine questions and in two cases completely eliminate questions. For example, pilot interview participants suggested the researcher eliminate focus group questions pertaining to individuals' backgrounds or previous experiences. Pilot interview participants also suggested use of less research jargon in favor of conversational language.

Individual interviews.

Individual interviews were conducted with a variety of LLC stakeholders including student participants, associated faculty members, residence life staff, and university administrators. Initial interviews involved personnel directly responsible for initiating LLC programs at the study university—particularly the Associate Director of Housing, Residence Life who holds primary responsibility for the operation of the campus's learning community initiative. Thereafter, efforts focused on securing interviews with representative members of each LLC including current and former participants in order to gain diverse perspective regarding individual experiences. Furthermore, LLC personnel with administrative oversight such as the Coordinator for Academic Initiatives and Residential Learning Communities as well as each program's resident assistant participated in interviews too. These program stakeholders who were responsible for the design, implementation, and maintenance of the two LLCs shared their experiences in creating and maintaining both programs.

Interviews occurred in person unless scheduling constraints prohibited respondents from meeting with the researcher. In the rare event when a one-on-one meeting was not possible, the researcher conducted telephone interviews (Creswell, 2009). Barring a few exceptions, interviews occurred on-site at locations at the study institution including the university student center, library, cafeteria, and other dining facilities on campus.

Having implemented the pilot interview panel's protocol recommendations, the researcher conducted what Yin (2009) described as open-ended, "in-depth" interviews and "focused" interviews (p. 107). Both types of interviews served distinct purposes in advancing the research project. In-depth interviews occurred "over an extended period of time," and the flexible, open-ended format of the questioning afforded the respondent opportunities to present

information to serve "as the basis for further inquiry" (p. 107). This component of the in-depth interview aided in the construction of additional questions and new sources of data. Thereafter, interviews became more focused in that exchanges remained open-ended but increasingly structured because the researcher followed a semi-structured protocol. Like the in-depth interview, the semi-structured format of the focused interview afforded interviewees flexibility in providing information. However, the researcher relied on pre-determined questions to guide the inquiry until information emerged that steered the interview in a different direction. Thereafter, the researcher responded "to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

With the exception of a few occurrences, the researcher recorded interviews and subsequently transcribed the proceedings. When interviewees did not agree to a recording of the proceedings, the researcher documented information by hand through field notes and post-interview assessments. Recordings and written notes were then examined for emergent themes that might contribute to new ideas and concepts worthy of attention in subsequent data collection (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Focus group interviews.

While not as intimate as individual interviewing sessions, focus group interviews hold the potential for revealing information that might not arise through one-on-one interviews. Creswell (2009) maintains that focus groups create a socially structured environment in which information arises in response to comments or ideas presented by fellow focus group members. This group dialog and exchange of ideas provided rich data to illuminate the social dynamics between learning community participants. This dialog was enhanced by observation of non-verbal behavioral cues that conveyed attitudes and reactions to specific topics or comments. For

example, in sharing different individuals' perspectives, focus group interviews often brought to the forefront tensions previously unspoken or undocumented.

The overarching purpose of this research project influenced the selection of individuals invited to participate in focus group interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Merriam (2009) suggests that focus group composition preferably consist of individuals who do not know one another. However, given the population of this study, familiarity among participants was commonplace. In terms of students, the pool of eligible focus group participants did not exceed 60 individuals given the currently enrolled population of former and existing LLC students. Of those students, focus group participant selection entailed purposeful sampling to gain a representative population (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Specifically, the researcher consulted with program administrators and peer mentors to identify current and former students likely to provide rich data regarding LLC participation. As originally planned, this research project derived information from a variety of focus group sessions consisting of 5-7 participants each. Four focus groups consisted of students representing the two LLC programs—two focus groups consisted of Trailblazers Living-Learning Community participants, and two focus groups consisted of Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community participants.

As with individual interviews, focus groups are vulnerable to some disadvantages. For example, outspoken participants sometimes threaten group dialog by dominating conversations. In this research project, those willing to share their feelings more readily inadvertently threatened to silence those who were quieter or not as forceful in expressing their thoughts. Similarly, focus groups were not an optimal medium for gaining insight on personal or sensitive information. Participants were less likely to share their views on sensitive matters simply because of the potential for discomfort or friction (Yin, 2009).

Focus groups also create an artificial environment where the researcher is not embedded with the group but rather controls a formal dialog where natural interaction and exchanges are less likely. While little may counteract the artificial environment of the focus group, researchers can minimize some of the inherent limitations of focus group interviews (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). For this project, focus group interviews took place within a dining area within each LLC's respective residence hall. Selection of a familiar location for interviews placed students in a comfortable environment, and thus minimized some of the artificiality of the focus group session. Furthermore, during interviews the researcher moderated exchanges to control input from participants and thereby limit outspoken individuals from dominating proceedings. Consequently, the researcher steered the group away from sensitive issues that could have potentially sparked unnecessary tension and discord. Under the researcher's guidance, the focus group provided rich opportunities for information not otherwise evident in individual interviews or other data collection measures (Merriam, 2009).

Observation.

Multiple sources of data allow researchers to develop "converging lines of inquiry" or "triangulation" by supporting findings with "more than a single source of evidence" (Yin, 2009, pp. 115-116). Furthermore, multiple sources enable the researcher to overcome the specific limitations of any single source of data. Observation, for example, affords the case study researcher an opportunity to witness a phenomenon in its natural environment—an often insurmountable limitation of interviews—and corroborate information previously gleaned from other data sources (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews and focus group discussions alone are not likely to fully convey the manner in which individual experiences reflect the consequences of learning community participation.

Whereas the artificial environment of a focus group may stifle natural exchanges between participants, direct observation allows the researcher to observe subjects' interactions in a familiar setting (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, observation frees the researcher from relying solely on the second-hand information acquired through interviews.

Observations for this project documented a variety of LLC events such as program-specific field trips, formal and informal social functions, class seminars, and residence hall activities. These observations were critical to gaining insight into the social forces at work within the two programs. To minimize intrusion, senior faculty members associated with the two LLCs introduced the researcher during class sessions so he could become a familiar presence in the classroom. This introduction proved critical in demonstrating to students that the researcher had "gained the confidence and permission of those who [could] approve the activity" (Merraim, 2009). The researcher then positioned himself in an area close to the activities at hand but removed from direct participation. Doing so enabled the researcher to document the social interplay between students and associated faculty and staff.

To accurately document observations through field notes, the researcher observed with a "selective attentiveness" by detailing pertinent information such as the emergence of social cliques, group cohesiveness, and member roles (Merriam, 2009, p. 118; see also Jaffee et al., 2008). The resultant field observations corroborated existing information and illuminated social dynamics not evidenced through interviews or document analysis.

Document Analysis.

Documents or artifacts are critical to conducting a thorough and informative case study because they offer unique insight into the phenomena under investigation. Merriam (2009) defines documents as "written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study" (p.

139). Thus documents provide a unique reflection of a research subject or subjects in that they may reveal philosophical assumptions not evident through interviews or observations. Furthermore, documents serve as reliable sources of data because they "are usually produced for reasons other than the research at hand and therefore are not subject to the same limitations" (p. 139).

In relation to the LLC programs under study in this research project, the researcher collected a variety of documents such as program brochures, information flyers, internal and external promotional materials, and administrative reports detailing the institution's LLC programs' outcomes. Procuring these sources of data at the beginning of the project allowed the researcher to gain an awareness of the philosophical assumptions undergirding the university's LLC programs and enable an understanding of intended consequences of program participation.

Throughout the data collection period, researcher-generated documents also provided further understanding of specific circumstances, programmatic outcomes, and individual perspectives (Merriam, 2009). By asking learning community stakeholders to provide written reflections of their experiences within their respective programs, the researcher gained information individuals might not have shared through other more public data collection procedures. Whereas individuals might have resisted vocalizing disaffection within the context of a focus group interview, the anonymity and confidentiality afforded through personal reflections may have encouraged program stakeholders to divulge information they might otherwise have kept to themselves. As with selection of participants for individual interviews, purposeful sampling enabled selection of individuals to participate in the creation of reflective documents. The goal of any researcher-generated document collection depends upon identifying participants likely to provide detailed information. Therefore, the researcher relied on

information gained in field interviews and focus groups to identify students and program facilitators whose perspectives would likely illuminate the research questions.

Data Analysis

Qualitative inquiry necessitates that data analysis begin in the earliest stages of data collection. As an emergent design, the qualitative researcher is dependent upon findings to guide and propel the study. Consequently, qualitative studies, including this research project, adhere to what Merriam (2009) describes as an inductive and comparative method where data derived from initial interviews and document analysis inform subsequent fieldwork. This process occurs again and again until the researcher reaches a point of data saturation in that no new relevant information arises from the data being collected.

Preliminary data analysis relied upon a "theoretical orientation" in that the research questions informed data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 130). That is, the conceptual framework of this study—the law of unintended consequences, the theory of homophily, primary group formation and interaction, and social class theory—guided both data collection and subsequent analysis. Therefore, initial data analysis occurred upon conclusion of preliminary interviews and collection of documents and artifacts. The researcher transcribed interview recordings to produce documents conducive to analysis and coding. After transcription, the researcher examined the raw data to identify ideas for follow-up interviews or fieldwork. The researcher also evaluated the data by identifying emerging themes and assigning codes to specific aspects of the data. These findings subsequently informed follow-up interviews and document analysis as the data collection process evolved based on the researcher's on-going findings (Merriam, 2009).

Throughout the data collection process the researcher continually refined the "analytic questions" guiding the field research to make certain they addressed the overarching research questions (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 161; see also Merriam, 2009, pp. 171-172). This precaution ensured accuracy in collecting data that addressed the study's purpose while simultaneously propelling it forward. Furthermore, the researcher asked study participants who were "key informants" to offer feedback regarding themes that had been identified by that point (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 163). This member checking allowed participants to assist the researcher by commenting on the interpretation of events; this measure also helped reveal any potential "biases and misunderstandings" (Merriam, 2007, p. 217).

Data collection concluded when the researcher had exhausted all sources and achieved saturation of information because continued fieldwork produced miniscule or insignificant new data. Upon reaching saturation, the researcher transcribed, coded, and categorized remaining data sources according to the emergent themes identified. Thereafter, all data were reviewed to refine codes and combine or revise necessary categories to identify "recurring pattern[s]" present across the data (p. 181). The researcher then staged a within-case analysis whereby findings provided a categorical portrait of each distinct LLC. Next, a cross-case analysis guided the researcher in determining characteristics common across both programs. The information gained from the within-case and cross-cases analyses enabled a clearer understanding of resultant intended and unintended consequences of LLC participation (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

All data collection occurred in written format, and select events such as interviews and focus groups entailed the use of digital audio recordings. Once data collection concluded, the researcher analyzed data and conducted a coding process to identify emergent themes. In coding

data, the researcher used open and axial coding to sort the raw data and subsequently categorize it into groups and themes.

In concluding data analysis, the researcher again employed the services of key informants involved in the study to review the final report. This review gave key informants an opportunity to review final analyses to offer criticism or affirmation in regard to the accuracy of information reported. As before, this measure safeguarded against any unintentional biases or misconceptions on the part of the researcher (Merriam, 2009).

Trustworthiness of Data

To assure trustworthiness of data, the researcher remained committed to presenting an accurate, unbiased presentation of findings. Consequently, this project relied on multiple strategies to ensure the research was guided by stringent adherence to appropriate qualitative research methods. Because qualitative inquiry is subject to the biases and worldviews of researchers, precautions were taken to verify credibility of findings (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Reliance upon multiple sources of data to triangulate or corroborate findings was central to the design of this research project. As previously noted, collection of data entailed document analysis, interviews, and observation. These distinct sources equipped the researcher with "multiple measures of the same phenomenon" in order to verify consistency across findings and establish internal validity (Yin, 2009, p. 116). Moreover, the researcher sought feedback from research subjects by allowing them to review interview transcripts and subsequent written conclusions to verify or critique accuracy of reported findings. These "member checks" ensured the researcher did not misinterpret information collected (Merriam, 2009, p. 217).

Establishing internal validity also depended upon the researcher's dedication to collecting data until reaching a point of saturation. This measure required persistence in remaining in the

field until findings became repetitive. To achieve saturation, the researcher conducted interviews and observations until emergent data offered no new discoveries relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009).

Peer review relies upon the expertise of qualified individuals who assess findings and offer necessary criticism (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, this project employed the expertise of a committee of research scholars to review the researcher's findings and analysis throughout the data collection and reporting process. The guidance provided by the expert panel helped the researcher maintain strict adherence to scholarly standards by offering constructive criticism aimed at improving the project.

The applicability of qualitative research rests with the awareness that the overarching purpose is to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2009). While generalizability as known in quantitative research is not necessarily the goal of qualitative inquiry, findings remain useful and even applicable to other populations. Transferability of findings ultimately rests with those who later review the research to determine its relevance in other settings. Consequently, the researcher shoulders the burden of presenting an accurate, detailed presentation of the subject(s) and robust evidence to support findings (Merriam, 2009). In carrying out this study, the researcher meticulously recorded data in order to provide evidence to support conclusions. Furthermore, the researcher provided readers with rich, thick descriptions of the site and subjects to help future researchers determine transferability of data.

A final consideration in promoting external validity relates to the manner by which the sample was selected. In order to achieve variation, the researcher specifically chose to study similarly designed yet distinct programs at a single institution. The LLCs at the study institution are similar in design and structure; these similarities enabled the researcher to maintain

consistency across the programs under study. However, both LLCs are unique with respect to scholastic goals and population, and these variations enable a better understanding of the degree to which intended and unintended consequences occurred within separate LLC programs. Variation in the characteristics of the LLC programs ensures greater transferability of findings to those who later review this research (Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Given the researcher's participatory role in qualitative research, he or she must engage in "critical self-reflection…regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study" in order to position oneself in a manner not to manipulate data or adversely impact the investigation (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Furthermore, research involving human subjects poses a variety of ethical considerations to which the researcher must be attuned. The implications of careless field conduct have far reaching consequences—not least of which is the emotional well-being of research subjects. While the researcher's primary role is to collect data, one must remain equally vigilant in protecting the emotional, physical, and situational well-being of participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Consequently, in designing this project proposal, the researcher has maintained a strict adherence to ethical standards. Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers abide by the *Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association* (2009) when engaging in research; accordingly, every effort has been made to ensure this research project honors those standards.

In an effort to disclose information that one might interpret as compromising the integrity of this research project, it is necessary to reveal that the researcher's professional duties include the coordination of a learning community program (not related to this project) at the institution where he is employed. However, the researcher's involvement with a learning community is in

no way connected to any the programs identified for this inquiry. The researcher has no previous professional connection to any of the LLC programs nor their host institution. Nonetheless, in the interest of transparency it is critical to make known the researcher's professional involvement with the facilitation of a collegiate LLC.

Finally, the researcher's personal experiences with LLC programs could conceivably color perception of the programs studied in this inquiry; however, advance knowledge of the phenomena under study may also have served as an asset in arming the researcher with an awareness of a phenomenon's attributes worthy of investigation. Cast in such a light, the researcher's professional knowledge of learning community programs may actually have contributed to a more thorough investigation. Furthermore, to ensure appropriate safeguards prohibited biases from tainting data collection and analysis, the researcher bracketed personal experiences in an effort to minimize the influence of personal beliefs (Creswell, 2009).

As previously noted, qualitative learning community analysis has to-date remained an anomaly in scholarly research. Given the absence of such inquiries, this research project intends to enhance the present literature by illuminating an idiosyncratic phenomenon previously undocumented in the manner carried out for this study. Accordingly, studies like the present research project promise to investigate aspects of learning community participation that have been inadequately documented. When viewed as an asset to furthering a deeper understanding of learning community phenomena, the researcher's professional experiences likely enhanced the level of scholarship achieved through this project rather than undermined its validity.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

This comparative case study investigation of unintended consequences of collegiate living-learning communities (LLCs) at a public university began in February 2013 and was completed in June 2014.

A regional university in the southeastern United States served as the data collection site for this project. The researcher relied on a diverse data collection plan to capture the experiences and perceptions of the institution's stakeholders associated with the two LLC programs selected for this project. Accordingly, the cases selected for this study were the institution's two most robustly populated and/or longstanding LLCs.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the unintended consequences of living-learning community participation?
2. How are the institution's living-learning community stakeholders affected by these unintended consequences?

The preceding research questions directed the manner by which data were collected. The researcher relied on a range of methods to capture the experiences and perceptions of those at the study institution associated with the two LLC programs selected for this project. Data collection included in-depth interviews with LLC participants, program faculty and staff, and administrators affiliated with the institution's LLC initiative. Interviews were a mixture of focus group interviews and one-on-one semi-formal conversations between the researcher and LLC stakeholders. Data were also collected through official university documents such as LLC marketing materials, LLC leadership team meeting minutes, associated course syllabi, and institutional research reports regarding the university's LLC programs. Additionally, the

researcher logged numerous hours as a participant observer in a variety of LLC events including class sessions, formal and informal programming, and recreational activities. As follows, the data collected for this project enabled the researcher to capture diverse perspectives and experiences regarding the consequences of two of the study institution's LLC programs. The findings presented herein represent the researcher's presentation of data documenting perspectives of LLC stakeholders.

Results

The LLCs identified for this project are as diverse in mission and associated academic discipline as the students who populate them. Both LLCs have been in existence at the study institution for a minimum of four years with one having been in existence for nearly a decade. The two programs are considered by university administrators as the most consistently successful programs given their respective rates of fall-to-fall retention, student applications for admittance, participants' overall academic performance, and faculty/staff involvement.

Case study 1 – Trailblazers Living-Learning Community.

The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community has been in existence since 2006, and its mission is to develop or enhance participants' skills as related to outdoor activities such as hiking, backpacking, and a general appreciation of the outdoors. Particular emphasis in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community pertains to development of leadership skills and exploring career opportunities in outdoor recreation. There are no required skills for those who apply to participate in the program, but applicants selected for participation in the LLC are expected to participate and engage.

The most critical component of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community pertains to participation in a rigorous 4-day backpacking trek known as *Into the Wild*. This backpacking trek

occurs the week before fall semester classes begin, and its purpose is to place students —most of whom have never met—in a wilderness environment where they must work together and depend on one another for survival. Ideally, the group emerges from *Into the Wild* socially and emotionally bonded with one another, and thus they begin their academic year with a tight-knit affinity group in place.

Any incoming student may apply to participate in The Trailblazers Living-Learning Community irrespective of intended major; however, the LLC is sponsored by two distinct factions of the university: the Department of Recreation Management and Physical Education and an outdoor activities-focused division of the institution's Division of Student Development. Therefore, participation in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community does advance students toward meeting major-specific graduation requirements for degrees in recreation management and physical education. Thus, the 2013-2014 Trailblazers Living-Learning Community cohort consisted of a majority of students (16 of 24) who planned to major in recreation management, physical education, or related field.

At the outset of the 2013-2014 academic year, the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community cohort consisted of 24 total members—12 females and 12 males. Of these 24 students, many entered the LLC with previous outdoor experience. In using the Recreational Equipment Incorporated (2013) *Essential Camping Skills* assessment as a guide, members of the LLC's leadership team rated a majority of the cohort as having advanced or intermediate outdoor skills as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Entering 2013-2014 Trailblazers Living-Learning Community Outdoor Skills Profile

Outdoor Skills Assessment

Gender	*Beginner*	*Intermediate*	*Advanced*	Total
Males	2	5	5	12
Females	6	4	2	12
Total	8	9	7	24

Note: Assessments occurred before the academic semester began.

Only a fraction of the group began the fall semester with beginner outdoors skills. Among females, approximately half (6 of 12 or 50%) rated as having intermediate or advanced outdoor skills at the beginning of the year. Conversely, a majority of males (10 of 12 or 83%) rated as intermediate or advanced outdoorsman. Thus, an overall majority (16 of 24 or 67%) of program participants entered the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community with intermediate to advanced outdoor skills. Only a fraction of participants (8 of 24 or 33%) entered the group with little knowledge of outdoor skills.

As expressed by university residence life personnel, intended outcomes of the institution's LLCs relate specifically to benefits documented in the research literature. These outcomes include commonly cited advantages of LLC participation such as adjustment to college life, building relationships with faculty, development of deep friendships, and increased satisfaction with the university.

As an institution that has hosted LLCs for well over a decade, the university touts institutional data supporting the success of their programs. For example, in a report pertaining to the 2011-2012 academic year, residence life officials cited institutional survey data where LLC

students, when compared to students not participating in a formal learning community, showed greater overall development of skills and intellectual growth. Specific areas where LLC students outpaced their non-LLC counterparts were: ethical and moral development, campus involvement, leadership, sense of confidence and purpose, development of meaningful friendships, awareness of academic campus resources, and feeling a part of the campus and local community.

Despite the successes of the institution's learning community initiatives, university administrators recognized a need to grow and strengthen their programs. Thus, officials welcomed the opportunity for this research project to explore the oft neglected aspect of extant learning community research: unintended consequences of LLCs.

Unintended consequences themes.

Case study 1 consisted of interviews of 16 student participants, 4 leadership team members (including faculty), and 2 Trailblazers Living-Learning Community-associated residence life administrators. A multitude of themes emerged from the collected data—several of which confirmed previously reported benefits of learning community programming including commitment to the institution, social integration, and intellectual stimulation. However, five specific themes related solely to unintended consequences: social stratification, insularity, risky behavior, negative views of faculty and associated curricula, and rebellion.

Social stratification. Social stratification emerged as a pervading unintended consequence theme of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Many members of the LLC and associated staff viewed the social structure of the group as fractured or divided. Some attributed this fracturing of the group to different interests among group members, but a majority felt that the group split between those who were accepted as core members of the group and those who were not. This recognition of division among group members occurred in each of the student

interviews and two interviews with non-faculty leadership team members who worked closely with the group.

Trailblazers Living-Learning Community stakeholders cite pervading values of a majority of group members as primarily contributing to the emergence of a stratified social structure within the group. After the initial bonding of the *Into the Wild* trek, the group returned to campus as a unified entity mostly intent on sharing experiences and maintaining what one faculty member termed "a bond forged through dependence on one another for survival." This unity eventually succumbed to a social hierarchy that would alter students' perceptions of the LLC experience. Some suggest this fragmentation of the group occurred over time as a result of too little structured programming to maintain group unity. One participant voiced this sentiment in noting the manner by which group unity faded after the academic year was underway:

> It's just weird now to look at how close we were and how we thought and, like, how we had a different and more positive impression of everyone at first and how that's changed over the semester. Because at the beginning we were all really close, and we all did everything together and moved in this big pack. And then the group kind of started to, like, group off and get a little exclusive. There were no longer group activities that brought us together, so there were groups that did their own thing and didn't like tell anyone else. They were just really secretive about it, and so that really kind of sucked and was an issue.

Despite a lack of LLC programming as the academic year progressed, division among students seemed to result from divergent worldviews and interests.

Trailblazers' students participating in this research project uniformly recognized the existence of two distinct factions or social classes within the LLC: a core group that dictated the

social mores of the group, and a secondary group of students or outliers who did not fully share the interests of those in the core group. Furthermore, subgroups existed within each of these primary social groups. Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of these social classes and their respective subgroups:

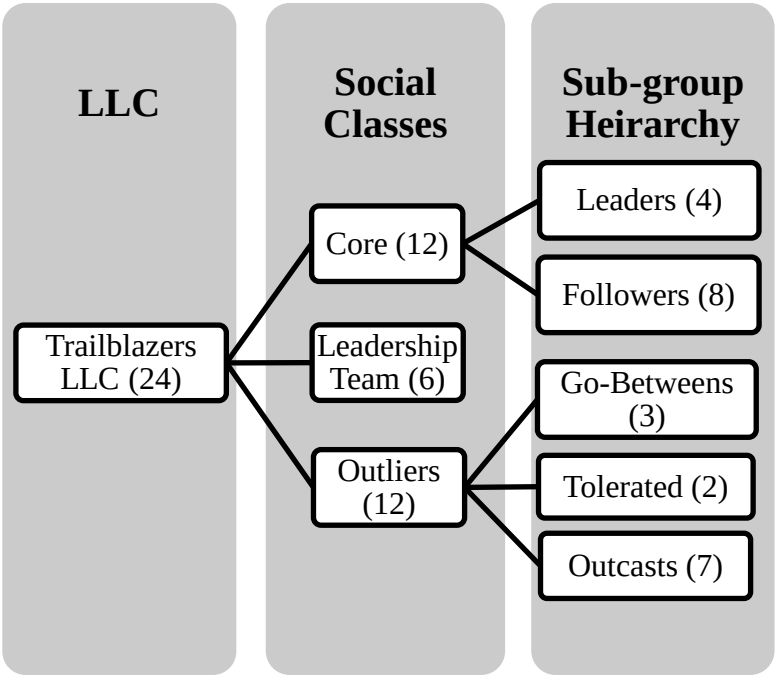


Figure 1. Trailblazers Living-Learning Community social classes.

Observation and interviews with students and leadership team members revealed characteristics of both groups that suggested a divisive social stratification within the LLC. Far from a harmonious coexistence, the two social classes within the LLC appeared to fracture partly on the degree to which members exhibited enthusiasm for outdoor activities and/or intent to major in recreation management. Core group members, of whom there were 12, shared a vigorous enthusiasm for participating in outdoor activities, and all members intended to major in recreation management or a related filed. These students dictated the social culture of the group,

its values and norms. The secondary group, of whom there were also 12, functioned as a collection of second-class members or outliers who to varying degrees existed, as one student noted, "on the fringes of the [core] group."

Fracturing of the Trailblazers group occurred steadily over the first six weeks of the fall semester, but there were indications of social marginalization as early as the *Into the Wild* excursion. At least one member of the outlier group sensed a hint of exclusiveness from core group members before group stratification was so pronounced:

> Those of us considered mainstream [the less experienced outdoorsmen in the group] were frowned upon from the beginning; it just wasn't so obvious. My [*Into the Wild*] hiking companion and I were made to feel like our clothes were not right. It was made known that we didn't have the right gear and we didn't dress the part. We both were like 'dang, these people are like already making us feel like we don't belong.'

Despite these moments of discomfort, the students who participated in *Into the Wild* came away from the experience feeling a part of the group. Fracturing of group unity occurred gradually, and by the time members of the group participated in the first focus group interview in October of 2013, a clear delineation existed between those who were part of the core group and those considered outliers. One core group respondent in that first focus group interview noted that "…there are people [who are] kinda excluded from the group; they don't want to hang out most of the time. It's not like a mean thing—it's like we're really different, and I think we mutually know, like, we're not the same." Such differentiation between those who shared the "same" beliefs or values versus those who did not suggested at that early stage a tacit acknowledgement that a stratified social structure was in place.

Those who identified with the outlier group were relegated to second class status based on a variety reasons not least of which related to previous outdoor experience. As one core group member stated, “If you’re going to be in [the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community], you have to know what your signing up for. Like, if you don’t hike or love the outdoors, this [LLC] isn’t the place for you.” As evidence that the core group valued experience in outdoor activity, all members of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community who began the year as beginning outdoorsmen were eventually relegated to the outlier group.

Despite the clear distinction between those who enrolled in the group with previous outdoor experience and those who had no outdoor experience, outlier group membership was not solely identifiable based on those characteristics alone. Four members of the outlier group ranked as having intermediate outdoorsman skills, so they were familiar with fundamental hiking and backpacking practices. In contrast to core group members, however, outlier group members with previous outdoor experience seemed not to share the zeal for outdoor activities that core group members expressed. One outlier member noted that “while [he] enjoy[s] the outdoors, [he] also [has] other interests that don’t require being muddy.”

Whereas core group members shared at least one of two aforementioned traits (status as intermediate or advanced outdoorsman and recreation management major), outlier group members were far more unique. Of the 12 students populating the outlier portion of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, no fewer than six academic disciplines were represented in terms of those students’ intended major courses-of-study.

Observation throughout the fall and spring semesters further revealed the extent of separation between core group members of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community and those who existed on the fringes of the group. Nuanced levels of membership existed among core

members and outliers. The core group consisted of two subgroups of membership: leaders and followers. Predictably, leaders in the core group—of which there were 4—were those who had extensive experience in outdoor activities and possessed charismatic personalities or a level of knowledge about the outdoors to which others deferred. The remaining 8 core members maintained positions as followers within the subgroup. They were often the individuals in awe of the experience core group leaders possessed, and they were often the individuals who championed loyalty to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Moreover, core group followers were uniformly the individuals outlier members cited as making them feel unworthy of group membership.

In contrast to the core group's unity, the outlier group existed as less of an identifiable entity but rather a collection of individuals who shared the commonality of separation from the core group. The degree of separation from the core group, however, varied based on the individual, and thus represented one's standing within the social hierarchy of the group. Consequently, three subgroups of outlier membership existed: go-between, tolerated, and outcast.

Of the 12 Trailblazer participants comprising the outlier group, individual ability to socialize with members of the core group differed. Even as outliers, some associated with core group members without negative repercussions. In many instances, these "go-betweens" were welcomed into the core group when they chose to associate with them. On the other hand, the core group merely tolerated other outlier group members. Though these tolerated members associated with the core group, they were often relegated to less active roles at social functions and frequently derided when out of earshot. Finally, "outcasts" were outlier members who were shunned at core group gatherings. These students were shut out of conversations and often

simply ignored. In turn, most outcasts often chose not to associate with the core group, and their participation in the LLC became increasingly minimal as the academic year progressed.

Of all the subgroups of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, outcasts were most willing to acknowledge the existence of hierarchical social classes within the group. They knew they were not readily accepted by their peers in the LLC, and as the academic year progressed they seemed to gain a sense of solidarity in knowing they occupied a different social standing in the group. Evidence of an emboldened sense of unity among two outcasts occurred near the end of the fall semester when they were not invited to a holiday gift exchange organized for the LLC by prominent core group members. Whether this omission in invitation was purposeful or not remains unknown, but the two outcasts who did not receive an invitation felt their omission was intentional. Though both expressed feelings of hurt at being left out, they were also motivated to express their displeasure in the perceived slight by attending and participating in the event as uninvited guests:

> We crashed the [holiday event]. I mean it hurt that we weren't invited because people were there who aren't even part of the [LLC]. But we knew we had to go, and they [members of the core group who organized the event] were surprised when we showed up. It made them look bad that they hadn't included us, so I'm glad we went.

By the conclusion of the academic year, outcast members of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community were mostly disengaged from the group apart from required hall meetings or end-of-the semester gatherings. They even expressed regret at having chosen to participate in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, but they clung to an appreciation of the experience that "taught them a lot about people and how to treat others."

The existence of outliers was also evident through the expressions of those in the core group. Some expressed strong opinions about those who they perceived as not belonging in the group. One female core member who some outlier participants cited as having an adversarial attitude toward them underscored her feelings about those she felt were not the right fit for the group:

> You have to be an outgoing person if you're going to be in the [Trailblazer Living-Learning Community]. If you're shy or the outdoors makes you uncomfortable, then maybe you should look into a different [LLC] or something. I think people should, like, just commit. The people who don't commit are the ones now who are, kind of, on the fringes of the group. To be honest, I'm fine if they go off and do their own thing.

Such sentiments were echoed by a number of participants, and even associated staff members acknowledged feeling some students were possibly "not a good fit" for the group. However, the difference between staff members' views of outlier students versus those held by core group members differed in terms of perceived worthiness of inclusion. Staff members often did not perceive sub-groups as evidence of social stratification. Therefore, staff members often characterized outlier students as "shy" or "different," but they typically did not see them as separate from the active and involved members of the LLC (the core group). Moreover, staff members were more likely to fault outlier participants for their diminished role in the group suggesting that they "stay to themselves in their rooms and don't try to participate."

There appeared a general unawareness on the part of core group members regarding the level of discomfort outlier students experienced. As one outcast student reported, "if you're in the [core] group, then you don't see the [LLC] as exclusive; but if you're not accepted, you're basically on the outside looking in at a very exclusive group." Similar to the unawareness of core

group members, select members of the leadership team seemed unaware of the social divide within the group. When asked why one participant was often absent at group functions, a member of the leadership team offered that the student "just liked to do her own thing, and that's OK." When pressed if the student might have chosen not to attend because she felt excluded, the same leadership team member suggested that "this group isn't like that. They're a lively and rowdy bunch, but they don't exclude anyone." Similarly, many within the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community leadership team felt the overall group remained harmonious with the exception of a select few students who chose not to be involved. However, the leadership team member closest to the daily interactions of those in the community—the live-in resident assistant (RA)—noted strife between members of the community. Unlike other leadership team members, the RA was aware that the group was not as harmonious as others might have thought.

Staff elected to wrap up the academic year by hosting a casual carry-in dinner for all members of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. The purpose in hosting this final group meal was to conclude the year in a unified fashion much as it had begun nine months earlier. The meal was a success as a majority of participants—core members and outliers alike—attended (although three outliers chose not to attend), but the divide among the community remained evident. Members of the core group held command of the conversations and exchanges that occurred while outliers, particularly outcasts, sat to the side and ate their meals while interacting little with others in the group apart from fellow outcasts. In reflecting on the year, one outcast member of the outlier group wrote in a reflective questionnaire about experiences in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community that she "regretted joining the group because it got cliquey [sic] so early in the semester" and that she "never felt [she] was accepted" as part of the group. On the other hand, a prominent member of the core group expressed joy in having the

opportunity to “meet people with the same interests” with whom she could “make friends so easily.” Thus the divide among the two factions of the group remained entrenched through the end of the year. While many felt the experience of participating in the program was “worthwhile” and even “life-altering,” the distaste some felt for the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community was evident.

Insularity. Insularity occurred as a consistent unintended consequence theme of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Generally, Trailblazers participants seldom connected with other campus entities; rather, they preferred to limit social interaction to within the LLC. Among Trailblazers participants—particularly core group members—many felt little need to develop social connections beyond the LLC. This restricted social activity meant that students frequently limited their social outings to those associated with the LLC. Consequently, participants and staff expressed concern that Trailblazers members might face difficulty adjusting to campus life the following academic year when they would live among the general campus population without the social structure of a LLC.

Members of the Trailblazers leadership team recognized the likelihood of students remaining attached to their LLC, so they offered programming that involved other campus organizations as a way to integrate students. Unfortunately, a faculty member associated with the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community felt the potential for program participants to isolate themselves from other aspects of campus life remained high despite these efforts to the contrary. He noted that part of the challenge in fostering a tight-knit social group involved combating participants’ will to “sequester themselves in the residence hall rather than take part in other campus events.” Indeed many in the group felt a sense of loyalty to the LLC to the point their devotion restricted them from availing themselves to opportunities that might promote personal

growth. A highly regarded member of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community noted the manner by which the group promoted insularity:

> From *Into the Wild* to now, our group has gotten so close because it's designed that way. We developed as friends in this little bubble world, and that's our reality. It was tough to adapt to even going to class since we didn't have to do that at first because we all hung out all the time. But it's nice having this community because we're all friends. The funny thing is that we're not making friends anywhere else because we're so into our own little group.

Even when members chose to attend events not related to the LLC, they often did so only when accompanied by several fellow participants. For example, at a film series event Trailblazers participants were encouraged to attend to connect with other campus entities, the few Trailblazers members present sat huddled together and interacted little with others in attendance.

Trailblazers' participants—particularly core group members—often encouraged their peers to limit involvement with other campus entities. One student who enjoyed co-curricular opportunities apart from the LLC described incidents where Trailblazers peers discouraged her from branching out, suggesting her actions amounted to disloyalty. One admired core group member openly confirmed this penchant for insularity noting that Trailblazers' participants have an obligation "to the community" in terms of social interactions; conversely, involvement in other campus programs symbolized "a lack of commitment" to the LLC.

Students who expressed strong opinions advocating loyalty to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community were typically those associated with the LLC's core social group. Most core members consistently opposed making social connections outside the group:

> That's one thing about the [LLC]: like it's really awesome because you know these 24 people super-well, but it has kinda limited everyone in like meeting other people. We have our [residence hall floor] lobby, and we're always there with each other hanging out. That's like the one negative thing—it's not really negative, because I don't care that much. Like outside the [LLC], I have like three friends. But I don't try to go out and find friends because I have them here, and that's fine with me. We should focus on our relationships within the [LLC].

The suggestion that members restrict their social interactions to the LLC only widened the gulf between core group members and outliers. Some core members even felt that involvement in other campus organizations warranted a punitive response, so they retaliated by disassociating with those who chose active engagement elsewhere on campus. Predictably, the students who took the brunt of punishment were most often those on the fringes of the group.

In contrast to the insular practices of the core group, outlier group members frequently expressed a need to socially connect with peers outside of the Trailblazers group. One go-between outlier group member who was generally well liked across the LLC noted that she "liked having friends in different parts of campus because [she didn't] want to limit [herself] to [interacting exclusively] with the [fellow Trailblazers]." Yet she found her decision to engage with other campus entities came at a price. As one who typically remained in high regard among her peers in the LLC, the student expressed emotional pain at having been chided for "not doing what [she] signed up to do."

Group insularity produced a twofold negative effect: many in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community chose not to pursue active involvement in other campus organizations. This practice was particularly evident among the group's most active and admired members.

Furthermore, those participants who did spend time associating with social groups apart from the LLC—whether formal campus entities or otherwise—were often admonished for doing so. These outcomes further divided the group—particularly between core membership and outlier participants.

Risky behavior. Though not as widespread as the other unintended consequences, risky behavior surfaced as an unintended consequence of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Students reported a willingness to engage in risky behavior when encouraged by fellow members of the LLC.

Similar to recreational drug and alcohol use characteristic of many students' collegiate experiences, students in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community reported use of illegal substances, mostly marijuana and alcohol. Surprisingly, several students who reported a general moral aversion to alcohol and/or recreational drug use described incidents where they felt an obligation or willingness to experiment with prohibited substances because others in the group engaged in such practices:

> I don't drink or do drugs, but I think when you know each other in a large group like we do, it makes it easier to try new things or do new things. I mean drinking and partying are the topics of a lot of our conversations, and there's a lot of peer pressure to do it. Even though I don't really drink, I went out with the group partying because there was a lot of pressure. I mean, everybody was like 'Why aren't you drinking anything?' when we went out, so I did. But it didn't seem worth it to me, but I did it then, and I've done it again since then. There's just a pressure to do it.

Even students who acknowledged previous use of alcohol or recreational drugs expressed mild surprise at the degree to which members of the LLC seemed to bond over alcohol and marijuana.

One member of the group characterized their customary bonding over the use of illegal substances as "sad but true" noting that alcohol use slowly became a "group-wide thing…because [members of the LLC] could all bond over that."

Recreational use of alcohol and marijuana or "partying" as students often characterized it increased in some facets of the group as the academic year progressed. In the early part of the fall semester, students reported limiting the occurrences of alcohol and/or marijuana use primarily to weekends because of their academic obligations. While instances of "partying" occurred during the week, students reported a preference for engaging in this risky behavior on weekends. However, as the group began to fracture into subgroups, alcohol and marijuana use increased among these smaller social groups.

The core group—those who were or aspired to be well-versed outdoorsmen—shared more frequent intentional gatherings to engage in alcohol and marijuana use than the outlier subgroup. While both factions of the group contained students who encouraged alcohol and marijuana use, the core group consistently bonded over these risky behaviors. Many in the core group attributed their willingness to engage in risky behavior to the culture of outdoor enthusiasts suggesting that alcohol and marijuana use served as a recreational activity during camping and hiking trips. Some even suggested that alcohol and marijuana use were akin to watching television only more beneficial because substances "loosened people up:"

> What else are you going to do when you're backpacking miles away from anywhere? After a day on the trail, a little smoke helps everyone relax. You can sit around the fire and laugh and enjoy being together. It's not like it's a habit for us. It just makes us relax, and it's something we can share.

Those who aspired to attain the skills and respect of the experienced outdoorsmen in the core group embraced the habits of those they respected. For example, one young woman in the group embraced marijuana use whereas before enrolling at the university she had no experience with recreational drug use. In pointing out how the LLC had opened her eyes to a new way of living, she acknowledged casting aside previously held beliefs she deemed prudish in order to better align with the social practices of those within the core group with whom she identified.

Exposure to alcohol and marijuana was for a small number of students an expectation in joining the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. For two students in particular, applying for admittance into the Trailblazers group was the result of their assessment as to which of the institution's LLC programs were likely to provide opportunities to engage in the "college experience." These two young women chose the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community as their preferred LLC placement because of their perception of the outdoorsman culture:

> When I applied for the [LLC programs], I listed the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community as my top choice. Initially I thought Free Living (a LLC dedicated to abstinence from alcohol and drug use) sounded cool but then I realized what it was. I'm not a drug attic or alcoholic or anything, but I don't want to live with those people. I came to college for the experience. When I saw this [Trailblazers Living-Learning Community], I knew it was for me. I grew up in the mountains, so I knew I could fit in. But I also know what backpackers are like [socially], so I felt this [LLC] would be fun.

While no student reported joining the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community solely for access to alcohol and recreational drugs, the allure of the community providing opportunities for recreational use of those substances proved attractive to some. For others, alcohol and drug use felt necessary in order to participate in the group because of the perception that all group

members sanctioned if not encouraged the behavior. Thus some reluctantly engaged in risky behavior while others embraced it. Meanwhile, associated faculty and staff members believed that some level of experimentation with alcohol and recreational drugs occurred, but none felt it was as widespread as students reported. Though concerned about the prospect of illegal substances circulating in the residence hall, faculty and staff accepted that some students' use of alcohol and marijuana was likely the result of experimentation and not indicative of widespread use. Staff members in particular did not feel the LLC promoted engagement in risky behavior, and they felt that while some students may have embraced irresponsible behavior most group members were not likely to fall prey to peer pressure.

Negative views of faculty and associated curricula. A fourth unintended consequence of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community related to the impact of Trailblazers participants' negative views of a faculty member and associated program curricula. Having a negative view of an associated LLC faculty member and related course often shaped students' perception of the overall Trailblazers Living-Learning Community program. In certain instances, unfavorable views of associated faculty members and associated courses prompted students to devalue the advantages afforded them through the program or, at worst, consider withdrawing from the LLC.

Several students expressed unfavorable views of the faculty member who taught the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community-specific section of *First Year Seminar*. These negative views often influenced them in ways that adversely impacted the community. Specifically, withdrawal from program participation and resistance to the enrollment in an additional LLC-associated course resulted from students' experiences with a Trailblazers faculty member.

The faculty member who taught *First Year Seminar* for the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community was the source of many students' complaints. Though most students found the

instructor likeable apart from class, they characterized him as "unstructured," "boring," and "judgmental." Students initially met this faculty member during the *Into the Wild* trek, and many found him engaging in that informal setting. However, even in that informal setting their view of the instructor colored their perception of the LLC as a whole:

> We first met [the *First Year Seminar* instructor] at [a remote waterfall known for its suitability for swimming], and we were like sliding down this rock waterfall thing, and it was really cool. I said, 'Oh, this guy is going to be so cool!' But then later that night when we were all circled around the campfire, he explained a little about himself and then just kept on talking and talking. I just wanted to go to sleep, and I felt like this guy just wanted to talk to hear himself. I knew then we would have a long semester in his class, and I wondered if I had done the right thing [by joining the LLC].

Despite such misgivings about the *First Year Seminar* faculty member, most Trailblazer participants began the semester with a positive view of their instructor. However, once students began interacting with the *First Year Seminar* instructor in the classroom, their opinions largely changed. Consequently, as their opinions about the instructor evolved, some began to question their commitment to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community.

By deliberately linking the LLC with a specific section of *First Year Seminar*, university administrators ensured that students would associate their class experiences with their overall assessments of the Trailblazers program. Ideally, a positive experience in the classroom would translate to a heightened sense of satisfaction with one's LLC experience. Unfortunately, many students found the *First Year Seminar* lacking in purpose, and they viewed the faculty member as occasionally "mean-spirited" and frequently "absent-minded." Consequently, students came to resent taking the Trailblazers variation of the *First Year Seminar*, and they attributed their

negative experiences in the classroom to their enrollment in the LLC. This negative experience adversely impacted their views of the Trailblazers program:

> …[I]ncluding myself and probably most of my hall mates, we just bullshitted [the *First Year Seminar* course]…It wasn't my best work, and I just wanted to get it turned in so I could get out of there. I mean, we did stuff that didn't seem to have a point, and I would leave thinking 'I signed up for this?' That [class] really made me question being in the [Trailblazers Living-Learning Community].

Despite negative views of the *First Year Seminar* course, students felt the faculty member assigned to teach the course was a good individual, one who was "cool outside of the classroom" but not a good fit for linking curricular content to the wider mission of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community.

Though students complained the *First Year Seminar* amounted to "busywork," all Trailblazers participants persisted in the course and passed. Their experiences in the course, however, illogically shaped their opinions of the LLC-associated course scheduled for the spring semester, *Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation.* Consequently, several students determined their commitment to the LLC was less important than guarding against "suffering through another pointless class." The belief that the spring course would mirror their experiences in the *First Year Seminar* unfairly prejudiced students toward further academic obligations. This negative perception, therefore, set in motion a rebellion that would alter the academic component of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community experience in the spring semester.

Rebellion. Rebellion occurred as a persistent unintended consequence of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Program stakeholders noted instances of rebellion that persisted throughout the academic year. Students specifically cited a growing sense of power that

emboldened them to act in accordance to their wants even if doing so violated the wishes of the leadership team.

From the beginning of the academic year, the *First Year Seminar* faculty member who accompanied students for part of their *Into the Wild* backcountry trek suggested that a fundamental risk in cultivating an independent, closely bonded social group is giving them a heightened sense of control over the academic and social direction of the LLC. His perception was that when imbued with a sense of confidence in their ability to make decisions, LLC participants often attempt to collectively impose their will on those charged with guiding the direction of the group (faculty, staff, and administrators).

Incidents of rebellion surfaced multiple times throughout the academic year, but often these occurrences marked little more than students' desire to conduct themselves in a manner not in accordance with university policies. These episodes usually involved minor noise violations or residence life staff members confiscating prohibited substances (such as alcohol), but these events were mostly isolated occurrences. A growing resistance to curricular engagement, however, surfaced as a potentially encompassing threat to undermine the academic mission of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community.

Academic affiliation and advancement of knowledge in relation to a specific discipline remained a critical component of the institution's LLC programs. Yet, Trailblazers participants often failed to embrace the curricular component of the LLC. Students frequently viewed their commitment to the community as one relating solely to non-academic programming. When asked about the purpose of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, participants usually emphasized social integration as the primary intent of the LLC. One student offered that learning communities were in place at the university "to help people make friends so they won't drop out

of college"—a sentiment repeatedly echoed from other students in the group. Of all the interviews conducted with Trailblazers' participants, no student mentioned the curricular component of the LLC as a reason for its existence.

Connecting co-curricular activities to course obligations seemed at best a secondary concern for students. When asked about the significance of the associated *First Year Seminar* course Trailblazers participants took in the fall semester, many responded apathetically:

> I thought the class was kind of silly, but I mean I didn't really learn anything in the [*First Year Seminar*] class…I mean the class inspired me to get outside and do things, but like at the end of the day I didn't learn much from it and I don't see why it's necessary [for the LLC].

As previously noted, many students were critical of the class, suggesting the *First Year Seminar* had little place within the overall purpose of the LLC:

> I just, like, don't see the connection. The class wasn't hard, but I don't think being in it helped me as far as the [Trailblazers Living-Learning Community] goes. It didn't help us bond; we'd already done that. It was a waste of time, but that's usually how those kind [sic] of [freshman seminar] classes are.

Students' inability or unwillingness to link the content of *First Year Seminar* directly to co-curricular activities such as *Into the Wild* accentuated their belief that class was simply a task to endure to satisfy those who facilitated the LLC.

Meanwhile, the level of decorum students demonstrated in the *First Year Seminar* class devolved as the semester progressed. Considering that all students in the class shared a general level of comfort with one another after having shared the *Into the Wild* experience and life in a residence hall, their classroom conduct was interactive but frequently disruptive. By the

conclusion of the fall semester, students were habitually unruly, loud, or inappropriately informal in addressing their instructor. During one class activity that involved groups of students presenting a course project, many classmates interrupted presenters or made disruptive and crude jokes at their expense. Furthermore, even students presenting projects to the class cursed openly or incorporated offensive language into their presentation visuals. These incidents revealed a level of informality that challenged the authority of the instructor who typically preferred to maintain somewhat of an informal relationship with students. Ultimately, the instructor characterized students' behavior as indicative of their comfort with one another and the degree to which they felt they possessed the authority to act as they pleased in that classroom setting.

While not singularly indicative of rebellion, students' boorish behavior in the *First Year Seminar* class coupled with a sense of power in shaping the direction of the LLC underscored a misguided perception that they could wield influence in shaping leadership team decisions. Consequently, some students felt emboldened enough to challenge and later violate a curricular requirement of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Coupled with a disdain for their *First Year Seminar* course and an emboldened sense of autonomy, eight students staged a significant act of rebellion in late fall when students began enrolling in courses for the spring. Convinced that their commitment to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community did not prohibit them from exercising free will, eight students or roughly a third of the LLC balked at enrolling in the required LLC-associated spring semester course and simply refused to do so.

Initially registration for the spring semester course proved problematic for all Trailblazers participants due to a technical snafu within the university's registration system. Once the technical problem was addressed, eight Trailblazers students chose not to enroll in the course citing a variety of reasons—many of which related to curricular requirements for their respective

majors. A point of contention for students was the perceived benefit of taking a course that for some did not fulfill any graduation requirements for their respective majors. The course, *Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation*, worked well for students planning to major in recreation management or a related field because the course fulfilled a major core requirement. Conversely, for other students the course amounted to little more than an elective that could possibly prohibit them from taking a needed course during the same time slot.

Those who decided they would not take the required course all had reasonable arguments for not doing so; however, their decision to act on their own will without consulting members of the leadership team amounted to a defiant backlash against the staff and faculty members guiding the LLC. Predictably, leadership team members expressed disappointment in the manner by which select students chose to address a challenge that could have been "easily fixed." This act of sedition somewhat tainted the view staff members had of the students who unapologetically acted solely with their own needs in mind as it set a precedent for behavior that staff members feared would reoccur.

The resulting fallout over registration for *Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation* further divided the group as all but one of the students who refused to take the course were part of the aforementioned outlier group. Consequently, many students who took the spring course resented those who did not, and members of the leadership team also found themselves at odds with students over those who determined not to take the course. The students at the center of this controversy held to their decision not to take the course, some defiantly suggesting they would welcome dismissal from the LLC if necessary. While no consideration was given to ousting students from the LLC, the perceived threat of dismissal was met with an almost righteous indignation because students felt their participation in the Trailblazers Living-Learning

Community had earned them the right to influence the direction of the group. Furthermore, students felt that punitive measures would be of little consequence as they had already reaped the benefits of participating in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community:

> What are they gonna [sic] do? Kick us out? That's fine with me, but it's not like I haven't already made friends in the group. If you ask me, putting us in that second class [*Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation*] was stupid because [the course] is for rec. management majors but our [LLC] has kids that aren't majoring in that. Why should non-[recreation management] majors have to take that class?

While not completely unexpected, students' collective acts of rebellion cast a shadow over the successes of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. The persistent indignation of several LLC participants seemed to have the effect of less involvement from leadership team members in offering co-curricular activities during the spring semester—a recurring complaint that students voiced. Staff members openly expressed frustration with the group, and they seemingly washed their hands of select students who they perceived lacked, as one staff member on the leadership team suggested, "a teachable spirit." This discord clearly influenced the perception of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community among students and leadership team members alike.

Summary of unintended consequences themes.

In sum, five unintended consequences themes emerged from the data collected in this project regarding the study institution's Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. While this LLC is among the institution's most robust and consistently popular programs, unintended consequences of the program largely negatively affect stakeholders and the institution in general. According to the participants in this study, the five unintended consequences of the Trailblazers

Living-Learning Community share the commonality of weakening the overall impact of the program. By the conclusion of the 2013-2014 academic year, students and select staff members second-guessed their roles in contributing to the success of the program and/or their decisions to become involved with the LLC. Most notably, the division of the group into two opposing factions impeded the growth and development of the group in a manner that saw the LLC devolve into a bifurcated entity in which several members felt isolated or marginalized. Moreover, the habits of participants in the LLC did not lend to acclimation at the institution but rather separation from other departments, programs, and campus services.

Case study 2 – Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community.

Designed for students interested in psychology, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community has been in existence at the study institution since 2010. Participants explore the discipline by learning more about the way the human brain works, and they also learn about behavioral and brain science while also exploring career opportunities in psychology and the behavioral sciences fields. There are no required curricular prerequisites for those who apply to participate in the program, but applicants are expected to have an expressed interest in the field of psychology. As with most of the institution's LLC programs, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community is intended for incoming first-year students. However, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community does accommodate select transfer students who are new to the institution and show a demonstrable interest in the field of psychology.

The only curricular requirement for students selected to participate in the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community program is enrollment in a *First Year Seminar* class specifically tailored to those interested in psychology. The *First Year Seminar* is a required course for all first-year students and transfer students with less than 30 credit hours upon enrollment. The class

generally introduces students to the rigors of academic life at the university. However, for *First Year Seminar* courses associated with the institution's LLC programs, classes address specific curricular interests. Therefore, the *First Year Seminar* for Mind Odyssey participants focuses heavily on neuroscience and behavior in addition to general concepts covered in all *First Year Seminar* courses (research methods, intellectual engagement in the college classroom, and academic advising). Furthermore, the Mind Odyssey variation of *First Year Seminar* offers extra-curricular opportunities to engage in cultural activities at the university and surrounding community.

Apart from enrollment in the associated course, students are expected but not mandated to participate in co-curricular activities related to the LLC. Similar to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, Mind Odyssey participants bear the responsibility of contributing to the betterment of the program by "developing community standards and planning the future of the community." The leadership team responsible for the community places particular emphasis on students' academic success, so they stress participants share a duty to help one another transition to college life and embrace the rigors of intellectual inquiry. Ideally, students emerge from the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community better positioned for academic success at the institution as a result of intensive advising, enmeshment into the university culture, development of strong social bonds with their peers, and greater awareness of the discipline of psychology and its concentrations within the sponsoring department.

By mid-summer of 2013, leadership team members had selected participants for the fall/spring Mind Odyssey cohort. Having received a robust pool of applications for program admittance, faculty and staff members selected 24 participants for the LLC—19 of whom were female and 5 of whom were male. All applicants accepted for admission expressed interest in

psychology although at least four incoming students intended to major in a discipline other than psychology.

Similar to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, Mind Odyssey students moved to campus early to acclimate to life at the university. They arrived at campus a few days prior to the start of the fall semester, and the senior faculty member responsible for the group coordinated a variety of introductory activities designed to familiarize students with one another and the campus in general. By coordinating with the group's assigned RA, the lead faculty member assisted students with move-in, ice-breaker activities, and group discussions about college life. These events served as the first in a series of early semester activities to engage Mind Odyssey participants and help the group gel as a community.

Once the fall semester got underway, events occurred with regularity through October, but then began to wane as the end of the semester neared. Despite efforts of two faculty members in particular, Mind Odyssey programming occurred minimally during the spring semester. Unlike the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, by late February programming had ground to a halt apart from a few social events the RA coordinated. On two occasions, inclement weather forced the cancellation of faculty-led events. Despite intentions to the contrary, these events were never rescheduled.

By the conclusion of the 2014 spring semester, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community had undergone a number of trials and leadership challenges. For all intents and purposes, the program ceased operation by February. Nonetheless, the group finished the semester remarkably intact having lost only one participant or 4% to attrition. Conversely, the majority who completed the full academic year did so in grand fashion. No matriculating Mind Odyssey participant completed the first year with less than a 2.4 average GPA, and the average

GPA for the entire group finished at a respectable 3.19. Despite these successes, a variety of challenges plagued the LLC throughout the academic year, and the effects of these challenges led to some members of the leadership team questioning the continuation of the program.

While the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community netted several intended consequences—strong academic performance, social integration, and retention—the 2013-2014 cohort also promoted unintended consequences. Chief among these consequences was a widening disconnect between members of the leadership team and a burgeoning indifference from student participants. While aspects of the LLC suggested a thriving initiative representative of a robust residence life program, probing the daily interactions of those associated with the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community revealed a program succeeding despite deep-seeded challenges.

Unintended consequences themes.

Case study 2 consisted of interviews of 12 student participants, 4 leadership team members (including faculty), and 2 Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community-associated residence life administrative staff members. A multitude of themes emerged from the collected data, but five specific themes related solely to unintended consequences: social stratification, engagement, risky behavior, conflict, and financial reciprocity.

Social stratification. Similar to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, social stratification and resultant class conflict emerged as a pervading unintended consequence theme of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. Over the course of nine months of observation and interviews, social stratification continually arose as a prominent theme when investigating the daily experiences of those associated with the group. Social class conflict affected faculty, staff, and students alike

Of the Mind Odyssey stakeholders most affected by social stratification, the leadership team members experienced the most contentious incidents of class conflict. Though constructed to enable faculty and administrative staff members to collaboratively shape the direction and outcome of their respective LLCs, these two entities seldom blended successfully within the context of the Mind Odyssey Leadership Team. Ideally, joint coordination of educational and social opportunities allows faculty and staff to forge partnerships across departments, thus strengthening relations between components of the institution that infrequently overlap. However, for the study institution this melding of ideologically unique departments resulted in discordant practices from both facets of the university.

Though University Housing assumes responsibility for the institution's LLCs in terms of allocation of residence hall space and staffing contributions to leadership teams, the curricular development of programs rests with the sponsoring academic departments. This shared responsibility between staff members accustomed to oversight of residence life matters and faculty members devoted to the advancement of their respective disciplines presents opportunities for partnership that potentially unify distinct university entities. However, for the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, shared governance created friction indicative of a social stratification between faculty and administrative staff members.

Faculty members working with the LLC often found themselves at odds with the University Housing staff who served on the leadership team. Though both parties participated in the oversight of the LLC, they rarely shared occasions to collaboratively shape the direction of the Mind Odyssey group. On the contrary, each faction of the leadership team often worked apart from the other, thus creating a communication gulf between the two. This divide between the two entities responsible for guiding the direction of the program ironically occurred as a result of

the collaborative design of LLC initiatives. In the case of faculty and staff, two disparate entities working together seemed to impede collaborative efforts.

Tension between faculty and administrative staff members on the leadership team stemmed from conflicting views regarding student engagement and a resistance to yield to one another's directives. Charged with advancing intellectual pursuit and scholarship, faculty members for the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community viewed their role in guiding the program as pertaining primarily to intellectual engagement. In the view of psychology faculty members, this engagement related specifically to the academic intent of the community. Consequently, faculty members often felt that the community's social events were the responsibility of University Housing because their residence life staff members routinely coordinated social activities. Though the senior faculty member consistently supported and participated in both faculty and residence life programming for the Mind Odyssey group, the remaining psychology faculty members on the leadership team seemingly ignored non-academic events. Similarly, University Housing officials maintained a hands-off approach to academic-based programming, and they intentionally left academic programming to faculty members.

The senior faculty member on the leadership team often expressed disappointment in collaborating with University Housing staff, noting that those who shouldered the burden of coordinating events were usually undergraduate and graduate student employees rather than seasoned University Housing professionals. He interpreted University Housing's assignment of low-ranking personnel as evidence of a lack of investment on the part of the institution's student life administrators:

> …[L]ots of the 'partnership' and 'investment' language from the [University Housing] side was mostly smoke and mirrors and…truly bizarre that tenured faculty who were

> trying to facilitate [a LLC] engaged in 'partnership' as equals of RAs (undergrads) and RDs (grad students).

In contrast, University Housing administrators viewed the placement of low-level staff members on these teams as evidence of their desire to meet students' needs by involving the personnel most closely associated with students. University Housing administrators maintained that student employees (undergraduate RAs and graduate RDs) interact with students daily, and are thus better capable of orchestrating student programming. Though certainly lower-ranking university employees, student personnel—in the view of University Housing administrators—understood fellow students' needs and wants better than those within the administration whose daily interactions with students remained limited.

Just as faculty members expressed frustration at University Housing's involvement in the leadership team, University Housing personnel exhibited a subversive unwillingness to collaborate with faculty members. For example, just weeks into the fall semester, a University Housing member of the Mind Odyssey Leadership Team reported that she and her colleagues occasionally deliberately excluded faculty members from meetings by reasoning that the faculty members on the team "didn't understand what [college student personnel] do." This exclusion, however, only worsened the divide between the faculty and staff members participating in the leadership team. Though unaware of the deliberate omission, faculty members expressed bewilderment upon discovering that some program planning had not involved them. In turn, they interpreted this exclusionary behavior as a passively aggressive effort to minimize faculty members' influence on the direction of the LLC.

Ironically, purposeful exclusion was not necessary to minimize contributions from either faction of the leadership team. Faculty and staff appeared not to want to work with one another,

so they often elected to do nothing and blame their leadership team counterparts for the programming stalemate. Instead of seeking input from all factions of the leadership team, University Housing personnel, for example, were often content to wait on faculty representatives to generate academic programming rather than initiate collaborative planning sessions. Similarly, faculty participants on the leadership team often chose not to proceed with event planning in favor of "waiting for [University Housing] involvement." In both instances, faculty and staff elected to forego programming opportunities rather than collaborating with one another for the betterment of the LLC. Predictably, both factions of the leadership team blamed the other for event-planning failings, yet neither entity actively sought to address the programming impasse.

Inactivity was the usual outcome of the class struggle between the two factions of the Mind Odyssey Leadership Team. Programming ground to a complete halt by February as leadership team meetings ceased to occur. Students complained that the Mind Odyssey group was "essentially dead" because they "didn't do anything." Some students even expressed resentment over the "inconsequential" amount of programming that occurred in the early part of the spring semester. As the academic year neared its conclusion, only nine students identified themselves as active members of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, and they felt the "grown-ups" in charge of the group had let them down. They expressed gratitude for the opportunity to bond closely with their peers, but they felt that the Mind Odyssey program essentially ended with the conclusion of the fall semester.

As with the leadership team, social stratification and resultant class conflict also existed among factions of Mind Odyssey participants. Though not to the extent of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, participants in the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community divided into two factions or social classes based on commitment to or involvement in the

program. One faction, those who identified themselves as active members of the LLC, wielded influence in directing the social integration opportunities of the group. The other faction, those who were inactive in the group, resisted the influence and control active members of the group exercised in shaping the group's identity. Figure 2 provides an illustration of the social stratification evident among the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community:

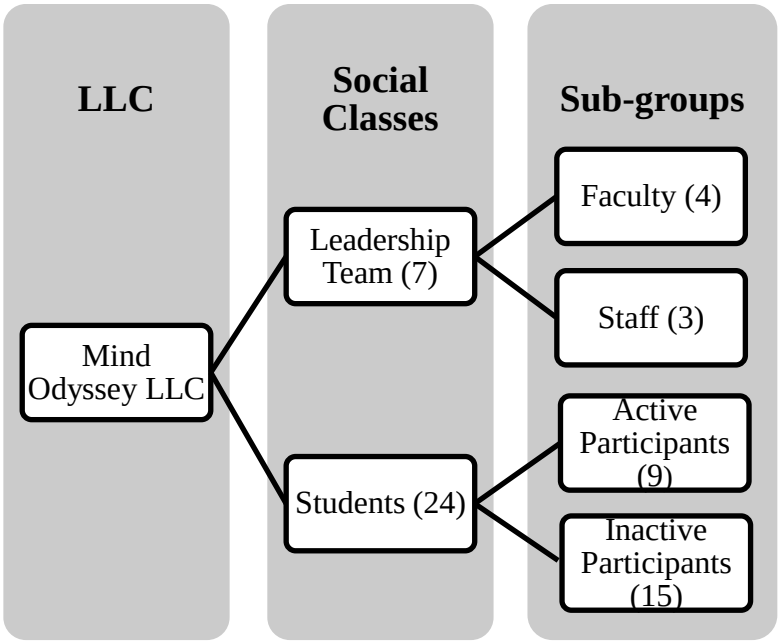


Figure 2. Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community social stratification.

Soon after the fall semester began, various Mind Odyssey participants began withdrawing from participation in learning community events. Though initially small, the number of students who elected to miss Mind Odyssey events steadily increased to the point that half of the group ceased participation. By the spring semester, less than half the group (9 members) considered themselves active participants in the program.

Students who chose not to engage in the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community were most often those who had decided to pursue majors other than psychology. These students

frequently reported that psychology-related events for the Mind Odyssey group were "not interesting" or "not important" in relation to their educational goals. Some students even suggested their involvement in the Mind Odyssey group resulted from a desire to gain housing in a preferred residence hall rather than the standard, older residence halls to which freshmen students were typically assigned.

Disengaged Mind Odyssey students frequently avoided contact with faculty and staff associated with the group, and many avoided their peers in the program as well. One student reported feeling "awkward" around fellow Mind Odyssey participants because he had neglected the group. Others simply quit associating with the group entirely once the fall semester concluded and students were no longer obligated to attend the *First Year Seminar* course. They simply conducted themselves as if they had never participated in the Mind Odyssey group, and they often limited their interactions with peers in the group to simple passing greetings in the residence hall or on campus.

In contrast to the students who disassociated from the Mind Odyssey group, those who remained engaged throughout the academic year came to resent their peers who quit participating in the LLC. Moreover, engaged participants expressed frustration over students who reportedly joined the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community solely to gain a preferred residence hall assignment:

> I wish more people in our group were involved in activities [related to the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community] because I feel like we always have small numbers. But people [in the Mind Odyssey group] said from the beginning that the only reason they applied for the [LLC] was because of the room or because of where they were going to be living. I wish we could just pick the kids who want to learn about psychology and leave

> out the people who come for the perks. The kids who don't do anything make me mad because I know there are plenty that didn't get into the program that would be at every event if they could.

Criticism of disengaged Mind Odyssey peers intensified as the academic year progressed. When first evident that some students were unhappy participating in the LLC, students and faculty/staff initially made overtures to encourage wayward participants to renew their commitment to the LLC. However, resultant well-meaning offers to join in group activities were often interpreted as passive aggressive attempts to coerce inactive students to engage. This perceived peer pressure usually carried little weight with those recurrently absent. One student felt that pressure from peers only fostered resentment toward the group and Mind Odyssey events in general:

> Our group is lame. I mean, we've done some good stuff, but the more they (fellow Mind Odyssey participants) try to push me to go [to Mind Odyssey events], the more I'm like 'no thanks.' I know they don't mean anything by it, but I don't really need them bothering me. I'll be successful [at the institution] with or without them and the [LLC].

As with divided faculty and staff members on the leadership team, the two factions of Mind Odyssey students—active and inactive—became entrenched in their alignment against one another. Active participants blamed inactive Mind Odyssey members for perceived failings of the group, suggesting that few programming opportunities occurred as a result of previous poorly attended events. Similarly, inactive participants felt that those who actively engaged in events were responsible for influencing the selection of programming opportunities—many of which inactive participants characterized as "boring" or "lame." The overall effect of this division amounted to a communication standstill between the two factions, so they largely cut off

communication from one another. Those active in the LLC shared time and experiences almost exclusively with one another. Inactive Mind Odyssey participants, on the other hand, kept to themselves or engaged in other social outlets at the institution—particularly once the fall semester *First Year Seminar* course concluded.

A final manner in which social stratification manifested in the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning community occurred as a result of the administration's decision to split the *First Year Seminar* course into two sections. The decision to split the course was initially based on erroneously high enrollment projections for the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. During the summer preceding the 2013-2014 academic year, the acting Residence Life Coordinator for Academic Initiatives believed the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community would likely surpass 40 enrolled students. Therefore, she opened a second section of the *First Year Seminar* to accommodate the entire group (classes typically cap at 20 per section). As students enrolled in the Mind Odyssey program, they were alternately placed in one of the two *First Year Seminar* sections designated for the LLC. Unfortunately, when enrollment numbers fell below the anticipated amount, Mind Odyssey students only filled slightly more than half the spaces allotted for each class. With openings available in the two Mind Odyssey *First Year Seminar* sections, administrators in the university's General Education Program decided to make those spaces available to non-LLC students. What had been two specialized sections of the *First Year Seminar* for Mind Odyssey students suddenly became standard versions of the course with approximately half of each class containing an embedded subgroup of LLC participants. Predictably, this decision created a series of difficulties and disruptions for the leadership team's senior faculty member assigned to teach the courses. No longer could he tailor the class solely to the needs of the Mind Odyssey students in the course. Instead, he had to adapt the course

structure so that it met the needs of the general incoming student population while also covering limited LLC topics.

Mind Odyssey students found the split arrangement of their *First Year Seminar* particularly challenging. The LLC divided in half with one portion attending an early morning section of the course and a second portion attending an afternoon section of the course. Students complained about this seemingly nonsensical divide, noting that they "often had very different class experiences" from the Mind Odyssey participants in the alternate section of the course. Several students reported covering completely different material in one section of the course when compared to the other. Furthermore, students complained that they were not granted the shared learning experience advertised through the institution's learning community promotional material. Students felt that dividing the group impeded unity among members of the LLC and equally frustrated the senior faculty member teaching both sections of the *First Year Seminar*:

> Our [*First Year Seminar*] class is different to say the least. Like, since we have the 8:00am, we don't talk a lot, and [the professor] has to keep rambling just so things aren't so quiet. He tried to make [students in the class] talk, but [the Mind Odyssey students present] were the only ones talking. It wouldn't be so bad if our group hadn't been separated for the class, but we're in class with people we don't know who aren't in the [LLC]. [The *First Year Seminar* professor] tries to talk about stuff that relates to [Mind Odyssey], but then he has a whole other group [of students] he has to keep awake. It's a tough class for [the faculty member] because you can only say the same thing so many times.

Students felt distressed by the dual *First Year Seminar* sections, and they reported feeling isolated and divided from their peers because they could not interact with fellow Mind Odyssey

participants placed in the alternate section of the course. Consequently, students frequently reported feeling closer to Mind Odyssey peers with whom they shared the *First Year Seminar* course because class sessions "gave them an opportunity to get to know each other better." Otherwise, students were not likely to have placements in classes with their LLC peers. Thus, Mind Odyssey participants felt deprived of opportunities to engage with one another in a classroom setting:

> There's this one [person] in the other [section of *First Year Seminar*] that I've never seen at any of our [co-curricular] events. That makes me kinda sad because, she never comes to anything, and I think that's because she doesn't feel comfortable around us. If we got to know her in class, maybe she would have wanted to [attend Mind Odyssey] events, but that didn't happen because the way our classes are. I don't think that's fair, and that wasn't what I signed up for.

Finally, Mind Odyssey participants reported feeling segregated from non-LLC students in both sections of the *First Year Seminar*. Social distinctions between Mind Odyssey and non-LLC participants were evident in the manner by which both facets of students interacted within the class setting. Predictably, Mind Odyssey students typically associated with one another whereas traditional first-year students attended class without having experienced the benefits of social integration programming. Therefore, non-LLC students seemed disconnected from classroom participation because they engaged less. Moreover, when they contributed to class discussions, non-LLC students did so without the "support of fellow peers with whom they were familiar." The resultant social climate in the classroom manifested as a hierarchical social class where Mind Odyssey students dominated contributions to the class while non-LLC students' involvement remained limited.

Similar to the Mind Odyssey students, the senior faculty member found the bifurcated structure of the *First Year Seminar* class challenging. Providing information related to the curricular needs of the Mind Odyssey program while also engaging non-LLC students posed challenges not easily overcome. Furthermore, concepts covered in class were often incongruous between morning and afternoon sections simply because lectures differed based on students' understanding of the material or their willingness to simply contribute to discussions. Compared to students in the morning session, those attending class in the afternoon were far more engaged and participatory. Thus, students in the afternoon section covered course material more expediently than their morning section counterparts.

To summarize, social stratification and resultant class conflict plagued the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community in all facets of the program. From the leadership team to student participants, program stakeholders faced challenges in maintaining group harmony. In the most extreme cases, those charged with directing the LLC placed their departmental routines and administrative preferences above the needs of the program and its participants. Thus, students often missed opportunities to engage in events because faculty and administrative staff could not collaboratively share in oversight of the program. Similarly, students struggled to maintain group unity for a variety of reasons including lack of structured direction from faculty and staff charged with leading the program. Unfortunately, student participants often succumbed to the same divisive practices that plagued the leadership team. Students frequently shut one another out or refused to honor their commitment to the program. Unfortunately, splitting the group in two and then embedding them in separate *First Year Seminar* courses further exacerbated this problem. By splitting the group to partially fill two sections of the *First Year Seminar*, students lost the opportunity to engage with their peers in the classroom. By sacrificing the shared learning

experience, many students felt they missed the opportunity to intellectually bond with half of the Mind Odyssey group.

Insularity. As with the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, insularity surfaced as a recurring theme in relation to the manner by which Mind Odyssey members elected to interact with their peers. Though participants were expected but not obligated to participate in Mind Odyssey programming, approximately half of the members ceased involvement in the program by the start of the spring 2014 semester. Conversely, of the active students who remained committed to Mind Odyssey most willingly isolated themselves from social interaction on campus save LLC events. Moreover, social engagement among active members of the LLC primarily took place through structured and informal interactions on the floor of the residence hall where the Mind Odyssey group was housed. Ironically, within the confines of the residence hall floor, active members interacted with non-LLC peers and included them in activities.

Voluntary participation in the LLC contributed to a general participation malaise among members—particularly less active participants. Despite expectations to the contrary, students generally interpreted voluntary participation as permission to retreat from their obligations to engage in the LLC. Therefore, a large majority of Mind Odyssey members attended the few mandatory events associated with the program, including the *First Year Seminar*, but slightly less than half consistently participated in the voluntary activities and events.

> Yeah there are people in [Mind Odyssey] who don't come to anything. They're not really in the group. Like, I don't mean that in a mean way; it's not like we excluded them or that kind of thing. They just choose not to come, and we're not going to stop them. [The leadership team] said from the beginning this was a volunteer program. They don't make people come, so [participants] don't [attend Mind Odyssey events].

Students generally appreciated that participation in the LLC remained voluntary. They felt that voluntary participation assured the involvement of those who genuinely enjoyed the program. Nevertheless, when attendance at events decreased, active members of the group began to complain that the program could not thrive with less than half of the group sitting out.

Active members of the group felt that those who disassociated with the LLC acted traitorously. By the spring semester of 2014, active Mind Odyssey students began expressing far more critical views of inactive participants. To dedicated members, inactive participants' involvement with campus programs other than Mind Odyssey equated to forfeiture of one's membership in the group. Consequently, active members reacted negatively when, on the rare occasion, a disengaged Mind Odyssey participant attended a LLC event. One active member expressed disdain for a fellow Mind Odyssey participant who attended a formal program after disengaging from the group earlier in the semester:

> I wasn't impressed that [the student] came. I mean, why now? If you're not going to be in [the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community] for the long haul, don't show up all of a sudden and think no one's gonna [sic] notice. I'd rather they just quit the [LLC] altogether instead of showing up once in a while.

Predictably, contempt for disengaged Mind Odyssey participants only encouraged inactive members to further distance themselves from the group.

While inactive members occupied themselves apart from the group, active Mind Odyssey participants preferred to refrain from social engagement that did not relate to the LLC. Several students reported limiting social engagement opportunities because they felt little need to assert themselves socially since they had forged deep friendships with fellow Mind Odyssey members. Most notably, the nine students who identified themselves as active members of Mind Odyssey

believed the LLC satisfied their need for social involvement at the university. They frequently chose to avoid social functions not related to Mind Odyssey and events that did not involve Mind Odyssey participants with whom they were closest. The RA for the community characterized students' unwillingness to socialize apart from the "safety of the group" as an "unfortunate outcome of having a good experience" within the LLC. Students confirmed that they felt "safe" interacting with Mind Odyssey peers with whom they had shared bonding experiences. One student attributed her restricted socialization practices to her contentment with the friendships forged within the LLC environment:

> [The Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community] gave me instant friends. I didn't have to worry about meeting people; they were already here for me. I came [to the university] worried that I wouldn't have any friends, and like after a day in the [LLC] I felt like I had a lot of new best friends. I guess the only drawback is that I haven't met many people other than the ones in [Mind Odyssey]. It's not that I don't want to meet anyone else; it's just that I don't have the need to go out and try to make other friends because I have them here.

Similarly, other active Mind Odyssey participants described the LLC experience as secure in that its structure allowed them to transition to college life by providing them with a ready-made group of friends. They felt the community lifted the burden of establishing themselves socially; thus they focused on academic obligations and adapting to other facets of college life.

Contrary to active Mind Odyssey members who typically chose to restrict social engagement, members who distanced themselves from the LLC embraced socialization opportunities outside of the group. These disengaged students often felt awkward when present while Mind Odyssey events occurred in the residence hall, so they sought refuge through

involvement with other campus entities. Rather than encouraging disinterested Mind Odyssey participants to seek alternative avenues for social engagement, active members simultaneously celebrated inactive members' absence yet criticized their choices to involve themselves elsewhere on campus.

Ironically, as the semester progressed and students' participation in Mind Odyssey decreased, active members' social circle began expanding to include non-LLC peers who lived on the same floor of the residence hall. Despite their unwillingness to engage across campus or with inactive Mind Odyssey participants, active members nevertheless promoted social engagement within the residence hall. As the academic year advanced, these Mind Odyssey students cultivated a tight-knit social group with established social routines such as pot-luck dinners, movie nights, and town outings. These events were ritualistic in that active members expected them to occur routinely in order to share time with one another and relieve stress from the demands of college life. Consequently, as non-LLC students inquired about events or established casual acquaintanceships with active Mind Odyssey participants, they were invited to join in these weekly events. This comingling of engaged Mind Odyssey members and non-LLC students resulted in a greater residence hall experience for both groups of students. This social engagement did not relate specifically to any formal programming, but it occurred as a result of the bonding and interconnectivity among the active students in the LLC.

Mind Odyssey participants were pleased other students were willing to take part in their activities—particularly since half of their Mind Odyssey peers withdrew from participation. Similarly, non-LLC participants found acceptance among active Mind Odyssey students invigorating because they gained entry into what they perceived as an exclusive group:

> They're cool, and I wish I was in the [Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community]. I didn't even know about it, but I might as well be in it. I'm with them all the time, and it's like I'm part of the [LLC] anyway. I'm always with them hanging out, watching movies, or going to [the campus dining hall].

Though the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community failed as a cohesive group, the resultant social integration between active members and those who became associated with the group contributed to a positive experience for them.

Risky behavior. While not as pronounced as with the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, risky behavior occurred within the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community as a product of students' engagement practices. Moreover, risky behavior occurred within both the active and inactive factions of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. In both cases, risky behavior manifested as the illegal use of alcohol.

The RA associated with the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community observed that use of alcohol among program participants became a much more common occurrence and concern early in the semester than with non-LLC residents. She attributed this behavior to a small but influential subset of students in the group whose previous use of alcohol swayed more impressionable members of the group to engage in this risky behavior:

> There's definitely a small group [within the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community] who likes to abuse alcohol, and then there are the rest of them who don't. Though this scenario happened with all types of residents, I think [abuse of alcohol] happened more quickly [among Mind Odyssey participants] because of how close they were and how convincing some members were. The ones who were partiers when they came here were able to introduce the uninitiated.

Select participants confirmed they tried alcohol for the first time at the suggestion of a Mind Odyssey peer they admired. One active Mind Odyssey participant to whom many looked for leadership summarized her observation of alcohol use within the LLC by noting that impressionable members caved to peer pressure to consume alcohol:

> You're going to have [alcohol abuse] wherever you go on campus, and we do have it here in [Mind Odyssey]…[T]here's definitely some peer pressure just because—since you're such good friends with somebody, if they're doing something, you'll want to do it too. I don't partake in it. I'm kind of…an individual, I guess. But I've definitely seen [others in the group] who've been willing to try alcohol just because someone else in the group convinces them to do it.

Whereas active and inactive Mind Odyssey participants differed in the manner by which they engaged socially, their patterns of risky behavior in relation to alcohol use remained similar. Granted, alcohol use among active Mind Odyssey participants occurred less frequently than that of less-involved participants. Inactive participants often bonded over the use of alcohol, as if its clandestine use signified membership within an exclusive group of nonconformists. Inactive students often boasted that they "didn't need" the LLC "for friends" because they could partake in more adventurous endeavors like "partying."

Of all the issues the Mind Odyssey RA addressed with program participants, alcohol violations proved the most challenging and threatening to the overall harmony of the community in her view. She observed that alcohol-related problems frequently undermined group cohesion and individual safety:

> …alcohol-related incidents are always more challenging, but that's what I get the most of. The problem with alcohol use is you don't know what you're going to get: violence,

> sadness, or something else. Of all the incidents we've had this year [involving Mind Odyssey participants] many of them have involved alcohol. If students weren't drinking, things might not have spiraled out of control like they did in certain situations.

Students confirmed that "drama" or conflict between Mind Odyssey participants often occurred in conjunction with alcohol use. Students would squabble over minor disagreements, but when fueled with clouded judgment induced by alcohol consumption, minor disputes escalated to major arguments. Consequently, participants would sometimes harbor anger well into sobriety and maintain animosity toward one another. In the most severe of occurrences, roommates who experienced these trials requested alternate living arrangements. The consequence of risky behavior proved at its worst disruptive to overall group harmony, and risky behavior also threatened to undermine closer, more personal relationships that had developed within the LLC.

Conflict. Conflict occurred as an unintended consequence of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. Though not widespread within the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community *per se,* conflict, when it occurred, threatened unity among program participants. While the overall tenor of the Mind Odyssey group remained upbeat and generally positive throughout the academic year, when conflict arose—particularly among active group members—its consequences affected the entire group.

Typically Mind Odyssey students got along even if close friendships were not widespread across the entire group. As previously iterated, Mind Odyssey students existed socially in two camps: active members and inactive members. Between these two subsets of the LLC, conflict most often arose among those who were part of the active group of students. Nearly half of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community participants considered themselves active members of the group throughout the entire academic year. For these active students, the Mind Odyssey

Living-Learning Community represented a group of diverse people linked together for a shared experience in the name of advancing academia at the university. These active students proudly identified themselves with the Mind Odyssey program, and they felt that membership in the program connected them friends they otherwise "would never have met."

Friendships among active Mind Odyssey participants were characteristically strong but emotionally charged. Unlike the traditional residents in the dorm, LLC participants developed deep social connections with a larger number of residents in the hall—most of whom were fellow Mind Odyssey participants. Thus, difficulties that arose within the context of the LLC typically impacted greater numbers of students than would have occurred if traditional residence hall roommates faced a challenge or conflict. Sharing experiences with fellow Mind Odyssey participants in such close proximity meant that when conflict arose between members of the LLC, tensions often spread throughout the community. Moreover, friendships sometimes endured trials when individuals became angry with one another or put off by a perceived slight. The closer the friendship, the seemingly greater flashpoint between peers when they experienced conflict. On occasion, roommate tensions between Mind Odyssey members festered to explosive levels, thus requiring formal and informal intervention.

An example of this permeating conflict occurred during the fall semester when two Mind Odyssey roommates squabbled over one another's habits and daily rituals. Characteristic of typical roommate conflicts, the RA intervened to help the two students agree on a resolution to their differences. Unfortunately, both parties exacerbated the problem by denigrating the other student when speaking with fellow Mind Odyssey participants. By disparaging one another, the two opposing students contributed to a divide amongst the group as fellow Mind Odyssey participants aligned themselves with one or the other roommate.

Unfortunately, tensions from these quarrels often escalated to the point that other members of the LLC experienced the effects of the conflict. In the worst cases when peers could not resolve conflict, other Mind Odyssey peers often sided with one party over another. Despite intentions to prevent conflict from "turning into a total sideshow" as one student described, Mind Odyssey peers often heightened disputes by taking sides rather than promoting a resolution.

Ironically, many participants felt that interconnectedness contributed to the escalation of conflict within Mind Odyssey, thus threatening to undermine the close-knit group the LLC had fostered. Because of the integrated living and learning environment students shared, conflict resulted in a palpable tension that negatively impacted the group. The Mind Odyssey RA described the tension amid the LLC section of the residence hall when conflict surfaced:

> Unless [Mind Odyssey members] attempt to neutralize the drama between arguing students…you can just step on the floor [in the residence hall] and it feels really tense. You don't say the wrong thing because you never know what might come of it or what might set someone off. Unfortunately, this problem happens because [LLC students] are with each other so much. RAs don't have this kind of problem with the other residents.

While leadership team stakeholders expected periodic quarrels between Mind Odyssey members, none expected the LLC environment to exacerbate tensions when conflict arose.

Attending to tensions among Mind Odyssey participants became a challenge for the leadership team with the RA usually addressing intra-group hostility. Leadership team members anticipated inconsequential bickering among LLC peers, but they were unprepared to address widespread disagreements that divided the group. Consequently, team members scrambled to resolve problems because they had not anticipated the LLC could magnify negative occurrences much in the same manner it could enhance positive experiences.

In summary, conflict emerged as an unintended consequence of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. The attributes of interrelated living and learning were occasionally offset by the conflict that resulted from participants bonding so closely and sharing in a residential experience. Conflict between two peers often engulfed the entire group when hostilities were not quelled immediately. Thus, students usually took sides when their peers disagreed, and in so doing they unintentionally undermined group unity. Unfortunately, associated faculty and staff were ill-prepared to address conflict once rifts garnered their attention.

Financial reciprocity. Financial reciprocity surfaced as a minor but notable consequence of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. Pleased with the perceived advantages of participating in a LLC program, at least two parents of Mind Odyssey participants reported willingness to donate to the institution as a result of their children's enrollment in a LLC. This revelation marks the emergence of a lone positive unintended consequence of one of the study institution's LLC programs.

While one might reasonably expect students' caregivers to express gratitude for university programs that help students adjust to college life and engage with their peers, pledges of financial support are not an intended outcome of the study institution's LLC programs. Though the institution's advancement personnel hope that students' satisfaction with their collegiate experience will prompt them to eventually offer monetary support for the university, the immediate expectation of LLC programs remains focused on increasing students' satisfaction with their residential experience so they persist and matriculate. However, to suggest LLCs exist for reasons other than financial gain is misleading too. Curbing attrition and bolstering students' satisfaction with the institution certainly provides a financial windfall for the institution through

consistent tuition revenue, improved time to program completion, and easing of recruitment burdens. Irrespective of these obvious financial gains, generating revenue does not factor in the institutional commitment to fund and support its LLCs.

Though programs like Mind Odyssey ideally contribute to student success and subsequently financial gains associated with matriculation, garnering pledges of financial support as a result of satisfaction with a LLC is unexpected. Nonetheless, parents of two Mind Odyssey students pledged financial support for the study institution as a result of their children's experiences within the LLC. This support came in response to parents' satisfaction with residential programming that helped their children acclimate to the university culture and gain access to a seemingly constructive peer group. One student noted how her mother's happiness with the LLC opportunity sparked a willingness to donate money to the university:

> She doesn't feel like she has to worry about me because I've got friends here…and she knows I'm in a safe group—not some crazy party people. She was so worried when I came here, and I was too. But [the Mind Odyssey program] made the transition so much easier; it gave me that structure so I could focus on academics and not worry about social stuff. I've been so happy here that she wants to give money to support the school so they keep doing [programs] like [Mind Odyssey].

Similarly, another parent of a Mind Odyssey participant shared this sentiment of helping fund the institution's LLC initiatives because she appreciated the perceived benefits the program provided her daughter. The comfort the parent experienced in feeling her daughter participated in a "healthy club" eased fears of her daughter engaging in destructive behaviors or excessive socializing. Her daughter's pursuit of a baccalaureate degree marked a first for her family, and

she expressed gratitude for the institution providing a program that in her view would help ensure degree attainment.

In both instances, gratitude for the perceived benefits of participation in a LLC program inspired parents to pledge financial support at the university. This pattern of giving represents an unintended consequence of the institution's LLC programs because none were designed with the intent of soliciting monetary donations. Nonetheless, at least two parents' perceived satisfaction with opportunities afforded to their children at the university elicited in them a desire to give back to the institution that in their view made degree attainment possible for their daughters.

Summary of unintended consequences themes.

To summarize, five unintended consequences themes emerged from the data collected in this study regarding the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community: social stratification, insularity, risky behavior, conflict, and financial reciprocity. While each of these themes manifested in unique ways, all but one shared the commonality of lessening the desired impact of the collegiate learning community experience. Unfortunately, Mind Odyssey stakeholders often contributed to negative unintended outcomes of LLC participation. Program participants and associated faculty and staff perpetuated social division within the LLC. Furthermore, students promoted insularity by limiting or stifling engagement beyond the LLC. Likewise, they promoted risky behavior, and perpetuated conflict. Consequently, key Mind Odyssey leadership team members concluded the academic year feeling ambivalent about their experiences with the LLC. More alarming, however, was the manner by which these stakeholders and others chose to address challenges when they arose. As students disengaged or faculty and staff quibbled over event planning, attendance and involvement lessened. Rather than facing challenges, stakeholders often elected simply to withdraw from participation or involvement. Stakeholders'

decisions to limit their involvement negatively impacted the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community because fewer programming opportunities arose or fewer students engaged in the scant programming that occurred. Conversely, only one unintended consequence—financial reciprocity—suggested a desirable aftereffect of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. In two instances, parents of Mind Odyssey participants pledged financial support to the study institution as a way of expressing gratitude for the perceived benefits their children gained through membership in a collegiate LLC.

Cross Case Analysis

LLC Outcomes Across Cases

Despite challenges posed by negative unintended consequences as previously detailed, performance indicators for both LLCs suggested program success in relation to overall academic performance, persistence, and declaration of major in LLC-associated fields. Table 3 illustrates 2013-2014 performance outcomes for the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Communities:

Table 4

Summary of LLC Outcomes

	Fall 2013 to Fall 2014 Retention	2013-2014 GPA	Declaration of LLC-Associated Major
Trailblazers	92%	3.24	44%
Mind Odyssey	96%	3.19	58%
Freshman Class	96%	3.24	n/a

Retention and academic performance of students in the study LLCs is consistent with that of other LLC programs at the university. While the study LLCs' retention and overall GPA does not exceed that of the freshman class, their rates of fall-to-fall retention and earned GPA are also consistent with that of the 2013 freshman class. This finding might seem disappointing given that LLC programs in general typically boost retention. However, retention of all freshmen at the study institution is consistently strong, so administrators hope the benefit of LLC participation will manifest during students' sophomore and junior years when attrition typically increases. The study institution boasts a healthy 6-year graduation rate of 68.5%, but administrators anticipate LLC participation will net far better graduation rates among living-learning community participants. LLCs at the study institution are intended to solidify persistence for the duration of students' academic careers, so the impact of program participation will remain uncertain until 6-year graduation rates for the 2013 freshman class are known.

Unintended Consequences Themes across Cases

Seven distinct unintended consequences themes emerged from the data collected in this study in relation to research question 1 (What are the unintended consequences of living-learning community participation?). Table 4 illustrates the themes that occurred in the study and their frequency of occurrence as related to each living-learning community:

Table 5

Summary of Unintended Consequences Themes

Unintended Consequences Themes	Trailblazers Living-Learning Community	Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community
Social Stratification	X	X
Insularity	X	X
Risky Behavior	X	X
Negative Views of Faculty and Associated Curricula	X	
Rebellion	X	
Conflict		X
Financial Reciprocity		X

Note: X indicates that the theme was exhibited in the case.

In addition to confirming unintended consequences, the seven unintended consequences themes emerging from the data revealed the effect unintended consequences had on program stakeholders for both LLCs. While the effects of unintended consequences varied, barring one exception their impact most often manifested negatively for both LLC program stakeholders chronicled in this study. Ironically, unintended consequences often occurred as a direct result of intended program outcomes such as heightened social integration and engagement. For example, participants in both LLC programs persisted from their freshman to sophomore years at impressive rates, but their individual perceptions of the university varied sharply based on their individual experiences with their respective LLCs. Unfortunately, students in both the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Communities who expressed negative views of their respective programs ultimately interpreted their experiences as detracting from their

perception of the institution. Likewise, program stakeholders such as faculty and administrative staff held an array of views regarding their LLC experiences. For example, faculty and administrative staff who clashed over their views of managing the LLC expressed unwillingness for continued involvement with their respective programs given their negative experiences. The following is a summation of the effects unintended consequences had on LLC stakeholders:

Social stratification. The first unintended consequence theme pertained to the existence of social class structures within the two LLC programs. This social stratification existed across all facets of the two programs, and thus included faculty, administrative staff, and students. Examples were rigid social classes arising among Trailblazers Living-Learning Community participants and entrenched social classes inhibiting collaboration of Mind Odyssey Leadership Team faculty and administrative staff representatives.

The effects of social stratification among Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community stakeholders undermined the central purpose of both LLCs. Building community through a collaborative purpose such as advancing knowledge within the context of a specific academic discipline remains a central goal of both the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey programs. Unfortunately, tensions between *de facto* and emerging social classes within the LLCs impeded collaborative efforts. For example, a clear social class divide between faculty and administrative staff associated with the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community inhibited collaborative efforts within the leadership team and resulted in a programming stalemate. Similarly, a rigid social hierarchy among the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community polarized the group so much that participants often refused to comingle with fellow members associated with opposing strata within the LLC. For both communities, many stakeholders concluded the year often uncertain about continued affiliation with their respective programs.

Insularity. The second unintended consequence theme related to the manner by which participants in each LLC engaged with fellow participants, non-LLC peers, and campus entities apart from the institution's learning community programming. For Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey participants, engagement habits depended largely on students' commitment to their respective LLC. Unfortunately, active participants in both programs willingly refrained from campus engagement apart from programming and social interaction within their respective LLCs. Conversely, students in both programs who were less active with their LLC programs often sought involvement in other campus organizations or social ventures. This phenomenon bewildered leadership team members because students engaging in their communities exhibited an insularity that prohibited them from exploring additional opportunities and resources at the institution. On the one hand, students showed clear enmeshment into the institution by identifying strongly with their LLCs, but in so doing they sequestered themselves from other aspects of the institution. Conversely, students who were largely disengaged from their LLCs pursued alternate avenues for engagement at the institution. These students often capitalized on the resources and programs available to them, but much to the dismay of leadership team members they withdrew from LLC participation.

Risky behavior. The third unintended consequence theme was risky behavior as related to LLC participants' willingness to engage in activities that placed themselves and others in danger of violating university policies relating to use of controlled or illegal substances. This unintended consequence included program participants' use of alcohol and marijuana, and the influence of peers in encouraging one another to engage in risky behavior.

The effect of Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community students engaging in risky behavior was twofold. The primary concern regarding risky behavior among

participants was wellness and safety. As participants engaged in alcohol consumption and recreational drug use, they sometimes made irresponsible decisions that threatened their physical safety and jeopardized their enrollment at the institution. For their part, leadership team members for both programs expected that students would likely experiment with alcohol and recreational drug use; however, they did not anticipate bonding within the LLC context and intra-community peer pressure would promote these activities. Unfortunately, select participants in each group felt compelled to engage in risky behavior because alcohol and recreational drug use were commonplace among influential, respected members of both LLCs. While these respected peers inspired constructive habits such as studiousness, environmental stewardship, and physical activity, they also encouraged risky behavior.

Negative views of faculty and associated curricula. The fourth unintended consequence theme related solely to Trailblazers Living-Learning Community participants' negative views of a faculty member and associated curricula. Negative views of the group's *First Year Seminar* and the faculty member who instructed that course inadvertently contributed to negative views about the LLC and forthcoming curricular obligations. Consequently, several students resisted enrolling in an associated LLC course given their experiences in the Trailblazers iteration of *First Year Seminar*.

Selecting faculty and staff to facilitate and guide a collegiate LLC involves careful deliberation because those individuals ensure the success of the initiative. Furthermore, linked courses ideally spark participants' intellectual curiosities, so deliberate course planning and sequencing is vital to student engagement in the academic components of a program (Smith, et al., 2004). Thus, participants' impressions of a program often depend on their response to faculty and staff guiding the group. In regard to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community,

widespread negative views of a foundational course and its instructor contributed to apathy toward curricular offerings associated with the program. Participants' impressions of their first LLC-associated course shaded their perception of a future linked course and subsequently contributed to students manipulating their schedules to avoid further curricular involvement with the LLC.

Rebellion. The fifth unintended consequence theme also involved the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Rebellion emerged as an unintended consequence of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community as nearly half of participants' defiantly elected to withdraw from mandatory enrollment of the LLC-linked spring semester course. Trailblazers participants also exhibited rebellious behavior in the classroom, and they often diminished curricular obligations pertaining to the LLC. As participants gained greater familiarity with one another, they exhibited an emboldened sense of entitlement.

In the view of faculty and administrative staff, the most perplexing unintended consequence of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community manifested as rebellion. As participants became comfortable with one another and within the university environment, they developed a sense of power that in their view entitled them to command faculty and administrative staff. The most notable example of this sense of power related to registration and enrollment in the second linked course required of all Trailblazers participants. Expressing displeasure with the aforementioned fall semester linked course, nearly half the Trailblazers participants balked at registering for the second linked course which was to occur in the spring of 2014. Select participants banded together and collectively decided they would resist enrolling in the required course. They felt their status as members of the LLC warranted an authority in determining what courses in which they would enroll. Ironically, in fostering a collective,

empowered sense of autonomy among students, faculty and staff felt they became victims of their own success. In their view, building a tight-knit LLC where participants were encouraged to express themselves freely contributed to a belief in they could challenge authority and dictate the activities and obligations expected of Trailblazers members.

Conflict. The sixth unintended consequence theme emerging from the data was conflict. Conflict occurred among Mind Odyssey participants, and examples included polarizing differences between peers that often impacted the entire LLC. Given the close-knit relationships characteristic of several in the Mind Odyssey group, tensions between members often spread across the group as fellow participants unwittingly fueled conflict by taking sides in disputes.

Incidents of conflict divided the Mind Odyssey group and required administrative staff to concentrate efforts on repairing relations among the community rather than strengthening bonds of friendship and collaboration. Ironically, the divisive fallout from conflict posed a significant challenge to overcome in light of the strong social bonds that leadership teams helped foster among LLC participants. Among active members of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, participants' daily lives were highly intermingled and thus their relationships complex. Therefore, when conflict arose between participants, involvement of others within the group often escalated rather than eased tensions. The most glaring example of turmoil resulting from the interconnectedness of group members occurred when a simple roommate spat exploded into a divisive conflict that encompassed a majority of the LLC as fellow participants aligned themselves with one of the two parties in the dispute. Unlike non-LLC roommate conflict where residence hall staff members intervene to ease hostilities, when conflict occurred between members of the LLC, faculty, administrative staff, and participants had to work to keep tensions from derailing the entire community.

Financial reciprocity. The seventh and final unintended consequence theme, financial reciprocity, represented the lone unintended consequence with a potential positive outcome. Though a minor theme, financial reciprocity emerged as an unintended consequence for the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community as select participants' parents indicated a willingness to pledge financial support to the university in response to gratitude for their children's experiences in the program. Financial reciprocity emerged solely as an unintended consequence theme for the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community.

Effects of financial reciprocity were negligible at best in terms of current program stakeholders. The finding that program stakeholders—in this case parents of Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community participants—profess a willingness to commit to financial support of the institution as a result of their children's perceived positive experiences within a LLC holds promise for the future of program. Funding for LLC programs at the institution is constrained, and small operating budgets limit programming opportunities. Potentially gaining access to funding earmarked specifically to support the Mind Odyssey program promises to bolster opportunities for faculty, staff, and participants to engage in meaningful curricular and co-curricular programs.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Learning communities have transformed the way students integrate into the collegiate environment and experience academia. Since Meiklejohn's Experimental College in the 1920s, learning communities have evolved to meet a variety of needs (Smith et al., 2004). Though learning communities are as unique as their host institutions and typically manifest in one of five variations, their objectives remain focused on specific outcomes. Personalizing students' educational experiences, promoting social integration, and enabling greater student/faculty collaboration are among the most common and desirable learning community achievements. In addition to gains in the aforementioned areas, the proliferation of learning communities owes primarily to student persistence (Johnson, 2000-2001; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). With college and university administrations placing greater emphasis on retention, learning communities have made notable contributions to curbing attrition. More often than not, learning communities have shown to contribute positively to students' satisfaction with their educational experiences, and administrators eager to bolster retention are more than willing to adopt learning community initiatives believing they will promote continued enrollment and persistence (Andrade, 2007-2008; Hotchkiss et al., 2006). Moreover, program development has increasingly involved implementation of living-learning communities (LLCs). Citing research attributing college persistence to social and cultural acclimation, college and university personnel often see LLCs as vessels for welcoming students into the academy (Brower et al., 2003; Harris, 2006-2007; Johnson & Romanoff, 2000-2001; Pike et al., 1997).

LLCs have been successful ventures at many institutions, and research consistently has confirmed these programs help students adapt to the collegiate environment. Most notably,

residence-based learning communities have been shown to personalize institutions of higher learning in a manner that enables even the largest of universities to offer programming tailored to individual student interests. LLCs provide students with a support program to help them navigate the foreign landscape of college campuses. Moreover, LLCs provide students with the comforts of routine and familiarity by allowing them to take select courses as a cohort and sharing designated space in a residence hall. By grouping students in LLCs, participants often develop strong social bonds with fellow program participants. Ideally, these socially integrated students more easily adapt to the collegiate environment because they share in the acclimation process with their peers (Smith et al., 2004).

Though years of research confirm positive, intended outcomes of collegiate LLC programs, there is a lack of research exploring unintended and potentially negative consequences of LLC participation. As recent as 2008, Jaffee et al. found that while learning communities indeed contribute to desirable student outcomes, they also promulgate negative behavior that undermines positive gains. Unfortunately, Jaffee (2004, 2007) remains the only major scholar to address potential unintended consequences of collegiate learning communities. Therefore, this research project sought to determine if unintended consequences occur among two established, successful LLC programs hosted at a university well-known for its learning community initiatives. These two LLC programs adhere to the linked courses learning community model in that they tie co-curricular programming to select academic courses. Leadership teams consisting of faculty, administrative staff, and peer mentors serving as RAs are responsible for the design, implementation, and facilitation of the LLC programs. In terms of participants, each LLC began the 2013-2014 academic year with 24 students.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to 1) identify unintended consequences, if present, of two collegiate living-learning community programs at a well-known regional university and, 2) if unintended consequences exist, document their impact on living-learning community stakeholders. To accomplish the goals of this project, the researcher relied on sociological constructs to guide the inquiry. These constructs included the law of unintended consequences and the theory of homophily as posited by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), primary group formation and interaction as conceptualized by Cooley (1962), and Marx and Engels' (2012) social class theory. While in the field, the researcher collected data through a variety of methods: individual interviews, focus group interviews, observation, and document/artifact analysis. Data collection for this project occurred throughout the entirety of the 2013-2014 academic year, and the researcher attended numerous program events as a participant observer to document a range of LLC experiences. These events included curricular, co-curricular, and informal social activities.

This chapter summarizes findings and offers discussion of those findings by positioning them within the extant body of learning community research. This chapter also addresses implications for practice and offers recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Unintended Consequences Themes of Collegiate LLCs

To answer this project's research questions, the researcher relied on an inductive approach to analyze data. Inductive reasoning enabled the researcher to collapse voluminous data into categories and themes. First, data were coded and then analyzed again to determine emergent themes. Data were analyzed by individual LLC and then again across cases. Resultant themes pertained in some instances to both cases whereas others related to only one of the two

LLCs. Overall, seven distinct themes emerged from the data—three of which appeared in both cases. These resultant themes are summarized as follows:

Social stratification. The first and most prominent theme to occur across both cases was social stratification. For both LLCs, social stratification within the groups hindered stakeholders from reaping desired benefits of the programs. In regard to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, initial group unity among participants succumbed to a rigid social class divide based on students' incoming skill or perceived enthusiasm regarding hiking and backpacking. Students who entered the program adept in outdoor skills and those determined to become seasoned outdoorsmen came to embody a favored ruling class of sorts that dictated the social mores of the LLC. On the other hand, those in the group with no previous hiking and backpacking experience or those with only moderate interest in outdoor activities were eventually relegated to secondary social status within the group as many of them were shunned at formal events and excluded from participation in student-initiated social outings. This divide fueled a mutual but often silent animosity between the two subgroups within the Trailblazers cohort. The dominant subgroup, the core group, often expressed resentment toward those in what seemed a second-class subgroup, known as outliers. This resentment typically surfaced as passive aggressive attempts to let the "less enthusiastic" outdoorsmen or "posers" know their membership in the group was unworthy because they had taken spots that supposed better-versed outdoorsmen could have occupied. For their part, outlier group members responded to criticism and exclusion by withdrawing from the group or involving themselves in other campus ventures. Unfortunately for both subgroups of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, the unity initially established within the group at the beginning of the semester eroded quickly as students began identifying with subgroups of students rather than the whole community. While whole

group functions occurred throughout the year, attendance and enthusiasm waned among faculty and students as the year progressed. Students, particularly among the outlier group, eventually withdrew from events that were not required, and in some cases these less active students even withdrew of from mandatory events.

For the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, the most starkly divided faction of the group was among leadership team members. Faculty and administrative staff found themselves at odds over facilitation of the LLC. For instance, faculty members resented perceived intrusion of administrative staff members, and administrators often intentionally circumvented faculty contributions to programming and events. Consequently, the leadership team responsible for guiding the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community failed to collaborate and ultimately abandoned program planning rather than work with one another. As a result of this leadership team stalemate, program participants lost opportunities to engage with faculty, staff, and one another. For all intents and purposes, the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community ceased formal programming for much of the spring 2014 semester.

For their part, students also fostered a divisive social climate within the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community as the group split between active and inactive members. Active Mind Odyssey participants prided themselves on their affiliation with the group whereas inactive members often avoided association with the LLC. This divide produced a constrained residential environment where each faction of the group generally avoided the other, thus squelching any possibility of fostering a group-wide sense of community.

Insularity. The second unintended consequence theme pertained to insular engagement practices among students in both LLCs. Participants in the two programs exhibited similar campus engagement behaviors. These engagement practices correlated with the degree to which

one was actively involved in his or her respective LLC. For Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey participants, those who expressed strong allegiance to their respective programs limited social engagement primarily to those within their respective groups. Core members of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community exhibited an insularity that limited them from connecting with non-LLC peers or other campus programs. Similar behavior occurred among active members of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. On the other hand, individuals in both groups who were less engaged or completely disinterested in their respective programs often involved themselves in other facets of campus life. While leadership team members for both programs encouraged students to seek out campus opportunities for social engagement and cultural enrichment, participants most likely to seek these opportunities where those who felt ostracized from the LLC or were simply disinterested in the program.

Risky behavior. The third unintended consequence theme was risky behavior. This theme occurred in both cases as LLC participants willingly engaged in risky behavior as a manner of gaining social acceptance among fellow members of their respective programs. Recreational use of alcohol and/or marijuana occurred with regularity among participants in both programs—particularly among those with previous experience using alcohol and/or marijuana. These seasoned recreational drug and alcohol users frequently enticed fellow program participants to engage in this risky behavior as a bonding experience. Often socialization among active members in both groups involved alcohol and to a lesser extent marijuana, and even those with little to no previous experience using these substances felt compelled to partake in order to "fit in."

Negative views of faculty and associated curricula. The fourth unintended consequence theme emerging from the data pertained to Trailblazers Living-Learning

Community participants' negative views of a program faculty member and curricula pertaining to the linked courses. Trailblazers students generally expressed dissatisfaction with the first of two linked courses required of program participants. They often found the first of the two LLC linked courses irrelevant and inconvenient, and they complained the faculty member assigned to instruct the course lessened their interest in remaining involved in the program because of contentious exchanges with students. Consequently, students greeted course assignments with disdain and often outright contemp. Negative responses to class often swelled as the interrelated social structure of the LLC fueled a collective disdain for the academic requirements of Trailblazer membership. Furthermore, participants' negative perceptions of the fall linked course in the curriculum unduly colored their perception of the second linked course scheduled for the spring semester.

Rebellion. Rebellion was the fifth unintended consequence theme to emerge from the data, and the theme of rebellion also related solely to the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community. Just as negative perceptions of faculty and associated curricula swelled within the integrated social structure of the LLC, uniform acts of rebellion occurred as participants became comfortable interacting with leadership team members. Though leadership team members routinely solicited input and feedback from program participants, students frequently interpreted familiarity with leadership team members as permission to conduct themselves irreverently. For example, students often staged small-scale revolts during *First Year Seminar* sessions if they did not like class assignments. Though questioning an assignment or petitioning the instructor to alter coursework requirements did not alone constitute rebellion, the manner by which Trailblazers participants expressed dissenting opinions undermined the collaborative partnership between students and faculty members. Trailblazers participants routinely voiced dissent by

rallying others in the group to aggressively confront the instructor during class lecture. Furthermore, a singular act of rebellion leading into the spring 2014 semester characterized the perceived authority students felt they could wield regarding LLC obligations. In response to their experiences in the fall semester *First Year Seminar* course, approximately half of the students in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community decided to forego mandatory enrollment in the second linked LLC course. Though enrollment in the linked spring course was a requirement of membership in the program, several students—most of whom populated the outliers subgroup—felt they could collectively impose their will on the leadership team. In so doing, program participants created tension between themselves and members of the leadership team.

In rebelling against curricular obligations of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, participants created a barrier between students and leadership team members. The resulting communication gulf appeared to dramatically lessen engagement opportunities for students to collaborate with faculty and staff. By the onset of the spring semester, Trailblazers programming all but ceased. Many of those who revolted against enrollment in the second linked course withdrew from active participation in the LLC; likewise, leadership team members reeling from students' refusal to honor their commitments to the program expressed disinterest in continuing programming. Consequently, the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community for all intents and purposes ceased formal operations at the conclusion of the fall semester.

Conflict. Leadership team members spent an exorbitant amount of time concentrating efforts on repairing relations among Mind Odyssey participants. Minor disagreements between a few members of the LLC often escalated to contentious divides among larger factions of the group. Given the highly integrated nature of the LLC, conflict seemed to spread quickly given

the close relationships among program participants. Ironically, in building such a tight-knit community, leadership team members faced adversity in maintaining group cohesion because the interconnectedness of the Mind Odyssey group members usually fueled discordant behaviors. Program participants often took sides against fellow students when disagreements occurred between community members, and this behavior threatened to dismantle the cohesiveness the leadership team built among program participants in the early part of the academic year. Whereas minor disagreements between roommates would likely not have spread beyond the residents involved in a spat, conflict between Mind Odyssey students typically engulfed the entire group. In some cases, bitter division between factions of the group resulted from seemingly innocuous disagreements. Unfortunately, the interconnected nature of the LLC made it difficult for participants to resolve differences without involving others in the community.

Financial Reciprocity. The emergence of financial reciprocity as a minor but important unintended consequence of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community suggests that stakeholders would contribute monetary support to the program under certain conditions. In two instances, parents of Mind Odyssey participants vowed to contribute financial support to the LLC as a result of what they perceived as desirable outcomes of the program. While this theme of financial reciprocity occurred minimally, its presence suggests the potential of unforeseen positive consequences of LLC programming.

Discussion

This research project sought to identify unintended consequences of collegiate LLCs and, if present, the effect on stakeholders of these unintended consequences. The theoretical framework guiding this inquiry was conceptualized by David Jaffee's (2004, 2007) research on peer cohorts and learning communities (see also Jaffee et al., 2008). In this previously published

research, Jaffee (2004, 2007) and Jaffee et al. (2008) hypothesized learning communities could, in addition to positive intended consequences, produce negative unintended consequences because of the social dynamics cultivated within peer cohort groups. Jaffee (2007) theorized unintended consequences would likely manifest among peers participating in a learning community because of the integrative design of the program coupled with students' "postadolescent" social development (p. 67). Consequently, these students—traditionally aged freshmen in particular—would exhibit behaviors characteristic of adolescents but within a collegiate learning community environment. These behaviors would include "identity seeking, the struggle for autonomy, the need for acceptance, the formation of cliques and subcultures, a preoccupation with social affairs rather than learning, and disruptive and rebellious forms of behavior" (p. 67). Jaffee further suggested that minimizing the effects of such unintended consequences would require those designing and facilitating learning communities to recognize the likelihood of their occurrence and address them before they detract from what should serve as an immersive and positive introduction to the academy.

The findings of this study confirmed the existence of unintended consequences occurring within the two collegiate LLCs at the host university. Of the seven unintended consequences occurring within one or both of the LLCs studied for this project, all but one produced negative outcomes for program stakeholders. Overall, the findings of this study supported Jaffee et al.'s (2008) assertion that unintended consequences "may hinder student learning, student development, and student-faculty relations" (p. 56).

The host institution for this research project has a lengthy history of developing and supporting learning community initiatives—particularly LLCs. Furthermore, internal research at the university confirms students' participation in LLCs enhances their collegiate experiences in a

variety of categories including ethical and moral development, extra-curricular involvement, leadership, social integration, awareness of campus resources, and feeling a part of the university community. Moreover, in previous years institutional data revealed that students enrolled in a LLC typically outperformed their non-LLC peers academically. As a result of this internal data, administrators have continually supported LLC initiatives at the institution. However, there remains no internal research documenting daily occurrences within specific LLC programs; thus the findings of this study promise to illuminate areas of research heretofore not investigated at the institution and the wider research community.

As a point of clarification, the researcher for this project found positive, intended consequences occurred as a result of the institution's LLC programs that confirm several results reported in previous internal research on the university's LLCs. These intended consequences—development of deep, close friendships; feeling of belonging as part of the university community; awareness of campus resources; close relationships with faculty and staff members—bolster support for the university's overall commitment to learning community programming. However, the focus of this project was to report unintended consequences of LLCs. While the university clearly provides quality LLCs for students, this research project reveals areas of concern that program stakeholders in all of the university's LLCs should recognize and address. In revealing programmatic shortcomings, this project has not intended to undermine or discredit the efforts university personnel have made in establishing a robust LLC initiative. Rather, this project intended to advance LLC research in general and provide the study institution with findings that can help strengthen its LLC initiatives.

Homophily, Intergroup Bias, and the Social Class Divide

Students' LLC experiences in the two programs investigated for this research project were wildly divergent based primarily on their ability to socially integrate with their respective groups. In both programs, students' who found acceptance among the majority of members in their programs enjoyed a positive, affirming experience in their respective communities. Conversely, those who failed to socially integrate in their respective groups typically reported an undesirable experience within the LLC. Teitel (1997) suggested students who fail to acclimate to a cohort group often find their academic experiences isolating and uncomfortable. Clearly, students unable to socially integrate in the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Communities generally characterized their experiences as difficult and frequently lonely. For Trailblazers participants in particular, the bifurcated social structure of the community manifested as a Marxist stratification between bourgeoisie and proletariat when considering the two emergent social classes of the group (Marx & Engels, 2012). The core group represented a ruling class of sorts afforded the luxury of steering the social direction of the group, and the outliers group embodied the traits of a subordinate class holding little sway in influencing the LLC's social culture.

The social stratification evident in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community resulted as Jaffee (2007) suggested from a "homophilous concentration" of like-minded participants enabling the "formation of cliques and subcultures" (p. 67). Trailblazers participants who entered the program with previous outdoor experience or ambition to become seasoned outdoorsmen congregated in an exclusive subgroup. This subgroup that the researcher termed the core group exhibited the "behavioral conformity" associated with homophily in that participants adhered to specific behaviors and incidents of groupthink (p. 67). Unfortunately, for those not part of the

core group—the outlier group as labeled by the researcher—existence in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community devolved into an unpleasant experience where students felt excluded and their contributions minimized. This occurrence of marginalization within the confines of a LLC confirms previous research from Radencich et al. (1998) and Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott (2001) in that participation in a cohort group where one feels ostracized becomes a demoralizing experience for those unable to gain social acceptance.

Similar to the social class divide between two factions of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community, Mind Odyssey program participants split between active and inactive members in a manner that also manifested as a Marxist social class struggle. Students who consistently engaged in Mind Odyssey programming bonded with one another and formed a close-knit social group. This group, however, evolved into an exclusive subgroup in that students who intermittingly engaged in Mind Odyssey programming were unable to integrate into the active group. Moreover, active Mind Odyssey students expressed disapproval at program members who showed what they deemed too little commitment to the LLC.

The rise of core and outlier groups within the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community and the active members contingent of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community is characteristic of what social psychology literature identifies as intergroup bias between in-groups and out-groups where members of one group or subgroup (the in-group) view their position within a group "more favorably" than another (the out-group) (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002, p. 576). This distinction between in-groups and out-groups serves to bias group members against other members of the same group. Similar to homophily, research has shown that a variety of factors contribute to intergroup bias including values orientation and individuals' identification with other group members. Most notably, threat or perceived threat often drives intergroup bias

(Brewer, 1999). The prospect that threat may contribute to intergroup bias advances an understanding of the behavior and motive members of all LLC subgroups in this project exhibited. Threat served to motivate members of both LLCs' subgroups to unify to protect their respective identities or positions within the larger group. For core members of the Trailblazers group and active members of the Mind Odyssey group, those existing on the periphery of their groups posed a threat to the LLCs' "distinctiveness" and overall values (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002, p. 586). Consequently, preservation of desired group identity or preferred values necessitated denigration of peripheral individuals or subgroups.

The success of any LLC depends on the involvement of all members in the development of a collaborative, inclusive community (Lei et al., 2011). Yet the result of active members' scorn toward inactive participants created a social divide that encouraged less engaged students to withdraw from program participation, an outcome attributable to intergroup bias (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996). By discouraging participation of less active participants, active members of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community hindered program growth. This occurrence represents a manifestation of what Maher (2004) characterized among cohort groups as a silencing of less dominant participants. As with educational cohort groups, discouraging involvement of less-active Mind Odyssey participants diminished the community's capacity to provide enriching educational experiences to all members. Though active Mind Odyssey members rightfully prided themselves on their commitment to the program, their expressions of ownership of the community hindered involvement of less engaged students who, albeit minimally, wanted to contribute to the community. Consequently, the program came to reflect the interests of the dominant active members subgroup.

The existence of a socially marginalized subgroup within the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Communities adds to the current body of learning community research by confirming Jaffee's (2007) hypothesis that unintended consequences undermine programs like those at the host university. Though many participants in both programs concluded their stints in their respective LLCs with a positive view of their programs, those among the disaffected subgroups typically expressed regret at having joined a LLC. For those students, participation in a LLC became an exercise in isolation. Consequently, their perceptions of their LLCs and even the university were seen through the lens of an unpleasant experience.

Social Stratification between Faculty and Administrative Staff

For the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, social stratification also manifested between associated faculty members and administrative staff participating in the leadership team. This clash between faculty and staff represents a new consideration for examining homophilous influences within the context of LLCs. Though Jaffee (2004, 2007) expressed concern about the potentially divisive social climate learning communities could foster among students as a result of homophilous sub-groupings, no research to date has examined the possible influence of homophily among learning community program faculty and staff. Nonetheless, in the case of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, faculty and staff members exhibited homophilous preferences by willfully limiting interaction with other factions of the leadership team. Faculty members preferred to work with one another, and staff members typically avoided collaboration with LLC faculty members.

Just as division between factions of students negated potential positive outcomes for LLC participants, faculty/staff leadership team strife resulted in a programming stalemate that likely magnified tensions between students in the Mind Odyssey program. Once faculty and staff

reached a point where they no longer collaborated, programming ceased. Consequently, students had few opportunities to engage simultaneously with faculty and staff members. Moreover, students lost opportunities to benefit from the mentorship faculty and staff could have offered if present. In short, less programming also meant less guidance from leadership team members, and the lack of leadership correlated with the rise of social discord within the LLC.

When social strife plagued the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community, only one member of the leadership team typically addressed problems—the RA. Unfortunately, the RA was frequently so overburdened with managing existing conflict and challenges she often failed to recognize budding problems. The extent that other leadership team members' involvement could have curtailed problems is unknown, but their absence certainly left problems unchecked. As Jaffee (2007) suggested, freshmen learning communities in particular are susceptible to social strife because post-adolescent students lack the emotional maturity to recognize the harmful behaviors that erode group unity. Therefore, the guidance and leadership of mentors, even upperclassmen peers, is critical in maintaining a healthy learning community climate. In the case of the Mind Odyssey Living Learning Community—and to a lesser extent the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community—as programming waned, social troubles among program participants escalated. This correlation underscores the necessity of mentor involvement throughout the duration of a LLC program. Mentors' presence alone may not eradicate destructive behaviors such as social marginalization, groupthink, and formation of cliques, but their involvement may minimize threats to group unity.

Though previous scholarship has well documented inherent tensions between faculty members and administrative personnel in collegiate settings (Holton & Phillips, 1995; Kuo, 2009), researchers have devoted little if any scholarship to the effects of faculty/staff conflict on

collegiate learning community programs. While limited in scope, this research project's findings suggest that harmonious relationships between faculty members and administrative personnel associated with learning communities is critical to establishing and maintaining a sense of community among program stakeholders. Associated faculty and staff are ultimately responsible for cultivating the collaborative environment of a learning community, so contentious relationships between these entities as evident with the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community may doom programs to underachievement.

Learning Community Insularity

Homophily and social class influences also shaped the manner by which students acclimated to not only their learning communities but also the larger university community. Students in both programs exhibited a general lack of interest in pursuing socialization opportunities apart from their respective LLCs. In particular, those students who were most active in their respective programs typically chose to limit social integration opportunities rather than involve themselves in non-LLC campus programming. Similar to Berger's (1997) finding that social integration within a residence hall may impede involvement in the larger campus community, LLC participation impeded social integration within the larger campus community.

Students' abstention from the campus community in favor of interacting primarily with their LLC peers raises a concern that one's affiliation with a group or program designed to promote engagement could ironically impede student integration. This willful insularity among LLC participants aligns with Jaffee's (2007) suggestion that learning communities may promote homophilous subgroups as evidenced by the uniform conduct of factions of both programs in this research project. In the case of the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey groups, active participants conducted themselves as a "mobilized alliance" whereby allegiance to the group was awarded (p.

68). Conversely, those who sought campus engagement apart from the group were singled out as lacking commitment to the LLC and consequently discouraged from active participation. As shunned members of the community, inactive participants had little social integration options other than what existed apart from the LLCs.

Primary Group Formation

The homophilous formation of relationships "between those who are alike in some designated respect" only partially accounts for the emergence of subgroups within the two programs profiled in this research project (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954, p. 23). The sociological concept of primary group formation further explains how subgroups coalesced within both LLCs and subsequently threatened to diminish potential positive outcomes.

In previous scholarship, Jaffee (2007) theorized that learning communities embody the characteristics of primary groups because their members bond over shared responsibilities or tasks and eventually develop intimate emotional connections. Viewed this way, learning communities indeed exhibit the traits characteristic of primary groups: advancing a common purpose over time and facilitating strong emotional connections between members. In Jaffee's view, these characteristics along with Marx's (2012) concept of social class struggle explains why learning community members often act uniformly in ways other assemblages of students do not. Since most academically-grouped students assemble solely within the confines of a classroom, apart from shared academic obligations they have little connection to one another. This lone "pursuit of a common activity" absent emotional bonding between group members impedes most college classes from developing as primary groups (p. 67). When class concludes, the groups disperse. Learning communities, however, typically do not dissolve at the conclusion of class or other gatherings because, particularly in the case of LLCs, their curricular and co-

curricular lives blend. Over time, learning community students forge experiential and emotional bonds not otherwise likely within a typical classroom setting.

For Jaffee (2007), the uniform conduct learning communities often exhibit is best explained by the primary group construct. This research project, however, added to Jaffee's theory regarding primary group formation and learning communities. Instead of confirming previous assertions that learning communities embody the characteristics of a single primary group, this project documented evidence that learning communities may actually facilitate the formation of multiple primary groups within a learning community. For example, both LLCs in this study gave rise to subgroups once unity within the cohorts began to wane. Contrary to Jaffee's theory, seldom if ever did either LLC act collectively as a primary group. Rather, facets of both LLCs acted uniformly, particularly when attempting to thwart rules imposed by the leadership team or challenge a competing faction within the LLC. This finding signifies that learning communities may engender the formation of primary groups in a way previously not documented.

Emergent primary groups.

The factions of the LLCs in this project that functioned as primary groups were the core and outlier contingents of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community and the active members contingent of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community. The common trait each of these groups exhibited was shared values forged through mutual experiences over time. The Trailblazers' core group shared enthusiasm for outdoor life and its culture, and they valued loyalty to the LLC. Similarly, the active members of the Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Community shared a righteous commitment to their LLC program. Though they lacked a uniform interest akin to the Trailblazers' affinity for outdoor life, active Mind Odyssey members

came together intent on seeing the LLC persist in the face of waning interest among several members. Conversely, the Trailblazers' outliers contingent unified by sharing the burden of social marginalization. They rallied together as second-class citizens intent on resisting the perceived dominance of the core group. In each these instances of primary group formation, factions of the LLCs unified rather than entire cohorts as Jaffee suggested. Therefore, this research project revealed that learning communities might produce multiple primary groups. This finding is significant because multiple primary groups operating within a learning community may heighten tensions between participants and diminish program benefits. As evidenced in this project, primary groups maneuvering within the two LLCs ultimately fractured both cohorts. The consequences of intra-group struggles undermine the intent of programs as evidenced in the following section.

Consequences of Primary Group Formation

Acts of defiance.

When reviewing primary group formation among the two LLCs studied in this research project, all three emergent primary groups contributed to disruptive occurrences that detracted from the curricular ambitions of the university's LLC initiative: social stratification, acts of rebellion and expressed negative views of faculty and curricula. This finding signifies a critical social challenge facing learning community facilitators in guiding programs. In the absence of continual, immersive programming that involves all stakeholders—particularly faculty members and administrative staff—learning communities might subject themselves to sociological vulnerabilities that ultimately undermine program effectiveness as evidenced in this research project. Previous research on student resistance in secondary education classrooms is informative in light of these LLCs' acts of defiance. As with secondary classrooms, LLCs populated by post-

adolescents are vulnerable to program derailment because "dense [social] networks buffer young people in conflicts and provide them with social support" to act disruptively (McFarland, 2001, p. 663). Furthermore, social networks advance defiance in a way that "transforms the classroom" from a constructive learning environment to one that completely undermines teachers' or facilitators' authority (p. 614). These powerful social forces are countered only by continual involvement of program facilitators who collaborate with students in promoting learning and actively disrupt the formation of "cliques of students that collude to undermine classroom affairs" (p. 666). In both programs studied for this project, LLC facilitators likely inadvertently contributed to subgroup formation and resultant defiant behaviors by withdrawing from program involvement.

Risky behavior.

While previous researchers have found LLCs contribute to positive social behaviors (Brower et al., 2003; McCabe et al., 2007), this project documented instances where the LLC environment contributed to participants engaging in risky behavior and intra-group conflict. Similar to previous research on collegiate fraternal organizations (Capone et al., 2007; Cashin et al., 1998; McCabe et al., 2004), both the Trailblazers and Mind Odyssey programs fostered social cultures that encouraged students to engage in alcohol and recreational drug use. This result differs from Boyd et al. (2008) and McCabe et al.'s (2007) previous findings that participation in a collegiate learning communities correlate with lesser incidents of alcohol use. Though use of alcohol and recreational drugs among LLC participants in this study may represent isolated incidents unique to those programs, their occurrence warrants further investigation because the social norms of the two groups in this research project encouraged

risky behavior. This finding suggests that social culture of a learning community may play a greater role in lessening or increasing risky behavior.

Conflict.

While no learning community venture is immune to conflict among participants, the degree to which conflict may escalate in a LLC owes to its integrative design that can inadvertently inflame tensions rather than ease them. As with risky behavior, the two LLCs in this research project often fueled conflict between students. Similar to conflict previously reported among collegiate cohort groups (Barnett et al., 2000; Greenlee & Kalianov, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001), the unique social structure of the LLCs chronicled in this research project often exacerbated conflict among students. However, unlike disagreements occurring within traditional collegiate cohorts where students engage with one another primarily in academic settings, LLCs' extension of group interaction to all facets of participants' collegiate experiences may magnify disagreements between students. Minor disagreements within the classroom between two LLC participants often carried over to the residence hall, and these personal disagreements frequently escalated to divisive conflicts between factions of the LLC. As fellow participants sided with one party over another, these occurrences diminished the integrity of the LLC experience by sabotaging the collaborative intent of the program.

Positive Unintended Consequences

Not all unintended consequences of the two LLCs chronicled in this research project negatively impacted the programs. That a stakeholder's perception of a LLC's success could potentially open avenues for benefactors to provide monetary support to the host institution marks a new avenue for exploration in learning community research. Though previous scholarship has documented correlation between alumni satisfaction with their undergraduate experiences and monetary giving (Clotfelter, 2001; Gaier, 2005), learning community research

remains focused primarily on student retention rather than documenting other outcomes. Correlation between institutional giving and LLC participation remains uncharted territory ripe for future research.

Furthermore, a silver lining exists within at least one of the unintended consequences that had an overall negative impact on the two LLC programs. In challenging the authority of the leadership team in regard to enrolling in a required spring semester course, the outliers contingency of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community brought attention to a programmatic and curricular deficiency worth addressing. As McFarland (2001) noted regarding high school students, the classroom or educational setting "greatly affect[s] student decisions to rebel," and expressions of defiance are not exclusively negative (p. 663). Rather, acts of defiance can draw attention to instructional deficiencies and classroom inequities; seen in this light, resistance can "alter [a]…situation for good" (p. 613). For outlier participants in the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community who refused to enroll in a course they deemed unnecessary given their intended majors, taking the *Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation* course as planned may well have created future scheduling difficulties given tightly prescribed course sequences. As a result of the spring semester registration uprising, leadership team members reevaluated the curricular requirements of the Trailblazers Living-Learning Community and came to the conclusion that students who revolted were in most cases correct at least with regard to the course sequencing problems that could have occurred. Consequently, leadership team members made the decision to drop *Leadership and Group Dynamics in Recreation* from the 2014-2015 curricular requirements for the program.

Conclusions

The present study of unintended consequences of collegiate LLC programs at a large Master's public university confirmed previous research that learning communities may produce unintended consequences that "hinder student learning, student development, and faculty-student relations" (Jaffee, 2007; see also Jaffee et al., 2008). The mixture of a post-adolescent student population coupled with LLCs' unique social conditions may create a toxic, dysfunctional environment that ultimately undermines the intent of learning community programming. Sociological principles of homophily and primary group formation proved informative in revealing the manner by which a variety of unintended consequences afflicted the two LLCs chronicled in this project. Division between students, faculty, and administrative staff plagued the LLCs as the academic year progressed. The hallmark of the LLC initiative—collaboration and shared experiences—caused conflict among all stakeholders as faculty and administrative staff often worked in isolation from one another, and students segregated based on a variety of social influences including perceived commitment to the program, knowledge, and social adaptability.

In addition to the challenges arising from social stratification within the LLC programs in this study, participants adopted insular social practices that inhibited them from involvement in other campus programming. Further compounding these insular practices, once students were comfortable residing within the LLC they increasingly engaged in risky behavior and encouraged fellow participants to do so as well. Maintaining what students perceived as appropriate social standing within the programs often meant joining in ritual bonding activities that included illegal use of alcohol and marijuana. Finally, program participants also attempted to assert influence by directly challenging faculty members and administrative staff responsible for guiding the LLCs.

As program participants became comfortably acquainted with faculty and administrative staff, they often derided curricular programming, challenged the authority of faculty, and refused to fulfill program obligations.

These incidents of unintended consequences confirmed Jaffee's (2007) assertion that for all the positive outcomes LLCs generate, negative consequences threaten to minimize if not negate potential gains. In both cases documented in this research project, unintended consequences began to emerge as "students [grew] comfortable and familiar" in their environment in the classroom and residence hall (McFarland, 2001). Similarly, as leadership team members settled into their respective faculty and administrative roles they often became complacent and increasingly less active in their LLCs (Mendelson, 2006). While not uncommon that learning community programming decreased as the academic year progressed, less intervention on the part of facilitators left both programs open to vulnerabilities among participants such as lack of interest, dissent, and withdrawal—all of which were evident in these two cases (Lichtenstein, 2005).

By understanding the conditions and factors that contributed to unintended consequences of the two LLCs in this research project, practitioners at the study institution and beyond may minimize if not avoid programmatic pitfalls by confronting threats as they arise. In the current study, too often leadership team members were unaware of conflict or the severity of social strife within the groups, so problems went unaddressed. Furthermore, leadership team members' general unawareness of the social forces at play within the two LLCs left marginalized participants without any hope that program facilitators could alleviate budding social strife. Leadership team members placed too much emphasis on building community at the beginning of the academic year, and they did so at the expense of sustaining group cohesion across the fall and

spring semesters. Unfortunately, this is the model that many LLC practitioners follow in implementing immersive learning community initiatives. Frontloading intervention did not sustain initial harmonious relationships in either the Trailblazers or Mind Odyssey Living-Learning Communities; rather, many program participants came to resent that the unity and sense of belonging they experienced in the early weeks of program involvement faded so quickly.

Despite programmatic flaws, the two LLCs profiled in this research project remain soundly constructed in terms of intent, curricular focus, and goals. Where the programs seemingly failed pertains to delivery. Learning community initiatives depend on continual, collaborative involvement of all stakeholders—faculty, administrative staff, and participants (Smith et al., 2004). Furthermore, as evidenced by this study, stakeholders can only advance the mission of a learning community by maintaining an awareness of shortcomings and limitations inherent to the learning community model. Learning communities vary with each incarnation largely due to the collective identity of those who populate them. Therefore, as evident with this study, the degree to which any learning community succeeds depends upon the commitment stakeholders maintain in developing and sustaining a cohesive community dedicated to advancing its scholastic and communal mission.

Implications for Practice

Learning community initiatives represent more than mere block scheduling and thus entail collaboration among a variety of institutional stakeholders to ensure successful program design, implementation, and outcomes. Cultivating successful learning community initiatives necessitates awareness not only of desired outcomes but also likely barriers to program success. Years of research have confirmed positive consequences of learning community programming,

but very little documentation explains difficulties that arise from learning communities—particularly programs with a residential component. Though limited to the study institution in terms of generalizability, this research project illustrates how the learning community model contains challenges inherent to its design that plague seemingly successful programs and ultimately minimize their impact. Therefore, adopting a learning community initiative must include extensive planning and subsequent monitoring, intervention, and student engagement to ensure programs grow as intended and provide positive collaborative experiences for all stakeholders.

Administrators, faculty, and student affairs personnel responsible for developing and maintaining learning community programs should consider that the present body of research scantly addresses unintended consequences of learning communities. Therefore, given the findings of this study coupled with that of Jaffee et al. (2008), appropriate consideration of the possibility of unintended consequences detracting from intended outcomes should be considered and addressed through program design and consistent intervention during program implementation and delivery.

Learning community stakeholders must maintain an awareness of the intricate social processes at play within learning communities. In particular, learning community facilitators should gain familiarity with the concept of intergroup bias and measures to minimize its impact (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Anticipation of likely social conflict will help facilitators build and maintain a sense of community among program participants. Mediating intergroup bias depends on frequent "quality" contacts between all group stakeholders (p. 589). Therefore, continual engagement with learning community participants is necessary to gauge and counter potential divisive social practices that occur among homophilous groups of post-adolescent

students. Furthermore, providing participants opportunities to conduct formative evaluations throughout a program's operational cycle will help facilitators become aware of challenges and deficiencies. Periodic evaluation can equip program facilitators with the knowledge needed to address problems before they become widespread.

Curricular engagement alone offers little to integrate peer groups, particularly learning communities and other education cohorts vulnerable to intergroup bias. Countering intergroup bias requires an "increase in the quantity and quality of intergroup contact" (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002, p. 589). Therefore, successful programming requires active involvement of faculty and staff by joining with students in all facets of the learning community process. Learning communities cannot exist singularly as vehicles to promote retention and persistence. Unfortunately, too many practitioners concentrate on the assumed benefits of program implementation rather than developing sound curricula and socially integrative programs that contribute to positive experiences for all stakeholders. Program facilitators must recognize that sharing in scholarly endeavors, field trips, socialization, and cultural engagement opportunities bonds students and faculty. Forging these bonds strengthens community among all program stakeholders and guards against pitfalls that detracted from the programs in this research project such as formation of cliques, social marginalization, and rebellion.

For both LLCs investigated in this research project, faculty and staff contributions to their respective programs sharply dropped after the conclusion of the fall 2013 semester. Therefore, the void left by too little programming during the spring 2014 semester certainly contributed to several students expressing disappointment in their experiences with their programs. This outcome alone reinforces previous research on the powerful role faculty and staff members shoulder in contributing to the success of any given learning community initiative (Brittenham et

al., 2003; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Smith et al., 2004). However, an arguably more important realization is the possibility of contentious relationships between faculty and staff members potentially undermining learning community programs. To ease tension that might inherently exist between faculty members and administrative staff (Holton & Phillips, 1995; Kuo, 2009), learning community leaders must commit to carrying out the mission of the program. Doing so requires investing in student participants but also other institutional entities contributing to the program.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the social class structures documented in the two LLCs chronicled in this study are unique to those programs, the existence of a stratified and divisive social climate within such tightly integrated programs suggests susceptibility to negative outcomes for any LLC initiative. Therefore, future research endeavors should replicate this study at other institutions hosting learning community programs. Furthermore, future research should document the experiences of learning community stakeholders over an extended period of time beyond a single semester or academic year. A limitation of this study is that it documented a lone iteration of two established LLC programs for one academic year. The findings of this research project only represent the experiences of the two cohorts active during the 2013-2014 academic year. Therefore, gathering longitudinal qualitative data documenting stakeholders' experiences relative to specific programs may broaden understanding of the learning community phenomenon. Additionally, a quantitative longitudinal study at multiple institutions chronicling learning community participants' social experiences might offer breadth of research not possible through qualitative inquiry. While limited in depth, quantitative inquiry might reveal trends across groups that warrant further investigation.

Another consideration for future research pertains to non-residential learning community programs. Replicating this study at institutions hosting non-residential learning communities will further understanding of the social processes at play within learning community programs. Given the immersive nature of LLCs, questions remain as to the extent the residential component of a LLC contributes to or detracts from participants' collegiate experiences. Identifying shared and unique challenges non-residential learning community stakeholders face versus those of LLC stakeholders promises to improve practice by documenting challenges inherent in both program models.

Finally, researchers must further investigate the manner by which "corrosive forms of social hostility" arise within peer groups such as learning communities (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002, p. 576). While the theories of homophily, primary group formation and interaction, and social class conflict may explain the emergence of unintended consequences within learning communities, other theories and constructs from the fields of social psychology and sociology may equally inform learning community research. This study focused on the emergence of unintended consequences that inadvertently arise as a result of the LLC design, but this study does not fully address the social circumstances between individuals that may perpetuate group dysfunction. Consequently, a need remains for exploration of intergroup bias and its occurrence in distinct populations to further understanding of social processes within learning communities. Therefore, future research should explore how theories of intergroup bias account for prejudice and oppression within learning communities. A variety theories and constructs including social identity theory, optimal distinctiveness theory, social dominance theory, and even Michels' (1966) Iron Law of Oligarchy may inform research on social behaviors of those within learning communities (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Leach, 2005).

Learning communities remain a powerful method for uniting the collegiate community in advancing scholarship and providing students with a rewarding introduction to the academy. As revealed in this study, however, unintended negative consequences may overshadow and neutralize intended outcomes. Therefore, those charged with oversight of learning community programs must shepherd their implementation and development to ensure participants reap intended benefits.

References

American Anthropological Association. (2009, September). *Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association.* Retrieved from http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/AAA-Ethics-Code-2009.pdf

Andersen, M. L., & Taylor, H. F. (2010). *Sociology: The essentials* (6th ed). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Andrade, M. S. (2007-2008). Learning communities: Examining positive outcomes. *Journal of College Student Retention, 9*(1), 1-20.

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

Baker, S., & Pomerantz, N. (2000-2001). Impact of learning communities on retention at a metropolitan university. *Journal of College Student Retention, 2*(2), 115-126.

Barbatis, P. (2010). Underprepared, ethnically diverse community college students: Factors contributing to persistence. *Journal of Developmental Education,33*(3), 14-24.

Barnett, B. G., Basom, M. R., Yerkes, D., & Norris, C. J. (2000). Cohorts in educational leadership preparation programs: Benefits, difficulties, and the potential for developing school leaders. *Educational Administration, 36*(2), 255-282.

Barnett, B. G., & Caffarella, R. S. (1992, October). *The use of cohorts: A powerful way for addressing issues of diversity in preparation programs*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, Minneapolis, MN.

Barnett, B. G., & Muse, I. D. (1993). Cohort groups in educational administration: Promises and challenges. *Journal of School Leadership, 3*(4), 400-415.

Berger, J. (1997). Students' sense of community in residence halls, social integration, and first-year persistence. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(5), 441-444.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Borden, V. M. H., Burton, K. L., Evenbeck, S. E., & Williams, G. A. (1997). The impact of academic support programs on student performance and persistence. *Research Brief, 4*(4), 1-14.

Borden, V. M., & Rooney, P. M. (1998). Evaluating and assessing learning communities. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum, 9*(1), 73-88.

Boyd, C. J., McCabe, S. E., Cranford, J. A., Morales, M., Lange, J. E., Reed, M. B., Ketchie, J. M., & Scott, M. S. (2008, August). Heavy episodic drinking and its consequences: The protective effects of same-sex, residential living-learning communities for undergraduate women. *Addict Behavior, 33*(8), 987-993.

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love or outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues, 55*(3), 429-444.

Brighton, R., & Phelps, J. M. (2012, March 15). Learning communities: More to it than just pairing courses. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 29*(3), 22.

Brittenham, R., Cook, R., Hall, J. B., Moore-Whitesell, P., Ruhl-Smith, C., Shafii-Mousavi, M., Showalter, J., Smith, K., & White, K. (2003). Connections: An integrated community of learners. *Journal of Developmental Education, 27*(1), 18-25.

Brower, A. M., Golde, C. M., & Allen, C. (2003, Spring). Residential learning communities positively affect college binge drinking. *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal, 40*(3), 132-152.

Browne, M. N. & Minnick, K. J. (2005, December). The unnecessary tension between learning communities and intellectual growth. *College Student Journal, 39*(4), 775-784.

Butler, K. L., & Dawkins, P. W. (2008). The impact of a "Healthy Youth" learning community on student learning outcome measures. *The Journal of Negro Education, 77*(3), 264-270.

Cabrera, A. F., Amaury, N., & Castaneda, M. B. (1993, March-April). College persistence: Structural equations modeling test of an integrated model of student retention. *Journal of Higher Education, 64*(2), 123-139.

Capone, C., Wood, M. D., Borsari, B., & Laird, R. D. (2007, September). Fraternity and sorority involvement, social influences and alcohol use among college students: A prospective examination. *Addictive Behaviors, 21*(3), 316-327.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2010). *The Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education*. Retrieved from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching website: http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/

Cashin, J. R., Presley, C. A., & Meilman, P. W. (1998). Alcohol use in the Greek system: Follow the leader? *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 59*(1), 63-70.

Christie, N. G., & Dinham, S. M. (1991, July-August). Institutional and external influences on social integration in the freshman year. *Journal of Higher Education, 62*(4), 412-436.

Clotfelter, C. T. (2001, Winter). Who are the alumni donors? Giving by two generations of alumni from selective colleges. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 12*(2), 119-138.

Cooley, C. H. (1962). *Social organization.* New York, NY: Schocken.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crissman, J. L. (2001). Clustered and nonclustered first-year seminars: New students' first-semester experiences. *Journal of the First-Year Experience, 13*(1), 69-88.

Cross, K. P. (1998, July-August). Why learning communities? Why now? *About*

Campus, 4-11.

Daffron, E., & Holland, C. J. (2009). Honors living-learning communities: A model of success and collaboration. *Honors in Practice, 5*. 197-210.

Dewey, J. (1974). *John Dewey, on education: Selected writings*. R. D. Archambault, (Ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Dinsmore, J., & Wenger, K. (2006, Winter). Relationships in preservice teacher preparation: From cohorts to communities. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 33*(1), 57.

Dunlap, L., & Pettitt, M. (2008). Assessing student outcomes in learning communities: Two decades of studies at a community college. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College, 15*(2), 140-149.

Engstrom, C. M., & Tinto, V. (2008). Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on the persistence of low-income students. *Opportunity Matters, 1*, 5-21.

Franklin, K. K. (2000). Shared and connected learning in a freshman learning community. *Journal of the First-Year Experience, 12*(2), 33-60.

Gabelnick, F., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R. S., & Smith, B. L. (1990). *Learning communities: Creating connections among students, faculty, and disciplines.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gaier, S. (2005). Alumni satisfaction with their undergraduate academic experience and the impact on alumni giving and participation. *International Journal of Educational Advancement, 5*(4), 279-288.

Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., Airasian, P. W. (2009). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (6th ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Goldberg, B., & Finkelstein, M. (2002). Effects of a first-semester learning community on non-traditional technical students. *Innovative Higher Education, 26*(4), 235-249.

Gordon, T. W., Young, J. C., & Kalianov, C. J. (2001). Connecting the freshman year experience through learning communities: Practical implications for academic and student affairs units. *College Student Affairs Journal, 20*(2), 37.

Greenlee, B. J., & Karanxha, Z. (2010, September). A study of cohort dynamics in educational leadership cohort and non-cohort groups. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 5*(11), 357-379.

Hansen, E. J., & Stephens, J. A. (2000, September). The ethics of learner-centered education. *Change, 32*(5), 40-52.

Hardin, C. J. (1988). Access to higher education: Who belongs? *Journal of Developmental Education, 70,* 324-345.

Harris, B. A. (2006-2007). The importance of creating a "sense of community." *Journal of College Student Retention, 8*(1), 83-105.

Hewstone, M., Rubin, M., & Willis, H. (2002). Intergroup bias. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*. 575-604.

Hill, M. S. (1995). Educational leadership cohort models: Changing the talk to changing the walk. *Planning and Changing, 26*(3/4), 179-189.

Hill, P. (1985, October). *The rationale for learning communities and learning community models*. Paper presented at the Inaugural Conference on Learning Communities of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, Olympia Washington.

Hill, W., & Woodward, L. S. (2013, November/December). Examining the impact learning communities have on college education students on an urban campus. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(6), 643-648.

Holton, S. A., & Phillips, G. (1995, Winter). Can't live with them, can't live without them: Faculty and administrators in conflict. *New Directions in Higher Education, 92*, 43-50.

Hotchkiss, J. L., Moore, R. E., Pitts, M. M. (2006). Freshmen learning communities, college performance, and retention. *Education Economics, 14*(2), 197-210.

Hung, D., Tan, S., & Koh, T. (2006, Spring). From traditional to constructivist epistemologies: A proposed theoretical framework based on activity theory for learning communities. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research, 17*(1), 37-56.

Inkelas, K. K., & Weisman, J. L. (2003, May-June). Different by design: An examination of student outcomes among participants in three types of living-learning programs. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(3), 335-368.

Jackon, P. (1968). *Life in Classrooms*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Jaffee, D. (2004, July 9). Learning communities can be cohesive—and divisive. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B-16.

Jaffee, D. (2007, Spring). Peer cohorts and unintended consequences of freshman learning communities. *College Teaching, 55*(2), 65-72.

Jaffee, D., Carle, A. C., Phillips, R., & Paltoo, L. (2008). Intended and unintended consequences of first-year learning communities: An initial investigation. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 20*(1), 53-70.

Jetten, J., Spears, R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (1996, December). Intergroup norms and intergroup discrimination: Distinctive self-categorization and social identity effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*(6), 1222-1233.

Johnson, J. L. (2000-2001). Learning communities and special efforts in the retention of university students: What works, what doesn't, and is the return worth the investment? *Journal of College Student Retention, 2*(3), 219-238.

Johnson, J. L., & Romanoff, S. J. (1999). Higher education residential learning communities: What are the implications for student success? *College Student Journal, 33*(3), 385.

Jones, R. & Smith, B. L. (1984). *Against the current: Reform and experimentation in higher education.* Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

Kandel, D. B. (1978, September). Homophily, selection, and socialization in adolescent friendships. *The American Journal of Sociology, 84*(2), 427-436.

Keup, J. R. (2005-2006). The impact of curricular interventions on intended second year re-enrollment. *Journal of College Student Retention, 7*(1-2), 61-89.

King, A. (1993, Winter). From sage on the stage to guide on the side. *College Teaching, 41*(1), 30-35.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kuo, H. (2009). Understanding relationships between academic staff and administrators: An organizational culture perspective. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 31*(1), 43-54.

Kvale, S., & Brinkman, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lardner, E., & Malnarich, G. (2008, July-August). A new era in learning-community work: Why the pedagogy of intentional integration matters. *Change, 40*(4), 30-37.

Lazarsfeld, P. F., & Merton, R. K. (1954). Friendship as a social process: A substantive and methodological analysis. In M. Berger, T. Abel, & C. Page (Eds.), *Freedom and control in modern society* (pp. 18-66). New York, NY: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.

Leach, D. K. (2005, September). The iron law of what again? Conceptualizing oligarchy across organizational forms. *Sociological Theory, 23*(3), 312-337.

Lei, S., Gorelick, D., Short, K., Smallwoood, L., & Wright-Porter, K. (2011, Spring). Academic cohorts: Benefits and drawbacks of being a member of a community of learners. *Education, 131*(3), 497-504.

Lenning, O. T., & Ebbers, L. H. (1999). *The powerful potential of learning communities. Improving education for the future. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report* (Volume 26, Issue 6).Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

Levitz, N., & Noel, L. (1989). Connecting students to institutions: Keys to retention and success. In M. L. Upcraft & J. N. Gardner (Eds.), *The freshman experience: Helping students survive and succeed in college.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lichtenstein, M. (2005, July/August). The importance of classroom environments in the assessment of learning community outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(4), 341-356.

Logan, C. R., Salisbury-Glennon, & Spence, L. D. (2000). The Learning Edge Academic Program: Toward a community of learners. *Journal of the First-Year Experience, 12*(1), 77-104.

MacGregor, J. (1991). What differences do learning communities make? *Washington Center News, 6*(1), 4-9.

Maher, M. A. (2004, July-August). What really happens in cohorts. *About Campus, 9*(3), 18-23.

Marchand, A. (2010, April 4). Wild about Anime? There's a dorm for you; Colleges cater to students' interests with special housing to encourage learning around the clock. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 56*(30),

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2012). *The communist manifesto*. New York: SoHo.

Maxwell, W. E. (1998, Fall). Supplemental instruction, learning communities, and students studying together. *Community College Review, 26*(2), 1.

McCabe, S. E., Scholenberg, J. E., Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Kloska, D. D. (2004). Selection and socialization effects of fraternities and sororities on US college student substance abuse: A multi-cohort national longitudinal study. *Addiction, 100*(4), 512-524.

McCabe, S. E., Boyd, C. J., Cranford, J. A., Slayden, J., Lange, J. E., Reed, M. B., Ketchie, J. M., & Scott, M. S. (2007, September). Alcohol involvement and participation in residential learning communities among first-year college students. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 68*(5), 722-727.

McFarland, D. A. (2001, November). Student resistance: How the formal and informal organization of classrooms facilitate everyday forms of student defiance. *American Journal of Sociology, 107*(3), 612-678.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology, 27*, 415-44.

Mendelson, M. (2006, Summer). Confessions of a learning community coordinator. *Liberal Education, 92*(3), 56-60.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Michels, R. (1966). *Political parties: A Sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*. New York: Free Press.

Minkler, J. E. (2002, Winter). ERIC review: Learning communities at the community college (community colleges work out the problems that arise with the use of learning communities). *Community College Review, 30*(3), 46-64.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Peterson, K. D., Benson, N., Driscoll, A., Narode, R., Sherman, D., & Tama, C. (1995, Spring). Preservice teacher education using flexible, thematic cohorts. *Teacher Education Quarterly,* 29-42.

Pike, G. R., Schroeder, C. C., & Berry, T. R. (1997). Enhancing the educational impact of residence halls: The relationship between residential learning communities and first-year college experiences and persistence. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(6), 609-621.

Potts, G., Schultz, B., & Foust, J. (2003-2004). The effect of freshmen cohort groups on academic performance and retention. *Journal of College Student Retention, 5*(4), 385-395.

Radencich, M. C., Thompson, T., Anderson, N. A., Oropallo, K., Fleege, P., Harrison, M., Hanley, P., & Gomez, S. (1998). The culture of cohorts: Preservice teacher education teams at a southeastern university in the United States. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 24*(2), 109-127.

Raftery, S. (2005). Developmental learning communities at Metropolitan Community College. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 129*, 63-72.

Recreation Equipment, Incorporated. (2013). *Essential camping skills class*. Retrieved from http://www.rei.com/class/142/market/120

Rendon, L. I. (1993). *Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development* (Report No. ED 371 672). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Reynolds, K., & Hebert, F. T. (1995). Cohort formats and intensive schedules: Added involvement and interaction for continuing higher education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 43*(3), 34-42.

Reynolds, K. & Hebert, F. T. (1998). Learning achievements of students in cohort groups. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *46*(3), 34-42.

Rodriguez, G. G., & Buczinsky, C. (2013). Linking classes: Learning communities: "High" culture, and the working class student. *Learning Community Research and Practice, 1*(2), 1-13.

Ross, D. D., Stafford, L., Church-Pupke, P., & Bondy, E. (2006). Practicing collaboration: What we learn from a cohort that functions well. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 29*(1), 32-43.

Sapon-Shevin, M., & Chandler-Olcott, K. (2001, November/December). Student cohorts: Communities of critique or dysfunctional families? *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(5), 350-364.

Scribner, J. P., & Donaldson, J. F. (2001, December). The dynamics of group learning in a cohort: From nonlearning to transformative learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 37*(5), 605-636.

Scharff, C., & Brown, H. (2004). Thinking through computing: The power of learning communities. *Computer Science Education, 14*(4), 297-320.

Schroeder, C. C., & Hurst, J. C. (1996). Designing learning environments that integrate curricular and cocurricular experiences. *Journal of College Student Development, 37*(2), 174-181.

Schroeder, C. C., Minor, F. D., & Tarkow, T. A. (1999). Freshman interest groups: Partnerships for promoting student success. *New Directions for Student Services, 87*, 37-49.

Shapiro, N. S., & Levine, J. H. (1999). *Creating learning communities*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, B. L. (2001, Fall). The challenge of learning communities as a growing national movement. *AAC&U Peer Review, 4*(1), 1-6.

Smith, B. L., & MacGregor, J. T. (1992). What is collaborative learning? In A. Goodsell, M. Maher, V. Tinto, B.L. Smith, & J. MacGregor (Eds.), *Collaborative learning: A sourcebook for higher education* (pp. 10-30). University Park, PA: National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.

Smith, B. L., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R. S., & Gabelnick, F. (2004). *Learning communities: Reforming undergraduate education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Soldner, L., Lee, Y., & Duby, P. (1999-2000). Welcome to the block: Developing freshman learning communities that work. *Journal of College Student Retention, 1*(2), 115-129.

Sommo, C., Mayer, A. K., Rudd, T., & Cullinan, D. (2012, July). *Opening doors commencement day: Six-year effects of a freshman learning community program at Kingsborough Community College*. New York, NY: Manpower Demonstration Resource Center (MDRC).

Spanierman, L. B. Soble, J. R., Mayfield, J. B., Neville, H. A., Aber, M., Khuri, L., & De La Rosa, B. (2013). Living learning communities and students' sense of community and belonging. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 50*(3), 308-325.

Stassen, M. L. A. (2003). Student outcomes: The impact of varying living-learning community models. *Research in Higher Education, 44*(5), 581-613.

Stefanou, C. R., & Salisbury-Glennon, J. D. (2002). Developing motivation and cognitive learning strategies through an undergraduate learning community. *Learning Environments Research, 5*, 77-97.

Taylor, K., Moore, W. S., MacGregor, J., & Lindblad, J. (2003). *Learning community research and assessment: What we know now.* National Learning Communities Project Monograph Series. Olympia, WA: The Evergreen State College, Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.

Teitel, L. (1997). Understanding and harnessing the power of the cohort model in preparing educational leaders. *Peabody Journal of Education, 72*(2), 66-85.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education. *Review of Educational Research, 45*, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987, November 20). *The principles of effective retention.* Paper presented at the Fall Conference of the Maryland College Personnel Association, Largo, MD.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (Second ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Tinto, V. (1998, January). *Learning communities and the reconstruction of remedial education in higher education*. Paper presented at the Conference on Replacing Remediation in Higher Education, Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

Tinto, V. (2003). Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on student success. *Higher Education Monograph Series, 2003-1, Higher Education Program, School of Education, Syracuse University* [Monograph]. Retrieved from http://faculty.soe.syr.edu/vtinto/Files/Learning%20Better%20Together.pdf

Tinto, V., & Goodsell-Love, A. (1993, Fall). Building community. *Liberal Education, 79*(4), 16-22.

Tinto, V., & Love, A. G. (1995). *A longitudinal study of learning communities at LaGuardia Community College.* (ERIC Report No. ED380178). Washington, DC: Office of Education Research and Improvement. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED380178.pdf

Tinto, V., Goodsell-Love, A, & Russo, P. (1994). *Building learning communities for new college students: A summary of research findings of the Collaborative Learning Project*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.

Tinto, V., & Russo, P. (1994, Fall). Coordinated studies programs: Their effect on student involvement at a community college. *Community College Review, 22,* 16-25.

Thomas, S. L. (2000, September). Ties that bind (understanding student integration and persistence). *Journal of Higher Education, 71*(5), 591-611.

Tokuno, K. A. (1993). Long-term and recent student outcomes of the Freshman Interest Group Program. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience, 5*(2), 7-28.

Tokuno, K. A., & Campbell, F. L. (1992). The Freshman Interest Group Program at the University of Washington: Effects on retention and scholarship. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience, 4*(1), 7-22.

Tucker, J. E. (1999-2000). Tinto's model and successful college transitions. *Journal of College Student Retention, 1*(2), 163-175.

Tussman, J. (1997). *The beleaguered college*. Berkley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies Press, University of California.

Visher, M. G., & Teres, J. (2011, July). *Breaking new ground: An impact study of career-focused learning communities at Kingsborough Community College*. New York, NY: National Center for Postsecondary Research.

Visher, M. G., Weiss, M. J., Weismann, E., Rudd, T., Wathington, H. D. (2012, July). *The effects of learning communities for students in developmental education: A synthesis of findings from six community colleges*. New York, NY: National Center for Postsecondary Research.

Walleri, R. D., Stoker, C. L., & Stoering, J. M. (1998, Fall). Building a community of learning: A comprehensive approach to as-risk students. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College, 6*(1), 15-26.

Washington Center at the Evergreen State College. (2013). *The national resource center for learning communities*. Retrieved from http://www.evergreen.edu/washingtoncenter/index.html

Wawrzynski, M. R., & Jessup-Anger, J. (2010, March/April). From expectations to experiences: Using a structural typology to understand first-year student outcomes in academically based living-learning communities. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*(2), 201-217.

Weber, J. (2000). *Learning communities in higher education: A field observation case study*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). (ED 459 882).

Weick, K. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weiss, M. J., Visher, M. G., & Wathington, H. D. (2010, June). *Learning communities for students in developmental reading: An impact study at Hillsborough Community College*. New York, NY: National Center for Postsecondary Research.

Wright, D. G. (1989). Clustered learning in the liberal arts for above-average freshmen. *College Student Journal, 23*, 234-241.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yockey, F. A., & George, A. A. (1998). The effects of a freshman seminar paired with supplemental instruction. *Journal of the First-Year Experience, 10*(2), 57-76.

Zhao, C., & Kuh, G. D. (2004, March). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(2), 115-138.

Appendices

Appendix A

Sample Interview Protocol

Project: *Unintended Consequences of Collegiate Living-Learning Communities at a Public University*

Date of Interview:
Time of Interview:
Location:
Interviewee:
Learning Community Standing (Faculty, Staff, Administrator, or Student):

This is a qualitative research study that will fulfill degree requirements for the Ph.D. in Education. The purpose of this study is to identify and examine unintended consequences of collegiate living-learning communities (LLCs). [redacted] students, faculty, and staff associated with the [redacted] Learning Community and the [redacted] Learning Community are invited to participate in a research study concerning learning community programs. Participation in this research is voluntary, and those who choose to participate may exit the study at any time for any reason. Furthermore, information gathered for this research project will be reported anonymously. Therefore, any identifying data naming the institution, study participants, or other identifiers will be cleansed from the data. Participation in this research is voluntary, and those who choose to participate may exit the study at any time for any reason.

Reminders

- Have interviewees sign the Informed Consent
- Obtain permission to record the interview
- Turn on recorder and timepiece

Interview questions:

1. What is your intended major and why did you elect to attend [redacted]?

2. Tell me how you came to be associated with the [redacted] Learning Community?

3. Describe your involvement with the [redacted] Learning Community.

4. Characterize for me your relationship with the faculty and the staff who are affiliated with the [redacted] Learning Community.

5. How would you describe the [redacted] Learning Community?

6. How would you describe the personalities of your peers in the [redacted] Learning Community?

7. What was it like being in the [redacted] Learning Community when you first moved in on campus?

8. Describe what it was like making friends with the other participants in the group?

9. How would you characterize the friendships among [redacted] Learning Community participants currently?

10. Describe any challenges the group has faced? What brought those challenges on?

11. How would you characterize your role in the [redacted] Learning Community?

12. Explain for me what is the purpose of the [redacted] Learning Community?

13. Describe the involvement of the [redacted] Learning Community faculty members?

14. How does the [redacted] Learning Community RA interact with the group?

15. Is there anything further you wish to share today regarding your experiences with the [redacted] Learning Community?

Thank the interviewee for his/her time, and remind him/her how to contact you in the event of questions or concerns!

Appendix B

FORM B APPLICATION

All applicants are encouraged to read the Form B guidelines. If you have any questions as you develop Form B, contact your Departmental Review Committee (DRC) or Research Compliance Services at the Office of Research.

FORM B

IRB # _____

Date Received in OR _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

1. **Principal Investigator Co-Principal Investigator:**
   David Buchanan Smith
   265 Wayland Dr.

   Greeneville, TN 37743

   Home Phone: [redacted]

   Office Phone: (423) 798-1635

   E-mail (UTK): dsmit111@utk.edu

   E-mail (Work): dsmith@tusculum.edu

Faculty Advisor:
E. Grady Bogue, Interim Chancellor

University of Tennessee-Chattanooga

Office of the Chancellor

615 McCallie Avenue

Dept. 5605

Chattanooga, TN 37403

Office Phone: (423) 425-4141

E-mail (UTC): grady-bogue@utc.edu

E-mail (UTK): bogue@utk.edu

Department:
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

2. **Project Classification:**
   Dissertation

3. **Title of Project:**
   Unintended Consequences of Collegiate Living-Learning Community Programs at a Public University

4. **Starting Date:**
   Upon IRB Approval

5. **Estimated Completion Date:**

   December 1, 2013

6. **External Funding** *(if any)**:***

   N/A

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The research project will document the consequences of college students' participation in university-sanctioned living-learning communities. Furthermore, this project will chronicle the extent to which students may encounter enriching experiences as well as difficulties as members of collegiate living-learning communities.

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this research project will consist of [redacted] *undergraduate students enrolled in two of the institution's residential-learning community programs, the institution's learning community support staff/administrators, and associated faculty mentors.*

The principal investigator/researcher will gain access to these students as well as associated staff, administrators, and faculty through a single point-of-contact within the institution's University Housing

office. [redacted], Associate Director of University Housing, Residence Life at [redacted], will facilitate contact with research subjects. As evidenced by the letter of cooperation included in Appendix A, [redacted] verifies the institution's commitment to support the principal investigator's research project. Additionally, Appendix B verifies that the target university's Institutional Review Board will permit the research project given the principal investigator gains the University of Tennessee's approval of this IRB Form B Application.

Specifically, the principal investigator's research will focus on stakeholders in two of the institution's residential learning community programs: [redacted]. Both of these residential-learning communities consist of approximately thirty students—most of whom are traditional aged, first-time freshmen. These students along with associated faculty, peer mentors, and support staff will receive invitations to participate in focus group meetings. Additionally, select student participants will receive invitations to participate in individual interviews.

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Data for this evaluation will be collected from [redacted] residential-learning community student participants, program facilitators, and select administrators. More specifically, in order to collect data from students, [redacted] residential-learning community participants will be interviewed both individually and in focus groups. Unless a telephone interview is the only option convenient for a given participant, interview sessions will primarily occur in person. Furthermore, interviews will be conducted in a private office or classroom secured by cooperating institutional personnel such as the Associate Director of University Housing, Residence Life. Interviews will adhere to a format Yin (2009) describes as "guided conversations" whereby the researcher follows a semi-structured protocol (p. 106). The researcher will loosely follow an interview protocol but will also allow respondents' answers to guide the direction of the dialogue (see attached Appendix C). The intent of these interviews is to document students' individual and collective perceptions of their experiences within a residential learning community as well as their perceptions of program impact. Likewise, other residential learning community stakeholders (select university administrators and learning community facilitators) will receive invitations to participate in individual interviews.

Interviews and focus group sessions will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will adhere to a conversational, non-threatening exchange between the principal investigator and respondents; moreover, interviews and focus group sessions will be minimally intrusive, and respondents will be encouraged to stop the session if at any time they feel uncomfortable. Participation in interviews and focus groups for the purposes of this research project will be completely voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. Interviews will be anonymous in order to protect the identities of the respondents. Collected data will not include identifiers such as names, e-mail addresses, or other personal data that could potentially identify a respondent or the institution at which the research is occurring. Furthermore, any data that could potentially identify the research location or link a respondent to his or her identity will be cleansed from all transcripts before any public presentation or reporting of the research findings. The only person who will have access to the raw data is the principal investigator, David Smith.

The principal investigator will also observe program participants and select faculty and staff during living-learning community-specific events in order to document living-learning community interaction in its natural environment. To minimize intrusion, the learning community facilitator will introduce the principal investigator in order to "[gain] the confidence and permission of those who can approve the activity" (Merraim, 2009). Furthermore, these observations will be limited to an hour in most cases so the presence of the researcher remains appropriately minimal. Furthermore, the principal investigator will conduct observations of residential learning community events where he will be positioned as a non-participant observer. Depending on the activity or event, the principal investigator will be situated in a classroom, common gathering space within a residence hall, or common location on campus such as one

of the institution's dining facilities; however, a representative of the Office of University Housing, Residence Life will be present for the duration of these events to ensure the researcher only accesses these pre-approved areas. Doing so will enable the principal investigator to document the social interplay between students and associated faculty and staff.

Additional research will entail artifact and document analysis to mine data from various printed materials related to the two residential learning community programs. These materials will include promotional materials, program records, and event attendance logs.

All data collection will occur in written format, and select events such as interviews and focus groups will also entail the use of audio cassette taping. Once data collection has concluded, the researcher will analyze data and conduct a coding process to identify emergent themes. In coding data, the researcher may use qualitative analysis software, QDA Miner, to assist in extracting information to report as findings.

In conducting this research project, all written and audio records will remain in the principal investigator's possession. When these records are not in use they will be stored in a locked cabinet at the principal investigator's private office at Tusculum College in Greeneville, Tennessee.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Risks associated with participation in this research project are minimal. Nonetheless, some inherent risks of participating in interviews and focus groups entail the possibility of discomfort if topics of discussion or select questions broach subjects that are uncomfortable for interviewees/focus group participants. If such occasions arise, the principal investigator will have ensured that participants know they can choose not to answer questions or even end the interview without any repercussions or questions asked. Similarly, focus group participants will have the option of leaving sessions if they feel uncomfortable at any point. In the rare event that focus group discussions were to become heated or contentious between participants, the principal investigator will end the focus group session and ask the attending university official (such as the residential learning community coordinator or the Associate Director of University Housing, Residence Life) to mediate and/or defuse any tensions.

In relation to field observations, the principal investigator will make certain that participants know of his presence and the intent of the observation. A university official will introduce the principal investigator so that those in attendance of the event under observation have full awareness of the principal investigator's presence and intent. Furthermore, those in attendance will have the option of opting out of the event if they feel uncomfortable participating. The researcher will conduct observations as a non-participant observer remaining visible but not interacting in proceedings. Observations will occur in classrooms, common gathering spaces where learning community activities or meetings occur in residence halls, and other campus facilities such as one of the institution's dining halls.

Maintaining the confidentiality of research participants is of utmost concern for the principal investigator. Case studies, in particular, present vulnerabilities that the researcher must carefully guard. Therefore, in maintaining confidentiality for those who participate in this research project, the principal investigator will first gain informed consent from each participant in the project (see Appendix D). This consent will be kept locked and inaccessible to anyone other than the principal investigator. Any data that is collected—whether in written or audio recording format—will be kept locked in a secured cabinet at the principal investigator's office at Tusculum College. Only the principal investigator will have access to the contents of the cabinet. Furthermore, when analyzing the material collected, any identification markers or pieces of information that could be linked to specific individuals will be cleansed (removed) from the data. Finally, once the research project has been concluded, all documents and recordings will be destroyed via incineration. However, as mandated by the institution's Office of Research, the signed informed consent documents will be transferred to the University of Tennessee and kept secured there for three years after the conclusion of the project.

VI. BENEFITS

This research project offers the prospect of adding to extant literature regarding learning community program outcomes in relation to individuals' experiences. The current body of literature regarding

collegiate living-learning communities lacks qualitative research documenting the individual participant's experiences. Therefore, this research promises to illuminate the experiential outcomes of living-learning community participation.

Furthermore, by engaging in this research project, [redacted] living-learning community stakeholders stand to benefit from greater awareness of the impact the program has in relation to the individual student's experience.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

The principal investigator will gain informed consent from participants by interacting with each potential project participant. During these meetings, each potential research participant will be provided with a detailed, written informed consent statement to read that specifies information about the research project, participants' involvement in the study, risks, benefits, confidentiality, emergency medical treatment, the principal investigator's contact information, and a disclaimer noting that participation in the research project is voluntary. The informed consent document will also contain disclaimers that those who choose to participate in the study may also elect to withdraw at any time for any reason. Upon reading the informed consent document, prospective participants may then take the form home with them so they have ample time to determine if they wish to participate in the project. The principal investigator will be readily available to retrieve any signed informed consent documents as they become available.

The language used to craft the informed consent form is clear, easy to understand, and concise. The informed consent form follows the standard format available through the University of Tennessee's Office of Research.

All signed informed consent documents will be kept confidential and secure at the principal investigator's place of employment—a private office at Tusculum College in Greeneville, Tennessee. Informed consent documents will be locked in a secure cabinet solely accessible to the principal investigator. Upon completion of the research project, the signed informed consent documents will be transferred to the University of Tennessee and secured there for three years.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The principal investigator's education credentials qualify him to conduct this research project. As a doctoral candidate from the University of Tennessee's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department of the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, the principal investigator has the requisite training and classroom experience to sufficiently conduct a qualitative research case study.

Furthermore, the principal investigator is uniquely qualified to carry out this research project as his professional credentials include fifteen years of experience working with students and collaborating with colleagues in a higher education setting. Furthermore, the principal investigator has four years of experience implementing a living-learning community program at the institution where he is employed (Tusculum College). This experience equips him with knowledge of the field he is currently researching; thus he is attuned to the learning community population as well as the professional obligations of those who facilitate learning community programs.

IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

Administrative authorities from the Office of University Housing, [redacted] have granted the principal investigator access to residential learning community-specific classrooms on campus as well as common gathering areas in the residence halls where the target living-learning community participants reside. The rooms made available to the researcher meet the needs for this project. All afford the researcher and participants' privacy and security. A university official has provided an official letter of permission to use facilities at [redacted] which accompanies this document.

In terms of equipment used during this research project, the principal investigator will employ the use of an audio recording device. This device, a hand-held Panasonic voice-activated cassette recorder, will enable the taping of focus group sessions and individual interviews as needed.

When analyzing data gathered through this research project, the principal investigator will use a computer software program, QDA Miner, to assist in the extraction of information from the raw data.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)
By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator(s) further agree that:

1. ***Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.***

2. ***Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.***

3. ***An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.***

4. ***Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.***

XI. SIGNATURES

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

Principal Investigator: David Buchanan Smith

Signature: _____ **Date: June 13, 2013**

Co-Principal Investigator: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Student Advisor (if any): _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

[ ] Expedited Review -- Category(s): _____

OR

[ ] Full IRB Review

Chair, DRC: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Department Head: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on (Date) : _____

Approved:
Research Compliance Services
Office of Research
1534 White Avenue

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer or by phone at (865) 974-3466.

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Unintended Consequences of Collegiate Living-Learning Community Programs at a Public University

INTRODUCTION

[redacted] students, faculty, and staff associated with the [redacted] Learning Community and the [redacted] Learning Community are invited to participate in a research study concerning learning community programs. The purpose of this research study is to identify unintended consequences of collegiate living-learning communities. Participation in this research is voluntary, and those who choose to participate may exit the study at any time for any reason.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Subjects involved in this study may voluntarily participate in this research project through specific procedures. Specifically, research participants may contribute in the following ways:

- Observation in specific learning community activities such as linked course classes, group meetings, and learning community-specific activities.
- Focus group interviews where groups of program participants are interviewed jointly (maximum 30 minute interview)
- Individual interviews where the researcher conducts one-on-one interviews to gain an understanding of a program participant's views and opinions as related to the living-learning community program (maximum 30 minute interview)

Participants' time commitment is minimal. Participate selected for and agreeing to participate in focus groups and/or individual interviews will engage in an interview session lasting no more than 30 minutes. Depending on a participant's level of involvement in the study (whether the participant is involved in more than one interview), no research subject's time commitment will exceed 2 hours.

The researcher may rely on audio recording to document focus group discussions and individual interviews. Recordings are necessary solely for the purpose of accurate documentation. Any audio recordings will be kept confidential and locked in the researcher's office at Tusculum College. Recordings will only be accessed for the purpose of transcribing data.

_____ Participant's initials

RISKS

Risks associated with participation in this research project are minimal. Nonetheless, some inherent risks of participating in interviews and focus groups entail the possibility of discomfort if topics of discussion or select questions broach subjects that are uncomfortable. If such occasions arise, you may choose not to answer questions or simply exit the interview without any repercussions or questions asked. In the rare event that focus group discussions were to become heated or contentious between participants, the principal investigator will end the focus group session and ask the attending university official (such as the living-learning community coordinator of the Associate Director of Housing, Residence Life) to mediate and/or defuse any tensions.

In relation to field observations, the principal investigator will make certain that participants know of his presence and the intent of the observation. A university official will introduce the principal investigator so that those in attendance of the event under observation have full awareness of the principal investigator's presence and intent. Furthermore, those in attendance will have the option of opting out of the event if they feel uncomfortable participating.

BENEFITS

This research project offers the prospect of adding to extant literature regarding learning community program outcomes in relation to individuals' experiences. The current body of literature regarding collegiate living-learning communities lacks qualitative research documenting the individual participant's experiences. Therefore, this research promises to illuminate the experiential outcomes of living-learning community participation.

Furthermore, by engaging in this research project, [redacted] living-learning community stakeholders stand to benefit from greater awareness of the impact the program has in relation to the individual student's experience.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Maintaining the confidentiality of research participants is of utmost concern for the principal investigator. Case studies, in particular, present vulnerabilities that the researcher must carefully guard. Therefore, any data that is collected—whether in written or audio recording format—will be stored in a locked cabinet at the principal investigator's office at Tusculum College. Only the principal investigator will have access to the contents of the cabinet.

_____ Participant's initials

Furthermore, when analyzing the material collected, any identification markers or pieces of information that could be linked to specific individuals will be cleansed (removed) from the data. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Finally, once the research project has been concluded, all documents and recordings will be destroyed via incineration.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the principal investigator/researcher, David Smith, by calling 1-800-729-0256 ext. 5231).

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the principal investigator/researcher, David Smith, at Tusculum College, P.O. Box 5053, Greeneville, TN 37743, and (1-800-729-0256 ext. 5231 or dsmith@tusculum.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Vita

David Smith was born in Richmond, VA, and raised in Gate City, VA. He is the only child of Oscar and Patricia Smith. He graduated from Gate City High School in 1989. After high school, David enrolled at Mountain Empire Community College in Big Stone Gap, VA where he earned an Associate's Degree in General Studies in 1992. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1995 from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN, and in 1998 he earned a Master of Arts degree in English from East Tennessee State University.

David's professional career began in 1997 at Tusculum College in Greeneville, TN where he worked for the Educational Talent Search TRIO Program until 2008. Employment in TRIO Programs proved particularly rewarding as David, a first-generation college graduate, helped other first-generation students enroll in baccalaureate programs upon completion of high school. In 2008 David began serving as Director of Student Support Services, a TRIO Program dedicated to assisting low-income and first-generation college students complete their baccalaureate programs-of-study. David remains employed at Tusculum College as the Director of Student Support Services, and in his free time he also serves Tusculum College as an adjunct English instructor.