Priming the Pump
Residential Learning Community Effects on Engagement

Presented by:
Kelly Finley, program director residential colleges
“...we’ve got to probe more deeply into the nature of the student experience at a particular institution, and not assume that all colleges of a certain type and size are comparable”

George Kuh, 2003

WHAT TO EXPECT

• Describe Bucknell
• Describe Residential College program
• Describe the study conducted by Dr. Amy Wolaver, economics
• Share results
• Discussion: what do you think?
MEET BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY

Small, private, liberal arts with both engineering & management

9:1 faculty to student ratio

Around 93% retention rate

Residential campus, just under 4,000 undergrads

Predominately White Institution, located in rural PA
MEET BUCKNELL’S RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

Founded in 1986

Seminar courses linked by theme

Themes housed together

Two peer mentors per floor - RA and JF

Programming budget for each theme to support outside of class learning

About 30% of FY class opt in
RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE LEARNING GOALS

Develop capacities consistent with being a member of a community of engaged learners and citizens.

Demonstrate a deep level of understanding as a result of connecting classroom learning with experiential learning.

By integrating the living environment with academics, students will understand and appreciate competing perspectives and viewpoints both inside & outside the classroom.
PROPOSE OF OUR STUDY:

Measure outcomes of Res College experience on student engagement:

• Participation in other High Impact Practices (HIPs)

• Participation in Leadership positions

• Engagement with diverse groups
  • measured by having serious conversations with students from different backgrounds
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Astin’s (1993) “Input → Environment → Outcome” Model
  - Students come to college with skills, or “inputs”
  - Controlling for “inputs” helps isolate outcomes attributed to the environment

Before-College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) & National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data ideal for measuring these outcomes.


They matched student records from the BCSSE & NSSE using student id numbers, making it possible to examine the affect of the Res College from the end of FY 2011, 2014 & 2017, and the end of Senior Year from 2014 & 2017.
INPUTS: HIGH SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

- GPA:
  - Non-RC: 3.65
  - RC: 3.73

- Prepared 2 or more drafts:
  - Non-RC: 15%
  - RC: 20%

- Came to class unprepared:
  - Non-RC: 5%
  - RC: 10%
INPUTS: BEFORE-COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS

- Positive attitude
- Finish even when discouraged
- Ask for help
- Find Information
- Study even when other things to do
- Serious conversations w/ people of different religion / political views
- Serious conversations w/ people of different Race / ethnicity
- Work w/ faculty outside of class

Non-RC vs. RC
ENVIRONMENT

1. Res College participant
   NSSE sample size: FY = 256, SY = 223

2. Res College Resident, non-participant
   NSSE sample size: FY = 37, SY = 49

3. Non-resident, non-participant
   NSSE sample size: FY = 361; SY = 427

Students included in sample size, also took BSSE
Analysis: Multivariate regressions using NSSE outcomes

Regression form controlling for Inputs:

\[ Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 RLC_i + \beta_2 \text{Resident, nonparticipant}_i + \beta_3 X_i + \beta_4 HS_i + u_i \]

- \( Y \) = Student engagement
- \( \alpha \) = constant term
- \( RLC \) = Program participant
- Resident, nonparticipant = Res College Resident, non-participant
- \( X \) = Student inputs: Demographics
- \( HS \) = Student inputs: High school engagement & college expectations
- \( U \) = Error term
OUTCOME: PARTICIPATION IN OTHER HIPS & LEADERSHIP

By senior year, RC participants:

• Completed 1.15 more HIPs than those who weren’t

• 2.55 times more likely to have engaged in research*

• 2.30 times more likely to have held a leadership position*

*significant to .01 level
OUTCOME: ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSE GROUPS

Participation in RC increases likelihood White students report engaging often/very often in conversation with student of different race/ethnicity:

• 1.66 times more likely during first year*
• 1.65 times more likely during senior year*

*significant to .05 level
OUTCOME: SPILLOVER EFFECTS

We found that living in a RC community, without taking part in the RC academic components, had no effect on student engagement.

- In First Year, they are more likely to engage conversation with diverse others, but the effect disappears by Senior Year

- Implies both structural diversity and cross-cultural interaction are necessary
OUTCOME: PARTICIPATION IN NSSE

RC participants less likely to take BCSSE, but more likely to take NSSE at end of first year, and at end of senior year.

Taking survey a measure of engagement?

- If so, we’re comparing most engaged students, do we fully capture the program effect?
- We don’t know about the students that don’t take it
CAVEATS:

• One program, at one institution

• Controlling for biases:
  • BCSSE good option, but may not capture all the inputs
  • Just taking NSSE can be associated with engagement
DISCUSSION:

Thoughts, comments, questions?


Forthcoming: Special Issue on Residential Learning Communities in *Learning Communities Research and Practice* online journal
THANK YOU FOR COMING

RES COLLEGE PEER MENTORS 2019-20
PLEASE REMEMBER TO SUBMIT YOUR EVALUATION ON GUIDEBOOK!