High Impact Practices (HIP)
Cover Sheet 2013 - 2014

Contact Name: Craig Rotter
Department(s): Residence Life
Email: craigr@housing.tamu.edu

Name of HIP: Leadership Living Learning Community (L3C)
Approximate # of TAMU students involved in the HIP: 65 – 90 each year

Please check the TAMU learning outcome(s) associated with this HIP:

Bachelor’s:
- Master the depth of knowledge required of a degree
- Demonstrate critical thinking
- Communicate effectively
- Practice personal and social responsibility
- Demonstrate social, cultural, and global competence
- Prepare to engage in lifelong learning
- Work collaboratively

Master’s:
- Master the degree program requirements
- Apply subject matter knowledge
- Communicate effectively
- Use appropriate technologies
- Develop clear research plans
- Choose ethical course of action

Doctoral:
- Master the degree program requirements
- Apply a variety of strategies and tools
- Communicate effectively
- Develop clear research plans
- Use appropriate technologies
- Teach and explain the subject matter

Please check the QEP learning outcome(s) associated with this HIP:

- Improve student learning by developing habits and skills for lifelong learning — Curiosity, Initiative, Independence, Transfer, Reflection
- Improve student learning by developing habits and skills for integrative learning — Connections to experience, Connections to discipline, Transfer, Integrated communication, Reflection and self-assessment
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Abstract

The Leadership Living Learning Community (L3C) was established in the 2005-2006 academic year as a collaborative undergraduate first year experience by the Department of Residence Life in direct partnership with the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications. Sixty to ninety students participate in the learning community each year. Incoming freshmen apply to the community, which is open to all majors. All participants complete two one-semester credit hour courses in leadership education, ALED 125 in the fall term and ALED 225 in the spring term. A focus on relational leadership and leaders being purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical and process-oriented is at the center of the curriculum. Students have been exposed to a variety of cultures through activities such as a dinner hosted for international graduate students and their families, a field trip to the Brazos Valley World Fest, a Turkic Cultures Festival and at least one performing arts opportunity per year. During the year long experience, students are challenged to consider leadership through the relationships they build among their peers and transference of knowledge from the classroom to experiences both witnessed and lived as well as in decision making that affects self and others.

All participants live on one floor of a residence hall community. A professor in leadership education and a student affairs professional co-teach the course. Since the learning community’s inception, both educators have held an earned doctorate in leadership education. As best as can be done, students are paired with roommates/suitmates with similar majors within the residence hall.

Students who are in this community their first year apply and interview to serve as peer mentors in their sophomore year. Eight to twelve sophomore peer mentors live on the same residence hall floor as the freshmen, two of which serve as resident advisors. Peer mentors complete an additional three-semester credit hour course, ALED 340, in the fall term and a directed study in leadership education in the spring term. Peer mentors are paired and lead small groups of eight to ten freshmen that meet weekly in the residence halls for study, support and discussions about leadership. A full-time residence hall community director, who lives in the residence hall, as a professional staff member manages the learning community peer mentor program.

Students in the program complete reflective exercises throughout their time in the program as part of the required coursework.

Description of the activity

a) **Invest time and effort to purposeful tasks. Please describe the length of time of the experience.**

All student participants are required to complete two one-semester credit hour courses in leadership education in their first year. As part of their course requirements, students participate in an away-from-campus weekend-long retreat, academic field trips, and attend at least one performing arts event per year, sometimes two per year. Student participants who are interested in serving as sophomore peer
mentors to the next year’s first year participants apply and interview for this role. For nearly all of the participants, the length of time of the experience is one academic year, their first year, which research shows is most critical to the successful completion of an academic degree. Students are provided additional attention by peers, faculty and staff. Student participants have shared feedback that, without this experience and the care provided to them in their first year of learning and life experiences, their subsequent experiences and years would not have been as rich.

b) **Interact with staff, advisors, and/or faculty about substantive matters usually over extended periods of time.**

Student participants interact weekly with faculty and staff through classroom discussion and conversations in the residence hall community during their first collegiate year. Regular interactions also occur during and after academic field trips, retreats, service projects and semester-end adjourning activities such as banquets. Faculty and staff who co-teach ALED 125 and 225 lead discussions in the classroom on topics relevant to information provided in the textbook. Conversations connecting what is learned in the classroom to experiences that take place outside of the classroom are intentionally held regularly both in and out of the classroom. Peer mentors (sophomores) meet with the residence hall community director on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to plan and discuss topics covered in on-going small group meetings with the freshmen. Student participants feel that they know the faculty and staff members associated with this program very well by the completion of the experience. Discussions on topics relevant to the learning community experience and about relevant life matters are a source of this connection. Letters of recommendation for internships, employment, graduate school and professional school admissions, and scholarships are requested of the involved faculty and staff by present and past student participants while they are enrolled at Texas A&M and post-graduation every year. Correspondence continues with students long after their first year at Texas A&M University, serving as proof of the deeper relationships formed with faculty and staff because of this experience.

c) **Interact with peers about substantive matters usually over extended periods of time.**

Student participants meet weekly or bi-weekly with peer mentors to discuss content shared in class and in the text as well as about experiences had on academic field trips, during service projects, and in their lives. The learning community provides opportunities for deeper and more meaningful interaction with peers because the student participants not only collectively enroll in a course for fifty minutes a week, but also because they live with one another in the residence hall for a full academic year. Beyond this, students are placed in small groups that meet weekly or bi-weekly to spur additional critical thinking and communication about substantive matters as they pertain to curricular content and experiences had individually and as a group. A surprising bi-product of this experience has been how many students continue to live with fellow students with whom they have interacted within this program, whether it be peer freshmen or sophomore peer mentors. The relationships developed in this program last beyond the first year and student participants continue to have interactions with each other about substantive matters in years following their first at the institution. Some have created new student organizations
within one another that fulfill a perceived need. Some have become leaders in existing student organizations within their colleges and have had increased connection with student leaders outside of their colleges because of their first year of studying and living together in this learning community, centered in leadership education and development.

d) **Experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves**

Student participants experience diversity both where they live and as part of their formal learning. Student participants live in community on one floor of a residence hall. Participants come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, regions, states and countries, beliefs, rural and urban settings, all living with one another for a full academic year. A medium priced residence hall was selected to house participants in order to decrease exclusivity and maintain affordability for a wider number of interested students. In the application process, students are asked to critically think about and share an experience in which they have had to work with someone who is not like them. From a leadership perspective, students are formally exposed to concepts such as cultural programming, intercultural competency, difference, group and team dynamics, change, social change, and ethical decision making. From a programming perspective, students have experienced people who are different from themselves through events/activities such as a cultural dinner with international graduate students and their families, a day at a Turkic cultures festival, a private tour of the Holocaust Museum – Houston, performing arts events with a cultural message/theme, and/or service projects that impact people in need.

e) **Receive frequent feedback about their performance – both formal and informal – in settings that allow them to respond to that feedback**

Student participants complete two academic exams per semester as part of ALED 125 and 225. “If-At” scantron forms are provided for these examinations. These innovative scantron forms provide instant feedback to students as to their knowledge retention. The forms utilize a scratch-off process. Students read an exam question and select an answer. They then scratch off the answer they feel is correct. If the answer is correct, a star will be revealed in the scratched box. If the students do not answer the question correctly the first time, students scratch a second box for partial credit. If the correct answer is still not revealed, the students continue to scratch the answer boxes until the correct answer is revealed, though credit is not earned beyond two scratched boxes. Students leave the exam room knowing how they performed on the exam, what the correct answer is to each exam question and specifically what they should have focused upon in the course content.

Students also write reflective papers about experiences they have had in the learning community. Topics include academic field trips, retreats, service projects, and changes in their personal development. Feedback is provided to students in the form of an academic grade. Historically, questions have been centered in the cognitive, affective and behavioral domains of learning.
f) Are provided opportunities to integrate synthesize and apply knowledge gained from their classroom/discipline to their co-curricular experience and vice versa. Students are provided opportunities to discover the relevance of learning through application and practice in a range of contexts.

Because the subject matter pertains to leadership education and development and the delivery of course content focuses upon knowledge of self and others, a co-mingling of knowledge and experiences in and out of the classroom is fairly easy. Co-curricular experiences within the learning community, including living with peers who experience the program and upperclassmen who experienced the program in the previous year, as well as aforementioned planned outside-of-the classroom activities allow for application and practice in a range of contexts. Because a large number of the students participate in at least one, if not multiple co-curricular activities at the same time they are in the learning community, relevancy of learning through application and practice as well as integration, synthesis, and application of knowledge and experiences seem to occur naturally and continue post-first year.

g) Are provided opportunities to become aware of their values and beliefs and thus to better understand themselves in relation to others and the larger world.

Understanding of self and others is a critical part of this learning community and the experiences of student participants. Opportunities for exposure to people who may think differently and may have different beliefs than themselves are intentional planned. These have included cultural events, the study of specific leaders, some of whom students may not have identified as leaders previously, the use of the StrengthsFinder questionnaire and a collective facilitation that focuses upon individual talents, knowledge and skills, team building activities such as low-ropes activities, diversity focused facilitations such as “Tearing Down the Walls,” knowledge about in-groups and out-groups and the roles they play in intercultural competency and learning processes, as well as leadership topics that include: inclusiveness, empowerment of self and others, attitudes toward difference and conflict resolution.

Assessment
Assessment has occurred in a number of ways in the nine years this program has existed, focusing on continuous improvement and increased effectiveness of both the learning community program and the student experience itself. Adjustments occur annually, sometimes semestery, based upon feedback sought out and shared by current students and former students who have experienced the program. Assessment methodology has been carried out by means of weekly reflections about what has been learned by student participants that are regularly evaluated and returned with feedback, course examinations, pre and post assessments with both quantitative and qualitative questions at the beginning and end of the academic year, simple surveys and the asking of questions at the start or end of classroom time, reflections papers intentionally grounded in cognitive, affective and behavioral
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domains of learning about experiences had within the learning community, and studies completed with student participants serving as a sample or population. Students have also documented their learning through online blogging and journaling.

Program outcomes:

- exposing students to theoretically based concepts of leadership, including a relational leadership model centered in social justice
- challenging freshmen to be increasingly global-oriented
- stretching students in their development of self and others
- supporting Texas A&M University’s core purpose of developing leaders of character dedicated to serving the greater good.