PARTICIPATION IN LIVING-LEARNING PROGRAMS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN:
BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas

Living-learning programs enable undergraduates to integrate their coursework and their out-of-class experiences in a variety of ways: taking courses in the residence halls, meeting with faculty informally, or being part of a cohort of students who take the same core courses or share similar academic interests. Living-learning programs have been established on college campuses over the past three decades and have proven especially helpful for students in large institutions. Students, in an environment where living and learning are integrated, demonstrate increased intellectual abilities in academic autonomy, critical thinking skills, and cognitive development (Bennett & Hunter, 1985; Blimling, 1993; Inkelas, 1999; Lacy, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Students in living-learning programs benefit in non-intellectual ways as well, including gains in cultural and aesthetic interests, self-understanding, multicultural sensitivity, and interpersonal skills (Fisher & Andrews, 1976; Goldman & Olczak, 1980; Lacy, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1981).

The University of Michigan identified the educational potential of living-learning programs early in their development and has been committed to living-learning programs on the Ann Arbor campus since the 1960s. More recently, the University and the College of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts (LS&A) have both strongly endorsed an expansion of learning community opportunities for U-M undergraduates, particularly first-year students (see: A Michigan Education, 1991; Building Undergraduate Academic Communities and Delivering Student Support Services, 1996; Restructuring the First Year Experience Final Report, 1995).

The University of Michigan currently offers undergraduates the opportunity to participate in seven different living-learning communities. This Occasional Paper introduces the diverse living-learning programs at the University and focuses on the benefits derived from participation in these programs, not only for students, but also for faculty members.

Living-Learning Programs at the University of Michigan

The University of Michigan has a long-standing tradition of supporting undergraduate students through living-learning programs. Although residential facilities designed to bring together faculty members and students have been a part of the University of Michigan since the 1930s, the major thrust for learning communities began in 1962, with the establishment of the Pilot Program (currently called the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program) by the LS&A Executive Committee. Since then, the University has initiated several more living-learning programs, as well as other learning communities, that provide high quality faculty-student interaction but are not residentially-based, such as the Comprehensive Studies Program and the University Mentorship Program. This Occasional Paper, however, focuses solely on those programs that formally integrate curricular studies into students’ residential experiences in one of the University of Michigan residence halls.

The seven U-M living-learning programs under this definition fall into three categories: four-year academic programs, transition programs, and academic initiative programs.

Four-year academic programs provide their participants a wide variety of curricular offerings that span all four years of their enrollment at Michigan.

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Students may elect to live in the designated residence halls for these programs during some or all of their years of participation. Transition programs generally serve only first- and second-year students and focus on the transition to college and first-year retention and achievement. Many transition programs also offer their own courses or course sections, but they do not offer the same breadth or length of curriculum as the four-year academic programs.

Academic initiative programs are living-learning components of broader academic initiatives that focus upon a particular area of undergraduate education.

Table 1 (p. 3) provides a list of the seven living-learning programs in this study and the categories into which they are classified.

Faculty Involvement in U-M Living-Learning Programs

While each of these programs is clearly unique in its goals and purposes, they all share three features. First, each of the living-learning programs aims to foster enhanced student learning through a focused coordination of students’ academic and personal lives. Second, all of the living-learning programs strive to create a smaller, more intimate community setting for students on an otherwise large and sometimes intimidating campus. As a result, staff members in each of the programs can provide their students with more individualized attention than can be afforded to the general student population. Finally, increased student interaction with faculty is a cornerstone of the U-M living-learning programs. Students in these programs have opportunities to interact with faculty members, both inside and outside the classroom.

Faculty involvement in U-M living-learning programs differs according to the design and focus of each program. Several living-learning programs offer special sections of introductory, or “core,” courses (e.g., English 125 and Mathematics 105) for their students only. In addition, many of the living-learning programs offer special, limited-enrollment seminars for their students, many of which are created and taught by faculty members affiliated with the program. For example, Professor Emeritus James Crowfoot teaches a seminar for the Michigan Community Scholars Program entitled “Sustainability, Environmentalism, and Social Change.” Teaching these courses allows instructors to try new teaching methods, collaborate with other faculty members from different disciplines, and teach a course outside their department’s standard curriculum.

Through living-learning programs, faculty members also have opportunities to interact with students outside of class. Faculty working with U-M living-learning programs meet with students over a lunch or dinner, conduct fireside chats about their research or personal interests, join students in group outings to campus cultural events, and participate in student-run activities, such as ethnic celebrations and community service projects. For example, Chief Information Officer and School of Information Professor Jose-Marie Griffiths spoke to students in the Women in Science and Engineering Residence Program about the implications of technological advances in women’s daily lives. For more information about how faculty can become involved with U-M living-learning programs, please refer to the contact information on page 6 of this Occasional Paper.

Profile of Prior Academic Ability of U-M Living-Learning Program Participants

Not all students join a living-learning program at Michigan. Based on an analysis of 1997-98 data, Danielson (2000) found that living-learning first-year students and the general freshmen population at U-M differed in many ways.1 For the 1997-98 cohort, freshmen who elected to join a living-learning program for their first year at Michigan had stronger standardized test scores, dedicated greater amounts of time to academic and extra-curricular pursuits while in high school, had more positive perceptions about themselves, and had more clearly articulated goals for their futures than the other freshmen. In another study that included both living-learning students and a random control sample of non-living-learning students (Inkelas, 1999), living-learning students reported higher scores on both the SAT and ACT than their non-living-learning peers (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1**

**Comparison of SAT scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living-learning students</td>
<td>1326.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-living-learning students</td>
<td>1281.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparison of ACT scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living-learning students</td>
<td>29.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-living-learning students</td>
<td>27.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Residence Environment Assessment Survey, p<.001*

Finally, in terms of prior academic achievement, living-learning students also began their studies at U-M with significantly more advanced placement credits.

The Danielson (2000) study also revealed that living-learning students are more likely to more strongly articulate their goals for the future, including a desire to become an authority in their chosen field, to write original works, and to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. However, living-learning students do not plan to be consumed by their work; they have strong social and civic goals for their futures, such as the desire to participate in environmental clean-up, promote racial understanding, become a community leader, and influence the political structure. These positive perceptions and goals may be related to living-learning students’ high educational aspirations: Inkelas (1999) found that significantly more living-learning students aspire to legal, medical, and terminal aca-
Table 1
Types of Living-Learning Programs at the University of Michigan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four-Year Academic Programs</th>
<th>Transition Programs</th>
<th>Academic Initiative Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honors Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Made Kade German Residence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential College (RC)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In-Residence (UIR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women in Science and Engineering Residence Program (WISE-RP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Works with academic departments to enrich the curriculum of some of the U-M's most academically talented students through Honors courses and special academic projects, such as the Senior Honors thesis.

Employs its own faculty and possesses degree-conferring status in order to offer a wide array of curricular choices for its students in 12 disciplinary areas. Special features include narrative evaluations instead of letter grades and requirements for foreign language competency.

Focuses on writing, in collaboration with the English department, and achievement in introductory or "core" courses. Many LHSP instructors live in the residence hall alongside students.

Stresses community and democratic principles through service learning. MCSP also seeks to facilitate students' successful transition to college by offering a first-year seminar on transition issues and mastery workshops in several of the core courses.

Provides a setting in which students can converse in German and learn about German culture through seminars, language courses, and special events based on German themes and holidays.

Serves as a component of the larger UROP initiative, which pairs undergraduates with faculty members in research partnerships in an effort to improve student achievement, retention, and interest in scholarly research.

Works to increase the retention of women majoring and considering careers in science, engineering, and mathematics through special WISE-only sections of introductory math or science courses and formal and informal study groups with upper division or graduate student facilitators.

demic degrees than non-living-learning students, who were more likely to state that they planned to finish their postsecondary education at the bachelor's or master's level.

Participation in Living-Learning Programs:
The Benefits for Students

Inkelas (1999) studied the impact of living-learning programs on students in a study initially developed through a collaboration between University Housing, LS&A, U-M living-learning programs, and the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education. The results of the study showed clear differences in the academic and social experiences of living-learning vs. non-living-learning students during their time at Michigan. For example, living-learning students were significantly more likely than students in the control group to have interacted with faculty members outside of class and to have engaged in conversations with their peers, especially concerning socio-cultural issues, such as multiculturalism, diverse lifestyles and customs, and major social problems with other students. (Figure 2, p. 4).

These non-classroom interactions with faculty members appear to be beneficial for living-learning students: 71% of living-learning students felt that their non-classroom interactions with faculty members had a positive influence on their intellectual growth, 65% felt an impact on their career goals and ambitions, and 64% on their personal growth and values.

The results of the study reveal that living-learning students also appear to have better academic success and are more engaged in rigorous intellectual pursuits than non-living-learning students. While 61% of living-learning students reported that their cumulative college grade point average was in the “A” or “A-/B+” range,
only 51% of non-living-learning students reported that their college GPA was in the same range. Moreover, living-learning students also seem to be more intellectually curious. As Figure 3 (p. 5) shows, living-learning students prefer to engage in academic activities that challenge their existing beliefs, require more than rote memorization, and help them learn more about themselves.

Comparing living-learning and non-living-learning students of similar aptitude

Naturally, some may argue that the academic and intellectual outcomes in living-learning students are a by-product of the fact that living-learning students come to college with stronger academic aptitude and interests than their peers. In order to investigate whether living-learning and non-living-learning students of similar aptitude experienced similar or different outcomes, Inkelas (1999) broke both the living-learning and control samples into three groups of SAT cumulative or converted ACT composite scores: under 1210, between 1220 and 1320, and greater than 1330.

The results (Figure 4, p. 6) indicate that living-learning students in the SAT ranges still appear to have more positive outcomes or experiences at Michigan than their counterparts of similar aptitudes. Students in the lowest SAT range seemed to benefit most from living-learning programs in terms of transition-to-college concerns, while students in the highest SAT range appear to excel in academic or intellectual pursuits. Thus, while it may be true that—in the aggregate—living-learning students begin their careers at Michigan with higher standardized test scores, even among students of similar test scores, living-learning students exhibit more positive outcomes during their time in college.

The benefits of participation in certain types of living-learning programs

In addition to the overall benefits of living-learning participation, the results of this study reveal that students in specific types of living-learning programs demonstrate progress toward the primary goals of their respective programs more clearly than students in other types of living-learning programs and in the control sample. For example:

- While all living-learning participants perceived a greater ease in adapting to their new collegiate responsibilities (in comparison to students in the control sample), students in the transition programs were the most comfortable with their transition to college life. This finding is particularly noteworthy if one assumes that the students who join transition living-learning programs are the ones who perceive themselves at a higher risk of a poor transition to college.

- Students in the four-year academic and academic initiative programs were the most likely to describe their residence environments as supportive, both academically and socially. Since both types of programs strive to facilitate a strong intellectual and collegial environment, these results imply that the programs are providing an environment conducive to their missions.

- Students in the four-year academic programs were found to have the highest levels of academic achievement and advanced cognitive development. It is true that some of the participants in four-year academic programs (i.e., Honors Program students) have already been identified by the University as the most academically talented. However, this
finding may suggest that the rigorous curricula and creative intellectual stimulation that these types of programs provide are helping students maintain a high level of critical thinking and academic success while at Michigan.

**Participation in Living-Learning Programs: The Benefits for Faculty Members**

The most obvious benefit for faculty who participate in living-learning programs is the opportunity to work with engaged and motivated students. As indicated by the Danielson (2000) and Inkelas (1999) data, these students are the ultimate constituency for faculty members who enjoy teaching in an intellectually stimulating atmosphere. In addition to that benefit, Stark (1993) and Arndt (1993) note that faculty members, through the curriculum in living-learning programs, appreciate the opportunities they have to develop creative course offerings freed from the constraints of traditional departmental disciplines. Furthermore, faculty report positive experiences in working closely with colleagues from other disciplines in teaching a course, serving as a living-learning program mentor, or just becoming more involved in the program’s activities. More generally, Martin & Wilkinson (1970) found that faculty members who become involved with living-learning programs develop a deeper understanding of and compassion for the educational mission of the University and thus improve undergraduate education as a whole.

Finally, as Klein (2000) wrote in an essay about teaching in a living-learning program, the most rewarding aspect of participating is the joy of witnessing first-hand, the development of students into fully-participating citizens of an educational community. He describes the pleasure of seeing how his courses have an impact on his students’ lives, and how his students begin to use the knowledge they have gained to strengthen their own goals and communities. For many faculty, these are the experiences that make college teaching rewarding and exhilarating. In many respects, living-learning programs help make these moments more of an everyday reality for enthusiastic faculty members.
### Figure 4
Comparison of College Perceptions, Experiences, and Achievement Between Living-Learning and Non-Living-Learning Students with Similar SAT Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who agree with each statement</th>
<th>SAT 1210 or less</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>SAT 1220-1320</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>SAT 1330 or higher</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Found managing new responsibilities somewhat or very easy</td>
<td>64.8 L/L 54.0 L/L</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61.7 L/L 59.6 L/L</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>59.2 L/L 57.2 L/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussed socio-cultural issues with peers at least a few times per month or more</td>
<td>69.4 L/L 57.6 L/L</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>57.9 L/L 57.2 L/L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60.0 L/L 56.4 L/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Made appointment to meet with instructor at least a few times per month or more</td>
<td>54.3 L/L 31.3 L/L</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30.2 L/L 26.0 L/L</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26.0 L/L 24.6 L/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived academic environment in residence hall to be supportive</td>
<td>65.1 L/L 55.4 L/L</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>56.9 L/L 52.3 L/L</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60.3 L/L 48.6 L/L</td>
<td>**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived social environment in residence hall to be tolerant</td>
<td>60.0 L/L 55.7 L/L</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>59.0 L/L 56.1 L/L</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64.7 L/L 55.7 L/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean College GPA (based on 4-point scale)</td>
<td>3.06 L/L 2.96 L/L</td>
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<td>3.25 L/L 3.23 L/L</td>
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<td>3.45 L/L 3.40 L/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Favored courses/faculty that helped them learn more about themselves</td>
<td>91.3 L/L 89.0 L/L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89.5 L/L 87.0 L/L</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89.1 L/L 81.1 L/L</td>
<td>**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred complex intellectual activities and challenging existing beliefs</td>
<td>68.3 L/L 68.3 L/L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>76.0 L/L 76.0 L/L</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>86.5 L/L 79.0 L/L</td>
<td>**</td>
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</table>

* p≤.05; ** p≤.01  (Source: Resident Environment Assessment Survey)

### Becoming Involved with Living-Learning Programs at Michigan

Faculty members interested in becoming involved with one or more of the living-learning programs at the University of Michigan should contact any or all of the following:

**Honors Program**
1228 Angell Hall
(734) 764-6274

**Lloyd Hall Scholars Program**
100 Observatory (Alice Lloyd Hall)
(734) 764-7521

**Max Kade German Residence**
1440 Hubbard (Baits Hall)
(734) 764-8018

**Michigan Community Scholars Program**
1200 East Ann Street (Cousens Hall)
(734) 647-4860

**Residential College**
701 E. University (East Quadrangle Hall)
(734) 763-0176

**Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program/In Residence**
200 Observatory (Mosher-Jordan Hall)
(734) 936-6536

**Women in Science and Engineering Residence Program**
200 Observatory (Mosher-Jordan Hall)
(734) 936-6536
Endnotes

1 Each summer, the University of Michigan collects information on all undergraduate matriculants, including living-learning students, through its participation in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), an annual national study of American college freshmen conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. For the 1997-98 cohort, 4,937 out of 5,534 incoming freshmen (1,153 of which were identified as living-learning students) completed the CIRP survey, resulting in an 89 percent response rate.

2 The Residence Environment Assessment survey was administered to the entire living-learning population at Michigan, as well as a large control sample of other students living in U-M residence halls. Of the over 8,600 students living in residence halls in 1998-99, 2,890 responded to the survey, resulting in a 34% response rate. However, living-learning students responded to the survey at a higher rate, yielding an overall 47% response rate among living-learning participants. Five of the living-learning programs had a response rate over 63%. The living-learning and control samples were diverse by gender, racial/ethnic background, and residency status.

References


Inkelas, K. K. (1999). A tide on which all boats rise: The effects of living-learning program participation on undergraduate outcomes at the University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, MI: University Housing. The University of Michigan.


Other Sources of Information on Living-Learning Programs


Tinto, V. (1994). Building learning communities for new college students: A summary of research findings of the collaborative learning project. State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University, National Center of Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.
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