STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITY AT BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTERS OF THE ARTS
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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, IN
MAY 2010
Title: Student Perceptions of the Relationship between Academic Success and Participation in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University

The purpose of this research paper was to examine students’ perceptions of academic success as it related to their participation in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University. The research conducted was a qualitative study, which examined students’ perceptions of success. The instrument was emailed to 436 individuals who reside within Botsford and Swinford Halls on the campus of Ball State University. There were 43 total respondents to the instrument. Through this paper, the researcher examined the literature relating to the topic, reflected on the respondents’ information, and concluded with recommendations for Office of Housing and Residence Life at Ball State University.

Findings from the research showed the community lacked identity at this point and would benefit from implementing a program to increase the amount of identity with the CJLLC. Another finding included increasing the number of students who reside in the community who are also members of the Criminal Justice program. Lastly, start a social norming campaign to help students understand the reason they have been placed in the CJLLC and the benefit it can serve them. Suggestions for further research and limitations of the research are also presented in the document.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Thalia Mulvihill who has challenged and supported me through the process of writing this research paper. She is an incredibly brilliant woman who pushed me and other individuals in our cohort to do their best both in and out of the classroom.

Thank you to my wife, Christine Thompson, who has stood by me through the entire process and will be my partner in life for many more days to come. I appreciate you and all the support you have given me. Thank you for being truly amazing!

A special thank you to the professionals in Housing and Residence Life at Ball State University who allowed me to complete this study. They allowed me to complete the research with trust and confidence in their communities. Without their willingness to allow me to succeed as a graduate student both with this research paper and with my assistantship, I would not be able to complete this study. The professionals in Housing and Residence Life have supported me as a colleague and as a developing professional throughout my graduate experience.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Living Learning Communities (LLCs) within Higher Education have become increasingly more important programs to college and universities around the nation. At Ball State University, LLCs began in the fall of 1998 with seven communities surrounding student interest; those ranged from Communications and Honors to All-Female and Substance-Free communities. As time has progressed there has been an increased demand by both the students and institution to develop more LLC environments.

This chapter provides a summary of the purpose of the study and examines the role LLCs play at Ball State University (BSU). This chapter also contains the personal interest of the study, rationale, history of LLCs, role of university’s strategic plan in increasing the population in LLCs, and the process of students being placed into the LLCs they reside in.

Personal Interest

This survey has served as personal interest for me in many ways. While serving as a student in the Student Affairs Administration Program in Higher Education Program, I served as an Assistant Residence Hall Director. During the time in this position, I worked
with a living learning community. This work experience sparked my interest in the position and also with living learning communities. Choosing the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community (CJLLC) occurred because it was a new living learning community within Housing and Residence Life at Ball State University. While being a new LLC, there have been many changes within the building the LLC has resided in. The students are living in a residence hall community, which was very well defined until this year as an Honors community. This year has redefined the community and the whole system the residence hall was operating under.

History of Living Learning Community

Living learning communities are a new phenomenon within higher education. They have begun to appear on universities and residence life programs around the nation. More universities are becoming engaged in the experience of living on campus and therefore, universities have begun to define communities as the experience they have been looking for.

The living learning community structure has been continuously changing as students are changing and their environments needing to suit them better. As universities work with millennial students in on campus living experiences, they are asking for and requiring new aspects to their experiences.

Role of Living Learning Communities at Ball State University

Ball State University Housing and Residence Life (HRL) has implemented many living learning communities to increase the satisfaction and retention of students. While students reside in the residence hall, they are likely to become more engaged in their communities. Through this process, students will work to become more involved in their
building communities. They will also hopefully become more satisfied with their community and become more successful academically.

HRL has endorsed the strategic plan for the university as implemented by President Jo Ann Gora. One of the strategic plan initiatives has been to promote academic excellence throughout campus through increased admission standards, increased retention on campus, and a larger immersive learning experience program for students. As is noted in the strategic plan, there was an intention to increase retention rates for students enrolled at BSU and to increase the learning opportunities to students both in and out of the classroom. As the popularity of living in a LLC increases, the number of students living in learning communities will continue to grow.

At Ball State University, students do not select to live in the learning community unless they are returning to reside in building again from the previous year. HRL places them in the learning community based on their major or special interest when they apply for Housing on campus. Within the LLC structure at BSU, there was a need to connect with students in majors the university did not otherwise find support for. One academic population, which was identified by HRL, were students in the field of Criminal Justice.

The Criminal Justice Living Learning Community (CJLLC) is a community to support students studying in the field of criminal justice. The LLC has been implemented to connect students with faculty members, help students to establish identity in their community, and learn about their future career paths in the field of Criminal Justice. The Community is housed within Botsford (all female hall) and Swinford (all male hall) Halls in the Johnson Complex. The community has eight Resident Assistants (RAs) and two
hall directors who oversee the students and staff members (one Assistant Residence Hall Director and one Residence Hall Director).

Through monthly Learning Team meetings, hall staff connects with faculty members in the area of Criminal Justice and other campus partners. These faculty members then work with hall staff to put programs on for students to attend. The faculty members have a role of educating students outside the classroom in programs but also help students understand the role of their major in their collegiate experience.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the student perceptions of academic success in Living Learning Communities at Ball State University. Through the students describing their living learning community experience, the information will allow faculty members in Housing and Residence Life to see if their efforts have been successful.

As living learning communities have grown at Ball State University, the idea of living and learning in the same atmosphere has become increasingly more popular. Housing and Residence Life has put emphasis on ensuring students feel as though they are being provided quality programming. The research found as a result of this study has been presented in chapter three and four. It is the information provided by the respondents to the survey administered to students.

Rationale

Living learning communities are important because they provide many resources to our students. The students have been able to attend programmatic sessions for their interests, received support from Resident Assistants who have similar interests, and worked more closely with an Assistant Director for Housing and Residence Life. The
students residing in the community also have an opportunity to have increased contact with their faculty members.

Relation to Student Development

Students are at a different point than other generations in terms of developing as a student and as an adult. LLCs play an integral role in student development because of the direct link they have to academic majors and student living conditions. The communities help students make sound decisions relating to their majors and encourage them to continue on their path to academic success through programs and other initiatives.

Organization of Paper

This paper is written with an introduction and review of Ball State structure. Chapter one examines the relevant information pertaining to the study, Chapter two discusses literature relevant to the topic, and Chapter three will discuss the methodology of the study. Chapter four shows the data and findings collected from the study. Chapter five will present the summary, conclusions, recommendations for further research and future practices relate to the CJLLC, as well as limitations of the study.
Summary of Project

The purpose of this research is to examine the academic success factors of living learning communities on the campus of Ball State University. The examined population was the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community (CJLLC) in Botsford and Swinford Halls.

Living Learning Communities in Higher Education

Research regarding living learning communities has been a recent development in Higher Education. To understand the importance of an LLC, it is important to begin understanding the definition of the community itself. The characteristics of a learning community, as outlined by Inkelas et al. (2006), include living together on campus and to take a role in their shared academic endeavors. LLCs are being formed and utilized by institutions around the country to benefit the students who live on campus and attend the institution.
The Association for College and University Housing Officers- International (ACUHO-I) has even developed a conference to focus solely on this unique housing population. The intention with the ACUHO-I Living Learning Programs Conference is to bridge the gap between the Housing and Residence Life professionals and the individuals who are in other facets of the institution. This professional conference allows individuals within Student Affairs to connect with academic partners to talk about how to benefit students around the globe. While talking to Ms. Heather Bisher (personal communication, January 13, 2010), a committee member who assisted in the implementation of the 2009 ACUHO-I Living Learning Programs (LLP) Conference, she mentioned, “The ACUHO-I Living Learning Program Conference is really intended to bring faculty and housing professionals together to share and learn about successful strategies in developing, sustaining, and promoting viable learning programs for our residential students. Faculty, administrators, academic advisors, housing professionals, and graduate students from all over the country and world gather to brainstorm ideas, discuss pros and cons of various models, sort through implementation strategies, learn how to involve campus partners, examine assessment plans, and gather important information to share with their home institutions at this conference.”

The ACUHO-I LLP Conference expands on the efforts mission of many institutions to assist with the experience of LLCs.

While professionals on campus are changing the way they interact with students, literature shows us it is important to gage the student’s perceptions about their
experience. Students have changed the way they are studying to better suit their education and living in conditions by themselves, according to Holley and Dobson (2008). Students are studying more on Sunday evenings and through electronic resources then they are in other important places. While examining how to foster growth in living learning communities we can utilize insights from results like Holley and Dobson.

According to the quality of life survey data from Ball State University, students are studying in their rooms. While comparing data from the quality of life to Holley & Dobson (2008), many students nationwide are choosing to study in their rooms. This has been another reason schools nationwide have implemented LLCs to keep students academically focused while still studying in their residence halls.

Roles of Living Learning Communities

Inkelas et al. (2006) looked at the experience of students as they attend educational programs. While showing programming data, Inkelas used data from the National Study of Living Learning Programs (NSLLP). The authors used the study regarding four institutions to examine student demographics, learning community environments, and examined student development through the learning communities. Learning community outcomes were also examined by the study. NSLLP assisted in defining the characteristics of LLCs and provided recommendations for the LLCs to be successful.

At Ball State University, HRL has implemented learning outcomes similar to the other institutions seen in NSLLP. HRL has encouraged “students to express themselves in a clear, concise, and respectful manner”, “respect their environment and individuals within it”, and “explore their values” among other learning outcomes. Through Resident
Assistant efforts and intentional programming by the Learning Teams in the communities, HRL has utilized the learning outcomes to increase the experience of students living in the residence halls.

Pike (1997) found sources, which show the capabilities of LLCs in housing programs across the country. “Campus residence halls represent a potentially powerful venue for integrating students’ diverse curricular and co-curricular experience,” (Marchese, 1994 as cited in Pike 1997). Students are choosing to study and learn in their residence halls based on the data provided by Pike. Marchese was able to show how the experience can assist the students residing in the community.

Examining the role LLCs play in the living environment of students, it becomes increasingly important to remember there are campus partnerships to make them successful. In Kuh et al. (2005), the authors mention, “No single unity or office can, on its own, enhance the overall quality of large numbers of students with widely differing needs and characteristics. The dedication and efforts of everyone on campus are needed” (p. 171). Housing and Residence Life is a major contributor to LLCs but it, as Kuh et al. mentioned, it is very important for other campus partners to play a role in the communities.

Another role, which is essential to the LLC functioning, lies within the faculty membership of the department in which the community resides. Laufgraben and Shapiro (2004) points out, “faculty are key personnel resources in any learning community program. Sustained faculty development is one key ingredient of a successful learning community program” (p. 27). With greater faculty involvement, it will benefit the community in many ways, according to the authors. It does become important to make
sure there is faculty involvement with the LLCs to ensure the students see their involvement as academic in nature.

Perceived benefits of a living learning community

Throughout the Holley and Dobson (2008) examined student engagement within a learning community. Holley and Dobson (2008) mentioned, “It was felt that to engage students with a significant core module, designed to settle them into academic life, a more interesting and innovative approach was needed. This redesign looked to engage students in a more interesting and innovative approach was needed” (p. 141). This is the basis for many diverse experiences students demand from their experience and therefore, requires the communities to design unique experiences for the students. Many students need to find the benefit in the experience to encourage them to participate in the LLCs, which may be in place for them.

Laufgraben & Shapiro examined LLCs and the role they play in residential learning on campuses. They stressed the importance of gaining the living learning experience as a college student to prepare the students for their future. Laufgraben and Shapiro mention LLCs as a very important aspect of Housing and Residence Life. “Understanding the structure and purpose of learning communities helps explain why learning communities are a particularly useful curricular model for the current context of undergraduate education” (p. 8). As the authors mention, it becomes increasingly important for students to learn in the environment they live in but it is successful if the individuals understand why they are in the LLC. The students and other campus partners must understand the model and why they are particularly useful.
Theory of Student Development

While understanding the seven vectors of Chickering’s development theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), student affairs professionals can place students into one of the many vectors of student development. During the collegiate career of a student, there are multiple opportunities for students to develop throughout their LLC experience. As students progress through their LLC experience, the students have the opportunity to develop relationships with their faculty members. Faculty members are able to assist students by, “they respect students’ developing skills and life experiences, while both student and teacher work to refine them” (Chickering & Reisser, 317).

As students have formed bonds with their professors and faculty members, the faculty members have helped the students develop throughout their experience. Students do not always know the answers and, at times, have had to turn to faculty members when they had questions. The questions could pertain to the curriculum of a college career but it can also be directly related to student’s lives after they graduate. Frequently, professors have developed through the seven vectors of Chickering’s student development theory and they are able to assist students in the transition.

Chickering’s seven vectors are difficult to transition through and many individuals, regardless of their age, never really make it all the way through all of the vectors. The seven vectors are labeled as 1) “developing competence” 2) “managing emotions” 3) “moving through autonomy through interdependence” 4) “developing mature interpersonal relationships” 5) “establishing identity” 6) “developing purpose” 7) “developing integrity”.

Throughout the LLC experience, one of the goals of an academic based LLC has been able to connect students to their faculty members when they participate in the programming provided to the community. The connection between student success and the faculty member interaction can be seen and is addressed directly by Chickering (p. 327) as:

“frequent student-faculty contact has particular significance for women, students of color, and students entering with high SAT scores. The quality of student-faculty relations is most important for entering students who, relative to others, do not place great emphasis on graduating.”

Programming as it relates to the size of a building can have a large impact on the amount of individuals who attend the programs. As a way to supplement the discussion, it is beneficial to use Chickering’s ideas stated as, “Three to five hundred students are enough to support a wide range of activities and programs. Competition then exists for only a few of the most attractive programs, and the rest welcome additional participants. In a residential complex of that size, there are few strangers” (p. 406).

The intentional source of programming for the students in the CJLLC is to make the community members feel as though they are not strangers to one another. Depending on the amount of programming presented to them from the CJLLC, they may not find the programming applicable. Programming, according to Chickering, then has become increasingly important to not find competition between the options presented to students in the community.
By building the connection with the individuals in their community, students are able to form bonds and understand the context of the living learning community. Therefore, programming assets of the community are better served if they are not up against other programmatic efforts within the community, such as Resident Assistant programming.

An important part of the theory regarding student development from Chickering addressed developing purpose as a part of his theory directly as it relates to vocational exploration and goals. There are direct connections from students who reside in a LLC and students who discover their vocation as it relates to their academic major. Chickering addressed his thoughts regarding utilizing vocation as a part of the job search. He addressed it on page 212 as:

“Finding our vocation is more than just securing a job. Vocations can include paid word, unpaid work, or both. We discover our vocation by discovering what we love to do, what energizes and fulfills us, what uses our talents and challenges us to develop new ones, and what actualizes our potentials for excellence.”

While not every student has made their transition through six of the seven vectors towards developing integrity but they are able to define their purpose very thoroughly as a part of their LLC experience. Involvement in the LLC can be directly related to what the students will do for their future and career.

Some organizations and individuals are creating theories surrounding LLCs during the 20th century. Whitehead (1998) devised his own theory surrounding living learning communities and incorporated it with a living educational process more than a
decade ago. Through this theory he hoped to help students establish their values and how the students want to incorporate others. The theory, when the paper was published, was only in the building stages but Whitehead used the ideas as theoretical frameworks to construct his ideas of theory.

Living Learning Community Assessment and Programming

As universities around the nation look at changing their learning outcomes, the University of Delaware has already begun to make the transition in thinking (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). This institution has started with their programming model rather than their learning objectives but has changed for the student’s assistance. Clearly other institutions have begun to see how they can “use student learning goals to frame their practice” (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006, p. 10) but University of Delaware was one of the first. The university attempted to create an environment where their students were challenged to learn while still learning through the programming.

While examining how we choose to program to students, it can become more important to learn more about how we assess the programs we are offering to students. According to Kerr and Tweedy (2006), there can be multiple ways to assess student’s involvement to produce results they would like to see. However, they mentioned, “. . . only about forty-five minutes of what we considered to be the learning outcomes we considered most important.” In the experiences spoke about by Kerr and Tweedy, the role of assessment should consider more than just program attendance.

When considering the roles of the students, examining the approach of how the topic is presented and how the students perceive it becomes important (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). The way in which students are learning about or from their living learning
community experience may not be how we are intending to teach it. Through thorough assessment, individuals or organizations can find if they are holding themselves accountable as they initially thought they were.

Research exists to show students are satisfied with their living learning community experience. One example of the research which exists examined the levels of involvement of LLC students and students in traditional residence hall living (Pike, 1997). Pike was able to find a larger involvement of students who are in LLC settings, more awareness of resources, and students thriving intellectually throughout their experience. These results are not found in every LLC environment but if the students studied by Pike found it to be successful, there must be a level of success on behalf of the institution.

The experiences students have in their living learning community are ones they are able to articulate as they leave the community. At times, this articulation is not direct in their communication but rather in their actions as students in the community. Students, according to Pike (1997), were more involved in their communities and had a direct location on their relationships with others. Pike was able to articulate many other specific studies which had a very similar expectation to those as well. Many of the qualities which were found to be part of the connection as a member of the community were found to be connected to one another (Pike, 1997, p. 27).

Through the examination of student perceptions, the truth regarding how and what the students are learning can become important. Holley and Hobson (2008) were able to begin the process of gauging the student’s input about their own experiences and perceptions of their academic experiences. The authors did not relate it directly to LLC
involvement but the perceptions given by the students was the beginning of the importance in getting students feedback.

In interviews with the students involved with Holley and Hobson, it shows us there is a strong association between student’s experiences and being engaged in the students. The interviews showed the students are going above and beyond their project requirements for the course. While going above and beyond, they also became very engaged in their projects they were given by professors. These interactions and student perceptions can help others to balance their thoughts with other people who are not in the community.

Assessing the LLCs success factors is important and Inkelas et al (2006) have begun the assessment projects. Through the assessing LLCs, Inkelas was able to point out the success can produce stronger academic achievement, which in turn can help improve retention. The information identifies the idea there should be faculty relationships with students involved in the community. Faculty members can, according to the article, play a role in student’s experiences but there are likely ways for the participation of students.

While the NSLLP surveyed students and desired to request students input on what they need to see within their communities, the researchers were able to examine many factors which make the student’s college environment successful. The researchers also asked the students to discuss their learning outcomes, which are similar to Ball State Housing and Residence Life’s Learning Outcomes. Inkelas et al. (2006) were able to relate the experience of a Traditional Residence Hall (TRH) and students living in the LLC by describing the efforts as more involved in the residence hall and more likely to engage in academic conversations with each other.
Conclusion

Through the examination of related literature and student development theory, it becomes essential to assist in the understanding and connection to the CJLLC. Although LLCs are a rather recent establishment in Housing and Residence Life around the United States, it has grown leaps and bounds at Ball State in recent years.

However, there has not been extensive research conducted about the student perceptions of LLCs on campus. Through the exploration of the literature and theory surrounding LLCs, it is infrequently examined from the student perspective, as it has been in this research paper. The literature available has been able to show the success of living in an LLC, but there is has not been a large amount of research present to examine success from a student’s perspective. Therefore, it has become important to ask students about their experience, if they feel the community has assisted them in their academic success, and are the students receiving what we believe they are from the LLC.

As students are able to connect to their experience in the CJLLC and reflect on it, it can be determined as successful for the students. Through the examination of the CJLLC, the survey respondents will assist in the assessment of the community, and therefore the overall success of living in an LLC. In turn, as noted by a great deal of the research and literature provided previously, there will be a connection to finding success as professionals in the field do as well.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions students had about academic success as it related to their participation in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University (CJLLC). The CJLLC is located in the Botsford and Swinford Residence Halls in the Johnson Complex on the campus of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. The 2009 – 2010 academic year was the first year this living learning community was in operation.

Research Questions

This project was a phenomenological qualitative study, which examined the perceptions students had about participating in a living learning community at Ball State University and the impact of those experiences on their academic success. The Research Questions (RQs) are:

RQ1: “What are the living learning community experiences impacting students’ academic success factors?”

RQ2: “How do students describe their Living Learning Community Experiences?”

RQ3: “How do students participating in learning communities describe ‘academic success’?”
Design of Study

Population

The population of this study, approximately 400 students, was comprised of primarily first year students living in the Botsford and Swinford Residence Halls at Ball State University during the 2009 – 2010 academic year, who lived within the CJLLC.

Sample

The purposive sample (Patton 2001) consisted of 400 students living in the CJLLC community. The students were asked to take an online survey and their decision to complete the survey communicated their informed consent. The results were found from students who self-selected to participate in the survey. They were asked to complete the survey, which included demographics, academic program(s), and the effectiveness of the programs the students attended.

Data Collection

After reviewing literature related to living learning communities, the researcher developed a ten-item online survey instrument with a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions (Appendix A). The instrument was designed to ascertain the perceptions that students had about participating in a living learning community at Ball State University and the impact of those experiences on their academic success. The instrument was administered through SurveyMonkey.com, a free, anonymous online survey design tool to administer surveys.

A list of residents was requested through the Residence Hall Director (RHD) and Assistant Residence Hall Director (ARHD) of Botsford and Swinford Halls in email form to students. The researcher emailed the instrument to the students residing in Botsford
and Swinford Halls (Appendix B). The participants had eight days to complete the instrument.

The students received an email reminder (Appendix C) from the researcher five days after the initial instrument was emailed to the students. The students received a second reminder two days later, on the seventh day (Appendix D). The survey closed the following day.

The anonymous results from the survey were collected via a password protected surveymonkey site specifically designated for this study.

Data Analysis

After data was collected from the survey, the researcher used descriptive statistics to compile and understand the information from the survey. Descriptive statistics uses frequencies and distributions to assist with the analyzing of data (Coldarci et al, 2008). The instrument provided quantitative data, which was interpreted by the researcher. There were many characteristics the researcher looked at to view the data, including duration of time living in the residence halls, academic program, and how they feel the LLC has supported them academically.

While examining the responses to the research, successes were found in the frequencies and distributions of responses as descriptive statistics dictate. As respondents to the survey showed support within an area of the CJLLC, it was determined as successful in their opinion. The Research Questions can be seen as successful if the students are able to provide feedback stating their positive feelings for the intentional efforts within the community. As with descriptive statistics, the frequency can assist in analyzing data and determining success.
Summary

This study examined the perceptions that students had about participating in a living learning community at Ball State University and the impact of those experiences on their academic success. Data was gathered in early Spring 2010 semester, during the first year on campus for the CJLLC. Results of the data have been placed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The findings of the study regarding student perceptions of the relationship between academic success and participation in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University are presented in this chapter. This study was designed to examine respondents’ perceptions of their Living Learning Community (LLC) experience. The three central Research Questions (RQs) were:

RQ1: “What are the living learning community experiences impacting students’ academic success factors?”

RQ2: “How do students describe their Living Learning Community Experiences?”

RQ3: “How do students participating in learning communities describe ‘academic success’?”

Through an anonymous ten-item survey, student perception data was collected. The department of Housing and Residence Life, and others involved in designing LLCs, may be able to better incorporate the findings of this study (with a focus on student voices) into their planning processes regarding student learning outcomes for LLCs. The respondents identified their willingness to give feedback about their experiences with a LLC by participating in the survey. Each respondent chose to select the website address
provided to them in their email accounts, which was a direct link to the survey. The data was organized and analyzed for the voice of the respondents in relation to the study’s three central RQs.

Findings

Demographics

Forty-three respondents, out of a possible 436, who reside in Botsford and Swinford Halls participated in the survey, with a return rate of 9.8%. These respondents, by participating in the survey, identified themselves as being a member of the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community (CJLLC) at Ball State University. Information was collected during the anonymous surveying process to examine the duration of the student’s living experience in Botsford and Swinford Halls. Of the 43 responses, there were 15 people who identified as Criminal Justice majors, representing 34.9% of the sample. Other demographic information was not asked of participants during the data collection.

Residence Hall Living Duration

Throughout the survey, 29 of 43 respondents, representing 67.4% of the sample, were in their second or third semester of living in the residence halls. There were ten respondents, representing 23.2% of the respondents, who stated they had been in Botsford or Swinford Halls for four semesters or longer and four people who identified the spring 2010 as their first semester.

Of the respondents, only fifteen of the forty-three respondents, representing 34.8% of the sample were Criminal Justice majors, while twenty-eight respondents,
representing 65% of the sample, were identified as respondents who did not have majors closely affiliated with the Criminal Justice field.

Participation in Criminal Justice Living Learning Community

Looking at the self-reported information, nearly 50% of the respondents (21 respondents) have not been to a Criminal Justice Living Learning Community program. There were 16 people (37.2%) of the total respondents who have attended one or two programs sponsored by the LLC. The number of respondents who attended three or more events was represented by less than 15% in the survey.

Academic Experience in Living Learning Community

The respondents articulated their academic experience of living in the CJLLC and minor demographic information throughout the survey.

As the respondents began the survey, they were asked about the contribution the LLC has had on their academics. Based on information found in the survey, 17 respondents (40.5%) agreed the CJLLC has contributed to their academics while 24 respondents mentioned they disagree (21.4% of respondents) or strongly disagree (35.7% of respondents) the CJLLC has been supporting their academics. One respondent did not provide an answer to the selected question.

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents identified as having a closer connection with faculty members through their LLC experience. Of respondents who answered the question, 65.6% of the respondents did not believe they had more involvement with their faculty members [either disagree (twelve respondents) or strongly disagree (thirteen
respondents) on the Likert scale]. There was one respondent who did not provide an answer to the question.

While examining the perceptions of respondents regarding an academic focused LLC, it was beneficial to examine how the respondents felt the LLC benefits their academic experience. Overall 18 respondents, representing 42.9% of the sample thought the LLC had enhanced their academic performance. The other respondents selected disagree (11 respondents, or 26.2% disagreed that the LLC had enhanced their academic performance and an additional 13 respondents, representing 31.0% of the sample strongly disagreed that the LLC had enhanced their academic performance. There was one respondent who did not provide an answer to this question.

Student reported that the CJLLC has been able to provide the them with support for their academic goals with nine respondents answering they strongly agree (21.4%) and 16 respondents (38.1%) who agree their experience in the community has supported their academic goals. There were a substantial percentage of respondents who did not support the statement as eight respondents disagreed (19%) and nine respondents strongly disagreed (21.4%). There was one respondent who did not provide an answer to the question.

Respondents were also asked, if they had seen an increase in their academic GPA (Grade Point Average) because they lived in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community. There were no respondents who strongly agreed their GPA increased because they lived in the CJLLC. There were 12 respondents (27.9%) who believed their GPA increased because they live in the community. There was a larger percentage who did not believe the LLC benefited their GPA with 17 respondents (39.5%) stating they
disagreed with the statement and 14 respondents (32.6%) selecting they strongly disagree with their GPA increasing because they live in the community.

Student Perceptions of Changes

Respondents were asked, if given the opportunity, would they make changes to their living learning community. Twenty respondents (47.6%) said they agreed they would make changes to their LLC. Another nine respondents (21.4%) stated they strongly agree they would make changes to the community if given the opportunity. Seven respondents (16.7% of the respondents) stated they disagreed with the statement and six respondents (14.3% of the respondents) stated they strongly disagreed they would make changes.

Effectiveness of community aspects

With the last question, it provided the respondents with the ability to provided written feedback to the survey. The question asked them to provide the most and least effective aspects of the living learning community. There were 29 total responses to the final question of the survey. There were some common themes within the responses provided from the respondents.

The first theme identified from the respondents was feeling supported in their community. While the students living in the community may be of different academic majors or have different backgrounds, a number of respondents felt as though they were supported throughout their LLC experience. The respondents felt as though they were
able to connect with their peers in their classrooms, share books with each other, and ask questions of their peers while in the community.

Another theme, which dealt with academics in the CJLLC, addressed the students not being caring or compassionate about their academics. While the respondents felt supported by their community, they also felt as though the community did not add as much to their academics as they thought it would. Comments addressed feeling as though they were a part of the community but it did not add to their academics. Respondent’s comments included, “I think it adds nothing to the academic success” and “. . . If the CJC Living Learning Community is to thrive, much in the way that the Communications Living Learning Community has thrived, drastic changes are needed.” Respondents are able to feel supported by the program but may not see the academic benefit it offers to them.

The programmatic efforts were another topic addressed by the respondents. Respondents expressed it as the least effective aspect of the CJLLC when they were providing feedback about the community. Programming seems to be very directed at the students who are Criminal Justice majors and not relating to the other students who are in the community. Respondents commented about a lack of programs associated with the community and direct programming which only seems to pertain to the Criminal Justice majors in their building.

Another theme presented in the research addressed opinions regarding individuals who resided in the community when the community was part of the Honors LLC. The Community has changed from the Honors student focus to the CJLLC. The respondent perception of the building dynamic seems to be very different in comparison to previous
years. A few responses dealt with student choice to consume alcohol while residing in the community. It seems as though alcohol use was not as present in years past as it has been this years, according to the respondents. The students have expressed some frustration in the change in alcohol use through this open-ended question.

Summary

This chapter provided the findings as they were collected and organized by a ten-item anonymous survey. Chapter 5 will now present a discussion of these findings as they relate to the three central RQs of the study:

RQ1: “What are the living learning community experiences impacting students’ academic success factors?”

RQ2: “How do students describe their Living Learning Community Experiences?”

RQ3: “How do students participating in learning communities describe ‘academic success’?”

In addition, Chapter 5 will provide the conclusions of the study and recommendations.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The summary, conclusions, and recommendations for this project regarding student perceptions of academic success in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University are found in this chapter five. The chapter begins with a summary of the information studied, includes discussion, and concludes with recommendations for the future of the community.

Summary of the Project

Throughout this project, the researcher hoped to investigate the level of success of this living learning community by asking the respondents for feedback. The respondents provided answers through a survey with ten total questions. Nine of the questions were multiple-choice questions (six of which were on a Likert scale) and the tenth question was an open-ended question. The tenth question allowed respondents to give direct feedback to the survey about information they may not have been asked.

The respondents received three emails with the survey link in it. The first email was the initial request for students to respond to the survey. The students received two follow up reminders, one reminder five days after initial email and a second reminder two
days later. The survey was closed on the eighth day. It was then evaluated and processed by the researcher after the survey was closed.

Discussion

RQ1: “What are the living learning community experiences impacting students’ academic success factors?”

The respondents were asked to answer questions regarding how the CJLLC related to other parts of their academic life. There were multiple questions dealing directly with their academic success as college students. The respondents did not answer the questions in favor of the CJLLC benefiting them academically in most of the questions. The programs may be benefitting them but the respondents, at this point, do not see the benefit. If this research were a long-term study, the assessment may produce a benefit in the long term which respondents are not able to report at the current time.

The ability of students to work closely with faculty members is a goal of an academic based LLC, like CJLLC. The extended ability to work closely with the students who are looking to have a closer relationship with their faculty members can, in an ideal living environment, have the increased amount of interaction with their faculty. While it is a goal, it does not mean it is a definite but is an intended outcome from Ball State’s LLCs. Throughout the survey, students were able to provide feedback about their interactions with their professors. As the goals of the CJLLC are implemented, it becomes important for the community to examine the effectiveness of the following statement, “Our living-learning communities thrive with academic support, faculty/alumni interactions, and experiential learning opportunities that are guided by our goals and learning objectives for the community.” Looking at the goals and objectives
established for the CJLLC, we can see the success may be found in the results of the respondents attribute to the role of faculty members.

RQ2: “How do students describe their Living Learning Community Experiences?”

There was a seemingly close relationship between the number of respondents who have lived in the residence hall longer than the amount of time the LLC has been in place in the community. The transition from the Honors LLC, which resided in Botsford and Swinford before the CJLLC moved there, to the current LLC can be a change in the community feelings. The respondents who resided in the community has had to change with the community identity change, which occurred in the last year. The Honors community had a very strong identity while it resided in Botsford and Swinford Hall. When the community moved to another building, there were some respondents who stayed behind thinking the community would remain the same.

A large number of students who reside in the CJLLC are not Criminal Justice majors according to the respondents. While not researched, this likely creates an issue making the programs seem beneficial to all students who reside within the community. Students who have academic majors which are not connected to the Criminal Justice program, as the respondents noted, will have difficulty finding the benefit of the programming of the LLC. In order to assist the growth of the CJLLC impact on the students and to assist them in seeing the benefit, the students in the Criminal Justice program in the community will need to grow.
RQ3: “How do students participating in learning communities describe ‘academic success’?”

Many of the respondents who took the survey mentioned they had not attended any CJLLC programs. Less than fifteen percent of the respondents who participated in the survey mentioned they had not attended more than two CJLLC events during this school year. However, most of the respondents felt as though they had an increase in their communication with their faculty members and also saw an increase in their academic success because they lived in the community. The largest response answer of the respondents felt the community has enhanced their overall academic experience. However, the majority of the respondents disagree with their community adding to their overall academic experience. Making the greatest impact with the community is to create an ability of the students to connect directly to the CJLLC.

Limitations of study

The research instrument did not yield a high percentage of respondents to the survey. With a small number of survey respondents, all the opinions of the community are not represented in the research information. Offering the students an incentive to participate in the study might have been beneficial in yielding more responses from the student population. However, the incentive might not encourage participation for reasons for the students to voluntarily participate in the survey.

If the study were to be duplicated, the survey could have been expanded to include another LLC. This would ensure there were responses to compare the information collected from the CJLLC to student perceptions from another community. The information yielded from the research would allow the information, once analyzed, to
know if responses were symbolic of the CJLLC or were across the board. While the information yielded from the research was beneficial, having another group of information to compare the data to could also be beneficial.

Recommendations for Improvement

Students are not attending the programs according to the respondents as most the respondents have attended zero to two programs. With a community where more than 400 students live, there should be a number of students who have attended more than two programs within the community. Making programs more appealing to the students will help ensure they will attend is important for the students to feel connected to the position. Including the CJLLC programs as a part of the Resident Assistant expectations allows the student staff members to be held accountable for supporting the programs. This step might already be occurring with the student staff members, as the researcher did not ask about the expectations.

The community seems to lack an identity to allow the students to connect to the events and not attend the programs associated with the CJLLC. Without an identity, the students who reside in Botsford and Swinford are connected to the building but are not connected to the community. By creating an identity for the program, the students will be able to be connected to the community. Provide an incentive program for the students who reside in the building to come to the programs and encourage the student staff to be a part of the solution for the community.

Creating a buy in from the students will hopefully encourage the students to participate in the programs of the community. If there is a buy in from the students they will be support for the programs, which happen within their community. Ask students for
feedback after every program to gain their opinions from each individual program. This will allow students to voice their opinions while attending part of the programming offered by the CJLLC. This will also help the community to provide programs, which students will benefit from and want to attend.

As a result of an identity not being established for the CJLLC, a recommendation for the community is to begin establishing an image for the community to be able to associate with the LLC. An incentive program for students to attend programs could increase identity with the program. Students will be able to begin associating the LLC with their academic success. The students will also be able to associate the community with their programming and the positive attributes it has to offer them. This type of student buy in will be able to assist the students in getting involved with the community.

Establish a social norming campaign to educate students about the importance of LLCs regardless of their major. With a large amount of research completed about LLCs, there will be a large amount of information available to assist in the education of students regarding the benefits of living and participating in an LLC. This will help the students to know and understand the importance of the LLC in their environment. This campaign can play into the programs provided by staff members so they can educate students about the benefit through the social norming campaign.

Last recommendation for the LLC is to have a larger number of individuals who are Criminal Justice majors living in the community. If there were larger concentrations of individuals on a specific floor or within the community as a whole, it would be able to boost their overall commitment to the LLC. It would also help to connect to their faculty members and individuals in their community without making it an awkward effort.
Having programs, which allow the individuals to connect with one another through some kind of networking to begin to form identity is important. With this community, they will be able to identify with the intentional programming offered to the students.

Recommendations for Further Research

The research produced limited number of respondents to the survey. A recommendation for future research would be to include a larger representation of the opinions of the community. While individuals responded to the survey and supplied the researcher with responses, there were only a total of forty-two responses to the survey. This number of respondents represents approximately ten percent of the total student population within the community.

Secondly, offering an incentive to the students residing in the community or conducting the research utilizing a different method to target the students. The students may be more likely to participate in the research if they have the opportunity to achieve something during the process. This incentive can be monetary or a benefit within the hall which is coveted by the students.

Lastly, seeking the perspective of the student staff members who reside in the building is a perspective, which might not have been heard in the research. The student staff members will be able to be the voice of the students when the students do not respond to the survey. The staff members will also provide a realistic perspective of the student thoughts. This information could be gathered through interviews with the student staff members or a focus group to gather the information.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Research Project Survey Questions

1. How many semesters have you lived in the residence halls?
   - Less than 1 semester
   - 2-3 semesters
   - 4 or more semesters

2. Are you a Criminal Justice Major?
   - Yes
   - No

3. How many Criminal Justice Living Learning Community events have you attended so far during the 2009-2010 school year?
   - 0
   - 1-2
   - 3-4
   - 5 or more

4. My experiences in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community have contributed to my academic success.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

5. My Living Learning Community experience has helped me interact more frequently with my faculty members.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

6. My participation in the Living Learning Community has enhanced my overall academic experience.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
7. As a member of the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community, I feel that my academic goals are supported.
   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree

8. I have seen an increase in my academic GPA (Grade Point Average) because I live in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community.
   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree

9. If I was given the opportunity, I would make changes to my living learning community.
   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree

10. Please provide a description of what you believe are the MOST effective aspects of the living learning community experience, and what are the LEAST effective? (Open Ended Question)
APPENDIX B
Initial Email to Students

If you are a member of the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University we are seeking your opinion on the following survey (approximately 10 minutes) http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/P2P6KYJ. Please read the invitation below:

Title:

Student perceptions of the relationship between academic success and participation in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University

Study Purpose and Rationale:

This information collected from this survey will be involved in research for a graduate research project.

The purpose of the research is to conduct an exploratory study about the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University. It is also research to fulfill academic obligations as a part of the graduate research project process for the researcher.

Inclusion Criteria:

To be eligible to participate in this research you need to currently reside in Botsford or Swinford Residence Halls. Individuals must be 18 years of age or older to participate in the research.

Procedures and Duration:

This survey will take approximately five minutes to complete.
To complete this survey please click on the hyperlink below, answer the survey questions, and click submit when you have finished with the questions.

Data Confidentiality/Anonymity

Your responses to the survey questions will remain anonymous. The information from the survey will be password protected and until complied, only handled by the researcher. The information will be retained through the online database surveymonkey.com and will be password protected. The information will be anonymous and will be deleted through the website once the data has been used for this academic project.

Benefits:

The survey will benefit the students in Botsford and Swinford in answering questions about what might be the best for suiting their needs appropriately.
Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks with participation in this study.

Contact information if you have question(s):

If you have questions regarding your rights as human subject, please contact the Institutional Review Board at irb@bsu.edu or 765-285-5070.

Voluntary Participation:

By clicking the link and completing the survey, you are giving the researcher consent to use the data you submitted in the survey. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can end your participation in this research at any time you wish to. Any questions you may have can be directed to the researcher at 765-285-6069 or kegarrison3@bsu.edu.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/P2P6KYJ

Researcher Contact Information

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APPENDIX C

First Reminder to Students

Reminder: If you are a member of the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University we are seeking your opinion on the following survey (approximately 10 minutes) http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/P2P6KYJ. Please read the invitation below:

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Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks with participation in this study.

Contact information if you have question(s):

If you have questions regarding your rights as human subject, please contact the Institutional Review Board at irb@bsu.edu or 765-285-5070.

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APPENDIX D

Second Email to Students

Third Invitation to Participate in Research Survey: If you are a member of the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University we are seeking your opinion on the following survey (approximately 10 minutes) http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/P2P6KYJ. Please read the invitation below:

Title:

Student perceptions of the relationship between academic success and participation in the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University

Study Purpose and Rationale:

This information collected from this survey will be involved in research for a graduate research project.

The purpose of the research is to conduct an exploratory study about the Criminal Justice Living Learning Community at Ball State University. It is also research to fulfill academic obligations as a part of the graduate research project process for the researcher.

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To be eligible to participate in this research you need to currently reside in Botsford or Swinford Residence Halls. Individuals must be 18 years of age or older to participate in the research.

Procedures and Duration:

This survey will take approximately five minutes to complete. To complete this survey please click on the hyperlink below, answer the survey questions, and click submit when you have finished with the questions.

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Benefits:
The survey will benefit the students in Botsford and Swinford in answering questions about what might be the best for suiting their needs appropriately.

Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks with participation in this study.

Contact information if you have question(s):

If you have questions regarding your rights as human subject, please contact the Institutional Review Board at irb@bsu.edu or 765-285-5070.

Voluntary Participation:
By clicking the link and completing the survey, you are giving the researcher consent to use the data you submitted in the survey. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can end your participation in this research at any time you wish to. Any questions you may have can be directed to the researcher at 765-285-6069 or kegarrison3@bsu.edu.

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