

University of Kansas
Retention Implementation Committee
Residential Retention Programs Master Plan Subcommittee Report:
Findings and Recommendations

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I. Introduction

In December of 1999, a meeting was held of members of the joint Student Affairs / Academic Affairs Retention Implementation Committee, headed by Mary Ryan and Diane DelBuono. That group had produced a report (Fall 1999) which found that “connections within the living environment, particularly for students of traditional age and preparation, are vital to retention efforts.” As a result of this meeting, several interest groups or subcommittees were created to divide and focus the tasks within the larger RIC. One such subcommittee was charged with exploring the viability of residential Living/Learning communities, assigned a chairperson and several members, and given the name

Residential Retention Programs Master Plan (RRPMP) Subcommittee.

RRPMP Subcommittee Membership:

Kimberly Grassmeyer, Department of Student Housing, Chair
Lloyd Sponholtz, History Department and Freshman-Sophomore Advising Center
Michele Eodice, Writing Center
Gail Rooney, University Career and Employment Services
William Nelson, Student Organizations and Leadership Development Center
Julie Francis, Watkins Health Center
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Trina Ramirez, Freshman-Sophomore Advising Center
Brett Logan & Melissa Wilson, student staff -- 3E program in Ellsworth Hall

RRPMP Subcommittee Charge:

This committee will develop a plan for the implementation of a variety of services and programs appropriate for the residential setting that will contribute to improving retention among Freshman and Sophomore students. The plan should include services and programs currently provided by offices in the Division of Student Affairs, the Division of Academic Services and the various schools and the College. The plan should include a timetable or order of implementation and any new budgetary requirements. The programs and services to be offered may be existing or new ones yet to be developed.

The RRPMP subcommittee met throughout the spring semester on a bi-weekly or weekly basis to develop a philosophical core and specific programs that would enhance the living-learning environment of the university. This report is the result of those efforts; it includes:

- Definitions and clarifications
- A conceptual framework which includes a vision statement developed to express our current understandings of the potential of LL Communities for KU
- Supportive data regarding best practices both inside and outside KU
- Key findings related to LL Communities effectiveness as a retention effort
- Specific recommendations for continuing and developing the living learning communities model at KU

II. Definitions and Clarifications

Improving retention / success: persistence from the freshman to sophomore year, with the goal of graduation; we would hope to see persistence increase from its current mid-70% rate to over 80%

Organized living units at KU: traditional residence halls, scholarship halls, on-campus apartment complexes, and fraternity and sorority houses

Living/Learning Community: the whole university is a living/learning community where students, faculty and staff come together for the purpose of mutual growth and learning through teaching, research, and service

Neighborhoods : clusters of organized living units with geographic proximity to one and other; they include affinity and academic groups (eg. Daisy Hill or scholarship halls, or Tennessee Street Greek housing)

Academic Groups : require common living space, cross-course enrollment and collaboration, and coordinated involvement by faculty and academic services within the housing unit

Affinity Groups : groups of students aligned through shared interests and backgrounds; eg: culturally based, fraternity and sorority, theme housing.

III. Philosophical Premise

As a committee, we came to believe in the importance of residential living/learning communities. These types of programs--when implemented in comprehensive and programmatic ways--address student retention using the four major retention focus areas identified by Wyckoff (1998)¹

- College Fit
- Student involvement
- Student / faculty interaction
- Academic and social interaction

We knew that we could not simply create a greater number of separate programs for learning; ***rather, we must create environments in which learning can occur.*** The University must first develop norms that pervade the institutional culture, so that we then attract students for whom academics and engagement are primary concerns. Many institutions, private and public alike, are returning to statements of principles, creeds and honor codes which invite all members of the university community to join together in claiming their common purpose. Such a statement for the University of Kansas must make overt our belief that all community members, faculty, staff and student alike, participate with one another—through campus involvement--both within and outside the classroom. ***Successful students, by our definition, are engaged in multiple interactive associations with one another and with other community members.*** As new students pledge to become "Jayhawks", they can expect that every member of the university community will greet them with the shared desire to both learn and participate in the community at large. Such a philosophy must be embraced and practiced by all members to establish the positive academic and social norms so crucial to the persistence of new students. A generalized statement might consist of the following:

The University of Kansas is a community of scholars interacting to advance learning and embrace the highest standards of civilized behavior and performance in academic, living and social realms. The students, faculty and staff who choose to become participants in this community commit themselves to uphold a series of principles that define their involvement in the community and demonstrate pride in the University. Therefore, each will work to foster the development of themselves and other members of the community, hold themselves to the highest standards of academic, personal and social integrity, engage with other persons and involve themselves in the teaching, governance and activities of the university, and generally contribute in a positive way to the living-learning community.

IV. Findings of the Committee

A. Overview of Best Practices at other Institutions

University of Michigan Learning Communities (MLC):

The University of Michigan undertook a series of studies that explored shortcomings in the experiences of their students, concluding that students needed to involve themselves in "smaller communities within the larger University." Two responses developed were: the use of small classes including first-year seminars, and the development of living-learning programs. In some cases, the two initiatives were connected (small-class experiences and living-learning programs). All living/learning communities at U of M share the common characteristics of:

- a). a unifying theme with an academic sponsor or co-sponsor;
- b). an educationally purposeful community both intellectually and physically safe for students and faculty;
- c). academic program foci with active faculty involvement, collaborative learning opportunities and core competencies among others;
- d). student development and support services;
- e). program administration and support structures; and,
- f). assessment and evaluation.

Examples of U of M living-learning communities are the Residential College, Women in Science and Engineering Program (WISE), the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program and several scholars programs.

The University of Michigan expanded its living-learning perspective to include the Residential Learning Programs Communities noted above, within Campus Neighborhood Communities, which operate within the University of Michigan Community as a whole. Their goal is to better link the residential communities to the institutional community. Common characteristics of the neighborhoods include:

- a). academic space
- b). living-learning residential programs
- c). faculty presence
- d). coordination of neighborhood resources
- e). community space
- f). identifiable neighborhood boundaries
- g). student development and support services
- h). safety and security

Issues addressed in making the neighborhoods intellectually stimulating places of collaborative and interdisciplinary learning ranged from attention to faculty parking and housing, to summer orientation and purposeful educational centers. At the time of their report, three such neighborhoods had been identified for continuing development.

Syracuse University Theme Housing and Learning Communities

Syracuse University created four housing themes:

- School of Management Floors
- Quiet Lifestyle Floors
- Wellness Floor
- Life Floor

Additional residential programs proposed are:

- Women in Science & Engineering (WISE) floor
- Multicultural Living/Learning Center (MLLC) floor
- Leadership theme floor

Syracuse University (cont.)

Both theme housing and learning communities –in the Syracuse design—include:

- Active faculty, staff and student involvement
- The identification of learning outcomes
- Calendars of events to support such learning outcomes

The key difference between theme housing and learning communities, in the Syracuse design—was the shared curricular component of the learning communities model.

Syracuse offers several cautionary notes:

- It advised against creating housing by academic major only
- Theme housing or structured learning communities do risk student segregation
- The Syracuse proposal advised against making theme housing mandatory for students, creating a 25% goal

Iowa State University Learning Communities

Learning communities at Iowa State University began as a grass roots effort in 1994, with the first learning communities implemented in the fall of 1995. In 1998 President Martin Jischke allocated \$1,500,000 to the development of learning communities at Iowa State over a three year period, from 1998-2001. Components of the Iowa State program include:

- **Learning Community Advisory Committee** to foster a vision for learning community initiatives and to build a campus-wide network for communication, coordination, and innovation.
- **Administrative Committee** for budget oversight and administration.
- **Request for Proposals (RFP)** process that allowed faculty and staff (teams) to submit proposals for learning community initiatives.
- **Assessment** procedures that focused on outcomes and results in explicit, measurable terms.
- **Peer Mentors** in learning communities, including mentor stipends (\$1,000-\$1,250) and mentor training programs.
- **Supplemental Instruction** using resources from the Academic Success Center.
- **Website** dedicated to learning community resources and networking.
- **Learning Community Institute** for faculty and staff, which promoted innovations in learning community programs to enhance student learning with an emphasis on developing course curriculum.
- **Workshops** and **Video Teleconferences** to inform college community about learning communities, a focus on faculty involvement, and exploration of experiential/service learning as a component of learning communities.

The success of the Iowa State program can be attributed to the support of the University President, allocation of significant financial resources, and college-wide collaboration among academic affairs and student affairs colleagues. From the beginning the program promoted a collaborative vision and received financial resources to implement initiatives and program components.

Harvard University Assessment Seminar²

Highlights from the Harvard Assessment Seminar confirm our sense of what contributes to the retention and success of students here at KU. We mention these not only as points we agree with but to also ask that they be included in future discussions as essential to the design of any LL communities programs initiated here at KU.

- Interactive relationships organized around academic work are vital.
- Students' academic performance and satisfaction are tied closely to involvement with faculty and others around substantive academic work.
- Interactive relationships can take diverse forms, including study groups, mentoring (programmatic or natural), undergraduate research opportunities, service learning activities, and campus employment.
- Students recognize that effective advising is crucial to their success.

Other external sources

In addition, a recent study of faculty at Canada's colleges and universities found that both students and professors identified the "teaching/learning environment" as the chief motivating factor in student success.³

The idea of environment fits with our notion of living/learning communities: sites—both real and virtual—that provide interactivity with diverse people and projects, meaningful participation, and academic support.

B. Successful programs and activities at the University of Kansas

Fraternities & Sororities

Fraternity and sorority chapter houses at the University of Kansas offer some lessons in creating smaller communities. First, average chapter size is 140 women and 70 men, and chapters are quite intrusive in how they impact students' lives. Alumni are typically involved and national organizations set expectations; there is on-campus and off-campus oversight. Nearly all chapters set minimum academic standards, nearly all chapters require specific study hours, and most chapters also maintain a point system that rewards members for involvement within the chapter and in the larger university community. A recent study of sorority women showed that the freshman to sophomore retention rate is 90%. While the entering GPA and ACT scores for these same women are slightly above that of non-Greek women, and their KU GPAs are also slightly higher, academic preparation alone cannot account for the 11-13% differential in retention rates over the three year study period (1995-1997 inclusive).⁴

Department of Student Housing facilities

In existing residential environments at the university, similar conclusions regarding the success of smaller communities and the effectiveness of mixed levels interaction (upper class students live among freshmen, for example). *Scholarship Halls* are very small, cooperative living units (approximately 50 residents each) where involvement in self-governance and duty rotations to provide for one another is mandatory. Residents of these halls, both male and female, enjoy a greater than 95% retention rate from their freshmen to sophomore year, a trend which continues through later years as well. These living units do not carry a purposeful academic component, theme or class links; rather they carry a strong tradition of longevity in which the presence of upper class students creates an environment that puts academic concerns over social concerns. These experienced students tacitly model responsible academic behaviors while developing meaningful personal relationships with younger students.

Within the large *Residence Halls*, the few existing examples of purposeful living-learning communities provide important insights. More intentional and intrusive programs have been developed to address the issues associated with greater numbers (isolation and alienation) and the concentration of youth (overemphasis on socialization). The Experience Excellence in Ellsworth (3E) program has long involved its residents in developmental and social programming, including connections with campus student support services (various) and informal faculty interactions. More recent efforts to connect the 3E residents through co-

enrollment in classes has made a difference as well: for the 1998-99 residents there was a 95% retention rate. An 85% first to second year retention rate was achieved in Templin Hall. A Faculty Fellows program, the Writer's Roost (a branch of the KU Writing Center), the Student Development Center, and other offices have provided services, and a higher concentration of academically prepared freshmen and upper-division students reside there.⁵

New Student Orientation & Freshman-Sophomore Advising Center

KU seeks to provide a seamless transition for incoming freshmen. The combined efforts of NSO and FSAC has led to a 96% participation rate in summer orientation activities for incoming freshmen and a significant rise in the number and quality of advisement contacts for new students. Also a study of PRE 101 – Orientation Seminar course, coordinated by NSO, has shown that it has a positive effect on retention and graduation rates.

For example, the FSAC successfully assigned 4275 freshmen and sophomores to individual advisors in Fall 1999 and Spring 2000 semesters. This is a 50 percent increase over the previous year. The total number of students advised during Fall 1999 enrollment was 5581, a 66% increase over the previous year. From August – December 1999, a total of 7195 students were advised through the FSAC.

The FSAC also expanded group advising meetings for all freshmen and first year transfer students. These meetings were held in October 1999 and March 2000 to prepare new students for the upcoming advising and enrollment period. In the fall semester, 1700 students attended 65 group meetings, including several meetings in the residence halls.

An annual OIRP survey of academic advising administered in April 2000 to randomly selected freshmen and sophomores showed a 10 % increase since 1998 in the percentage of respondents who say KU's current academic advising meets their needs exceptionally well or more than adequately from 45.9% in 1998 to 56% in 2000. The percent saying it met their needs less than adequately or very poorly dropped from 11.0% in 1998 to 6.0% in 2000.

PRE 101 – Orientation Seminar

A study conducted by OIRP of PRE 101 – Orientation Seminar found:

- Students who enrolled in PRE 101 were more likely to return for subsequent semesters.
- Students who completed PRE 101 were more likely to graduate than students who did not take the course.

The study examined first time, full-time freshmen who took PRE 101 – Orientation Seminar in the fall semester from 1991-1998 and compared them to a group of freshmen matched on the basis of residency, sex, ethnicity, and ACT composite score range. The study found that as compared to this matched group.

- **Students who enrolled in PRE 101 were more likely to return for subsequent semesters.**

For example:

1996 Group

<u>Took PRE 101</u>	<u>Returned After 2 Semesters</u>	<u>4 Semesters</u>
Yes X	89.6%	80.0%
No X	68.1%	60.7%

- **Students who enrolled in PRE 101 were more likely to graduate from KU.**

For example:

1992 Group

<u>Took PRE 101</u>	<u>Graduated After 5 Years</u>	<u>6 Years</u>
Yes X	62.1%	71.2%
No X	40.9%	48.5%

The course was found to be particularly helpful, both in terms of retention and graduation rates, for students in the ACT Composite ACT range of 17-22.

Scholarship groups

- a. Honors Program
This program is significantly anchored in the institution, with paid leadership, designated credit-bearing courses, and a wide support structure; retention remains consistently in the 90% range.
- b. Mt. Oread Scholars
The freshmen-only Mt. Oread Scholars program, absent the structure noted above, remains an example of the positive effect of informal mentoring by faculty. Students are invited to participate in Mt. Oread Scholars to reach out to high academic achievers who may not be involved in a designated scholar program, such as the Honors Program. The retention rates for Mt. Oread Scholars remains consistently higher than for non-Mt. Oread Scholars.

V. Recommendations of the Committee

We recognize that it is essential that activities within the academic environment and the living environment intersect in order to transcend the typical boundaries of time, location, department, affiliation, and the many structures that divide us. We understand that in order to implement any model of a living/learning community with a goal of increasing retention, we must value the existence of multiple and diverse learning environments as they already exist, in both formal and informal ways. These environments can and should mean different things to different people, and as such must provide a myriad of opportunities to benefit differing perspectives and experiences, while honoring the principles stated earlier.

Based on the research findings, the philosophical premise we developed and worked under, the best practices we reviewed, and our attention to the more focused committee charge, we developed recommendations for **both residential and institutional implementation**.

Institutional/cultural recommendations:

1. Adopt an institutional statement (see above) that invites all members of the university community to both view and participate in the University of Kansas as a Living-Learning community.
2. Make a financial commitment to support and provide incentives for retention efforts – to support programs, conduct research and ongoing assessments, and reward examples of extraordinary engagements with students.
3. Establish a well-funded office under a retention director to ensure the establishment, coordination and continuation of the multiple efforts; this person would require institutional support, work to build the multi-disciplinary and cross-organizational connections required for success of multiple retention efforts.
4. Recognize and reward the scholarly efforts of faculty and staff that include personal connections with students; create a climate in which teaching and connecting with students is viewed as scholarship; honor advising and the co-curriculum; provide teaching grants for the development of credit-bearing service learning opportunities and other examples of connected teaching (see ISU model of RFPs)

5. Utilize a social norms marketing approach to design and implement a campaign which promotes and encourages the normative behavior or successful KU students; eg. successful students at KU are participating in their organized living groups; successful students engage in their neighborhood living communities; eg. successful students are employed on campus/involved in student organizations.
6. Develop expectations for new student engagement with the community. Students could:
 - Attend New Student Orientation
 1. Incorporate a mandatory program for students on leadership, living-learning, involvement and jobs on campus, stressing connection to campus, and having students sign a commitment card
 2. Make stronger links with out-of-state students, particularly those who attend only Fall Orientation; coordinate with the out-of-state retention committee studying this effort specifically
 - Develop Mentor / Protege relationships (through a systematic effort); attract faculty / staff (department/unit) commitment to the effort
 1. Explore implementation of various types of mentoring programs in residence halls.
 2. Enhance the Meet-A-Professor program or some other early connection.
 3. Expand Freshman tutorials so that all new students enroll in at least one course per semester of fewer than 25 students.
 - Live in an organized living unit at the university [see **residential recommendations**].
 - Participate with neighborhood and campus learning, student leadership and activities [see **residential recommendations**].
 - Obtain on campus employment, research or other experiential opportunities
 1. Provide 8-15 hour on-campus employment opportunities for those new students who must work, to create invaluable personal connections, access to resources, and attention to the primacy of academic work
 2. Utilize Federal Work Study Funds to attract new students to faculty-student research teams
 3. Encourage faculty use of RFPs noted above to create short-term, team-based research projects
7. Create a system of “cluster enrollments” or “block schedules” so that new students can connect with peers in more than one course each semester (of particular importance to off-campus students).
8. Create expectations for “intrusive caring” so that informed faculty and staff can involve themselves with students who are struggling; work with the Early Warning Subcommittee to ensure their recommendations include distribution of warning information to staff beyond academic advisors; eg: mentoring programs.
9. Standardize the collection and dissemination of mid-term grades all students with less than a 2.0 gpa receive intrusive support in the development of Individual Study Plans (ISPs) monitored through neighborhood academic centers
10. Create Cyber-Communities: involve computing services, academic technology services and other offices to both develop and monitor sites; involve faculty and administrative staff in chat rooms, listserves, etc. Schedule cyber-tutor sessions and monitored chat rooms. Provide access to downloadable programs and skills assessments (e.g. <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/>). Create social gatherings where cyber users can meet face-to-face.
11. Create a campus-wide programming timeline and distribution plan
 - Provide a centralized listing of campus programs and activities, accessible on-line or at kiosks placed across campus

- Understand that programming and academic needs / flow should compliment one another
 1. First quarter of semester: heavy programming to establish strong academic behaviors
 2. Second quarter leads to mid-terms: less programming, provide academic skill development, do limited social programming as stress relief
 3. Make use of Fall Break to re-energize, do short-term involvement / service / research
 4. Third quarter after mid-terms: academic skills, some stress busters, dealing with return home
 5. Fourth quarter: limited social activities in living communities to ease stress, little else
- 11. In an effort to continue with a long-range plan, acquire available properties in or adjacent to neighborhood centers (such as vacant Greek houses) for use in continuous development of affiliated housing; enhance the campus plan to redefine the “footprint” for the university and its neighborhoods

Residential recommendations :

- Living in an organized living unit at the university
 1. Create a broader selection of academic or affinity-based environments (eg: FIGs, see Schroeder⁶) to make the large campus environment more intimate and personal; for example:

Academic

Pre-Business
Journalism
Liberal Arts
Engineering & Architecture
Pre-Law
Pre-professional programs

Affinity

Band
Leadership
Hawk Link
Intramurals
Wellness
Substance Free Lifestyles

Several campus components must coordinate on this effort. Plans could be made to pilot two sections in fall 2001, but a concerted effort is necessary, requiring designated representatives from individual departments, NSO, FSAC, enrollment and housing.

2. Provide incentives to retain a higher number of upper division students in large Residence halls. Research shows that upper level students serve as natural mentors and role models in that environment and could be compensated for a commitment to mentoring through paid positions, scholarships, internships, financial aid/room & board/meal plan or leadership program roles (eg. offer \$500 stipend to upper classmen to stay in residence halls). Because Oliver currently has the lowest freshmen retention rate, a pilot project for fall 2001 could be implemented in order to test the effectiveness of a student-to-student mentoring program.
- Participating with neighborhood and campus learning, student leadership and activities
 1. Develop neighborhood identities for cooperative activities and services
 - Create a visual symbol or name to add to maps and campus literature (for more details see University of Michigan model)
 2. Make use of ACT and O&L data collection to associate students with others of similar interests; provide data to advisors for their encouragement of on-going involvement.
 3. Ensure that upper division peer (student) mentors are available in every neighborhood.
 4. Provide neighborhood opportunities as diverse as intramural sports, performance arts, community service, academic and other student groups, and student government.
 5. Create neighborhood centers for academic support; eg: tutorials, recitations, exam reviews, and faculty engagement; make session availability a part of class syllabi. Coordinate academic services areas, such as the Writing Center and Student Development Center to provide services in residence halls.

The following freshmen courses could be included:

Math
Spanish
Psychology

History
Chemistry
Biology

6. Preserve opportunities for women to affiliate with sororities during the first semester at KU, while allowing for their immediate participation in the larger campus community; eg. defer women's recruitment activities to later in fall semester or create fall break programming.
 7. Ensure fraternity first year student participation in activities beyond chapter activities, such as NSO, Hawk Week, and other programming.
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RRPMP
Report of Findings and Recommendations
Sources

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²The Harvard Assessment Seminars, Second Report 1992, Richard J. Light

³excerpt from report of a study of what Canadian Post Secondary teachers define as success for their students in the higher education newsletter: Net Working

⁴ KU Office of Institutional Research and Planning report on Sorority Pledges and Rushees and Non-sorority Women Comparison, submitted March 1999

⁵ KU Special Interest Communities, Summer Review 1999, Randy Timm & Jon Davis—DHS Report on Special Interest Communities

⁶Schroeder, Charles C. & Phyllis Mable. *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls*. Jossey-Bass, 1994.