

LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITIES THAT WORK

A Research-Based Model for Design,
Delivery, and Assessment

*Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas,
Jody E. Jessup-Anger, Mimi Benjamin,
and Matthew R. Wawrzynski*

Foreword by Jillian Kinzie

Afterword by Jon Dooley and Peter Felten

Copublished with



Sample Chapter



STERLING, VIRGINIA

www.Styluspub.com



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PUBLISHING, LLC.

Published by Stylus Publishing, LLC.
22883 Quicksilver Drive

Sterling, Virginia 20166-2019

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Inkelas, Karen Kurotsuchi, author. |

Jessup-Anger, Jody, 1975- author. |

Benjamin, Mimi, 1967- author. |

Wawrzynski, Matthew R., author.

Title: Living-learning communities that work : a research-based model for design, delivery, and assessment / Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Jody Jessup-Anger, Mimi Benjamin, and Matthew R. Wawrzynski.

Description: Sterling, Virginia : Stylus Publishing, LLC, [2018] |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017041936 (print) |

LCCN 2017061564 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781620366028 (Library networkable e-edition) |

ISBN 9781620366035 (Consumer e-edition) |

ISBN 9781620366011 (pbk. : acid free paper) |

ISBN 9781620366004 (cloth : acid free paper) |

ISBN 9781620366035 (consumer e-edition)

Subjects: LCSH: Education, Higher--Aims and objectives--United States. |

Education, Higher--United States--Evaluation |

Interdisciplinary approach in education--United States. |

Group work in education--United States.

Classification: LCC LA227.4 (ebook) |

LCC LA227.4 .I57 2018 (print) |

DDC 378.1/7--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017041936>

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-600-4 (cloth)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-601-1 (paperback)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-602-8 (library networkable e-edition)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-603-5 (consumer e-edition)

Printed in the United States of America

All first editions printed on acid-free paper
that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39-48 Standard.

<p>Bulk Purchases Quantity discounts are available for use in workshops and for staff development. Call 1-800-232-0223.</p>

First Edition, 2018

INTRODUCTION TO LIVING- LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The concept of the living-learning community (LLC), or a group of students who live together in the same on-campus building and share similar academic or special interests, is not a new one. Indeed, its roots can be found in the beginnings of American higher education itself. But its recent popularity—with one study noting over 600 LLCs currently in existence (Inkelas, 2007)—is part of an ongoing, changing, and sometimes contentious debate about both the purposes and failures of a college education. In 2007, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) named learning communities a high-impact practice (HIP) because of the potential of these communities to provide coherence to and ultimately improve undergraduate education (Kuh, 2008). Although there is variation in thematic and organizational type, LLCs typically group students together in a residence hall, offer a shared academic experience, and provide cocurricular learning activities for student engagement with peers (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). Institutional leaders have demonstrated a commitment to providing LLCs, but they currently do so primarily with anecdotal information to guide their work. As a result, there is substantial variation in organizational structure, collaboration, academic and social environments, programmatic integration, student outcomes, and overall quality related to LLC participation.

Despite increasing interest in LLCs as a way to improve undergraduate education and a growing research foundation, there is no comprehensive, empirically based resource that supports the development, delivery, and assessment of LLCs. Existing work on LLCs is typically encapsulated as a subset of the broader learning community (i.e., nonresidentially based) literature and thus rarely gets adequate attention. The existing paucity of LLC literature has led to a broad, largely anecdotal overview of how to create these communities. This book addresses these gaps in the literature by providing

a deeper discussion of the origins of LLCs, their role in improving undergraduate education and other contemporary problems they are thought to address, the way they fit into the HIP landscape, and a synthesis of current research. Furthermore, this book offers an empirically based framework for LLC development and empirically based discussion of best practices related to each element of the framework. However, it is critically important to begin by recounting the history of LLCs in American higher education: how they have been conceived, how they have been criticized, and how they have been reinvented.

Brief History of Learning Communities and LLCs

The LLC “story” begins with the development of the broader and more curricularly based learning community. Although learning communities take a number of different structures (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Inkelas, Soldner, Longersbeam, & Leonard, 2008; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Lenning, Hill, Saunders, Solan, & Stokes, 2013; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004; Smith & Williams, 2007), the foundation for all of these learning community formats is shared. Names such as Dewey, Meiklejohn, Tussman, and Cadwallader are commonly referenced within the history of learning communities as their approaches to education and attempts at structuring intentional learning experiences undergird the current enactment of learning community programs.

Core concepts of education espoused by John Dewey were elements of early learning communities and remain important considerations in today’s programs. Recognizing learning as a social process, Dewey saw students and teachers as partners in learning. Additionally, his emphasis on democracy was a focus for future learning community programs, such as the program founded by Alexander Meiklejohn. Meiklejohn’s Experimental College, an LLC focused on democracy, operated at the University of Wisconsin from 1927 to 1932. Ideas about the effectiveness of learning in community, the importance of integration of multiple knowledge vantage points, the benefits of active learning, and the need for holistic learning that includes both the in-class and out-of-class experiences of students were some of the elements of the Experimental College reflected in learning communities today (Smith & Williams, 2007).

Following a period when higher education’s focus shifted from teaching to research and graduate education, learning communities resurfaced. With the expansion of higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, a renewed interest in educational innovation led to new learning community efforts such as those spearheaded by Joseph Tussman at the University of California, Berkeley, from

1965 to 1969 and Mervyn Cadwallader's similar program at San Jose State College during the same period. Like Meiklejohn's Experimental College, Tussman's and Cadwallader's programs focused on democracy. Tussman, a former student and friend of Meiklejohn, was influenced by his mentor's experiment in Wisconsin and encouraged the integration of course content and multiple perspectives recommended by Meiklejohn. Community was a key element of these initiatives, which also had a physical space near the campus. Although Cadwallader's Tutorial Program incorporated the focus on democracy, a central element of the program was team-teaching in a coherent curriculum, an approach Cadwallader took with him when he moved to the State University of New York College at Old Westbury to institute a similar program there. Unfortunately, this was a tumultuous time at the institution, which shut down the following year (Smith et al., 2004).

The sustainability of learning communities was as much a problem in their early iterations as it is today. Often reliant on a single champion to usher the curriculum and organizational structure into the collegiate environment, these communities faded when the community's champion left the institution or moved on to other projects. To expect a learning community to sustain itself without adequate structure, support, or resources is not realistic nor sufficient for postsecondary institutions. Whereas early learning communities were created as a result of pedagogical beliefs by individuals who championed them into the university environment, a national cry for undergraduate educational change arose in the 1980s and 1990s, reinvigorating the learning community approach. As a result of the need for innovative and reformed undergraduate education, heralded by national reports such as *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the *Returning to Our Roots* series of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (2001), and *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2002), learning communities resurfaced in the late 1980s (Lenning & Ebberts, 1999) and have proliferated ever since that time. Many of these reports provided recommendations for improvements to the undergraduate experience that could be implemented through learning community structures. Some even specifically suggested the designing of learning communities (Fink & Inkela, 2015) in the spirit of the early communities highlighted previously.

Since the 2008 AAC&U publication *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access, and Why They Matter*, in which learning communities were categorized a HIP, greater attention has been paid to ways to incorporate this construct into undergraduate education. A variety of

learning communities, many of which are modeled on the historical communities mentioned previously, exist, and some of them involve students living in proximity to other learning community students in the same residence hall with the intent of capitalizing on that common location. On-campus housing has a history of its own in the United States, shifting from the learning-community-like experiences during the earliest founding of higher education institutions, through the dormitory phase, to today's attempts at creating intentional academically supportive environments.

Residential Learning Communities

Residential learning communities were actually the first learning communities. Early residential experiences in higher education, mirroring what are now called LLCs, were transplanted from England in the form of the Oxford and Cambridge residential college models. In this “collegiate model” (Blimling, 2015, p. 3), students lived, ate, and studied with their peers as well as faculty members, experiencing a holistic university experience similar to the objectives of today's LLCs. Then, with the rise of the Germanic model of education focused primarily on research and graduate education in the 1900s, a more “impersonal approach” (Blimling, 2015, p. 5) followed. During this time, attention to the “living” element of the student experience changed as faculty viewed students as adults and preferred resources to be focused on academic as opposed to residential spaces. Because students needed places to live, dormitories were constructed in order “to house and feed students and to maximize the number of beds constructed for the dollars available, with little or no regard for the quality of students' educational experiences and personal development. Dormitories were designed for low-cost maintenance, not livability” (Frederiksen, 1993, p. 172), and most were clearly not designed with academic integration in mind. The “student development approach” (Blimling, 2015, p. 13) and the “student learning approach” (Blimling, 2015, p. 17) emerged as dormitories eventually transitioned to residence halls, “designed to provide students with low-cost, safe, sanitary, and comfortable living accommodations and to promote students' intellectual, social, moral and physical development” (Frederiksen, 1993, p. 175). Residence halls were operated by staff informed by student development literature, with later additional emphasis on student learning (Blimling, 2015). Thus, the transition to residence halls marked renewed recognition of the integration of living and learning for students residing on campus. This refocusing on students' combined in- and out-of-class experiences has resulted in attention to intentional environmental elements of living on campus.

Although the current philosophy of residence halls situates them as venues for student growth and development as opposed to solely places where students reside, not all residence halls share the same resources and characteristics as LLCs. Schuh (1999) defined *living-learning centers* as “specific interventions designed to tie living in a residence unit (floor, hall, wing) to a specific program sponsored by the institution” (p. 12). Thus, LLCs are more than theme housing, a residential environment with its own types of benefits for students. Additionally, LLCs require more than simply acknowledging the academic within the residential experience, instead calling for the intentional integration of the two. For the purposes of this book, we define *LLCs* as cohorts of students intentionally grouped together in a residence hall who have a shared academic experience along with cocurricular learning activities for engagement with their peers (Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). This definition distinguishes LLCs from theme and other special-interest housing because of the intentional emphasis on academic content within the LLC.

Continuing Challenges LLCs Can Address

Learning communities remain relevant in higher education because educational issues addressed by previous learning communities still exist today. Gabelnick and colleagues (1990) stated, “In a time of widespread criticism of higher education, learning communities constitute an unusual reform effort because of their focus on the structural features of our institutions and our curriculum as both the problem *and* the solution” (p. 5). Following numerous national reports in the 1980s and 1990s calling for educational reform, concerns in the 1990s surfaced regarding educational quality and standards, accountability, attrition, student learning (and what they were not learning), curricular coherence and rationale, declining rewards for and valuing of faculty teaching, and the growing diversity of student demographics (Gabelnick et al., 1990). In the 1998 *About Campus* article “Why Learning Communities? Why Now?” Hutchings noted learning communities can address philosophical, research-based, and pragmatic concerns in higher education. Philosophically, “a fundamental revolution in epistemology” (Hutchings, 1998, p. 7) led to the recognition of knowledge as socially constructed and belief in the educational benefits of active and collaborative learning, which are hallmarks of learning communities. Additionally, Hutchings (1998) highlighted research on student development, student learning outcomes, and motivation and cognition, suggesting learning communities attentive to these elements may lead to important gains. Finally, learning communities provide opportunities for developing talents such as

independence and citizenship that are needed in and outside the workplace, helping colleges and universities achieve their missions.

Higher education scholars believed organizational aspects of colleges and universities were hurdles in the educational process. Gabelnick and colleagues (1990) noted:

The learning community reform effort is distinctive in its focus on structural barriers to educational excellence, pointing to the structural characteristics of many colleges and universities as major impediments to effective teaching and learning. Large, impersonal, bureaucratic, and fragmented, the American college is often an educational community only in theory. (p. 9)

Tinto (1998) touted community as a primary factor in student persistence, noting students who are involved and integrated tend to persist. He also indicated involvement in the first year matters most—“especially during the first ten weeks when the transition to college is not yet complete and personal affiliations are not yet cemented” (Tinto, 1998, p. 169). Tinto’s suggestions for restructuring higher education organizations reflect elements of learning communities, including active and integrated learning. In fact, Tinto recommended outright that learning communities be part of the solution to the issues of student learning, persistence, and citizenship. These structures encourage staff and faculty collaboration, bringing the two aspects of the student experience together with a focus on shared goals. Although Tinto noted that *learning communities*, as he termed them, are well suited for commuter students, the components of these programs can be applied to residential students as well.

Considering the “ideal” academic experience, Gabelnick and colleagues (1990) remarked,

The vision of the collegiate learning community refers to an idealized version of the campus of the past, where students and faculty shared a close and sustained fellowship, where day-to-day contacts reinforced previous classroom learning, where the curriculum was organized around common purposes, and the small scale of the institution promoted active learning, discussion and individuality. (p. 9)

Thus, higher education returned to its past to address its present. The collegiate model exemplified in the early colonial colleges was now being recommended as a way to fortify undergraduate education some 300 years later. LLC structures provided opportunities to create desirably smaller learning environments (Fink & Inkelas, 2015) that are more personalized and connect the students with each other and with the institution.

At the core of learning community programs is integration—of multiple disciplines or subject areas, of academics with cocurricular experiences, of academic experiences with residential experiences. This book focuses on the possible integration between students’ academic and cocurricular experiences through the use of the residential environment, known as LLCs.

Introduction to Studies of LLCs

Before we turn to a description of contemporary LLCs, it is important to briefly summarize the research studies this book relies on in its assertions, especially because this book is the first of its kind to rely on empirical data in the development of LLC best practices. Although there have been a number of single-institution and/or single-program studies of LLCs, this book used data from several multi-institutional or national studies in addition to a comprehensive, single institution study. These studies included (a) the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP), a 10-year mixed methods project that included, in total, nearly 50,000 undergraduates, 60 postsecondary institutions, and over 600 LLCs; (b) a comprehensive, mixed methods study of LLCs at a 4-year public land-grant university that boasts a long history of well-established, academically based LLCs; and (c) a multisite case study of social justice–themed LLCs located within 3 private Catholic postsecondary institutions in different regions in the United States. For more information about each of these studies and their methodologies, please refer to the Appendix.

A Profile of Contemporary LLCs

The NSLLP provided an important contribution to the LLC literature by offering a national portrait of these communities that indicated the diversity of LLC types and their characteristics (e.g., size, financing, organizational structure).

Typologies of LLCs

Although LLC history contains specific examples of programming archetypes, such as the “Oxbridge”-based colonial college models and early twentieth-century reformer models such as Meiklejohn’s Experimental College, the explosive growth of LLCs on college campuses in the 1990s and early 2000s included a variety of programmatic themes and types. What resulted was a panoply of LLCs varying from institution to institution—or

even from program to program within the same institution. A few authors have created models to categorize the different LLC offerings. For example, Smith and Williams (2007) highlighted a continuum of residential intensity for learning communities, from no residential program (“no intensity”) to dedicated residence hall space where students live together, faculty have offices, and classes and other learning community activities may take place. Schoem (2004) categorized LLCs into three types: residential colleges, residential learning communities, and residential education programs, each reflecting a different degree of programming intensity. Although residential colleges may be degree-granting units within the institution, residential learning communities might include connected academic experiences, with residential education programs having the least in- and out-of-class integration but nonetheless providing academic initiatives within the residential setting. Finally, Zeller, James, and Klippenstein (2002) categorized residence-based programs into five types: (a) residential colleges, (b) living-learning centers, (c) theme housing, (d) residential learning communities, and (e) the freshman year experience. Several of these categories are similar to Schoem’s typology, with the addition of living-learning centers, which were characterized by student housing having a strong partnership with a traditional academic unit, such as foreign language programs. Theme housing, another addition, simply grouped students with similar interests or hobbies in a common living space, but these programs typically offered no academic or disciplinary content. Finally, freshman year experience programs focused on helping students make a successful transition from home to college via residence hall programming.

However, Inkelas and her team (2007) provided the most comprehensive typologies of LLCs, using empirically driven data from the NSLLP. First, using information collected from over 600 LLCs, Inkelas and associates developed a thematic typology of LLCs based on (a) program name, (b) program goals and objectives, and (c) stated learning outcomes. The researchers culled the over 600 programs into 41 types in total, which were further combined to form 17 primary categories (in alphabetical order):

1. *Civic/Social Leadership Programs*: Focusing on public service, programs in this category included (a) civic engagement programs, (b) environmental sustainability programs, (c) leadership programs, and (d) service-learning and social justice programs.
2. *Cultural Programs*: Emphasizing cultural appreciation and tolerance, of the following types: (a) international/global programs, (b) language programs, and (c) (domestic) multicultural/diversity programs.

3. *Disciplinary Programs*: Concentrating on a specific discipline or academic major, such as (a) agriculture, (b) business, (c) communication or journalism, (d) education, (e) engineering and computer science, (f) general science, (g) humanities, (h) interdisciplinary studies, (i) law or criminal justice, (j) mathematics, or (k) the social sciences.
4. *Fine and Creative Arts Programs*: Promoting interest and appreciation in artistic endeavors, such as music, art, architecture, film, poetry, photography, and cooking.
5. *General Academic Programs*: Providing general academic support not tied to a specific discipline or type of student.
6. *Honors Programs*: Offering an academically enriched environment for preidentified academically talented students.
7. *Leisure Programs*: Centering on recreational activities, such as (a) general leisure pursuits (e.g., playing card games); (b) local community exploration, particularly at universities in urban centers; and (c) outdoor recreation, such as sporting or wilderness pursuits.
8. *Political Interest Programs*: Discussing political issues, typically through media outlets. Public service, however, was not a feature of this type of programming, unlike civic/social leadership programs.
9. *Research Programs*: Providing students an opportunity to participate in faculty-guided research or peer/team projects while also living together.
10. *Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Programs*: Offering shared living space for students participating in ROTC programs.
11. *Residential Colleges*: Attempting to provide a traditional liberal arts living experience, usually in programming that spanned multiple years.
12. *Sophomore Programs*: Focusing on the continued needs of students in their second year of college.
13. *Transition Programs*: Assisting first-year students with their transition to college life, in the following areas: (a) career or major exploration, (b) first-year programming, (c) new student transitions for marginalized students (e.g., first-generation college students, LGBTQ students), and (d) transfer student programs.
14. *Umbrella Programs*: Combining several distinctive, small programs into one broader, central program. An example might include the University of Maryland's College Park Scholars program, which is a collection of 12 LLCs with themes ranging from public health to business to the media. All 12 College Park Scholars programs are housed in the same residential complex on the University of Maryland campus.

15. *Upper Division Programs*: Serving the interests of third- or fourth-year students, usually focusing on preparing them for graduate school or workforce entry.
16. *Wellness Programs*: Providing an environment inclusive of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, including (a) general wellness and healthy living (e.g., no smoking, no alcohol consumption) and (b) spirituality and faith-based programs.
17. *Women's Programs*: Focusing on women students' development, including programming on (a) women's leadership and (b) women-only science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs.

Using the same data from the NSLLP, Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, and Leonard (2008) developed a second LLC typology, this time examining the following structural or organizational components of programs instead of their themes: (a) size, (b) budget sources, (c) faculty involvement, (d) courses offered, (e) program director affiliation, (f) special resources, and (g) cocurricular activities. A cluster analysis determined there were three distinctive structural types of LLCs represented in the NSLLP data:

1. *Small, Limited Resourced, Primarily Residential Life Emphasis*: Smaller-sized programs (fewer than 50 participants) funded and run by residence life and housing (RLH) professional staff with little-to-no partnership with academic affairs and thus scarce faculty involvement.
2. *Medium, Moderately Resourced, Student/Academic Affairs Combination*: Medium-sized programs (approximately 100 participants) with limited partnerships between academic affairs and RLH that provided resources to students (academic advising, faculty involvement, community service opportunities, career workshops, etc.) not typically provided in traditional residence halls.
3. *Large, Comprehensively Resourced Student/Academic Affairs Collaboration*: Large-sized programs (average size was 343 participants) with robust collaborations between academic affairs and RLH. Students in these programs had the opportunity to access a large number of affiliated faculty, a variety of courses, and a number of resources and cocurricular activities.

In comparing results using the 2 typologies, Inkelas and colleagues (2008) noted their surprise to learn that hundreds of LLCs could be represented by only 3 structural types. Meanwhile, however, there were 17 different LLC themes. The authors conjectured that although different campuses might boast LLCs with varying themes, most LLCs are run and operated using a

similar organizational structure. Additionally, although one might assume LLCs with more comprehensively and collaboratively resourced components are more effective than smaller programs primarily run by RLH staff, the self-reported student outcome data from the NSLLP were not significantly different between clusters 1 and 3. However, the reasons behind the lack of significant differences between the two clusters are not well-known, and the authors cautioned their findings were preliminary.

Characteristics of Contemporary LLCs

Although the cluster analysis revealed only 3 structural types of LLCs, there was a significant amount of variation in the organizational characteristics of the over 600 LLCs represented in the 2007 NSLLP. The most common enrollment size of the typical LLC was 50 participants, but there were some LLCs with over 1,000 participating students and some with fewer than 10 students. In 2007 U.S. dollars, the average LLC budget was \$21,000, not including salaries. However, nearly 10% of the LLCs in the NSLLP had no operating budget, and one-quarter had budgets under \$1,000 (Inkelas, 2016).

Nearly half of the LLCs were directed by a staff member, whereas 15% had directors whose appointments were in academic affairs. The rest were run collaboratively through a student/academic affairs partnership. Despite a high number of academic partners in today's LLCs, there is not much faculty involvement. Almost 1 in 4 LLCs had no faculty participating in their programming, and 64% had only 1 to 3 faculty members working with the program. Of the limited number of faculty participating in LLC programming, they most often could be found teaching, conducting workshops, mentoring LLC students, and performing academic advising. Meanwhile, 85% of LLCs used RLH staff, in roles such as participating in social events, handling community or discipline issues, and performing administrative tasks (Inkelas, 2016). Although the efforts of the RLH staff are critical to the success of these programs, the lack of faculty involvement represents a missed opportunity for deeper integration of learning within the LLCs.

A number of LLC characteristics tended to vary by program theme. For example, LLC goals and objectives tended to vary by theme; however, half of the LLCs in the 2007 NSLLP listed the following goals/objectives as pertaining to their programs:

- Experiencing a smooth academic transition to college (56%)
- Feeling a sense of belonging to the institution (54%)
- Demonstrating openness to views different from one's own (52%)

- Learning about others from different backgrounds (50%)
- Experiencing a smooth social transition to college (50%)

Similarly, cocurricular activities tended to be idiosyncratic to the theme of the LLC, but there were a few common types of activities included in many LLC portfolios. For example, 23% required some form of orientation program, whereas 14% and 12%, respectively, required students to undertake group projects or team-building exercises. Among the optional cocurricular activities, the most popular among LLCs were cultural outings (79%), multicultural programming (77%), and study groups (75%) (Inkelas, 2016).

Although the preceding analysis identifies some of the common characteristics of contemporary LLCs, these characteristics do not exemplify best practices. This requires further investigation, and the focus of the remainder of this book will be on those aspects of LLCs that have been found empirically to facilitate positive student outcomes.

Purposes of This Book

Clearly, LLCs as a HIP have the attention of faculty and administrators both within and outside the United States; the evidence is in the hundreds of LLCs that now exist. Because, until now, there was no empirically based framework for LLCs, there is substantial variation in quality and student outcomes related to LLC participation. Rising attendance at professional conferences related to LLCs and the development of new conferences like the Residential College Symposium illustrate that institutional leaders are looking for ways to enhance the quality of their LLCs.

Despite the reclaimed interest in LLCs, there is a lack of resources available to researchers and practitioners; therefore, we have written this book to offer an empirically based framework to guide the design, delivery, and assessment of LLCs, using best practices from research to illustrate each element of the framework. We also address the resources needed to build and maintain these critical elements for program success. Practitioners, researchers, and institutional leaders can use this book as a guide to more effectively allocate resources to create and sustain successful LLCs and to realize the potential of these communities to improve undergraduate education. This book provides guidance for LLC administrators, institutional leaders, and faculty working in LLCs. Those who are just beginning to develop LLCs and those who are looking to improve them will also find many ideas of interest. Additionally, students in student affairs graduate preparation programs and other researchers exploring LLC environments may find this evidence-based approach to understanding LLCs beneficial to their work.

Readers will note throughout the book that some institutions are identified when they are used as examples whereas others are not. Those from research studies for which confidentiality was assured are referenced by pseudonym. Other institutional examples, sought directly from particular institutions with recognition they would be named within the book, identify the specific college or university. We provide this information to clarify our approach. Additionally, we have made specific decisions about terminology for this book that deserve explanation. We have used the term *academic affairs* to reference academic units within institutions. When referencing staff from residence life and housing, we use the abbreviation *RLH*; we specify when those RLH staff members are students or professionals.

Chapter 2 introduces the best practices model (BPM) based on the NSLLP, and readers are provided with an in-depth overview of each level of the BPM, with current LLC examples highlighting specific elements at each level. Each of the following five chapters (2–6) begins with the BPM graphic to provide a visual guide for the reader and reinforce the importance of building each level on the foundation of the previous level. Chapters 3 through 6 also include a special section highlighting one LLC to illustrate the BPM across chapters. The case example is introduced in Box 1.1. After exploring best practices, logistics and costs are described in chapter 7. Finally, sustainability considerations are addressed in chapter 8, including such aspects as program equity and faculty recruitment and rewards. In addition, at the end of each chapter we provide discussion questions for further exploration of that level of the model. At the end of the book, we offer an inventory for campuses to reflect on their current programs and determine current strengths as well as areas for improvement. Readers new to LLCs may want to read the book in its entirety, whereas those more familiar may opt to read chapters focused on areas in which they wish to improve or dedicate additional effort.

Although this book represents a new model for LLCs, it should not be considered comprehensive. LLCs mainly exist on residential college campuses, and although some community colleges are beginning to provide campus housing options for their students, this book and the studies referenced in it are focused on four-year residential institutions. Moreover, although the evolution of LLCs in U.S. higher education includes the development of the broader-based set of learning communities, this book concentrates solely on residentially based learning communities and does not reflect current research and practice related to other types of learning communities. Finally, this book addresses best practices in LLCs but does not go into detail on other programming commonly found in college residence halls, such as residential education, community building, and other programming without an academic focus.

BOX 1.1

Pace University Case Study

In chapters 3 through 6, toward the end of each chapter, we present a special section that highlights one institution's LLCs in particular. With their permission, we use the First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs) at Pace University–Westchester as a case study on how the BPM can help identify places of strength and also show areas for improvement in an institution's LLCs.

Pace University–Westchester in Pleasantville, New York, underwent a major renovation transforming its 200-acre campus. Architectural firm EYP, Inc., was hired to create and carry out a new sustainable master plan, including designing a 125,000-square-foot residence hall, Alumni Hall, which opened in the fall of 2015. Through its commitment to building long-standing relationships with clients to assist in fulfilling their vision, EYP introduced a researcher to consult with them as well as their client, Pace University–Westchester. As an outgrowth of this assignment, Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, the researcher and coauthor of this book, arranged to conduct a case study site visit of the FIGs and a survey of all FIG participants.

Alumni Hall houses approximately 500 students in a semi-suite-style layout. The new residence hall features two classrooms, a coffee bar, and six study rooms. Alumni Hall also houses all of Pace's seven FIGs, and each FIG has its own themed lounge. The themes of the seven FIGs are, in alphabetical order: Body and Mind (BAM), Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO), Extreme Sports & Pace Nation (ESPN), Honors, Nursing, Pop Culture & Media, and Setters Leadership and Service House (SLH). There is also a themed program for returning (i.e., non-first-year) students in nursing, but that program is located in adjacent Elm Hall and is not included in the case study.

Data for the case study were collected through a variety of methods. At the start of data collection, Pace's Office of Residential Life and Housing (RLH) provided Inkelas a large set of documents about the FIGs, including residence director and resident assistant (RA) training documents, information about FIG orientation and selection, marketing information, agendas from FIG Advisory Board meetings, and results from prior assessments. RLH also responded to the LLC inventory described in chapter 6. In addition, Inkelas conducted a site visit at Pace on December 16, 2016, during which she was provided a tour of the FIG facilities and interviewed faculty and staff associated with the FIGs. Finally, in February and March of 2017, the researchers conducted a survey of all FIG participants, which resulted in 190 respondents, or a 42.9% response rate.

The boxes in chapters 3 to 6 each show a real-life example of how LLCs can be scrutinized using the BPM.

Like all HIPs the proving ground for institutions is not whether they operate any LLCs but if they operate effective LLCs. Indeed, although the premise for LLCs is rather simple—namely, to make the in-class and out-of-class experience more seamless—the components that make LLCs successful are anything but simple and are instead a series of building blocks that rely on one another for support. The next chapter describes this series of building blocks, which serves as our BPM.