

Residence Learning Community Program Report 2014

Executive Summary

The residential learning communities (RLCs) at JMU include hundreds of students from various disciplines and interest groups across campus. Students from six of these learning communities participated in this assessment: Arts, Huber, Madison International, Roop, Psychology, and Trelawney. To assess the effectiveness of these programs the Office of Residence Life established holistic goals and objectives for the learning communities. The goals for the RLCs are:

Goal 1: Increase students' academic motivation

Goal 2: Increase students' academic success

Goal 3: Increase students' involvement in the JMU environment as well as one's civic responsibility

Table 1 provides a more thorough listing of the goals and objectives of the RLC program. ORL assesses these goals via numerous objectives that specify areas of student development. Data were collected early in the fall 2013 semester and then again late in the spring 2014 semester. We compared pre and post-test responses from RLC students to students who lived in a similar residence hall, but were not in an RLC (i.e., non-RLC students). We use growth across time and differences between non-RLC and RLC students to determine the effectiveness of the program. A total of 380 (61%) students provided complete assessment responses for the pre-test and 189 (30%) completed the post-test. Of these responders, 148 students were matched from pre- to post-test, 103 (70%) of which were RLC. Approximately 38% of possible RLC students completed both the pre- and post-test, and 13% of possible non-RLC students. This year, we attempted to increase response rate by requesting that RLC coordinators encourage their students to complete the survey and/or use it as a class assignment; we did in fact get a higher response rate for the RLC students than we did last year. Future assessment efforts should continue to focus on obtaining an even larger percentage of both RLC and non-RLC students.

Objective 3.2 (spending more time with students with similar academic interests) was met, with RLC students spending more time with like-minded peers than non-RLC students. However, Objectives 1.3, 1.4, and 3.1 were not met, with RLC students' level of comfort with faculty and valuation of academic courses decreasing from pre- to post-test, and exhibiting no differences from non-RLC students in expectancies to succeed. These findings should be examined carefully when considering any future programmatic changes to the RLCs.

Over the years there has been a disconnect between RLC goals/objectives, programming and assessment; some objectives were never assessed, and others were not addressed in the RLC program. The lack of alignment called into question if RLC programming is designed to show gains in the area prescribed by the objectives. This disconnect decreases the utility of the results of the assessment and needs to be addressed. The ultimate goal for this assessment is that the results are relevant to the coordinators of the RLCs, such that they can use them for program improvement. As a result, the decision was made to revise the objectives for the 2014-2015 school year. The new objectives can be seen at the end of this report.