CALL FOR APPLICATIONS
Center for Engaged Learning Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice
2017-2019

The Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University is pleased to announce the 2017-2019 Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice. This three-summer research seminar facilitates multi-institutional research on types of Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) using a mixed-methods approach to conduct qualitative and quantitative research. We invite interested scholars and practitioners, regardless of discipline, to apply to join a multi-institutional cohort of researchers collaborating to investigate evidence-based, high-quality RLCs.

Overview of Current Research on Residential Learning Communities

Learning communities in undergraduate education have been identified as a high-impact practice that can increase students’ engagement, enhance their sense of belonging, and prompt deeper, more engaged learning (Pike, 1999; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Kuh 2008; Inkelas & Soldner 2011; Penven et al., 2013; Spanierman 2013; Spear et al., 2003). Yet learning communities vary widely in objectives, structure, resources, selection criteria, accessibility, curricular content, and co-curricular programs, not only from one institution to the next, but also from one learning community to another within the same institution. Not unsurprisingly, given this variation, researchers and practitioners have not been able to agree on a single definition of a learning community. Over the past three decades, scholars and practitioners have created categories that help differentiate learning communities by concept, design, stated purpose, target population, structure, academic and co-curricular connections, and more. Some broad categories of learning communities generally recognized by practitioners and in the scholarly literature include cultural specific populations or curricular interest groups, classroom-based communities where the same students take two or more academic courses together (in a paired or clustered fashion), and learning programs that are residentially based (Fink & Hummel, 2015; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Inkelas & Soldner, 2011; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999, Smith et al., 2004; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Scholars who have conducted research on residential learning communities introduced sub-typologies of these communities, helping practitioners and researchers understand both the complexity and the great variety of residential learning communities in undergraduate education (Zeller et al., 2002; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Schoem, 2004). While much of this work has been either theoretical or focused on RLCs at single institutions, there has been some exciting empirical research conducted on RLCs over the past 15 years across multiple institutions. Perhaps the most exhaustive research to date is the multi-year, multi-institutional study of living-learning programs in the United States: The National Study of Living Learning Programs (NSLLP) (Inkelas & Associates 2004; 2008). For this study the researchers described living-learning programs as those “in which undergraduate students live together in a discrete...
portion of a residence hall (or the entire hall) and participate in academic and/or extra-curricular programming designed especially for them” (Inkelas & Associates 2004; 2008). Through the data collected in this longitudinal study, researchers ultimately identified seventeen different primary categories and forty-one types of living learning programs, most falling into one of three structural forms (Inkelas & Associates, 2008).

While the NSLLP has helped us understand the variety, range, complexity, and number of residential learning communities (RLCs) across the country and the National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh, 2008) has helped us identify these communities as a high-impact practice, we still do not have a clear understanding of how and under what conditions RLCs become an undergraduate high-impact practice. Matthew J. Mayhew and a team of researchers at New York University have launched a new multi-institutional study, the Study of Integrated Living Learning Programs (SILLP), that examines student outcomes in RLCs with the aim of understanding how RLCs affect student development and success (Mayhew, Dahl & Youngerman, 2015).

Our seminar on Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice seeks to build upon this body of established and emerging research. Research teams will explore more deeply RLC experiences and outcomes for students, staff, and faculty through multi-institutional studies that use a mixed-methods approach to conduct qualitative and quantitative research, aiming to discern the conditions for RLCs to be a high-impact practice in undergraduate education.

**Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice**

The 2017-2019 CEL Research Seminar builds on existing knowledge of learning communities in higher education but will focus specifically on examining those undergraduate learning communities that have a residential component—a type of learning community that we are referring to as “residential learning communities,” or “RLCs.” While a residential learning community may be thought of as one kind of learning community, we recognize that there is significant variation among RLCs in mission, emphases, and priorities, not to mention resources, institutional value, accessibility, and level of engagement from various institutional departments and divisions. As such, we anticipate forming several multi-institutional research teams differentiated by RLC type as indicated by the community’s primary emphasis on the residential, learning, or community aspect. Within these differentiated teams, using quantitative and qualitative data and a mixed-methods approach, participants might explore lines of inquiry such as student outcomes, faculty experiences, staff experiences, institutional cultures, or degree of cross-divisional collaboration.

Ultimately, the goal of these multi-institutional research projects is to better understand – within and across types of RLCs – what makes these experiences high-impact practices for students, how institutions might scale up access to them, how faculty and staff can contribute to their high-quality while balancing other job responsibilities, and how RLCs shape and are shaped by institutional culture.
We expect applications from team members of emerging and existing RLCs at a range of institutions, from small private liberal arts colleges to public comprehensive or research universities. International participation is encouraged.

**Required Elements of Proposal**

**A. Information about the RLC you wish to study**

1. Describe the residential learning community you have at your institution or are working to establish at your institution that you are most interested in researching. (If you have more than one kind of RLC, please describe the one that you want to research more deeply.)

2. What is the institutional context for the RLCs you wish to study? Are there unique demographic/background variables at the institution that are relevant to the RLC?

3. In reflecting on the residential, learning, and community components of the RLC, which is emphasized/prioritized the most: residential, learning, or community? Explain your selection:

4. Describe the residential component (including housing style, required or typical duration of stay) and/or requirements as well as the application process (if any) for students:

5. Describe the formal and/or informal learning components (e.g., tied to an academic course, involves experiential learning, no academic credit but has extant learning outcomes, etc.):

6. Explain how the community is formed and identified (e.g., all accepted applicants are provided housing in the same location and the community is reinforced through exclusive events and courses):

7. Articulate one or two research topics that you would like to explore about the RLC/RLC-type through multi-institutional research with other seminar participants.

8. Why is this research topic appropriate for multi-institutional investigation?

**B. Information about your professional experience**

1. How does this inquiry focus fit with your existing scholarly or practitioner work?

2. What research methods do you have experience using, and which methods (regardless of your experience with them) do you anticipate would help you explore this research topic? What kind of research methodologies would you need support implementing?

3. What kinds of expertise do you bring to the investigation of residential learning communities?

**Research Cohorts and Seminar Logistics**

The Center for Engaged Learning Research Seminar will support multi-institutional research addressing and surrounding this theme over two academic calendar years, with three one-week summer meetings on the Elon University campus. Participants will collaborate on active
research over the entire period. These multi-institutional collaborations will enable larger scale studies and explorations of the impact of different institutional contexts.

- **June 25-30, 2017:** Participants will meet on Elon’s campus to collaboratively develop and plan multi-institutional research projects to be conducted throughout the following year at the participants’ own institutions. Participants’ research will build on existing literature, and multi-institutional research teams will develop both shared inquiry questions and interventions to use in formative and summative evaluation. Participants will be active researchers over the course of the seminar, and the Center will provide support for learning scholarship of teaching and learning research methods that extend participants’ disciplinary research experience.

- **June 17-22, 2018:** Participants will meet to collaboratively analyze data, share their initial multi-institutional results, and plan a more sharply focused research agenda for the research cohort for year two, using data gathered the first year to help develop that agenda.

- **June 16-21, 2019:** Participants will reconvene to share their year two results, to plan continuations of their work, and to host a conference on the seminar theme.

Elon University will provide lodging in residence halls and meals for seminar participants during the seminar’s 2017-2019 summer meetings. In addition, each participant will be reimbursed up to $500/year (up to $1000/year for international participants) for travel costs (e.g., airplane tickets, mileage, airport parking, meals in transit) incurred while traveling to the seminar’s summer meetings at Elon University. Full reimbursement policies will be distributed to accepted participants. Other participant expenses, including travel costs above the limit and any research costs, will be paid by the participants and/or their home institutions.

Participants will produce significant, concrete outcomes. Past Center for Engaged Learning research seminars have generated edited volumes, journal articles and book chapters, white papers, and conference presentations – as well as local initiatives on participants’ home campuses. Participants will be well-positioned to use evidence-based assessments of student learning conducted as part of the seminar to inform residential learning communities at their institutions.

**Seminar Leaders**
The 2017-2019 Center for Engaged Learning Research Seminar will be led by Mimi Benjamin, Jody Jessup-Anger, Shannon Lundeen, and Cara McFadden.

*Mimi Benjamin* is Assistant Professor of Student Affairs in Higher Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include student co-curricular learning outcomes,
learning communities, and faculty experiences. She is the editor of the 2015 New Directions for Student Services book *Learning Communities from Start to Finish* and served as a student affairs administrator for 19 years, during which time she worked extensively with residential programs and learning communities. She served as a Resource Faculty Member at the 2016 National Summer Institute on Learning Communities at The Washington Center at The Evergreen State College and has given professional presentations on learning community topics at the American College Personnel Association Convention, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Conference, the Learning Communities and Collaboration Conference, and the National Learning Communities Project Conference. In 2011, Mimi was a guest co-editor for a special issue focused on faculty involvement in residence halls for the *Journal of College and University Student Housing*. She also is the co-editor of the book *Maybe I Should . . . Case Studies in Ethics for Student Affairs Professionals* (2009). Mimi earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a focus on Higher Education from Iowa State University, her M.Ed. in College Student Personnel from Ohio University, her M.A. in English from Clarion University of Pennsylvania, and her B.S. in Secondary Education-English from Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

**Jody Jessup-Anger** is Associate Professor of Educational and Policy Leadership at Marquette University. Her research explores how student and collegiate environment interaction facilitates or impedes student development and learning. Jody has written several research articles exploring the effectiveness of living-learning communities, authored a chapter about theoretical foundations of learning communities in the *New Directions for Student Services* monograph, and recently completed a study exploring the roles of living-learning communities in social justice and civic engagement. She has given papers and professional presentations on living-learning community environments at the American College Personnel Association, the Association for the Study of Higher Education, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators annual conferences. Jody serves on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* and on ACPA’s Commission for Professional Preparation in Student Affairs. Jody earned her Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education from Michigan State University, her M.S. in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Colorado State University, and her B.A. in International Studies from American University.

**Shannon B. Lundeen** is Director of Academic Initiatives for the Residential Campus and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Elon University. At Elon, Shannon oversees the incorporation and development of academic programs and initiatives in Elon’s seven residential neighborhoods, working to advance the University’s goal of transforming the residential experience at Elon by integrating the residential, academic, and social aspects of campus life. Shannon works with multiple departments and leaders across the university in order to recruit faculty and staff to serve in the residential campus as teachers, scholars, and mentors in a range of roles from living-learning community advisor to neighborhood faculty director-in-residence. She has previously served as a faculty member living in residence and as a living learning community advisor at a prior institution. Recently, Shannon was elected Chair of the newly founded
Residential College Society, which seeks to transform higher education by providing a learning network for faculty and student affairs educators to share knowledge, build community, and advance scholarship about the residential college experience. Shannon has published in feminist philosophy, bioethics, and gender and sexuality studies and has conducted trainings, led workshops, and given presentations on diversity, women’s leadership, and Title IX in higher education. Shannon earned her Ph.D. in Philosophy and Graduate Certificate in Women’s Studies from Stony Brook University, and her B.A. in Philosophy and Women’s Studies from Colgate University.

*Cara McFadden* is Assistant Professor of Sport and Event Management at Elon University. At Elon, Cara served two years as a faculty-in-residence as the Faculty Director for one of the seven residential neighborhoods. In the position she collaborated with the residence life Community Director to create academic and social experiences in the neighborhood. Cara has 15 combined years of experience in collegiate recreation and higher education. Her first full-time faculty position was for the Sport and Recreation Management program at James Madison University where she taught college student development theory for the campus recreation graduate program. Cara’s areas of interest include leadership, college student development, assessment, and student engagement. In 2013, she published an article entitled, “Development and Validation of the Sense of Competence Scale-Revised (SCS-R)” in the *Journal of Applied Measurement*. Recently, Cara published a co-edited issue of *New Directions for Student Leadership* entitled, “Student Leadership Development through Recreation and Athletics.” Cara received her B.S. in Sport Management from Elon University, an M.A. in Recreation Administration from Central Michigan University, and her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with an emphasis in Higher Education from Virginia Tech.

**How to Apply**
The review committee will select participants from a range of institution types (e.g., research-intensive universities, liberal arts colleges, teaching institutions, etc.), geographic locations, and program type of residential learning community to ensure a variety of approaches and models are included in the seminar’s multi-institutional studies.

To apply, submit a completed application and abbreviated curriculum vita (CV, 4 pages maximum) by 5:00 PM EST on Monday, November 21, 2016. The application, available online at [http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/cel-seminars/residential-learning-communities/](http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/cel-seminars/residential-learning-communities/), asks you to provide responses to the required elements of the proposal as outlined above.

More than one person per institution may apply. Although CEL Research Seminar projects will be multi-institutional, applicants do not need to form these teams before they apply. CEL Research Seminar leaders will create initial teams based on applicants’ information. After the November 21st deadline, a review committee, including the seminar leaders, will review applications, make selections, and notify all applicants by Friday, December 16, 2016. Questions
about the application and selection process should be directed to Shannon Lundeen and Cara McFadden at rlc@elon.edu.

To learn more about the 2017-2019 CEL Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities, visit: http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/cel-seminars/residential-learning-communities/

To learn more about the Center for Engaged Learning, visit: http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/.

References


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