

# RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES [RLCs] AT PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY [PLU]

## WHAT ARE RLCs?

Residential Learning Communities are a type of higher education Learning Community (which can also exist in non-residential formats and which often include linked courses, learning clusters, and/or first year interest groups). At PLU, our Residential Learning Communities are wings or halls that are organized by a theme (e.g., year in school, interest subject, etc.). Some of our RLCs include Residential Linked Course options for first-year residents. RLCs are a high impact practices in higher education, linked with greater positive student outcomes (such as learning, satisfaction, and retention).

## WHY RLCs?

There is a wealth of evidence in student affairs literature pointing to Residential Learning Communities as high impact practices, specifically with positive impact on college student outcomes, such as critical thinking, increased interaction with faculty and peers, increased sense of belonging and satisfaction, and increased openness to diversity and new ideas (Banta, T. W., 2001; Evenbeck, S., & Borden, V. M. H., 2001; Inkelas, K. K., Soldner, M., Longerbeam, S. D., & Leonard, J. B., 2008; Inkelas, K. K., Vogt, K. E., Longerbeam, S. D., Owen, J., & Johnson, D., 2006; Mac Kinnon, J. L., 2006; Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T., 1980; Smith, C., & Bath, D., 2006; Spanierman, L. B., Soble, J. R., Mayfield, J. B., Neville, H. A., Aber, M., Khuri, L., & De La Rosa, B., 2013; Stassen, M. L. A., 2003; Tinto, V., 2000; Ward, L., Siegel, M. J., & Davenport, Z., 2012; Wawrzynski, M. R., & Jessup-Anger, J., 2010; Woosely, S. A., & Johnson, N. J., 2006; Woosley, S. A & Shepler, D. K., 2011; Zhao, C., & Kuh, G. D., 2004).

## HISTORY OF RLCs AT PLU

Eleven years ago, Residential Life established PLU's first RLC with the founding of Hong International Hall (HIH) in conjunction with the Languages and Literatures department and several other campus partners. In Fall 2008, Residential Life developed a second RLC in partnership with the Diversity Center called Social Action and Leadership (SAL) recently re-named in 2017 to Diversity, Justice, and Sustainability [DJS] RLC (in Stuen). Since that time, we have grown to thirteen (13) different robust themed RLCs across the nine (9) residence halls. In the past two years, it has been a primary departmental initiative to deepen the impact of these communities through formalizing curricular connections by establishing residential linked courses and creating new RLC Taskforces (i.e., interdisciplinary committees comprising students, faculty, and staff that direct the co-curricular development for their RLC). Residential Life has been able to increase the positive impact of the RLCs on student outcomes through intentional collaborations with the First Year Experience Program (FYEP), Academic Advising, the Diversity Center (specifically in commuter student inclusion), Admission, and individual faculty members. These campus partners have been integral to the success of our pilots in linking courses with our RLCs and in serving on the RLC Taskforces.

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## RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (RLCs)

Students who participate in RLCs, especially those that have a linked course, have increased:

- Critical thinking & academic outcomes
- Faculty & peer interactions
- Sense of belonging & satisfaction
- Diversity awareness & openness to new ideas



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