

LEARNING COMMUNITIES [LCs] AT PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY [PLU]

WHAT ARE LCs?

Learning Communities (LCs) are a valuable component of the PLU experience, adding to the learning that happens in and beyond the classroom. At PLU, Learning Communities are residential wings or halls that are organized by theme (e.g., year in school, interest subject, etc.). Many LCs offer **linked courses for first year students** that are thematically connected to the interests and concerns of the LC. LC linked courses are open to both first-year residents of the linked LC and first-year commuter students who are interested in opting in to the LC community. For first-year residential students, by participating in an LC linked course your classmates for that course will also be your neighbors. For first-year commuter students, by participating in an LC linked course, you will have an additional “home” on-campus in the hall/LC to which the course is connected. Students who participate in LC linked courses (both residential and commuter) have increased community and academic support to promote success in their first year at PLU!

WHY LCs?

There is a wealth of evidence in student affairs literature pointing to 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, 2001; Evenbeck & Borden, 2001; Inkelas, Soldner, Longebear, & Leonard, 2008; Inkelas, Vogt, Longebear, Owen, & Johnson, 2006; Mac Kinnon, 2006; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1980; Smith, & Bath, 2006; Spanierman, Soble, Mayfield, Neville, Aber, Khuri, & De La Rosa, 2013; Stassen, 2003; Tinto, 2000; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012; Wawrzynski, & Jessup-Anger, 2010; Woosely, & Johnson, 2006; Woosley, & Shepler, 2011; Zhao, & Kuh, 2004).

HISTORY OF LCs AT PLU

Eleven years ago, Residential Life established PLU's first LC 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 LC in partnership with the Diversity Center called Social Action and Leadership (SAL) recently re-named in 2017 to Diversity, Justice, and Sustainability [DJS] LC (in Stuen). Since that time, we have grown to thirteen (13) different robust themed LCs 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 linked courses and creating new LC Taskforces (i.e., interdisciplinary committees comprising students, faculty, and staff that direct the co-curricular development for their LC). Residential Life has been able to increase the positive impact of the LCs 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 LCs and in serving on the LC 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

