After 16 years of practice and research, we now know a lot about living-learning programs (LLPs). Based on our results from the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP; www.livelearnstudy.net), living in an LLP produces the kinds of academic and social outcomes that we want our students to achieve (See Table 1). Students living in LLPs expressed more critical thinking, more civic engagement, and more involvement with faculty. They make a smoother academic and social transition to college, and they view their college as more supportive of their academic pursuits. They make better choices about their health, particularly their drinking. Impressively, these gains persist throughout their college years even if the student lived only one year in an LLP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LLP Environment</th>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Application of Knowledge</th>
<th>Commitment to Civic Engagement</th>
<th>Smooth Academic Transition</th>
<th>Smooth Social Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In peer study group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/vocational discussions with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/cultural discussions with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course-related faculty interaction</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically supportive residence hall climate</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially supportive residence hall climate</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Brower & Inkelas, Living-Learning Programs. One High-Impact Educational Practice we know a lot about. Liberal Education, Spring, 2010.
LLPs come in a variety of types and sizes (see Appendix), though the strongest programs share three features. The most effective LLPs have strong partnerships between student and academic affairs; they have clearly defined and academically oriented learning objectives; and they take full advantage of the living side of the equation—they “walk the talk” to put learning objectives into daily practice (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Three basic ingredients for successful LLPs

Living-Learning Programs at UW-Madison

At UW-Madison, we’ve taken to heart the findings of the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) to build strong LLPs. We began our modern LLPs in 1995 with the Bradley Learning Community, and we’ve grown to host seven programs at present, with two more coming on line by 2015. About 25% of our first-year class lives in one of our living-learning programs.

Our programs are distinguished by the strong partnerships between faculty and housing staff. These cross-divisional leadership units jointly oversee programming, courses and budgets, and they are responsible for special seminars and set-aside courses taught within the LLP. Faculty and staff, including student staff, receive specialized training to design and implement the cohesive programs that bring each LLP’s mission to life.

As one example, consider Green House (http://www.housing.wisc.edu/greenhouse/).
Green House states its mission as “setting students on paths to find sustainable solutions to social and environmental challenges, exploring food and agrifood systems, conservation and biodiversity, environmental justice, and green business, building and design.” It’s co-led by a faculty director who is an expert in food systems, a housing director with a deep passion for environmental justice, and a graduate assistant studying environmental advocacy. 112 students live in Green House; it occupies an entire floor of one of our large residence halls.

**Figure 2. Three characteristics of successful LLCs, expanded**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LLPs with the strongest outcomes are most likely to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have a strong student affairs—academic affairs presence and partnership:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program objectives value vital, well-defined, multiple roles for faculty, staff, and graduate students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communication among all faculty and staff leaders is excellent and frequent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Budget and program oversight are shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify clear learning objectives with strong academic focus throughout the program:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least one credit-bearing course taught specifically for LLP participants is offered as part of the program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Study space is provided as part of physical facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A healthy dose of cocurricular activities is academically focused—internships, service learning, collaborative research, career-focused workshops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Capitalize on community settings to create opportunities for learning wherever and whenever it occurs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High engagement and intentionality are key, throughout all aspects of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning by doing—through programming, staff training, budget decisions, student discipline, hall governance, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Physical characteristics of the program mirror objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Faculty, staff, and students can take on variety of roles—instructor, mentor, advisor, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Faculty and teaching assistants are helped to make best use of the residence-hall environment, which can be an unfamiliar setting for them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Green House began from the interests of students who took a popular course on sustainable food systems offered by the faculty member who eventually became its faculty director. The faculty member inspired his students, and they approached the Director of University Housing with the idea to create a new LLP focused on sustainability and environmental advocacy. After 18 months of planning, Green House opened in the fall of 2010.

It’s been a wildly successful program. It has a clear and compelling mission that drives everything—from activities to governance to discipline to budget. Partnerships among the faculty and staff are particularly strong.

It is amazing how the Green House, a single mission-driven program, grew to impact the
entire campus. The residents in the first year were encouraged to examine how they live—
their use of electricity and water, trash and recycling, heating and cooling of the building,
and what they ate. They explored how food was sourced for their own residence hall eating
commons, and they capitalized on the faculty director’s network of connections with local
farmers to source locally about 50% of their food. The exploration led to the development of
new sustainability-based policies and practices for sourcing, composting and waste
management institution-wide.

In the spring, Green House worked with facilities staff to use some of the grounds
surrounding one of campus’s central gardens to cultivate a vegetable garden. This, too,
became a great success, and is now used
as a “tasting garden” which invites
community members to snack on cherry
tomatoes and green beans while they’re
waiting for the bus.

Not all LLP programs will have such
wide-ranging impact, of course, but this
example illustrates how mission-driven
programming, coupled with true faculty-
staff-student partnerships, generates
programming that “walks the talk” and
leads to the liberal learning that inspires
undergraduates.

Our findings from the NSLLP—to ground an LLP in multidimensional partnerships between
student and academic affairs, to develop a mission that is clearly defined and academically-
oriented, and to generate engaged learning programs that capitalize on the comprehensive
living environment—are foundational touchstones as UW-Madison nurtures its existing
LLPs and expands these opportunities into the future. These features of smart design can be
replicated by any residential institution looking to create a living-learning program with a
similar impact on student outcomes.

Our research on LLPs has been summarized by myself and my colleague, Karen Kurotsuchi
Inkelas in an article for Liberal Education (Spring, 2010, available at
http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-sp10/LESP10_Brower.cfm). More information is
also available at our National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP,
http://livelearnstudy.net/).
Appendix
Program themes that emerged from the National Study of Living-Learning Programs:

- Civic and social leadership
- Disciplinary
- Fine and creative arts
- General academic
- Honors
- Sophomores only
- Cultural
- Leisure
- Political interest
- Residential college
- Research
- Upper division (juniors or seniors only)
- Reserve Officers’ Training Corps
- First-year transition
- Umbrella (many themes under one banner, such as foreign-language halls)
- Wellness or health
- Women

Basic program characteristics found through the NSLLP:

- **Size**
  Median Size = 52 (mode = 50)
  11 programs had over 1000 students

- **Cost**
  Average cost of program = $21K
  (mode = $5K)
  10% of programs had *no* budget
  25% had budgets under $1K

- **Configuration**
  71% of programs housed within one
discrete portion of residence hall
  18% encompass entire residence hall
  Rest were unique arrangements

- **Oversight**
  47% Residence Life/Housing only
  15% Academic Dept/Affairs unit only
  31% Combination Student
  Affairs/Academic Affairs
  Rest are unique arrangements

- **Professional affiliation of director**
  43% Residence Life
  21% Academic Department
  13% Combination
  8% Multi-person board
  Rest are unique arrangement