

2020

## Unique Strategies to Foster Integrative Learning in Residential Learning Communities

Richie Gebauer

*Cabrini University, gebauer@cabrini.edu*

Mary Ellen Wade

*Loyola University Maryland, mewade@loyola.edu*

Tina Muller

*Pacific Lutheran University, tmuller@plu.edu*

Samantha Kramer

*The University of Central Oklahoma, skramer3@uco.edu*

Margaret Leary

*University of San Diego, margaretleary@sandiego.edu*

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrjournal>

---

### Recommended Citation

Gebauer, R. , Wade, M. , Muller, T. , Kramer, S. , Leary, M. , Sopper, J. (2020). Unique Strategies to Foster Integrative Learning in Residential Learning Communities. *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, 8(1), Article 9.

Available at: <https://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrjournal/vol8/iss1/9>

Authors retain copyright of their material under a [Creative Commons Non-Commercial Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

---

## Unique Strategies to Foster Integrative Learning in Residential Learning Communities

### Abstract

Lardner and Malnarich (2009) identify learning communities as an educational reform strategy designed for intentional student cohorts that engage students in at least one integrative learning opportunity. Colleges and universities are aware that robust educational programs exist on their campuses, yet institutions must identify strategies to help students connect and make meaning of these fragmented experiences (DeZure et al., 2005). In this article we discuss the intentional structure of Residential Learning Communities (RLCs), also referred to as Living-Learning Communities, on six different campuses, specifically focusing on how curriculum and co-curriculum are integrated to enhance the integrative learning practices of students. For learning to be truly effective, it must be threaded through the intellectual life of the RLC in ways that meaningfully connect the curriculum and co-curriculum and on-campus and off-campus life experiences (Huber et al., 2005).

### Keywords

Integrative learning, residential learning communities, co-curricular programming

### Cover Page Footnote

This project was supported by the 2017-2019 Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities as a High-Impact Practice, a multi-institutional research initiative hosted by Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning ([www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org](http://www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org)).

### Authors

Richie Gebauer, Mary Ellen Wade, Tina Muller, Samantha Kramer, Margaret Leary, and John Sopper

Traditional methods of teaching, including lecture-based learning, are less likely to lead to student success when compared to more engaging, active teaching approaches (Freeman, et al., 2014). This challenges institutions to consider, and reconsider, teaching and learning practices designed to engage, excite, and empower students to connect learning across environments. The residential learning community (RLC), considered a high-impact practice (Kuh, 2008), has been defined in a variety of ways within RLC research; however, for the purposes of this article the RLC is defined as “cohorts of students intentionally grouped together in a residence hall who have shared academic experiences along with co-curricular learning activities for engagement with their peers” (Inkelas et al., 2018, p. 5). These various learning environments create spaces and opportunities for students to examine and integrate themes or concepts that they are learning across a variety of settings (Gabelnick et al., 1990) and to do so with members of their community in a way that is intentionally designed by the faculty and staff with whom students partner. “At the core of learning community programs is integration—of multiple disciplines or subject areas, of academics with co-curricular experiences, of academic experiences with residential experiences” (Inkelas et al., 2018, p. 7).

When most effective, RLCs “practice pedagogies of active engagement and reflection” (Smith et al., 2004, p. 67). The intention of faculty and staff is to help students develop the skills and knowledge to make connections across academic and non-academic contexts (DeZure et al., 2005). However, this intention by itself may not be sufficient; this type of learning requires thinking beyond the traditional disciplinary lens and demands that students draw from their knowledge across multiple sources and disciplines and establish a deep understanding of course content (Boix Mansilla, 2005). This process of integrative learning is deeply rooted in developing an understanding of a subject through its connection with self-awareness and the interdependent world (Booth et al., 2009).

Newell (1999) argues that students are encountering very disparate learning experiences and that it is the responsibility of faculty to create a more interconnected learning environment. To promote integrative learning, faculty must teach students the skills to draw connections among the various settings in which learning is occurring. Faculty and students should traverse the boundaries that may be assumed between academic disciplines and recognize that integration occurs in “multiple stages and at multiple levels” (Burg et al., 2009, p. 72). Students’ lived experiences do not reflect the academic disciplines but rather an integrated whole of intersecting ideas and knowledge from many academic perspectives and life experiences. These experiences must be channeled to help students integrate knowledge by making sense of the complex issues they face through the varied lenses and perspectives they encounter in their learning processes (Newell, 1999). Jaffee (2007) explains that when “issues, topics, debates, and concepts introduced

in one setting are reintroduced and reinforced in another, there is a greater likelihood that students will develop a deeper understanding of the content and material” (p. 65).

Integrative learning does not need to be elaborate when it occurs. However, it should initiate the process of making connections across contexts, and students should be aware they are engaging in integration, rather than it occurring by accident (Burg et al., 2009). When students begin to realize how their use of integration can be used to make sense of the world, they are then able to independently strengthen this practice in their future learning. In an effort to encourage students to integrate previous learning with new information, Baxter Magolda and King (2004) explain that facts must serve as the foundation for exploring and constructing this new knowledge. Students must also be invited to engage in the process of analyzing their learning experiences, which both validates that they are capable of constructing knowledge and results in mutually constructing meaning with others, specifically their faculty and their peers. In this process, opportunities for feedback must occur through the learning process with faculty assessing students’ abilities to connect their learning to other parts of the curriculum as well as to their own individual lives (Bransford et al., 1999).

RLCs, and the use of integrative learning in the context of those communities, look different on every campus. Teaching and learning practices can be offered in various shapes and sizes to elicit the student-learning outcome of integration. Yet it is this integration that reminds RLC practitioners that the strength of the RLC is reliant on the extent to which they design an experience that truly integrates the curricular, co-curricular, and residential environments of the community (Inkelas et al., 2018). In light of Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)'s *Integrative Learning VALUE Rubric* (AAC&U, 2009), the next four sections of this article explore the practicality of facilitating integrative learning via RLCs on six disparate campuses in response to the rubric’s four categories of integrative learning:

- *Connections to Experience*: Connects relevant experience and academic knowledge;
- *Connections to Discipline*: Sees (makes) connections across disciplines, perspectives;
- *Transfer*: Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations; and
- *Reflection and Self-Assessment*: Demonstrates a developing sense of self as a learner, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts (may be evident in self-assessment, reflective, or creative work) (AAC&U, 2009).

## Connections to Experience

As Newell (2010) explains, integrative learning is grounded in academic disciplines in addition to the out-of-class experiences students encounter. These out-of-class experiences, or co-curriculum—the *connections to experience* value of the AAC&U rubric—serve the dual purpose of extending learning beyond the classroom and building community between students and their peers and faculty. Co-curricular learning includes, but is not limited to, student clubs and organizations, leadership programs, jobs/internships, and residential learning community programs that provide intentional and scaffolded experiences through measurable learning outcomes.

Regardless of type, co-curricular opportunities offer students new information about complex situations that cannot be offered through discipline specific or interdisciplinary studies (Newell, 2010). In other words, this type of learning occurs outside of the formal curriculum. This teaching approach challenges educators to design “greater fluidity and connection between the formal curriculum and the experiential co-curriculum” (Bass, 2012, p. 5). For curriculum to become meaningful for students, they must develop a clear understanding of the information, skills and knowledge relevant to real life (Kysilka, 1998). The co-curriculum that occurs outside of the classroom is essential to integrative learning since these experiences facilitate the integrative process, challenging students to confront new perspectives and to integrate insights across diverse perspectives (Newell, 2010).

RLCs provide multiple spaces for students to make meaningful connections between their curricular and co-curricular experiences. Learning may extend beyond the classroom to experiential learning settings, either in the form of a robust residential curriculum that aligns with academic learning outcomes, or in the form of community engagement. Yet it is the intentionality behind these intersections between the classroom and the campus or local communities that is critical.

In faculty-led communities, such as the criminal justice RLC at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), students take two classes together that expose them to the technical underpinnings of the field. Experiences that bring the classroom to life include touring a federal prison, participating in firearm simulations at a community police department, and observing live court cases at the county courthouse, all of which introduce students to real perspectives of what is happening in the American criminal justice system. While students at UCO are engaging in the community through experiential learning, students enrolled in Messina, the first-year RLC at Loyola University Maryland, engage with the local community through service. More specifically, students in Messina participate in the university's York Road Initiative (YRI), through the YRI Community Days, a monthly service experience in which students work alongside community members

in the neighborhood adjacent to campus to develop an understanding of the history of Baltimore's discriminatory housing policies and practices that continue to affect neighborhoods, including the area where Loyola is located.

The YRI Community Days have resulted in students integrating their service into their other Messina coursework, best illustrated by a student in a Messina Law and Social Responsibility and Studio Art course pairing. Students in the Studio Art course of this course pairing were assigned a project, *Images of Social Justice*, which challenged them to design a piece of art that showed an organization, a person, or a project that affects change in a positive way. One student chose to use the experience of participating in the YRI Community Day to respond to this assignment prompt. During the service experience, the student helped to clean up an area park alongside a community member who was instrumental in advocating for the development of that park. The community member shared a vision for the community including the work that had already been done and future projects they envisioned. The student opted to use their artwork to highlight the positive changes this community partner spearheaded in this neighborhood.

While these experiences occur primarily off campus alongside faculty, students at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo are engaged in RLCs focused on embracing a “learn by doing” philosophy (California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, 2020) that exists within their residential space. RLC integrative learning outcomes at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo—connection of coursework/career, connection to experience, and connection to self/impact—are designed to align with the institutional learning outcomes. To ensure each integrative learning outcome is met through the residential curriculum, residential programs are developed, implemented, and assessed in partnership with Academic Affairs and Career Services. These outcomes guide students' residential experiences and offer an intentionally designed co-curriculum led by RLC Advisory Boards that connect the classroom to the residence hall in ways that allow students to explore academics, career options, social change, leadership roles, independence, and interpersonal skill development. Examples of residential living and classroom learning intersecting include Faculty in Residence hikes exploring local plant biology studied in Botany classes, underwater testing of robots created for academic competitions, internship panels related to specific majors, and the creation of a life size Angry Birds game to experiment with equations.

To facilitate this learning, at RLC Advisory meetings, Cal Poly administrators discuss topics that are related to specific College or RLC themes and share with staff the top ten classes that residents in the building are taking to guide the development of the RLC specific syllabus and creation of a calendar of initiatives. All of Cal Poly's incoming students apply to, are accepted, and begin coursework immediately in a specific College. These placements are supported by a partnership between Academic and Residential Student Experience staff to discuss common

student experiences specific to their Academic College. One example of a connect to coursework focused week would include in-hall review sessions, tutoring, faculty events related to preparing for midterms, and intentional connections to resources to provide support (faculty office hours, study skills sessions, online resources, etc.).

As outlined above, universities can implement unique strategies to connect students' life experiences to their coursework, and each RLC can have a distinct approach to engage students in integrative learning. Regardless of the institution, each of these pathways that connect the classroom to life experiences both in and outside of the residence hall advance student learning through the establishment of conduits for students to identify relationships between course content and campus and community engagement, bringing life to learning. Creating spaces for students to make these connections simultaneous with the intersections between content from different RLC courses contributes to integrating the holistic student experience.

### **Connections to Discipline**

The *connections to discipline* dimension of the Integrative Learning Value Rubric (2009) seeks to evaluate students' ability to see or make connections from one discipline and/or perspective to another. Barber (2012) takes this a step further by identifying three emergent categories of integration: connection, application, and synthesis. For these components of integration to occur, faculty must consider creating opportunities for students to engage in personally relevant coursework, identify multiple perspectives, encounter conflict (conflict outside or within self), and reconcile conflict (Leonard, 2012). Leonard (2012) argues that students must move away from dualism and recognize there is not always one right answer. Instead, knowledge needs to be discovered as students move from being dependent learners to independent ones. In the form of RLCs, this can occur within an interdisciplinary set of coursework or through integrating sub-disciplines within a particular academic discipline. Students evolve from being able to identify connections at a basic level to independently synthesizing across disciplines, sub-disciplines, and/or perspectives.

Each university approaches first-year curricular integration uniquely. This approach to teaching and learning is a required component of the University of San Diego's (USD) core curriculum. All students who enter USD as first time, first-year students are enrolled in one of five themed RLCs, each of which aligns with the university's strategic plan and identity. Cohorts of 18 to 20 first-year students are admitted to one of a range of RLC courses that fall under the umbrella of each of the themed RLCs. For example, Acting I—one of 13 fall courses in the Collaborate RLC—incorporates social justice into the exercises, scene work, discussion, and literature chosen for the course. At the midpoint of the Fall

semester, students across all 13 Collaborate RLC courses participate in the Open Classroom program, in which the RLC faculty teaching in courses associated with this RLC dedicate one of their class sessions to an open classroom that any students in the Collaborate RLC can attend. The purpose is to expose students to a different disciplinary perspective from that of their own RLC course in the context of the Collaborate RLC theme. RLC faculty adapt this open classroom to facilitate these interdisciplinary connections. For instance, a student in the Introduction to Sociology course in the Collaborate RLC may attend an open classroom for the Bioenergetics and Systems course offered in the same RLC, during which they would be introduced to a scientific and technological inquiry perspective for the purpose of recognizing differences with the social and behavioral inquiry perspective of their own Introduction to Sociology course.

The organizational structure of themed RLCs can vary from campus to campus. Another way to structure integration across disciplines is illustrated by the themed RLCs at Cabrini University, a 4-year, liberal arts institution that also offers themed RLCs, each of which enroll 18 to 20 students into small, first-year cohorts that take 4 to 5 courses together over the full academic year. Courses are integrated within and across semesters, with spring coursework building off the curricular foundation established in fall. This is illustrated by the curricular experience offered in the IMPACT (Leadership) RLC, for which students take 7 credits in the fall and 7 credits in the spring, all tied to the RLC. The conceptual framework of the Social Change Model is embedded throughout the 14 academic credits offered to IMPACT students, with fall courses focusing on individual values and spring courses shifting attention to group values (Astin & Astin, 1996).

To lead, one must first understand the self. In the fall semester, students interact with the *7 Habits of Highly Effective College Students* (Covey, 2014) to develop a better understanding of self-management and life skills in a one-credit College Success Seminar while simultaneously exploring their social, emotional, and cognitive awareness as integral factors to leadership in their Metacognition for Leadership course. This provides students with the infrastructure to then embrace the “Reacting to the Past” curriculum offered in their spring semester first-year writing seminar. It is in this course that students are assigned the role of a historical figure and must embrace the philosophical and intellectual beliefs of this character. Doing so will challenge them to reflect back on their exploration of self-awareness in the fall in an effort to employ their strengths, skills, attitudes, and values as a leader while honoring the inherent spirit of the character they have been assigned. This is achieved through their speech, written work, and efforts to collaborate and problem solve, intersecting their individual values with group values as they exhibit leadership skills within the structure of role-playing.

Another approach that guides students to make connections from one discipline to another discipline/field of study can be found in Grogan Residential

College at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Grogan is an RLC for first- and second-year students designed around the theme of “developing the professional self.” Students in the RLC take at least one of the RLC’s specially designed general education core courses each semester. Integrative learning is intentionally fostered through an e-portfolio. One portfolio prompt asks students to upload and reflect on a specific RLC course assignment that demonstrates connections between their RLC course and other courses they are taking in college. Students take different approaches to this assignment. A first-year Theatre major shared how the research and speech she presented in her On-Demand Media course in Grogan provided insights and concepts she used to consider audience participation in her Theatre courses. A Marketing major discussed how she used concepts from Narrative Theory learned in her fall semester Grogan course on “Millennial Narratives” in her spring semester Communication Studies course outside of Grogan. Finally, another student discussed how his Grogan course project on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s educational philosophy was enriched by his General Psychology and Christian Thought courses.

The avenues institutions take to provide students the intellectual space to connect content and concepts and apply learning across academic courses differ. However, whether students co-enroll across an integrated set of courses, explore various academic perspectives connected to an RLC’s academic theme, or are challenged by faculty to create an e-portfolio as an online space to showcase integration, they are encouraged to make connections and transition away from dualistic thinking. It is here that students are placed in the driver’s seat to discover new knowledge and are given the support to become independent learners.

### **Transfer**

College students are continuously interacting with new knowledge across a variety of settings, yet it is challenging to understand if and how students are making use of this knowledge. Beach (2003) identifies this concept of *transfer* in its most simplistic form as “the appearance of a person carrying the product of learning from one task, problem, situation, or institution to another” (p. 101). A student recognizing connections across disciplines and connections between coursework and co-curricular experiences is one step. The student actively making practical use of that knowledge is the next step. As educators, our intention is that students not only encounter new knowledge in a learning setting and identify the relationship(s) between this new knowledge and previous knowledge but are then able to make practical use of that new knowledge in another learning setting. The process of adapting and using knowledge in another setting prepares students as “boundary crossers” (Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom, 2003), not only constructing new knowledge (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) but also, and more importantly, making use of this new knowledge to instigate change. It is this adaptive use of

knowledge in a new context—removing boundaries that exist between activity systems (Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom, 2003)—that we mean to highlight as *transfer*.

Transfer of knowledge may occur between two academic settings or between academic and non-school contexts. In Messina at Loyola University Maryland, this occurs via the former with students taking a course pairing during their fall and spring semesters of the first year. The two faculty members in that pairing collaborate to develop content that fosters cross-disciplinary connections. One such pairing involved faculty from engineering and psychology who developed a student project for which students would design a smartphone app to engage users in pro-social behavior. During the fall semester, students learned concepts around pro-social behavior in their Introduction to Psychology course and worked in groups to select an area their app could address. Topics developed by students included increasing student access and engagement in campus activities; reducing driving under the influence and other risky behaviors related to alcohol consumption; and promoting mindfulness, stress reduction, and bystander intervention.

In the spring semester, these students worked in the same groups in their Introduction to Engineering Design and Creativity course to develop specific app content related to their pro-social topics, concluding in final oral presentations of their projects. Student presentations covered design, target users, problems identified and addressed by the app, and next steps. One particular topic that resounded with the entire class was presented by a group of students who designed an app to make students better informed about campus events offered on any given day. There was general agreement that it can be difficult during the first year to get involved on campus—accessing information about events, club meetings, and activities is available to students but not in a user-friendly, consistent format. To guide student success, both faculty selected specific readings and built in structured time for students to meet to discuss and work toward manageable project goals. For these Messina students, transfer of knowledge occurred across semesters and across two distinctly different academic disciplines within a purposefully designed curriculum.

At Cabrini University, faculty teaching in a second-year leadership RLC designed a leadership practicum in students' sophomore year that connected coursework with an on-campus internship that served as a co-curricular element of the community, extending their learning beyond the classroom. Faculty established partnerships with academic, student life, enrollment management, and institutional advancement departments to offer students an on-campus internship. As an expectation of the leadership practicum, students selected an internship of interest, completing 150 hours over the semester. Students and faculty then met face to face every few weeks, and students were assigned course readings in advance of these face to face meetings. Through course discussion and weekly journal reflections,

students were challenged to identify the intersections that occurred between course readings and their internships. RLC students were evaluated on their ability to identify the connections between course content and their work environment. Students were assessed on their application of new knowledge in their approach to assigned course projects, programs, and events, both via interviews with faculty and staff employed in their assigned internship department and via the students' observations of leaders (and misleaders) within the office setting and at meetings and events that they attended as an intern.

These two examples illustrate how students are invited to engage in the process of applying their learning across multiple settings. This presents students the opportunity to validate that they are capable of mutually constructing meaning from their learning alongside their fellow community members (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Aligning this with faculty feedback devoted to assessing students' abilities to connect their learning to other courses and to their own individual lives (Bransford et al., 1999) prepares students to become “boundary crossers” and agents of change (Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom, 2003).

### **Reflection and Self-Assessment**

It is critical that *reflection* and *self-assessment* become ongoing processes in the life of a student. Yet, it cannot be assumed that students will initiate these processes on their own. It is the responsibility of staff and faculty to foster student growth by embedding activities and opportunities for self-assessment and reflection into the residence hall, curriculum, and co-curriculum. It is also important to differentiate between reflection and self-assessment. Reflection is “a metacognitive act of examining performance in order to explore its significance and consequences” (AAC&U, 2009) while self-assessment “describes, interprets, and judges performance based on stated or implied expectations followed by planning for future learning” (AAC&U, 2009). Reflection and self-assessment may occur simultaneously or independently of one another. This is dependent on the flexible or narrow scope of the environment designed to elicit such reflection and assessment.

The residence hall is an advantageous space for faculty, staff, and peer leaders to create an ongoing presence that amplifies the student experience and cultivates this process of self-evaluation. Resident Advisors (RAs), professional staff, and Faculty in Residence at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo do just this, meeting with students multiple times per quarter to conduct guided conversations—called Poly Chats—focused on reflection and self-assessment with first-year residents. Poly Chats are an ongoing part of resident interactions focused on faculty and staff getting to know, supporting, and educating residents through intentional interactions around RLC integrative learning outcomes. Staff use intentionally developed sketches (lesson plans/outlines created with campus staff and faculty) to

help provide the knowledge and resources necessary to support residents to integrate learning inside and outside the classroom. One example of a Poly Chat includes a sketch guiding a reflective conversation with Business students to help them determine career options, strengths identified in classes, and selection of a minor. Another example occurs in the Leadership RLC, where students are engaged in Leadership workshops, some of which occur in students' residential space. RAs are also provided scripts to guide intentional conversations to engage students in reflection, exploration, and application of leadership topics. Staff then document conversation themes and create socio-grams to determine future initiatives using data-informed, holistic approaches.

Whereas Cal Poly's RLCs create opportunities for reflection in students' residential space, first-year students in Messina at Loyola engage in an ongoing self-focused journey that begins with Fall Welcome Weekend programming and is continued by the Messina RLC team throughout the year in the form of advising conversations, major exploration, nominations for student leader positions, and other outlets. During Welcome Weekend, students attend a session with their Messina mentors—the administrator who works with their RLC class throughout the year. While this session has multiple focuses, it concludes with an Ignatian reflection in which students participate in an activity that leads them to look inward and reflect on their talents, motivations, passions, and goals. This session is designed to support the practices of discernment and self-reflection during the first year and beyond. Students are asked to consider where they find joy, to identify what they value and why, and to identify their favorite academic explorations prior to college. These reflections are collected and used by Messina faculty and mentors throughout the year in other RLC environments as described above, including a culminating activity at the end of the spring semester that builds on these original questions asked during Welcome Weekend. This activity shifts attention specifically to a student's Loyola experience, asking students to reflect on the Loyola Core Value that has most resonated with them, why this core value has personal meaning, and where joy was experienced while a student at Loyola.

As stated earlier, providing students with ongoing feedback must be ingrained through the learning process for students to plan for their future learning. In all RLCs at Cabrini University, faculty design layered writing assignments within the first-year writing seminar to improve student writing skills. The culminating assignment in this course—a 4- to 6-page persuasive essay—occurs in multiple stages: an annotated bibliography, a rough draft, a final draft, and then a student's final submission. Following each stage of the process, students receive ongoing feedback so that they are then able to utilize this feedback to increase their ability to actualize what they are learning about their writing skills. Students are challenged to adapt their educational approach, based on this information, as they encounter the later stages of the writing process that culminates in their final

submission. For this final submission, some RLC faculty require that students write an accompanying cover letter that discusses this process of self-assessment, explaining their openness to receiving feedback, how they used feedback to examine their own performance, and how receiving ongoing feedback assisted in their growth as a writer and learner.

Whether students are engaging in the process of reflection or self-assessment or both, their evaluation of their learning and performance is critical to growth. It is the responsibility of faculty and staff to create intentional spaces for such self-evaluation to occur since most first-year students may not be prepared to engage in this process on their own. It could be argued that the metacognitive nature of this dimension of integration provides the infrastructure for increased awareness of other modes of integration.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that different institutions approach integration very differently. However, the common theme across these approaches is the intentionality of the design of each RLC experience that serves as a vehicle for providing students with various ways to integrate their learning across curricular, co-curricular, and residential contexts. Although students may be experiencing integration in their everyday lives, from the classroom to the residence hall to their interactions with the community, they may not always be aware that they are connecting learning across contexts. When RLCs are intentionally designed—creating unique curricula, extending learning into environments beyond the classroom, fostering connections through e-portfolios, modifying residence halls into learning spaces, and creating intersections between and within disciplines—students are exposed to an abundance of intellectual avenues to integrate learning across settings.

When RLCs approach curriculum and co-curriculum with integrative learning as a learning outcome, students gain exposure to multiple activity systems and are challenged to consider how these activity systems are intertwined. Over time, the boundaries that exist between these activity systems are removed, and students become “boundary crossers” (Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom, 2003). All students, regardless of the academic credentials they bring with them to a college or university campus, have the potential to reach this stage as learners. Regardless of the shape or size, however, it is the responsibility of RLC educators to be innovative in the delivery of an intentionally designed RLC that offers integrative learning opportunities that a traditional classroom cannot.

RLC faculty and staff seeking to investigate modes of integration within their RLCs should begin by defining integrative learning as it pertains specifically to their campus and their RLC program. RLC practitioners should consider what engaging in integration means for RLC students in particular. It is critical that this dialogue includes defining integrative learning with language students will

understand in order to ensure that they are able to develop a clear understanding of the expectations outlined by RLC faculty and staff. Once defined, RLC faculty and staff must ensure that intentional intersections occur between residential experiences and curriculum, between curriculum and co-curriculum, and/or between academic courses. These experiences cannot occur independently of one another but must be interwoven to support students in their learning both in and outside of the classroom.

### References

- Association of American Colleges and Universities (2009). *Integrative learning VALUE rubric*. <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/integrative-learning>.
- Astin, H.S., & Astin, A.W. (1996). *A social change model of leadership development: Guidebook version III*. The National Clearinghouse of Leadership Programs. University of California, Higher Education Research Institute.
- Barber, J.P. (2012). Integration of learning: Grounded theory analysis of college students' learning. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(3), 590-617.
- Bass, R. (2012). Disrupting ourselves: The problem of learning in higher education. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 47(2), 1-14.
- Baxter Magolda, M.B., & King, P.M. (Eds.). (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Stylus.
- Beach, K. (2003). Consequential Transitions: A developmental view of knowledge propagation through social organizations. In T. Tuomi-Gröhn & Y. Engeström (Eds.), *Between school and work: New perspectives on transfer and boundary-crossing* (pp. 39-61). Emerald Group.
- Boix Mansilla, V. (2005). Assessing student work at disciplinary crossroads. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 37(1), 13-21.
- Booth, A., McLean, M., & Walker, M. (2009). Self, others, and society: A case study of university integrative learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(8), 929-939.
- Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., & Cocking, R.R. (Eds.). (1999). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. National Academy Press.
- Burg, E., Klages, M., & Sokoski, P. (2009). Beyond "parallel play": Creating a realistic model of integrative learning with community college freshmen. *Journal of Learning Communities Research*, 3(3), 63-73.
- California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo. (2020). *Strategic plan: Learn by doing*. <https://strategicplanning.calpoly.edu/homenew/learn-by-doing/>
- Covey, S.R. (2014). *The 7 habits of highly effective people: Succeeding in college . . . and in life*. Simon and Schuster.

- DeZure, D., Babb, M., & Waldmann, S. (2005). Integrative learning nationwide: Emerging themes and practices. *Peer Review*, 7(4), 24-29.
- Freeman, S.F., Eddy, S.L., McDonough, M., Smith, M.K., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H., & Wenderoth, M.P. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 111(23), 8410-8415.
- Gabelnick, F., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R.S., & Smith, B.L. (1990) Learning communities: Creating connections among students, faculty, and disciplines. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 41. Jossey-Bass.
- Huber, M.T., Hutchings, P., & Gale R. (2005). *Integrative learning for liberal education*, *peerReview* 7(4), 4-8.
- Inkelas, K. K., Jessup-Anger, J. E., Benjamin, M., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2018). *Living-learning communities that work: A research-based model for design, delivery, and assessment*. Stylus.
- Jaffee, D. (2007). Peer cohorts and the unintended consequences of freshman learning communities. *College Teaching*, 55(2), 65-71.
- Kuh, G.D (2008). *High impact educational practices: What are they, who has access to them, and why they matter*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.
- Kysilka, M.L. (1998). Understanding integrated curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal*, 9(2), 197-209.
- Leonard, J. B. (2012). Integrative learning: A grounded theory. *Issues in Integrative Studies*, 30, 48-74.
- Newell, W.H. (1999). The promise of integrative learning. *About Campus*, 4(2), 17-23.
- Newell, W.H. (2010). Educating for a complex world: Integrative learning and interdisciplinary studies. *Liberal Education*, 96(4), 6-11.
- Smith, B. L., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R. S., & Gabelnick, F. (2004). *Learning communities: Reforming undergraduate education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Tuomi-Gröhn, T., & Engeström, Y. (2003). Conceptualizing transfer: From standard notions to developmental perspectives. In T. Tuomi-Gröhn & Y. Engeström (Eds.), *Between school and work: New perspectives on transfer and boundary-crossing* (pp. 19-38). Emerald Group.