

ABSTRACT

Community Contributions to Academic Success in Residential Communities

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There are many initiatives implemented by institutions of higher education to promote the academic success of their students. Utilizing the community within the residence halls is a way to connect university resources to students and create a support system that carries one through the rigor of collegiate courses. The goal of this project was to establish the importance of community in developing successful students and how it promotes academic thriving. The conducted analysis was parameterized by the circumplex family model. After the analysis, I proposed a universal plan to implement within the hall to achieve a community that is most likely to promote academic success by focusing on academic endeavors and a supportive community. Although the generic plan could be met with limitations, the incorporation of this plan promotes academic success for the students in the community.

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COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN RESIDENTIAL
COMMUNITIES

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By

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May 2022

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The academic experience that university students will have in their undergraduate career is unique to each student. While there are programs in place that seek to provide resources and support, there are still students who remain unaware of these resources or do not take advantage of what is offered. A challenge that those in higher education are faced with is how to provide academic support and encourage all students to reach their full potential in the most efficient way possible. A way to do this is to find a unifying feature amongst all undergraduate students and implement academic strategies through this commonality.

At Baylor University, this unifying feature is residential life. Each first-year student at Baylor is required to live on campus. With this shared experience comes the opportunity to foster intellectual growth and success through the community of the residence hall. This is not a novel idea, and there are strategies and systems set up in the residence hall to build this kind of community. My experience in the residence halls has been as a resident and as a leader responsible in implementing those strategies and systems. I believe that growing a community could benefit with the implementation of a system that highlights each resident as a unique member that plays a role in building that community. A method of putting the community into this perspective is by considering it through the lens of family development. Creating a family-like system within the

residence hall that holds academic success as a primary priority allows for the members of the community to create structure around how they will achieve that success.

This thesis will aim to connect a theory of family development with residential life to formulate a proposal that better strategizes how to manufacture a successful community. In this paper, success will be defined as an increase in academic performance and confidence. This will be accomplished by defining a family development theory: Olson's circumplex model. Then, literature that supports the idea of community as a necessity will be reviewed through the lens of the circumplex model. Included in this review will be data from a survey taken by first-year students at Baylor University. This survey will provide aspects of residential life that are important to develop when creating a community. The psychological sense of community will be defined and explored as it pertains to academic environments as well.

After reviewing the literature, a strategy of community implementation will be proposed. Finally, a case study will be supplied to give an idea of how the strategy can be carried out in practice. This chapter will introduce the family theory that is used, followed by a discussion of the importance of community in relation to academic success, and finally the introduction to the theory of the psychological sense of community.

Introduction to the Circumplex Model

The family theory that will inform how the rest of the literature is considered was formulated by Dr. David Olson and is titled the 'Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems'. This model compares the curvilinear interaction of two variables,

cohesion and flexibility, and linear interaction of communication. These three variables work in cohesion to produce either a balanced or unbalanced family dynamic. From the image below, one can see the range of healthy relationships and how the balance between cohesion and flexibility are necessary to achieve a system within this range. Movement to arrive at this stage is accomplished via communication.

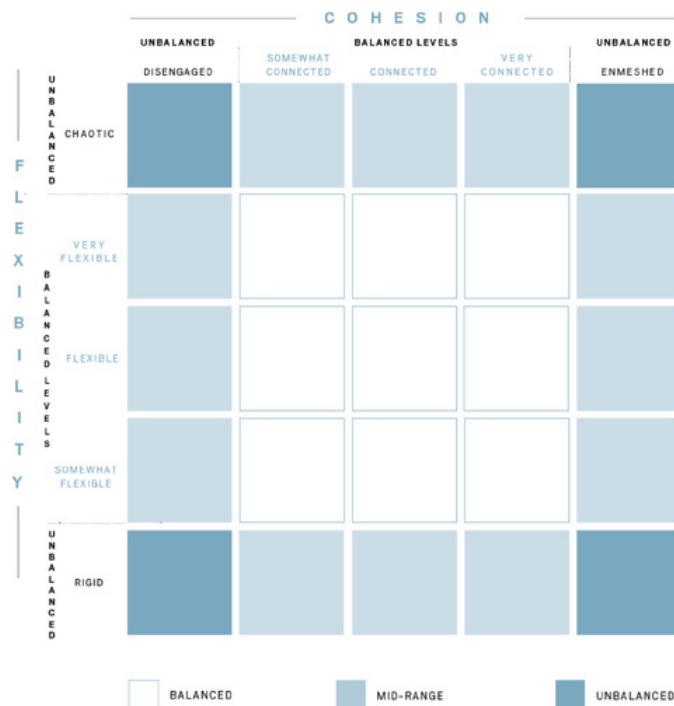


Figure 1. Circumplex Model Graph. This figure demonstrates the ranges of relationships within the confines of the circumplex model.

From this model, a hypothesis has been derived that holds significance for this thesis. The hypothesis postulates that family systems that are more balanced are better

able to handle stress and development change than unbalanced systems. This hypothesis can be translated to residential communities in the sense that, if the community is a balanced community, the members are more equipped to handle academic stress and changes in the rigor of the courses they are undertaking¹.

To implement this theory, the three variables need to be understood and applicable to a residential community. The first variable, cohesion, is defined as “the emotional bonding that ... family members have toward one another¹”. The extremes of this variable are enmeshment and disengagement. Reaching both extreme results in a dynamic that is no longer healthy and can not provide the desired benefits. A balanced cohesive unit results in productive communication and satisfaction with the community.

The second variable is flexibility. The purpose of this variable is how the family system can accommodate change while maintaining a level of stability. The extremes of this variable are chaos and rigidity. Balance in this area is seen when change is handled functionally, and stability can return to the system after the change occurs. This variable is necessary as the dynamic between the individuals in the system change as well as the external environment.

The third variable is communication. It plays a conciliatory role between the other two variables; effective and productive communication practiced in a family system contributes to the balance of the other variables. Some of the main components of communication are listening and speaking skills and practiced respect. Listening skills

¹ Olson, D. H., Waldvogel, L., & Schlieff, M. (2019, May 13). Circumplex model of marital and Family Systems: An update. Wiley Online Library. Retrieved September 15, 2021, from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jftr.12331>

can be defined as fully engaging with the conversation and displaying empathy and understanding for what is said. Speaking skills can be defined as speaking clearly and concisely, saying words for which one is willing to take accountability. By practicing good communication often, a family unit can move from potentially unhealthy ranges back to a desired balance.

Application of the circumplex model and its associated hypothesis extends beyond family systems. In 2000, the model was extended to classroom settings and leadership styles in business teams¹. With these applications, it was found that balance in these areas promote positive outcomes professionally with an overall increase in satisfaction and productivity.

As this model has been successfully translated from a family system into other community units, it follows that it can be applied to a residential community. As such, the circumplex model and how it could effectively be implemented within a residence hall will be explored. The other ideas from the literature review will be examined with the balance of the three variables as the result.

The Role of Community in Academic Success

In general, studies have been conducted in which the role of support systems are evaluated by how they help an individual cope with stress. From an article that examined the relationship between support and stress, the authors define social support to have both

a structural dimension and a functional dimension². The structural dimension is concerned with the individuals in the support system and the regularity of time spent with one another. The functional dimension is composed of emotional support and an “instrumental component”³ in which an individual receives more practical assistance to relieve burdens or obligations. From this article, it is understandable that there are universal benefits to being a part of and contributing to a community.

More specifically, supportive communities have been shown to improve academic performance. In a study conducted by faculty members at Wayne State University, researchers looked to test if the success of pharmacy students would increase if they formed a community of learners. They used four key characteristics to form this community: varying experience in the group, a common goal to deepen the group’s understanding, a universal commitment to the process of gaining that understanding, and diverse ways to communicate the different information amongst community members⁴. To test this, the study followed a cohort of students in the pharmacy program for an academic year and were surveyed at the end of the semester and the end of the academic year. Peer mentors were selected from third-year students in the program who were committed to the success of the cohort and placed in the cohort.

² Ozbay, F., Johnson, D., Dimoulas, E., Morgan, C., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007, May). Social support and resilience to stress: From neurobiology to clinical practice. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921311/>

³ Ozbay, F., Johnson, D., Dimoulas, E., Morgan, C., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007, May). Social support and resilience to stress: From neurobiology to clinical practice. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921311/>

⁴ Moser, L., Berlie, H., Salinitri, F., McCuiston, M., & Slaughter, R. (2015, June 25). Enhancing Academic Success by Creating a Community of Learners. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4571052/>

There are several results from this study that help solidify the foundations of this thesis. The students involved in this cohort “improved student progression and decreased failure rates⁴” which gives support to the notion that community can benefit the learning experience of involved members. Over 90% of students were of the belief that the older peer mentors enhanced their experiences (Moser et al. 2015). From this, it can be understood that experienced mentors increase the efficacy of the community, which can be easily mirrored in a residential community. Peer mentors benefitted from this cohort as well, although they were not the direct target of this study. The mentors were able to develop their communication skills, interact with students in the cohort, and celebrate their successes; the mentors reported “significant benefits in their own professional development⁴.” With this information from the mentors’ experiences, all members of a supportive community benefit, whether they are being supported or giving the support. From these two studies, the component of this thesis that states that supportive communities are effective in improving academic performance is solidified.

The Psychological Sense of Community

The final concept that makes up the foundation of this thesis is found in the construct of the psychological sense of community. While there is not a concrete definition to this term, psychologists McMillan and Chavis postulate that the sense of community is comprised of four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection⁵. Membership is comprised of

⁵ Fisher, A. T., & Sonn, C. C. (2002). Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications. (pp. 7-8). Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

boundaries to which members adhere; members must uphold a set of responsibilities and are subject to certain rights since their identity is found in the community. Influence is defined as “an internal process that reflects the perceived influence that a person has over the ... community”⁶. This contributes to the balance of the community, as each members contributions are valued.

The next component is integration and fulfillment of needs. This component represents what each member of the community requires from the rest of the community. Finally, the last component of the sense of community is shared emotional connection. This is reflected in community when significant events and changes occur. As evidenced in Olson’s circumplex model, balanced communities allow for dynamic changes and other significant life events. By illuminating a shared emotional connection with the rest of the community, the bond that is formed helps the community remain strong and return to a balanced state.

The sense of community that is developed in a residential community is crucial to retaining members of that community and ensuring that each of the members can benefit. By identifying these four components, a plan can be instated that is directed to strengthening those components. They can also serve as checkpoints: if these components are not suited for each member of the community, changes can be made. More on the sense of community will be discussed in later chapters; specifically, the sense of community in relation to university students. This scenario is most practical when considering on-campus residential life.

⁶ Fisher, A. T., & Sonn, C. C. (2002). Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications. (pp. 7). Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

The Foundation

Having discussed the circumplex model, the role community plays in academic success, and the psychological sense of community, the formulation of this thesis can be more thoroughly understood. With the understanding that community does play a role in the academic success of students, there is cause to develop an effective and universal standard for a residential community. Since every freshman is required to live in a residence hall their first year at Baylor University, implementing a plan that promotes a healthy community of learners could greatly benefit the academic success of these first-year students. This plan should place them on a solid path for the rest of their undergraduate career, and hopefully beyond if pursuing a post-graduate degree. By implementing the circumplex model proposed by Dr. David Olson and understanding how it can foster the development of the four components to the sense of community, residence halls can build an environment conducive to academic success. The implementation of this community-building proposal could yield favorable outcomes in other areas, such as emotional stability or stress resilience. However, this thesis will focus on the outcome of academic success, as academics remains a focal point for every student involved in the community.

In subsequent chapters, a more in-depth consideration of materials ranging from scholarly articles, published books, and released survey data will be considered. The conclusions of these resources will be linked through the perspective of the circumplex model, and the family unit structure of a residential community will be better understood.

Finally, a practical plan for residence halls to facilitate and deepen a healthy community within the halls will be proposed.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

To gain the information and parameters necessary to formulate the proposal of residential life, this section will be conducted as a systematic review. The literature reviewed in this section will aim to answer the question: What do exceptional residence halls do to promote academic success in their residents? The literature will be reviewed using the Circumplex Model as a lens. The type of materials analyzed were articles, books, and the results from an annual survey conducted by the Campus Living and Learning (CL&L) department at Baylor University.

Circumplex Model

To begin, the lens that is being used will be described. “Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems” composed by David Olson, Laura Waldvogel, and Molly Schlieff provides an overview of this theory and the history of its development. The circumplex model was designed to explain the dimensions conducive to a balanced and functional family unit. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the circumplex model is defined by the bilinear dimensions of cohesion and flexibility and the linear dimension of communication. In this discussion, bilinear can be understood as the relative absence or excess of the dimension. In both cases, the two extremes can be harmful to the family unit. The term linear indicates that as communication increases, so does the health of the family unit. The outcome of balancing these three components is a family system that is equipped to handle stress, developmental, changes, and lending support to other family

members. Several hypotheses have been derived from the circumplex model. A few examples suggest that units that are balanced function more adequately through life changes, positive communication skills allow the transition between levels of cohesion and flexibility, and cohesion and flexibility should be modified to effectively deal with situational stress. These hypotheses are helpful when considering the application of the circumplex model to units outside of the family. This article shares of several environments in which this model has been applied external to the family, namely a classroom and in the workplace. In the classroom, a balanced classroom showed positive outcomes for the children regarding their academics and social lives. In the workplace, balanced work groups were satisfied with their work and more productive.

For the purposes of this thesis, the circumplex model will be used as a lens through which the other literature will be considered. The literature reviewed should be able to contribute to one or a combination of the three components to a healthy family system: flexibility with structure, cohesion with autonomy, and an open line of communication. In this way, the question posed for this literature review will be answered.

Analysis of the Literature

Effects of Social Support on Physical Health

The first article that will be analyzed is “Social Support and Resilience to Stress: From Neurobiology to Clinical Practice” composed by F. Ozbay, E. Dimolas, C. Morgan, D. Charney, and S. Southwick. This article considers the aspects of stress and what can build

resilience. An important concept to understand from this article is that the stress response is rooted in several pathways, including the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) pathway along with the involvement of the sympathetic nervous system. This article was conducted to answer the postulate of whether social support could increase an individual's resilience to the stress response. With consideration to the HPA and sympathetic pathways, social support would optimally regulate or dampen the neurochemical stress responses. The authors of this article define social support as "support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community⁷". The social support that is given can be further categorized as either functional or structural. Structural can be defined in the quantity of the relationships and different avenues of support. Functional can be defined as the quality of the relationships. The article highlights the findings that indicate that social support is beneficial for stress resilience and that lack of social support exacerbates the stress response. In preclinical studies, social isolation produces health problems conducive to chronic stress responses. Examples of these health problems includes high blood pressure and exacerbated cardiovascular disease. In studies conducted over diverse populations – with one of the identified groups being college students – a high level of social support appeared to moderate the full effects of mental and physical ailments. For example, a high level of social support has been demonstrated to play a crucial role in lowering the impairment of those suffering with depression. In all, it can be understood from this article that there is biological support for the necessity of social support.

⁷ Ozbay, F., Johnson, D., Dimoulas, E., Morgan, C., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007, May). Social support and resilience to stress: From neurobiology to clinical practice. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921311/>

The information in this article contributes to answer through the cohesive dimension. This article demonstrates that social support can lower the stress response and decrease the negative effects that stress causes on students; by doing so, students are better suited to apply themselves academically. Since structure and function of the relationships within the system are necessary to create a healthy support system, we can transfer the principle of balanced cohesion from the circumplex model to this community. Thus, we see from this article that a support system of diverse relationships of good quality is important in our hypothetical community.

The second source considered was “The Role of Social Relations in Health Promotion” composed by Dr. Lisa Berkman, a social epidemiologist. This study seeks to understand methods to better prevent and treat disease and disability from a public health perspective. This study focuses on the role that social support systems play in recovery and in prevention of health conditions such as myocardial infarctions and diseases with compounded causes. While these conditions rarely affect young adults, the principles that were deduced from these studies can be generally applied to a social support system between people of these ages.

From this study, isolation affects multiple pathways in the body, amongst these being neuroendocrine and immunological pathways. These pathways are concerned with recognizing and responding to pathogens and interfering with these pathways can explain a negative change in one’s health. Physiological research discussed in this study shows that there are likely multiple biological pathways of neuroendocrine and immunological origin that are linked to one another. These pathways can respond to environmental triggers and their cumulative responses influence disease outcomes. There is not just one

stressor pathway that predict one's health, but rather a connection of them that can be affected by one's socioenvironmental circumstances. Assuming the responsibility of being a member of a social network is to also accept the premise that the health of one member affects the health of the system. Therefore, it is beneficial for each member to actively maintain the health of this system. Finally, in order for a social support system to be beneficial, "it must provide both a sense of belonging and intimacy and must help people to be more competent and self-efficacious⁸."

The information from this article provides support for both the flexible and cohesive dimensions. The structure of the desired support unit must be structured in a way that allows for enough interactions between members that they can experience the health benefits of connection. While providing this structure, the community must also remain dynamic to honor the fact that this community is comprised of humans. Since everyone will experience change in their personal lives, an interconnected community must also be aware that changes will come in their community as well. The structure of this community must be able to accommodate this while still providing a community to the members. Along with the capability to be flexible, this community must be aware of its levels of cohesion. A level of connectedness is necessary; the support provided in the community is responsible for the health benefits for members. However, members must be alert to the danger of becoming codependent. The role of the community is to support

⁸ Berkman, L. (1995). The role of social relations in health promotion: Psychosomatic Medicine. The Official Journal of the American Psychosomatic Society. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from https://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Fulltext/1995/05000/The_Role_of_Social_Relations_in_Health_Promotion.6.aspx

one another through struggles, but members should not be personally assuming the burdens of other members.

Psychological Sense of Community

The third source that will be considered is “The Psychological Sense of Community: Research, Applications, and Implications” edited by Adrian T. Fisher with contributors from The Plenum Series in Social and Clinical Psychology. The theory of the psychological sense of community (PSOC) was developed by psychologists David McMillian and David Chavis in 1986. They postulated that there are four components integral to developing a sense of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Research for this psychological phenomenon was conducted on a college campus, which gives insight on how to apply the PSOC to the proposal of this thesis. A challenge identified by the research is the ability to “assess [the sense of community] in a manner that is grounded in community theory, while at the same time making no assumptions about the similarities in dimensions and correlates from setting to setting⁹.” In general, communities are formed based on location and interest. Location-based communities are typically residential in nature and driven by proximity. Interest-based locations are identified around an activity center. A university, therefore, may be considered a mixture of location-based and interest-based communities. For example, a residence hall is certainly a location-based community. In some cases, such as halls that dictate their residents pursue a similar field of study, they can be interest-based as well.

⁹ Fisher, A. T., & Sonn, C. C. (2002). Psychological sense of community: Research, applications, and implications. Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

The community of the university has several characteristics worth delineating. A university holds some similar interest for all students as it is centered around two goals, according to this book. These two goals are the discovery and the passing on of knowledge. Further, the community established at a university is bolstered by morale and trust. Morale adds to the experience of attending a university and can affect the performance of the students. Morale can be associated with school spirit, general student satisfaction, and extracurricular activities such as sporting events. Without trust, “the difficult questions are not asked, the limits are not tested, and innovations are not dared”⁹. It is necessary to establish trust at every level of interaction, such as between peers, older students, and members of faculty and staff. Although not included in McMillian and Chavis’ original theory, trust can be inferred to play a role in developing the sense of community as it allows members of the community the emotional safety to develop intimacy with one another.

The information derived from this book provides support to all three dimensions of the circumplex theory. Using the four components laid out to develop a community, membership and influence speak to the flexible dimension. Everyone in the community must first belong to the community and find that their opinions are able to help further shape the community. The dimension of cohesion is supported by the component of shared emotional connection. Members can rely on and support one another when they share a level of emotional intimacy. This component can be developed when the group actively supports morale and trust within the group. Finally, communication is found through the component of integrating and fulfilling needs. As members share what they expect from the group, they are then able to work together to achieve those needs.

Therefore, we can see from this book that the four components of McMillian and Chavis' theory on the psychological sense of community helps form a community, and morale and trust can further develop that community.

Next, a source that explores the psychological sense of community specifically on a university's campus will be considered. Dr. Daniel DeNeui composed "An Investigation of First-Year College Student's Psychological Sense of Community on Campus", a study that seeks to find the relationship between the perceived sense of community and personal factors of a college student. To conduct this study, first-year students in an introductory psychology course were asked to complete a questionnaire assessing the level of belonging they felt regarding the collegiate community at the beginning of the fall semester. These students were incentivized to complete a follow-up survey at the end of the spring semester to further assess their sense of belonging and to monitor if that perception increased over the academic year. The other qualities of extroversion and campus participation were measured as well.

The results of this study did not indicate that the sense of community unanimously increased over the year. Positive trends of the sense of community must be moderated by the student's status as extrovert or introvert as well as their participation. A positive correlation was found between extroversion and the sense of community; extroverts taking this survey scored significantly higher when asked if they felt like they belonged and had an upward trend from the start of the year to the end. However, participants that scored themselves highest in extroversion did not follow the general trend: they felt a decrease in sense of community over the year. The author's hypothesized explanation is that these students set expectations of connection too high

based on their desire to connect and perceived opportunities. When these expectations were not met, they were disappointed and did not feel as strong a connection to the university as they had previously.

The factor that is highly associated with an increase in sense of community is campus participation. Students who sought out campus involvement in many areas felt the greatest sense of belonging as the year progressed. There was a positive correlation between campus participation and extroversion, explaining why extroverts displayed the positive trend in sense of community. In addition to the quantity of participation opportunities, it seems that quality of participation played a role in feeling a strong sense of community. This follows when considering the case of the extreme extroverts; too many opportunities to connect can disrupt meaningful connection to a lesser number of communities. Over-commitment to campus organizations can prevent a member from reaping the benefits of belonging to that group.

This study provides insight into the importance of the cohesive dimension. Instituting guidelines that promote relationships and diversity amongst those relationships – which mimics the extroversion characteristic – can give the members of the community the same odds to develop a stronger sense of community as the year progresses. This study also highlights the importance of remaining in a healthy range of cohesion. Campus participation was proven to be a high indicator of developing a sense of belonging. This implies that complete dependence on a residential community would detract from a student feeling like they belonged at a university. Therefore, a residence hall would incur the responsibility to connect members to other organizations and communities across

campus while remaining a community of quality that adds to the overall sense of belonging of its members.

Effects of Community in Academic Environments

The next source considers a strategy to enhance the academic success of a cohort of students. “Enhancing Academic Success by Creating a Community of Leaders” composed by Lynette Moser, Helen Berlie, Francine Salinitri, and Micah McCuiston. This article covers the results of a study conducted within a cohort of students at a pharmacy school. The objective of this study was to improve the academic performance of the students within the cohort. The design of this study included creating a community of learners and then comparing the cohort with previous classes. As students progressed through pharmacy school, they were able to take the position of peer leader within the next cohort to further add to the community. Overall, the study reported enhanced academic success; the students in the cohort progressed further, had a significant decrease in failing test scores compared to previous classes, and developed a positive perception regarding the program from those that participated. The authors of this article outline four key characteristics to build a community of learners: diversity of expertise in the group, a shared goal to build the knowledge of the group, emphasis on the process of building that knowledge, and diverse methods of sharing knowledge. They also suggest having clearly defined goals for the group and allocating resources to reach these goals.

This study shows that there is academic benefit to implementing a community of learners. The four characteristics to build a community support all three dimensions of the circumplex theory. The flexible dimension is supported through the shared goal to build knowledge. This component gives a base purpose to those in the community, which

provides a reason to participate in the community. However, since the type and depth of knowledge that is being pursued is different for everyone, the group is allowed to remain flexible. The cohesive dimension is met through the diversity of expertise and the emphasis on building knowledge within the group. As the community members share what they know and learn from one another, the community bonds can strengthen. The fact that each member brings something different and of value to the community allows everyone to maintain their level of autonomy within the group and still benefit from being in the group. The diverse methods of sharing results contribute to the dimension of communication. From this article, therefore, we can see that implementing the four characteristics derived from this study contribute to the dimensions of the circumplex theory that will help build the proposal in the next chapter.

The next article in this sequence also speaks to the academic outcomes of students. “The Role of University Support Services on Academic Outcomes for Students with Mental Illness” written by Andrea Simpson and Kelly Ferguson explores the benefits of utilizing the school’s support system for students with mental illnesses. An assertion from this study is that poor mental health directly affects academic performance. This occurs due to a combination of decreased motivation and concentration, lack of confidence, and the decreased ability to handle the rigor of studying. It is common for institutions of higher education to have support systems in place for these students, but it requires the disclosure of mental illness for these students to take advantage of these resources. For some students, disclosing their mental health status is not a favorable option. This article summarizes these reasons to be due to the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. The results of this study are limited, as the results

were not analyzed against students who identify with other health conditions and the relatively small number of students with reported mental illnesses compared to the wider population of students within the university. However, students with mental illness who utilized the support did report that it had a positive impact on their academic results. It is in the best interest of the university to grow their resources and their outreach to students with mental illness as “psychological symptoms are a significant predictive factor of student retention¹⁰.” Of the methods this study offers to encourage students to disclose their health diagnoses and benefit from the resources the university offers, the common theme between them is the role of community. When these students were a part of a community that left them feeling supported and accepted with their decision to reach out for help, they were more likely to use the university’s resources.

From this study, support for the cohesive and communication dimensions are provided. The cohesivity of the community provides support and acceptance, which this article showed to be a predictor of academic success for students that are affected by mental illnesses. As the community continues to show acceptance and support, the members of the community that especially need that support are better able to academically thrive. The communication between members of the community that need support and the rest of the community is paramount; with communication, the support and acceptance can be asked for and then given. Hence, we see that support and acceptance of community members that have different needs is important to ensure that

¹⁰ Simpson, A., & Ferguson, K. (2014, November 11). The role of university support services on academic outcomes for students with mental illness. Education Research International. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/edri/2014/295814/>

everyone in the community can receive the assistance they need to obtain success and to belong in the community.

The final article in this sequence reviews the effect that learning communities can have on first-year university students. “The Impact of Learning Communities on First Year Students’ Growth and Development in College” by Dr. Louis M. Rocconi was written to better understand the relationships between membership to a learning community, student engagement within the university overall, and self-reported learning outcomes. This was accomplished by examining the relationships between participation within a learning community and the students’ perceived gains. Perceived gains can best be understood as the cumulative benefits received from the college experience, including academics, networking opportunities, and other experiences credited to the institution.

From this study, it was found that the “relationship between learning community participation and learning outcomes are mediated by students’ levels of engagement¹¹.” It was found that student involvement within the community was the strongest predictor of how the student perceived the gains of being involved at the university and within the learning community. Students who participated in the learning communities showed positive relationships with the following: increased effort in coursework, more frequent interactions with faculty and staff members of the university, and a more positive perception of peer and faculty member interactions. Overall, this study suggests to those planning learning communities to “be well-advised to develop and focus on activities in

¹¹ Rocconi, L. M. (2010, October 27). The impact of Learning Communities on First Year Students' growth and development in college - research in higher education. SpringerLink. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-010-9190-3>

the learning communities that promote student-faculty interaction, encourage interactions among students, and collaboration on coursework¹¹.”

Rocconi’s article provides support for the flexible and cohesive dimensions. As the results show, communities that prioritize academics yield results that show the gain of such efforts. It follows that implementing guidelines to give structure to the academic pursuits of a community’s members would provide an avenue to achieve those results. The guidelines for this community should not only focus on making academics a priority but engaging with other students within the community. As student engagement is critical to the student’s perception of what the community can do for them, prioritizing ways to encourage that engagement is paramount. A community that practices healthy cohesion could reach that desired level of student engagement.

New2BU Survey Data

The idea for this thesis was influenced by the specific residence hall infrastructure of Baylor University. As such, insight is provided by an annual survey, the New2BU survey, conducted by the Campus Living and Learning department (CL&L) at Baylor. CL&L oversees the residential housing at Baylor and seeks to provide a positive living experience for on-campus students. The results of this survey provide insights to the conditions of the housing experience of students completing their first year at Baylor. The data available for this thesis are from the results of the fall 2020 semester at Baylor University. The survey was completed by 89.8% of the eligible residents. Of the first-year students, approximately 80% were freshmen with the other 20% composed of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The responses in this survey relevant to this thesis were: “I belong at Baylor.”, “I like where I live.”, and “My Community Leader (CL) has

made me feel welcome at Baylor.” For terminology, a CL at Baylor is an upperclassman hired by the department to enforce the policies set by CL&L and build community within the hall. The responses to these statements were largely favorable, with 95%, 94%, and 97% of survey takers indicating they agreed with the respective statements.

CL&L achieves these satisfaction levels by prioritizing five main goals in each hall and throughout the department: Life Together, Faith Development, Self-Advocacy, Cultural Humility, and intellectual growth. These learning goals are developed in the hall through programs, bulletin boards, and intentional conversations with the staff of the hall. By the results of this survey, most students who responded have found community and support at Baylor.

Limitations to this data include completion rates, availability of data, and reference to reported data. 10% of the first-year population did not complete this data. It cannot be assumed that they would agree with the statements about their community or disagree, but the input from these students would likely change the reported numbers. The data made available to use in this thesis was not raw; therefore, no original tests were able to be run on this data. As such, the information gained from this survey should be as a frame of reference to the population of first-year students’ satisfaction with on-campus life. The reference for the category “agree” and “disagree” is a compilation of other options. For example, agreement to each statement ranged from “strongly agree” to “tend to agree”. While either option implies agreement, the difference from strong agreement to belonging to a community to tending to agree to belong to it is a distinction that would inform the level of cohesion between members of the community. Further, this survey was designed to capture the experiences of first year students at Baylor. The information

gained is a helpful tool in understanding what factors indicate a satisfactory experience, but they cannot be assumed to be universal.

This survey provides several guidelines already set in place within the residence halls to build community. The responses to “I belong at Baylor”, “I like where I live”, and “My CL has made me feel welcome at Baylor” speak to the cohesive and communicative dimensions of the circumplex theory. It is important for the proposal to factor in the resident’s enjoyment of the community, along with the eventual benefits of the community on academic success. From this survey, we can gather that the involvement of others in the community, specifically the CLs, help strengthen the sense of belonging for the individuals.

Conclusion

The key points ascertained from this chapter give insight to how a residential community could be monitored in a way that prioritizes academic growth. The literature shows that relationships are necessary for this community to be successful; the benefits of these relationships are the knowledge that can be shared, the support that can be offered, and the sense of belonging that can be developed amongst members. These relationships should be diverse and emotionally intimate, creating space and support for the academic rigor of college life. Communication and action should be prioritized within these relationships. In this way members can ask for the support that they need, develop steps to achieve that support, and then follow through with those steps. The intentional and

reciprocal pursuit of these relationships is necessary, as this is what strengthens the bonds between community members.

The literature also gives insight to how the relationships that comprise this community can have a scholastic dimension. Relationships that are fostered between student, staff, and faculty provide the most benefit as it increases access to resources. Members of the community should utilize their connections in the community to find similar academic goals and the desire to pursue knowledge.

To ensure all community members can participate relationally and academically to the community, their differing needs need to be acknowledged and respected. By either offering or encouraging the use of resources, community members should be open in their support of their fellow member. While focusing on the development of the hall community, members of the community should further be encouraged to seek out other communal opportunities outside of the residence hall. By doing so, everyone will be more likely to feel like they belong at the university and be inspired to encourage others to feel the same. Additionally, membership to other communities increases the resistance of the entire group to codependency.

. By considering these sources through the lens of the circumplex model, several elements that will set the foundation of the proposed community have been identified. In the next chapter, the elements identified in this chapter will be arranged and the proposed plan will be developed. In doing so, each source will contribute to the final proposal of a hall community that supports the academic success of its members.

CHAPTER THREE

Plan Proposal and Case Study

Plan Proposal

The information gathered in the last chapter will now be used to develop a universal plan that can be implemented into a residence hall. Following is a summary of the central ideas extrapolated from the data of the literature in the last chapter. It was found that the developing community must have diverse relationships between members. These relationships should be of good quality and build around peers, older students, and faculty from diverse backgrounds. The members of this community should feel a sense of belonging within the community. Members should feel emotional intimacy with the other members and offer support concerning other's emotional needs. This level of emotional intimacy and trust should be developed in tandem with overall morale and group cohesion. A balance of communication and action should exist within the group to keep the dynamic between members healthy. Members should share what they need from one another and then actively work to meet these expectations. Involvement within the community is necessary, specifically from those in leadership positions, to strengthen the sense of belonging within the group.

To meet the criteria of a community that promotes academic thriving, the relationships within this community should have a scholastic dimension. Along with diversity amongst

relationships, there must exist diversity of academic expertise within the community.

Members of the community must have shared goals relating to academics and a common commitment to develop knowledge. The community must work to accept and offer support to those in the community with differing needs. This should be done to ensure that each member of the community feels the support necessary to do well academically. The overall goal of the implementation of these components is to create a community that members are actively involved in and keeps academic success as a unifying tie between members.

The plan that will be proposed to address the stated components is quadripartite. The first step is to establish community. The second is to set community goals. The third part is to maintain the community. The fourth is to fortify the community. Each step of this plan will be elaborated upon with the qualifications of the circumplex model. By meeting these qualifications, the steps of the plan should seek to maintain the balance between structure and flexibility, as well as independence and connection. After the plan is established, a case study will be presented to explore how this plan could be implemented within the community.

Establishing the Community

The first step of this plan is to establish the community. The sense of belonging to the group is an indicating factor of the eventual success of the community. As such, the establishment of the community is paramount. The goal of this step is to lay the foundation of a community with the common understanding that all members deserve to feel included. The foundation of this community should be first established by the leadership of the residential community. This should take place before the general

members of the community are introduced. The faculty, university staff, and assigned student leaders responsible for creating and maintaining community within the residential community should establish clear guidelines for the community they wish to create. Leadership roles, division of labor, group beliefs, and desired outcomes should be clearly understood by all involved. In this way, the agreed upon ideals can be unanimously enforced.

In this pre-planning stage, leadership should implement the SMART goals approach to define how they wish to build the desired community. The goals should meet the SMART criteria as well as remaining within the desired range of a healthy family unit as defined by the circumplex model. In terms of flexibility, the goals should aim to provide structure to the community while considering the unique personalities and needs of the general members yet to be introduced. In terms of cohesion, the goals should aim to establish a sense of belonging to the residence hall without seeking to isolate future members from other communities.

Once general members are introduced to the community, leadership should seek to establish connections with the residents as well as facilitate an environment in which residents are building connections with one another. During this stage, it is acceptable for academics to not be the focal point of community-building activities. The importance of this stage is to capitalize on the eagerness to connect, and to create a solid foundation that is worthy of connection.

Setting Community Goals

The next step in the process is to set community goals. This should mirror the activity of leadership in the pre-planning stage. All members of the community should be aware of the desired outcome of academic success and should take part in this step. By doing this, the group dynamic of achieving success together can begin. In allowing members to take ownership in the establishment of the guidelines, they are more likely to commit to the success of the community. These guidelines should have the same broad ideals as identified by leadership with the addition of member contributions. In this step, the maintenance of flexibility should be considered carefully. The academic goals set should be something residents strive toward; success is not gained by remaining stagnant. However, as members might be new to a collegiate setting and the academic rigor of university courses, these goals should still be attainable. Goals set for the community should not eventually discourage members from engagement in the community and their individual coursework.

Additionally, the importance of member involvement should not be overlooked during this step. The input from every member contributes to group cohesion. The implementation of these community guidelines should be treated as essential to the community. During this step, leadership should focus on helping members identify academic goals, encouraging members to vocalize and advocate for these goals, and affirming members in their efforts to contribute to the community.

Maintaining the Community

The third step is to establish activities and practices that provide a foundation for the community. Initial connections are made at the establishment of the community and should not be neglected as the academic semester begins. Leadership should share the

burden of strengthening these relationships with the general members themselves. Each member of the community should be encouraged to continue to seek out and support the other members of the community. The academic component to the community should take higher priority as course instruction begins. As reality meets the hypothetical goals of the community, the group should focus on how to hold true to the ideals in practicality. During this stage, an increase in the stratification of connections should occur. Older students in leadership roles should be offering mentorship and advice. Students should be connecting with faculty, whether they are linked to the hall community or not. Leadership should endorse these diverse relationships and create environments for these bonds to strengthen.

To remain in the healthy range regarding the circumplex model, it is crucial in this step to remain flexible and reassess academic goals. It is possible that the goals set are unmeetable, even with the guidance from leadership. Members will have to learn how to balance holding one another accountable to meeting community guidelines with modifying said guidelines when they are discovered to be unrealistic. The element of communication is important in this phase to maintain the balance between flexibility and rigidity.

Fortifying the Community

The fourth and final step of the plan is to fortify the community. While community practices have been established, there should be a concerted effort to provide novel and unique experiences to those in the community that aid in connection and morale. This portion of the plan should span most of the academic year. The direct

actions performed in this plan should feature original leadership and the new members who have assumed leadership roles within the community.

The focus of community efforts during this stage should mostly revolve around academic pursuits with supplemental community-minded events. At this stage, variety is essential in maintaining the dynamic nature of the community. Members of the community should be engaging on a consistent timeframe, but the interactions should remain variable. Subgroups should be transient and often mixed to promote the sense of community amongst all members while still providing each student the opportunity to connect with their class materials in different ways. By implementing different study groups and study strategies, a greater success rate is accounted for across the community.

In this stage, the overall sense of community between members should be deepened. As the academic year progresses, leaders within the community should be vigilant in identifying dissent or potential barriers for students. Support within the group to combat threats to the community stability should be established as the need arises.

To remain in the healthy community range, leadership should beware of the balance between independence and enmeshment. While the community is in place to promote academic thriving, the members of the community should not be isolating themselves from other groups outside of the residence hall. Conversely, the success of the group is contained in the willingness to engage with one another. The previous three steps should have laid a foundation for relationships within the community, and actions within this step should serve to strengthen these connections while still allowing members to grow in the other communities to which they belong.

Case Study

The residence hall in this case study is a co-educational building with 350 students. The building does not require a specific major or course of study. Most students within this building are first-year students to the university. Several upperclassmen live within the building to serve as Community Leaders (CL) or in a position of leadership on the hall leadership team. A faculty member resides within the community, as well as the director of the residence hall.

The hall leadership team is a volunteer-based group comprised of upperclassmen and eventually include first year students. The purpose of this group is to plan program promoting community growth and to create spaces that facilitate connections with those outside of the residence hall, such as with faculty members or other organizations. The hall director and the CLs also plan programs to grow community as well as to uphold the policies in place in the residence hall to ensure a safe environment for students.

Establishing the Community

This step occurs before residents move into the residential community, so the bulk of work done in this step is preemptive in nature. Events discussed in the following sections are planned in this stage. Leadership should take this opportunity to plan for a successful academic year, as well as to model behaviors expected from the main community. Diverse relationships, emotional intimacy, and supportive behavior amongst those in leadership set the precedent before general members are even introduced as to how the community can benefit those who are willing to participate. Leadership will

connect different members of the team during planning activities as well as during other designated times. Team building exercises that promote conversation surrounding motivations, goals, and passion areas are conducted during this step. Events are planned with different combinations of leadership members to ensure that the events that are being produced are original and fresh. Doing this also allows for those leadership members to build comradery and trust.

To complete the first step, leadership should meet before the introduction of general members. During this time, bonds between those on leadership are established while the plans for the hall are created. This time should be split between planning for the upcoming events and interacting to learn more about other leadership members. The long-term goals for the community will be discussed, allowing leadership to inject with their ideas to benefit the community as well as which values are important to infuse into the community.

Setting Community Goals

To complete the second step, leadership should focus on sharing the vision of the established goals with the rest of the community. Community-building events as well as an event that solidifies the academic standard of the community should be held during this step.

Two community-building events are held. The first program is an all-hall event within the first few days of move-in. Food will be provided for residents, along with games and music. Leadership will oversee the distribution of papers to each resident. These papers include questions about residents, ranging from favorite ice cream flavors

to life goals. After the completion of these papers, residents will be instructed to find someone with identical or similar answers. They will initial each other's papers after discovering their similarities. During this activity, leadership will also participate with the instruction to seek out the residents who are more hesitant to engage and connect with peers; leadership should connect with these residents and then find other residents that they can meet as well. When moving to a new question, residents will be instructed to find new partners. At the end of this activity, completed sheets with signatures will be collected and several will be selected for a shareable prize. The goal for this event is to provide a fun environment for residents to meet one another naturally, and to provide an activity that guarantees more meetings. The shareable prize is another way to strengthen the burgeoning connections amongst residents.

The second large-scale program is a vision-board party. Leadership will provide posterboard, magazines, newspapers, and a binding agent. Residents will be instructed to create a vision board, making a visual representation of what they want their future to look like. This project can focus on the immediate future or span out decades. As this takes place, leadership should begin conversations with groups of residents, encouraging them to share what is being placed on their board. The focus of these questions can be about the desired personal life, but leadership should begin the conversation about career goals and how academic pursuits during college will further their path. This event's goal is for residents to begin the process of considering how their academic pursuits will inform their future while also aiding in the development of community relationships

To establish the academic goals with all members, leadership hosts a hall-wide event where community expectations are formally decided upon, and a communal copy is

signed by the members of the community. Prior to the all-hall event, each individual hall should meet to decide on a few goals they would like to propose to the community. These ideas can range from agreed upon usage of common spaces for studying, establishing large study groups, and accountability plans. At the general meeting, these proposed ideas can be voted on by the whole community and added to the final set of guidelines. By including residents in each step and providing a physical copy of what was agreed on, residents can take an active role early on in establishing the academic goals for the community. Later in the school year, this list can be referred to as a mode of inspiration. This activity also provides a space for emotional trust to be built; leadership should work to ensure each voice and idea is heard and respected.

To further this step, smaller groups of a different composition should meet to discuss their personal academic goals. Sharing the ambition and ideas for a successful school year allows for vulnerability to exist amongst members and creates natural accountability.

Fortifying the Community

The third step covers more time than the first two steps. Many events should occur during this phase, although they do not need to be aimed at the entire hall. Three ways this can be accomplished is through weekly check-ins, study hours, and community events. Weekly check-ins can be limited to the CL and their individual halls. These do not to be formal and should focus on the support that the CL and other hall members can offer to one another. Residents should be encouraged to attend and share how they are

handling the academic guidelines of the community and other personal situations. This is a way for members to hold one another accountable and to come up with methods for struggling members to meet their expectations.

Study hours should be conducted as the name implies. As the year progresses, the nature of these sessions can be altered by study focus or method. At the beginning of the semester, these should aim to get different members of the community together to complete homework or focus on studying for exams. Leadership in these spaces should focus on mentoring students younger than them if they have taken similar courses. The methods of study and general advice can be imparted during this time.

While the focus during this stage should certainly be on the academic pursuits of the community, it is essential to the emotional well-being of the group to provide events that are solely focused on building community morale. This weekly community event should aim to give residents a break from the daily grind of academic life. These events can be planned monthly to cater to the interests of the residents. Beginning ideas could be residence hall room crafts, a recess hour, or the utilization of university spaces available to students at no cost.

Maintaining the Community

The implementation of the final step relies on the flexibility and awareness of leadership surrounding the community. Events hosted in this stage should consider the unique makeup of the community. Some general events can be planned, but this step requires ongoing effort from leadership.

Two events that can be planned prior to the semester are a professor panel and a career-skills event. Student leadership should utilize the connections that they have made to better the community. This is easily seen within a professor panel. Faculty members that are willing to invest as mentors are invited to a casual event in which residents can ask questions regarding academics, graduate school, and other facets of higher education and academia. Not every student knows how to build connections with faculty or has not yet developed the confidence to pursue relationships with faculty members. Older students who have already formed connections with faculty members can contribute to the community by composing these professor panels and highlighting that resource to other students.

Career skills are rarely taught inside the classroom but are vital to success in applying to graduate schools or for finding employment. While the university often has these resources available, some students find the experience to be overwhelming. Again, bringing these resources directly into the residence hall is a way to bring every member of the community up to the same level. In addition, students who are anxious to admit they need help in this area are not required to overcome this fear alone, and instead can gain the knowledge in an environment that is familiar and supportive.

Other events planned during this stage should be directly reflective of the community's values that were delineated when community goals were set. Leadership should use their best discretion in maintaining the balance between academic-focused events and community-strengthening events.

Limitations

Limitations can arise at any step in this plan due to a myriad of reasons unique to the communities. As this plan aims to be universal in nature, the limitations posed will also remain universal. Each stage has a defining limitation that will be explored in this section.

In the first step, Establishing the Community, the defining obstacle is the difference in personalities amongst members. Conflict arises where differences exist. No matter the depth of the difference – whether it is found in senses of humor or cultural upbringing – these conflicts cause friction when attempting to form a community. To accommodate this conflict, leadership should not ignore or push aside the conflicts, but instead set the standard of how the community will work through them. By finding resolution, this limitation can serve to strengthen the community.

In the second step, Setting Community Goals, the limitation is found in the expectations of the residents. It is imperative that leadership challenges the expectations residents pose, ensuring that they are not too demanding or too lax. Expectations that are too demanding are unlikely to be met by every community member and can lead to dissension amongst the community and weaken the sense of community within the hall. Expectations that are too lax will be easily met without effort or growth, giving the impression that the community is not worth the effort as results would be the same without it.

In the third step, Maintaining the Community, the complications are rooted in group cohesion and dedication to the community overall. As other communities become available to the members of the residential community, relationships and connections within the hall may not be prioritized by the residents. This should not be discouraged –

any support system available should be explored and utilized – but taken into consideration. This reaffirms the importance of the foundations of the community and the focus of academic betterment within the group.

The limitation in the final step, Fortifying the Community, is homogeneity. Subgroups that arise within the community should not be allowed to become stagnant as this detracts from the group's overall progress. Stagnancy implies that some individual is not benefitting from the resources of the group. Facilitating different interactions and forms of study is the way to combat this issue. Leadership should strive to create spaces where they are continuously changing the membership makeup of subgroups to ensure that members are not creating cliques within the total population. The same logic should be applied to methods of academic progress. Creative study methods should be extended to topics that are scientific in nature and vice versa. This allows for deeper understanding of the materials being presented in the classroom and allows for different members of the community to contribute their ideas and ways of study.

Conclusion

The adherence to this plan would ideally yield a group of scholars with developed strategies and a support group that promotes academic success. The investment of students, faculty, and staff are necessary for the establishment and furtherment of this community. As such, leaders within the community should strive to be proactive and engaging. Students in the leadership position should dedicate the time and energy to pass on a positive experience of the residence hall community to new members. With each

progressive step in the plan, a fresh look should be had to the progress of the community in adherence to the guidelines. Flexibility and community cohesion should be considered at each stage as well and the plans to shape the community should strive to remain within a healthy balance of these two factors.

The general outcome of this plan is a community within the residence hall that encourages its members to thrive academically. Each segment should be carefully devised by the leadership of the community and monitored as the year progresses. The case study gives examples of how this can be accomplished, but the plan should be modified to fit the community for which it is serving.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to provide a plan promoting academic success within the context of an academic community. Creating a formula to establish this community is possible because of the existence of its constants: proximity of the community members, identity as students, and members of a university. While other variables are introduced to the formula, the general structure can stay consistent. As such, the plan that was proposed is not reliant on a specific university or residence hall style to have success. While the topic was devised from experiences at Baylor University, resources specific to this type of institution were not assumed to be available at other universities. For example, students in Baylor's residence halls are provided opportunities to promote their individual spiritual growth, in respect to the university's Baptist classification. As this is not a common characteristic amongst all institutions of higher education, this dimension to community was not elaborated on in the thesis.

The guidelines and parameters of this planned community aimed to answer the driving question of the thesis: What do exceptional residence halls do to promote academic success in their residents? The answers to this question were intentionally universal and broad in nature, to accommodate for each individual hall to adjust benefitting their specific community. Despite the malleability of the plan, there are three foundational facts that must be true of a targeted community for this plan to be implemented successfully. The plan must be executed on a university campus, within a

residential community, and amongst students who agree to put forth good academic work. Without these conditions, aspects of the plan cannot be met or sustained. If these conditions are met, this plan serves to create a support system for its members to handle events of an academic year and create patterns of success.

The literature reviewed in this thesis highlighted that there was a need of community in an academic setting. This was established by showing the role community plays in stress management, sense of belonging to an institution, and proved academic improvement when belonging to a community of learners. Beyond this, community was found to be most successful when members felt comfortable enough to be emotionally vulnerable, leading to the distribution of novel ideas and strategies in approaching education. Diversity was found to be a critical factor in the establishment and maintenance of community. It is a necessary component in the types of relationships, levels of experience, and scholastic methods suggested by members. The literature was reviewed through the lens of the circumplex model, showing that the discoveries in the literature satisfied the dimensions of the theory. By establishing the bilinear relationships between flexibility and structure, and cohesion and independence, the residence hall community could find a healthy balance that provided support to residents while allowing them to maintain their autonomy. In total, the materials used in the literary review established that community was a relevant component to academic success. While proving relevancy, the literature also provided key information in how community could be used as a tool to meet an objective. In this thesis, that objective was defined as promoting academic success.

The cumulation of the literature review led to the creation of a plan that creates structure and guidance to the formulation and sustenance of a residential community. The provided case study provides an example of how the general plan can be modified and tailored to meet a specific community. The benefit of the plan is found in the structure it provides, for the members of the community as well as the leadership of the hall. Apart from trained faculty and staff, the community within the hall is established by students. These students are certainly put into a leadership position because of their aptitude and ability to lead and contribute to the hall community. However, it cannot be assumed that these novice leaders grasp the importance of utilizing the community in a way specific to academic success. In this regard, the plan is the blueprint to a healthy and functioning academic community that can accommodate the unique leadership abilities of student leaders.

The residence hall community is a wide-reaching resource that should be employed to its greatest extent. Students who leave the community at the end of each academic year should feel like they belonged to the community and were a valued member. Highlighting the academic component of community and focusing efforts to its promotion can provide maximum benefits to those belonging to the community. This thesis sought to reveal how a residential community could encourage academic thriving amongst its members when made a priority. More work could be done with this plan, such as monitoring its effectiveness after implementation in subsequent years. Modifications to the steps of the plan should follow, as field experience dictates. After introducing this plan to an institution, permanent changes could be made to the plan to match the institution's values. To strengthen this thesis topic, I would suggest more

research be conducted in a longitudinal study of students within a plan-integrated residence hall, those in a residence hall not utilizing this plan, and those that do not commune within a hall at all. In this way, the true effectiveness of this plan on academic success could be measured.

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