

# **Department of Residence Life**

## **Living Learning Communities Common Assessment**

### **Spring 2021**

#### **Purpose of Assessment**

The Department of Residence Life wanted to understand the experiences of first-time in college (FTIC) students living in the residence halls. They specifically wanted to compare the experiences of students in a Living Learning Communities (LLC) to residents not in one of the Living Learning Communities. Residence Life will use the information to improve the programs and services provided to students living on-campus.

Student Life Studies assisted the Department of Residence Life in conducting a similar assessment in spring 2019 as a pilot assessment. After the pilot was completed, questions were adjusted and were divided to ask half of the questions one year and half the following year. Spring 2020 would have been the first year to administer the revised assessment; however, it was postponed until spring 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions for the first assessment focused on a sense of community, personal gains, and general satisfaction. Students participating in Living Learning Communities were also asked about their experience in their LLC.

#### **Key Findings with Recommendations**

Student Life Studies identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the Department of Residence Life may take based on the results. However, Residence Life staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the hall and Living Learning Communities. Staff members are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students' experiences.

- Students indicated that having a sense of community was important to them. LLC participants talked about the community or knowing people with similar interests as a strength of the LLC. Almost two-thirds of respondents either mostly or completely felt like members of their community care about each other. However, 81% of students indicated that their community members did not know them somewhat or at all.
  - LLC participants would like more activities to make them feel involved. Residence Life staff are encouraged to provide more events to help students feel involved and get to know other students.
- Most students (86%) reported that they made progress in learning on their own quite a bit or very much. Additionally, approximately three-fourths of the respondents (78%) reported that they gained skills in adapting to change quite a bit or very much.
  - Less than half of the respondents felt that through their college experience they broadened their acquaintance with campus resources (44%) or gained knowledge about other parts of the world and other people (43%) either very much or quite a bit. Department staff might consider offering additional programs about different cultures or experiences around the world and campus resources.
- Students were mostly positive when asked about their experience with their LLC. Students in an LLC shared that they liked being able to make friends with people who had similar interests and found it academically beneficial because they were able to share information and join study groups. When they were asked to share an area of improvement for the LLC, students would like there to be more frequent activities and programs with more flexible meeting times to allow them to feel more involved with their community.
  - One-third of LLC participants did not feel informed about what LLCs were available. Residence Life may look at providing additional resources and information about all LLCs on their website or possibly including short videos explaining the different LLCs.

- Three-fourths of the respondents felt satisfied or very satisfied with their overall academic experience and campus resources, as well as that during their time at Texas A&M their interest in their major increased.
- The number of people who responded to the survey was low. The 3% response rate could be due to the length of the survey (63 questions). The department may consider asking fewer questions and designing broader questions.

## **Method and Sample**

The electronic survey was developed using Qualtrics®, a software program for creating web-based surveys. The survey consisted of 63 questions, of which 61 were quantitative and two were qualitative. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions.

The survey link was emailed on March 30, 2021, to a sample of 2,266 first-time in college students; half of the students were in an LLC and half lived on campus but not in an LLC. Sixteen email addresses were undeliverable; therefore, 2,250 students successfully received the survey. Non-respondents received up to three reminder emails before the survey closed on April 30, 2021. Of those 2,250 students, 63 students completed some part of the survey, yielding a 3% response rate. Just over half of the 63 respondents (56%) were participants in an LLC and 44% lived on campus, but not in an LLC.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and the qualitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel®.

## **Results**

Results are reported as means, standard deviation (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are in descending mean or frequency order unless otherwise specified. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are contained in this report; the entire list of responses can be found in a separate document. Additionally, results for LLC participants and students not in an LLC but living on campus can be found in a separate document. This report is divided into five sections: Sense of Community, Personal Gains, General Satisfaction, Living Learning Communities, and Student Demographics.

### **Sense of Community**

For the questions in this section, students were told that community referred to the Texas A&M University community, or the institution as a whole, and not only their hall or floor community or group of friends. Students were initially asked to share how important it is for them to feel a sense of community with other community members. A vast majority of the 63 respondents (94%) reported this was somewhat important, important, or very important to them. Alternatively, 6% felt it was not very important or not at all important (overall  $m=4.73/6.00$ ;  $sd=.88$ ;  $n=63$ ). Nobody selected the option that they would prefer not to be part of this community. Students living in an LLC indicated that community was important at a slightly higher rate compared to students not in an LLC.

Respondents were asked how well a series of statements represented how they felt about Texas A&M University. Table 1, on the following two pages, shows that approximately two-thirds of the respondents mostly or completely felt that members of their community care about each other, people in the community have similar needs, priorities, and goals, and that being a member of this community makes them feel good. However, over half (60%) of the respondents reported that most members of their community do not know them at all. There were some slight differences between LLC participants and students not in an LLC, which can be found in a separate document.

<b>How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about Texas A&amp;M University?</b>	<b>Completely (4)</b>	<b>Mostly (3)</b>	<b>Somewhat (2)</b>	<b>Not at All (1)</b>	<b>Mean (sd) [n]</b>
<b>Members of this community care about each other</b>	22%	45%	29%	5%	2.83 (.83) [60]
<b>People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals</b>	16%	47%	34%	3%	2.76 (.76) [62]
<b>Being a member of this community makes me feel good</b>	23%	40%	24%	13%	2.73 (.96) [62]
<b>This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, logos, architecture, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize</b>	31%	26%	23%	20%	2.69 (1.12) [61]
<b>This community has good leaders</b>	20%	39%	31%	10%	2.69 (.90) [61]
<b>Community members and I value the same things</b>	16%	41%	38%	5%	2.68 (.80) [63]
<b>I can trust people in this community</b>	13%	47%	36%	5%	2.68 (.76) [62]
<b>I feel hopeful about the future of this community</b>	18%	44%	25%	13%	2.67 (.93) [61]
<b>I expect to be a part of this community for a long time</b>	27%	33%	21%	20%	2.66 (1.08) [61]
<b>This community can influence other communities</b>	13%	44%	36%	7%	2.64 (.80) [61]
<b>I get important needs of mine met because I am a part of this community</b>	16%	41%	33%	10%	2.63 (.87) [63]
<b>This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met</b>	13%	44%	37%	7%	2.63 (.79) [62]
<b>If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved</b>	13%	34%	46%	7%	2.54 (.81) [61]
<b>It is very important to me to be a part of this community</b>	20%	26%	38%	16%	2.49 (.99) [61]
<b>Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters</b>	16%	34%	31%	18%	2.49 (.98) [61]

How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about Texas A&M University?	Completely (4)	Mostly (3)	Somewhat (2)	Not at All (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community	19%	27%	36%	18%	2.48 (1.00) [62]
Fitting into this community is important to me	15%	26%	41%	18%	2.38 (.95) [61]
I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them	20%	21%	33%	26%	2.34 (1.08) [61]
I care about what community members think of me	13%	26%	38%	23%	2.30 (.97) [61]
I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community	13%	20%	38%	30%	2.16 (1.00) [61]
Being a member of this community is part of my identity	10%	18%	43%	30%	2.08 (.94) [61]
I can recognize most of the members of this community	8%	17%	35%	40%	1.93 (.95) [60]
I have influence over what this community is like	7%	16%	31%	46%	1.84 (.93) [61]
Most community members know me	7%	13%	21%	60%	1.66 (.94) [62]

Table 1: Sense of Belonging

#### Personal Gains

Students were asked to think about their college experience and to what extent they felt they had or had not gained or made progress in a variety of areas. Table 2, on the next page, demonstrates that students felt they made progress in learning on their own and adapting to change. Students indicated they felt they made the least progress in gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people and broadening their acquaintance with campus resources.

<b>In thinking about your college or university experience up to now, to what extent do you feel you have gained or made progress in the following areas?</b>	<b>Very Much (4)</b>	<b>Quite a Bit (3)</b>	<b>Some (2)</b>	<b>Very Little (1)</b>	<b>Mean (sd) [n=61]</b>
<b>Learning on my own</b>	61%	25%	8%	7%	3.39 (.90)
<b>Adapting to change (new technologies, different jobs, or personal circumstances, etc.)</b>	44%	34%	18%	3%	3.20 (.85)
<b>Using digital tools to find information</b>	39%	31%	23%	7%	3.03 (.95)
<b>Thinking analytically and logically</b>	30%	46%	18%	7%	2.98 (.87)
<b>Understanding myself, my abilities, interests, and personality</b>	31%	38%	23%	8%	2.92 (.94)
<b>Developing my own values</b>	26%	44%	21%	8%	2.89 (.90)
<b>Getting a broad general education about different fields of knowledge</b>	26%	39%	28%	7%	2.85 (.89)
<b>Putting ideas together and seeing relationships (i.e., similarities, differences)</b>	26%	41%	23%	10%	2.84 (.93)
<b>Getting a range of information that may be relevant to a career</b>	23%	41%	25%	12%	2.75 (.94)
<b>Developing good health habits and physical fitness</b>	28%	33%	20%	20%	2.69 (1.09)
<b>Acquiring background for specialization for further education in a professional, scientific, or scholarly field</b>	25%	33%	25%	18%	2.64 (1.05)
<b>Acquiring knowledge or skills applicable to a specific job or type of work</b>	26%	26%	30%	18%	2.61 (1.07)
<b>Developing the ability to function as a member of a team</b>	18%	30%	43%	10%	2.56 (.90)
<b>Becoming aware of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life</b>	13%	31%	41%	15%	2.43 (.90)
<b>Broadening my acquaintance with campus resources</b>	18%	26%	34%	21%	2.41 (1.02)
<b>Gaining knowledge about other parts of the world and other people</b>	15%	28%	36%	21%	2.36 (.93)

Table 2: Personal Gains

#### General Satisfaction

When asked if they would choose to attend Texas A&M University again, 46% strongly agreed, 41% agreed, 8% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed ( $m=3.28/4.00$ ;  $sd=.82$ ;  $n=61$ ). Students not in an LLC reported they agreed or strongly agreed slightly more than students in an LLC. Furthermore, students were asked about their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction on a series of statements. Table 3, on the following page, illustrates students were most satisfied with their academic experience and least satisfied with their overall social experience. Students not in an LLC were slightly more satisfied compared to LLC participants in all statements.

<b>Please rate your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the following aspects of your campus experience?</b>	<b>Very Satisfied (4)</b>	<b>Satisfied (3)</b>	<b>Dissatisfied (2)</b>	<b>Very Dissatisfied (1)</b>	<b>Mean (sd) [n]</b>
<b>Overall academic experience</b>	18%	57%	16%	8%	2.85 (.81) [61]
<b>Campus resources (i.e., counseling, health center, IT, etc.)</b>	15%	60%	14%	12%	2.79 (.85) [52]
<b>Residential campus facilities (i.e., residence hall or apartment, community center, etc.)</b>	13%	52%	23%	12%	2.67 (.86) [60]
<b>Value of my education for the price I am paying</b>	13%	47%	27%	13%	2.60 (.89) [60]
<b>Overall social experience</b>	10%	52%	22%	17%	2.55 (.89) [60]

Table 3: Satisfaction with Student Experience

When asked if they have had a positive experience at Texas A&M University overall, 21% strongly agreed, 61% agreed, 12% disagreed, and 7% strongly disagreed ( $m=2.97/4.00$ ;  $sd=.77$ ;  $n=61$ ). Almost all students (95%) indicated they planned to return to Texas A&M University in the fall and 5% were unsure of their plans. None selected the “no” response option. LLC participants reported having a slightly less positive overall experience at Texas A&M; however, they were slightly higher in stating they were coming back to Texas A&M in the fall semester when compared to students not in an LLC.

Students were asked about their level of agreement or disagreement about their major or career path. Table 4 illustrates that 80% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that during their time at Texas A&M their interest in their major increased. Approximately two-thirds of the students said that they agreed or strongly agreed that during their time at Texas A&M, they have clarified their career path.

<b>During my time at Texas A&amp;M University, I have:</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (4)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>	<b>Mean (sd) [n=61]</b>
<b>Increased my interest in my major.</b>	36%	44%	13%	7%	3.10 (.87)
<b>Increased my interest in college.</b>	34%	39%	15%	12%	2.97 (.98)
<b>Clarified my career path.</b>	20%	46%	26%	8%	2.77 (.86)

Table 4: Satisfaction with Student Experience

#### Living Learning Communities

Respondents in the Living Learning Communities (LLC,  $n=35$ ) were asked a series of questions about their experience specifically with their LLC. Table 5, on the following page, in descending order by the yes column, reveals that most students felt it was clear when they were admitted or accepted into their LLC. Alternatively, just over half of students felt informed about what LLCs were available. Results by each Living Learning Community can be found in a separate document.

<b>Please respond to the following questions about the LLC application process.</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
<b>Was it clear to you when you were admitted / accepted into your LLC?</b>	74%	14%	11%
<b>Was the LLC roommate selection process clear to you?</b>	66%	20%	14%
<b>Did you feel informed about what a Living Learning Community (LLC) is?</b>	63%	26%	11%
<b>Did you receive information in a timely manner about the LLCs you indicated interest in via email?</b>	60%	17%	23%
<b>Was the LLC room assignment process clear to you?</b>	60%	20%	20%
<b>Did you feel informed about what LLCs were available?</b>	53%	32%	15%

Table 5: Living Learning Community Application [n=35]

When asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were overall with their experience in their LLC this year, 77% of the respondents reported they were satisfied (20% were very satisfied and 57% were satisfied). Alternatively, 11% were dissatisfied and 11% were very dissatisfied ( $m=2.86/4.00$ ;  $sd=.88$ ;  $n=35$ ). In looking at individual LLCs, all students in Terry Scholars (ASPIRE), LAUNCH Constellation, and Geosciences indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied. The one respondent from FACTION stated they were very dissatisfied.

Students were asked to share a strength of their LLC, and 18 responded. Most LLC participants shared something that was related to the people in the community. Some liked living near people who shared similar interests and priorities, making friends easier, and being part of a family. Some liked being surrounded by people who care about their grades which made it easier to form study groups, ask classmates for help, and encourage each other. A few students expressed what they did not like about their LLC or said there were no strengths.

Alternatively, students were asked to share an area of improvement for their LLC and 17 provided suggestion. The responses for the Engineering Village LLC varied. Some students said that they want further involvement. They specifically mentioned wanting more frequent events with more flexible times to meet. One respondent shared that students needed to clean after themselves when using the kitchen. There was only one response from the FACTION LLC, they shared that the LLC needs to improve working with students with disabilities. The responses were similar for the members of the Honors Housing Community; they shared that there needs to be more in-person activities or events that involve them in the community.

All students were asked how many roommates they currently live with. A majority (83%) indicated they lived with one roommate, 3% lived with two roommates, 3% had three roommates and 11% did not have a roommate. Respondents who reported having at least one roommate ( $n=53$ ) were asked a follow-up question about how they selected their current roommate(s) in a select all that apply formatted question. Of the 53 respondents, 53% indicated they were assigned a roommate, 49% stated they selected their roommate, and 11% reported they searched for a roommate. Additionally, 2% selected the "other" response option and had the opportunity to write a comment. The one student responding said they sent out information and their roommate contacted them.

### Student Demographics

Student demographics were gathered through the University student database and are displayed in Table 6, on the following page in descending order by the survey respondents for each category, for all the students the survey was sent to as well as all the survey respondents. Most of the survey respondents were female, freshmen, White, not first-generation, in the College of Engineering, and were in an LLC. Many categories were similar between the survey population and the survey respondents. However, there were more female and White students responding

compared to the survey population. Students' academic majors, state they graduated high school from, citizenship, and residence hall were also gathered and can be found in a separate document. Additionally, student demographics by students only in a Living Learning Community and those not in an LLC can be found in a separate document.

<b>Student Demographics</b>	<b>Survey Population [n=2,266]</b>	<b>Survey Respondents [n=63]</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	49%	59%
Male	51%	41%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	55%	65%
Hispanic or Latino of any Race	25%	21%
Asian	13%	6%
Multi-Racial Excluding Black	3%	5%
American Indian	<1%	2%
Black or Multi-Racial with Black	4%	2%
International	<1%	--
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	--
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%	--
<b>Classification</b>		
Freshman	48%	44%
Sophomore	46%	43%
Junior	6%	11%
Senior	1%	2%
<b>College</b>		
Engineering	45%	44%
Science	7%	14%
Veterinary Medicine	6%	11%
Agriculture and Life Sciences	6%	10%
Liberal Arts	7%	6%
Geosciences	2%	5%
Architecture	3%	3%
Mays Business School	8%	3%
Education and Human Development	5%	2%
General Studies	10%	2%
Public Health	1%	--
<b>First-Generation Status</b>		
Not a First-Generation Student	80%	78%
First-Generation Student	20%	22%
Unknown	<1%	--
<b>Living Learning Community</b>		
LLC Participant	50%	56%
Not LLC Participant	50%	44%

Table 6: Student Demographics

## **Department Background**

The Department of Residence Life is comprised of over 60 full-time staff and over 180 graduate and undergraduate student staff. According to its website (<https://reslife.tamu.edu/about/>), the departments' mission is to "support student success through exceptional service, facilities, and experiences; empowering students to develop as leaders, scholars, and citizens." Approximately 11,000 students live on-campus in six different style residence halls, two apartment complexes, and halls specifically for the Corps of Cadets.

Students living on-campus have the option to sign up to be part of a Living Learning Community (LLC). The departments' website (<https://reslife.tamu.edu/living/llcs/>) reports that residents in an LLC "benefit from additional resources, support, and enhanced activities centered around a specific focus in order to elevate their Aggie experience." The Department of Residence Life offers four types of LLCs: Academic Residential Experience Districts, Academic LLC, Enhanced LLCs, and Themed or Interest.

## **Project Details**

One limitation to note with this assessment is the low response rate. The department should use caution when interpreting the results and making data-informed decisions. Additionally, the 2020-2021 academic year was not a traditional year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students had virtual classes rather than traditional in-person classes. This was the same for many of the student activities. This should be taken into consideration when using the results for making decisions or changes.

The Department of Student Life Studies provides quality assessment services, resources, and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, anyone can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

Report Prepared for: Justin Majors, Department of Residence Life  
Report Prepared by: Kelly Cox and Judith Barrera, Student Life Studies  
Report Prepared on: November 9, 2021  
Survey Designed by: Kelly Cox, Student Life Studies  
Analysis by: Robert Tirso, PH.D., Student Life Studies