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Examining how interactions contribute to thriving for sophomore, junior, and senior living-learning community students

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INTERACTIONS ACROSS CAMPUS have long been documented as an important component of understanding the college student experience. This is especially salient in relation to interactions with faculty and peers during a student's first year, when susceptibility for departure is high. However, it is likewise critical to understand how distinctive types of interactions with various constituents inform the experience of sophomore, junior, and senior college students. The purpose of this study was to examine a theoretical model of the relationships between various interaction factors hypothesized to predict student success in college, as operationalized in the construct of thriving. A survey research design was utilized to collect data for this study from sophomore, junior, and senior living-learning community students at eight large research institutions in four states. Data was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine the relationship between eight interaction variables and five thriving variables. The final model indicated acceptable fit (*CFI* > .90, *RMSEA* < .06) and explained between 30 and 53% of the variance across thriving factors. Additionally, results indicated that individual interactions are able to predict student thriving in unique and significant ways with varying effect sizes. Recommendations from these findings for housing professionals are also discussed.

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Higher education leaders continually search for ways to capitalize on the power of students' relationships. Felten and Lambert (2020) proclaim that "relationships are the beating heart of the undergraduate experience" (p. 2), and the interactions that trigger such connections occur across campus, from classrooms and laboratories to dining halls and sport fields. One environment poised to heavily promote interaction and relationship building on campus is a living-learning community

> *LLCs are distinct, structured environments that offer a place where academic, social, and deeper life interactions with faculty, staff, and peers can occur all in one place.*

(LLC). In these spaces, students' "propinquity to one another in their residence hall, classroom environment, and cocurricular activities [makes] serendipitous interactions more common" (Inkelas et al., 2018, p. 57).

Individual campus policies often influence the living decisions of first-year and upper-division students. These policies vary widely depending on the institution, where some have a first-year live-on requirement, some have no requirement for residency, and others have a four-year requirement to keep students engaged in a residence hall until they graduate. Further, some institutions have moved to a two-year requirement, where students stay in residence halls until their junior year. Such policies play a role in students' LLC participation. Students on campuses with more flexible housing arrangements have more choices regarding living and therefore have more choices regarding LLC involvement. Nonetheless, many LLCs are designed as academic housing initiatives geared toward first-year students.

The vast majority of LLCs represented among the approximately 600 communities in the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) focused on first-year students (Inkelas et al., 2018). Considering classification, that sample comprised more than 71% first-year residents (Inkelas et al., 2007). This is a common trend, as interventions to support students during their initial year of college are essential to combat departure and promote success (Kuh et al., 2010). The emphasis to study first-year students has also unintentionally led to fewer studies on returning students. However, the "increased pressure and decreased support" (Schreiner et al., 2012, p. 111) many students face after their first year is an issue that various departments across campus can and should address. One way to concentrate effort in this area is to focus on opportunities for upper-division student interaction with faculty, staff, and peers.

Schreiner (2009), in a study on student satisfaction and retention, found that faculty availability outside of the classroom can increase the odds of juniors returning for their senior year. Further, she posits that "availability to engage in academic discussions that extend learning outside of class can contribute to juniors' intellectual growth and satisfaction with their experiences" (p. 8). Peer interaction is equally important for students beyond their first year. Dumford and colleagues (2019) found that seniors report high levels of peer belonging, and students who go through the college experience together are more likely to bond with one another. However, as many upper-division students who remain living on campus are given increasing opportunities to reside in suite-style spaces, creating these bonds presents a challenge; further, such a "push for increased privacy can often undermine the development of community" (Gahagan & Hunter, 2010, p. 193) for these upper-division students. The types of programs often present in LLCs, such as peer study groups, mentoring programs, or cultural experiences, can provide opportunities for these interactions and help resulting peer relationships to flourish (Inkelas et al., 2018).

Living on campus has tremendous potential to provide the type of emotional support and academic resources sophomores need to succeed (Gahagan & Hunter, 2010). Sophomores are more likely to feel a sense of belonging on campus when they are engaged in the learning process and can create connections between what they are learning and their desired future (Schreiner, 2009). This sense of belonging is a process often promoted through intentional yet informal interactions with faculty, such as in LLC programs. Informal interactions can cover topics related to academic or social matters, but they are also a gateway to deeper conversations where the content shifts to potentially include aspects of meaning-making, values, or spirituality.

Emphasis on the content of these interactions is further discussed by Lindholm (2010), who stated that more than half of the college juniors who participated in the Spirituality in Higher Education pilot study "said their professors 'never' provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life" (p. 210). Lindholm further admonishes that colleges and universities are doing little to support students in their exploration of the sphere of values and beliefs. The interactions students have, however, benefit from deeper exploration of elements such as meaning and purpose. In short, institutions should be doing more to address this void identified by Lindholm and encourage interactions beyond traditional academic and social realms.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERACTIONS

Although researchers often categorize campus interactions according to what occurs in either academic or social domains of college students' lives (Benjamin & Griffin, 2013; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Mara & Mara, 2010), recent scholarship (Sriram, Haynes, Cheatle, et al., 2020; Sriram, Weintraub, et al., 2020) emphasizes the need to more seriously consider the importance of deeper conversations regarding meaning, value, and purpose, as Lindholm (2010) suggested. While academic interactions are defined by their explicitly academic context—often promoting intellectual stimulation through connections to classes, majors, careers, or support—social interactions are more light hearted and informal, often occurring through casual conversation or greetings. Sriram and McLevain (2016) introduced deeper life interactions as a needed third construct to more fully explain the relationships students have on campus. These interactions add a layer of clarification and explanation to the traditional academic and social views of the student experience and are descriptive of encounters that reflect a level of personal engagement prompting critical thinking about meaning, value, and purpose, often including discussions about relationships, identity, meaning-making, or spirituality (Sriram, Haynes, Weintraub, et al., 2020).

Although it is important to study the various types of interactions that students have, it is also important to consider with whom they are having these interactions. Most research regarding student interactions has focused on student-faculty or student-peer interactions separately (e.g., Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Studying faculty and peer interactions together can provide more insight into how interactions influence success. Additionally, student in-

teractions with professional staff are understudied in the literature. This is unfortunate, as student-staff interactions likewise have the potential to impact success in meaningful ways (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Martin & Seifert, 2011). These professional staff interactions are not limited to occurring with individuals in one specific area, such as residence life, but instead include individuals in administrative, practitioner, and administrative support positions across various functional areas such as student life and academic support programs.

LLCs AS INTERACTION INCUBATORS

In addition to the pursuit of outcomes such as increased sense of belonging, higher levels of academic performance, or enriched academic environments (Spanierman et al., 2013; Stassen, 2003; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010), living-learning communities are campus housing interventions intentionally aimed at increasing interactions, and they have their "own types of benefits for students" (Inkelas et al., 2018, p. 5). LLCs are distinct, structured environments that offer a place where academic, social, and deeper life interactions with faculty, staff, and peers can occur all in one place. Sriram, Haynes, Cheatle, et al. (2020) describe LLCs as "an ideal environment" (p. 241) for distinct interactions between faculty, staff, and peers to occur.

Within these environments, however, it is important to keep in mind how LLCs might promote interactions differently based on an institution's unique size, culture, and resources (*resources* here referring not only to finances, but also to such things as faculty or staff time, expertise, and participation). Inkelas and colleagues (2008) offer a helpful typology derived from data across 300 LLCs at 34 postsecondary institutions. From their cluster analysis, the authors identified the following types: (a) small, limited resourced, primarily residential life programs; (b) medium, moderately resourced, student affairs/academic affairs combination programs; and (c) large, comprehensively resourced, student affairs/academic affairs collaboration programs. These different structures may promote distinct environmental characteristics that in turn may have effects on student interactions. Students unquestionably interact with professors, peers, and professionals outside of LLCs, but, regardless of structure, these programs provide one of the best spaces on a college or university campus through which to study interactions and their associated influence on success.

Bronkema and Bowman (2017) demonstrate that sophomore, junior, and senior students in residence halls can exhibit lower levels of a sense of community and college satisfaction, as well as lower GPAs. Although the authors mention that building design may help counteract the isolation these students might otherwise experience, we maintain that the *interactions* promoted in programs such as LLCs are where much promise lies. However, as most LLCs are situated to serve first-year residents, it is critical to understand how these interactions influence the experience and success of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Many scholars study how LLCs influence various student success measures (Brower & Inkelas, 2010), and most studies assess outcomes in one or two areas, such as retention or GPA, instead of focusing on a more holistic measure of success.

Thriving students experience high levels of functioning in three areas that contribute to success and persistence: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal well-being.

Although some recent research (Eidum et al., 2020) has focused on thriving outcomes in LLCs, there is a lack of research related to interactions for LLC students and how such interactions influence thriving.

COLLEGE STUDENT THRIVING

From Tinto's (1975) seminal work, studying the social and academic domains of students' lives has become the status quo for understanding their success. This traditional approach can be supplemented with a more holistic one: the concept of *thriving* (Schreiner, 2010a; Schreiner, Pothoven, et al., 2009). Thriving students experience high levels of functioning in three areas that contribute to success and persistence: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal well-being (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). Essentially, students who thrive are fully engaged in the college endeavor: intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Schreiner, 2010a).

The thriving construct contains five unique factors that represent these domains: academic determination, engaged learning, social connectedness, diverse citizenship, and positive perspective. Campus residential settings such as LLCs are strategically designed to encourage relationship building and are therefore primed to explore the ways students interact and thrive. This quantitative study focused on how the different types of interactions LLC students have with different constituents can impact these five factors of thriving. Further, by focusing on a sample of non-first-year students, we were able to assess specifically what interactions most strongly influence thriving for sophomore, junior, and senior students.

METHODS

A quantitative approach was utilized to address the following research question: How do academic, social, and deeper life interactions with peers, faculty, and staff contribute to thriving for sophomore, junior, and senior LLC students? Two instruments were utilized for this study: the Academic, Social, and Deeper Life Interactions Instrument (Sriram, Weintraub, et al., 2020) and the Thriving Quotient (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). Both instruments have demonstrated validity and reliability and have been included in multiple studies with different populations (e.g., Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018; McIntosh, 2015; Schreiner, 2014; Sriram & McLevain, 2016; Sriram, Weintraub, et al., 2020).

Sample and Data Collection

This study included data from undergraduate students residing in LLCs during the fall of 2019. Data were collected from eight campuses across four states in the southeastern region of the U.S. through a survey research design. Based on Carnegie classifi-

cations, the institutions from the sample were all considered large (5000+ students) research universities (seven designated as R1-very high research activity, and one as R2-high research activity). Institutions were first selected on these two criteria (size and research status) and then out of convenience (they employed administrators who agreed to distribute the instruments). Seven institutions were public, and one was private, and the mean enrollment from the institutions sampled was 36,239. Students were asked to complete an online survey that consisted of items from the interactions and thriving instruments, as well as demographic questions. Prospective participants were offered an opportunity to enter into a random incentive drawing for completion ($25 Amazon card). Survey distribution was facilitated by institutional partners from our personal and professional networks on these campuses who emailed LLC students a survey link and invitation to voluntarily participate. After closing the survey, 1,322 total responses of all classifications (first-year through seniors) were documented. After missing data and screening procedures, 903 responses were valid based on completion. After removing all first-year students, the final usable sample for analysis consisted of 206 sophomore, junior, and senior students (22.8% of usable surveys). Information about the sample is offered in Table 1.

Data Analysis

This study employed a non-experimental design by examining the relationships among variables (Sriram, 2017). The analysis was executed in two stages. First, measurement models were created to appraise the integrity of all latent variables through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) techniques. Measuring the contribution of each indicator toward its construct through CFA verified that the data measured the latent construct it intended to measure. Performing CFAs through the maximum likelihood method allowed us to test that all constructs met the level of statistical viability needed for inclusion, as evidenced by acceptable fit indices.

After conducting the CFAs, we utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) as our primary statistical technique. This approach assumed two central procedural elements: the causal processes under study were represented by a series of structural (regression) equations, and these structural relationships could be modeled pictorially to enable a clearer conceptualization of the theory under study (Byrne, 2016). A hypothesized model was created based on the review of literature that predicted how interaction variables would be in relationship with thriving factors. After loading data ($N = 206$) into SPSS 25 and checking normality and variance assumptions, data was transferred into AMOS 25 and mapped onto the hypothesized model. Goodness-of-fit measures at the following thresholds (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2015) were utilized to test model fit: $CFI > .95$, $RMSEA < .06$, and Chi-squared > .05 p-value.

RESULTS

Fit indices implied satisfactory fit for all CFAs. Factor loadings for all items also loaded above the acceptable threshold of .40 (Matsunaga, 2010; Walker & Maddan, 2019). Further, reliability measures (Cronbach's α) of all latent variables were suitable (> .80)

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of Dataset (*N* = 206)

VARIABLE	NUMBER	TOTAL %
Sex		
Male	61	29.6%
Female	141	68.4%
Prefer not to answer	4	1.9%
Classification		
Sophomore	125	60.7%
Junior	49	23.8%
Senior	32	15.5%
Race/ethnicity		
American Indian / Alaska Native / Native Hawaiian	1	0.5%
Asian / Asian American / Pacific Islander / South Asian	22	10.7%
Black / African American	17	8.3%
Hispanic / Latino(a)(x)	26	12.6%
Multiracial / Multiethnic	14	6.8%
White / Caucasian / European American	121	58.7%
Other or no answer	5	2.4%
International student status		
International student	7	3.4%
Domestic student	199	96.6%

to confirm adequate psychometric properties (Sriram, 2017). With the measurements established, we then proceeded to confirm the theoretical causal model. Analysis of this initial model produced sub-standard fit for the sample based on χ^2, *CFI*, and *RMSEA* thresholds.

To improve the model, we first consulted standardized residual covariances for any output that exceeded the +2 and -2 thresholds. However, before modifying the model based on violations, we assessed regression and covariance pathways for significance ($p < .05$). Although covariances between latent predictor constructs were statistically significant, a small number of non-significant regression pathways were represented.

Out of the 24 regression equations tested from the initial model, we removed eight that were non-significant for the final model. Sriram (2017) notes that a moderate effect size without statistical significance means there is a real difference found in the sample, but we cannot (with adequate confidence) infer that about a larger population. Although these changes altered pathways from the proposed model, it was important to take effect sizes into account along with *p*-values.

We then analyzed modification indices to explore additional variations affecting goodness-of-fit. As researchers, it was important to not allow computer software to dictate how the theory under study was conceptualized. With that understanding, we implemented two theoretically supported changes: adding regression equations between thriving factors (which also allowed for an observation of mediating relationships) and adding a regression equation from academic interactions with staff to diverse citizenship. While improving model fit, these relationships were also justified based on the review of literature (Astin et al., 2011; Cole & Griffin, 2013; Kim & Sax, 2014). After these adjustments, the final model was improved and remained parsimonious, demonstrated through satisfactory fit indices [χ^2 = 1706.689 (df = 1190, p < .001), CFI = .933, $RMSEA$ = .046]. The final structural model is represented in Figure 1 below. Squared multiple correlations (R^2), which correspond to the percentage of variance in the endogenous/outcome variables explained by the exogenous/predictor variables, are summarized in Table 2.

Direct effects, the equivalent of path coefficients (which indicate the effects of an assumed cause variable on an assumed effect variable) are offered in Table 3 *(see page 20)* as standardized beta weights. For effect size thresholds, recommendations for higher education research from Mayhew, Pascarella, et al. (2016) were used as follows: .06 as small, .12 as medium, and .20 as large. The aim of this study was to validate a model that identified how certain interaction variables contribute to college student thriving for sophomore, junior, and senior LLC students. The creation of this predictive structural equation model established the utility of using various student interactions with different constituents to predict factors of success for such students.

LIMITATIONS

There are certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. The first concerns the sample (N = 206). Although the dataset comprised a range of students from multiple institutions and LLCs, it is not representative of all sophomore, junior, and senior students enrolled in four-year universities. Choosing LLC students was intentional due to the frequency of interaction these environments generate. However, non-LLC students likewise have interactions across campus and may experience relationships in different ways. Further, different LLC structures on different types of campuses may promote interactions in distinct ways. Future research should consider using typologies such as those from Inkelas et al. (2008) as a framework for parceling out how LLC student interactions may contribute to student success based on community structure.

FIGURE 1

Final Full Structural Equation Model of Five Thriving Factors

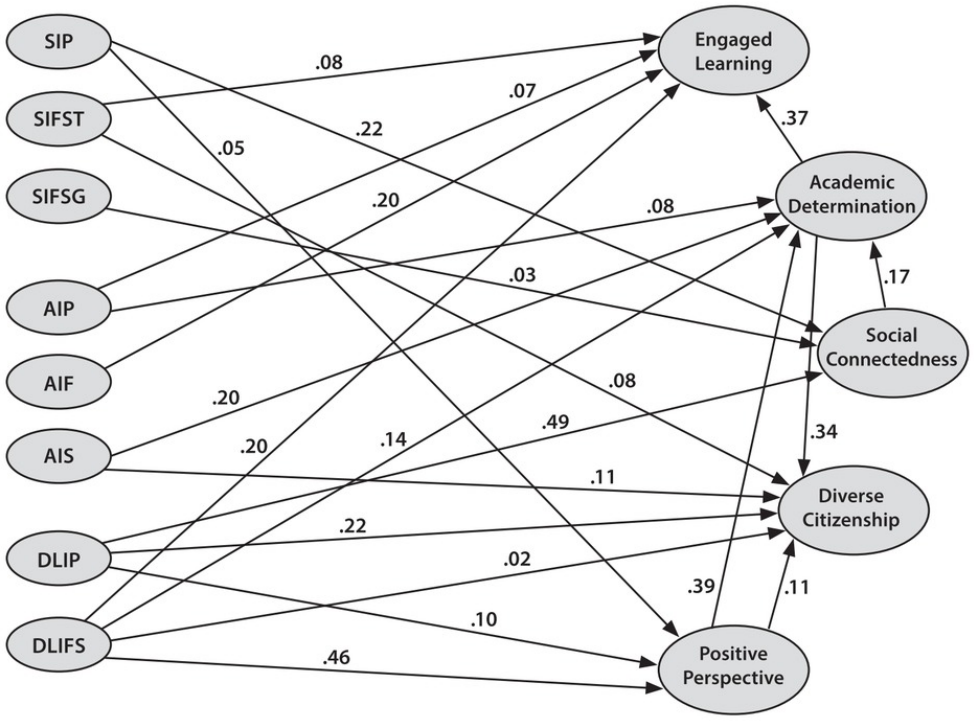

TABLE 2

Squared Multiple Correlations (R^2) of Final SEM

VARIABLE	ESTIMATE
Engaged learning	.530
Academic determination	.515
Social connectedness	.445
Diverse citizenship	.441
Positive perspective	.297

TABLE 3

Summary of Interaction Contributions in Final SEM

OUTCOME VARIABLE AND PREDICTORS	STANDARDIZED EFFECTS
Engaged learning	
Social interactions–time with faculty/staff (SIFST)	.082
Academic interactions with peers (AIP)	.066
Academic interactions with faculty (AIF)	.197
Deeper life interactions with faculty/staff (DLIFS)	.200
Academic determination	
Academic interactions with peers (AIP)	.079
Academic interactions with staff (AIS)	.199
Deeper life interactions with faculty/staff (DLIFS)	.140
Social connectedness	
Social interactions with peers (SIP)	.218
Social interactions–greetings with faculty/staff (SIFSG)	.029
Deeper life interactions with peers (DLIP)	.490
Diverse citizenship	
Social interactions–time with faculty/staff (SIFST)	.075
Academic interactions with staff (AIS)	.113
Deeper life interactions with peers (DLIP)	.218
Deeper life interactions with faculty/staff (DLIFS)	.017
Positive perspective	
Social interactions with peers (SIP)	.047
Deeper life interactions with peers (DLIP)	.096
Deeper life interactions with faculty/staff (DLIFS)	.461

Note: Effect size thresholds: .06 as small, .12 as medium, and .20 as large.

This study is also limited by excluding demographic characteristics in the analytic procedures. Although it allowed the final model to be more parsimonious, the hypothesized model did not account for conditional effects beyond student classification. Additionally, males were underrepresented (29.6%) compared to females, and White students were overrepresented (58.7%) compared to students of color. Consideration of how various demographic characteristics interact with the variables used may offer a further understanding of how interactions influence thriving. For example, future research might explore how students of color experience interactions that drive success. Nonetheless, the current study contributes to a general understanding of interactions and success for LLC students, which is valuable to researchers and practitioners.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The model developed from this study explained 53% of the variance in engaged learning. Deeper life interactions with faculty and staff demonstrated the strongest effects on this factor (β = .200), which indicated that these connections can lead students to feel energized by their classes, to apply coursework to other areas of life, and to reflect on their classes even when they are not in class (Schreiner & Louis, 2006). Academic interactions with faculty also had a strong effect (β = .197) on participants' engaged learning.

The model also explained 52% of the variance in academic determination. Students who are academically determined embody the attitudes and behaviors that empower them to persevere through difficult academic situations and endure challenges associated with attaining academic goals (Schreiner, 2010b). Deeper life interactions with faculty and staff had a moderate effect (β = .140). One of the central elements of this factor is the concept of hope (Schreiner, 2013). As students exhibiting high levels of hope believe they can and will accomplish their goals and discern what strategies can help them get there (Papantoniou et al., 2013), deeper life interactions, such as conversations about students' values, can spur the hope that drives students toward achieving academically. Academic interactions with staff were also a strong predictor (β = .199) of academic determination. This finding confirms previous studies that highlight the academic value of LLCs in regard to the proximity of staff support and resources (Inkelas et al., 2018). In the context of LLCs, this often occurs through hall directors or program directors engaging in frequent student interaction, advising, or even general encouragement in a student's educational journey.

The social connectedness construct also had a high percentage of variance (45%) explained by the model. The pathway from deeper life interactions with peers to social connectedness was the strongest single predictor (β = .490) in the model. Social interactions with peers also had a strong effect (β = .218) on social connectedness. The nearness

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LLCs have the potential to be a powerful environment . . . as they are linked to a variety of positive success outcomes, such as academic achievement, student engagement, retention, high application of critical thinking skills, high commitment to civic engagement, and smoother social and academic transitions to college.

of students to peers when residing together in LLCs reinforces friendships, but more so they help students feel psychologically connected to others, which here manifests in high predictive variance toward the social connectedness element of thriving.

The model explained 44% of the variance in diverse citizenship. Two pathways moderately to strongly predict this relationship: academic interactions with staff ($\beta = .113$) and deeper life interactions with peers ($\beta = .218$). Academic interactions with staff can occur in LLCs through programs such as service-learning experiences, which have been shown to increase students' plans of future civic action (Moely et al., 2002). Previous studies have also validated how peer interaction can influence the development of certain values, such as civic engagement (Astin, 1984; Gurin et al., 2002; Vreeland & Bidwell, 1966). Although these findings cannot point specifically to a living environment causing increases in diverse citizenship, they can point to the ways that abundant social and academic interactions meaningfully contribute to this outcome, which are reinforced by programs often present in LLCs.

Finally, the model explained 30% of the variance in the positive perspective factor. Deeper life interactions with faculty and staff had a large effect ($\beta = .461$). The strength of this predictor (the second strongest in the entire model) demonstrates that interactions beyond the academic and social realms of the student experience are important for intrapersonal and psychological thriving. Having an optimistic perspective on life or being able to look for the best in situations when things seem hopeless stems from conversations with faculty and staff that go deeper and address matters of meaning, value, and purpose. Interestingly, deeper life interactions with peers had a small effect ($\beta = .096$). As deeper life interactions with peers produced strong effects toward social connectedness, this finding demonstrates the range of purposes that peer interactions have regarding different measures of success. Additionally, this finding could indicate that students' relationships tend to grow stronger over time, and the deeper they get in terms of content the stronger they get in terms of feeling connected as opposed to feeling encouraged.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study suggest a number of recommendations for practitioners in the housing and residence life profession. First, we recommend that professionals strongly encourage LLC participation amongst sophomore, junior, and senior students. Sriram, Weintraub, et al. (2020) posit that college and university campuses can promote academic interactions, social interactions, and deeper life interactions by creating environments that facilitate meaningful exchanges with faculty, staff, and peers. LLCs have the potential to be a powerful environment in this regard as they are linked to a variety of positive success outcomes, such as academic achievement, student engagement, retention, high application of critical thinking skills, high commitment to civic engagement, and smoother social and

academic transitions to college (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Inkelas, 2008; Inkelas et al., 2004; Inkelas et al., 2018; Mayhew, Dahl, et al., 2016; Stassen, 2003). However, although LLCs have been shown to have a strong association with students' success, it is the interactions they promote that make them valuable for sophomore, junior, and senior students.

The findings in this study do not make the case that LLCs in themselves promote thriving, but rather that the interactions in which students engage influence their thriving. Students have meaningful interactions across campus, but as long as LLCs continue to enthusiastically promote such connections, students should be encouraged to participate. It is critical to understand that merely offering programs such as LLCs does not guarantee they will have intended effects on student success (Kuh et al., 2010). Rather, they must be of high quality, customized to meet the needs of students they are intended to reach, and firmly rooted in a student success-oriented campus culture.

Second, in addition to promoting LLC participation, practitioners should foster deeper life interactions with sophomores, juniors, and seniors in residential communities. Deeper life interactions—with either faculty and staff or with peers—were the only type of interaction that demonstrated significant effects for all five of the thriving factors. Although social and academic interactions were shown to be strong predictors of multiple thriving factors, the deeper life interactions proved to be the most powerful influence on holistic success. Engaging students in academic or social interactions is fairly straightforward. Deeper life interactions, however, are more challenging. It is time consuming to connect with students about meaning, value, and purpose. It takes intentional investment to have conversations about life's big questions or guide students to reflect on their beliefs and relationships.

One clear way to implement these interactions is for housing and residence life professionals to weave them into mentoring, advising, and counseling conversations. Casual conversations in a hall with residents can be an excellent launch point for deeper life interactions. More serious conversations, such as in conduct situations, are another opportunity to help students reflect on their purpose or role in society. In the residence hall, this may occur around sanctions for policy violations, such as drug possession or noncompliance with certain housing guidelines. With the academic context of LLCs, this could also include areas such as violations of academic integrity. Not all campus organizational structures integrate the formal conduct process within residence halls. However, residence life professional staff, when aware of such issues involving their students, are in an opportunistic space to spark deeper life conversations. Although it can be difficult to try to blend policy or conduct violations with discussions of students' values or beliefs, it is this type of meaningful (and data-driven) thinking that exemplifies the larger vision of student development and the mission of holistic learning or growth.

The findings in this study do not make the case that LLCs in themselves promote thriving, but rather that the interactions in which students engage influence their thriving.

Staff such as hall directors also have an opportunity regarding their resident assistant supervisory styles. While guidance is provided in such relationships, the personal outlet for students to engage in meaningful connection is rife with prospects for deeper discussion (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014). Additionally, for LLC faculty-in-residence positions with in-hall offices, this could include re-envisioning office hours to go deeper in one-on-one conversations. Deeper life interactions for sophomore, junior, and senior students are critical, as the need for reflection on possible paths through life becomes more urgent as each college year passes. After students' first year, which is typically a transitional time, they begin "an especially daunting maturational period in which they must begin to clarify their personal priorities, academic plans, and vocational paths" (Lindholm, 2010, p. 203). Once they are sophomores, students start to spend time seriously reflecting on questions such as "Who am I? What do I want to get out of college? What should my life's work be?" (Lindholm, 2010). As such, deeper life interactions with concerned faculty and staff in LLCs can help facilitate this development and help upper-division students process such questions.

The final recommendation from the results of this study is for campus housing professionals to tailor programming to increase students' interactions with other professional staff. Professional staff, especially those in residence life or student affairs roles, have educational credentials and life experiences that provide value for students. Results of our analysis substantiate previous research (Sriram, Weintraub, et al., 2020) showing that though students are keenly aware of when they are talking to a faculty member versus a staff member regarding academic interactions, they do not make a meaningful distinction between faculty and staff in social or deeper life interactions.

Cocurricular programming, especially in LLCs, often aims to connect students to faculty through out-of-class experiences. However, it is clear that housing practitioners, specifically those working with LLCs, should consider how both faculty *and* staff can be involved with initiatives aimed to promote interaction. This extends beyond invitations to other housing professionals to enter LLC spaces to encourage interactions; staff from across campus should be invited into such spaces to interact with students because there is such a high value on those interactions in terms of students' success. Staff practitioners and administrators in functional areas across campus (e.g., multicultural affairs, Greek life, etc.) should not be perceived as a second-best option to bringing faculty into program initiatives, but should be prioritized as an equally resourceful connection. This study showed that even in regard to academic outcomes, these professional staff, both directly and indirectly, can offer meaningful interactions that contribute positively to thriving. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As residence life professionals, how can we reimagine living-learning communities (LLCs) as more than just a tool to improve retention? What other positive impacts can they have on student learning and development?
2. The authors mention a study suggesting that the "push for increased privacy can undermine the development of community" (Gahagan & Hunter, 2010, p. 93) when working with upper-division students. What are strategies that housing and residence life professional staff can use to respect privacy but also encourage development in non first-year residence hall communities?
3. How can you take advantage of intentionality and teachable moments in your role as a professional staff member in order to encourage student growth and development? How might these lessons look different than those taught by a faculty member?
4. One of the implications for practice noted in the article is for practitioners to foster deeper life interactions with continuing students in residential communities. How might the environmental characteristics of a residential community impact these conversations? Examples could include social climate, physical set up of spaces, student demographics, etc.
5. As student affairs professionals, should we solely focus on encouraging first-year students who are part of an LLC to continue their journey, or should we focus efforts on recruiting continuing students who live on campus? What are pros and cons to each approach?
6. Continuing students often experience difficulties once they move into and through their second academic year at an institution. How can we leverage LLC resources in order to appropriately challenge and support students through this process?

Discussion questions developed by Drew Johnson, Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina