Review of Living-Learning Programs

Review Committee Membership

Chair: Nathan Phillips, Professor, CAS, Earth & Environment
Staff: Kelly Connors, Office of the Provost
Heather Barrett, Graduate (PhD) Student, English, CAS
Linette Decarie, Director, Institutional Research
Roscoe Giles, Professor, ENG, Electrical Engineering (Fall 2013)
Karen Jacobs, Clinical Professor, SAR, Occupational Therapy; Faculty-in-Residence,
            33 Harry Agganis
Steven Jarvi, Associate Dean, Student Academic Life, CAS
Sam Kauffmann, Professor, COM, Film
Hugh O'Donnell, Professor, CFA, Visual Arts
Davida Pines, Associate Professor, CGS, Rhetoric
Tyrone Porter, Associate Professor, ENG, Mechanical Engineering (Spring 2013)
Sean Reilly, Undergraduate Student, CAS; RA Italian House
Bruce Schulman, Professor, CAS, History
Kelly Walter, Associate Vice President and Executive Director, Admissions
David Zamojski, Assistant Dean of Students and Director, Residence Life

Background: Living-Learning Communities

Together with WISE@Warren, the new WISE-Up, and the Kilachand Honors College,
30 Specialty Houses/Floors make up Boston University’s living-learning communities.

The hope of the living-learning community movement at large research universities
has been that students living in smaller, more manageable communities with a focus
on a common interest and sometimes with associated curricular and co-curricular
programs, adapt more readily to college both academically and socially, learn better
and more, graduate in greater numbers and in a more timely way. The kinds of
living-learning communities offered by universities have also helped articulate their
distinctive intellectual strengths and values—the particular identities that set one
university apart from another--and have, thus, aided in the recruitment of high-
achieving students who are a good “fit.” The growth of living-learning programs and
their popularity with students suggest that they work, at least in some ways. The
2007 National Survey of Living Learning Programs, based on student-reported
evidence, concluded that students in living-learning programs have a somewhat
easier transition to college, higher grades, a stronger sense of belonging, greater
likelihood of attending graduate school, and greater gains in crucial skills such as
critical thinking, among other positive advantages. Other studies report more
dramatic positive effects, including: students in living-learning communities are
35% less likely to leave the university and 49% less likely to be dismissed, are 2.5 times more likely to meet with each other outside of class and are 7.4 times more likely to meet informally with faculty. That report also suggests that the kind of program and its explicit goals matter to the program’s effectiveness. On the other hand, the 2007 study reported that students in living-learning programs have less appreciation for diversity and fewer interactions with people who are different from them or who don’t share their views. It also found a number of areas in which living-learning communities had little effect.

**Charge to the Committee**

To undertake a comprehensive review of BU’s Specialty Houses, and make recommendations for the future development of BU’s living-learning programs over the next 5-10 years. The recommendations could include suggestions for particular themes for living-learning programs, but should focus centrally on the kind of program and a process for developing them. The Committee should report its recommendations to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs by May 17, 2013.

The Committee should pay particular attention to evaluating whether BU is taking full advantage of living-learning communities to:

1. Provide an enriched educational experience that is engaging and interesting, that promotes student interaction with faculty on substantive matters, that actively advances the understanding of diverse experiences and points of view, that integrates what happens inside the classroom and out, and that matters significantly to students’ intellectual development;
2. Increase BU’s ability to recruit top students;
3. Increase BU’s ability to retain and graduate those students;
4. Promote curricular innovations (such as interdisciplinary programming across departments and colleges) or social/community goals (such as civic engagement or community service).

The proposed plan should pay special attention to how living-learning programs help define a distinctive BU residential experience. This will include thinking carefully about how to use our extraordinary housing assets, particularly the houses on Bay State Road, to best advantage. Size of program will be an important factor here.

In conducting its study, the committee should think of BU’s living-learning communities as a whole. It is assumed that all programs should advance goal 1 above, but not all programs need to promote all of goals 2-4. Our suite of offerings as a whole should, however, should strongly advance all four.

The committee will want to consider such questions as: how effective are the existing programs and in what ways? What are the characteristics of an effective program? Are BU’s programs the right size? Should BU have different kinds of
living-learning programs, e.g. more curriculum-based, more limited or extended in time, focused just on first and second year students, on third and forth year students? If so, what kinds of programs ought we develop and how should they be developed? These questions are not meant as limits to what the committee considers, but as examples of some issues.

The committee will want to educate itself about programs at our peer institutions and other universities to spur new ideas and discover effective practices for use at BU.

WISE@Warren and Kilachand Honors College are not part of this review, but should be considered for purposes of comparison and as part of the suite of living-learning programs BU offers.

**Initial Resources Available on the Committee’s Blackboard Site**

- National Study of Living-Learning Programs (2007)
- Boston University Specialty Community Guidebook
- Document titled “Specialty Housing Information”
- Data on university retention and graduation rates
- Data on retention and graduation rates of BU students in specialty housing (including Wise@Warren and Kilachand Honors College)