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Student voices: The residential business learning community experience

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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2002

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background Information

After a visit to campus from Vincent Tinto in the fall of 1994, where he presented

information and research results on learning communities (LCs), discussions began across

campus about the possibilities and benefits of implementing LCs at Iowa State University

(ISU). The fall of 1995 saw the beginning of this initiative with two programs taking the

lead: biology and business. The Biology Education Success Teams (BEST) and the College

of Business Learning Teams (BLTs) were formed to provide an alternative, integrative

approach to students' first-year experience, and have continued since 1995. While BEST

always included a shared residential link for participating students, BLTs started their first

residential teams in the fall of 1999, when the newly renovated Maple Hall residence was

reopened.

Residential BLTs

Housing Learning Communities is a focus of Maple Hall. There were four different

LCs living in the building as of the fall semester 2001 (ACES-Agriculture, ABE-

Engineering, BEST-Biology, and BLT-Business). The BLTs had team spaces available on

two different floors: one for women, one for men (26 spaces total). First-year business

students who applied, were offered, and accepted their admission by late March of 2001 were

sent letters of invitation and a Maple Hall BLT application (see Appendix A and B), sharing

more information about the LC and the residence. Interested students were asked to return

the application (by early May) along with their housing contract, which was sent separately

from the Department of Residence, shortly after the College's invitation letters were sent out.

BLT spaces in Maple Hall were filled on a first come, first served basis, with remaining spaces filled at summer orientation in June 2001, by students' request.

Students in the BLTs shared two freshmen level courses (First-Year Composition I and Discrete Mathematics for Business and Social Sciences—Engl 104 and Math 150) and Business Orientation (BusAd 101), which was taught by the advisor/researcher in this study during the first eight weeks of the fall 2001 semester. The English composition class was a "linked" course, meaning that the content was matched with the topics in BusAd 101 and the field of business in general. The English class was taught in a computer lab in the residence commons (which connects Maple with Willow and Larch Halls, and houses the dining center, mailboxes, convenience store, and Hall Director offices).

Living among the ten BLT students on the women's floor was a female College of Business peer mentor, previously a member of the Maple Hall BLTs. A former BLT male member typically lives on the men's floor as well, but in the fall of 2001, a live-in peer mentor could not be assigned due to logistical reasons, so a peer mentor living off campus was assigned to the 13 men on this floor. The peer mentors were a guiding link to the Undergraduate Programs staff and LC coordinators in the College of Business, providing support, activities, and leadership to the first-year BLT students.

Problem and Significance

Despite all the research and discussion on student learning (see Chapter 2, Literature Review), and the importance of building community as a means of enhancing learning, much of our understanding of how that [building community] actually occurs is vague and "uncharted." Much of the data collected on learning communities (at Iowa State University and elsewhere) are quantitative (persistence rates, GPA, etc.) or simply demographics. As

noted by Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990),

> While quantitative measures provide a picture of student retention and academic
>
> achievement, they do not adequately illuminate what happens to students in
>
> learning communities: what students value in these programs, what problems they
>
> face, and what difference the programs make. Neither do these data provide the
>
> kinds of critical feedback that learning community faculty and administrators
>
> need to improve these programs. To understand student responses to their
>
> learning community experience and to build in ongoing program evaluation many
>
> programs build in ways to gather qualitative information. (pp. 66-67)

As a student affairs professional and former high school teacher currently working in

academic advising, I understand the role of learning in the context of student development.

The underlying connections between the campus setting, living area, and academic arena are

so vital to learning, and so often overlooked in the research. We know from the literature

(outlined further in Chapter 2), that cooperative and collaborative teaching methods (among

others), frequent contact with faculty members, peer interaction, residential ties, and

collaboration between student and academic affairs all play important roles in the success of

learning communities. But what exactly are the tangible, underlying elements that cause this

enhanced learning for students? Quite often these tangible elements (environmental factors,

roles of relationships, etc.) not measured by many of our quantitative assessment instruments

are the very elements that are the key components of the success or failure of academic

initiatives.

A 1998 final year-end LC report to the President and Provost at ISU noted, "Other

qualitative findings show that students engaged in learning communities are more involved in

and excited about learning" (ISU Learning Communities Working Group, 1998). According to Schuh (1998), "Living learning centers, or variations on the concept . . . either directly, or indirectly, result in good things happening for students. While *the precise reasons for this are still not completely clear* [italics added], it appears as though the atmosphere created by such arrangements can result in educationally-purposeful outcomes" (p. 7).

Purpose of the Study

This study undertook the discovery of those tangible, underlying elements and factors that the residential business learning community students found beneficial to their community building and learning, as well as those that connected them to their LC. These tangible elements took the form of specific instances and information that further explained what it meant to be "more involved in and excited about learning," and what those "good things" actually were, in the context of this particular LC. To fulfill this purpose, I gathered information from the Maple Hall BLT students and tried to identify these tangible, underlying elements more clearly in order to allow LC coordinators in the College of Business at Iowa State University to put programs, ideas, and/or practices in place that intentionally infuse those elements into their teams, therefore increasing the likelihood of enhanced student learning and retention in our college and on our campus.

Focus and Research Questions

This study was done to discover the tangible, underlying elements that enhanced student learning and connections for learning community students and helped them successfully navigate their first year at ISU. Utilizing a qualitative research approach and the theoretical backgrounds of student development and secondarily, critical theory, to help fill this research void, constructs such as residential links, like majors, adjustment, peers, and

student success helped focus this study on the participants' point of view on these topics,

leading to the identification of tangible, underlying elements as described earlier.

Specifically, this study addressed these five research questions:

1. Does the Maple Hall setting or its special nuances (policies, cost, features, staffing) have any effects on student learning, behavior, or attitude?

2. What elements of the residential link are helpful to students in connecting with and/or enhancing their academic learning? How does the grouping of like majors in learning teams (LTMs) influence or detract from academic success?

3. How is adjustment to the University enhanced or accomplished through participation in residential learning teams?

4.a. What elements of the learning team structure have more of an influence on the social vs. academic realm of student success? 4.b. Which realm is more beneficial to overall student success?

5. What kind of influence do peer mentors have on the residential BLT experience?

These research questions guided me in determining the features and events of

significance that occurred beyond the formal structure of the learning communities. Utilizing

a naturalistic (qualitative) approach in this study allowed me to focus on these questions from

the participants' point of view, therefore preserving "the real life context in which events

occur and the manner in which the many complex variables interact" (Isaac & Michael, 1995,

p. 219).

Theoretical Frameworks

The foundation of these research questions came from a student development

background, which combined with critical theory, formed my theoretical frameworks.

Student Development Theory

The primary theoretical basis for this study was student development theory, specifically Sanford's notion of challenge and support and Chickering's vectors of development. Since, ultimately, this research focused on the perspectives, experiences, and reactions of first-year students to their residential BLTs, it certainly warranted a connection to what student affairs has come to know about students and student learning. In defining student development, Rodgers (1990) describes it as "the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education" (p. 27). According to Rodgers (1990), student development is also a programmatic application, used by student affairs professionals in working with their students, academically and personally. As noted by Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998),

> Because student development theories focus on intellectual growth as well as
> affective and behavioral changes during the college years, they also encourage the
> collaborative efforts of student services professionals and faculty in enhancing
> student learning and maximizing positive student outcomes in higher education
> settings. (p. 5)

The residential learning communities of the College of Business certainly meet the criteria of a student development application, with their emphasis on intellectual growth and overall development, and in practice, intend to directly affect the growth, progress, success, adjustment, and capabilities of the students involved. As also noted by Schroeder (1993a), "The theories and models, however, are not ends in themselves, but rather means to a greater end—that end being the enhancement of student learning" (as cited in Schroeder & Mable,

1994, p. 12).

Challenge and support.

Perhaps the person providing the most insight into the connection between student development and student affairs is Nevitt Sanford (Evans et al., 1998; Parker, Widick, & Knefelkamp, 1978). In his work with students' transition to young adulthood in the college environment, Sanford (1967) focused on areas of challenge and support. This approach grew out of the person-environment interaction equation as first introduced by Lewin (1936), where behavior is a function of the interaction of person and environment, $B=f(PxE)$ (Evans et al., 1998, p. 24). In the challenge-and-support perspective, students try to adjust to the college environment (the "challenge") and succeed to the level of support that is available to them. Another element included in Sanford's (1962) thinking is *readiness*, "the notion that certain kinds of response cannot be made unless certain states or conditions have been built up in the person" (p. 258). In the case of the residential BLTs, first-year students were perhaps quite ready for the supports inherent to these structures (i.e., shared courses, common living, peer mentors, advisors, residence hall staff, faculty), as their immediate challenge was adapting to and succeeding in the new collegiate environment of which they had just become a part.

When a student achieves readiness (which could vary depending on students' maturation or environmental conditions), Sanford urges colleges to provide challenges for students, then also the support to handle those challenges when they become too great. If these challenges are too little, students will not develop, and if too much, they will demonstrate regression or avoidance (Sanford, 1966). The amount of support needed for students will also vary, depending on the individual and the challenge itself. The

effectiveness of this student development approach relies on a balance of these challenges and supports (Parker et al., 1978). It is the task of the student affairs division to help determine appropriate levels of challenge and support via their programs, services, and activities. LCs at ISU often take on the form of the entity (i.e., College, academic department, program) who organizes it, therefore allowing much latitude to address the differing needs of students in particular majors and programs, although changes need to be ongoing, due to the nature of the students who participate year after year, and their readiness for the built-in challenges and supports. In the College of Business, my "style" (or form) as LC coordinator is based primarily on personal responsibility (students taking responsibility and actively involving themselves in their "business," with support and guidance from others), which is reflected in the basic structure of the BLTs. This provides our students a bit more challenge than support.

In the College of Business, the primary built-in structural supports are the shared courses of the BLT, along with the proximity of their residential living (all team members on the same floor). "People" supports in place for the BLT students are the live-in peer mentor on their residence floor (which was in place only for the women in fall 2001), their university academic advisor who teaches the BusAd 101 class and mentors their team (in this study, that was me, the researcher), the College LC Coordinator (also me), and the faculty member teaching the First-Year Composition I class. Ultimately, the challenges for students in the residential BLTs included navigating the transition to college; figuring out who they were in light of their new-found independence and freedom; identifying with and perhaps clarifying their chosen area of study (business); and growing in their connections to other students, residence hall student staff, faculty, and staff; which, most likely, would positively affect

their learning. The structure of the BLTs and the timing of them in the first year are quite intentional, in an effort to address the issue of readiness of these students. Providing students with a sense of structure and order (perhaps much like that they are used to within their families and high schools), while also providing them opportunities to ease into the total freedom and independence they associate with college helped ease this external-to-internal focus on their lives as young students, and guided them to focus on their learning.

Vectors of development.

Another proponent of the environmental influences on students' development, Arthur Chickering based his vectors of development on the identity stage of Erik Erikson's work, who believed that "an understanding of individual development requires consideration of the external environment as well as of the internal dynamics" (Widick, Parker, & Knefelkamp, 1978a, p. 1). These two theorists developed work categorized as psychosocial theories of student development, which "are helpful in understanding the issues individuals face at various points in their lives" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 33). Chickering believes, as did Sanford, that colleges are developmental environments, and provide "stimulation which encourages new responses and ultimately brings about developmental changes" (Widick et al., 1978b, p. 21). Environmental factors that influence student development include: (a) clear and consistent institutional objectives, (b) institutional size, (c) student-faculty relationships, (d) curriculum, (e) teaching, (f) friendships and student communities, and (g) student development programs and services (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These environmental factors play out in the overarching goal of BLTs, which is to ease the transition and adjustment of first-year business students to college: addressing connections, friendships and student communities (within their major and College); student development programs and

services (via the services primarily provided by the Business Undergraduate Programs Office); curriculum (common to all business majors); and student, faculty, and advisor relationships (see Appendix C for BLT Philosophy).

Chickering's developmental theory (Chickering, 1969; Chickering and Reisser 1993) identifies seven vectors which form a student's sense of identity:

(1) developing competence—intellectual, physical, and interpersonal (social)

(2) managing emotions—learning to recognize, accept, express, and control

(3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence—developing increased emotional independence (autonomy) and recognizing and accepting interdependence

(4) developing mature interpersonal relationships—gaining intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and appreciation of differences, and a capacity for healthy and lasting intimate relationships

(5) establishing identity—builds upon each of the previous vectors, forming personal stability and integration (coming to terms with one's physical and sexual self)

(6) developing purpose—developing clear vocational goals, meaningful commitments to personal interests and activities, and establishing interpersonal commitments (life style preference)

(7) developing integrity—humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence between beliefs and behavior. (pp. 8-19; pp. 45-52)

Each of the seven vectors "seem to represent central themes in the lives of traditional-age college students" (Widick et al., 1978b, p. 31), and matched quite well with the structure of the BLT and the environment of Maple Hall as their residence (e.g. developing purpose, as linked to the curriculum in the BLT and College of Business and developing competence, as

fostered and encouraged by the campus organization membership, personal development activity, and community service activity requirements of the "Fresh Start" program in Maple Hall). A similar list of developmental issues, as developed by Upcraft, Finney, and Garland (1984) focuses on the development of academic and intellectual competence and the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships as urgent areas to be addressed by students upon coming to college. These issues are loosely based on Chickering's vectors, and are discussed further in the Discussion chapter.

In applying Chickering's theory to the residential BLTs in this study, much of the emphasis was on developing competence (Vector 1), with the students initially focused on questions of "Will I make it?" and "Do I belong here?" (adjustment issues). Moving through autonomy toward interdependence (Vector 3) and developing mature interpersonal relationships (Vector 4) were also important, due to the nature of the "out on their own" experience of these first-year students, and the need to develop peer groups and interpersonal supports. The third vector involves a gradual decrease in the "continual and pressing need for reassurance, affection, or approval" (Chickering, 1969, p. 12), which came into light as the students progressed throughout their first semester and BLT experience. Finally, developing purpose was somewhat of an issue, as the BLT is tied to a specific curricular and career area (business), although vocation alone is not central to this vector. These particular vectors match most closely with the goals and objectives of the BLTs, which include an understanding of the major functional areas in business, and an immediate connection to their College (see Appendix D).

Critical Theory

In this study, critical theory helped to guide the initiation of this study (asking "What

about the social, political, and economic inequities inherent in the BLTs?"), and was also used as a secondary perspective from which to look beyond the face value of the information gathered in this study, to the educational and social implications of LCs. The critical theory approach evolves from the early works of Karl Marx, and in taking a neo-Marxist critical view, Lather (1993) outlined two tasks in exposing the contradictions of liberal democratic education: "The substantive task is the portrayal of the role of schooling in the reproduction of inequality in all of its content and specificity, its contradictions and complexities" (p. 463). Second, the methodological task is to reveal "participants' views of reality, where these views come from, and the social consequences of such views, all situated within a context of theory-building" (p. 463). In essence, the underlying question in this study was "Who benefits, and how, from the residential BLTs in Maple Hall?" in light of the inequities inherent in this structure. Marcuse (1992) makes this argument: "The theory of society is economic, not a philosophical, system. There are two basic elements linking materialism to correct social theory: concern with human happiness, and the conviction that it can be attained only through a transformation of the material conditions of existence" (p. 5). The term praxis is used to describe this change of "material relations through practical reflective activity" (Harvey, 1990, p. 48). Were students in Maple Hall affected just by the material conditions of being residents in that newly renovated (with new furniture, updated heating and cooling, built-in common and academic spaces—see Chapter 3, *Site Information*), modern setting, or were the academic and pedagogical effects of the LC more a factor? Using critical theory as one means of addressing the overall setting and structure of LCs helped to answer this question.

Structures.

To further substantiate the secondary use of a critical approach in addressing the structure of LCs, it is helpful to discuss the momentum of these programs at ISU. The LC initiative on campus at ISU has grown exponentially since its "unofficial" start in the fall of 1995. Beginning with two LCs, and growing to a total of 47 (with 2,103 participants) in the 2001-2002 academic year (Office of the Registrar, 2001a), the project is well established on campus. Over a three-year period, from 1998-2001, the President's Office at ISU committed $1.5 million ($500,000 per year) to the promotion, implementation, and funding of these programs throughout campus. A campus-wide LC Advisory Committee was established in 1998 (co-chaired by the Associate Vice Provost/Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Assistant Director of Residence Life for Academic Services) to provide leadership and programmatic assistance in this initiative as well. Without this funding and administrative support, LCs would not be as established on campus as they have become.

Looking at the LC initiative from a critical perspective, it has strong political implications. In fitting in with the University's (and former President's mission) to be "the Best" land grant institution in the country, the formation of LCs throughout campus is directly tied to the University's *Strategic Plan for 1995-2000* goal "to *improve the quality of undergraduate education* as measured by student retention, graduation, and placement rates" (p. 180). This "agenda" (being the best) is also one shared by the Board of Regents in the State of Iowa, the political governance structure overseeing the three public universities. Since the College of Business was one of the first programs on campus to provide learning teams for our students, it maintains a vested political interest in the continuation, improvement, and promotion of LCs at ISU. For the College of Business, making concerted

efforts to include entering first-year students in LCs (whether residential or not) is an important, innovative move to promote and enhance the academic programs of the youngest (established in 1984), dynamic, growing College on campus, (fall 2001 enrollment of 3,757) (Office of the Registrar, 2001b) which is trying to carve out an identity for itself among other nationally-recognized business programs among our peer institutions. Providing enriching educational activities (such as BLTs) for our students is an important move internally at ISU, as well as nationally, in the face of competing industry interests and connections as well as shrinking budget dollars. Providing potential employers with team-oriented, motivated, and involved students is crucial to the College's livelihood in the business marketplace.

Another element of critical theory focuses on economic factors. While not consciously considered a factor at all by the LC coordinators in the College of Business when deciding to house the residential BLTs in Maple Hall, there is the reality that it does cost more for students to live in that residence ($170/semester above the basic room plan). While many students are willing to pay more for the newest facilities, it also means that the price is prohibitive to other students. From the University's perspective, the economic factors that come into play include the continuation of tuition dollars from LC students who persist and are retained at the institution because of the effects of the LC programs. Recruitment and marketing strategies are also greatly enhanced with the LC initiative, bringing students to campus that may not have otherwise chosen ISU, in part because of their "buy in" to the LC initiative, its resources and programs, which again equates to tuition dollars for the University, and the College of Business. In times of tightened State budgets, budget cutbacks, and increasing tuition rates, retention of students is paramount.

A "charge" of critical theory is to look beyond the surface and question social

structures that create unequal opportunities (Harvey, 1990). If following Marcuse's (1992) thinking, that happiness is attained through a transformation of material conditions, an example of the effects of this argument are the responses of those students who saw involvement in the BLT as the means of getting the residence assignment they desired. I recall talking with an incoming first-year business student prior to his arrival in fall 2001, and his intention was to get assigned to Maple Hall, so he planned to apply for the BLT in order to ensure that happened. Was he interested in the LC, or just in living in Maple Hall?

In order to change culture (or society), it must be studied, which is one important way in which critical approaches aid in emancipatory goals (Thomas, 1993). In this study, the call for "separation from constraining modes of thinking or acting that limit perception of and action toward realizing alternative possibilities (Thomas, 1993, p. 4) was reflected in the literature review in the discussion of utilizing LCs as an "educational reform vehicle" (see Chapter 2). In broadening the scope of LCs overall and encouraging/allowing students and Colleges or departments to take steps in guiding the scope of this LC initiative, these "alternative possibilities" may be realized.

Rationale.

Thomas (1993) believes that "critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain. Critical scholarship requires that commonsense assumptions be questioned" (pp. 2-3). In this study, some of those assumptions are that the BLTs are successful, as students have reported their strong connections with students in their teams, shared their continued excitement and commitment to the BLTs and College of Business through involvement as peer mentors, and typically have stronger GPAs than other business students. What needs to

be critically viewed is if the BLT experience is really the "cause" of this success, or if these are the results of innately involved, motivated students. Critical theory will help to seek out the "truth" by looking beyond what we see on the surface.

While elements of power centers are addressed more specifically from a postmodern perspective described in Chapter 3, Carspecken (1996) reminds us that truth and power are interconnected, and "unequal power distorts truth claims" (p. 21). As a central element of social critique is to "attempt to locate their [researchers] respondents' meanings in larger impersonal systems of political economy" (Anderson, 1989, p. 253), a critical theory perspective seemed to fit the framework of this particular study perfectly, in light of the political climate throughout ISU's campus regarding LCs (in which it holds a somewhat "golden child" status), and secondly, the economic and material factors which then come to light in Maple Hall. The "power" of these political, economic, and material factors had the potential of distorting the "truth" as discovered via the discussions with the participants in this study, so moving beyond "what is" and looking for "what could be," was crucial to a more complete understanding of the BLT experience.

Although this study was primarily focused on the underlying factors contributing to the social and academic change, growth, and adjustment of the BLT students in Maple Hall (student development) and was viewed through this "lens," framing this focus within the current political and economic factors was also crucial to a better understanding and analysis of the students' responses (how this development played out from an underlying "critical" viewpoint). Critical ethnography "attempts to provide clearer images of the larger picture of which we are a part. Once the picture takes on sharper detail, opportunities for revising it take shape" (Thomas, 1993, p. 61). The information from the Maple Hall BLT students

came from a much greater perspective than they may even have realized, so conducting such a study from a purely phenomenological perspective would have done the students' responses a great disservice, and not tapped into the richness of the situation. Critical theory allowed for a closer look at the external structures of LCs at ISU, separate (but connected) from the inner workings of the students' personal experiences, as addressed more appropriately and heavily by the content theory of student development.

Delimitations of the Study

The focus of this study was only on the two residential business learning teams, who reside in Maple Hall. While some of the perceptions and experiences of learning community students in general may be similar to those in non-residential teams, a specific look at the residential element is what is most applicable to the theories applied in this research and sets this study apart. Since the underlying philosophy for all the College of Business LCs is a smoother adjustment to college and stronger social connections to the College, other business students, and the University overall (see Appendix C), the focus of this study was on these related perceptions, and not strictly on the academic progress or achievement of the students. Prior experience with BLTs has shown that academic achievement is affected positively by participation in LCs, although in a somewhat residual fashion, as academic achievement is not the primary goal of BLTs (establishing relationships and making connections is the goal—see BLT Philosophy, Appendix C). The following literature review will provide insight into learning community research (including the student affairs/academic affairs connection), and secondarily, residence hall connections to that research. Basic student learning concepts will also be explored. This latter element, student learning concepts, also works in tandem to form the structures that have become learning communities on the ISU

campus, but learning per se was not the central focus of this study.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the Introduction, which includes the *Background Information* of residential BLTs, *Problem and Significance*, *Purpose of the Study*, *Focus and Research Questions*, *Theoretical Frameworks* of student development and critical theory, and *Delimitations of the Study*.

The Literature Review is found in Chapter 2, presented in three main sections: (a) *Student Learning Concepts*, including basic principles, ethos, learning research and learning environments; (b) *Learning Community Research*, which includes historical highlights, characteristics and features, structure, timing, student, faculty, and institutional benefits, educational reform vehicle, and student affairs/academic affairs collaboration; and (c) *Residence Hall Connections*, including definitions and rationale, programmatic structure, benefits, and space assignments. A summary of the literature and research integration are also included.

The Research Design and Methods used in this dissertation are explained in Chapter 3. *Overall Approach and Rationale, Methodological Frameworks, Audience, Participant Selection, Site Information, Researcher's Role, Ethics and Human Subjects Considerations, Data Collection, Data Management, Data Analysis,* and *Trustworthiness Features* are included. Focus group and personal interview questions used to gather the primary data for this study are included in Appendix H, I, J, and M.

Chapter 4, Results, reviews the *Overall Approach* in this study; introduces the participants and peer mentors; reviews the *Data Collection Process and Format*; and reports the findings from both the students and peer mentors, as related to the five focus and research

questions. The *Effect on Learning* for the students and peer mentors is also highlighted in this chapter.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, is the Discussion section of the study. A *Summary of Findings* is found, which includes residential setting, connecting with others, involvement, and structure. Also included are *Connections to Theory* from student development and critical theory perspectives, *Implications, Limitations of the Study, Recommendations for Further Study, Research/Literature Review Integration,* and the *Summary and Conclusion.*

Appendix material and Reference information are found at the conclusion of the chapters, along with Acknowledgments.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In taking on a study to discover the tangible, underlying elements and factors that students find beneficial to their community building and learning within a residential learning community, as well as those that connect them to their LC, it was important to first get a sense of the elements that come together to make up our body of knowledge about residential learning communities. This review of the literature discusses three major areas: student learning concepts, learning community research, and residence hall connections. The term learning community has many different definitions, but for the purposes of this dissertation study and literature review, the definition of Angelo, (1997) will be used: "purposive groupings of students, shared scheduling, significant use of cooperative and/or collaborative learning approaches, and an emphasis on connecting learning across disciplinary boundaries" (p. 3). Not only do LCs denote intentional curricular structuring, but also the interaction of the people within that structure, all in the interest of increased learning. Much of the recent interest in learning communities stems from what we have learned from the research on successful concepts of student learning.

Student Learning Concepts

There is much discussion about the purpose and "payoff" of higher education, especially in light of today's social, economic, and political forces. Schroeder and Mable (1994) note, "The multitude of reports generated in recent years on the status of higher education clearly indicate that student learning must be the primary focus of colleges and universities" (p. 301). Just exactly what defines student learning, and how can we identify it? This section on student learning concepts highlights the following four subsections: basic

principles, ethos, learning research, and learning environments.

Basic Principles

Ten basic principles about learning and how to strengthen it were identified in a June

1998 joint report from AAHE (American Association for Higher Education,), ACPA

(American College Personnel Association), and NASPA (National Association of Student

Personnel Administrators):

1. Learning is about making connections—biologically, mentally, and

experientially.

2. Learning is enhanced by taking place in the context of a compelling situation.

3. Learning is also an active search for meaning by the learner, a process of

constructing knowledge rather than receiving it. (constructivism)

4. Learning is a developmental process that involves the whole person.

5. Learning is done by individuals who are tied to others as social beings.

6. The educational climate affects learning.

7. Frequent feedback and practice are necessary to sustain and nourish learning as

well as opportunities to use what has been learned.

8. Learning takes place informally and incidentally.

9. Learning is grounded in particular contexts and individual experiences.

10. Learning involves the ability of individuals to monitor their own learning. (pp. 5-

20; Ewell, 1997, pp. 4-5)

Ethos

Aside from basic principles of learning, another important factor to consider in the

discussion of student learning is an institution's ethos, or "a belief system widely shared by

faculty, students, administrators, and others. It is shaped by a core of educational values manifested in the institution's mission and philosophy" (Kuh, 1993, p. 22). It is this ethos on a campus that will help define and identify an institution's values and principles, making clear the "relative importance of various educational functions" (p. 22).

Kuh (1993) goes on to explain that a college marked by an "ethos of learning" shares three common themes: "a holistic institutional philosophy of learning; an involving campus culture; and a climate encouraging free expression" (p. 25). Campuses that actively support this philosophy throughout will most likely be ones where successful learning is taking place among its students. ACPA (1996) agrees when it states that "Environments can be intentionally designed to promote student learning" and "Institutional and student cultures also influence learning" (p. 119). This is the essence of an ethos of learning.

Learning Research

As we look further at the research on learning, it can be categorized into three general types: empirical research on learning outcomes, theory-based research on motivation and cognition, and research on intellectual development. Learning outcomes research, perhaps the most applicable to this study, identifies one important conclusion: students who have frequent contact with faculty members in and out of class are more satisfied, less likely to drop out, and perceive themselves to have learned more than students with less faculty contact (Astin, 1993b; Cross, 1998). Faculty contact is "the most important factor in student motivation and involvement" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 4).

Another important conclusion of research on learning outcomes indicates that the most consistent positive findings center on the attitudinal and affective change of students, which may result in more productive learning anyway, due to the positive nature of this

change (Astin, 1993b; Cross, 1998). Developmental research deals most closely with constructivist theories of learning (see #3 in *Basic Principles* subsection, above) and strongly supports the notion of collaborative learning as well (Astin, 1993b; Tinto, 1995; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993), which is yet another important element emphasized in most learning community structures. Research on cognition and motivation takes on more of a psychological slant, where students are fitting learning in to what they already know, a *schema* (Cross, 1998, p. 9). Each of these three types of research on learning supports the idea of getting students actively involved in learning, which is critical, but not easy. According to Tinto (1993), "If we wish to have our students become actively involved in their own learning, we must first be involved in their learning as well as in our own" (p. 210).

This active involvement in learning is one of the seven principles of good practice, as discussed by Chickering and Gamson (1987), who state that "Learning is not a spectator sport" (p. 5). Talking, writing, relating, and applying what is being learned is of great importance in this process, and is not limited to the classroom alone. Chickering and Gamson (1987) go on to state that "Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning" (p. 4). In his longitudinal study of entering college freshman in the mid-1980s, Astin (1993a) found: "The single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group" (p. 7). This conclusion supports Tinto's (1995) finding: "In being a part of a shared learning experience, the students found academic and social support for their learning among their peers and they became actively involved in learning" (p. 12).

Learning Environments

In order for students to engage actively with one another in their learning, the setting is important, and includes the campus' ethos, physical environments (including those in residence facilities), and attitudes. Lewin (1936) devised a formula $B=f(P \times E)$, with B (behavior) the function (f) of the person (P) as interacting with the environment (E). Campus ecology is based on this formula, and Banning (1989) defines it as "the relationship between students and their campus environments" (p. 54), an important element to consider in the success of students. Four environmental conditions positively affect this success: (a) high interaction among students, (b) strong faculty-student contact, (c) availability of on-campus housing, and (d) extensive extracurricular opportunities (Upcraft, 1984). Certain institutional conditions (such as these) are more beneficial to learning than others.

In their book *The Abandoned Generation*, Willimon and Naylor (1995), discuss important characteristics of learning "communities": shared values and common aims, including open communication and commitment to these concepts; a foundation of equality and justice; empowerment; and adaptability and conflict resolution (pp. 147-153). A setting such as this would certainly have a stronger sense of ethos and provide a healthy environment for student learning to take place, although Willimon and Naylor (1995) also believe "The success of college learning communities will depend heavily on the strength of the college's leadership and the commitment of the faculty" (p. 160).

The ethos and environment of Iowa State are beginning to look more and more like an ethos of learning, with the growing involvement and influence of learning communities across campus, implementation of student-centered learning programs such as Project LEA/RN (Learning Enhancement Action/Resource Network) for faculty, and the focus on

other programs and seminars for faculty through the Center for Teaching Excellence. As more of this campus wide involvement continues regarding learning strategies, practices, and outcomes, and a more nurturing structure is put into place, learning issues creep ever closer to the forefront. This study will be looking at ISU's changing campus setting through the eyes of students in one particular program (residential BLTs), and attempt to find the tangible, underlying elements that connected these students to their LC. In doing so, it may also be possible to "get a reading" on the students' sense of the campus ethos.

In their article comparing the stories of Harry Potter (the main character in a popular children's book series), to a learning community, Levine and Shapiro (2000) state: "The learning is as much about the process as it is about the outcome" (p. 11). This concept helps us focus on the setting in which these aforementioned learning principles occur, and includes the qualities needed for this type of learning environment:

1. A strong sense of shared purposes.

2. Concrete support from administrators and faculty leaders for those purposes.

3. Adequate funding appropriate for the purposes.

4. Policies and procedures consistent with the purposes.

5. Continuing examination of how well the purposes are being achieved. (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 6)

Learning communities are purposeful attempts at putting into practice these good learning principles, while creating involving and engaging learning environments. In his article, "Organizing for Learning: A New Imperative," Peter T. Ewell (1997) discusses what is known about learning, what is known about promoting learning, and then challenges higher education to change to a learning focus, improving undergraduate education.

Learning communities are an important initiative in this change. A report from the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education (1984), stated that "the quality of undergraduate education could be significantly improved if America's colleges and universities would apply existing knowledge about three critical conditions of excellence: (a) student involvement, (b) high expectations, and (3) assessment and feedback" (p. 17). Combining these elements are what learning communities are all about.

Learning Community Research

Historical Highlights

LCs have been around for nearly ninety years, beginning with the ideas of John Dewey (student-centered and active learning) and Alexander Meiklejohn (reorganizing the structure of the curriculum). Meiklejohn began the Experimental College, (an integrated, full-time, two-year, lower-division program focused on democracy, which used the "great books"), at the University of Wisconsin in 1927. While this program and its 1960s successor at the University of California, Berkeley by Joseph Tussman (a former student of Meiklejohn's) were short-lived, these attempts at LCs laid the foundation for the movement we see today on campuses throughout the country (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, & Gabelnick, 1997; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Smith, 2001).

Following Tussman's ideas, in 1970, The Evergreen State College was established, and is perhaps the longest running LC in the country, utilizing a coordinated studies curriculum (which is discussed further below). Other LC programs were established in the 70s on the east coast as well (SUNY Stony Brook, LaGuardia Community College), and "joined" the west coast movement with the establishment of the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education at The Evergreen State College in 1984, led by Barbara Leigh

Smith and Jean MacGregor (Matthews et al. 1997; Smith, 2001). Aside from this "long

history on a small scale, the 'movement,' as a large-scale endeavor, is only about fifteen

years old" (Smith, 2001, p. 1). At ISU, the LC movement is only four years old, with two

forerunning programs (biology and business) begun three years prior to that. Although this is

a young initiative, it focuses on integration and collaboration across campus.

Characteristics and Features

Features of learning communities vary greatly, but they typically include "purposive

groupings of students, shared scheduling, significant use of cooperative and/or collaborative

learning approaches, and an emphasis on connecting learning across course and disciplinary

boundaries" (Angelo, 1997, p. 3). Additional features include small size (groups),

encouragement of faculty to relate to one another and overcome isolation, continuity and

integration in the curriculum, and building a sense of group identity, cohesion, and

"specialness" (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education,

1984, p. 33).

Another element included in many learning communities is an intentional interest in

the setting, allowing students to develop a true sense of "community," and in many cases,

LCs can offer "a critical lens for examining the first-year experience" (Shapiro & Levine,

1999, p. 3). Underlying all these shared features and characteristics, nearly all LCs do have

two things in common—shared learning and connected learning (Tinto, 1996, p. 4). Tinto

(1999) later added a third objective of LCs—shared responsibility (of students to each other).

Structure

As explained by Gabelnick et al. (1990), LCs are, "in a fundamental sense, vehicles

for the making of meaning" (p. 54). LCs "make this meaning" by serving many purposes

and taking on many different forms, which are shaped by a variety of factors (student populations, themes, issues, etc) (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Smith, 1991). They are most successful when they match an institution's strengths and needs, but sadly, "the structure and political economy of many of our colleges are increasingly at odds with our deeply held values about educational effectiveness" (Matthews et al., 1997, p. 457).

There are four main curricular models of LCs: linked courses, the simplest form, which link skill and content courses (most often English composition); clusters, an expanded form of linked courses, which share a common theme or topic; freshman interest groups, (simple, popular, and inexpensive to implement), which link three courses around a theme or pre-major topic and include a peer-advising component; and coordinated studies, (the most complex), which integrate entire curricular programs for a semester or year. This last model provides the most integrated learning experience for faculty, as well as being the most expensive to implement and sustain (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Smith, 1991). (This is the structure of the curriculum at The Evergreen State College, and most closely similar to the Meiklejohn and Tussman experiments.)

Gabelnick et al. (1990) also add a fifth model, federated learning communities (FLCs), to the list. FLCs are complex and ambitious, with a goal of overcoming the "isolation and anonymity of a large research university" (p. 26). Diverse courses fit around a theme and also include a seminar led by a master learner (faculty member) from an outside discipline, who has been released from his or her regular teaching duties. Yet another model, residential learning communities, identified by Shapiro and Levine (1999), incorporates the classroom-based LC with a residential component (this is the model of the BLTs studied in this research). The primary goal of these residential LCs is the integration of students' living

and academic environments. Typically, this means that "intentionally organized student cohorts enroll in specified curricular offerings and reside in dedicated living space" (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 37). Because of this mix of experiences, Shapiro and Levine (1999) also believe this model may be the most radical, as "they challenge and require change within multiple university systems: curriculum, teaching, and housing" (p. 37).

Most institutions utilize a mix of the four main models, as no one model is always appropriate. LCs at Iowa State each looks very different, depending on its particular purpose, although Matthews, Smith, MacGregor and Gabelnick (1996) feel that "the ultimate structure of a particular learning community is less important than its informing principle of intentionality" (pp. 8-9; Astin, 1993a). One of the main intentions behind the implementation of LCs is to reduce the fragmentation of the disciplines and the people— social and structural atomism—"which isolates people and enterprises from each other" (Hill, 1985, p. 3; Gabelnick et al., 1990). In LCs, students and faculty experience their courses and disciplines as connected, allowing for greater coherence (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Smith, 1991). Another rationale for learning communities (and increasing interest therein) is "they are compatible with changing epistemologies about the nature of knowledge, because research generally supports their educational benefits, and because they help institutions of higher education meet their missions of educating students for lives of work and service" (Cross, 1998, p. 11).

Other important factors to consider when forming LCs are the four I's: involvement, investment, influence, and identity" (Schroeder, 1994, p. 183), which guide student interaction within these structures, as well as keeping in mind that these are student-centered, not staff-centered ventures. Providing a purposeful, supportive framework within which

students can make connections with each other may be all that is needed to "get the ball rolling," as students are primarily responsible for their own learning.

Timing

The timing of fostering the community building and commitment within LCs is crucial; the freshman year is particularly important, which is when most LCs begin. (Thirty-nine of forty-seven ISU LCs were aimed at first-year students in fall 2001.) While individual student attributes are difficult to control, environmental settings for students are completely within the institution's control, and should begin "during the critical first year of college when student persistence is so much in question" (Tinto, 1999, p. 5; Levitz & Noel, 1989). Support, involvement in the campus community (and with faculty, staff, and other students), deliberate goals, and integrated, cohesive learning experiences are some of the most important "structural" elements to consider during this crucial freshman year (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989a).

Tinto (1999) advises that "colleges and universities should make learning communities and collaborative learning a hallmark of the first-year experience" (p. 6). Lenning and Ebbers (1999) agree, "because institutional bonding is an important factor in retention" (p. 84). In their discussion on attrition factors for students, Levitz and Noel (1989) note a sense of irrelevancy (of their often early-taken general education coursework) and transition or adjustment difficulties as likely problems for freshmen. These two areas in particular can be addressed specifically through LCs, in helping to tie together coursework and creating immediate support systems for students. Learning communities within the first year "strive to promote both student learning and retention through actively involving students in some cooperative/collaborative fashion that builds both learning and community

membership" (Tinto, 1993, p. 169).

In his article on retention, Tinto (1999) discusses five important steps in structuring the first-year experience of students in order to increase their persistence:

(a) shared learning should be the norm; (b) academic advising should be an integral part of the first-year experience; (c) the important concepts that underlie the freshman seminar should be integrated into the very fabric of the first year; (d) the first year of college should be understood as a developmental year in which new students acquire the skills, dispositions, and norms needed to learn and grow throughout the college years; and (e) the first year of college would be a year where no student, faculty, or staff would be required to show a badge of belonging. (p. 9)

Similar sentiments are noted by Upcraft and Gardner (1989b) as well, and are based on certain *beliefs*, formed from their work with freshman students. Ultimately, "we believe in a freshman year focused on students, undergirded by institutional, faculty, and staff commitments to enhance freshman success" (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989a, p. 6). They also go on to state that "We believe institutions have a responsibility to help ensure freshman success" (p. 6). In order to do this, Levitz and Noel (1989) recommend that "Establishing the vital freshman connection requires that we front load our best services and people in the freshman year" (p. 81). LCs are certainly an able vehicle to help address and fulfill these beliefs, while addressing the crucial nature of the freshman year and its experiences as well.

Student, Faculty, and Institutional Benefits

Learning communities work. Research on LCs identifies many positive benefits for students, faculty, and the institutions themselves. Students gain greater connections to peers

and faculty, active participation in learning, increased social and academic links, and a sense of community, all leading to academic achievement, overall satisfaction with college, and higher retention rates (Astin, 1993b; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Kuh, Schuh, and Whitt, 1991; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Levine, Smith, Tinto, & Gardner, 1999; Matthews et al., 1997; Tinto, 1993; Tinto et al., 1993). Creating that sense of community occurs in two major ways—socially and academically—leading to the higher retention (increased persistence) of these students because of their commitment to each other and their coursework (Matthews et al., 1996; Tinto, 1995, 1999; Tinto et al., 1993). Group empowerment is also a residual effect of this community building and is an inherent dynamic (Levine & Tompkins, 1996, p. 5).

When students participate in groups that are formed around similar interests, whether intellectual, career-related, or curricular, learning and personal development are enhanced (ACPA, 1994). At Temple University, other benefits of their LCs included: "ease of meeting people and forming study groups, the support from their teachers and peers, and the availability of professors," as well as "the ideal way to make the transition from high school to college" (Levine & Tompkins, 1996, p. 6). Perhaps the biggest benefit for students is their sense of involvement—with peers, faculty, college in general, and with themselves as learners (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Overall conclusions are similar in a number of studies of LCs at various institutions, including LaGuardia Community College, Seattle Central Community College, and the University of Washington, which made up the focus of longitudinal studies done by the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment at Syracuse University, conducted by Tinto, Love, and Russo (1994).

Faculty find teaching in LCs invigorating and rich, allowing them to collaborate with

colleagues and establish relationships with their students. One faculty noted, "They work because they turn everyone into a learner again. They remind us why we went into this business in the first place" (Matthews et al., 1997, p. 472; Smith, 1991, p. 46). Learning community involvement for faculty also helps to "establish a climate of growth, trust, permission, and personal responsibility—key elements in self-renewal" (Matthews et al., 1997, p. 472). As tedium and burnout are possible traps that seasoned faculty may run in to, the opportunity to refresh and renew one's career (i.e., faculty development) via involvement in LCs is attractive to many (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Levine et al., 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Connecting seasoned and respected faculty to LCs also lends an association of viability, commitment, and support for this effort, something Gablenick et al. (1990) believe is crucial for its sustainability. But, as noted by Lenning and Ebbers (1999), "a commitment to learning communities cannot occur unless faculty buy in on their implementation" (p. 70).

In the often fragmented environment that higher education has become, "Learning communities provide a relatively safe structure for faculty to reframe the work environment and participate in an effort that is 'new'" (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 80). Ultimately, "learning communities provide an important community *structure* for bringing people together in an environment that is otherwise highly individualistic" (p. 82). Matthews et al. (1997) believe that "Learning communities enrich the education experience of students and faculty wherever they are located" (p. 473). Another of the "unexpected benefits of learning communities is that the faculty learn as much as the students" (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 109). This is a powerful impetus for the transformation of our colleges and universities in times of heightened public accountability.

Institutions with LCs also benefit with the growth of cross-campus collaboration,

"...often creating a renewed sense of involvement and common purpose. As a result, they frequently improve the climate of the campus" (Smith, 1991, p. 45). Changing the "ethos" of a campus is a major undertaking, but perhaps more often is a return to their initial purposes and missions. For example, at ISU, one of the goals in the University's *Strategic Plan for 1995-2000* is "to *improve the quality of undergraduate education* as measured by student retention, graduation, and placement rates" (p. 180). Focusing on undergraduate education in this way can only happen by revisiting and committing to an initial purpose of higher education—undergraduate education. Tinto et al. (1993) found that "the attainment of the goals of enhanced student involvement and achievement is possible only when institutions alter the settings in which students are asked to learn" (p. 21). LCs can be a powerful vehicle in this effort.

Educational Reform Vehicle

Learning community programs are in essence a purposeful attempt at curricular restructuring leading to educational reform in the undergraduate experience, promoting greater student involvement in learning (Levine & Shapiro, 2000; Matthews et al., 1997; Tinto, 1999), and perhaps a shift from a campus ethos of teaching to an ethos of learning. Smith (1993) believes that "The effort is firmly grounded in the belief that individuals have the power to transform their environment, but it also recognizes the complexities of higher education today and the powerful forces of fragmentation" (p. 34). Shapiro and Levine (1999) note, "Paradoxically, faculty are both the first and the last to initiate change in institutions of higher education, particularly at research institutions" (p. 91). Both structure and process must change for this reform to occur, "paradoxically out of a combination of more structure—of the right kind" (Smith, 1991, p. 42). Smith (1993) also adds that

"Learning communities are a realistic response to hard times" (p. 34), which may lead to more serious efforts at implementing this type of curricular reform on our campuses, at a time when government funds for higher education are being reduced, and public criticism is running high (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

Shapiro and Levine (1999) discuss "change levers" in higher education, including mission statements, strategic planning, periodic departmental and college reviews, collaboration between departments and colleges, and external reviews as key elements in the change process. First, knowing the mission of the institution is crucial to the strategic planning process, which can often be the vehicle in which to begin implementation of learning communities, much like the development of the LC initiative at ISU. Collaboration among departments and colleges is a common outgrowth of the LC movement on campuses, and a natural place for change to occur as well. These change levers are perfect incubators for LCs, as well as refocusing our institutions into "learning organizations."

In reforming our institutions into organizations with an ethos of learning, Angelo (1997) discusses "seven promising shifts" to lead us:

1. A culture of inquiry and evidence.

2. A culture of explicit, broadly shared goals, criteria, and standards.

3. A teaching culture that applies relevant knowledge to improve practice.

4. A broader, inclusive vision of scholarship.

5. An academic culture that attempts to realistically account for direct, deferred, and opportunity costs.

6. A culture that encourages collaboration for the common good *and* individual advancement.

7. A model of higher education that is fundamentally qualitative and transformative. (Angelo, 1997, pp. 4-6)

These shifts would certainly put into place an ethos of student learning, which would allow for a wide scale implementation of learning communities on our campuses, furthering the impact of this type of curricular reform.

Learning community programs that succeed are those infused into the curricular mission, not just hidden on the fringe, and those with a clear sense of what is to be accomplished (Matthews et al., 1997; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Those programs that have evolved in the past few years have done so "because the organizers have been savvy about working with existing organizational structures and adapting them to their needs" (Smith, 2001, p. 7). Focusing on the outcomes and the means available to achieve them requires collaboration across campus. No matter the structure implemented in a LC, without faculty actively involved, there will be no support (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). From their insights on creating learning communities, Matthews et al. (1997) state: "The success of learning communities demonstrates that we can create educational reform initiatives that rely more on the development of communities of people than on the massive infusion of new resources" (p. 473). In learning from Temple University's campus-wide implementation of learning communities for its freshmen, another key factor in LC success is administrative attention to recruitment and registration issues (Levine & Tompkins, 1996, p. 5), which involves collaboration and coordination between these groups.

According to Smith (1991), "On most campuses, the campus culture is nobody's responsibility; it is created by default" and "some of the neglected issues in the debates over educational reform really are about the character of our communities" (p. 48). In order for

the LC effort to move from an innovation to a true reform, there must be "structural change, reworking roles and relationships, and generally re-engineering the organization so that learning communities are appropriately supported" (Smith, 2001, p. 9). Masterson (1998) believes, "The learning community movement, you see, is not about connecting courses, it's about connecting us" (p. 9). People on our campuses need to come together with a shared purpose and understanding of LCs in order to make them work.

Student Affairs/Academic Affairs Collaboration

Why do learning communities work? They work because of the power of collaboration, which is the responsibility of both the student affairs and academic affairs divisions on our campuses (Levine & Tompkins, 1996; Masterson, 1998; Schroeder, 1994; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Tinto, 1999). The collaboration between student affairs/academic affairs is a missing link in institutional improvement, and learning communities (the focus on student learning) could be the vehicle to begin this relationship of cooperation. Matthews et al. (1997) claim that "Creating a learning community should be a community-building experience" (p. 466). Tinto (1999) believes, "in leaving, at least momentarily, their respective silos, both academic and student affairs professionals discover the many contributions each makes to the student learning process" (p. 8). At ISU, the co-chairs of the LC Advisory Committee mirror this collaboration: one, a faculty member in Human Development and Family Studies (with central administration duties); the other, a student affairs professional from the Department of Residence.

In coming together to combine their respective strengths, student affairs (knowledge of the institution) and academic affairs (knowledge of the curriculum) help students to (a) reconcile conflicting approaches to life; (b) create cultural diversity, in the contrast of values

each represents; and (c) role model careers within the educational world (Blake, 1996, pp. 8-9). Smith (2001) agrees that these two groups must come together in the LC effort, stating that "Strategic partnerships have been a key element of LC development and an important dissemination strategy" (p. 6). Working together in this manner will help each division to form stronger bonds. In order to build bridges with academic affairs, student affairs (including residence) needs to affirm student learning and personal development as the primary goal of undergraduate education (ACPA, 1994, ACUHO-I, 1999; Kuh, 1997; Murphy, 1989). One way to build these bridges is through assessment.

Assessment.

Banta and Kuh (1998) believe, "One of the most promising but underused opportunities for collaboration comes in the form of outcomes assessment. Assessment constitutes common ground" (Banta & Kuh, 1998, p. 42). Student affairs professionals are good at helping students improve their abilities and develop personally; faculty are skilled at helping students gain knowledge and develop intellectually. Each of these strengths is greater when pooled together in the interest of student learning (ACPA, 1996; Banta & Kuh, 1998; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Hutchings (1996) also agrees: "Student learning is a campus wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility" (p. 6).

Other advantages of collaboration are the sharing of multiple perspectives and saving time and money. However, even with all the positive benefits of working together for this common goal, it is not an easy task to accomplish. Banta and Kuh (1998) identify six themes that will assist in promoting this specific student/academic affairs collaboration:

1. *Model strong administrative commitment.* The institution needs to value and reward participation in assessment activities.

2. *Plan curriculum and assessment jointly.* Representatives from each division need to participate in this process.

3. *Promote campus wide understanding of the goals for student development.* It is easier to work together if there is a common view of learning and personal development.

4. *Coordinate in-and out-of-class learning experiences.* Benefits are greater if expectations for performance outside the classroom reinforce curriculum learning goals.

5. *Design and administer appropriate measures of desired outcomes.* Assessments must provide information of interest and important to both groups.

6. *Use assessment findings to improve the entire student experience.* Attention needs to be paid to the findings and action taken. (Banta & Kuh, 1998, pp. 44-46)

Assessment in the form of studies such as this dissertation can also help improve the student experience as noted by Banta and Kuh above. Aside from the initial partnerships in creating LCs and the continuing follow-up via assessment activities, often times LCs are also an important involvement and potential learning opportunity for students within the residence halls, providing yet another avenue for collaboration among administrative units on a campus. Shared courses along with shared living create residential LCs (or living learning communities).

Residence Hall Connections

Definitions and Rationale

In defining living learning communities (LLCs), Schuh (1998), describes them as "specific interventions designed to tie living in a residence unit (floor, hall, wing) to a specific program sponsored by the institution" (p. 5). While the "look" of these programs may be very different, depending on the needs of the institution, they are, in essence, LCs.

As noted further by Schuh (1998), "Regardless of format, the effects of LLCs on student growth have been shown to be very positive" (p. 6). Residence halls are a powerful vehicle for incorporating students into college, "particularly where in-class instruction merges with the out-of-class experience" (ACUHO-I, 1999, p. 1). Tinto et al. (1993) believe that "Students in residential settings typically devote most of their time, in one form or another, to the life of the college" (p. 21). Because of the large number of students living in residence halls and the opportunities to influence them in that setting, student success can be improved, but residential "association" alone does not guarantee success (Blimling, 1993; Marchese, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Schroeder (1994) describes residential LCs as those that "encourage continuity and the integration of diverse curricular and co-curricular experiences" (Schroeder, 1994, p. 167), including elements of intentionality and integration.

Programmatic Structure

Structured environments should be put in place to reinforce classroom learning and enhance student commitment. Schroeder (1994) believes that "Learning communities should not be created in a vacuum; they are designed to intentionally achieve specific educational outcomes" (p. 183). Whitt and Nuss (1994) highlight three common elements that have helped a number of institutions connect their residence halls to the curriculum: (a) clarity of institutional purposes and expectations; (b) policies, practices, and environments that connect the curriculum and residence halls; and (c) people committed to these connections (p. 149). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) conclude that "those residence climates with the strongest impacts on cognitive development and persistence are typically the result of purposeful programmatic efforts to integrate the student's intellectual and social life during college" (p. 613).

In this vein of thinking, the Department of Residence at ISU has undertaken an ambitious challenge to focus on its academic connections to the University. In doing this, both physical and programmatic efforts are underway. New student "neighborhoods" are being created, and much like the Maple Hall facility, will include renovated facilities, as well as new construction. Suite-style buildings, community centers, classroom space and computer labs within the residence halls, and various living options are becoming the new "look" of the department. An intentional grouping of underclass students in campus-perimeter housing areas is also part of the master plan, in an effort to integrate these younger students to the University and their academics, to address the urgency (in regard to persistence) of the freshman year as discussed by Tinto (1993).

To highlight another example of a "purposeful programmatic" effort, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) conducted a study on a LLC that included these features: (a) extensive architectural renovations; (b) 7 live-in academic staff members; (c) approximately 20 credit-bearing courses taught in the LLC; (d) a faculty lecture series; (e) regularly scheduled informal discussion sections with faculty and staff; (f) a series of noncredit minicourses; and (g) regularly scheduled informal meetings with visiting scholars, deans, and administrators (p. 346). Perhaps the most important result of this study is that the structure of these LLCs provides a context in which influential relationships are more likely to develop. Providing these opportunities for our students may be more important in their overall success than direct programming for academic outcomes. An implication of the ACUHO-I (1999) document notes, "The Residential Nexus—where students and faculty can come together often on more common ground—will provide a myriad of opportunities for these types of activities" (p. 3). As further noted by Astin (1993a; 1993b), Blimling (1993), Schroeder

(1994) and Upcraft (1989), peer groups are perhaps the most powerful influence in students'

lives, whether inside or outside of the residence setting.

Developing programs such as LLCs in the residence halls is one such way to

capitalize on the benefits of peer interaction in particular (Schroeder, 1994), but these

programs can take on many forms, as discussed earlier in this review. In a study of

Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) at the University of Missouri, Columbia, Pike, Schroeder,

and Berry (1997) found three surprising results: (a) FIGs did not directly or indirectly

enhance students' academic achievement; (b) institutional commitment was not a factor in

the persistence of FIG students; and (c) there was the absence of a significant role for social

integration in persistence. These results seem to contradict prior research findings, but Pike

et al. (1997) also conclude that "affecting student success by implementing educational

interventions designed to enhance students' first-year experiences is possible. However,

these interventions may not result in the intended effects" (p. 619). Many benefits of LLCs

(or LCs) are indirect, and are often more powerful for students in areas of student growth and

development (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). Often "the impact of an institution's

'academic' program is mediated by what happens outside the classroom" (ACPA, 1996, p.

119).

Much of the impact of residential LCs can be explained by what Schroeder (1994)

calls the *interaction* effect, associated with four essential principles: (a) involvement of its

students, including an ethic of membership and a high degree of supportive interaction; (b)

investment, or a reflection of ownership, which includes an ethic of care; (c) influence, or a

consequence of an ethic of responsibility; and (d) identity, which focuses on commonalities

and shared values—a commonality of purpose (pp. 175-176). In essence, Schroeder (1994)

sees the theme of student involvement underlying these curricular connections in the residence halls. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) also concur, saying "Students are not simply the recipients of institutional effects. They themselves bear a major responsibility for the impact of their own college experience" (p. 611). Students "get out" of college what they put in.

Benefits

Residential students have been found to share "results" similar to those found in learning community students (as discussed earlier): higher levels of faculty interaction and peer support, greater academic and social integration, greater satisfaction and commitment (Pascarella, 1984; Pascarella, et al., 1994). These effects in turn positively affect their persistence (a prerequisite for other educational outcomes), as does the fact that residence hall students generally come to college better prepared to succeed (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Many reasons may explain the somewhat contradictory findings from Pike et al. (1997) discussed earlier, but ultimately the research shows overwhelmingly that academically oriented residential settings enhance the educational potential of students in unexpected ways (Upcraft, 1989). As noted by Schroeder (1994), "In effective learning communities, students know they matter—their participation and involvement are central to their day-to-day experience" (p. 169).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) concluded that exposure to LLCs "was significantly and positively associated with freshman year persistence (versus voluntary withdrawal), gains in measures of intellectual and personal development and progress, and perceptions of the extent of intellectual press and sense of community in freshman year non-academic life" (p. 351). Blimling (1993) found, further, that "the most powerful influence in residence halls

is the peer environment" (p. 290), which can also be manipulated by residence hall staff (in space assignments, specifically) to structure these "purposeful" environments leading to increased student success.

Space Assignments

In structuring these residential settings, additional findings should be considered by residence hall staff. Interestingly, when students are assigned to residence halls homogeneously, it "increases the trait on which students are assigned. Students attracted to certain subject areas become even more interested in these areas" (Blimling, 1993, p. 290). When looking at the issue of co-ed versus single-sex residences, there tends to be more social involvement with the opposite sex in co-ed units than those in single-sex units (Blimling, 1993). What these findings suggest is that LLCs should be structured around shared academic subject areas (or perhaps majors), and be housed in co-ed facilities to help increase their likelihood of success, while keeping in mind the balance of exposure to "diverse points of view, values, and reasons for pursuing a college degree" (Schuh, 1998, p. 8). Upcraft (1989) adds these strategies to space assignments: (a) according to academic ability, (b) along with upperclassmen, (c) not in overcrowded areas, and (d) to assign roommates according to selected criteria (p. 147).

The combination of these residential benefits, as well as the LC benefits, should only lead to enhanced success for students, even if, as noted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), "residential effects may well be indirect ones, mediated through the interpersonal experiences students have with peers and faculty members that are shaped by the residential setting" (p. 613). As concluded by Schroeder (1994), "Learning communities in residence halls can provide the "value-added dimension" by integrating diverse curricular and cocurricular

experiences in the service of specific educational outcomes" (p. 185). Upcraft (1989)

believes that the positive impact residence halls can have on academic achievement, personal

development, and retention does not happen by chance, it "occurs when residence halls are

structured by carefully assigning students... and developing educational programs and

activities" (p. 150). Residential LCs do just that.

Literature Summary

The review of the literature is addressed in three major sections: student learning

concepts, learning community research, and residence hall connections, which are, in

essence, major components of the residential business learning teams at ISU.

Student Learning Concepts

The first section of this literature review is introduced by Schroeder and Mable

(1994) who state, ". . . student learning must be the primary focus of colleges and

universities" (p. 301). While the "means to an end" may take on many forms in higher

education, of which learning communities are a growing part, basic learning principles are

vital in developing these means (structures). While learning principles are important, the

belief system in which they are framed is nearly as crucial. Kuh (1993) discusses *ethos* as a

widely-shared campus belief system which can help define an institution's values and overall

principles.

Research on learning covers many facets, but learning outcomes research is the most

applicable to this study. One important conclusion in learning outcomes research is that

faculty contact is "the most important factor in student motivation and involvement"

(Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 4). Active involvement in learning is also key, and is most

powerfully influenced by the peer group (Astin, 1993a). The environment or setting in which

this involvement and peer interaction occurs is very important as well, and includes qualities such as shared purposes, support, funding, structure, and assessment.

Learning Community Research

The second section of this literature review begins with a historical review of LCs. Early LCs began in the 1920s with Alexander Meiklejohn at the University of Wisconsin, then re-appeared in the 1970s at institutions on both the west and east coasts. Even with this long history, the "real" growth of LCs has occurred within the past 15 years in all parts of the country, and at all kinds of institutional types.

Features of LCs vary, but most include purposive grouping of students, shared scheduling, cooperative/collaborative learning, and connected learning across disciplines (Angelo, 1997). The size, setting, integration, and sense of community and cohesion are other common elements, but all LCs have shared and connected learning (Tinto, 1996). Four main models of LCs exist: linked courses, clusters, freshman interest groups, and coordinated studies (Gabelnick et al., 1990), which is most like the Experimental College first introduced by Meiklejohn. A fifth model, federated LCs, are very complex; and a sixth, residential LCs (as studied in this research), are classroom- and residentially-based in focus (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

The timing of LCs is crucial for a number of reasons (persistence, support, adjustment, institutional bonding), so most are situated in the freshman (first) year, and what is known so far is that LCs work. Positives for students include connections to peers and faculty, active learning, a sense of community/involvement, and increased achievement, satisfaction, and retention at our institutions. Faculty find LCs provide a rich, collaborative environment in which to refresh and renew their careers (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Levine et

al., 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). A benefit of LCs for institutions is as a vehicle in which

to provide *structure* in "bringing people together in an environment that is otherwise highly

individualistic" (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 82). Cross-campus collaboration is crucial in

developing and implementing LCs on a campus, which may work to change institution's

overall climate.

Using LCs as a curricular reform vehicle is common, and may help shift a campus'

ethos from teaching to learning, addressing accountability in times of increasing financial

hardship. As people come together to form this shared purpose and direction, collaboration

across student and academic affairs lines is of utmost importance. Working together on a

common structure such as LCs will provide both areas with a stronger bond and better

affirmation of student learning, which, again as mentioned by Schroeder and Mable (1994),

". . . must be the primary focus of colleges and universities" (p. 301). An easy opportunity to

collaborate comes in the form of assessment of LCs, and as noted by Banta and Kuh, (1998),

"Assessment constitutes common ground" (p. 42).

Residence Hall Connections

This final section of the literature review starts with the definitions and rationale of

living learning communities and residential learning communities, which integrate the many

benefits of residential living with the structure and shared purpose of LCs. Residence halls

are powerful influences on students, and housing LCs within them only increases the

potential for positive impact on students.

The structure of residential LCs is important. Environments must reinforce and

enhance classroom learning and student commitment, or what Pascarella and Terenzini

(1991) describe as "purposeful programmatic efforts" (p. 613). The structure of these

programs and settings are what provide a context in which influential relationships (most likely, peers) can develop (Schroeder, 1994). Much of the impact of residential LCs is a residual or underlying effect, including themes of student development and personal growth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroeder, 1994).

Overall benefits of residential LCs are very similar to LCs in general: increased peer and faculty interaction; greater social integration, satisfaction, and commitment; which positively affect their persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Peer involvement is powerful in the residence halls as well (Blimling, 1993), and can be manipulated in space assignments by residence hall staff. Those assignments structured around shared academic interests or subjects and in co-ed facilities help increase success as well. Even though residential effects may be residual or indirect, in combination with the benefits of LCs in general, residential LCs have the potential for "... the 'value-added dimension' ... in the service of specific educational outcomes" (Schroeder, 1994, p. 185).

Literature Review/Research Integration

Using qualitative methods, specifically the case study approach, this dissertation research focused more deeply on the lived experiences and perceptions of the residential business learning team students housed in Maple Hall at Iowa State University. Discussion with participants in small groups and individually helped to uncover or specifically highlight elements of the BLT structure that promoted or hindered increased learning, peer and faculty connections, and residential influences, mirroring the major elements discussed in detail in this literature review.

The literature review revealed the need for additional working examples of the integration of the concepts of student learning within learning community programs housed

in the residence halls, because the learning community movement nationwide is still somewhat new (in terms of the life of an educational program). There seems to be a gap between what each element in the literature review (student learning, learning communities, and residence halls) provides as a greater benefit to the environment of learning on a campus, and what can be done collectively to magnify that benefit. This study looks at a specific program that integrates these three areas, and identifies the tangible, underlying elements that students found beneficial to their residential business learning community experience.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methods

Overall Approach and Rationale

The intent of this study was to find those tangible, underlying elements that enhanced

student learning and connections for learning community students. As serving as a LC

coordinator is part of my job responsibility, I hoped to bring to light elements that we could

utilize and focus on in our teams in order to promote further success for our College BLT

students. We have had learning teams (LTMs) in place in our College since 1995, and we

"know" they are successful based on our interactions with students, observations of them

interacting in class, and simple quantitative data (e.g. GPA, retention). We will continue to

gather information from these students, and BLTs will continue in our College, but I hoped

to find out more about what exactly does make them successful. As this initiative grows

throughout campus, we hope to continue to be in the forefront of leadership in team success,

and this study will contribute what we need to know about the tangible, underlying elements

of that success. At some point, we plan to infuse information from this study into our

programs to enhance the BLTs within the College of Business at ISU, whether residential or

not.

Naturalistic Inquiry

The research approach I used in this study was naturalistic inquiry, which has as a

main thrust "to investigate human behavior in its natural and unique contexts and settings by

avoiding the artificial constraints of control and manipulation" (Isaac & Michael, 1995, p.

218). This type of inquiry contains four elements, as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

"purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample, development

of grounded theory based on the inductive analysis, and projection of next steps in a constantly emerging design" (pp. 187-188). Isaac and Michael state, "Because of its reliance on human perception, naturalistic inquiry leads to multiple realities—the world as seen through the eyes of more than one beholder" (1995, p. 219).

I utilized qualitative methodology to gather information, primarily the case study approach, as it was the most adaptable to these multiple realities. A goal of the case study approach is to develop an understanding of a complex phenomenon within its real-life context (Bogden & Biklen, 1982; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Yin, 1994). This approach is explanatory, or as Yin (1994) explains, "The preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed" (p. 1). The case study method incorporates multiple sources of evidence, and is seen as an all-encompassing method (Yin, 1994). It is also "the primary vehicle for emic inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 339). Since the purpose of this study was to give voice to the residential BLT students' experiences, the observational case study approach served this well.

Using this emic (participant's viewpoint) perspective, there was much thick description (Gall, et al., 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), allowing me to develop constructs and themes as part of the emergent research design, which was ever-changing with new insights into the data (Gall et al., 1996; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), "what will be learned at a site is always dependent on the *interaction* between investigator and context, and the interaction is also not fully predictable" (p. 208). These constructs and themes formed the basis for grounded theory (Gall et al., 1996; Isaac & Michael, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a term which was coined and is best defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as "one that will fit the situation being researched, and

work when put into use" (p. 3). Going on to explain further, Glaser and Strauss (1967)

consider "fit" to mean that categories must easily apply and are indicated by the data, and in

order to "work," they must be meaningfully relevant to and explain the situation under study

(p. 3). Using description to explain the framework, situation, and circumstances in which

this study was done is also key to the balance of the data analysis and interpretation (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1982, Patton, 1990).

Methodological Frameworks

Postmodernism

While framing the focus of the design of my study from a critical theory perspective

(focusing on the *structures* framing the context and then the meanings behind these

structures), the actual methodology took on more of a postmodern (or post-structuralist)

viewpoint, which focused on how individuals dealt with processes and acted as knowing

subjects. In order for the purpose of creation or inscription of knowledge to occur (a key

element of postmodernism), the multiple voices of the students (subjects) needed to be

clearly heard. Looking at the experiences of the Maple Hall BLT students through their eyes

and perspectives, allowing their thoughts to come through, required me to take on an

approach much like that of Smith (1987), who focuses on the standpoint of the participant, or

looking at the individual's lived experience. Standpoint, in Smith's view, sees the

respondent as "knower," as a subject, not object, and looks at the situation from the inside,

then out, or "locating the subject in one's everyday world means locating oneself in one's

bodily and material existence" (Smith, 1987, p. 97). Maintaining the standpoint of the

respondents was of utmost priority, in order to capture their "voices."

Power relationships.

Another important element in the postmodern and critical theory perspectives is that of power relationships. As noted by Carspecken (1996), "all qualitative studies should examine power relationships closely to determine who has what kind of power and why" (p. 129). In viewing power relationships as the means by which things happen to people, Foucault (as cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982) believes that power is intentional, and "there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (p. 187).

With another element of Foucault's concepts of power, Howley and Hartnett (1992) discuss the idea of pastoral power, or the idea that the public institution (or College of Business, in this case) "knows what's good for students," and arranges programs, activities, settings, etc. in order to "confer salvation" on them (p. 271). In higher education, the concept of pastoral power is very strong, and within the structure and functioning of LCs in particular, "[the power of the state—the University] distinguishes them [students] as individuals, counsels and guides them, and, through this process, ensures, sustains, and improves their lives" (Foucault, 1988, p. 67). Are we in LCs truly providing (through the structures we have established) avenues for growth, support, adjustment, and success as we claim, or are we framing "truth" in a neat little package to provide care for and control of our "congregations?" The roles of the student respondents and their influences and functioning within these processes tell the tales. Keeping in mind the postmodern perspective, the power negotiations and ongoing dynamics of the researcher-respondent relationships were crucial in this respect.

Audience

The primary audience for this study was my program of study committee, although

my fellow office LC coordinator and co-workers were nearly as primary an audience for this study, due to their close involvement with the LC students and process in our College. The findings gathered in this study will be used within our own College to adjust, adapt, or enhance the LC experience for our residential and non-residential BLTs.

Following these first two audiences were other LC coordinators, the LC Advisory Committee, and residence hall staff across campus. These secondary audiences were the ones who may have been additionally affected by the results of the data collected and the ideas generated by this study. A practical application of the information gathered through this research could have further-reaching effects across campus, although the main focus was to utilize this information within our College BLTs first and foremost. This may be an area of (critical) theoretical struggle though, in terms of knowing how to frame these findings in light of the political realm of both the College and University settings (Harvey, 1990).

From another perspective, the respondents and future BLT students were also the audience for this study. As the viewpoints of the participants in this study were key in creating the knowledge and formulating the implications they may have for future students in College of Business LCs, it was also important to represent, preserve, and share this information with others who may wish to be a part of this LC initiative on our campus. In a very broad sense, this study included an emancipatory function (in the adaptations or changes in Business LCs for upcoming students), although the thrust of this research was not intended to directly empower the participants at the time.

Participant Selection

The LC students in the College of Business at ISU were the participants in this study. I focused on the gender-specific learning teams with a structured residential link (i.e., men's

and women's BLTs housed in Maple Hall)—23 students.

Choosing this type of participant group qualified as "purposeful sampling" described by Patton (1990) as the practice of "selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth" (p. 169). Patton (1990) has also identified fifteen types of purposeful sampling strategies (e.g., criterion, convenience, chain) but the one used in this study was that of homogeneous sampling, with "the purpose here to describe some particular subgroup in depth" (p. 173). In this way, I was able to collect detailed information on residential business LC students via this small group, instead of looking at all residential learning community students, for example.

Site Information

The Maple Hall residence facility at ISU includes updated amenities, including new furniture, in-room sinks, and individual heating/cooling controls in each room, along with private or individual bath facilities on each floor. As a building intended for freshman and sophomore level students, the rules, policies, and standards of living are more restrictive and closely monitored by the residence hall staff. This staff includes Community Assistants (CAs), (taking the place of traditional Resident Assistants), whose responsibilities are to establish personal relationships with each student and develop a strong sense of community among the floor members. Academic Resource Coordinators (ARCs) supplement the services of the CA, and focus on activities and opportunities that enhance the students' academic experience, intervening to assist with students' academic progress when necessary. The entire building is alcohol- and smoke-free, visiting hours (9 a.m.-1 a.m. Sunday-Thursday and 9 a.m.-3 a.m. Friday and Saturday) are enforced, and a security entrance system has been established to most common areas of the building, except for the main floor

lobby, which allows pass-through access to the other residences in the three-building complex. There is a separate cost, different than the basic room plan (a total of $170 more/semester), for living in Maple Hall, in order to assist in the payment and maintenance of the new facilities.

Students living in Maple Hall participate in the "Fresh Start" program, which encourages involvement in co-curricular activities, supplementing and enhancing the classroom learning experience (Department of Residence, 2001). Students wishing to return to Maple Hall in subsequent years must maintain a minimum GPA that demonstrates academic success to remain housed in the building, along with participation in at least one community service activity, personal development activity, and campus organization membership each semester. (This participation is monitored and recorded by the ARCs in the building.) Students must also not have a serious judicial record, and are expected to contribute, participate, and be involved in their residence hall community.

Researcher's Role

As a LC coordinator, staff mentor, and assigned academic advisor to most of the students in the Maple Hall BLTs, I needed to make sure my roles were carefully defined and delineated. Another element that came in to play was my role as instructor to these students in the BusAd 101 (Business Orientation) class. My role in this qualitative study was a combination of "participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1994, pp. 93-94) in many ways, because of my connections to all logistical and operational aspects of the BLTs, along with my professional interactions with the students in class and in their university academic pursuits.

(Surprisingly, throughout the actual data collection and efforts in conducting this

study, the students did not even seem to recognize all these formal connections and roles I played. They saw me only as "Diann," who was a student (albeit older) conducting a study with which they were helping. The lines of advisor/student seemed to be separated quite distinctly in their minds and through their interactions with me, perhaps due to the prolonged timeframe of this study.)

Noting the power relationships and "pastoral power" concepts discussed earlier, building relationships and being honest with these students was of utmost importance. I needed to be sure to maintain my personal and professional image, as well as the methods and tactics I used to establish rapport and gain trust with these participants. Because of all my formal "university" connections with these students, I kept these areas in mind and in check, so as not to prevent, detract from, or over-stimulate participation. I also needed to be aware that I was removed from them—both age- and "culture"-wise, remembering that although I was trained as a teacher and taught high school students, those days have since gone. I also kept my personal biases and preconceptions in check, but not buried, a process Reason (1988) terms *critical subjectivity:* "a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be swept away and overwhelmed by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process" (p. 12).

Once data collection began, I was the measuring instrument (Gall et al., 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), affecting the emerging design of the study. This outsider's viewpoint, etic perspective, began to blend with the emic perspective, fulfilling the descriptive purpose of this case study. Utilizing a "subjectivity audit" as described by Peshkin (1988), I took notes about research situations or events that brought about strong

feelings—positive or negative—that may have had an influence on the way that particular data was gathered, or the way it was later interpreted. Keeping in mind my own reflexivity, biases, or what "pushed my buttons" and how that played out was also important (Patton, 1990). This helped me keep a more "even keel" and reality-checked my perspective, so that my data collection and analysis were more consistent, all the while keeping in mind that "*Any view is a view from some perspective*, and therefore incorporates the stance of the observer" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 29).

I brought to this study the perception and knowledge that the BLTs were effective and beneficial in helping students connect to each other and adjust more smoothly to the University, as previous students (with whom I had worked) reported their connections to other students as a major benefit of the LC experience. Having a shared experience was also helpful and reassuring to BLT students, and I anticipated this to be the case with the students in this study as well. While pure academic success (higher grade point averages) has never been the underlying goal of BLTs (see BLT Philosophy, Appendix C), it does tend to be a residual effect, and I expected that to hold true with this group of Maple BLT students too. Based on these premises, I entered into this dissertation study hoping to find out exactly what fostered those connections and what those "things" were, by engaging in an ongoing dialogue with the Maple BLT students.

Utilizing the concept of reciprocal sharing, as described by Lather (1991), it was important for me to provide information about the LC process, initiative, my research, personal background, and insights to the participants as well, instead of expecting them to provide me with all sorts of data, with nothing in return. In this co-creation of knowledge, it was important that both respondent and researcher took on each others' roles from time to

time, in order to give meaning to the facts of the situation (in context), since they do not "come" with meaning. This give and take also "normalized" the power relationship imbalances, helping to provide a more equitable balance of the process and structure viewpoints, leading to richer information about LCs. In this way, we learned about the benefits and nuances of residential BLTs together, but disproportionately through the perspectives of the students.

Ethics and Human Subjects Considerations

Informed consent to participate in this research study was secured in accordance with the procedures set forth by the University Human Subjects Review Committee. The application was completed and submitted, with approval granted on August 20, 2001 (see Appendix E).

After an initial LC kickoff event in early September, I held a short meeting with the Maple Hall BLT students, in which they received a letter from me explaining my research and intentions (see Appendix F). I then explained my role as a graduate student and the dissertation requirements as a part of the Ph.D. degree, along with a brief overview of my topic and theoretical basis, the research process, and their potential role. Confidentiality and the concept of their role in member checking (allowing them to review their statements, initial analyses, and information for accuracy, completeness, and interpretation) the data collected were also discussed in detail at this meeting (Gall et al., 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was also made clear that there would be no penalty for those students who chose not to participate, or those who wished to drop out at a later time.

The eleven students who agreed to participate were given the consent form (see Appendix G) at the first focus group sessions (held two weeks later), and were asked to

choose their own pseudonym for the study in order to help facilitate their role in member checking and provide more comfort with confidentiality issues.

The location for interaction and data collection for much of this study was the main floor classroom of Maple Hall (the students' residence) and in "neutral" common sites on campus (Memorial Union, MWL Commons, College of Business classrooms). I sought appropriate permission and reservations for rooms and meeting areas in advance (when needed), working with the University Room/Classroom Scheduling office, Maple Hall director, and Department of Residence. Varying the locations of these interactions with the participating students gave a bit more balance to the "territory," providing for more comfort and ease of discussion. I was very deliberate about not skewing this balance, avoiding data collection in my campus office and students' rooms for safety, security, and liability issues as well.

My personal ethical perspective in this study followed ecological ethics as identified by Flinders (1992), as judging the morality of my decisions and actions in terms of the participants' (student) culture and the larger social systems (University, community) of which they are part. I needed to keep in mind the larger (College and University) implications of my research actions (e.g. sound research practices, constructive and honest critique of the BLT/LC programs, etc.) in conducting this study as well, and acted accordingly.

Data Collection

Focus Groups

The initial data collection was in the form of group (focus group) interviews, "which are typically based on homogeneous groups" (Patton, 1990, p. 173). Patton (1990) also

believes "The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (p. 335). My aim in using focus groups was to get a sense of the overall experiences of the students, while also providing a framework in which to further focus additional one-on-one interviews. Six general topics questions (motivation to apply, strengths/weaknesses, suggestions or advice, definitions, and "describing" factors) were used to guide these focus groups (see Appendix H), which were held approximately 4 weeks into the fall semester.

The 11 participants were divided into two groups (based on their availability within the two times offered), with a mix of genders in each group as well, so as to provide for optimum participation in the focus groups. I needed to keep in mind the pre-existing relationships they shared, and facilitated the discussion accordingly. Because of the nature of their residential connection, I anticipated there to be much interaction and "bounce-off" discussion, truly operating in focus group fashion, although the initial focus groups were a bit more "question and answer-like," due to the students' unfamiliarity with the focus group process and newness to their participation in a study such as this. As the sessions progressed, the discussion picked up and was a bit more relaxed and free flowing. At the end of each session, the students stayed and continued conversation about LCs and research at ISU, struggles with a particular shared class (math), and with the scribe and myself about our graduate program in general.

A second round of focus groups was held near the end of the fall semester, approximately 10 weeks after the initial sessions. These focus groups functioned more as "exit interviews" with the more "seasoned" first-semester students. The seven topics questions in this discussion aimed at their overall viewpoints of their soon-to-end BLT

experience (major influences, factors of participation that influenced learning, overarching benefits, view of BLTs as social or academic) (see Appendix I).

Again the 11 participants were divided into two groups, with a different participant makeup in each than in the initial focus groups. Students switched themselves around, due to availability for the given sessions, but the groups still remained a mix of genders. The discussion again began as "question and answer-like," but did not progress as easily into a true discussion format, as did the first round, although the participation was quite free and open. As occurred in the initial focus groups, once the questions were asked and taping complete, free-flowing conversations sprung up between the students, the scribe, and myself, with requests for copies of my study, sharing of holiday plans, and academic questions and frustrations as topics.

Personal Interviews

As suggested by Yin (1994), "interviews are an essential sources of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs" (p. 85). The personal (one-on-one) interviews in this study were held in weeks 11 and 12 of the semester. These discussions were a bit more focused, using 7-8 set questions in an open-ended format (see Appendix J) allowing for some questions to evolve from the discussion, in order to explore additional topics as addressed or initiated by the participants. The interviews were more of a conversation, but were geared toward the questions in order to obtain additional information and insight into the residential BLT experience of the participants.

Some of these set questions were in follow-up or in addition to the questions on the ISU Undergraduate Education Survey (pre- and post-tests) and ISU Learning Community Survey created by the ISU LC Assessment Subcommittee (see Appendix K and L), and

administered by the Department of Residence and LC Coordinators, respectively. This strategy fulfilled the survey interview purpose of supplementing data that has already been collected by other means (Gall et al., 1996), and allowed me to connect the tangible, underlying elements I looked for in this study to the more quantitative measures gathered by the University. (See Chapter 5 for a discussion of these results for the BLTs.)

Respondent criteria.

The respondents chosen for the one-on-one interviews were determined somewhat at random, through the insights, participation, and interactions from students as witnessed in the initial focus groups. Five of the 11 students (two women, three men) were identified and chosen to provide individual information. This number of students seemed to be enough to maximize information and achieve *redundancy*, or "when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202).

These five participants were chosen due to these contributing factors: one student provided two extremely insightful responses that seemed to exemplify a particularly advanced level of thinking and student development (see Chapter 4, *Residential Setting* section); another student described a very interesting analogy of LCs (again see Chapter 4, *Peers and Academic Success* section), warranting a deeper look; one student arrived late to the initial focus group, and via the limited amount of input he could provide, it was evident he had more interesting things to say; a fourth student was simply just very participatory, and truly interested in this information-sharing/research process; one last student surprisingly agreed to participate in this study, even though it had been made clear to me (and others) that she did not plan to return to the University after the fall semester.

Additional Methods

Observation.

Another technique used to collect data was observation, initially in the BusAd 101

class setting, but primarily in small group activities and one-on-one interactions with the

team students throughout the year. Observation within the classroom setting was

challenging, as I was also instructing and an active participant in the class much of the time.

Observations in their team activities and in one-on-one interactions was a bit easier, although

again, I was certainly not a "complete observer," with the chance to be detached from the

setting (Gall et al., 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1994). Most often taking the

participant-as-observer role, as mentioned earlier, I tried to utilize the observation strategy of

"observe and look for nothing—that is, nothing in particular" as noted by Wolcott (1994, pp.

161-162). In this strategy, he encourages observers to look for those things that stand out

from an otherwise flat landscape: the "bumps." This strategy was especially helpful in the

too-familiar classroom setting.

Informal interactions.

Other data collection occurred through one-on-one interactions (primarily in advising

appointments), although these were sub-collections of data, as the intent of these

appointments was to assist the students with issues relating to their academics in the College

of Business at ISU. As advising is the primary function of my job on campus, and my

research is a personal function as a doctoral student, information gathered through these

means was utilized very carefully and cautiously, and with participants' full knowledge.

Other interactions occurred at random, in chance meetings on campus, at various College or

University events, or around the city in our daily "life" activities. While these meetings

certainly did not take the shape of formal data collection opportunities, the conversations shared provided avenues for connections to this study.

Peer mentor interviews.

I also conducted personal interviews with the peer mentors of these two BLTs near the end of the spring semester 2002, in order to get a better feel for the connections and insights of the students who participated in these teams, and a sense of the BLT/residence hall structure and the peer mentors' role in it (see questions, Appendix M). Since these two peer mentors were previous members of the Maple Hall BLTs in the 1999-2000 academic year, their information was still quite fresh in their minds, and provided additional insight along with a "dual perspective" as a mentor and former BLT participant.

Timing

These various methods were utilized heavily over the course of the fall 2001 semester, as the evolution of the teams continued as the students progressed through their first semester. As some of the students individually decided to continue into teams for the spring semester (which equated to "new" course-based teams only, as their residence assignment did not change unless they chose to move), I continued with data collection (primarily observation and informal interactions) with those particular students as well. I also completed member checking and "spot" interviewing with the fall BLT participants as needed throughout the spring 2002 semester.

Data Management

As I collected information from the participants during focus groups, those interactions were audio taped, along with written notes as taken by fellow graduate student "scribes," including descriptive and reflective information (Gall et al., 1996). I promptly had

these tapes transcribed (on the computer) by an outside transcriptionist, and wrote and

reviewed personal notes immediately after our sessions in order to accurately account the

thoughts and interactions of the participants, as well as identify my own feelings and

reactions to the sessions. I labeled the tapes appropriately with dates and site information

and have both hard copy and computer disks of the written transcripts. Handwritten notes

were taken in the personal interviews, and were carefully reviewed after each meeting,

adding clarifying notes, setting details, and observations. All written transcription data and

original notes are kept in a 3-ring binder, and tapes and disks are kept separately in my home.

The original pre- and post-tests of the ISU Undergraduate Education Survey and

Learning Community Survey were returned directly to the LC Assessment Sub-Committee,

so I received only the processed data summaries that were returned to me from the sub-

committee in mid-May 2002, along with general LC assessment information as presented at

the annual Learning Communities Institute on campus.

I utilized detailed researcher notes, "thought" memos (i.e., subjectivity audits), etc. to

help me categorize data loosely as I went along. Proper participant coding and recording of

their chosen pseudonyms, dating of documents, and the organization of all this information

was crucial in managing the data appropriately and effectively. I also utilized participant

review (member checking) of transcribed personal and focus groups interviews in particular,

to ensure accurate, credible, authentic, and representative accounts of the participants' shared

information (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996).

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data was an ongoing process while data collection and management

were being done. As interviews and notes were reviewed and transcribed, sorting and

"categorizing" of this information was very important. Notes that summarized what took place in each observation or interview, along with my personal reflections after each session allowed me to think about each interaction and determine if additional information was needed, lending to the emergent design process of case study research. I hoped to be able to match these emerging strands in the data collected to those outlined in the theoretical framework, or to be able to identify new strands that were perhaps even more compelling in terms of providing traits to infuse into the BLT structure, a strategy identified by Yin (1994) as "relying on theoretical propositions" (p. 103). This approach is similar to that identified by Tesch (1990) as interpretational analysis: finding constructs, themes, and patterns that describe or explain the phenomena being studied.

Focus and Research Questions

Keeping in mind my original research questions listed below, constructs such as residential links, like majors, adjustment, peers, and student success were categories from which to start grouping or coding information from my field notes. While emergent themes and ideas are the primary focus of qualitative research, beginning data analysis must start with some direction in which to proceed. The purpose of these research questions was to focus this study on the participants' point of view on these various topics, with the intent of finding those tangible, underlying elements that ultimately led to the likelihood of enhanced learning and success for LC students in the College of Business:

1. Does the Maple Hall setting or its special nuances (policies, cost, features, staffing) have any effects on student learning, behavior, or attitude?

2. What elements of the residential link are helpful to students in connecting with and/or enhancing their academic learning? How does the grouping of like majors in

learning teams (LTMs) influence or detract from academic success?

3. How is adjustment to the University enhanced or accomplished through participation in residential learning teams?

4.a. What elements of the learning team structure have more of an influence on the social vs. academic realm of student success? 4.b. Which realm is more beneficial to overall student success?

5. What kind of influence do peer mentors have on the residential BLT experience?

Emergent Themes

Identifying underlying emergent themes was somewhat of a challenge, so I used a similar method to Wolcott (1994), conceptually, with "chunks" (topics) of data instead of the physical movement of note cards as he used. Although I utilized the computer for transcription of written notes and data management, I did not use one of the packaged data management programs (e.g. NU*DIST). I coded and grouped like-themed topics and information, then tied these chunks of data with specific themes or strands as guided by my research questions, revising and re-classifying them as needed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This coding and categorizing of topics themes fits into the process of inductive data analysis as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "a process for 'making sense' of field data" (p. 202).

Member Checking

Due to my strong connections with all areas of the LC process in my job, it was vital that I used member checking as I analyzed the data as well. The students' voices needed to be heard appropriately and honestly, not in "my terms." According to Isaac and Michael (1995), "research outcomes are the result of negotiations between the researcher and the

human sources yielding the data" (p. 220), further supporting the importance of this step in data analysis. In order to provide sincere, helpful working ideas and practices for the College of Business (and perhaps other) LCs, I committed to this step in particular.

Trustworthiness Features

Credibility

The credibility issue in qualitative research depends on three distinct elements as described by Patton (1990): (a) rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that is carefully analyzed, and attends to validity, reliability, and triangulation; (b) the credibility, competence, and trustworthiness of the researcher; and (c) philosophical belief in the phenomenological paradigm, including naturalistic inquiry and qualitative methods (pp. 461 & 491). Trustworthiness in the findings of qualitative research is not as systematically defined as are reliability and validity in quantitative research. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe four criteria that maximize sound research in naturalistic inquiry: (a) credibility (vs. internal validity), or findings that are believable and convincing; (b) transferability (vs. external validity), or application of findings to similar settings; (c) dependability (vs. reliability), or findings that are consistent with similar studies; and (d) confirmability (vs. objectivity), or findings and processes that are auditable.

The use of thick description in the reporting of information in this study and the extensive use of triangulation, prolonged engagement, and persistent observation also led to credible and representative findings, as well as the potential for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). Member checking and peer debriefing also played major roles in the concept of face validity (Lather, 1991, 1993), or credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and member checking in particular is seen by Guba and Lincoln (1981) as "the backbone of

satisfying the truth-value criterion" (p. 110). Dependability of findings is most often achieved with the combination of triangulation methods and the audit trail described earlier, similar to having reliability once there is validity, or in this case, dependability once there is credibility (Guba, 1981). Finally, ensuring that findings are operating within the context of theory building and are multiple measures of the same phenomenon, construct validity (credibility) is also addressed (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Lather, 1991, 1993; Yin, 1994).

Generalizability

One of the biggest perceived disadvantages to qualitative research is the problem of external generalizability (Maxwell, 1992; Patton, 1990) to other situations, in part because of the nature of the grounded theory approach. Many scientists are stuck on the notion that generalizations must be absolute, and within naturalistic inquiry, "absolute" is very contextual. This difficulty holds true in this study as well, although I collected information from a range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods, data sources, and theoretical schemes that provided for adequate triangulation (Denzin, 1970; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lather, 1991, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994), helping to reduce bias, check the credibility of the findings, and support my interpretations thereof.

Due to the basic structure of shared team classes, similar living complexes, and like majors in all the College of Business LCs, basic applications of this study's findings will be more easily transferred to the non-residential business teams, an internal generalizabilty of conclusions within the group or setting (Maxwell, 1992). Patton (1990) addressed the topic of generalizability in saying, "evaluators using qualitative methods provide perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of decision makers' theories of action rather than generation

and verification of universal theories, and context-bound extrapolations rather than generalizations" (p. 491). If this research can provide useful and credible information to decision makers, perhaps "mass generalization" of findings is not necessarily the sole function or purpose of this study. Stake (1978) argues, "Case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization" (p. 5). Making this information "real" for readers goes far in assisting with "naturalistic generalizations" as Stake (1978) describes.

Researcher Effects

As an undergraduate student, I attended a small, private, liberal arts institution in Iowa. Just the sheer size of this institution lent itself naturally to many of the elements institutions of higher education are working to infuse via learning communities, so while I was not a part of a learning community per se, I feel I developed a tremendous connection to the campus community of which I was a part. I was greatly impacted by the experiences I had at that institution, and still have a warm place in my heart for private schools, even though my career has been centered now for the past six (nearly seven) years at a large public research institution.

My professional career began as a high school business education teacher in a small, rural Iowa school district. After working with high school and junior high students in a variety of classroom, extracurricular, and athletic settings for four years, I realized I was interested in teaching at the community college level, prompting my return to earn my masters degree. Upon entering the higher education program at Iowa State University, the emphasis of the program itself is what led me to the student services area. As my personal

interests and training had always been in education and teaching, I aimed the next stage of my career to the field of academic advising, which I have done for just over 8 years, along with a year-long stint in a Federal TRIO program, which focused on academic, but also personal counseling with special populations students. I currently advise primarily freshman and sophomore students (along with student athletes) in the pre-business major, as well as coordinate nearly all aspects of the College of Business LCs at ISU.

My personal connections with all these aspects of the business LCs allowed me some access and understanding that may not have been available to other researchers, and provided me with three roles as researcher: external, internal, and that of intermediary, speaking "for" my participants (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). With my strong professional ties to the College of Business LCs especially, it was very important that I represented myself and this research in a way that could assist other students and learning community programs. Keeping in mind the discussion of subjectivity earlier in this chapter, it was crucial that I monitored my personal reactions and sensed how I felt throughout this process (Peshkin, 1988). Future participation in our College LCs and the effectiveness of my daily student interactions relied upon the trust, honesty, and good practices required of a responsible researcher. Considering my closeness to the LC process and our College's vision for LCs, I also made sure to have others, who are not actual participants in this process, do peer debriefing along the way to ensure clarity and accuracy in this study as well (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This is my study as well as the students' study, and it was conducted with this intent in mind. As researcher I was a chief catalyst for the project, a partner in helping them create knowledge, and a reporter in sharing that knowledge (in their words) with the readers. I kept in mind the words of Patton (1990), when he said, "Technical rigor in analysis is a major

factor in the credibility of qualitative findings" (p. 472). In order for this study to contribute to the base of knowledge on residential learning communities, I held true to the methods outlined in this chapter.

Summary

Using naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research methodology, primarily the case study method, I hoped to find those tangible, underlying elements that enhanced student learning and connections for learning community students. Focusing on the students participating in the residential Business Learning Teams in Maple Hall at ISU, I utilized focus group and personal interviews to glean their perspectives and viewpoints on the LC experience. Observation and informal interactions were also data collection techniques I utilized, along with interviews with the BLT students' peer mentors.

The inductive data analysis process was used after information was collected, sorted, and "categorized," in order to "make sense" of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were involved along the way in the process of member checking the data and analysis, in order to accurately preserve their perspectives and thoughts. In order to provide for trustworthiness of the data, member checking, thick description, prolonged engagement, and multiple data collection methods (triangulation) were heavily utilized. The emergent themes and results are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Overall Approach

In order to better tell the stories of the students in the residential BLTs, I talked with them at different times throughout the fall semester 2001, in both small groups and individually. I also taught them in their BusAd 101 orientation class, so I was able to interact with them in a more academic and classroom setting as well. This somewhat continuous and varied contact with them allowed me to develop a better sense of their BLT experiences, along with an observational view of the changes and challenges they were facing as new first-year students.

As I visited with some of the BLT student participants individually, I began each session with a "warm-up" question asking about their families and backgrounds. In this small group of five students (the "key participants"), there was perhaps a similar proportional representation of family demographics in society and at the University. Two students came from traditional two-parent nuclear families; two from blended, step-parent families; and one from a divorced, single-parent family. All five students had siblings, two with half-brothers as well. Only one of the students was not the oldest child; she was third of four in her family.

Study Participants

Key Participants

Each of the following students participated in all phases of this study (focus groups and personal interviews) of the residential BLT "family," and deserves an introduction.

Robert is originally from California, and has lived in a mid-sized western Iowa city for the past three years. He is grateful to be here in the Midwest, as he describes this as a

"much better environment for him" with no violence or distractions. Since moving to Iowa, he has since become a Christian. Although his mom and brother live close by, he resides with his grandma, who he seems to thoroughly enjoy. He has a good relationship with his dad and his relatives in California (all whom are of Mexican descent).

Sylvia grew up on a farm in northwest Iowa, and is very close to her family. Her older brother graduated from a private, liberal arts institution (my alma mater), and her sister is attending another of these institutions now. She described her 13-year-old brother as "a great kid." She is truly appreciative of the support and opportunities her family and small community have provided her growing up. She admits she has "gotten to do so much" in her life, outside of her community, and her family is the main reason why.

Sasha is from a small college town in northeast Iowa, and described a fair amount of exasperation with his younger sister, who he seems to view as a bit "spoiled" and irresponsible. He is very mature in his college "direction," and strives to do the right thing, without being too ordered or rigid. He has a strong willingness to help others, and had just come from donating at a campus blood drive when we talked individually.

Logan is from the Twin Cities area, and when his oldest brother was 12 years old, lost him to cancer. He has a good relationship with both his father and (somewhat) new stepfather (who he says is "cool"). He went to an all-male military high school, (which he chose to attend, after attending parochial schools growing up), and enjoyed that experience greatly.

Anne is from southeast Iowa and was very clear from the start of the semester that she would not be returning to ISU in the spring. She has a fairly large extended family, and talked at length about her relationships with her maternal aunts and grandparents, who are

"second moms and parents" to her and her sister in particular. Her dad and paternal grandparents live in central Iowa, but she is not really as close to them as her mom's family, even though she did see them a bit more during the semester, since she was closer in proximity here in Ames.

Additional Participants

Even though the rest of the study's participants were not interviewed individually, they continued to be valuable informants via the focus group process, and provided great insight into the BLT experience overall. The remainder of the research group includes the following students.

Vanessa is a northwest Iowa girl who chose her BLT placement in part because "I thought it would be the closest thing to having my own apartment." Another reason she was drawn to Maple Hall is because she hates smoke and does not drink (two major restrictions in the building). She is also active in the marching band.

Sara is from central Iowa, 30-minutes from Ames, and is Vanessa's roommate. She had many high school friends who came here, and her family has been connected to ISU for quite a while, attending campus events and visiting since she was young, which made Ames and ISU "like a home away from home" for her, making her college decision easy.

Jose is also from central Iowa, and he, too, had a strong tie to ISU from the time he was in 7th grade, due to a "college connections" program in which he participated. He was sold on ISU by the end of junior high.

David is an Ames native, and admits, "I don't know about you, but I'm a homeboy, so I got to stick near home." By his own description, he is a salesman, and sales "has been a part of my entire life," so a College of Business major was an easy decision for him to make.

Frank is from a mid-sized city in southwest Iowa. He is a bit more quiet than some of the other participants (perhaps more introspective), but is still open and friendly, willingly participating in the research effort. Logan is his roommate.

Erica is from a small town near Ames, and she and Sylvia are roommates. Erica was very uncertain about her major and career direction, perhaps more so than any other participant, and did end up changing her major to biology near the end of the fall semester. She chose Iowa State because "I did want something bigger than high school . . . I really like the environment and the campus here and it is close to home so if I ever need to go home, it's just right there."

Peer Mentors

Along with the eleven BLT member participants, I also talked with the two peer mentors who worked with the teams throughout the fall (and spring) semesters. They were each interviewed personally, and should also be introduced.

Felipe is from a small town 35 miles from Ames. He continued his involvement from high school when he came to ISU, in particular as a member of the marching band and active in trampoline and tumbling competitions. His dad is an ISU graduate, so he remembers attending lots of VEISHEA (an annual ISU spring festival) parades and taking 4-H trips to campus growing up.

Bailey is from a small town in western Iowa. She is very close to her family, which includes her parents and an older brother and sister, and they all spend their yearly vacation together fishing in Minnesota. She speaks very fondly of her niece and grandpa, and her friends are also very important to her. She loves to read, watch basketball, and movies.

Data Collection Process and Format

Each of the eleven participants in this study provided detailed responses and personal insight into their day-to-day activities as a member of the residential business learning teams (BLTs) in Maple Hall. They shared their feelings and opinions about the program and its structure, providing suggestions for improvement through frustrations with its shortcomings, along with praises for its benefits and opportunities. The questions asked of the students (see excerpts below and Appendix H, I, J, and M) had an emphasis on the social and residential components of the BLT experience, based on the overall goals and objectives of the BLT (i.e. forming an overall connection to the College of Business, business as a field of study, fellow students, staff, and faculty—see Appendix D).

Early discussions with the participants seemed to focus on awareness and appraisal issues. The initial focus group questions asked: how they came to know about the Maple BLTs; what motivated them to participate; what positive and/or negative experiences they had so far; and what advice they might have for other students or for me as a LC coordinator (see Appendix H for the complete list of initial focus group questions). In a sense, the first focus groups on September 20 and 24, 2001 were a formative evaluation (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997), which "took the temperature" of their residential BLT experience to date, and provided a snapshot of what the students had come to know so far. Personal interviews later in the semester (November 8-15, 2001) extended the discussion with nearly half of the focus group participants (5 students) about how the activities and continuing operation of the BLT throughout the semester played out on the effects for the participants. Questions asked included: what kind of impact the BLT peers/peer mentor had; had they connected to the College of Business; had the BLT experience had an influence on their

adjustment, or was it secondary; and were they aware of the extra cost to live in Maple (see Appendix J for entire list of personal interview questions). The final focus groups on December 3 and 4, 2001 were more of an "exit interview," asking questions such as: identify major influences of the BLT; had the BLT affected their adjustment; would you repeat your BLT experience; and how has the BLT affected your learning (see complete list of exit focus group questions, Appendix I), providing a form of summative evaluation (Worthen et al., 1997) and wrap-up on the students' BLT experiences, even though most all the participants continued to live on the same floors and many shared similar classes together for the spring semester as well. (The formal residential BLT arrangement and classes were established for the fall 2001 semester only.)

The two peer mentors were interviewed late in the spring semester 2002, as a sort of "exit interview" from their positions, asking questions such as: what motivated them to become a peer mentor; how did they view their role within the team; what kind of impact did they have on their team; had they accomplished the goals they set out to reach; how would they describe their (and their mentees) learning; and what advice would they have for other peer mentors or BLT members (see entire list of peer mentor interview questions, Appendix M). They provided additional insight into their roles within the BLT, and provided a somewhat different perspective on the students' experience, due to their "inside-outsider" role. Their comments were focused primarily in relation to the last focus and research question; the influence of peer mentors on the BLT experience, and is presented in a separate section later in this chapter.

Student Insights

The information shared by the participants in this study was quite detailed and

extensive, and is arranged here in the order in which the topics match with the focus and research questions of the study: Residential Setting, Peers and Academic Success, Adjustment, Social vs. Academic Realm, and Peer Mentors. The peer mentor's information is presented in a separate section later in the chapter.

Residential Setting (Research Question One)

In looking at the themes that emerged from the initial data collection opportunity in particular, one of the most-often mentioned topics was that of their residence facility, Maple Hall. Beginning the initial focus group with the question, "How did you find out about the Maple Business Learning Teams, and what was your motivation for applying/choosing to participate?" (see Appendix H), this theme connects directly to focus and research question one, *Does the Maple Hall setting or its special nuances (policies, cost, features) have any effects on student learning, behavior, or attitude?* The topic of their residence facility (Maple Hall) garnered great discussion, and overall, seemed to focus primarily on pressing, immediate needs of first-year students.

Housing quality and comfort.

Perhaps the most commonly heard response with these students was their draw to Maple Hall because of its physical (and organizational) features. Sasha described his motivation like this, "but when I found out [the BLT] was in Maple Hall, then that kind of turned me because Maple Hall had all the residential stuff that I needed and wanted to have: no smoking, no drinking, were the two big major things . . . and the air conditioning!" Creature comforts, like air conditioning and sinks in their rooms were often mentioned as plusses, making it seem more like home. Vanessa really wanted her own apartment, but was encouraged by her parents to live in the residence halls, as was Erica, so Maple was the next

best thing in their eyes, due to the building's amenities. Besides, as Vanessa declared, "Well, I hate smoke, I absolutely hate it and I don't drink, so it was one of those choices."

Other students saw choosing to join the Maple Hall BLT as a way to get their housing assigned over the summer, as noted by Frank, "I didn't have housing when I came here [for June orientation] and it was suggested to me by my counselor and I took it basically for housing. I've seen the benefits of it since I've been here." Similarly, Jose "first went along with the lines of checking it out just for the rooms, how nice the room was, then I found out about the business learning team and I thought that it wouldn't hurt anything to be part of it . . . ."

While their initial motivation was to fulfill their housing needs, many of the students also saw beyond the living arrangements to the opportunity for support and peer connections. Logan thinks that students who choose Maple only for the rooms and amenities "won't like it," as they "need to put in effort and uphold what it's supposed to be." Anne took exception with those BLT students who "just used the learning team to have a place to live, and that's not right."

Another point of concern addressed by Anne was the number of prospective student and special group visits and tours within the building. As a newly updated facility, there is a tendency to showcase the amenities and elements within the building to prospective students and conference groups. She grew tired of these visits and felt very put out when she was asked to eat at another dining center on campus (in order to ease the load on her building). She was also concerned with issues of privacy when there are tour groups on the floor, as one of her friends was surprised once by a tour group as she was coming out of the shower. More advanced warning is a suggestion she made to help address these issues.

Building security features.

It is security, perhaps from the more literal definition, that produced a lot of heartfelt conversation from some of the participants. Maple Hall is different than other ISU residence halls in that it is a secure building, with public access limited to the ground floor lobby only. Students must have their proximity ("access") card to access the elevators to the residential floors (although that did change later in the year), and other "public" areas of the building (classroom, ground floor lounge area). While this system of access is perceived by others outside Maple Hall as problematic or restrictive, (calling it "prison" or "the lockup," as reported by the participants) students in the BLTs sang its praises.

Sylvia explained, "I guess I'm used to coming from a nice, safe family and I guess I thought that living in Maple would allow that. I could always break away from my nice community that I live in and venture off, but I always had a core place to come back to that was solid ground." She went on to say, "Especially for the girls here, because you always hear about things going on, but I always feel really safe." Just knowing that access to the building and their personal areas was restricted, the students felt safe overall, as mentioned by Sara, "so I know that, I mean nothing probably isn't going to happen here that wouldn't happen at my house." Sasha summed it up by saying "A little extra security is always nice to have around when you want it, but then it's not there when you don't really want it. You have your own in and out time, freedom like any of the dorms." Robert also believes that Maple is not the stereotypical dorm, "but it can get fun and you don't have to worry about anybody doing anything illegal here because the repercussions are . . . it takes a lot more ease off and I know there's nothing big going on . . . ."

While these students came from both small towns and larger cities, there seemed to

be no difference in their perspective of the importance of a "safe and secure" living area. Many of the main discussants on this topic were the women in the BLT, but same "sense" was gathered from the men as well, with issues related to respect, the building's "study spaces," and its overall quiet environment. Viewing this discussion in terms of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs—specifically safety needs, or those protecting against bodily harm or injury and security against threat—this finding should not be surprising.

Robert initially believed that the access card system was a "big hassle," but "Now it's just normal, you get used to it." After being locked out and not able to get into his room a few times, he believes he has been "taught some responsibility with keys and stuff . . . I grew up." This recognition of responsibility and freedom by Robert is described by Moore, Peterson, and Wirag (1984), "They [students] will learn that freedom involves responsibility and that responsibility is not always an easy burden to carry" (p. 40).

Building policies.

Along with the security features of Maple Hall, there are additional building policies that are different than those in other residence halls, which brought forth additional discussion from the BLT participants. As Vanessa admitted, "When people say, 'You live in Maple? I couldn't live with all those rules.' I don't even notice the rules. I can't imagine anything worse than that. It must be really loud and you can't study . . . that's just not ideal." As mentioned earlier, the no smoking or drinking policy was important to most all of the participants, and they often equated the lack of drinking (in particular) with a quieter building overall. Robert claimed, "I like the way Maple is structured for having it to be a positive, quiet, learning area."

This quiet environment in which to study was a benefit of the overall policies in

Maple, although the students were also quick to point out that it was still possible have fun in Maple. They were not, as Sylvia said, "all just a bunch of big nerds, and just in here doing our homework and stuff," as sometimes perceived from those living outside the building. As Sasha *vehemently* stated, "If you're set on first priority is doing your studies and getting your homework done, you have the quietness there to do that. But this isn't a place where no fun goes on. There's fun going on, we just do it differently than people like that [those breaking the rules]. We don't have to get drunk to have fun. We just have our priorities set!" Jose mentioned, "At least what I found is Maple has quite a bit going on, you just have to look around and see where it's at." Sasha even commented, "As a freshman, it's a little hard to get used to everything going on all the time, so it's kind of hard to get into that." Too many choices, it seems to some.

One of the building's policies includes a restriction on visitation by the opposite sex after 3 a.m. on the weekends. Logan believes,

> I think they [Department of Residence] have unfair judgment . . . because I have
> like, friends that are girls that go to schools around here that would come visit, but
> they can't really, can't stay in the dorm and they can't get a hotel room because
> they aren't 21. I think that is pretty unfair just because . . . that's kind of hitting on
> heterosexuals because if you're a homosexual, you can still do the normal things,
> because if you did have someone in your room of the opposite sex and you were
> dating them, they wouldn't allow that, but if I was homosexual and I had a guy in
> the room, they wouldn't have a problem with that at all. I find that kind of
> bothersome. Equality and what not . . .

This response in particular seemed to exemplify an advanced level of thinking (which motivated me to personally interview Logan) and brought to mind connections to student development theory. Most notable is the concept of justice as noted by Kohlberg (1972), "Justice, the primary regard for the value and equality of all human beings, and for reciprocity in human relations, is a basic and human standard" (p. 14). Logan's frustration with this lack of "equality" may also be telling based on his prior educational experiences in the Catholic and military schools he attended in his upbringing, where a strong sense of order and set rules (fairness), were more the norm.

Even though she claimed, "I don't like how strict it is," Anne justified the rules in Maple Hall as not really an issue, since "the things you can't do at Maple, you can do other places. You can leave Maple and do whatever you want that you can't do in Maple." Sasha seemed to agree with the strictness of the rules, as he sees the reasoning behind it, but also wanted there to be a reasonable enforcement of them as well. "Keep the rules, but yet, don't harp on them as much" was his comment. Frank and Logan lamented the way the rules were enforced, particularly on their floor. As Logan said, "It's like, our parents are back home for a reason, you know." It is the overall "delivery" of the enforcement of the rules that makes Frank believe, "It makes you kind of not want to live here." He also went on to say that, "Even though I know I'm not doing anything wrong, I just feel like someone's out to get me kind of. Maybe that's a little extreme . . . but I mean, I'm just real paranoid about stuff [following the rules]."

This discussion suggests that Frank and Logan in particular seem to be ready to grow beyond the structure of Maple and the BLT. As roommates, their shared viewpoint is not surprising, but also reflects a movement along student development lines, as in Chickering's

(1969) third vector, moving through autonomy toward interdependence. In this vector (and as evidenced by Frank and Logan's discussion in particular), there was definitely a decrease in the "continual and pressing need for reassurance, affection, or approval" (Chickering, 1969, p. 12). In many ways, it seems the balance of challenges and supports has been tipped to the side of too much support for these two young men. These two students in particular provided quite deep insights throughout the research process, and were rather introspective in their answers and discussion, again an indication of their movement (or perhaps advanced starting point) within the framework of student development. I found it interesting to hear the similarities in their viewpoints and comments, much like Sara and Vanessa at times, another roommate/participant pair.

Another area of impassioned discussion centered on the requirements for involvement in a campus group or club, and community service hours expected of all building residents. David believes that, "clubs . . . you should worry about your own self. In a sense, they're kind of still 'mommying' you by telling you to join the clubs." This statement in particular exemplifies Foucault's concept of pastoral power, as discussed by Howley and Hartnett (1992). By requiring students to join clubs and volunteer, the Department of Residence is leading their student "congregation" into an involvement and service learning mission, because of the benefits to the greater good that will come of it. Others shared this resistance to clubs and volunteering, and as mentioned by both Anne and Logan, if students are required to volunteer, then it is not truly *volunteer*. Logan also stated, "but to force people to do it . . . you're not going to see the best side of community service."

In contrast to the feelings of these three students, Jose "particularly liked" the part about joining clubs and volunteering and "going out and experiencing other fields and just

things that you wouldn't normally do. I found that . . . this is just one more thing that enriches me . . . ." Erica agreed with Jose, as "It gets you where you meet people . . . ." Later Anne commented, "living in Maple to begin with, how they ask you to do your community service and everything, I think that that helps promote community involvement and helps to get to know the people on your floor." This statement is in contrast to her earlier qualms about "volunteering," and highlights the movement of Anne along a line from "wanting her newly-earned freedom" without any constraints put upon it early in the semester, to realizing and appreciating the sense of community and belongingness her Maple BLT experience had afforded her when looking back on the semester. She also described her "sense of obligation" to complete these requirements, and the fact that it was not difficult to do. This is an example of the impact of involvement in Anne's development, as described further by Astin (1984) and his fifth postulate of involvement theory: "The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student development" (p. 298).

Logan realized early on that even with his frustrations and disagreement with some of the policies in Maple, it provided an overall good and positive environment. He believes,

> I think the overall basic thing about Maple is respect. It is hard to explain, but
> like over in the Towers [residence complex] . . . there's no respect there . . . and
> they [residents] could care less about what you think, but here it's like we have that
> respect . . . you have respect for your roommate and they have respect for you and
> your neighbors and what not. I think that is the overall thing that Maple has is
> respect that people have or will learn to have over the course of the semester.

These particular building policies mentioned by the students are part of the "Fresh Start" program instituted in Maple Hall upon its re-opening in 1999, which is an outgrowth of the ISU Department of Residence's *Student Living, Learning, Leading Model*. This model aims to provide students with opportunities to fulfill five basic outcomes: academic skills, personal skills, understanding and appreciation of human differences, leadership skills, and civic and community responsibility (Olson, 1998). These outcomes form the basis for the specific policies within Maple Hall.

Additional building cost.

The reality of an additional cost (above the typical residence hall charge) to live in Maple was surprising to some, and a point of confusion to others, but interestingly did not elicit as much conversation as I predicted. Sylvia admitted she did not know about the extra charge until someone referred to Maple as "the rich people dorm," then told her she paid more to live there. Once it was clarified that the extra charge was for the facility (being a newly renovated space), and not for membership in the LC, most all seemed to be in agreement that the charge was appropriate. Frank summed it up when he stated, "I think that [the increased charge] just makes sense to the university if it was just recently updated." Addressing the fairness issue of the extra cost to live in Maple (and in turn be part of the BLT), Logan thought it was fair, as "you are getting added luxury, so you probably should pay for it," even though he also admitted that he might think differently if he could not afford it, "but probably not." Robert echoed Logan's thought when he stated "if you're going to live here you should have to pay no matter what you're involved in because of the cost of living here."

In essence, you get what you pay for, and to these students, that seems to be the way

it works. Many of them equated this to analogies such as paying more for a better apartment, higher costs for luxury hotels, etc. Jose believes, "I guess it just depends on everyone's lifestyle. I mean, some people, this is really nice to them, and others it is just okay, it just depends on what they are used to and what they go by." This response takes into account the argument of Marcuse (1992), as mentioned earlier, where he ties the "material conditions of existence" with human happiness. Having the newest and "nicest" residence facility may be important for some, whether it costs more or not. Sasha, Sylvia, and Logan each echoed these sentiments, and felt it was "worth it" from their perspectives. As a non-drinker, Sasha claimed he "would pay no matter what" for the facilities and atmosphere within Maple.

When asked if LC planners should put LCs in places that cost more (new and renovated facilities) for students, Vanessa shared, "I think you should have the option to put them in cheaper places just in case there are some people who don't want to pay the extra money . . . ." As Anne stated, "I think they should have them placed everywhere . . . they should have them in other residence halls also, so that the people have the choice whether or not they want to pay the extra." The option of "choice" was important to the students, and was reiterated by many of the participants. Sasha also saw the potential limitations of this extra cost for some, especially those on their own or "barely making it" financially, which indicates his understanding that some people may want to take part, but are limited by resources, not just their own desires.

The students who participated in this study were financially supported by their parents or through financial aid scholarship and loan monies. I suspected there would be much impassioned discussion about this topic, and I was surprised to find otherwise. The automatic exclusion of some students due to the higher cost to live in Maple Hall is a glaring

economic inequity in my mind, and one that motivated me to bring this question and topic of discussion to the students directly. Their "you get what you pay for" mindset may be explained by the strong level of financial and educational support from the students' families, or perhaps the somewhat dualistic stage of these students, although I suspect they may also see it as a "right" or reward for those who work hard or can afford it.

Peers and Academic Success (Research Question Two)

Along with having a comfortable place to live, and finding friends and peer groups, entering students are "worried most about whether they will succeed academically" (Moore et al., 1984, p. 39). As Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) notes in his first vector, developing competence, intellectual (and interpersonal) successes are important to "stabilizing" this area of developing identity as well. The BLT students seemed to link together their teammates and their academics without question, much like the notion expressed by Upcraft (1989): "Establishing close friends is important to academic success, especially during the first month of enrollment" (p. 150).

Sara and Vanessa, as roommates, seemed to view the BLT in a similar way, making a connection between the courses they shared with their floor mates as an opportunity to meet others. Vanessa stated, " . . . I thought that [the BLT] would be a good opportunity for me because there were people with the similar academic . . . we would be learning the same things from school and being in the same classes, so if I had any questions I could go ask them." As mentioned by Sylvia, "I really wanted to keep my academics strong while I'm in college. That was kind of my motive behind [choosing to participate in the Maple BLT]." She also stated, "From our little study groups that we have, not just academically we're growing stronger, also socially, we have that certain need too, as well, which is good."

David would tell other students to "do it [join a residential LC] because you're going to make a lot of friends . . . I mean heck, first week, holy cow, I was bringing some of them home to my parents. But I mean my family's proud of me because I'm doing that. I'm having a good time doing it too, so . . . " Erica believes an overarching benefit of her BLT experience is the friendships she has been able to form, as in "just the BLT alone you meet 20 people." Sylvia spent a great deal of time studying and establishing friendships with the BLT men's floor too, as she believes "different viewpoints are helpful," and "it's good to have that mix of male and female perspectives." She also likes the "no frills" demeanor of guys, as they are usually "easy to relate to."

Access and proximity.

The initial focus group question that began the discussion specifically addressing part one of the second research question in this study, *What elements of the residential link are helpful to students in connecting with and/or enhancing their academic learning?* was "What do you perceive as the value/utility/usefulness of your residential BLT experience so far?" (see Appendix H). The answer in these students' view is the access and proximity to others who share the same classes, as well as the motivation that comes from this shared academic experience. Living on the same floor with their teammates, along with having the mix of the other students on the floor is helpful as well. Sasha describes it in this way, "you're not tight knit, you know, one little group disconnected from everybody else, you still have access to everybody else, so you are not tied away, you just have a little benefit right there close by you." Getting study groups together, just knocking on another's door to ask a question, walking together to class, and seeing familiar faces in large classes were common responses that students shared in describing this benefit. As explained by Sylvia,

I think the convenience of [the BLT] is what I would value a lot; it's right there. It's all set up for you, all you have to do is use it and that's really awesome. If we were elsewhere and not on a learning team, there is more of a chance of doing it myself. I know I can do it, but it's just right there, you don't have to think about it. The tools are right there at your hand.

The issue of proximity is a strong link in the continued connection of students with each other. Jose explained, "I think people do play a big part just being so close. At least in my case I wouldn't be able to deal with people [in BLTs] that are all spread out." Sara also believes that "living in a residential LC is probably better than having people in different areas because . . . it's easier to live in the same location just so you can meet and communicate and ask questions . . . you get to be a little closer, I think." Interestingly enough, Sasha also cautioned that "too much together might get old though," because of the living arrangements and shared classes. (This is a major reason why many residential LCs at ISU limit the number of shared classes and place students on floors with a mix of students in different majors.)

Many of the students mentioned the large class sizes they experience in their first semester, but in being in the BLT Sasha's view is that "You go to classes for an hour with 200 students, but all your work is done by yourself and with people around you. You're having class with fellow students down the hall." He also observed that "You're around them [BLT members] most of the day and you get to know them a lot easier and know who they are because you are around them more often," other than just seeing students on the floor at night, because they do not share classes throughout the day.

Immediacy also seems to be addressed within the realm of proximity, as when there

are course-related questions to be asked, Sara admits, "it's just easier so that I know if I'm doing something wrong right away. I don't have to wait until I go to class the next day. I can just find out right away."

Chickering and Reisser (1993) believe that when shared interests and significant interactions couple with friendship groups or communities, development will be fostered in all seven vectors. To maximize this benefit, the community should "[encourage] regular interactions between students, [offer] opportunities for collaboration, be small enough so that no one feels superfluous, [include] people from diverse backgrounds, and [serve] as a reference group" (p. 277). The BLT students seem to have found this type of setting within their residence hall arrangement, providing them with an environment in which to grow. This environment continues to influence them as they motivate each other.

Motivation.

In the "motivation from others" aspect Erica believes, "I think it's good because, like I probably wouldn't have studied as much as I do, but it's not even, I would've studied, but with having someone saying 'Hey, do you want to get together tonight?', that's really cool. I wouldn't know the people that I know on my floor." She went on to say "I also think it does help a person that's not motivated to study . . . " because of the encouragement and "pull" from the group. Although Sara felt she probably would have studied on her own, the BLT "did give me an extra shove to study certain things and at certain times and stuff."

In admitting to getting a math assignment done one Sunday afternoon much more efficiently than she would have on her own, Sylvia attributed it to the effects of the BLT in this way, "It breaks it down to a closer knit group, which is good. Good motivation too, behind it . . . I had motivation behind me." Robert describes his motivation in this way:

Being in a BLT actually sort of pressured me to want to study and become

successful. Because I know that within our study group, there would be people

that would be successful and people who wouldn't be as successful and I, of

course, want to be of those that wants to be successful. As a team, we would

study and that would be cool. . . . I knew that my GPA would reflect how I was

studying, and we're not going to sit down and compare our GPAs during the

semester, but I knew that some of the guys in the BLT would be doing much

better than I would be and it just encouraged me to want to study more to have a

better GPA.

Since he believes Maple is seen as an academic building, Logan personally feels he

does not want to be "the BLT guy with midterms [progress reports for C- and lower grades]."

This helps him try to "step it up" and be part of the norm. Even with the mostly positive

influence from the group experience, Jose maintains "but it's definitely, if you're not one to

study, or just a big partier, it's definitely not going to motivate you. No one is going to be on

your back telling you to keep up on your studies or anything . . . ." The peer influence is

certainly strong, but not the sole driving force for student participation and activity within the

BLT, as Jose highlights here.

Involvement.

While the students believed their BLT peers helped to motivate and support them

academically, they also realized that in order for the BLT to "work," they had to put effort

into it as well. As described by Robert, "The LCs, I think it's built so that it appears . . . this

is how I say structure is helpful . . . it's built so yourself and your peers take it upon

yourselves to take initiative to learn, and that right there is positive experience in itself." In

using an analogy learned in his anthropology class, Sasha claims, "the more people there, the more collective and individual benefit." He describes this "pizza analogy" as "one person with limited money can't buy much pizza, but when joined by others, they can get more pizza and benefit more the more that join." In his eyes, it takes many within the team to work together to reap the benefit of the BLT experience.

Anne reported "There are some people that seem like they don't want to give it the effort . . . ," which is very disappointing to her. David agrees. Anne went on to admit a sense of "needing" to take part in the BLT, as she chose to be on it, and wants to help out others if they need it, just like she expects them to do for her. Robert also admitted he was "not okay" with those "fair-weather members" who only participate when they need something. He believes that these members could use the team to their advantage too, and not hurt those (or take away the full potential of the team) from those who want to be on the team who *are* doing their part.

Most students agreed that everyone should have the opportunity to be in a LC, but not everyone should be in one, as Logan stated, "I think it takes a little bit of your own . . . I don't know what you want to call it . . . but like the determination and desire to actually participate in it to want to be in it solely to be successful." In taking responsibility for their team and experience in it, Erica thought "it's good having a person that's around our age and stuff [Bailey, their peer mentor], or us just doing it ourselves."

Once Logan and his teammates realized the BLT was not as focused and structured as they thought it was going to be, they "kind of took it upon ourselves and made it focused anyways and it turned out to bring us closer as a group. It turned out alright." David views this "unofficial" involvement as "little groups inside this big group . . . just different groups

of friends," as there is interaction and activity going on, just not as a whole team. He also laments that "Some people have not been active participants." Anne recognized this personal initiative more so with the men's team, but feels that the women "still show initiative that we need help by contacting Bailey, where you guys contact the other members of your team personally."

Although it takes effort from the students in the BLT, Logan also recognized that his own participation varied from time to time; "I found that I participate when I need it and when I don't, the group can still function without certain members being there, so it's always there." This thought suggests an understanding of the synergy of the group, with the whole being much greater than the individual parts. Anne also realized that "it [the BLT] really has a lot of benefits and the benefits do outweigh the bad about it. Yeah, you can't always get everyone together, but you're never going to be able to get everyone together at one time. There's going to have to be a little bit of flexibility there." If Logan were to give advice to other students considering living in a residential LC, he would ask, "Do you want to be part of a community? You get to take, but you have to contribute and you have to evaluate your own personal preferences on that to decide if you want to be in Maple or not."

The students also seemed to recognize that the "need" for the team and its structure lessened over the course of the semester. Sasha believes "the resource of it [the BLT], slowly goes away as far as how much you really need it, socially wise. But definitely more important as a freshman than as a senior." Frank agrees in that "as you get older you probably will be more independent." Jose feels "It's [the BLT] a good structure to start with, and then like as the semester goes along, kind of each group modifies it as to what they need or what they want to get out of it." The students in this discussion described very accurately

the movement of these students along student development lines throughout the course of the semester. Again, Chickering's third vector (moving through autonomy toward interdependence), comes into play, as these students are realizing their "instrumental independence, which includes self-direction, problem-solving ability, and mobility" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 39).

Even with all these "realizations" of the evolvement of the students' roles in and needs for the BLT over the course of the semester, there was quite a discussion on the topic of "discipline" within the teams. Robert initiated this topic during one of the focus groups, and feels that "if you're not involved or if you do something wrong [in the BLT], there's no way for you to get in trouble. I would venture to say that there should be some sort of mandatory activity or involvement that you would like to have in order to stay in." Taking students "out" of the learning team was not what he had in mind, as he also felt that "Being on a learning team isn't a big deal. There's some people that aren't on a learning team, but they really are." Robert struggled a lot with describing what he wanted to see happen, but Anne shared some of his same frustrations and concerns as well, and suggested that maybe the peer mentor should "evaluate" the students' participation within the team. While not necessarily determining what kind of sanctions should be applied in these cases, the overall message Robert wanted to get across was that with responsibilities to fulfill [to the BLT] and consequences if these were not met, "that would prompt more involvement and more of a special feeling to be on a LC." Anne wanted to somehow "hold people responsible for their commitment to the BLT."

Here again, a sense of structure, order, and "justice" in the involvement of students within the teams came to light, mirroring the developmental stage of many college students.

This line of thinking demonstrates Kohlberg's (1971; 1976) fourth stage of moral development, Social System Morality, in which there is a tendency toward authority, fixed rules, and procedures, that apply equally to all people. "Doing what is right" and fulfilling one's obligations is crucial in this stage (Evans et al., 1998). Students in this stage of moral development tend to be loyal to and identify with the people or group involved in this social order (Smith, 1978), as evidenced here by Anne and Robert's feelings, and their wish for others to share their "loyalty."

Other students were frustrated or somewhat disappointed with the lack of planned activities for them. They wished for more "going on" within their BLT. Jose "was expecting more like in the first week to figure out who everyone was and what was going on there." He went on to suggest, "Yeah, like maybe have some sort of set schedule or something and a few things that would happen along the way." Anne added, "Instead of things coming up sporadically." During the recruitment and admissions process prior to coming to ISU, Jose noticed that the learning team was stressed in promotions as "one of their selling points, but then there just wasn't much to back it up," which was disappointing to him. Sasha echoed some of these same sentiments for more planned activities (academic and fun), and sees it "not just something that you're in and do nothing for it. It's like a club . . . it's not a club if you don't do anything."

Comfort and reassurance.

Even with some misgivings about the changing involvement of BLT members, and the lack of planned activities, there was still a comfort level established within the team. Logan's comfort with having this close, shared experience with others he describes as "an overall friendliness in people . . . it's good to see people on campus and be able to recognize

them . . . and it just helps, gives you a little bit of security." Robert also felt this sense of

security "like you're supposed to do it [BLT participation]," and feels without it [the BLT],

he would have self-doubted himself, as there was no one else to do it for him. In sharing

classes with others on his floor, Sasha feels that it "takes some of the stress off of you . . . it's

a little bit of a stress relief or an insurance policy on classes," especially when it comes to

clarifying assignments or getting information from a missed class, but also realizes "Then

again, too, that could be a negative side too. You can take it either way." David agrees, "But

yeah, the BLTs really helped me out because it has given me some 'study buddies' a little bit

to bail me out."

Like majors.

Part two of research question two asks, *How does the grouping of like majors in*

learning teams influence or detract from academic success? Since the BLT is framed as a

setting for freshman business majors who live in Maple Hall, the concepts and connections of

this field of study are the underlying academic link for each of the students. While

technically each of the students is a pre-business major at the University, many of them may

already have an idea of the specific business area (management, accounting, finance, etc.) in

which they are interested, although there are some still struggling with business as their

academic choice.

During the initial focus group I also asked the students to define a residential learning

team in their own words. Many of the participants noted the shared academic major as a key

factor, as well as the elements of living together, resources close at hand, and the support of

each other in reaching a common goal. As Vanessa explained, "They are together to help out

each other and help each other succeed." Perhaps the most interesting definition came from

Sylvia, when she said,

> I would describe a residential learning team as a jungle because we all have really
>
> strong roots. We are all like the trees and they are all deeply rooted and that
>
> really helps out and we are all individualized in a sense as the part of the tree and then
>
> we can also all branch out into different areas, so I think that is really awesome. And
>
> we've got to make that canopy of Iowa State so . . . it's a jungle out there!

(Based on a response such as this, it was important for me to include Sylvia in my personal

interviews as well.) Frank sees a learning team "like a neighborhood . . . you have your

neighbors and you help them through tests and they help you through stuff like that too. It's

just so much more than . . . this school's hard on it I think. There's a lot of social things."

David believes that in meeting a bunch of new friends, "Some of them will become

your lifelong friends. You don't know it right now, but they could turn out to be that."

Sasha sees the people in the BLT as a resource, although he claims that the BLT is not a

study group, which is a common misperception. He also describes the BLT as the "roots of

the tree" to help, but not provide *total* support. Logan echoed much of this sentiment, but

added the terms "group community" and the reliance on "individuals in that community" to

help each other achieve their goal. These students seem to have picked up on the potential

and lasting benefits of the BLT experience (based on these comments), from both a social

and academic viewpoint. Sylvia believes these connections will continue throughout college,

as they will often see each other in required business classes yet to be taken.

Due to their physical proximity and availability to one another in the residence hall,

Jose feels he has benefited from talking with others about their major interests in business

(once they have moved beyond pre-business), giving him ideas about the possibilities, and

more insight into what the majors entail. Sasha believes the different paths within the field of business are like "interstate exits" coming off of the same road. The connections are there, but each "exit" or major has its own nuances. Although there were people resources and business-related information available on their floor, Frank wished for even more connections to students in majors other than business, but he admits that is a reflection of his own uncertainty with business as his major. In Frank's case in particular, this uncertainty is a reflection of his struggle in developing purpose, Chickering's sixth vector. While Frank has been able to develop strong interpersonal connections via this business LC experience, he is trying to come to grips with his vocational identity, which may not be in business.

One of the underlying goals of the College of Business' BLTs is to help students connect to the College and/or the business major. In asking the students interviewed personally just how or if that had happened for them (see Appendix J), a variety of views came to light. Both Logan and Sasha felt a connection to the processes of the College and the majors via the topics and instruction in their BusAd 101 class, and felt that gave them a good overall understanding in that respect. In Sasha's words, "gotta have that class," as it "made it easy to know things," and helped to strengthen the relationship with his advisor, me (who also taught the class). The connections to the College per se were not as strong, but occurred in small ways (e.g., College emails, updates, etc.). Sylvia believes the College connection happens "automatically" because of the things set up for you (e.g., BLT, structures). Both Anne and Sasha feel there is not much connection with the business major, as they are taking general classes to start with, and not courses specifically related to business, as well as classes that are located "all over campus." Sasha also mentioned specifically the "College" concept at ISU, and feels it is "confusing."

Adjustment (Research Question Three)

Upon their entry into higher education, and once the basic housing and comfort needs were fulfilled, students seemed to turn quickly to their next priority, as nearly as important a factor—connecting with others. Research question number three asks *How is adjustment to the University enhanced or accomplished through participation in residential learning teams?* To get to this research question's focus, in the exit focus group I specifically asked the students, "You all self-selected (chose) to be in the Maple BLT for various reasons. Was it [the BLT] important to your overall adjustment and success (assuming that's happened), or would you have done that anyway because of the students/personalities you are?" (see Appendix I). As discussed earlier in the literature review by Astin (1993a) and Tinto (1995), and reiterated by Upcraft, et al. (1984), "What determines whether or not entering students adapt to their new environment? There are several factors, but undoubtedly the most important is the influence of students on one another. The scope of this influence is enormous" (p. 10). Upcraft et al. (1984) go on to say, "Many institutions help these students find each other because they know the importance of peer group influence" (p. 11).

Meeting people/making friends.

According to Gabelnick, et al., (1990), "For freshman in large institutions . . . an immediate circle of friends is seen as a crucial element of the learning community experience" (p. 67). Students in the BLT picked up on this built-in opportunity almost instantly, as shared by David: "I thought [the BLT] would be a good way to meet new people. I mean, heck, I'm on first floor and I know a whole bunch of people. When we were moving in, we got to say, 'Hey, are you on a business learning team?'" He also admitted that "it [the BLT] just introduced us to college relationships and gave us people to hang out

with." For students considering living in a residential LC, Sasha claims, "I would address them that this would be a good thing to help with the transition to college." He went on to say,

> Pretty much just the friendships that grow really quickly, just from being involved with the same morals and the same ideas and the same perspectives for what your goals are for your future. You all have the same ideas so it makes easy friendships and you can talk to people a lot easier. It makes freshman year really easy.

Sasha also equated this experience with the "high school" perspective of shared experiences and classes, something that is very familiar and comfortable to new freshman students. When Sylvia was considering joining the BLT, her mom's advice was to "do everything you can," and "take advantage of all opportunities." Since she had already done so much throughout her high school years (trips, special awards, events, etc.) being in a BLT just seemed "right" for her.

Robert echoed some of these same sentiments when he shared that "It [being in a BLT] also helped with my confidence because I wasn't having to worry about the other kids, I was just like, okay, we're all in this together, so [I] don't have to worry about anything." He also believed that the BLT gave him a sense of being in something not everyone else was in, which helped him to "get 'in' quicker." Anne confessed that she usually has more guy friends than girl friends, but when she chose and moved into the BLT, figured, "since I knew we would be spending a lot of time together I really truly made an effort to get along with the girls and everything." These two students in particular seemed to realize early on that they were a part of "something," and took steps to put effort into the experience from the start.

Although Anne also admitted that even without the team, she "could have done it on my own, too, it just would've taken longer to adjust."

Roommates Sara and Vanessa both felt that membership in the BLT was a tool that forced and pushed (their words) them to come out and meet more people than they would normally be comfortable doing on their own. Self-described as shy, Vanessa admitted "that [the BLT] was important for the adjustment" in this way. They both view this personal growth effort as a positive benefit or outcome of their BLT experience. Anne shared in this growth effort as well, and noted that the overarching benefit of her BLT experience "was being able to make friends with the other girls on my floor. I'm not a very friendly person to like other girls usually. I mean, that's helped me a lot to be able to go hang out with the other girls on our floor." She also believes that "it [the BLT] has helped me socially, academically . . . and it was overall a good experience for me." This is quite a notable accomplishment for a student who decided a few days into the semester that she was not going to return for spring semester!

Peer connections/common ground.

Because the students share business as a connecting link in the BLT, they perceive a commonality of the students involved in the team with them, which is what seems to bring them together early on, addressing this initial need for peer connections. Robert thought, "whereas if I wasn't on a LC, I wouldn't know for sure . . . I would end up knowing [people] eventually, but the first couple of days or the first week or so. The BLT will at least connect you with at least one person who can help you with what's going on." David was glad for this early connection with others via the BLT, particularly in the first couple of weeks when "the only person you really know is your roommate." Jose's experience was a bit different,

as he "was looking for it [the BLT] to be like a big help adjusting . . . it didn't play such a part as I had planned, but that also had to do with the makeup of the group. Just personalities . . . so that just plays a part in itself about who you meet up with and who wants to do things." Sylvia also believed that the BLT helps to realize the different personalities and styles of the members, making it easier to find people to work with—more of a reason to get together. Anne's view was that "you take the first two months to get to know the people on your learning team and you find people that study the same way you do and then you break off into smaller groups and form your own study teams." Anne also thought that if there was more interaction between the men's and women's teams, "Then there would be the ability of . . . you would have a chance of finding more people that study the same style that you do."

Roommates as teammates.

For those three pairs of BLT members who are roommates (and participants in the study), sharing classes together just adds to their connection, as noted by Sara, "Yeah, a roommate being in a lot of similar classes really helps . . . ." For Sasha, whose roommate was also on the team (but not a participant in this study), it was a disappointment to him that his roommate was not invested or involved in the team, due to his parents' "putting him" in the BLT. Sasha's view is that "He has other things in mind . . . other than school . . . what he wants to get out of his college education is way different that what I do, so that's kind of disappointing for me." Logan admitted that his transition was a bit easier since Frank (his roommate) was in the BLT too. Robert was somewhat disappointed that his roommate was not a BLT member, as "I would rather have a roommate that is in my grade, in my situation in some of my classes." David and Jose shared the same feelings, but Jose also realized "I can always go somewhere else, but I have to bang on someone else's door to get an answer

instead of just finding out . . . . "

BLT influences.

When asked if they would choose to be in a BLT if they could do first semester over again, overwhelmingly, without hesitation, the participants said "yes." Sara felt that "it made the whole college experience not so overwhelming at first and helped me adjust to everything." Logan believes there's no good reason not to be in a BLT because "all it does is lay out in front of you different ways to accomplish what you need to do. Whether it is meet people socially or complete stuff academically. It's just an overall positive thing." Sasha is convinced that he "would definitely do it all over again because, I mean, everyone has a fear of college and don't know what to expect and don't know who they're going to meet. This just makes it easier . . . ." He also claims he was "proud to be in one [a BLT]," as he felt a part of something, the same feelings that Robert shared. Erica feels "It's been a really positive experience and you get to know . . . even girls and guys above and below me, different floors, and different dorms too. You can just branch out and meet new people that way." Sylvia wished the BLT included all her classes, as now, finding people to connect with just happened at random.

Sara felt that it was important for everyone to have the chance to be in a LC, "so that your LC can help you get started off good right away the first semester and then if you feel that you don't need it anymore, you could always drop it. And, it should be the student's choice and not their parents because their parents don't have any control over what they do once they get here . . . ." This concept of student's choice vs. parents "placement" or influence was a notion addressed by more than one participant, and alluded to a resentment and disappointment of those whose participation in the BLT was lacking, due to it not being

"their choice" to join. The students who noted this element of choice may be exercising their newly-earned independence and freedom from their parents, making decisions such as joining the BLT as part of that process (Widick et al., 1978b). Students were very vocal about providing the opportunity to be in a LC to all students, but also realize it is not for everyone either. Erica believes that "Group learning isn't for everyone, you know. Some people can't study in groups or whatever, but if they can't, I don't know that the learning team is really appropriate for them to be on to begin with."

Even though the BLT students realized the potential for their shared experience, they did not sense a focus on LCs throughout campus. Anne, Robert, and Logan believe there is a strong sense of LC focus in Maple specifically, for as Anne says, "because no matter what floor you go on there's always members of a LC on that floor . . . it's just like they have LCs on every floor." Anne also feels LCs are important for the participating Colleges, and is somewhat of an "elite" thing too. Frank also believes it may be hard to tell the focus of LCs on campus as "I guess there's no real way to recognize someone you know as being in one [a LC]." Sasha reported lots of positive comments from others when he talked about being in a BLT. He claimed many described it as "cool" or commented "I thought about that." in his conversations with them, so he did not view people seeing him as "different" because of his LC participation. Because "sometimes I forget and think that all students are on it [LCs]," Sylvia also sees no difference in how she is perceived. She does not see the same kind of separation for LC/non-LC participation as she does for the residence hall/Greek populations on campus, which is a fairly visible division (to the students).

Social vs. Academic Realm (Research Question Four)

While the students noted many social and academic elements of their BLT experience

throughout the discussions, part of this study's purpose was to find out how the students view the BLTs—are they academic or social? During the exit focus groups, I asked the students this question specifically, which elicited the responses for the essence of both parts of research question four: *What elements of the learning team structure have more of an influence on the social vs. academic realm of student success? Which realm is more beneficial to overall student success?*

BLT focus.

In specifically addressing part two of this research question, *Which realm [social or academic] is more beneficial to overall student success?* one focus group was evenly split on the "mix" between the two: two believed it was social first, then academic; two saw their experience as equally social and academic; and the other two viewed it as academic, then social. As Sasha said, "it starts out to get you thinking academically of what you should be doing . . . but the bigger benefit is the social interaction with the other people on the floor. Academic being the basis of what it's for and you gain the social from it." Vanessa agreed with him, and then noted the change and growth (independence) that was fostered as the semester went on, "socially, you start organizing your own stuff, you don't need that older person [peer mentor] as much anymore." Sara and Logan shared the social, then academic view, and Logan characterized the experience this way: "Doing it together as a group and that just adds to the whole social aspect too. I think they kind of intertwine and feed off each other." Sara also believed that students "branch off" with those students with whom they had made good connections, and tended to study more with them. Frank shared much of Sara's viewpoint on branching off, as did Jose, although he felt "it started out equal and then the academic kind of goes away . . . ." Sylvia viewed the BLT as a way for the people within it

to bond, whether or not they became friends, but saw academics as the biggest benefit, just by the nature of the BLT set-up (with the shared classes and access to each other for questions). Logan agreed with her take on the overall benefit, "because that's the focus" [of the BLT]. Sylvia also admitted she could have made the academic aspect more of an asset to herself as well, but was "still trying to figure out college life."

All the participants in the second focus group viewed the BLT experience as an equal mix of both the social and academic realms. Anne sees them as equal, with the social addressed via the living connection and the academic connections coming from the shared major and classes. She also believes that "group learning isn't for everyone, you know," which may indicate that she leans a bit more toward the academic view of BLTs. David sums it up this way, " . . . the academic and social aspects actually intertwine because you can actually do academics and hang out at the same time . . . just in front of your math book or something." Perhaps the most introspective description came from Robert.

> It was a *social accelerant.* We started not knowing anybody here and we were in
>
> this common thing and we pretty much had no choice but to talk to each other and
>
> get to know each other and then we started going into academics. After the
>
> novelty of being in a BLT wore off, we were still . . . we ended up knowing each
>
> other, we just got to know each other quicker and then from there, it's more . . . it
>
> turned out to be more academic. I think the social part of this actually wore
>
> off. . . . We're not talking to each other just because we're on a BLT, we all know
>
> each other now, we're all friends, it has nothing to do with the BLT anymore. I
>
> think it was just a social accelerant, then academics . . . the BLT helped us get
>
> quicker into both studying and making friends.

Students also realized that their social connections can disrupt their academic focus, as explained by Erica: "if you get too many people together we don't always study, we just start a chat fest and it's hard to stay on topic." As for the students viewing the social and academic realms in different combinations, they agreed this was an outgrowth of their personal needs, preferences, and personalities. When asked if these two elements could be separated out of the learning team, or if they almost have to go together, Frank replied, "Social and academic? I guess it's pretty hard to study with someone you don't like." Touché.

Structural elements.

Part one of Research Question Four asks, *What elements of the learning team structure have more of an influence on the social vs. academic realm of student success?* The topic of structure provided lots of discussion and addressed the three following areas: connections to faculty, physical building structure, and environmental team structure. Again, the residence facility instigated the most conversation.

Connections to faculty. Another element of academic interaction that was targeted in focus group discussion and personal interviews was that of the influence of and connection to faculty members. The literature links LCs and connections to faculty as one of many benefits of LC participation (Astin, 1993b; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Kuh, Schuh, and Whitt, 1991; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Levine et al., 1999; Matthews et al., 1997; Tinto, 1993; Tinto et al., 1993), but in this group of students, most of the participants felt that was a missing link in their experience, even with two of their BLT courses established as a curricular link. Since he is from a small school (700 students 6-12), Logan was surprised to find that faculty were "willing to help" at an institution of this size, and that he did not get the feeling he was "just

a number," although he also did not feel he knew his instructors. Logan also believes "that when you don't connect with your teacher, your peers help cover the issues at hand and basically cover what the teacher lacks in certain subjects." Again, there was a realization here that the peer group was crucial in support and assistance in academics, and together they could take care of themselves. The BLTs had the same instructor for their English and also math classes, and many of the students mentioned the struggles and frustrations they had in adjusting to the math instructor's teaching approach and style. (Much of an "after-focus group" discussion was centered on this topic, and ideas for addressing their concerns.) They were very glad to have each other to lean on in this class in particular, and as Sasha mentioned, "the BLT is there when you need it."

Sylvia set out to meet all her instructors the first week, but felt it did not have a huge impact for her, although she mentioned connecting with three instructors in particular—one classroom instructor (journalism), her dance teacher, and me, her BusAd instructor. She "kind of likes" the anonymity a bit, since she was always being highlighted throughout high school via the activities, events, and programs in which she was involved. (Sylvia has not lessened her involvement in college, as she was selected president of Freshman Council and has joined a sorority, to name just a few of her many activities.) She believes "being in a BLT is not a factor" in connecting with faculty, and even thinks "being part of something [BLTs] could be a bias though too, if faculty were more aware [of the BLT presence in their classes]."

Three of the students did have the opportunity to interact a bit more closely and personally with some of their instructors, and they were rewarded with good experiences and positive interactions that were in some ways surprising to them. Robert believes "Most of

the faculty members are warm. They treat us like, not like we're students, like we're young adults. It's more friendly. It's like we're almost closer to peers than we were in high school and they treat us like so." He went on to say, "it's still pretty weird to think about the relationships are different from college to high school. They're more impersonal, but they're more personal at the same time." David, who is from Ames, made a conscious effort to "get to know my professors better," and found he was connected to more than one of his instructors either by (his parents) living in the same neighborhood in town, or by going to high school with their kids. His experience with faculty "wasn't too surprising because I'm a pretty outgoing person. If they didn't want to talk to me, I was going to talk to them. They had no choice!" Erica was the most surprised by the fact that her English (one of the linked BLT courses) teacher chatted with her after their one-on-one conference (a built-in course expectation) one day. Erica was talking about changing majors, and her teacher mentioned that her sister-in-law was in the field Erica was considering, "so she [the teacher] gave me her sister-in-law's email address so I could email her and find out more about that job . . . and see if I want to go into that for sure. That was pretty cool and surprising." Perhaps these positive interactions will open the door for other connections to occur with faculty in the future, as these three students have found faculty to be "real people who are accessible and interested in them beyond the classroom" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 41). This environmental influence as noted by Chickering and Reisser (1993) can have a powerful impact on student development.

Physical building structure. Structure remains an important element of the BLT experience, both the physical structure of the building and its facilities as well as the structure of the environment within the team itself. One of the most commonly mentioned building

attributes that students equated with academic support or perhaps success was the availability of study spaces and classrooms within Maple Hall. Even out of the ordinary spaces are conducive to study, as Robert describes; "if you get desperate, even the showers are individual, so you can always go and shower and take a steam bath while you read your math book." The rules, building policies, and even increased cost help to make Maple more conducive to study, and as Sara explained, "There's always a place where you can get away from distractions." Sasha believes,

> It [the atmosphere in Maple] adds to one of the foundations of the community itself and getting the point across of what we are there for and that's to study so it's one of the better places to go instead of having to meet at the library for a place to study, you can just walk out of your room or walk downstairs to the nice commons area . . . it makes studying a lot nicer.

Having the small lounge/kitchenette on each floor, as well as the computer lab are intentional efforts by the Department of Residence to infuse personal as well as academic spaces into buildings like Maple and new residence buildings to come. Logan believes that Maple is seen as an "academic building," which is a stereotype, but "you make it live up to that," which he views as a good thing. Maple also has a large meeting room and classroom on the ground floor, to which all residents have access with their proximity cards. (We met in the classroom for the focus groups in this study.) Jose feels, "The classrooms are like an added bonus; it makes it a lot easier for everyone to get together . . . ." Also within this residence complex (which includes Larch and Willow Halls), the buildings are connected by a commons area. This area includes additional conference rooms and two computer labs, one in which the BLT First-Year Composition class was held.

The students were so connected with the availability of the study spaces in Maple, that when the discussion centered around placing LCs in other places on campus (specifically those that did not require an additional building cost), David said, "Yeah, if they've got space like that, then yeah, throw a couple of learning teams in there." Logan sees his friends in the Towers residence halls as separated from campus, and feels "if that happens, students lose focus and 'drive' for that [academics]. It goes hand-in-hand." This perception from Logan agrees with Pascarella et al., (1994), who believe "the central theme [of living learning centers] appears to be one of bringing about a closer integration of the student's living environment with his or her academic or learning environment" (p. 32).

Another topic that came up in the discussion of Maple and its attributes was that of the "character" and "feel" of the building. Frank sees a "sameness" of the rooms, where "No matter what room you're in in Maple, it still looks like your room only different posters on the wall and stuff like that." Jose mentioned the character, as "our doors are hardly open it seems like. Not everyone just leaves their door open so you can stop in and say hi or something. I'd like that . . . it's kind of quiet in that sense." This discussion went on to explain to me that the doors are heavy and made to close themselves, so have to be propped open with door stops, or the hinge screws physically taken out in order to remain open. Although a somewhat minor point, it does speak very clearly to the message and "feel" of a residence floor and building, when the interaction among residents is made to be more formal (i.e. having to knock on a door to say "hi" or stop by). The students sensed this difference from other residences or their view of residence hall character in general.

Environmental team structure. As discussed previously, students wished for more structure and organization in terms of set meetings and consistent activities within their

BLTs, especially at the beginning of the semester. Sylvia admitted, "The biggest thing for me at first was I don't think I was really aware of what was going on. I think prior to this . . . and still today, I don't think we are really aware of how we can use it [the BLT] to our advantage." The students just seemed to be not totally clear on what was to happen within a BLT, but as Vanessa stated, "it's still early, we can still get into our pattern." As echoed by Sara, "I feel that maybe we haven't made use of our opportunities yet." Although these thoughts and comments in particular were shared in the first focus groups, held late in September, similar comments were made later in the semester as well, again lamenting the lack of organized activities within the BLT. Logan shared, "it seemed like it was a real well constructed thing that was aimed at a goal" but later found it was not. In the students' eyes, it seemed as if the BLT lost focus from its original "billing," as Sasha explained, "just a loss of contact and stuff."

Even with some misgivings about the way the BLT functioned, and their understanding of that function, overall, the students agreed that the BLT itself helped them focus on academics, mostly because of their connections with one another as teammates, and the easy access afforded them by living together.

Peer Mentors (Research Question Five)

Shapiro and Levine (1999) indicate that "Peer leadership is an excellent way to connect freshman with upper-division students" (p. 30). Although the intent of the BLT set-up is to have a live-in peer mentor on the same floor with the group, there was difficulty in assigning a male to the Maple BLT in the fall of 2001. A former Maple BLT student agreed to serve as the men's peer mentor (Felipe), but he lived off-campus in an apartment. Obviously, this situation was not ideal, from the students' perspective and from the College

of Business' intent, but this was the reality of the situation. The women, on the other hand, had the benefit of a live-in peer mentor (Bailey), who was also a sophomore and former Maple BLT member.

Peer mentor influence.

Research Question Five aimed at finding *What kind of influence do peer mentors have on the residential BLT experience?* For those students interviewed personally, I asked them to "Describe your peer mentor's role or impact on you and the BLT." (see Appendix J). In the focus groups, most of the comments that addressed the peer mentor's role and influence came from questions that asked about benefits or detriments, positives or negatives that the students experienced within their team (see Appendix I). One question asked, "Describe the biggest hurdles, disappointments, or concerns you have with your Maple BLT experience to date." (see Appendix H). Some of the early comments, from the women in particular, praised the assistance their peer mentor gave in helping to set up study groups and sessions. Even with this praise and valued assistance, the women in the BLT still had a bit of role confusion regarding their peer mentor. As stated by Sylvia,

> I had more understanding, I thought that our coordinator, Bailey, or
>
> whatever, that they were actually going to have more, like they, you know, they
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> had gone through it, so I thought they were going to be helping us, but she is more
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> of a facilitator, which is fine, because she gets things going. As far as her job is
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> concerned, she is doing a great job, but I just thought there was going to be more
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> interaction from her and more of like a tutoring type of thing, I guess.

Missing element. As these same kinds of sentiments were mentioned throughout the focus group discussions, and came up numerous times, it was evident the men truly felt at a

disadvantage without a live-in peer mentor in their midst. Sasha declared that "not having that person there is a big disadvantage, but then again, there are people all around, so that makes up for it." Robert agreed, and also added, "I think we still get along . . . some of the students really know what they're doing and they can help us along." Even though the men seemed to take it upon themselves to lean on each other and make the most of their BLT experience, Frank realized "the ideal situation would have been if he [their peer mentor] lived on our floor with all the members of our learning team so he could have helped us out if we got stuck on something . . . ." David agreed, but then looked to his CA to help fill this role a bit, and believed he "has been doing a decent job actually."

Even though it [the lack of formal structure in the BLTs] was a different idea at first, and took a while for the students to "get" (Sylvia's word), the BLT members realized pretty early on that they could rely on themselves and others when they lacked involvement or direction from a peer mentor, even though they still felt a bit lost. Logan explained it this way, "it's kind of like the blind leading the blind, because we're all freshmen here and we try to point each other in the right way, but none of us know where we're supposed to be going . . . ." He went on to wish that the BLT had better connections with upperclass students, "someone who's already been through it and knows all the answers . . . somebody above me a grade or two that could give me a little heads up." Frank claims, "I just think it's really important to have a leader [peer mentor] because the teams are doing much better that have some kind of leader." (This was his observation or perception of the other LCs housed within Maple Hall.)

Once the BLT women fully realized the men's situation, they were in complete agreement with this "disadvantage," as summarized by Sylvia, "I think it [peer mentor living

and involvement] should be . . . maybe not living on the same floor that we have, but in the same building, because that's who we should be able to go to because I just walk down the hall and ask . . . whereas yours isn't convenient." Anne asked later if it was okay to have the women's peer mentor help organize study groups and activities for the men too, which of course, it was. But in reality, the BLT women ended up including the men on their own, without the "leadership" of their peer mentor, taking on more of a supportive "team" role. In viewing the set-up of the BLTs, Sylvia realized "we are the group and have control, it's not all on the peer mentor." This message seemed to resonate throughout both teams.

The men also continued to act as a true "team" throughout the semester, without the formal leadership of a peer mentor, and as noted by Robert, when he stated he had only seen his peer mentor three times during the semester: "That's negative, but the positive is that we do have involvement. We do get together and study for stuff." Logan believes the BLT is "basically peer teachers," as all of them put in their fair share. David also claimed, "I don't know, I think it's partially our fault because we really didn't try to do that much with our group. In a sense we've got little groups inside this big group." Even with this "missing element" within their team, many of the men admitted that they "know" their peer mentor (Felipe) is there, as he does continue to make periodic contact with them (mostly via email). Logan admitted, "We could call him, but we don't." Many of the women shared this same sense, and felt good "knowing" that Bailey [their peer mentor] was there, even if they did not "need" her at a particular moment. It is interesting to note that while the students felt so "alone" (perhaps mostly at first), they did not take steps to reach out to their peer mentors, even though they admitted they knew they could (and should) do so. This most likely demonstrates a lingering connection to their entering developmental stage of "needing"

others to guide and direct them specifically.

Structure is wanted. As mentioned in earlier sections, these students, both male and female, seemed to crave structure within their BLTs, and saw the role of the peer mentor as the main person to help construct that within their teams. Vanessa expected to "meet more and have some more little meetings, like some have house meetings . . . maybe just meeting maybe 10 minutes a week or something. Just to see what is going on." Jose mentioned this desire often in these discussions, and viewed the biggest hurdle in his BLT experience early on as "just getting people together." He also had expectations of how the BLT would operate, "to at least meet by three weeks in, that there would be more going on. At least they [the BLTs] would be established and ready to go."

Later on, Jose said, "one thing I would change [about his BLT experience] . . . I would try to lean on my learning team instructor's [peer mentor's] back a little more about some stuff. Just try to keep something going whether it's just going out to eat maybe another time or just getting the group all together." [Both the men's and women's teams went out to eat at Hickory Park (a local barbecue restaurant) with their peer mentors early in the semester to celebrate finishing their first round of tests (particularly in Math). This gathering had a profound impact on the students, as they often mentioned it in their discussions of team activities (as Jose did above) and wished that experiences like this occurred more often.] While Anne viewed Bailey's efforts as peer mentor as positive, she did suggest that "we could have done something as a BLT as a community service or whatever. There is opportunities to go out and do stuff together to meet Maple requirements." David suggested, "Just have us interact more as a group. I mean get us to do more things together so we can kind of form stronger bonds a little bit." Tapping into her prior experiences in 4-H, Sylvia

suggested the mantra of "set, achieve, assess goal," as she felt working *towards* something [in the BLT] would have been helpful.

While the students had misgivings and disappointments with the lack of formal structure within their teams, and their view of the peer mentors as the vehicle for that structure, they were quick to make positive suggestions and take on some of the responsibility themselves. Jose's craving for a stronger sense of structure within the BLTs led him to inquire about the possibility of becoming the men's live-in peer mentor for the fall semester 2002. He was later chosen for the position, so if his vision and suggestions for the BLTs are realized, there will be a strong framework in place for the new BLT men in Maple Hall this coming fall. Sasha was also chosen to be a live-in peer mentor for the men in the newly constructed UDA Suite Building, a new residential business LC in a different campus housing complex, just beginning this coming fall. His willingness to involve himself in his team and take advantage of its opportunities should serve his new mentees well.

Once again, the "movement" and changing development of these students is evident. In earlier conversations with the student participants, they "lamented" the lack of activities and direction for them. By the end of the semester, they were taking on some of the responsibility within their teams and making constructive suggestions for improvement, along with some, like Jose and Sasha, taking steps to act out on their suggestions by taking on peer mentor roles. In viewing this change within Chickering and Reisser's (1993) developmental framework, intellectual and interpersonal competence were specifically addressed. Intellectual competence "stems from the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully" (p. 53). These students' skills in interpersonal competence improved via "communication, leadership, and working effectively with others"

(Evans et al., 1998, p. 38).

In light of the viewpoints of these students (and from other comments and disappointments shared by other BLT peer mentors in the fall 2001 semester), the lack of formal structure within the residential BLTs was an inherent flaw, beginning with the structure and planning of the BLTs from the College level on down. Latitude and freedom was given quite freely to the BLT peer mentors by the LC coordinators in the College of Business, within a loose framework in which to operate. It is painfully obvious, in light of these conversations and those with other peer mentors, that more structure must be infused into the BLT program from the start, and initiated at the College level.

Staff and faculty mentors.

Another part of the focus group discussion specifically addressed the possible value of a faculty or staff mentor. [By "staff," I was intending to mean College of Business staff (academic advisors primarily), which is the current model.] Logan thought a faculty mentor would be great, as "there's tons of questions I'd have for a professor that I wouldn't have for just a second or third year student . . . I think they can answer more," although he and David agreed that it would depend on the professor—some would relate better than others. Other students thought it would be more intimidating to go to a faculty person than a student, and Erica was convinced that students would not even be interested in BLTs if they knew a faculty person was going to lead them, as they would be in class with the faculty all day then be around them again when they returned to their residences; "It wouldn't be as much fun."

Student staff in Maple (CAs, ARCs) were identified as appropriate mentors, as their closeness in age played a factor. A few of the students felt that age was an important factor in this role, and David mentioned the possibility of a grad student, as "They are closer to our

age." Even though age was important in relating to the students, surprisingly, a couple of the women felt guilty that their peer mentor even "had" to hang around with the team during study sessions, etc. As Erica describes, "she [Bailey] knows what it's all about and she doesn't really know how she can help us. We just kind of do it ourselves . . . I think it would be boring for her to be there and she wouldn't really want to." Sasha and Sara believed a combination of staff and student mentors would provide them with the most benefit, and as Sara stated, "a staff member would be very helpful just because they might be more organized and be able to plan things for you better." Surprisingly, aside from these few comments on staff mentors, there was nearly no discussion on the role of the College of Business staff, nor the direct mention of me serving in this capacity (which I do). This may suggest that their "connections to the College" are not being realized via the BLT. Robert related his vision of the mentor roles in the LC this way:

> . . . this is a business learning team. With a team, there's players and then there's a
> coach and usually the coach is much older, more experienced, and knows
> everything about the aspect that the team is involved in. In a learning community,
> there's nothing like that. A learning community is just a group of people sharing
> common value. I would like both. I would like to have a student person in
> residence and then like . . . half a semester of class . . . a learning community class. I
> know a lot of people probably wouldn't like that, but I think I would, because I
> wouldn't have a choice but to be involved with the learning team.

Again, the concept of structure and order coming from the mentor seems to play a role here. Most likely this line of thinking relates to the developmental stage of these first semester students, in which they seem to cling to the sense of order and "direction from

others" with which they are most familiar, much like that in their homes and high schools. This is also another example of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector three, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, as the students are coming to "recognize and accept the importance of interdependence, an awareness of their interconnectedness with others" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 39).

Leadership styles.

Another topic that came to light along the way was that of the leadership styles of those "guiding" these BLT students. In a line of discussion mentioned earlier, Frank, Logan, and Sasha lamented the *way* that the rules in Maple were being enforced by their CA and ARC, and the approach these men took in relaying the rules to them. In relating that situation to the role of an older student leader, Logan thinks,

> It has to be more of a prior participant type of leadership instead of directing, because that's kind of what's going on. You expect your RA's (or whatever they are called), to be on your level so that you can relate to them and interact with them too. Like when they think they are above you and play the role of tough guy, it just doesn't work.

He went on to wish that his floor leaders were more positive and "cool with us . . . more like a friend than like, 'What are you guys doing?' and this and that."

While the desire for structure, order, and guidance from someone older than these BLT students is evident, there is also a fine line that should not be crossed. Chickering (1969) believes in the challenge/response pattern, and sees development following "when students pursue tasks through which changes occur" (p. 144). In looking at this situation from the viewpoint of Sanford's challenges and supports, the balance between the two seems

to have tipped to too much support in this particular case, which has the effect of stifling

student development (Sanford, 1966).

Peer Mentor Insights

Both Felipe and Bailey provided "their side of the story," in relation to the efforts

they put forth in guiding and mentoring their respective teams. In personal interviews with

them late in the spring semester 2002 (see questions, Appendix M), when their "official"

responsibilities were about to end, there was a general sense of accomplishment shared by

both of them, in respect to their own wishes for their performance as peer mentors.

Sense of Accomplishment

Felipe believed he came "pretty close" to being the kind of peer mentor he wanted to

be, although he wished he would have done more for his team in respect to studying. He

admits he "left it up to them," as he "didn't want to force that [specific study times, etc.] on

them." This, he admitted, is a reflection of his own personal learning style, in which he tends

to be a "sole worker." Felipe is an exceptional student, and is hesitant to give up the security

and confidence he has in his own academic abilities, in order to function within a study group

(as he admitted he did in his own lack of participation in his BLTs activities the year before).

In turn, this style led him to leave the academics to the team members themselves, which as

the students admitted earlier, ended up being a benefit to them, as they had to learn to rely on

one another, even if they were not really ready or expecting to do so.

Inadvertently, the BLT men may have been provided a greater challenge and

therefore, opportunity for development, with the absence of Felipe living on their floor.

While he was "there" for them and did provide support to them, the men were pushed to find

ways to develop their instrumental independence (including self-direction and problem-

solving ability), modeling in many ways an interdependence and interconnectedness with each other (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Felipe is already at this stage, and perhaps without knowing, "mentored" his team to follow, via the non-intrusive style he described above.

Bailey felt she accomplished a lot that she set out to do, although she wished for more "team" things together, if even as simple as going to dining service to eat as a group. She felt her role as a friend to the women on her team was very evident, as "lots of unplanned stuff came up," such as one of the women stopping by frequently to ask if she would like to go work out with her. Bailey's biggest disappointment in her role as peer mentor was the lack of continued interaction and activity with her team members in the spring semester, even though she realized the formal structure of the team was for fall semester only.

Motivation to Mentor

Both peer mentors were asked to serve in this role—Felipe by me (as LC Coordinator), when the men's residential peer mentor position remained open into the summer of 2001, and Bailey by her residential BLT peer mentor near the end of the 2000-2001 school year. Bailey originally wanted to have an ARC position within Maple, but was very excited to be asked to serve in this capacity, and seeing similarities between the two positions, decided to take on this role. Some of her personal goals for this opportunity were to become more involved on her floor, do a better job than her peer mentor did, and meet other women on the floor. Most of these same goals motivated Felipe, and he also believed that the BLTs were a good program, so he became involved as well, even though he knew there would be some special challenges without him "living in" with his team.

This shared motivation to "improve on their peer mentor's performance" is a common reason given by many of the BLT peer mentors, and is why they take on these roles. Felipe

shared this feeling, although he praised his own peer mentor from the 2000-2001 academic year. Felipe admitted "It's [peer mentoring] harder than it sounds." He went on to describe the challenges of getting people within his team to participate in activities and events (a common frustration among nearly all BLT peer mentors), but also claimed he had a good group (10 of his 13 team members) that actively participated in the fall semester.

Bailey wanted to be "more" for her team members than her own peer mentor was the year before, and she knew she had to put forth more effort in order to do that. Her first goal was to start the year off differently, and began in summer 2001 by sending her team notes including her contact information; putting information on their residence doors prior to their arrival; and meeting with them after their first floor meeting, providing them with a detailed contact information sheet for all team members and the chance for personal introductions so all women could recognize and easily contact their teammates. Bailey believes this immediate contact was crucial in establishing a working relationship and friendship with her team members. She "liked how it [the year] started off with my team."

When asked if they would "re-do" this experience, or do anything differently, both Bailey and Felipe said they would make additional efforts to reach out even more. Felipe would try to have his team connect to other teams (not just the women's team in Maple), and Bailey specifically to those women on her team who lived on the other side of her hall, whom she did not see quite as often. Both mentors felt they had positive experiences, and Bailey will serve as peer mentor again next year, but this time for a non-residential BLT, as she will be living off campus in an apartment. Felipe also offered to assist again, but will not be assigned, due to the number of offers for assistance and the limited number of spaces available for mentors.

Influence on Team

Research Question Five aimed at finding *What kind of influence do peer mentors have on the residential BLT experience?* focusing on their role within and impact on their teams. One of the questions asked of the peer mentors during their interviews was "Describe your role within the team." (see Appendix M). With the challenge of not living with his team (which he, too, agreed would have been a better situation), Felipe saw his role as one of facilitator and contact person, and kept in touch with his team often via email. He also made residence door signs, answered questions about registration, and held a group session to work on the BusAd 101 take-home exam. Bailey saw her role as "there all the time for them . . . they know they can come in anytime." Some one to ask questions of when needed, Bailey gave her team "advice on school-related stuff (nothing personal—they did that with each other)," set up study group times ("a lot for math, especially"), helped them figure out their schedules for spring, and gave her insight on teachers and courses she had taken. She felt she was "more like a friend than a peer mentor," and living with them helped foster that role.

When asked, "What kind of impact have you had on your students/team?" (see Appendix M) Felipe stated, "hopefully a good example," in showing his involvement throughout campus, his knowledge of how the College of Business works, and his willingness to be accessible and help them out. He understood their turmoil of experiencing a "not great" math professor (as he had him for math too) and had experience working with other instructors they will be having, which he believed "came in handy." The women "always said 'thank you', a lot" to Bailey, which she interpreted as an appreciation of her efforts for the team. Some of the women asked about future shared scheduling possibilities, one went on to become the residential peer mentor for fall 2002, and they seemed to meet a

lot and study with the men's team too. Bailey feels "they seemed to get interested in the BLT (but not necessarily because of me)." She often sent quick email reminders about events and programs coming up (e.g. College of Business Career Day), and felt that "they liked knowing someone was watching out for them and caring about them."

Shared Experiences

One of the interview questions asked the peer mentors how they would describe their teams' overall BLT experience, after watching their teams evolve throughout the year. Bailey saw a real correlation between those students who took advantage of the opportunity, and their satisfaction with the experience. She felt "it was good for those who stuck with it," highlighting again the idea of personal involvement as important in realizing the benefits of a LC. She went on to say that some students truly benefited from the BLT, "especially just knowing others shared the same experience as they did." This shared experience seems to have been important to Bailey and Felipe as well, as they both mentioned their residential BLT days as freshman, and how that led to their connections with others. It was reassuring to Bailey to know that there were others having troubles in class too, and having similar problems their first year. She also gained a sense that there was "someone to turn to," whether it was her peer mentor, the advisors in the College of Business, or her teammates.

Finding a network of people to lean on was also important to Felipe, and he still sees many of his BLT cohorts [from other teams] in his classes. He felt his experience in meeting and living with people in the BLT helped him prepare [to mentor] his team this year. This "network" of people in the BLT was so important to Bailey, she admits that she was "kind of 'thrown' into business" as a freshman, but "didn't want to get out because of the security with the team." Even though she admits she is not sure business is the most appropriate

choice for her, she "didn't explore other majors," but has not had a bad experience anywhere.
She believes "learning teams can only help and motivate you to do stuff."

In this sense Bailey and Felipe are describing their experiences in Chickering &
Reisser's (1993) fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships. The
relationships they were able to form via their own BLT membership, and now the
connections with their BLT mentees, have helped them to form their own sense of self.

Efforts as a Mentor

Felipe was frustrated with his impact on academic learning for his team, and his
ability to influence that. He wished for more ways to organize or the ability to create interest
in study groups for his team members. He admitted that "even as an 'A' student, I didn't feel
I had advice to give them." As he realizes, personality differences can make team
involvement difficult, and he thinks opportunities for organized academic assistance
(Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, etc.) "may entice them [the BLT members] more than a
peer mentor." Felipe tried to let his team know he was available for them, and "encourage
good academics," but not force it on them.

Bailey also wished for ways to try to help enforce team members' involvement,
although she realizes that is hard to do. (Robert and Anne's comments presented earlier in
this chapter would agree wholeheartedly!) She felt it was very helpful for her to attend the
Department of Residence's peer mentor training, shortly before classes began in fall 2001.
She would recommend that all peer mentors attend this training, as it helped her to be more
aware of involvement and leadership issues that came up within her team. The added
structure of "organized" BLT events in spring semester 2002 (that evolved from early
discussions with this study's participants and other peer mentors) were helpful in Bailey's

view as well.

Advice for Others

I asked both peer mentors what advice they would give to students considering becoming a BLT member. Both Bailey and Felipe agreed that it was important for students to "take advantage of the opportunities" in a BLT and not pass it up. Sticking with it and putting in a commitment to participate is also important, along with the chance to meet others, make contacts, and use the resources here for you. Bailey would also tell students "It's okay to reach out now, as others don't always reach out for you. Tell someone if you have ideas and want to express feelings about it. Don't just say what others want you to say." Felipe also believes the BLT is "a good tool to transition and get to know others."

As for advice Bailey would give to potential peer mentors, she first recommends "Be excited about it—if you're not, they [the BLT members] won't be." She went on to say, "The effort you give will be returned (give or take), but be willing to sacrifice. Have fun with it. It's not meant to stress you." Another piece of "operational" advice was to "make contact [with your team] immediately, don't wait for the first [College-wide] event." Felipe recommends that peer mentors work with other peer mentors, much like he and Bailey did. This approach helps provide another avenue for networking, and a better opportunity for generating ideas. Combining BLT teams in this way makes for a bigger group, and Felipe believes then it is "easier to find people with your personality," plus "it's not the same people they see everyday."

Here again, the emphasis on connecting with others and reaching out to form valuable interconnected networks of students is key. Bailey and Felipe believe that connections with others have helped them to perform better as peer mentors, and also provided them with a

useful tool in navigating their own collegiate experience.

Effect on Learning

With the term *learning* as a part of its name, the BLT experience should be assumed

to have some effect on the students' learning (in a broad sense), even though that was not the

primary focus of this research inquiry, nor the major intent of the BLTs overall (see

Appendix C and D for BLT philosophy and goals and objectives). I was able to talk with

both the student participants and peer mentors late in the school year (near the end of spring

semester 2002) regarding their take on how the BLT affected their overall learning.

Peer Mentors' View

In describing his team members' learning, Felipe felt he could not monitor their

academic learning since he did not live with them, but did feel their "social learning" was

enhanced greatly. The men were "networking with people in order to be successful," which

Felipe believes is a key to his own successes in college. (He also admits this emphasis on

networking may be a natural outgrowth of his public relations major and interests along with

his marketing and management majors as well.) He felt his own learning was not affected by

his peer mentor experience, although he may have contradicted that declaration with his

admission of this "networking" emphasis! Bailey saw her team members affected by the

nature of the Maple setting itself, as "there's a motivation for academics to improve here."

She saw her women arrange for tutors, go to Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions, and use

her as a resource as well. In regard to her own learning, Bailey believed that listening to

others' techniques helped her as a student, and "opened her mind to new strategies" (e.g.

essay tests). Living in Maple also just helped Bailey to connect and stay connected to others

from her own BLT her freshman year (e.g. her roommate).

Students' View

When asked how the BLT affected their learning, Jose believed that "putting others together in teams helped, as the social led to learning." Logan agreed with Jose, and visualized this as a circle (social—learning). Sara claimed,

> It [the BLT experience] changed my learning by allowing me to talk to other
>
> students with the same major and ask them questions. I believe it improved my
>
> learning because I could ask others questions if I didn't understand something
>
> instead of trying to figure it out myself or just 'staying lost'.

Vanessa felt her learning "was helped by the fact that I was living around mostly business majors." She also leaned on the other upperclass business majors on her floor, and liked the convenience of having these people close by, in case she (or they) had questions to ask. Vanessa admits, "even though I studied on my own most of the time, the study groups did help me review and to make new friends. Overall it was a great learning experience that I would recommend."

It seems these students see these two aspects (social and learning) as causal. Linking them to other people with shared goals within a common setting (the underlying premise of many LCs, and BLTs in particular) does seem to help achieve improved learning, as noted by most of the participants. They seemed to describe learning in a broad sense, and not specifically as an academic measure (as reflected by GPAs), which is more in line with the tangible, underlying elements set out to be discovered in this study. David believes that the social aspect is key, as "being good with people is important," especially in business. Erica feels "The BLT experience didn't affect me academically; instead it enabled me to establish life-long friendships with other students in my classes and in Maple."

Another "lesson learned," as shared by both Logan and Frank, was that learning goes far beyond the classroom. Logan believes "There is lots of learning outside of class. That's what college is all about." Frank claims "80% of what's learned in college is *not* in class, only 20% is learned in class." David added, "Books are not all it." Sasha felt "learning to be self-sufficient and independent is important too." This is an important realization and strong indication of Sasha's movement through Chickering's third vector of interdependence.

Interestingly, when conducting personal interviews with both Sasha and Logan, they each used analogies from one of their courses in relating their BLT perceptions to me. Sasha's "pizza analogy" from an anthropology class was described earlier in this chapter, and Logan used a stereotyping example from his sociology class to describe his motivation to achieve academically. He explained, "if you steal once, you're not stereotyped, but if you steal again, then you 'are' that [a thief]." With Maple being viewed as an academic building, then Logan feels "you make it live up to that," which he views as a positive thing. In just these somewhat simple analogies used by these men, they may have made a strong statement about their learning—applying academic knowledge to explain and interact in the world around them.

Summary

It seems as if the students in this study have ended up exactly where they allowed the BLT to take them, with a strong network of social connections that have supported them through the challenges of their first year, framed by the elements and structures of their residential facility in Maple Hall. Their experiences along the way have formulated, reshaped, honed, and restructured their thinking, learning, attitudes, relationships, and efforts. Further discussion of these overarching changes occurs in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover the tangible, underlying elements and factors that the residential business learning community students found beneficial to their community building and learning, as well as those that connected them to their LC. The data described in Chapter 4 indicate several important conclusions: the residential setting, connecting with others, involvement, and the BLT structures all are key elements of this LC experience.

Residential Setting

Research question number one focused on the Maple Hall setting and its special nuances. This residential setting was found to have a significant impact and influence on the students' overall BLT experience, based on the descriptions and accounts of the students in this study. The students' initial wish for the facility's creature comforts and appreciation of its organizational structure (staffing, security, policies) can be likened to that of the fulfillment of basic physiological and safety needs, as noted by Maslow (1954), which is quite typical for new students in particular.

Beyond those basic needs, there seemed to be a strong support network and enhancement of the students' experiences based solely on the physical environment of Maple Hall. As mentioned earlier, the Department of Residence at ISU has as its mission "to further the academic mission of the University by providing quality services and promoting living/learning communities that stimulate, enhance, and extend the total learning experience" (Olson, 1998). In Maple Hall in particular, the "Fresh Start" program

(participation in community service, campus organization membership, and personal development activities) is intended to help new students in connecting with Iowa State, by encouraging their involvement in co-curricular activities. These activities serve as supplemental learning activities, and enhance the classroom experience (Department of Residence, 2001). This program is also a way to structure the environment within Maple Hall, so that learning and education beyond the classroom can happen as well. As another component to this enhancement of the classroom experience, Maple Hall also incorporates residential LCs as a focus within the building.

This overall residential philosophy and structure, with its emphasis on reinforcing student learning and involvement, that has been instituted within Maple Hall, is a direct example of what Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) describe as "purposeful programmatic efforts" (p. 613). The students and women's peer mentor in this study directly noted facility features such as the study spaces, classrooms, and overall building emphasis on academics as both noticeable and therefore, influential on their academic experiences. This physical environment, coupled with the micro environment within their BLTs (shared business major, close proximity to one another, shared classes) helped them to establish what many entering students consider a frequently mentioned concern—connecting with others (Upcraft et al., 1984).

Comparison study.

Facilities. In comparing the overall responses and findings of this study's BLT participants with those of a Department of Residence study (Thompson & Epperson, 2001) of the residents of Maple and Larch Halls, the results from the Maple students were quite similar in a number of categories. These students in Maple were satisfied or very satisfied

with the study rooms and common areas (~82 and ~89% of the respondents), much like the emphasis placed on these facilities by the BLT students. Ninety percent of the Maple respondents in the study were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall facilities, again similar to the responses of the BLT students in this dissertation study. Most of the Maple respondents agreed that both the facilities (~71%) and policies (~63%) in Maple contributed to an academically supportive environment overall, just like the responses of the BLT students in this research.

Interestingly, the University study also highlighted comments from Maple students about the lack of a sense of community within the building, many citing the self-closing doors as a contributor to that "feeling." As mentioned in Chapter 4, this topic of the closed doors was also an issue of concern for the BLT students as well. Another similar comment shared between the studies was that of "who chose the hall." As consistent with the BLT students, Maple students in general reported more parental influence in choosing to live in the building, along other motivations such as the LCs being housed there, the "newness" of the facilities, and the substance-free policy.

Staffing and policies. The Maple Hall students in the University study were mostly satisfied with their CAs, although less satisfied than those students in Larch Hall. Based on some limited discussion by the BLT men about their CA and ARC, their interactions with these staff members would lean more toward dissatisfaction (which was only ~4% for CAs in the University study).

As mentioned in detail by Logan, the visitation policy in Maple is somewhat bothersome to him, from a fairness standpoint in particular. In the University study, the visitation policy overall was less satisfying to the Maple residents versus the more "standard"

policy as in Larch, as well as all other building policies. Many students questioned the

rationale for the policy, along with stating it was too strict (which was Logan's viewpoint).

The other building policy which fostered much discussion among the BLT students

was that of the co-curricular requirements in Maple. Early on, many of the students were

somewhat unsettled with the idea of *requiring* them to volunteer (community service).

Others were comfortable with this requirement, and saw it as a way to enrich their college

experience. This same mix of feelings was reported in the University study, where two

themes emerged: the requirements were time consuming and took away from coursework,

and students did not want to be forced to do community service and personal development.

In the University study, approximately 81% of the respondents positively or very

positively believed they would recommend Maple hall to others, a bit less than the

respondents in Larch. In the BLT study, all the students reported they would recommend the

BLT to other students, or if given the chance, would repeat their BLT experience.

Considering the emphasis these students put on connecting their residential experience

synonymously with their BLT, this would equate to a similar recommendation to other

students, in agreement with the University study's Maple respondents.

Influences of people. In reviewing some of the written comments from the University

survey in Maple in particular, one of the more "commented about" topics was that of

upperclassmen living in the building. There was quite a mix of feelings between having a

heavy freshman emphasis versus having more upperclassmen in residence. In the BLT

study, there was quite a bit of discussion (among the men) about the desire for more

upperclassmen on their floor. At first, their concern stemmed from the absence of a live-in

peer mentor who could "show them the ropes," and later, seemed to arise from some

lingering uncertainty about their choice of major (from Frank's standpoint in particular) and their "next steps."

In the University study, upperclassmen were viewed as helpful in terms of leadership; as role models; a balance to freshman; a way to increase the maturity level of the building; "people who know what they're doing," and a good way to have variety, "so you don't think that you're still in high school." The BLT respondents yearned for some upperclass leadership on their floor as well, to help them balance their feelings of "the blind leading the blind as noted earlier by Logan. Students who liked the freshman emphasis in Maple noted their similar situation as being helpful to them, and not intimidating (or made to feel inferior) as when upperclassmen are around. Some students specifically mentioned that it was easier to get to know others if they shared a common "bond". It is this common bond that allowed the BLT students to connect with one another, and function as a "team."

Connecting With Others

In looking at the second and third research questions in this study, elements that help students connect with each other and their learning and how adjustment to the University is accomplished or enhanced, the participants in this study looked directly to the structure of their living arrangements and the BLT. As discussed earlier in the literature review by Astin (1993a) and Tinto (1995), and reiterated by Upcraft, et al. (1984), "What determines whether or not entering students adapt to their new environment? There are several factors, but undoubtedly the most important is the influence of students on one another. The scope of this influence is enormous" (p. 10).

As noted by Gabelnick et al. (1990), "Learning community students value knowing other students in classes and realize an immediate sense of belonging" (p. 67). The

participants in this study understood this concept too, and viewed the BLT as a vehicle in which to meet people, make friends, and likely establish life-long relationships. This was done via their day-to-day interactions as residential floormates, classmates in their shared BLT classes, and as teammates in the BLT. Even though there were concerns and frustrations with their BLT experience (lack of "structure a peer mentor that did not live with the men, teammates that did not participate), these multiple connections with each other helped the students feel that overall this was a valuable experience for them. A general finding of the ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee (2002) from the open ended questions on the ISU Learning Community Survey, noted that meeting people/making friends (in general, in my major, and with similar interests) was one of the most satisfying aspects of LCs.

All of them would choose to participate in the BLT again, if they had the opportunity, and would recommend the BLT to other students as well, due to the benefits of its shared experiences (classes and their major), motivation from each other, and the comfort and reassurance from these connections with one another. As Schroeder (1994) claims, "It is precisely these components—commonality of purpose, unity, transcendent values, and cohesiveness—that distinguish a community from a traditional residential unit" (p. 167). The efforts of the Department of Residence at ISU in creating learning environments within residential spaces (and particularly in Maple Hall) have been instrumental in creating community for the BLT students in this study, and seem to have captured the essence of Upcraft et al. (1984), who believe, "Many institutions help these students find each other because they know the importance of peer group influence" (p. 11). Although this "help" could also be construed as an exercise of pastoral power over the students as well (a

postmodernist perspective), as we [the institution] "know what's good for the students the

benefits in this case may outweigh any potential negatives. As student affairs professionals,

we are taught and trained to exercise some of this "pastoral power" over our student

congregations, but with a sense of their readiness and need for support in mind as well.

Academic connections and learning.

Aside from connecting with each other socially, these BLT students linked together

their teammates and academics without question, along with the features of the Maple facility

itself. Having easy and immediate access to one another, the students felt they could ask

questions, do homework, and study together without much effort, which fostered their

learning, which was also supported in summary results from the open ended questions on the

ISU Learning Community Survey (2002), which noted "having people as resources" was a

very satisfying aspect of LCs. As noted by Chickering and Reisser, (1993) "Powerful

learning occurs in situations where people come to know each other as friends" (p. 399).

They also believe that "Students who live together learn together—when studies and

activities overlap sufficiently to permit it" (p. 402). Although there is much discussion on

the impact of faculty connections to students' learning (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gamson,

1987; Tinto, 1993), these types of interactions were few with the students in this study.

Where this element was lacking, there seemed to be a stronger connection to their peers,

which, as noted by Tinto (1993) "Admittedly, contact with one's student peers may, for some

students, somewhat compensate for insufficient contact with the faculty" (p. 70). For these

BLT students, the peer influence was quite strong, as noted by and observed with them.

Grouping students in a common setting was an important key to this social-academic

connection, as was the students' shared major in business. The participants seemed to

identify completely with one another as "business majors as they shared common courses and academic goals. Even though the response rate was minimal (n=20), the results from the ISU Learning Community Survey as reported by the ISU LC Assessment Subcommittee (2002) reported a mean of 6.00 when students were asked to rate the degree in which they could "interact with other students in your program or major," and 5.53 when asked the degree in which they could "study with students in your classes" (out of a maximum degree of 9.00). These means compare to 6.97 and 6.09 (respectively) for all LC students.

Although their BLT courses were not specific to business topics, the students did seem to connect on a base level, knowing that they were all part of a shared experience, which to them, was enough. As noticed by Felipe, the men's peer mentor, the "social learning" of his mentees was enhanced greatly by the BLT experience, as they learned to network with each other in order to be successful. Although the students appreciated and valued their learning, the social aspect was what they deemed most important. The students also came to recognize that learning takes on many forms, and they believed their learning went far beyond the scope of the classroom, as did Light (2001) in his extensive interviews with Harvard University students. This "learning beyond the classroom" is also supported by Astin (1984; 1985; 1993a; 1993b), who devised a theory of involvement.

Involvement

Gabelnick et al. (1990) learned that "When students talk and write about their learning community experiences, they remark on their sense of involvement more than anything else—with their peers, their faculty, with college in general, and with themselves as maturing learners" (p. 67). The students in this study were no different, although the emphasis of the importance of involvement (i.e. student participation) within the BLTs was

perhaps the most surprising finding for me. I had not anticipated this to be such a crucial element for the students to take note of and recognize, although I realize that active participation makes the BLT experience that much more beneficial for students. Pace (1980) would agree, and believes that what a student gets out of college is more a factor of the student's effort (with help from what the college does as well).

Perhaps the biggest proponent of student involvement is Astin (1985) who believes, simply, that "Students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). His theory has five basic postulates:

1. Involvement requires the investment of psychological and physical energy in "objects" (for example, tasks, people, activities) of one sort or another, whether specific or highly general.

2. Involvement is a continuous concept—different students will invest varying amounts of energy in different objects.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.

4. The amount of learning or development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement.

5. Educational effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to its capacity to induce student involvement (1984, p. 298; 1985, pp. 135-136; 1993a).

While Astin clearly views the student's role as central in this theory, the institutional environment plays nearly as important a role, as it provides the setting in which this involvement is to happen. This theory of student involvement "encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does" (Astin, 1984, p. 301). The BLT participants in this study did quite a lot within their teams (studying together, reaching

out to one another, supporting each other and the BLT program), which is most likely why they deem their LC experience as beneficial.

While what the student does is important, it is also key for students to maintain a balance in their involvement in order to be successful. Too much involvement in one area will detract from another, limiting the possible effects of that area (Astin, 1985). In this study, Sylvia was most affected by this imbalance, as noted by her somewhat concerned male BLT counterparts. They remarked at the quantity of Sylvia's campus activities, as they evidenced by the entries in her planner (which she had shared freely with them). They were amazed and worried at the same time that she was taking on too much, too soon. Sylvia seemed to recognize this situation, but is in many ways continuing a similar level of involvement from her high school days, which were filled with school, civic, and community activities.

Like Astin, Schroeder (1993b) also applied a similar line of thinking to learning communities, and believes there is an interaction effect, including four essential principles. As mentioned earlier in the Literature Review in Chapter 2, his four *I's* include: involvement, investment, influence, and identity. The first *I*, Involvement, includes an ethic of membership (Kuh et al., 1991), along with an environment where students interact with one another in a variety of roles (Schroeder, 1994). The students in this study took on roles within study groups, as motivators to one another, supporters of each other, and as classmates and friends. As supporters of one another, they helped each other with personal issues and problems, as noted by Bailey, the women's peer mentor. The BLT students learned to rely on one another, especially the men, as the absence of a live-in peer mentor "forced" them to do so. Describing their involvement and how it varied throughout the semester (as they

"grew"), the "give and take" necessary for the community to be built, and their recognition of the importance of all these nuances clearly demonstrates the need for active involvement and participation within the BLTs in order to make the experience beneficial.

Investment, or the second *I*, is an outgrowth of involvement, and also relates to the ethic of care (Schroeder, 1994). There is a sense of ownership that grows in this way, and as evidenced by the feelings of some of the BLT members, (most clearly Robert and Anne), also a sense of justice that should be in place for those students who do not contribute and take part in the team as they should. This issue of fairness came up more than once in the discussions with the participants in this study, as a reaction of the care for their team members, and the "hurt" caused by those who did not reciprocate by caring (participating) in return.

In this particular LC, influence Schroeder's (1994) third *I*, played out most clearly in the academic realm. Students were motivated and influenced by one another to do well, as noted very clearly by Logan and Robert in particular. These two students (and others) felt compelled to do their best, because of the influence of the group (and the academic atmosphere of Maple Hall). Identity is Schroeder's (1994) final *I*, and may be the most lacking for the students in the BLTs. While they had a clear sense of what the team could do and had done for them, they did not strongly identify with the College of Business, which is one of the basic philosophical goals of the BLTs. The bulk of their identity rested within their team, which was still quite positive, although their own personal identities began to come more clearly in view, as evidenced by some of the "progressions of thinking" and change of attitude, as evidenced by their thoughts and my observations along the way.

Both of these viewpoints on student involvement focus on the behavioral aspects of

student development, or the "how" (Astin, 1984). These behavioral mechanisms or

processes can be affected, enhanced, or fostered by the setting or environment in which they

operate. In this study, this was evident in the students' need for structure.

Structure

As mentioned earlier, part of the second research question looked at the structures in

place that form the BLT at a micro and macro level. At a large research institution such as

Iowa State University, a way to manage the administrative system and multiple academic

layers is to divide programs into general groupings, schools, or colleges, each functioning

(somewhat) as distinct units within the whole. While this system may have its benefits,

sometimes at the student level it may seem inefficient, disconnected, or just go unnoticed (at

the macro level in particular).

The entire focus of the discussion of the micro BLT structure for students in this

study boiled down to their desire for *more* structure, whether it be in the form of weekly

meetings, a set schedule for the semester (instead of sporadic events led by their peer

mentors), more continually "going on and a definitive start or introduction to the team, aside

from the College-wide BLT event held early in the semester. This finding was perhaps the

most obvious, but also surprising to me, and definitely resonated in other responses

throughout the data collection process. Peer mentors from these and other BLTs expressed

the same wish, provoking plans to implement those changes as early as spring semester 2002,

when monthly organized meetings were held with all team members, including the

residential BLT students.

While the latitude and looseness of the BLT structure was originally built in by the

College to foster group cohesion and connectedness in allowing the groups to structure their

teams to meet their needs, the information from this group of students in particular tells us that is not what they are ready for, perhaps based on their developmental level. Keeping in mind Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Upcraft's (1984) developing competence (explained more fully in the next section), providing BLT students with more solid footing on which to start their college experience, and connecting them (early on) to their new environment is exactly what is needed (again, an exercise of "pastoral power as based on our student affairs knowledge and training). In general, "not enough group activities/social events" was one of the most disappointing aspects of LCs, as reported in open ended questions on the ISU Learning Community Survey (ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee, 2002), which further stresses the importance of "structure" in these activities for the (primarily) first semester LC students. Students who adapt and adjust to college socially tend to be more confident and feel more competent, often reflecting in academic success, as noted by the students in this study, who viewed their social connections as a direct link to their academics.

Connections to Theory

Student Development

During week four of the semester (the date of the initial focus groups), many of the students' responses (as mentioned earlier) seemed to shine directly on immediate needs (or goals) of freshman students. The first two needs as described by Upcraft (1989) and Upcraft et al. (1984) include developing academic and intellectual competence and establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, which were the essence of these early discussions. In talking to the women participants later in the semester, they agreed that early on, their concern was with figuring out how everything "worked" [in college]. As also reported in summary data by the ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee (2002), students

look forward to (and worry about) grades, classes, studying, meeting people/making friends, which may explain further exactly what these BLT women meant by "everything," and mirrors that of the immediate needs mentioned above.

Four additional needs are identified by Upcraft (1989) and Upcraft et al. (1984), and include: (a) developing identity, (b) deciding on a career and life-style, (c) maintaining personal health and wellness, and (d) formulating an integrated philosophy of life. These six needs in many ways mirror the seven vectors of development as first outlined by Chickering (1969), and taken to their core, seem to again be derived from those first identified by Maslow (1954), encompassing human needs such as belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization or fulfillment. Making progress in these six areas constitute freshman "success," as defined by Upcraft & Gardner (1989a), and "means taking advantage of the collegiate environment by growing and developing to one's maximum potential (p. 4). Chickering (1969) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) elaborated on these developmental and environmental areas as described below.

Vectors of development.

Deriving from these immediate and basic needs, students are beginning their path towards forming a personal identity. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the theoretical basis of this dissertation study was primarily that of student development theory, notably the seven vectors of development as initially derived by Chickering (1969). These seven vectors seem to represent central themes in students' lives: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. The primary focus in this study was on Vectors 1, 3, and 4, with

perhaps a secondary emphasis on Vector 6, due to the nature of the BLT students' shared major in business. These "targeted" vectors seem to have rung true with the needs, responses, and experiences shared by the BLT students in this study, and will be outlined further below.

Developing competence (Vector 1). Chickering and Reisser (1993) view competence as "a three-tined pitchfork where intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence are the tines, "But the handle is most important. Without it, no work can be done, no matter how sharp and sturdy the tines" (p. 53). For students to achieve goals and act confidently, a sense of competence is achieved. While the underlying purpose of attending college is to improve intellectual skills, students in most collegiate environments also focus heavily on interpersonal relationships, and their abilities to facilitate, foster, and improve these relationships. This vector is clearly the most important in terms of the BLT students' needs and experiences. As noted earlier, and supported by Upcraft et al. (1984), the BLT students participating in this study formed personal bonds with their teammates in order to facilitate increased learning, seeing these two areas as a circle, with social leading to learning. Research question number four specifically addressed this issue (Are BLTs more social or academic?), and the students could not seem to separate the two realms, whether they believed one area or the other came first. Connecting these academic and social elements early on helped ease the transition to college for these students.

Moving through autonomy toward interdependence (Vector 3). In this vector, perhaps a more literal definition of student development comes into play. As students progress and grow physically and psychologically during their collegiate experience, they begin to take on (and figure out) their own sense of self, moving away from a more

"dependent" self, as in earlier years. Three components make up this vector: emotional independence, instrumental independence, and interdependence. As noted in students' responses in Chapter 4, particularly in the discussion of the enforcement of the rules in Maple Hall, it was very clear that there was a decrease in the need for "reassurance, affection, or approval from others which is an important component of emotional independence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). As the students began to realize they were learning to be self-sufficient (near the end of the school year), they showed signs of instrumental independence, and also interdependence, as they came to view themselves as members of a team, with contributions to make—a part of something much larger than just the individuals within the team. While many college-age students may be looking out for themselves, Chickering and Reisser (1993) claim that "College experiences that involve students in group decision making and learning communities help counteract these tendencies" (p. 142). As mentioned specifically by Logan, his advice to others considering involvement in a LC would be to ask "Do you want to be part of a community? You get to take, but you have to contribute. . . ." This "give and take" perspective clearly demonstrates interdependence.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships (Vector 4). The BLT students learned to relate and interconnect with each other through their experience, forming networks that they may still have yet to completely recognize and utilize to its fullest potential. Many of them mentioned the lifelong friends they had met in the BLT, along with the friendships and acquaintances formed with people they would never have met otherwise, were it not for their common connection as LC teammates, mirroring the beginnings of a capacity for intimacy, a component of this vector. Other examples I observed with the BLT students included the giving of birthday balloons and singing of "Happy Birthday" to Robert during the BusAd 101

class, and the level of concern the men showed for Sylvia and her frenetic pace of extracurricular activities. Simple acquaintance connections may not have driven the students to interact on this personal a level, whereas with their multiple connections, they seemed to establish deeper friendships.

While Chickering and Reisser (1993) include tolerance and appreciation of differences as a major component of this vector as well, actual evidence of the BLT students specifically addressing this component is somewhat limited. This is due in part to the mostly homogenous makeup of the teams, although the students seemed to be tolerant and open to new ideas, people, and situations around them (as I observed) in more of an interpersonal context.

Developing purpose (Vector 6). In this vector, Chickering and Reisser (1993) again identify three elements: vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments. As the students in this study were just navigating through their first semester (and year), their focus seemed to be limited to the element of vocational plans and aspirations. As explained, "We discover our vocation by discovering what we love to do, what energizes and fulfills us, what uses our talents and challenges us to develop new ones, and what actualizes our potentials for excellence" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 212). This particular LC was for entering freshman students in business as a major, and while some of the BLT students knew exactly what that business major was going to look like and where it would take them later on, others did not, and struggled with that discovery. Chickering and Reisser believe "Whether the career choice changes or stays the same, development of purpose involves an increasing level of clarity about what one wants to do, or at least about the next step in the process" (1993, p. 216). One student in the study, Erica,

did change her major during her first semester, and as he reported near the end of the school year, Frank still seemed to be searching a bit for clarity in his major choice. Sylvia, too, waivers in her choice of business as a major, but in her case, may struggle more with this clarification due to her diverse interests and reservations about "giving up" something or sacrificing one passion for another (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Her long history of multiple interests and activities, civic and community commitments, and a hectic pace in which to pursue them all, are evidence of this richness (and source of confusion).

Campus environments.

As noted by Upcraft et al., (1984), "An institution's climate, as well as its characteristics, exerts a very powerful influence on entering students" (p. 10). This climate is also important to Chickering, who supports Sanford's (1966) notion of challenge and support. Sanford believes that the role of the campus environment is to challenge students to respond, which in turn fosters their development (Widick et al., 1978b). As evidenced by much literature on the subject, "students develop in different ways, and both learning and development need to be nurtured by an environment that accommodates this diversity" (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, p. 304). As discussed earlier, the residential facilities in Maple Hall have been intentionally structured to connect to and enhance the academic mission of Iowa State University. As a living-learning center (by definition), Maple Hall, like other LLCs, appears "to have significant positive indirect effects on student academic and personal growth and development, mediated by the distinctive social, interpersonal, and cultural living environments that they shape" (Pascarella et al., 1994, p. 40). The participants in this study fully recognized and appreciated these connections as well, and clamored for even more ways in which to connect.

While structured activities for the BLT students would be helpful (in their view), it takes an expectation from staff (challenge) and the encouragement and support to go along with it, in order to work (Sanford, 1966). This challenge for most incoming students lies within the cognitive structures around them, whose risk of failure nearly commands that support be available as well (Schroeder & Hurst, 1996). Students early in their college careers are still trying to discover their own identity and navigate through a new system that relies on their individual efforts and motivation to "make it." As noted by Astin (1984), "It is easier to become involved when one can identify with the college environment" (p. 303).

As Astin (1984) mentioned earlier, in order for students to learn and grow, they need to actively take part in their environment. Student affairs has been taking the lead in structuring the campus environment for years, and with learning communities, academic affairs has begun to get involved as well, realizing the in- and out-of-class connections to learning. As mentioned throughout this discussion chapter, living in residence halls, in general, is a positive influence on students, as is the influence of peer groups (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft et al., 1984).

Students' development as affected by the college environment is the basis for much of Chickering's (1969) original work and revised perspectives (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser (1993) specifically identify seven elements that work toward fostering a learning environment on campus: (a) clear and consistent institutional objectives, (b) institutional size, (c) student-faculty relationships, (d) curriculum, (e) teaching, (f) friendships and student communities. Of these elements, institutional size and friendships and student communities are the most applicable to the information shared by the students in this study.

Institutional size. In order for involvement and interaction to occur in a large campus setting, there must be opportunities to make the environment seem "smaller." Learning communities are one way in which to do that, as are "purposeful housing arrangements, architectural alterations, academic organizations, cocurricular activities. . ." (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 654). Developing competence, identity, mature interpersonal relationships, and integrity are the vectors Chickering and Reisser (1993) believe are most affected by institutional size. The BLT students viewed themselves as "little groups inside this big group" (David), and "like a neighborhood" (Frank), which seems to directly address this potential "problem," along with the easy access and proximity these students had to one another.

Friendships and student communities. This area is perhaps the most important environmental factor for students, and also the one which encourages development along all seven of Chickering's vectors. These connections may have lifelong impact, as noted by the BLT students, as well as providing purposeful interactions linked to a common experience. This "common experience" is a major element of learning communities in general, and seemed to be an important feature of the connections formed among the BLT students in this study. Although the basic structure of the BLT may provide a "framework" for the experience of its students, it is the community that is built by the efforts of the students that provides them more benefit and fosters their development. Regular interactions, opportunities for collaboration, small size, people from diverse backgrounds, and serving as a reference group are the characteristics Chickering and Reisser (1993) note as key to this building of community.

Residence halls "provide ready-made communities that can have major impact on

students" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 399). Residence hall arrangements can affect

development of competence, purpose, integrity, and mature interpersonal relationships,

depending on the attitudes of residents, opportunities for exchange, and existence of shared

academic interests (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Colleges can have a huge effect on these

factors due to the placement of its residents, programming, and staffing in the residence halls.

Intentional focus on these issues, much like that which has been done by the Department of

Residence at ISU, can have enormously positive effects on students, much like those

discussed earlier in this chapter.

Collaboration among the various administrative units on a college campus, whether

student affairs or academic affairs, can also have a major influence on the campus

environment. In working together to create the seven environmental influences as outlined

earlier by Chickering and Reisser (1993), educationally powerful learning environments can

be formed on college campuses, in turn fostering student development.

Critical Theory

Critical theory played a major role viewing the structures in place at ISU, the College

of Business, and Maple Hall, and led me to ask, "Why is this important?" in determining my

topic of study, due to the nature of some things that seemed "not quite right" in regards to

LCs at ISU (Thomas, 1993). The political role of the learning community initiative on ISU's

campus, the economic benefits of the impact of higher retention as a result of these LCs, and

the economic impact of the higher housing rates charged to the students living in Maple Hall,

along with the "material" nature of the physical features of Maple Hall, all seemed to point at

critical theory as a theoretical framework for this dissertation, as critical social research asks

questions about existing social processes (Harvey, 1990). As I progressed through the study

and gathered data, it became very clear that this was not a true critical ethnography, even though there are a few of its elements that do have quite a bit of explanatory power.

Structures.

One of the biggest connections this study has to a critical perspective is that relating to the emphasis on *structures* within BLTs. As noted by Marcus and Fischer (1986), "the 'outside forces' are an integral part of the construction and constitution of the 'inside'" (p. 77). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the residential setting itself was a huge influence on the students in the BLTs, and they often discussed their need and craving for even more structure within the BLTs, while relying on the material features of the building as a draw to the facility in the first place. While this is clearly an indication of the students' developmental level and their basic human needs that need to be fulfilled upon transition to college, it still speaks clearly to the influences of these "outside forces" that are provided to the students by the Department of Residence and the College of Business, which come through to the students in the form of pastoral power ("We know what is good for you."). While there is professional training and knowledge that makes this somewhat true, it also can be stated that by having structures such as LCs in place, students will believe that they are "choosing" these opportunities for themselves, when in fact, they are being "led" because of the greater benefit that we (higher education) know that students will gain through participation in these programs. Other outside forces that contribute to the benefits and experiences of the BLT students include that of the campus climate and the emphasis of the LC initiative and its structures across campus (even though the students in this study admitted they did not perceive that sense).

Campus climate.

While the campus climate of ISU is not under scrutiny in this study, it does have a direct connection to the "behind the scenes" element as addressed by a critical theory perspective. Much of the discussion in the Learning Community Research section of the Literature Review in Chapter 2 talked about LCs as an educational reform vehicle. As Smith (2001) maintains, "It [the history of LCs] is also a story about the power of institutional structures, processes, and value systems in shaping our institutions" (p. 6). In thinking about this "reform" in the long term, LCs "must move from being an innovation or an interesting project to being a reform. Being a reform requires structural change, reworking roles and relationships, and generally re-engineering the organization so that learning communities are appropriately supported" (Smith, 2001, p. 9). This transformation will not happen immediately, and must progress with conscious effort from entire campus populations.

While individuals do have the power to change their environment, it is important to realize that there are political and economic forces at work on our campuses, which can impede this progress. Academic silos, fragmentation, decreased legislative funding, and increased private intervention and support make it difficult to commit to a culture of "learning" when the culture of "research" may be what speaks more loudly from an economic (and sometimes political) standpoint. LCs are very focused on learning, but may at times be at odds with the greater campus environment, particularly when the "learning" culture is not efficient or seemingly effective in the short term. A more business-like mindset is beginning to infiltrate higher education, and long term reform efforts such as learning communities are often suspect. Student-centered learning efforts may need to take precedence over the more career- and skill-related efforts as often deemed important by

"business." Continuing to look beyond the surface of these "conflicting" educational missions will help address potential stumbling blocks.

Inequalities.

An important area of emphasis that can be best explained by a critical perspective is that of the inequalities generated by the LCs on campus. It is quite clear, from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, as well as the findings from the students in this study (who believed that everyone should have the opportunity to be in a LC), that LCs provide great benefits to the students who actively participate in them. This finding is wonderful, but still leaves one to wonder, "What about those students who are not involved in a LC? If LCs are so beneficial, then why not put every beginning student in one?"

This question of inequality is one that has plagued me for years. In my prior educational endeavors and career experience in public and higher education, there has always been a "new" idea, paradigm, initiative, program, etc. that when implemented, benefits many (if not most), but not *all* students. These students that are "left out" are those that bring me back to this critical viewpoint. In our College, we note every year how the students who perhaps "need" (or would benefit from) the structures and supports inherent in the BLTs the most, are the very ones who are excluded. While this may be the result of their own actions (late application to the University or for housing, indecisiveness about their major, tardiness in reserving orientation dates, etc.), we may be perpetuating the inequality of benefits in this fashion. Many of the students who are placed into BLTs have either returned their materials in a prompt fashion, have specifically inquired about LCs, or have parents or siblings who may have navigated the higher education system, providing a bit more "savvy" in their incoming students' transition to college.

Another inequality that is inherent in the BLTs studied in this research is that of the cost differentiation for living in Maple Hall. While the students in this study seemed to believe that because they were willing to pay for better facilities and amenities, that it was fair, because everyone else had that same chance. In reality, everyone does not have that same chance, as cost is prohibitive for many students. The participants believed heartily that everyone should have the opportunity to be in a BLT, but if the only BLT experience students can afford are those without the residential link, due to financial constraints, then is everyone really getting the same experience, or are those who can afford it getting a better one? Economic stratification continues to exist even in the face of a wonderful, beneficial educational program, and from a critical standpoint, that is woefully unfair.

Resource allocation and cultural rewards are distributed unequally throughout educational institutions (and society as a whole), so this viewpoint is perhaps not telling, but still should remain a question to keep in mind. As educators working to make an impact at educational institutions and in society, we should be concerned about programs and services that may continue to separate students and perpetuate "layers." As critical ethnographers like Carspecken (1996) claim, "We are all concerned about social inequalities, and we direct our work toward positive social change" (p. 3). I share this perspective, as I do not believe that because LCs do create some inequalities on our campus, we should not pursue them. I am proud to have a part in the implementation and opportunities that LCs provide our students at ISU and in the College of Business. But, as is true in many cases, the benefits must be weighed against the potential harm, and decisions made that impact the greater good. In this case, BLTs and LCs on campus at ISU do positively impact large numbers of students and bring together student and academic affairs divisions on our campus, fostering an

environment of collaboration and encouraging increased learning, but we should be trying to provide more LC opportunities for even more students. These unequal opportunities (in the College of Business due mostly to space availability in BLTs) for LC participation are perhaps the greater question.

Implications

For BLTs

In order to truly continue to bring positive change to our campuses and impact our students, we must continue to think from a somewhat critical perspective, which asks us to "dig a little deeper" and look beyond basic information (Harvey, 1990). Figuring out these frames of reference is key to implementing the tangible, underlying elements that this study set out to discover.

First, the biggest implication of the findings of this study is that of the importance and positive influence of the residence hall connection. While I underestimated the effects of this impact on the students, it should not be surprising, given the literature on this topic (ACUHO-I, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Upcraft, 1989). Given the physical structure, programming, and environment (ethos) within the building, it would be a natural step to look toward the possibility of making all College of Business LCs residential in nature, if space could be utilized within the newer "Fresh Start" facilities on campus, which may provide the "best" environment for students. With the varying housing rates currently in place, other residences with similar programming would also be desirable, in order to be sensitive to economic concerns of students and their families.

Second, the residential environment also sets an important stage for peer interaction and involvement, which is certainly important in regards to fostering learning (Astin, 1993a,

Blimling, 1993). While the students in the BLT seem to have managed quite well in their connections to one another, these relationships could be improved with increased interactions and efforts of the teammates and their peer mentor (e.g. weekly meetings, cooperatively-planned "schedules of events," etc.). Perhaps increased interaction (specific gatherings) among the different LCs in residence facilities such as Maple could also work together to provide peer connections, and help to fill in gaps for those students (like Frank) who crave interaction from students in majors other than business.

Third, another important "people" connection for students is that with faculty. A long-standing concern for LC Coordinators in the College of Business and others, as reported by the ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee (2002), is how to involve faculty in the BLTs. Due to the nature of the business curriculum, where students do not take upper-level business courses until (often) their junior year, it continues to be difficult to connect first-year students to business faculty members in meaningful ways. Courses chosen for the BLTs are typically lower-division general education courses, often large lectures, so significant interactions with faculty are hampered even more. As reported by the summary data from the ISU Undergraduate Education Survey post-test (see Appendix K for post-test), (as administered to all first-time, full-time students in the residence halls), business students reported a mean score of 5.15 (n=68), when asked about "opportunities to interact closely with faculty," as compared to a mean of 5.77 (n=692), as reported by all LC students; and a mean of 5.36 for the control group (n=900), with 9.00 representing the strongest satisfaction level (ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee, 2002).

Perhaps BLTs should be continued throughout the first and second years, with encouragement of the faculty to become more involved in the second year in particular. This

would help to address another finding from the ISU Undergraduate Education Survey post-test, in which the "level of individual support, encouragement, or advice from faculty members," for business students was a mean of 4.80 (n=69), compared to 5.53 for all LC students (n=692) and 5.13 for the control group (n=906), again with 9.00 representing the strongest satisfaction level (ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee, 2002). Using faculty as mentors has been tried in BLTs, with varying degrees of success, but may be a viable option to pursue once again, because of the benefits faculty contact has on student motivation and involvement (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989a).

Fourth, based on the implications of entering students' developmental level and movement along vectors as outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), explicit instructions, events, activities, and purposes need to be outlined and implemented for new BLT students from the beginning. As new student orientations are now occurring for fall 2002, information is being shared a bit more directly, in terms of what is expected from the new BLT students. Training for the new peer mentors for fall 2002 also included more explicit direction in terms of "what a difference a year makes" in terms of both their needs and those of their incoming mentees. A "student development" discussion took place that helped these new peer mentors to realize what needs are more immediate for new students. As mentioned previously, the monthly BLT seminars will be continued, per request of both the BLT students and (more emphatically) the peer mentors. It seems this infusion of structure added a missing element, and again gave those who participated another outlet for connections—to the College of Business, each other, their peer mentors, and resource people and services throughout campus—helping to achieve, more directly, some of the original outcomes of the BLTs.

Fifth, another "structural" change that needs to be considered in the College of Business is that of making the residential BLTs a year-long program, instead of just fall semester only. As most of the students contract to live in their residence for the entire year, and often continue to share similar classes, it would only be reasonable to continue the BLT structure into the students' second semester. As the relationships, involvement, and connections have already been established, it may be even more beneficial to allow them to continue. It would be interesting to see if the benefits to the students would multiply, or if they would take their experiences to another level altogether. Developmentally, continuing throughout the entire school year would also be prudent, as many students in their first semester are just starting to "get it and the continued support provided into a second semester may be welcomed.

Finally, to offer the opportunity for all business students to be in a BLT would help address the inequalities now in place, as well as help to address the needs of more students— in particular those without as much family support or college "savvy." In order for all business students to have the chance to benefit from the BLT experience, there must physically and logistically be space (in residence halls and in courses) in order for this to happen. (As of fall 2001, there were only spaces for approximately 38% of the incoming freshman business students.) As the participants in this study agreed, all students should have the opportunity to be in a LC. As it now stands, many students are excluded from the opportunity based solely on space issues, which contributes to this inequality and perpetuation of layers.

For All Students

As noted earlier by Upcraft & Gardner (1989a), support, involvement in the campus

community (and with faculty, staff, and other students), deliberate goals, and integrated, cohesive learning experiences are some of the most important "structural" elements to consider during this crucial freshman year. How these elements are integrated into the workings of our college campuses is the challenge put forth to higher education. In their book, *The Freshman Year Experience*, Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates (1989b) outline ten beliefs necessary for freshman success. Topping this list is the belief that "institutions have an obligation to support and enhance the freshman year" (p. 4), which includes the rationale of retention and an obligation to create campus environments with the maximum opportunity for success. Creating this setting includes many of the "structures" and programming features highlighted throughout this dissertation study. As a broader implication of the findings of this study, two areas are discussed further below, academic advising and student affairs/academic affairs partnerships.

Since my primary role is that of an academic advisor in the College of Business, and my career aspirations continue to focus in the academic affairs arena, this connection to students' collegiate experience is relevant (although not specifically addressed in my discussions with the participants). As noted by Light (2001), "Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81). The arrangement of the advising duties in our college in particular focuses on that of the needs of first-year students, who often are indecisive, unclear about their goals, and unsure about their transition to college. Utilizing LCs as an avenue for making connections to these students, and giving them a "campus contact" is crucial in starting their link to the institution and then to others. As reported by the business LC students in the ISU Undergraduate Education Survey post-test, the "helpfulness of your academic advisor" had a mean of 6.57 (n=67),

compared to 6.45 for the control group (n=888), and 6.68 for all LC students (n=678), once again with 9 as the strongest satisfaction level (ISU Learning Community Assessment Subcommittee, 2002). Light (2001) found advising to be critical to success for students with whom he visited. Depending on the arrangement of advising duties in a particular institution (whether faculty or professional advisors), it may be necessary for professional advisors to work more closely with faculty advisors and work in tandem with faculty teaching LC courses, in order to help "bridge the academic and social divide by connecting academic advising to students' classroom learning experiences" (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 124).

Bridging this "divide" is a key element to the success of any LC program or initiative. Learning communities are not sole ventures by student affairs or academic affairs divisions on our campuses. It takes the collaboration and partnership of both areas in order to make LCs successful. Schroeder and Mable (1994) maintain, "student learning is the central focus of higher education, and it provides the common ground on which academic affairs and student affairs can speak with a unified voice" (p. 309). While it may be the task of the faculty to teach students academic content, it is up to the student affairs staff to support and uphold the learning that takes place within the classroom. An environment of learning should infiltrate throughout our campuses. Faculty and student affairs learning from one another will model what should happen in this setting, and "the intellectual oneness that results can only serve to improve these kinds of [integrated] programs" (Murphy, 1989, p. 381). In residential LCs in particular, "the central theme appears to be one of bringing about a closer integration of the student's living environment with his or her academic or learning environment" (Pascarella et al., 1994, p. 32). In this study, that seemed to be the case, and may point to the students' perceived "success" of their BLT experience.

Limitations of the Study

As this study only focused on the residential business learning teams housed in Maple

Hall in fall 2001, it may be somewhat difficult to apply these findings to the other BLTs that

do not include the structured residential connection, although this may be a cautious

approach. The following limitations may have further influenced the results:

1. The students who agreed to participate in this research (11 of 23 Maple Hall BLT

students total), may have been students who were more motivated, committed, or self-

assured (or just interested in this study); influencing the perceptions and experiences they

shared with me. The other 12 non-participating students may have viewed their BLT

experience in vastly different ways, based on their personal characteristics, attitudes,

interests, and backgrounds.

2. The participants in this study all reported a strong family influence, even if

"family" was non-traditional in definition. With strong parental and family support, these

students may have come to college with a more developed sense of self, in turn elevating

their ability to make connections with others, involve themselves, and progress along student

development lines, skewing the results of this study.

3. The focus group discussions with these students were held in the 4th and 14th

weeks of fall semester, with personal interviews held in the 12th week. While the timing of

these contacts was a factor of my own personal availability and scheduling, with no

particular "scheme" in mind, these timeframes may have produced different responses, if

done at different points in the semester.

4. The BLT women had the benefit of a live-in peer mentor on their floor, but the

BLT men did not. If their peer mentor did live with the men, that might have changed their

responses or affected their experiences greatly, given the connections and influence noted often by the women in the study, as related to their live-in peer mentor.

5. It may be difficult to distinguish which of the benefits of these students' BLT experience was the result of the effects of the BLT itself or the effects of their residential experience within the Maple Hall setting, due to the seamless integration of the two efforts, and the more "immersed" nature of students in their residential setting.

6. While important "comparative" information, the results from the ISU Undergraduate Education Survey and ISU Learning Community Survey are of limited benefit, due to the small number of respondents (in the Learning Community Survey in particular). It is also not distinguishable as to the responses of the residential BLT students and those that are not. Caution must be taken in relying solely on these comparison numbers, although they do most likely reflect a representative proportion of the BLT students overall.

7. As mentioned briefly by Frank and in the Department of Residence study (Thompson & Epperson, 2001), there is a lack of great numbers of upperclass students in Maple Hall. These missing "role models" have an impact on the interactions and experiences of the students living there. Many of these effects are positive ("forcing" students to become self-sufficient and stand on their own), but there are potential negative effects as well, which may limit the effects of the BLT or residential experience.

8. This study only reports what the BLT students who are involved and "participating" have to say about their LC experience. There is no report from those BLT students who may find the LC experience stifling, too structured, or not beneficial—the "non-participators." It would be helpful to hear their side of the story as well, to get a truer sense of the effect and impact of the residential BLT experience.

9. The importance of the social and residential connections within this study may have been due to the underlying goals and objectives of the BLTs, which emphasize these areas, and not necessarily due to these factors as independent from this framework. The impact of learning and connections to faculty may have been more greatly reported, had these areas been specifically targeted as an element of the BLT philosophy and structure.

10. While not even mentioned by the students during this study, the events of September 11, 2001, had a profound impact on the attitudes and cohesion of the country as a whole. It is possible that the students, in light of the tone of the nation set by this event, consciously or unconsciously, worked harder to come together as teammates and involve one another in their BLT experience, which would have naturally enhanced their positive responses and perceived benefits.

Recommendations for Further Study

After reviewing the findings of this study, there are a number of possibilities and ideas for further study in the area of the residential business learning teams.

First, a follow-up study could be done with these BLT students in 4-5 years, revisiting their college career, and the impact the BLT had on their continued interactions with one another, career direction, and learning. Another element in this follow-up study would be that of their identity and development over the same period of time, given that some of the students in particular (Frank and Logan) exemplified a noticeable movement along these lines within their first semester.

Second, a longitudinal study could also be done, following these eleven students throughout their careers at ISU. This study would identify more specifically the inner workings of their daily experiences, and how these initial BLT experiences and influences

played out in those events.

Third, a separate study could be done with residential BLT peer mentors, similar in scope to this study, but with the entire focus on the experience from their perspective. The results from this study would benefit both the LC Coordinator (me) who works most closely in supervising the peer mentors, as well as the BLT students, who directly interact with the peer mentors on a regular basis. This study would also provide valuable information to the LC Peer Mentor Subcommittee on campus at ISU.

Fourth, a longitudinal study with peer mentors, beginning with this year's pair and including those to come, could be conducted, to measure the effects of the mentoring experience on other arenas within these students' college experience. The impact of mentoring is often cited anecdotally, but is still somewhat unclear, so findings such as this would help contribute to a more specific definition.

Fifth, it would be interesting to conduct a study with future residential BLT students, specifically identifying and accounting for their learning and study styles. A few students in this study (specifically Anne, Erica, and Felipe, the men's peer mentor) mentioned the impact learning and study styles had on their (or others') participation within the team. Specifically identifying and "carving out" these characteristics would give a new dimension to the responses and experiences of these students.

Sixth, another study could be done from the viewpoint of the gender differences as they play out in the effects of the residential BLT. Since these residential teams are strictly single-sex in structure, and other non-residential BLTs are co-ed, there may be some distinct elements specific to gender differences that could be identified, and then analyzed in relation to the programmatic needs and wants of each gender.

Seventh, once the residential BLTs in the new Union Drive Association Suite Building are in place (they begin fall 2002), a study similar to this initial study could be conducted, in order to get baseline information about the similarities and differences of that residence and BLT with that in Maple Hall. Since both buildings implement the "Fresh Start" program and residential BLTs, the results should be similar, but that remains to be seen until a study is conducted there as well.

Eighth, a study could be conducted with those BLT students in non-residential teams, in order to get a better sense of the impact of the residential setting, and if the Maple Hall facility is truly as influential as this study seemed to indicate, or if the experiences of these students were more the result of their actions within this residential BLT.

Finally, a study of the "non-participators" (as identified by the students in this study) within the residential BLTs would be intriguing. It would be helpful to find out if some of the same effects or conclusions from this study were important to these students as well, or if they were unaffected by the residence facility or the BLT itself. They may have had similar experiences, but perhaps were just not as interested in being openly participative in this research project.

Research/Literature Review Integration

Learning communities are an outgrowth of the thinking of John Dewey, who believed that learning is a social activity. As the philosophy of the BLTs is that of fostering connections among students, faculty, and staff in the College of Business (see Appendix C), it is quite clear that the BLTs are "social" vehicles that in turn affect student learning.

Student Learning Concepts

Fostering an environment of student learning on our campuses should be a major

focus, and LCs are an important initiative in this effort, as they typically include collaborative learning efforts, which Astin (1993b), Chickering and Gamson, (1987) Tinto, (1995), and Tinto, Goodsell-Love, and Russo (1993) note as key to active involvement in learning. This environment of learning is composed of both attitudes and physical structures, and is best explained by Lewin (1936) with the formula $B=f(P \times E)$, with B (behavior) the function (f) of the person (P) as interacting with the environment (E). The influence of peers in learning is also a major component in this learning environment.

In this study, these elements of learning concepts held true, in that the students recognized and appreciated fully, the learning environment "built" for them specifically within their residence, Maple Hall. Opportunities for involvement in their learning were also realized, but specifically with one another, not overwhelmingly with faculty, as the literature suggests is another key component of academic involvement and success (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). The BLT students did interact and react to their environment within Maple Hall and the BLT, and worked together to function as a team and to involve and motivate one another, which had the effect of fostering their learning. As they viewed it, "the social led to learning," so the peer influence was strong.

Learning Community Research

While LCs have been around for a long time, it has been within the past fifteen years that they have picked up momentum and could be characterized as a "movement" (Smith, 2001). While features of LCs can vary greatly, based on an institution's needs and purposes, many of them include purposive grouping of students, shared scheduling, cooperative/collaborative learning, and connected learning across disciplines (Angelo, 1997). Other factors such as size, setting, integration, and sense of community are other common

elements, but characteristic of all LCs is that of shared and connected learning (Tinto, 1996).

The timing of LCs is another important factor, with most of them situated in the first (freshman) year, in order to help address adjustment needs, persistence concerns, and provide support. While the benefits of LCs reach out to not only its students, but the faculty, staff, and institutions in which they operate, this is only achieved through efforts of cross-campus collaboration among administrative, faculty, and staff units. In utilizing LCs as a vehicle for curricular reform, it is common to highlight these programs as a key to shifting the campus ethos from teaching to learning, and this collaboration is crucial in those efforts.

The BLTs take on the sixth model described in the literature review, residential LCs, which is classroom- and residentially-based in focus (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). (These are also known as living learning centers, or LLCs.) As is common, the BLTs are offered for first semester freshman, in order to immediately address their transition and support needs. As reported repeatedly by the students in this study, their personal connections to one another (as teammates, floormates, and classmates), involvement within their teams as related to their learning, and appreciation of the academic structures within their residential setting, all contributed greatly to their positive experience within the BLT.

Residence Hall Connections

Residence halls are powerful influences on students, as evidenced by a number of researchers and studies (ACUHO-I, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroeder & Mable, 1994), and those with "purposeful programmatic efforts" are most effective in integrating the students' academic and social lives (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 613). As the Department of Residence at ISU has already started to do, both physically with the buildings and structures, and programmatically with efforts such as "Fresh Start," this integration of

students' "lives" is occurring on campus.

In the BLTs, this integration of their social and academic lives has been fully realized. The students report very clearly the impact of the residential setting on both their interactions and involvement with one another, and with the effects it has on their learning. An underlying effect of their residential experience is that of their personal development and growth, which is woven throughout their comments about their experiences (explained in more detail in the *Connections to Theory* section earlier in this chapter).

Summary and Conclusion

This study set out to discover the tangible, underlying elements and factors that the residential business learning community students found beneficial to their community building and learning, as well as those that connected them to their LC. These elements included the residential setting, peer connections, their own involvement, and the BLT structures around them, which helped the BLT students successfully navigate their first year at ISU.

As identified by both the literature and the extensive information shared by the students in this study, it was made quite clear of the importance of an integrated, purposeful, and supportive living environment that supports the academic environment of the students (and the campus overall). While "the design of purposeful and powerful learning environments is perhaps the greatest opportunity and challenge facing higher education today" (Schroeder & Hurst, 1996, p. 180), initiatives such as the Maple Hall residential structure and "Fresh Start" program at ISU, along with the residential (living) LCs integrated into this setting provide tremendous opportunities for students' personal growth and development. The challenges and supports in place in this type of structure assist in this

effort, and lead to enhanced learning as well.

Fostering and utilizing collaborative relationships between academic and student affairs divisions only helps institutions to realize this seamless in- and out-of-class connection, which in turn leads to better and more available learning opportunities for our students. As peer connections was identified (again in the literature and by the students in this research) as a key component to students' academic and transitional success, a sense of this type of "peer connection" among the faculty and staff on campus seems only natural as well, especially if we are truly committed to building learning environments on our campuses. Light (2001) recalled a comment from a senior dean at a distinguished university, who believed that since "Students learn mostly from one another. We shouldn't muck up the process" (p. 2). To admit good students, then "get out of their way" was this dean's philosophy, which, as Light (2001) believed should be just the opposite approach. By "getting in the way" of students through planned, structured, and intentional means, a campus environment of learning can be developed, which is why there are higher education institutions in the first place. Working together as colleagues is the only way to achieve this goal. According to Tinto, "We cannot expect students to do what we are unable or unwilling to do" (1993, p. 210).

Faculty, staff, and students and their peers have to actively work together and be invested and involved in order for this learning environment to be effective. Perhaps the most unexpected finding in this dissertation study was that of the level of involvement realized by the BLT students. The men in particular seemed to fully grasp the importance and benefit of involvement in their team and with each other, and as perhaps best stated by Robert, "it's [the LC] built so yourself and your peers take it upon yourselves to take

initiative to learn, and that right there is positive experience in itself." It is this involvement and taking initiative that helps guide the students in their development as adults as well. The relationships, competence, and independence that are fostered through students' involvement help them further develop their identity and a greater sense of purpose (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

As noted by Levitz and Noel (1989), it is programs and services that help students (1) connect to the environment, (2) make the transition to college, (3) work toward their goals in terms of academic major, degree, and career, and (4) succeed in the classroom, that make "the freshman connection" (p. 71). In this study on the residential BLT freshman living in Maple Hall in 2001-2002, this connection was also achieved with help from the residential setting, peer connections, their own involvement, and the BLT structures around them. These tangible, underlying elements helped the BLT students successfully navigate their first year at ISU.

APPENDIX A

Maple Hall BLT Invitation Letter

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IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Andersen Undergraduate Services Center
College of Business
204 Carver Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011
515-294-8300
FAX 515-294-5296

March 29, 2001

Name
Address
City, State ZIP

Dear Name,

Welcome to Iowa State University and the College of Business! We look forward to having you join us this fall and invite you to be a part of the Maple Hall Business Learning Teams (BLTs). BLTs are a great opportunity for new freshman students in the College of Business—giving you the chance to live with other new business students, while developing friendships and academic support networks that will help you ease the transition from high school to college.

Space is available for 26 students in the Maple Hall BLTs. Team members will live on two adjacent floors, one for 13 men and one for 13 women. An upper-class business student (and former Maple BLT member) will live on each floor to serve as a mentor to the team. Each house will also include students from the university's seven other colleges, as well as a community assistant. There are community advisors and academic resource coordinators on each floor as well. You'll enjoy the best of both worlds—a core group of students sharing your interests and major, and those in other areas of study around campus.

These two teams will be housed in Maple Hall (part of the Richardson Court Association near the Iowa State Center), which has undergone a complete renovation. Rooms are designed to facilitate interaction with residents, and the building includes more gathering places, study spaces, and computer access. The updated facilities feature double occupancy rooms with air conditioning. Dining service, as well as a convenience store is located nearby in the Maple-Willow-Larch Commons. The Lied Recreation Athletic Center is a short walk away.

As a member of this BLT, you will share a core of classes with the other team members. *You must be eligible for Math 150 (Discrete Math for Business and Social Science) and Engl 104 (Freshman Composition I) in order to be placed into this team and the living spaces accompanying them* (please call if you have questions regarding your eligibility). If you would like to become a member of the Maple Hall BLTs, please fill out the enclosed application form and return it with your housing contract (which you will receive in a few days) by **May 4, 2001**. If you are not selected for a Maple Hall BLT, you may still be eligible for one of the other BLTs (which will not have a structured residential link to Maple Hall). It is very important that you return your housing contract and application as soon as possible.

Please call us at the number listed above if you have any questions. We hope you'll join the Maple Hall BLTs!

Sincerely,

Ann Coppernoll Farni, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Undergraduate Programs

Diann L. Burright
Academic Advisor

APPENDIX B

Maple BLT Application

Application for
Business Learning Teams (BLT) Living Area
Maple Hall, Richardson Court Residence Halls

I would like to be assigned to one of the spaces designated for the Business Learning Teams (BLTs) and be a team member, as I am eligible for both Math 150 and Engl 104. The spaces for this living area in Maple Hall are air-conditioned and double occupancy. Students living in Maple Hall will agree to the following policies and procedures:

- Maple residents will agree to participate in one or two activities within the first semester in each of the following categories: campus organization; community service; personal development.
- Visitation Hours: Guests of the opposite sex will be welcome in student rooms between 9:00 AM and 1:00 AM Sunday through Thursday; and between 9:00 AM and 3:00 AM Friday and Saturday.
- Guests may visit twenty-four hours a day in designated common spaces such as house dens, computer labs and study areas.
- Maple Hall will be substance free (smoke-free and alcohol-free), including public spaces and student rooms.

If a space is not available in the BLT living area, I understand that my room assignment will be made according to the preferences listed on my housing contract.

Name: _____

SSN: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Phone: _____

Signature: _____

To receive consideration for this living area **your completed housing contract and this form must be returned by May 4, 2001**. After that date assignment will be on a space available basis. If you have returned a housing application you should receive a housing contract within the next few days. Assignment to the BLT living area will be made according to the application date on your Department of Residence Housing Contract.

If you have not received a housing application, please call 1-800-854-9050 to request an application. A housing contract will not be sent to you unless you have applied for university housing.

Please complete the information above and return it with your housing contract to the address below:

Department of Residence
Iowa State University
1215 Friley Hall
Ames, IA 50012-0003

F-250, M-255

APPENDIX C

College of Business BLT Philosophy

Philosophy for Business Learning Teams in the
College of Business at Iowa State University

Andersen Undergraduate Programs - College of Business, Iowa State University

The Business Learning Teams (BLTs) are a means for new students in the College of Business to meet and interact with other students, faculty and staff in the college. BLTs provide opportunities for students to establish relationships, personally and professionally, which support and encourage the exploration of academic and career related questions and issues. The outcome of this experience will be students who are more quickly and intentionally connected to the College of Business and Iowa State University in their first year.

acf. February 2001

APPENDIX D

College of Business BLT Goals and Objectives

College of Business
BLT Goals and Objectives
Fall 2001-Spring 2002

Goal Statement 1: "Provide a high quality professional education in Business."

Goal Statement 2(a): "Provide the student with an appreciation of the evolution of the professions and an awareness of the social, technological, political, legal, and economic forces shaping their future."
Objective 2(a): Given faculty and business professional presentations, student panel discussions, and classroom instruction in ethics and cultural diversity awareness; LC students will recognize elements of ethical situations, differences in approaches and styles by people other than themselves, and outside forces that can affect their chosen career paths, academic endeavors, and social interactions; as measured by classroom discussion interactions, direct question responses (written and oral), and participation in LC activities (including assessments).

Goal Statement 2(b): "Provide the student with an understanding of the major functional areas in Business with the opportunity to focus on a career in one of those areas."
Objective 2(b): Given classroom instruction and explanation of the requirements and tasks for the different functional areas in Business, as well as information from both faculty and Career Services personnel; LC students will identify elements and match with or discount functional areas based on their desires and personal career goals; as measured by identification, declaration, or elimination of their chosen major of study in the "Planning Ahead" and/or Career Day summary assignments.

Goal Statement 2(c): "Provide the student with an ability to recognize ethical and social values."
Objective 2(c): Given specific instruction and discussion on the role of ethics and social values in the world of business (work), as well as interactions with business professionals, faculty, Career Services personnel, and College staff; LC students will be able to identify and recognize those values; as measured by their spoken and written responses on the Career Day summary assignment, test questions, minute papers, and group activities, as well as their classroom actions.

Goal Statement 2(d): "Provide the student with an opportunity for advanced study."
Objective 2(d): Given encouragement and explanation of the possibilities for advanced study; LC students will know of that opportunity; as measured by their responses to class discussion and questions.

Goal Statement 3: "Provide students with an immediate connection to their College by way of mentoring, supplemental instruction, and opportunities for personal and professional growth."
Objective 3: Given staff instruction, advising, referrals, and peer mentoring; LC students will understand, recognize, and identify resources and opportunities available to them as College of Business students; as measured by participation in (i.e. SI sessions, tutoring), registration for (i.e. clubs, groups, activities), and reception of these ideas and information (i.e. completion of courses, workshops, test questions, and verbal responses).

APPENDIX E

Human Subjects Review Form

Iowa State University
Human Subjects Review Form
(Please type and use the corresponding instructions for completing this form)

1. Title of Project: <u>Residential Business Learning Community Study</u>

2. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree that all key personnel involved in conducting human subjects research will receive training in the protection of human subjects. I agree to request renewal of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

<u>Diann L. Burright</u>   <u>8-8-01</u>   _____
Typed name of principal investigator   Date   Signature of principal investigator

<u>ELPS (my graduate dept.)</u>   <u>204 Carver Hall (my staff office)</u>
Department   Mailing Address for Correspondence

<u>294-8301(office)/dlburri@iastate.edu</u>
Phone number and email

2a. Principal investigator
☐ Faculty ☒ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☒ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3. Typed name of co-principal investigator(s)   Date   Signature of co-principal investigator(s)

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

3a. Co-Principal investigator(s) (check all that apply)
☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☐ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3b. Typed name of major professor or supervisor Date   Signature of major professor or supervising
(if not a co-principal investigator)   faculty member

<u>Dan Robinson</u>   <u>8-8-01</u>   _____

4. Typed names of other key personnel who will directly interact with human subjects.

5. Project (check all that apply)
☐ Research ☒ Thesis or dissertation ☐ Class project ☐ Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project)

6. Number of subjects (complete all that apply)
_____ # adults, non-students <u>25-30</u> # ISU students   _____ # minors under 14   _____ # other (explain)
                           _____ # minors 14-17

7. Status of project submission through Office of Sponsored Programs Administration (check one)
☐ Has been submitted ☐ Will be submitted ☒ Will not be submitted

7a. Funding Source:

8. Brief description of proposed research involving human subjects: (See instructions, item 8. Use an additional page if needed.) **(Include one copy of the complete proposal if submitting to a Federal sponsor.)**

This research will be a qualitative study of freshman business students living in the two residential learning communities in Maple Hall (10 women, 13 men). I will be gathering responses related to the students' experiences of living in these learning communities, and the residual effects of these experiences on their academic success and adjustment to the University, as well as their identification and integration into the College of Business. I hope to uncover the tangible elements of residential learning communities that engage students in their learning—a piece often missing in more traditional quantitative studies of learning communities. The initial data collection will occur via focus groups with all the students, then narrow to a case study approach utilizing 4-6 key respondents. Additional information may be gathered from the sophomore peer mentors serving these two learning communities, as well as 3-5 additional freshman business learning community students who do not live in formal residential communities. Information will continue to be gathered throughout the 2001-2001 academic year, with opportunities for follow-up and clarification throughout my dissertation writing (scheduled to be completed in Dec. 2002). Participants will specifically be asked to provide feedback and "approval" of the data analysis and interpretation of their responses throughout the data analysis process and final writing stages. Incentives for continued participation will primarily be gratitude, occasional meals, and treats (pizza, treats, sodas, etc.). Monetary compensation will be considered after all research is complete—as a final thank you for their assistance and participation, but this will not be offered as an incentive during the process.

9. Informed Consent: ☒ Signed informed consent will be obtained. (Attach a copy of your form.)
☐ Modified informed consent will be obtained. (See instructions, item 9.)

10. Confidentiality of Data: Describe below the methods you will use to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained. (See instructions, item 10.)

Student responses will be assigned a number code corresponding with their initials (A=1, B=2, etc.), along with a fourth number that will designate male or female (4=female, 5=male). Actual student names will not be used in the reporting of the data—pseudonyms will be used, as chosen by the students themselves. I will keep a list of both the initial codes and pseudonyms, but it will not be published. Transcripts of all audio (or video) tapes will be done, utilizing this coding system. Tapes will be securely stored at my home, and will not be viewed or heard by anyone other than myself or a transcriptionist. Students will have access to these tapes and the transcripts upon request, and will also have the opportunity to "member check" my data analysis and interpretation of their responses throughout the dissertation process. I plan to seek the students out to assist in this last step. An accurate presentation of their responses is the impetus for this study, so this step will be vital. Through this process, the students will be able to alert me to potential breaches of their confidentiality (or others).

11. Will subjects in the research be placed at risk or incur discomfort? Describe any risks to the subjects and precautions that will be taken to minimize them. (The concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes risks to subjects' dignity and self-respect as well as psychological or emotional risk. See instructions, item 11.)

Potentially the biggest risk for my student respondents is that of personal conflict or hesitation in reporting their residential learning community experiences honestly. I will make every effort to allow them to feel comfortable in sharing negative as well as positive information, and encourage them to be forthcoming, knowing that they will not be penalized or punished in any manner for their perceptions. This entire study is based on my presentation of their perceptions and viewpoints, so their responses cannot be "wrong".

12. **CHECK ALL** of the following that apply to your research:
☐ A. Medical clearance necessary before subjects can participate   ☐ H. Deception of subjects

☐ B. Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to subjects
☐ C. Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects
☐ D. Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from subjects
☐ E. Administration of infectious agents or recombinant DNA
☐ F. Application of external stimuli
☐ G. Application of noxious or potentially noxious stimuli

☐ I. Subjects under 14 years of age and/or
    ☐ Subjects 14-17 years of age
☐ J. Subjects in institutions (nursing homes, mental health facilities, prisons, etc.)
☐ K. Pregnant women
☐ L. Research must be approved by another institution or agency (attach letters of approval)

If you checked any of the items in 12, please complete the following in the space below (include any attachments):

Items A-G   Describe the procedures and note the proposed safety precautions.

Items D-E   The principal investigator should send a copy of this form to Environmental Health and Safety, 118 Agronomy Lab for review.

Item H   Describe how subjects will be deceived; justify the deception; indicate the debriefing procedure, including the timing and information to be presented to subjects.

Item I   For subjects under the age of 14, indicate how informed consent will be obtained from parents or legally authorized representatives as well as from subjects.

Items J-K   Explain what actions would be taken to insure minimal risk.

Item L   Specify the agency or institution that must approve the project. If subjects in any outside agency or institution are involved, approval must be obtained prior to beginning the research, and the letter of approval should be filed.

Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Form

PI Last Name Burright **Title of Project** Residential Business Learning Community Study

---

Checklist for Attachments

The following are attached (please check):

13. ☒ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
    a) the purpose of the research
    b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #'s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 18)
    c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
    d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
    e) how you will ensure confidentiality
    f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
    g) that participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject

14. ☒ A copy of the consent form (if applicable)

15. ☐ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

16. ☐ Data-gathering instruments

---

17. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:
    First contact   **Last contact**
    September 14, 2001   November 1, 2002
    Month/Day/Year   Month/Day/Year

18. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

    January 1, 2005
    Month/Day/Year

19. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer   Date   Department or Administrative Unit

                                                                        ELPS
    _____   _____

20. Initial action by the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

    ☐ Project approved   ☐ Pending Further Review _____   ☐ Project not approved _____
                                                        Date   Date

    ☐ No action required _____
                          Date

21. Follow-up action by the IRB:

    Project approved ☐ _____   Project not approved _____   Project not resubmitted _____
                        Date   Date   Date

    Rick Sharp_____   _____   _____
    Name of IRB Chairperson   Signature of IRB Chairperson   Date

APPENDIX F

Letter to Participants

Date

Dear (student's name),

      As a part of the curriculum requirements of the Ph.D. program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) here at ISU, all students must complete a comprehensive research project (dissertation) on a topic of their choosing. I am a student in this program, and am beginning my dissertation project this fall. I have chosen to study the residential business learning communities in Maple Hall (BLTs). What I am hoping to find out, with your help, are the not-so-measurable elements that contribute to the success, struggle, failure, frustration, excitement, etc. of this experience for you, and how that might affect your success, involvement, and/or adjustment to ISU and the College of Business.

      I will begin by talking with all of the Maple BLT students in small focus groups, then hope to identify 4-6 of you who seem to have a greater insight into this experience to interview more in-depth. These discussions will be information-gathering in nature, with an emphasis on conversation, not formal Q & A sessions, and will occur in small groups or one-on-one. These discussions will primarily take place over the course of the fall 2001 semester, with opportunities for additional follow-up and clarification during the spring semester 2002. I anticipate this process will take no more than 1-2 hours per week, particularly in the fall, with less time in spring. These sessions will take place either in the common areas of Maple Hall, or in conference or classrooms in Carver Hall or the Memorial Union.

      When I write the responses and interpretations of your responses in my dissertation (which will be a published document housed in ISU's Parks Library), I will not use your real names. Upon agreeing to participate in this study, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym for yourself, which will be kept in strict confidence between the two of us. Any written transcriptions of video or audio taped discussions and focus groups will be coded with a number that corresponds with your initials (A=1, B=2, etc.) and a fourth number that designates male (5) or female (4). I will keep the tapes in storage in my home, and they will be available to you upon request. I may utilize the assistance of a transcriptionist, who would also view or hear the tapes. I plan on destroying the tapes by January 1, 2005, but will keep the coded, written transcripts indefinitely.

      An important part of this study will be your assistance in the review and verification of my interpretations of your responses. As I analyze the information you give me, I will try to make connections to educational and social science theories in order to create additional insight into what is already known about residential learning communities. Your participation in this review process is known as "member checking", and will be vital to an accurate representation of your experiences in this BLT, and to the contribution of this knowledge to the learning community field.

Risks to you for your participation in this study are few. The research conducted will primarily be in the form of verbal questions, group discussions, and one-on-one interviews. The only potential for risk may be in your comfort level with responding honestly or forthrightly in these situations. Your responses will not be taken personally, nor used to evaluate or judge the worthiness of your perceptions and opinions. They are your personal feelings and viewpoints, which cannot be "wrong". The benefits to your participation in this research project will be mostly intrinsic--helping to add to the knowledge base about residential learning communities (via a printed "book" in the library), assisting a fellow student (albeit a graduate student) in completing a graduation requirement, and perhaps providing insight into residential business learning communities that could help improve or change this experience for future students. Small incentives and compensation for your participation will also be awarded, most often in the form of food--pizza, sodas, treats.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. I will ask for your written consent on a separate form which I will keep with the other information for this project (tapes, transcripts, etc.). You are free at any time to discontinue your participation in the study, and any information gathered from you prior to that time will not be used in my dissertation unless specifically approved by you. Choosing not to participate initially will in no way affect my evaluations or interactions with you as student of the College of Business. This research project is a personal undertaking on my part, in order to complete the requirements for the Ph.D., and is not a function of my staff duties as an academic advisor. I will be available to you at any time to answer questions about any and all aspects of this project.

Sincerely,

Diann L. Burright
Graduate Student
204 Carver Hall
515/294-8300
dlburri@iastate.edu

My major professor can also be reached with questions or concerns about this study:
Dr. Dan Robinson
N247 FA Lagomarcino Hall
515/294-1241
dcr@iastate.edu

APPENDIX G

Consent Form

Consent Form

My signature on this form is verification that I have been informed of the intent and scope of this dissertation research project of residential business learning community students in Maple Hall, and understand my role as a research participant in the data collection/data review process.

I agree to participate willingly and with no hesitation, realizing that responses and information given by me will be kept in confidence and my identity unknown other than to the researcher (and possibly her transcriptionist). The pseudonym to be used for me in this dissertation is noted below, and is of my own choosing.

I further understand that I may drop out of the study at any time with notification to the researcher (Diann), and that my information will then not be used in this project without specific approval.

I, _____ agree to participate in the dissertation

research project as described by Diann L. Burright.

Date _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Ames/campus address: _____

_____

My chosen pseudonym is _____.

Date _____

APPENDIX H

Initial Focus Group Information and Questions

Maple BLT Focus Groups
September 2001

Overview of tonight's process
- welcome, food, nametags
- Summary/Background of dissertation project
- introduction of recorder and role
- explain format of session

Define a focus group
"A semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a selected topic."
- planned discussion designed to gain perceptions of or explain how participants regard the residential BLT experience
- permissive, non-threatening environment
- facilitator's (my) role: listen, let participants take conversation wherever it goes with minimal direction, remain neutral

Discussion of informed consent
- questions and answers about study and participants' role
- tape recording (is it ok?)/transcription process
- collection of signatures on consent forms

Ground rules for focus groups—
1. only one person speaks at a time
2. no side conversations
3. everyone participates and no one dominates
4. all experiences shared are equally important and equally valid

Opening go-round—(for all participants, facilitator, and recorder)
"In order to initiate open conversation, let's begin with everyone sharing with the group their name, hometown, and best moment or experience of this past summer."

Questions for participants--

How did you find out about the Maple business learning teams, and what was your motivation for applying/choosing to participate?

Name the biggest/most important factors that seem to connect you socially to the residence halls, College of Business (major), and/or University.

What do you perceive as the value/utility/usefulness of your residential BLT experience so far?

Describe the biggest hurdles, disappointments, or concerns you have with your Maple BLT experience to date.

Are there any suggestions or advice you would have for other students who might consider living in a residential learning community?

Any last comments or questions?

THANK YOU for participating!!

APPENDIX I

Exit Focus Group Questions

Exit Focus Groups
Questions for participants—

Discuss the 2 major influences BLTs had on the social realm of your 1st semester experience.
--Probe with peers, faculty

Do you believe there is a focus on LC throughout campus? What shows that?
--Should everyone be in a LC, or have the chance to be? Why?

You all self-selected (chose) to be in the Maple BLT for various reasons. Was it (BLT) important to your overall adjustment and success (assuming that's happened), or would you have done that anyway because of the students/personalities you are?

Should LCs be housed in residences that charge extra for their renovated space?
--Is the charge fair to all or "worth it"?

Describe 3 factors of your participation in the residential BLT that positively or negatively influenced your learning.
--Are there factors in the structures put in place (LCs, Maple, COB) that are key to your experiences?

If you could do 1st semester all over again, would you choose to be in a BLT? Explain.

What one overarching benefit (or detriment) have you gotten from your BLT experience this semester?
--Has there been any change in your perception of your BLT experience from FG 1 to FG 2?

THANK YOU for participating!!

APPENDIX J

Personal Interview Questions

Interview questions—

Tell me a bit about yourself first (hometown, likes/dislikes, family makeup, interest in ISU, etc.).

What kind of impact do your BLT peers/floor mates have on you?
--Probe: Does being all one gender matter when it comes to the BLTs?

What kind of link or relationship has developed with faculty?

Describe your peer mentor's role or impact on you and the BLT.

Part of our College's goals for BLTs are to help students connect to the COB &/or business major. Has that happened for you? How (or why not)?

Do you see or feel an influence of LCs here or across campus? Is there a sense of being "different" because of being in a LC? (If yes, how?)

Describe the mix of ideas, people, and backgrounds (diversity) in your BLT.

Since you chose (self-selected) to be in this BLT, do you believe the BLT has had an influence, or would "it" have happened anyway because of your own motivation, personality, etc?

Did you know of the extra charge to live in Maple before or after you agreed to live there? Does it have a bearing on your experiences in the BLT? Does this charge leave others out or is it fair? Explain.

What elements of the BLT structure (building, courses, shared majors, personnel, etc.) influence social vs. academic realms? Which realm is more beneficial for you?

How has (or was) your adjustment/transition to ISU been enhanced by participation in the BLT? (time mgmt, working within a group, cooperative living, acceptance of/adjustment to differences, etc.)

APPENDIX K

ISU Undergraduate Education Survey

Pre- and Post-Tests

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

August 19, 2001

Dear Student:

Welcome to Iowa State University! We are keenly interested in assessing students' perceptions of themselves and their educational experiences at ISU. We invite you to share your observations by completing the enclosed survey. Results will be used to improve both the academic environment and overall college experience.

Please help us out by completing the enclosed survey. If you are willing to participate;
- **Remove** the General Purpose Answer Sheet from this packet;
- **Write** your Social Security number on both the backside of this page and on the General Purpose Answer Sheet, beginning with the first box of the Identification Number section (there will be one box left empty);
- **Fill-in** the appropriate circle on the answer sheet in the column below each box;
- **Darken** with a number 2 pencil the corresponding circle on the answer sheet indicating the one answer you select for each question;
- **Record** on the survey itself your written answers to the questions on the third page.

Your Social Security number is needed to link this survey to any follow-up survey and to access demographic information not obtained from the survey. Your identity and individual responses will be kept confidential and only group data will be reported. You can withdraw from the study at any time. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Please return the survey to your Resident Assistant/Community Assistant or to 2419 Friley by Wednesday, August 29. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle McFadden via phone (294-2545) or email (mcfadden@iastate.edu).

Thank you for your cooperation. We greatly appreciate the information you provide on the survey. We hope you will also be willing to complete a follow-up survey at the end of the semester. Have a great semester at ISU!

Sincerely,

Howard Shapiro
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs

Michelle D. McFadden
Graduate Research Assistant

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ISU Undergraduate Education Survey

Record the information requested below in the space provided

Social Security Number:_____

Items 1-28. Listed below are a number of knowledge and ability domains related to your education at Iowa State University. Please rate your current level of skill functioning in each domain using the scale below.

Very Weak   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   Very Strong

1. Knowledge of university policies and procedures relevant to undergraduate students
2. Knowledge of university resources for undergraduate students (e.g., Academic Success Center, Student Counseling Center, etc.)
3. Knowledge in your anticipated discipline or field of study
4. Knowledge of career choices and options in your anticipated discipline or field of study
5. Knowledge of other cultures and/or ethnic groups
6. Ability to produce well-written term papers that would receive a grade of "B+" or better
7. Ability to write the types of technical, critical, review, or creative papers typical for your discipline with a grade of "B+" or better
8. Ability to edit a document or paper for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
9. Ability to analyze and evaluate ideas systematically and critically from different perspectives
10. Ability to apply academic knowledge and reason to current problems
11. Ability to think of different ways to solve problems
12. Ability to work cooperatively and productively with others
13. Ability to effectively listen to others enabling you to clearly understand what is being said and reflect that understanding back to the speaker
14. Ability to interact with others and contribute to group discussions
15. Ability to put team goals above your own personal goals
16. Ability to make formal class presentations
17. Ability to argue a point of view assertively
18. Ability to persuade others to follow your lead
19. Ability to effectively and comfortably interact with people from other cultures or ethnic groups
20. Ability to speak up when you see bigotry
21. Ability to accept religious differences
22. Ability to manage your time effectively
23. Ability to prioritize tasks to be performed for a project
24. Ability to coordinate multiple concurrent tasks or projects
25. Ability to study effectively
26. Ability to inspire others through your leadership
27. Ability to bring people with different viewpoints together to cooperate on a project
28. Ability to facilitate group interactions

A. What are you most looking forward to this semester?

B. What most worries you about your first semester?

Thanks!

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

November 25, 2001

Dear Student:

As the end of the semester approaches, we are once again interested in your opinions about your educational experience this semester. We are systematically surveying all first-year students living on campus. Results from this study will be used to improve the student experience at Iowa State University. Please provide us with this important information by completing and returning the enclosed survey.

We know that your time is valuable. To thank you for participating in this study, we would like to enter your name in a drawing for a $500.00 prize. We will randomly select one winner from all those who complete and return a survey prior to December 5, 2001. Only those individuals who complete and return the survey will be included in the drawing. Your odds of winning will be approximately 1 in 3500. You will be notified by mail, email, or phone if you have won the $500.00 prize. The drawing will be held on December 18, 2001. You should receive notification between December 18 and December 21, 2001.

Please help us out by completing the enclosed survey. If you are willing to participate;
- Remove the General Purpose Answer Sheet from this packet;
- Write your Social Security number on both the backside of this page and on the General Purpose Answer Sheet beginning with the first box of the Identification Number section (there will be one box left empty);
- Fill-in the appropriate circle on the answer sheet in the column below each box;
- Darken with a number 2 pencil the corresponding circle on the answer sheet indicating the one answer you select for each question;
- Record on the survey itself your written answers for the questions on the back page.

Your Social Security number is needed only to link this survey to any previous or follow-up survey as well as to link to demographic information not obtained from the survey. Your identity and individual responses will be kept confidential and only group data will be reported. You can withdraw from the study at any time. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Please return the survey to your Resident Assistant/Community Assistant or to 2419 Friley by Wednesday, December 5. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle McFadden via phone (294-2545) or email (mcfadden@iastate.edu).

Thank you for your cooperation. Results from this study may highlight and identify ways we can improve student experiences at ISU!

Sincerely,

Howard N. Shapiro   Michelle D. McFadden
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs   Graduate Research Assistant

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ISU Undergraduate Education Survey

Record the information requested below in the space provided

Social Security Number:_____

Items 1-28. Listed below are a number of knowledge and ability domains related to your education at Iowa State University. Please rate your current level of skill functioning in each domain using the scale below.

Very Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Strong

1. Knowledge of university policies and procedures relevant to undergraduate students
2. Knowledge of university resources for undergraduate students (e.g., Academic Success Center, Student Counseling Center, etc.)
3. Knowledge in your anticipated discipline or field of study
4. Knowledge of career choices and options in your anticipated discipline or field of study
5. Knowledge of other cultures and/or ethnic groups
6. Ability to produce well-written term papers that would receive a grade of "B+" or better
7. Ability to write the types of technical, critical, review, or creative papers typical for your discipline with a grade of "B+" or better
8. Ability to edit a document or paper for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
9. Ability to analyze and evaluate ideas systematically and critically from different perspectives
10. Ability to apply academic knowledge and reason to current problems
11. Ability to think of different ways to solve problems
12. Ability to work cooperatively and productively with others
13. Ability to effectively listen to others enabling you to clearly understand what is being said and reflect that understanding back to the speaker
14. Ability to interact with others and contribute to group discussions
15. Ability to put team goals above your own personal goals
16. Ability to make formal class presentations
17. Ability to argue a point of view assertively
18. Ability to persuade others to follow your lead
19. Ability to effectively and comfortably interact with people from other cultures or ethnic groups
20. Ability to speak up when you see bigotry
21. Ability to accept religious differences
22. Ability to manage your time effectively
23. Ability to prioritize tasks to be performed for a project
24. Ability to coordinate multiple concurrent tasks or projects
25. Ability to study effectively
26. Ability to inspire others through your leadership
27. Ability to bring people with different viewpoints together to cooperate on a project
28. Ability to facilitate group interactions

Items 29 - 35. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements by using the following rating scale.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

29. I was able to see connections among my classes (e.g., learning in one class supported or augmented learning in another class)
30. I was able to see connections between personal experiences and class learning
31. I was able to earn high grades in classes
32. My professors had high expectations for me
33. I better understand the nature of my anticipated major
34. I have had experiences this semester that "fit together" in helping me meet my goals as a student
35. I have received prompt feedback about my progress in classes

Items 36 - 48. Please indicate your degree of satisfaction this semester on each of the following dimensions.

Strongly Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Satisfied

36. Opportunities to interact closely with faculty
37. Level of individual support, encouragement, or advice from faculty members
38. Opportunities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds
39. Opportunities to participate in a department club, residence government, or other organization
40. Opportunities to work collaboratively with other students on class projects
41. Opportunities to develop or participate in study groups
42. Opportunities to apply learning to real world problems
43. Opportunities to practice the skills you are learning or have learned
44. Overall quality of instruction that you received this semester
45. Overall quality of your classmates
46. Availability of your academic advisor
47. Helpfulness of your academic advisor
48. Overall experiences at ISU

Items 49 - 57. During the fall semester, how many hours per week did you spend on the following activities?

1=0 hours	5=7 to 8 hours	9=15 to 16 hours
2=1 to 2 hours	6=9 to 10 hours	10=17 or more hours
3=3 to 4 hours	7=11 to 12 hours	
4=5 to 6 hours	8=13 to 14 hours	

49. Classes and labs

50. Studying alone

51. Studying in groups

52. Talking with your advisor

53. Talking with instructors outside of class

54. Community service/volunteer work

55. Recreational/social activities

56. Leadership activities

57. Paid work

Respond to the following questions in the space provided.

A. What was your greatest success or positive academic experience this semester?

B. What was your greatest difficulty or negative academic experience this semester?

Thanks!

APPENDIX L

ISU Learning Community Survey

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

November 25, 2001

Dear Student:

Iowa State University is keenly interested in your opinions about your learning community experience this semester. Please help us by completing and returning the enclosed survey. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Results from this study will be used to improve learning communities at Iowa State University.

If you are willing to participate:

- Write your University ID (the middle nine digits of the ISU card number) on the attached survey form and on the General Purpose Answer Sheet, beginning with the first box of the Identification Number section. (There will be one box left empty.)
- Fill-in the appropriate circle on the answer sheet in the column below each box.
- Darken with a number 2 pencil the circle on the answer sheet indicating the one answer you select for each question.
- Record on the survey itself your written answers to the questions on the back page.

Your University ID is needed to link this survey to any previous or follow-up survey, as well as to access demographic information not obtained from the survey. Your identity and individual responses will be kept confidential, and only group data will be reported. You can withdraw from the study at any time. Please return the survey to your learning community coordinator or the person administering the survey.

If you have any questions, please contact Michelle McFadden via phone (294-2545) or email (mcfadden@iastate.edu). Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Howard N. Shapiro   Michelle D. McFadden
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs   Graduate Research Assistant

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ISU Learning Community Survey

University ID: _____

Section A

For each learning community dimension described in items 1 through 8, record your satisfaction on the answer sheet, using the scale below. If the item does not apply to you, choose 10 for your response.

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Satisfied   (10 = Does Not Apply)

1. Overall learning community experience
2. Social activities in the learning community
3. Peer mentor
4. Peer mentor availability
5. Peer mentor helpfulness
6. Peer mentor knowledge of the discipline
7. Peer mentor knowledge of Iowa State University resources
8. Peer mentor level of concern about my academic success

Section B

Respond to questions 9 through 12, using the scale below. If the item does not apply to you, choose 10 for your response.

None 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Great Deal   (10 = Does Not Apply)

As a member of a residential learning community, how often have you had the opportunity to:

9. interact with other students in your program or major?
10. study with students in your classes?
11. converse with other students in your living area about academic topics?

12. If you participated in Supplemental Instruction this semester, how much did it improve your learning?

Section C

On the answer sheet, please record the ONE answer you select for item 13. Also, if you choose "Other (Please specify)," record your comment in the space provided.

13. Which of the following had the greatest impact on your decision to join a learning community?
   a. ISU representative who visited my high school
   b. Correspondence I received from my department or college
   c. Experience Iowa State (EIS)
   d. Learning Community brochure
   e. Orientation
   f. Learning Community website
   g. Academic Adviser at ISU
   h. Friend
   i. Parent/Guardian
   j. Other (Please specify): _____

Section D

Record your written comments for the following questions.

14. What was the most satisfying aspect of your learning community?

15. What was the most disappointing aspect of your learning community?

APPENDIX M

Peer Mentor Interview Questions

Peer Mentor Interview questions—

Tell me a bit about yourself first (hometown, likes/dislikes, family makeup, interest in ISU, etc.)

What motivated you to want to become a BLT peer mentor?

Describe your role within the team.

Has your view of the role of peer mentors changed from when you were a team member last year? How (or why not)?

What kind of impact have you had on your students/team?

Have you accomplished the goals you had in mind or become the kind of peer mentor you set out to be? Explain.

Looking at how your team has evolved throughout the semester, how would you describe their overall experience? How would you describe their learning (and yours)?

Looking back to your own BLT experience, what were the major influences, elements, or experiences that stuck with you and helped (or hindered) your second year?

What advice would you give to a student considering becoming a BLT member? A peer mentor?

What would have helped your peer mentor experience be better (information, skills, direction from others, etc.)?

If you could "re-do" this year and experience, what might you do differently (or would you re-do it)?

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my husband, John for his encouragement and support throughout this process. Knowing that you believed in me and were excited about the possibilities this degree might produce for us helped motivate me more than you know. I also appreciate all the roles you took on and the care that you provided me as I spent time in class and on the computer—let alone while I was in the hospital and recuperating at home. May our life continue to be as wonderful as it has been so far. All my love and thanks go to you, as this is *our* degree!

Next, I want to thank my co-workers, classmates, and friends for putting up with me when I was crabby and anxious about getting things done, supporting me when I needed a boost, covering me when classes and projects took me away from the office, and caring for me so openly after my surgery. Your outpouring of concern and feeling during that time in particular, was overwhelming. I appreciate all you have done for me personally and professionally. I am lucky to know and work with all of you. Special thanks to Renee and Deborah for sticking with me throughout this journey!

My committee and the professors and staff in the ELPS department also deserve huge thanks and recognition. You always made me feel challenged, encouraged, supported, and worthy of your time and talents. I will continue to learn from you, and hope that our paths continue to cross. Dan, once again, your understanding and appreciation of my working style got the job done. I am just saddened by the fact that our formal opportunities to work together have ended, although I will continue seek your counsel, as you have my greatest respect and admiration. To John, my biggest cheerleader and supporter, thanks again for guiding me along the way, listening to my fears, gripes, joys, and concerns. We have come

so far from those first days with CCIM! Barb, Ginny, and Corly, you made each step along

the way seem so smooth—thank you! Judy and Marjorie, where do I start? You always

made time for me, answered my questions, helped me out, and did me favors. I appreciate all

your knowledge, care, and efforts.

I cannot forget to say thanks to my parents and brother Dan. You always believed in

me, supported me, and loved me—who could ask for more? I am lucky to be part of such a

wonderful family. My other wonderful family of in-laws has truly made me feel as one of

their own. I am blessed with your support and love as well and I thank you with all my

heart!

To look back and realize how far I have come, since that scary day in August of 2000

when I had surgery for a brain aneurysm, it is almost unreal to believe that even happened. I

am sure that you will never forget that semester, Dr. Schuh (I have not!), and I do appreciate

your compassion in working with me throughout the finance class. It is an amazing feat that

I was able to continue my studies without missing a beat, and I owe much of that to your

understanding. Thank you!

To all those who played a part along the way . . . my unending thanks.