

Residential Learning Communities

No studies of *residential learning communities* for students in developmental education that fall within the scope of the Developmental Students in Postsecondary Education review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) group design standards. Because no studies meet WWC group design standards at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of *residential learning communities* for students in postsecondary developmental education. Additional research is needed to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this intervention.

Program Description¹

Residential learning communities in postsecondary education—also known as living-learning programs—attempt to integrate students' academic and daily living environments with the goal of improving student learning and success. Students in a *residential learning community* will live together (usually in a residential dormitory), take certain classes together, and engage in structured co-curricular and extracurricular activities. *Residential learning communities* are hypothesized to create deep social and academic connections that serve to both enhance student learning and increase the probability of student success.² This particular intervention report focuses on *residential learning communities* that are specifically aimed at students in developmental education.

Research³

The WWC identified eight studies of *residential learning communities* in postsecondary education that were published or released between 1999 and 2012, none of which both fall within the scope of the Developmental Students in Postsecondary Education topic area and meet WWC group design standards.

One study is within the scope of the Developmental Students in Postsecondary Education review protocol but does not meet WWC group design standards. This study used a quasi-experimental design for which the WWC was not able to assess baseline equivalence on academic achievement and/or socioeconomic status.

Seven additional studies were identified for possible inclusion in this report but are out of the scope of the Developmental Students in Postsecondary Education review protocol because the participating students were not enrolled in developmental courses.

References

Study that does not meet WWC group design standards

Ashley, W. J. (2012). *The efficacy of learning communities in assisting developmental students in achieving graduation and accumulation of credit hours in a southern metropolitan community college* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3522188) The study does not meet WWC group design standards because equivalence on baseline achievement and socio-economic status cannot be assessed. In addition, the study compares students living in a *residential learning community* on campus to students who do not live on campus. As such, the effect of the *residential learning community* cannot be separated from the effect of living on campus.

Studies that are ineligible for review using the Students in Developmental Education Evidence Review Protocol

Chafin, C. N. (2006). *The impact of a living learning community and inquiry guided learning on first year students' emotional intelligence and academic achievement* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3247014) The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Dong, S. (2005). *The impact of residential learning communities at four-year, public, midwest universities on students' self-reported levels of civic engagement* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3171117) The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Humphreys, H. J., III (2010). *The psychosocial effect of residentially-based learning communities on first year honors students in a highly selective private university* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3397948) <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515012>. The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Johnson, J. L., & Romanoff, S. J (1999). Higher education residential learning communities: What are the implications for student success? *College Student Journal*, 33(3), 385–399. The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Kahrig, T. (2005). *An evaluation of the residential learning communities program at Ohio University: An analysis of student involvement, satisfaction, academic success, and retention* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3197298) The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Leinwall, F. (2006). *A residential learning community and its effect on the psychosocial development of college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 3235107) The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Stassen, M. L. A. (2003). Student outcomes: The impact of varying living-learning community models. *Research in Higher Education*, 44(5), 581–613. The study is ineligible for review because it does not fall within the scope of the review—the students are not in developmental education.

Endnotes

¹ *Residential learning communities* do not have a single developer or official description. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from publicly available sources, including the research articles reviewed in this report (Ashley, 2012; Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.

² Inkelas, K. K., & Soldner, M. (2011). Undergraduate living-learning programs and student outcomes. In J. Smart & M. Paulsen (Eds.), *Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 335–368). New York: Springer.

³ The literature search reflects documents publicly available by December 2013. The studies in this report were reviewed using the Standards from the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0), along with those described in the Developmental Students in Postsecondary Education review protocol (version 3.0). The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

Recommended Citation

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Glossary of Terms

Attrition	Attrition occurs when an outcome variable is not available for all participants initially assigned to the intervention and comparison groups. The WWC considers the total attrition rate and the difference in attrition rates across groups within a study.
Clustering adjustment	If intervention assignment is made at a cluster level and the analysis is conducted at the student level, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for this mismatch, if necessary.
Confounding factor	A confounding factor is a component of a study that is completely aligned with one of the study conditions, making it impossible to separate how much of the observed effect was due to the intervention and how much was due to the factor.
Design	The design of a study is the method by which intervention and comparison groups were assigned.
Domain	A domain is a group of closely related outcomes.
Effect size	The effect size is a measure of the magnitude of an effect. The WWC uses a standardized measure to facilitate comparisons across studies and outcomes.
Eligibility	A study is eligible for review and inclusion in this report if it falls within the scope of the review protocol and uses either an experimental or matched comparison group design.
Equivalence	A demonstration that the analysis sample groups are similar on observed characteristics defined in the review area protocol.
Extent of evidence	An indication of how much evidence supports the findings. The criteria for the extent of evidence levels are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0).
Improvement index	Along a percentile distribution of individuals, the improvement index represents the gain or loss of the average individual due to the intervention. As the individual student starts at the 50th percentile, the measure ranges from -50 to +50.
Multiple comparison adjustment	When a study includes multiple outcomes or comparison groups, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for the multiple comparisons, if necessary.
Quasi-experimental design (QED)	A quasi-experimental design (QED) is a research design in which study participants are assigned to intervention and comparison groups through a process that is not random.
Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	A randomized controlled trial (RCT) is an experiment in which eligible study participants are randomly assigned to intervention and comparison groups.
Rating of effectiveness	The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in each domain based on the quality of the research design and the magnitude, statistical significance, and consistency in findings. The criteria for the ratings of effectiveness are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 3.0).
Single-case design	A research approach in which an outcome variable is measured repeatedly within and across different conditions that are defined by the presence or absence of an intervention.
Standard deviation	The standard deviation of a measure shows how much variation exists across observations in the sample. A low standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be very close to the mean; a high standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be spread out over a large range of values.
Statistical significance	Statistical significance is the probability that the difference between groups is a result of chance rather than a real difference between the groups. The WWC labels a finding statistically significant if the likelihood that the difference is due to chance is less than 5% ($p < .05$).
Substantively important	A substantively important finding is one that has an effect size of 0.25 or greater, regardless of statistical significance.

Please see the [WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook \(version 3.0\)](#) for additional details.