

Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute  
Engaged Practices Innovation Grant Application  
Drs. Kailee Brickner-McDonald and Jason C. Garvey

**Abstract**

Student engagement in learning communities facilitates learning, development, and retention. Faculty play an integral role in undergraduate students' success within this high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008). Learning communities (LC) are a new initiative for students to live and learn within a cohort of first-year undergraduates, and contain several key components to foster student success, including faculty engagement and a one-credit first-year seminar.

The development and delivery of the LCs requires investment from a large group of stakeholders, including student affairs professionals and faculty. In order to cultivate buy-in from stakeholders, Drs. Kailee Brickner-McDonald (Program Director for the Leadership LC) and Jason C. Garvey (Faculty Associate for the Leadership LC) have developed the Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute to train faculty working with the newly formed LCs.

### **Faculty Associates Institute**

Learning communities (LCs) are a new initiative for students to live and learn within a cohort of first-year undergraduates and contain several key components to foster student engagement, including faculty engagement and a one-credit first-year seminar. The development and delivery of the LCs requires investment from a large group of stakeholders. In order to cultivate buy-in, Drs. Kailee Brickner-McDonald (Program Director for the Leadership LC) and Jason C. Garvey (Faculty Associate for the Leadership LC; Appendix A) have developed the Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute to train faculty working with the newly formed LCs (Appendix B). There are three learning objectives for participating in the Faculty Associates Institute:

- Become familiar with Residential Life and learning communities at the University of Vermont.
- Become familiar with theoretical and empirical foundations of student success within learning communities.
- Cultivate teamwork that contributes to positive learning community environments.

We will invite 18 faculty to participate in the Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute. All Faculty Associates will have related roles within Residential Life and will be placed within one of six theme-specific LCs to promote student engagement. Given the interdisciplinary goals of the LCs, we anticipate inviting faculty across academic disciplines and appointments to offer unique perspectives to theme-specific LCs. For a more detailed overview of Faculty Associate responsibilities and compensation, please visit Appendix C.

The Faculty Associates Institute will occur across two days of training at the end of the spring 2018 semester. Day one will involve an overview of Residential Life and learning communities through practice-based, theoretical, and empirical scholarship. On day two, Faculty Associates will split into their theme-specific LCs to cultivate teamwork and learn more about the theoretical and foundational perspectives within their respective LC. Trainers for the Faculty Associates Institute will include three key roles across all six theme-specific LCs: Program Directors, Area Coordinators, and Faculty Directors,

As such, the trainers will have collective expertise in LCs, Residential Life, and theme-specific academic disciplines.

### **Description of Project in Context of Current Literature**

We frame the LCs through Kuh's (2008) conceptualization of high-impact educational practices. The Association of American Colleges and Universities listed ten of the most promising high-impact educational practices in its 2007 report, *College Learning for a New Global Century*, including LCs. Kuh (2008) advocated that institutions should create curricular and learning opportunities "so that *one high-impact activity is available to every student every year*. This is a goal worth striving for, but only after a school has scaled up the number of students...who have such experiences in the first year" (p. 20). The key goals for LCs are to encourage learning engagement and to involve students with broad topics that matter beyond the classroom (i.e., Leadership, Outdoor Experience, Sustainability). The Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute will enable us to train and support Faculty Associates so that they can embed multiple high-impact educational practices into the LCs.

### **Expected Impact on Student Engagement, Success, and Retention**

High-impact practices, including LCs, are effective for college students as a whole (Finley, 2011; Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students who actively participate in high-impact practices have a more positive outlook regarding their undergraduate experiences (National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2013). Moreover, students experience greater amounts of success as they increase their involvement in high-impact practices (Kuh, 2009). Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2014) found that students involved in high-impact practices achieve higher educational outcomes, including higher retention rates and greater student engagement. Student engagement in high-impact practices like LCs facilitates student growth and development (Finley, 2008; Kuh, 2009). Learning Communities Faculty Associates will develop engagement strategies during the Faculty Associates Institute so that they may promote success among first-year LC students. With greater personal, social, and academic gains, students become more invested in their undergraduate experience. In turn, students are more able to relate

personally to events and situations that occur on their campuses, which reinforces their commitment to their institution (Renn, 2007).

Faculty play an integral role in the success of undergraduate students. The influence of faculty on student success occurs both in classroom environments and through out-of-classroom experiences like LCs (Kuh, 2009; Ullah & Wilson, 2007; Zaho, Carini, & Kuh, 2005). Student-faculty interactions lead to increased student motivation and achievement (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010), and students who experience strong student-faculty interactions are more likely to earn higher grade point averages and have more self-confidence in their academic abilities (Cress, 2008). Faculty mentorship also has significant impact on student retention, student performance in the classroom, and overall satisfaction with college (Kuh, 2009; Salinitri, 2005; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; Ullah & Wilson, 2007; Zaho, Carini, & Kuh, 2005).

The influence of faculty on student success is especially meaningful when validating students from historically marginalized populations (Barnett, 2011). Mentoring is effective in improving retention for undergraduate students who are historically underrepresented in higher education, including students of color, women and trans\* students, LGBTQ students, first-generation students, international students, and students from low-income backgrounds (Garvey & Inkelas, 2012; Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005; Kim & Sax, 2009; Schneider, Bickel, & Morrison-Shetlar, 2015).

### **Assessment Plan**

Assessment for the Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute will include three components: faculty reflections, annual survey of student outcomes, and longitudinal academic data collection. Assessment is an essential component to any successful university initiative for two distinct purposes: accountability and improvement (Ewell, 2009). Consequently, the main priority for assessing the Faculty Associates Institute and LCs is to determine how to maximize student outcomes and improve institutional priorities (Kinzie, 2009; Livingston & Zerulik, 2013).

First, we will assess the effectiveness of the Faculty Associates Institute in achieving the intended outcomes among Faculty Associates. To inform the depth to which we engage participants across learning

outcomes during the Faculty Associates Institute, we will first ask participants to complete a pre-institute assessment to gauge familiarity with the practice-based, theoretical, and empirical scholarship about student success within LCs and theme-specific dimensions of the LCs. At the conclusion of the Faculty Associates Institute, we will ask participants to engage in a structured written reflection during which we will ask questions about their learning outcomes achievements.

We will also directly assess student participants in the LCs to track retention, engagement, and theme-specific outcomes. Students in the LCs will be required to complete an annual survey of student outcomes administered by Residential Life to provide quantitative and narrative insights regarding their experiences in Residential Life and LCs. Linking students' residential experiences to academic and social outcomes will enable us to modify and improve the LCs and to maximize student success.

We will also use institutional data to complement survey data collection, including students' academic and admissions records. Combining survey data with institutional data will enable us to create a longitudinal understanding of student outcomes. With a longitudinal perspective, we will be able to compare grade point averages and retention rates for students across the various LCs, including students who do not participate in any LC.

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## Budget and Proposed Cost Share

Purpose	Details	Cost to EPI Grant	Cost to Residential Life
Faculty Associates Institute	Breakfast day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 participants and 18 trainers</li> <li>• The Continental (\$4.15 p/p)</li> <li>• Coffee and tea service (\$1.65 p/p)</li> </ul>	\$208.80	
	Lunch day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 participants and 18 trainers</li> <li>• Wraps (\$4.50 p/p)</li> <li>• Seasonal vegetable &amp; dip platter (\$2.00 p/p)</li> <li>• Flavored sparkling water (\$1.10 p/p)</li> </ul>	\$273.60	
	Breakfast day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 participants and 18 trainers</li> <li>• The Continental (\$4.15 p/p)</li> <li>• Coffee and tea service (\$1.65 p/p)</li> </ul>	\$208.80	
	Lunch day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 participants and 18 trainers</li> <li>• Plated entrée salads (\$5.95 p/p)</li> <li>• Sliced fresh fruit platter (\$2.25 p/p)</li> <li>• Flavored sparkling water (\$1.10 p/p)</li> </ul>	\$334.80	
	Supplies, printing, and copying		\$300.00
Faculty Associates compensation	\$1000 stipend for 18 Faculty Associates	\$9000.00	\$9000.00
Faculty Associates cohort luncheon session	Fall luncheon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 participants and 2 facilitators</li> <li>• Wraps (\$4.50 p/p)</li> <li>• Seasonal vegetable &amp; dip platter (\$2.00 p/p)</li> <li>• Flavored sparkling water (\$1.10 p/p)</li> </ul>	\$152.00	
	Spring luncheon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 participants and 2 facilitators</li> <li>• Plated entrée salads (\$5.95 p/p)</li> <li>• Sliced fresh fruit platter (\$2.25 p/p)</li> <li>• Flavored sparkling water (\$1.10 p/p)</li> </ul>	\$186.00	
Faculty Associates programs to promote student engagement, success, and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$150 per program (estimated)</li> <li>• 18 Faculty Associates, one program each semester (36 programs total)</li> </ul>		\$5400.00
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>		<b>\$10,364</b>	<b>\$14,700</b>

### **Appendix A**

#### **Co-Author Biographies**

Dr. Kailee A. Brickner-McDonald is the Program Director of the Leadership Learning Community and Dewey House for Community Engagement in the Department of Residential Life at the University of Vermont. She teaches four one-credit service-learning seminars each year through the UVM Department of Social Work and co-coordinates nine sections of the one-credit introductory seminar for the Leadership Learning Community. Kailee's teaching and student services work is informed by her research on how college students become committed to creating social change as leaders in their communities, and the fields of student development, leadership development, and service-learning. Dr. Brickner-McDonald earned her Ed.D. from the University of Vermont's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program, with a concentration in Higher Education.

Dr. Jason C. Garvey is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs in the Department of Leadership and Developmental Sciences at the University of Vermont. He is the Faculty Associate for the Leadership Learning Community and in this role co-coordinates nine sections of the one-credit introductory seminar and promotes faculty engagement for the Leadership Learning Community. His research examines student affairs and college classroom contexts with focus on assessing and quantifying student experiences across social identities. Dr. Garvey has taught undergraduate courses in student leadership in organizations, LGBTQ leadership, and human diversity in social institutions, among others. He has also taught graduate courses in student affairs administration, college students and environments, counseling and helping skills, among others. Prior to his faculty appointment, Dr. Garvey worked in student services across a variety of functional areas, including academic advising, LGBTQ student involvement and advocacy, undergraduate research, and student affairs assessment. Dr. Garvey received his Ph.D. in College Student Personnel Administration from the University of Maryland with a certificate in Measurement, Statistics, and Evaluation.

## **Appendix B**

### **Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute**

#### **Learning Outcomes**

- Become familiar with Residential Life and learning communities at the University of Vermont.
- Become familiar with theoretical and empirical foundations of student success within learning communities.
- Cultivate teamwork that contributes to positive learning community environments.

#### **Participants and Recruitment**

- 18 learning community Faculty Associates, three within each of six theme-specific learning communities
- Faculty recruitment across academic disciplines and appointments to promote interdisciplinary goals of learning communities
- Recruitment will occur throughout fall 2017 and spring 2018 in collaboration with other cross-institutional efforts to involve faculty in learning communities

#### **Trainers**

- Learning communities Program Directors
- Area Coordinators with learning communities responsibilities
- Learning communities Faculty Directors

#### **Day 1 Overview**

- Welcome
  - Trainer introductions
  - Faculty Associates introductions
- Assessment
  - Review Faculty Associates Institute learning outcomes
  - Pre-institute assessment
- Practice-based, theoretical, and empirical scholarship
  - Promoting student engagement, success, and retention
  - High-impact educational practices
  - Learning communities and student outcomes
- University of Vermont contexts
  - Overview of Residential Life
  - Overview of emotionally intelligent leadership

#### **Day 2 Overview**

- Learning communities contexts
  - Program Directors overview learning communities structures
  - Area Coordinators overview residential structures
  - Faculty Directors overview academic structures
- Promoting student outcomes within learning communities
  - Responsibilities and compensation for Faculty Associates
  - Relationship to other stakeholders
  - Timeline and calendar of events
- Theme-specific contexts
  - Theoretical/foundational perspectives for learning community
  - Overview of theme within Faculty Associates' academic disciplines
  - Discussion about potential programs and ongoing commitments
  - Teambuilding
- Assessment
  - Revisit Faculty Associate Institute learning outcomes
  - Structured written reflection about learning outcomes achievements

## **Appendix C**

### **Faculty Associates Responsibilities and Compensation**

#### **Overview**

Student engagement in learning communities facilitates learning, development, and retention. Faculty play an integral role in undergraduate students' success within this high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008). Learning communities (LC) are a new initiative for students to live and learn within a cohort of first-year undergraduates, and contain several key components to foster student success, including faculty engagement and a one-credit first-year seminar.

The development and delivery of the LCs requires investment from a large group of stakeholders, including student affairs professionals and faculty. Faculty Associates are key stakeholders for promoting student engagement, success, and retention within theme-specific learning communities.

#### **Responsibilities**

- Attend two-day Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute at end of spring 2018 semester (date to be determined)
- Offer one program per semester to promote student engagement, success, and retention within theme-specific learning community
- Choose one ongoing commitment for the 2018-2019 academic year
  - Join Learning Communities Faculty Advisory Board and attend monthly meetings
  - Develop or redesign a course to promote theme within learning community
  - Propose a research project to understand learning communities student experiences
  - Construct your own commitment (pending approval)
- Meet with Faculty Associates cohort for luncheon session once a semester for discussion and support of ongoing commitment

#### **Compensation**

Faculty Associates who complete all responsibilities will be provided a \$1000 stipend at the conclusion of the 2018-2019 academic year. In addition, costs related to initiatives developed by Faculty Associates to promote student engagement, success, and retention will be covered by Residential Life (pending approval). Lastly, Faculty Associates will be provided a letter of recognition to include in promotion and tenure dossiers, outlining contributions made to Residential Life and learning communities.



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
**RESIDENTIAL LIFE**  
DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

**To:** Engaged Practices Initiative Grant Review Committee  
**From:** Rafael Rodriguez, Director of Residential Life & John Sama, Director of Learning Communities  
**Date:** September 28, 2017  
**Subj:** Endorsement of Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute EPI Grant Proposal

We are writing to convey our support for the proposed Learning Communities Faculty Associate Institute grant, being submitted by Kailee Brickner-McDonald and Jay Garvey. We believe that our department and the students that we serve will benefit significantly from the outcomes of the proposed institute. As well, faculty participants from across the institution will become better prepared to support and engage with students in new and important ways.

Following a year of intensive planning and significant allocation of resources, the Department of Residential Life has recently launched three new Learning Communities that are engaging students, faculty and staff around the themes of the Outdoor Experience, Leadership, and Sustainability. All three of these new communities were fully enrolled when we opened in August, and two had waiting lists.

National statistics – as well as our own – show that learning communities are high-impact practices that benefit students in significant ways, including deeper engagement, higher retention, and academic success.

Each of the three LCs has built a solid framework to deliver curricular and co-curricular experiences to their students, and the students are responding. However, we need to reach out and engage more UVM faculty in these communities, particularly as the number of students enrolled in these communities continues to grow. Next week we will begin a series of meetings with three groups of faculty who have expressed an interest in helping us to develop the curricular elements of three new Learning Communities that will be launching next year. (More than 30 faculty agreed to participate!) Therefore, we know that there is faculty interest in this initiative, and we want to be sure that we provide a solid on-boarding process so that faculty are more likely to be successful in this work.

We agree that the three learning objectives that Kailee and Jay have identified (introducing faculty to Residential Life and our Learning Communities, familiarization with theoretical and empirical foundations of student success in these communities, and the cultivation of teamwork) are critical to a successful academic affairs-student affairs partnership. Moreover, we believe that the activities proposed over the two days of the institute will enable us to achieve these objectives. It is important to us that this proposal contains a plan for a variety of quantitative and qualitative assessments, which complement our own departmental and institutional assessment activities.

In conclusion, we are excited about the benefits that this proposed institute may provide, and we are prepared to match (or exceed) whatever support is provided by the EPI grant with our own departmental resources.

Rafael Rodriguez  
Director  
Department of Residential Life  
University of Vermont



*The*  
**UNIVERSITY**  
*of* **VERMONT**

**Center for Academic Success**

September 26, 2017

Brian Reed

Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning

Dear Brian,

We are writing to express our enthusiastic support for the Engaged Practices Innovation grant proposal submitted by Drs. Kailee Brickner-McDonald and Jay Garvey to create a Learning Communities Faculty Associates Institute in spring 2018. All the signatories of this letter are intimately involved in helping to develop new Learning Communities (LCs) and refine existing ones. We are thus well situated to assess both the viability and the desirability of the proposal.

The three new LCs which launched in fall 2017 (Leadership, Outdoor Experience and Sustainability) were the product of a year's worth of work both to translate previous communities into new formats and to build things wholly new. Looking forward to fall 2018, we are currently working to create three new LCs: 1. Arts and Creativity, 2. Language/Culture/Lifestyle, and 3. Innovation/Entrepreneurship. Faculty associates for the new LCs will be in place by the end of the spring semester.

What the proposed LC Faculty Associates Institute will do is provide a focused, coordinated opportunity to bring faculty involved in new and existing LCs together with key community partners to understand campus resources, share ideas, explore best practices, and build collaborations. Faculty involved in LCs come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives and bring together diverse interests. Those faculty also come with different levels of experience, both with teaching within LCs and with navigating the broader world of co-curricular experiences at UVM which operate often outside academic units. By bringing together all the faculty associates with key stakeholders from Res Life, First Year Experience, and Student Affairs for two days of intense conversations, the Institute will ensure that faculty share common understandings of campus resources and structures, as well as common frameworks for exploring the possibilities of student engagement within a LC. More broadly, however, the Institute promises to deepen and enrich faculty engagement with LCs by providing a detailed grounding in the literature and scholarship on how to build bridges between classroom and non-classroom learning opportunities.

We see the proposed Institute as supplementing and complementing our work. Our group is assisting faculty to define and refine LC courses. The Institute will build on that by coordinating faculty efforts and perspectives and building teamwork with and across the various LCs, based in a deep grounding in the literature on student engagement.

We are very enthusiastic about this proposal, and hope that it will earn grant funding.

On behalf of the FYE Faculty and Student Engagement Committee Members,



Dani Comey  
Director  
Center for Academic Success



Abby McGowan  
Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

FYE Faculty and Student Engagement Committee Members:

Dani Comey, Director, Center for Academic Success

Abby McGowan, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Ferene Paris Meyer, Program Director, First Year Experience

Jennifer Prue, Faculty Fellow for Advising and First Year Experience

Rafael Rodriguez, Director, Residential Life

John Sama, Director, Living/Learning Center & Residential Learning Communities