

GPA, Retention, and Graduation in Living-Learning Communities: A Multi-Method Study

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of different living-learning communities and other housing arrangements on student outcomes, including retention, degree attainment, and first- and second-year GPA over six years of student data. Since assessment in this area is inherently biased by subject (student) self-selectivity, this study provides four techniques to control for this threat to internal validity, including a matching method, Regression, ANCOVA, and multilevel modeling. Aside from a comparison of multiple methods, this study provides a campus-level view of the effects of residential communities on mission-critical student outcomes. These findings are mixed. Specifically, off-campus housing arrangements and two learning communities have students at higher risk, as measured by lower rates of both retention and degree attainment. One learning community shows mixed results in student academic progression after four years enrollment; with lower rates of graduation but more students still enrolled. Only one living-learning community demonstrated a positive effect on student retention, but this result was only present for students after one year of enrollment and effect size was small. Results of this study were not fully consistent with previous studies and did not provide the positive effects one might anticipate when evaluating residential communities.

Key words: GPA, retention, graduation, learning communities

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