

**2024 CTE Faculty Fellow****By Mikki Kressbach****Housing**

At the beginning of the semester, I was charged by Housing with the task of helping LMU develop sustainable and creative living learning programs. Thanks to the push of the Strategic Plan, there is growing enthusiasm for supporting and improving the student residential experience. By housing students together and offering a shared set of academic and social activities, living learning communities (LLCs) ideally bridge the academic and residential components of student life, encouraging them to create critical connections between their academic studies, campus communities, and social life. Through partnerships between Academic and Student Affairs, these programs can foster belonging and active engagement inside and outside of the classroom, and help students develop deeper connections to faculty and their surrounding communities. As such, LLCs mirror many of the tenets of Ignatian pedagogy by attending the *cura personalis* of the students and faculty alike.

These ambitious goals make LLCs attractive to University administration at the conceptual level. At LMU, LLCs have become a central component of the Task Force on the spotlight initiative “Personalized Connections,” where they are trying to promote programs that satisfy intellectual engagement, reflection and contemplation, interdisciplinary engagement, community advocacy and service, and global and cultural awareness. At the same time, they require significant staff, faculty, and financial resources, making them challenging to operate and sustain over an extended period of time (Inkaelas et. al.). My goal as the Faculty Fellow for Housing has been to understand how these programs operate at LMU: the individual program structures, learning outcomes, assessment mechanisms, and the experiences they generate for our students. While the administration may understand the utility of programs from a particular perspective, they may not align with the ethos of individual programs, each unique in their goals, student populations, and needs. Questions that have guided my work include: What does the University

want from LLCs? How does this compare to the goals of individual programs? What challenges emerge as a result of this gap or other structural barriers at the University?

I have spent the first half of my fellowship gathering information about current programs, and initiatives in place at LMU, and examining existing research on LLCs. Through interviews with staff and faculty advisors for seven existing LLC programs, I have found that while programs are creating meaningful and positive student experiences, most struggle with the most common challenges stated by existing research. Meta-analyses of LLCs have identified common stress points for programs, including infrastructure (adequate means of communicating between student and academic affairs), resources (both human and financial), and that many programs rely on a single “champion” or individual who bears the responsibility for keeping a program afloat (Inkaelas et. al.). The LLCs at LMU are run by dedicated and hardworking individuals, many of whom single-handedly navigate the logistical and financial difficulties of managing the program alongside their other job responsibilities. I have also found a persistent divide between programs run by staff and those run by faculty, which influences whether the living or the learning element of the program is emphasized. Programs run by staff often struggle to find partner faculty and departments to offer courses and instead, staffers find themselves teaching 1-unit courses for their programs. Those who do have faculty partnerships worry that their coursework hinges on the single faculty who has stepped up to volunteer. The few programs run by faculty often deemphasize the living component of the program, perhaps due to a lack of familiarity with residential life and the resources available to students living on campus. As a faculty advisor for the SFTV LLC, this fellowship has helped me learn about the countless campus resources that faculty may not be aware exist. Across all of my conversations, current advisors have stated that the division between living and learning, staff and faculty, could be facilitated by a clearer, more centralized organization of the programs and opportunities to bridge the divide between Academic and Student Affairs. In other words, there is no clear answer to “who is in charge” of these programs, where funding should be sourced, and how they should be evaluated. Without this information, individuals are left to rely on their existing understanding of the university and work to keep their program going year after year. The

recent work by the Task Force on LLCs would appear to be an answer to this problem. As I've read through their report and spoken with campus partners, I see hope for greater resources and infrastructure, but I have concerns about how these new program goals may impact the existing design, goals, and benefits of LMU's programs. I worry that imposing such lofty goals on over-burdened staff and faculty risks undermining the meaningful experiences that current programs generate for our students. Moreover, the proposed changes are likely years down the line, so how can we help current programs succeed in the meantime?

In my remaining time as a Faculty Fellow, I hope to work towards designing and creating resources to help current programs and encourage the development of programs that are built to succeed within the current structures of the university. This will mean creating opportunities for communication across programs (summer LLC retreat), educating faculty on LLCs to encourage greater academic integration into programs (information sessions), and leading workshops on how to build a strong foundation for LLC success.