Defining Collaboration Through the Lens of a Delphi Study: Student Affairs and Academic Affairs Partnerships in Residential Learning Communities

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Abstract

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Keywords

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Acknowledgements

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Evidence suggests that collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs can foster student success both inside and outside of the classroom. Residential learning communities (RLCs) are a popular avenue by which these two divisions can find collaborative opportunities to integrate students' curricular and cocurricular experiences. Although this strategy can be rich in student success rewards, academic affairs, and student affairs face challenges as they work to overcome cultural and structural differences. One of these challenges may simply be the lack of a shared interpretation of collaboration. The purpose of this study is to arrive at a consensus definition of collaboration within the context of RLCs. We engaged RLC scholars and practitioners in a Delphi study to create a comprehensive definition for use in RLC program assessment and development resulting in the following definition: Collaboration between academic and student affairs is the continuous process of cultivating an interdependent relationship where each stakeholder is mutually committed to working toward the shared purpose of holistic student learning. This definition serves as a springboard for academic affairs and student affairs RLC collaborators to strive for continuous processes, interdependent relationships, and commitment to a shared purpose.

Keywords: collaboration, student affairs, academic affairs, residential learning

Introduction

To address the current challenges in higher education, it is imperative that colleges and universities undertake a cultural and structural shift devoted to becoming "student ready." (White, 2016) These challenges include declines in enrollment across all sectors of higher education (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019); an increase in first year students required to take remedial education (Jimenez et al., 2016); and students needing greater levels of socio-emotional support to increase student achievement (Jones & Khan, 2017). For those of us who work in institutions of higher education, this needed cultural shift challenges the way we approach and define our work. This shift also challenges the traditional higher education model in that to maximize student success, we can no longer work in silos—we must learn to collaborate with our colleagues in both academic affairs and in student affairs.

Research indicates that collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs[1] supports student learning and success (Frost et al., 2010; Kezar, 2001; Kuh, 1996; Love & Love, 1995; Nesheim et al., 2007). Effective collaborations can manifest in a variety of ways, such as residential learning communities (Brower & Inkelas, 2010), assessment (Banta & Kuh, 1998), and new student orientation (Kezar, 2001). Although collaborative efforts can be beneficial to student success, members of academic affairs and student affairs are often faced with challenges that threaten the effectiveness of their initiatives, including professional cultures and organizational structures (Browne et al., 2009; Kezar, 2001). One of these challenges may simply be differences in the ways stakeholders interpret the concept of collaboration (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000).

Despite the importance of collaboration to foster student success, an agreed-upon definition of collaboration among academic and student affairs professionals does not exist. A shared definition is a necessary precursor to rigorous examination of this important topic. Moreover, although evidence indicates that collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs enhance student learning and success (Inkelas et al., 2018; Kezar, 2001; Mayhew et al., 2016), practical approaches as to how to build and sustain collaborations are largely absent.

The purpose of this Delphi study was to fill both the conceptual and the practical gaps in the literature left by this lack of consensus. The development of an empirically based definition of collaboration among academic and student affairs professionals within the context of residential learning communities (RLCs) provides researchers on collaboration in higher education a well-defined object to study. Similarly, practitioners can use such a definition to assess collaboration on their campuses and guide efforts to enhance and sustain those collaborations. This study examined the following research question: How is collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs in RLCs defined?

We review the benefits and challenges associated with collaboration among academic and student affairs in the relevant literature. Additionally, we discuss the Delphi method, its suitability to address this study's research question, and the ways in which the method was used in this study. Finally, we explain the results and present a definition for collaboration among academic and student affairs professionals in RLCs. We also further articulate the relevance of the definition to current literature and outline implications for future studies and practical applications.

## Benefits of Collaborations between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

Evidence indicates that when academic affairs and student affairs units work together, they can improve students' academic performance by helping them transition to the social and academic demands of college (Colwell, 2006), a key outcome of residential learning communities (RLCs). For example, these collaborations can facilitate more opportunities for students to interact with faculty members outside of the classroom, a practice that is critical to student success (Frost et al., 2010; Kezar, 2001; Kuh, 1996; Love & Love, 1995; Nesheim et al., 2007; Tinto, 2012). One avenue by which institutions foster faculty-student interactions beyond the classroom is RLCs. Faculty involvement in these programs is considered one of the most important components to the success of these communities (Browne et al., 2009; Inkelas, et al., 2018). Students who frequently interact with faculty outside of the classroom report gains

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[1] For this study, academic affairs professionals include faculty and academic administrators. Student Affairs professionals include those who support college student development and/or provide services to students. The authors acknowledge that the situational nature of academic and student affairs roles may vary depending upon an institution's organizational structure.

in a variety of areas, including cognitive skills, interest in pursuing a career, autonomy, and personal development (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Mayhew et al., 2016).

RLCs have the potential to enhance the quality of these interactions as well. Students in RLCs are more likely to develop supportive relationships with faculty members (Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016). By incorporating faculty members into RLC programs, students are more likely to engage in opportunities that extend their classroom learning into their residential and social environments. This suggests that RLCs can more effectively foster students' success in curricular and cocurricular pursuits if the communities exist as intentional collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs. Figure 1 presents the Best Practices Model for Living-Learning Communities (Inkelas et al., 2018), which shows the critical components of a successful RLC (RLC and LLC are used interchangeably in the literature) in the form of a pyramid. The pyramid, which is based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954), identifies the foundational needs at the base of the pyramid. This foundation supports the levels above to achieve the goal of intentional integration at the top of the pyramid. Inkelas et al. (2018) places collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs (shown in the diagram as "housing") at the central, foundational position of their BPM pyramid, illustrating its importance to the success of RLCs.

Figure 1
The BPM for LLCs
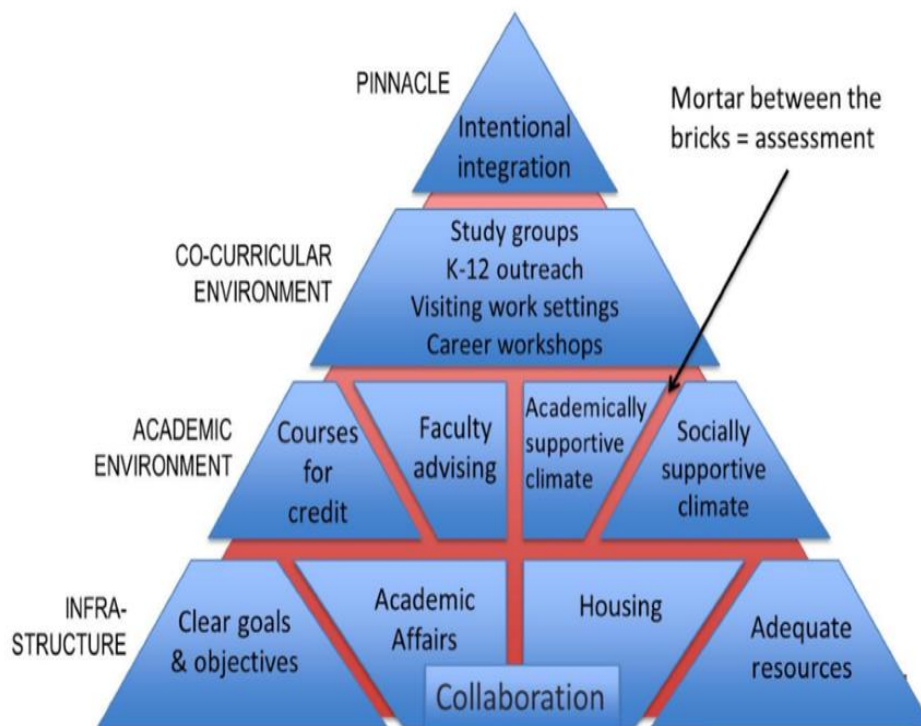
Note. Reprinted from *Living-Learning Communities That Work: A Research-Based Model for Design, Delivery, and Assessment* (p. 18), by K. K. Inkelas et al., 2018, Stylus. Copyright 2018 by Stylus Publishing, LLC. Reprinted with permission.

In their review of models of student affairs practice, Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2014) illustrate the importance of collaboration among academic and student affairs. The authors characterize student affairs practice models in which academic and student affairs collaborations place students at the center of a shared learning experience as innovative,

suggesting that this approach is novel, rather than largely adopted (Manning et al., 2014). For example, features of their Academic-Student Affairs Collaboration model include "student affairs as a partner in the learning enterprise," engaging in an environment where student affairs and academic affairs operate in a tightly coupled fashion utilizing structural bridges. These bridges include embracing a shared educational mission and language concerning student learning and success to ensure they are "working in concert rather than at cross purposes" (Manning et al., 2014, pp. 161-164). In their discussion of student affairs practice models, Manning et al. (2014) do not define collaboration, which perpetuates different understandings of a concept they hold to be important. They indicate that collaboration among academic and student affairs is essential, yet not widely adopted, suggesting that there are challenges to achieving this beneficial way of operating.

Challenges of Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration

As a decade of research suggests, academic affairs and student affairs often struggle to achieve a level and type of collaboration that effectively supports student success (e.g., Kezar, 2001; Manning et al., 2014). Campus climates are complex and academic and student affairs divisions often exist as silos, separated by nuances such as assumptions about the purpose of higher education (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) and interpretations of collaboration. Additionally, the professional trajectory to higher education is often different for student affairs and academic affairs professionals. On the academic track, faculty members are more likely to be deeply immersed in a singular topic, to prioritize research and knowledge generation, and to embrace the stance of a critic (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). The student affairs professional path, on the other hand, is often informed by a desire to foster holistic student learning and development and an applied - as opposed to theoretical - approach to their work (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949). These differences can powerfully influence the way academic and student affairs professionals define and value collaboration and the other's perspective on the purpose of their institutions. These differences can also lead to confusion and conflict when attempting to collaborate.

Differences in responsibilities to students and reward systems can also present challenges for collaboration (Browne et al., 2009; Manning et al., 2014; Schroeder, 1999). Faculty and academic affairs administrators are traditionally responsible for students' intellectual development, whereas student affairs professionals assume the role of service providers and authorities of students' psychosocial development. In terms of reward systems, faculty members and administrators in academic affairs seeking tenure or promotion are often encouraged to prioritize research. This may come at the expense of interacting with students outside of the classroom, which can be detrimental to student learning and success (Kuh, 1995). On the other hand, the typical reward system for many student affairs divisions is more tightly tied to student engagement beyond the classroom. These differences in norms among academic and student affairs professionals can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and/or operating at cross purposes when it comes to collaborating in RLCs.

Often, when faculty members do engage with students in cocurricular environments, they tend to gravitate toward other faculty members to implement these experiences - rather than seeking collaborations with student affairs professionals (Arcelus, 2011; Golde & Pribbenow, 2000). Despite student affairs professionals' general expertise in holistic student learning, some faculty members are skeptical that involving such staff members will contribute to the experience's academic rigor (Peltier, 2014). Additionally, some professionals in academic affairs view student affairs professionals as indirect influences of student learning, rather than as active partners in fostering student learning outside of the classroom (Peltier, 2014).

Another challenge to effective collaboration is that academic and student affairs professionals may have different definitions of collaboration. To academic affairs, collaborations with student affairs may include inviting them to contribute to conversations about student learning and the academic mission of the institution (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000). On the other hand, student affairs may interpret collaboration as providing opportunities for faculty members to suggest ways in which they might engage students in cocurricular environments. Different ideas of how collaboration manifests may suggest that without an agreed-upon understanding in the beginning stages of a collaborative effort, collaborations may struggle before they have even had a chance to succeed. As campuses across the nation grapple not just to retain students but also to find innovative strategies to foster student success, the ability to define and assess collaborations is a challenge faced by many stakeholders.

This evidence and innovative approaches (e.g., Frost et al., 2010; Kezar, 2001; Manning et al., 2014; Schein, 2005), however, are not enough by themselves to help practitioners improve RLC collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs divisions. Relevant literature lacks a common language to assess student-centered collaboration within the context of RLCs, which limits the ability to measure the effectiveness of an academic affairs and student affairs RLC collaboration. Thus, there is a need to establish key components of a successful RLC collaboration and the tools that could be used to foster and sustain collaboration in RLCs across multiple campuses. These gaps were the impetus for this study as we strove to provide a clear definition of the collaboration construct and to assist academic affairs and student affairs collaborators strengthen their RLC programs.

Materials and Methods

The extant literature emphasizes the importance of collaboration among academic and student affairs professionals in Residential Learning Communities (RLCs; e.g., Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Frost et al., 2010; Inkelas et al., 2018). However, the literature does not include an empirically based definition of collaboration among academic and student affairs professionals in RLCs. A definition is needed to serve as a foundation to study this important and complex construct. This Delphi study examined how academic and student affairs professionals and scholars define collaboration in RLCs, among these two entities.

The Delphi method was selected because this research methodology is appropriate to address research questions that explore ill-defined topics, where knowledge is limited (Kezar & Maxey, 2016), and where more objective and analytical techniques would not provide as rich evidence as experts in each field (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 4). The Delphi method is an iterative research design used to gather input from experts on a topic through a multi-step structured process of collecting, synthesizing, and distilling expert feedback and applying the meaningful information derived to solve a problem or respond to a question (Ziglio, 1996). For these reasons, the Delphi method was the most suitable approach to explore a definition of collaboration among academic and student affairs in RLCs. In this study, the Delphi method invited experts to evaluate the construct of collaboration among student and academic affairs professionals related to RLCs through a process that included multiple, structured rounds of asking questions and soliciting input and feedback. Through this process, data from each round informed the structure and content of the subsequent rounds. We considered other study methods, including a survey to a wide range of practitioners and scholars. However, we determined that the Delphi method was a stronger choice after weighing the strengths and limitations of other methods. While other methods may have allowed for a wider range of participants and different forms of analysis, they most likely would not have resulted in a precise definition of this complex construct. The iterative nature of the Delphi method made it

the research design that was best equipped to address the research question - how is collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs defined?

To identify participants for the study, we solicited practitioners and scholars from our own networks as well as leaders in the field. Practical expertise in the topic, collaboration in RLCs, as well as the ability to meaningfully engage in the study (Ziglio, 1996) were the criteria used to narrow down the list of experts invited to participate. The initial group of 50 participants across 36 institutions was an appropriate sample size to adequately cover the topic since this purposive sample is homogeneous in terms of their expertise (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). The participants in this study included scholars and practitioners holding significant expertise in the field. The group comprised equal numbers of participants holding leadership positions in academic affairs and student affairs including Provosts, Vice Presidents, Assistant Vice Presidents, Deans, Associate Deans, Professors, Directors, Associate Directors, and Coordinators. For this study, academic affairs professionals include faculty, academic administrators, and/or anyone else working toward the support of college student academic success and/or growth and student affairs professionals include anyone working toward the support of college student development and/or providing services to students.

We received approval for the Delphi study by the University of San Diego Institutional Review Board (IRB) on Human Subjects Research. The study included four rounds, each in the form of a brief online survey sent to participants via email, see Table 1.

Table 1
Delphi Study Survey Questions

Round 1	Participants were asked two open-response questions: 1. Considering the extant literature on collaboration between student and academic affairs related to RLCs and your own experience, please list the elements you think are essential to be included in a common definition of collaboration between student and academic affairs related to RLCs. 2. Please describe your current or previous role(s) in working with RLCs (e.g., faculty member in a RLC, researcher, residential life staff, etc.)
Round 2	Participants were asked to complete a 28-question survey derived from participant responses in Round 1 of the study and compiled into 6 sections. A 5-point Likert scale was used to gather responses indicating level of importance. Each section focused on a particular element of collaboration (e.g., shared outcomes, top-down support, resources, relationship, communication) and survey questions asked about specific features. Each section was followed by an optional open-ended question asking participants to share any clarifying comments to their responses in that section of the survey.
Round 3	Participants were asked, via an open-response question, to provide feedback on a draft common definition of collaboration between student and academic affairs in RLCs. This definition was drafted based on responses from round 2 of the study
Round 4	Round 3 was repeated. However, the definition was sent to researchers participating in and facilitating a research seminar on RLCs through the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University. These researchers were asked to provide feedback to a revised definition that was created from the responses in round 3. Following this round, a final definition was created.

The first round included two open-response questions. One question asked participants to list elements they thought were essential to include in a definition of collaboration between academic and student affairs regarding RLCs. The second question asked participants to describe their current or previous role(s) with RLCs to help us understand the perspective they were bringing to the study. The instrument is included in Appendix A.

The round one survey was in the field for 19 days. After the initial invitation and three survey reminders, we received 20 responses. We determined that this was an adequate response rate because respondents included both academic and student affairs professionals and we saw redundancy in responses indicating we reached saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, 11 respondents included reference to shared goals for the RLC and eight included communication as important elements to include in the definition. We used structural coding (Saldaña, 2015) to analyze round one responses. One researcher carefully read and then organized the responses into categories. The other members of the research team reviewed the categorization. We revised the categories as needed. For example, we initially identified Communication as a category and then, after discussion, we decided to break this into two categories: Communication - Form and Communication - Content. The Communication - Form category described the practice of communication (e.g., respectful, dialogue) while the Communication - Content captured elements that were important to communicate, such as role clarity and resources. Our resulting analysis yielded the following six categories: Shared Outcomes, Top-Down Support, Resources, Relationship, Communication - Form, and Communication – Content.

To develop the round two survey, we used specific statements that comprised each of the six categories to create questions asking participants to indicate the importance of including each concept in the definition. For example, one survey item from the Communication (form) category was Communication between academic and student affairs staff related to residential learning communities is characterized as respectful. At the end of each category, participants were also given the opportunity to further explain their ratings in an open response question format. An additional open response question was included at the end of the round two survey to capture any emerging ideas that were not included in survey items.

The second-round survey was in the field for 14 days. After the initial invitation and three survey reminders, we received 16 responses. Of the 28 items, 22 scored a four or above indicating that most of the items resonated with participants and there was agreement about what to include in the definition. Because there was strong agreement among participants, it was appropriate to move to round three. See Appendix B.

To develop the round three survey, three members of the research team drafted a definition of collaboration using the ratings and open responses collected in round two. We used a mean score of four as a cutoff point for including items in the draft definition. Items receiving a mean score of four or five indicated that participants thought it was very or extremely important to include. The full research team then held a dialogue and revised the definition. For example, through dialogue we were further refined our initial communication categories by joining some concepts with other categories and eliminating the category focused on content. "Shared decision-making," which was initially coded in the category of Communication - Form, was moved to the category Interdependent Relationship through this dialogic process. Our rationale for this decision was that communication was a process that led to shared decision-making rather than a distinct element of the definition of collaboration.

In round three, participants were asked to offer feedback to improve the definition. The round three survey also included an open response question after each of the four key elements and after the definition as a whole, allowing participants to share specific insights regarding each component. Round three was in the field for seven days. After the initial invitation and two survey reminders, we received 12 responses. Three members of the research team

incorporated the feedback received from round three participants and revised the definition. For example, a few participants commented on the wording for the commitment to resources. The original wording read: A commitment to the shared purpose of the RLC is demonstrated by mutual engagement in the RLC, and a mutual commitment of resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC. The participants thought this phrasing implied that resources would be equal and observed that this may not be the case on every campus We incorporated this feedback by revising that statement to: A commitment to the shared purpose of the RLC is demonstrated by mutual engagement in the RLC, and a mutual, not necessarily equal, commitment of resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC. The other three research team members reviewed the revisions and through dialogue, we finalized the definition. In round four, we distributed the round three survey to 15 RLC academic and student affairs professionals selected to participate in Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning (CEL) Research Seminar on Residential Learning Communities. These participants were selected to engage in the research seminar due to their experience and contribution to the RLC field. We also distributed the survey to the four leaders in the field who facilitated the CEL seminar. The survey was in the field for one day and we received 13 responses. The full research team then met and aligned the feedback for each element in a document, discussed the feedback, and made revisions we thought were necessary. We also reviewed the previous rounds of feedback to determine if the stepwise development of the definition was reasonable. This process led to refinement of the Shared Purpose element, which required us to decide whether to define the shared purpose for all RLCs as holistic learning or to leave it open to interpretation. Based on participant feedback, we decided to revise the Shared Purpose element so that the definition establishes that holistic student learning is the shared purpose for all RLCs.

Results

The key finding from this study is that academic and student affairs professionals agreed on multiple key elements of a definition of collaboration between academic and student affairs professionals in residential learning communities (RLCs). This study produced the following definition:

> Collaboration between academic and student affairs is the continuous process of cultivating an interdependent relationship where each stakeholder is mutually committed to working toward the shared purpose of holistic student learning.

This definition is intentionally broad as it captures a complex construct. As such, the definition benefits from additional, contextual description of its key elements: (1) continuous process, (2) interdependent relationship, and (3) commitment to shared purpose (Table 2). By using the Delphi method, we were able to capture data that allowed us to describe these elements.

Table 2

Description of Key Elements in the Definition of Collaboration

Element	Description
Continuous Process	Collaboration between academic and student affairs in Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) is an ongoing process that takes time and effort to develop and maintain. Collaboration is not an end state, but rather a fluid process that evolves and can devolve as challenges arise or various features, such as stakeholders, institutional priorities, and resources change.
Interdependent Relationship	Collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs is interdependent and characterized by trust and shared decision-making. Collaboration is based on understanding and valuing the curricular and cocurricular experiences, one another's unique contributions toward the shared purpose, and mutual acknowledgement of one another's professional norms. This interdependent relationship reflects integrated rather than parallel efforts among stakeholders toward holistic student learning.
Commitment to a Shared Purpose	The shared purpose of RLCs is holistic student learning that takes place both in and outside the classroom. Collaboration requires that the RLC has a clearly defined shared purpose that is understood, embraced, and practiced by all stakeholders. A commitment to the shared purpose of the RLC is demonstrated by mutual engagement in the RLC, and a mutual, not necessarily equal, commitment of resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC.
A Note on Collaboration and Campus Culture	Institutional and divisional cultures can support or interfere with collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs. For example, support from institutional leadership regarding collaboration, resources to support the RLC, and an understanding that collaboration supports the institutional mission are cultural elements that vary by institution. It is important for stakeholders to acknowledge and discuss how campus culture influences collaboration in RLCs.

A final component that contextualizes the definition is culture. The researchers fully acknowledge that the unique features of discreet institutional and divisional cultures can support or interfere with collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs. For example, support from institutional leadership regarding collaboration, resources to support the RLC, and an understanding that collaboration supports the institutional mission are cultural elements that vary by institution. It is important for stakeholders to acknowledge and discuss how campus culture influences collaboration in RLCs.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to pursue a definition of collaboration among academic and student affairs with respect to RLCs and fill the gap in the literature. The study resulted in a definition that contributes to the extant literature and provides a basis for future research.

Future research from our team will include studies seeking a better understanding of equity and inclusion within the context of collaboration, addressing virtual strategies, and demonstrating how a collaboration tool, developed as a next stage of our research, can be used to assess, and enhance collaboration.

The Definition in Context

Some of the elements of the definition derived from this study support more general assertions by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), and Manning et al. (2014), and more specific ideas put forth by Browne et al. (2009) and Schroeder (1999), while other definition elements add new contributions to the literature.

Elements that Support the Literature

Within the "interdependent relationship" element, understanding and valuing the curricular and cocurricular experiences, one another's unique contribution to the RLC's shared purpose, as well as one another's professional norms are components that are discussed more generally in the literature. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) acknowledge the different cultures in the academy and generally place academic affairs/faculty in the Collegial Culture whereas student affairs professionals generally fall in the Developmental Culture. These cultures hold differing values and assumptions and therefore exist in tension when those values and assumptions come into conflict. Although Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) argue that these different cultures exist and that each perspective is important, we extend this threshold to understanding and valuing. This conflict presents itself as a cultural-historical barrier in which academic and student affairs professionals speak different languages, define student success in unique ways specific to their background and training, and possess different understandings of assessment (Kuh & Banta, 2000). To overcome this obstacle, faculty must be willing to put aside their disciplinary acumen, acknowledging that learning occurs beyond the four walls of the classroom and student affairs staff must showcase their devotion to cognitive development in ways that promote integration and critical thinking (Browne et al., 2009). It's here that a common ground is established for an interdependent relationship in which both groups must not only understand but also value the other's realm (curricular and cocurricular experiences), unique contribution to the RLC's shared purpose, and professional norms.

Understanding and valuing assumes an acknowledgement that differences exist and that there is an openness to understanding those differences as well as a process of coming to value them. This approach to collaboration - what Manning et al. (2014) identify as the Academic-Student Affairs Collaboration model - is based on trust, and on acknowledging that joint efforts do not diminish the importance of either area but instead amplify the learning environment for faculty, staff, and students. This willingness to trust one another is critical for RLCs to achieve programmatic learning outcomes (Browne et al., 2009) as trust allows student and academic affairs practitioners to negotiate differences of opinions with respect, comfort, and honesty (Schroeder, 1999). Magolda (2005) argues that "as partners from different subcultures cross borders and begin to collaborate, confront difference, and tolerate discomfort, new borderlands - cultural areas infused with differences - emerge" (p. 21). This shared responsibility, at times through accepting conflict, for the student experience ensures that decision-making is not fragmented or compartmentalized but instead contributes back to the shared vision (Schroeder, 1999).

The most effective and successful RLCs exhibit a faculty-staff collaboration that rebalances power differentials (Brower & Inkelas, 2010). Manning et al (2014) argue that academic and student affairs should "work in concert rather than at cross purposes" (p. 178).

Within the interdependent relationship and commitment to shared purpose elements of our definition, we expand on this idea to be more specific and assert that efforts among stakeholders should be integrated rather than parallel (Inkelas et al., 2018) and should work toward the shared purpose of holistic student learning. Successful RLCs equally value learning that occurs in and out of the classroom, are intentional when designing learning (Brower & Inkelas, 2010), and recognize the value of both faculty and staff in achieving this shared purpose through a meaningful, reciprocal, and responsive relationship (Magolda, 2005). However, "if the goal is to create a broad-based partnership, an integrative educational experience, and a learning-centered campus, then we must challenge each other to delve deeply into understanding the purpose and goals of our own divisional work and then engage each other across divisions in dialogue" (Arcelus, 2011, p. 69). Magolda (2005) reinforces this idea, arguing that these two, separate cultures of academic and student affairs—of in- and out-of-class experiences—must first understand themselves before beginning the journey to understand the other. It's here that these two cultures can complement, rather than antagonize, one another to offer a rich, holistic educational experience.

We are specific about the "shared purpose" being holistic student learning in an RLC because this framework reinforces the interdependent relationship and the need for mutual understanding and valuing of one another's unique contributions. This holistic approach to learning blurs the boundaries that typically exist between curriculum and co-curriculum in the traditionalist approach to education (Magolda, 2005). We further argue that the shared purpose needs to be clearly defined and understood, embraced, and practiced by all stakeholders. This shared purpose is not intended to be an espoused theory but rather a theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

As discussed in the findings, institutional and divisional "cultures" can support or interfere with collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs. The choices that faculty make are rooted in the culture of which they are made (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000), a culture that doesn't tend to reward faculty for seeking to deepen the intersections between the classroom and the residence hall. By embracing RLCs as critical to student learning, faculty challenge the dominant culture (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000) and create synergy through "shared understandings of interrelationships and patterns of change" (Senge, 1990, p. 118). As Senge (1990) explains, this requires institutional learning where leaders are willing to expose their own thinking and open it to the influence of others. As this study has revealed, stakeholders must acknowledge and discuss how campus culture influences collaboration in RLCs, shifting institutional value toward the unification of an academic experience that embraces the intersections of in-class and out-of-class learning (Golde & Pibenow, 2000).

Elements Absent from the Literature

Other elements of the definition are not currently explored in the literature related to collaboration among academic and student affairs with respect to RLCs and collaboration in virtual practices to support student success and retention. Conceptualizing collaboration as a "continuous process" that takes time and effort to develop and sustain is critical as collaboration is not an end state, but rather a fluid process that evolves and can devolve as challenges arise and/or various features change (e.g., stakeholders, institutional priorities, organizational structures, and resources).

Study Limitations

As is the case when evaluating methodology, limitations associated with the Delphi technique must be considered. Concerns related to the Delphi method include participant

attrition over the multiple rounds involved, participant aptitude in responding to questions posed in the study (Fink et al., 1984; Gordon & Helmer, 1966), a risk of producing the lowest common denominator of agreement on broad generalities already known to and accepted by nearly everyone in the field, (Fink et al., 1984) or that participants may not achieve the ultimate objective of reaching a consensus (Combs, 1985; Lawrence, 1980). To address these concerns, a portion of our team developed the instrument for each subsequent round based on careful analysis of the data collected in the previous round and the remaining portion of our team served as peer reviewers to objectively evaluate decisions made by those drafting the instruments for each round. We also included opportunities for participants to provide rationale and clarification for their responses via open response items and included this in our analysis. As with any research study, the quality of the study is contingent on close attention to the implementation of methods (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). We ensured that both instructions to participants were clear and that instruments developed for each subsequent round carefully reflected input from participants in previous rounds by involving peer reviewers (Ziglio, 1996). Utilizing methods from Lincoln and Guba's (1986) criteria of trustworthiness, we maintained a detailed documentation of our process throughout the study.

Implications for Practice & Conclusion

In an era of growing public accountability and salience of student success, academic affairs and student affairs cannot simply coexist on college campuses (Magolda,2005). Instead, they must respond to the changing higher education landscape by finding points of collaboration to support student success most effectively. And as a starting point, academic affairs and student affairs must acknowledge that they may be operating from different interpretations of the term "collaboration." The definition produced in this study offers a common understanding and nuances that can help the partners be successful in their collaborative efforts.

The Best Practices Model for living-learning communities (BPM) emphasizes the importance of partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs (Inkelas et al., 2018); however, this partnership cannot develop without significant efforts by both academic affairs and student affairs professionals. This definition of collaboration offers collaborators detailed elements to focus on as they work together. These specific elements can be practically discussed and evaluated to identify points of strength and areas for growth in the collaborative effort. For example, the definition may illuminate the fact that academic and student affairs colleagues have different professional norms and guide them to understand one another's professional norms and unique contributions to the shared effort. Due to the distinctly different types of education, training, and reward systems for faculty and staff, it is critical that they engage in dialogue about what skills, experience, and expertise they can contribute to the shared goals of the RLC. This dialogue helps establish a trusted, interdependent relationship between academic affairs and student affairs and leads to shared decisions that are informed by a unified understanding of the curricular and cocurricular elements of the RLC. Through this kind of dialogue, collaborators may also engage in professional development and enhance their own competencies. For example, they may develop new professional awareness and skills that can only result from collaboration. The definition can be used as a tool to begin conversations about expectations and approaches throughout the collaboration—from the start of an RLC partnership, when encountering challenges, at the start of each academic year, and at key milestones such as mid and end of year evaluations.

A shared understanding of the value surrounding the integration of curricular and cocurricular settings, although it will be put into action differently from one institution to the next, serves the shared purpose of holistic student learning in RLCs (Inkelas et al., 2018). The

commitment to this purpose directly contributes to students' meeting the social and academic demands of college. It creates an environment that reinforces the partnership between academic affairs and student affairs in ways that are visible to students. This shared purpose may exist in the form of measurable learning outcomes, a unified mission or vision statement, or clear, agreed-upon expectations that define the roles of RLC faculty and staff.

One could argue that, in theory, this approach to collaboration is aspirational at best. Achieving the level of collaboration as defined here is difficult work and doesn't come without sacrifices. As Browne et al. (2009) and Kezar (2001) have suggested, cross-divisional collaboration is not a seamless process and is rarely, if ever, achieved without challenges that chip away at the foundation of such efforts. In the context of this definition, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the role that culture plays in contributing to or hindering collaboration within RLC programs. In a time of scarce resources, organizational restructuring, and ongoing changes in leadership, institutional priorities shift. Therefore, it is important to view collaboration in RLCs as a continuous process that can both evolve and devolve as institutions change. Recognizing this fluidity, it becomes the responsibility of RLC faculty and staff—those who champion these efforts—to ensure protocols are in place to ensure the sustainability of collaboration as campuses undergo these significant changes.

Finally, as we consider these changes, we have an opportunity to move beyond the distinction between in-class and out-of-class learning, or curricular and co-curricular. In this definition of collaboration, we challenge both academic affairs and student affairs professionals to reexamine these distinctions and consider how they can each make contributions in both learning environments. The spatial metaphor of in/out holds institutions in a static, past cultural approach that maintains a siloed structure. This can be transcended as we recognize the imperative for a cultural and structural shift. Where learning happens, in-class or out-of-class, can be transcended and instead, what is learned and how best to teach the content become central.

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APPENDIX A

Round 1

The purpose of this study is to develop a common definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs related to residential learning communities with input from a panel of experts on this topic. The study will consist of three rounds. The first will ask for your input on essential elements to be included in the definition. I will compile the elements collected from the panel and then ask you to indicate the importance of each element using a five-point Likert scale in round two. I will then use these results to draft a common definition and ask for your feedback on this in round three.

1. Considering the extant literature on collaboration between student and academic affairs related to residential learning communities and your own experience, please list the elements you think are essential to be included in a common definition of collaboration between student and academic affairs related to residential learning communities.
2. Please describe your current or previous role(s) in working with residential learning communities (e.g., faculty member in a residential learning community, researcher, residential life staff, etc.)

Round 2

The purpose of this study is to develop a common definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs related to residential learning communities. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert on this topic. The study will consist of three rounds. The first will ask for your input on essential elements to be included in the definition. I will compile the elements collected from the panel and then ask you to indicate the importance of each element using a five-point Likert scale in round two. I will then use these results to draft a common definition and ask for your feedback on this in round three. Your responses will be confidential and used only to develop the definition.

This survey is the second of three brief rounds of the study. Each round will last about a week and should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Shared Outcomes

Please indicate how important it is to include each of the following elements in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

1. the outcomes of the RLC are clearly understood by all stakeholders (e.g., academic affairs and student affairs)
2. achievement of the outcomes of the RLC are demonstrated
3. the relative importance of the RLC in terms of other institutional priorities is clear
4. a central outcome of the RLC is a focus on the whole student
5. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question.

Top-Down Support

Please indicate how important it is to include each of the following elements in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

1. support from top leadership in terms of resources for the RLC
2. support from top leadership for collaboration
3. acknowledgement from top leadership that collaboration supports the institutional mission
4. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question.

Resources

Please indicate how important it is to include each of the following elements in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

1. each stakeholder (e.g., academic affairs and student affairs) commits resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC
2. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question.

Relationship

Please indicate how important it is to include each of the following elements in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

The relationship between academic and student affairs staff collaborating on residential learning communities should be characterized by...

1. Trust
2. Compromise
3. a mutual (non-judgmental) acknowledgement of professional norms for student affairs and academic affairs
4. a mutual acknowledgement of the primacy of the academic priorities of the institution
5. mutual engagement in the RLC
6. mutual respect
7. mutual valuing of the others' role in the process
8. mutual valuing of the curricular and cocurricular experience
9. integrated versus parallel efforts
10. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question.

Communication (form)

Please indicate how important it is to include each of the following elements in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

Communication between academic and student affairs staff related to residential learning communities is characterized as...

1. deep listening
2. Respectful
3. deliberative dialogue
4. shared decision-making
5. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question.

Communication (content)

Please indicate how important it is to include each of the following elements in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

Student affairs and academic affairs staff collaborating on residential learning communities should communicate about...

1. shared vision of the residential learning community
2. residence hall and classroom activity
3. residence hall assignments and changes
4. clarifying roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, student leaders, other)
5. the rationale for the various roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, student leaders, other)
6. Programming
7. Budget
8. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question.

Please share any other thoughts you have about elements that should be included in a definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to residential learning communities.

Round 3

The purpose of this study is to develop a common definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs related to residential learning communities. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert on this topic. The study will consist of three rounds. The first asked for your input on essential elements to be included in the definition. I compiled the elements collected from the panel and then asked you to indicate the importance of each element using a five-point Likert scale in round two. I used these results to draft a common definition and in this round, I ask for your feedback about this definition. Your responses will be confidential and used only to develop this definition.

This survey is the third of the three brief rounds of this study. Each round will last about a week and should only take about 15 minutes to complete.

DEFINITION: The below definition is intended to be used with the contextualization shared in the further descriptions of each element of the definition. Please offer suggestions to improve the draft definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs

related to residential learning communities.

Collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs related to residential learning communities is the ongoing process of cultivating an interdependent relationship where each stakeholder is committed to working toward a shared purpose.

The following elements of the definition are described further here. Please offer suggestions to improve these descriptions.

Ongoing Process

Collaboration is an ongoing process that takes time and attention to develop; it is not an end state but rather a fluid process that evolves and can devolve as various features such as stakeholders, institutional priorities, and resources change.

Interdependent Relationship

Collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs is interdependent and characterized by trust, shared decision-making, mutual valuing of the curricular and cocurricular experience, mutual respect for the other's contribution to the shared purpose, and mutual acknowledgement of the other stakeholders' professional norms. An interdependent relationship reflects "integrated" efforts among stakeholders rather than "parallel" efforts that may be independently working toward shared purpose.

Commitment to Shared Purpose

The shared purpose of RLCs includes student learning that takes place both in and outside the classroom. Collaboration requires that the RLC has a clearly defined shared purpose that is understood and embraced by all stakeholders. A commitment to the shared purpose of the RLC is demonstrated by mutual engagement in the RLC, and a mutual commitment of resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC.

A Note on Collaboration and Campus Culture

Institutional and divisional culture can support or interfere with collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. For example, support from institutional leadership regarding collaboration, resources to support the RLC, and an understanding that collaboration supports the institutional mission are cultural elements that vary by institution. Divisional cultures differ and the extent to which different groups acknowledge that the academic priorities of the institution are primary can likewise vary. Institutional and divisional culture can also influence communication. As a critical component of a collaborative, interdependent relationship, communication between stakeholders is ongoing, respectful, and deliberative. Communication between stakeholders is used to ensure clarity about the shared purpose of the RLC and each stakeholder's roles and responsibilities to work toward the shared purpose.

Round 4

The purpose of this study is to develop a common definition of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs related to residential learning communities. You are

being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert on this topic. This is the final of four rounds. Your responses will be confidential and used only to develop this definition.

DEFINITION:

Collaboration between academic and student affairs is the ongoing process of cultivating an interdependent relationship where each stakeholder is mutually committed to working toward the shared purpose of holistic student learning.

Note: This definition of collaboration between academic and student affairs is intended to be used with and is reliant on the contextualization shared in the further description of each element within the definition.

Please provide any feedback to improve the definition.

The following elements of the definition are described further here. Please offer suggestions to improve these descriptions.

Ongoing Process

Collaboration between academic and student affairs in Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) is an ongoing process that takes time and effort to develop and maintain. Collaboration is not an end state, but rather a fluid process that evolves and can devolve as challenges arise and/or various features, such as stakeholders, institutional priorities, and resources change.

Interdependent Relationship

Collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs is interdependent and characterized by trust and shared decision-making. Collaboration is based on an understanding and valuing of the curricular and cocurricular experiences, one another's unique contributions toward the shared purpose, and mutual acknowledgement of one another's professional norms. This interdependent relationship reflects integrated rather than parallel efforts among stakeholders toward holistic student learning.

Commitment to Shared Purpose

The shared purpose of RLCs is holistic student learning that takes place both in and outside the classroom. Collaboration requires that the RLC has a clearly defined shared purpose that is understood, embraced, and practiced by all stakeholders. A commitment to the shared purpose of the RLC is demonstrated by mutual engagement in the RLC, and a mutual, not necessarily equal, commitment of resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC.

A Note on Collaboration and Campus Culture

Institutional and divisional cultures can support or interfere with collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs. For example, support from institutional leadership regarding collaboration, resources to support the RLC, and an understanding that collaboration supports the institutional mission are cultural elements that vary by institution. It is important for stakeholders to acknowledge and discuss how campus culture influences

collaboration in RLCs.

Please share any overall feedback to improve the definition and further descriptions.

APPENDIX B

Table B1
Mean Scores for Elements of a Definition of Collaboration Between Academic and Student Affairs Professionals in Residential Learning Communities

Element	Mean	N
Shared Outcomes		
The outcomes of the RLC are clearly understood by all stakeholders (e.g., academic affairs and student affairs).	4.9	16
A central outcome of the RLC is a focus on the whole student.	4.4	16
Achievement of the outcomes of the RLC are demonstrated.	3.9	16
The relative importance of the RLC in terms of other institutional priorities is clear.	3.8	16
Top-down Support		
Support from top leadership for collaboration.	4.6	16
Support from top leadership in terms of resources for the RLC.	4.3	16
Acknowledgement from top leadership that collaboration supports the institutional mission.	4.3	16
Resources		
Each stakeholder (e.g., academic affairs and student affairs) commits resources (e.g., human, financial, space, other) to the RLC.	4.4	16
Relationship – The relationship between academic and student affairs staff should be characterized by…		
mutual valuing of the curricular and cocurricular experience.	4.6	16
mutual respect.	4.5	16
mutual valuing of the others' role in the process.	4.5	16

integrated versus parallel efforts.	4.4	16
mutual engagement in the RLC.	4.2	16
trust.	4.2	16
a mutual (non-judgmental) acknowledgement of professional norms for student affairs and academic affairs.	4.1	16
a mutual acknowledgement of the primacy of the academic priorities of the institution.	4.1	16
compromise.	3.9	16
Communication (form) – Communication between academic and student affairs staff related to residential learning communities is characterized as…		
respectful.	4.5	16
deliberative dialogue.	4.4	16
shared decision-making.	4.2	16
deep listening.	3.9	16
Communication (content) – Student affairs and academic affairs staff should communicate about…		
clarifying roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, student leaders, other).	4.6	16
shared vision of the residential learning community.	4.4	16
the rationale for the various roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, student leaders, other).	4.4	16
budget.	4.1	16
residence hall and classroom activity.	4.0	16
programming.	3.8	16
residence hall assignments and changes.	2.9	16

APPENDIX C

Collaboration Between Academic and Student Affairs Professionals in Residential Learning Communities

The following is a definition of collaboration between academic and student affairs professionals. For this definition, student affairs professionals include anyone working toward the support of college student development and/or providing services to students. Academic affairs professionals include faculty, academic administrators, and/or anyone else working toward the support of college student academic support and/or growth. This definition is intended to be used with and is reliant on the contextualization shared in the further description of each element within the definition.

Collaboration between academic and student affairs is the continuous process of cultivating an interdependent relationship where each stakeholder is mutually committed to working toward the shared purpose of holistic student learning.

Continuous Process

Collaboration between academic and student affairs in Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) is an ongoing process that takes time and effort to develop and sustain. Collaboration is not an end state, but rather a fluid process that evolves and can devolve as challenges arise and/or various features change (e.g., stakeholders, institutional priorities, organizational structures, and resources).

Interdependent Relationship

Collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs is interdependent and characterized by trust and shared decision-making. Collaboration is based on an understanding and valuing of curricular and cocurricular experiences, one another's unique contributions toward the RLC's shared purpose, and one another's professional norms. This interdependent relationship reflects integrated rather than parallel efforts among stakeholders toward holistic student learning.

Commitment to Shared Purpose

The shared purpose of RLCs is holistic student learning which is broadly defined as learning derived in curricular and co-curricular settings in the context of student development. Collaboration requires the RLC to have a clearly defined shared purpose which may vary by institution yet is understood, embraced, and practiced by all stakeholders. A commitment to the shared purpose of the RLC is demonstrated by mutual engagement and a mutual, not necessarily equal, commitment of resources (e.g., human, financial, space).

A Note on Collaboration and Campus Culture

Institutional and divisional cultures can support or interfere with collaboration between academic and student affairs in RLCs. For example, support from institutional leadership regarding collaboration, resources to support the RLC, and an understanding that collaboration supports the institutional mission are cultural elements that vary by institution. It is important for stakeholders to acknowledge and discuss how campus culture influences collaboration in RLCs.

APPENDIX D

1) Traditional
   a) Out-of-classroom Centered
      i) Extra-curricular
      ii) Co-curricular
   b) Administrative Centered
      i) Functional Silos
      ii) Student Services
   c) Learning Centered
      i) Competitive and Adversarial
      ii) Seamless Learning
2) Innovative
   a) Student-centered
      i) Ethic of Care
      ii) Student-driven
      iii) Student Agency
   b) Academic Centered
      i) Academic-Student Affairs Collaboration
      ii) Academic-driven

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