

# **RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

## **MARKETING INTRODUCTION**

From Creating Learning Communities, (pages 139-146) by Shapiro and Levine:

The process of building community in learning communities begins with the recruitment of students to the program. Developing a marketing plan, particularly if participation is not mandated for students, is an important step in program development. A marketing plan is defined as “a detailed description of resources and actions a firm needs to achieve its stated marketing objectives.” Each learning community must clarify program objectives, assess internal resources, and measure environmental risks and opportunities. Organizers should address three questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How can we get there?

A useful strategic planning activity for program leadership is the SWOT exercise (scanning internal and external environments for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). For example, a strength of the program might be a strong commitment to campus leadership; a limited budget or lack of dedicated space for learning community classes and activities could be considered weaknesses. Strong faculty and student interest in the program is an opportunity; impending loss of graduating members or leadership might be a threat. These nuts and bolts issues of marketing and recruiting are legitimate concerns for the success of learning communities and need to be addressed just as seriously as the academic and intellectual aspects of the community.

### **Where Are We Now?**

In this phase of the marketing planning process, program leadership assesses the historical background of the initiative, reexamining the original set of goals and objectives for learning communities to revisit the expressed goals of establishing learning community. An important step is to identify the market or audience, which includes newly admitted students, prospective students, and various constituencies on campus.

### **Where Do We Want To Go?**

Considerations here are not only the goals for the program but also the purposes of the marketing plan – for example:

- Generating interest among clearly defined populations
- Increasing program enrollments
- Increasing campus awareness of the learning communities initiative
- Communicating program expectations to students

Marketing objectives can be measured in either quantitative or qualitative terms. The marketing plan must be reviewed regularly, with adjustments based on successes, disappointments, or changes in the environment. For example, during the first year of recruiting in the College Park Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, the students received a questionnaire at the end of orientation asking them where

## MARKETING INTRODUCTION

they first heard about the learning community and whether the learning community had influenced their decision to attend the university. The results of that survey helped the campus market the program the next year.

### **How Can We Get There?**

This stage focuses on decisions about marketing strategies to promote the program. It needs to identify the multiple opportunities for promoting learning communities on campus and among prospective students and identify the different individuals and offices that can help market the program.

*Preadmission:* Advertised as the ideal way to make the transition from high school to college. Members should be discussing the program with prospective students and their families. Working with the admissions and Greek life staff is crucial to the success of learning community, and bringing them into the earliest conversations makes a big difference in their willingness and ability to describe the benefits of such an innovative program enthusiastically. Learning community information should be included in fraternity view-books, application materials, and other admissions literature. On- and off-campus recruitment events should feature learning community faculty and students, who are often the best promoters of the program.

*Orientation:* Since most learning communities programs draw participants from new students, orientation is a critical point during which to promote the program. Once students have joined, program leadership should promote learning communities as places where students can connect to each other, faculty, and their new environment. Departments and colleges find that talking to students about learning communities during orientation gives new students, who might not be ready to focus on their majors, a way of thinking about constructing their schedules.

By design, learning communities alleviate many of the major fears entering students have about college and the undergraduate experience: Will I be just a number? How will I meet people? Will my professors know my name? What support resources are there if I need help in a class?

*Promotional Activities:* Informative, student-friendly literature such as the [RLC Brochure](#) and the SigEp RLC website ([www.sigep.org/rlc](http://www.sigep.org/rlc)) should be used to describe the program to perspective students and their families, current students, or any other groups targeted as participants. Literature should answer the basic questions:

- What is a learning community?
- Why should I enroll?
- What can learning communities offer me?
- How does participation affect my general education and major requirements?
- How do I enroll?

Once students join the fraternity, the process of creating community begins. Learning community faculty and leaders do not need to wait for the start of the semester to begin this important step.