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Publication Date
2016

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Social Capital and the Academic Experience in College Residential Learning Communities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership by William Darrell Hess

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2016
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Chair

University of California, San Diego
California State University, San Marcos
2016
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, W.S. and Wanda Hess, for being outstanding Christian role models who have always been patient and supportive; to my sister and brother, Vick and Wade, who never doubted my ability to complete this work; to Shelley, Jon, and Laura Kate for letting me miss play dates; and to the memory of my Grandpaw, Hubert Cleveland Hess, because you always asked me to tell you what I learned in school.
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AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Jennifer Jeffries, thank you for planting the seed for this dissertation topic. It grew from an acorn into a tree. Kara Bauer, Jenna Hazelton, Ray Savage, Edwin Darrell, Tita Gray, Paul Minifee, and university seminar instructors, your help recruiting participants made this possible. Thank you to my classmates, Nancy for always being supportive, Barbara for the technical help, Brie for crying with me, and Susan for being a good Christian friend who made me work on Saturdays. Frances Contreras and Annette Doud, your feedback and guidance have been much appreciated; and Amanda Datnow, I thank you for your never ending positivity and dedication to my success.

Eric Hansen, I thank you for understanding my stress, helping me to remember what is really important in life, putting things into perspective, and wanting me to have a work-life balance.

Kaleo, Kevin, Mike, Salina, Molly, Yayoi, Paul, and David thank you for scheduling training and travel around my availability, providing encouragement, and providing stress relief. Let’s go for a run!

Most of all, thank you Kaleo O Ke Kai Achacoso for never doubting me, giving me the confidence, the space, and the time needed to complete this project, being my best friend, and being my partner in life.
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Evidence suggests that social capital developed through social networks is critical for individuals to succeed in education and in careers. The on-campus college residence hall is one environment where college students have the opportunity to build social networks that support their academic and social development. On today’s campus learning communities are often used to provide additional influence. However, not all students develop positive social relationships in these settings. This qualitative study investigates how fourteen male and female first year students of various ethnicities navigate the social networks in a variety of different residential living learning communities. The study was conducted at a large public university and
focuses on how the students gain information that contributes to their academic experience.

Findings suggest that participants perceived the overall impact of the learning community and the residence hall experience to be positive. More specifically, insight is provided into students’ drive to succeed, social ties with small groups, social ties with faculty and staff, and the impact of the built environment. Implications for practice are discussed and suggestions are made that may help to cultivate and direct the development of social capital for students in the residence hall and in the learning community setting.

Keywords: Social Capital, Residence Hall, Learning Community
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Education, particularly higher education, coupled with hard work, is often seen as the pathway to prosperity and a better life in the U.S. Research, media, and politicians tell us that those who have a college education are less likely to be unemployed and typically earn more over their lifetime than those who do not have a degree (“NCES Fast Facts”, 2013). As a result, countless dollars in scholarship money and financial aid are made available each year, and families and communities proudly send students off to college. Yet, not all are successful. In American society we are typically taught that if a person goes to school and works hard the sky is the limit. Meanwhile, this promise of a better life through a college education escapes many, and thus it is obvious that more than hard work alone is needed.

Social capital may be needed in addition to hard work. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as the product of social connections in a network. Many scholars (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2013; Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2011; Coleman, 1988; Crisp & Nora, 2009; Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Kao, 2013; McDonald, 2011; Ovink & Veazey, 2010; Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006; Wells, 2008) argue that the benefits gained from social relationships create social capital, which plays a key role in academic success. In fact, social capital has been found to influence college enrollment and persistence (Perna & Titus, 2005; Rios-
Learning how social capital affects educational success provides important implications for public policy discussions and provides the educational community with practical guidelines for increasing student success (Byun et al., 2011; Coleman, 1988; Ovink & Veazey, 2010; Sandefur et al., 2006).

**Statement of the Problem**

The influence of social capital is seen throughout all levels of the education system. However, educational institutions tend to value forms of social capital that reflect white, upper-middle class, male cultural norms (Enriquez 2011; Simmons, 2011). When educational institutions show a preference for forms of social capital outside their cultural norms the ability to receive an education and contribute fully to society is undermined for otherwise well qualified persons. Because of this, women, low-income individuals, and people of color tend to be marginalized in the higher education system. They have higher rates of attrition and are less likely to enroll in more selective institutions (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Sandefur et al., 2006; Leonhardt, 2013; Simmons, 2011).

Regardless of ambition and cognitive ability, to be competitive, students from vulnerable populations are required to discover methods to unlock access to exclusive social networks, or create their own social networks capable of building much needed social capital. This is in addition to demonstrating their academic achievement and initiative more emphatically than others. Understanding and leveraging social capital in the education arena holds incredible possibilities for uncovering more secrets to student success and increasing the effectiveness of programs. Therefore,
understanding how social capital works to influence success in higher education is important to all of us. Understanding these intricate influences may even help us understand how to better bridge the achievement gap.

Research shows that the structural capital elements of college such as class size, number of advisors, and living on campus impact student success (Pascarella et al., 2004; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Many scholars (Museus & Neville, 2012; Ovinck & Veazey, 2010; Palmer & Gasman, 2008) agree that when the university as a community directs socialization and cultivation in addition to academics they can become purveyors of social capital. It seems that an ideal place to direct, cultivate, and purvey social capital would be the university residence hall. By their very nature college residence halls create social networks in a bounded environment. They provide a social structure and hierarchy that are reinforced through the physical layout of the building, legitimate authority of the staff charged with running it, and the specific time during which persons are allowed to reside in the residence hall.

However, most studies found regarding social capital and residence halls are typically related to behavioral outcomes or social identity. Yet, studies do exist about the connection between living on-campus in a residence hall and academic success measured as persistence to graduation, grade point average, or time to graduation. Many of these studies provide evidence supporting the notion that living on-campus in a residence hall is positively correlated to academic success (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). A number of them also support the notion that living on-campus in a residence hall is correlated
to engagement, which is in turn correlated to academic success. Still others indicate that intentionally structured learning communities in the residence halls are even more impactful (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Pasque & Murphy, 2005). Yet, these studies still do not directly address the social capital connection.

Overall, the literature suggests that on-campus residents may receive opportunities for social support, resources, and integration into the campus community that give them an advantage over students living off campus (Astin, 1977; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schudde, 2011). One could reasonably assume that these opportunities could be directly related to social networks and the benefits received from social networks, or social capital. Yet, specific empirical studies are lacking.

A commonly noted criticism of prior research regarding academics and residence halls is that outcomes may be more related to student ability and preference rather than program impact (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003). The concern seems to be that the numbers could be skewed if students who are of lesser ability or academically underprepared choose to live off campus. Additional research is needed to better define the relation between academics, social capital, and college residence hall environments. What factors are present in the on-campus college residence hall that contribute to both the structural and process dimensions of social capital? Is the academic experience different based on background characteristics? How might these factors create social capital in the on-campus college residence hall? Does the social
capital they create contribute to students’ perceptions of their academic success or hinder it?

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

This dissertation research investigated the social capital created or inhibited by the experience of living on campus in a residence hall. Specifically, I investigated the experiences of students who live on campus in a residence hall in a residential learning community.

The following overall research question guided this study: How do social interactions in the residence hall learning community contribute to or hinder the development of social capital that contributes to the academic experience of students?

The following sub-questions are also addressed:

1. How do the number and types of social ties and the information gained through them shape students’ academic experiences?
2. Do students with different background characteristics (e.g., gender, race, income status) have particular successes and challenges in accessing and building social capital in residence hall settings?
3. What best practices can be established to assist with the development of social capital that contributes to student success in on-campus residence hall setting?

By addressing these questions, this study helps provide insight for important practical and policy discussions and provide the educational community with possible guidelines for increasing college and university student success. The study also
contributes to the research literature on social capital and student persistence in college.

The study employed qualitative research methods. A qualitative approach explores meaning, tries to make sense of what is observed, and unveils a deeper understanding of peoples’ experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Semi-structured interviews and surveys were used as the primary forms of data collection for this investigation. Fourteen students from various residence halls and learning communities participated.

**Definition of Terms**

The following list of definitions clarifies how specific terms are used within the study.

- **Social Capital**: The product, whether beneficial or debasing, of social connections in a network (Coleman, 1988).

- **Process Social Capital**: Actual interactions between members within social networks and social relationships (Byun et al., 2011; Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Sun, 1999).

- **Structural Social Capital**: The basic organizational make up of social networks and relationships including the number of members, their titles, functions, and similar attributes (Byun et al., 2011; Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Sun, 1999).

- **Residence Hall**: On-campus residential facility staffed by university personnel trained to facilitate college student development.
• **Residential Learning Community:** A group living together in a specific residence hall where they are provided with academic programming and services and coordinated curricular activities. These may include academic courses taught in the residence facility, in-hall tutoring, academic advising, ongoing lecture series, and more. (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

• **Apartment:** Completely self-contained living units with bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, and full kitchens for the exclusive use of the residents in that unit.

• **Suite:** Similar to an apartment in that there is a common area similar to a living room surrounded by single, double, and triple bedrooms, and bathrooms for the exclusive use of persons who live in that suite. However, there is no full kitchen.

• **Traditional Residence Hall:** A building with single, double or triple occupancy bedrooms on either side of a long hallway with community bathrooms and lounges, shared by all residents on a hallway, floor, or wing.

• **Student Success:** Descriptors for academic success as defined by individual students themselves.

**Personal Significance**

Sometimes I look back at the community where I grew up in rural Alabama and remember many who were capable of doing very well in college, but never even attempted. Often times it was because they did not have the networks to give them information and the confidence that comes with it. In high school it seemed that some
kids had insider information when it came to academics, especially college. They seemed to know when, where, and how to apply for admission, scholarships, housing, and more. These were the same kids who seemed to have a better understanding of what electives to take in high school just a year or two earlier.

I can remember asking how they knew these things and the typical response was something like, “Oh everyone knows that.” “A family member or neighbor told me,” or “That’s just what people who go to college do.” Often it was said with a tone to imply that I was not one of those people who go to college. Sometimes I thought they might be right, because when I asked my family and neighbors about college, there was no wealth of knowledge to impart. The typical response was simply, “I don’t know.” “I didn’t go to college.” Sometimes they would try to find an answer, but that is hard to do when you have no idea where to start looking.

Today I am still reminded of how important the information network is each year when new freshmen arrive on campus and I see some who are misguided and struggling. In my current position as a university administrator I try to make sure that students have the opportunity to be part of a productive network. Through this dissertation experience I gained greater insight in order to help students through that struggle. I want to improve their academic experience, and I want to help level the playing field. I also hope to be a bit of a role model to let them know that it is possible because I started out just like them.
Significance of the Study

The impact of social capital upon education is well documented. It seems that social capital impacts education at every stage. This impact begins with childhood aspirations and reaches far beyond continuing through high school achievement, community college success, transfer adjustment, and degree attainment (Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001; Ovnick & Veazey, 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Nitecki, 2011; Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012). Through this investigation the development of social capital within institutional structures (i.e., the residence hall) in the educational environment is examined.

This qualitative study analyzing the contribution of social capital developed by students in on-campus residence hall environments has the potential to contribute new knowledge and inform practice and policy in educational communities. The elements of social capital structure and process will be investigated. Specific insight into how they are created and the nature of the influence that they exert is sought. Through this insight it is hoped that strategies for providing positive influence and minimizing negative influence may be inferred. This information should be valuable for the creation of future organizational structures, policies, and trainings on college campuses and throughout education systems.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with a description of social relationships, social networks, and how social capital may be derived from them. Multiple studies from a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods are reviewed. Findings from the studies are synthesized in an attempt to address the impact of social capital on educational aspirations, college enrollment, and persistence to degree attainment. Then the influence of social capital in post-secondary education is considered. Studies examining, the correlation of living on campus in residence hall and academic success are discussed. The possibility that this success may be attributed to social capital is also explored.

Social Capital

Networks

Social networks may be formed through families, organizations, classrooms, friend groups or any other type of relationship. Each person or group in a network is considered a node that receives and transfers information. A network consists of a set of nodes along with all of the ties that connect them. Through these ties, a web of relationships is created that both provides information and constrains it. This is because ties affect not only the nodes they join, but also other nodes that are joined to those nodes (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010).

In his seminal article “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital,”
Coleman (1988) defines social capital as the product of social connections in a network. He describes a closed network system generating trust, reciprocity, and information channels. These social network connections result in the acquisition of norms, networks, and human relationships that provide skills and knowledge to assist with social advancement in the form of social capital (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010; Coleman, 1988). Nonetheless, there seems to be some confusion and disagreement as to an exact definition of social capital (Gerwitz, Dixon, Power, Haplin, & Whitty, 2005; Kao & Rutherford, 2007). However, there is agreement that social capital refers to benefits derived through social networks.

It is easy to see that students are linked to each other through networks. However, the unique point relative to social capital is that every student may be thought of as a node and every group to which they belong may also be considered a node (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010). For example, student A may be considered linked to a classmate. That classmate is linked to a church friend and the church friend is linked to the coach of his or her soccer team. The soccer coach is linked to a large corporation where he works. If the large corporation provides scholarships for college, then student A may gain valuable information about the scholarship through this social network. It is easy to see through this example that the position any node, or student, occupies in the network affects the quality of the information received.

Attributes or Dimensions

Social capital may be further described through two attributes or dimensions of the network. They are the process dimension and the structural dimension. The basic
organizational make up of networks and relationships are referred to as *structural attributes*. Examples of structural attributes would be the number of members or nodes in a network and titles and functions of those nodes. Interactions within networks and relationships are referred to as *process attributes*. Therefore, process attributes are the actual and intentional social interactions between network members (Burt, 2000; Byun et al., 2011; Coleman, 1988; Sun, 1999).

**Types**

Often times social capital is referred to by where the network is formed. Family social capital refers to social capital gained through the process and structural attributes of a family network. Critical information and values flow through family members to others might not otherwise be aware. Community social capital refers to social capital gained through the process and structural attributes of a community network (Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988). The resources for each may be very different. Family social capital typically affects only the members the family. Community social capital may affect all members of the community (Coleman, 1988; Sun, 1999). We typically think of social capital as having a beneficial outcome. However, it may simultaneously have a negative impact by inhibiting the exploration of other options (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Hoxby & Turner, 2013).

The following section will examine how social capital may influence the academic experience to produce both positive and negative outcomes for students. I begin by looking at educational aspirations. Next I move to a discussion college preparation and enrollment. Then I examine the research college attendance and
persistence. This review of literature then concludes by considering the interplay of social capital with the on-campus college residence hall, and the student academic experience.

**Educational Aspirations**

Some people seem to have always assumed they would go to college. A person who has this sort of aspiration is said to have a *college going habitus* (Grodsky & Rieglecrumb, 2010). A strong college going habitus is a strong indicator of high school academic performance and college enrollment. The college going habitus of a student is generally linked to educational level of parents, paternal employment and socioeconomic class (Grodsky & Rieglecrumb, 2010). Some might argue that this is an early indicator of the impact of social capital. Indeed much research has shown that the impact of social capital may be seen beginning with a youth’s aspirations (Bohon et al., 2013; Byun et al., 2011; Byun et al., 2012). This impact continues on through enrollment, academic success and persistence to graduation (Crisp & Nora, 2009; Grodsky & Rieglecrumb, 2010; Irvin, Byun, Meece, Farmer & Hutchins, 2011; Byun et al., 2012).

Aspirations begin early at home with the family. Process social capital in the form of conversations with parents about education and setting expectations is a significant predictor of aspirations to attend college (Byun et al., 2011; Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Sun, 1999). Students who perceive that their parents expect them to go to college and have frequent conversations about college have higher aspirations and expectations for college attendance (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Israel et al.,
When parents and children have intentional conversations to come to an agreement or an alignment of their educational goals the odds of attending college within the first year of graduation increase dramatically (Leigh & Schneider, 2005). These effects on aspirations and expectations are not only true for aggregated populations, but they can also be seen when considering disaggregated populations. Rural, urban, immigrant and migrant families of various racial backgrounds all show similar correlations regarding parental involvement, expectations and aspirations (Byun et al., 2011; Burt, 2000; Keller & Tillman, 2001; Astone & McLanahan, 2013; Ovink & Veazey, 2010; Sun, 1999).

There is also a positive relationship between school and community educational expectations and student aspirations. When teachers, counselors, and administrators convey higher expectations they typically translate into higher student aspirations (Byun et al., 2012; Farmer-Hinton, 2008). This is consistent with other findings that the process components of school and community social capital are important influences on educational aspirations across all types of communities (Bhon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2013; Byun et al., 2012; Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; O’Connor, Hammack & Scott, 2009; Perna, 2000).

Family size, single parent families, blended families, and mobility all represent different forms of structural social capital. Each has an effect on aspirations and intentions by influencing the flow and quality of information. Some examples illustrating the effects would be that larger families are associated with a lower academic performance (Sun, 1999). A greater number of siblings increases
dependence on funding from extra-familial sources (Steelman & Powell, 1989), and single parent families may have stronger parent-child ties (Perna & Titus, 2005; Sandefur et al., 2006).

The resource dilution hypothesis says that as families grow larger each child competes for attention from parents, thus reducing the amount of social capital available per child. It is easy to see that several aspects of structural social capital of the family may be beyond control, such as family size. However, many of the influences of structural social capital may be mitigated my manipulating the process features of family social capital (Sandefur et al., 2006; Steelman & Powell, 1989). Having more purposeful conversations with students regarding educational plans and altering schedules to allow time for participation in school related activities are examples. Simultaneously improving multiple aspects may have an even larger effect on aspirations and expectations (Sandefur et al., 2006).

There are differences in how racially underrepresented populations, students from low-income families and genders are affected, as well as first generation college students (Bohon et al., 2013; Engbert & Wolniak, 2009; Enriquez, 2011; Kao & Rutherford, 2007). One example is the finding that immigrant parents often have higher expectations than native-born parents and that this higher expectation can sometimes translate into children who are better prepared academically for college (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2013; Keller & Tillman, 2001). Another example is that high school teachers are less influential on the aspirations of female students than they are on the aspirations of male students (Byun et al., 2012). Latino
students are less likely to seek help from a high school counselor than are their White peers (Byran et al., 2011). It may not be surprising that students from lower income families report their parents are less helpful in gaining information about preparing for college attendance than students from higher income families (Bryan et al., 2011). These examples show that more research is needed to understand the ways that social capital affects aspirations and expectations.

**College Preparation and Enrollment**

Studies by Israel, Beaulieu and Hartless (2001) have shown that both the structural and process components of family social capital affected academic achievement more than socioeconomic status or educational level of parents. They also found that family social capital was more impactful on student achievement than social capital from outside the family. Multiple studies have shown similar results (Byun et al., 2011; Steelman & Powell, 1989; Sun, 1999), including those comparing urban (Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006), suburban, and rural (Byun et al., 2011) populations. Sometime in immigrant groups the impact of family may even be responsible for better college preparedness than that of native-born populations. This pattern has been seen in Chinese, Black and Latino immigrants and may even result in higher levels of college enrollment (Keller & Tillman, 2001; Wu, Palinkas, & He, 2010).

Although family social capital may have great impact resulting in some positive outcomes, students from low-income families and underrepresented populations are less likely to report that information regarding college preparation
gained from family is helpful when compared to other information sources (Griffin et al., 2011). Parents from these underserved groups may lack access to networks that provide valuable information required for college planning. One explanation for this lack of accurate information is that social networks tend to be segregated racially and ethnically. This restricts the flow of information along these same lines (Hoxby & Turner, 2013). The same barriers tend to be present along socioeconomic divisions (Perna & Titus, 2005).

As the socioeconomic level of a community or school increases, so does the likelihood of college attendance. Yet, student counselor interaction may reduce the negative effect of lower socioeconomic status. It has been shown that the number of school counselors is a predictor of college enrollment (Bryan et al., 2011). Counselors who spend more time with students and have more deliberate interactions provide the same result. These correlations to student and school counselor interaction appear across a variety of communities (Byun et al., 2012; Irvin et al., 2011; O’Connor et al., 2009). Their presence is an example of the value of school resources in the utilization of both structural and process attributes of social capital.

Perna and Titus (2005) showed that the likelihood of enrolling in college depends on resources accessed through school networks. Resources included participation in college linking networks (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009) and student counselor contact (Bryan et al., 2011; Leigh & Schneider, 2005). Even in these cases the quality of the interaction or the process element was of great value.
The effect of a higher level of community social capital for rural students contributes significantly toward achievement (Byun et al., 2012). The challenge with rural and urban students seems to be enrollment. They lag behind suburban peers in college enrollment and therefore, degree attainment. Evidence shows that this challenge is largely due to lower socio-economic background, further supporting the idea that communities might have some unique features causing different impacts from those in urban and suburban communities to rural (Byun et al., 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Yet, the overall interplay of geography and moderating factors including push/pull is complex and needs further exploration to create a more complete picture (Byun et al., 2012).

The interplay of geography, social networks and moderating factors may create a social capital phenomenon known as spatial isolation. For example, urban processes have limited students’ and families’ access to social networks that could improve college planning (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Spatial isolation may also be present in rural communities. Rural students lag behind suburban and urban peers in college enrollment and therefore, degree attainment. Evidence shows that this challenge is largely due to lower socio-economic background and supports the idea that rural communities might have some unique features causing different impacts from those in urban and suburban communities (Byun et al. 2011).

Additional examples of how spatial isolation may affect community capital is evidenced in the facts that suburban high school students are more likely to attend a 4 year college (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Overall, students are most likely to go to parents
and peers for information about educational possibilities (Hoxby & Turner, 2013). Yet, rural and low-income students are more likely to go to teachers (Griffin et al., 2011; Hoxby & Turner, 2013) and rely more heavily on school counselors (Bryan et al., 2011).

Utilization of school and community social capital for college planning varies based on gender and race (Bryan et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2011). White students tend to go to parents more for information about college planning. Non-White students are less likely to say parents were helpful in college planning (Griffin et al., 2011). Females tend to go to a larger variety of sources for college planning information than do their male peers (Griffin et al., 2011) and Latino students may seek college enrollment information from avenues other than school counselors (Bryan et al., 2011).

Race/ethnicity and parental level of education are strongly correlated with odds of estimating college tuition accurately. Non-white parents and those with lower levels of education are less likely to have accurate estimates. Parents who are not confident in their estimates of college costs are less likely to act in ways to help their children pursue college (Grodsky & Jones, 2007). This is not only true for responsible financial planning. It includes encouragement to enroll in appropriate college prep courses, take college entrance exams, apply on time and apply for financial aid.

One of the most important components influencing enrollment for marginalized populations seems to be acquisition of accurate information regarding cost, financial aid and application procedures (Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Hoxby &
Turner, 2013; Leonhardt, 2013; Perna & Titus, 2005). Low-income students are also less likely to be reached regarding opportunities for financial assistance through traditional methods. Oftentimes, parents or other family members inaccurately screen out information they feel is irrelevant or not reliable before it gets to the student. They are also untrusting of information received on line (Hoxby & Turner, 2013).

Hoxby and Turner (2013) showed that simply providing information that is typically gained through social networks via an alternative source had a great impact on college aspirations, applications, and enrollment decisions with their Expanding College Opportunities Comprehensive (ECO-C) Intervention. Through the intervention advice that an expert college counselor would typically provide to high achieving students was provided to 15,000 randomly selected low-income high achieving students via US Mail. The result was that the low-income high achieving students applied and were admitted to selective schools equal to their ability, rather than less selective schools equal to their socioeconomic standing. Each summer follow up surveys were conducted and information was collected from the National Student Clearinghouse regarding enrollment, persistence and progress toward degree. This follow through showed that the low-income high achieving students had academic performance equal to high-income high achieving students when compared with a control group of 3,000 low-income high achieving students (Hoxby & Turner, 2013).

Many residence halls have policies and procedures that may intentionally or unintentionally affect the academic experience in ways similar to those described. For example, several studies already mentioned showed relationships between counselor-
student ratios and college enrollment (Bryan et al, 2011; Byun et al, 2012; Irvin et al, 2011; O’Connor et al, 2009). Could similar patterns be found for residence hall staffing and academic indicators? Residence hall location on campus could have impacts similar to the spatial isolation described by Farmer and Hinton (2008). Policies and networks could also affect the accurate and timely distribution of information in the residence hall environment. It is also important to understand if the effects are perceived differently across socio-economic groups.

**College Attendance and Persistence**

The influence of parents over students seems to lessen in the latter years of high school and during actual college attendance (Keller & Tillman, 2001; Ovink & Veazey, 2010; Rios-Augular & Deil-Amen, 2012). However, family and peers still remain a powerful influence. Parental family involvement is a significant predictor of college attendance (Byun et al., 2012; Bryan et al., 2011). Aspirations of family and friends are also significantly related to college enrollment and increased parent-to-parent contact increases the likelihood of 4-year college attendance (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Byun et al., 2011). It seems that immediacy of family and friends carries more weight than distal influences on college enrollment and persistence (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009). In fact, parents have more influence over college attendance than does high school. This can be seen in noting that college students report family and friends provide motivation, inspiration and a sense of reciprocal obligation to sacrifice and succeed (Enríquez, 2011; Rios-Augular & Deil-Amen, 2012).
The family connection is inspirational across a variety of races, socio-economic groups and geographic boundaries. Yet it can also serve as a pull factor making the student feel obligated to stay at home in the community rather than attend college (Byun et al., 2011; Byun et al., 2012; Enriquez, 2011; Hoxby & Turner, 2013). Despite their key role in educational success families are generally left out of the mix of proposed strategies (Israel, et al, 2001). However, it seems that this combination of inspiration and obligation to succeed combined with the pull to remain a vital part of the family unit could provide an opportunity for faculty and staff at the college level to capitalize on the unique influence of family. Organized college parent and family associations could encourage the continued inspiration while mitigating the pull factor by maintaining the student family relationship.

The impact of at school social capital and community social capital matter when measuring student success and persistence to graduation (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Sun, 1999). Byun et al. (2012) showed that the effect of a higher level of community social capital for rural students contributes significantly toward achievement in college. This contribution results in an increased likelihood of college degree attainment once enrolled and may help overcome some of the negative effects of spatial isolation as described by (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Evidence shows that involvement in community networks such as church positively influence achievement and persistence for rural, urban and suburban students (Bryan et al., 2011; Sun, 1999).

Many of the support factors described in rural communities are similar to the tight-knit, unique cultures described by Nitecki (2011) and the community directed
cultivation described by Ovinck & Veazey (2010). It is evident that both contribute positively to student success. Colleges that provide deliberately structured environments with social networks, both social and academic in nature, stand out. This is supported by the notion that participation in extracurricular activities, living in a campus residence, and conversations with faculty and peers are positively related to college persistence and satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh, 1995;). In fact, Astin (1993) indicated the three the types of involvement in college that are most influential on academic outcomes are involvement in academics, involvement with faculty, and involvement in student peer groups.

Nitecki (2011) showed that community college students could benefit from creating social capital based on this model. In a case study two successful programs at an otherwise struggling community college were explored. It was discovered that students credited their success to trusting reciprocal relationships with faculty, administrators, and peers. These relationships promoted academic success in spite of a general feeling of nonsupport from the institution as a whole.

Ovinck and Veazey (2010) provide similar results with minority students at a major research institution. This case study showed that networking for the creation of social capital and an alternative intellectual community were key contributors to academic success. This was accomplished partly through advisors and faculty who created meaningful mentoring relationships with students. Another more unique aspect of the program was the intentional creation of a social experience where academic success was “normalized”. Students described a situation where they no longer felt
pressure to be exclusively social, political, or academic. They felt free to be all three at
the same time. Both Nitecki (2011) and Ovinck and Veazey (2010) found that
programs with tight knit relationships were crucial to student success. The quality of
the relationships was crucial, not the quantity.

Sun (1999) found that the process and structural elements of community social
capital were influential, but attributed most of the influence to the process component
of community social capital. As we look deeper at the relationship we find that
involvement in the classroom, with the advisor, or in the residence hall is often key to
the outcome. It seems that the quality of the interaction, or the process, is once again a
very influential component (Pascarella et al., 2004; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Many universities provide thematic living options, learning communities,
structured residence hall programs and faculty in residence Studies have shown that
students of color need the benefits of school social networks such as these to reinforce
college expectations and provide college planning tools and resources (Farmer-Hinton,
2008). Museus and Neville (2012) found that racial minority students benefited from
social capital provided by institutions that “share common ground with students,
provide holistic support, humanize the educational experience, and provide proactive
support” (p. 436). Palmer and Gasman (2008) found similarly that students were more
successful when faculty and administrators displayed concern for personal welfare and
acted as role models and mentors in addition to showing concern for academic
success.
Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) discuss trust and reciprocity as necessary for the accumulation of social capital. This is typically thought of on an individual basis. However, sometimes students seem to work together with an understanding of indirect reciprocity for the common good of the group rather than the individual. This can be seen in the communities described by Nitecki (2010) and Ovinck and Veazey (2010) as well as in immigrant and African American students at college (Enriquez, 2011; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). The result is that social capital is accumulated for the entire community. Similar behaviors can be seen when students in a residence hall community spontaneously create test banks, organize study groups, or assign a duty rotation for collecting recyclables from the floor.

The Residence Hall Connection

Because they have a bounded environment that is easily defined through the physical layout of the building, policies, and the limited time during which persons are allowed to reside in them, the campus residence hall may be one of the more unique environments where social networks could be studied. Yet, most research that I have found regarding social capital or networks and academics does not focus on the residence hall. Some studies (Nitecki, 2010; Ovink & Veazey, 2010; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Stewart, 2011) about social capital mention that the residence hall was impactful, but it is only mentioned in a very ancillary way.

Soria and Stebelton (2012) say that it is important for residence hall advisors to coach first generation students to promote academic engagement. In their study of the role of social capital in promoting academic success for Black men, Palmer and
Gasman (2008) reference a participant’s story about being a resident advisor and providing a role model for residents. In a related study of the academic experience of African American students, Stewart (2011) states that it is important for students to have a residence hall free of discrimination. Yet, none of these studies provide an in-depth examination of the interplay between social capital gained from the in the on-campus residence hall and students’ academic experiences.

Astin (1996) cited three key types of involvement considered most influential on academic outcomes. They are involvement with academics, faculty, and peer groups. These three are often used as the foundation for creating learning communities on college campuses. Not surprisingly, studies indicate that learning communities centered in an on-campus residence hall have an additional positive impact on grade point average and persistence to graduation beyond that of simply living in a residence hall (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996).

These residential learning communities typically consist of a group of students who live together in a specific residence hall where they are provided with academic programming and services, and coordinated curricular activities. Academic courses taught in the residential facility, in-hall tutoring, academic advising, ongoing lecture series, and more are often included (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). This definition of a living learning community definitely describes a deliberate attempt to manipulate the structure and process components of social capital. However, studies still do not specifically address it as such.
Many researchers have shown that living on-campus in a residence hall is positively correlated to academic success, yet the specifics of factors contributing to this success are fairly unexplored. A large local university has similar statistics showing higher grade point average, more timely graduation, and lower rates of academic probation for students who live on-campus in a residence hall. The statistics are even more impressive for students assigned to a learning community in an on-campus residence hall (“Housing Administration & Residential Education Statistics”, n.d.). Yet, very little is known beyond these basic descriptive numbers.

One commonly noted criticism of prior research regarding academics and residence halls is that outcomes may be more related to student ability and preference rather than impact of the residential program (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003). The concern seems to be that students who are of lesser ability or academically underprepared could skew the numbers by choosing to live off campus. More definitive research into the student experience could shed light to alleviate or validate such concerns.

**Summary**

Information gained through social network connections in the family, school and community create social capital. The influence of social capital may be seen at all levels of the educational system beginning with aspirations and continuing on through educational achievement and college degree attainment. Networks provide social capital that either promotes educational success or impedes it. Regardless, understanding how to mitigate influences that impede success in education and leverage those that promote success is the goal.
The literature indicates overall that access to networks capable of providing accurate information and trusting reciprocal relationships with faculty staff and peers are key to providing social capital that promotes student success. Programs that concentrate on providing these elements are successful at increasing social capital and increasing the odds of higher aspirations, educational achievement, and college degree attainment. In an age of shrinking budgets, calls for greater fiscal responsibility and reports of accountability, learning how to leverage social capital may provide an opportunity to be more impactful throughout all levels of the educational experience at a lower cost. One environment that holds potential for this type of focus is the on-campus college residence hall. Yet, very little information is available regarding the specifics of social networks and social capital in residence halls as they relate to student success. More inquiry is needed to determine the impact of the structure and process attributes in the on-campus college residence hall. How do they really affect academic experience of students who live there and how can administrators leverage their impact for positive outcomes?
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation study focuses on students who live on-campus in residence halls at a large, four-year university and are assigned to learning communities. The purpose of this study is to explore how the social capital created in the residence hall environment contributes to the academic experience for students who live on-campus in a residence hall and are assigned to a learning community. To reiterate, the following overall research question will guide this study: How do social interactions in the residential learning community setting contribute to, or hinder, the development of social capital that contributes to the academic experience of students?

The following sub-questions will also be addressed:

1. How do the number and types of social ties and the information gained through them shape students’ academic experiences?
2. Do students with different background characteristics (e.g., gender, race, income status) have particular successes and challenges in accessing and building social capital in residence hall settings?
3. What best practices can be established to assist with the development of social capital that contributes to student success in on-campus residence hall setting?

This chapter begins with an explanation of qualitative methodology and the
reasoning behind applying the approach to this particular study. The study design and participant selection are discussed. Next data collection and analysis procedures are presented, and lastly, the limitations of this study are addressed.

**Qualitative Research Methodology**

A qualitative approach is useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. It includes the use of broad general questions and the collection of detailed views of participants in words or images (Creswell, 2008). The qualitative "approach contributes to the authentic portrayal of a complex, multifaceted human society" (LeCompete, Preissle, & Tsch, 1993, p. 28). It is important to note that the purpose of a qualitative study is not necessarily to generalize conclusions (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 2005), but to explore and understand a central phenomenon.

This qualitative study provides an opportunity to capture student voices about their experiences in college residential hall setting. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe how social capital gained through social networks in the on-campus college residence hall setting may influence the academic experience. Participants are students who resided in the residence hall and were assigned to living learning communities. The residence hall environment at a traditional four-year public university located in southern California serves as the context for this study.

**Sample and Population**

The following section provides a description of the site selected and the methods that were used for participant selection.
Site Selection

The university selected for this study is a traditional four-year public university located in southern California. The university offers 91 bachelor’s degrees, 78 master’s degrees, and 19 doctorate or professional degrees. It is classified as a "research-high" institution by the Carnegie Foundation. Approximately 33,000 students are enrolled. Female students comprise about 55 percent of students and males comprise about 45 percent of those enrolled. The average age of an undergraduate student is 22.3 years old. International students comprise about five percent of the population. Approximately 35 percent of the undergraduate population is white, 26 percent is Mexican-American, and six percent are of multiple ethnicities. ("San Diego State University At a Glance", 2014; “University History”, n.d.).

Approximately 4,300 students live on-campus in a residence hall. About 4,000 of those who live on campus are first year students. Just under 400 of the first year students are assigned to living learning communities. Data collected by the university shows that students who live on-campus in residence halls have higher grade point averages, are less likely to be on academic probation, and graduate in a more timely fashion than students who live off campus. Additional data shows a similar disparity for students who live on-campus and are assigned to a living learning community when compared with students who live on-campus, but not in a living learning community (“Housing Administration & Residential Education Statistics”, n.d.). Living learning communities at this particular university are typically comprised of first year students who are enrolled in a set of connected academic courses with other
first-year students in their living space. Students who live on-campus in a residence hall, but are not assigned to a living learning community do not have the shared classroom experience and are randomly assigned to a living space.

Some administrators have expressed concern that the academic differences observed between on-campus and off-campus students may come from a smaller number of “at risk” students living on campus than off campus. However, according to the director of the Center for Assessment and Research, the differences remain statistically significant even when controls for measures of college readiness are introduced. In some cases the data shows that students from underrepresented populations may even be impacted more dramatically than others. (R. Monzon, personal communication, March, 10, 2015)

While we know that there are different academic outcomes for these groups of students, we do not know how social capital is developed in the residence hall setting or how it impacts the academic experience. Additional research is needed to better define the relation between social capital, academics, and college residence hall environments. Factors impacting the structural and process dimensions of social capital need to be explored. Resulting contributions and hindrances to the student academic experience should also be explored and understood.

**Participant Selection**

Students from residential learning communities at the research site were invited to participate in this study via a flyer that was distributed by instructors of learning community seminar classes. Responses were received from 42 students
indicating an interest in participation. In attempt to provide equal representation based on gender identification and learning community assignment 20 were invited to interviews.

Of those students invited to interview, four students did not respond. Sixteen scheduled interviews. Two were no-shows for their scheduled interview. Multiple attempts were made via email to contact the non-respondents and no-shows. None replied.

The 14 students interviewed represented seven different learning communities from six different residence halls. Ten participants were female and four were male. Students interviewed came from traditional, suite and apartment style residence halls. All but one participant was required by the university to live on campus in a residence hall. However, none were required to be in a learning community. Basic demographics for the sample are shown in Table 1. Some basic information regarding learning communities represented and the accommodations for participants in each community are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/Latino</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell Eligible</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Learning Communities and Accommodations of Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Community</th>
<th>Building Style</th>
<th>Room Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discover Your City</td>
<td>apartment</td>
<td>double</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>apartment</td>
<td>single, double</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>traditional</td>
<td>double, triple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism and Media Studies</td>
<td>traditional</td>
<td>double</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Fitness</td>
<td>suite</td>
<td>single, double, triple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Law</td>
<td>traditional</td>
<td>double</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared Majors</td>
<td>apartment</td>
<td>double</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Observations, interviews, analysis of documents, and analysis of audiovisual materials are forms of qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2008). In-depth interviews were used as the primary method of data collection for this study over a period of approximately four weeks. Interviews focused on how social connections promoted academic success. Each participant was interviewed once.

Data was collected during the beginning of Fall Term 2015. Collecting data at this time allowed students to experience an entire academic year in the residence hall prior to collection. Each participant completed a short demographic survey before to the interview. The survey was used for descriptive analysis after the interview was completed. Through this process a thick and rich description of participant experiences was achieved as described by Geertz (1993).

**Interviews**

Interviews are a form of data collection that allow the researcher to unfold the meaning of experiences from the participant’s point of view (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Therefore, semi-structured interviews with residents were the primary form of data collection used in this study.
The interview was approximately 45 minutes to one-hour in duration. This was the first in-person encounter between the interviewer and the participant. It was one-on-one using open-ended and semi-structured questions designed to help the researcher get to know the participant and gain insight into their experience. Questions were based on research and specifically formulated to probe into how information related to academics was gained by participants. They were categorized to draw from different aspects of the residential experience such as residence hall staff, academics, information sources, involvement, and network connections. See Appendix A for a list of the questions.

The script shown in Appendix B was used to introduce the researcher to the participant at the beginning of each interview. Participants were also provided a short questionnaire as they entered the room. The questionnaire was designed to provide demographic data and assure that all participants met the criteria of the study. The questionnaire is shown in Appendix C.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study was approved by the University of California, San Diego Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the IRB at the university where the study was conducted. Explicit written consent was obtained from participants, and all data gathered was in full compliance with IRB guidelines. In order to keep identities confidential, all participant names used in this study are pseudonyms.

All electronic files created from data gathered were saved on a laptop computer issued by the university. The computer was password-protected. Each file
had an additional layer of password-protection. All paper files created from the data collection process were stored in a locked safe stored in my home.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. They were then analyzed as collected. This provided an on-going review to inform the continuing data collection and allowed for an understanding of the case through the deliberate and measured aggregation of data. A qualitative analysis software program called MAXQDA was used to sort salient features and themes from interview transcriptions. Common themes, patterns, terms, or ideas were identified in an attempt to form a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the research questions as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). A list of priori codes based on the research questions is provided in Appendix D. Inductive coding was also used to identify new codes that emerge in the course of the analysis. Originally 48 priori and emergent codes were used. These codes were collapsed into 11 categories. A frequency report showed six particular categories with high frequencies. The quotations from those high frequency categories were analyzed again to arrive at six themes. Appendix E provides a frequency distribution for all codes combined.

A simple descriptive analysis of the demographic surveys was completed after each interview. This provided a clearer description and more insight to the group and the individuals. Table 1 at the beginning of this chapter provided a breakdown of demographic characteristics gleaned from the surveys.
A journal and field notes were kept to allow for reflection upon the process of conducting research. The use of a reflective journal added rigor to qualitative inquiry because the researcher was able to record reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process (Morrow & Smith, 2000). These field notes provided additional data for further investigation and may help insure validity. In an attempt to gauge the accuracy of findings, triangulation, member checking, and rich, thick description were used to help achieve validity (Creswell, 2008; Geertz, 1995).

**Limitations**

**Generalizability**

Generalizability to a population is not the goal of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2008). Rather, the goal of qualitative research is to provide a rich description of the experience of study participants. This investigation examines in detail the experiences of a small sample of participants from one university. Therefore, it is limited in scope and context. The knowledge created is unique to those students and their experience, but helps build conceptual understanding about how social capital is created in the on-campus college residence hall environment and how policies, structures, and administrators provide influence upon it.

**Self Reported Data**

The data used in this study was provided through self-report from participants. As a result participants may have provided information in a manner to portray themselves in a more positive light than reality. Participants were also required to recall events that occurred several months prior to the study. Their ability to recall
events accurately and completely after the passage of time may have caused some inaccuracies in data reported by participants.

**Positionality**

My position as Associate Director in the Office of Housing Administration and a former instructor in a living learning community seminar class at the university could have introduced bias into the study, because it brings with it pre-existing experience, context, and knowledge. My position as a hearing officer at the university could have also influenced the information that students provide to me during their interviews. However, the typical student was not aware of my positions or what those positions entail.

I believe I converted my positionality to a helpful resource rather than making it an impediment. I purposely reflected upon the role of power and how my positionality may influence the study throughout the process. I informed participants that I was looking for their open and honest responses prior to each interview and when informed consent documents were signed. I also asked any participants who have prior knowledge of me and feel that this knowledge could influence their answers to questions to excuse themselves from the process. I attempted to mitigate the risk introduced by my positionality through the use of member checking and data triangulation.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich description of the experience of students of living on campus in different residence hall arrangements. Through the use
of rigorous qualitative case study research techniques, I examined how living on campus in a residence hall created or hindered the development of social capital that contributed to student success. This question was thoroughly investigated for students who live on-campus and are assigned to a learning community. Most importantly, this study considered the implications of their stories that may help practitioners to contribute to student success in the on campus residence hall environment.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study sought to investigate the social capital created or inhibited by the experience of living in a learning community in an on campus residence hall. Three questions guided the study. They were (1) How do the number and types of social ties and the information gained through them shape students’ academic experiences? (2) Do students with different background characteristics (e.g., gender, race, income status) have particular successes and challenges in accessing and building social capital in different residence hall settings? (3) What best practices can be established to assist with the development of social capital that contributes to student success in on-campus residence hall setting?

To offer context to the study this chapter begins with a brief description of the learning communities from which participants came. Then a presentation of overarching themes as determined from the categories and codes assigned to interview transcripts is provided. Next each theme is considered in light of the research questions and supported with quotes from interviews. Finally, a summary of findings closes the chapter.

Seven learning communities were represented in the study. The topical theme for each community is implied by the community’s name. Those names are Physical Fitness, Journalism and Media Studies, Pre-Law, Journey into Entrepreneurship, Undeclared Majors, Honors, and Discover our City. Students in each community were assigned to live together in a particular wing, floor, or hall. They were also enrolled in
a university seminar class together. The class met in the residence hall once each week. In some cases community members had additional classes together that were related to their theme. Residence hall staff members provided additional opportunities to participate in field trips, lectures, and other events related to the community’s theme.

When considering research question number one, the first and most obvious theme to emerge from data was that students perceived the experience of being in a learning community in an on campus residence hall to have an overall positive impact on their academic experience. The second theme was a communal drive to succeed. That is, for most participants there was not only a desire to succeed personally, but there was also a strong desire to help other community members succeed academically. The third theme was that participants engaged in a variety of small social groups in the residence hall. These groups were influenced by building style, room type, and academic major. Lastly, social ties with faculty and residence hall staff were influential on the academic experience.

Research question two gave way to three notable differences for students of color. These differences were that students of color were less likely to take advantage of a professor’s office hours. Students of color listed Academic Mentors and professors as their first source of academic information more often than white students, and they felt less obligated to share academic information than white students. These themes are discussed in more detail below.
The third research question: “What best practices can be established to assist with the development of social capital that contributes to student success in the on-campus residence hall setting?” provided four themes. These themes related primarily to implications from the study’s findings. Therefore, they are discussed in Chapter Five.

**Perceived Overall Positive Impact**

Participants reported unanimously that being in a learning community in an on-campus residence hall had an overall positive effect on their academic experience. In fact, 69 different passages from transcripts were coded as indicating positive aspects. That is an average of almost 5 per transcript. When those 69 passages were analyzed, three themes emerged. They were (1) a feeling of connection, (2) emotional impact, and (3) resources. A few key comments made regarding the overall experience were: “It felt very complete and I was pretty satisfied with the experience…. The effect is a positive effect on your academics” (Jon). “It was convenient. I felt comfortable. If didn't live in a dorm or even live in like a learning community, I don't think I would have gotten the same experience” (Clara). “I think you should just remember that the living [learning] community has really helped, at least mine particularly” (Wade).

Many participants became visibly excited when asked to summarize their overall experience. They would smile, and it seemed as if they could not get the words out fast enough. Often, they would attribute their positive experience in the community to a unique feeling of connection. This connection was based on common
interests, and a feeling of camaraderie that they expected to last on even after moving out of the community.

when I found, like the learning community, that was something completely different and interesting. It is just awesome that you could be living with people that will probably be your classmates fairly the rest of your college years just because you are into the same thing. (Shelley)

Indeed, the camaraderie did continue. In some cases it was almost as if the entire community moved together to a new location the next year.

it just goes back to having something in common with everyone. [It] made us friends and like I've said, I literally live together with everyone from my floor. There's not one girl that's on my floor [this year] that I didn’t live with last year. (Tess)

Another participant described the social connection as an extended family group and said that students in the community commonly and openly referred to their group as a family.

I liked it a lot. I think living in the dorms, for me, was a big social aspect that I felt like I benefited a lot from getting to know these people. Again, most of my friendships that I made, that I have today, I met from the people living on the same floor as me. It was almost like a family. We called our floor the Maya 3 family. We still see each other a lot today, and I know that if I had not lived with them, maybe lived in a suite style or not on campus, I wouldn't have made those relationships with those people and learned from them in the same way. (Wanda)

The theme of a shared interest and the support that came from it was mentioned often. For some it was just a simple acknowledgement, “You’re all here for the same reason.” (Shelley) For others the shared interest became more of a passion.

This shared interest or passion was not related to just one curiosity or academic theme. For them the connection was a shared drive to succeed and become independent.
Overall, it had a very positive effect on me. They helped me meet new people that were just as enthusiastic about doing entrepreneurship or whatever you want to do. Helped you out with school. I think it helps you. Like I said, now I have a website, and I sell stuff online. That was a huge thing. I think that's awesome. I'm pretty psyched about that. That was only because I lived on that floor, and there was someone just as interested in making a business or trying to do something. So, if you're in a living learning community, you are going to find at least someone like that, someone that will be just as passionate about something as you are. That's a huge thing. (William)

The feeling of connectedness within the learning community seemed to be a starting place within the larger social structure. It provided a foundation on which a connection to the university at large was built.

I remember just talking to upper class [students] them saying, “The campus seems really small once you get to know people.” That’s so true looking back now I have that connection now because of all those activities that I did [in the learning community]. (Viola)

it seemed like everyone else was going through the same thing with me, that I was with. I learned how to take on more responsibilities for myself and learned how to deal with different situations, whether it be studying or making new friends, talking to new people, getting myself out there. It was all up to me now. Yeah. (Wanda)

There was also an emotional impact from the bonds formed within the community. The connection was uplifting and calming. One participant explained that the emotions generated from these bonds had a direct impact on his ability to focus and study.

Socially it feels great, and if you're feeling great then you're going to do good academically too. At least that's exactly how I work. I can't even study on a bad day. Most of my days, especially second semester because of the bonds that I made through the learning community, I would say it was one of the greater decisions I made my freshman year, to join. (Kaleo)
Another participant elaborated a little more on his emotional connection and stated that living in a learning community was “essential”. During this conversation he became very excited. His eyes became large. He had a happy look on his face and an obvious passion in his voice. It was as if he was ready to do an advertisement for a learning community.

Regardless of what learning community you're in, join one because it is essential. Even if you're in the dorms it's just essential to make really good friends and to have a lot of fun because you're never going to be able to join a class again where you're so specialized in this little community of people that have some sort of commonality with you. These are all strangers and they all chose this or somehow got thrown into this melting pot, but they're in this and they have that commonality with you. That's kind of the greatest thing when you are a scared 18 year old leaving home. (Kaleo)

Access to academic information sources was a benefit to learning community members. Some of these sources were exclusive to community members others were simply made easier by being a community member. Students described examples ranging from electronic newsletters and residential staff members to community members themselves. One student admitted that she did not take advantage of all that was offered, but the knowledge that resources were available provided a more stable environment: “Overall, I definitely, felt more supported than if I had just been living in a regular dorm.” A feeling of calm and reassurance came from having readily available information sources: “I knew whether or not anyone used the resources, they had the resources available to them… because I was surrounded by the resources that I needed.” (Leigh)
The negative aspects of living in the learning community were minimal. Some students even said that they could not think of any negative aspects at all. Almost all were related to the built environment, as discussed below. Only one negative item discussed was not related to the built environment. None were related to the programmatic aspects of the learning community. All but one item seemed negligible or temporary.

Examples of negative aspects were having to walk through a construction site to get to class, walk up stairs, or having to ask a neighbor to be quiet. In each case the participant down played the concern. The one item that was not negligible or temporary was the inability to find a place for privacy or alone time in a traditional style residence hall. This concern was raised by occupants of double and triple occupancy rooms in traditional style residence halls. No participants in this study came from single occupancy rooms in traditional style residence halls.

Wanda lived in a triple room in a traditional building. All of her other comments about the experience were positive. Other students in traditional residence halls, whether in a double or triple room type, alluded to the same concern.

It was hard to get alone time, like studying-time alone was hard to find. If you wanted to do that, it definitely was not guaranteed. You would have to go to the library or somewhere big enough that you knew that you could find somewhere to be alone. (Wanda)

In spite of these minimal negative comments, it is still obvious that participants perceived being in a learning community in an on campus residence hall to have an overall positive effect on their academic experience. The feeling of connection provided by membership in the community had an emotional impact on participants.
This emotional impact was furthered by a sense of support from the availability of resources to the community. In conclusion, these three factors combined to provide a uniquely positive perception.

**Communal Drive to Succeed**

When asked about academic performance, every student in the study felt that they had been successful in their academic pursuits. They often attributed their success, or ease of success, to features of the learning community.

Having the RAs and having the academic advisers on my floor, that definitely helped as well as being close to campus and being able to go to see the advisers on campus and stuff like that. I think it definitely made it easier to be successful. (Leigh)

Being able to study with people, or if I didn't get something [in class] I can just ask somebody. It was helpful to clear things up fast, instead of having to look it up on my own and figure it out. I could just go anywhere on the floor, or walk to the common room and see if anybody knew. (Wade)

Self reported degrees of success ranged from mildly successful to good or excellent. When probed deeper and asked to define what academic success really meant to them only one participant said that it was defined by grade point average alone. The specifics of academic success were uniquely personalized for each individual. It was made clear that there was no one right or wrong answer. However, the core description that emerged was one characterized by experiential learning, doing one's personal best, and a hope to apply learning in the real world outside the classroom in the future. They also described a certain feeling of satisfaction that came from knowing that they had been successful. Tess from the Physical Fitness learning community summed it up well.
I feel like everyone wants to just say it's your GPA, but I think it's about everything. It's how well rounded you are and what you're involved in as well. Because like me personally, I'm not a straight A student, but I still think I've been successful, because I'm learning and I'm applying what I'm learning to the real world. I think that's what it means. I think having good relationships with your professors is really important to academic success. Your grades do matter, like your study tactics and stuff. I think learning how to study and how to prepare your self for finals that's all part of it. I don't think it's all about GPA.

Tess’s description of academic success was so complete that a follow up question inquiring as to how she developed it was asked. It was a bit surprising to hear her say, “kind of just, by myself.” Then she went on to explain that her parents were the biggest influencers. Although she personalized the definition, it was plain that her description grew from a seed planted by her parents.

Wanda from the Honors community specifically tied in personal growth with her definition of academic success. She also clearly states that it is unique to the individual and says that people should not compare themselves to others.

[Academic success is] similar to what I described growth to be. Again, definitely a personal thing... There's no universal definition for academic success, because everyone's different and you can't be comparing yourself. I think it's achieving a certain level of academic success that you are personally happy with. Definitely working your hardest, and whether it's in a subject that you don't pick up as easily as someone else, I think you could achieve academic success just as well as the next person, as long as you're putting in all your effort, I would say. Definitely pushing yourself to do the best that you can do, as cliché’ as that sounds. (Wanda)

Leigh from the community for undeclared majors talked about how her notion of academic success had changed since high school. Her current description also supported other participant’s statements that downplayed the importance of GPA. Leigh said that she now understood academic success came from learning, but not
from just any learning. She had specific criteria for learning that would contribute to her academic success.

I feel like learning information that, A) I enjoy, and B) will be relevant to my future is bigger. It’s playing a bigger part the older I get in my academic success. Granted, GPA does matter. No one can dispute that. I think taking, even the GEs and stuff, I’ve learned skills and things like that, that I think are going to influence the rest of my life and make me a better person, and stuff like that. I think I feel more successful academically in that sense than having a high GPA. (Leigh)

While Leigh talked about feeling successful, others supported the notion that GPA was not as important to academic success. They focused on “working your hardest, or studying as hard as you can, whether it's a good or a bad outcome… just doing your best. Not slacking off, I guess” (Patricia), or “…being proactive and putting in your full effort” (Jon). One student combined that feeling with giving one’s personal best, and even expressed frustration because grades do not always reflect leaning. She said that letter scores are just a “pat on the back kind of thing”.

I studied nine hours a day for this anatomy test. I went into it thinking I did my best studying the information. I know I can’t do anything about it. I can’t add more, there isn’t more time left, time is running out. I’m going to get a good night sleep, so that I can go do my best on this test. Walk in to the test. Take it. I felt good taking it. I still don’t know what the results are, but personally I feel I learned a lot. Whether or not my test shows it I know that I learned. If I messed up or made a silly mistake, at the end of the day I know I know that information. Yes a letter is a letter, but also what I know no one can change that. It’s frustrating sometimes how an A or a B can change a GPA and then that can maybe change something down the road for you. I think academic success is more of emotional reward…. The letters are there to help pat me on the back and that kind of thing. (Viola)

Finally, regardless of GPA, academic success was defined by a feeling that new information and skills learned could be applied in the future as a professional in
the world outside the classroom, or that it fulfilled requirements for a degree that would get them into that planned profession.

Well, it's not just about getting an A or whatever, I think it's actually retaining information, especially when it comes to my major, because I'm going to have to use it in the future, and understanding the concept. (Vicki)

I would say its just focusing on obviously what you plan on doing for the rest of your life. It's like you need to start with your academics now, and get through, just make it through college. Maybe even go to get your Masters, but it all starts here the first time you step into college. (Shelley)

All students implied that they wanted to enjoy learning, but one student specified that having fun was a part of succeeding academically.

If I'm having fun and I'm learning something, I'm succeeding. If I happen to see my GPA go up, all right even better. As long as I'm making sure that I don't fail a class, or as long as I see myself filling out the blanks in the mind MAP [Major Academic Plan] then I know that I'm successful academically. (Kaleo)

Although the specifics of academic success were uniquely personalized for each individual, time and time again the core description that emerged included experiential learning, doing one’s personal best, and desire to apply learning outside the classroom. The feeling of satisfaction that came from knowing that they had been successful may have contributed to a strong will to succeed.

This strong will to succeed was pervasive throughout the group. Students talked about being individually and personally responsible for their own success. They felt that being surrounded by a learning community of others who were equally driven was beneficial for them. They were aware of the need to connect socially in the residence hall and made comments such as, “I’m going to be 100% in this residence
hall. I want to know people, I want to make connections” (Viola). They trusted others in the community to provide support when needed. In the following passages two different participants show an understanding that they alone are ultimately responsible for their success. It is interesting to note that they have an innate drive to succeed. There is no clear indicator of how this drive was developed, but it was there.

My academic experience was mostly self-driven. I didn't have to rely on people to push me a whole lot because I do all my things as much as I can on my own and then I seek help if I need it… (Jon)

There was always nothing stopping me from being successful as long I wanted to. (Viola)

Students went on to talk about being surrounded by others with this same drive to succeed academically. It seemed as if there was camaraderie, or even a feeling of kinship, that came from this common characteristic. Yet, it helped provide a feeling of individual strength that made it easier to achieve independence.

There’s always a few who aren’t but for the majority everybody seemed that they were driven. Not necessarily driven and going out to get information about certain things but academically driven. (Viola)

I was surrounded by a bunch of people, but it was different than living at home with my family. In this case I felt more independent, but it seemed like everyone else was going through the same thing with me, that I was with. I learned how to take on more responsibilities for myself and learn how to deal with different situations, whether it be studying or making new friends, talking to new people, getting myself out there. It was all up to me now. (Wanda)

The camaraderie and kinships amongst community members seemed to develop into an unwritten expectation to share academic resources. The following excerpts from interviews describe an unwritten rule of reciprocity among these
academically driven individuals to share and support. The beginning prompt for each exchange is, “Did you ever feel obligated to share academic information?”

Jon: Especially when a difficult project or exam was due soon and my classmates were having trouble, I was willing to let them look over some notes or explain some homework problems to them, or show them certain ways that could help them out with their projects. Interviewer: But why did you feel that you should do this?
Jon: It's because it gives me a sense of community. Especially since my small group of people who are in the same age as me, is so small, I feel like we should all help each other out since we don't have many of each other.
Interviewer: Do you think the folks in this group had the same feelings, or were their feelings different?
Jon: I think they had the same feelings.
You think that they also felt obligated to help you?
Jon: Yeah, whenever they could.

The same ideology was repeated in different variations throughout multiple interviews. There was a feeling that the entire group should succeed together academically. Leigh explains that community members expected to be academic resources for each other. However, this expectation did not carry over into the social realm for her.

We were our best resources because our parents weren’t there. We didn’t have all the things in high school that we were normally around and stuff like that. I think we had the expectation that we were each other’s best resources almost because we were there and we were going through the same things and stuff like that. (Leigh)

I think for the most part everybody I know helped people especially academically, socially maybe not, but academically, everyone was like we’re all doing this together. We’re all going hopefully to graduate. Everyone was helping each other. For the most part, I don’t think anyone just was like, No. I’m not going to help you. I’m not. (Leigh)

The data make it clear that participants in this study had a strong drive to succeed, but they were also very committed to helping the entire community succeed.
Each person had a very well developed concept of what this success meant. That concept did not typically revolve around grade point average and all participants felt that they were achieving it. Most importantly, they attributed the ease of their success to connections gained through being in the learning community.

**Social Ties**

Research question number two asks, “How do the number and types of social ties and the information gained through them shape students’ academic experiences?” During interviews, participants named social ties as individual people. However, they were typically described as part of a small group with which they were connected. These groups included roommates, suite mates and apartment mates, neighbors and peers, and persons with the same academic major.

**Roommates**

The first social ties students in a residence hall will have is with their roommate or roommates. Three different residence hall styles were included in this study. These different styles allowed for students to have connections with roommates who share an actual bedroom with them, and with suite mates or apartment mates who share a living unit, but not an actual bedroom with them. Bedrooms ranged from single occupancy to double or triple occupancy. When all bedrooms in a suite or apartment are combined, one unit could have a total population ranging from six to nine residents. Therefore, quite a range of possible connections existed for students within a single living unit. For the purpose of this study roommates are defined as persons who share the same bedroom.
Whether in a double or triple room type, all participants reported having good relationships with their roommates. They talked about being there for each other socially and academically. Some even talked about making sure that no one ever had to go out alone socially. There was desire to provide mutual support. One student from a triple room in a traditional style residence hall said of roommates, “They were there to help me out, and help me study, and I was also there to help them out.” (Jon)

There was no pattern to how roommate groupings were chosen. Some requested friends as roommates. Others found roommates through Facebook, and quite a few had roommates that were assigned randomly. A few participants preferred the random assignments, because they wanted to meet new people. One person reported rooming with a high school friend, but searching out a third roommate on Facebook for their triple room. The idea was to meet someone new while having the comfort of already knowing one roommate. No participants reported utilizing the University’s roommate matching service.

All participants reported studying together with their roommates. Descriptions of studying together ranged from sometimes, or for one class that they took together, to studying together all of the time regardless of class, and making quizzes for each other. It was commonly reported that if one roommate was studying the other roommates felt obligated to do the same. Participants seemed to prefer that roommates have the same major or at least one class in common.

Persons with more than one roommate spoke more positively about their roommate situation than those who had only one roommate. Although all participants
reported that academic information was routinely shared amongst roommates, the larger groups seemed to share information more freely than those who only had one roommate.

I would say that we all spread information to each other so if one of us heard something, I wouldn't keep it to myself. I would go tell them. I kind of think we were mostly all on the same page with that kind of stuff. (Tess, resident of a triple room in a suite style building)

They also reported continuing to live with the same roommates the next year more often than participants who had only one roommate.

**Suitemates and Apartment Mates**

Suitemates or apartment mates share a living unit, but not an actual bedroom. Participants who lived suites or apartments felt that they had an advantage over students who lived in traditional residence halls. They indicated that suite mates and apartment mates formed a small group of peers for a level of comfort somewhere between the intimate roommate group of one or two people and floor level group or entire learning community group that would have many more people.

Most students reported getting along well socially and academically. However, some participants reported that one person in their suite or apartment group was considered an outsider. In one case the outsider had a different academic major. This provided fewer opportunities to study and discuss academic concerns. Another one was assigned to the group later in the academic year and just never seemed to fit in with the established group. A third person was described as simply having issues with attitude and anger. When participants were asked what was most influential on their academic experience it was common to receive answers such as, “My roommates
[apartment mates] especially. Since we were in the apartment, I became really close to them. They helped me in social and academic and all that stuff.” (Patricia)

Neighbors and Peers

Neighbors and peers were students who did not live in the same room, apartment, or suite but were connected by sharing academic information. Neighbors and peers could live in the same hallway, same building, a different building, or not in a residence hall at all. All participants described relations with neighbors and peers positively. A few described an occasionally noisy neighbor that typically quieted when asked. They all described a residence hall floor and learning community that provided a readily available group of people with whom they felt comfortable socially and academically. The following exchange with a resident who lived in a triple room in a traditional residence hall provides a rich description of the community he lived in.

Jon: It was very closely knit, and it was entertaining, and gave me a sense of community, just to be there for an academic year.
Interviewer: When you say closely knit, what does that really mean to you?
Jon: It means everyone knows each other well, and they're not afraid to speak with each other about anything in general. It's neighbors, but more than neighbors. Close friends pretty much. Everyone within one floor of the residence hall.
Interviewer: Okay. You also said it was entertaining, what do you mean by that?
Jon: It's fun to be with people in the residence hall. Interacting with them, doing things that you couldn't do if you were, say living alone off campus like I do [now]. Always being around people.
Interviewer: Okay. You said close knit, entertaining and community, sense of community. How do you define a sense of community then?
Jon: A sense of community would be having plenty of people you are willing to work with and speak with about anything, makes you feel less alone. That's why I call sense of community.
Generally participants talked positively regarding their floor, community, and neighbors. However, one participant talked about the benefits of the group, and then warned of the temptation to become distracted from academic endeavors.

Interviewer: Do you think that living on campus affected your academic experience?

At times, sometimes if I had to study, but it's very social when you live in a dorm, so sometimes you get distracted a lot. If everyone said, "Oh, let's all go to dinner," or something, it's like, "I can't," but you're trying to make friends as well, so it's like I should be social because I need to make friends here so, sometimes, at times.

When asked if they got more information about classes and academic issues from people who lived in their residence hall or from people who lived outside their residence hall it was clear that they received more information from people who lived in their residence hall with an emphasis on suite mates or apartment mates. More than one participant used the term “go-to-people” for neighbors and floor mates in regards to academic concerns.

Two residents talked about how they thought other floors were a closer and more cohesive group than theirs. Interestingly, both students lived in the same building, but one lived on the first floor and thought that the second floor had a much better community. The other student was on the second floor and thought that the first floor had a much better community. They were talking about each other’s floor! Looking at this grouping of relationships also highlighted the importance of remembering that each person is sharing their personal point of view that cannot always be generalized.
Academic Major

A surprising amount of influence was placed on connecting with students in the same academic major. Students stated that academic major impacted their choice of university, preference of residence hall, preferred learning community, roommates, and suite mates. In all situations participants preferred that contact with persons who have the same or at least a related academic major was maximized. An instant bond seemed to form between residents having the same major.

Many also mentioned that they did not have a relationship at all with roommates, suite mates, or apartment mates who had a different academic major. Some organized study nights or study groups regardless of academic major, but most did not. As one student explained, “I hardly studied with people in my apartment, just because we're all different majors. We never studied together.” (Kaleo.) When discussing suite mates or apartment mates who had different academic majors the statement was often that, “we never talked to them” or “they just did their own thing”. When one participant said an apartment mate was on her own and did not participate with others in the apartment she explained, “She was one of the one’s that didn’t have a business major, so everything: her interests, her classes, were very different from the rest of us.” (Shelley)

Even the community for undeclared majors followed a similar pattern. Students in the undeclared major community expressed disappointment when someone had an academic major. It appeared as if they were looking for companions to explore possibilities and share in the experience more intimately with them. One student in the
undeclared community felt that the seminar class would have been structured differently and been more helpful if more people in the community were truly undeclared.

So many of the people weren't, actually, undeclared, the class couldn't really be just about being undeclared and finding your major and stuff like that. I think it would've been more helpful if that was the actual intent of the class. Again, because so many people weren't, you couldn't really do that. If it did, I think there could've been a lot more information on either undeclared, picking your major, or the difference, maybe have guest speakers from the different colleges, or something like that, more on the academics specifically than all the other things about the school. (Leigh)

In the end, one participant did seem to understand the benefits of being exposed to other majors. However, she only said this after she had talked at length about how important it was to have everyone in the same or related majors.

I guess people would argue that you don't get the diversity of other majors. I luckily did. I got along with the theater major and the computer science major. I don't know how they got in there. I don't know if it was strictly supposed to be only business people. Had it been all business people, I wouldn't have gotten the broad range of personalities that come with different ambitions and learning goals and everything. (Melita)

The connections or social ties that participants made in all of these small groups are key to the academic experience of participants. It is also clear that many of these social ties were influenced by the physical structures or built environments in which they were housed. Built environments encouraged or facilitated many groupings and may have impeded others.
Built Environment

Each participant in this study lived in one of three different residence hall styles. They are traditional, suite, and apartment style. Traditional residence halls are double or triple bedrooms on either side of a long hallway with community bathrooms and lounges, shared by all residents on a hallway, floor, or wing. Residents in suites have a common area similar to a living room surrounded by single, double, and triple bedrooms, along with bathrooms for the exclusive use of persons who live in that suite. Suites in this study housed six to nine persons each. Apartments are completely self-contained living units with bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, and full kitchens. It is not surprising that students felt these different building styles affected their residence hall experience. However, it may be surprising to note that they also played a role in how academic information was shared. Students seemed to be very aware of some of the ways that building style provided influence.

Traditional Style Residence Hall Rooms

Students who lived in traditional style residence halls tended to feel that they were in a more sociable situation. Some from suites and apartments agreed that the traditional halls had a reputation for being more sociable. However, both groups had concerns that it was harder to focus and have privacy in a traditional style residence hall than in an apartment or suite style and made. These concerns were confirmed by students in traditional style residence halls who made comments such as, “studying-time alone was hard to find” (Wanda), “You can't really study in the dorm, you have to go to the library” (Vicki), or “The library, I just went to study and get away from
sitting in my dorm with random people coming in and out” (Katie). They talked about
going to the library to study as if it was a necessity. This was different from when
residents of suites and apartments talked about going to the library to study. For suite
and apartment residents it was mentioned as a convenience because it was so close, or
a social experience, rather than a necessity. This situation was compounded for those
who were in triple rooms in a traditional style residence hall. Given that residents of
triple rooms in suites did not have similar concerns this should be noted.

Definitely in a room that I was sharing with two other people, the
amount of times I was alone in the room wasn't too much, because
there was always at least one other person in there. Even if it was quiet
in the room, if I was practicing for a speech, I didn't want to disrupt
other people so I had to find a spot by myself and I would have to
physically remove myself from the building. There's just so many
people there, so I had to find a spot for myself to study and practice,
that kind of stuff. (Wanda)

**Apartments and Suites**

Regardless of whether they were in a single, double, or triple bedroom all of the
residents in this study seemed to be happy with their suite or apartment
accommodation.

I would say the main influence on my academics, the entire year,
socially and academically, was the fact that I lived in an apartment style
rather than a traditional style dorm because that influenced the way I
live, the way I study, the way I interact with people, the way [I do]
pretty much everything more than having the resources, and having
everything like that. (Leigh)

In relation to the larger population, students in apartments and suites considered
their group of apartment mates or suite mates as an intermediate group between their
roommate group and the larger group of the entire learning community or floor. Many
described this as an advantage over students who lived in traditional style residence halls. They explained that this gave them options with vary levels of intimacy for information sharing and information gathering. Different levels of intimacy were desired depending perceived level of risk involved with the information or even personal mood. For example if a student wanted to compare their test scores with others they might prefer to have conversation with a smaller group rather than a large group. On the other hand, if they were looking to determine which answer for a possible test question was best, then polling a larger group might be more appropriate.

We probably had the same amount of people as other residence halls but the spacing was a lot better than having to be the rooms all next to each other. If you're in the suites you would never hear anything from any of the other suites, you're just inside your suite. It was really helpful because you could just talk to the people in there if you just wanted a couple people. I had a single so I could just be alone if I wanted to too, or you can go out in the floor common room and see a bunch of people. I think the spacing works really well in the suites. (Wade)

Consequently, students with double and triple bedrooms in suites and apartments spoke more favorably about their roommates than those who lived in traditional style residence halls. Students who lived in traditional residence halls also commented often that they were glad they were not isolated in an apartment or suite. Yet, only one student who lived in an apartment or suite seemed to be concerned about being isolated because of living in a not-traditional style residence hall. She said that, “we would just hang out in our living room rather than if you're in a [traditional] dorm, you go and hang out in the common room, and get to know everyone on your floor sort of thing” (Patricia). Other students in apartments and suites reported that the
layout of their units provided meeting places for conversations to happen and a space for escape if there was no privacy in the bedroom. These meeting spaces were typically living rooms, kitchens and dining areas.

If they're being loud in the [bed]room, I would just go out to the little living room area or if that still bothered me or if they're out there, I'd go to my [bed]room. (Clara)

I would say it was a good thing to be like six people in an apartment. Since I was in an apartment I feel like I definitely prefer that or being and having to have been in the dorms where you're just with a room, after room, after room, with different people… (Shelley)

Some also looked back on the experience and said that it had helped prepare them for apartment life off campus.

I would say the main influence on my academic, the entire year, socially and academically, was the fact that I lived in an apartment style rather than a traditional style dorm because that influenced the way I live, the way I study, the way I interact with people, the way, pretty much everything more than having the resources, and having everything like that. I know, now, I'm more prepared to live in an apartment now. It's almost exactly the same. Then the people that lived in a more traditional style dorms, they're having more adjustment now. Although it had a lot of disadvantages socially, which then impacted me academically, the biggest influence was more the style of living. (Leigh)

Students from all residence hall styles talked about the benefits of common spaces. They provided areas for socialization, studying, and general exchange of knowledge. They provided an opportunity to hang out with people in the floor lounge and, as a student explained, “At the same time if I wanted to be removed from that I can go back to my room and not feel like I’m missing out on anything, because I could go back whenever I wanted to, or leave whenever I wanted to.” (Viola)
Wanda lived in a traditional style building triple room. She provided more
detail about how common spaces in her residence hall were utilized.

Throughout the year a lot of people would be doing their homework
there [floor lounge]. We did have a study room downstairs, which
people would do there, but sometimes people would just hang out in
the common room, some people would be doing homework. In our
conversations we'd talk a lot about how classes are going, what we're
learning, our opinions on stuff. I don't think I was ever involved, but
sometimes I'd walk by and people are having deep conversations about
political issues, religious topics. Yeah. (Wanda)

Her remarks are supported by William, who lived in a single room in an apartment
style residence hall. When he talked about the benefits of the public patio for his
building he said, “We'd always sit out on the patio and do our work out there.” He also
talked about using the community room in the same way.

It is not surprising that different building styles affected the residence hall
experience, but participants in this study provided insight into their impact on the flow
of academic information and the overall academic experience in the residence hall.
Design features for future construction and staffing practices may be derived from this
information. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

**Faculty and Staff**

Many students indicated that social ties with faculty and residence hall staff
were highly influential on the academic experience. These ties are notable because the
learning community sets parameters and expectations for them through position
descriptions. Faculty in residence are required to teach seminar classes in the residence
hall, make presentations in the residence hall, have meals with residence hall students,
and even live in the residence hall. Resident advisors and academic mentors live and
work in the learning community in the residence hall, and are required to have regular meetings with students. They are also required to plan, organize, and facilitate regular social and educational events for students in the learning communities.

**Faculty Interactions**

Relationships and interactions with faculty were regarded as important and highly beneficial. Through the faculty in residence program the learning community may have played a significant role in facilitating these relationships. This is because the faculty in residence are required to teach learning community seminar classes in the residence hall, make presentations for students in the residence hall, have meals with students who live in the residence hall, and even live in the residence hall. However, it should be noted that faculty interactions did not just occur in the residence hall or with faculty in residence. Some important interactions did occur in the residence hall, but others described by participants occurred in classes, during office hours, and other places. Most of these interactions with faculty were described by participants as important, positive, or providing helpful information.

In the interview excerpts below two different students describe the importance of making contact with professors and creating good relationships with them. These comments are consistent with those made by others throughout the investigation.

I like to have a good relationship with my professors, because when they know you personally, and they know your name, and they see you come into office hours all the time, then it's a good reflection of you as a student. (Tess)

For a few of my classes last year they were large lectures, for example my chemistry class. My TA would know me but if I didn’t go up to the professor myself and introduce myself he would never know me.
Making that relationship and walking next to him to his office hours as he was trying to get there as fast as he can, me trying to have a conversation with him helped me form a relationship that I wasn’t just another seat being filled in his lecture hall. When I’d raise my hand he’d recognize who I am or he’d be like, “Why are you sitting in the back go sit in the front?” “I’m sorry I got here not on time. I’m sorry I’m like two minutes late.” Making that connection was definitely essential for me. (Viola)

When asked if there was one particular information source for academics that everyone seems to go to several students talked about the benefits of utilizing office hours with professors for a variety of subjects. When students told me that they utilized office hours I asked them to tell me more about a visit.

Normally there's not too many people in there. I've gone to talk to the teachers. I've gone to teachers' ones also, just one-on-one, and it's helpful, even if it's just about the class in general and not just topics or questions. It's helpful a lot and everything. Just learning how the tests work and stuff. (Patricia)

Office hours are a huge help. I mostly went to office hours for my English classes because they'd usually just read over your paper and they tell you what you need to improve on. That was the easiest thing ever to drastically improve your grade. Almost every person goes to office hours at least every semester. I think it helps out a lot. It's a very beneficial ... That's the biggest one for sure. (William)

Several students talked about helpful and lasting insights or information provided to them by professors. Many of these were from the seminar classes required by all learning community members. The following exchange with a student from the entrepreneurship community provides some insight.

William: We had our instructor and I thought he was awesome. He helped us. Like I said, we did the resume thing, which only benefited us. We made the Linked-In, which only benefited us again. Then, there was a lot of cool speakers that were in that class. There was the guy that made Shake Smart. He told us how he started it. There was the guy that made Pura Vida, which is this bracelet company. He came in and
told us how he made his business. Those were really cool events where we could ask all the question we wanted to and they told us how they got started and what they did. If we wanted to make something where we can get started, that was... The class itself was very beneficial, I thought.

Interviewer: Is there anything that was not provided in the seminar class that should have been provided?

William: I already got more out of the seminar class than I ever thought I was going to get. The speakers itself was cool. I was psyched on that. That was more than I ever thought I was going to get out of the Entrepreneur Society really. I expected to get some cool things, but that was way better than I thought. I was pleased. I can't even think of anything else more to ask for, really.

Others mentioned benefits from the seminar class such as meeting additional professors from their major field of study or learning tips to help organize their new found college academic life. One student even mentioned that their seminar professor would even have lunch with them after class.

We had a class once a week with the faculty in residence. That was actually very helpful, and she introduced us to a lot of people in the field and future teachers that I'm going to have and everyone. It actually was really beneficial if you're in the major. You got a preview if you go with it. (Vicki)

I remember at the beginning of the school year our professor [faculty in residence] made us write down all of our major due dates and so I still do that. It's really helpful to have all those major due dates in one place and you know what's due when. That's kind of something that really contributed to my academic success that I can pull out. (Katie)

Although most participants described positive interactions with faculty, two described very negative interactions with faculty members from outside the residence hall who were intimidating. They listed them as the biggest barriers that they encountered to academic success. Vicki described a professor who was so intimidating
that after she and her friends tried to talk with him once they never approached him again.

Participants in this study made it clear that they place a great deal of importance on interactions with professors. Students made deliberate attempts to establish relationships. They also cited words of wisdom and best practices learned from professors rather than academic concepts. It seems as if professors were often viewed as role models. Interactions with them may have been symbolic in addition to providing information.

**Residence Hall Staff**

In interviews, participants were free to talk about any staff they wanted. However, staff interactions that participants chose to discuss were limited to situations in the residence hall. Large amounts of information and encouragement came from resident hall staff. These staff included resident advisors (RAs), academic mentors (AMs), and residence hall coordinators. These staff members were seen as resources, role models, support when needed, and motivators.

RAs are typically undergraduate paraprofessional staff members who live in the residence hall on the floor with residents. RAs are responsible for policy enforcement, relaying important information, providing social and academic learning opportunities for residents, and working at the front desk. They were often listed by participants as role models who provided support, encouragement, and guidance in a variety of areas including academic, social, and personal. They were also cited as authority figures who helped to keep order. Several participants considered RAs to be
personal friends as well as student leaders. The following quotes are typical of participant’s descriptions of RAs:

They were coming by to check up on how we were doing. They would also ask other questions related to our academics and how our schedule is, and the grades we have. I feel like that was important, because I was at one point where I wasn’t doing so good in class. They reached out to me seeing if I needed any help. That kind of a lead to me going to my [advisor’s] office… (Shelley)

She was always really supportive in my decisions of when to study versus other people not studying as much. I would always go to her programs and she would always give me information at the programs. Most of the programs that she had and the other RAs had were definitely geared towards academic success. (Viola)

AMs are also typically undergraduate paraprofessional staff members who live in the residence hall on the floor with residents. AMs are responsible for meeting one-on-one with residents to discuss academic issues, providing seminars regarding academic issues, and holding office hours in the Students Taking Academic Responsibility (STAR) academic resource centers which are located inside residence halls throughout campus. AMs were known among participants for providing reliable guidance regarding class scheduling, graduation requirements, and study abroad programs. One participant was not partial to the personality of his AM. Another one wanted an AM with a major more similar to his. Each actively sought out guidance from another AM on a different floor in the building, and was satisfied with the result.

Interviewer: If you needed academic information, where did you go to get that?
Kaleo: Actually not my AM, not my academic mentor. I actually went to the first floor’s academic mentor, just because he specifically was a business major himself. He was an accounting major. He helped me out with so much. I think because of him I am able to graduate a year early, because I didn't know about the pre requisites thing. I didn't know even
if you had 60 credits you had to do all those 9 specific business classes before you moved on. He helped me out in accounting, Bob too.

The role of RAs and AMs may be unique because they are undergraduate peers to participants. Yet it is clear, that RAs and AMs were seen by participants as resources, role models, support, and motivators. Some participants even considered them friends. Their role was key in shaping the residence hall learning community.

**Demographic Differences**

One of the goals of this study was to examine whether students with different background characteristics had similar experiences in the residence halls. Specifically, research question number three asks, “Do students with different background characteristics (e.g., gender, race, income status) have particular successes and challenges in accessing and building social capital in different residence hall settings?”

To address this question all interview transcripts were coded for gender, race, first generation college student status, and Pell Grant eligibility (low-income status).

Only two participants were Pell Grant eligible. One was male and one was female. The male also stated that his parents were not born in the United States. The female had a strong accent that may have indicated similar family circumstances. These were also the only participants in the study who identified as first generation college students.

Three participants indicated that they received “other” forms of financial aid, and the remaining nine participants indicated that they received no financial aid at all. No major differences were discovered in relation to the learning community.
experience based on low-income status, first generation college student status, or gender.

Some differences in the way that students of color obtained and shared academic information were noted. However, no discernable patterns in how students obtained and shared academic information were discovered based on gender, income status, or first generation college student status. These are the only background characteristics that were addressed directly and no others emerged. The differences for students of color were that they were (1) less likely to take advantage of a professor’s office hours, (2) listed academic mentor staff from the residence halls and professors as their first source of academic information more often, and (3) felt less obligated to share academic information than white students.

These differences were not immediately noticeable in the course of conducting the interviews. They were only discovered after pulling the students of color out as a separate group and looking for themes. It is interesting note that the students of color in this study were not all from one ethnic or racial group. As shown in Table 1, these students were a mix of multi-racial, Hispanic, and Asian students, yet these patterns were consistent across the entire group.

Of the 14 different students who participated in this study, seven or 50% of participants, discussed utilizing professors’ office hours as an important source of academic information. None of these was a student of color. Of the eight white students who participated in the study six discussed utilizing professors’ office hours
as an important source of academic information. In other words no of students of color were likely to use professors’ office hours, compared with 75% of white students.

In conversations regarding whom they went to for academic information or support, or who provided the most influence over their academic experience. Students of color were more likely to mention an AM or professor, while white students typically talked about peers or an RA. AMs were listed first by five out of 6 or 83.3% of students of color and only three out of eight or 37.5% of white students listed them as the first staff person to provide influential academic information. Note in the passages below how the student of color immediately names the AM, but the white student mentions two other persons before getting to the AM. It seems like the AM was just an after thought.

we had two academic mentors, one for each hallway that was on each floor. There was one academic mentor in particular that everyone seemed to go to, whether you were in her hallway or not. I would definitely say a lot of people went to her for help. Student-wise, I can't think of any one person in particular, everyone would ask around but there wasn't one who stood out. Definitely the academic mentor helped a lot of people (Student of Color)

Yeah, probably there's one girl just because she was really smart and she knew about everything. This is somebody in your suite or your floor? Yeah in our suite, and then actually when you said on our floor, we went to Trish [the RA] for everything because she knew everything about all the academic stuff. We had an academic mentor, Michael, on our floor too, who helped us a lot and we met with him. (White Student)

Most white students never mentioned the AM at all.

My one roommate (apartment mate) who was a theater major…. Just because she was always in her room studying and out of the people I have met in this college, she probably just has one of the highest
standards for herself. If I needed to ask her, "How should I organize my
time tonight? I have a test on this and I've got turn in homework here
and there." I don't understand a material. I'd go to her and ask her.
(White Student)

This was an interesting pattern, especially when the academic mentor's job title clearly
indicates that their job is to be an academic resource.

Students of color did not feel as strong of an obligation to share academic
information as freely as white students did. Only one of eight white students said that
they did not ever feel an obligation to share academic information with other students.
Another white student said that she felt less obligated as the academic year progressed.
Others spoke about how freely they shared information. The two excerpts below
illustrate the differences. Each person was asked if there was an expectation or
obligation to help other people academically. Note the differences in response.

If someone asked me, I felt pretty obligated if they really didn't know
what to do, and I knew exactly what to do, and they knew I knew what
to do. If they asked and I would've said 'no', I would have felt really
bad. I wouldn't have felt like a good person. I always felt obligated to
say 'yes', but I don't think they necessarily expected it. I think they
asked me and then I wanted to say 'yes', so I always did. (white student)

No. We've made that a point, it's like we're not going to pick up
someone else's slack, definitely not that. (student of color)

Three of six students of color said that they did not feel an obligation to share
academic information, while the other three would share academic information freely
with others. That is 50% for students of color, compared with 75% for White students.
The difference of attitude seemed to be one of feeling guilty for not helping versus one
of rules dictating that each person should earn their own way. It was almost as if the
students of color felt like they were cheating if they provided information to others too
freely. Although these patterns are interesting to note, further research with a larger sample and more deliberately probing questions could draw meaningful conclusions.

**Summary of Findings**

Participants in this study perceived the experience of being in a learning community in an on campus residence hall to have an overall positive impact on their academic experience. Three additional themes seemed to contribute to this positive overall academic experience. They were a communal drive to succeed, engagement in small social groups in the residence hall, and social ties with faculty and residence hall staff. Building style, room type, and the student’s academic major influenced social group interaction. Requirements of position descriptions impacted interaction with faculty and residence hall staff.

The meaning of academic success was unique for each individual. Yet all but one participant had a well-developed concept that went beyond measurement by grade point average. alone. These concepts were accompanied by a self-directed determination to achieve their own unique vision of success. Some unique themes for students of color were also discovered. Academic Mentors and professors were more likely to be listed as the first source of academic information for these students. Students of color were also less likely to take advantage of a professor’s office hours, and felt less of an obligation to help others with academic concerns.

Four themes regarding best practices were provided by the third research question. These themes relate to implications from the study’s findings. Therefore,
they are discussed in Chapter Five. The relationship between all of the findings and the existing literature are also addressed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study is to better understand how social networks in the residence hall learning community setting contribute to and inhibit the student academic experience. Findings were presented in Chapter Four. In this chapter the findings are briefly summarized. Then they are discussed in context of the research questions and the literature previously reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion then continues with implications for best practices that may be established to contribute to student success in on-campus residence hall settings. Finally, suggestions are made regarding areas for future research.

Summary of Findings

Participants in this study perceived the experience of being in a learning community in an on-campus residence hall to have an overall positive impact on their academic experience. Three themes contributed to the overall academic experience. They were a communal drive to succeed, engagement in small social groups, and social ties with professors and residence hall staff. Building style, room type, and each student’s academic major influenced social group interaction. Duties set forth in position descriptions impacted interaction with faculty and residence hall staff.

The concept of academic success was well developed and uniquely defined for each individual. They also felt a deep personal drive to achieve it. Most students
conceptualized something that was measured by more than just grade point average alone. Doing one’s best and acquiring skills that could be applied outside the classroom were often included in these visions.

Interestingly, most also felt a compelling drive to help others in the community achieve academic success. This communal drive to succeed seemed to be based in an unwritten expectation of reciprocity for the good of the community. The trust and reciprocity exhibited here are a clear demonstration of the exchange of social capital within the community.

Three unique themes for students of color were discovered. The most surprising was that students of color were less involved assisting others with academic concerns. They were also less likely to take advantage of a professor’s office hours. However, academic mentors from the residence hall and professors in general were more likely to be listed as the first source of academic information for students of color than they were for other students. No unique findings were discovered based on gender, income, or first generation status.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Perceived Positive Impact**

Students interviewed for this study perceived that simply living in a residence hall was beneficial. They cited both academic and social benefits. This is consistent with previous studies which suggest that on-campus residents may receive opportunities for social support, resources, and integration into the campus community.
that give them an advantage over students living off campus (Astin, 1977; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schudde, 2011).

Furthermore, students indicated unanimously that the learning community had an even greater impact than living in the residence hall, but not being in a learning community. Their statements lend support to claims made by the university showing a higher grade point average, more timely graduation, and lower rates of academic probation for students who live on-campus in a residence hall. (“Housing Administration & Residential Education Statistics”, n.d.). This is also in line with findings of previous studies indicating that learning communities centered in an on-campus residence hall have an additional positive impact on grade point average and persistence to graduation beyond that of simply living in a residence hall (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; and Terenzini et al., 1996).

**Communal Drive to Succeed**

All of the students who participated in this study exhibited a strong sense of self-motivation and responsibility for their own success. They talk about being “self-driven”, learning to be independent, and how it was “all up to me.” They also had well developed concepts of what that success looked like for them. It could be said that they had high educational aspirations.

Is it possible that students who self selected to participate in the residential learning communities for the institution being studied were more driven than the typical student? Is it also possible that students who self selected to participate in research studies like this one are more self-motivated than the typical student? It may
be possible. However, it is notable that 100% of participants would possess these characteristics and express them so passionately.

One participant stated that the installation of her personal aspirations began with parents. This is not surprising, because students who perceive that their parents expect them to go to college and have frequent conversations about college have higher aspirations and expectations for college (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Israel et al., 2001). The high aspirations of all students in the study could also be linked to Grodsky’s and Rieglecrumb’s (2010) findings that the college going habitus of a student is generally lined to educational level of parents, paternal employment, and socioeconomic class. This could be supported by the fact only two students in the study were first generation college students. Those same two were also the only ones classified as low income.

Every student in the study felt that they were successful in their academic pursuits. They often attributed their success, or ease of success, to features of the learning community. This finding supports findings of previous studies indicating that learning communities centered in an on-campus residence hall have an additional positive impact on grade point average and persistence to graduation (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; and Terenzini et al., 1996), as well as claims from the university of higher grade point average, more timely graduation, and lower rates of academic probation for students who live their residential learning communities. (“Housing Administration & Residential Education Statistics”, n.d.).
Students in this study had a camaraderie or kinship with members of their community. One student even referred to them as her family. Their relationships developed into a desire for all members of the community to succeed. None put it better than Jon when he said of roommates and suitemates that “They were there to help me out, and help me study, and I was also there to help them out.” Others went on to talk about a feeling of obligation for all community members to help each other with academic concerns.

Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) explain that trust and reciprocity must exist as a prerequisite for developing social capital. This is exactly what participants are describing in the learning community. Each community member is providing valuable academic information to their social ties, because they trust and expect that the favor will be returned. In other words, they are trading social capital through their social network.

However, what participants describe goes beyond just trust and reciprocity. Their desire for all members of the community to succeed constitutes an indirect reciprocity for the common good of the group rather than the individual. These desires are similar to what is described by Nitecki (2011) and Ovinck and Veazey (2010) in the college communities that they studied where students credited their success to trusting reciprocal relationships with faculty, administrators, and peers.

This feeling of indirect reciprocity for the common good could be one of the greatest benefits of the residential learning community. Through it students learn to be responsible for their self and responsible to others. In many ways this describes what
is often considered an ideal educational community, and perhaps an ideal community outside of academia.

**Small Groups**

Social connections and the information shared through them lie at the heart of the notion of social capital. One of the amazing opportunities with the residential learning community is the ability to influence these connections in so many different ways. In this setting, both the structure and process components of social capital may be leveraged. The structure component is leveraged through room type; building style; staffing; and roommate, suitemate, and apartment mate assignments. The process component may be leveraged through staff training and requirements, policies, and event planning for residents.

Students who lived in triple rooms, suites, and apartments had a more positive attitude toward roommates and the overall experience than those who lived in traditional style residence halls with double rooms. They talked fondly of multiple opportunities for small group interactions within the residence hall environment. On the other hand, students in traditional style residence hall double rooms got along with roommates, but also talked more seriously about frustrations with roommates and lack of privacy.

These interactions are illustrations of the impact of the structural component of social capital, which refers to the number and type of social ties for an individual. In this situation types of ties would be roommates, suitemates, and community members.
The number of ties would be a function of room type (double or triple) combined with the residence hall style (traditional, suite, or apartment) and learning community.

It is important to note that these groups were influenced by both the built environment of the structure that they live in, and the social structure imposed by the learning community. The number and size of subgroups within the learning community was often determined by the built environment. The built environment had more impact on the structure component and the learning community had more impact on the process component.

However, when students talked about the ties within these groups it seemed as if the catalyst for interaction came more from the connection of membership in the learning community or having similar academic majors. What the participants are describing falls in line with the recommendations of Lenning and Ebbers (1999) who state that successful learning communities incorporated small groups to promote collaborative and cooperative learning.

**Faculty and Staff**

Another group of social ties that participants discussed exchanging academic information with was professors and residence hall staff. They discussed connections with professors who were instructors for learning community seminar classes, faculty in residence for the residence hall, and others who had no connection to the residence hall. Residence hall staff members with whom they described having interactions were resident advisors and academic mentors.
Previous research has shown that conversations with faculty and peers are positively related to college persistence and satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh, 1995) and that when teachers, counselors, and administrators convey higher expectations they typically translate into higher student aspirations (Byun et al., 2012; Farmer-Hinton, 2008). These statements seemed to be true for participants in this study. Social interaction with instructors was highly regarded by participants. They emphasized the value of one-on-one contact during office hours, group lunches with instructors, and any other opportunities for contact. Some like Viola even went out of their way by walking with instructors to their offices. They liked the idea of having a relationship with someone who could be considered a subject matter expert in the classroom and in the world outside the classroom.

Residence hall staff members were described as role models, people who provided support, the keepers of order, and providers of key information. Encounters with them were routine and occurred in groups or one-on-one settings. Interactions with them was somewhat taken for granted. However, it was described as positive, beneficial, and necessary.

The benefits of interaction with these two groups can be seen as examples of the influence of both the structure and process components of social capital. The fact that the learning communities were formally organized in ways that required these interactions to occur on a regular basis can be seen as an example of influencing the structural component of social capital. When participants describe details of conversations and the feeling of connection and real relationships with the individuals
involved, the process component is clearly evident. The process component may be
influenced by selecting staff and faculty who have an investment in the community
and providing them the appropriate training to facilitate connections.

A good example may also be seen when considering Kaleo talked about not
liking the academic mentor assigned to his floor, so he went to another floor and
utilized the academic mentor on that floor. The process component of this situation is
seen in the weakness of the tie between Kaleo and the AM. The structure component
is seen in having another AM to choose from and making it easy to access that AM.

In summary, it seems that participants perceived their contact with professors
and residence hall staff to provide added value to the experience. This added valued
came in the form of information, role modeling, and encouragement. Intentionally
influencing the structure and process components of social ties with professors, staff,
and community members could leverage this added value to be more effective.

**Academic Major**

Most students in this study craved interaction with peers who were enrolled in
the same academic major or at least a similar field of study. Interaction and
information was valued from those who were at higher levels in their academic
discipline and at the same or level as the participants. Persons at higher levels in the
academic major provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of those who
had gone before. Persons at the same level in a field of study were seen as an
opportunity to provide support and be supported as well as corroborate current
feelings and experiences. Students seemed to be most concerned with the quantity and
type, or structure component, of these connections. However, it was apparent that both
the quantity, and quality, or process component, of the connections were influential
factors.

As stated earlier conversations with faculty and peers are positively related to
college persistence and satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh,
1995). Additionally, the students discussed by Nitecki (2011) credited their success to
relationships with faculty, administrators, and peers. Therefore, these desires for
interaction with peers, as well as faculty and staff, seems to be in line with previous
findings. However, two things about this desire for interaction were surprising. First
was its intensity and second the willingness to completely discount those who were
not related to an academic major or theme. These are details that were not described in
previous studies.

The intensity of the desire for connection could be due in part to a
predisposition for connection. This may be evident in the fact that participants chose
to be in a thematic learning community in the first place. Many of these communities
are already linked to a major or academic discipline. It is possible that this could also
explain their readiness to go to office hours or follow a professor to their office to
make a connection.

Participants’ willingness to completely discount individuals with differing
academic majors could also be fed by this same predisposition to find connection
mixed with a desire to make the most of their college years. To be efficient one would
look for the first and most obvious connection related to their ultimate college goal of
graduation. That connection would be academic major. Much less emphasis would be placed on others.

The connections or social ties that participants made with all groups listed thus far are key to their academic experience. However, social ties were also influenced by the physical structures or built environments in which participants made connections. Based on descriptions from participants, it is clear that the built environment may have encouraged or facilitated many groupings and may have also impeded others.

**Built Environment**

Students who participated in this study were required to indicate their preference for participation in a learning community when they applied for housing. They were not required to indicate their preference for a particular physical structure. However, participants discussed often how living in a particular room type or building style influenced their experience. They viewed some of these influences as positive and others as negative.

It is not surprising that students felt these differences in the built environment affected their residence hall experience. However, it may be surprising to note that they also played a role in how academic information was shared throughout their social networks. Students seemed to be very aware of some of the ways that physical buildings provided influence.

The built environment provided most of its influence on the structure component of social capital in the residence hall. It dictated the number of social ties available by specifying the number of people in a room type, suite or apartment, hall,
floor, and even building. The built environment also influenced the type of social ties by dictating the number and location of staff and faculty units in a given area, as well as the number and location of social spaces and study spaces.

Examples may be seen when participants talked about the dynamics of their room, suite, or apartment. Remember the two participants who each compared their floors. Each one of them thought the other floor had a better dynamic. It is also prevalent when students talk about going to the common area (floor lounge) to catch up, study, or hang out with others.

These building options may have also been influential on the strength of social ties. Open, inviting, and comfortable environments would most likely have a different influence on the strength of social ties than would a place where no one ever likes to hang out. An example would be when William said that his apartment was so dark that he and his apartment mates always hung out and studied on the outdoor patio, or when Wade and Patricia talked about the relationships they formed with neighbors they met in the common area of their floor.

Many times in the university housing and residence life fields we make assumptions that assignments to apartments should be reserved for upper division students and avoided for freshmen. Apartments are typically seen as providing lots of privacy and not very encouraging for interaction outside the individual apartment unit. In keeping with this assumption, freshmen learning communities at the university studied were historically in traditional style buildings. However, because of capacity concerns, that trend was changed for the year during which this study was conducted.
Several freshmen learning communities were located in apartment style buildings for that year only. Of the seven communities studied four were in apartment style buildings.

This study does not take into consideration factors such as judicial concerns or student behavior that may or may not have been satisfactory. Yet, it does provide a description of an academic environment where the apartment design contributed by providing a balance of privacy and small group interaction opportunities for learning community participants to exchange academic information. This is a fact that may be of significance for university housing and residence life professionals.

A recent study featured in *The Talking Stick* published by the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I) reviewed national data that indicates a trend across the U.S. is to provide more apartment style housing for undergraduate and freshmen student populations. The same article also states that engaging students in the apartment environment is significantly challenging, and that the reward for successfully engaging them can be huge. (Venaas, Knerr & Robinson, 2016) This study shows that the learning community design may be helpful for such successful engagement.

**Demographic Differences**

Some differences in the way that students of color obtained and shared academic information were noted. However, no discernable patterns regarding social ties and sharing of information were discovered based on gender, income, or first
generation college student status. These are the only background characteristics that were addressed directly by the study and no others emerged.

It is interesting to note that the only two students in the study who were classified as low-income were also the only two students who identified as first generation college students. One was female and the other was male. They were also students of color. They definitely fit the demographic stereotype. Yet, responses they provided about their experience was not noticeably different from that of other participants in the study.

The differences in the way that students of color obtained and shared academic information were more profound. Two of the differences seemed to be counter-intuitive. It is odd that students of color were less likely to take advantage of a professor’s office hours. Yet, they list academic mentors and professors as their first source of information for academic issues. Because academic mentors and professors have titles and are portrayed as authority figures, it makes sense that participants would list them first. However, if a person is less likely to visit a professor in their office, it also seems that they would be less likely to list them as a source of information.

It could be that students of color are referring to the information provided by professors in the classroom. Possibly, because this information comes from the instructor it is considered to be more reliable. Yet, approaching a professor for a one-on-one conversation could be more intimidating than being part of a crowd that is simply listening.
The literature reviewed in Chapter Two showed that racial minority students benefited from social capital provided by institutions that “share common ground with students, provide holistic support, humanize the educational experience, and provide proactive support” (Museus & Neville, 2012, p. 436). The reluctance of participants to approach professors may be an indicator that such displays of concern are not perceived to be present at the study site, and could therefore impact student success. Data from this study clearly indicates that students of color are looking to professors as a source of academic information. A way to help professors and students of color connect more comfortably would be beneficial.

Although faculty contact is important, peers should not be overlooked as a quality source of information. Research has shown that involvement with peers is one of the three most influential types of college involvement (Astin, 1996). Peers can often provide information in a way that could be more relatable and therefore, more completely understood. Practicing information exchanges with peers could also be good training for the world after graduation when it may become more necessary to gain additional information beyond that provided by traditional authority figures. A mix of social ties with persons from both groups would probably be the best option for all students to gain a more complete and thorough picture.

The most striking finding regarding students of color was that they felt less obligated to share academic information than white students. One participant stated, “we are not going to pick up someone else’s slack.” It could be that they were concerned about being perceived as cheaters if they provided information to others too
freely. This difference of attitude may have been culturally based. However, this study provided no proof one way or the other.

Prior research has also shown that students of color in high school tend to go to counselors and teachers more for advice and help on academic issues and less to peers and family members (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hoxby & Turner, 2013). Students in this study were first time freshmen. Therefore, it is possible that their behavior is just a continuation of the same pattern into the early part of their college career.

However, it would be a shame for any group of students to miss out on the opportunity to exchange information on academic issues. Many consider such an exchange to be one of the main reasons to attend college. It could also turn out to be valuable for all parties involved. It seems that an exchange of information beginning with academics could lead to exchanges of information related to other non-academic topics. Thus benefitting both parties.

Although all three of these patterns shown for students of color are interesting to note, it should be realized that the sample size was relatively small. More research is needed to determine exactly where these differences are based. Are the cultural? Are they a continuance of high school behaviors, or are they based on other signals? Further research with a larger sample and more deliberately probing questions could draw meaningful conclusions.

**Implications for Practice**

Research question three asks, “What best practices can be established to assist with the development of social capital that contributes to student success in on-campus
residence hall settings?” This study has important implications for practice. Several recommendations are provided in the following paragraphs. These include suggestions for leveraging the built environment and staffing to influence the structure and process components of social capital, considering diverse populations, and the focus of learning communities.

Small Groups

Influencing the number of opportunities for small group interactions could be one way to leverage the structure component of social capital for residents. This could be achieved by approaching the situation from two different angles. The first is through the intentional design of the built environment, which seems to mainly affect the structure component of social capital. The second is through careful planning with staff to influence opportunities for interaction. Working with staff in this way can influence the structure component of social capital, but will mainly influence the process component. More specifics about both of these opportunities for influence are provided in the following paragraphs.

Built Environment

Special attention should be paid to students in double occupancy and single occupancy rooms to make sure that they have appropriately designed physical spaces to provide multiple small group interactions opportunities. This could be achieved by using the double or single room set up in suites and apartments whenever possible, rather than in traditional style residence halls. When traditional style residence halls require the use of double or single occupancy rooms, special attention should be paid
to make sure that ample lounges, kitchens, study rooms, game rooms, and other spaces are available. They should also be intentionally designed to encourage small group gatherings.

Many times residence hall professionals shy away from assigning first year students to suite and apartment style residence halls, because they fear new students will be isolated inside the living units and therefore not have enough forced group contact. Exactly the opposite may be true when assigning first year students to learning communities in suite and apartment style residence halls. The structure of learning community already provides an organized large group opportunity.

Learning community meetings and seminar classes are typically used to break the ice and set the tone in a larger group. Then the suite or apartment assignment groupings can provide smaller groups organized for more intimate interaction. Additional influence could be provided by an appropriately furnished physical suite or apartment layout that provides a space to encourage these additional small group interactions.

Regardless of residence hall style and room type, students could benefit from a model that provides staffing and programmatic requirements structured in a way to encourage small group opportunities. This could be accomplished by requiring small group meetings led by residence hall staff, faculty in residence, or instructors from seminar classes. Another option would be to have multiple seminar classes of smaller size or have small group breakout meetings of seminar classes with teaching
assistants. Of course ample staffing levels would be needed to accomplish these suggestions.

An emphasis should also be placed on making sure that ample lounges, kitchens, study rooms, game rooms, and other spaces are available, and intentionally designed, to encourage small group gatherings in residence halls of all styles. Students use these types of spaces for socialization, studying, privacy, and exchange of information. As such, these spaces are integral for providing opportunities to build and accumulate social capital. Therefore, it seems that students could benefit from having multiple options. If spaces are specifically designed to encourage groups of different sizes, types, and functions to gather then more students with differing needs and personalities can and will take advantage of them.

While group opportunities are important, the individual and privacy should not be overlooked. All residence halls should be designed with spaces to allow for personal privacy and one-on-one interaction rather than just groups alone. Students with the opportunity to have private space spoke more positively about roommates, suitemates, and apartment mates. Those who did not have dedicated spaces for privacy were clearly frustrated.

The students who were frustrated about privacy were mostly in triple and double occupancy rooms of traditional style residence halls. This indicates that special attention should be paid to traditional style residence halls, especially those with triple rooms. Community spaces outside the students’ personal bedrooms must be purposefully designed. As stated earlier, if spaces are specifically designed to
encourage groups of different sizes, types, and functions to gather then more students with differing needs and personalities can take advantage of them.

**Staff Influence**

Residence hall staff members are typically required to organize educational and social gathering opportunities for residents. These requirements should be designed to take into account the need for small group interactions. Often times organizers may feel that the larger the gathering, the more successful the event. However, students in this study clearly demonstrated a desire for small group opportunities. Small group opportunities should include peers, residence hall staff, and faculty members. They could be arranged in a variety of ways ranging from 1-on-1 meetings and suite or apartment meetings to smaller scale events and large events with opportunities to break into small groups.

Faculty and staff interaction should always be encouraged, and it should be required when possible. Increased faculty interactions could be achieved by requiring individual and group meetings with instructors of learning community seminar classes at regular intervals throughout the academic term. Incentives for individual and group meetings could also be provided for other faculty members who instruct classes typically taken by students in specific learning communities. Faculty could also be invited into the residence hall for meet and greet events and special functions.

To increase interaction with staff members, programmatic requirements in job descriptions for residence hall staff could be structured in a way to specify
opportunities. For example small group and individual meetings led by residence hall staff could be required to occur at regular intervals throughout the academic year.

The responsibility does not lie with residence hall staff or faculty in residence alone. It belongs to both. Requirements for collaboration between the two on small group gatherings could be very productive.

Meetings and gathering do not need to be elaborate occasions. Training should be provided for both faculty and staff to assure the quality of meetings and gatherings. Training should explain the concept of social capital. Modeling techniques and providing examples of ways to leverage the structure and process components should be provided. Role plays could emphasize the importance of quality interactions. Examples of conversation starters and lists of suggested questions should be provided.

Varying the type, size, quantity of gathering opportunities is an example of how staff may leverage the structure component of social capital in the residence hall. Training as described should also influence the process component of the social capital in the residence halls. Such training could increase the quality of the interactions and strengthen social ties between student peers as well as students and faculty. As a result the quality of information flowing through social connections should increase.

**Diverse Populations**

Studies have shown that students of color need the benefits of school social networks such as these to reinforce college expectations and provide college planning
tools and resources (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). However, more specific direction may be needed to help them fully reap the benefits.

Workshops to explain how social networks function and the benefits of them should be directed at and focused on students of color. This could be done through organizations and offices that typically serve under represented groups. Such workshops should not only provide insight to the value of social networks, they should provide case studies, role playing scenarios, and networking opportunities through introductions to real people in less intimidating environments.

Similar workshops could be provided to professors. The goal would be to first make them aware of the issues. Then the tools to tackle issues could be provided in much the same format. These workshops should provide case studies, role playing scenarios, and networking opportunities through introductions to real students in less intimidating environments.

**Learning Community Focus**

The learning communities represented in this study were focused on topics ranging from discovering your city to choosing a major, becoming an entrepreneur, pursuing a career in law, physical fitness, or majoring in journalism. Findings were consistent across all of these topics. However, it is possible that other topics could more easily lend themselves to small group activities craved by students, or some could focus on the needs of students of color. Exploring such ideas could be more impactful by focusing on very specific outcomes for each group rather than broad and general exposure to a topic.
Areas for Future Research

Many questions remain regarding the academic experience and social capital in residence halls. Of all of the themes that emerged from this research, the self-motivation of participants was the most unexpected. From where does this characteristic of self-motivation emerge? Is it a by-product of a college going habitus? Is it a characteristic of persons who would self-select to participate in a residential learning community? Is it a characteristic of students drawn to this specific university? Was it just a coincidence? Such questions make this theme a prime opportunity for further research.

The communal drive to succeed was the most intriguing theme. Additional research examining its occurrence in the residence hall is needed. This research could build upon the work of Nitecki (2010), and Ovinck and Veazey (2010) and the behaviors they discovered in community colleges. They refer to it as an indirect reciprocity for the common good. Specifically finding ways to encourage this behavior in the residence hall should be pursued.

Particular successes and challenges in accessing and building social capital in different residence hall settings for students with different background characteristics (e.g., gender, race, income status) should be explored more deliberately. Specific questions addressing possibilities and the “why” behind them should be asked during interviews. A study that provides a comprehensive picture for students of color and one that compares them could provide additional insight.
Perhaps a study of students’ experiences in living learning communities using social network analysis could be helpful. Network and graph theories, socio-grams, and other techniques could uncover more details and patterns regarding who students go to for support. Such techniques would provide another angle beyond the purely descriptive qualitative study.

**Conclusion**

Most previous studies regarding social capital and residence halls are typically related to behavioral outcomes or social identity. Other studies connect living on-campus in a residence hall and persistence to graduation, grade point average, or time to graduation. Many even provide evidence supporting the notion that living on-campus in a residence hall is positively correlated to academic success (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). However, they do not explicitly address the very social nature of being in a residence and or learning community. This study is unique, because the residence hall experience and interplay of academics is approached from the angle of social capital.

This study contributes to theory and research by identifying specific themes that provide components to contribute to the development of social capital in the residential learning community. As a result of this new inquiry, additional insight into the academic experience of university students in learning communities based in on-campus residence halls is provided. Other residence hall students may now benefit from a better understanding of how social networks can play a part in the development of social capital which impacts the academic experience. With this knowledge,
university leaders now have additional resources to assist them in creating a more positive and purposely directed academic experience for future students.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Note: numbers in parenthesis after each question indicate which sub-questions are addressed.

Introduction: I will begin with a few minutes of explaining the study, who I am, and the purpose of the study. I will explain that while the interview will be taped, responses are strictly confidential. I will let participants that if there is something they would like to say off tape, they can inform me and the recorder will be shut off for their comment. I will inform them that they may choose to not answer any question they like and that they can stop the interview at any time. I will also, let them know the approximate length of the interview and ask if they have any specific questions before beginning.

Background

● How old are you?

● How do you classify yourself in terms of ethnicity/race/gender?

● What residence hall do you live in?

● Are you the first generation in your family to attend college?
Choices

- Are you assigned to a learning community? If so, which one and why did you choose it? (2)
- How did you gather information to help you choose a place to live? (2)
- How did your academic major influence your campus living choices? (2)
- If you had the option, why did you choose to live on campus? (2)
- How did financial considerations affect your choice whether to live on or off campus? (2)

Academics

- How do you describe academic success? (3)
- How do you think that living on campus has affected your academic experience? (3)
- How would you describe your academic performance thus far? (2, 3)
- What are some resources (e.g., academic support centers, cultural resource centers) in the residence hall or on campus that stand out to you and why? (3)
- Are there any missing resources that you are concerned about? (3)

Networks

- Tell me about your involvement in extracurricular activities. (1, 2)
- Are any of your extracurricular activities related to living in the residence hall? (1, 2)
- What are the academic ties, if any, to your extracurricular activities? (1, 2)
• Tell me how peers in the residence hall influence your academic performance. (1, 2)

Information Sources

• Think back to a time when you needed information regarding an academic issue. Please tell me how you went about getting this information. (1, 2)

• Are there particular people that you go to for academic information more than others? If so, who are they and why do you go to them? (1, 2)

• Is there any one source of information that everyone seems to go to regarding academics?

• Describe the biggest barrier to getting helpful information during the past academic year. (2, 3)

• Tell me about particular people or situations who have contributed to your academic success during the past academic year. (1, 2, 3)

• Tell me about particular people or situations who have hindered your academic success during the past academic year. (1, 2, 3)

• Describe to me the most beneficial source of information for you regarding academic concerns during the past academic year. (3)

• Tell me what academic information has been missing or hard to find for you. How did you eventually find this information?

Residence Hall Staff

• Could you tell me how the residence hall staff has influenced your academic experience? (1, 2, 3)
- What staff member has offered you the most guidance regarding academic issues? How so? (1, 2, 3)
- How big of a role do residence hall staff members play in your academic experience? (3)
- Did you actively seek out guidance or was it offered to you? (3)
- How did you perceive your relationship with the residence hall staff? (3)
- Do you get academic assistance from sources outside of the residence hall? (1, 2)
- Do you feel you were properly advised? Why or why not? (3)

Residence Hall Community Characteristics
- How would you describe the residence hall community that you live in? (2, 3)
- Are there any specific descriptors for your floor, learning community, building, neighbors, or suitemates? (2, 3)
- Do you think that the number of people living in your residence hall has affected your academic experience? How? (1, 3)
- Do you think that the physical building of your residence hall has affected your academic experience? How? (1, 3)

Living Learning Community
- What characteristics would you use to describe the your learning community?
- What helpful information has been provided to you through the seminar class?
- What information was not provided in the seminar class that should have been provided?
● Please tell me about the benefits you received from living in a living learning community.

● Tell me about the negative aspects of being in a living learning community?

Closing questions (Choose among the following):

● Reflecting on our conversation, which factors played the biggest role in your academic experience? (all)

● Overall, how do you feel about your experience living on campus in a residence hall? (all)

● Is there anything else you want us to know? (all)

● Do you have any questions for me? (all)
Appendix B: Informed Consent Script

Hi, my name is Darrell Hess. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD and CSU San Marcos and Associate Director of Housing Administration at San Diego State University. I am conducting a research study to learn about the academic experience of students in residence halls. I am asking you to participate because you either currently or have recently resided in living learning community in an on-campus residence hall at SDSU.

I am interested in learning about the various factors that influence students’ academic experience in the residence hall. To find out more about this issue I would like to interview you. This is not a university or housing requirement and you don’t have to participate if you don’t want to. After I am finished analyzing the data, I will provide the Office of Housing Administration with a report summarizing the findings but no one at Housing Administration will see your actual responses. Your responses and any information that could identify you as an individual such as your name or other personal details in your response will be kept confidential.

If you would like to participate, please review and sign the consent form. If you have any questions about the project or the consent please just let me know and I will be happy to answer them.

[Provide consent forms. Ask students to review and if they have any questions answer them.]

Thank you!
Appendix C: Demographic Survey

What is your age today? ________________  What is your major? _______________

Where do you live on campus? Please circle one.

- Chapultepec
- Granada
- Maya
- Olmeca
- Piedra del Sol
- Tacuba
- Tarastec
- Tepeyac
- Tenochca
- Toltec
- University Towers
- Zapotec
- Building not Listed

Are you eligible for or do you receive funds from any of the following financial aid sources? Please circle one.

- Pell Grant
- Guardian Scholar
- Other
- I do not receive financial aid.

What is your gender?

Are you the first generation in your family to attend college? Please circle one.  Yes  or  No

Are you assigned to any of the following living learning communities? Please circle one.

- Army, Navy, Air Force ROTC
- Business Floor
- Discover San Diego
- Emerging Leaders Program
- Future Education Professionals
- Health and Healing Professions
- Honors Residential College
- Journalism and Media Studies
- Journey Into Entrepreneurship
- Language Village
- Men Engaging in Technology & Science (METS)
- Nursing
- Physical Fitness (P-Fit)
- Toltec Undeclared Majors
- Social Activism and Global Environments (SAGE)
- Pre-Law Community
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE)
Appendix D: Priori Codes

The following categories were predetermined for use when coding transcripts.

Additional inductive categories were naturally be discovered and added as the analysis was conducted.

- *Campus Organization* – related to an SDSU registered student organization.
- *Faculty* – related to faculty members.
- *FIR* – related to faculty members who are specifically assigned to work in the residence hall.
- *Floor Mates* – indicates relationships between students who live on the same floor.
- *Hall Organization* – related to a student organization for which membership requires a person to live on-campus in a residence hall.
- *Homophily* – refers to groups of similar people staying together.
- *Living Learning Community* – refers to items related to being assigned to a particular living learning community.
- *Negative* – refers to a person, connection, or item that resulted in a feeling of regression.
- *Neighbors* – indicates relationships between students who live in the same building.
- *Oracle* – indicates a person who is a key source of information.
• **Package** – related to classes for which residents were automatically enrolled in due to their membership in a living learning community. This is different from the seminar.

• **Positive** – refers to a person, connection, or item that resulted in a feeling of helpfulness or progress.

• **Process** – related unique characteristic(s) of process social capital attribute(s).

• **Roommates** – indicates relationships between students who share the same bedroom.

• **Seminar** – related to the seminar class assigned to persons in a learning community.

• **Staff** – related to full-time staff members who work in the residence hall.

• **Paraprofessional** – related to the student staff who work in the residence hall. These staff members may be Academic Mentors, Community Advisors, Desk Assistants, or Resident Advisors.

• **Strength** – refers to the structural bonds of a network and how weak or strong they are.

• **Structure** – related to unique characteristic(s) of structural social capital attribute(s).

• **Suite Mates** – indicates relationship between students who are assigned to live in the same suite.

• **Tridactic Closure** – involves three individuals in a social network where a is connected to b and c, and b and c are later connected.
Appendix E: Frequency Distribution for Priori and Emergent Codes

The top 10 codes are shown in bold type face.

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Appendix F: Consent For Interview Participation

University of California, San Diego
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Academic Success, Social Capital, and Residence Halls Study

Darrell Hess, doctoral student in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD and CSU San Marcos and Associate Director of Housing Administration at San Diego State University, is conducting a research study to learn about the academic experience of students in residence halls. You have been asked to participate because you either currently or have recently resided on-campus in a living learning community. There will be approximately 20 participants in this study. San Diego State University and University of California San Diego have both approved this form and provided permission to conduct this study.

The purpose of this study is to learn about the various factors that influence students’ academic experience in the residence hall.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your experience in the residence halls and academic performance at SDSU. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration. Specific conversation topics of the interview will center around how you define academic success and information sources that have contributed or provided a hindrance to that success while you were a resident of a living learning community at SDSU. As a participant you will be responsible for your own transportation to meeting sites and any costs associated with this transportation. At no time will project personnel transport a participant.

This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher may discuss the results at scientific meetings and in research papers. The researcher will also share findings with SDSU’s Office of Housing Administration. The results will present information in summary form, which means that no students will be identified by name. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but they will not be connected with specific students or attributed to specific individuals. Information that could identify you such as your name or personal history details unique to you will be left out. The study will use confidential study ID numbers rather than names to record information. Only the researcher will know which ID number refers to each student.

Risks: Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include:
1. There is a possibility of loss of confidentiality, but I have taken steps to prevent that.
   a. The information collected will be kept in locked files and password protected computers.
   b. All information will be kept under the confidential study ID number, not your name.
   c. Only I and my supervisor, Professor Amanda Datnow at UCSD, will have access to study information. However, research records may be reviewed by the UCSD Institutional Review Board.
   d. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.
   e. Research records will be destroyed at the end of the study.

2. Because the Principal Investigator for this study is the Associate Director of Housing Administration at SDSU, it is important for you to understand that should you disclose any activities committed or ongoing that potentially violate University policy I am required to report that information to the proper authorities at the University.

3. A potential risk of emotional discomfort. The survey will ask questions about your experience in the residence halls and academic performance at SDSU. There is the possibility that this may lead some participants to feel some mild emotional discomfort or embarrassment. Please be advised that you will be under no obligation to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, and you may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and still remain in the study.

4. A potential risk for feelings of frustration, stress, discomfort, fatigue, and boredom during the administration of the interview. You are under no obligation to participate in or complete the interview. Please be advised that you may decline to complete the interview at any time for any reason.

Under California law, we must report information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any investigator/researcher has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report such information to the appropriate authorities.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable.

**Benefits**: There will not be any direct benefit to you from participating this study. The investigators, however, may gain a better understanding of the ways that social networks contribute to and inhibit student success. This information could be used to
identify practices that would more positively impact the student experience. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. The alternatives to participation in this study are no participation or limited participation (e.g., you might choose to complete some but not all interview questions).

You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions on a questionnaire at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you entitled. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you may notify the researcher at any time or notify the Principal Investigator, Darrell Hess in writing via U.S. mail or e-mail to the address listed below:

Darrell Hess, Graduate Student  
Department of Education Studies  
9500 Gilman Drive #0070  
La Jolla, California 92093-0070  
wdhess@ucsd.edu

The researcher may remove you from the study without your consent if the he feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study. You may also be withdrawn from the study if you do not follow the instructions given you by the study personnel.

You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

You will receive a $25 gift card for participating in this research.

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

This document has informed you about this study. If you have any questions about the study you may contact Darrell Hess at 619.594.5742 or Professor Amanda Datnow at 858.534.9598. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or wish to report a research-related problem, you may call the UCSD Human Research Protections Program at (858) 657-5100.

If you agree to participate in the research, please sign here:

Your Signature _________________________ Date: ______________

Your Name (please print) ________________________________
REFERENCES


