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Learning communities gain positive response

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Last fall, Oakland University introduced a pilot program designed for students who want to explore common areas of interest while enjoying the benefits of living on campus. Students could choose to live in one of five **learning communities** within the residence halls and use their living environment as a place to form connections by participating in various student activities. After a successful first year, residence hall staff are looking to increase student involvement and move the program forward.

“Our goal is to have students with shared interests live with each other and provide the opportunity for them to gain more knowledge in their interest area,” said Dave Moroz, assistant director of program services, who helped organize the communities. “This goal also aligns with our academic mission, and this year we’ve taken some steps toward reaching it.

“Some of the learning communities were more successful than others in terms of participation. And we’ve learned the importance of getting our students and faculty involved as early as possible in the semester. But I also think that after this year the program will be more familiar to students and faculty, which will allow for more interest and enthusiasm next year.”

Four of the five learning communities were introduced last fall:

- Community Outreach Community, located in West Vandenberg Hall;
- International Culture Community, located in South Hamlin Hall;
- Scholars Tower and Residential Honors College, located in West Vandenberg Hall;
- Upper-Division Community, located in Hill House.

In addition, a substance-free community, called the Wellness Community, is located in Anibal House. This community was introduced more than 10 years ago and has proven successful over that time.

The International Culture Community, designed for students interested in activities, programs and issues related to global society, was one of the most active communities over the past year.

“The students on our floor who participated were very open and excited about the various scheduled events,” said junior sociology major Christiana Paige, a resident assistant in South Hamlin Hall. “Margaret Pigott (director of the International Education Office) came to our floor in the fall and spoke about study abroad opportunities through Oakland. The Akanke African Drum and Dance group also came to perform and teach us some dance steps. We watched a film called ‘The Joy Luck Club,’ which is about different Chinese families that came to the United States and their integration into our society. And a large number of our students from our floor attended International Night, which was held in the Oakland Center.

“The majority of the students who participated in our community were freshmen who came to Oakland with a strong interest in international affairs. It was a very interesting experience.”

The Residential Honors College Community also held a number of programs providing expanded opportunities for academic-related activities and interactions with faculty.

“The students in the Residential Honors College Community were very enthusiastic,” said Jude Nixon, professor of English and director of The Honors College. “We held a number of talk-backs and programs this year presented by students and faculty. For example, students from (Assistant Professor of Sociology) Jo Reger’s class came and gave phenomenal presentations on the international women’s movement. Students in my class on the art of slavery also presented their research topics. We invited (Professor of Hindi Urdu and Linguistics) Carlo Coppola to speak about

the history of pizza. Recently, we held a forum on the 50th anniversary of 'Playboy' magazine.

"In the future, we hope to bring together groups of two to three Honors College faculty to plan their courses around each other. Perhaps we'll include a community service project as an additional component. It would be similar to a team-taught class, but without the students being in one classroom simultaneously. It's a way of looking at the curriculum and determining what can come together in a learning community. It's a more purposeful, coherent way of making connections within the disciplines."

Students in the Community Outreach Community staged several food and clothing drives during the holiday season and were involved in Make a Difference Day last fall. The Upper-Division Community, which focuses on interactive programs to prepare students for the professional world, had several programs in conjunction with OU's **Career Services**.

"We're looking to continue our efforts in the Upper-Division Community next year," Moroz said. "In the future, we may put a career resource center directly in Hill House. We've found that if you bring the resources to the students, they're more able to take advantage of them."

For more information, visit the **Learning Communities at OU** Web page. For more information on campus housing options, activities, costs and life on campus, visit Oakland's **Housing and Dining** Web site.

SUMMARY

Last fall, Oakland University introduced a pilot program designed for students who want to explore common areas of interest while enjoying the benefits of living on campus. Students could choose to live in one of five learning communities within the residence halls and use their living environment as a place to form connections by participating in various student activities. After a successful first year, residence hall staff are looking to increase student involvement and move the program forward.

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