

EXAMINING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND RETENTION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS IN LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITIES, FRESHMEN INTEREST GROUPS AND FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSES

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ABSTRACT

Based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Astin's (1993) Inputs-Environments-Outputs model, this dissertation presents the findings of a single-institution study into the effect participating in a living-learning community (LLC), Freshmen Interest Group (FIG) and First Year Experience course (FYE course) had on the academic performance and retention of first-year students. Multiple regression was conducted on institutional data covering a three-year period. After controlling for entering characteristic (i.e., high school GPA, ACT score, sex, race, and family income level) and environmental characteristics (i.e., initial major, residence hall living, and Greek membership) the researcher found that students who participate in FIGs did earn higher grades (standardized $\beta = .02$, $p < .01$). Students in LLCs and FYE courses did not. This same dataset was analyzed using logistic regression to determine if, after controlling for these same variables plus the co-variable of first-semester GPA, participating in LLCs, FIGs and FYEs increased the odds of being retained. Participating in a FIG increased students' odds of being retained by 18% ($\text{Exp}(\beta) 1.18$, $p < .05$), but no change in odds was found for students in LLCs or FYE courses. The results of this study reinforce current research regarding the efficacy of FIG programs, but draw into question the benefits students gain from participating in an LLC or FYE course offered on this campus.