

The Impact of Living-Learning Communities on Student Belonging at Dartmouth College

LLCs Make Dartmouth Bearable, But Ineffective Community-Building Efforts Decrease Student Sense of Belonging

Executive Summary

- 56% of students indicate that living-learning communities are strongly supportive of their sense of belonging.
 - Experiences in LLCs vary largely depending on the priorities of the house professor and UGA.
 - Students do not think Dartmouth's campus-wide community-building efforts are effective, leading to a decreased sense of belonging.
 - Living in LLC does not encourage cross-racial friendship or interactions; instead, students search for friends in affinity-based groups, events, and organizations.
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Introduction

A student's sense of belonging is fundamental to positive collegiate experiences. Feelings of belonging influence academic success, personal well-being, and engagement with the institution.

This research project explores the impact of living in affinity-based living-learning communities (LLCs) at Dartmouth College on students' sense of belonging to the institution. Affinity-based living-learning communities are residential programs that bring together students who share a racial or ethnic identity, occasionally incorporating people who don't hold the identity but want to learn more about a given culture, to learn by living with each other, building relationships with live-in advisors, and attending educational programming organized and hosted at the house.

Understanding the impact of affinity-based living-learning communities on students' sense of belonging is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of these programs and informing future initiatives. This brief communicates the results of student survey responses (n=16) and interviews (n=8) followed by recommendations to improve the state, performance, and impact of LLCs.

Methodology

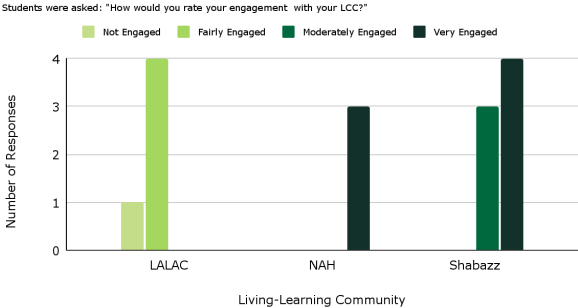
We employed a cross-sectional design using qualitative data and analysis methods. Data was collected from current and past residents of three identity-based LLCs: Shabazz, Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean (LALAC), and the Native American House (NAH). Participants completed a survey to assess their experience and the option to participate in a follow-up interview. Eight 20-30 minute interviews were carried out and recorded. These findings can be used to create future policies on Dartmouth's LLCs and community-building efforts.

Research, Results & Conclusions

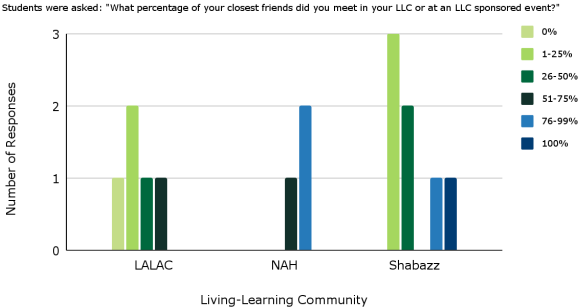
Engagement

Engagement varies across the houses. Living in LALACS significantly decreases the likelihood that a resident will engage in the living-learning house programming. However, living in Shabazz significantly increases the likelihood of participation, while living in the NAH doesn't have a significant impact on engagement. This is because of the limited events hosted at LALAC compared to the increased number of events at Shabazz due to its role as the campus hub for Black organizations and clubs. Shabazz programming and openness for the Black community make the house a meeting place for close friendships. In the NAH, the events are attended mostly by Indigenous students, representing a small portion of the student body, leading to the development of close friendships.

Self-Rated Engagement Levels



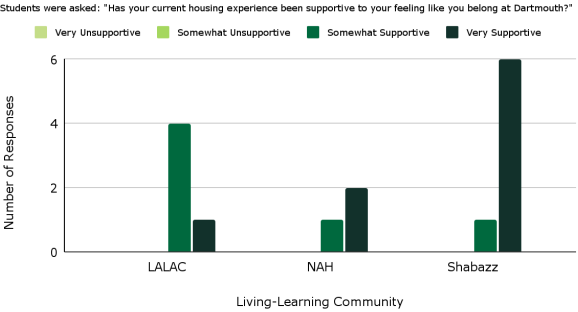
Proportion of Friends Met Through an LLC



Role of LLC on Belonging

While students report that living in their LLC contributes to an increased sense of belonging, living in a particular house does not significantly impact their sense of belonging. In other words, a student living in LALAC or the NAH is not significantly more likely than a Shabazz resident to feel like they belong at Dartmouth.

Contribution of LLC to Sense of Belonging

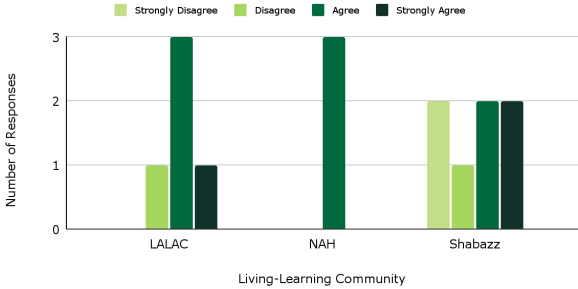


Perceptions of Self and Community Efforts

Although most students feel they are part of the college community, Shabazz students are more likely to feel as though they aren't part of the community. In turn, students who don't feel as though they are part of the community are significantly more likely to have negative perceptions of Dartmouth's community-building efforts. The relationship between feelings of belonging and the perceived effectiveness of community-building efforts is mediated by whether a student feels like they are a part of the college community.

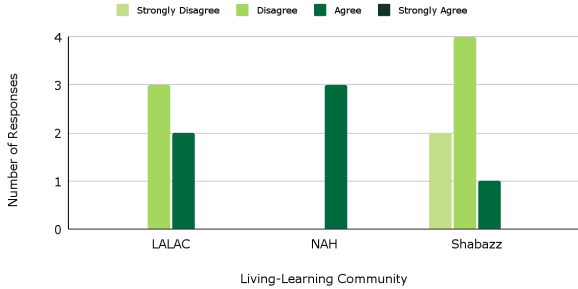
Part of the Community

Students rated how much they agree with the statement: "I feel like I am a part of the college community."



Perceived Effectiveness of Community-Building Efforts

Students rated how much they agree with the statement: "Dartmouth's efforts in community building are effective."

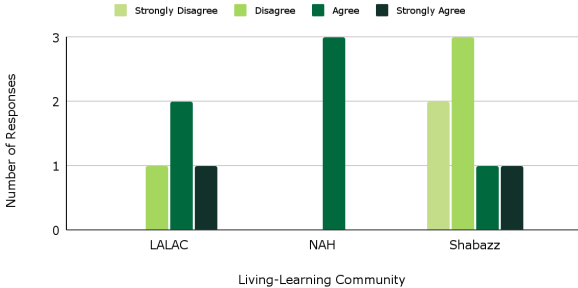


Sense of Belonging and Commitment

At Dartmouth, most students have a strong sense of belonging to the institution. However, some students disagree. Some students wish they were at a different school. Disdain for the institution was a pattern amongst Shabazz residents in interviews and the survey. Despite not wanting to be at a different institution, some LALAC residents don't have a strong sense of belonging to the institution. What this demonstrates is an area for improvement. Policies and efforts geared towards fostering a sense of belonging among Latinx and Black students at Dartmouth are crucial.

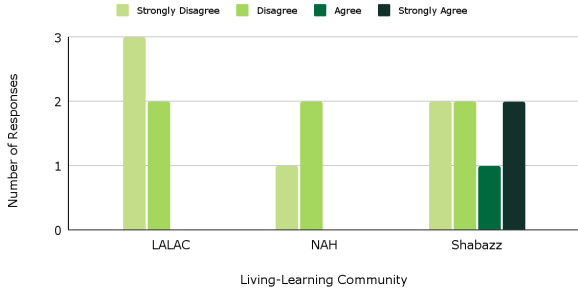
Strong Sense of Belonging

Students rated how much they agree with the statement: "I have a strong sense of belonging to the institution."



Desire to be at a Different Institution

Students rated how much they agree with the statement: "I wish I were at a different college."



	Living-Learning Communities		
Dimension Observed	Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean House ("LALAC")	Native American House ("NAH")	The Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry ("Shabazz")
Social Networks	While most residents at LALAC share Hispanic ethnicity, social networks are fragmented along racial lines	Most residents share a race, and social networks are cohesive at the house level	Most residents share a race, and social networks are cohesive at the house level

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<p>Multi-Purpose Structure of the LLC</p>	<p>Most residents enjoy living in an LLC but do not actively engage in house programming, which is limited. Limited programming demonstrates “learning” is not the current emphasis of the house.</p>	<p>Most residents enjoy the living-learning structure of the house but find that it can be overwhelming to host all Native American and Indigenous programming at the NAH</p>	<p>All residents enjoy the accessibility of house programming, but UGAs find it challenging to manage the space for programming and residential purposes. Additionally, residents think “learning” is not as prominent as it was in previous terms</p>
<p>Community-Building Efforts</p>	<p>Have poor views of Dartmouth’s campus-wide community-building efforts. Most residents find it difficult to connect with people of different races and don’t engage in additional extracurriculars</p>	<p>Find that Dartmouth’s community-building efforts are effective</p>	<p>Have poor views of Dartmouth’s campus-wide community-building efforts, find it difficult to connect with people of different races, and don’t feel like part of the college community. However, open events bring in members of the Dartmouth Black community</p>
<p>Sense of Institutional Belonging</p>	<p>Most students feel like they’re part of the community despite feeling different than other Dartmouth students. Most have a strong sense of belonging to the institution</p>	<p>Most students feel like they are a part of the community, have a lot in common with other Dartmouth students, and have a strong sense of belonging to the institution</p>	<p>Students do not feel as though they are part of the community, feel different than other students, and don’t have a strong sense of belonging to the institution</p>
<p>Role of UGA & Professors</p>	<p>The UGA attempts to facilitate activities that provide residents with academic and well-being resources</p>	<p>Don’t have a house professor</p>	<p>The UGA is attentive to the events occurring in the house but feels may need more support managing the space as a residential and</p>

			<p>community space. The house professor is responsible for academic programming and plays an active role in the house</p>
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Policy Implications & Recommendations

In-House Changes

1. Require Cross-Cultural Programming
 - a. Programming in living-learning communities is already a requirement. However, at least one of the events per term should involve cross-cultural collaboration.
 - b. Cross-cultural programming shouldn't be limited to the LLCs but can incorporate other student clubs and organizations. For example, Shabazz residents can organize a collaborative event with the Korean Student Association.
 - c. Cross-cultural programming shouldn't be limited to the undergraduate student body. Collaboration with graduate students can also serve as an opportunity for students to network while learning about other cultures and students who they might not already know.
 - d. Event planning should be the joint responsibility of UGAs and the house professor. Still, UGAs should regularly communicate event success and participation to OPAL to ensure programming happens and students are learning.
2. Designate Quiet Space and Time
 - a. Residents at LLCs with high programming levels report enjoying the accessibility to events but sometimes struggle with finding quiet times and spaces. To maintain a balance between an LLC as a residential and social gathering space, we recommend restricting the availability of public events or events by student clubs or organizations to three days per week. Exceptions to this rule will be made on Black Legacy Month when events can occur up to four days a week.
3. Improve Accountability for Organizations Using the LLC
 - a. Since many events use LLCs as meeting places, OPAL, Residential Life, and the house professors should collaborate to come up with a series of rules for organizations using the space. The guidelines should emphasize respect for the house and outline the consequences if the agreement is not followed.
 - b. Having this process in place will redirect this responsibility from the UGA to the house professor who will communicate with the student organization if guidelines aren't obeyed.

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Policy Changes and Developments

1. Increase Funding & Visibility for Affinity Groups
 - a. Students at the Native American House reported feelings of invisibility and limited funding. The lack of funding has made a mark on the LLC's ability to host community gatherings, making it difficult for LLC residents to interact with the broader Dartmouth community. Subsequently,
 - b. OPAL should allocate funds dedicated to affinity groups such that LLCs don't have to apply on a case-by-case basis.
2. Promote Financial Incentives to Support Collaboration Across Houses
 - a. Although the OPAL Fund exists, dedicating part of the budget for cross-LLC events will encourage multiracial engagement, increase engagement for houses with low levels, and boost the sense of belonging to the larger community since there are more opportunities to interact with people outside your residence.
 - b. This initiative shouldn't be limited to include Shabazz, LALAC, and the Native American House, but also the Asian American LLC, which may feel even lower levels of attachment to their LLC and Dartmouth community, given their limited support.
 - c. If most residents participate in this event, we can expect a minimum of 50 attendees. With this in mind, the fund should be at least \$500.
 - d. Funding for this initiative should come from collaboration between the Office of Residential Life and OPAL. The Office of Residential Life's Building/Cluster Program typically funds up to \$500 for a "larger community of residents to come together for social, supportive, or experiential activities" (Office of Residential Life 2016), and the OPAL Fund does the same for initiatives that align with the organization's mission, vision, and goals.
 - e. The financial resources exist, but both offices must promote a new LLC-specific opportunity. UGAs, house professors, and students should be allowed to submit applications for these funds to distribute the responsibility for desired events. UGAs and house professors should be informed about this incentive during their training and acceptance of job offers.
3. Improve UGA and Live-In Advisor Vetting, Accountability, and Support
 - a. Our survey results and interviews show that the commitment to the goals of living-learning communities depends on the house professor and UGA. To ensure a consistent experience across and within LLCs, OPAL and Residential Life must develop accountability guidelines for house advisors and UGAs.
 - b. The accountability guidelines must set a minimum number of events planned for residents, in addition to mandatory Sundar dinners. Per term, residential programming should include at least three events focused on intellectual, cultural, academic, or professional development.
 - c. UGAs also report maintenance issues in the house. Given the variety of common issues such as broken doors/ locks, damaged sinks, drain clogs, etc, a UGA report

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issue should be treated with high precedence. If the issue is unable to be resolved by UGA, then the house professor must step in to help.

4. Design a Social Referent Intervention
 - a. Create a council of students heavily involved with their respective LLCs and identity group who will inform and advocate for changes in their community needs.
 - b. This group of students will be representative of each LLC and collaborate with UGAs and house professors to plan separate and joint events.
 - c. Their duties will include but are not limited to:
 - i. Reporting to Dr. Rachele Hall about any house changes that need to be made
 - ii. Collaborating with stakeholders to plan events exclusively for residents
 - iii. Tracking engagement and attendance of residents at house programming
 - iv. Act as liaison between residents and UGA
 - d. This position would create more accountability for UGAs within the houses and increase residents' sense of belonging due to increased house engagement
 - i. This will also allow OPAL and Residential Life to have (House Professor, Council member) a consistent report on the state of the LLC.

Helpful Resources

- Akel, S. 2019. "Insider-Outsider: The Role of Race in Shaping the Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Students", Goldsmiths University of London.
- Halawah, I. 2006. "The Impact of Student-Faculty Informal Interpersonal Relationships on Intellectual and Personal Development"
- Johnson, Royel M. 2022. "A Socio-Ecological Perspective on Sense of Belonging Among Racially/Ethnically Minoritized College Students: Implications for Equity-Minded Practice and Policy." *New Directions for Higher Education*2022(197):59–68. doi: 10.1002/he.20427.
- Rambaran, J. Ashwin, Adam J. Hoffman, Deborah Rivas-Drake, David R. Schaefer, Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor, and Allison M. Ryan. 2022. "Belonging in Diverse Contexts: Sociability Among Same-Ethnic and Cross-Ethnic Peers." *School Psychology* 37(6):467–77. doi: 10.1037/spq0000480.
- Baker, Debora E. 2004. "A National Set of Competencies for Paraprofessionals in Residential College Or Living/Learning Programs." Order No. 29121793 dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, United States -- Louisiana <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/national-set-competencies-paraprofessionals/docview/2674874714/se-2>.

The State of LLCs Fact Sheet

Methods

This study explores the impact of spatial distribution and the multi-use purpose of race/ethnicity-based Living Learning Communities (LLCs) on students' sense of belonging. We employed a cross-sectional design using qualitative data and analysis methods. Data was collected from current and past residents of three LLCs: Shabazz, Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean (LALAC), and the Native American House (NAH). Participants completed a survey to assess their experience and the option to participate in a follow-up interview. Eight 20-30 minute interviews were carried out and recorded. This study provides insights into Dartmouth College, a predominantly-White Ivy League institution in a rural setting. These findings can create future policies on Dartmouth's LLCs and community-building efforts.

3
LLCs
surveyed

8
Semi-structured
interviews
(4 Shabazz, 2 LALAC,
2 NAH)

16
Survey
respondents
(7 Shabazz, 5 LALAC,
3 NAH)

Findings

Multi-Purpose Use of LLCs & Location

- Residents like multi-purpose use and the location. However, UGAs may need more support to manage both.

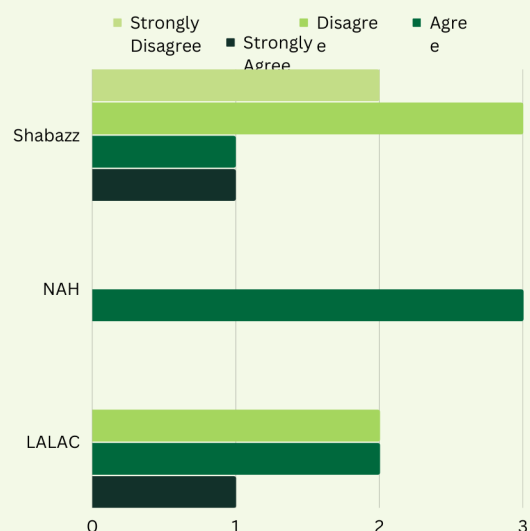
Social Networks

- Over 75%** of respondents' closest friends have the **same race/ethnicity** as them.
- Interviews emphasize how LLCs' multipurpose structure makes it easy to center social life around their LLC and affinity.

Belonging

- Most students agree that they have a strong sense of belonging to the institution.
 - Most Shabazz students disagree and wish they attended a different college.
- Most respondents say their **housing experience has supported their feeling of belonging** to Dartmouth.

Students were asked how strongly they resonate with the following statement:
"I have a strong sense of belonging"



Engagement

Whereas most Shabazz and NAH students consider themselves "very engaged" with their LLC, LALAC students say they are only "fairly engaged."

- Besides sleep, Shabazz residents spend 6-10 hours in their LLC; the highest of any LLC.
- Students living in the NAH met most of their close friends at the LLC or an LLC-sponsored event.

Role of LLC

LLCs give students a **safe social and cultural hub**.

- "If someone's playing a good song, you're like "Bro, I hear that music! I love that song!" You know what I mean- little things like that." - *Isaiah, LALAC*
- "This was one of the reasons why I chose to come to Dartmouth. Looking at other schools and comparing them, they didn't really have a space for Natives to come together for certain events. And I feel like the NAH offered that space." - *Tee, NAH*

However, students think **learning is not the primary function** of LLCs.

- "I don't know how many students would say they necessarily learned something as a part of being in the Shabazz community, as opposed to just wanting to be in a building that has Black people in it." - *Haylie, Shabazz*
- "I don't really [feel intellectually engaged in LALACs]. I just go there to talk to my friends. I like to hang out. I like that there is a lot of art. Sometimes I like to look at the art and think about it. Besides that, not really." - *Brendon, LALACs*

Key Takeaways



Quality of experiences varies depending on house professor and UGA.



LLCs are seen as separate from Dartmouth (as an institution).

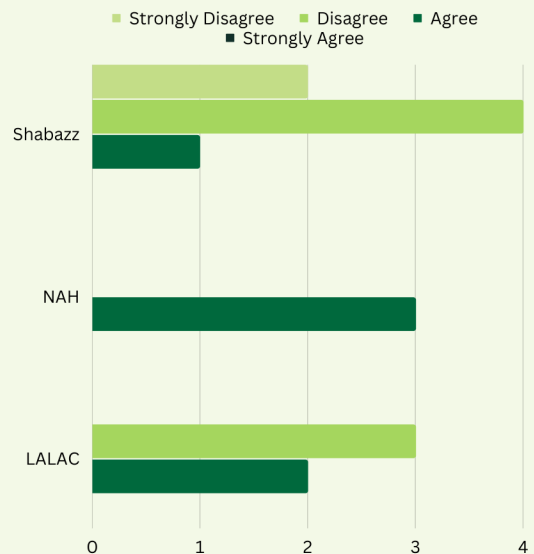


Dartmouth's community-building efforts are not seen as effective.

Community-Building Efforts

Most Dartmouth students do not think Dartmouth's community-building efforts are effective.

Students were asked how strongly they resonate with the following statement: "Dartmouth's community-building efforts are effective"



Suggestions

General In-House Changes

Quiet Space & Time

- Designated quiet times in common areas with no external organization programming
- Provides residents a sense of ownership and say in how often their space is used

Cross-Cultural Programming

- Requires at least one cross-cultural event per term
- Increase the connection between LLCs and give residents a greater sense of belonging on campus outside of the LLC they belong to

Accountability for respect of house during events

- Establish accountability processes for organizations using the LLC space
- Provide help for UGAs to manage the space as a residence hall and public space

House-Specific Recommendations

Shabazz

- If residents do not meet the minimum participation requirement, their residency in the house should not be guaranteed. Interviews indicate a desire for non-Black residents to engage with the community.

Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean House

- According to LALAC responses, residents are the least engaged and have the least programming. Accountability processes need to be emphasized to ensure residents of the house have a quality experience.
- Student participation can be incentivized with food and other rewards.

Native American House

- Interview responses indicate that the general recommendations outlined below would improve residents' experience.

Suggestions

Policy

Increase Funding & Visibility for Affinity Groups

- Increase funding for each LLC and affinity groups housed in each (ex. the AAM in Shabazz, and Latinx Caribbean Council in LALAC)

Improve UGA and Live-In Advisor Vetting, Accountability, and Support

- Establish requirements for minimum house programming and develop accountability processes to maintain a stable house culture
- Distribute UGA and professor responsibilities to avoid overwhelming students. Alternatively, increase pay for LLC UGAs to compensate for their increased responsibilities.

Promote Financial Incentives to Support Collaboration Across Houses

- OPAL and the Office of Residential Life should dedicate part of their funds to support cross-LLC events.
- Although two funds are available, one incentive needs to be promoted and dedicated to cross-cultural LLC collaboration.
- With an anticipated minimum of 50 attendees, a budget of at least \$500 is proposed.

Design a Social Referent Intervention

- Create a council of students heavily involved with their respective LLCs and identity group who will inform and advocate for changes in their community needs.

