Creating High Impact Academic Leaders: Residential Peer Mentors

Erica D'Eramo, Assistant Director CWIT
Kaleigh Mrowka, Assistant Director for Residential Education
Laila Shishineh, Assistant Director, First-Year Experience

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)

Session Objectives:

Participants will…

1. Describe involvement-academic spectrum of peer mentorship within the residence halls

2. Identify and explore benefits of at least two different peer mentorship models

3. Reflect on at least two engagement strategies to work with peer mentorship opportunities on their own campuses

Where we are going...

1. Context: UMBC
2. Peer Mentorship Defined
3. Reflection and Individual Engagement
4. Examples
5. Strategies to Engage Peer Mentors
6. Questions?

UMBC - An Honors University in Maryland

- Part of the University System of Maryland
- Located just outside of Baltimore, MD
- Honors University - focused on academic excellence
- 11,142 undergraduate students
- 2,498 graduate students
- Scholars Programs as a central component of the university

UMBC

AN HONORS UNIVERSITY IN MARYLAND

Residential Life

- 4,000 residential students
- 73% of first-year students live on campus
- In process of re-developing residential curriculum
- 10 living-learning communities
- Many programs affiliated with Scholars Programs
- Various peer mentorship structures

"Residential Life at UMBC co-creates innovative and exceptional living learning communities for our campus community"
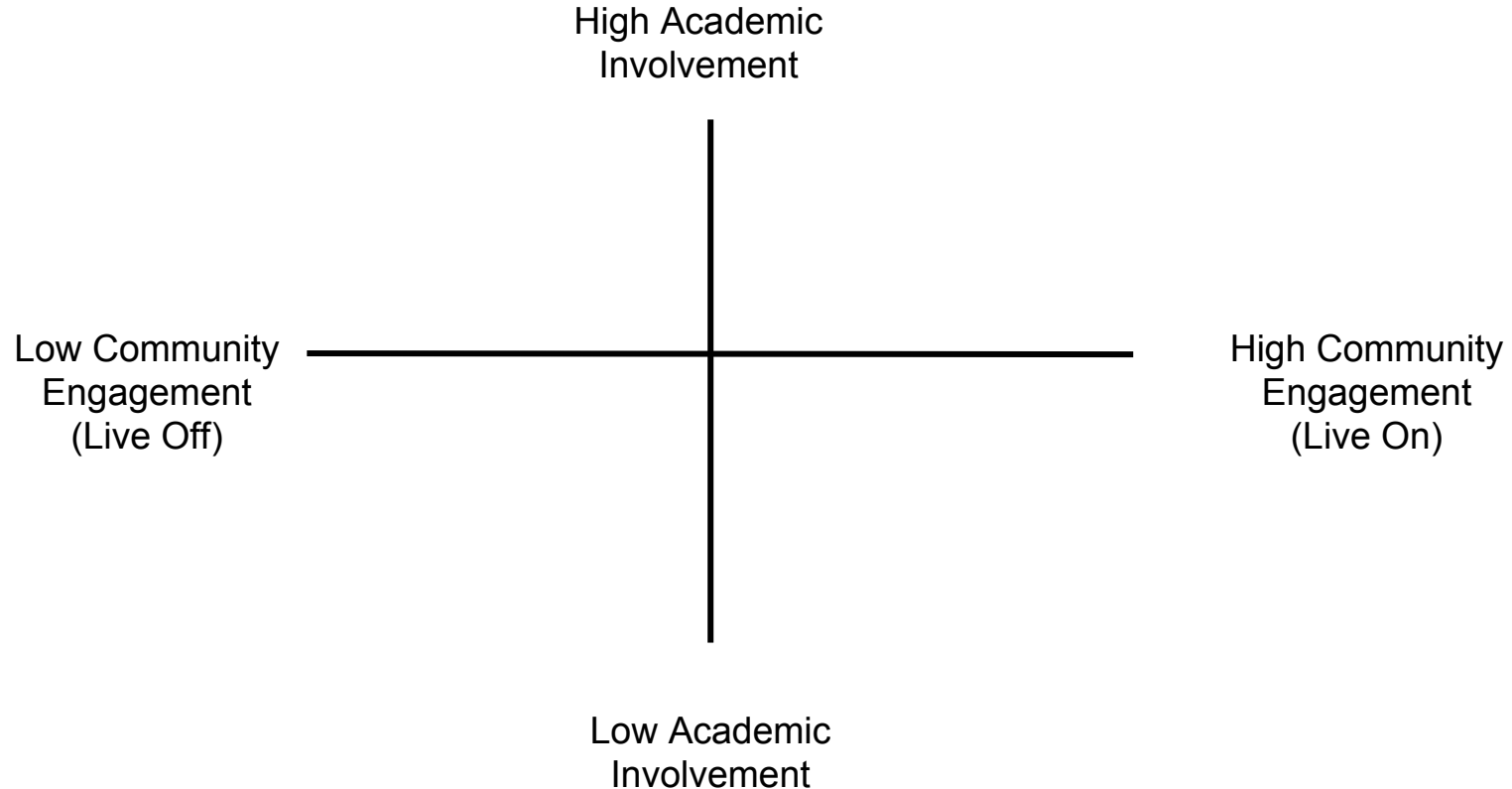
Residential Peer Mentorship

- Definition: Residential student leaders with responsibilities aimed at the academic success of students
- Why "High Impact"?
  - First-Year Seminars & Experiences
  - Common Intellectual Experiences
  - Learning Communities
  - Writing Intensive Courses
  - Collaborative Assignments and Projects
  - Undergraduate Research
  - Diversity/Global Learning
  - Service/Community-Based Learning
  - Internships
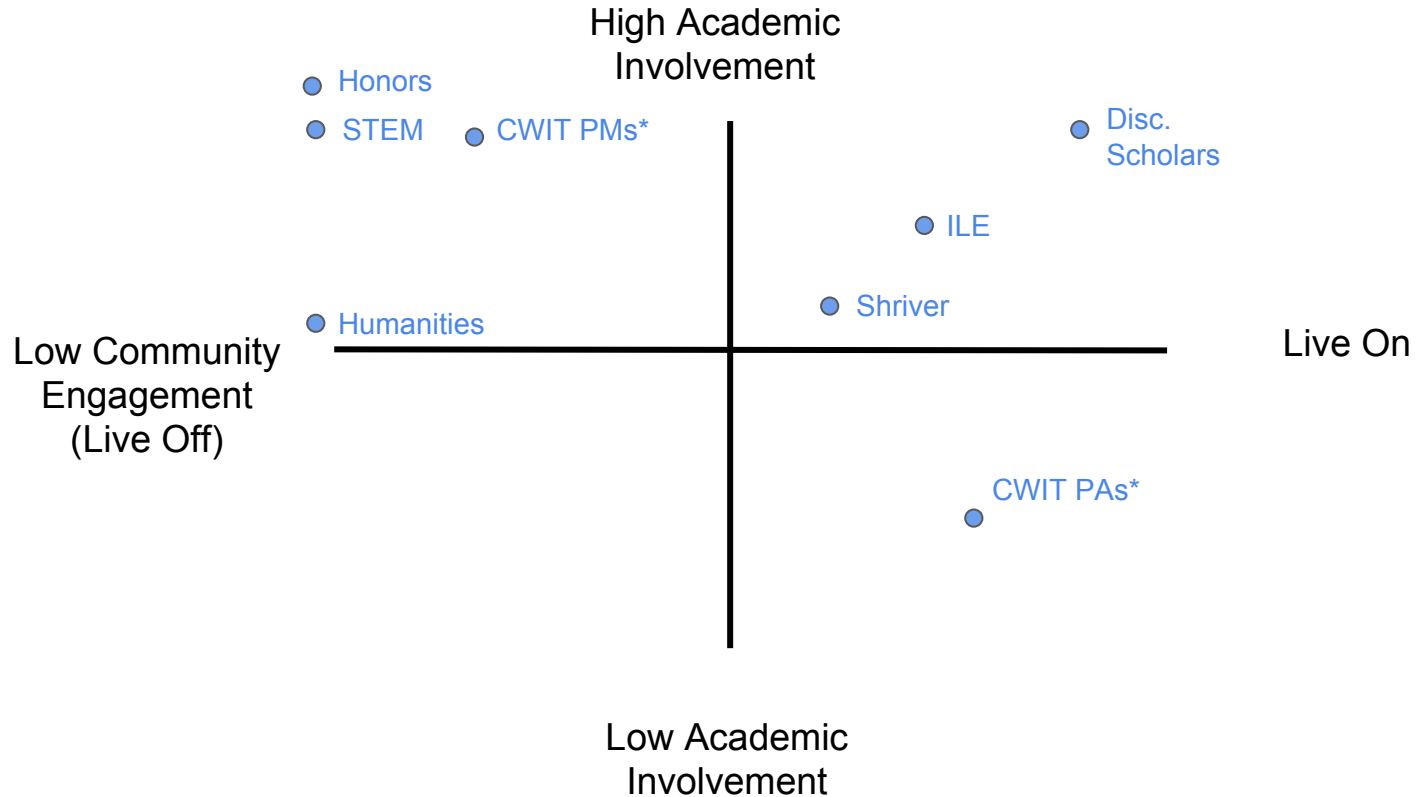 - Capstone Courses and Projects

Residential Peer Mentorship

- Research says:
  - Positive impact of peer mentorship on: student GPA, study progress, dropout rates, and persistence
  - Success of Peer Mentor interventions depend on a myriad of variables that vary from program to program and institution to institution.
  - Mentoring style, readiness, motivation, and level of structure
- Typical Academic Peer Mentoring Roles:
  - Informal academic conversations,peer tutoring, engagement with residential students in a classroom environment (TA)

Involvement-Academic Spectrum

High Academic
Involvement

Low Community
Engagement
(Live Off)

High Community
Engagement
(Live On)

Low Academic
Involvement

Involvement-Academic Spectrum

Peer Mentorship: Additional Aspects to Consider

- Student academic needs and individual characteristics
- Community needs and features
- Selection, training, and development needed for success
- Faculty and academic partner collaboration

S — COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

- What makes our community unique?
- What are our greatest assets?
- What are our most recent accomplishments/ investments?
- What do our strengths tell us about our community?

O — COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

- What threats exist?
- How can we reframe the threats as opportunities?
- What is our citizens require from us?
- How do we leverage partners to expand our opportunities?

A — COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

- Considering strengths and opportunities what should be the vision for our community?
- How do we allow what we value to drive our vision?
- How can we make a difference for our community and citizens we represent?

R — COMMUNITY RESULTS

- What are the manage-able and measureable results?
- What do we want to measure beyond financial impacts?
- How do we tangibly translate measure-ments?

Reflection & Application

Jacqueline Stavros and Gina Hinrichs, *Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-Based Strategy*. Thin Book Publishing Co, 2009.

Center for Women in Technology

CWIT LLC Purpose: Create a supportive and inclusive community for women and underrepresented students in computing and engineering majors

1 RA

3 Peer Assistants

43 First Year Students

Center for Women in Technology

Peer Assistants (3+ students)

- Uppderclass students
- Live on the LLC floor
- Volunteer leadership opportunity
- Create Leadership Development Plans
- Lead 3 Engagement Teams
  - **Fun & Co.**: Create monthly community building events
  - **A-Team**: Academic tutoring and study groups
  - **R-Connect**: Promoting UMBC Retriever events and CWIT events to the community
- Weekly meetings with RA
- Monthly meeting with Community Director and CWIT Assistant Director
  - Check-ins
  - Leadership development

Center for Women in Technology

FYE Course: Required for all first year student on the CWIT LLC Floor

Peer Mentors (3 students)

- Co-Instruct First Year Experience Course
- Weekly meeting with staff instructors
- Compensation: $250 to Bookstore and Leadership Practicum credit on transcript
- Topics include:
    - Study strategies
    - College budgeting
    - How to do a presentation
    - Time management
    - Learning styles
    - Graduation planning
    - Career planning

Discovery Scholars

DS LLC Purpose: Create a community for new students as they explore and select appropriate college majors and future careers and discover their true academic passions during their first year at UMBC

1 RA

8 Peer Mentors

28 New Students

Discovery Scholars

Introduction to an Honors University (IHU) Seminar: Required for ALL new students

Peer Mentors (8 students)

- Apply, participate in training, and attend monthly meetings
- Assist with IHU Seminar (Fall)
- Assist with Academic Workshop Series (Spring)
- Plan co-curricular & extra-curricular activities for the floor (Fall & Spring)
- Live on the floor
- Engage with 3 to 5 new students on an individual basis

Takeaways

1. Where do your peer leaders fall on the academic-involvement spectrum? Does this meet your program needs?
2. What are the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results of your current or developing peer mentorship model?
3. How are you assessing the effectiveness of your peer mentorship model in coordination with other aspects of your program?

Engagement Strategies

Examples:

Recruitment

Training

On-Going Reflection

Debrief

Reflection & Application

Jacqueline Stavros and Gina Hinrichs, *Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-Based Strategy*. Thin Book Publishing Co, 2009.

Questions? Thoughts? Reactions?

Contact us!

Erica D'Eramo, Assistant Director CWIT, deramo@umbc.edu

Kaleigh Mrowka, Assistant Director for Residential Education, kmrowka@umbc.edu

Laila Shishineh, Assistant Director, First-Year Experience, lailams@umbc.edu

References:

Crisp, G., & Cruz, I. (2009). Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6), 525-545.

Leidenfrost, B., Strassnig, B., Schutz, M., Carbon, C., & Schabmann, A. (2014). The Impact of peer mentoring on mentee academic performance: Is any mentoring style better than no mentoring at all?. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 26(1), 102-111.

Minor, F. D. (2007). Building Effective Peer Mentor Programs. In B. L. Smith, & L. B. Williams (Eds.), Learning Communities and Student Affairs: Partnering for Powerful Learning (pp. 57-69). Olympia, WA: The Evergreen State College.

Zachary, L. (2000). The mentor's guide: Facilitating effective learning relationships. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.