An Exploratory "Baseline" Development Study on the Impact of NUS University Town Residential College Experience on Students' Holistic Development

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Overview of University Town

Learning and social spaces for today's digital learners

Combining the convenience of campus living with a multidisciplinary academic programme

Holistic educational experience
The Residential College System: Beyond Academic Learning

- The College Experience: Integrated Living and Learning with emphasis on
  - Effective communication skills
  - Appreciation of differences and diversity
  - Holistic understanding of issues
  - Community building and social awareness

  - Accomplished through a structured curriculum that focuses on multidisciplinary engagement and innovative pedagogies
  - Complemented by out-of-classroom learning opportunities

Curriculum: Knowing, Questioning, Reasoning & Articulating

- Students read five modules (which are taught in small classes) over 2 years, while completing their major(s) at their home Faculties
  - Junior Seminar (1): Sharpen inquiry and critical reasoning skills
  - Senior Seminar (2): Relate global issues back to Singapore/Asia
  - Ideas & Exposition (2): Foster clear thinking & create impactful communications

Modules: Multidisciplinary, while emphasizing critical/creative thinking and high level of interaction
Out-of-Classroom Learning

- Examples:
  - Master’s Tea: Intimate sharing sessions with people from all walks of life
  - Tembusu Forum (offered at Tembusu College): Lively debates on current and often contentious issues
  - Capstone Experience (offered at College of Alice & Peter Tan): Module aimed at addressing real world issues with local communities and organizations

Diversity

- Mix of local and international students from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds
- Students from all disciplines and years of study
**College Life...**

- Master’s Tea with Dr Catherine Lim, one of Singapore’s prolific writers
- Fellow’s Tea with Mr prominent lawyer
- Tembusu Forum: Will the US Live in Peace with a Rising China?, with the US Ambassador to Singapore on the panel
- Master’s Tea with Prof Lee Kok Onn, Endocrinologist

**Developing leadership skills, teamwork and community service**

- Inaugural Community Outreach to West Timor’s Roslin Orphanage
- The FLAGship project, undertaken by the students, seeks to understand and enhance mental resilience among adolescents.
Beyond grades and books

Visit by patients from People’s Dialysis Centre as part of a Junior Seminar at College of Alice & Peter Tan

3rd Formal Dinner at Tembusu College

College of Alice & Peter Tan visits St Luke’s ElderCare

Tembusu student models at the Shunji Matsuo Hair Show

Vibrant College Life...

Performances for Cultural Night

MINUM: Tembusu Music Festival

Birthday Celebration @ Shan House

Mid Autumn Festival with ORA House members
Access to an Enhanced Education for All Students

- No additional tuition fees for College programs;
- Admissions on “needs-blind” basis

- Financial aid package to offset accommodation and meal costs
  - Bond-free Bursaries and Scholarships through gifts & donations
  - Residential Programme Bursaries
  - College Grants
  - Loans

An Enabling Environment

- Students have access to wide-range of facilities which are open 24/7
- Convenient access to a host of activities held at UTown throughout the year
Technology-rich learning spots for today’s digital learners

- Enabling students to work comfortably round the clock

Wi-Fi-enabled, the learning spaces at UTown are also equipped with open-access terminals and ample power points for laptops and other electronic devices.

Supporting a vibrant student life: Facilities for cultural, social and sporting events

- Holistic personal development and community bonding
The UTown Experience

• Creating a memorable student experience through vibrant College life
• Broadening of the mind and the development of the whole person
• Providing an engaging and enriching NUS’ educational journey

Curiosity Driven: What is happening in UTown?

- Gain understanding
- What more, if anything, needs to be done at UTown?

PVO-initiated study conducted by CDTL is complementary to the Teaching Enhancement Grant funded studies conducted by Tembusu and CAPT (then Angsana)

Throughout, we have been in touch with Masters of CAPT, Tembusu and Cinnamon College – sought their Inputs, shared what we were doing etc.
Methodology

Online Survey
Focus Group Discussions (7 groups; ~7 members/group)
Interview (30 students)
In Situ observations (random times)
Online Survey

First round:
- Launch Date: 21 March 2013; End Date: 30 May 2013

Second Round:
- Launch Date: 5th August 2013

- Total number of participants: 5333
- Complete responses: 2950
- Incomplete responses: 2383

- Female (48%), Male (52%)
- Off-Campus = 70.8%; Halls = 16%; RCs = 9.6%; SRs = 3.6%
- FASS (24%), FoE (26%), FoS (22.4%), Biz (7.94%), SoC (4.97%); SDE (6.66%)
- Year 1 (30.31%), Year 2 (32.41%); Year 3 and above (37.28%)

Constructs of the Survey Instrument

Initial Conditions (18 Questions)
- Demographic Data
- Educational aspirations
- High school achievement

Environment (24 Questions)
- Peer interactions
- Faculty interactions
- Diversity interactions and climate
- University resources
- Extra-curricular activities

Measures of Development (39 Questions)
- Intellectual abilities
- Intellectual growth
- Diversity outcomes
- Academic development
- Satisfaction and sense of belonging
- Skills development
- Identity development
- Self-confidence
- Computer and IT skills

UTown-specific questions
(CAPT 5; Tembusu 20)
Statistically Valid Conclusions from the Survey

**Perceptions of RC students are higher than perception of Hall Students which are higher than those of Off-campus Students**

**Peer Interactions**

**Use of University Resources**

**Diversity Interactions & Outcomes**

**Sense of belonging to campus community**

**Perceptions of RC students, Hall Students and Off-campus Students are statistically similar**

**Faculty Interactions**

**Intellectual Abilities**

**Intellectual Growth**

**Academic Development**

**Communication Ability**

**Perceptions of RC students are equal to perceptions of Hall Students which are greater than the perceptions of Off-campus Students**

**Extracurricular Activities**

**Satisfaction with University Experience**

**Leadership Ability**

**Self Confidence**

**Identity Development**

**Focus Group Discussions:**

- 7 FGDs consisting of ~7 students each from different faculties (2 hours + 20 minutes break); FGD around 6 questions
- Priority given to those students who volunteered
- FGD sessions:
  - Mixed group (from all years; UTown, Halls, Off-campus)
  - First year students (UTown, Halls, Off-campus)
  - Second-year students (UTown, Halls, Off-campus)
  - Third year and above (UTown, Halls, Off-campus)
  - Mixed group (from all years; UTown, Halls, Off-campus)
  - UTown students from different Colleges
  - Students from different Halls of Residence
**FGD Session Plan**

At the beginning of the session, the facilitator asks students to write down about their NUS/UTown/Hall experience in 10 minutes.

1. Why did you choose RC, Hall or off-campus? What advantages / disadvantages do you see?
2. What activities, curricular, extracurricular have benefited you most? Why? Could you please elaborate about your experience?
3. How would you characterize your peer interaction (NUS), in terms of size, diversity, curriculum, background, cultural, nationality?
4. Are you engaged or planning to engage within the community around you or society at large? What are the drivers for this?
5. Teamwork is highly valued in the workplace, where do you develop this ability from?
6. NUS emphasizes on critical thinking and life-long learning. Are you getting these from the classes you take and/or from elsewhere?

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**Interviews**

- 30 students selected (based on the survey data)
- priority given to those who volunteered; background characteristics will be considered in selecting the participants.
  - 10 (UTown RC residents) + 10 (NUS Hall Residents) + 10 (other NUS Students)
- ~30 minute interview → audio tape, transcribe, text analysis, coding
- ~Semi-structured questions (open-ended) together with follow up questions (about 8 questions)
Yield from FGD Sessions + Interviews

Students feel Halls are optimal – “freedom” more than in RCs, essay requirement for RCs 😜

In RCs you have the opportunities to really do what you think can make a difference. In Halls, all activities are for fun and experience

The cross cultural mixing seems to be less – there is lack of mixing (cultural, across disciplines and Colleges/Halls)

College/Hall activities and CCA help gaining teamwork skills rather than coursework

Critical thinking happens accidentally in modules rather than deliberately

In Situ Study

Diversity is variety → seen in the many members of various groups encountered when walking around the UTown space.

• UTown Spaces:
  – Starbucks, ERC, Koufu, Stephen Riady Centre, Food Court

• Morning, Afternoon and Evening

• Observed 56 student groups (1 week period)
In Situ Study: Data Summary

Group Size:
Mean = 3.75; Median = 3; Min = 2, Max = 10

Group Nature:
Pure Social = 23; Pure Academic = 19; Pure CCA = 4
Hybrid (Social + Academics) = 9
Job Related (non-NUS guests) = 1

Meeting Frequency:
Everyday (18); 2-3 times a week (11); Once a week (12);
First Time (6)

Membership in Other Groups:
45 groups → all members are part of other groups as well
8 groups → Only this group
3 groups → one or more members part of other groups as well
The Employed Metrics
(Normalized Entropy and Interaction Index)

1. The Entropy Index
\[ H = - \sum P_k \log P_k \]

2. The Interaction Index
\[ S = 1 - \sum \left( P_k \right)^2 \]

where \( P_k = \frac{N_k}{N} \)

\( N_k \) = number of persons in kth group

\( N \) = total population size.

Results

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<th>Average value</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
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Future Plans

- Sustainable with strong local participation (faculty and students) generating both local and global value
- Support from the Integrating and Enabling layer that comprises education researchers, and researchers with specific skills
- Evidence-based: through ePortfolio analysis, diagnostic tests, surveys, focus group discussions, interviews
- Use existing research approaches adopted in LLPs as a basis
- Offer students soft incentives – Extended Transcript, Socials, …
Overarching Research Questions:

What are the common and positive student outcomes in NUS LLCs? [Academic, Intellectual and Social / iNUS]

What are the conditions that foster the positive outcomes?

What policies and practices can be adopted to sustain and enhance the positive outcomes?
Composition and Role of Local Research Teams

1. PIs
   • Directors of Studies and Student Life (2)

1. Research Teams
   • Fellows of RCs
   • People with Research Methodology skills

3. Recruitment of Students for Longitudinal Studies

4. Nurturing the group and conducting the study

5. Framing of “local” research questions
   (aligned with the overarching research questions)

6. Analysis of local data and follow-up actions

Key References

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Key References


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