LIVE AND LEARN

Freshmen choose a new spin when it comes to on-campus residency

by Trisha J. Ratledge

I LIVE AND LEARN

Freshmen choose a new spin when it comes to on-campus residency. For the USD freshmen the country’s 1960 resistance and the heart-wrenching murder of Las Mariposas in the Dominican Republic to the UD Student Union by Trisha J. Ratledge

I had never heard anything about these atrocities (of the Trujillo dictatorship),” says Bre Burgos, a freshman English major from San Francisco Bay Area. “It really put on my radar something I had never thought about before.”

That’s the idea behind the LLC program, launched by a task force led partly by Nicole Horton, associate dean, College of Arts and Sciences, and Margaret Leary, associate dean of students to build a bridge between academics and student life, as well as connections between students, faculty and staff, creating a salon of sorts that isn’t constricted by time or place. At the core of the program are the freshman preceptoral classrooms — small, core-curriculum courses taught by faculty mentors — that tie to the LLC theme.

“My hope is that this program (changes) the students’ introduction to the intellectual community,” says Leary, “that they realize it doesn’t have to be bound by the classroom and they can carry their intellectual discourse into the residence hall.”

“Not only have I been given a community of people who have similar interests and goals as I do, but the LLC has expanded my view of how I see the world,” Burgos says. “It inspired me to get more involved in social justice issues that I hadn’t considered before.”

Discourses at USD include access to a full staff of mentors for every LLC resident, including their preceptor, preceptorial assistant, resident assistant and resident minister, who work together as a team to ensure that the students — and the larger university community — are well served.

“What the students are seeing is that faculty who are integrated and care about them together, so they are getting that true holistic experience,” adds Dayanne Iznizar, assistant dean of residential life. Excursions and events in the last year have included dinner with an Irish priest and social justice worker from Pakistan, a visit to the California Wolf Center in Julian, Calif., and an exploration of art exhibits in Los Angeles to learn about the birth of the L.A. art scene.

“My goal the first semester is to get the students connected to each other, and then the second semester, to use those connections to broaden their experience beyond the LLC and help engage them with the wider campus,” says Jonathan Bowman, faculty director of the Social Justice LLC.

“The program experiences we’ve had have been a good way to start my four years here,” affirms Connor Self, a freshman international relations major from Maryland and member of the Honors LLC. “I really did so see that they are not alone and that there are places for them to fit in, and they do it quickly,” he says.

Next year, organizers anticipate that about 50 percent of freshmen will participate in five themed communities: sustainability, social justice, the natural world, honors, and space and sound. The program is expected to grow to 100 percent participation by 2014.

As Burgos transitions to her sophomore year, she says the effects of her first year in an LLC will be lasting. “Coming to college your freshman year, you’re a little nervous that you’re not going to find a group of people that you’ll really get along with, or that they’ll be superficial friendships,” she says. “I’ve made some really great friends. I’ve loved college so far and I don’t know if my experience would have been the same without my Social Justice LLC. I couldn’t have asked for a better first year of college.”

Dear Dr. Lyons:

I am in my senior year here, majoring in biochemistry and political science. I have lived in the BEST dorm on campus (Maher Hall), followed was astonishing.

I began to receive emails from my advisors. I had a personal email from the dean of students, Dr. Godwin, as well as daily check-ins from theGreek advisor, Mandy Womack. I then received a handwritten letter from Chemistry Department Chair Dr. Tahmassabi on behalf of the entire department.

I received messages from 11 of my upper-class professors, and even four from core classes I had as a freshman. If this wasn’t enough, Director of Financial Aid Judy Lewis Logue called and spoke with me while she was on vacation. She assured me that she would do everything in her power to help and that my first priority was to be with my family.

The tipping point came on the day of my father’s funeral. As people arrived at our house for a reception after the funeral, I was completely surrounded when I turned to see one of my professors in my kitchen. He had traveled to Arizona to personally offer his condolences. This support and sense of family is why I love USD.

What an incredible gift to receive during such a difficult time. I have been to three graduation ceremonies, and my only critique is that I don’t believe our seniors are left with a message about remembering the gift USD has given them. Throughout this entire process, I have been left with the notion that you always have something to be thankful for.

I had to try to express my gratitude and let you know what a wonderful institution the University of San Diego is.

Thank you.

— Ashley Torkelson ’12