



LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

# The Benefits of Living in an Agricultural Residential College

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# LSU's Residential Colleges

- ▶ 10 total Residential Colleges

Honors, Career Discovery, Business, Engineering, Agriculture (ARC), Science, Mass Communication, Human Sciences and Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Visual and Performing Arts

Three Types: Honors, Interdisciplinary, and Discipline-based

- ▶ All Involve LSU Faculty (Rectors) engaging students in the residence halls
- ▶ Faculty Director jointly appointed



# Timeline



## 2008

ARC welcomed its first students in a newly renovated residence hall.

## 2010

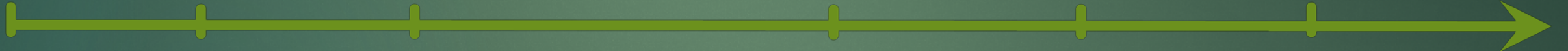
The Associate Dean became the director of the program and major-based "tracks" led by faculty were introduced: two in animal sciences and one each for environment/sustainability and food/fitness/fashion.

## 2014

Under new faculty direction, the program shifted to a more explicit focus on career exploration, agricultural literacy and undergraduate research, as part of the University's QEP.

## 2018

A new 1st year residency program is presenting even more opportunities for growth and development.



In the first year, students were enrolled in several sections of the same courses, as well as in an ARC-only section of a freshman writing course in the fall and a speech communication course in the spring.

### Other changes:

- ARC-only sections of a required orientation-type course
- agricultural-specific field trips
- a weekly e-newsletter.

The tracks were reorganized and additional faculty members were recruited to provide seven individualized track experiences to provide even more hands-on learning. The large single section orientation course was also divided into multiple sections of fewer students.

# Purpose



- ▶ As part of a multi-year, multi-cohort research project, investigate the longer-term perceived benefits of living in a discipline-based, first-year learning community

# Method



- ▶ At the beginning of the 2013 academic year, 85 first-year students lived in ARC
- ▶ Graduating seniors who remained in a major housed in the College of Agriculture (CoA) were contacted by email about participating in a focus group interview in April 2017

# Method

- ▶ Eleven students were interviewed in three groups by a member of the residential college staff
  - ▶ The students were informed that the interviewer was a staff member
  - ▶ The faculty director of the University's Residential College program sat in as an observer and note taker



# Method



- ▶ Both food and a nominal gift card were used for incentives
- ▶ The interview questions inquired about their experiences in college, specifically those that stemmed from their participation in ARC
- ▶ The interviews were transcribed verbatim and supplemented by the previously-described notes
- ▶ A one page survey was also completed

# Participants

- ▶ Most of the participants were female and most were majoring in a field related to animals
- ▶ These characteristics reflect both the gender composition and majors of the students (primarily pre-veterinary medicine) who live/lived in ARC as well as the CoA as a whole





# Results--Interviews

- ▶ Most students agreed that their ARC experience enhanced connections to faculty and peers, and that these interactions continued well beyond the first-year experience in ARC



# Results--Interviews

- ▶ Of the students who reported changing their degree programs, most changed from a 3+1 Pre-Veterinary Medicine to a Wildlife-related one and expressed enthusiasm for the changed career path.
  - ▶ They further advised freshmen not to get 'upset' about changing majors



# Results--Survey

- ▶ The majority of students moved off campus after their freshmen year
- ▶ Most of the students agreed or strongly agreed that their faculty connections which begun in ARC continued



# In Conclusion...



- ▶ “One size does not fit all”
- ▶ Resources need to be dedicated and faculty need to be rewarded, for a sustainable program
- ▶ Assessment and research are indispensable