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Reframing SEA Semester®: A Model Living and Learning Program in Education Abroad

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REFRAMING SEA SEMESTER®:
A MODEL LIVING AND LEARNING PROGRAM
IN EDUCATION ABROAD

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PIM 72 IELR

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of the requirements for a Master of International Education at
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Consent	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Abstract	1
Introduction.....	2
Literature Review.....	6
Research Design.....	10
<i>Methodology</i>	10
<i>Respondents</i>	12
<i>Data Collection</i>	13
Methodology of Analysis.....	14
Presentation and Analysis of Data: Alumni Survey Section I.....	16
Presentation and Analysis of Data: Alumni Survey Section II.....	27
Discussion and Conclusion	39
References.....	41
Appendix A: Alumni Survey Email.....	43
Appendix B: Alumni Survey	44
Appendix C: Academic Contact Survey.....	51

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: LLP Characteristics Reflected in SEA Semester (Section I).....	18
Table 2: LLP Outcomes Produced by SEA Semester (Section II)	28
Figure 1: NSLLP Constructs	30
Table 3a: SEA Semester Alumni Knowledge of Home Institution LLPs	36
Table 3b: SEA Semester Alumni Participation in Home Institution LLPs	36

ABSTRACT

Sea Education Association (SEA) has educated nearly 7,500 undergraduates through its SEA Semester[®] study abroad programs since 1971. In an effort to refresh the brand and marketing efforts to influence enrollment and develop more institutional relationships, the program is being reframed in the context of a living-learning program (LLP). Two electronic surveys with Likert and open-ended questions were distributed to SEA Semester program alumni and academic contacts at sending institutions, both seeking to determine whether such an endeavor would be accurately representative and beneficial to enrollment and institutional relations. Alumni were asked to consider: what characteristics of SEA Semester programming are most representative of living-learning programs and why; and how have those characteristics produced outcomes commonly associated with living-learning programs, if at all? Their feedback was then informed by comments from academic colleagues at colleges and universities that sponsor LLPs. Both groups overwhelmingly supported the notion of SEA Semester as an LLP, but determined that such a reframing effort may be more successful within the academic realm than the student one.

Introduction

In 1971, Corwith “Cory” Cramer brought a vision to reality. A lifelong sailor and educator, Cory wanted to provide undergraduates with a hands-on, interdisciplinary way to learn about the world’s oceans. A strong advocate of learning by doing, Cory could think of no better way to educate young people about the marine environment than by offering them the opportunity to do so from the platform of a traditional sailing vessel. With the help of many supporters, Sea Education Association (SEA) and its namesake program, SEA Semester[®], was born. Four years later in 1975, the institution and its first vessel, R/V *Westward*, relocated to Woods Hole, Massachusetts where its campus still resides today. Since these humble beginnings, nearly 7,500 undergraduates have chosen to sail with SEA Semester for their education abroad experience.

SEA Semester has always attracted students from a spectrum of academic majors, with only half pursuing degrees in a scientific discipline despite its reputation as a science program. From 1971 to 2006, the organization simply offered “SEA Semester”: one twelve-week semester program – half in Woods Hole, half at sea – that offered eleven credits in Oceanography and Oceanographic Research, three credits in Maritime Studies, and three credits in Nautical Science, all through Boston University. Since then, our course portfolio has increased dramatically with six new programs being introduced over the last eight years. In each instance of a new program, the institution’s goal has been to better understand and respond to the ever-changing needs of today’s undergraduates, and to stay ahead of some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time.

More recently, SEA has also designed and built two new ships to replace the *Westward*; expanded its academic programming to accommodate even more students from a wider variety

of disciplines through varied course options and electives; and charted cruise tracks towards the farthest flung destinations yet. However, one program element has remained consistent despite so many other changes: the institution's mission of providing "challenging voyages of scientific discovery, academic rigor, and personal growth" that allow students to develop teamwork, decision-making, and problem-solving skills in a real world environment while assuming increased levels of responsibility (Sea Education Association, 2014).

As SEA enters its fifth decade of operations, it is clear that the landscapes of both higher education and education abroad in the United States have changed dramatically since its inception. The United States saw a "phenomenal expansion of study abroad programs in the 1960s and 1970s," with the greatest bloom happening between 1962 and 1975 (Bowman, 1987, p. 27), years which bookend the founding of SEA Semester. Today, according to the Institute for International Education, U.S. student participation in education abroad has more than tripled over the last two decades alone (Open Doors 2013 Fast Facts, 2013). We can assume that this continued increase in participation has been facilitated by increased capacity – students have more program options now than ever before, a trend that has been steadily increasing since the 1920s (Hoffa, 2007) – as well as increased support for cross-cultural training to prepare students for future careers.

The need for internationalizing institutions of higher education is not only based on basic civic principles such as promoting diversity or understanding different languages and cultural practices. Rather, it responds to more severe national deficiencies such as the absence of qualified personnel for filling national security positions or playing key roles in fostering international relations and policy making. (Chin & Bhandari, 2007 as cited in Tajés & Ortiz, 2010, p. 17-18)

According to Bowman, the concept of study abroad in and of itself is “a uniquely American invention that is peculiarly appropriate to the American system of higher education. Its objectives reflect the strongly American commitment of the university to train citizens as well as scholars” (1987, p. 10). More than twenty years after Bowman’s statement, a 2010 assessment of study abroad programs in *The Journal of General Education* agrees with this concept of citizenship, stating, “The globalization phenomenon requires college graduates to adequately function in a more integrated and interdependent reality” (McGrew, 2005; Summers, 2002 as cited in Tajes & Ortiz, 2010, p. 19). The notion of creating global citizens is not one that has been embraced by the education abroad community alone. Rather, it is a theme that can be found at the center of recent U.S. educational reform efforts.

A 2007 report from the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U’s) National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) entitled *College Learning for the New Global Century* speaks to the importance of creating citizens in addition to scholars. The LEAP report details the aims, learning outcomes, and guiding principles necessary for a “twenty-first-century college education” (AAC&U, 2007, p. vii). In outlining seven key Principles of Excellence, LEAP seeks to guide higher education practitioners towards the goal of producing educated citizens who are ready for a dynamic, globalized society. Principle Five, *Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action*, offers a series of recommendations to “prepare students for citizenship and work through engaged and guided learning on ‘real-world’ problems” (p. 26). The core elements of this principle are accomplished through educational environments that are problem-oriented, field-based, collaborative, and practical. As far as LEAP is concerned, a twenty-first century education should prepare students for the demands of the real world through quality, community-based learning. Principle Four –

Engage the Big Questions – also suggests that it is no longer enough for students to follow a predetermined track in arts and sciences coursework. Rather, they must use what they learn in a meaningful way, looking beyond the classroom to put theory into practice.

All students – including those least prepared – learn best when they can see the point of what they are doing. By engaging students with complex issues, questions, and problems where there are real consequences at stake, and by teaching students how to draw and assess knowledge from many sources, this problem-centered approach to liberal education will prepare students both for the challenges of a dynamic global economy and for the responsibilities of citizenship. (p. 33)

The report goes on to pose the important question, “What kinds of learning are needed for knowledgeable and responsible citizenship?” (p. 22). One of their answers: community-based learning.

SEA Semester has been creating global scholars, citizens, and leaders with a community-based learning model since 1971. By combining academic coursework in a residential environment on shore with a hands-on sailing research voyage at sea, SEA Semester allows students to put their newfound knowledge into action while facing the real consequences associated with crewing a tall ship on the open ocean. Despite the evolution of higher education and education abroad over the last five decades, SEA Semester’s theory-to-practice methodology remains the ideal representation of what the LEAP reports expresses as a vital component of a twenty-first century education. As a program that embodies many of the ideal characteristics of a living-learning program (LLP), I believe that SEA Semester is a model LLP in education abroad. However, having never defined itself as such, my guiding questions for this capstone research are: what characteristics of SEA Semester programming are most

representative of living-learning programs and why; and how have those characteristics produced outcomes commonly associated with living-learning programs, if at all? Using alumni feedback informed by perspectives from academic contacts, I seek to explore if and how these stakeholders can place the SEA Semester experience within the framework of living-learning programs, and in turn to determine whether that information may be useful in reframing SEA Semester for purposes of enrollment and institutional development.

Literature Review

Beginning with the nine colonial colleges – those established before the United States gained its independence – the American educational system was modeled after the British system, known for its residential design and strong commitment to community. According to Ryan, during this earliest era of American higher education, students participated in all activities alongside their professors: they “lived, attended class, studied, dined, socialized, prayed, and slept in the same building” (as cited in Inkelas, 2011, p. 28). It is in this history that modern learning communities are rooted.

The first colleges in America were places that deliberately sought to create a community of scholars with common values. In those days, the focus on community and the moral character of students was as important a part of the college years as academic work.

(Coye, 1997, p. 25 as cited in Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, p. 9)

However, by the late 1800s the British model had been replaced by a Germanic one, which “shifted the focus of learning from a communal atmosphere to one where students specialized in a particular vocation, or major” (2011, p. 28). This large-scale reform of U.S. higher education, which included the introduction of electives into the undergraduate curriculum, was not well received by all.

One critic, Alexander Meiklejohn, felt that the increased focus on compartmentalized disciplines and departments was in direct conflict with the overarching goals of the college experience (Inkelas, 2011). He therefore called for a return to community-based, residential learning: that which had “historical roots in the ‘social clubs’ of Oxford and Cambridge” (Brower & Inkelas, 2010, p. 36). His neo-revolutionary ideas manifested into what is now widely regarded as the first modern living-learning program of the twentieth century.

In 1927, Meiklejohn founded the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin. For him, “education was all about building the skills and habits of mind to support democratic citizenship” (Smith & MacGregor, 2009, p. 126). He saw no better way to do this than by bringing students together to study a singular theme from multiple perspectives, deeply engaging with one another and with their teaching faculty. The College blended students’ social and academic lives, and incorporated new methodologies including team teaching and linked courses (Inkelas, 2011). “His alternative to the social and intellectual fragmentation of unrelated courses was a fully integrated year-long curriculum: it would be team taught, interdisciplinary, and organized around important issues in the modern world” (Smith & MacGregor, 2009, p. 126). Thus while the term “learning community” is grounded in the colonial colleges, their legacy derives from Meiklejohn and the first experimental undergraduate colleges (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Unfortunately, Meiklejohn’s ideas appear to have been ahead of their time. The Experimental College only lasted five years due to political and financial stress, and Meiklejohn himself admitted the challenge of “maintaining such a vanguard program in the face of the dominant higher education model of the day” (Inkelas, 2011, p. 29). However, despite the short-lived experiment, his efforts were not wasted. Meiklejohn’s model was revived in the 1950s and

1960s and lives on today in other renowned living-learning programs such as The Evergreen State College, the University of Michigan, and Wagner College's Wagner Plan.

The aforementioned LEAP report cites the Wagner Plan as one of its "Principles in Practice," specifically representative of Principle Five, *Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action*. Wagner's curricular model "requires students to complete issue-centered integrative learning communities (LCs) during the first year, the intermediate years, and the senior year. The LCs are organized around a big theme or problem and include experiential as well as academic learning" (AAC&U, 2007, p. 35). This plan is celebrated because of students' ability to make connections between learning in the classroom and in the field in the context of global, real-world issues. Published eighty years after Meiklejohn's establishment of the Experimental College, it is clear from the LEAP report that his philosophies and pedagogies had finally gained significant traction. Living-learning programs have made a comeback over the past thirty years in particular, beginning in the late 1980s. Learning communities "designed for both in-class and out-of-class student-student and student-faculty interaction began to evolve as a broad educational movement at the college level that came to be referred to as 'the learning community movement in higher education'" (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, p. 9).

In the years following, several calls for educational reform in the late 1990s and early 2000s questioned and criticized three main hallmarks of higher education. First, the quality of undergraduate education as a whole: reformers complained that the curriculum was too disjointed ("eerily echoing Meiklejohn sixty years prior" (Inkelas, 2011, p. 29)) and the instruction too reliant upon graduate student teaching assistants. Second, large universities specifically came under attack for their large lecture classes and impersonal instruction. They were instead charged with implementing more active and collaborative educational methods to

deepen students' engagement. Finally, a growing attrition rate drew attention to the importance of transition assistance programs for first-year students, making the freshman experience a target for reform. Given that LLPs have demonstrated the ability to provide a more personal learning environment, connect in-class learning to out-of-class experiences, and incorporate more applied learning methods, they were "promoted... as the 'answer' to many of higher education's ills" (2011, p. 29). Just as study abroad programs boomed in the 1960s and 1970s, living-learning programs experienced their own rise in popularity from the late 1980s into the 2000s.

According to a 2007 survey by the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP), over 600 living-learning programs existed across the United States by that time (Inkelas, 2011). Two years later, an article by Smith and MacGregor (2009) cited more than 800 learning community initiatives among American colleges and universities. With so many programs in place, the definition of living-learning programs has understandably become somewhat broad.

Learning communities are not merely block programming, an administrative convenience that facilitates registration and use of rooms. Rather they are conscious intellectual structures that teachers create, and students participate in, to share a high-quality and enduring educational experience... There are as many variations on the models of learning communities as there are institutions willing to participate. All, however, strive to provide an intense and supportive environment for intellectual growth and development. (Matthews, 1994, p. 184 as cited in Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, p. 16)

In an effort to better distinguish the variety of types of learning communities, Lenning and Ebbers suggest four categories to exist under the general umbrella term: curricular; classroom;

residential; and student-type. For purposes of my research question, I am most interested in the characteristics and outcomes of curricular learning communities.

The goal of curricular learning communities is to “purposely restructure the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students” (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 5 as cited in Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, p. 18). Some examples of this style of learning community include freshman interest groups, linked courses, course clusters, and coordinated studies. Additionally, there are multiple subcategories of curricular learning communities. *Curricular cohort learning communities* is the style most applicable to SEA Semester, and is defined as “academic programs in which the same students are together in every course because they are required to complete the program on schedule” (p. 23). This is certainly the case with SEA Semester in that each program offers a set curriculum, and all students are required to pass their shore courses before they can continue the program at sea.

My quantitative research questions were informed by an understanding of the characteristics of curricular learning communities. My goal was to determine if our alumni could place their experience within this context, and if so, how.

Research Design

Methodology:

To explore how SEA Semester programs might embody curricular LLP characteristics, and to examine the impact that our shore-to-sea methodology may have on the learning outcomes envisioned by Meiklejohn and now deemed essential by the LEAP report, I constructed two four-page electronic surveys: one for SEA Semester alumni (Appendix B) and one for academic contacts at our sending institutions (Appendix C). My goal with these surveys

was to first elicit feedback from recent SEA Semester students regarding their own experiences on the program. I was interested to hear how they might identify commonly agreed upon characteristics of curricular LLPs as part of their experience, and also how they might connect personal outcomes to the program structure. I then wanted to inform those findings with more comprehensive feedback from academic contacts at sending institutions known to sponsor learning communities by asking them to rate if and how specific characteristics of SEA Semester were represented in LLPs on their own campuses. My hope with the reverse design of the second academic survey was to both inform our contacts about elements of SEA Semester programming they may not have been aware of, and then with that knowledge reframe their definition of SEA Semester *as* a curricular LLP. Being cognizant of how many emails our alumni receive from SEA, and being sensitive to the busy schedules of our sending institutions' faculty and advisors, I endeavored to keep the surveys as brief as possible to elicit the highest response rate.

I chose to use Survey Monkey for my electronic data collection because SEA subscribes to a Survey Monkey Gold account. This account level allows for unlimited surveys; unlimited responses; customizable survey templates; filterable responses; text analysis of open-ended responses; and custom reports. It also allows us to redirect respondents to any website upon completion of the survey. This was a nice benefit in my particular case since I could redirect alumni to our alumni webpage and our academic contacts to our academic information request page. My goal with each redirect page was to engage the respondents further with the organization while SEA Semester was fresh in their minds. Alumni were reminded of ways to give, volunteer, or stay connected; academic contacts were offered the opportunity to request SEA Semester information for prospective students. Overall, I was able to design both surveys

to meet both my individual needs and the needs of the organization, and to then filter and tabulate the data in a way that would be useful to my analysis.

Respondents:

For the alumni survey, I specifically chose to contact SEA Semester alumni from the past five years of programming only (Fall 2008-Fall 2013). Despite the fact that our Development & Alumni Office maintains over forty years' worth of alumni records, I made the decision to focus on post-2008 programs for several reasons.

First, I had greater confidence in the data with regard to contact information. Recent alumni are more likely to remain engaged with the organization, and to update their email addresses with our Alumni Coordinator in an effort to stay in touch. Second, we have greatly expanded our programming within the past eight years, and our curricular design has been influenced by changes in higher education as a whole. Several of our programs have evolved to reflect a stronger interdisciplinary model, with individual courses being team-taught to encourage an overlap of topics to ultimately influence a more holistic understanding of the topic at hand. Students who sailed with earlier SEA Semester programs most likely would not have experienced such an interconnected course design or teaching style. Third, younger alumni are less likely to be major donors to the organization, so communication with them is less closely guarded by the SEA Development Office. Finally, I felt that alumni from within the past five years would have their time with SEA Semester more freshly in their mind, and could therefore make stronger correlations between their own experiences in the program and the outcomes that were posed to them.

For my second academic survey, I also specifically chose to only invite participation from academic contacts at SEA Semester sending institutions that foster their own learning

communities. First, I felt that the respondents' familiarity with SEA Semester would be an important element in collecting meaningful feedback specific to my research. I considered opening my survey to a much wider audience by sharing the link with over one thousand cataloged contacts from our priority schools, and by posting the link on SECUSS-L, but felt that in both cases I risked a high volume of responses from individuals who would either confuse SEA Semester with other shipboard programs or lack an understanding of our academic model. Second, I thought that respondents' knowledge of learning communities or living-learning programs through models visible on their own campuses would better inform their participation in the survey. They would have a greater probability of understanding the LLP model and drawing parallels between programs on their own campuses and SEA Semester. The institutions represented in the survey invitations were Colorado College; Eckerd College; the Evergreen State College; Lafayette College; Miami University of Ohio; Purdue University; Syracuse University; the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; the University of Rhode Island; and the University of South Carolina, Columbia.

Data Collection:

Given that the SEA Admissions Office records are not updated post-enrollment, the majority of alumni email addresses I have access to are linked to the institutions students attended at the point of application. Since it is common practice for schools to discontinue institutional email accounts upon students' graduation, I had to look to our Alumni Coordinator for the most up-to-date contact information. Understandably, our Development and Alumni staff are quite proprietary of SEA Semester alumni since we depend upon them to support our annual fund, refer prospective students, and overall remain engaged with the organization. Therefore, I was asked to share a preview of my survey and accompanying cover email before I was

provided with the information. Once my survey was approved, I received a spreadsheet with 744 alumni names and email addresses.

I emailed a link to the survey¹ with an invitation to participate (Appendix A) on Tuesday, March 11, 2014 and asked alumni to respond by the following Monday, March 17, 2014. This was a quick turnaround for a survey but I hoped that the short timeline might motivate them to participate. I've also learned through previous surveys that even by allowing the survey to remain open while sending reminders, the majority of respondents who will ultimately participate are those who do so immediately. After emailing the survey invitation, I received several email bounce backs, which I then forwarded to our Alumni Coordinator so she could begin the process of investigating the correct email addresses for her records. By the time I closed the survey, 183 alumni had started (24.6% of those who had successfully received the invitation), and 154 had completed (84.2% of those who had started).

In hindsight, the lack of personal questions in my survey was a weakness. It would have been helpful to use demographics such as gender, age/year of graduation, or SEA Semester program to determine trends in the data. Similarly, I was not fully through my literature review at the time of creating and sending my alumni survey. It would have been ideal to wait until I had reviewed more sources to better determine the overlap in commonly accepted curricular LLP characteristics. That being said, I feel that my survey accurately reflected such characteristics, but perhaps I may have been able to be more deliberate in my questioning with more qualitative research in mind.

Methodology of Analysis

I began the alumni survey with a welcome statement and introduction, followed by a

¹ https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=mmD6Z1unJTTPgSyP8huyH2U5xcRskUVIB61ru1UDQk0_3d

confidentiality statement and informed consent checkbox. I then divided it into two main sections: Section I, characteristics of LLPs reflected in SEA Semester, and Section II, outcomes of LLPs produced by SEA Semester. A final optional page invited the respondents to share their personal information including their name and college/university attended while in SEA Semester. For the sake of context, I also asked two questions related to learning communities. First, does/did your college/university have learning communities? Second, are/were you a member of a learning community at your college/university? I theorized that this data might inform responses depending on how familiar the alumni were with learning communities through their own experiences.

For the second academic survey, I also opened it with a welcome statement and introduction, followed by a confidentiality statement and informed consent checkbox. I then also divided it into two sections: Section I, characteristics of SEA Semester programming (Likert and open-ended responses), and Section II, one open-ended essay box. A final optional page invited the respondents to share their personal information including their name, college/university, and position and department. For the sake of context, I also asked whether their college/university has learning communities. Admittedly, this was somewhat of a trick question since I only sent the survey to academic contacts at institutions that support learning communities. However, I thought it might be interesting to see how many of them were aware of that fact in order to determine how embedded the LLPs were in their campus culture.

For the analysis of both surveys, I first looked at the overall percentages of responses to each answer choice to get a sense of the trends. I downloaded Survey Monkey-produced column charts (Tables 1 and 2) to show each response choice by percent selected, which presented an excellent visual of the patterns throughout. I then read through all open-ended responses for

each individual characteristic or outcome posed. Using Survey Monkey's text analysis function, I was able to create word clouds to show the most commonly used words in each section. This analysis allowed me to first hone in on the responses that produced the richest data, and then explore a variety of responses that touched on the similar subject.

For each characteristic or outcome presented in the survey, I selected quotes from the responses that best represented the overall feedback. In an effort to avoid bias by only including responses that support my hypothesis, I included both positive and negative feedback when applicable. I then referred to sources from my literature review to reinforce the data and draw parallels between the alumni responses and current literature on the topic of living-learning programs.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Section I of my alumni survey (Appendix B) was titled, "Qualities of a Living and Learning Community." After reviewing many of the sources presented in my literature review, I settled on six characteristics that I felt were most commonly accepted as representative in almost all curricular living-learning programs. For each characteristic, I asked alumni to rate if/how it was reflected in their SEA Semester experience by way of a Likert scale. Their answer choices for each question were "Yes," "Somewhat," or "No." Despite the variety of current SEA Semester program offerings, I felt that the consistency of programming the last five years warranted not enabling "Not Applicable" as an option. Had I opened the survey up to all SEA Semester alumni from the last forty-three, I would have needed to provide that as a choice. After asking respondents to rank how prominent each LLP characteristic was in their own SEA Semester program, I asked them to expand upon their answers, if applicable, through open-ended responses.

Overwhelmingly, the alumni respondents felt that the six LLP characteristics presented were indeed reflected in their SEA Semester experiences. The percentages of “Yes” responses ranged from a low of 60.9% to a high of 95.9%; “Somewhat” responses from a low of 4.1% to a high of 29.6%; and “No” responses from a low of 0.0% to a high of 9.5%.

Presenting the six characteristics from the greatest agreement to the least, 100% of respondents answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if SEA Semester offered them social and academic interaction with other students, faculty, and staff in a residential environment.

100% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if their program allowed for personalized interaction with faculty.

100% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if their program was representative of a curriculum that combines two or more linked courses with a common theme.

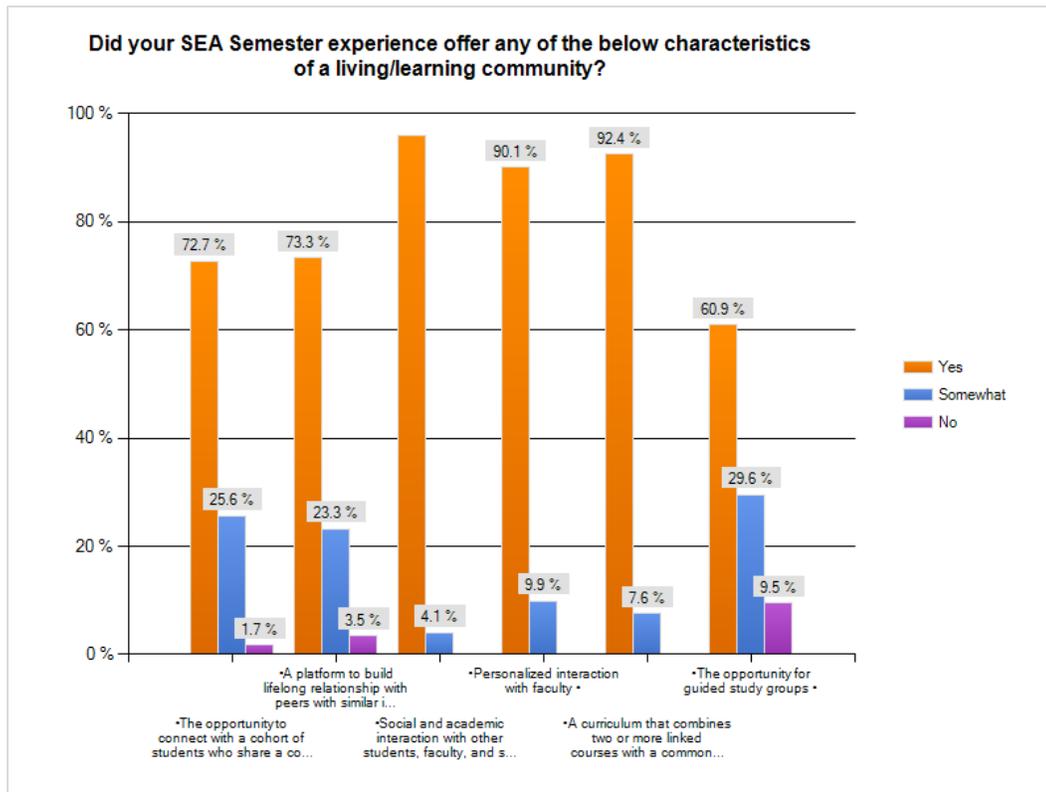
98.3% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if SEA Semester offered an opportunity to connect with a cohort of students who share a common academic major or area of interest.

96.5% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if their program provided a platform to build lifelong relationship with peers with similar interests and goals.

Finally, 90.5% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if SEA Semester offered the opportunity for guided study groups.

Overall, 100% of respondents felt that three out of the six living-learning program characteristics presented were either fully or somewhat represented in their experience with SEA Semester.

Table 1: LLP Characteristics Reflected in SEA Semester (Section I)



With regard to the first characteristic presented, “The opportunity to connect with a cohort of students who share a common academic major or area of interest,” forty-seven alumni responded with open-ended answers. Some of the most commonly used words in those responses were “shared,” (fifth most frequently used word), “connected” (seventh most used), “perspectives” (eighth most used), and “learning” (tenth most used).

Connected Experience Focused Learning Love Ocean
 Exploration Perspectives Project Sailing **Science Shared**
 Shipmates **Studies** Sustainability

With the exception of alumni who had participated in programs that are limited to science majors via prerequisites, respondents to this question noted that although their SEA

Semester class was comprised of students from many majors, they enjoyed coming together to explore a common theme. Many alumni mentioned that the spectrum of different academic majors resulted in a richer learning environment, one that they had never before experienced and one that allowed them to bond with a wide variety of individuals over a particular interest. Specific common interests mentioned included oceanography, adventure, sustainability, sailing, and the environment.

One alumna commented, “I connected with students both in and outside of my major and found that the multiple perspectives and thoughts about different topics was extremely insightful and enriching” (Wellesley College). Another alumna said, “... the really unique thing about SEA is that it attracted people who were had vastly different interests as well. I was able to work and communicate with very different people, I certainly benefited from that experience” (University of Mary Washington). Regarding students representing multiple majors, a third respondent added, “This made class discussions and my overall experience much more educational and rewarding” (Macalester College).

Even alumni who had participated in programs that were designed to attract students from similar majors noted that the academic homogeneity did not necessarily hinder their ability to bond further over a particular topic.

Everyone came together with the same academic background but each brought their own unique experiences. That allowed for the sharing and understanding of new ideas, innovations, projects, job opportunities, the list goes on. It was a melting pot that facilitated growth and new ways of thinking. (Anonymous)

This idea of bonding as a cohort over a shared academic interest reflects the opinion of Theodore Newcomb, an American social psychologist. In an article by S. Stewart Gordon

entitled *Living and Learning in College* (1974), Newcomb is cited as having said:

In the typical large university setting it is hardly more than a chance occurrence if a set of students whose personal relationships are close find themselves simultaneously excited by the same lecture, the same book, or the same seminar, with resulting reverberations in their peer-group life, so that they re-enforce and sustain one's excitement. (p. 106)

One alumni respondent further verified Newcomb's hypothesis, saying, "I am still in touch with some students from my semester who I felt better shared my academic interests than almost anyone at my home college." This characteristic also reflects the definition of curricular learning communities as stated by Smith and MacGregor.

By restructuring a student's time, credit, and learning experiences, learning communities aim to build more coherence to the curriculum, increase student engagement, and help build social and academic community (Smith et al, 2004, p. 67). Learning communities rearrange students' otherwise piecemeal academic experiences to bring focus, coherence, and community to their learning. (2009, p. 120)

The second characteristic presented, "A platform to build lifelong relationship with peers with similar interests and goals," elicited thirty-five written responses. Some of the most commonly used words or phrases in those responses were "touch" (presumably with regarding to staying in touch, second most frequently used word), "friends" (third most used); "ship mates" (fifth most used), and "future" (eighth most used).

Contact Page **Friends** Friendships Future Interests Look
Meet Relationships **Ship Mates** Similar **Students Touch**

While the responses ranged from having lost touch to still remaining best friends with their classmates, a common theme was that friends or not (“I love them all, but we’re all really different.”) or in touch or not (“Still my best friends!”), the community on shore and especially at sea provided the *opportunity* to build those bonds. One alumna explained:

Once you live on a ship with a group of people, you will always have a strong connection with them of being shipmates that is hard to find and cultivate anywhere else. I still look at SEA Semester as one of the best experiences of my life and I’ve made many lifelong friends out of it. (Carleton College)

Some respondents also reflected on the unique relationship that SEA Semester fosters of being shipmates. A common mantra on board either of our ships is “Ship – Shipmate – Self.” The idea is that the ship must come first and foremost in all situations, whether it means tending to a sail or line before your watch group can do down below to eat, or participating in “DC” (dawn cleanup) and scrubbing the soles even when you’re feeling seasick. After the ship comes shipmate: those who surround you, professional crew and fellow students alike. One person cannot sail the ship by him- or herself. Rather, it takes a community working together. After you’re sure that the ship is safe and that your shipmates are doing well, only then can you think about yourself and your own individual needs. One alumna spoke to this point, saying, “Though I don’t keep in close contact with many of my shipmates, we shared an amazing experience and I feel as though I could call on almost any one of them and trust them with my life... again” (Roger Williams University).

The third characteristic presented, “Social and academic interaction with other students, faculty, and staff in a residential environment,” resulted in twenty-five open-ended responses. Some of the most commonly used words or phrases in those responses were “shore” (fifth most

frequently used word), “Woods Hole” (sixth most used), and “community” (seventh most used).

Community Houses **Living** Quarters Shore Woods Hole

While I expected this question to elicit a unanimous response of “Yes” given our campus housing and shipboard environment, 4.1% of respondents replied with only “Somewhat.” This initially confused me. On shore in Woods Hole, all students live together in ten-to-twelve person cottages. At sea, they live in very tight quarters on a 134’ sailing vessel with professional crew and faculty. A 100% response of “Yes” seemed obvious to me: so much so that I almost didn’t include the question in my survey. However, after reading through the responses, I believe it was the combination of the words “social” and “faculty/staff” that caused not every respondent to reply with a resounding “Yes.” Given that SEA faculty do not live with students on campus, and that in some programs not all shore faculty go to sea with students, I can understand how some respondents may have not fully agreed that their program had offered social and academic interaction with faculty and staff in a residential environment throughout the entire program.

That being said, those respondents who did support this statement fully were able to capture the living-learning program environment through reminiscing about their own experiences. One anonymous alumnus responded, “I got to know all students, faculty and staff extremely well. It almost felt like I knew them better than the students, faculty and staff at the college I attended.” Another alumna commented, “The close living quarters was one of my favorite aspects of the SEA Semester program, and allowed for relationships to be built among students and faculty that went beyond the constraints of the classroom” (Macalester College).

Finally, one alumnus shared:

This program breaks down the barriers of teacher and student. I felt more at ease and able to dialogue with my instructors. The class was conversing rather than absorbing a lecture and I believe that to be much more beneficial. The faculty became more than just teachers, they became mentors, colleagues and friends. (Northeastern University)

This particular comment relates directly to what Smith and MacGregor (2009) cite as one of the ways that learning communities can be used as “levers for change” at an institution (p. 135).

Through learner-centered leadership, “There is synergistic collaboration at the learning interfaces, which breaks barriers and transcends the usual power relations (i.e. teacher-student, teacher-teacher, teacher-administrator...)” (p. 135). Removing power barriers is one goal of living-learning programs, and one that SEA Semester achieves organically through its community living models on shore and at sea.

The fourth characteristic posed asked alumni to rate their “personalized interaction with faculty.” This question elicited thirty-four open-ended responses with some of the most commonly used words being “learning” (fourth), “experience” (seventh), and “conversations” (ninth).

Conversations Experience Hard Learning Professors Ship Small Class Size Staff

One alumna referred to this personalized interaction as, “One of the greatest gifts of SEA” (Stanford University). Additionally, the following comment from an alumnus was the only open-ended response offered in his/her survey, perhaps because he/she felt most passionate about it:

One of the strongest academic aspects of the SEA curriculum was the ability to develop close working relationships with faculty – the door was always open for me to ask

questions or direct our learning topics towards issues relevant to where we would visit or the types of projects we were undertaking. (Anonymous)

This response reflects what the previously referenced 2007 NSLLP survey of different living-learning programs at colleges and universities across the United States found as well: “L/L participants were more likely to go beyond basic interactions with faculty and also have mentoring relationships” (Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006, p. 63).

In addition to the close working relationships, respondents referenced SEA Semester faculty’s support, willingness to provide individual or group tutorials, inspiration, compassion, and dedication. Further reinforcing the concept of SEA Semester as a curricular learning community, respondents also spoke to the unique relationship that develops at sea when your faculty are no longer lecturing from the front of a classroom, but rather working alongside you to accomplish a common goal. One alumna commented on how that power shift affected her personally. “I found a new and different kind of respect in my SEA program. On board, those figures of authority became my shipmates and equals. I felt much more comfortable taking on responsibilities when my leaders showed so much trust in my abilities” (University of Mary Washington). Another alumna shared a similar sentiment, saying, “I felt that once we got on the boat, faculty were just as much peers and friends as my classmates [were]. We learned together and we trusted each other” (Boston College).

Twenty-three alumni provided open-ended responses to the fifth characteristic, “A curriculum that combines two or more linked courses with a common theme.” The most commonly used words in these responses were “policy” (first more frequently used), “history” (second), and “learn” (fourth).

History Learn_{Lost} Nautical Science Policy

One alumna remarked, “My SEA experience treated information as an interconnected web instead of traditional separated subjects. Even now, I have a better understanding of how scientific facts and historical narratives are related” (University of Mary Washington). Another alumna commented, “It was amazing how all the courses fit together and worked to build their curriculum around one another. I had taken some of these courses individually (like similar content at other universities), but I liked how the research and policy were so linked” (Cornell University). A third alumna offered a concrete example of the interconnectedness, sharing, “EVERY SEA class was linked together. As you learn about Columbus in Maritime History, you learn about ship stability and the Gulf Stream in Nautical Science; how Columbus sailed” (Temple University).

Although all respondents selected “Yes” or “Somewhat,” this interconnection of course content and structure was not unanimously appreciated. Some alumni commented that the change from more compartmentalized coursework to an interdisciplinary curriculum presented a somewhat difficult transition. One said, “The courses were so interlinked, it sometimes felt as though they were simply smaller elements of a singular course” (Macalester College). Another shared, “The overlap between our courses sometimes made it difficult to distinguish which assignments were for what course, but our final projects were all related through common themes” (Boston University). However, I do not take either of these comments as negative. Rather, I see the former as a commentary on how well blended SEA Semester coursework is: so much so that the structure of individual courses fades away. The latter tells me that despite this student’s inability to distinguish individual assignments, she ultimately saw the benefit. This is

exactly what curricular communities are designed to do.

Undergraduate students generally see little connection across the courses they are taking, even when skills emphasized in one course are needed in others. Well-conceived student learning communities are intended to combat this problem, and to help students perceive their cumulative education as part of the big picture of life. (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, p. 15)

Despite the challenge in this learning model for a very few, other alumni commented that SEA Semester's linked curriculum was "the best way to learn" and "the way education should be."

The final living-learning program characteristic offered was, "The opportunity for guided study groups." As a reminder, this was the question that elicited the lowest "Yes" response rate (60.9%) and the highest "No" response rate (9.5%) of all six characteristics. The only commonly used words in these responses were "projects," "students," and "study groups," hence the lack of a word cloud. However, the twenty-four open-ended responses shed light on why this program element was the most controversial.

The majority of respondents felt that while they participated in study groups, they did so by choice, not because they were directed by faculty to do so. Others commented that by virtue of the small program size, they worked as a study group naturally. One alumnus felt that the residential nature of the program lent itself to such group work, saying, "We studied together, but there was no one guiding us or forcing us. It just organically grew out of our living situation" (Vassar College). A final comment from another alumnus questioned the verbiage and overall meaning of the question, commenting, "'Study groups' isn't the right term for what we did. In SEA, we didn't study together, we experienced together" (Carnegie Mellon University).

Section II of my alumni survey was titled, “Outcomes of a Living and Learning Community.” Once again, after reviewing multiple sources, I settled on four characteristics that I felt were most commonly accepted as outcomes produced by curricular living-learning programs. For each characteristic, I asked alumni to rate if/how it was reflected in their SEA Semester experience by way of a Likert scale. Their answer choices for each question were “Yes,” “Somewhat,” or “No.”

Unlike the overwhelming numbers of “Yes” responses regarding which LLP characteristics were represented in SEA Semester, alumni provided slightly more balanced feedback across the three answer choices regarding LLP program outcomes. The percentages of “Yes” responses ranged from a low of 57.9% to a high of 89.4%; “Somewhat” responses from a low of 8.8% to a high of 34.5%; and “No” responses from a low of 1.8% to a high of 7.6%. Also unlike Section I, none of the four outcomes in Section II elicited a unanimously positive “Yes”/“Somewhat” response. Also of note, as compared to a maximum of forty-seven open-ended responses on LLP/SEA Semester characteristics, the outcomes posed in Section II only resulted in a maximum of twenty-nine open-ended remarks.

Breaking down the four LLP/SEA Semester outcomes from the greatest agreement to the least, 98.2% of respondents answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if their SEA Semester experience resulted in expanded perspectives.

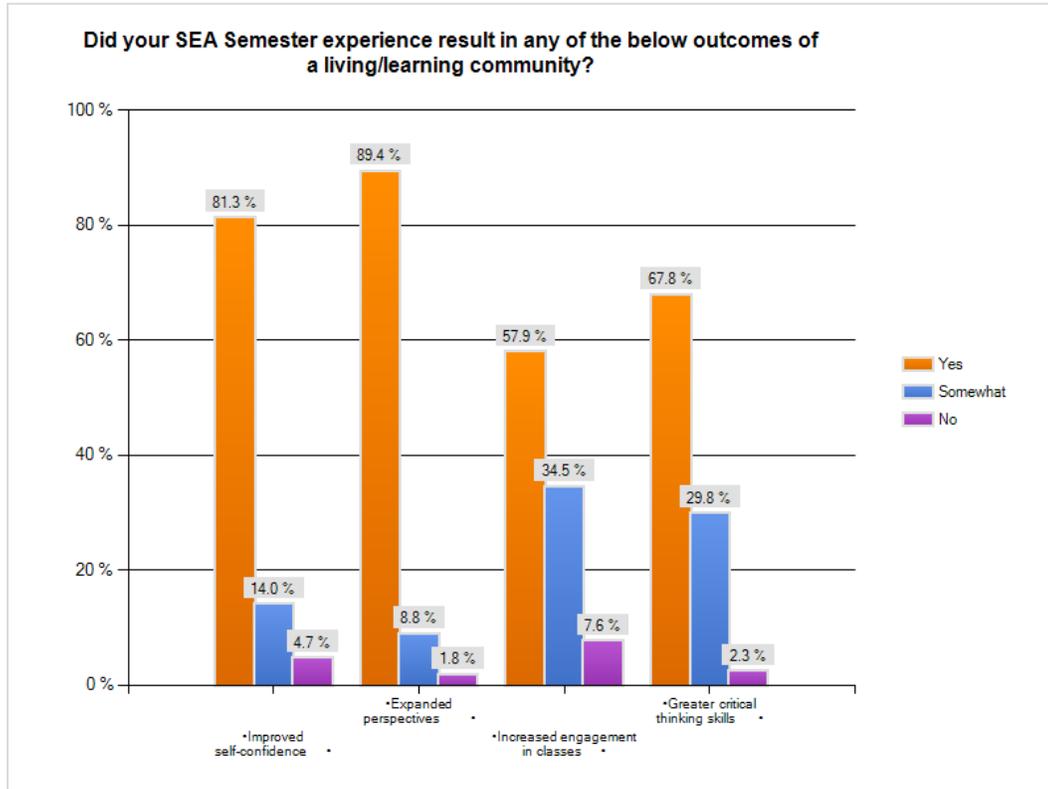
97.7% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if SEA Semester produced greater critical thinking skills.

95.3% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if their SEA Semester experience improved their self-confidence.

Finally, 92.4% answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” when asked if SEA Semester led to

increased engagement in their classes.

Table 2: LLP Outcomes Produced by SEA Semester (Section II)



The first outcome presented, “Improved self-confidence,” elicited twenty-eight open-ended answers, the second highest response rate in Section II. Some of the most commonly used words in those responses were “able” (sixth most frequently used word), “knew” (eighth most used), and “lead” (ninth most used).

Able College Definitely Knew Lead Ship

Many respondents referenced SEA Semester as a pivotal point in their lives due to the building of confidence. As one alumna said, “The unique study environment certainly fostered a sense of confidence and leadership building that is difficult to find elsewhere. I owe my ability to challenge myself and test my limits to the SEA [Semester] program” (Amherst College).

Another alumnus commented, “Very much so. This program helped me develop a much more powerful outlook towards accomplishing my goals” (University of Vermont). A third answered, “100%. I felt like I knew myself – my limits, my strengths, my weaknesses – so much better” (Scripps College).

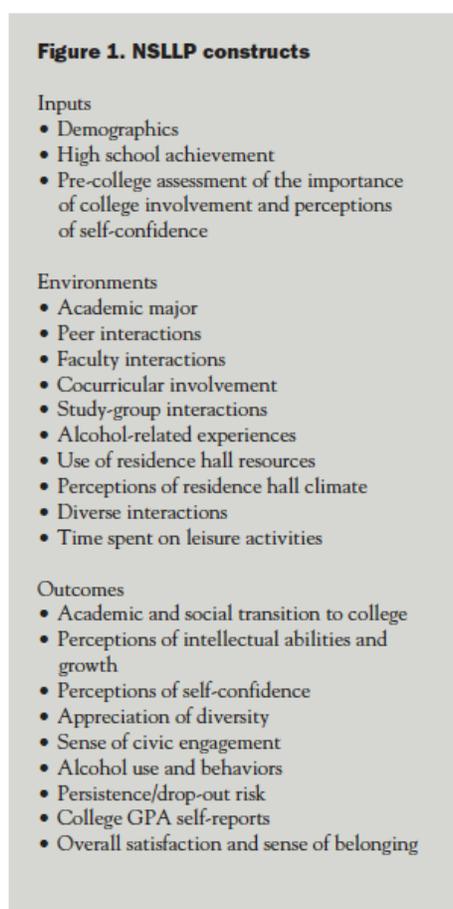
The sea component garnered the most credit for this particular outcome, whether for creating from scratch or developing existing confidence. One alumnus shared, “I knew I was a leader, but on the ship I became a good leader” (Eckerd College). Another alumna said, “When I first left the Corwith Cramer, I felt absolutely unstoppable. There are so many difficulties that a student faces while a part of SEA Semester, but working together, it is easy to realize that you can overcome anything” (Macalester College). A final respondent summed up her transformation by saying, “[SEA Semester] made me feel like I could handle anything” (Colgate University).

I believe that this increased self-confidence is due to the unique environment fostered by SEA Semester, especially at sea. The 2007 NSLLP survey results showed that in terms of self-confidence, “L/L [living-learning] students indicated a statistically higher level of academic self-confidence, but not significant differences exist among L/L and TRH [traditional residence hall] students regarding interpersonal self-confidence” (Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006, p. 64). However, the conceptual framework for this study was based on the “inputs-environments-outcome” (I-E-O) model developed by Alexander Astin in 1993 (Brower & Inkelas, 2010) and explained below.

In the I-E-O model, student *outcomes* result from both student *inputs* (or precollege characteristics) and college *environments* (various classes, programs, policies, etc. with which students come into contact while in college). Astin asserts that studies of the

impact of college environments on student outcomes will be biased unless they control student inputs. Moreover, studies that only investigate the role of one college environment (for example, the major) on student outcomes will overestimate the impact of that one environment element if the potential influence of other college environments is not studied simultaneously. Thus, the I-E-O model utilized for the NSLLP includes several inputs, environments, and outcomes (see fig. 1). (p. 38)

Figure 1: NSLLP Constructs



Obviously, one “environment” the I-E-O model constructs did not account for was crewing a tall ship at sea alongside your faculty and peers with no prior training. I would argue that unlike the NSLLP survey respondents, who were all based on college campuses, the

perspectives of SEA Semester alumni reflect an environment in which they not only lived and learned together, but worked together to achieve a common, tangible goal: safely sailing a tall ship over thousands of miles of open ocean. It is for this reason that I believe that our alumni demonstrated significant gains in *interpersonal* self-confidence, not just academic.

The second outcome presented, “Expanded perspectives,” elicited twenty-two open-ended answers. Some of the most commonly used words in those responses were “learned,” (third most frequently used word), “eye opening” (fourth most used), and “living” (fifth most used).

Academic Came Experience Eye Opening Learned Living Water

All of the open-ended responses that offered any level of detail on this outcome credited the experiential learning component at sea. One alumnus commented, “This was not a slideshow course of what the world looks like. We experienced it for ourselves. We learned, and witnessed firsthand how the world operates. My horizons have been greatly expanded” (Northeastern University). An alumna said, “SEA was a completely different form of learning, and I found that I learned so much about myself and working and sometimes dealing with people in such an extreme environment” (Carleton College). Others took a more existential approach to their answers, saying, “There is a lot of time to think out on the water...” (Roger Williams University) and, “Gazing up into the heavens (star filled sky) at 3 am will change everyone’s perspectives” (Wichita State University). Finally, one alumna connected her expanded perspectives to both the location and the curriculum, saying:

Before I sailed with SEA, I had a narrow view of the Caribbean. It is easy to picture the white, sandy beaches, and forget the poverty that is apparent upon the actual visitation of the islands. My time with SEA helped me realize that some subjects, such as

conservation, are much more complex than I originally realized. It is easy to sit in a desk in America and fight for sea turtle conservation, but much more difficult to look a native in the eyes and tell them that they do not have the right to sea turtles as a food source.

(Macalester College)

Open-ended respondents who did not feel their perspectives were broadened by SEA Semester referenced a range of reasons including a science-based curriculum and a homogenous student body.

The third outcome presented, “Increased engagement in classes,” elicited twenty-nine open-ended answers, the highest response rate of Section II. Some of the most commonly used words in those responses were “engaging,” (second most frequently used word), “hard” (fifth most used), and “small class” (seventh most used).

Awesome **Engaging** Hard Job Opinions
Regular _{ship} Small Class **Students**

This question elicited the highest “Somewhat” response of Section II (34.5%) as well as the highest “No” response (7.6%), which leads me to believe that our alumni were the least convinced that their SEA Semester experience had produced this outcome.

Those that did agree credited the small class size, hands-on nature of the program, close-knit environment, and theory-to-practice methodology. “Smaller classes with peers you lived with provided for a relaxed atmosphere. I felt comfortable engaging in class with the instructor and my fellow students,” said one alumna (Boston University). Another respondent agreed with the uniqueness of this outcome, saying, “During the program there was increased engagement in class; after the program and back at my undergraduate institution, it was difficult to extend the

class engagement (class size was much larger)” (University of Virginia). Acknowledging the close-knit nature of the program, another alumnus shared, “I have always been shy in the classroom. [But] working and living with the same instructors and students allowed me to feel comfortable expressing my opinions. I was never afraid to be wrong, as I had been in more traditional settings” (Northeastern University). Finally, one alumna pointed to the residential nature of the program both on shore and at sea, saying, “I think that it was easier to engage with people because you were constantly around them and engaging in other things such as working, cooking, researching [so] it was an easy transition to engage with them in class” (Carleton College).

While some alumni felt that SEA Semester engaged them in class through hands-on fieldwork or research at sea, others did not credit the program for initiating this outcome. A few respondents commented on the fact that they were already engaged in classes due to their love of their home institution or academics as a whole, so it was natural that that would carry over to SEA Semester. Another said that while SEA Semester did not increase his/her engagement, it definitely encouraged it to continue. However, other alumni felt that SEA Semester was the spark that changed their classroom experience. “This is a huge one. I understood [from my SEA Semester] that teachers are people too - they are approachable and can better help me when they know me. *Especially important for students that go to large universities” (Oregon State University). Finally, one alumna shared what I find to be a very interesting testimonial for someone from a woman’s college who enrolled in a coed program, saying, “I spoke up more in these classes than in about 95% of my classes at my regular school” (Smith College).

The fourth and final outcome presented in Section II of the alumni survey, “Greater critical thinking skills,” elicited nineteen open-ended answers, the lowest response rate of

Section II. The top two most commonly used words in those responses were “research” (second most frequently used word) and “learned” (third most used).

Classroom Figure Learned Project Research Students

Open-ended responses from those who selected “Yes” or “Somewhat” overwhelmingly credited three aspects of SEA Semester for this gain in skills: the independent research, theory-to-practice methodology, or shipboard environment.

The first – independent research – elicited comments such as, “Many very practical elements of research outside of a laboratory environment were very sensible and yet entirely new to me. I had a better idea of real world considerations after this experience” (Wellesley College) and, “It helped me in planning research projects and knowing all of the pieces needed to successfully plan one” (University of San Diego). The second aspect – theory-to-practice or hands-on learning – was credited through responses such as, “I liked how I had to apply what I learned in the classroom to actual research skills at sea” (Cornell University) and, “I have never been pushed harder to learn and to apply what I have learned in a practical way. Everything required critical thinking” (Northeastern University). The last program characteristic – shipboard life – was referenced in statements including, “The concept of situational awareness, ever-relevant aboard ship, has been incredibly useful in my life as a student and professional. SEA allowed me a safe place to learn to think critically and anticipate next steps and potential setbacks” (Anonymous) and, “Absolutely. The necessity of critical thinking on deck was out if this world. You had to observe, analyze, act, and communicate in one fell swoop” (Scripps College). One alumna summed up the benefits of this LLP outcome as produced by SEA Semester by saying, “SEA provides much greater critical thinking as students are put in

situations that most never can even imagine in a positive way. SEA changes the way one thinks” (Temple University).

I closed the alumni survey by gathering some basic personal details including name, school, whether or not their institution offered living-learning programs, and whether or not they had been a member of one (and if so, which). Fifty-three out of 152 respondents to the first question confirmed that their college/university offered LLPs (34.9%). Only twenty-three out of 134 respondents to the second question indicated that they had been active in an LLP on their campus (17.2%). Some LLPs reflected a more residential design including a Foreign Language House (Brigham Young University), Dewey House for Civic Engagement (University of Vermont), and Substance Temperate/Free (Anonymous). Other alumni had participated in more curricular or topical LLPs including the Global Living Learning Community (Colorado College), Sustainable Living Learning Community (Elon University), and a Community Service Based Learning Community (SUNY Environmental Science & Forestry).

In total, 41.6% of the 154 alumni respondents who completed the survey agreed wholeheartedly (with all “Yes” answers) that SEA Semester embodies the characteristics of a living-learning program; eight of those 64 respondents were active in an LLP on their home campus. Despite the more balanced responses across the three choices of “Yes,” “Somewhat,” or “No” in Section II, even more alumni respondents – 53.2% of the 154 respondents who completed the survey – agreed wholeheartedly (with all “Yes” answers) that SEA Semester produces the outcomes associated with living-learning programs; nine of those 82 respondents were active in an LLP on their home campus.

Table 3a: SEA Semester Alumni Knowledge of Home Institution LLPs

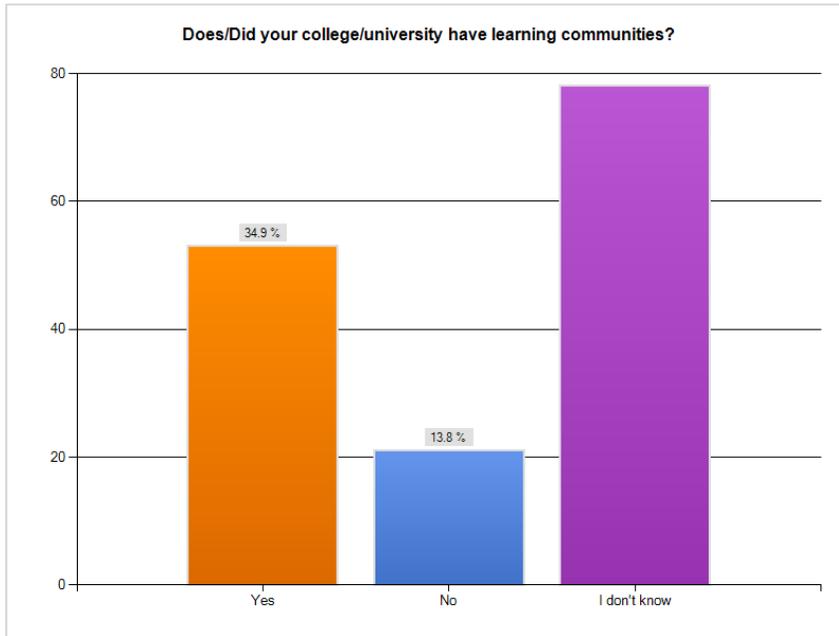
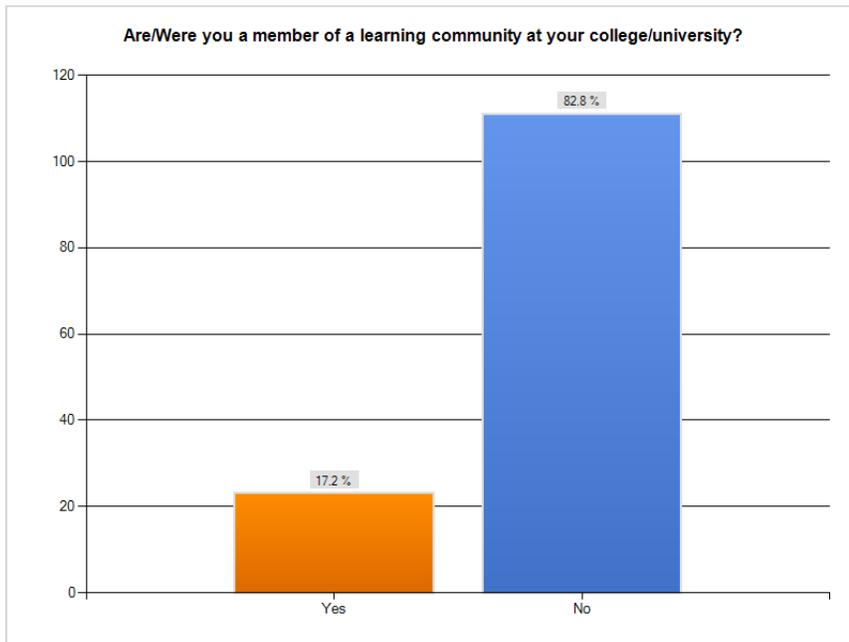


Table 3b: SEA Semester Alumni Participation in Home Institution LLPs



The second survey (Appendix C) was designed to inform the first alumni survey by soliciting complementary perspectives on SEA Semester as an LLP from academic contacts at

sending institutions who are familiar with our programs. Unfortunately, this survey did not return nearly as many responses as the alumni survey did. Out of 112 academic contacts invited to participate, only thirteen began the survey (11.6%) and only six completed it (5.4%). Section I of the academic survey was titled, “Qualities of SEA Semester Programming.” My primary goal was for respondents to compare characteristics of LLPs on their own campuses to characteristics of SEA Semester programs. A secondary – and more subversive – goal was to *remind* them of the unique benefits that SEA Semester can offer their students. For each characteristic, I asked the academic contacts to rate if/how it was reflected in LLPs on their campuses by way of a Likert scale. Their answer choices for each question were “Yes,” “Somewhat,” or “No.” After asking respondents to rank how prominent each SEA Semester characteristic was in their own institution’s LLPs, I asked them to expand upon their answers, if applicable, through open-ended responses.

The majority of respondents indicated that seven out of the eight SEA Semester characteristics presented were indeed reflected in LLPs on their home campuses, with the percentage of “Yes” responses for those questions ranging from 50% to 75%. The characteristic that resulted in the least agreement – “Foundation for leadership development” – only elicited a positive response of 37.5%. This was satisfying to me, especially given that we will be offering a new course as of this summer entitled, “Leadership in a Dynamic Environment.” By virtue of the sea component in particular, we know that our programs excel at fostering leadership skills. Now we will be formalizing that component of SEA Semester programming and attaching academic credit to it as well.

Section II of the academic survey contained only one open-ended question: “Based on your knowledge and understanding of SEA Semester programs, do you think we fit the model of

a Learning Community/Living & Learning Community? If so, why?" Six out of the seven academic contacts who offered open-ended responses responded positively by way of language such as "Yes," "Clearly," or "Absolutely." They cited aspects such as living *and* working together; participation in rotating shipboard jobs via the watch system to promote shared knowledge; real-world experience; and being part of a community and team where actions lead to consequences. One respondent who had participated on one of our five-day Colleague Voyages – our version of a program site visit – had this to say:

Absolutely. So closely knit, relying on one another, living and learning together in every single sense of the word. One reason I enjoyed my time on the educators' voyage is because it was a really unique time to see in very real terms with real consequences what it means to be part of a community and part of a team – you HAVE to fulfill your role, or else, like, you know. We could all drown. ;) That's a powerful and transformative learning experience. (Colorado College)

The two other respondents felt less strongly that SEA Semester could be embraced as an LLP, though neither disagreed outright. One cited the fact that students conduct their research projects on an individual basis rather than in groups. The other went on to say:

In some ways yes, but you'd need a critical mass of students from this institution to make it truly equivalent. Worthy as SEA is, that's unlikely. LCs here are also very much a chance for students to bond together, with the institution, at the institution. (Syracuse University)

I find this response very interesting. First, I was surprised to hear that this individual thought the only way SEA Semester might be equivalent to LLPs at Syracuse is by enrolling a majority of Syracuse students. SEA Semester not only brings together students from different

disciplines but from different institutions as well. I believe that this added layer of complexity produces an even richer learning experience, as students have to develop individual skills while at the same time building a community without the security of a pre-established campus culture. Second, I would argue that SEA Semester students absolutely do bond with SEA as an institution. Out of 508 SEA Semester students who enrolled between Fall 2011 and Spring 2014, sixty (11.8%) were referred by SEA Semester alumni. Similarly, the rate of alumni participation in the SEA Annual Fund was a whopping 19% in fiscal year 2013. This challenges the alumni giving rate at four-year universities including Harvard University (19%), the University of Virginia (19%), Cornell University (21%), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (22%), a statistic which I find to be very impressive for a study abroad program (The Alumni Factor, 2014). These relatively high rates of participation in student referrals and annual giving tell me that our alumni do indeed bond with SEA even as a short-term experience, and in some ways are more loyal to our institution than the one at which they spend four years.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although the responses in Section II of the first survey demonstrated that alumni were less fully convinced that SEA Semester had produced the outcomes most commonly associated with LLPs as compared to it embodying the characteristics of them, alumni respondents still overwhelmingly supported the hypothesis that SEA Semester can be defined as a living and learning community. None of the nine characteristics or outcomes presented in the survey elicited less than 90.5% agreement from alumni via a “Yes” or “Somewhat” response.

However, despite the overwhelming support from both alumni and academic contact respondents of SEA Semester as an LLP, Tables 3a and 3b above provide some interesting information as far as the success of a reframing initiative is concerned. First, Table 3a indicates

that despite my hypothesis that learning communities today play a more central role in higher education, approximately half of my alumni respondents did not even know if their home institution offered LLPs. Second, Table 3b demonstrates that the majority of SEA Semester students are not active in a LLP on their home campus, so perhaps advertising the LLP characteristics of the program would not necessarily attract more students. Both charts tell me that while reframing SEA Semester as a living-learning program for purposes of marketing may be successful within an academic market (i.e. sending institution faculty and study abroad advisors), it may have little to no impact on our primary market: undergraduates themselves.

Overall, I feel that reframing SEA Semester as a living-learning program in education abroad is a viable initiative, especially for purposes of institutional relationships. The closer we can tie our program description to language that is becoming more well-known on a growing number of college and university campuses, the more understood our program model will become by those who can truly influence enrollment: faculty and education abroad advisors. Such language may also clarify what are often common misconceptions, especially the typical confusion with other shipboard programs by similar names. Perhaps most importantly, this exercise will not seek to redefine who we are, but will rather honor our history and build upon what our alumni and others feel are our greatest strengths: all with a goal of securing another forty-three years of SEA Semester programming for another 7,500 undergraduates.

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APPENDIX A

Subject: Please Participate: Brief Survey to Benefit SEA Semester Marketing Efforts

Date: Tuesday, March 11, 2014 at 12:09:04 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Katharine W. Enos

To: kenos@sea.edu

Dear SEA Alumnus,

Greetings from Woods Hole! I am writing in my capacity as SEA's Dean of Admissions & Marketing but am contacting you because I am currently finishing my graduate degree in international education. My capstone project focuses on redefining SEA Semester as a "living and learning community" in education abroad.

As you may know, more and more colleges and universities are incorporating learning communities into their educational models. My capstone will reframe SEA Semester as a living and learning community in order to better align our program description with what many of our sending institutions view as a beneficial student experience.

Since you participated in SEA Semester in the last five years, I invite you to participate in this very brief survey about your own experience on our program. If you have a moment to share your thoughts, please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sitcapstone2014>. This survey will remain active until next Monday, March 17.

I hope you will take part in this important project. The goal is for my findings to ultimately contribute to future SEA Semester marketing and institutional relations efforts, leading to stronger enrollment in our programs. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about this project.

In the meantime, thank you in advance for your participation!

Katharine

Katharine W. Enos
Dean of Admissions & Marketing
Sea Education Association
SEA Semester

APPENDIX B



SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community

Welcome & Information

Thank you for taking a few moments to comment on your SEA Semester experiences for purposes of this capstone project.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY.

Should you choose to participate, your responses will be part of a research project that is designed to reframe SEA Semester for marketing and institutional relations purposes. I will present the findings of this report to a group of peers and faculty at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute.

If you continue with this survey, you will be asked a series of questions. You need not answer all of the questions. Your results will be shared electronically at the end of the survey.

If you encounter any technical difficulties or have any questions about the subject matter, please contact me.

Thank you again for your participation!

Katharine W. Enos
Dean of Admissions & Marketing
SEA Semester
kenos@sea.edu

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community

Confidentiality Statement & Informed Consent

This survey will not require your name. If you choose to share it, your name will be recorded, but your identity will be protected in this and any future publications.

Information pertaining to this research, including any recordings or personal information associated with the research, will be held in a secure location.

* 1. By checking the box below, I understand my role in the research project and agree to participate.

I understand my role and agree to participate.

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community

Qualities of a Living/Learning Community

The following is a list of characteristics generally agreed upon as representative of a living/learning community.

2. Did your SEA Semester experience offer any of the below characteristics of a living/learning community?

	Yes	Somewhat	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The opportunity to connect with a cohort of students who share a common academic major or area of interest • <i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A platform to build lifelong relationship with peers with similar interests and goals • <i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social and academic interaction with other students, faculty, and staff in a residential environment • <i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personalized interaction with faculty • <i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A curriculum that combines two or more linked courses with a common theme • <i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The opportunity for guided study groups • <i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community

Outcomes of a Living/Learning Community

The following is a list of outcomes generally agreed upon as produced by a living/learning community.

3. Did your SEA Semester experience result in any of the below outcomes of a living/learning community?

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>No</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved self-confidence • <p><i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expanded perspectives • <p><i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased engagement in classes • <p><i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater critical thinking skills • <p><i>(Please expand upon your answer, if applicable)</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community

Respondent Information (OPTIONAL)

4. Name:

5. College/University attended while at SEA Semester:

6. Does/Did your college/university have learning communities?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

7. Are/Were you a member of a learning community at your college/university?

- Yes
- No

If so, which one?

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community

Thank You!

Your participation in this survey is much appreciated.

If you have questions about the content or results, please contact:

Katharine W. Enos
Dean of Admissions & Marketing
Sea Education Association/SEA Semester
kenos@sea.edu

APPENDIX C



SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community (Academic)

Welcome & Information

Thank you for taking a few moments to share your thoughts for purposes of this capstone project.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY.

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Thank you again for your participation!

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SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community (Academic)

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I understand my role and agree to participate.

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community (Academic)

Qualities of SEA Semester Programming

The following is a list of qualities that are representative of all SEA Semester programs.

Please rank how these qualities align with elements of Learning Communities (LCs) or Living & Learning Communities (LLCs) on your own campus, and expand upon your selections if applicable.

2. Are the below characteristics of SEA Semester also reflected in LCs/LLCs on your own campus?

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>No</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A combination of interdisciplinary courses with a common academic theme • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A low student-faculty ratio allowing for more personal attention • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A design that allows students to work together to tackle large scale global issues from multidisciplinary perspectives • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of teamwork, decision-making, and problem-solving skills in a real world environment • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing levels of responsibility and independence • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close knit residential living environment • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation for leadership development • <i>(If Yes/Somewhat, how so?)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 450px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community (Academic)

SEA Semester as a LC/LLC

3. Based on your knowledge and understanding of SEA Semester programs, do you think we fit the model of a Learning Community/Living & Learning Community?

If so, why?

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community (Academic)

Respondent Information (OPTIONAL)

4. Name:

5. College/University at which you are employed:

6. Position/Department:

7. Does your institution have Learning Communities/Living & Learning Communities?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

SEA Semester as a Living/Learning Community (Academic)

Thank You!

Your participation in this survey is much appreciated.

If you have questions about the content or results, please contact:

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