

## **Global Crossings Evaluation Report**

### **History / Background**

The Global Crossings Living Learning Community (LLC) at George Mason University is a Living Learning Community wherein domestic and international students live together and participate in activities together. The Global Crossings curriculum consists of an academic course, co-curricular programming, and housing-based activities with an emphasis on intercultural engagement and global citizenship. Global Crossings is intended for students from all majors that are interested in adding an international aspect to their university experience. Domestic students and international students are paired as roommates and the entire community lives on the same floor that they share with the ACCESS LLC for international freshman. In addition to shared living quarters, the Global Crossings LLC students participate in a weekly course that is designed as an integral component to the success of the community (“Living Learning Communities | Housing and Residence Life | George Mason University” 2013). The coursework in the class covers topics of cross-cultural interaction, global justice, and leadership development depending on the semester.

The Global Crossing Living Learning Community is now in the first half of its third academic year. So far, the Global Crossings LLC has served 63 students, including the 30 students in this year’s cohort. The academic portion of the Global Crossings is a partnership between Mason’s Office of International Programs and Services, the Office of Global and International Strategies (GO), and the Mason LLCs program. The faculty adviser from GO is the primary course instructor. The OIPS Global Crossings LLC coordinator develops and implements co-curricular portion of the program, in coordination with the GC LLC faculty adviser and OIPS Internationalization Director. Additionally, two Resident Advisors (RAs) live on the floor with the Global Crossings and ACCESS students and are responsible for organizing special programming and addressing student life concerns. The Global Crossings GO faculty adviser and Global Crossings OIPS LLC coordinator meet weekly to share programming and curriculum ideas and student concerns. In addition, they meet 2-3 times a semester with the Resident Director. Finally, Global Crossings class leadership and Global Crossings RAs meet weekly to discuss the floor dynamics and housing-based activities.

### **Purpose of the Evaluation**

George Mason offers the Global Crossings LLC as part of its effort to provide international opportunities to students rather or not they travel abroad. For domestic students, these opportunities include gaining the ability to successfully interact with students from various cultures and learning about different parts of the world without having to travel. For international students, Global Crossings should provide an opportunity to practice English and provide the comfortable environment that is so vital to the success of students far from home. For all students, Global Crossings should provide opportunities to learn about the culture of others and make friends from around the world. Regardless of origin, each student in Global Crossings should leave the community with improved global competency<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> “What is Global Competence?”, [www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

For Fall 2013, the focus of the Global Crossings LLC's course component, "Global Studies: Personal and Cultural Dimensions of Leadership" is to "help students in the Global Crossings Living Learning Community engage in personal reflection and discussion with their peers to foster leadership skills, cross-cultural awareness, and a focus on their roles in the local and global community." Since the evaluation period was only half way through the semester, the evaluation focuses on measuring whether or how much the Global Crossings LLC feels both like a global community and a family to the student participants. For the purposes of this evaluation, we define community as a group of individuals who have a common goal. Because of the timing of this report, it cannot reflect the success of all of the Global Crossings LLC's goals for the 2013-2014 cohort. Furthermore, this report focuses on the opinions of the student participants and not the content and deliverance of the programming.

### **Methodology**

The data in this report was compiled from multiple evaluation methods in order to provide comprehensive results.

**Questionnaires / surveys:** For the initial part of the evaluation, 20 student participants in Global Crossings filled out a 21 question survey. The survey was composed of Likert scale, "choose one or more" questions and written response questions. The questionnaires were chosen as an evaluation tool because they provide a broad overview of the program under evaluation and give students a chance to voice their opinions anonymously. All charts in this report represent data from the questionnaires.

**Focus group:** Next, six students participated in a 45 minute focus group. The discussion was designed to follow-up on the views expressed in the questionnaires and to gather detailed opinions of the group view. The focus group format was chosen as it allows the participants to provide detailed responses and to follow-up on each other's statement. Additionally, the focus group format gives the evaluator opportunities to pose follow-up questions and to observe non-verbal cues.

**Personal interviews:** As the final leg of the evaluation data collection, two students were interviewed for 45 minutes to an hour. The interview was designed to explore topics raised in previous discussions. The one on one environment provided opportunity for the respondents to answer honestly and directly. Additionally, the personal interview format was chosen to provide the respondents uninterrupted time to concentrate on providing a personal and well-formed answer.

### **Findings**

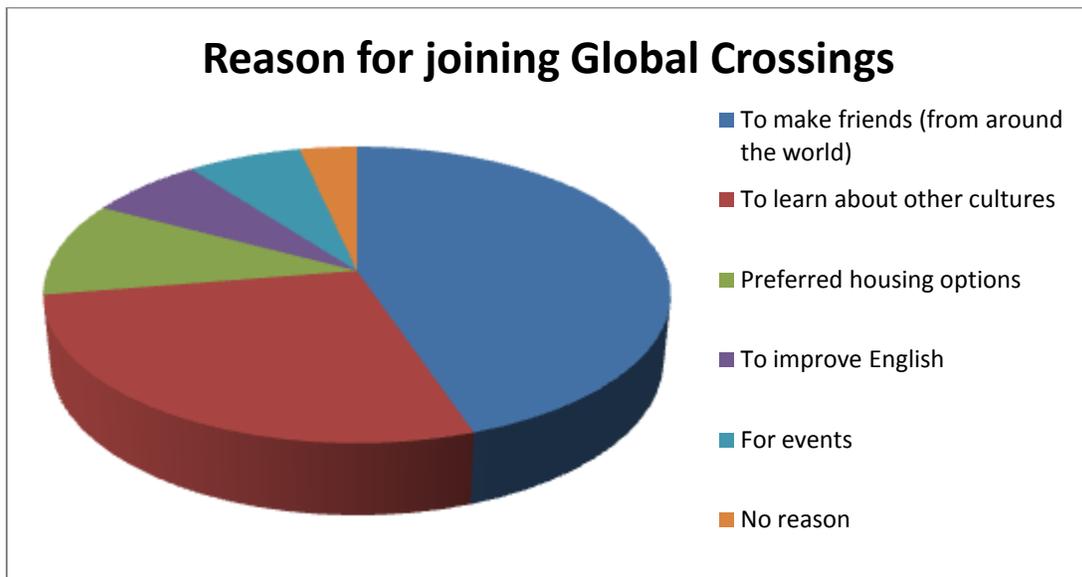
In the effort to measure whether the Global Crossings LLC feels like a global community and family to the students, the evaluator discovered four main themes of relevance:

1. Shared interest in building international friendships;
2. Shared interest in learning about the world;
3. Discussions about the Global Crossings LLC curriculum;
4. Tension between community expectation and reality

As evidenced from the data below, the Global Crossings LLC does already feel like a community to some participants. Considering that the data for this report was compiled one fourth of the way thru the year, it is likely that many more Global Crossings students will soon begin to view their Global Crossings peers and leaders as a familial unit especially if changes in a few key areas are implemented.

### ***Building friendships and social relationships***

45% of Global Crossings students reported that their primary reason for joining the Global Crossings LLC was to make friends with other LLC students. Specifically, the students wish to meet others from various cultures and backgrounds around the world. Over half the students surveyed reported having a strong interest in the personal and cultural background of their peers. This suggests a motivation behind the community openness, namely a desire to make friends.



The students who participated in the focus groups and interviews reported feeling that it was easy to make friends in the Global Crossings community, especially within the dorm setting. The students Global Crossing feel that their community is more open than other LLCs. For example, they report feeling comfortable approaching each other for casual conversation both in the confines of class and the dorm as well as around campus. Furthermore, the students surveyed reported feeling proud that they live in such a welcoming and fun community.

The Global Crossings students expressed two prominent ways in which the students in Global Crossings can develop deeper relationships. First, students want more opportunities to talk to each other. This desire includes more organic conversations between one or more students as well as part of scripted activities in the dorm or classroom. In a questionnaire, one student claimed that “talking is underrated!” The students in the focus group and interviews discussed the usefulness of the Resident Advisors (RAs) taking care to bring students together. Some students need the encouragement of others before they agree to participate in group conversations or events. The students also responded positively toward the movement in the class curriculum towards small group discussions.

Second, the students feel that more scheduled activities and excursions will provide opportunities to bond. This requests lie within the scope of the class as well as the living community and therefore falls under the responsibility of both the class leaders and the RAs. The students who participated in CG the previous academic year fondly recalled a trip to a Maryland farm where the students had to rely on each other to complete set tasks under semi-stressful conditions. This is noteworthy because those students felt that this particular event was responsible for the closeness that many of the students felt with each other for the remainder of the year. The largest event so far in the 2013-2014 academic year was a day of gardening in the on campus Potomac Heights garden. Students were mixed on their enjoyment of the activity but none reflected on it as an experience for growing friendships or community. Students also reported enjoyment of RA organized activities such as movie nights, dinner parties and the wall mural. Interestingly, students in the focus group mentioned that Global Crossings participants, including themselves, should also be responsible for organizing activities and inviting their peers. They believe that the responsibility could not and should not rest with the leaders but that the students could benefit from some direction in this area. For example, a few students positively mentioned an on-going language lab run by a fellow student as a good way to practice language as well as learn about each other. The project is of the student's own initiative based on a need she observed within the community.

One noticeable barrier of the building of friendship and community is what the students called "grouping". They feel that many members of the community are "grouped off" with peers that speak the same native language. The students that do not speak a particular group's dominant language then feel that they are unwelcome in that group. These groups tend to plan their own activities and events that may or may not include others. However, the same students also reports that the students who participate in the ethnic groups do connect with others when they are alone.<sup>2</sup> As another student pointed out, this type of self-organizing is natural, especially for international populations. These students are far from home and are constantly operating in a foreign language and culture. Some culture groups offer comfort to these students. However, when asked if CG feels like a family, one student responded "Sort of but not like previous years; we are too segmented."

---

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the interviews and focus group did not include a student from the groups in discussion. Consequently, the evaluator was not able to follow up regarding language issues or other causes behind the self-exclusion.

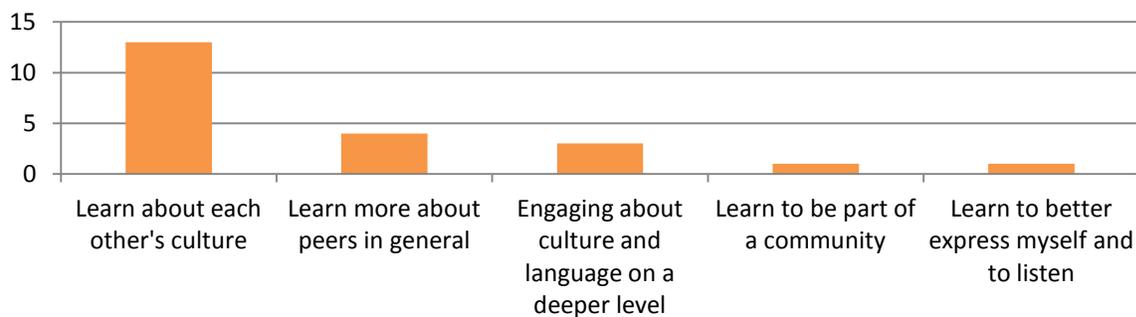
## Has GC helped increase your knowledge and interest in the personal and cultural perspective of your peers?



### *Learning about international cultures*

It is not surprising to learn that Global Crossings students are highly interested in learning about the world including the cultural similarities and differences of its inhabitants. Besides making friends, the opportunity to meet and learn about students from around the world was attractive to a majority of Global Crossings students. Specifically, the students hope that Global Crossings can serve as a catalyst to guide the participants through the process of cultural discovery. According to the students, the Global Crossings community has made much progress towards these goals but also has some opportunity to develop further.

### What Global Crossing Students hope to learn more about the rest of the year

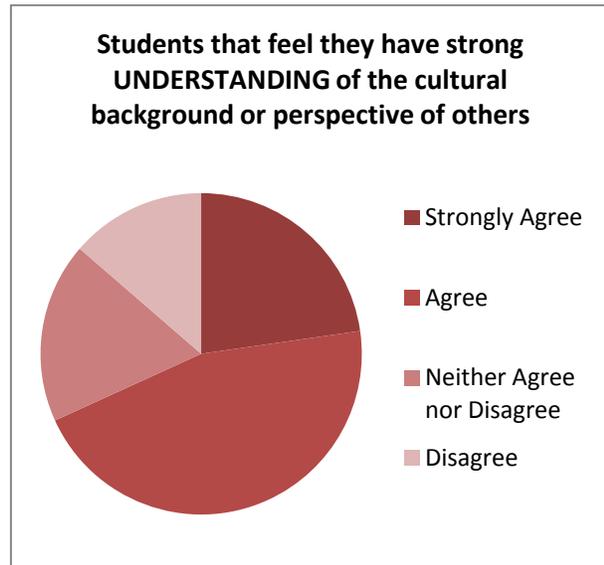
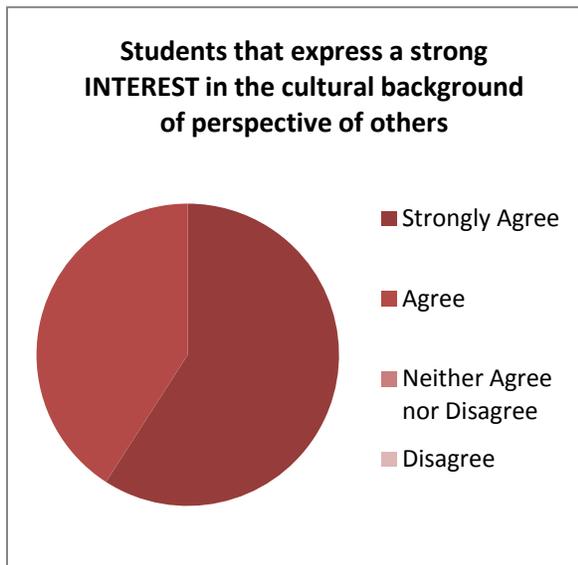


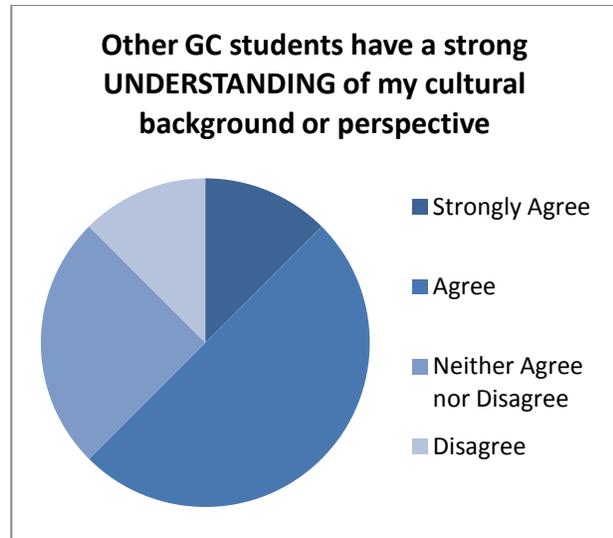
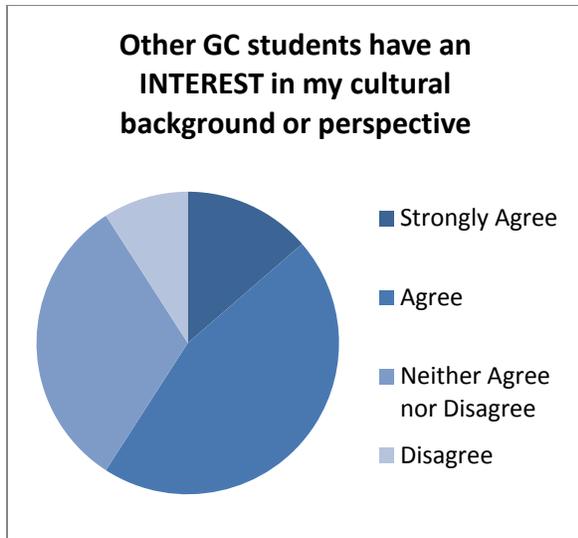
\*0-15 represents the number of student responses to surveys organized by theme.

Some Global Crossings students shared their desire to learn the meanings behind the “skin deep” items that are often focused on during international events. For example, one student requested the opportunity to have deeper level conversations about not only what various cultures do differently, but why. Another student explained his interest in the world’s cultures as an opportunity to learn the positive side of each culture. He could then apply the best ideas in the world into his life like a collection

of global best practices. Other students expressed interest in learning specific communication skills that would assist in breaking cultural barriers. A student remarked on her desire to show an honest respect and interest in lives and backgrounds of others. Answers from the survey questionnaire indicate that many students believe that the Global Crossings class has already taught them collaboration and communication skills but that the students hope to learn even more.

In the questionnaires, students were asked to comment on their interest in the cultural background and perspectives of others versus what they believed were their peers' perspectives of them. As demonstrated on the charts below, the students indicated some discrepancy between their own interests versus their understanding in the cultures of others. Furthermore, students demonstrated less knowledge of their peers' interest or cultural understanding. This could reflect a lack of communication about cultural perspectives. Indeed, when asked what Global Crossings could do to improve their understanding of the perspectives of peers, the students pin-pointed the following potential solutions: more activities, interactive large and small group discussion, lessons about cultures and more time together.



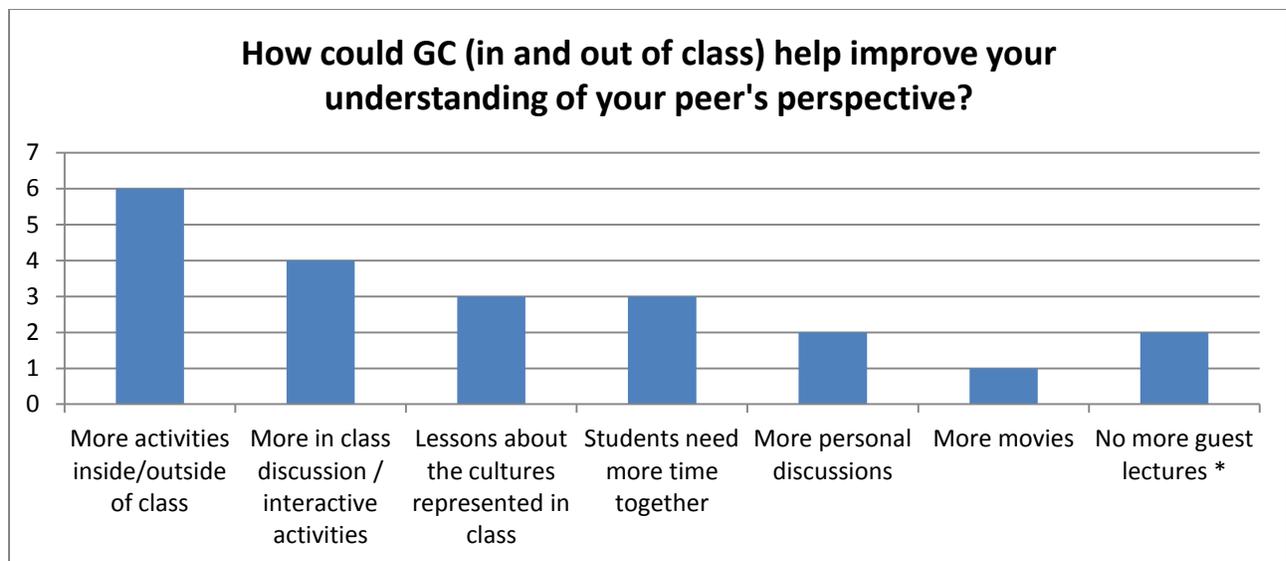


\*Data from surveys.

### ***Co-curricular offerings***

While the content of courses and extra-curricular activities cannot directly speak to the success of an LLC as a community or family unit, the success of the student's shared experiences is relevant. Course and event content can empower students to work together and learn more about each other. However, without the right direction, it is possible for students to encounter each other in the classroom and the dorm hallway for multiple years without developing communal relationships. With these reasons in mind, the evaluator surveyed the students on their experiences in the classroom and opinions on the Global Crossings class and student life opportunities.

Regarding the Global Crossings class, the most common themes in the questionnaire and focus group responses was a desire for fewer presentations from visiting speakers and more activities and discussion amongst the Global Crossings group. The Fall 2013 curriculum included presentations of guest speakers from Mason service units such as Counseling Services, Career Services and Learning Services. Although some students enjoyed one or more particular speakers, most identified the lectures as the least valuable to their growth. One student remarked that since they already have enough initiative to move to another country for their education, most international students are self-motivated enough to find information about university resources on their own. Others feel that since class time and therefore time with each other is limited, the time spent on guest lectures, valuable or not, could be better allocated to more relevant activities. Conversely, the guest lectures could be at least better tailored to the needs and leadership strengths of the particular student population. Indeed, informal conversations with the class teachers reflected a desire to move away from the speaker model for similar reasons.

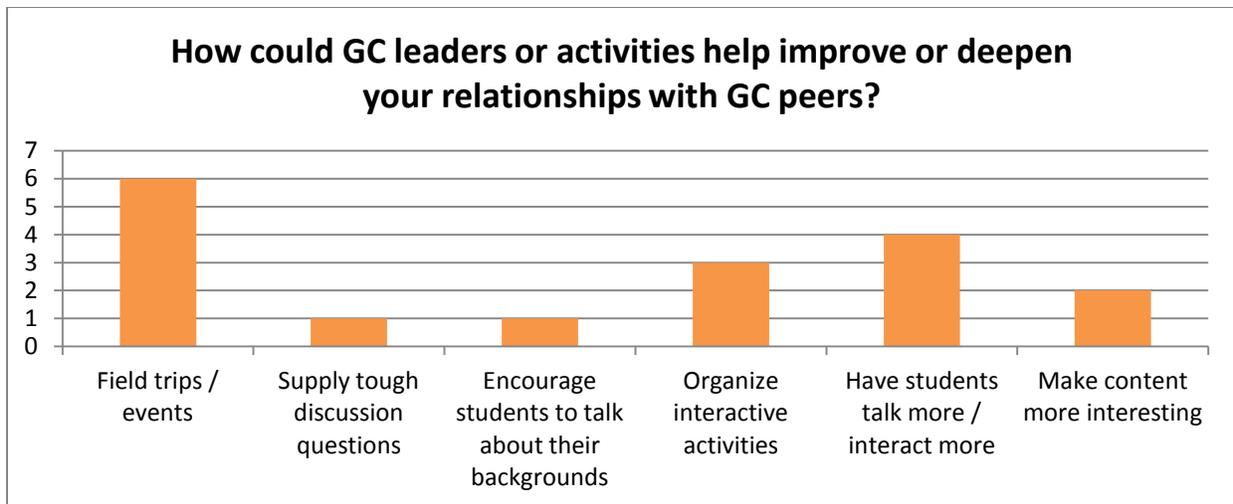


\*0-7 represents the number of student responses to surveys organized by theme.

*It is notable that when asked about the class item least valuable to their growth 40% of student respondents identified the guest lectures as least useful.*

The hope for the addition of more activities inside and outside of the classroom was a popular theme across all three evaluation tools. Some students reported that they and others rely on formalized gatherings to meet each other and hope that more recurring and preplanned events are added. For example, an RA in previous years hosted Sunday dinners where students would cook and eat together. There are already similar events this year but the students feel that something is missing. Indeed, students reflected strong appreciation for the work of the RAs while noting the power the RA holds over the community dynamic. It appears that the more out-going the RA, the more likely they are to influence group participation in formal and informal events. Students report having made friends at these events. Other students expressed disappointment that many events are held when they are in class or that they did not know about them. Conversely, Global Crossings students also feel that activities should be optional so that students can choose to participate based on their level of interest or availability.

Regarding the Global Crossings class, many students most enjoyed the semi-structured large and small group discussion activities. Some regarded these as the best way to get to know each other on a deeper level and to challenge their own cultural assumptions. These discussions allow students to talk about topics that would not come up in day to day conversation. Students expressed interest in more of these activities including the introduction of even more challenging/controversial discussion questions. In the focus group, one student requested that the discussion groups are mixed up more often. Another suggested that a good way to establish successful friendships would be to group students by common interests for some activities.



\*0-7 represents the number of student responses to surveys organized by theme.

### ***Tensions between community expectation and reality***

The Global Crossings LLC is designed for students who are interested in global issues and international cultures. Therefore, the initial expectation for any student participating in the Global Crossings community is that they both share interest in the international experience and are willing to participate in all components of the LLC structure including class and activities. If the common goal of the CG community is to learn about cultures and make diverse friendships, then the success of the community hinges on participation and group effort.

As in most communities, there are a few members of the Global Crossings community who have joined for other reasons. Some include former ACCESS students who want to stay with their peers and students who want to live in building and floor in which Global Crossings is located. Despite their motivations, some students of these students who reported having joined Global Crossings because the 4<sup>th</sup> floor is the “cool floor” are also relatively active participants within the community.

Students in the focus group identified the physical structure of their living environment as a barrier to a community feel. The floor where both the Global Crossings LLC and the ACCESS LLC is located is split into two sections. Global Crossings students can live on either side of that barrier and even when on the same side rarely run into each other. The students identified the layout issue as a reason why planned gatherings are so valuable.

Some students who participated in the Global Crossings LLC previous years admit to having heightened expectations based on those previous experiences. This seems to bring positive and challenging aspects to the community. These students can help repeat positive experiences from past years but also tend to share with their peers dissatisfaction that this year “is not as good as before”.

As mentioned previously in this report, students (and Global Crossings class teachers) raised concerns about student grouping, often based around ethnic identities. This makes some students feel unwelcome or disappointed at the opportunity lost for new friendships or community experiences. As

one student stated, “the Global Crossings LLC is meant to be about collaboration and to be for everyone.” [The cliques create a barrier to that ideal.]

### **Recommendations**

Based on the opinion of the evaluator, the following recommendations may be useful in transforming the Global Crossings LLC group in to a community.

For the class leaders and RAs:

- Implement more opportunities for organized discussion over culture, history, interests and other themes amongst the students.
- Continue to pursue ways to reduce cliques or student grouping.
- Consider the feasibility of one or more off campus activities.

For the students in the Global Crossings LLC:

- Attend the planned activities and encourage your peers to do so.
- When you see a need within the community no matter how small, see what you can do to fill it.
- Remember that the community ideal, to learn about and commune with students of other cultures, will only work if you actively seek opportunities to learn and commune.
- Remember that the Global Crossings LCC is your community and your experience. You will get out of it what you put into it.

For future evaluations:

The three methods of evaluation, questionnaire, focus group and personal interview work well. If choosing only one method, the evaluator recommends multiple small focus groups. For future questionnaires, the questions should be explained orally so that ESL speakers understand fully. Additionally, the leaders and evaluator should create buy-in for the projects with the students which will create a participatory environment. For focus groups, and interviews, a larger sample should be taken making sure that representatives for all cultural and social groups are represented. Future evaluations should also focus on intercultural competency and the success of the Global Crossings LLC curriculum.