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Rare, but Promising, Involvement of Faculty in Residence Hall Programming

M. Neil Browne

Bowling Green State University, nbrown2@bgsu.edu

Spencer Headworth

Kandice Saum

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Authors: Browne, M. Neil

Headworth, Spencer

Saum, Kandice

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THE RARE, BUT PROMISING, INVOLVEMENT OF FACULTY IN RESIDENCE HALL PROGRAMMING

Students regularly encounter faculty in classrooms. Student affairs personnel interact with students in the main when students are beyond the classroom. Both groups are pledged to encourage student development, but they rarely collaborate. What are the reasons for this divided effort? How can the separate spheres of faculty and student affairs work together such that learners can benefit from the partnership? This article reports on the insights gained from the five-year experience of two senior faculty who lived in a residence hall and endeavored to encourage greater academic presence in residence hall programming. In the interest of encouraging additional collaboration on other campuses, the article warns of obstacles and suggests promising strategies for overcoming them.

The role of a faculty member in most colleges and universities is complex. Certainly, the faculty member is a teacher, but he or she is so much more. Service and research responsibilities are vigorous competitors for a faculty member's energies. Consequently, it is not surprising that faculty are often unaware of the student development contributions of student affairs personnel. Many of the support roles that make effective classroom learning possible are too frequently just taken for granted.

As a result, student affairs personnel often see faculty as failing in their professional role as developmental agents for, as they are likely to say, "the whole student." Student affairs personnel experience training that focuses on adult development, learning styles, cognition, and human communication, while faculty members specialize in the knowledge and skills of a given discipline. (Lovett, 2006).

Faculty are often largely unaware of the support services provided by student affairs personnel. If asked, they would surely express recognition that their institutions have offices for Residence Life, Dean of Students, Financial Aid, and Alumni Affairs, but those offices appear peripheral to the faculty member's educational role.

This paper attempts to create interest in a collaborative possibility that both respects (1) the faculty member's emphasis on the growth of the mind and (2) the student affairs personnel's knowledge of the full life of a college student. Involving faculty in programming in the residence halls requires the right mix of faculty and Resident Life support for such collaboration. But when this collaboration is done thoughtfully, much is to be gained by creating a more seamless integration in the life of the classroom and the dynamics of residence hall living. Faculty want students to be more involved in the learning aspect of higher education, and one promising avenue for that engagement is programming in residence halls.

Involving faculty in programming, sponsored by student affairs, has potential benefits that are difficult to match when such collaboration is missing. Collaboration between faculty and student affairs personnel have had documented successes in learning communities and in certain student organizations. (Pace, Blumreigh, and Merkle, 2006). But the essential attribute of these successes seems to be a shared vision of purpose. Kuh and Banta (2000). The communicative strength of the partnership

is made possible by joint goals. Once that hurdle is overcome, both groups can search for optimal techniques for moving toward the goals. However, proceeding with collaborative projects without that common understanding threatens to bring to the surface the differences that make such collaborations rare in the first place. Long-standing differences, as well as specialization and segregation of institutional objectives, stand as barriers between academics and student-affairs personnel working successfully. (Kuh and Banta, 2000).

Historically, student affairs offices and faculty departments have been separate entities. Segregation of duties relating to students, career specializations, and even physical distance has put these offices in less-than-optimal situations for collaboration. As Philpott and Strange (2003) note, divisions among university constituents date back beyond the mid-Nineteenth century, to such an extent that entire organizations (such as the American College Personnel Association [ACPA] and the National Association of Student-Personnel Administrators [NASPA]) were formed to try to mend the territorial nature of the separate offices. (Philpott and Strange, 2003). Infrequent contact between divisions, ignorance of other offices' policies and goals, as well as general struggles over things like physical accommodations and institutional funding have all contributed further to the lack of collaboration between academic and student affairs. (Wergin, Mason, and Munson, 1976).

Obstacles to faculty and student affairs generally can be classified one of three ways: cultural-historical barriers; bureaucratic-structural barriers; and leadership barriers. Cultural-historical obstacles exist mainly because of disciplinary segregation within a university setting, and are amplified by largely varied norms and values, a lack of respect and understanding, as well as different goal and incentive orientations between academic and student-affairs personnel. (Kuh and Banta, 2000). Bureaucratic-structural barriers are largely a result of separate and relatively autonomous groups of administrators within university settings, administrators who are responsible for budgetary authority as well as organization. Perceived status differences between disciplines — and between academic and student-affairs offices — are a result of the discrepancies in funding and management of the different areas within the university. Finally, a lack of clear leadership making student-affairs and faculty involvement a priority to staff members advances the inertia of minimal collaboration among departments (Kuh and Banta, 2000).

As will be discussed later when relating the collaborative experience that generated this paper, the promise of collaboration is exciting. For example, when describing the University of Illinois' residentially based academic initiative "The Unit of One," Schein (2005) describes one of the best and most often used techniques to join academic and student affairs: the residential learning community (RLC) also known as a living-learning community /center (LLC). Unit One was designed specifically as a way to bring academic programming directly into the residence halls where students live (Schein 2005). Schein also illustrates how having faculty in residence directly within the halls can help foster liberal learning and student growth. Faculty and student affairs work in collaboration to plan programming, student involvement/initiatives, and a structuring of the community based on academic themes as well as student-specific needs (Schein 2005). This kind of partnership between academic and student affairs highlights the possibilities open to administrators, professors, as well as students, when all involved can work to program in a fashion consistent with the transcendent academic goals of the university.

A significant body of recent research suggests the educational multiple benefits from including faculty in residence hall programs. Increased levels of out-of-class interaction between students and faculty are a predictable outcome. Chickering and Gamson (1987) list faculty-student contact as one of their seven key principles for good practice in higher education; a wealth of subsequent research supports this

contention. Specifically, increased levels of contact between faculty and students outside of traditional classroom settings engender benefits in at least three major ways:

improving students' perceptions of their educational experience in college, enhancing mental orientations toward learning, and improving scores on quantifiable measures of student achievement.

As one might intuitively suspect, studies show that students' perceptions of their educational experience brighten when there is increased contact with faculty. For instance, Kuh and Vesper's (1997) comparison of student experiences among institutions highlights the beneficial effects that faculty-student contact can have on subjective experiences in college. Students involved in educational programs capitalizing on these principles perceive themselves as having elevated instructional experiences, in terms of both accomplishment in specific subject areas and in general capabilities such as writing skills, understanding their world, and synthesizing various pieces of knowledge. Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) support this point by demonstrating that self-perceived intellectual and personal development are positively related specifically to the frequency and quality of informal student-faculty relationships. The strongest positive associations with intellectual development are in those cases where faculty contact focuses on intellectual matters. Other research has demonstrated that general levels of satisfaction with the higher education experience rise when there is frequent interpersonal contact with faculty (Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, & Bavry, 1975; Lomport, 1993).

Additional research suggests that increased levels of out-of-class interaction with faculty can positively affect students' mental orientations. Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, and Pascarella (2006) demonstrate that enhanced levels of interaction with faculty have a positive effect on first-year students' attitudes toward the learning process, most significantly increasing openness to diversity and challenge, belief in learning for self-understanding, and internal attributions of academic success. Similarly, a study by Woodside, Wong, and Wiest (1999) revealed that increased levels of interaction with faculty enhance students' scholastic self-concept. Contact between students and faculty plays a critical role in enhancing students' willingness to persist in their educational endeavors. Tinto (1993) demonstrates that faculty-student interactions, including informal encounters outside of the classroom setting, are a critical variable in predicting students' educational persistence; those students whose institutional integration is bolstered by enhanced levels of contact with faculty have greater odds of remaining in college, and the absence of such integration is a strong predictor of attrition.

Studies also show that increased levels of out-of-class contact with faculty can boost students' quantifiable educational outcomes. In one investigation, Pascarella & Terenzini (1978) demonstrate that the quantity and quality of a student's informal interactions with faculty are significantly associated with educational performance during the first year of college. Although varying degrees of association have been found, later studies have yielded similar results, suggesting a considerable relationship between out-of-class interactions and in-class success (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Woodside et al., 1999).

However, the results of these investigations suggest that not every informal contact is equally valuable, and that intellectually focused interactions (such as those provided by residence hall programs incorporating faculty) are most beneficial to student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the benefits to quantifiable learning outcomes provided by increased student-faculty contact are not limited to standard measures of educational attainment such as GPA; for instance, recent research suggests that critical thinking skills are grown through these interactions (Frost, 1991; Terenzini, P., Springer, L., Yaeger, P., Pascarella, E., & Nora, A., 1994).

Faculty-guided, learning-focused residence hall programs are a potentially powerful method for retention and learning. However, very few institutions take advantage of such promise. A recent survey found that 45% of college faculty reported "no awareness" of their role in improving the academic atmosphere of residence halls, while another 19% reported negative opinions regarding their role in such efforts (Rong & Gable, 1999). Why are these experiences so rare? How can they be increased?

The senior author's five-year experience with a Faculty-in-Residence (FIR) program at a public Midwestern university provides the beginnings of an answer to those questions. Because context shapes experience in crucial ways, the first step in sharing any fruits from the FIR experience is a description of the framework and attributes of that particular collaboration between faculty and student affairs.

The starting point in understanding that experience is studying Appendix 1 because the information in the description of the program suggests a faculty role that is almost nothing like the role for which faculty are trained. Almost every faculty member recognizes that the opportunities in academia as a professor are linked to research productivity. Institutions may wax poetic about the significance of teaching at their respective institutions, but faculty at one institution are almost never raided by other institutions because of the alleged pedagogical prowess of the person being sought. Faculty know and understand these priorities of academia.

Yet the description of the FIR program suggests the need for the faculty member to be an "active member" of a residential community. In addition, it lays out expectations of collaborative meetings with residence hall staff and interactions with students during the late evenings when the students are more interested in interactions with faculty in residence. Finally, participants are urged to consider programming activities in such an extensive domain that any faculty who fulfilled this function would be taken far from their comfort zones of specialization.

Hence, OBSTACLE #1 is the understandable reluctance of faculty to engage in a potentially career damaging step that requires skills only moderately related to their classroom activities. Our experience avoided this serious impediment to these collaborations because student affairs wisely recruited two faculty who no longer felt a need to demonstrate their disciplinary acumen to professional colleagues. These faculty members had published over 30 books and two hundred research articles; their resumes were quite adequate for purposes of fulfilling any insecurity needs they might possess. Such faculty are sometimes looking for additional opportunities to create meaning in their own lives and to work closely with undergraduates in an innovative fashion.

The lack of experience of student affairs personnel in working with faculty can cause them to send signals unintentionally that might repel faculty. Many faculty are willing to acknowledge that they focus on intellectual development, and even that they do not believe that such development is the only kind of growth worth seeking. But if student affairs personnel are to be inviting partners to faculty, they need to articulate and reinforce their devotion to cognitive development. Lacking the same kinds of credentials as faculty, student affairs personnel need to be forthright in their support for integration and critical thinking skills.

Consequently, OBSTACLE #2 is miscommunication among the prospective collaborators about the importance of the training and learning outcome foci of the other group. The FIR program at our school had the distinct advantage of two groups of people who, although they had not worked together before, were respectful of each other. The faculty members had familiarized themselves with substantial portions of the literature in college student personnel (CSP) journals, and the student affairs staff

insisted that they shared the faculty devotion to the academic mission of the university. This willingness to trust one another was essential for whatever achievements the FIR program generated. A review of Appendix 1 also makes clear that the FIR program gave faculty broad latitude to create programs. The creativity of faculty was taken as a given, and faculty participants appreciated that vote of confidence.

A major impediment to these collaborations is the general experience of those who program for the residence halls that college students do not want programming. In other words, the programming is a learning input, but it is barren unless the prospective learners see the programming as more interesting and valuable than the plethora of modern pleasures available to them. Both faculty members in the FIR had prior experiences with residence halls that had asked them to lead discussions about academic honesty, upcoming elections, and hints for getting into law or graduate school. In each instance almost no one showed up to partake of these programs.

OBSTACLE #3 is the danger that faculty will prematurely abandon residence hall programming as a lost cause. The faculty in the FIR were very annoyed at first by the apparent lack of interest in their programs. Then they noticed that well-advertised programs about sex were not well attended either. At first, it was tempting to blame a lack of publicity, but the residence hall staff were aggressive promoters. Hence, that hypothesis did not make sense.

Talking with more experienced student affairs programmers gave the faculty participants a more realistic understanding of the struggle to attract participants. The faculty made multiple adjustments that enabled them to maintain some zeal for the potential of residential programming. Most importantly, we began to involve the student resident advisors in the definition and format for our programs. What in retrospect was an obvious need for students and their leadership to be involved in the determination of the program content turned out to almost double our participation in future programs.

The Resident Advisors would make a large list of prospective programs, and the faculty would try to infiltrate academic orientations into the programs. For example, we agreed upon a program called "tough questions" where we would invite campus leaders to the residence halls for tough interviews. We assured our guests we would be respectful, but at the same time, the questions would be challenging. Residents would place their questions into a fish bowl at the front desk, and the faculty would conduct the interviews. The faculty saw this activity as an opportunity to teach residents about the type of questions that are appropriate for different levels of exploration. We asked them to notice that some of our questions were by implication evaluation questions, while others were integrative or simply discovery questions. Through piggybacking academic skills and attitudes onto programs the residents wanted, residential programming became something both fun and developmental.

In conclusion, such collaborations are possible and full of promise, but they are not automatically rewarding. Essential to the FIR program was the willingness of the university to finance the effort adequately and the excitement of the staff who found the presence of the faculty both strange and intriguing. Finally, the faculty found their most critical resource to be the hall director. Having experienced multiple hall directors, they were cognizant of the extent to which the hall director can torpedo the entire effort by apathy or make almost everything work smoothly by sending strong signals to staff and residents that the FIR program is something both special and worthwhile.

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APPENDIX 1 Faculty-In-Residence Program Description / Program Opportunities

The FIR program offers the opportunity for faculty to live and be an active member of an undergraduate, residential community. FIR have the opportunity to interpret broad program goals in different ways, including those that align with their own academic interest and personal passions. Generally, however, the program encourages FIR to design structured and informal programs and events that will appeal to a broad range of students and that allow for significant interaction among students and between students and faculty members. FIR are encouraged to program towards helping students develop an understanding and appreciation of cultural, religious, political and/or social issues; helping students set and achieve a common goal; develop problem solving skills; examine values in making decisions; and, to make connections between academic and life experiences. Other themes of programming or discussions may include but are not limited to literature, culture, the arts, community service, inter/national travel, or professional planning.

Goals of the Program

The purpose of the Faculty-In-Residence (FIR) Program is part of an on-going university and departmental effort to create intimate living/learning environments for our students within the residence halls as a way to integrate students' academic experiences with their residential lives. FIR work closely with hall staff, Learning Community staff, and faculty from across campus to implement a wide range of programmatic opportunities. By bringing cultural and intellectual experiences more directly into students' lives in a lively and often informal fashion, the FIR program offers students the benefits of a "small college feel" at a large institution. Specifically, the program is designed to:

- Encourage collaborative partnerships between residence life staff and faculty.
- Create opportunities for staff and faculty to offer co-curricular programs and activities.
- Provide a bridge between formal academic programs and the learning and development of students that occurs out of the classroom.
- Share responsibility between FIR and Student Affairs staff for development of intellectual, social, cultural and ethical well-being of students.
- Provide faculty an opportunity to learn and understand more about student life in the halls; to meet with and interact with students on a personal level; and, to understand the work of Student Affairs professionals.
- Have faculty serve in residence halls as visible role models and personal mentors for students.

Duties and Responsibilities

Faculty In Residence

- Participate actively in the life of the residence hall, through both formal and informal interaction with residents, hall council and residence hall staff.
- Have frequent, direct interaction with students and staff.

Provide leadership and direction in designing and implementing programs and events.

Qualifications

FIR must be full-time faculty in an academic department, primarily teaching undergraduate level courses. FIR must have a belief in the benefits of living/learning environments; a strong desire to interact with students informally and during "peek student contact hours" (evenings); a commitment to undergraduate education; experience in or knowledge of general academic advising requirements.

Serve as an academic resource for residential students.

Serve as a mentor, role model and advisor for residential students.

Residence Hall Director

Organize opportunities for formal interactions with residence hall staff, including participation during Fall Training and regularly at staff meetings.

Administer FIR Budget. Coordinate, approve and track all expenditures related to FIR events.

Qualifications

FIR must be full-time faculty in an academic department, primarily teaching undergraduate level courses. FIR must have a belief in the benefits of living/learning environments; a strong desire to interact with students informally and during "peek student contact hours" (evenings); a commitment to undergraduate education; experience in or knowledge of general academic advising requirements.

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By M. Neil Browne; Spencer Headworth and Kandice Saum