

Residence Experiences

Residence halls are an important component in most undergraduate students' lives. Perhaps more intensively important albeit for a smaller number of students are the fraternity and sorority houses. Besides simply providing housing, the residence halls and Greek houses provide a source of companionship and can be the center of a student's social activity. They also can provide an enhanced connection to UF and a better academic experience.

Currently the residence halls are helping set a national standard for their operations. UF differs from many other institutions insofar as most of UF's operations—maintenance, IT, and so forth—are done in-house rather than being outsourced. According to Mr. Norbert Dunkel, the Director of University Housing and the current President of the Association of College and University Housing Officials International group, other campus seem to be moving toward UF's model.

Best Practices and Recommendations

Facilities and Funding

UF faces a difficult challenge because the residence halls range from less than 10 years old to historical buildings that are more than 100 years old. UF is doing an acceptable job of renovation but even so it takes longer than 14 years to complete a renovation cycle of the buildings. Currently residents are assessed an additional fee that aggregates to approximately \$10 million per year which is used to fund renovations. University of Kansas has uniquely been able to convince donors to fund housing expenditures. For instance, in 2007 KU received a \$4 million donation to build a new residence hall, Krehbiel Hall. Many of UF's residence halls have locational names—North, East, Lakeside—which, for an adequate donation, could be named for the donor. Hyphenating other residence halls names—Murphee-Griffen, for instance—would be possible. Therefore it seems as if the opportunity exists for UF to raise funds by offering these naming possibilities. UF's fund-raising history has stressed donations to colleges. For UF to fund more rapid renovations and potentially even new residence halls, this emphasis might be slightly redirected by creating a new position (perhaps half-time) in the residence hall staff devoted to fund raising.

Greek Housing

UF is currently moving toward providing more services to the Greek housing, particularly to fraternities. Currently University Housing is running a pilot program with Sigma Phi Epsilon in which University Housing is responsible for collecting various fees (rent, food, membership but *not* any social fees). The fraternity uses its income to pay University Housing for cleaning and maintenance services. Some universities—Emory and Virginia Tech—have taken over all the Greek houses on their campus so that the

university is responsible for cleaning and maintenance just as it is for the conventional residence halls. We see no need for such an extensive program, particularly because UF sorority houses tend to be well maintained and able to collect virtually all the fees levied upon their members. However, the same cannot be said of many of the fraternity houses. Many fraternity houses are in dire need of substantial renovation and many fraternities are unable to collect but a small fraction of the fees they levy on their members. Extending the pilot program so that UF assumes more of the collection, cleaning, and maintenance responsibilities would go far to enhance the experience of the students who join fraternities. While UF might not be able to compel fraternities to join such a program, UF should exert its influence to convince the fraternity membership that it is in their best interest to join.

Learning Communities/Residence Based Academic Programs

UF currently has a nine learning communities based in the residence halls, ranging from the Honors Program at Hume Hall to the Fine Arts Living Learning Community in Reid Hall to the Engineering Community in East Hall and six more. These communities seem to be working well. These sorts of learning communities are a national trend. UF is a leader in this endeavor, largely because UF commits resources to them rather than merely establishing them in name only. These programs are one year programs, largely because most students live in the residence halls for one year. A 2007 task force examining the Honors Program made a related suggestion: Allow a graduate student (or students) from various professional schools (such as medicine) and/or graduate programs (such as Chemistry) to live in Hume Hall and interact with the honors students. This interaction would assist the students who were contemplating such a career. This recommendation also carries over to the other Learning Communities. For instance, a graduate student in Fine Arts could be housed in the Fine Arts Living Learning Community. These graduate students would receive reduced rents in exchange for their interaction with the undergraduates in their areas. These students are not designed to be RAs; rather they would be primarily expected to help the undergraduates learn about their area of interest.