



BROWN

**Report of the Committee on the
Residential Experience**

**FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

May 2008

Contact information:

Office of Campus Life &
Student Services
Brown University
Box 1896
Providence RI 02912
401.863.1800

Committee on the Residential Experience

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Charge – Brown University's open curriculum is a unique model for undergraduate education. Through an initiative of the Dean of the College, the University is currently reviewing its undergraduate program and re-examining the goals for learning, advising, concentrations, pedagogy, and assessment. As this extensive examination is underway, it is the right moment to examine the broadest context for learning at Brown: the way our campus supports the mission for undergraduate education outside of the classroom as well as inside it.

What do we expect our students to learn from their experiences at Brown? Are we supporting students' education with leadership opportunities, informal and formal interaction with faculty through programming, and structures that assist them in integrating academic and experiential learning? What constitutes a successful experience at Brown outside of classes?

This Committee on the Residential Experience will examine and clarify our aims for learning through our residential education, campus programming, and non-academic centers that support activity outside the classroom.

II. Aims and Approach – In *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Derek Bok identifies a major flaw in the approach of undergraduate institutions. They do not devote enough attention to the rich learning opportunities through the “extra-curriculum,” all of the activities and engagements of students outside of their classroom learning. The “**extra-curriculum**” is the terrain of this committee.

In discussions with members of the Committee on the Residential Experience, when Brown students describe what could be added to their experience on campus outside of their classes, they expressed a desire for “**help with the process of connecting to faculty.**” They pointed to some individual examples of positive student interaction with faculty other than in classrooms -- through Departmental Undergraduate Groups (DUGS), with faculty fellows, and through individual research opportunities. Still, they felt broadly that there was more we could do to support all students in connecting with faculty about advising, thesis, research, and fellowship opportunities. They hope to have by the end of their undergraduate years, some relationships with faculty members who could write letters of recommendation and provide advice about jobs and/or graduate study.

Conversations with student groups, at committee meetings, with faculty, corporation members, and alumni identified some qualities and strengths to build on.

- Programs at Brown need to be strongly **student-driven**. Our rich models of peer education provide some opportunities for building other links and relationships within the residential experience.
- Efforts should **work with existing interests and communities**. We can locate good models and work from there, e.g. UCAAP integrates student activism and advising, Buxton International House has a strong community and sense of “home” in their residence, and the Engineering department has regular lunches for students and faculty members.

- We need to pay more attention to the **different needs Brown students have each year** of their undergraduate education. Likewise, they want different things out of their residential experience each year. Programs and services could be more effective targeting specific tasks of each undergraduate year. The sophomore year is particularly important because of the decrease in residential support from the first-year, because of the number of important academic decisions students need to make, and because sophomores tend to be housed in residence halls on our campus that are currently not well-designed to support community.
- The original aims of the Faculty Fellows program, to have faculty members in houses close to residence halls and for these faculty members to provide opportunities for students and faculty to have informal interactions over meals or programs, still resonate. **The founding mission of the Faculty Fellows program was exactly the same as what students are now currently requesting: assistance in connecting to faculty.** This has been described as introducing students to the “human face of the faculty” and as demonstrating to students how “one lives a life of the mind.”

When we presented models from other schools to Brown audiences, for example, the Alice Cook House at Cornell which integrates faculty involvement, programming, sense of community, and shared meals, the reaction was that this is too structured for Brown where students prize the peer environment and chance to retreat. Colgate’s residential model with housing selections driven by the tasks of each undergraduate class is also more top-down and directed than Brown students, faculty, or staff see as desirable. With both these examples, however, groups felt that we could learn from some of the strengths. The Brown version will have to be less formal and grow more organically from what we have that works.

In addition to Bok’s call to pay attention to the extra-curriculum, many research articles and books on campus culture agree that students perform better when there is a strong sense of community in residence, when there are leadership opportunities in the residential environment, and when colleges and universities assist in the integration of academic and non-academic learning (Kuh, Pascarella, Learning Reconsidered II). Models of learning are also changing and college campuses should be organized with the understanding that the traditional lecture-style classroom is not the only site for education. Residences need to be completely wireless, have spaces for studying and gathering, and coves for conversation – more and more, learning will migrate from the province of classroom buildings into the residences (the 21st century project of ACUHO-I outlines these principles).

The Swearer Center has developed a model of student learning that integrates students’ disciplinary learning with their work through the Swearer Center. Students progress from knowledge and skills acquisition to synthesis of learning and leadership. This model is consonant with the research cited above and with the aims of the Committee on the Residential Experience and is suggestive of what can be promoted more broadly across the campus.

The enrolled student survey suggests that Brown students are interested in more opportunities and structures to interact with faculty outside of the classroom. They report wanting that interaction over meals in the dining halls rather than in residence halls, partly, as we learned in probing this point, because they want the interaction to be anticipated or planned rather than a chance meeting that could be embarrassing. The enrolled student survey also showed that first year students are the most satisfied with the sense of community provided by the Residential Peer Leaders (RPLs) and judge the RPLs as successfully managing behavior in the residence halls. Juniors were the least satisfied on both

these dimensions. An evaluation of the particular needs in residence of sophomores, juniors, and seniors could result in more effective staffing and programming in residence beyond the first year.

III. Draft Recommendations

- A. Facilities** – Current facilities should be improved to better support the opportunities we want as part of campus life.
- 1. Create more informal community spaces** – Across the campus, there are not enough appealing spaces for faculty, students, and staff to gather for casual interaction, whether for lectures, an advising session over coffee, or for group study. Two examples that are mentioned again and again as exceptions because they are attractive spaces where casual interactions occur are the Blue Room in Faunce House and the Friedman Study Center. Those two locations cannot meet demand and both are very crowded. Opportunities exist with the renovations of J. Walter Wilson Hall and Robert Campus Center and this need should be a goal as much as possible with the planning for both projects.
 - 2. Open up more lounges in residence halls** – Students do not have enough social spaces in residence halls. We heard a number of times that study groups are routinely held in hallways because there are not enough places, outside of individual rooms, for students to get together. Lounge space is particularly lacking in Keeney Quad, New Pembroke, and Grad Center. We are planning to convert some temporary rooms in Keeney Quad back to lounges for the spring semester. The factors creating this problem include the need to use some lounges as rooms to meet our occupancy rates (Keeney and Andrews) and the design of our residence halls which do not include as many nooks for gathering as newer halls incorporate (Grad Center).
 - 3. Improve lighting, carpet, and paint in residence halls** – Students reported numerous times that the recent renovations in Slater and Machado have made a considerable difference in student satisfaction and morale in those living areas. Students are advocating for more renovation to improve appearances and to increase satisfaction with their living environment.
 - 4. Build new residence halls** – While there is some debate among students about the importance of new residence halls when the renovation needs are so dire, it is clear that the kinds of housing students want (suites and apartments) cannot be supplied in adequate number within our current housing stock. The reason they hesitate in endorsing new residence halls isn't that students wouldn't want new halls, it is because they see the vast need for renovation in what we have and because the timeframe that is meaningful to them is shorter than the timeframe for new construction. Having understood this, it seems that we need to take the longer view in planning. Many of our peers, most notably Harvard, Princeton, and Cornell, have made major investments in new construction while we have a very high percentage of traditional doubles and not enough apartments and suites. To build a progression of housing and to have alternatives on campus that are attractive to juniors and seniors, we need to invest in new construction.
 - 5. Have regular cycles of renovation** – In addition to simpler renovations for attractiveness, there are systems upgrades (uneven heat and hot water) and redesigns needed in our current residence halls (outmoded bathroom fixtures, etc). We have recently developed principles for determining renovation priorities and have launched

the beginning of a regular cycle of renovation. This needs to be kept up. We are hearing from students, faculty, staff, and alumni about the importance of regular renovation.

6. **Use Dining Opportunities** – Students enjoy the opportunity to have meals with advisors, faculty, guest lecturers, and deans. We can take better advantage of this through the dining halls, Faculty Club, and faculty fellow homes. The advising lunches in the Faculty Club sponsored by the Dean of the College Office have been very popular, and the Dean of the College Office recently launched a program where deans are available at lunch in the Sharpe Refectory. We can expand these opportunities, offering meal vouchers for faculty in the dining halls and having more dinners with guest speakers on campus in faculty fellow houses. The Robert Campus Center renovation presents an opportunity for another food venue that could offer comfortable seating and attractive food which would encourage meetings and conversations.
 7. **Use residence halls more creatively for programs and advising** – Faculty, advisors, and deans are not substantially connected to students’ residential experience. There would be benefits in bringing resources to students at hours when they are available and in places that would encourage more informal interaction.
 8. **Re-examine housing placement and principles of our intentional communities** – Students mentioned dissatisfaction with housing placement for transfer students. Some of our “intentional communities,” i.e. program houses and the first-year units, operate more successfully than our other residential areas. There may be ways to replicate these principles and improve other areas.
- B. Faculty/Student Interaction** – It is clear that students want more interaction with faculty. At other points in time, Brown had more faculty members in residence (we currently have one faculty fellow apartment in Vartan Gregorian Quad but there had been other faculty apartments in Keeney Quad and Emery Woolley). With the changes in academia and the demands of research and publication, as well as the fact that a lot of faculty no longer live close to campus, many colleges and universities are rethinking and restructuring their engagement of faculty in campus life. There is value in the approach of the Faculty Fellow program, and it is a good time for Brown to examine, strengthen, and expand our efforts. The Faculty Fellow program should not be our only structured involvement of faculty with residential life.
1. **Restructure faculty participation in residential life** – Conversations with students, faculty, alumni, and staff confirm the value of faculty and student interaction outside of the classroom which is not happening enough or as fully as it should given the aims of our university college model. Faculty involvement should be incorporated into the expanded advising resources proposed by the Dean of the College Office, including faculty supervision and work with the Advising Coordinators building a community of residential academic advisors. These resources, including the faculty, should be tied in with the residential staff and can operate within and through the residence halls. As identified by the Committee on the Residential Experience and the DOC Undergraduate Task Force, faculty involvement should include working with specific classes of students on their goals and aims. The Faculty Fellows program would take on a new charge, more focused on academic support and tied in with DOC advising resources, peer counselors (Meiklejohns and RPLs), and Community Directors. Faculty appointments to these positions would have specified terms and clear duties. We are recommending

that four additional houses near the campus be identified to bring faculty involvement in residence to 12 faculty members. This recommendation would include the following two components:

- a. Revise the Faculty Fellow job description** – The Committee on the Residential Experience would begin to develop an updated job description for the faculty fellows which would incorporate into the structure of the program some features that current Faculty Fellows have reported worked well, such as hosting campus speakers for dinners. Incorporating these features would expand duties beyond the study break model. The Faculty Fellows should be better integrated into a network of advising resources, including stronger links to Dean of the College initiatives and to the Community Directors and other residential staff. Terms and job duties would be specified.
 - b. Provide housing for 4 faculty advisors near the campus** – In conjunction with new advising resources through the Dean of the College Office, 4 faculty members housed near the campus would serve as advising liaisons, each one assigned to a particular class and working with the faculty fellows. Brown-owned houses near the campus could be offered to these faculty members in exchange for hosting a certain number of functions for students. This would expand the current faculty fellow program, would bring some new faculty into the program, and would be offered on a term basis (ex. 5 years) so there is a cycle of new participants.
- 2. Invite faculty to address the specific needs of students in different years** – Working out from the faculty fellows, faculty involvement in the residences could be better adjusted to fit the needs of students at each stage of their undergraduate career. Special attention should be paid to the sophomore year when students feel particularly adrift. Sophomores need concentration information and want to know more about the work of different fields—a department could host a concentration information session in the Bear’s Lair. Juniors may want to know more about research projects and internships, and a session could be held in Vartan Gregorian Quad. Seniors are thinking about how their undergraduate program has prepared them for post-graduate life and would like to hear how some of their faculty navigated these questions. These topics could be addressed in residential areas with staff there inviting and hosting these events.
- 3. Provide a stipend for faculty to invite students to their homes for dinner so that every first-year student has one dinner with a faculty member** – Currently the Office of Student Life reimburses faculty members who have students to their houses. This would be a more proactive measure, possibly working through the freshmen seminars as a first step, to give faculty members a small stipend to host a dinner in their home with the aim that each first-year student would be invited. At its inception, this had been a feature of the faculty fellow program where an expanded number of faculty was enlisted to make sure each first-year student had this opportunity.
- 4. Build on successful departmental efforts** – Students can rattle off examples of departments that encourage more student-faculty interaction. In some cases, it is because of a particularly active Departmental Undergraduate Group (DUG), in other cases it is because of social events the department hosts, and some have regular features like a weekly lunch with a faculty member. Working with the Faculty Fellows,

Dean of the College Office, and department chairs, we would like to promote more of these offerings, including encouraging departments to host events in faculty fellow homes or in residential areas.

- C. Programming and Staffing** – Within the residential areas, we know that our programming and staffing are most successful with first-year students. Including the Minority Peer Counselors with the other RPLs, our ratio of students to counselors in first-year units is 1 to 19. By the sophomore year, our ratio of counselors to students is 1 to 90. We know the decrease in counselors feels precipitous to students at a time when they are most anxious about academic decisions. It is important that we look at ratios and resources and more effectively address the needs of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Students reminded us throughout this process to pay attention to the fact that in addition to different needs, in different years, students also have varying expectations for what they hope to get out of their residential environment. We should not expect that seniors will spend as much time or be as interested in residence hall programs, but they might welcome a chance to present to younger students on their thesis work or a research project. The Committee on the Residential Experience recommends that our staffing and programming be more attuned to a progression of needs.
- 1. Need for “adult presence” in residential areas** – Compared to peer schools, Brown students report having more conversations with faculty outside of class, yet they are also missing the house deans, resident faculty, and professional residential staff that many other schools have which may be why they feel comparatively bereft of conversation with adults. We think there would be value in anchoring residential efforts with more adult presence. Some professional staff on campus could see that there is improved coordination between RPLs and other peer leaders, faculty fellows, graduate student Community Directors (CDs), and advising staff.
 - 2. Pair RPLs and Meiklejohns** – Since students regard peer education so favorably and report that they turn to peers for academic advice, RPLs and Meiklejohns should work together in freshmen and sophomore areas. We piloted this collaboration a couple of years ago, and it was very successful. This partnership should be revived.
 - 3. Make better use of graduate student Community Directors** – Graduate students are a natural bridge to faculty and academic departments and could also do more academic advising. We should be using their graduate student role more effectively than in the current system. Additional professional staff would assist in freeing the CDs for a more academic role, as well as allowing them to do the programming, directing to resources, and working with the RPLs.
 - 4. Infuse more academic resources** – Examples that bring academic resources to the residence halls could include holding study sessions for large classes that enroll sophomores in Grad Center or having the Writing Center sponsor a workshop for freshmen in Emery-Woolley.
 - 5. Build on strengths in the program houses** – When asked to describe areas where students have a sense of ownership and belonging, the program houses were the sites most often mentioned. Students from Buxton House described the pride they took in their lounge renovation. Interfaith House is a community with shared purpose and leadership. Some of what makes these communities work could be replicated elsewhere.
 - 6. Integrate transfer students** – Housing for transfer students can make for a difficult transition to Brown when transfers wind up in areas that are largely younger or older

students. Transfer students should be housed where other sophomores and juniors are located to assist with their orientation.

7. **Make use of student initiative** – Students mentioned the success of the Late Night Fund and asked if there was any place within residential life to fund student initiatives so that students with good ideas could implement them within their residential areas.

IV. Conclusion – Improvements to facilities will help us to develop the kinds of campus opportunities we would like to see, in the residence halls in particular although additional attractive social spaces across the campus are vital for supporting the community interactions we value as part of the Brown experience. We need to do some intentional work, which is beginning now with the initial renovation commitment to the residence halls and with the J. Walter Wilson and Robert Campus Center renovations and will hopefully continue with new construction. Facility improvements need to be an important priority of the University. We have strong peer leader programs that can be further developed and with better coordination, linked to new advising initiatives. We have willing faculty and capable students and are missing opportunities for an even more enriched learning environment. The Committee on the Residential Experience has suggested some ways to link faculty back into campus life that we expect can make better use of all the potential the Brown curriculum engenders.

V. Membership of the Committee on the Residential Experience

Co-Chairs: Joseph Pucci, Professor of Classics & Margaret Klawunn, Associate Vice President for Campus Life/Dean of Student Life

Committee membership:

Faculty representatives: Ethan Pollock, History, and Thomas Powers, Engineering

Two Faculty Fellows: Nancy Jacobs, History, and William Suggs, Chemistry

Dean of the College representative: Stephen Lassonde, Deputy Dean

Three undergraduate students: Sara Damiano '08, Steve Beckoff '08, and Erinn Phelan '09

Staffed by Natalie Basil, Richard Bova, Ricky Gresh, and Rosario Navarro, Division of Campus Life and Student Services

VI. Process – The Committee as a whole met three times this fall. The topics for the meetings were (1) the current residential staffing and programming, (2) an update on the Dean of the College Task Force on the Undergraduate Curriculum and review of one model for integrating academic and extra-curricular learning from the Swearer Center, and (3) a tour of campus social and residential spaces. Some Committee members and co-chair Margaret Klawunn also spoke with Residential Council, Undergraduate Council of Students (UCS), the Campus Life Advisory Board, the Campus Life Corporation Committee, the President's Leadership Group, and the Campus Life Executive Group. Margaret Klawunn also consulted with founding faculty fellow Professor Arnold Weinstein and with former Dean of Student Life Robin Rose who led a previous review of the residential program at Brown.

In 2006-2007, Russell Carey, Richard Bova, MaryLou McMillan, and Margaret Klawunn conducted 26 meetings with students to discuss housing needs. Comments from these sessions also informed these recommendations.

In spring 2008 the Committee met jointly with the Dean of the College Task Force, and hosted numerous programs with different student, faculty, and staff groups to seek input on the draft recommendations before submitting this final report for May 2008.