BEYOND SEAT TIME
AND STUDENT SATISFACTION:
A Curricular Approach to Residential Education

The success of a traditional residential education program is typically measured
by numbers of students who attend and how much they liked it.
Kathleen Kerr and James Tweedy offer a peer-reviewed curricular approach
that determines success by how much students learn.

BY KATHLEEN G. KERR AND JAMES TWEEDY

A S RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS summon greater resources and seek new strategies to encourage civic engagement, character building, and citizenship development among students, they too often overlook a potentially powerful asset. Residence halls, physically designed to provide students with direct access to personal differences and multiple occasions for sustained dialogue, represent an important setting for delivering a curriculum focused on citizenship development. Few places in society allow for such close contact with peers and such profound opportunities to reflect on relationships with others. Residence hall living offers a powerful opportunity to engage young adults in learning that will improve the quality of both their campus and their adult lives.

The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs, an American College Personnel Association publication, notes that while "higher education traditionally has organized its activities into 'academic affairs' (learning, curriculum, classrooms, cognitive development) and 'student affairs' (co-curriculum, student activities, residential life, affective or personal development) . . . this dichotomy has little relevance to post-college life, where the quality of one's job performance, family life, and community activities are all highly dependent on cognitive and affective skills" (p. 1). The central message of *The Student Learning Imperative* is that student affairs educators must view student learning as their mission and that student learning should not be viewed as the sole responsibility of an academic division. The challenge on residential campuses is to create living-learning environments that fully engage students in meeting desired learning outcomes. At the University of Delaware, as at many other institutions, a singularly important outcome in the residential setting is citizenship.

Placing learning at the forefront of everyone's work on campus requires identifying what is to be learned. For residence life at the University of Delaware, it has required shifting away from traditional educational programming models. Programming in residence halls has typically involved offering a series of educational events on a variety of topics such as appreciating diversity, building healthy relationships, maintaining personal wellness, and developing leadership. In most cases, the success of the programming has been measured by the number of residents who attend the events. Contemporary views offered in *The Student Learning Imperative* and in *Learning Reconsidered* (a publication of the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) invited us at the University of Delaware to use student learning goals to frame our practice. The authors of *Learning Reconsidered* write, "Clearly identifying these competencies and skills, describing the context within which they can be acquired, mapping the process through which students will gain them, and specifying ways in which their incremental development will be tracked and evaluated, will help students make sense of the institution's curriculum and academic requirements and provide an important guide to the institution's goals and commitments" (p. 17). These and like statements provided us with a context and impetus for reconceptualizing educational programming in residence halls and creating a richer learning environment for our students. The University of Delaware's residential curriculum on citizenship has replaced its traditional programming model and is used as a means to allow this residential campus to capitalize on the learning potential of its residence halls.

A Shift in Thinking

AT THE 1996 STUDENT LEARNING Institute held at Harrisonburg, Virginia, Lee Ward, director of the Center for Leadership, Service and Transitions at James Madison University, asked the audience what would happen if a student affairs division established a committee to create curricula that would articulate intentional, planned, and structured learning experiences. His premise was based on the assertion of Paul Bloland, Louis Stamatakos, and Russell Rogers that just as faculty members design courses, focusing on "content, rationale, and methodology" (p. 222), so should those working with students outside of the classroom. Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers note that "whereas faculty members have wrestled to defend their course content within the context of competition from other courses, curriculum committee reviews, and the limitations imposed by

students taking a set number of credit hours, the content of out-of-class learning has not had to withstand an equivalent form of focused scrutiny" (p. 222).

As our staff in the Office of Residence Life at the University of Delaware considered this challenge, we began to scrutinize our own efforts to provide educational programming to our students. A thorough analysis of our model surfaced important insights that sparked the major shift in our approach. Like many schools, we had been quantifying the amount of "education" that we believed needed to occur in areas such as wellness, diversity, and ethics. We had directed resident assistant staff to plan a specified number of programs on these and other topics, but we had failed to consider key questions related to student learning. What, for example, is diversity education? What knowledge, skills, or beliefs do we want all students to learn in the area of diversity? What layers of knowledge are needed, and in what sequence should these layers occur? What strategies effectively stimulate reflection on diversity? What are the observable or measurable behaviors that would allow us to know the education was effective? Without considering these questions, we found ourselves unable to claim success in our programming.

We also realized that designing educational programming should be the responsibility of our professional staff, not the burden of undergraduate resident assistants. We came to understand that while student interests are an important consideration when selecting program topics and methods, student learning should be the driving force. We realized that we had been functioning from a paradigm that required students to be exposed to ideas without paying any attention to the actual learning that was or was not occurring. For example, while we knew that motivating students to attend programming by providing pizza increased attendance, we did not know whether or how that programming affected learning. Program statistics made us look good and kept our budget healthy but did not necessarily prove that any learning directly resulted from our efforts. We realized that our model for delivering educational programming, despite its success by certain measures, was not the most effective means of delivering education in our residence halls. While we had logged more than 40,000 attendees annually at our programs and had received recognition from national associations, we estimated that our students had been exposed to only about forty-five minutes of what we considered to be the learning outcomes we considered most important.

We needed a new definition of success. Before we changed our definition, we had considered ourselves quite successful. When we shifted our focus to what we teach, how we teach it, and how our students learn,

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for delivering a curriculum focused on
citizenship development.

combined with a consideration of every student's approach to and purposes for learning, and away from attendance statistics, we realized that traditional programming as the primary educational vehicle was not effective. Our programming model was not a coherent curriculum; we had not thought carefully about the sequencing of this curriculum; we had not thought carefully enough about the roles of staff members; and we had focused on exposure rather than learning.

The challenge to hold ourselves accountable for intentional, planned, and structured learning experiences moved us from an exposure to a learning paradigm. Robert Barr and John Tagg state, "In a learning paradigm . . . a college's purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems" (p. 15). Our shift to this way of thinking began with a simple question: "What should every individual student learn as a result of living in a residence hall?" We then asked, "What must a student do in order to learn this?" The next question, of course, was "What must *we* do to engage each and every one of our students in this learning?" When we considered that we needed to provide rich learning experiences to 7,200 residence hall students, these became challenging questions indeed. The answers led to a curriculum for residential education that was developed and refined over a three-year period. During this time, department staff members discussed and debated the definitions of teaching and learning, each staff member explored his or her own educational perspectives and passions, and we finally agreed on a refined vision of what we call our "educational guarantees." An important question we faced was whether residence hall educators could justify using the word *curriculum*. We have come to believe that the answer is a resounding "yes." We believe that use of the curricular framework as a decisive delivery strategy focused on specific educational aims is critical to the accomplishment of our overall goal, which is to provide citizenship education.

A RESIDENTIAL CURRICULUM FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

OUR INTENT in using the curricular approach is to help our students see themselves as members of communities of learners. Our department's overall educational outcome states, "*Citizenship:* Become an engaged and active citizen by understanding how your thoughts, values, beliefs, and actions affect the people with whom you live and recognize your responsibility to contribute to society at a local, national, and global level. This will be accomplished through an exploration of self, community, and connections." These foci of exploration are further defined: "*Self-Awareness:* Critically examine your values, beliefs, and social identities in order to develop an understanding of your purpose and intent; *Connection:* Interact with others, build relationships, and achieve a sense of belonging in order to facilitate personal and academic success; and *Community:* Actively engage in the creation of a safe and inclusive environment by positively contributing, exchanging ideas, and caring for individuals and the group." The overall educational outcome articulates the ideal for a student who has lived in our halls for several years.

As we designed this framework for citizenship education, we were directed by five of the university's ten general education goals:

- Engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to self, community, and society at large

- Develop the ability to integrate academic knowledge with experiences that extend the boundaries of the classroom

- Expand understanding and appreciation of human creativity and diverse forms of aesthetic and intellectual expression

- Understand the foundations of United States society, including the significance of its cultural diversity

- Develop an international perspective in order to live and work effectively in an increasingly global society

We believe that connecting our department's educational outcome with the university's general educational goals sends a strong signal that we are serious about blurring the lines between learning in the classroom and learning in the residential environment. Our educational outcome also reflects key principles of the student affairs profession and has become the focus of work in our department.

The citizenship outcome has been divided into twenty-eight stated competencies that each student must achieve to meet this outcome. The competencies are time-specific (for example, first year, sophomore year); as a result, they can be arrayed in a curriculum map (see sidebar). Students are asked, for example, to demonstrate the ability to self-reflect and to demonstrate generalized knowledge of the social identities that exist in our society in their first year; to demonstrate an awareness of the power of an individual in a community in their second year; to demonstrate an understanding of the reciprocal nature of community in their third year; and to demonstrate an understanding of the power to choose between responsibility to self and responsibility to society and to demonstrate a sense of obligation to civic engagement in their fourth year.

These competencies are further divided into lesson plans sequenced for use at various points throughout the student's experience in the residence halls. We are fortunate that our students are housed primarily in first-year, sophomore, and junior-senior class groupings in eight geographically dispersed residential complexes, allowing us to target specific competencies for the specific years within each complex.

All competencies stem from and lead to our overall educational outcome of citizenship, which drives activities in each residential complex's curriculum. Each residential complex identifies learning outcomes and goals related to the competencies that also address unique student populations within the complex. For example, the learning outcomes and goals for one of our first-year residence halls are as follows:

Learning Outcome A: Each student will understand the obligations that membership in a society requires.
Learning Goals
1. Explore personal principles related to civic engagement

2. Identify individual issues that are considered worth taking a stand on

3. Explore the purpose and process of making

contributions to society, including service to those in need

4. Explore and identify the steps and strategies necessary for success in university society

Learning Outcome B: Each student will understand the obligations a democratic society owes the individual.
Learning Goals
1. Establish a framework for critiquing social policy and practices

2. Engage in "complaint activism" methods to explore one avenue of social change

3. Explore self-governance models

4. Engage in establishing community parameters

5. Engage in holding peer citizens accountable according to community parameters

6. Examine the strengths and weaknesses of various assertiveness techniques

7. Reflect on personal effectiveness when working in a group setting and on teamwork dynamics

8. Examine the U.S. government in action

Learning Outcome C: Each student will understand the obligation to pursue change when democracy is not working.
Learning Goals
1. Explore societal privilege and the experiences of those disadvantaged in our democracy

2. Explore social identity privilege

3. Explore class privilege

4. Explore race relations in America

5. Explore personal comfort with engaging with those having a different social identity than oneself

Kathleen G. Kerr is director of residence life and assistant professor at the University of Delaware. Her e-mail address is kkerr@udel.edu.

James Tweedy is associate director of residence life at the University of Delaware. His e-mail address is tweedy@udel.edu.

We love feedback. Send letters to executive editor Marcia Baxter Magolda (aboutcampus@muohio.edu), and please copy her on notes to authors.

These learning outcomes and goals become the road map for the residence life staff members working with the students in this residential complex. An underlying assertion of our twenty-eight competencies is that for each one, educational approaches can be designed and assessment models can be created to examine student gains. For example, the student competency "Demonstrate caring for individuals and the community" is addressed in one complex through a series of community meetings. The meetings progress through a sequence of problem-based learning activities calling for group decision making. The community initially examines problems that have a direct impact on individuals and by the end of the year moves on to examine problems that can affect the community unit. The lesson plan for the first of these meetings is available at http://www.udel.edu/reslife/about/samplelesson-plan.htm. At the end of the term, students are interviewed to determine whether their view of responsibility has moved. If our interviews were to suggest that students have not considered a responsibility to care for others in a community, we would redesign the lesson plan or reconsider our ability to help students achieve this competency.

WRITING A RESIDENTIAL CURRICULUM

OUR CHOICE to use the word *curriculum* accompanied a commitment to hold to a strict definition of that word. In our department, a curriculum must clearly define narrowly focused educational goals; must be based on sound and informed assessment of student educational needs and what they will learn (not what they will have opportunities to attend); must view residential education as learning over time and learning in sequence; must clearly define delivery strategies that include programming as only one component; must emphasize the indi-

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE
LEARNING COMPETENCIES, BY AREA AND YEAR

Competency	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year
Self-Awareness				
Demonstrate the ability to self reflect	X			
Identify social identities	X			
Demonstrate generalized knowledge of the social identities that exist in our society	X			
Identify values		X		
Articulate the importance of self-reflection		X		
Accept and value other social identities		X		
Examine values in the context of a larger society			X	
Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives of other social identities			X	
Connection				
Establish academic goals	X			
Identify how others perceive you	X			
Identify personal and vocational passions		X		
Demonstrate knowledge of the resources and the skills needed to pursue vocational interests		X		
Demonstrate an understanding of how your peer group influences you		X		
Develop a peer group that is supportive of your personal and academic success		X		
Develop and sustain individual relationships which are beneficial			X	
With an understanding of belonging needs, critically examine your peer group's impact on you and your impact on others			X	
Demonstrate an understanding of the power to choose between responsibility to self and responsibility to society				X
Community				
Identify community's behavior expectations of self and others	X			
Demonstrate caring for individuals and the community	X			
Contribute to the creation and maintenance of an inclusive community	X			
Demonstrate an understanding of how your behavior affects others	X			
Actively participate in idea exchange		X		
Demonstrate an awareness of the power of an individual in a community		X		
Demonstrate the ability to take action on an issue		X		
Identify your ability to take on multiple roles in distinct communities			X	
Demonstrate an understanding of the reciprocal nature of community			X	
Demonstrate an understanding of the costs and benefits of personal integration into a community				X
Demonstrate a sense of obligation to civic engagement				X

We now conceive of assessment as an opportunity
to further student reflection and learning as
we gather data on program effectiveness.

vidual student; must include specific lesson plans (also called *scripts*; must be outcome-based; must be highly intentional; and must be reviewed and externally approved.

Because we know that curriculum writing is foreign to most out-of-classroom educators, we designed the following requirements as a starting point for those designing our curriculum. *Learning outcomes* articulate the connections between the curriculum and the competencies that have been mapped for each specific complex. They explain what each student will learn during their year in the hall. *Learning goals* state what students need to do in order to accomplish the learning outcomes. A *sequence of learning strategies* detail what delivery strategies, or pedagogy, will be employed to accomplish the goals. The sequence addresses how complex learning goals are layered to reflect increasing sophistication. *Lesson plans with learning objectives* are provided to staff members to direct their implementation of learning strategies. Lesson plans are required for virtually every pre-planned individual and group encounter that staff members have with residents. The *assessment plan* identifies the means for determining the progress on competency development expected for that year and location.

Writing curricula, as outlined in the preceding paragraph, is a major undertaking for our professional staff. We have invested a great deal of time and energy in educating ourselves on learning outcome, learning goal, and lesson planning language and have investigated both K–12 and postsecondary models to inform our approach. Each curriculum is reviewed by the director and associate director of residence life and the assistant director of residential education. This is followed by a peer review process, and finally, each must withstand the scrutiny of the Residence Life Curriculum Review Committee. This committee includes faculty members, students, and administrators who annually review and approve each curriculum.

This multilayered review process breaks us out of residence life vernacular, poses tremendous growth opportunities through challenge, and improves language

and goal clarity before we introduce curricula to our students. The use of a curriculum review committee has also helped forge powerful partnerships with faculty members and administrative units on campus. Our committee members indicate that they have a completely new view of the residence life department and the learning potential within residence halls. Readying the eight curricula for the final review is an intensive two-month process, complete with extensive debate and periods of frustration. The end result, though, is a set of learning goals put forward in as clean and honest a manner as we currently know how to do.

NEXT STEPS: ASSESSMENT AND OTHER CHALLENGES

WE FIRMLY BELIEVE that moving residential education from an exposure-based, market-driven programming model to a curricular approach is necessary to fully deliver on the promise of citizenship education. Moving to the curricular approach has allowed us to use previously untapped resources, including faculty members and academic administrators, and to move from good intentions to good educational strategies. This approach also forces us to assess outcomes and verify our claims, which is crucial if we are to do as Elizabeth Whitt suggests: "Focus on student learning. Period" (p. 3). In her recent *About Campus* article titled "Are All of Your Educators Educating?" she states, "Policies, programs, and services of these [educationally effective college and university] student affairs units reflect a sustained commitment to achieving the institution's desired educational outcomes. There is no debate or confusion about this nor bemoaning perceived second-class citizenship. Student affairs staff members at these colleges and universities are partners in the educational enterprise, engaging in enriching educational opportunities for students, team teaching with faculty, and fostering student success" (p. 3).

As residence life veterans, we now find ourselves on an entirely new playing field, with fresh enthusiasm and fresh mistakes. Because there are more questions than

answers, we have had to become comfortable with the idea that we are experimenting on a number of fronts and do not yet have the results necessary to determine which experiments will yield long-term success. So far, though, the rewards have made the experiments unequivocally worthwhile. Staff members are focused and invested in new and unexpected ways and are receiving admonishments from their peers to engage students in challenging reflective conversations. Student views of what they expect from their residential experience are subtly changing, and members of academic departments are expressing an interest in joining our staff.

Our roles in assessment and educational research, requisites of the curricular approach, are unfolding. Success is now defined almost exclusively by student gains on the twenty-eight competencies. At the department level, each competency is being examined for its measurability. Our finished model will allow assessment of learning gains on the competencies desired for each year students spend in the residence halls. Our professional and graduate staff members are now expected to conduct studies that contribute to the knowledge of our departmental team. Overall, our assessment efforts rely heavily on the student self-reflection that is built into each lesson plan. Analysis of these reflections can be tremendously useful in determining a program's impact on student learning. We are also employing more traditional means of assessment, including individual surveys, interviews, focus groups, and frequency scales to gauge individual contributions. In addition, we are exploring the possibility of identifying behavioral factors that can be observed and recorded by hall staff members.

In "The Art and Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes," Andrea Leskes and Barbara Wright offer three functions of assessment that have served to direct our efforts. According to these authors, assessments can inform students about their performance, can demonstrate that an institution is fulfilling its mission, and, most important, can provide information for continual improvement of student learning and program effectiveness. Building assessments into our lesson plans, as we have done on the advice of experts in this field, increases the likelihood that we can achieve these functions.

To this point, we have largely used assessment to examine program effectiveness, but we are now concentrating our efforts on using assessments to improve the student learning experience. We now conceive of assessment as an opportunity to further student reflection and learning as we gather data on program effectiveness. While our learning curve has been steep, we look forward to moving further from traditional student satisfaction and attendance measures and toward assessment based on learning outcomes and competencies.

We are still determining whether our approach is best. However, we are convinced that the residence hall living environment has tremendous potential for citizenship education, a learning outcome that we believe is central to the purposes of an undergraduate education. We take seriously the idea that students must explore the multiple layers of this topic, and we believe we have the power to facilitate achievement of important learning outcomes through our sequenced approach. Our aim is to create a residential life program that directly contributes to student learning.

NOTES

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