

**Cornell College**  
**Departmental / Program Assessment Project**  
Year Three Progress Report

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| Department / Program:        | Residence Life |
| Person Submitting this Form: | Ryan Reinhart  |
| Date:                        | 28 June 2012   |

Brief Overview of the Assessment Project: (refer to original Assessment Project Outline)

- Outcomes you assessed.
- Questions your project attempted to answer.
- Methods used to gather and analyze evidence.

Residence Life offers three (3) themed communities for first-year students. These are called "connect floors" and have the following themes: leadership, career exploration, and community service.

In addition, we allow upperclass students to submit a charter request to form a living learning community. This allows for those students to tailor their living experience to center around a theme of their choice. We can accommodate up to 10 groups. In the past, we have had learning communities centered around women's issues, health issues, music appreciation, cultural awareness, etc.

We sought answers to the following:

1. Do residents in themed communities have a higher level of satisfaction in their living environment than residents in a non-themed community?
2. Do residents in themed communities learn more life skills that the residential program aims to teach than residents in a non-themed community?
3. Do residents in first-year connect floors learn more about their respective theme than first-year students in a non-themed community?

Every year, Residence Life administers a Quality of Life survey. This goes to all residential students. This year, we asked more specific questions to isolate those individuals in a themed community and to explore more deeply their experiences. In particular, we wanted look at basic life skills (noted in #2 above), including the extent to which living on campus has provided residents opportunities to meet new people, learn to solve problems, explore spirituality, improve communication skills, etc.). Regarding the specific connect floor themes, we asked both a philosophical question and an action-based question about each theme (so, the extent to which I was able to develop a commitment to service \*and\* the extent to which I was able to participate in service opportunities on campus or in the community).

Involvement:

- *Who has been involved in this project?*
- *How well informed and involved are members of the department/office?*

The Quality of Life survey has existed in Residence Life for several years. Knowing that we wanted to look specifically at the themed communities this year, I consulted with:

- Kara Trebil, Director of the Civic Engagement Office
- RJ Holmes-Leopold, Director of the Career Engagement Center
- Justin Gohdes, Assistant Director of Residence Life working with Leadership

They helped compose changes to the survey centered around service, career exploration, and leadership.

Results:

*Please outline in detail what you learned through your data analysis / interpretation.*

Specifically regarding students' residential experience that impacted their life skills (described in the "overview" section above), in almost every instance residents in New Hall, Harlan House, and Armstrong House (the locations of the upperclass living learning communities) indicated a higher level of satisfaction than residents in other halls. As an example, all upperclass students who were not in a living learning community reported an average satisfaction rating of 3.65 (out of 5) when indicating their level of satisfaction with the extent to which their living environment this year had provided them with the opportunity to grow as an individual. The residents in Harlan House (a living learning community) ranked their level of satisfaction in the same dimension as 4.80 (out of 5).

In almost every instance, residents of Tarr Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Pauley Hall 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and Pfeiffer Hall Garden Level (the locations of the first-year connect floors) indicated a higher level of satisfaction than first-year residents in other halls. As an example, all first-year students who were not on a connect floor reported an average satisfaction rating of 3.83 (out of 5) when indicating their level of satisfaction with the extent to which their living environment this year had provided them with the opportunity to improve their interpersonal relationships. The residents on the leadership connect floor ranked their level of satisfaction in the same dimension as 4.32 (out of 5).

Decisions:

*Please detail the decisions made as a result of the interpretations / conclusions drawn from the assessment project.*

The themed floors (upperclass living learning communities and first-year connect floors) demonstrated a noticeably higher level of student satisfaction and student learning within their residential experience. We should continue these programs and look for ways to expand the opportunities. This would most readily be accomplished by either/both of the following (listed in order of preference):

- Hiring graduate students who are focused on coordinating the programmatic portion of additional themed communities
- Partnering with other departments in the College to co-facilitate a themed community (examples include the Civic Engagement Office or the Career Engagement Center).

Documentation:

Please explain how your assessment work is being documented. Please be sure to address where the raw data is stored, what reports (including meeting minutes) exist, and where all relevant documents are located.

The survey was administered using Qualtrics, and so the raw data is housed there. An overview of the results of all aspects of the Quality of Life survey was compiled and shared with the President's Council. Recommendations were included in the Residence Life annual report. Those documents are in the Residence Life shared folder.

#### Year Four – Implementation of Change:

The goal of the fourth year of the assessment cycle is to implement decisions made as a result of the interpretations/conclusions drawn from the assessment project. What are your plans for the coming year? Please be sure to address:

- Plans for sharing results and decisions as well as for celebrating noteworthy results.
- Plans for implementing change(s).
- Plans for evaluating implementation progress and impact of the changes.

We have begun conversations with the Career Engagement Center about more intentionally partnering with that office for the career exploration floor.

Student Affairs has created a leadership program and we will have our leadership connect floor continue to help pilot that program.

We have also begun conversations with the Civic Engagement Office about increasing the service expectation of all students in a themed living community.

We will continue to administer the Quality of Life survey annually to monitor any change in satisfaction level.

#### Evaluation of the Assessment Project:

*Please provide an overview of the quality of the assessment project. What worked well? What changes would you recommend for the future?*

The data collected was helpful in confirming the successful impact of these communities. We looked, though, only at the impact of the community on the life skills that the residential program aims to teach. For our first-year themed communities, we did assess those students' understanding and commitment to service, leadership, and career exploration. However, the upperclass living learning communities can select their own theme; we currently do not assess the effectiveness of that. As stated above, we have had learning communities centered around women's issues, health issues, music appreciation, cultural awareness, etc. We need to assess whether or not students' understanding of their focus/theme is impacted (in addition to whether or not their life skills are impacted).

Challenges:

*What challenges has your department/office encountered to date with your assessment project?*

We have limited single occupancy rooms, and many of those are on the connect floors. We tend to give these rooms to upperclass students. So we have seniors living on these first-year themed floors. Also, we are at near capacity, and so we need to fill almost every bed.

As such, we regularly have students living on the first-year themed floors (and we could potentially have students living in the upperclass living learning communities) who did not choose to live in that community and who do not actively participate in the activities. If they respond to the Quality of Life survey, that can impact the integrity of the data.

Additional Information:

Feel free to add additional comments or supporting documents to this report.

Upon completion, please submit the report to Becki Elkins, Box 2628.

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Your Signature

Date

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Department Chair Signature

Date