



INTER-RESIDENCE COUNCIL
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT GENESEO

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Ad-Hoc Committee
Report On Faculty Involvement in the
Residence Halls

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1. Introduction

In August, the new Vice-President of Student and Campus Life, Dr. Robert Bonfiglio, solicited the help of the Inter-Residence Council (IRC) to analyze issues pertaining to the relationship between Geneseo's Residence Life and Academic Departments. In accordance with Section IV, B, of the IRC By-Laws, an Ad-Hoc Committee was established to look into the issue.

During the Ad-Hoc committee's review of the current status of resident-faculty relations, the committee held informal discussions with faculty and students. The topic of faculty involvement in the Residence Halls was brought up for open discussion at IRC meetings, Campus Round Table (CRT) meetings of the Hall Presidents, Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) meetings, and Central Council meetings. The minutes of those meetings can be found at the end of this report.

Additionally, the committee reviewed documents provided by the Vice-President from Truman State University and other sources. Committee members also informally inquired about similar programs at institutions such as Miami University of Ohio (which has had a faculty-in-residence program since the 1920s), and Western Illinois University.

The committee believes this report reflects student reaction and thoughts on topics involving faculty involvement in the residence halls and the idea of "blurring the lines" between faculty and students here at Geneseo.

2. Educational climate in the residence halls

The current educational climate in the residence halls is not strongly academic, and seemingly, the residents prefer it that way. A majority of the educational components of residence hall life involve life skills: responsibility, community, civility, and personal growth. In regards to programming and integration of traditional academic disciplines, integration is minimal. Quiet study areas and computer labs are provided for student use, but little educational encouragement is provided outside of facilities and services available to students to accomplish routine schoolwork. Programming focuses primarily on healthy and effective study habits.

Geneseo's academic clubs and organizations are most often the providers of faculty-student interaction and extracurricular educational activities. These organizations plan faculty-student potluck dinners, symposia, and bring in speakers from other colleges and universities. Currently there is no interaction between these groups and the residence halls.

As far as academic advisement in the residence halls, Resident Assistants (RAs) usually act as impromptu advisors in this area. RA selection criteria, however, is not based primarily on academic performance or commitment to academic advising (nor does the Committee believe it should be). Student Mentors in the Mentor Program often handle peer academic advising. The faculty handles official academic advising for students. Currently none of these academic-specific advisors have connections to Residence Life.

3. Resident Student Expectations

The overwhelming majority of students at all four meetings expressed their discontent with having faculty living in the residence halls. The opinion was that the residence halls were a place where they lived and a place they could leave academics behind. The students, however, were not averse to interacting to faculty outside of the classroom. They recognized this as a way to get to know their professors better and better the quality of their learning and academic programs.

3.1. Interaction with faculty

Students, especially upperclassmen, have come to expect interaction with faculty on a personal level. From academic organization parties at professors' houses, to casual conversations at the Around Back Café, students have had opportunities to learn and interact with faculty outside the classroom setting. Judging from student response during open discussions, this is currently the preferred method for Geneseo students to interact with the faculty. Given the size of the village of Geneseo and the fact that many professors live in the area, this has provided students with many of these opportunities. Approachability of professors is often directly correlated to how close they live to the Geneseo campus.

3.2. Faculty involvement in residence life

Many of the students were curious to know what the professors thought about living in the residence halls. They already thought the professors had high expectations and heavy workloads and did not really see the incentive for the professors to move into the halls. To the students, the halls did not seem very conducive to living if the professors were not Resident Directors. The overwhelming concern of the students was to make any involvement with faculty voluntary.

4. Current Scholar in Residence program

At all of the meetings, the living arrangement of Dr. Mary Hart in Onondaga Hall was raised. Many students have negative opinions of the professor and her lack of involvement in the hall. Any discussion the group attempted to raise concerning faculty in residence was brought back to the negative experience students had with Dr. Hart.

The Committee believes Geneseo's current program lacks guidelines, goals, direction and purpose. For two years there has been a faculty member in residence, but it is clear that the desired interaction between faculty and students, outside the classroom has not been achieved. Students also have a negative reaction to proposed expansion and continuation of this program. If Geneseo is serious in its goal to become a premier liberal arts institution with comparable faculty in residence as ivy-league institutions it is important to allow for a fresh start to the program. A significant amount of time must be allowed to pass after Dr. Mary Hart's participation if this program is to be successful in the future. If the college still wishes to pursue a scholar in residence program, we must allow time for the damage created by Dr. Hart's participation to leave the discussion.

4.1. Program criteria

If the college sees a scholar in residence program as a necessity of a premier liberal arts institution of higher learning, then the committee has some suggestions for the success of any program:

- A mission statement must be written for the program
- Guidelines must be established and fully understood by the college and the candidates
- A clear selection process must be employed to ensure the proper candidates are admitted into the program
- Students and Faculty should be engaged in the entire process of this program
- A fresh-start approach, not a continuation/expansion or building of the current program is necessary

- Clear commitment with the end goal of establishing a successful scholars in residence program

4.2. Selection of candidates

The program cannot be intended to cater to all levels of faculty. There must be an understanding that only certain faculty will be able to ensure the success of the program. Geneseo should focus the recruitment of faculty for the program on a targeted group:

- Young, recently graduated professors
- Faculty with a positive philosophy on students
- Program participation should be viewed as an added bonus
- Although there should be benefits to faculty on joining the program, it would be a mistake to select a faculty member only interested in the benefits and not the relationship with the students and the successful implementation of the program

5. Other options for enhancing faculty-resident interaction

In the near future, the committee recommends that the college pursue alternate initiatives to a faculty-in-residence program if it wishes to blur the lines between faculty and students. Not only have students spoken overwhelmingly against faculty living in the residence halls, but also the effects of the Dr. Hart living in Onondaga have damaged such a program for at least the next 4 years.

5.1. Inter-Residence Council/Academic Affairs Grants

This type of program would encourage academic clubs and organizations to bring faculty, speakers, and roundtable discussions into the Residence Halls. In their budget for next year, the IRC would set aside a small amount of money for Academic Clubs and organizations to use if they agree to hold some of their events in the Residence Halls. The grants could be used for refreshments or any other costs associated with the facilitation of the program itself. The AAC would remain the primary funding source for such events, but the IRC would market these grants to the members of the AAC as a way to increase program funding. This would encourage faculty-student programming within the Halls.

5.2. Adopt-A-Professor

Instead of having faculty living directly in the halls, a "hybrid" or "stepping stone" option would be to develop an "Adopt-A-Professor" program similar to the "Adopt-A-Cop" program already in place. This option has already been given strong support in student discussions the Committee facilitated. The "adopted professor" would be available to the RAs of the building to attend programs, hall meetings, and weekend outings. It is similar to the option of having the professors live in the halls, but is not perceived as invasive.

Additionally, RAs could be encouraged to make use of the faculty surveys found in each service desk. These surveys were created as a resource to RAs planning programs and provide information about faculty expertise and programming ideas. Currently, these surveys are outdated and the committee recommends that they be reissued and advertised better to RAs. They provide useful information for anyone wishing to put on a program involving faculty

members. The RAs could utilize these surveys to contact professors with interests or expertise in a specific programming area. This idea is similar to the IRC/AAC Grant program, in that academic programming is encouraged. However, since the programming is coming from the RAs it will no doubt be better target to the needs/interests of the building residents.

5.3. Off-Campus or apartment living

Rather than having faculty live in the Halls, the Committee brought up the option of having professors live in college sponsored housing in the village or in the new apartment complex. Rather than living directly with the students, this option would provide the type of interaction outlined in section 3.1 of this report. This would also be attractive for faculty, particularly those with families, who would wish to maintain a level of privacy. With such housing, however, would come the expectation that professors would attend programs and invite students to their "house" for informal mixers and academic events. Such a program would need to clearly articulate these goals and expectations if such a program were to work.

5.4. Expansion of the Mentor Program

Currently, Dr. Stacey Edgar of the Philosophy Department operates the Mentor Program. The Program hires approximately twenty (20) student Mentors each assigned 8-12 Mentees each. Freshmen register for the program during Summer Orientation, and are subsequently matched with upperclassmen student Mentors who either share the same major as the Mentee or who have already taken classes that the Mentee is registered for in the Fall semester. Student Mentors are expected to hold biweekly meetings with the Mentees to provide academic assistance and are made available to the Mentees at anytime for help with specific papers or exams.

The Mentor program, unfortunately, has not enjoyed much support from the college in recent years. Since its inception, student Mentors were given a stipend of \$200. Dr. Edgar pays for one half of this stipend out of her own pocket. The other half, in the past, has been provided from the Provost's office. Every year, Dr. Edgar has had to submit proposals and ask for continuation of this support. The committee suggests that the Mentor Program be provided a permanent home.

In order to encourage this type of peer academic mentoring, the committee also suggests expanding or revising the program to provide each hall (or particularly the FYE and mixed class halls) with a live-in academic mentor. This mentor, as a supplement to the RA staff, could continue some of the services provided by the Mentor Program and for appropriate compensation expand their duties to include academic programming in the halls. Currently, SUNY Oneonta operates a similar type program with live-in student academic advisors.