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Residential Colleges Task Force-Final Report

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TO: Carolyn Staton, Provost
FROM: Joseph Urgo, Task Force Chair
DATE: February 24, 2005
SUBJECT: Provost's Task Force on Residential Colleges, Final Report

I. Task Force Membership

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II. Residential College Task Force Meetings, Trips and Timeline

Monday, September 17, 2004: Organizational meeting

Creation of subcommittees:

Models: to locate exemplary models around the country;

Facilities: to locate and analyze campus facilities;

Funding: to explore the kinds of funding that may be required;

Conceptual: to provide a range of options for the definition of a University of Mississippi Residential College.

September-October, Subcommittee meetings throughout the two months

Friday, October 22: Subcommittee Reports

Thursday, November 4: Full committee discussion

Tuesday, December 14: Visit to Murray State University

Wednesday, February 2, 2005: Final Meeting of the Full Committee.

III. Task Force Recommendation

The task force unanimously recommends that student housing and the management of student academic and extracurricular records migrate from the present system to a system of Residential Colleges. Each Residential College should be associated with a University of Mississippi residence hall or hall-cluster, and all students, upon matriculation (including transfers) should have as their point of entry to all student services a Residential College. Affiliation with a Residential College shall continue for four years (and beyond, into alumni status) and is not contingent upon continued residency. In addition, all faculty and staff are to be affiliated with a Residential College. Faculty and staff affiliates are the pool from which the Residential Colleges may draw for volunteers to participate in various activities.

IV. Discussion

The history of residence life on American college campuses has come full circle since the 1950s and 1960s. In these decades, it was common to have ♦dorm parents♦ or some other adult presence (often faculty members) in the residence hall. The social and cultural transformations of the late 1960s led to policies of greater residential independence in the 1970s and 1980s, and most campuses accomplished an institutional divorce of housing from academic life in that era. Now, in the 2000s, we are witnessing a return to older models whereby an adult presence in the residential lives of undergraduates is considered less an intrusion and more an extension of the

educational responsibility of the institution. At the University of Mississippi, the 2000s have seen the emergence of learning communities (students housed by academic interest and served by faculty tutors), the setting up of classrooms, tutorial sessions, and Writing Center satellite locations in the residence halls, as well as numerous *ad hoc* programs designed to increase faculty/student interaction outside of classroom, discussion-section, and laboratory time. A Residential College system picks up these various pieces and organizes them into a cohesive

system of student academic and social life. It is the conclusion of the Task Force that conditions are ideal at The University of Mississippi to make the move from piecemeal programs to a comprehensive system of faculty, staff, and student interconnection.

The purpose of a Residential College system is to foster a universal sense of community. Large institutions tend toward a sense of anonymity among its individual members. The Residential College system takes one large number of people and distributes them in smaller numbers, into sub-groupings of collegiate identities. All large groups do this, of course, and we are already divided into academic departments, staff offices, clubs, fraternities and sororities. However, all such groupings are professionally or socially exclusive, and each has a competing allegiance off campus (faculty to their profession, fraternities to their national organization, and so forth). Residential College allegiances, on the other hand, are intended as concentrated allegiances to The University of Mississippi; the ♦parent♦ organization to the Residential College is the University itself.

A Residential College system has the potential to transform University culture by intensifying the inward, institutional focus of all constituents. Because one♦s Residential College affiliation precedes all other affiliations, it works to dilute an allegiance to any more exclusive organizations. It provides a default community to students, for example, who choose not to join more exclusive groups on campus. And because all students and employees of the University of Mississippi will have a Residential College affiliation, the system provides a universal experience to all students, faculty, and staff, thereby enhancing a sense of the University of Mississippi as an integral and cohesive community.

Finally, the Residential College system represents a commitment by The University of Mississippi to educate and nourish the whole lives of students, in classrooms, in dining halls, in residence halls, and in every aspect of student life. It further represents a commitment on the part of faculty and staff not simply to managing the one professional task they may have with students♦as teachers, administrators, or service providers♦but to commit themselves beyond their individual job descriptions to the entire student experience. Likewise, it commits students to modeling themselves as peers to adults, with adult connections and responsibilities to the members of their Residential College who are employed by The University of Mississippi.

V. Model

Murray State University, with a much less extensive residence life division, reformed its campus to a Residential College system in the 1990s. When task force committee members visited the campus, we became convinced that we had more than ample systems already in place to

implement Residential Colleges. Certain aspects of the Murray State system were especially instructive:

- All faculty have a choice between two merit-raise related service options: (a) service to the public schools; (b) active involvement in a

Residential College. The University has

created a budget line-item for service merit pay, and faculty are given annual merit raises based on their service to either program.

- Each Residential College has a faculty Head, whose 50% course buy-out is funded by housing. At Murray State, Heads do not live in the residence hall. Heads serve a two-year term; most opt for a second term, after which they must sit out for two years.
- The Head at Murray State is provided a \$2,000.00 budget for programming and operations, exclusive of staff salaries and stipends.
- Each Residential College is a microcosm of the general student population in terms of race, gender, academic major, etc.
- There is a university-wide Residential College competition committee, to organize academic, intramural sport, and other forms of competitive activities.
- Each Residential College has its own newspaper, separate traditions, annual events, etc. ❖ to individualize each College❖s identity.
- The largest Residential College has 400-500 students; the smallest has 200.
- Although every faculty and staff person on campus is a member of one Residential College, faculty and staff who become active in their Residential College are considered affiliates of the College. Currently, at Murray State, there are about 100 faculty and staff affiliates (among eight Residential Colleges). Affiliates serve as academic advisors, club directors, etc.
- Evidence of the Residential College system is ubiquitous on campus. For example, the designation is on the University ID card; the eight Residential College banners are in the dining center and sports arenas; and the bookstore sells clothing and other paraphernalia with Residential College insignia.
- Residential College Staff

1. Head (a faculty member)

2. Director (a graduate assistant)

3. Assistant to the Director (an undergraduate student)

4. The Residence Hall Assistants (undergraduate staff)

5. Desk workers (undergraduate student workers)

6. Class leaders (students)

7. Athletic Director (a student)

8. Secretary (staff member)

❖ Student culture: Murray State officials reported an increase in junior and senior residency on campus, and a decrease in the popularity of fraternities and sororities. Much attention is given to cultivating Residential College identity, including competitions for the intramural athletic flag, awarding of academic flags for high gpa, etc.

❖ There is a plan to assign a Development officer to each Residential College.

VI. Task Force Suggestions

The following are features of a University of Mississippi Residential College system favored by the Task Force (not in any particular order). Some may be initiated immediately; others are understood as long-term goals.

1. Strong faculty participation, at varying definitional levels.

- ❖ live-in, faculty resident & family wherever possible;
- ❖ faculty associates assigned to halls;
- ❖ faculty affiliates who may teach a class on the premises or offer an evening program;
- ❖ faculty guests in for a special event, a tea, or a meal.

❖ the task force is assuming that the term Residential *College* signals faculty and student cooperation, and that the mission of the Residential College will be driven by the will of two constituencies acting jointly. Exceptions to University housing policies may thus be expected in order to meet the goals of the Residential College.

2. Classroom space for programs like LIBA102; seminar rooms for upper-division courses for majors.

3. Office space for faculty associates.

4. Advising: have Residential College students advised by faculty associates (this would effectively remove advising from departments and schools and transfer responsibility to Colleges. All departments would have faculty affiliated with every College, and thus advising duties would be distributed among faculty associates).

5. Computer labs and study areas for students.

6. Residential suites for students, clusters of rooms instead of long hallways of doubles.

7. Establish an initial Residential College identity.

❖ the make-up of the Residential Colleges should not be left to chance, but should be selected by a committee of Admissions, Housing, and Faculty;

❖ the community created should be a microcosm of the larger student body in terms of racial & ethnic diversity, gender balance, and presence of transfer, international, athletic, and other categories of students;

❖ the first residents might be known as the Founders and might be asked to create a flag, various symbols, rituals, and recurring events.

8. Self-Governance: the Residential Colleges should be self-governing. The Founders will be charged with drawing up a constitution and bylaws which will govern it.

9. Establish Dining Traditions. It does not seem necessary to have a dining hall in every Residential College. However, a tradition of a weekly or monthly dinner might be established, held in Johnson Commons, for example. A coffee bar is important, however, one catering to a Residential College and open 24 hours (perhaps staffed by students). A breakfast bar is another possibility if students want another opportunity for shared meal space.

VII. Facilities. Bill McCartney, Director of Housing, has filed or will file a separate report on new construction and reforms to existing housing.

VIII. Funding. Minimal funds are necessary for the initial establishment of a Residential College system. The largest funding outlays would be for the creation of faculty housing within each residence, but this is understood as a long-term goal. Residential suites for Heads may be added gradually, as funding is secured. The Task Force recommends that the University of Mississippi Foundation explore the potential naming opportunities associated with Residential Colleges.

IX. Local Challenges

There are issues particular to The University of Mississippi or to Mississippi state institutions of higher learning which will pose challenges to the implementation of this proposal.

❖ Greek system ❖ rush ❖ week in the first semester will interfere with community-building efforts in the Residential Colleges. It may be wise to move rush to the Wintersession or to the spring semester.

❖ The IHL policy against co-ed housing (by floor, for example) makes it impossible to achieve the gender balance crucial to the Residential College experience.

- ◆ Many of our residence halls will need to be renovated over time to meet the goal of each hall having a faculty residence; nothing in this report is meant to suggest that such renovations need to be done immediately or in advance of the adoption of a Residential College system on campus.
- ◆ Large residence halls (Crosby, Kincannon, Stockard-Martin) will pose a logistical challenge because of the size of their present populations. It may be necessary to divide these buildings into more than one Residential College, or to use portions of these buildings for classrooms or student support administrative offices.
- ◆ The Task Force did not discuss the ways in which UM staff would participate; it is suggested that some method of office-release time or other flexible measures may be created to allow staff involvement in Residential College activities.

X. Conclusion

The Task Force considered the option of establishing one or two Residential Colleges and adding these to the mix of housing options available to students. The committee ultimately rejected this option because it would do little to change the campus culture, and may well introduce an element of confusion regarding the purpose of Residential Colleges on campus. The Task Force concludes that the migration to a universal Residential College student administration and housing system would have a transformative effect on undergraduate culture at The University of Mississippi, providing an intimate portal through which students would enter the larger community, and establishing a foundation on which to build productive and nurturing cross-generational relationships among students, faculty and staff.