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Intentional Residential Programming for Upper Division Students

Sally Zheng

University of San Diego, sallyzheng@sandiego.edu

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University of San Diego

Intentional Residential Programming for Upper-Division Students

An Action Research project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

By
Sally Zheng

Action Research Project Committee
Cheryl Getz, Ed.D.
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Abstract

The purpose of this study explored ways that the residential education department supported students through their transition out of college at the University of San Diego. In particular, it focused on intentional programming for upper-division students. The participants in this study were upper-division students who were in their second year, third year, fourth year, or fifth year at USD. This study showed that there is a low attendance rate of upper-division students at campus programming and challenges around finding a sense of belonging. Upper-division students are known to be independent, academic and career focused. This research also found that most upper-division students valued attending residential programs that were centered around wellness topics. Additionally, upper-division students found great value in connecting with their Resident Assistants and community building. There were three different cycles, consisting of individual interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Also, I utilized a meta-cycle that included an analysis of the different systems in the research and a personal reflection on the cycles. The results from this study informed a proposed intentional program model for residential education and a targeted guideline for supporting upper-division students. Residents Assistants were able to implement these programming models in their areas and have increased intentional interactions with students.

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Introduction

The values that I incorporated in my research topic were centered around student leader growth and the ability to support students holistically through intentional interactions. I am passionate about programming for students, specifically upper division students. Through this research, I have found a way to incorporate intentional interactions in a programming model. I also value interpersonal relationships and how that is viewed through the lens of student success, student development, student involvement, and community building. I also understood that as a residential department our main values are centered around a culture of care for our students and being able to connect them to different resources offered on campus. My values reflect those of my institutions and I was able to utilize my skills of collaboration with different campus partners in my research.

My values lead me to see the challenges of student growth and lack of student engagement on campus. I have noticed that students lack a community in apartment-style buildings versus a dormitory. I have also noticed that there is a lack of attendance from upper-division students in programming and events on campus. I have found that Resident Assistants were struggling to connect with students because they were not in the apartment or students simply did not come out to programs. Many students that I encountered did not know who their RA was or did not connect well with other residents in their building. I saw this through roommate conflicts or neighbor conflicts. I have observed a lack of community building and engagement with residents and RA.

In addition, I recognized early on that there was a lack of awareness of resources on campus or ways for students to get involved because students have gotten into the routine of coming directly to their room after class and not coming out to programs in the lounge or common room. This then created a domino effect to where there was a lack of outreach to RA's when it came to concerns that residents may have. What usually happened from this similar pattern was that students lacked conflict management skills and the conflict grew and became a larger issue that was brought to the Community Director's attention.

The lack of student engagement and RA involvement had led to possible retention rate challenges. For example, students may not choose to return to on-campus housing because of their negative experience. The uncertainty that came from not knowing the true values of upper-division students have stemmed from a lack of a residential curriculum or program model and limited connection to academic affairs.

Through my position as an Assistant Community Director of upper-division apartments, I have the opportunity to attend different programs and events hosted by my RA's. In these spaces, I have observed a lack of upper-division student involvement, whether this is through having open discussions with their RA's or other students. Through my reflections, I saw a gap between programming for the first year and second-year students and upper-division students. This new insight ignited my interest in initiating the implementation of a program model specifically for the upper-division students. Through this initiative, I was very intentional about trying to meet the needs of upper-division students and tried to collaborate with the first year and second year Community Directors on their programming model. With all of this information collected, I found a common pattern that is successful in outreach to students. I also acknowledged that there

was a different student dynamic in the first and second-year experience areas and understanding that many of the same students who have lived in the first year experience housing area transition to upper-division housing.

As I have been attending different events and talking to students about what upper-division needs and wants are, I was able to incorporate that into the residential curriculum and program model. In my position, I helped create a residential curriculum and connected it with intentional programming. I have noticed that intentional interactions with RAs were very valuable to these students. I have incorporated intentional interactions into a program model. In addition, I have come to an understanding that upper-division students may be disengaged because they were focused on graduating, hoped to finish up their classes with good grades, found comfort in their already established social groups, and found a job. I was curious about how these all related to retention rates and alumni relations when our students graduated and how effective a program model are in upper-division areas.

One of my goals that I have accomplished was implementing a more supportive programming model that incorporated intentional interactions and the residential curriculum, specifically for upper-division students. I saw a focused attention and resource outreach to upper-division students more centered around career development and academic affairs. Other campus partners were more proactive in outreach and exposure to further support students. I ultimately wanted was able to set a model to build leadership amongst students and staff and became more involved with upper-division students.

The purpose of this study was to study the needs and wants of upper-division students at a predominantly white private institution and how we as a residential education department can

support students who were planning to leave our university. In my position, I feel that I have impacted their living experiences. Through my research, I was able to encourage more involvement and attention to upper-division students and an overall understanding of the different needs these students have. I found ways to better support them with the resources and power that we held in residential life and then at large as an institution. I created a programming model that future RA's used as guidance to their programming planning for more upper-division student attendance. The research questions that I focused on in my action research project are: How can I incorporate intentional interaction focus models in a residential program to increase engagement for upper-division students? How can I increase engagement between RA and Upper-division students through intentional residential programming?

Research Question

The research question is: How can I increase the engagement of RAs and Upper-division students through intentional residential programming?

- A. How does upper-division student's sense of belonging compare to on-campus experience and residential life experience.
- B. How can I increase the engagement of Resident Assistants and STEP/UP students through intentional residential programming?

Definitions of Terms

Sense of Belonging is "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012).

Co-Curricular Learning Outcomes (CCLO) are statements that specify what students will know or be able to do as a result of interacting with a co-curricular program. They are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, or abilities that students will possess upon interaction with a program. USD's CCLO: Authentic engagement, well-being, courageous living, identities and communities, and purpose.

Upper-division students are undergraduate students at University of San Diego who have taken sophomore, junior, or senior academic courses and have been registered as a student for two or more years.

Resident Assistants (RAs) are student leaders employed by the department of Residential Life who have live-in responsibilities within a residence hall in exchange for compensation of room and board. The main responsibilities of an RA are to build community through programming, maintain safety of the residence halls through policy enforcement, and manage roommate conflicts with the help of their Assistant Community Director and/or Community Director.

Assistant Community Directors (ACDs) are part-time Graduate Assistants employed by the department of Residential Life who manage a residence hall, supervise a staff of RAs, and have other live-in responsibilities for the residence halls.

Community Directors (CDs) are full-time professional staff members employed by the department of Residential Life who manage a residence hall(s), supervise a staff of RAs, and have other live-in responsibilities for the residence halls

Literature Review

Throughout residential life, there has been a history of low attendance at programming. Specifically, the student population that has had low attendance are normally upper-division students. There have been other efforts to incentivize attending programs by providing free food at programming. However, there still seems to be a low turn out even with a plethora of food. Through my position as an Assistant Community Director of upper-division students, I have noticed that students in these areas are independent and have a high focus on academic affairs and career development. In particular, many of the Resident Assistants in these areas are also upper-division students themselves. The common themes that align with my values in this research are campus programming, upper-division student involvement, and sense of belonging.

Campus Programming

Many of the literature that I found, centered around residential programming and student involvement, upper-division students are at a different developmental stage than that of first and second-year students. The values for these students shift because of their community and environment. For example, most upper-division students are housed in apartment styles buildings, which as Bradley (2013) stated is a style that most upper-division students seek out. However, some of the literature also talked about the need for leadership opportunities in these residential apartments because they are so secluded from campus life. Knight, J. and Hegedus, C. (2002) showed that there was a 75.8% involvement rate in extracurricular activities at their institution and of this 66 % of students agree that joining organizations helps them to strengthen leadership skills.

Some authors suggest the most important indicators of retention in on-campus housing were dining plan, leadership opportunities, academic support, and proximity to campus (Yan et al., 2005). Student involvement is very important especially in upper-division students because it equips them with transferable skills for their future careers. These literatures helped me find ways to center programming in residential life around leadership opportunities for students.

Student Engagement and Involvement

Additional themes that came up was a lack of overall student engagement and involvement on campus (Knight and Hegedus, 2002). Many institutions are aware of this and are working their best to motivate students to be more proactive and interactive on campus. Whether this is through different campus-wide events, better advertisement, incentives, or outreach procedures. However, I would critique that although there is growth in trying to support students, this is mostly seen in first-year experience programs. Bradley (2013) observed an awareness of the sophomore “slump” and a decrease in retention because these students feel a lack of sense of belonging on campus because of the lack of involvement in extracurricular activities on campus.

Another theme that is prevalent in the literature is centered around a culture of care and support for student success throughout their college journey (Bradley, 2013). However, I view student success as including academic affairs and yet there still is a gap between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. I feel that if an institution is to pride itself on a culture of care for students that we need to think about the holistic student and their overall journey in college, not just focusing on their first year because this is where we see the “sophomore slump” and retention rates begin to decrease. Browne, Headworth, and Saum (2009) discussed that most programs have high attendance when a faculty is involved and can often lead to a more

educational component of programming outcomes. However, one limitation is that faculty do not always have the availability to attend programs especially when they are mostly in the late evening times and some faculty may not be as supportive in residential programming efforts.

Sense of Belonging

I have observed that upper-division students are generally in different developmental stages than other class levels because they seem to prioritize their future goals. This makes sense because they are usually preparing for life after college. Some literature suggests that upper-division students should have a sense of belonging and know resources on campus purely because they have been on campus for multiple years (Bradley, 2013). But I would also argue that many of these students are so invested in their academics that they may not have gotten an opportunity to seek out resources provided by the campus. That is why residential halls play a very important role in supporting students who are about to make the transition out of college. In addition, residential halls hold a space where students are able to interact with each other, which is an essential component in identity formation because it enables the development of a sense of respect and a sense of interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). One of the articles states that students living in residence halls who participate in activities to support and build their community are engaging in learning experiences that impact their education and personal development (Astin, 1999). These are important literature to consider in my research because upper-division students are still growing and learning even in their last few years in college.

Sense of belonging and social satisfaction in higher education is also another theme that is relevant to institutions whose majority of students live on campus. I define a sense of belonging as students who are able to connect with others and feel comfortable to ask for support

from their community. Kaser (2016) talks about challenges students who have minority racial backgrounds face when trying to connect with a predominantly white community and how that impacts their involvement on campus. I also view a sense of belonging in relation to geographical location. Kaser (2016) found that living farther away from campus is associated with lower levels of social satisfaction and that there was a positive correlation between sense of belonging and social experience. Living in residence halls had a positive impact on social satisfaction in this study and other studies have shown the many benefits of living on campus (Astin, 1999; Shushok, Scales, Sriram, & Kidd, 2011). This is important to note in my research because in my position I try to create spaces or events that are all inclusive to students. However, it is difficult to provide a common space for students to connect in when I receive a limited amount of feedback and input.

Factors that disrupt students' sense of belonging are outside influences, which include parental support. According to Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007), parental support is connected to faster declines in sense of belonging during the first year. This is particularly similar to the challenges that USD faces with parents wanting to be overly involved in their students' lives. It is important to reflect on this issue and implement ways that we can educate both students and parents on developmental ways to support each other.

Another commonality that I found in all of the articles I have read was that the main methodology used was survey questionnaires to students (Hegedus et al., 2002). Specifically, these surveys used Likert scales in asking students if they feel a sense of belonging on campus and about the engagement of RA staff. One topic that I found interesting that many of the articles talked about was staff contact. One study showed that connection with the hall director, the only

indicator in the data set measuring contact with that staff level, was connected significantly to student involvement in house activities (Yan et al., 2005). This was important information because I hold a position that is similar to a hall directors position. Villanueva (2018) talked about the importance of helping RA's understand their impact on student lives and motivating them to create intentional programming for their residents. RA's are the first point of interaction which allows them to set the foundation for students' involvement. Seeing that there is a direct positive correlation to my presence with students, I was able to take a more proactive approach to interact with students more often to promote community engagement.

Another interesting methodology I found in articles was taking a more ecological survey-based approach. One of the studies found that taking an ecological perspective helps unearth assumptions about residential life that exist within and among campus stakeholders (Shushok et al., 2011). These articles broaden my perspective because it asks residents about "how it is" at their institution and "how it should be." As I am currently trying to create a residential curriculum, it is important to get student input because they are the audience in programming events.

Overall, student engagement is scarce when there are not proactive efforts by an institution and staff members to support students. In particular upper-division students on campus have limited resources and attention by many institutions because there is a stigma that these students should already be adapted to their environment. However, working in residential life I have noticed many roommate conflicts arise because upper-division students at USD lack autonomy in their decision making and actions and often rely on authority to solve their conflicts.. There is an overall privilege that many students in higher education have in regards to

having their problems solved for them by the institution for multiple reasons. That is why it is important to be intentional about connecting with students, whether this is through programming events, or implementing support systems to help students' developmental growth into adulthood and help them reach independence.

Context

The organizational setting is at the University of San Diego. USD is a Catholic institution and a predominantly white private institution built in 1949. USD has a little over 9,000 students and over 400 full-time faculty members. My research is based on USD Residential life in apartment buildings that are continuous housing for upper-division students. This includes Manchester Village, features apartment units comprising four single bedrooms or two double bedrooms within a continuous occupancy area, and University Terrace Apartments, which features 38 apartments with two bedrooms and either 1 or 2 baths for three or four residents respectively and continuous occupancy. The mission statement and values for USD Residential Life is:

Mission: Residential Education fosters the holistic development of members within the USD residential community. We are committed to providing purposefully inclusive communities that create opportunities for personal and academic success in collaboration with members of the Torero Family.

Vision: Our residential communities cultivate and enrich students by integrating learning, engagement and development. We contribute to students' success by offering student-centered programs, services and environments that foster student involvement, responsibility, leadership, and wellbeing. We provide formational experiences that

empower students to be engaged leaders as they move beyond our communities and into the world.

I am an Assistant Community Director for upper-division apartments. I directly supervise 4 Resident Assistants and co-supervise 7 Resident Assistants with a Community Director. My role is a live-in position, in which I live in an upper-division student apartment complex. I oversee programming by the RAs and attend programming events. I have 1-1 with RA's to talk about programming strategies and I currently sit on the residential curriculum committee.

Understanding institutions characteristics is important because we pride ourselves with a culture of care and dignity for all students. It is important for our Residential Education department because we want to make students feel a sense of belonging and welcomed in their living environment and connected to those around them and the university. This research is specifically important to me because I have always been passionate about supporting upper-division students. Having gone through an undergraduate experience at a large public institution I did not get much support around career development and navigating the different challenges in my last few years in college. I have seen this same pattern replicated at USD. My goal was to increase upper-division student engagement and involvement on campus through intentional programming in residential education and working toward the future for a campus-wide effort.

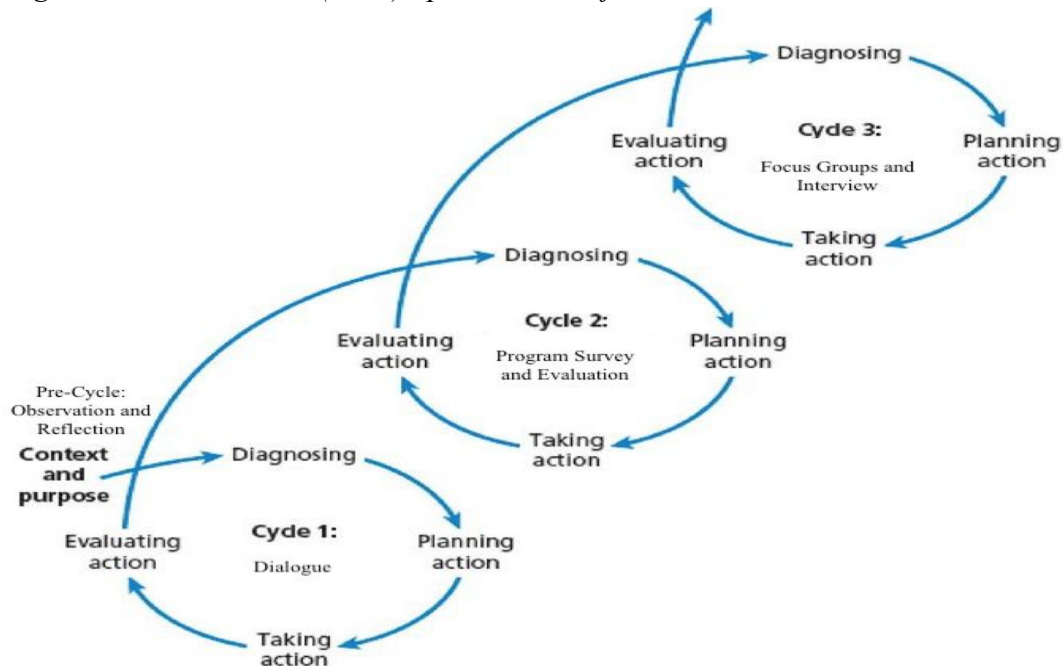
Some challenges that I found were that there was certain biases that I held for supporting upper-division students because I work with them every day. For example, I wanted to help them to the full extent even if they did not want the connection. I was often over ambitious to think that

there were a drastic change in upper-division student program participation when there was only a slight increase in program attendance rate. And I over ambitions in the different conversations I had with different faculty members and RAs because they were not as receptive or lacked availability to be more involved in upper-division resident programming.

I was able to connect with RAs 1-1 and as a group on how effective their program model was, what their student's needs are, advertisement, and brainstorming ideas on how we can further support students. I worked closely with my supervisor to support campus partner participation and academic affairs relationships. I was also a part of the residential curriculum committee and have worked in collaboration with other campus partners to incorporate some of my programming models into RA training.

Methodology I

In order to conduct meaningful and intentional research, I used Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) research model. This action research cycle is composed of a pre-step, context/purpose, and four basic steps: diagnosing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating. This research method filtered through the different continuous cycles to further study various action plans. From the pre-step, I have gathered as much information in order to have intentional planning for future steps. To get a better understanding of the context and purpose of my research I was present at all residential program events to observe and take notes on the different dynamics in those settings.

Figure 1*Coghlan and Brannick's (2005) Spiral Model of Action Research*

The image of the clock sums up my research method because this research method is composed of multiple cycles that have different time spans, Figure 1. For example, on the clock, the hour hand may represent the project as a whole, which may take years to complete its cycle. The minute hand may represent sections of the project and the second hand which may represent the smaller specific actions within the projects, such as interviews or meetings. This imagery has helped me have a better understanding of the research process and the different processes that are happening simultaneously.

In conjunction with this research method, I focused on the parallel process that comes with the cycles, that is the meta-cycle of inquiry. The model encompasses the core cycle process within a table-like diagram with three pillars. These pillars focus on the content, process, and premise reflection. The culture of my organization or subculture within the group is essential on

how my research question is discussed and viewed. The meta-process is just as important because throughout the research I have self-reflected on my positionality in the different processes and how I am able to contribute to the different cycles on an individual level.

Some limitations and challenges of this research method are that sometimes researchers get too preoccupied in the cycles at the expense of the quality of participation. For most of the cycles, I have utilized different methods of data-gathering. However, I understand that particularly at our university we over survey students and this could be ineffective because students get desensitized to surveys and end up not genuinely completing them. The survey method can sometimes be repetitive and rigid which may limit spontaneity and creativity in the different cycles.

Pre-Cycle and Needs Assessment

Throughout my upcoming four years of experience working in residential life, I have noticed a lack of attendance and participation from upper-division students in their living communities. My intentions coming into the position as an Assistant Community Director at USD was to implement an intentional interaction model to encourage resident outreach and involvement. The pre-cycle was completed in early September 2019. During the pre-cycle I attended two programs per month held by RAs and served as an observer of each program. I noticed that the most upper-division students that attended the program spanned anywhere from 2-10 participants. I also saw that more students came to programs that were proactive in their outreach and had food incentives to boost participation outcomes. Additionally, I noticed that programs around CCLOs, well-being and authentic engagement, had more upper-division student participation.

During the pre-cycle, I also recorded my self-reflections about my role as an ACD and how my identities show up in program spaces. I journaled about how my presence at program events can put pressure on RAs to be more interactive with their residents or influence the way they show up. I reflected on the amount of trust I have for the RAs to meet expectations of their role and their intentionality with connecting with residents. I felt comfortable with the RAs to be able to host and facilitate their own program events. However, I found myself curious if they were putting their best efforts in connection with their residents and encouraging them to come to programs. Additionally, I often reflected on the missions and values of the residential life department and aligned it with the work that RAs, ACDs, and CDs do. I have found that our mission and values are a foundation for our programs and it helps set an intention for our interactions with students.

Throughout the different articles that I have read in regards to student involvement in residential halls, I have noticed a common theme of low participation in general. However, upper-division students have been known to be more independent and career-focused because of their different stages of development. Since upper-division students are preparing their transition out of college, it is important that programs adapt to their different needs. For example, preparing students for the outside job force instead of college readiness programs. Although these general themes are important to consider, I am still learning about what in particular upper-division students' needs are at a private institution and if being part of a community that is predominately white is associated with any challenges or limitations for student engagement.

RAs and upper-division students have participated in specific residential program events and focus groups within these events. It is important that the participants feel safe and aware of

my research study. Therefore, I explained the intentionality of the study with my RAs through weekly meetings. My purpose was clarified through a series of conversations with Community Directors from first-year, second-year, and upper-division areas. I also consulted with the Assistant Director of Residential Education to provide additional support for the program model.

Methodology II

I used focus groups, 1-1 individual interviews, surveys, and existing data to better analyze both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research project. These 1-1 sessions were held with eleven upper-division RAs. Some challenges that I encountered in these processes are the participation and intentions of the upper-division students. Through the different dialogues with my participants and my self-reflection from the needs assessment, I was able to complete three cycles of research centered around Coghlan and Brannick research method while simultaneously considering the meta-cycle of inquiry. Each cycle of this research includes four main steps: diagnosing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action.

Main Steps in Each Cycle:

Diagnosing context and purpose. I looked at existing data about upper-division students' participation history, needs assessment, and programming models. I consulted with my critical friend's group to discuss the different possible outcomes and patterns for successful community building. I explored ways to connect institutional characteristics and values to our area specific communities' values in a programming model. I also conducted continuous self-reflection on my positionality and how my values align with that of my environments' values.

Planning actions from the previous analysis. In this process of the cycle, I was able to compile the survey data and diagnose the responses with the Resident Assistants through our 1-1 monthly meetings in preparation for future month's program events. We discussed what the residents have said about the program, what has worked and what has not worked. We sought out any patterns of needs and wants of these residents. Once this data was collected we planned out the next month's program around the suggestions made in the survey. We discussed the objectives of each program, anticipated outcomes, and any limitations. We also mapped out the way programs are advertised, outreach processes, and implementation techniques.

Taking action on the program plan. In this step, we implemented the program model for the next month's program. We discussed ways to align our institutional values and our community values in the program events. We followed the advertisement plan to have better outreach to students and encourage participation.

Evaluating Action by observation and survey evaluation. To evaluate the plan, I attended 11 monthly program events throughout the year planned by the RAs. At these programs, I was able to interact with upper-division students and RAs. I also observed the different group dynamics and interactions between residents and student leaders. After each program event, the Resident Assistants completed a resident program evaluation survey about what was successful or unsuccessful about the program, how residents heard about the program, how beneficial was the program, and what can be done to improve future programs.

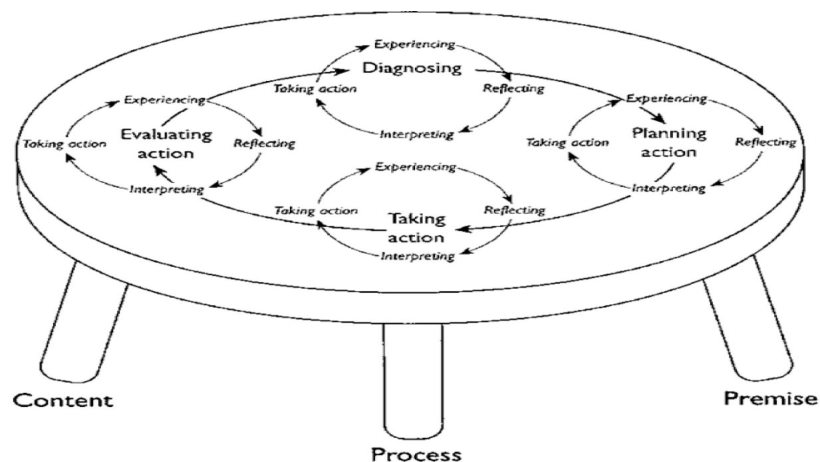
Meta-Cycle of inquiry: Concurrent process with the Main Step cycles

Content and background. I reflected on the current challenges for students, residential life, and college institutions. I found that the main challenge for students is finding a sense of

belonging on campus and receiving the necessary support to succeed. I found that challenges in residential life included supporting students by encouraging developmental skills rather than providing them customer service and providing students a home away from home. Additionally, I believe higher education struggles with providing equal support to all students and they are continuously growing to support our students through inclusive and diverse initiatives. I have also considered the current political and social climate on what is happening in general in higher education and how it may affect our current systems. During my research we had a tuition scandal that caused suspicion within higher education administration and current events relating to social justice issues. These current event issues were relevant in my research because they were often topics students wanted to discuss at programs and some RAs expressed interest in creating a program centered around current events.

Figure 2

Meta-Cycle of Action Research



The process of the main steps. The different strategies and procedures used throughout the cycle were innovative and created from evaluations of each program, Figure 2. During the

main steps I focused on how the diagnosis is conducted, how action planning is created and implemented, and how the evaluation process is conducted and critiqued.

The premise of institutional and community characteristics. The individual perspectives from the residents and RAs about the programs they held were that they were in residential spaces occasionally, most of the time included food, and were a way to socialize with other residents. An institutional level perspective about residential programming is that it is a way to build community and foster a sense of belonging while focusing on the institution's CCLOs. Through conversations with residents at USD I have learned that one reason why students did not feel a sense of belonging on campus and in residential life was because we are at a predominantly white institution and there is a lack of minority representing identities. This can be challenging for many students and can impact their involvement on campus.

Cycle 1: Dialogue Interviews (October 2019)

The 30-minute interviews were conducted with 12 Resident Assistants of Upper-division housing areas. The objectives of the Dialogue phase was to understand the relationship between Resident Assistants and upper-division students. These were information conversations with RAs and I did not use a strict script to follow. The conversations also allowed RAs to self-reflect about their own needs as an upper-division student as well. My goal was to explore the dynamic relationship between an RA and upper-divisions students.

Sub-Cycle 1.a Diagnosing

This sub-cycle began in early October 2019 as I was transitioning my supervision roles of RAs to conduct bi-weekly, 1-1 conversations. During these conversations, we talked about RA and student relationships, RA's experience interacting with upper-division students,

programming efforts in upper-division housing, and challenges RAs typically face supporting upper-division students. These individual conversations included self-reflection from RAs, where they were asked to explore a sense of belonging for upper-division students through relationships with themselves or programming events in the areas. Many RAs talked about the difficulties of finding appropriate times to support upper-division students since many of them had extracurricular activities that were off campus. Some stated that supporting upper-division students was easier compared to first-year students because upper-division students are more hands-off and do not need a lot of hand holding. When asked which co-curricular learning outcome programs were most interesting to upper-division students, many RAs voiced that well-being was the most important CCLO for upper-division students in particular because of the heightened stress and the realities of life after college.

Sub-Cycle 1.b Planning Action

From these Dialogues with RAs, we were able to come up with an action plan for their next program events. We discussed ways we can better support upper-division students knowing that they may be more interested in events centered around well-being and knowing that there may be some challenges about finding a time to meet everyone. RAs were told to fill out a program proposal about the program event and a CCLO that ties to their upcoming programs, as well as their goals from the program.

Sub-Cycle 1.c Taking Action

RAs were approved for their programs two weeks prior to their program date. Once their program was approved, I attended all of their programs to observe how many upper-division students showed up and their interactions with the RAs. The demographics of these students

were not collected for attendance. Since it was during exam season, most RAs centered their program around well-being and ways to de-stress during the times of high stress and anxiety about exams. Most RAs held their programs later at night so that students were able to attend after their extracurricular activities or take a study break. Some RAs even collaborated with campus partners from the wellness center at USD.

Sub-cycle 1.d Evaluating Action

The takeaways from these programs that I observed is that RAs do know their residents best because they live with them in community and have consistent interactions with them. The programs centered around wellbeing had more upper-division student participation and many of them expressed enjoying these programs because it was an opportunity to step away from studying and to de-stress. I also saw that RAs were using their own programs as stress relief and connecting with others about their similar challenges. At the end of each program RAs were tasked to fill out a program evaluation form where they were able to comment about their program event and provide suggestions for future programs. These program evaluation results were positive in that RAs appreciated the connection with their students and being able to provide their students support. The main feedback for the programs is that the RAs wished more students were able to attend, as these programs had a range from 5- 15 residents show up. Some ways RAs talked about overcoming this challenge was providing better advertisement of programs and reaching out to individual residents.

CYCLE 2: Focus group activity (November 2019- January 2020)

The focus group activity was centered around inviting 12 RAs to self- reflect on what community means to them as an upper-division student themselves, what type of relationship

they want with their residents, and what they think their students' needs are in upper-division areas. There was a poster paper for each of these questions and RAs were asked to write as many one word responses for each prompt (see appendix B). My intention was to have RAs explore their positionality as both an RA and an upper-division student. I wanted to invite RAs to find commonalities with their residents as they were also students who were experiencing the same challenges and stress of finishing up their college career and having more experience in higher education.

Sub-Cycle 2.a Diagnosing

During this sub-cycle, I saw that RAs were able to write multiple one word responses to many of the prompts and also have a conversation with each other during the process. They seemed to fill out the question around what they needed in their community themselves faster than the other questions. At the end of this cycle I asked them to walk around and reflect on some words that resonated with them. We then had a small group discussion about our thoughts and curiosities about the poster responses. Many RAs talked about how there was a need for a more intimate and comfortable relationship with their peers, especially to form study groups or bond outside of classrooms. RAs also talked about often being misunderstood by students who think RAs are only there to get them in trouble, when in reality RAs want to connect with students and provide them guidance. In conclusion, many RAs agreed that they have similar needs as their students and would appreciate having intentional interactions with their residents.

Sub-Cycle 2.b Planning Action

From this focus group, RAs were more able to align their needs and wants with their upper-division residents. They then came up with program ideas that catered to both their

residents needs and their own. Their ideas were submitted into a program proposal that I provided in which RAs were able to list the specific details for each program. Many of these proposals were centered around CCLOs of wellness and purpose. Since it was getting near summer internship season, many RAs centered their program around exploring purpose.

Another action that stemmed from the 1-1 dialogues with RAs and the focus group is implementing an intentional interaction plan. The intentional interaction plan is a set of guiding questions that RAs have with each of their residents focusing on checking-in on their well-being and helping residents explore their purpose and goals (see Appendix D).

Sub-Cycle 2.c Taking Action

I chose to attend one RA's program in November centered around resume writing and interview preparation. During this program event the RA collaborated with the career center at USD and had a representative come out and give students advice and guidance on job preparation. This program also allowed students to reflect on their purpose and their larger goal in life. This program was a great way to introduce students to resources provided by the university and to help set students up for success after college. Other RAs had similar programs in which they centered around helping students find their purpose as an upper-division student who is on their way to graduation.

The intentional interaction plan was turned into a form where RAs fill out their interactions with their residents. This was a great way for RAs to stay connected with their residents and take down notes about where their residents stand as far as their relationship with the RA, their well-being, and goal-setting (see Appendix D).

Sub-cycle 2.d Evaluating Action

In the one program evaluations per 12 RAs sent out to each RAs residents which consisted of 20-40 residents each, after our cycle two focus group, RAs were able to talk about ways that they were able to learn from their own program and be in solidarity with their students. In the programs that I attended, I saw RAs interacting with their peers as if they were doing so outside of a classroom setting. This was great to see the intentionality RAs had when connecting with their residents. I also heard about the many takeaways that RAs learned during their programs around purpose and how it has helped them get closer to their residents. Some RAs stated that the focus group allowed them to think about ways that they can have intentional interactions with their residents and build rapport with them. One of the RAs, Jay Mobisa, stated, “As an RA I was able to combat the RA myth of us being unapproachable and only out to get students in trouble, instead I was able to switch the narrative of what an RA is and has made it a more positive experience for both RAs and upper-division students.” Another RA, Jessica Liyanage, stated “intentional interactions were helpful to refer back to when I was concerned for a resident or when I was looking for ways to connect with residents.”

CYCLE 3: Program Survey (February 2020)

As the final cycle with RAs and upper-division students, this survey gave residents living in upper-division housing an opportunity to answer questions relating to their experience in the housing community, relationship with their RAs, and the most important CCLO to them. This survey also takes a poll on how many programs each resident attends and feedback or comments about future program events. This survey was sent via e-mail and I collected 126 upper-division resident responses, 23%- 2nd years, 49.2% -3rd years, 18.3%- 4th years, 2.4% -5th years, and 7.1%-grad/law students.

Sub-Cycle 3.a Diagnosing

During this stage, I sent three survey reminders to upper-division residents. The students who responded were largely 3rd year students and 65.1% lived in Manchester Village apartments, which was closer to campus than other apartments. I reached out to RAs to help encourage their residents to fill out the survey. I found that of these responses 34.9% attended 0 programs, 49.2% of residents attended 1-2 programs, 15.1% attended 3-4 programs, and 1% attended 5 plus programs during Fall 2019. This was not as surprising to see because during our other cycles and program evaluations, many RAs expressed low attendance to their programs. Other results from this cycle showed that about 71 out of 126 upper-division students value well-being as the most important CCLO to focus on and there was a positive skew towards feeling a sense of community and valuing relationships with their RAs. Many students expressed appreciation towards programs that had food as incentives and helpful life topics. Other feedback included having programs at more convenient times and better advertisements. The survey results were then shared with RAs at the beginning of the month and was utilized as a tool for them to start brainstorming program ideas of this month (see Appendix C).

Sub-Cycle 3.b Planning Action

I had conversations with most RAs about the results and discussed ways that the results were surprising or as expected. Many RAs expressed that the responses were consistent with what they have been hearing from residents during their intentional interactions. They were pleased to see that Residents valued the relationship with their RAs and valued programs around well-ness. During the month of February RAs planned program events aligning with the

feedback that they received from their residents. Some of them sent out surveys to their own residents about their interests and took polls on dates and times that they were most available.

Sub-Cycle 3.c Taking Action

A program one RA proposed was around a combination between CCLO purpose and well-being. It was an activity where residents cut out items or words from a magazine that stood out to them in regards to their aspirations in life or what they need at the moment. This activity was a success because residents who participated were engaged and had dialogue about goals. It also allowed space for mindless activity of cutting and pasting as a stress relief. In developing this program, RAs were able to evaluate the survey results and use their creativity to propose a program that met their residents' needs. Whether this was adjusting the time of their programs or providing more food incentives.

Sub-cycle 3.d Evaluating Action

Many RA's program evaluation represented the positive results of their program events. RAs expressed having a better connection with their residents by understanding their thoughts about community and expectations for program events. RAs were able to collect feedback from their residents and improve future programming. At the end of this last cycle, RAs developed skills to connect with their residents and provide program events that focused on their needs. RAs were able to include intentional interaction techniques into their programming by focusing on goal setting and well-being.

Limitations

Although I had 126 upper-division students respond to a survey I sent out during cycle 3, some of the limitations during my action research were the lack of respondents from upper-division students to attend programs hosted by RAs. One area of improvement for this research is to collect demographics from residents who came out to programs. I did not require an attendance sheet for program attendance and did not collect this data during my surveys. Another limitation was that there were only 12 RAs for upper-division areas and there was not enough time for me to attend all RA's programs. It was also very difficult to get feedback from upper-division students about each program and there was not enough time to pass by where RAs were able to implement more than one program based on the feedback.

Another limitation is that I was originally part of a residential curriculum committee where we were brainstorming ways we could incorporate CCLOs into a curriculum for our RAs and residents, but during the second year of my role as an ACD the committee fell apart and attention was given to an institutional initiative on incorporating CCLOs in departmental missions rather than a residential curriculum. This was an unfortunate event, because our committee worked hard to advocate for a residential curriculum and the committee fell apart without much notice. However, without the residential curriculum, I was still able to create a program model for our RAs, as seen below in recommendations.

As the upper-division RAs supervisor, I had to be mindful about my positionality as their supervisor and communicate that their performance evaluation is not based on their program outcomes. This was a difficult conversation to have with RAs because they often correlate the low attendance rate of their program events to low performance, however I told them that their

program outcome is not a judgement of character because we cannot control residents who come to programs. Another challenging piece was that RAs wanted solutions to get more upper-division students to show up to programs, but the reality is that there was no concrete solution that I could provide. I could only provide guidance and feedback about programming events based on the results from this survey.

Recommendations

My last cycle was incredibly informative and helped solidify my recommendations and ideas for further research. I asked specific questions in my survey that allowed residents to provide feedback and expectations for future programs. I have three sets of recommendations that will inform residential life and include a program proposal, future action research, and my personal takeaways and learnings.

Residential Life: Program Proposal

It is difficult for me to leave my position at the end of this year, because I feel like there is still so much more that I can contribute to our department. There are several recommendations that I have for continuing the work and further strengthening the team to support our students. I hope that my research cycles were able to capture the narrative of our upper-division students so that we can support them throughout their college journey. One of my recommendations is to create a program model for RAs where programs stem from: resident needs, residence life goals, RA interests, and resident interests, Figure 3. Since our most popular programs are centered around well-ness and identities and community building, our programs should reflect that.

Figure 3

Intersecting Circle Maps of Residential life

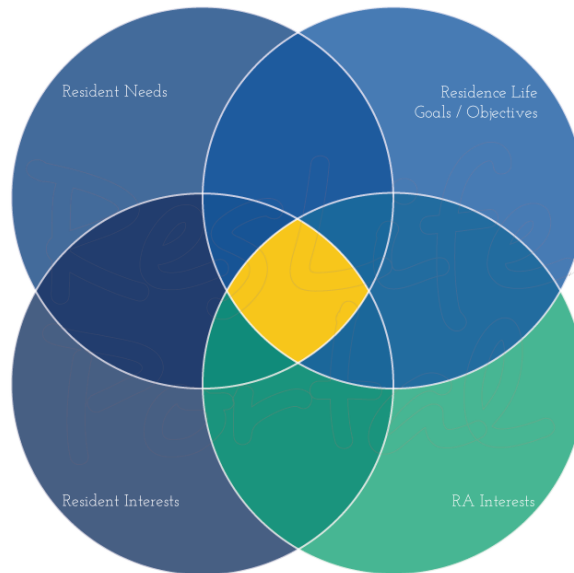


Figure 4

CCLO Overview Infographic



Additionally, the Programming model that I created is an extension of the CCLO overview infographic, Figure 4. The infographic I created focuses on the individual practices of each CCLO and outcomes to expect, for programs focused on specific CCLOs. The program model is replicated from the guidelines of programming for first-year areas and encompasses additional outcomes for upper-division students. I was able to combine a holistic student approach to programs related to the CCLOs. It is my belief that many RAs do not know how to focus their programs aligned with the CCLOs. For example, many RAs plan pizza parties as a program hoping to cover the authentic engagement CCLO. However, based on my program model, RAs were able to center programs around authentic engagements that are not just accomplished through providing pizza parties rather having meaningful dialogue and considering differing perspectives to meet the authentic engagement requirement. This infographic that I created is a quick and handy way for RAs to keep with them as reminders for upcoming program ideas and conversation starters. It is straight to the point and allows room for creativity and adjustments by area, Figure 5.

Figure 5*CCLO Program Model*

Additionally, Community Directors supervise RAs and they can utilize this infographic as a quick and simple way to connect with their RAs and use these outcomes to help support them as well. As a potential Community Director in the future, I hope to be present during RA programs and provide them hands-on support from their program proposal to the program event and evaluation. I think it is important that Community Directors play a part in helping RAs navigate and brainstorm program ideas for their students. I know that many RAs look up to their CDs for guidance and support. In residential life at USD, RAs are expected to have programs once per month for their halls and recurring updates for their bulletin board as a way of passive programming efforts. My hope is that this program model will incorporate some intentional interaction pieces where RAs can use these as guiding dialogue topics to share with their residents during their programs and through passive interactions.

Future action research

As far as future action research on programming in upper-division areas, there is still room for growth in our programming model. Currently, residential education at USD does not have a residential curriculum. However, there are efforts to create a general student affairs curriculum that helps students focus on more ways to implement CCLOs into their programs. If given more opportunities and time, I would do a comparison study on first year resident programming compared to upper-division resident programming. Since I did not collect residents' demographics in this study, in the future I would also dive deeper into resident characteristics and see which intersectionality of identities relates to an increased need of specific CCLOs by residents attending programs.

Further research can also include doing more assessment on upper-division students to provide more support for them. I attended a student success meeting at USD where I learned that our upper-division students have a hard time finding a sense of belonging in their community and oftentimes struggle with well-being. I believe that more research needs to be done to support our upper-division students because there is little to no literature out there about programs that support upper-division students.

Own personal takeaways

In conducting this research I was able to connect with many different campus partners that also support our upper-division students. I found that sometimes it does take a village to brainstorm ways to support our diverse students. This means that at a small institution like USD, there needs to be a lot of proactive communication and hands on support with our students. Another unique aspect of our university based on my observations with the institution's characteristics is that it's a predominately white institution where most students hold a lot of privileged identities. This was a struggle for me when I first started my graduate assistantship as an Assistant Community Director because I came from a large public institution that was very diverse and had a variety of resources on campus for our students.

I have found that I struggled to connect with students who held more privilege than I do because my experience as a first-generation student is different from theirs. But I have also found strength and power in holding spaces where students are able to talk about their differing experiences and learn from each other. In my position as an ACD, I had the opportunity to host programs centered around identities and communities and well-being. I found that I was able to

connect with students when we are in a space where mistakes are okay to make and vulnerability is accepted.

Another take away from my research is that through the different research methods I used, I found a passion for assessment and data-analysis. In particular, I want to use assessment to crack the code to student success and display student narratives through data. As I am graduating this May, I continue to pursue positions in student affairs where I can utilize my passion for assessment to support students in higher education.

Conclusion

Overall, I am content about my action research project and could see potential future action research building off of mine. This action research barely touched the surface of supporting upper-division students and there is still much more work that needs to be done. I would like to see the results of programming for upper-division students after my program model is implemented. As someone who thrives from student development, I have been thrilled to hear about students' experiences and work with campus partners at USD to build community and support our students. I am proud that my research has shed some light on upper-division students, as they are oftentimes left out of the narrative when we think about student support resources. I look forward to staying connected with residential life at USD, and continue to find a career in residential life where I will have more autonomy to innovate new ways to support our RAs and all residents. My vision is to utilize a residential curriculum that encompasses intentional programs to foster long-lasting relationships, equal and inclusive respect, and living-learning communities.

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Appendix A
Individual Interview Questions

1. How has been your experience supporting and interacting with our Upper-division students at USD?
2. Do you think that programming has changed/evolved for our Upper-division students at USD? If not, how can we better center our programming to support them?
3. How do you think the living-learning core values/ mission of our university reflect our programming/intentional interaction with our students? What type of CCLOs best relate to our students?
4. What are some challenges you face as an RA in upper-division areas?
5. In terms of our mission to build a sense of belonging for our students, how do you think your role as an RA can support this mission? Challenges?

Appendix B

Focus Group Activity Questions & Results

What type of relationship do you want with your residents?

engaging
informative
light hearted
warm
communicative
friendly
relaxed
supportive

Respect
open
friendly
fun!

Transparent
Community Building
Comfortable
chill vibez
honest
easy-going
what they need

Supportive
Positive genuine
effective
Authentic
boundaries
big sister-like
reaffirming allyship

Like Michael Scott and the Office

As an upper-division student who is an RA, what do you need to be successful in your living communities?

Organization
To find purpose
Beer on occasion
Support
Open/Effective communication
Support from my CDs
Flexibility
Love
Self Care

open ears/heart/mind
fun!
independence
trust & trustful staff
concise
good, positive reciprocal relationships
good fellow RA bond
allyship
a dog

Food
More Staff bonding

As an RA, what do you notice about the resident experience in upper-division areas? (i.e. programs, needs, intentional interaction etc.)

not very interactive; not willing to share
don't come to RA for emotional needs, come for admin./maintenance needs
residents don't always seem receptive to intentional interactions

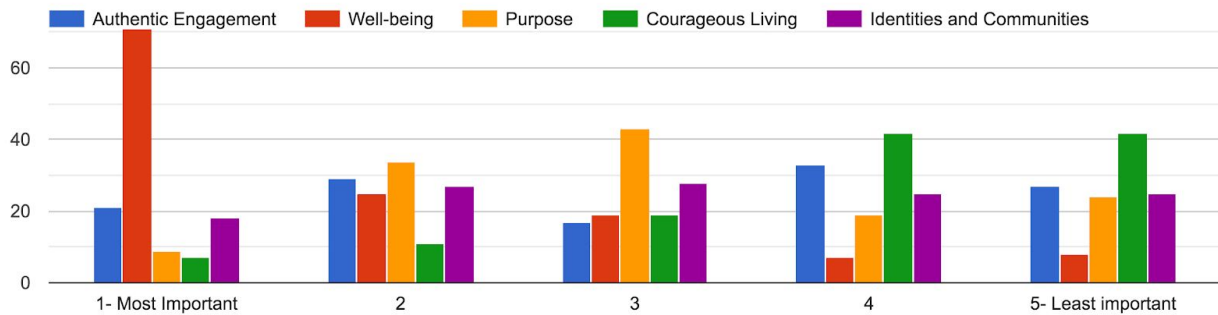
Like food
like to drink
like hands-off approach to support
Some have not found community and are now looking for it
Less participation from male residents
More private
are open to creating community
But less willing to work for it.

don't want to talk - Feed them
Like to talk about accomplishments (academic, extracurricular), but also say how stressed from school they are.
harder to contact/connect (all busy)
- don't respond sometimes until they need something
most already have a community they like/belong to.

Appendix C

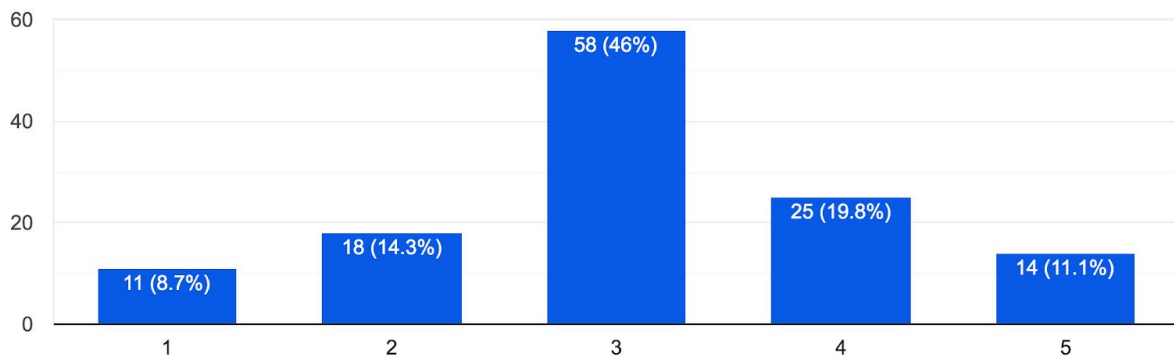
Survey Questionnaire and Results

Please rank the following Co-Curricular Learning Outcomes (CCLO) in order of importance to the Upper-Division student experience from 1:most important...tant. *Refer to the image above for CCLO descriptions



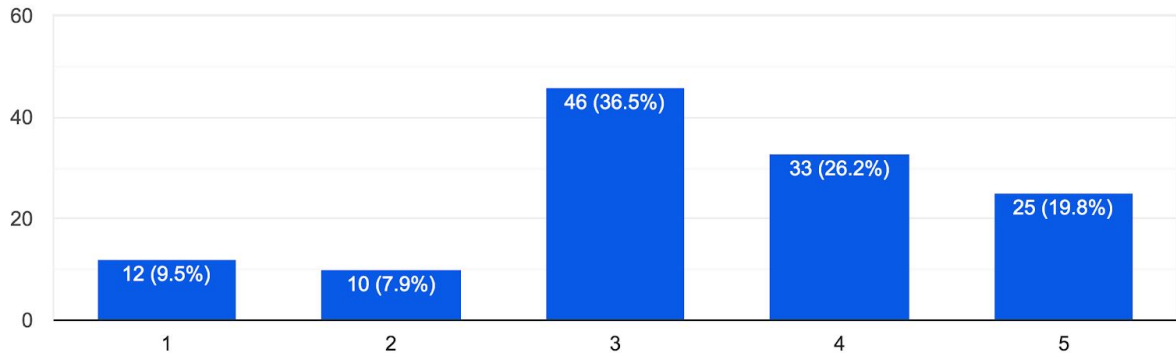
By attending Programs, I feel more connected to my community.

126 responses



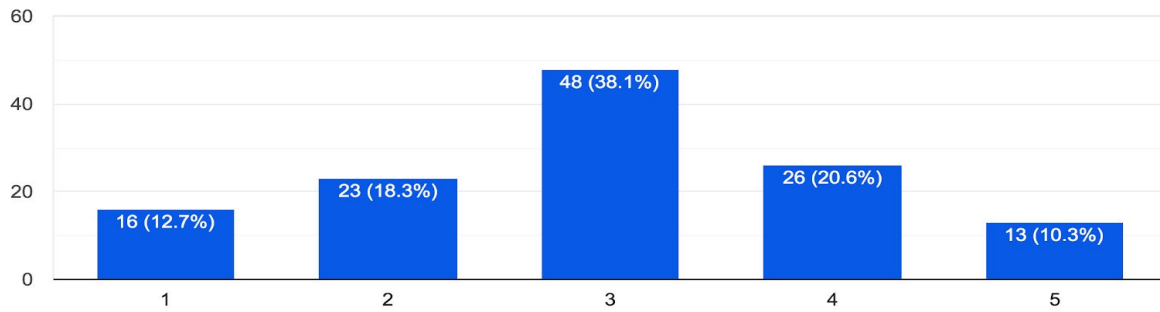
By attending Programs, I feel more connected to my RA.

126 responses



I feel that Residential programs in my community are relevant to Upper-division students experiences

126 responses



Appendix D Intentional Interaction Plan

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Learn all the names of your residents and general information (Hometown, room area) <input type="checkbox"/> Provide environment that allows opportunity to build sense of community	<input type="checkbox"/> All Bulletin boards #1 <input type="checkbox"/> Door Tags due	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor meeting/Program #1 <input type="checkbox"/> Opening information <input type="checkbox"/> Community standard overview <input type="checkbox"/> Get to know each other <input type="checkbox"/> Floor Program #1 <u>CCLO:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Authentic Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Identities & Communities <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous Living

OCTOBER

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete Roommate Agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Area Tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Safety Inspections <input type="checkbox"/> Target X 	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin boards #2 <input type="checkbox"/> Intentional Interactions #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What type of relationship do you want with your RA? <input type="checkbox"/> How is your transition into this year of college so far? <input type="checkbox"/> What is a goal for the semester or some area the student is working/growing in? 	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Program #2 <u>CCLO:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Authentic Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Identities & Communities <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous Living

NOVEMBER (Midterms)

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
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<input type="checkbox"/> Complete intentional interaction #2 <input type="checkbox"/> Resident Survey <input type="checkbox"/> Target X log	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin boards #3 <input type="checkbox"/> Intentional Interactions #2 <input type="checkbox"/> How is RA interaction working/meeting students' needs? <input type="checkbox"/> How are your classes going? <input type="checkbox"/> How are you maintaining your wellness during this stressful time? <input type="checkbox"/> What programs have you attended or want to see?	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Program #3 <u>CCLO:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Authentic Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Identities & Communities
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DECEMBER

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Support your residents as they prepare for finals <input type="checkbox"/> Take care of yourself too!	<input type="checkbox"/> Closing bulletin board #4	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Program #4 <u>CCLO:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Identities & Communities <input type="checkbox"/> Well-being

JANUARY (THE FIRST 2 WEEKS)

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Learn all the names of your new residents and general information (Hometown, room area) <input type="checkbox"/> Provide environment that allows opportunity to build a sense of community	<input type="checkbox"/> All Bulletin boards #5 <input type="checkbox"/> New Resident Door Tag	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor meeting/program #5 <u>CCLO:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Identities & Communities <input type="checkbox"/> Well-being

FEBRUARY/MARCH (Before Spring Break)

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
-------------------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------

<input type="checkbox"/> Complete intentional interaction #3 <input type="checkbox"/> **March: with your residents, do something nice for your building services workers	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin boards #6 <input type="checkbox"/> Intentional Interactions #3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What have you gotten involved in on campus? <input type="checkbox"/> How are you doing academically? <input type="checkbox"/> How is your well-being? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you started thinking about what you are doing this summer? If so, what? 	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Program #6 <u>CCLO:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identities & Communities <input type="checkbox"/> Well-being
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MARCH (After Spring Break)/ APRIL (Midterms)

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete intentional interaction #4	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin boards #7 <input type="checkbox"/> Intentional Interactions #4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What self-care strategies are you using during this stressful time? <input type="checkbox"/> What is next year looking like for you? 	<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Program #7 <u>CCLO:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Well-being <input type="checkbox"/> Purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous Living

MAY (Pre-Finals)

Individual Relationship Goals	Passive Programs and Initiatives	Active Programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Support your residents as they prepare for finals <input type="checkbox"/> Take care of yourself too!	<input type="checkbox"/> Closing Bulletin boards #8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Closing info <input type="checkbox"/> Self-management 	<input type="checkbox"/> Closing Floor Meeting/Program #8 <u>CCLO:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Well-being <input type="checkbox"/> Purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous Living