

The Zen of Unit One:
Residential Learning Communities as a
Way to Foster Liberal Learning
at Large Universities

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In the winter of 1962 I hopped onto the Rock Island Railroad with a footlocker and a duffel bag. I rode from Chicago to Grinnell, Iowa to spend four years engaged in a liberal arts education. I did not take much baggage. I was a product of the Chicago Public School system on my way to explore the academic unknown. In 1977, when I began my 28+ years at Unit One Living/Learning Program at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, I began a very engaging task of molding a program that had no explicitly designated mandate other than to explore the junction of academics in a university residence hall. The direction I took was largely and unconsciously shaped by my small, liberal arts college upbringing. I did not explicitly set out to recreate my undergraduate experience for the 10,000 or so students who have participated in Unit One. I'm sure that I was winging it for my first ten years. But I'm also sure that the values that I wrestled with developing at Grinnell College have been strongly imbedded in my thinking about what an undergraduate education should be. Consequently, in my attempt to create a setting where my undergraduate experience can be attained on a large, Research 1 university campus, I have focused on the basic values of a liberal education.

In this chapter, I intend to describe Unit One, describe the features of a liberal education that fit with Unit One's function, describe the problems inherent in establishing a campus unit that melds student affairs and academic affairs concerns, discuss the intersection of these two campus arenas, and describe the benefits of addressing the "whole student" without the encumbrances of the philosophical and administrative splits that characterize the student affairs-academic affairs relationship. Please note that, in many student citations, Unit One (the program) and Allen Hall (the setting) are interchangeable.

BASIC STRUCTURE OF UNIT ONE

Unit One is a residentially based academic program. Formally, it is generally classified as a residential learning community (RLC) and, specifically, as a living/learning center (LLC). Unit One, housed in Allen Residence Hall on the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign campus, was founded in 1972 with the charge of creating an academic program in a university residence hall. Through an evolutionary growth process, Unit One has developed to be a program that gives undergraduate students the opportunity to have a small, liberal arts college experience at a large, research 1 university.

Allen Residence Hall is part of the University of Illinois University Residence Hall (URH) system. Allen Hall has the same basic staffing structure as all of the halls in the system: A live-in resident director (RD -- masters degree entry level), an undergraduate resident advisor (RA) for every floor (about 1 RA for every 50 students), a 24-hour access main desk with student staffing, dining hall, computer site, library. The resident director supervises and trains the RAs and is supervised through the chain of command in the Department of Residential Life in the Housing Division.

In a sense, Unit One is “superimposed” onto and integrated into this residence hall structure. Unit One’s core staff consists of a director, assistant director, office manager, two art instructors, two music program coordinators, and three undergraduate program advisors. All core staff are appointed either by the Housing Division or by their teaching departments with Unit One funds. The resident director and the area coordinator (the RD’s supervisor) are also part of the Unit One Core staff. This staff is responsible for administering Unit One’s academic and non-credit granting programs. Along with the

core staff is a revolving teaching staff of about 60 instructors from various University departments.

Unit One has several basic programmatic features:

1-Academic: About 75 different credit-granting courses taught each year. About 50 courses are taught each semester. Half of these 50 courses are taught one semester, only, and the other half are repeated each semester.

2-Music Instruction: One specific course provides private music lessons to about 180 students each semester.

3-Guests-In-Residence: About six - eight guests are invited to spend one to two weeks in residency at Unit One. Guests live in an Allen Hall suite and engage with students in classes, in scheduled presentations, and in informal conversations and activities.

4-Non-credit programming: E.g., topical discussions; documentary film showings; guest speakers; field trips; volunteer activities; recitals.

The facilities that support these three features include:

- Seven internet-wired seminar classrooms;
- Two large multi-purpose spaces for classes/activities
(e.g., performance, dance, large group meeting)
- Faculty/staff office space
- Music practice facilities

- Photography, ceramics, and electronic music studios
- Audiovisual equipment
- Student computer site
- Library

For a more detailed description, go to: www.housing.uiuc.edu/living/unit1

LIBERAL EDUCATION AT RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Some statements about liberal learning that are consistent with the educational philosophy at Unit One include:

The Association of American Colleges and Universities' (1998) *Statement on Liberal Learning* :

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions.

Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.

We experience the benefits of liberal learning by pursuing intellectual work that is honest, challenging, and significant, and by preparing ourselves to use knowledge and power in responsible ways. Liberal learning is not confined to particular fields of study.

What matters in liberal education is substantial content, rigorous methodology and an active engagement with the societal, ethical, and practical implications of our learning. The spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students.

Because liberal learning aims to free us from the constraints of ignorance, sectarianism, and myopia, it prizes curiosity and seeks to expand the boundaries of human knowledge. By its nature, therefore, liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.

The ability to think, to learn, and to express oneself both rigorously and creatively, the capacity to understand ideas and issues in context, the commitment to live in society, and the yearning for truth are fundamental features of our humanity. In centering education upon these qualities, liberal learning is society's best investment in our shared future.

Adopted by the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges & Universities, October 1998

My daughter is now a freshman at Grinnell, so I've paid special attention to how that school identifies itself. In its academic planning booklet (Grinnell, 2004), their version of a liberal arts education is discussed (as I am sure it is discussed at many comparable liberal arts colleges):

“A liberal arts education has at its center four things that distinguish it from other kinds of learning: critical thinking, continuing examination of life, encounters with difference, and the free exchange of ideas. By offering an education in the liberal arts, Grinnell College endorses life-long learning characterized by sustained intellectual curiosity and an open mind for assessing the unfamiliar. At the same time, by using critical thinking to assess evidence, to identify assumptions, to test logic, to reason correctly, and to take responsibility for the conclusions and actions that result, a student of the liberal arts can grow personally as well as intellectually. A liberally educated person should be capable of principled judgment, seeking to understand the origins, context, and implications of any area of study, rather than looking exclusively at its application.

Because knowledge is lost if it is not shared, both students and teachers of the liberal arts strive to engage in precise and graceful communication. This communication takes place verbally, but also in other ways, such as the symbolic and expressive systems of mathematics, music, computer languages, the natural sciences, and the visual and performing arts. By learning and exploring these methods, one may attain an understanding of aspects of human thought, which is a crucial part of liberal education.” (p. 2)

Small, liberal arts colleges are structured to attain these goals. Faculty are hired to be teacher/scholars, and they are rewarded for good, interactive teaching. Students who attend these schools have similar educational expectations, and these students are also

likely to share similar values. At large Research 1 schools, working toward a liberal education is problematic: faculty's role in regard to undergraduate interaction/teaching is usually ambiguous; the goals of professional education in non-liberal arts curricula sometimes run contrary to the goals of liberal education; the large size of the undergraduate population, combined with the multiplicity of undergraduates' educational agendas, presents many problems in working toward the ideals of academic intimacy.

In *Making the Most of College*, Richard Light (2001) points to several observations about the undergraduate experience that contribute to successful educations. Some of Light's observations are relevant to large university Residential Learning Communities:

"...learning outside of classes, especially in residential settings and extra curricular activities such as the arts, is vital."

"..at many campuses today, professors increasingly are encouraging students to work together on homework assignments..."

"Not surprisingly, small-group tutorials, small seminars, and one-to-one supervision are, for many (undergraduates), their capstone experience."

"For most students the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on their college experience is strong."

"..students who get the most out of college, who grow the most academically, and who are happiest organize their time to include

activities with faculty members, or with several other students, focused around accomplishing substantive academic work.” (p. 8 – 10)

RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITY STRUCTURE AND CAMPUS STRUCTURE

A critical issue for most residential learning communities revolves around the relationship between its sponsoring units. On large campuses, the Student Affairs and Academic Affairs cosponsors do not regularly enter into cooperative ventures.

At a campus level, the Student Affairs/Academic Affairs cosponsorship of residential learning communities provides the budgetary and administrative structure for the program. Many models for implementing this cosponsorship are evident on the national level, and the agendas for the cosponsors are also important to consider.

Basically, Residential Learning Communities are academic programs housed in residence halls. These programs usually have a developmental underpinning, they frequently incorporate academic themes/courses, and they very frequently are structured in response to their campuses specific needs. Residential Learning Communities serve many purposes. In some cases, they are constructed to address specific areas of academic inquiry (e.g., they congregate students from specific curricula); or to address students' academic skills needs (e.g., they congregate students who need specific support services); or to address students extracurricular interests (e.g., wellness, community service), and, in some cases they are constructed to give students on large campuses a setting that supports the kind of liberal learning agendas that usually characterize small, liberal arts colleges.

The Residential Learning Communities International Clearinghouse is posted at: <http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/as/clc/rlcch/index.html>. It includes links to many Residential Learning Communities and a link to an extensive bibliography.

On many campuses, an underlying agenda for residential learning communities is tied to the concept of student success. Criteria for the learning communities' successes are consequently based on data that reflect measurable variables such as retention in college or in specified curricula, grade point, reasonable progress toward graduation, adjustment to college, and timely choosing of a major. For some campuses, the underlying agenda is not necessarily tied to these kinds of outcomes, and a less easy-to-quantify set of criteria, tied to "quality of education," form the underlying rationales of residential learning communities. Unit One falls into this latter category.

We in the academic world take for granted that the qualities of a liberal education are good, desirable things to incorporate into undergraduates' educations. We also know that measuring successful outcomes is difficult, especially since many of these hoped-for outcomes are set in motion during students' undergraduate years and unveil themselves over lifetimes. "Quality of life" programs are risky ventures if these programs are held responsible for data driven success since objectively measurable outcomes are difficult to track. At Unit One, we have been very fortunate to have an administration that believes in what we do and that accepts qualitative data, largely in the form of faculty and student feedback about the program.

In the old days, the term Residential College was reserved for degree granting residential communities; living/learning programs were residence halls with an academic component; theme houses were "off campus" houses with a specific themes,

such as Foreign Language Theme House, etc. These terms have become somewhat interchangeable nowadays, and the new term, Residential Learning Community is becoming the umbrella. (To further complicate the nomenclature, “Learning Communities” are also emerging on many campuses. These are “linked courses” that have concurrent enrollments by the same student cohort but that do not necessarily have a residential component. See, e.g., <http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/>)

For most Residential Learning Communities, cosponsorship between the academic and student affairs (usually through the Housing Division) branches of the campus is at the administrative core. On small campuses, this cosponsorship is usually collegial because all arms of the campus administration and the faculty are focused on the same goal, students’ development in their academic and personal realms. On large campuses, however, where the faculty and student affairs agendas are not always coincidental, good working relationships are usually difficult to negotiate, maintain, and manage. Since my discussion focuses on large campus residential learning communities, I’ll address this issue further.

The commonly held large campus model of undergraduate education is that faculty attend to students’ intellectual development and student affairs staff attend to students’ personal development, including character, physical, and moral development. Formal structures do not usually find places for the members of these two campus sectors to meet and/or work together. Consequently, faculty and student affairs professionals usually operate as two distinctly separate populations (except, of course, when they meet at the gym).

STUDENT AFFAIRS/ FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

Student Affairs operations tend to follow a linearly hierarchical model of the sort found in the corporate world. Campuses Student Affairs philosophies, which typically are supportive of students' academic development, filter down uniformly through student affairs divisions, and accountability to specific points of supervision is very clearly recognized. Student Affairs usually runs its sponsorship of residential learning communities through their housing divisions where, once again, staff hierarchies and accountability are clearly delineated. If for no other reason than legal liability, this kind of accountability makes sense. Students' personal well being is largely the responsibility of student affairs through living arrangements, campus health centers, campus recreation centers, and student entertainment venues. Whereas we don't frequently see court cases that revolve around professors' brainwashing their students, we do see lawsuits that evolve from hazing, drinking, and date rape. (See Kuh (1983) for a more detailed discussion of student affairs issues.)

Faculty operate quite differently from this linear, student affairs model. Under the academic affairs umbrella, faculty try to pay little attention to administrative lines of report and behave more like independent contractors with dual allegiances, one to their departments and one to their disciplines (e.g., Weingartner, 1996). Obviously, faculty do have lines of report, but accountability within these lines is quite different from that which characterizes student affairs. With research being high on most Research 1 faculty's priority lists, institutional lines of report are but one of several places toward which faculty must orient their behavior. Because their disciplinary colleagues largely judge faculty's academic worth, one set of faculty fealties is focused outside of their institutions and toward their national and international academic disciplinary peers.

And, because academic freedom promotes many different lines of thinking within departments and because disciplinary philosophies within departments and institutions are not necessarily uniform, faculty do not tend to toe a departmental or institutional line in the same way that their student affairs colleagues do.

At my institution, for instance, the Housing Division has a mission statement that is printed on the back of the picture identification cards that staff wear around their necks, and the department of residence life in the Housing Division has a vision statement, "Growing, Learning, and Mattering, for every person, on every floor, in every community." These mission and vision statements are actively invoked as the conceptual foundations that guide the creation of policies and programs, and we are frequently asked to rationalize how given actions are consistent with this mission/vision. One would be hard pressed to find a comparable statement that faculty attend to at any Research 1 institution.

In addition, student affairs tends to make solid commitments to making sure that positions that are key to programmatic success are staffed. If, for instance, the housing division creates the position of program coordinator of a residential learning community, the odds are great that, despite staff roll over, the position will be filled. On the other hand, if a faculty member commits to teaching a course at a residential learning community, that faculty's commitment will not be likely to last more than several years; faculty work-agendas are ever-changing.... new committee work, new departmental administrative assignments, sabbaticals, changing teaching obligations, etc. cycle into faculty's long term schedules. And, when a particular faculty leaves an RLC, replacement is usually problematic. Finding a new and appropriate person from within the faculty ranks to cycle into this teaching slot may be difficult, especially since this

person must come from within the ranks of already-existing faculty who may or may not have the time, expertise, or inclination to participate in the RLC.

Another academic issue at many RLCs involves teaching personnel. Because of the problems involved with long-term teaching commitments by regular faculty, many RLCs use instructors other than regular faculty, e.g., adjunct faculty, teaching assistants, and departmental instructors who are not tenure track. In some cases, RLCs are convenient teaching assignments for spousal hires who do not want or who cannot get regular, tenure-track assignments. Hiring instructors who are not tenure-track presents interesting issues: The absence of regular faculty can be a flag that “the faculty” are not interested in the RLC concept; critics may contend that the level of instruction at RLCs is sub-par; unionized campuses may have rules regulating this kind of employment.

HOW UNIT ONE ADDRESSES INSTRUCTIONAL ISSUES

Unit One has addressed this issue in this manner: The campus policy assigns course and instructor credibility issues to the colleges and departments that offer instruction at Unit One. Instructors are appointed to teach Unit One courses under the guidelines that the instructor’s department uses to make any of its appointments. As well, when we construct topical, experimental, or non-curricular courses to be taught specifically at Unit One, the department under whose rubric these courses are offered must approve these courses. In this way, Unit One’s academic offerings are consistent with campus instructional policies and are not seen as being aberrant.

Under these guidelines, Unit One utilizes teaching personnel who represent all levels of instructors including TAs, adjuncts, and regular faculty. TAs and adjunct instructors typically teach courses and discussion sections of large lectures that repeat on a

regular basis since departments can always staff these courses even though instructors at these appointment levels turn around on a regular basis. Regular faculty are usually found at Unit One teaching a revolving group of freshmen seminars. These faculty are recruited on a yearly basis.

Adjuncts and advanced TAs teach our experimental, non-curricular, and topical seminars under the umbrella of “Unit One Extra Options.” These one or two credit-hour seminars have several key features: They are not letter graded (students either get credit and a grade of Satisfactory or no credit, and a grade of Unsatisfactory), their topics change in response to instructor and student requests, and they are meant to be highly discussion oriented in small groups (5-15) with a good deal of student-instructor interaction. In some cases, these seminars are outgrowths of regular courses where the instructor can “take the course beyond the syllabus,” (e.g., for the Ethics course the seminar could be The Ethics of Dissent; and for the Child Psychology course, the seminar could be Exploring Parenting and Family Processes). In some cases these seminars are “stand-alone,” (e.g., American Sign Language for the Deaf; The Roots of Popular Music); and in some cases we introduce service learning through these seminars (e.g., Art and Social Action; Volunteer Projects at Local Elementary Schools).

When TAs teach these seminars, they design their courses under the supervision of a departmental faculty member with oversight by the Unit One director. This seminar series has given many advanced graduate students a way to design and teach their own courses and is seen, by departments, as a great training ground for their advanced students. Although they do not get instruction in these seminars by regular faculty, Unit One students do get enthusiastic and involved instruction by people who will be regular faculty in the very near future. An added advantage to grad students who teach these

seminars at Unit One and who are looking for small college teaching positions is a valid resume addition that reflects knowledge of a small, liberal arts college model of teaching.

FUNDING

Another issue that goes along with this campus academic affairs/student affairs split is funding. At the University of Illinois, student affairs operations are fee driven. Consequently, budgets can be maintained on predictable bases. Our academic operations frequently rely on state funding which is not always predictable. In the case of RLCs where the funding is shared by academic and student affairs, the portion funded by academic affairs is likely to be more in flux than the student affairs contribution. This potentially inconsistent funding source leads to yearly fluctuations in program planning and the ability to make long-term commitments. Another budgetary issue is salaries. As the “support services to the campus’ academic mission,” student affairs staffs are usually paid less than faculty. Sometimes, this issue plays out in the politics of the RLC when faculty and student affairs professionals are colleagues.

Successful Residential Learning Communities must solve the problems inherent in this campus split, and, from anecdotal reports from colleagues nationwide, no uniform formula has surfaced. Specific campus ecologies point to specific campus solutions, but, clearly, upper level administrators from both academic and student affairs must be behind these RLC ventures. In general, this level of support is necessary so that lower level budgetary concerns do not drive decisions and so that a clear statement is made to the campus of the RLCs’ worth to the institution.

BRIDGING THE WATERS BETWEEN STUDENT AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS' PHILOSOPHIES

Although the large campus model has student affairs, with their major concerns of physical and affective behavior, being split from academic affairs, with their major concern of intellectual development, students certainly don't envision their lives with this split. For students, their lives are whole entities with emotional, physical, and intellectual concerns wrapped into one, interactive package. Addressing this package as a unified venture is one of the strengths of a residentially based academic program where the various aspects of students' lives can be integrated.

When I started my teaching career as a teaching assistant, the model was pretty clear: "We university instructors are here to address the intellectual/cognitive aspects of student development; affective concerns are not in our purview." Over the past 35 years of my teaching undergraduates, I've come to understand that, in fact, affective concerns drive undergraduate learning; separating cognitive concerns from affective concerns diminishes students' ability learn and develop their intellect. Many students, and especially freshmen, see their connectedness to their instructors through a "caring" mode, and not necessarily through an intellectual mode. When I ask students what makes a good university teacher, their responses almost always include descriptions of people who display that they care about their students. This display can come from a lecturer of a large class where individual interaction never occurs, as well as coming from instructors in small teaching forums where student-teacher interaction is deep and intense. Merely being well organized and easy to understand may not put an instructor on the "good teacher" list. Some demeanor that projects caring is usually another necessary component.

In this context, stereotypic residence halls on large campuses are interesting places. They are loaded with affect and short on intellectuality. For many students, residence halls represent their “safe place” where they can retreat from the challenges of their academic experiences. And, for many students, this retreat divorces them from the intellectual rigors they find in the academic interactions that characterize many modern classrooms. Surely, students study in their residence halls, and surely, they form study groups to help them master their curricular course material. Although most modern residence halls put a lot of effort into co-curricular activities, most residence halls are not places where students are encouraged to stretch their intellectual capabilities. In observing that campuses address diversity issues mainly through student affairs efforts, Levine (1994) makes this observation about faculty involvement in students’ lives outside of the classroom: “The co-curriculum, though rich in diversity programs, lacks intellectual depth, is unconnected with the academic side of higher education, and is largely ignored by the faculty” (p. 341). Although this observation targets co-curricular diversity programming, this observation can probably be generalized to faculty’s involvement in all of the co-curriculum. Basically, faculty tend to focus on classroom activities. Their lack of involvement in other student activities leaves a gaping hole of possible involvement in helping students become liberally educated and in helping students to address their every-day concerns with intellectual tools alongside their affective tools.

The challenge, then, is to work with the affect that runs so strongly in residence halls and manipulate this affect in a way that accomplishes two tasks: make these settings intellectually safe, and include instruction/programming that inserts an intellectual component into this safe setting.

Students are perfectly adept at constructing community. Most freshmen seek to construct social networks, and especially ones in which they are comfortable. And upper-class students are constantly refining their networks. But these networks are most frequently built around social, and not academic, concerns. Providing an intellectual component into this social sphere is the beginning of expanding the process of becoming liberally educated into the everyday lives of our students. Residence halls can provide a setting where students may feel safe to take the kind of chances they need to stimulate their intellectual growth.

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT: A BASIC MODEL TO INSTIGATE CHANGE

A very basic model for effecting student change involves both challenge and support. Stimulus for change comes from the challenge of confronting and dealing with uncomfortable situations, newness, difference, etc. The challenge is to confront this discomfort in a way that effects change. Change can come in many forms, not all of which are immediately apparent. Amongst the kinds of changes we hope to see are new attitudes, new ways of thinking, new ways of communicating, new behaviors, and the like.

In a residence hall setting, challenge is all over the place. Without outside interjection, basic challenges to students come in the form of dealing with a large group of peers in a communal living setting. For many students, for instance, merely dealing with roommates for the first time in their lives is an adjustment. As well, students face the new challenge of dealing with a host of peers' ideas about how one's life should be lived and the differing moral and ethical stances that drive peers' behaviors in the context of living without constant parental supervision. And, of course, dealing with the chaos and

noise that pervades residence halls is always an issue. These situations are basic to any university residence hall experience.

In this setting, support comes from staff's ability to mediate interactions and from students' ability to retreat to comfort zones of the known and the familiar. Built into this scenario are mechanisms to help make these situations emotionally and physically safe, and, in most cases, students find sanctuary in their peer communities and in their rooms.

Missing, in most cases, is challenge from the intellectual realm, the insertion of ideas that do not come from that which is inherent in peer interactions but from sources found in new ideas from the "outside." Also missing in most residence halls is staff's pressing students to explore, more deeply than students usually would, the newness that they confront in their everyday lives. This is the void that living-learning communities can fill.

UNIT ONE – A CASE STUDY

In this section I will discuss Unit One as a Residential Learning Community that models ways for undergraduates to engage in the liberal learning process.

Unit One Living Learning Program was established at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign by Chancellor Jack W. Peltason (who then became President of the University of California System and President of the American Council on Education) to "explore the feasibility of an academic program in a residential setting." I mention Peltason's pedigree because I suspect that campuses respond actively and positively to upper level administrators who have this kind of respect and visibility. With this vague

mandate, the leadership of Unit One was given a pretty broad range of possibilities. But, over the past 34 years, as Unit One has grown and evolved, it has always kept several principles on the table: to provide an eclectic offering of courses and non-credit programming; to provide a safe place for students' personal and intellectual growth; to provide a variety of avenues to explore ideas and activities that are new, innovative, and controversial; and to provide a community that values and supports an open exchange of ideas with a cadre of faculty and student affairs staff who encourage and support these goals.

Using the logic model (Grayson, 2004; and see McLaughlin, J. A., & Jordan, G. B., 2004 for more on the logic model), we describe the program in a way that invites many levels of assessment. Unit One's logic model description is presented in the Appendix.

At the University of Illinois' freshmen must live in University approved housing. Over 80% of Unit One students tend to be freshmen and sophomores (who tend to be a representative sample of enrollment in the University's colleges and majors), so we incorporate into our mission an attempt to jump-start students on their way toward making good use of the University and its resources.

When I describe Unit One to prospective students, I frequently describe the program in two different ways: the "list" and the "demeanor." The "list" is an outline our activities and facilities...our "guarantees" (e.g., we guarantee credit courses, music lessons, guests-in-residence, facilities). But the "demeanor" of the hall is central to most students' experience and is the backbone of the program's success. The community that is recreated by each year's students provides the fluidity of interaction and openness of communication that allows Unit One's mission to be actualized.

UNIT ONE'S OPERATING STRUCTURE

At UIUC, the Housing Division is the primary sponsor of residential learning communities, but the Provost's Office plays a very integrated role, both financially and academically. Fortunately, for me, these two sponsors have been clear in general expectations and have been hands-off in the implementation of programmatic business. With this level of support and freedom, I have been able to be extremely flexible and opportunistic in making use of campus resources.

We have figured out a way to integrate the faculty and student affairs models that I have previously described in order to make best use of faculty and student affairs staffs. Basically, we ask faculty to do what faculty do best with undergraduates: teach. We then ask student affairs staff to do what they expect to do: support the academic mission of the institution. Finally, we ask faculty and student affairs staff to collaborate when appropriate situations arise. Students respond most reliably to faculty expertise in the classroom, and faculty's role in promoting students' intellectual development demands an ongoing and reliable commitment over time by students. In Unit One, we then extend the classroom into the students' non-curricular lives.

The academic affairs/student affairs dichotomy has never been a problem at Unit One. Rather than designing programs that necessarily ask for real-time collaboration, the housing staff and the faculty each make use of the contributions to the environment that the other makes: faculty teach students who live in an environment that encourages students to exchange ideas in a free and open setting, and, consequently, housing staff get to work with students who have issues of an academic nature to discuss in the context of affective/personal developmental issues.

Sometimes we get lucky and intentionally designed programs incorporate academic and programming collaboration. One great example was a field trip to see the musical, *Miss Saigon*. About 45 students bussed to Chicago to see this musical. A Unit One political science instructor who teaches a course on the Viet Nam War presented a program and film showing to explain the context of the musical, another Unit One instructor with a specialty in opera production arranged for a backstage tour, and the trip coordinator arranged for the students to eat at a Vietnamese restaurant after the performance. Even helping the bus driver recover from several wrong turns was educational.

Since the residence hall is the place where all of this action occurs, and since academic staff are, in a sense, visitors into this setting, the main responsibility falls into the lap of the residence hall/LLC core staff to maintain an environment that supports the intervention of academic staff. Rather than seeing academic staff as interlopers, this academic staff is best viewed as close and welcome family members who have keys to the house, their own guest rooms, and unrestricted refrigerator privileges.

With this access to the setting, instructors have several routes to creating interaction with their students:

- Small class size
- Seminar style classrooms
- Instructor office space
- Easy access to all necessary support technology
(wired classrooms, LCD/Laptop, overheads, film projectors, etc.)
- Office supplies and copy machine

- Meal passes to facilitate eating with students
- Budgets to support out-of-class ventures
- The ability to teach small group seminars that supplement and complement instructor's standard courses (for which faculty are paid extra)
- Honoraria to thank instructors for extra work

With their extra funds, instructors are encouraged to hold extra class meetings to facilitate review of material, film showings that complement in-class discussions, field trips both on and off campus, meals at international restaurants, inviting students to instructors' homes, etc. And, at times, instructors open their course activities (e.g., film showings, field trips) to all members of the LLC community.

One more feature, probably the most important, is students' own feeling of entitlement. Students, as well as staff, always have the ability to create programming that addresses the issues that interest them. At Unit One, students can readily form Student Groups that have long-term agendas and regular meetings, and students can also program one-time events that address specific topics.

Much of the non-credit programming comes from student initiatives and from student groups. For the Fall 2004 semester, for instance, some examples of Unit One student groups include:

- Allen Hall Chess Federation
- Allen Mind and Body
- Alliance Francaise

- Book Club
- Campus Moderates
- Chess Federation
- Couch Potatoes – weekly film discussion
- Ceramics Exploration
- Eusa Nia –Black Student Government
- Finance Board
- INK -- literary magazine
- Knitting Club
- Like Disco... But Not Really – improv comedy group
- Public Art installations
- LGBT group
- Running Club
- Small Town America – monthly meetings and monthly trips
to visit small towns
- Sounds Through Hands – sign language club
- Spanish Social Club
- Speakeasy – weekly social issues discussion
- Latina/Latino student group
- Yearbook Club
- Yoga

The content addressed in Unit One, both academically and programmatically, is eclectic because we do not have a decided curricular bent and because we do feel that the

process of intellectual interchange is at least as important as the content. Unit One has, however, paid special attention to the arts and issues of social concern, both in courses and in non-credit programming, because these two areas appeal universally to our students, regardless of major, and because students engage in these areas very readily.

What grows from these efforts is a group of staff who all contribute to students' personal and intellectual growth in a setting where all staff members can contribute that which they do best and that which they are trained to do. The result is a vibrant community where ideas flow in classes and in planned programming and, also, in the everyday conversations among students.

Basically, the model is to create our version of a small, liberal arts community where all members buy into the basic notion that lively discourse is an important feature of education, where all members see value in participating in this community, and where all members contribute to this community in ways consistent with their vision of the community. But, and this is very important, community members are not asked to take a singularly agreed upon route toward our ultimate goal of promoting lively intellectual interchange; and with this freedom of integrating various styles of approaching the process of education, diverse ideas and educational strategies thrive.

WHAT STUDENTS AND FACULTY REPORT

At Unit One we do semesterly assessments, and we have been evaluated many times. Some of the richest data has come from instructor interviews and from student focus groups (Grayson, 2004). In Grayson's study, instructors and students discuss the strength of the community as one of the central features of Unit One.

A summary of instructor comments from Grayson's draft of this study includes:

- “(a) Students in living and learning communities have a high level of commitment toward learning. They are eager to engage in open discussion and are full of questions. They are active learners;
- (b) Students are rich their academic backgrounds, interests, ethnicities and cultures;
- (c) Smaller class sizes offer many benefits in terms of student engagement, learning and teaching effectiveness;
- (d) Living and learning communities have higher levels of community spirit;
- (e) Students feel comfortable in their communities and easily make friends with other students;
- (f) Students and faculty feel comfortable with each other and have quality interactions;
- (g) Living and learning communities foster critical thinking and problem solving through innovative and creative teaching strategies.”

One faculty member, who also supervised teaching assistants, pointed out several major differences between teaching at Unit One and at the University-at-large:

“really knowing your students, having lunch with students, knowing their names, knowing what they want and their personal and professional goals are, establishing meaningful relationships with students, more opportunities to guide or suggest other classes/courses, able to develop comfortable relationships.”

..... Unit One “protects the notion of a liberal arts community where teachers and students can engage in meaningful dialogue and reap benefits of intellectual, personal, and professional growth...the larger University context does not easily allow for or promote opportunities for meaningful and comfortable relationships with students to be established or nurtured.”

Other faculty comments include,

“The Community aspect is certainly part of it.”

“...I lectured on the civil rights to a mixed diverse group and I couldn’t shut them up. Unit One builds a sense of community.”

“The interaction with the students is better than I have experienced elsewhere so far. They are ready to discuss, interrupt me to ask questions, and also indicate issues they wish to know more about. We always have discussions and everyone talks.”

Students are “engaged in discussion with openness and candor.”

The comfort level is high. “...a much higher level of engagement with its students...”

“Students at Unit One know each other and feel comfortable in sharing

ideas and are very willing to engage in discussion...Students speak up and are not afraid to ask questions....Student engagement, interactive classrooms and open dialogue allow for the exchange of ideas and critical thinking.”

“By students’ living together, classes congeal faster. Students are together already so they are more likely to do things together...care for one another more. ...they are not overly polite in discussion...they take care of details, share material with other kids who miss class.”

In other evaluations, instructors who teach two sections of the same course, one at Unit One and on “on campus,” frequently comment that the test scores of both sections are usually comparable but that the level of intellectual engagement found in Unit One sections is usually much greater.

Students’ responses in focus groups complement the faculty’s observations. Still from Grayson (2004) a summary of students’ responses includes:

- (a) Learning takes place in the entire community. It extends outside of the classroom;
- (b) Making connections is easier and one feels more comfortable with other students;
- (c) Smaller classrooms offer multiple benefits;
- (d) Faculty and instructors are more engaging, more thoughtful and fun;
- (e) Living and learning communities offer a variety of benefits not available in other residential halls.

In these focus groups, students commented that their learning carries over outside the classroom; taking classes with people they know makes it easier to approach each other.... that knowing classmates makes the class more comfortable; that collaboration outside of class is common; students experience more respect for classmates who are hall mates; personal relationships between classmates and with instructors makes classes more comfortable and open; teachers have respect for students and that dynamic carries over; when students get to know their faculty well, faculty expect more, and they know what they can expect from students; in Unit One, learning is not just about scores, but participation and involvement and thinking and questioning.

When queried about having conversations across lines of difference, students first identified difference in more dimensions than the standard race/gender/ethnicity boundaries. They saw all nature of difference worthy of noting:

“Everyone ... has opinions.... some students are to the right and others to the left and they clash. This is good because we enlighten each other.”

“Everyone has different views and much to offer. All the students here are willing to learn and willing to share.” “The idea of respect is a big part of Allen Hall....in your classroom, in your room or in the hallway. I can fall asleep any time of the day (because the noise level is kept at a respectful level).”

When queried about the uniqueness of Unit One/Allen Hall, students offered the following:

“The small school feeling. To have a unique experience with faculty.”

“Eases the transition from high school to college.”

“You go to Allen Hall, not to a room number. Allen Hall is your identity and it feels good.”

“It (Allen Hall) gives you an identity.”

“It is important for freshmen to have a community; a place that is home and Allen provides that. I cannot emphasize the importance of this.”

COMMUNITY AT ALLEN HALL

The concept of community has always been integral to Unit One/Allen Hall students' campus identity. In the early days, they were the “outsiders” (e.g., Horwitz, 1989) on a campus that is relatively conservative and that has one of the largest fraternity/sorority systems in the country. During my first years at Unit One, the program was under the budgetary knife three years running. Nothing rivals an outside threat to coalesce a community. The administration's claim was that the program was not fulfilling its mandate, but budgetary issues clouded this claim. In each of these three years, the students mounted successful and very creative responses to the University's attempts to end the program.

When students asked the administration what these students could do to win back their program, the administrators directed the students to change the minds of the faculty committee members whose vote (at the request of the sponsoring college's dean) was

meant to end the program. When the students quickly discovered that they could not successfully sway this committee's stance, they went to *their* source of power: their parents and their legislators. The students built a strong campaign that put informal pressure on the dean, and he relented that year. But he resumed his quest to cut the program the following year.

The role of parents' involvement is instructional. These parents were coming to the defense of their children's investment in their educations. What parents want to alter a formula that is keeping their kids happy and productive in college? For the students, as we've seen in their focus group responses, they are defending their home.

During the third and final year of the dean's attempt to eradicate the program, the campus had a new chancellor. The students' goal shifted: convince the top dog to instruct his dean to back off. Chancellor William Gerberding was a political scientist from UCLA. For him, coming to the mid-west in the mid-1970s was a step backward in time, and he was actually interested in seeing a group of lively students coming to the defense of their academic program. Gerberding had recently edited and contributed to a book, *The Radical Left: The Abuse of Discontent* (Gerberding & Smith, 1970). Some of the sections and chapter titles included, *Students and the University*, *A Foolproof Scenario for Student Revolts*, and *The Politics of the Alienated Left: An Assessment*. A group of students read this book and modeled their actions to fit Gerberding's description of a legitimate protest. Their actions were rewarded. The Chancellor directed the Provost and the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs to work out a way to keep the program running. With new and more explicit academic guidelines, Unit One began a path toward its present condition.

This campaign to keep Unit One extant illuminates several interesting points: students' affective ties to their education can be strong motivators; the role of community in solving problems can lead to innovative solutions; and the inclusion of an academic component to this problem solving is what we academics hope that our students will incorporate into their lives. (After all, these students did, in fact, create a theoretical foundation for their protest built on their reading of critical texts). An interesting continuation of this bonding occurred when this group of students graduated and were still coalesced as a community. About 40 of them collectively bought a farm in West Virginia to serve as an artists' retreat. When I last talked with them, they were still holding yearly get-togethers at the farm and had paid off the mortgage.

Last May 2004 we invited all of our graduating seniors to dinner. Most had been living in apartments for the past two years. About 50 stopped by. We asked them to comment on how Unit One fulfilled its promise of providing a liberal education.... critical thinking, self understanding, diversity, testing their points of view, ethical, moral, and intellectual development. The quotes, below, are from these students. One theme that has repeated itself over Unit One's existence is students' identification as campus outsiders (e.g., Horwitz, 1989). And, for many years, we were the outsiders in the minds of much of the campus administration. Not until the campus was called to task to show innovation in undergraduate education did Unit One fall into mainstream campus favor. And, now, with Residential Learning Communities' experiencing a national growth spurt, we have become a model for others. Although an outside threat can never be maintained as the force that coalesces a community, I think that their being consistently identified as "outsiders" serves the same function.

Unit One students have always been labeled, both by themselves and by the undergraduate campus culture. Over time, they have been the hippies, the campus radicals, the Goths, the alternative life-stylers, the geeks, etc., all of which have been outsider labels. We have never done a political spectrum survey, but I'd bet that our population is actually pretty representative of campus norms on many attitude variables. But the fact that these students live in a setting that values openness allows students to speak their minds, and their ideas and topics of discussion don't always fall within the boundaries of what other students see as "normal."

I'm always drawn to Luna Lovegood, a character in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* who is viewed as a weirdo and as an outsider until her special abilities are finally noticed. When my daughter went off to college, my main piece of advice (after getting to know her professors, of course) was to get to know the Luna Lovegoods of her campus. Getting to know new, and maybe even "strange," people and to expose oneself to new ideas is one of the strengths of Unit One. The openness of the environment appears to be one of the underlying features of Unit One that our graduating seniors focused on. This feature is remindful of a quote from Adlai E. Stevenson, former Governor of Illinois, "A free society is a society where it is safe to be unpopular." (www.democracy.ru/english/quotes.php). For me, this quote translates to fostering a setting where students feel free to speak their minds without fear of recrimination, even if they voice unpopular sentiments. In this vein, for instance, students take great pride in holding forums that address the conflicting views of evangelical Christians and atheists. Here, discussions of the kinds very opposing views that permeate these students' every-day lives can be held without acrimony or divisiveness.

Once again, from my anecdotal polling of graduating Unit One students:

“The strangest people can fit in and feel comfortable...being with “weird” people is good.”

“We are known as “weird” – but we’re the ones who open themselves freely, think outside the box, and recognize that “normal” can be “average.”

“A place like Allen Hall is intellectually stimulating to me, largely because the culture of openness fostered a great many diverse friendships that helped to grow me as a person.”

“...free to express my ideas and opinions...”

“A place like Allen Hall is intellectually stimulating to me, largely because the culture of openness fostered a great many diverse friendships that helped to grow me as a person.”

Students who move into Allen Hall from other halls frequently cite the difference between Unit One/Allen Hall and other residence halls on campus. One senior reflected:

“The difference between my original residence hall and Allen Hall was drastic. The Unit One environment brought people together...and encouraged candid and insightful discussions about pertinent and useful topics. I feel as though I had a chance to develop further as an aware

individual, more so than I would elsewhere on this often closed minded and stifling campus.”

This student wasn't aware of the paradigm of the Academic Affairs/Student Affairs dichotomy, but she did observe:

” ...Allen's strength lies in the fact that it fosters all aspects of life. Instead of focusing on (credit) hour accumulation, the focus is placed on the total quality of life.”

CONCLUSION

Small, liberal arts colleges have the ability to craft a mission that all members of the faculty and staff buy into and that students recognize as the guiding principles underlying their undergraduate educations. Very frequently, the philosophy underlying these principles involves providing these students with a liberal education.

By their nature, large Research 1 universities are fractionated. No single guiding principle unites the faculty, staff, and student body to guide them in a specific educational direction. For those members of this community who strive to experience a liberal education, Residential Learning Communities can be constructed to approximate a small liberal arts college setting. In these settings, students can get a level of intellectual intensity in their everyday lives, both in and out of the classroom, that integrates their academic and personal development.

Unit One offers a model Residential Learning Community with the mission of nurturing a liberal education for lower division undergraduates on a large, Research 1 campus.

The success of Unit One comes from students' buying into the concept that intellectual growth and lively exchange of ideas is important. The staff's job is to

- 1-foster a community that welcomes the insertion of intellectual challenge;
- 2-fuel this community with ideas and activities challenge students to confront the dissonance that these new ideas insert into their lives.

Fostering community involves conveying an attitude that this community values intellectual engagement. Fostering community involves incorporating concepts like support, acceptance of difference, the value of lively discourse, and willingness to insert new ideas into the classroom, into non-credit programming, and into the social structure of students' everyday lives in the residence hall. These concepts are readily modeled in the classroom and in purposefully structured non-credit programming. They are also readily modeled in the way staff helps students negotiate their everyday relationships. With a little bit of luck, these concepts then become incorporated into the students' long-term community traditions and passed down through student generations.

Fueling this kind of community involves staff's insertion of ideas and challenges that fall outside most students' normal experiences. Students are good at recycling their "knowns," but they need help to push into the unknown.

When students experience new ideas and challenges within the context of a supportive academic community that encourages engagement, they grow. It could be that simple!

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Unit One Living & Learning Community – Program Logic Model

Inputs Resources	Program Components or Activities	Workload or Outputs	Short Term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
<p>Core Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director (100%) • Asst. Director (100%) • Secretary (100%) • Resident Director • Area Coordinator • Grad Office Aid (25%) • Photo.Instr. (100%) • Ceramics Instr. (50%) • Music Instr. (50%) • Music Lesson Coord (50%) • 3 Program Advisors <p>Academic Instructors</p> <p>Teaching Assistants</p> <p>Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 seminar rooms • 2 large/class-activity rooms • Computer lab • Library • Music practice rooms • Electronic music studio • Ceramics lab • 2 darkrooms • Guest suite • Instructor offices 	<p>Provide an environment that is enriching in the liberal arts and humanities and encourages creative thinking, problem solving and intellectual inquisitiveness</p> <p>Freshman Orientation</p> <p>Arrange and conduct various onsite accredited courses (e.g., photography, drawing, speech communication, film studies, sign language, music composition, music lessons, economics)</p> <p>Extra Option special topic seminars</p> <p>Guest-in-Residence Program</p> <p>Non-credit Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topical discussions & film series • Student “groups” <p>Field Trips (e.g., Chicago Theater Trip, Camping Trip, St. Louis museum Trip)</p> <p>Academic Support (e.g., counseling, Assistance, and access to faculty tutoring)</p>	<p>Approximately 650 students living & learning in Unit One (ongoing daily engagement & communication)</p> <p>3 days orientation period</p> <p>Many accredited courses are offered each semester</p> <p>Many Extra Option courses (1 or 2 credit hours) are offered each semester</p> <p>Six to 8 guests per year for 1 to 3 weeks in residence</p> <p>Numerous programming of non-credit programs are offered throughout each semester (approximately 50 programs each semester)</p> <p>Two to 4 major trips are planned each year</p> <p>Academic support is ongoing</p>	<p>Increased comfort level and higher engagement with faculty and instructional staff</p> <p>Increased comfort level and number of engagements with other students of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints</p> <p>Increased levels of intellectual discourse in and out of class</p> <p>Increased number of academic and social boundary crossings by students</p> <p>Understanding and appreciation for visual arts exploration and musical development</p> <p>Building and establishing trusting relationships with others of diverse skills and viewpoints</p>	<p>Increased satisfaction with the overall UIUC educational experience</p> <p>Acquisition of a strong affiliation with the University of Illinois</p> <p>Increased number of students actively engaging in community service programs</p> <p>Increased number of students engaging in campus activities (e.g., social and political)</p> <p>Understanding and awareness of the importance of the acquisition of leadership knowledge and skills necessary for success in campus life, personal development and growth, civic engagement and employability</p>	<p>Upon graduation, all Unit One students will have had the opportunity to experience an intellectually and personally challenging environment, which is characterized by community engagement, exploration and taking risks, and crossing boundaries that create new possibilities, resulting in the acquisition of life-long learning skills, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Self-reflection and how to think and how to see things in new ways ➤ The ability to relate to others and to engage others in personal and intellectual discourse ➤ Engagement directly with political and social issues ➤ Involvement with the world of arts and humanities, and science ➤ Commitment necessary to make positive contributions or change in their families, careers, communities, and a global society

Abstract:

Unit One, a Residential Learning Community, is an academic program in a university residence hall where the pursuit of a liberal education is central to the program's mission. Unit One features many credit granting courses, guests-in-residence, academically oriented non-credit programming, and a strong sense of academic community with the intent of providing a small, liberal arts college environment on a large, Research 1 university campus. This chapter addresses the problems inherent in establishing a campus unit that melds student affairs and academic affairs concerns, discusses the intersection of these two campus arenas, and describes the benefits of addressing the "whole student" without the encumbrances of the philosophical and administrative splits that characterize the student affairs-academic affairs relationship.