

Residential Colleges Symposium 2015  
Doug Fisher Trip Report  
Edited

The Residential College Symposium 2015 was held at SMU on Oct 16-17, with a one day pre-symposium workshop “for those interested in and developing a residential college” on Oct 15. The schedule of talks, both plenary and parallel, is at <http://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/RCS/Schedule>. I attended all plenary sessions on Oct 15-17, and one presentation in each of the parallel sessions slots. My tweets are indexed by the symposium handle of @RCSymposium after mid morning on Oct 16, and by #RCS15 before that (or just see my twitter stream from Oct 15-17 at <https://twitter.com/DougOfNashville>).

The symposium included brand new ventures, including those who haven’t yet “broken ground”, as well as some with more experience (I include Vanderbilt in this latter category). Much of what was presented (e.g., importance of food and dining) are things we know, through our own experience, perhaps informed by prior literature (e.g., <http://collegiateway.org/pdf/ryan-2001.pdf> and <http://collegiateway.org>).

Rather than a session-by-session report out, I will comment on certain notable activities, ideas, and resources that were described in presentations, or that I otherwise observed.

1. **Undergraduate attendees.** Baylor University sent contingents from two residential colleges – Brooks (<http://www.baylor.edu/cll/brookscollege/>) and Teal (<http://www.baylor.edu/trc/>). Each group included the faculty head (master), ResEd representative(s), and three undergraduate residents. It is the six undergrad representatives that made Baylor unique in this setting, but faculty representation is also somewhat exceptional. If students (and faculty), along with ResEd, are to be channels of national-community ideas and experience back to Vanderbilt, then attendance of student leaders is desirable. I believe that Vanderbilt had one undergraduate attendee. Most attending institutions had no undergraduate attendees.
2. In the pre-symposium workshop, Carl Krieger of Purdue gave a **comprehensive presentation on things to attend to in developing a residential college (system)**. It was a distillation of things that Ryan and O’Hara have discussed (both were cited, and I have given links to both above), but Krieger provides a useful bullet-point resource for anyone moving into this area.
3. Lani San Antonio did a great job of organizing the pre-symposium workshop, and received a shout out at the end of the symposium. Vanderbilt’s Lani, Nadine de la Rosa, and Nina Warnke. Presented at the workshop as well. Nina’s talk on role definitions was informative on the different kinds of models, with audience participation taking discussion into
  - a. issues of **potential friction/negotiation between roles**;
  - b. **mixed messages** about the responsibilities of different roles, particularly around faculty roles;
  - c. staff **PREconceptions of having to be over protective of faculty time**
    - i. Apropos this last point, I had a conversation with WUSTL ResEd staff, over lunch before Chalene Helmuth’s keynote talk, who said that this perception of having to be overprotective seemed prevalent,

but agreed it was erroneous (let the faculty communicate clearly on the matter). Does this ever contribute to an artificial staff-induced buffer to emerge between faculty and students?

- ii. This is an interesting issue that every faculty/staff pairing should address explicitly.
4. WUSTL (Jill Stratton's presentation) prepares a **high quality, visually pleasing "Faculty Connections Newsletter" on activities of all residential colleges** that is distributed to the "usual" players (Residential colleges' students, faculty, staff), but **also to academic deans and faculty**, and others community members. "We" talked about a comprehensive high penetration newsletter at Vanderbilt, perhaps twice a semester as a start.
5. A session on "**Grading the Faculty**: How Faculty in Residence might be graded" was misnamed, but the presenters did talk about nascent research on faculty-student interactions in residential college environments, and the factors that are identified by this research (e.g., extent of "deeper life" dialogues) are potential direct or indirect factors in "Grading the Faculty". We may be reading some of the cited sources (found in the twitter stream) in the reading group (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e6pCNRDi690bvT4eZV-4x9pS5cfjARZBgfkIxjCnZtA/edit?usp=sharing>).
6. Apropos grading the faculty, a late-Friday report out by architects on a "Residential College Space Survey" indicated that at Rice (with lots of residential colleges), **the PLACEMENT and ORIENTATION of faculty apartments and offices** were significant factors (correlated, not necessarily causal) in students' perceptions of resident faculty! **These architects** (<http://www.hewv.com>) include Jane Cady Wright of Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas: see portfolio under Student Experience Theme at <http://www.hewv.com/-/510>).
7. Apropos the Grading the Faculty session focus on research, there was another parallel session on the "**Future Agenda for Practice, Research, and Advocacy**" led by Elon and WUSTL participants, discussed recommendations from a "National Think Tank", which included Frank Wcislo. I talked with the Elon presenter and received a copy of summary recommendations, but there appears to be an online presence too: <http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/rlc-recommendations-part1/>.
8. Teal College at Baylor University is an EECS discipline focused Residential College (EECS: both Electrical Engineering and Computer Science majors). There is some controversy about theme-based colleges because their membership is not diverse in obvious ways. However, the claim by the Faculty Master of Teal, an EECS professor, was that correlated with the establishment of an EECS residential college, representation of women in EECS at Baylor increased. Is this an instance where **theme-based residential colleges might actually increase diversity in disciplinary areas**? Other interesting aspects of Teal are
  - a. Nursing is the third "preferenced" major, to achieve better gender balance in Teal; like EECS, accreditation is also a big deal in Nursing, so disciplinary disparity was not be as substantial as the Teal faculty master first imagined;
  - b. potential for friction between EECS res college and EECS academic unit;
  - c. Teal includes office space for other EECS faculty. **Might theme-based residential colleges help on-board disciplinary faculty to the idea of residential colleges generally?**

9. The architect's survey I introduced in (6), found that the frequency that **faculty residences** were used for programming varied widely: 6 institutions said weekly; 6 said "monthly"; 1 said every other month; 1 said rarely. In addition, the survey said that there were three models of **faculty leadership**: 4 schools where faculty is sole leader; 7 where faculty is intellectual leader, and others lead "ops"; 3 said that faculty member was community member, and that others lead. Nothing was said about how these and other dimensions (e.g., faculty residence size – our residences compare favorably BTW) correlated. It would be interesting to see the full study.
10. Apropos the 3 faculty leadership models – **Vanderbilt's four defined roles for residential faculty** (Dean of the Commons, Faculty Head of House, Faculty Director; Faculty Member in Residence) span these leadership models, rather than following one model (see residential college survey), Vanderbilt spans the models under one roof.
11. Three **cohort group meetings** were held for (a) Residential Faculty; (b) Live In Staff; (c) Academic and Student Affairs Administrators. These meetings were 30 minutes, which the faculty cohort thought was far too short – people hated to break. We are starting a residential faculty listserv. An administrator later confirmed that her cohort group felt the same way, and she had very good ideas about having more, theme-based cohort groups at the next conference.
12. Chalene Helmuth gave a great keynote talk at the end, spotlighting the Commons experience, themes such as social justice and self-discovery, and made observations that residential faculty worked with students and staff in roles that are "invisible" to non-residential faculty, adding to the connective tissue between various stakeholders.
13. I was exposed to numerous programming ideas, including several from Brooks College at Baylor (e.g., senior Torchbearers/mentors, **highly structured** Tuesday Teas, senior inscribed book donations), as well as some mentioned above, such as taking undergrad leaders on residential college field trips and connections with other residential college students (e.g., consistent with the Melbourne portal).