The Educational Role in College Student Housing

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WHILE AN EDUCATIONAL ROLE has long been recognized as a function of college student housing, administrators, faculty members, parents, and even students sometimes have difficulty integrating this expectation into an operation which also has very definite business, service, and management roles. The purpose of this paper is to define, in both theoretical and operational terms, the nature of learning as it occurs in college residence halls. Of equal importance is that it provides a model which identifies the reciprocal nature of educational and management functions as they combine to produce a total housing program that is responsive to student needs.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

The educational role in college housing is founded in two very basic but very important assumptions (Riker, 1965):

1. Environment Influences Behavior.

Within the residential community students experience both a physical environment and an interpersonal or social environment, both of which communicate something to them on a daily basis. Thus, adequate physical facilities that support the educational process contribute in important ways to student learning. Proper lighting, soundproofing, and furnishings, for example, can transform a student room from a mere place to sleep into a most adequate and private study facility. Alternate places to study within the residence hall are most helpful as well as typing rooms, music listening rooms, reference libraries, seminar rooms, classrooms, faculty offices, and other facilities that meet the daily needs of students.

The interpersonal environment can, likewise, either facilitate learning or, if impoverished, inhibit the educational process. Newcomb (1962) suggests that peer influence, although not necessarily opposed to faculty influence, is probably the more effective factor in determining the direction and quality of student attitudes. Peer norms can dictate the behavior of individual group members, A student is not a passive digester of knowledge elegantly arranged for him by superior artists of curriculum design. He listens, reads, thinks, studies, and writes at the same time that he feels, worries, hopes, loves, and hates.
and these expectations may or may not coincide with the goals of higher education.

The introduction of professional and para-professional staff members who know students on a personal basis can also have a potent impact upon the quality of the interpersonal environment. Their role, of course, is to motivate

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2. Learning Is a Total Process.
The second assumption is that the college experience has a major effect upon the total human personality and, further, that a variety of factors contribute to the learning process. A recent statement by the Committee on Higher Education (1968) expresses this concern:

Despite our limited behavioral knowl-
edge, the college must recognize that
even its instructional goals cannot be
effectively achieved unless it assumes
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hates. He engages in all these activities
not as an isolated individual but as a
member of overlapping communities
which greatly influence his reactions
to the classroom experience. To teach
the subject matter and ignore the reali-
ties of the student's life and the social
systems of the college is hopelessly
naive.

It is simply not possible to disembodify the human personality and develop a student's intellectual capacities in isolation from his cultural, spiritual, and psychological growth. Non-classroom activities, experiential learning, as well as classroom education must be developed to enhance student growth as total human beings. Students spend more time in their place of residence than in all other locations on campus combined, and the role of professional and student-staff members again
becomes a prominent factor regarding the total educational process.

A recent study conducted at Ohio University (Estler, 1969) identified five major goals of higher education:

1. Social Awareness and Responsibility
2. Political Awareness
3. Human Values
4. Self Awareness and Growth
5. Vocational Learning

It is of interest that students in this study reported that their significant discussions regarding these important areas most often took place within their residence halls except in the area of "Vocational Learning" which most frequently took place in the classroom. Also important is that these meaningful discussions were overwhelmingly stimulated by peers, neighbors in their living unit, except again for "Vocational Learning" which most often involved a professor and classmates. It seems, then, that learning is very much a part of residence hall life. Opportunities to enrich these learning experiences will rest with the effectiveness and relevance of the total housing program.

**STUDENT HOUSING OBJECTIVES**

As a basic reference point for the educational role and function of college student housing, a hierarchy of general objectives for housing is offered in Table 1. It is hoped that this "build-
ing block” presentation of objectives will illustrate the interrelated nature of the educational and managerial efforts that are so vital to the total effectiveness of the housing program upon students. While the five categories merge and blend to form a continuum, each level represents a somewhat distinct set of student needs. Success at any one level will depend to a large degree on how well student needs are fulfilled at lower levels. We are unlikely to engender much interest in educational or cultural programs (level 4), for example, if students are preoccupied with excessive noise in their residential unit (level 3) or if they perceive their physical environment as grossly inadequate (level 1).

Objectives at the first two levels are met most directly through the management personnel, while the educational or instructional staff provides leadership to fulfill objectives at the fourth and fifth levels.

The point rather is this: the overall objectives of college housing are interrelated and interdependent. Unless an adequate job is accomplished in each of the five categories the housing program will fail to realize its total contribution to the university and to the students it serves.

Management and educational personnel share responsibility in meeting requirements at level three, providing guidelines regarding their respective areas of specialization that help to maintain orderly and compatible group living.
This model does not mean to suggest that objectives or needs at any one level are more important than those at another level. The point rather is this: the overall objectives of college housing are interrelated and interdependent. Unless an adequate job is accomplished in each of the five categories the housing program will fail to realize its total contribution to the university and to the students it serves. Furthermore, achieving total effectiveness requires careful planning and close cooperation between management and instructional personnel. Each must respect the other's area of expertise, and each must realize that a successful housing program depends upon their mutual support in meeting the varied needs of student residents.

REFERENCES


Newcomb, T.M. Student peer-group influence and intellectual outcomes of college experience. In R.L. Sutherland et al. (Eds.) Personality of the College Campus. Austin, University of Texas, 1962, 69-71.
