

TECHNICAL COLLEGE STUDENT HOUSING RESIDENCE LIFE

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TECHNICAL COLLEGE STUDENT HOUSING RESIDENCE LIFE

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ABSTRACT
TECHNICAL COLLEGE STUDENT HOUSING RESIDENCE LIFE

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Statement of the Problem

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College (SWTC) has offered on-campus student housing since 1997. While the College offered a very basic game room and exercise facility to students, no formal residence life plan had been developed to enrich the lives of those students who resided in the on-campus apartments.

Because of the lack of activities and recreational programs on-campus, SWTC began to see a rise in the prevalence of alcohol and other drug parties. A formal structure of activities, or a residence life plan, needed to be developed and implemented in order to offer more positive activities to students thereby enhancing the college experience.

Method of Approach

An examination of the current residence life at SWTC was completed, including the review of past years' surveys submitted by former on-campus student housing residents. A general review of literature was accomplished regarding the issues young adults faced and the programs having the greatest positive impact on students in campus apartments.

Results of the Study

Students enrolling in two-year colleges faced many obstacles including financial barriers of commute time and the cost of gas. The colleges believed offering on-campus housing would help reduce these financial barriers and increase enrollment and retention.

Although on-campus housing was widely viewed as a positive initiative, it also had a great impact on the college's operations. More resources needed to be allocated to student housing to both establish and maintain a well run program. How to ensure a positive cash flow to cover the operation costs was of major concern to the colleges.

There were also special responsibilities associated with on-campus student housing. Identifying the needs of incoming students was vital to maintain student emotional and physical well-being. Researchers discovered a high prevalence for drinking among college students. College administration needed to develop and offer programs geared toward responsible drinking while being diligent in their efforts of providing a quality housing experience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1997 the Southwest Wisconsin Technical College Foundation, Inc., purchased an existing apartment complex adjacent to Southwest Wisconsin Technical College (SWTC) in order to provide on-campus student housing for 32 students attending college. Shortly after, Design Homes Inc., donated a duplex to provide additional housing for four students with disabilities. In 2002 after identifying a growing need for more student housing, the Foundation received a grant/loan through the United States Department of Agriculture to build a six-unit apartment building to house 24 students.

By 2003 60 students annually resided in the on-campus student housing complex. While this had been a flourishing and very positive marketing and financial program for the Foundation and SWTC, the rural area in which SWTC is located as well as the lack of campus recreational programs and activities was negatively impacting the quality of resident life in the on-campus student housing apartments.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

SWTC is a commuter campus. Other than the 60 students who resided in the on-campus student housing, all staff and students commuted to and from SWTC daily. Most of the housing residents left

after classes on Friday and returned home for the weekend, arriving back at on-campus student housing Sunday night or Monday morning.

Students who resided in on-campus student housing and stayed through the weekend did not have access to recreational facilities or programs. SWTC had a fitness room and a separate recreation room that offered billiards, ping pong, card tables, board games, and cable television. However, the fitness room was open Mondays through Thursdays from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and was open on Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Therefore, access was limited during the week and not accessible on weekends. The recreation room was closed once classes concluded for the day and was not accessible during evenings or weekends.

The basement level of the six-unit on-campus apartment building was furnished with couches, chairs, a ping pong table, wireless Internet, and cable television. However, the ping pong table was in poor condition; and the paddles and balls were regularly missing. The flooring was bare cement, and no windows were installed during construction as this area was the residents' shelter during severe weather. This environment was not an inviting space for social activities.

Because of the lack of positive recreational programs and activities, some students had parties in which alcohol and other drugs were present. SWTC was an alcohol-free campus, and this standard extended to student

housing. The Foundation had a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol violations at student housing, which resulted in a student's immediate dismissal from the apartments. Local law enforcement viewed the on-campus student housing as a "party" area, and they were regularly called by other tenants or adjacent property owners to investigate complaints. Because of this negative behavior, an on-campus student housing residence life program needed to be developed and implemented.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was as follows:

1. Examine the current residence life at SWTC.
2. Study what other two-year colleges within Wisconsin and other states offer to students who live in on-campus student housing apartments.
3. Develop an orientation and residence life plan for students living in SWTC's on-campus housing apartments.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

On-campus student housing residents would benefit from the development of a student life plan that included offering developmental/informational programs and activities to students. The programs and activities would provide residents with positive and safe recreational options, thus decreasing the current negative behaviors such as alcohol and other drug parties.

ASSUMPTIONS

One assumption of this study was that on-campus student housing residents desired access to recreational facilities and programs that would positively enhance their educational experience. This researcher's second assumption was that the alcohol and other drug parties would only increase in intensity and frequency unless alternatives were provided.

METHOD

To gather the data needed for this project, interviews were conducted with ten current SWTC Foundation on-campus housing residents during the month of May 2008. Also interviewed was SWTC's Director of Student Services to determine programs that might be offered at SWTC in conjunction with student housing.

A short survey was conducted a few years ago with the on-campus housing residents regarding in which activities they would like to engage at the apartments. Comments made by individual students using on-campus housing at that time were reviewed.

Research also included interviewing the housing directors at other two-year colleges to determine if they had residence life programs; and, if so, what activities and programs were offered. Literature was thoroughly researched on the issues facing young adults and what social programs had the greatest positive impact. Finally, local community programs were researched in an effort to locate positive recreational activities.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to two-year colleges within the Wisconsin Technical College System as well as two-year colleges in other states that are similar in size and scope to SWTC.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Incoming Student Needs

In recent years enrollments at two-year colleges increased steadily. Not only were traditional high school students enrolling in two-year colleges but also displaced workers or those seeking a career change were enrolling. While the increased enrollments were a benefit for two-year colleges, many incoming students had needs that the colleges must address. The most critical of needs were unpreparedness and financial barriers.

An increasing number of students “are both more disadvantaged and less prepared for college work” (Zeidenberg, 2008, p. 2). Placement exams were administered to those enrolling in two-year colleges. If students did not meet the minimum standards to enroll in core program courses, students were placed in remediation classes. According to Kuh, “three-fifths of students in public two-year colleges... must complete at least one remedial course” in the subjects of math, reading, or writing (2007, p. 3). Most students went unwillingly into these courses as they cost time and money, and the students felt they did not need remediation.

Before students needing remediation could enroll in the core courses needed for the successful completion of the program, they first had to enroll in a remediation class and pass it successfully. For many

students this meant a setback of at least one semester for enrolling in a core class. For example, a student needing remediation coursework in writing had to first enroll in a fundamentals of language class and pass it successfully before enrolling in a written communication class that was a prerequisite to completing the chosen program. The remedial class added extra tuition costs. At least one semester was required to complete the remediation course, which either added to the course load in the second semester or extended the time of completion of a program. This included possibly adding a summer session if the class was even offered at that time.

Academic or skills centers have become increasingly popular on campuses as “nine out of every 10 students starting college say they intend to use” the assistance of one of these centers (Kuh, 2007, p. 3). Many remediation courses could be taught through these centers with instructors whose job was to specifically engage students with low skills. Academic or skills centers also offered a student community atmosphere for those needing the same remediation or building the same skills set.

For those students living in on-campus housing, remediation classes meant paying extra housing costs to enroll in summer classes or signing a ten-month lease to return for another fall semester of classes. If students resided at student housing for fall semester only, it might have meant that they were obligated to pay for the spring semester as well.

Incoming students also faced financial barriers to attending college. Transportation costs, tuition, and affordable housing placed financial constraints on college students whether they were attending right out of high school or were returning adults. In a report released in 2008, college students were likely to be “independent of their parents, working, and perhaps supporting a family” (Report finds gaps, 2008, p. 22).

The increasing cost of tuition represented another financial barrier for students. Nearly two-thirds of two-year college students were eligible for some type of financial aid. However, most “aid programs fall short of the financial support a typical community college student needs” (Report find gaps, 2008, p. 22). Over the past few years, most state’s two-year colleges had seen a decline in grant dollars due to federal and state entities allocating grant dollars to other priorities. Grants were especially valuable to students as they were “free” money that the student did not repay. Student loans were available; however, many students applying for loans were daunted at the prospect of having to repay thousands of dollars when they graduated.

Changing Two-Year Campus Environment

One significant student need that changed the face of many two-year college campuses was the need for on-campus student housing. Such colleges were developed to provide access to the college

experience and to meet local educational needs. Gas costs, average commute time, interest in campus life, and expressed independence from parents were driving the need for two-year colleges to invest in on-campus student housing.

Two-year colleges were traditionally commuter campuses. In July 2008, \$4.01 per gallon was the national average price for a gallon of gas (Rising gasoline, 2008). Thus, commuting to campus and back home daily represented a large financial strain on already tight budgets for college students. Students were turning to ride-share programs, asking colleges to provide more online courses, and looking for housing closer to campus to ease their pocketbooks. Yet others chose to not attend class one or two days a week because they could not afford to fill their gas tanks. In an article written by Amy Rolph (2008), students reported that commuting to campus was “becoming a deal breaker when considering the pursuit of higher education” (p. 1). The students likened the price of gas to the high cost of textbooks and child care. Many community colleges across the country “have cut Friday classes, at least partially because of rising fuel costs” (Rolph, 2008, p. 3).

The average two-year college student commuted more than 60 miles round trip (Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, 2008). Because of this statistic, SWTC and other colleges viewed on-campus student housing as an opportunity to retain students by greatly diminishing or

eliminating daily commute time. By offering on-campus housing, two-year colleges could also attract more students from their outlying district areas, thus boosting enrollments.

Commuting could also be a challenge when students were faced with adverse driving conditions. For many rural two-year colleges, poor winter driving conditions forced many students to miss class. However, urban colleges were also affected by commute times because the heavy traffic caused students to sit in their cars longer, burning gas (Wahlgren, 2008, p. 1). The cost of commuting was becoming more and more prohibitive.

While the price of gas and commute times were driving the need for student housing, the students' interest in campus life was also leading college administration to provide on-campus housing. Many students sought the college experience their moms and dads had (Wahlgren, 2008, p. 2). In high school they were involved in some type of extra-curricular activity and hoped to carry that over into their college experience. Being involved in campus activities created a sense of community among students. It also gave students an outlet for sharing their problems and successes as many of their peers were experiencing the same (Rauf and Mosser, 2004, p. 30). Studies had also shown that "students who [lived] on campus.... [had] higher education rates, [achieved] greater academic success, [and were] more involved in campus life" (Chappell, 2008, p. 1).

Expressing independence from their parents was also very important to college students. In the 2004 March/April edition of *Careers & Colleges*, Rauf and Mosser quoted a student's remarks about the independence from his parents: "My first weekend on campus I felt like I should keep my parents informed of where I would be and who I was going with" (p. 33). Another student commented, "I didn't have someone looking over my shoulder and telling me what to do" (p. 33). Providing on-campus housing allowed for self-discovery and self-expression.

Impact of Housing on College Operations

Offering on-campus student housing had a great impact on the operations of the college. Many two-year colleges did not have the resources readily available to invest in a housing project. However, more and more two-year campuses were finding the means with which to provide on-campus student housing (Chappell, 2008, p.1). Administration determined what resources were necessary to ensure profitability and sustainability of housing projects. Colleges also mitigated the risks and maximized the returns associated with on-campus housing.

One looming question for colleges was how to finance a student housing program. Student resident halls were largely "well-embedded into the budgetary fabric of these colleges" (Moeck, Katsinas, and Hardy, 2005, p. 4). Yet how to pay for buildings and administration costs weighed

heavily on two-year colleges. For most colleges, the residence halls had to turn a profit or, at the bare minimum, break even in order to cover personnel and upkeep costs. Revenue generated from housing could comprise 10 percent or more of total revenue at small and medium two-year colleges (p. 4).

The overhead of college operations increased greatly due to the addition of a student housing program. Not only would it be costly to build dorms or renovate existing buildings, but staff would need to be hired to oversee the program. Necessary staff included a student housing manager to oversee all aspects of housing, an accountant to monitor income and expenses, and resident managers who lived in the housing units and supervised the activities of tenants. The rent payments would need to be closely monitored to ensure overhead costs were sheltered and the housing program did not become financially detrimental to the college. Most two-year colleges could not absorb the housing expenses into other revenue generating areas.

Special Responsibilities for College Campus Personnel

Offering on-campus housing would result in special responsibilities for personnel of the college who oversaw the housing program. Students would face transitional issues that might affect their emotional and physical well-being. While students might relish their newfound

independence, they still required supervision and programming that established rules and models for proper behavior.

For those two-year colleges that offered on-campus student housing, each college would have to address student problems throughout the school year. The greatest concern was alcohol consumption. Among today's college students, there was a "high prevalence of drinking-related problems, including sexual assault, vandalism, driving under the influence, fighting, and other behaviors that [were] best characterized as antisocial" (McAloon, 1994, p. 12). The concern was how to channel this antisocial behavior into more positive activities that were not centered around or included alcohol.

Admittedly, most research regarding drinking among college students had been done at four-year campuses. However, with more and more two-year campuses beginning to offer on-campus student housing, researchers began studying drinking at two-year campuses. The findings from the studies showed an alarmingly high rate of alcohol consumption at the two-year campuses (McAloon, 1994, p. 13). Even more disturbing was the high rate at which students were involved in binge drinking or having five or more alcoholic drinks in one night.

A study by Davis and Hunnicut (1991) of alcohol abuse at community campuses stated that 90 percent of traditional-aged students entering college were already abusing alcohol before they arrived on

campus (p. 44). This meant that students began consuming alcohol before they were 18 years of age. This startling figure dispelled the notion of offering abstinence programs on alcohol but to instead offer programs geared toward drinking responsibly and teaching about the negative effects of alcohol consumption. Community college administration needed to intervene with educational based programming rather than using scare tactics to curb drinking (Davis and Hunnicut, 1991, p. 44).

The relationship between alcohol and sex crimes was also alarming. “Nearly one out of every five males [reported] having been taken advantage of sexually or having taken advantage of another where alcohol was involved” (Davis and Hunnicut, 1991, p.44). The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) reported nearly 70,000 cases each year of sexual assault or date rape that resulted from drinking by college students (National Institutes of Health, 2002).

Providing an adequate level of supervision might help curb undesirable behavior. Students might be more willing to seek the counsel of a peer rather than administration personnel. Therefore, the need to hire resident assistants to live in commune with the students in order to address immediate concerns from students was of utmost importance for the college. College personnel would do well to “[enforce] a more responsible alcohol policy, educating students from their first day on

campus, and setting a good example through the residential advisor program” (*The Reality of Freshman*, 2002, p. 1).

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

On-campus housing at two-year colleges was a growing enterprise, especially for rural campuses whose students' commute times were normally one hour or more. Fueling the demand for on-campus housing was the surge in enrollments, gas prices, interest in campus life, and students' desire for a "true" college experience. However, colleges needed to address several issues when developing and implementing an on-campus student housing program.

An increasing number of students enrolling in two-year colleges were underprepared and also began school with great financial barriers. Initially, they failed placement exams and were required to enroll in remediation coursework to build their skills. Having to complete remedial classes not only discouraged students but it prolonged the length of their programs. If students who were enrolled in remedial coursework resided in on-campus housing, they might be obligated to extend leases, which they really did not need. Thus, those already faced with financial difficulties were caught trying to find the funds with which to pay the rent. While nearly two thirds of two-year college students were eligible for financial aid, the amount of aid they received was usually not enough to cover both tuition and housing costs.

By offering on-campus housing, two-year colleges hoped to retain students by diminishing commute times. Housing also enabled colleges to attract students beyond their district's borders and to increase enrollment by offering specialized programs that other two-year colleges did not have. More students would also maintain good attendance practices as they would eliminate the need to drive to campus in bad weather or because they could not afford the price of gas.

Independence from parents was also drawing more students to on-campus housing. They envisioned the experience their parents had and wanted the same for themselves. Students felt more a part of the school community and contracted more of the college experience. They were more likely to become involved in campus activities and clubs and grew through self-discovery and self-expression. Housing provided the students with a real world experience and enabled them to share and communicate with their peers.

Even though on-campus housing was strongly viewed as a positive initiative for two-year colleges, it also had a great impact on the operations of the college. Additional administrative needs, profitability, and sustainability were all issues the college needed to address. The revenue generated was a large portion of total revenue reported for two-year colleges. College administration had to determine what resources were necessary to establish and maintain a housing program. Therefore,

housing weighed heavily on the college's budget. College administration needed to ensure that income generated from housing would cover the costs of personnel and upkeep.

Another impact to the two-year colleges offering on-campus housing was the special responsibilities associated with the program. The needs of incoming on-campus housing students must be determined in order to maintain the student's emotional and physical well-being. With newfound independence came the need for moderate supervision and programming that encouraged positive behavior. For instance, one serious issue that needed to be addressed was alcohol abuse. There was a high prevalence for drinking-related concerns with on-campus housing residents. What increased the prominence of drinking on-campus was that most students were already abusing alcohol before they were adults. This alarming realization disproved the belief of offering abstinence programs but to instead offer programs geared toward drinking responsibly.

For those two-year colleges venturing into on-campus housing or those already offering housing, the issues facing administration seemed daunting. Two-year colleges hoped to see an increase in enrollments and revenue with a housing program. The colleges sought to satisfy student needs of having a traditional college experience and removing some financial barriers associated with attending college. But colleges needed

to be diligent in their efforts to provide a quality housing program that met the needs of both the student and the college.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on these findings, this researcher developed a student life plan offering programming that was both fun and educational. Portions of this plan have already been implemented at SWTC's on-campus student housing complex. The programs and activities centered on positive and safe recreational alternatives that discouraged negative behaviors associated with alcohol and drug consumption. One communal activity was provided each month. Other activities outside of the housing program were also available. Current housing residents desired access to programs that enhanced their college experience. Working in union with the director of student services, this researcher established activities and programs that were offered to on-campus housing students throughout the year.

Appendix A outlines monthly activities planned by the housing director and resident manager. One group activity was to be offered each month. The activities ranged from educational programs with guest speakers to fun game nights. Based upon researched literature and documentation about the seriousness of alcohol and drugs in student housing life, two alcohol and other drug programs were scheduled to be offered each year, one per semester. The other monthly activities included outdoor games, food nights, and nonalcoholic drink events.

While Southwest Tech Foundation On-Campus Student Housing sponsored activities would take place each month, the college partnered with the Foundation to sponsor activities in which housing students could participate. Appendix B lists the free activities that were open to students. These included school sponsored dances, entertainment, intramural sports, and access to the campus' fitness and weight rooms. Such activities allowed the students to associate with their peers. The activities also gave the students a feeling of being a part of the whole campus community. These sponsored events were nonalcoholic, and two of these programs also engaged the students in physical recreation.

Students did not want to spend all of their free time on campus. Students spend money in the communities in which they live or those in close proximity to campus. Appendix C indicates non-sponsored activities that were available to the students living in on-campus housing. Students could visit local bowling alleys and movie theatres at reduced rates. A 24 hour fitness club in town could offer reduced membership fees for students of Southwest Wisconsin Technical College. Many golf courses were located throughout the surrounding communities and could offer discounted greens fees to students.

The Southwest Wisconsin Technical College Foundation demonstrated a commitment to offer a safe, fun, and educational on-campus student housing program. Through research, comments from

students, and assistance from student services personnel, this housing residence life plan, when fully implemented, is designed to enable students to grow through self-expression and in commune with their peers. By offering a well-run housing program, students would be able to have a true college experience at a two-year campus. Use of the residence life plan as outlined in the Appendices is expected to guide on-campus housing students toward a positive, fulfilling living experience.

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APPENDIX

A

Appendix A

College Sponsored Activities for on-campus housing students (at no cost to the students):

Date	Activity
Third Weekend in August	Friday and Saturday orientation and move-in. Parents are encouraged to attend with the resident. The on-campus housing handbook is distributed.
September	Back to school cookout on a Monday evening. Event allows the students to mingle, play games, and get to know each other.
October	Alcohol and Other Drug Awareness (AODA) Program. The Grant-Iowa Drug Task Force provides a presentation and open talk forum with students. The campus AODA counselor will also be present.
November	"Hard Mock Café": a fun game night with a nonalcoholic drink bar. Low key event geared toward building housing community.
December	"Finals Relief": game night with snacks and nonalcoholic drinks. End of semester stress relief for students; talk to each other about classes and a chance to identify with peers.
January	Welcome back gathering; chance to introduce new students who moved into on-campus housing over the semester break.
February	AODA Program. Presentation and open talk forum with the local county sheriff's office K-9 unit. Includes demonstrations with K-9 dogs.
March	"Hard Mock Café": a fun game night with a nonalcoholic drink bar. Low key event geared toward building housing community.
April	End of the Year Party. Game night with snacks and nonalcoholic beverages provided.
May	"Finals Relief": open night to talk, study, and visit with other housing students.

APPENDIX

B

Appendix B

College sponsored activities:

Other college sponsored activities open to all students attending the college will include the following:

- Fall and Spring dances
- Entertainment by comedians and hypnotists
- Intramural sports/open gyms offered two nights a week
- Extended hours for the fitness/weight rooms

APPENDIX

C

Appendix C

Non-sponsored college activities:

Other non-sponsored college activities to be offered at a reduced price to on-campus housing students will include the following:

- Bowling at local bowling alleys
- Admittance to local movie theatres
- Reduced membership fees at other community fitness centers
- Reduced fees at local community golf courses