

# SEAHO

SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF HOUSING OFFICERS



move forward, I am eager to involve myself with opportunities that excite me the most and align with my greater purpose. Onward and upward...always.

**Reference:**

Watkins, M. (2003). *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press

## Residential Curriculum: The Trials and Tribulations of Semester One

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### Introduction

Community development is something we find ourselves thinking a lot about while working in residence life. Our programming model has changed from year to year, addressing Residents' needs by a few traditional methods, for example, the Wellness Wheel. At the end of each year, we realized that we did not have a way of assessing student learning or the contribution received by the mission of the Housing and Residences Life Department and University. We wanted to better the connection between the students and our listed outcomes, serving them based on student needs during their development here. Being a STEM institution that focuses on aviation and aerospace industries, taking a curricular approach seemed to be the best fit for not only our student body but also the Resident Advisors who would be implementing the curriculum. We gathered feedback from our student staff and saw the need for a clear and concise approach to residential programming. We wanted to make sure that our residents got more out of our residence halls than just proximity to classrooms. This article walks you through our journey of implementing our first year of the residential curriculum.

### Planning

At first, we were inspired by the intentional interaction models of other institutions and we test piloted our own model. We started by calling them Eagle Chats (after much deliberation and failure to come up with a unique name; we are open to suggestions). For the summer, RAs had to complete two chats on pre-selected topics that were to address our educational priority and the different experiences of summer versus a traditional academic year. It took some explanation about their purpose, but once the RA understood the reasoning, they were on-board. Unfortunately, we run into a challenge with consistency here at Embry-Riddle in the summer semester, once a student completes the flight hours they typically leave. This negatively affected our ability to have a good sampling of chats. However, the foundations were set and this trial better prepared us for Fall Training and implementation.

In addition, summer programming has been a challenge in the past. We decided to host a weekly game night in the residence hall to improve engagement. It took a couple weeks and alterations to build a following and attendance, but as the summer ended, residents asked about whether game nights would continue into the Fall Semester. This piloted our strategy to reach residents on their wing so RAs could focus on the interpersonal/social development of their communities.



Our educational priority stemmed from two prevailing factors, our departmental mission and the mission of the University, so we had to find a way to merge a focus on career readiness with interpersonal exploration. Our Learning Goals were a little clearer. We benefited by a survey completed by Embry-Riddle's Career Services Department where employers provide feedback that showed our students were lacking the interpersonal/soft skills needed in the workplace. We saw this as an immediate opportunity for our curriculum to fill that void.

We were deliberate in the creation of our curriculum. We decided that our Learning Goals should address areas that we could directly affect Housing & Residence Life without having to double the work of other departments. From this idea, we developed the following for goals: 1) Interpersonal Development, 2) Inclusivity, 3) Wellbeing, & 4) Academic Achievement. For each goal, we developed three learning outcomes. From our learning goals, we developed the flight plan or matrix components, which outlined the different pieces of the curriculum. They are included below:

- Eagle Chats: These are 1:1 on intentional interactions with residents meant to achieve our Learning Goals through peer interactions and mentorship.
- Traditions: These are a consistent bi-weekly event that they can rely on attending. The purpose is to build a connection to their wing area and to have an event to rely on and look forward to attending.
- Wing Initiatives: These are the things done by the RA to make the residents feel at home and in the community on their floor. For example, these would be bulletin boards, wing meetings, decorations, and walk over events.
- Area Initiatives: These are programs hosted by the RAs located in a current building, area, or supervision group. This area includes our RA programming where we create facilitation guides handed out to each staff.
- Departmental Initiatives: These are programs hosted by our department, committees, and/or staff for all of our residents across different halls on campus. Some examples include large-scale programming like House Calls, Halloween Carnival, and Hall Olympics. These also include things like Occupancy checks and our Health and Safety checks.

### **Training**

When it came time to training our staff on our new approach, we wanted to make sure that we started with the “why” behind what we were doing. Like many student leaders, our RA staff needed to understand the reasons behind the changes as well as how this was going to affect their role as an RA. To do this we dedicated two half days during our fall training to explaining and teaching the new implementation of the curriculum.

To begin, we reviewed information from our Quality of Life Survey from the 2018 spring semester. This survey provided us with a framework to share the reasons behind the curriculum. We believe that taking this approach while introducing curriculum set us up for a smooth transition in the fall semester. It was important to us that the RAs had an understanding of what a curriculum looked like so we spent some time discussing the different aspects of the curricular approach. When teaching the specifics of our Residential Curriculum model at Embry-Riddle, we started by discussing the topic areas that made up the curriculum first, allowing the students to fully understand the areas in which they would be working. After we presented the Flight Plan (a matrix) to the staff, which outlined the entire semester week by week allowing the RAs to have an understanding of their potential workload. To allow our staffs to process and ask questions, we broke them into their individual teams to discuss specific questions and further delve into the flight plan for their building/area.

### **Assessment and Changes from Fall Semester to Spring Semester**

As the fall semester began, we realized that we had set goals and expectation for residents, but we had not streamlined way of assessing events and knowing if students were actually learning. In order to remedy this, we started an assessment process mid-semester. Although difficult due to the time of implementation, we were able to glean new and important information from our assessments. Our first departmental program was an alcohol education program geared toward students who needed to learn safer drinking practices in the community. The assessment created for this activity helped the professional staff understand the demographic makeup of the students who attended this program. We identified a high ROTC attendance and the major and gender make-up of attendees reflected those of the institution. Our next assessment dove deeper into student learning goals and assessed knowledge is taken away from our nutrition program. Students answered a digital survey and we collected similar demographic data to the alcohol program. These results allowed us to tweak the event in the future to better support student learning. Moving forward, we plan to continue assessing departmental programs to serve our residents. These assessments allow us to understand our student population, how we support their knowledge through programming, and their benefits for the future.

In addition to departmental programming assessment, the residential curriculum committee created a fall 2018 assessment asking about RA involvement on their floor and unity in each community. This assessment was printed and provided to the Resident Advisors. They were required to hand out the survey at their first wing meeting and asked students to complete it anonymously. After coding the data, professional staff members identified communities where the residential curriculum was successful, where student involvement was lacking, and which Resident Advisors needed more support or leadership challenges based on student leader feedback.

We changed things from the fall semester to the spring semester in order to better support our students. First, we added athletic events to our community partners and events that RAs were required to attend. This modification helped us strengthen our partnership with the athletics department and increased overall school spirit in the residence halls. We also removed one area of the curriculum flight plan. We combined it with a second area that was similar. This streamlined the flight plan for our resident advisors and constituents. During the transition between semesters, we also adjusted Eagle Chats for RA understanding. We moved away from topic areas because of their restrictive nature and moved toward solely addressing the four learning goals. This update allowed the RAs to tailor the conversations with the individuals on their wings instead of conducting informal interviews that felt awkward to both the staff and our residents.

### **Lessons Learned**

As we look back on the past eight months, we processed our approach in the implementation of this new initiative. One lesson learned is on involving campus partners in the conversation early to give everyone the time to plan for the semester/year. One of the positive outcomes of the curriculum for our student staff is having all aspects of the curriculum spelled out for them at the beginning of the semester, allowing for very few surprise additions to their calendar. We have come to find that our student staff really appreciate this proactive approach and this makes it even more important to have campus partner initiatives planned out. We also came to learn that some of our initiatives were difficult for our student staff to implement. This issue is partially because the entire curriculum was brand new to them this academic year but also that it was new to us as a professional staff. We learned that we needed to be flexible if an initiative was not working the way we intended and to make adjustments as we went to make the implementation more successful for our staff and more meaningful for our residents.

### **Plans for the Future**

As we get closer to completing our first year of Residential Curriculum, we are already looking to the future. One large impact area is that our university has announced that starting with the students joining in the fall of 2019, we will be implementing a two-year live on requirement. Up until this point, only first-year students were required to live on campus. With this change, just on the horizon for us, we are going to start piloting what a second year of the curriculum will look like. One of the main priorities of the university is the career readiness of our students. With this priority and using the NACE Career Readiness Competencies, ERAU has identified eight competencies that we believe will help better prepare our students for the workforce after graduation. These competencies include Career Preparations, Collaboration and Teamwork, Communication (Oral and Written), Critical Thinking, Digital Technology, Global Fluency, Leadership, and Professionalism (Work Ethic). As we prepare for our first group of students who will be living on campus for a required two years, we are in the beginning stages of mapping out how these competencies could fit into our curricular goals, whom they will require some adjustments to our goals, and how to transition from the learning from year one to year two. In addition to the year two requirement, we begin to reconsider how to best train our student staff to implement elements of the curriculum successfully, giving them the proper tools to continue to make a difference in the educational experience of our on-campus population. Finally, as we look ahead to next year we really want to take a close look at our conduct statistics. This year we have noticed a substantial drop in conduct related incidents in the hall. We are hoping to examine this a little closer comparing the incidents from before we initiated the curriculum as well as comparing year one and year two.

## Stepping out of the Residence Halls and into the Classroom

By Stephanie Alderson, Megan Mesco, and Dylan Ruffra, Middle Tennessee State University

During the fall 2018 semester, we were given the opportunity to step into the role of faculty member in order to gain another professional development experience by teaching a University Seminar course. This course is designed to help new students transition into college life and develop the tools necessary to be successful. Throughout the semester, we continued to work in our role as Area Coordinators in Residence Life while adapting our schedule to include preparing and teaching the University Seminar course.

### **What made you want to teach a University Seminar course?**

**Stephanie:** During my undergraduate career at MTSU, I took University Seminar. At that time it was required for all undeclared students, and while I was personally a declared psychology student, my roommate was not. She convinced me to take the course, and it completely changed the rest of my undergraduate career. It was through that course that I discovered a completely new major, Social Work, that I had not been aware of, and helped me build a cohort of people that I still remain friends with to this day. This course was one of the reasons that I decided to get into student affairs. So, when I found out that the department was in need of adjunct professors, I jumped at the opportunity to provide the kind of course that had such a positive effect on my life.

**Megan:** I taught at an institution that I worked at previously and loved engaging with a new group of students. When the opportunity arose here at MTSU, I thought it would be another good opportunity to connect more to the campus as well as the MTSU community. I knew it would give me the chance to work with a different group of students than I typically work with and help me develop as a professional. Also, working with campus partners is always really rewarding and making those connections is really important to me. In housing we're always reaching out to those partners for help or to present or to do a training session so this is a great opportunity to strengthen that relationship as well.