

Learning Beyond the Classroom: Mentoring and Engaging Students Through the Residential College Model

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Abstract: The Gallup Purdue Index reveals the importance of mentoring relationships between students and faculty. The “Oxbridge” residential college model provides a structure for increasing those interactions. This session will highlight successful strategies and approaches to expansion of residential colleges at modern institutions of higher education, including large, research-intensive institutions. Presenters will share strategies for empowering students to engage in learning opportunities with their peers and near peers. Participants will discuss ideas for further engaging faculty in mentoring opportunities with students beyond the formal curricula of their disciplines.

Literature Review

The inaugural report of the *Gallup Purdue Index* revealed that life in college matters for life after college. “Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates” (Gallup Inc., 2014, p. 6). More specifically, Gallup (2014) found, “if graduates had a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams, their odds of being engaged at work more than doubled, as did their odds of thriving in their well-being” (p. 6). The question remains, though, what can colleges and universities do to foster such an environment. One option is a return to (or increased use of) the “Oxbridge” residential college model.

When colleges and universities were founded in the United States, many of them drew upon two prominent English universities: Oxford and Cambridge. Fink and Inkels (2015) note that “this ‘Oxbridge’ inspiration included a residential college model that was the precursor to contemporary living-learning programs” (p. 5). One of the hallmarks of this approach is interaction between students and faculty that span beyond the classroom into students’ whole lives. As O’Hara (2006) notes, the “object is to ensure that students’ formal learning in the classroom is integrated in every way with their external life in the world.” In this way, the residential college model “expands the potential for learning because it consists of curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities” (Grohs, Keith, Morikawa, Penven, & Stephens, 2013). However, in order to accommodate larger student populations and more discipline-focused graduate training, the U.S. higher education system has limited its adoption and maintenance of the “Oxbridge” residential college model.

Goals and Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify foundations and key components of the “Oxbridge” residential college model.
- Evaluate the potential for expansion of residential colleges at modern institutions of higher education, including large, research-intensive institutions, like Virginia Tech.
- Share strategies for empowering students to engage in learning opportunities with their peers and near peers.
- Discuss ideas for further engaging faculty in mentoring opportunities with students beyond the formal curricula of their disciplines.

Description of the Practice

In 2011, Virginia Tech opened its first residential college, a place “where undergraduates, graduate students and faculty could live together in a facility dedicated to learning” (Johnson, 2011). The Honors Residential College (HRC) is a multi-generational, multi-disciplinary living-learning community with our own traditions and sense of belonging. We are comprised of more than 300 Junior Fellows (undergraduate students), several Graduate Fellows (graduate students), and more than 30 Senior Fellows (faculty and

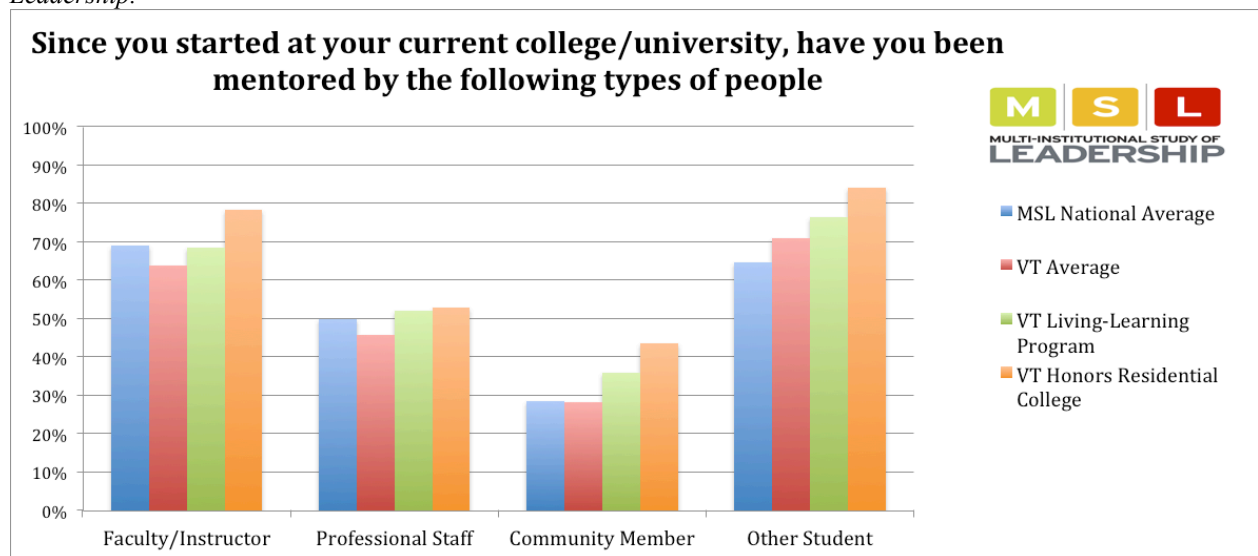
esteemed members of the New River Valley). While the HRC is student-governed, it also receives consistent leadership from a Faculty Principal (live-in tenure-track faculty member) and Student Life Coordinator (live-in Housing and Residence Life staff member). We foster a supportive, yet challenging community that creates the conditions for students to pursue meaningful encounters with the wider world. Four “pillars” comprise the guiding intellectual vision of the HRC: learn a language, study abroad, engage in undergraduate research, and embody Virginia Tech's motto *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).

Discussion

The foundations of the residential college model include decentralization, faculty leadership, social stability, and genuine diversity (O'Hara, 2006). Data is emerging on the tangible benefits of this approach. The multi-institutional study of leadership is revealing that students in the Honors Residential College at Virginia Tech exceed their peers in terms of relationships with a variety of mentors (Figure 1). In this way, we are making gains toward our students' future thriving and well-being. In sum, one of the faculty associated with the Honors Residential College shared:

“HRC provides a space on campus where students can practice informal networking with faculty, staff, and administrators. This kind of interaction prepares students for future leadership roles, gives them insight into the workings of the academic world, and facilitates connections among the various aspects of the intellectual and personal lives. I have thoroughly enjoyed conversations with students across the university, beyond my department and college.”

Figure 1. *Virginia Tech students' engagement in mentoring, as reported by the Multi-institutional Study of Leadership.*



References

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- Johnson, J. (2011, September 21). Virginia Tech dorm becomes a learning experience. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/virginia-tech-dorm-a-learning-experience/2011/09/14/gIQAoud3iK_story_1.html
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Presented by Eric Kaufman and Jay Read

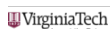
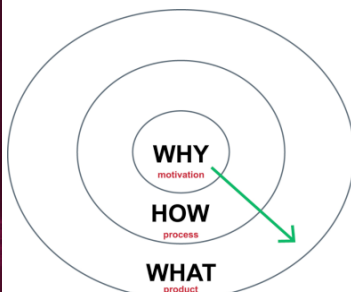


Objectives for this Session

- Identify foundations and key components of the “Oxbridge” residential college model.
- Evaluate the potential for expansion of residential colleges at modern institutions of higher education, including large, research-intensive institutions, like Virginia Tech.
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Overview



College Students' Current Goals

(AAC&U & Hart Research Associates, 2015)

Doing well in college 85%

Getting a good job 82%

Friendships/social connections 67%

Making a difference by helping others 64%

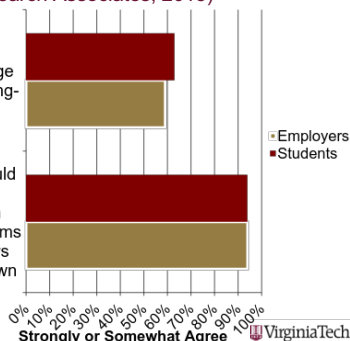


Most Important Skills for Success

(AAC&U & Hart Research Associates, 2015)

Both field-specific and broad range of knowledge and skills important to long-term career success

All college students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own



Employers' Expectations of Graduates Have Increased

Our company is asking employees to **take on more responsibilities** and to **use a broader set of skills** than in the past

91%

Employees are expected to **work harder to coordinate with other departments** than in the past

90%

The **challenges** employees face within our company are **more complex today** than they were in the past

88%

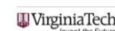
To succeed in our company, employees need **higher levels of learning and knowledge** today than they did in the past

88%

% who agree with each statement



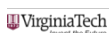
Source: Raising the Bar (AAC&U, 2010)



How important is it for colleges and universities to provide the type of education described below?

This particular approach to a four-year college education provides both **broad knowledge** in a variety of areas of study and more in-depth knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a **sense of social responsibility**, as well as **intellectual and practical skills** that span all areas of study, such as **communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills**, and a demonstrated ability to **apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings**.

Source: *How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy?* (AAC&U, 2007)



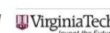
How important is it for colleges and universities to provide this type of education? (see previous slide)



Business Leaders

* 76% of employers would recommend this type of education to a young person they know.

Source: *How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy?* (AAC&U, 2007)



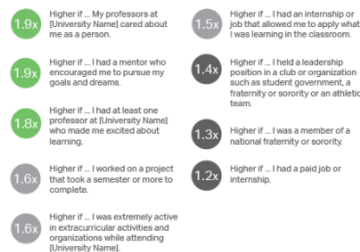
Life in College Matters for Life After College

- “Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates” (Gallup, 2014, p. 6).
- More specifically, those “who felt ‘supported’ during college... are nearly three times as likely to be thriving than those who didn’t feel supported” (Gallup, 2014, p. 7)



Making College Worth the Cost

The odds of strongly agreeing education was worth the cost are:

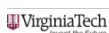


Each odds ratio represents the unique variation in the dependent variable education was worth the cost associated with each college experience while controlling for the other experiences and for the control variables per capita income, amount of student loan debt and five-factor personality model characteristics.

GALLUP®



The “Oxbridge” Residential College Model



A Collegiate Way of Living

Fundamental advantage of the residential college system: “the way students in the colleges educate one another.”

- *A Collegiate Way of Living*, by Ryan (2001, p. 24)



Virginia Tech's Approach

"First and foremost, residential colleges at Ambler Johnston are places where students belong, learn, and give. These multi-disciplinary, freshman through graduate level living-learning communities, thriving with meaningful and sustained relationships among faculty, staff, students, and the worlds they pursue together, promote rich intellectual, cultural, and social context where students "know and are known." The residential colleges seek self-motivated, lifelong learners, with diverse interests, who will build a community of scholars in the spirit of Virginia Tech's motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve).



"In fellowship, all things grow!"



Our Vision

The Honors Residential College at East Ambler Johnston strives to engage a diverse community of students pursuing development of themselves, relationships with others, and the projection of their passions into the greater community with unwavering curiosity and a commitment to lifelong service and learning.



HRC Pillars

Study Abroad



Learn a Language



Research



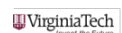
Ut Prosim



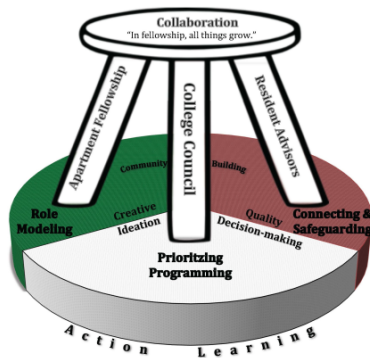
Welcome Week Activities



College Council



Student Leadership Structure



VirginiaTech
Invest the Future

Weekly Fellowship Dinners



VirginiaTech
Invest the Future

Principal's Tea



VirginiaTech
Invest the Future

#VTHRC Fellowship Rewards Program



VirginiaTech
Invest the Future

Community Seminars

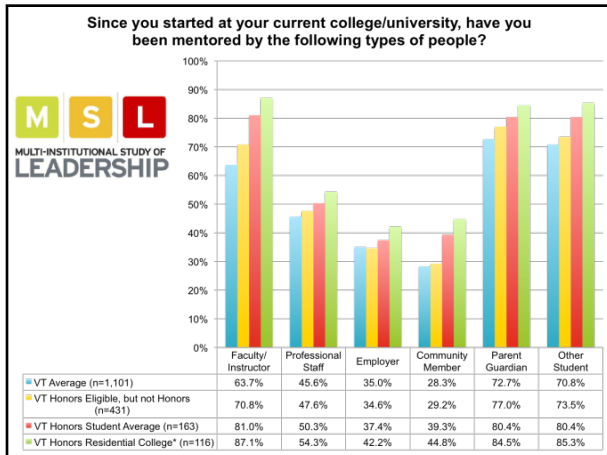


VirginiaTech
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Supporting Program Ideas



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What Questions Remain?

You can learn more about our community at www.hrc.org.vt.edu

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