Department of Residential Living

Program Review

Western Carolina University

July 18 – 19, 2013
Introduction and Overview

In May, 2013, Mr. Keith Corzine, Director of Residential Living at Western Carolina University invited via his staff members, Mistie Bibbee, Associate Director of Residential Living, and Jack Harris, Assistant Director of Residential Living, Vickie Hawkins and Lorinda Krhut to conduct a Program Review of the Department of Residential Living at Western Carolina University. Vickie Hawkins is currently the Associate Director of Residence Life at Appalachian State University having retired as the Director of Housing at Georgia Southern University and Lorinda Krhut is retired from the University of Mississippi where she served as Director of Student Housing and Residence Life. Mr. Corzine also invited Ms. Jolene Elkins, a Financial Affairs staff member at WCU to be a part of the review team focusing on and giving financial expertise to the review.

The Department of Residential Living is part of the Division of Student Affairs at Western Carolina University. The department has responsibility for residence life staffing, programs, and support to students; academic initiatives; assignments; judicial procedures; custodial services; and general maintenance of facilities. Large scale maintenance and renovation projects are handled through Facilities Management. The Department of Residential Living recently hired skilled electrical and plumbing personnel to address recurrent electrical and plumbing problems and to reduce the dependency on Facilities Management. Facilities Management services are funded through internal fund transfers from the Department of Residential Living. The department also works closely with faculty in the support of the PEAKs program – a first year residential experience program – and other academically based programs with in the residence halls.

The Division of Student Affairs was in transition just before the consultants arrived on campus. The Department of Dining Services, Auxiliary Services, and Bookstore were being brought into the division. In addition, Mr. Corzine was promoted to Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs overseeing these additional departments. His current job description includes Residential Living as well as the additional responsibilities of Dining, Bookstore and Auxiliary Services. Mr. Corzine will continue to oversee Residential Living until such time that it is financially feasible to hire a separate Director of Residential Living.

The consultants were very impressed by the hospitality displayed by all interviewed during the campus visit. All who were involved were very welcoming and seemed excited to talk about the department’s excellent leadership and service to students. We wish to note our appreciation for the time, comments and observations of those who participated in the process. The
observations and recommendations included in this report are made based on the discussions the consultants had with those who participated in the process. We hope that the observations and recommendations are helpful to Mr. Corzine and the university in moving the department forward.

**Executive Summary**

The consultants found the Department of Residential Living to be in excellent order within the Division of Student Affairs. The transition of Dining, University Bookstore and Auxiliary Services began as of July 1, 2013 and introductory leadership to these organizations by Mr. Corzine was taking place. It was evident that Mr. Corzine has provided strong leadership during his tenure of nine years as Director of Residential Living. He and his staff members in the department have used information gathered in both the Pappas External Review of 2002 and their own internal review to bring positive change to the residential living program and provide a better environment for staff and students. It was expressed during the visit that Mr. Corzine enjoys the support of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs who understands the issues and challenges of the department. In addition, campus partners identified Mr. Corzine as a “picture of a good director”, “honest”, “awesome”, “dedicated professional who knows best practices”, and “a can-do person”. The following report is written in an attempt to help the department in meeting some challenges. The intent of the Observations and Recommendations in this Review is to assist the department in building on the successes of the past by providing feedback for the future.

The consultants have grouped the Observations and Recommendations into: General Observations, Leadership, Personnel and Organization, Facilities and Housekeeping Management, Summer Conference Housing, Technology, Residence Life, Educational Programming, and Budget/Finance. General comments and recommendations are summarized at the end of each section.

**General Observations:**

The Department of Residential Living has an excellent reputation on campus and enjoys good relationships with colleagues within Student Affairs. The consultants had limited opportunities with individuals outside Student Affairs but input from faculty, financial affairs, Informational Technology, Facilities Management and Purchasing personnel participating in the review was positive. Special mention was made of Mr. Corzine by numerous university staff and faculty in his willingness to contribute financially to programs outside the department. He was also cited as being a valuable member of the Student Affairs division due to his leadership not only in the
Department of Residential Living but in other programs as well. In addition, numerous individuals mentioned Bryan Boyer as a great asset to the university in his availability to students in crises.

**Leadership:**

Comments were made on numerous occasions about the excellent leadership of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Dr. Sam Miller. It was evident that he is a strong supporter of the Department of Residential Living having had previous housing experience and understands the importance residential living has on the success of the university student. Under the leadership of Mr. Corzine, the department has a well-developed strategic plan that supports the university’s strategic plan. Renovation of Harrill Hall, the construction of Balsam and Blue Ridge demonstrates the department’s goal of keeping the buildings attractive, well maintained and up to date for today’s students. Plans for future renovation of Scott Hall to mirror Harrill are dependent on the financial feasibility of undertaking the additional project. It was stated that the availability to secure bonds for future building and renovation was dependent on the university’s capability of taking on additional debt. It is important to note that the department needs the support and assistance of colleagues in Business Affairs and Facilities Management in developing a plan for future building and renovation. In addition, there needs to be a coordinated long range planning effort involving Residential Living, Business Affairs, and Facilities Management for planning and budgeting to address these issues in order to insure the best use of all resources.

**Personnel and Organization:**

The consultants felt that the staff members of the Department of Residential Living were for the most part well qualified for the tasks they were assigned. There was excellent cross training among key staff in the areas of assignments, purchase orders, and hall access. There is a planned annual workshop to involve all levels of staff in goal setting and staff team building. Although yearly evaluations take place, the consultants were not aware that employees were developing individual goals that support the departmental goals. Each professional staff member should develop an annual Professional Development Plan and when financially possible, participate in state, regional, and/or national professional organizations.

The current organization is separated in three general areas: Residence Life, Facilities and Administration. This works well for the overall function of the department. There was mention during some of the interviews that on occasion, there seems to be a lack of communication between some of these areas. The area that seemed to be of particular concern was in regard
to summer conference housing. The consultants noted a need for more coordinated planning of conference group turnover between the facilities/custodial and housing conference staff. In addition, there seems to be some confusion as to the boundaries of the planning and booking of summer conference groups due to two entities that are currently overseeing summer conference groups: Department of Residential Living and University Continuing Education. Due to the dual roles that are involved in booking and overseeing summer groups, the consultants feel there are inherent challenges in producing a smooth running conference operation.

The consultants also noted the need to review the duties of the Assistant Director of Operations in order to be more specifically defined. This is an area that will be addressed later in the report.

**Academic Initiatives/Educational Programming**

The development of the PEAKs program has been an excellent endeavor to offer specialized first year experience programs as well as involve faculty in the success of the students. It has been a valuable tool in the recruitment and retention of the residential student. Although there is limited faculty involvement in this program, this seems to be an area of great opportunity for the future in recruiting more faculty in the residential experience. It was noted that the university had an interim provost but a new provost would soon be employed. It is the recommendation of the consultants that an early meeting be set up with the new provost to discuss methods to get faculty more involved in the living learning residential experiences. Resident Assistants were generally positive about their programming experience. Freshmen RAs were more positive about their programming experience than Upperclassmen RAs. This was also evident on the EBI results. The RA staff was satisfied with funds they received to do programming.

**Facilities/Custodial Management**

The Department of Residential Living pays a significant amount to Facilities Management to provide daily service for repair of large-scale equipment, after hour’s emergency maintenance service, and complicated repair of buildings. They also oversee renovation, landscaping and new building projects. As one of the largest customers of Facilities Management, the Department of Residential Living should receive a priority relationship. There is currently the implementation of TMA, The Maintenance Authority, which is a work order system that will track work orders, account for employee time, and keep inventory of supplies. This program will be interfaced with Facilities Management and should provide accountability for work done by both Facilities Management and Residential Living Maintenance. Renovation done in buildings has included the addition of a kitchen per floor, a practice that has been discontinued at many other universities across the country. The decision to reinstate kitchens on floor shows
a commitment of the leadership to community building within each living area. The cleanliness of the halls was impressive. Each building and or area has a lead housekeeping supervisor who is responsible for overseeing his/her area in addition to having an area of primary responsibility. The maintenance team is comprised of mostly mechanical technicians with the addition of two newly developed plumbing and electrical tradesperson positions. Wireless internet was in the final stages of installation in Scott Hall.

Review of Printed Materials

The material received prior to the visit was a completion of an internal review. In addition, the Residential Living Handbook and Housing Contract were downloaded from the website and read in order to become familiar with the Western Carolina Campus before arriving. Once the consultants arrived, they were given a binder which included a hard copy of the internal review, a CD of the facilities master plan, the organizational chart of the Department of Residential Living, primary duties of each employee, resumes of the leadership, the results of the most recent ACUHO-I EBI survey, a departmental budget for the past 3 years, the Department of Residential Living strategic plan, and the Western Carolina University 20/20 strategic plan. In addition, the consultants received a copy of the Student Housing Operation Final Report submitted by the Pappas Consulting Group, Inc. in March, 2003. Attention was also given to the layout of the Departmental website, the ease of transition between topic areas, the clarity of instruction of filling out the application both from a PDF format as well as the video tutorial.

All of the information received prior to the visit, while on campus and after returning was used in making the enclosed recommendations. The materials reviewed indicate a very well-run operation. However, the consultants believe that the recommendations set forth in this document that include aspects of staff duties, technology, summer conferencing, revenue enhancements, communication and council development might be further investigated. These components are addressed in the General Observations and Recommendations that follow.
General Observations and Recommendations

The consultants have formulated the following list of observations and recommendations in order to assist the Department of Residential Living in improving on its already well-run department. The observations and recommendations developed in this report come after spending time with members of the Department of Residential Living and associated campus partners to include: Counseling Services, Student Recreational Sports, Campus Programming and Activities, Assistant Vice Presidents, Faculty, Financial Affairs, Purchasing, IT, Continuing Education, Bursar, One Stop Shop, University Police, Writing Center, Facilities Management, Safety/Risk Management, Emergency Management, Networking, and Project Management. In addition, the students interviewed played a pivotal role in providing valuable information regarding their experience living and working on campus.

The goal of these recommendations is to offer possibilities to meet some challenges that the department faces from a personnel, organizational and budgetary perspective. It is important to state that the Department of Residential Living is financially sound, has excellent personnel, and satisfies a great majority of the ACUHO-I Standards. Any area of the ACUHO-I standards not being met will be addressed in a specific recommendation citing the standard. It is not the consultants’ intent to be critical of the organizational standards or methods of operation. Some recommendations, however, may indicate a change in current practices, current job responsibilities, and current procedure. Most recommendations require only the support of the Department of Residential Living. However, there may be a limited number of recommendations that would require upper-level administrative support and a commitment to implement more cost effective methods as well as support revenue enhancements enjoyed by comparative institutions across the country. The Observations and Recommendations are grouped in topical areas of General Observations, Leadership, Personnel and Organization, Educational Programming, Facilities/Custodial Management and Budget and Resources.

General Observations

- Comments from students indicate that they are very happy at Western Carolina University. Specifically, they liked the small classes and the ability to have a personal academic relationship with their professors.
• Both the staff and students were very friendly, and the consultants noted a true sense of community.
• The EBI student satisfaction survey indicated that students residing in the halls were satisfied with the condition of the buildings as well as their hall environment. The results of the EBI survey showed a consistent level of excellence as compared to the select six institutions.
• It was noted that there was very little vandalism experienced in the residence halls. This is reflective of both the Western Carolina student in having pride in their institution as well as the commitment of the Residential Living staff in their commitment in providing an environment that is conducive to sleep and study.
• The professional staff members from other departments were very complimentary of the leadership offered by the director. They specifically noted a willingness of the director and others in the Department of Residential Living to help other departments in trying to solve challenges.
• The mandatory meal option has benefits for students residing on campus. However, review of the EBI survey indicates that the Dining program is an area where students feel improvement is needed. The moving of Dining Services to the Division of Student Affairs should help in this area. The resident student is the backbone of the dining operation and as such there needs to be a seamless relationship between the Department of Residential Living and Dining Services. Dining Services depends on the success and occupancy of the Residential Living department for its success.

**Recommendation:** Dining Services should provide a dining opportunity for residence hall students to meet monthly or minimally twice a semester to make suggestions in regard to food plans, food options, and food programs.

• This has been done in other university settings where a meeting is developed on a regular basis involving Dining Services, the Residential Student Association, Hall Councils, and/or representation from each building. A meal is served by the catering department to make the *meal* more appealing. Funding would come through Dining Services as a marketing tool for student feedback. If housing input is also desired, the Residential Living department could contribute a financial portion to the cost of the meal. Feedback given by the students and followed up by the Dining Services personnel would help in the perception of the Dining Services commitment to offer improved service. It would also give Dining Services the opportunity to teach residential students about various challenges and opportunities Dining Services has in its operation. It is understood that the contract for Dining Services is up for renegotiation in the near future. It is also understood that this recommendation would have to be included in the contract negotiations for consideration.
• While reviewing the 2013 Internal Review, the consultants noticed that the occupancy of spring term for 2008, 2009, and 2010 was increasing gradually. Although the 2011 and 2012 occupancy rates were not included in the report, the consultants felt that if this increase in occupancy has not continued to rise, that an analysis should be done to determine factors involved in the occupancy decrease from Fall to Spring term.

• The leadership team identified Western Carolina University as having the lowest housing rates in the North Carolina System. The consultants understand that this may be a recruitment tool. But seldom is having the lowest housing cost positively correlated with superior housing facilities.

**Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that a market survey be done to determine where the housing rates stand in comparison to the surrounding housing facilities. The consultants understand that mandatory meal programs often give students the impression that they can live more inexpensively off campus, but a good marketing campaign could demonstrate the cost savings in utilities, internet, and food when living on campus.

**Leadership**

• The consultants feel the leadership of the Director of Residential Living has been instrumental in the success of the Department of Residential living. Those in the department feel valued because the director tells them they are appreciated. Many commented on his willingness to help other departments with programming efforts as well as helping financially with university projects. The consultants feel that due to the director’s leadership, there is good morale among the professional staff in the department.

• The three associate directors also provide strong leadership. Although they are responsible for the three branches of the department, each person brings with them specific qualities that enhance the areas they supervise. The consultants were especially impressed with the role the Associate Director for Residential Life played in emergency management. Comments were made from other departments about her interest and role in the development of a departmental emergency management plan. The consultants would also like to note that mention that appreciation was made concerning the Assistant Director of Academic Initiatives and the Case Manager in their sense of urgency for students who had missed a number of classes.

• Specific comments made about professionals in the department were: “go getters”, “great at getting students to university programs”, “good academic partners”, “the
programing done in the residence halls has had a positive influence in retention”,
“dedicated professionals who bring expertise to campus”, “always helpful for early
arrivals”, “does a good job of training RAs”, and “great partners”.

**Recommendation:** The Director of Residential Living is taking on additional duties as
the Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. The addition of the University
Bookstore, Dining Services and Auxiliary Services into the Division of Student Affairs
will require much attention in the transition. The consultants feel it is critical that
consideration be given to the advertisement and hiring of a new Director of
Residential Living to take place within the 2013-14 academic year. This
recommendation is made in order that the Department of Residential Living remains
in its current strong position.

**Personnel and Organization**

- The consultants feel that members of the Departmental Residential Living are well
qualified for the positions they hold. Many of the personnel had been students at
Western Carolina University and came up through the ranks and now hold leadership
positions in the department. This is a valuable asset in that employees feel a vested
interest in passing on their appreciation for the university to others who now live and
work in the halls. A disadvantage to long-time home-grown employees is they don’t
have experience in other programs therefore are sometimes not aware of other and
possibly better ways of doing things. It is noted, however, that many of the graduate
hall directors do come from other places and can help introduce new ideas to those who
have not had experiences elsewhere.

- The consultants felt that the position description of Assistant Director of Housing
Operation is well defined yet, in practice, it seems to be intertwined with the Associate
Director of Housing Operation. Although there are supervisory responsibilities for
assignments, student mail supervisor and office assistant positions, these functions
seem to require little supervision. In addition, the job description lists this position as
the management and lead application administrator for RMS and Schlage. In practice,
this does not seem to be the case. The consultants couldn’t get a clear picture as to
who was responsible for technology systems as it appeared the primary person
overseeing technology was the Associate Director. There seems to be redundancy in the
Associate and Assistant Director positions.
Recommendation: Create a job description for the Assistant Director of Operations that has specific duties not identified in the Associate Director of Operations job description. In reading the Assistant Director of Operations job description, it outlined technology oversight as the main function. If technology is the primary focus of the Assistant Director position, replace “manage” with “supervise” in the Associate Director job description and give the Assistant Director job description responsibility for the implementation and administration of new modules of RMS, TMA and Schlage.

Recommendation: The area of technology will only become more important in the future and a technology position should be identifiable with a person who oversees all departmental technology software and hardware. If departmental funds are not available for a technology position, additional thought could be in changing the name of the Assistant Director of Operations to Assistant Director for Residential Technology Services. (*It is noted that in the organizational change of the department beginning on July 1, 2013, some changes have been made since the review.)

- The majority of professional staff members have participated in professional development on an annual basis. Most of the senior members have been involved in either a state, regional or national conference that is appropriate with their area of expertise. Professional associations help managers learn more efficient and effective practices of improving the work environment.

Recommendation: Each Assistant and Associate Director should develop a Professional Development Plan and submit it to their respective supervisor. This plan should be updated on an annual basis. In addition, it is recommended that if funds are available, the plan include opportunities to participate and be involved with state, regional and/or national conferences in order to learn more efficient and effective ways of improving workplace programs and processes.

- In the initial orientation to the department, Mr. Corzine stressed how the type of student challenges had moved from benign student behavior issues to more serious emotional challenges. As a result, the creation of a case manager position was instituted in order to address these students in crises. It was evident during the interviews with both students and campus partners that the Case Manager position was very important. The RAs often mentioned how much the case manager helped them with students on their floors. But many felt that the current case manager was at times overwhelmed with the amount of students he was in contact with on a daily basis.

Recommendation: If it is the desire of the department to continue to offer professional crises intervention for students in the halls it is recommended that the
addition of a second case manager be created. The campus could be divided in half with each case manager responsible for certain buildings. These two positions could create opportunities to train and supervise a student peer advocacy group utilizing the expertise of the university professionals to do presentations in the halls regarding suicide prevention, depression, alcohol/drug abuse, domestic violence, etc.

Recommendation: The current case manager may be assuming more responsibility than is necessary and could refer some less critical situations to the resident directors. This would lessen both the sense of responsibility of the case manager and also give resident directors a better understanding of situations occurring with students in their halls.

- The consultants feel that the maintenance operation is doing an excellent job in spite of its small size. Most maintenance departments are twice the size of the Western Carolina University maintenance staff. Although the Facilities Management Department takes care of the large scale equipment in the halls, the housing maintenance staff takes care of daily maintenance and minor mechanical problems. With the recent addition of plumbing and electrical skilled craftsmen, plumbing and electrical issues are being addressed internally.

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that the addition of a minimum of one HVAC mechanic be created for the purpose of changing filters and taking care of small condensing units that are located in The Village.

- During the meeting with separate Residential Living Staffs, it was mentioned that there is sometimes a “silo effect” within the department. This is not uncommon in housing departments especially when there are many functions going on at the same time. It is often recommended that the department find ways to have fun with each other so that employees have opportunities to have conversations without being in a crises mode. The consultants understand that this is already being done in the Residence Life area of Residential Living.

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that a recognition/social committee be established to provide opportunities for fun and the relaxation of employees across the department as the focus. This could include “Pot Luck Fridays”, birthday celebrations, and recognition activities, i.e. “Geek of the Week”, “Top Banana”, Hero Award, etc. recognizing individuals for not only outstanding handling of a situation but also funny situations that employees often find themselves on a regular basis.
• When meeting with campus partners, it was mentioned that staff members outside of the department would like to be more familiar with the job responsibilities of the professional staff. Some didn’t know who to call if they had a specific question.

Recommendation: Provide information on the departmental website for identification of professional staff with brief job responsibilities. An additional hard copy brochure could be developed and sent to departments across campus.

Facilities and Housekeeping Management

• The consultants were impressed by the friendliness of the housekeepers when visiting the halls. There was a sense of pride among the group that was evident in the cleanliness of the buildings that were toured. The maintenance team also mentioned satisfaction with their work environment. When meeting with the maintenance and housekeeping staffs, they mentioned that they liked the variety of the work, liked working with the students, there was a good environment in the department, and they liked to clean (housekeepers).
• There were some opportunities for growth that the housekeepers brought up as well as some suggestions for a better work environment.
• They mentioned that some Residence Directors and Resident Assistants were very good about developing a good working relationship with the housekeeping staff. But there were others that seemed to have no interest in developing a working relationship. They also mentioned that the RDs who had a commitment to work well with the housekeeping staff usually had an RA staff that was also committed. They all expressed a desire to work more closely with the hall staff.
• They mentioned that there was little time for the supervisors to train new employees and as a result, new housekeepers were underprepared.
• A number of housekeeping supervisors said the computers that they are given to use in the buildings are often not working for long periods of time. They asked that the computers that they use in the buildings be kept in good repair. *
• Housekeepers working on the weekends were required to use their personal vehicle to get from one building to another. Often they used their vehicles to transport supplies on the weekends. *
• Although they were satisfied with the time policies concerning breaks, they felt that there was some disparity by supervisors in the way break times are taken between the housekeeping and the maintenance staff.
• Housekeepers mentioned they’d like to have an opportunity to meet with the Director of Residential Living. They realize that this position is extremely busy, but they felt disconnected from the Director because they were not in a position of seeing him often.
• The consultants were made aware by the maintenance and custodial staff that because the Assistant Director and Associate Director of housing facilities offices were in different buildings it made it difficult for communication and collaboration of departmental goals to take place on a daily basis.

Recommendation: During RD and RA training, set as an expectation that the hall residence life staff develop a positive working relationship with the hall housekeeping staff. The RD could include the housekeeping staff in building staff meetings. If building staff meetings take place in the evening, the RD can meet with the housekeeping staff on a weekly or bi-monthly basis to allow housekeeping staff to relay to the residence director current housekeeping challenges taking place on the floors. There is no denying that a housekeeper’s job is not often pleasant. Special recognition for the work they do could be manifested in developing a Housekeeper Appreciation Week where a different form of recognition could take place each day of the week.

Recommendation: New housekeeping employees should have the training needed to be familiar with the products that are used in cleaning, the process of cleaning, and the floor where they have been assigned. The consultants recommend that no less than a week be devoted to job training for new housekeeping staff. The new employee should be paired with a seasoned employee where they can work as a team for the week of training. It is understood that both assigned areas would be cleaned by both individuals so as to make sure all areas are cleaned. If necessary, additional housekeeping staff could be temporarily assigned to the new employee’s area to help during the orientation period. The consultants also recommend that a checklist of housekeeping competencies be developed helping new employees feel empowered when all competencies are met.

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that a housekeeping and maintenance handbook be created to address topics on safety, harassment, break times, dress code, employee benefits, absenteeism, and general expectations of employee professional behavior are noted. These topics are often not covered in on-the-job training. By making sure they receive written expectations protects the employee as well as the institution.
Recommendation: Residence Hall computers that are assigned for use by housekeeping staff should be maintained and in working order so that communication is optimal in the working environment. If repairs are needed, maintenance of the equipment should be done in a timely manner. (* It was noted by administration that the housekeeping staff were turning in computer issues to the wrong place therefore causing a delay in the issue being resolved.)

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that the Department of Residential Living provide a vehicle for use on the weekends for housekeeping staff. Ideally, the vehicle could be a van in order to be large enough to transport a number of staff to buildings. Departmental vehicles that are not being used on the weekends could be assigned to the weekend housekeeping staff. (* The administration noted that housekeepers have access to a vehicle on the weekend. With new staff being hired, they may not have been aware.)

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that departmental expectations regarding time taken for breaks and lunch be equally enforced between the maintenance, warehouse and housekeeping personnel.

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that a Housekeeping Council be developed to meet with the director. Membership should come as a result of an election by other housekeepers in order that any perception of favoritism by the professional staff is avoided. Each hall or area should be represented. Based on 30 housekeeping personnel, it is recommended that the council consist of 6 – 8 members. There should be no professional supervisors (Associate or Assistant Directors) other than the Director in the meeting to allow for open dialog. Consideration could be given to a maintenance council but the two should not be combined.

Recommendation: The consultants recommend the investigation of moving the Assistant Director and Associate Director into the same building to improve communication between the housekeeping and maintenance areas.

- In meeting with the maintenance and housekeeping personnel, the consultants noticed that the employees were not wearing identifying uniforms. With personnel who work in public bathroom facilities and in student rooms, it is customary for these personnel to have a uniform issued to them identifying them as members of the Residential Living staff. This helps students identify legitimate housing personnel from random individuals who could enter rooms and restroom facilities with ulterior motives. Although
individuals may have badges on their clothing, it is much harder for a non-employee to replicate a uniform than it is a badge when entering student rooms and restrooms.

**Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that the Department of Residential Living investigate the feasibility of issuing uniforms to their housekeeping and maintenance staff. This will not only help students recognize legitimate housing personnel who may be working in their living area, but will also provide more risk management to the department and university.

- While meeting with the professional Residence Directors, the issue of living accommodations was mentioned. They felt that there was some inequality between apartments offered to the staff. Although the consultants did not view staff apartments, they understand that there are some restrictions in what can be done depending upon facility structures.

**Recommendation:** Provide as much renovation as possible to apartments that are currently perceived as inferior. This will increase staff morale as well as help in the recruitment of new staff.

**Summer Conference Housing**

- Summer conference operations on most university campuses provide valuable financial support to the department. Western Carolina University is no exception to this premise in providing approximately $350,000 to the overall housing budget. There are also basic ACUHO-I principles set up to help provide standards for the conference housing operation. These are:
  - Conference housing is administered to support the mission of the Housing Department and the University/College.
  - Live-in supervision is provided when housing conferees are under the legal age of majority.
  - Conference housing is administered in an efficient and professional manner.
  - The conference operation is auxiliary to the student housing operation when student residence hall facilities are used for conferences.
  - Participants evaluate the conference operation including the customer service aspect of their experience on a regular basis.

- The subject of summer conferencing on the WCU campus was mentioned numerous times during the interviews. The consultants understood that there is a committee
currently working on campus who is meeting to provide focus and definition for the summer conference program at WCU. Those who spoke of Conference housing did so in mostly positive terms. The consultants understood that “for credit” camps were set up through Continuing Education and “noncredit” camps were set up by Residential Living. This setup is not unusual in university settings. To do this smoothly there must be deliberate and frequent meetings of the two departments to discuss maintenance schedules, preparing for incoming groups, special needs of the groups, concerns of the groups, and evaluation. There is also the expectation that there is enough staff (primarily student) to oversee the execution of each camp stay and provide the necessary risk management oversight to protect the campers as well as the university.

The Departments of Residential Living and Continuing Education seem to have a mostly positive working relationship. The Conference Service Coordinator has done a good job in helping make the two groups work as a seamless operation. Places of opportunity were centered on communication between maintenance staff, student paint crew, Residential Living and Continuing Education during times where last minute changes take place. There were reports from the different groups that last minute changes did not always get to all the people involved which caused some confusion for the WCU staff and inconvenience for the summer conference guests. The consultants understand that there is a meeting between the conference service coordinator and continuing education personnel at the end of the summer to review any concerns the groups had and to reserve housing space for the upcoming summer. Communication is primarily dependent upon email, cell phone and text between the summer conference coordinator and the continuing education coordinator during the summer. The consultants also understand that there are eight student camp counselors employed by the Department of Residential Living. This is an unusually low number of student workers for the amount of conferencing done at Western Carolina University, especially in regard to risk management of underage groups.

Recommendation: Prior to the beginning of the summer conference season, the consultants recommend having weekly meetings between the Continuing Education Summer Conference personnel, the Coordinator for Conference Services, Maintenance Supervisor and Custodial Supervisor to begin the conversations about planning summer conferences. When student conference assistants are hired, designate one or two of the students as student managers, paying them a little more, and begin including them on the weekly meetings. During the conference season, an agenda with all groups planned for the week, where they are staying and when they are leaving should be discussed. The consultants understand that last minute changes often come up and how critical it is for information concerning these changes to trickle down to everyone involved is. If any changes are made, the changes would be
funneled through the conference planning group and the individuals in this group would be responsible for getting the information to the individuals they supervise.

- While it is understood that much communication takes place utilizing technology, there is nothing that can take the place of face to face conversation where individuals from numerous constituencies are present. This often leads to a clearer understanding of group goals, commitments and schedule mandates.

- The consultants understand that the Summer Conference Coordinator had an intern this past summer that was responsible for developing an evaluation for conference feedback. The process of evaluating the conference operation, facilities and food is recommended in the ACUHO-I Standards.

**Recommendation:** Evaluation of conference services should continue with an evaluation of customer service as well as facility satisfaction from every conference participant. This recommendation is based on the ACUHO-I Ethical Principles and Standards for College and University Student Housing.

- The consultants applaud the Summer Conference Coordinator for executing the summer camp schedule with few student staff. Based on the consultants’ experience, a program the size of Western Carolina University frequently employs a larger summer conference staff. The ACUHO-I Standards identifies as a basic standard of conference administration the live-in supervision of underage conferences. It would be very difficult to meet this expectation with the small number of student staff. Not having a representative from the housing department residing in a building while housing underage conferees can put the University in jeopardy from a risk management standpoint as well as not being available for immediate on-site emergency referral. *

**Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that the number of student summer staff be increased in order to allow a summer staff member be present in the building both during the day when campers are coming and going and overnight when a camp is taking place where conferees are under the legal age of majority. (* The administration pointed out that most buildings have full time resident directors residing in the buildings during summer conferences. The ACUHO-I Standard would be met if these resident directors are part of the summer conference operation and understand that when they have underage students residing in the buildings, they are in the building, on duty with information posted that they are the person to contact.)

- The consultants understand that multiple buildings are often occupied by underage conferees. If there are not staff in every building where underage conferees are
residing, the consultants recommend the number of summer staff be increased to accommodate meeting this ACUHO-I standard for conference administration.

**Technology**

- RMS software assignment program can be a valuable tool not just for administering assignments, but for financial reports, judicial reporting, conferencing and other housing administration operations. The consultants were made aware during the interviews with campus partners that there was not a functioning interface between RMS and Banner, the university student information system. As a result, the Bursar was finding discrepancies of the RMS program through error reports caught by Banner. Based on the RMS experience of the consultants, the interface of RMS and Banner should rectify error reports being generated by Banner.*

Recommendation: The consultants recommend that an interface be developed by RMS to correct double billing, double refunds, etc. when uploaded to Banner before it’s caught as an error report by Banner. (*The administration noted that there is currently an interface between Banner and RMS that produces error reports. This recommendation was made based on the Bursar’s comment of her daily activities in checking error reports between RMS and Banner.)

**Residence Life Staff**

- The consultants feel the Residence Life Professionals working in Residential Living at Western Carolina University are skilled, strong and effective. There are also many effective and dedicated student staff members. When the consultants met with several Resident Assistants, they seemed to enjoy their positions, especially assisting first year students with their transition to college. RAs who worked with first year students seemed to enjoy programming more than those who work with upper-class students, but all agreed they would like to increase attendance at programming events.
- Campus partners indicated the Residential Living staff members were “dedicated professionals and were knowledgeable of best practices”. They went on to say that RAs were available “to support student success.”
- RAs made several comments about RA training. They all agreed that RA training is getting better each year. One RA commented, “they (Residence Life professional staff members) have listened to our feedback”. Additionally, RAs attending the meeting facilitated by the consultants indicated they were “over-prepared” for programming responsibilities, but not as prepared for the administrative tasks associated with the RA
position. Behind Closed Doors was the most talked about and most effective training method according to the RAs attending the meeting. The RAs desired more in hall time during training. In meeting with a representative of the WCU Police Department, he indicated his department was not involved with RA training.* Professional staff members indicated it was difficult to recruit men and students of color for the RA position.

**Recommendation:** Create a RA training committee which includes not only professional Residence Life staff members, but also several seasoned Resident Assistants. Having RAs on the committee would assist with “buy-in” and offer a venue for RAs to continue to provide feedback on their training experience and needs. It may be helpful to analyze the percentage of time expended in training on programming versus completing administrative duties, and adjust as needed. Including someone on the RA training committee familiar with administrative paperwork would help with creating sessions in this area. The consultants feel it is important that the WCU Police Department be involved in RA training. From a mixer where the RA staff could have a social meet and greet with the officers to having an officer facilitate the video, Shots Fired, the staff could learn so much from each other as well as get to get to know one another prior to working together to handle an emergency. (*The administration noted that the police representative that took part in the discussion did not realize the Police Department took part in training.*) Recruiting men and students of color for RA positions seems to be a normal concern with institutions throughout the country.

- The RAs seemed to appreciate the purposes of the Resident Assistant Advisory Council (RAAC). They seemed appreciative of the RAAC grant proposals and desired more staff to use them.

- **Recommendation:** In order to allow a meaningful dialogue between Resident Assistants and upper management in Residential Living, the RAAC could meet with the Director and Associate Directors once a semester. These meetings could create additional trust, respect, and understanding between the parties. New ideas to benefit the entire Residential Living program could also be generated.

- The Resident Assistants discussed RA selection. They felt the process was “intense.” They indicated they would like more input into the process and into placement.

**Recommendation:** Much like the RA Training Committee, it may be helpful for the composition of the RA Selection Committee to include RAs. These RAs could be
involved in offering ideas to design the process. In addition, if RAs are not being trained to be a part of the RA Selection process, this should be considered in order for RAs to understand their role, to eliminate bias, and for RAs to feel a part of this crucial task in Residential Living.

**Educational Programming**

- Programming in general was mentioned quite often in most of the group meetings facilitated by the consultants. The Student Affairs’ leaders seemed appreciative of the programming efforts by Residential Living. They also indicated how cooperative the Residential Living staff members were in offering joint programs, but it was a challenge to use the RAs for marketing programs. Several staff mentioned that at times there was duplication in programming efforts and a closer partnership was needed. Programs created to address social justice and recreational needs were the most mentioned areas. It was also noted that at times there were too many programming opportunities available to students throughout campus.

**Recommendation:** During the summer, perhaps Residential Living could host a meeting with key members of the Student Affairs’ leadership team to discuss programming efforts for the upcoming year. A discussion on communicating programming expectations, including marketing needs, for the year may be helpful. After programs are planned, learning outcomes for each program could be created/shared, a calendar of large events could be created, as well as a discussion on when assistance from Residential Living staff members was needed for each of the large programs.

- The PEAKS program and CAT Camp (University Center program) were often mentioned with much pride from Residential Living staff, as well as staff members throughout the University.

- The RAs indicated they had sufficient funds for programming; however, they felt they had too much money for pizza.

**Recommendation:** An analysis of programming expenditures during the past year may be helpful to determine the best use of limited programming funds. A discussion could be held by professionals and student staff members on if the “pizza budget” is still a valid need for staff and students. The RAAC could be consulted each year for their opinions on the programming budget.

- WCU’s Residential Living program offers a multitude of academically focused programs and activities. Additionally, there are two full time and four graduate assistants devoted
to helping students succeed in the Office of Academic Initiatives. On several occasions faculty involvement in the residence halls was mentioned. The Faculty in Residence program was created in 2004 in one residence hall with one faculty member. It lasted a few years. In the campus partners’ meeting, a faculty member remarked, “we need a sustainable way to integrate faculty in the residence halls.” She felt with the hiring of a new Provost that the opportunity to explore meaningful ways for faculty to become involved in residential education would exist.

- **Recommendation:** University Housing staff members should discuss and agree upon what type of involvement, if any, they would like to have from faculty members. If the decision is to involve faculty members in programming, a faculty in residence program or other way, then a position paper and presentation should be created and presented to the new Provost, with the endorsement and assistance from the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. If a FIR program is created, appropriate accommodations for the FIR would be required to assist with the success of the program. The House Calls program (where faculty and staff go door to door at the beginning of the school year visiting students) may be an easy first step to get faculty members more involved in Residential Living.

**Budget and Finance**

- The total budget for the department seems adequate and the department has been able to accumulate a sufficient reserve to assist with any emergencies that might occur.
- The Department of Residential Living produces a budget for each fiscal year and incorporates budget information for each residence hall. These budgets are useful to the staff in planning for revenue and expenses, including maintenance costs. The budgets are compared to actual results each year, which is a great tool in assessing future needs for funding and planning for new residence halls. Most residence halls stay within budgets each year. Blue Ridge and Balsam residence halls are the exception.
- The Department of Residential Living is planning a new residence hall. The new residence will include a dining facility either within the walls or within close proximity. Current projections have the new residence hall operating in the negative, but staff members are reviewing the numbers to bring them closer to a break-even before the project begins.
- Overall, the Department of Residential Living manages their financial resources well as shown by the reserve accumulation and the condition of the facilities.
• Recommendation: The Department of Residential Living should review the budget process for Balsam and Blue Ridge residence halls and adjust to be closer to actual expenses. Since Blue Ridge has some conference facilities, these may be skewing the numbers for the residence hall. Expenses should be reviewed to determine if the conference facilities are included and if the budget numbers should be adjusted or if the conference facilities should be excluded, if possible.

• Recommendation: The Department of Residential Living should review the budget for the new residence hall and dining facility to bring the cost closer to revenue projections.

• Recommendation: The consultants recommend that the revenue collected from the laundry contract be allocated to the Department of Residential Living. This is done on many campuses because the residential students who use the service should directly benefit from the revenue. The Department of Residential Living could initiate a non-metered laundry service which would both increase revenue and offer a benefit to students and their parents by having laundry included in their rent. It also serves as a great customer service benefit.
Summary of Recommendations

General Observations

- **Recommendation:** Dining Services should provide a dining opportunity for residence hall students to meet monthly or minimally twice a semester to make suggestions in regard to food plans, food options, and food programs.
- **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that a market survey be done to determine where the housing rates stand in comparison to the surrounding housing facilities. The consultants understand that mandatory meal programs often give students the impression that they can live more inexpensively off campus, but a good marketing campaign could demonstrate the cost savings in utilities, internet, and food when living on campus.

Leadership

- **Recommendation:** The Director of Residential Living is taking on additional duties as the Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. The addition of the University Bookstore, Dining Services and Auxiliary Services into the Division of Student Affairs will require much attention in the transition. The consultants feel that it is critical consideration be given to the advertisement and hiring of a new Director of Residential Living to take place within the 2013-14 academic year. This recommendation is made in order that the Department of Residential Living remains in its current strong position.

Personnel and Organization

- **Recommendation:** Create a job description for the Assistant Director of Operations that has specific duties not identified in the Associate Director of Operations job description. In reading the Assistant Director of Operations job description, it outlined technology oversight as the main function. If technology is the primary focus of the Assistant Director position, replace “manage” with “supervise” in the Associate Director job description and give the Assistant Director job description responsibility for the implementation and administration of new modules of RMS, TMA and Schlage.
- **Recommendation:** The area of technology will only become more important in the future and a technology position should be identifiable with a person who oversees all departmental technology software and hardware. If departmental funds are not available for a technology position, additional thought could be in changing the name
of the Assistant Director of Operations to Assistant Director for Residential Technology Services.

- **Recommendation:** Each Assistant and Associate Director should develop a Professional Development Plan and submit it to their respective supervisor. This plan should be updated on an annual basis. In addition, it is recommended that if funds are available, the plan include opportunities to participate and be involved with state, regional and/or national conferences in order to learn more efficient and effective ways of improving workplace programs and processes.

- **Recommendation:** If it is the desire of the department to continue to offer professional crises intervention for students in the halls it is recommended that the addition of a second case manager be created. The campus could be divided in half with each case manager responsible for certain buildings. These two positions could create opportunities to train and supervise a student peer advocacy group utilizing the expertise of the university professionals to do presentations in the halls regarding suicide prevention, depression, alcohol/drug abuse, domestic violence, etc.

- **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that the addition of a minimum of one HVAC mechanic be created for the purpose of changing filters and taking care of small condensing units that are located in The Village.

- **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that a recognition/social committee be established to provide opportunities for fun and the relaxation of employees across the department as the focus. This could include “Pot Luck Fridays”, birthday celebrations, and recognition activities, i.e. “Geek of the Week”, “Top Banana”, Hero Award, etc. recognizing individuals for not only outstanding handling of a situation but also funny situations that employees often find themselves on a regular basis.

- **Recommendation:** Provide information on the departmental website for identification of professional staff with brief job responsibilities. An additional hard copy brochure could be developed to be sent to departments across campus.

**Facilities and Housekeeping Management**

- **Recommendation:** During RD and RA training, set as an expectation that the hall residence life staff develop a positive working relationship with the hall housekeeping staff. The RD could include the housekeeping staff in building staff meetings. If building staff meeting take place in the evening, RD can meet with the housekeeping staff on a weekly or bi-monthly basis to allow housekeeping staff to relay to the residence director current housekeeping challenges taking place on the floors. There is no denying that a housekeeper’s job is not often pleasant. Special recognition for the work they do could be manifested in developing a Housekeeper Appreciation Week where a different form of recognition could take place each day of the week.
• **Recommendation:** New housekeeping employees should have the training needed to be familiar with the products that are used in cleaning, the process of cleaning, and the floor where they have been assigned. The consultants recommend that no less than a week be devoted to job training for new housekeeping staff. The new employee should be paired with a seasoned employee where they can work as a team for the week of training. It is understood that both assigned areas would be cleaned by both individuals so as to make sure all areas are cleaned. If necessary, additional housekeeping staff could be temporarily assigned to the new employee’s area to help during the orientation period. The consultants also recommend that a checklist of housekeeping competencies be developed helping new employees feel empowered when all competencies are met.

• **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that a housekeeping and maintenance handbook be created to address topics on safety, harassment, break times, dress code, employee benefits, absenteeism, and general expectations of employee professional behavior are noted. These topics are often not covered in on-the-job training. By making sure they receive written expectations protects the employee as well as the institution.

• **Recommendation:** Residence Hall Computers that are assigned for use by housekeeping staff should be maintained and in working order so that communication is optimal in the working environment. If repairs are needed, maintenance of the equipment should be done in a timely manner.

• **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that the Department of Residential Living provide a vehicle for use on the weekends for housekeeping staff. Ideally, the vehicle could be a van in order to be large enough to transport a number of staff to buildings. Departmental vehicles that are not being used on the weekends could be assigned to the weekend housekeeping staff.

• **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that departmental expectations regarding time taken for breaks and lunch be equally enforced between the maintenance, warehouse and housekeeping personnel.

• **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that a Housekeeping Council be developed to meet with the director. Membership should come as a result of an election by other housekeepers in order that any perception of favoritism by the professional staff is avoided. Each hall or area be should be represented. Based on 30 housekeeping personnel, it is recommended that the council consist of 6 – 8 members. There should be no professional supervisors (Associate or Assistant Director) other than the director in the meeting to allow for open dialog. Consideration could be given to a maintenance council but the two should not be combined.
• **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend the investigation of moving the Assistant Director and Associate Director into the same building to improve communication between the housekeeping and maintenance areas.

• **Recommendation:** The consultants recommend that the Department of Residential Living investigate the feasibility of issuing uniforms to their housekeeping and maintenance staff. This will not only help students recognize legitimate housing personnel who may be working in their living area, but will also provide more risk management to the department and university.

• **Recommendation:** Provide as much renovation as possible to apartments that are currently perceived as inferior. This will increase staff morale as well as help in the recruitment of new staff.

**Summer Conference Housing**

• **Recommendation:** Prior to the beginning of the summer conference season, the consultants recommend begin having weekly meetings between the Continuing Education Summer Conference personnel, the Coordinator for Conference Services, Maintenance Supervisor and Custodial Supervisor to begin the conversations about planning summer conferences. When student conference assistants are hired, designate one or two of the students as student managers, paying them a little more, and begin including them on the weekly meetings. During the conference season, an agenda with all groups planned for the week, where they are staying and when they are leaving should be discussed. The consultants understand that last minute changes often come up and how critical it is for information concerning these changes to trickle down to everyone involved is. If any changes are made, the changes would be funneled through the conference planning group and the individuals in this group would be responsible for getting the information to the individuals they supervise.

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Ancillary Recommendations.

- The consultants recommend that the administration look into two programs that may be of benefit to WCU. The Peer Hero Program is a recognition and referral training program that may help in the recruitment of minority RAs. The program was developed through an ACUHO-I grant and information may be obtained by contacting Gary Kimble at The University of Southern Mississippi. So far, those who have been trained were three times more likely to refer following the program.
- The University may want to look into a software program, Orgsync.com or something similar, to develop a programmatic university-wide calendar. Programs of this nature are being used at many medium to large universities with great success and offer solutions to communication and programming issues.

The consultants would like to again extend their gratitude to the students and staff at Western Carolina University for their contribution to this report. The Western Carolina University campus is indeed a beautiful campus and the hospitality and warmth of the university community was genuinely appreciated.

(Sentences marked with an * indicate further explanation is noted in the recommendation and made after input was received from the administration.)