Report of the College Halls Role Definition Committee
Vanderbilt University

Final Report of 5 December 2012

Context for the committee discussions

Two new residential colleges (Moore College and Warren College) are currently under construction at the former Kissam Quadrangle site. These residential colleges, which open in fall 2014, will introduce a new level of community and engagement for Vanderbilt upperclass students. During academic year 2011–12, a College Hall Task Force developed recommendations regarding expectations for college hall membership, student selection process, and the building of community within the college hall environment (http://www.vanderbilt.edu/collegehalls/task-force.php). These recommendations took into account the role of The Martha Rivers Ingram Commons and existing living-learning communities here on campus. The final report addressed basic aspects of faculty and student roles in the college halls environment.

During fall 2012, the current committee (the College Hall Role Definition Committee) was charged with developing further guidelines for the roles of the Faculty Director, Graduate Fellows and Area Coordinator. The committee, comprised of faculty, students, student life professionals, and administrators, met regularly during October and November to generate job descriptions and search processes for each of the three roles, drawing both on last year’s recommendations and on existing roles and processes in The Ingram Commons and our other Vanderbilt living-learning communities.

Precis

The committee generated job descriptions for the roles of Faculty Director and of Graduate Fellow, provided below. The committee recommends that the Area Coordinator role, however, follow the job description of that role elsewhere in the OHARE system for The Ingram Commons in which the Faculty Director is consulted, but OHARE conducts the search.

In addition, the committee found that the intersecting roles of Head Residents and Graduate Fellows needed the most clarification, and provides recommendations on that front.
Committee Membership

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<tr>
<td>Chair: Cynthia Cyrus, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education</td>
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<td>Susan Barge, Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives, Ex Officio</td>
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<td>FACULTY:</td>
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<td>Frank Dobson, Director, Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center, and Faculty Head of Gillette House</td>
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<tr>
<td>Douglas Fisher, Associate Professor of Computer Science and McGill Faculty-in-Residence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karen (Carrie) Kortegast, Assistant Professor of the Practice of Higher Education, Dept. of Leadership, Policy &amp; Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Josh McGuire, Senior Lecturer in Aural Skills, Blair School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridget Rogers, Associate Professor of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering</td>
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<td>DOS STAFF:</td>
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<td>Mark Bandas, Dean of Students</td>
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<td>Randy Tarkington, Senior Director of Residential Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maggie Konich, McGill Program Coordinator and M.Ed. Candidate, Higher Education Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jessica Reasons, former AC and current Program Coordinator for Ingram Commons</td>
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<td>STUDENTS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristen Mosley, Undergraduate, GPC (2014); VSG representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick Burton, Undergraduate, A&amp;S (2014); RA in Tolman / former RA for Commons</td>
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Charge to Committee

Refine the responsibilities of the Faculty Director, Graduate Fellows, and Area Coordinators in the new College Halls at Vanderbilt environment. (The broad outlines of each position were defined by the College Halls Task Force of fall 2011; this committee continues that work.) Specific sub-tasks include:

- Develop a job description for each of the three position types.
- Recommend context-sensitive selection processes and their communication plans. Each of these three processes should take into account candidates’ campus affiliations outside of the College Halls environment.

Documents consulted

During its deliberations, the committee consulted the following documents:

- Final report of the College Halls Task Force (10 January 2012)
- Final report of the Committee on Graduate Students in The Commons and the College Halls (29 April 2005)
- Job description for Dean of the Ingram Commons
- Job description for Faculty Head of House in the Ingram Commons
- OHARE documentation on Living Learning Communities Faculty Involvement, 2012–13
General Observations

Faculty Director

The character of the job will vary from candidate to candidate, but the committee believes that an effective leader will provide a structure where ideation can occur.

Likewise, mentoring as evoked here is reciprocal and non-hierarchical. The faculty director will seek ways to feature issues surrounding the life-long task of finding a sense of belonging and purpose. At the same time, s/he should also be open to learning from students.

Finally, the role of the Faculty Director will itself necessarily shift over the course of a year. One should start by getting to know the residents; building community is seen as a top priority. Particularly in the first weeks of the fall semester, the Faculty Director must possess sufficient ease and charisma to engender meaningful “informal interactions.” After that, one can think of programming and undertake the work of assessment and reflection that follows. The rhythms of the academic year and the variable levels of student engagement will help to shape the choices s/he must make about College priorities. As the previous Task Force put it, one of the central tasks of the Faculty Director will be to “avoid programming clutter.”

Graduate Fellows, Head Residents, and Area Coordinator

The various roles are complementary and collaborative. Each leader needs to be comfortable with a certain element of ambiguity and be willing to form a close-knit team. The Head Resident will likely take on most of the operational details – handle lock-outs and dorm checks, and take the lead on student welfare concerns, for instance. The Graduate Fellow will remain aware of the pulse of the hall, help with programmatic response to Hall issues, and will handle some individual situations as the “best” contact, but will focus more of her/his efforts on helping to shape student-led programming by mentoring residents on how to produce something, solve and provide resources for issues that arise, and bring a focus on learning outcomes. The Area Coordinator is a full-time professional and serves as direct supervisor to the RA/HR staff. S/he provides crisis response and is focused around supporting the residents and the RA/HR staff, not on programming per se. All three groups will work closely with the Faculty Director to achieve the vision of the Hall, the College, and the College Hall system.

Faculty Director

Job Description

Working within a college halls environment – a part of the Vanderbilt residential system centered on the idea of an engaged community – the Faculty Director facilitates the development of a vision for a particular college. The Faculty Director is tasked with establishing an integrated and inclusive academic and residential learning environment in which all students feel welcome to participate and contribute ideas and experiences. By providing appropriate scaffolding for student initiatives, the Faculty Director provides leadership opportunities for all members of the College Hall community.
S/he also fosters the unique characteristics of each Hall, allowing for student agency and for a flexibility of content, knowing that the system will inevitably change over time.

The effective Faculty Director participates dynamically with students, serving as a visible presence within the community. S/he should encourage and support student-conceived programming, both formal and informal, and encourage civil dialogue about contemporary and challenging issues. S/he acts as a facilitator for the residents, helps them to form a strong community at the beginning of the academic year, and works with them thereafter to lead initiatives that bring other faculty members and community members into the college halls. S/he also serves as a mentor and model who directs and/or facilitates discussion of professional identity and vocation. S/he provides residents with regular opportunities for reflection about the intersection of their co-curricular and academic lives with their personal aspirations.

The Faculty Director works closely with the residential education staff (the Area Coordinator, Head Residents, and Resident Advisers), with Graduate Fellows, and with other faculty in residence to assess the state of each hall, each college, and the residential college system generally in the context of the University at large. S/he should play an ongoing evaluative role, serving as a conscious observer of both formal and informal activities within the halls and enabling student leadership to address issues that arise. S/he will wisely steward the university’s physical, fiscal, and human resources. S/he will document and assess the activities of the hall on an ongoing basis, and prepare a “State of the Halls” report at yearly intervals. The Faculty Director reports to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education.

Search Process

The search committee for the Faculty Directors should include a number of constituencies:

- Students – including at least one representative from each class (First years, Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors), a member of VSG, and someone with RA experience
- Residential Education staff
- Faculty representation
- University staff (as potential collaborators)
- Administrative representative with budget authority

The committee recommends an initial hire for a two-year term with the option to renew on an annual basis. We expect that a Faculty Director would likely stay at least three years in order to see a full cohort graduate, and we hope that terms for the two Faculty Directors can be staggered after the initial terms of appointment. Faculty Directors serve at the pleasure of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education.

Graduate Fellow

Job Description

The Graduate Fellow works to realize the programmatic vision of the College Halls system,
particularly its emphases on “engaged community” and on student-generated programming. Like the Faculty Director, to whom s/he reports, the Graduate Fellow serves as a visible presence within the community, one who interacts with students in a variety of ways in their place of residence and models academic responsibility in an informal yet powerful way. The Graduate Fellow works closely with the Head Resident and Area Coordinator to support Hall residents in their maturation, vocational exploration, and intellectual aspirations.

The Graduate Fellow facilitates and elicits student-led initiatives and activities within the residence hall, and monitors those programs to make best use of budget, facilities, and personnel. S/he takes responsibility for managing the logistical details of “hall-related” programs within the hall, including those initiated by the Faculty Director, just as the Head Resident manages the logistical details of OHARE programs in the hall. S/he encourages hall residents to reflect actively as individuals and as groups on meaning-making processes in their co-curricular and social-intellectual lives. S/he brings strong networking and liaison skills and provides students with access to university resources within and outside of college halls. S/he also coordinate hall activities with those of other areas, in part by attending the LLC Program Coordinator gatherings as Hall representative.

The Graduate Fellow keeps track of themes, projects, and events within the hall and reports regularly on the content and effectiveness of hall programming. The Graduate Fellow will also work with the Faculty Director on the end-of-year report.

Search Process and Training

Graduate Fellows should be recruited in conjunction with the Program Coordinators selection process in OHARE, and should follow similar interview and recruitment cycles. In advance of the first Graduate Fellows recruitment cycle, however, recruitment materials should be vetted by existing graduate students, and care made to distinguish this role from the Graduate Assistant, Program Coordinator, and Head Resident positions. Issues of content and scope of work and issues of compensation should be addressed in advance of the application process. Currently, recruitment of Program Coordinators happens in February, and they have until April 15th to accept or decline an offer.

The search will be coordinated by Residential Education but run in conjunction with the Faculty Director. The search will include student representation. Given the scope of the position and expectation for a 20 hour/week commitment, approval by the candidate’s DGS or Department Chair will be required in advance of any offer.

The Graduate Fellow should be hired for one year with a possibility for renewal; under ideal circumstances, most Graduate Fellows will remain in the role for at least two years.

The Graduate Fellow helps to facilitate others’ involvement within the Hall; training for the Graduate Fellows needs to incorporate successful strategies for doing so. As with the incorporation of the Humphreys Fellows into the Ingram Commons, such partnerships work best when someone describes steps an individual needs to take to engage in the life of a community, follows up to ensure that logistical details are seen to, encourages experiments outside of the ordinary, and reports on successes and failures. In addition to a college-hall specific orientation, the Graduate Fellow should
attend training with the Program Coordinators of the LLC system in advance of the start of the school year.

**College Halls Area Coordinator**

**Job Description**

The Area Coordinator will work closely with the Faculty Director and the Graduate Fellows in Moore College and in Warren College. The committee recommends that the Area Coordinator role, however, follow the job description of that role elsewhere in the OHARE system, and that hiring follow the model used in the Ingram Commons in which the Faculty Director is consulted, but OHARE directs the search.

**Other Task Force Recommendations**

The committee recommends working toward a program of credit-bearing College Halls seminars, perhaps to be developed and taught by non-resident graduate students as a way to broaden the intersection of graduate and undergraduate experiences at Vanderbilt. Coordinating those experiences (and ensuring they are open to the broader campus community) will eventually be folded into the existing roles of the Faculty Directors and Graduate Fellows.