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# Living in Hogwarts: The Experience of a Dean of Honors and His Wife While Living in an Honors Residence Hall

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CHAPTER 22

Living in Hogwarts:  
The Experience of a Dean of Honors  
and His Wife While Living in an  
Honors Residence Hall

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On Friday, May 17, 2013, we watched the class of 2013 Honors Scholars at West Virginia University (WVU) enter the Honors Convocation to the sound of *Non Nobis Domine*. While certainly not our first Honors Scholars graduation since Keith had been running honors at WVU, it was nonetheless special. This cohort of graduates was the first freshman class to live in the specially built residence hall that houses the honors college administrative offices, each new freshman class of the honors college, and an apartment for faculty living in-residence.

When construction of the Honors Hall was completed in 2009, the honors college needed to find a faculty member to act as the

Resident Faculty Leader (RFL) for the hall. The West Virginia University RFL program was started by President David Hardesty in 1996 in what turned out to be a successful effort to bring an academic component to the residence halls as well as to change the culture of the residence halls from one primarily focused on socializing and, unfortunately, partying to one that was more in keeping with the academic mission of the university. All residence halls have RFLs who live in apartments in the halls or in adjacent townhouses. RFLs provide primarily academic programming for their individual halls and each hall has its own theme. There was no question in our minds that we wanted to be the first faculty leaders in the Honors Hall, so we applied and were accepted. The experiences of the next five years changed the way we viewed students, not just those living in Honors Hall, but all undergraduates, and gave us a deeper understanding of the wide range of issues facing undergraduates in the twenty-first century.

## **PHYSICAL STRUCTURE**

In the summer of 2009, we moved into an apartment on the first floor of the Honors Hall. The apartment is set up with both private and public space. A great room is furnished as part of the apartment, but it can be used for programming within the hall. One wall is lined with bookshelves, and the room also features comfortable leather sofas, two wooden rocking chairs, and a large dining table that can accommodate 12 people. The room can easily seat as many as 30 people.

The design of the Honors Hall was informed by other recently built residence halls on the WVU campus; its five floors house 360 students. Floors two through five are identical and consist largely of student rooms set up as suites in which four individuals living in two bedrooms share a bathroom. Suites are single gender but floors are mixed. The central hub of each floor features a large recreational lounge with a large-screen TV and comfortable chairs where students may socialize, play video games, and sometimes do their homework. The other half of the hub is dedicated to a study lounge. This area, with individual carrels and tables for group study,

is strictly reserved for academic activities and may not be used for meetings of clubs and student societies or for social activities. On the ground floor of the Honors Hall are the RFL and Residence Hall Coordinator apartments, the honors college administrative offices, the administrative offices for the Residence Life unit, the student laundry, one wing of student rooms, and a large multipurpose room that serves as the primary programming space for the hall.

## **HALL ADMINISTRATION**

Honors Hall is administered by a leadership team consisting of the Resident Faculty Leader (Keith Garbutt), the Live/Learn Community Specialist (Christine Garbutt), and the Residence Hall Coordinator (Jeremiah Kibler). Kibler's wife, Keisha Kibler, also volunteers with the hall programming although she does not have an official position in the hall. Kibler and his wife also live in an apartment in Honors Hall. The RFL is responsible for overseeing the programming of the hall and acting as an academic guide and mentor for the students who live there. The Live/Learn Community Specialist supports the RFL and is responsible for the day-to-day logistics and coordination of programs designed by the leadership team. The Residence Hall Coordinator (RHC) is responsible for managing the Residence Assistants (RAs) and the judicial system in the residence hall. In addition, the RHC and the RAs are also responsible for the social programming in the hall.

In practice, the leadership team works closely together in order to generate a coordinated collection of programs for the hall. The idea is that the majority of the programs should in one way or another support the academic mission and vision of Honors Hall. (See Appendix 1 for a list of some of the programs in Honors Hall and their frequency.)

## **PROGRAMMING IN HONORS HALL**

One of the requirements of the RFL program at West Virginia University is that each hall should have a basic theme. For Honors Hall, the obvious theme was academic excellence. As the leadership

team designed programs for Honors Hall, they realized that Honors Hall needed a vision and a mission statement based on the honors college mission and vision. Initial vision and mission statements were generated; they were modified slightly after the first year to include the concept of internationalization. (See Appendix 2.)

While the presence of an RFL is not necessarily required for all the programs available in Honors Hall, the presence of the RFLs living in residence halls creates the potential to generate a type of programming space and opportunities for programs within that space that provide unique educational experiences and faculty-student interactions. These programs are multi-layered in their instructional and social content. In particular, programs like Book at Bedtime would be unlikely to happen if faculty members associated with the program were not residents within the hall.

Book at Bedtime happens on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 10:00 p.m. in the great room of the RFL apartment where cocoa, marshmallows, and home-baked cookies are provided. Students take a break from their homework and come down to the apartment, some of them even in their pajamas, and listen while we read to them. Each semester we talk to the students and then each pick a book to share. These cover a variety of genres and have included such titles as Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, and Christopher Moore's *A Dirty Job*. In addition, both early in the semester and again towards the end, we will have special evenings when we will read shorter books that the students request. It is amazing how many college students can cram into the apartment to hear books such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, *The Little Engine that Could*, and *The Night before Christmas*. At one level this event could be viewed simply as a cozy hour at the end of the day, which in part is indeed what it is. In choosing what to read, however, we try to pick books that will sometimes lead to discussions of differences in culture and provide positive role models across genders, ethnicities, and sexualities, and, at the same time, just be fun. So, close to the winter break one of us might read *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* while the other reads selections from NPR's *Hanukkah Lights*. The genesis

of this program is interesting in that when we first moved into the residence hall, students actually came to us and asked that we read to them; they had heard us speak at orientation and at other events. Since both of us are from the British Isles, they found our accents interesting. One student told us: "We want you to read to us because you sound funny."

On a social or pastoral (in a non-religious sense) level, this program also serves another important purpose in that it allows us to get to know some of the students in the honors college very well. Book at Bedtime often appeals to students who lack some social skills. We have seen young men and women who, early in the semester, were shy loners slowly develop and become part of the group by attending this program. Book at Bedtime provides a non-threatening environment in which they can sit with others but are not required to interact. They slowly become comfortable, and they eventually feel like they are part of the community by participating in the discussions and conversations before and after the readings, ultimately building connections and friendships with others.

The Student/Faculty Dinner is another program that works well because we are living in the hall. Each week on Wednesday, we invite faculty from a particular discipline to the hall to have dinner, home-cooked by Christine, with students interested in that major. Students sign up at the front desk for this event, which has a maximum of 30 attendees because of the capacity of our apartment. For popular majors, we will host several dinners that focus on sub-disciplines within those majors. Engineering is a good example; we might have one dinner for civil engineers, another for chemical engineers, and another for mining engineers. These dinners provide students with the opportunity to interact with faculty on a social level and frequently run for two to three hours as the faculty and students linger over dinner and talk not only about the discipline but also about a wide range of subjects. Feedback from the students on these dinners is extremely positive. They value them highly, and many students make important connections with faculty and the department through these dinners.

Hall Council is a student body that, with the oversight of the RFL and RHC, plans and implements many, if not all, of the social events in the hall. The Hall Council is run as a class in practical leadership (Garbutt, 2006). This class requires students to learn the fundamentals of leadership theory and organization. Working in groups of three or four, students submit proposals for activities they wish to plan. These proposals are substantive documents that describe the proposed activity, including budgets, logistical timetables, and assessment methods. They are peer-reviewed by the members of the class. Each group must organize two events during the academic year. That the class rejects the first proposals or sends them back for significant improvement is not unusual. Once a proposal is accepted, the group must create and run the program. The group is responsible for all aspects of the event, including advertising, setup, takedown, and cleanup, and then they must write an academic reflection on the planning and implementation process. They must critique their program and critique the members of their group in terms of their work as leaders or as group members. In addition, all members of the council are required to evaluate at least six programs that they attend that are not their own programs.

We have run the Hall Council this way for three years, and it has proven to be extremely successful with high enrollments each term, approximately 50–70 students. Because of this arrangement, Honors Hall offers more programming than any other hall on campus even though it is a relatively small residence hall. The success of Hall Council and its programs can be attributed to the fact the students feel they have ownership of and are responsible for activities that take place in the hall.

Another important program that could be run in any hall but does not require a resident faculty leader is our Tutoring Program. This program uses upper-class students as mentors and tutors and is in some ways a standard peer-education program. What makes it stand out from others is that in order to become tutors, students must take a class in mentoring and tutoring that is designed and delivered by Dr. Marie Lechlitter Krause, the Program Coordinator for the WVU Honors College. Krause's academic background is in

education. She has designed a sequence of three courses that develop the tutors' and mentors' understanding of educational theory. Students are not required to take all three courses but must take the more advanced courses if they wish to continue tutoring beyond one year. The first course is practical: basic methods of tutoring, knowledge about learning styles, and methods for tutoring students with different learning styles. The later courses concentrate on educational theory and practice and require students to play a larger role in both the administration and design of more complex tutoring programs for the residents in the hall. This program has been exceptionally successful and has helped struggling students master courses with which they were having problems.

## **ASSESSMENT**

One of the more difficult aspects of offering intensive academic programming within a residence hall is assessment. While obtaining student feedback immediately after an activity would be beneficial, presenting students with questionnaires as they leave a dinner or a program undermines the social and cultural environment that is part and parcel of the event. End-of-year questionnaires have been used for two years although their results have not been particularly useful in evaluating the hall programs more thoroughly. All honors students are required to complete an exit interview when they graduate from the honors college. Both the exit interview questionnaire, filled in before the interview, and notes from the interviews themselves show that the residence hall experience was an extremely important one to the students who lived in the hall during their first year. Students who for one reason or another did not live in the residence hall will frequently make comments that in retrospect they think they would have been more engaged with the university if they had lived in the residence hall.

## **PETS**

One of the advantages of having a home in the residence hall is that the leadership team is able to have pets, something that



would not normally be allowed in a university residence hall environment. Both the Kiblers and the Garbutts had dogs. The Kiblers had an eight-pound Shih-Tzu, and our dog, Huxley, was a placid eighty-pound mutt. They both provided a significant service to the students in the hall.

Quantifying the impact of having dogs in the hall is difficult, but anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that residents and their parents viewed the animals as a positive thing and that they even helped some students make the decision to attend WVU rather than another institution. We heard time and again that visiting the Honors Hall RFL apartment and meeting Huxley sealed the deal for families.

A good example of the impact of having pets occurs at the beginning of the semester. During the first week of the term, we will sit in the lobby for several hours each evening, usually with food such as hot dogs, smoothies, or homemade cookies, encouraging the students to stop by and meet and talk with us. Huxley usually accompanies us. Huxley will lie at Christine's feet, and the students will come over and pet him. Petting Huxley acts as an icebreaker for students who may then ask a question that they otherwise might not have been willing to ask. In fact, students have told us that being able to come over to play with Huxley made coming to talk to us when they needed information about something serious that much easier. We find that during that first week we probably provide more academic advice and counsel to the freshman class than at any other time including during advising. As students relax, they are willing to share their worries about their choice of major or about classes that they may be finding difficult during this first week, and we can help them through those processes.

At other times in the semester, students will come into the apartment to ask if they can pet Huxley. They will sit on the floor with the dog and just start talking, and slowly it becomes apparent that they have some problem in their life. Christine can be a sympathetic ear and in many cases a source of good advice and counsel.

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM LIVING IN THE RESIDENCE HALL FOR FOUR YEARS**

The residential floors in Honors Hall are well designed and work extremely well. The ground floor, however, could benefit from a second programming space that need not be as large as the first, but the limitations of having only one large space in the building are obvious because of all of the programming and group events. The hall could also benefit from a greater number of storage areas, but this theme appears to be common in all buildings, including new homes. When the hall was first built, some discussion took place about increasing the number of floors; however, the projections for growth at that time were modest and did not justify the increased expense. Those very conservative growth projections were mistaken; incoming first-year honors students could easily fill at least one or two more floors.

Not all the activities or programs will be successful. What seems like an exciting program to the leadership team may sometimes fall flat with the students. For this reason, after the first year, a greater emphasis was placed on programs designed and run by students through the Hall Council; that adjustment significantly increased the success of the programs. But by the same token, just because a program does not run well the first time does not mean that it will not work another time. Each incoming class has its own personality, and events that appeal to students one year will not necessarily appeal to another group and vice versa. A good example is the Friday Night Board Games program. The first year it was held in the RFL apartment, and at best half a dozen students would attend each Friday night. This group was particularly interested in complex games like “The Settlers of Catan,” “Pandemic,” “Diplomacy,” and other strategy games. The next year, Board Game Night was incredibly popular, and we had to move it from the RFL apartment into the multipurpose room because so many people participated. While a group of students continued to play many of the hard-core strategy games, students also played a wide range of games from “Monopoly” to “Taboo” to “Quelf” and “Pokemon.” That no strong group of chess players has yet to emerge remains a surprise.

Another example of change from year to year would be the World Dance Club. This program was offered during the first year of Honors Hall by two of the RAs who were particularly interested in folk dance and swing dance. We purchased a portable dance floor for the multipurpose room because the World Dance Club was extremely popular. Several years later it was one of the few RA-run activities that drew only three or four attendees each time.

After the first year in the hall, much as we had enjoyed ourselves, we were both overwhelmed because we were at times quite literally working during all of our waking hours. We maintained a policy of keeping the apartment door open whenever one of us was home in order to be welcoming to students. We realized that we needed some time for ourselves. With this in mind, we carefully programmed time into each day when we close the apartment door and have time to ourselves. In addition, when possible, we try not to have RFL programs on Saturdays, thus giving us at least part of the week to ourselves.

Another important lesson was not to fall into the trap of generalizing about undergraduate students. West Virginia University has an undeserved reputation as a top party school; while it is true that our students know how to have a good time, our experience suggests that they are no better or worse than those students at many other institutions, including ones that claim to have stronger academic populations. Unfortunately, faculty and staff, who should know better, will sometimes buy into this image; thus it was almost an item of faith amongst Residence Life staff that one could not hold successful programs on Friday and Saturday nights. Just the opposite proved true; regularly run programs on Friday and Saturday nights, in fact, attracted students who wished to have an alternative to the more traditional student activities on those evenings. While on some occasions the number of students at these activities may be small, providing these opportunities for students who do not wish to go out to the venues in town and might otherwise simply stay in their rooms is important.

One unintended consequence of the success of the first-year program in Honors Hall has been a growing dissatisfaction among

the students concerning the level of programming for years two through four. While prior to opening Honors Hall, students were satisfied with the programs offered, they are now requesting a higher level of programming for these later years, and the design of more programs for the later years has become a priority of the WVU Honors College.

## **AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE**

In late fall 2012, owing to the midyear resignation of their RFL, Keith unexpectedly became the faculty leader for Summit Hall, the residence hall adjacent to Honors Hall. This experience was important because we learned some significant lessons about the nature of different halls and their students. While Summit Hall does have honors students on its top floors, in many respects it is a normal residence hall; in fact, in the past it had earned a rather poor reputation. Contrary to the views of some colleagues and standard stereotypes, the honors students were not that different from the rest of the students in Summit Hall. In fact, the vast majority of the students in Summit Hall, just like the students in Honors Hall, were keen to get a good education, do well, and graduate in a timely manner. Relatively few students in Summit were disruptive and apparently cared little about their education. The higher level of judicial incidents occurring in Summit could, in the main, be attributed to this small group of bad apples. Unfortunately, for many people this problematic group defined the hall and its residents and dictated the types of programming being offered. The consequence was that the students who were interested in training and education were perhaps not getting the services they actually needed.

The other major lesson learned from the association with Summit Hall was that space can significantly impact the ability to provide quality programs. Summit is a much older hall than Honors Hall. While Summit offers suite-style residences to students, it does not have a good, large programming space. The only space that can be used for large programs is the cafeteria, which is not available until after closing time and then must be cleared of the tables and chairs. Without doubt, the cafeteria was a much less warm and

friendly environment than that provided by the multipurpose room in Honors Hall. Clearly students in Summit Hall would have liked to have some of the programs offered in Honors Hall, especially those that utilized the multipurpose room, but the lack of an equivalent space created a significant barrier to scheduling comparable activities in Summit Hall.

## **CONCLUSION**

One of the underlying intentions of creating the Honors Hall as a first-year residential experience was building a strong community of honors students who would go on, ultimately, to be active both as individuals and as a group in the life of West Virginia University. Given these are amongst the most able students attending WVU, the hope was that they would become leaders at the university. While honors students have always been involved in the institution, the Honors Hall experiment has produced a significant increase in the number of honors students taking leadership positions across the institution. The obvious change has been in the area of student government, which was traditionally dominated by students from the Greek system. Honors students had been part of student government, holding important posts before such as president. In 2013, however, the two major tickets running for student government were characterized as the Geeks and the Greeks. The outcome of the election was a landslide victory: the Geeks, with a ticket that was close to 100% honors students, swept the board. Both tickets for the 2014 elections were dominated by members of the honors college. This change in the student leadership of WVU has led to a different set of priorities being established by the student government: academic reputation and academic achievement. Certainly this shift in the composition of the Student Government Association is a direct result of the community building that is occurring in Honors Hall.

On an individual level, Honors Hall has had a significant impact on student success. Students who, as entering freshmen, were extremely shy and interacted poorly with their peers, developed through their time in Honors Hall. They became more social,

even becoming the leaders of student organizations, something that would have seemed inconceivable during their first semester. Particularly because of the increased ability, garnered through Honors Hall interactions, to recognize and support truly outstanding students early in their career, the already-excellent level of competitiveness of WVU students for prestigious external awards has increased. In 2013, the Honors College had its first Rhodes finalist in many years, and the number of students obtaining Fulbright scholarships significantly increased.

Residing in Honors Hall for the past five years has been a remarkable experience, allowing us to share the lives of our students. We would strongly encourage other academic families who have the opportunity to work closely in a living-learning environment to do so. As we have watched the students grow, we have also grown in understanding, compassion, and admiration for these young people at the beginning of their adult lives. Many senior academics and administrators in particular are asked what their legacy will be. For many, it is a particular piece of academic work or the development of an endowment to support the work of their particular unit. If asked this question before living in Honors Hall, we would have answered without hesitation: the establishment of the West Virginia University Honors College. Now, however, after quite clearly having a significant positive impact on the young men and women in Honors Hall, we would claim that they are our legacy to the future. We are inordinately proud of that legacy and will continue to be, even when we, like our students, must venture forth from Hogwarts.

## REFERENCE

- Garbutt, K. (2006). "Ah well! I am their leader; I really ought to follow them": Leading student leaders. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 7(2): 45–48.

**APPENDIX 1****Program Events During 2012–2013 Academic Year**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Responsible Individuals</b>
Student/Faculty Dinners	Once a week	RFL/LLCS
Book at Bedtime	Twice a week	RFL/LLCS
Friday Board Games Night	Once a week	RFL/LLCS
Cookies & Conversation with Prof	Once a month	RFL/LLCS
Women in STEM dinner with the provost	1	RFL/LLCS
RFL in the Lobby	3	RFL/LLCS
Friday Night Fun	Once a week	RHC
Saturday Night Fun	Once a week	RHC
Hall Council class	Once a week	RFL/RHC
Bolton Writing Workshop	10	LLCS/Keisha Kibler
Honors Book Club	12	LLCS/Dr. Claycomb
Banned Books Week Celebration	13	RFL/LLCS/RHC
Ice Cream Social	13	RFL/LLCS/RHC/RAs
Early move-in ice cream social	1	RFL/LLCS
4.0 celebration	1	RFL/LLCS/RHC
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra concerts	3	LLCS

Div Music & Theatre performances	6	LLCS
Tutoring	Three times a week + individual hours	Dr. Leichter Krause
Floor programs	Once a month	RAs
Community Service Club	Once a week	RAs
Quidditch Club	Once a week	RAs
Photography Club	Once a week	RAs
Student Conduct Board	Once a week	RAs
Fitness Club	Once a week	RAs
Cooking Club	Every 2 weeks	RAs
Glee Club	Every 2 weeks	RAs
Games Club	Every 2 weeks	RAs
Craft Club	Every 2 weeks	RAs
World Dance Club	Every 2 weeks	RAs
Science Club	Every 2 weeks	RAs
Insanity Workout	Daily	RAs
Honors Student Association	Every 2 weeks	Honors Student Ambassador/RFL Oversight
Superbowl party	1	RHC



Off-Campus Housing presentation	1	RHC
Harry Potter Trivia Challenge	1	RA
Blood Drive	3	RHC/RAs
WELLWVU programs	15	WC/WELLWVU staff
Bike the Rail Trail	1	WC
Graduate Programs in Business & Economics	1	Dr. Claycomb
Amizade presentation	1	Dr. Claycomb
Summer Study Abroad programs presentation	1	Dr. Claycomb
Med School Reality v Grey's Anatomy Drama	1	Dr. Leichter Krause
Alumni Pharmacy panel	1	Dr. Leichter Krause
History Alive!	1	Dr. Leichter Krause
Operation ID	1	RA/University Police Dept
Alcohol program	1	RA/University Police Dept
Meet the Tutors	2	RHC
Peer-led workshops	20	Tutors w/ oversight Dr. Leichter Krause
One-time programs	56	Hall Council w/ oversight of RFL/ RHC/LLCS

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **West Virginia University Honors Hall Vision and Mission Statement**

#### *Vision*

The Honors Hall will provide a high-quality living-learning environment for academically talented students at West Virginia University. It will provide these students with intellectually challenging programs and encourage their personal development in service and leadership by providing them with the skills needed to fulfill their potential as leaders in the university community, and ultimately the state, the nation and the world.

#### *Mission Statement*

The program is committed to giving students a high-quality, enhanced intellectual experience.

The program is committed to the social and personal welfare of its students as well as to their intellectual development.

The program will provide an environment where individual and cultural differences are respected and valued.

The program provides an environment that promotes personal and professional integrity among its students.

The program fosters a strong sense of community in its members.

The program encourages, supports and expects its students to be active in service and to become leaders in the university community and beyond.

#### *Guiding Principles*

The program will promote its core values: personal and professional integrity, tolerance, academic excellence, service to the community, leadership, and a global perspective.

The program will be open to individual and cultural differences and create a living-learning environment that is conducive to the expression of multi-cultural values.

Profound intellectual experiences are not confined to the traditional classroom.

The program must be flexible and respond to the needs of its students; by extension a one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate.

Programs developed initially for the Honors Hall should, where appropriate and resources permit, be extended to the entire university community.