

Reviving the Concept of Residential College in Taiwan: An Introductory Study

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Abstract. The paper discusses the revival of the concept of residential colleges in Taiwan higher education. A comparison of the various objectives and strategies of four key institutions is accomplished. Within the model of residential colleges, it is said that a quality education experience is not limited to rigorous academics but also integrates healthy non-academic activities that instill a sense of community and civic responsibility amongst students.

Keywords: Liberal Education, Student Involvement, Residential College, Student Engagement.

1. Introduction

In Taiwan, the rise in number of higher education institutions and the problem with regards to low birth rate have altogether contributed to the issue of sustainability. To alleviate this problem, quite a number of higher education institutions in Taiwan is reviving and adapting the concept of Residential Colleges. Within the model of residential colleges, it is said that a quality education experience is not limited to rigorous academics but also integrates healthy non-academic activities that instil a sense of community and civic responsibility amongst students. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to analyse the new Model of Learning in Residential Colleges of Taiwan Universities. Analysis shall be accomplished by analyzing the four (4) key universities (National Tsing Hua University, National Chung Cheng University, National Cheng-chi University, and Tunghai University) that are currently utilizing the concept of Residential Colleges.

It is hypothesized that the concept of Residential Colleges is actually a way of promoting student engagement. According to Kuh [1], student engagement or positive involvement in educationally purposeful activities such as: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment; are said to contribute to a range of outcomes gains including general education gains, personal social gains, and practical competence gain, which in essence are the main proponents of learning persistence, school satisfaction, achievement, and academic success.

Within the model of residential colleges, it is said that a quality education experience is not limited to rigorous academics but also integrates healthy non-academic activities that instil a sense of community and civic responsibility amongst students. The primary objective of this study is to analyse the new Model of Learning in Residential Colleges of Taiwan Universities.

2. The Development and Characteristics of Residential Colleges

The collegial models in academic system are different between the East and the West. In ancient China, academic system are called Chinese Academies; while, it is known by the name Residential Colleges in the Western culture. Although the names are different, however, both fully practice the concept of residential learning community. In the west, residential colleges is traced back from the prototype colleges of the University of Oxford and Cambridge of the United Kingdom. During the middle ages, students' enrolment and management system are quite different from what universities are practicing today. In those days, the

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colleges are not only a teaching and learning institution, but it is a place where the teachers and students lived. In essence, a classical residential college is characterized by one factor, which is faculty reside among their students [2].

In the US, higher education institutions are greatly influenced by the universities of Cambridge and Oxford in the United Kingdom. While the functions, name, and organizational structures of colleges differ from university to university, leading institutions in the US share certain general patterns. In institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Rice Universities, residential colleges are decentralized academic societies or associations composed of faculty and student members [3]. More recently in Harvard, it is reiterated that the role of general education includes the concept of residential houses, wherein it is said to have contributed to the intellectual, ethical, and personal growth of undergraduates [4]. Moreover, the report mentioned that even at the present, colleges of professional education enable students to enhance their knowledge of liberal education, while also allowing the students to acquire their professional skills; however, such environment seems unable to develop an individual who can both possess a holistic personality and become an outstanding intellect at the same time. Furthermore, the report also stresses that education should have the essence of holistic education; it ought to cultivate students to comprehend life education, critical thinking, civic participation, as well as the notion of self-reflection. Through the process of Activity-Based Learning (ABL) and a well-established student guidance systems, an integration of both academic and extra-curricular activities, shall be able to produce the much needed outstanding intellect.

The concept of residential colleges, basically builds on the notion that freshmen entering their university years should feel welcomed by senior students and faculty. As the years progress, their relationships and activities should help to develop a sense of belonging to the institution and ownership of its collective values. This is not only important for creating a rich and multi-faceted educational experience but is critical for providing a safety-net to students who are lagging behind in academic, social, or personal development [5]. Most residential colleges, range in size from 250 to 500 members. A distinction is usually drawn between senior and junior members of the college. The senior membership includes faculty, selected staff, and distinguished members of the local community. The junior membership includes undergraduate and graduate students. Senior members are drawn from all schools and departments; care is taken to achieve a balance in disciplinary representation. While, the junior members of a college reflect the full range of academic interests and backgrounds present in the university as a whole. In essence, residential colleges are microcosms of their universities [6].

Nowadays we emphasis on the residential college system not only blindly following the trend of world's top universities, however, it is mainly because of the system is considered to be able to supplement the current need of developing the university's general education. Residential colleges have actually evolved over the centuries and under different local conditions. As a consequence, there is a range of variation in their structures and a lack of consensus about the meaning of the term residential college. In its most generic sense, the term may be used to refer to an institution that houses most of its on-campus students as opposed to an institution with a large commuter or off-campus population. Many small, independent, liberal arts colleges conform to this definition of residential college. In a more restricted sense, the term residential college may be used interchangeably with terms such as living-learning center, theme house, and residential learning community. This usage, however, may obscure important differences between the classical model of residential college, conventional residence halls, and other types of contemporary residence education programs.

3. Residential Colleges in Taiwan

As the current higher education institutions in Taiwan excessively emphasis the pursuit of excellence, which only considers seeking research funding and promotion of performance as the top priority of a university education, but forgetting to take on the responsibility in the task of cultivating our university students. It is suggested that the creation of a residential collegiate culture can enhanced the educational atmosphere in a university dormitory. Researchers mentioned that residential colleges are aimed to elaborate the peer-to-peer learning, life education, as well as other characteristics, and have the connotation of experiential education [3, 7, 8]. Although it does not necessarily improve academic achievement, however, it

can make freshmen entering adapt more quickly to the universities environment. In addition, it also improves peer-to-peer social interaction, and eventually enhances the students' engagement.

For school administrators, residential colleges seems to provides students' a successful learning programs, thus paying more attention to each of the student's unique learning needs in order to welcome them and make them feel comfortable on-campus. In sum, as the residential college model emphasis life education, peer learning, non-academic learning, and other characteristics. It lies in the transformation of founded and well-established philosophy which differs from the traditional concept. While the merits of how the activities complement each other in order to enhance the overall student engagement, the current study shall seek to find the inherent positive properties within the residential college model of learning.

For some higher education institutions in Taiwan, such as: *National Tsing Hua University*, *National Chung Cheng University*, *National Cheng-chi University*, and *Tunghai University*; adaptation of the residential college model was seen as a way to improve the universities general education. The following section shall depict the philosophy and practice of residential colleges, particularly the year of establishment, scales, core concepts, curriculum, and other specific characteristics of the strategies of the different collegiate universities.

4. The Comparison

This following section integrates the various experimental implementations of residential colleges in Taiwan: *Tsing Hua College for National Tsing Hua University*, *CCU Elite Program for National Chung Cheng University*, *Cheng-Chi College Project for National Cheng-chi University*, and *Liberal Arts College for Tunghai University*.

- School Type - One of the objectives of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the establishment of residential colleges in Taiwan. More specifically, this study shall compare between higher education institutions focusing on the Fields of Science and non-Science. *National Tsing Hua University* and *National Chung Cheng University* for the Science, while *National Cheng-chi University* and *Tunghai University* for the non-Science.
- College Scale - The number of college students that have been accumulated since the implementation of each of the residential colleges since its year of establishment. As different residential colleges of the study differs in form and size, hence, each distinct higher education institutions universities have different number of students in their residential college program. For instance, the *National Cheng-chi University* (NCCU) started to implement the residential college model in 2008; activities such as a freshman orientation camp or tutor system is basically targeted to all freshmen student and is also open to senior university students. A total of around 2000 students attended the orientation camp; hence, NCCU has the most number of participants among the other three universities.

Other universities such as the *National Tsing Hua University*, *Tunghai University*, and *National Chung Cheng University* are selecting college students to participate in their residential college program. Each school year, recruitment of new student participants is established, with only a limited number of slots available; the selection system seems to get more competitive year by year. *Tsing Hua College* (National Tsing Hua University's residential college) recruits 150 student participants each school year for the past three years, hence, a total of 450 student participants are included in the current residential college program. The *CCU Elite Program* (National Chung Cheng University's residential college) recruits 80 student participants each school year for the past three years, however, participation is of the voluntary basis, hence, a total of around 200 student participants are currently included in the residential college program. The *Liberal Arts College* (Tunghai University residential college) recruits around 100 student participants each school since 2008, hence, a total of around 300 student participants are currently in the residential college program.

- Founding Concepts and Specific Goals - This section integrates the Taiwan residential colleges founding concepts and goals. Much similar to the concept of *Living-Learning Communities* (LLC) of the US; LLC are designed to create the intimate climate of a small college within large universities [9]. Residential colleges in Taiwan also strongly emphasize the personal development through engagement in broader community, which is similar to the LLC overall goals [10-13]. Among the

four residential colleges in Taiwan, the most prominent goal is to development the students' life education within the general education program. In addition, institutions also added their distinctiveness in lieu of their history and founding goals. In such a way that each of the residential colleges are different in a way, but also similar in some ways. In essence, residential colleges in Taiwan generally fosters the students' development through extra-curricular activities, which are also said to be educationally purposeful, hence, quite similar to the concept of student engagement as proposed by Kuh [1]; wherein appropriately designed positive activities which enhances students engagement are the major factors contributing to desirable collegiate outcomes.

For instance, the *National Cheng-chi University's* residential college; *Cheng-chi College Project* establishment reflects today's higher education concept of general education. Wherein its founding objectives are as follows: Develop a much wider sense of thinking, Develop a keener sense of observation, Develop an independent study habit, value judgment, and the ability to reflect, and Empathy for others. In sum, such objectives overall contributes to a holistic development of the future individual through life education.

- Strategies (Curriculum Planning and other Feature Activities) - Looking into table 1a, institutions emphasizes on creating various activities that are geared toward achieving their goals and objectives. For instance, *National Cheng-chi University* emphasizes on creating a physical environment conducive for learning, using freshmen tutoring programs, accommodations and innovations in general education, and many others. While, *National Tsing Hua University* places service learning, social research and career exploration, along with other learning activities in their curriculum programs, as well as dormitory, spontaneous group, and the opening of a third semester (during the summer and winter vacations), as their strategies. For *National Chung Cheng University* curriculum planning are focused on career exploration, service learning, creativity, leadership and communication ability, along with other activities, which are all supplemented by a tutorial system and a dream plan activities. Lastly, *Tunghai University* utilizes systematized curriculum and activities, which are integrated into the students' compulsory courses and activities. Programs include courses in general education, the six arts curriculum, consciousness and life learning studies.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the residential college system and the concept of student engagement as proposed by Kuh [1] are the two leading theory for uplifting the quality of higher education. Based on such notion this study shall concern on the intersection of these two concepts, while looking into the effectiveness of the residential college model in Taiwan. This study shall also provide the much needed empirical data for strengthening the concepts of residential colleges systems of learning. Furthermore, with the residential college learning model deemed as informal learning, which the outcome of such is hard to assess (difficult to apply on the existing college evaluation system). A development of a model of learning in residential colleges shall make available a psychometrically sound tool for accessing how Taiwan college students learn.

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