

A.W.E.S.O.M.E. COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING IN FRESHMEN RESIDENCE

HALLS: EDUCATION THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

By

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Project Certification Page

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

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Abstract

Does residential programming produce important learning gains for college freshman beyond what they learn in the classroom? How do freshman residents in a small, regional comprehensive college feel about these programs? These questions, among others, were the focus of the present study. A group of 10 Resident Assistants in conjunction with the investigator developed 10 program units under the title of AWESOME, an acronym for Artistic, Wellness, Emotional, Spiritual, Occupational, Multicultural, and Educational; a community residential programming curriculum for college freshmen. Resident volunteers were exposed to 10 specific program topics and activities and were pre-and post-tested on their understanding of important program content. In addition, residents independently and anonymously completed consumer satisfaction surveys following their participation in program activities. Findings indicated that the AWESOME program produced consistent and numerous improvements in residents' understanding of program content across all 10 topics. Additional information indicated that residents' rated program goals, activities, and outcomes quite favorably. In spite of these positive effects, however, outcomes were limited by rather low attendance (11%) rates across programming sessions. Implications for future research and practices are offered.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	6
The Importance of Programming.....	6
Traditional Programming.....	7
The New Programming Model.....	8
A New Focus.....	9
Literature Review.....	10
Out-of-Class Collegiate Experience.....	10
Comprehensive Residence Hall Programming.....	12
Application and Engagement.....	14
Living-Learning Communities.....	15
Methodology.....	19
Participants and Settings.....	19
AWESOME Community Programming.....	21
Study Design and Procedures.....	22
Data Collection.....	23
Results.....	24
Discussion.....	26
References.....	30
Appendix.....	35
Data Collection Charts.....	35

Wellness Wheel.....39

Former Program Evaluation Form.....43

AWESOME Community Programming Model.....44

AWESOME Program Planning Form.....50

Program Outcomes and Questions Rubric.....51

AWESOME Program Evaluation Form.....52

Introduction

The Importance of Programming

A residence hall is a closed community where students are required to live in close proximity for the duration of the academic year, becoming residents of that building. A recurring issue in residence life is the lack of community and civility among residents. Based on personal observations as a Residence Director (RD), students have grown more dependent on technology and are not interacting socially in the *physical world*. Thus residence life programming in its simplest form offers students a way to interact on a more interpersonal level. This programming exists to help ease the transition from high school to college and from college to the “real world.” Programming is primarily a social experience because of the basic interactions one goes through attending most events. However, the programs are also inherently educational in that they can teach residents about themselves and others. Programs are delivered to educate and develop skills that will help residents succeed in college and life.

The Office of Residence Life at this regional state college provides a mission statement on its website that clearly explains its commitment to helping students grow and develop. The mission statement reads:

The Office of Residence Life strives to provide a comprehensive residence life program as an integral part of the educational program and academic support services of the institution. The residential life program is committed to providing opportunities for personal growth and development and supports the educational mission of the college by providing facilities and programs to assist students in developing mutually supportive relationships in order to live, work, and learn with people of diverse backgrounds and individual differences.

Traditional Programming

Programming at this comprehensive state college over the last 20 years was accomplished through the *Wellness Wheel*. The Wellness Wheel was developed by Dr. Bill Hettler (see Appendix A) to promote balance in the life of an individual (Witmer, Sweeny, & Myers, 1998). The college adapted the model to apply to programming in residence halls. The Wheel's specific aspects varied over time but initially these were the different pegs of Hettler's Wheel:

- Social
- Intellectual
- Spiritual
- Educational
- Multicultural
- Occupational
- Physical
- Emotional

Under this model, RAs completed five programs a semester choosing a different aspect of the Wellness Wheel for each program. For example, RAs would often hold programs where residents can try foods from other cultures for a multicultural program. The activity is creative and meets the general idea for multicultural programming. Tasting the different types of food was the only purpose of the program, as there was no discussion furthering residents' development as to why a particular food was chosen or what role it has played in a particular cultural. While the wheel worked adequately, it offered little program structure and did not have an accountability component for how Residence Life could help residents develop skills needed to succeed in life.

The Wellness Wheel model had other shortcomings. One flaw was the adaption of activities to fit programming quotas for the semester. The focus, for example, was more about completing programs instead of considering *why* these activities were being hosted in the first

place. Another concern was that the Wellness Wheel model had little to no assessment components to illustrate important programmatic ideas and outcomes. There was a program evaluation form to record costs, attendance, and Wheel components used, but nothing to evaluate effectiveness or how to improve program functions. This form also contained a section where resident assistants would rate their own programs (see Appendix B). This evaluation did not show, however, the importance of the program, what was learned, and/or how participant learning occurred.

The New Programming Model

The Residence Life staff has held many discussions on how to improve the program quality at our college over the last three years. This past summer, three graduate assistant residence directors took on the task of developing a new programming model that focused on more specific personal growth and developmental goals. The new model was a modified version of Hettler's Wellness Wheel and offered more structure and a fresh appearance. This model was very similar to the Wellness Wheel in that it promoted the different facets on the wheel. Residence life staff also added new aspects to the model. The official title became the AWESOME Community Programming model; each letter stood for a different pillar or programmatic component.

- Artistic
- Wellness
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Occupational
- Multicultural
- Educational

Several differences between AWESOME and the Wellness Well are worth noting. First, “intellectual” programs were removed as a *separate* aspect of AWESOME because all programs

should be intellectually stimulating for residents. Second, a “physical” aspect was added to the wheel under “wellness”. The “wellness” section now promoted physical, as well as mental health because of their interdependence. Finally, an “artistic” pillar was added to accommodate the needs and interests of students at this liberal arts university and to develop their cultural awareness (Brown & And, 1969).

A New Focus

The AWESOME Community Programming model focuses primarily on expectations and assessment. Instead of leaving programming wide open, RAs are now required to present specific learning goals and objectives for scheduled activities. To begin, each program must be categorized under a single pillar such as *Artistic*. Within each pillar is a framework of criteria (i.e., goals) that provide further program structure (see Appendix C). Goals were created to focus program content and formulate instructional objectives for activities. Programs fall under a single pillar and must meet one or more goals. Objectives, on the other hand, specify important learning outcomes for each activity. Essentially, it is the reason why the program was created. Instructional objectives are used to guide content specific to activity assessment. The goals and objectives help RAs to develop engaging programs that relate to students’ personal interests.

With clearer expectations in place, the AWESOME Community Programming model extended its focus to assessment. The present study was designed to examine the extent to which meaningful learning occurred as a function of RA programs and to determine the extent to which activities met their Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). It was hypothesized that using more specific programming criteria would result in greater participant gains in personal development in and out of the college classroom.

Literature Review

Out-of-Class Collegiate Experience

While universities are traditionally perceived as institutions for primarily academic enrichment and growth, the collegiate environment offers similar opportunities for relevant learning outside of the classroom. George Kuh (1995) cited many benefits associated with the collegiate experience including: (a) gains in knowledge, (b) social maturation, and (c) personal acceptance. Kuh also discussed further how students become aware of their interests, values, aspirations, and religious views and how the cumulative effects of these experiences can change their sense of identity. In 1995, Kuh conducted a study to identify out-of-class experiences that college seniors associated with improved learning and personal development. There were two frameworks used to guide the study: (a) the involvement principle and (b) the impact model.

According to Kuh (1995), the involvement principle is significant when discussing residence hall programming. The principle is separated into five propositions:

1. Involvement is the spending of mental and physical energy in some kind of activity.
2. Students invest varying amounts of energy in different activities.
3. Involvement has quantitative and qualitative features.
4. The gains resulting from involvement are a function of the quality and quantity of effort students expend.
5. An educational policy or practice is only effective to the extent to which it promotes students to take initiative and become actively engaged in the activity.

To determine out-of-class experiences associated with various outcomes, Kuh (1995) interviewed college seniors from 12 institutions known to provide rich, out-of-class learning and

personal development opportunities for their students. The researcher interviewed 69 young men and 80 young women and asked them three general questions: (a) What were the most significant experiences you had here? (b) How have you changed since starting college? and (c) To what do you attribute these changes? Kuh concluded that while college classrooms were not devoid of opportunities to gain critical thinking and organizational skills, many out-of-class experiences often demanded that students develop more competence in these areas. The researcher suggested further that the primary benefit of this study was that it illustrated that students were willing to invest time and energy in educationally purposeful activities.

A similar study by Hughes (1999) was conducted to explore developmental changes that occur as students attend college. The study's focused on out-of-class experiences and 61 freshmen attending Texas A&M University were interviewed. These students were asked what they expected to learn at college, and what they had achieved outside of the classroom. Subsequent interviews reported by Hughes (1999) supported Kuh's conclusions that extracurricular learning was vital to personal development in the college environment. One student in Hughes' study, for example, described his learning in this way, "...Probably the least amount of education I have received is actually from the classroom-it sounds bad but I have learned a lot of things that will help me in the real world through extra-curricular (sic) activities..." (p. 7).

Another study (Kuh & Walsh, 1980) examined learning dispositions of students living in residence halls. Learning dispositions included: (a) student appreciation and exploration of personal responsibility, (b) sensitivity to cultures, and (c) other social skills. Kuh and Walsh (1980) found that the more effort students put towards the different dimensions of their learning, the more they appreciated their own development. Students were also "less certain whether

residence life staff and programs could be helpful to themselves personally” (Kuh & Walsh, 1980, p.14). The researchers suggested as well that it would be extremely difficult to provide effective programs for students who had very different expectations of what they wanted to learn. Residence hall staffs would struggle to improve student learning if students themselves were unwilling to put forth sufficient effort.

While Kuh (1995) found that many students had great learning experiences outside of the classroom, he also acknowledged that, “colleges cannot force students to participate in organized campus activities or perform leadership roles. However, they can and should be accountable for creating the conditions that promote such behavior” (p.150). Residence life should, “bridge the gap between the academic theory a classroom provides and the real world application that students are likely to experience on a regular basis” (Seidman & Brown, 2006; p.112).

Institutional policy and practice should be designed to promote personal responsibility, frequent interaction with diverse student populations, and a setting to apply knowledge gained in the classroom in other areas (Kuh, 1995).

Comprehensive Residence Hall Programming

Outside of the classroom is where students begin to form identities independent from what they had before college. An important part of this *personal growth* is experiences outside the academic environment where they can apply new values and gain meaningful knowledge. According to Kuh and Walsh (1980), residence life departments on campus should, “strive(s) to integrate the living and learning environment of each student by providing academic, cultural, social, and recreational programming within a community atmosphere” (pp. 4-5). Residence life should initiate group experiences that are related to cognitive, affective, and physical development. This development should occur, in turn, through a variety of policies, programs,

and activities. The researchers provided the following guidelines for residence life departments to follow:

1. To provide for successful growth in young adults;
2. To provide an environment for the integration of personal and academic lives;
3. To develop a community that benefits the education of all students.

An early study by Brown and And (1969) examined similar development programming goals for residence life activities. Their study isolated the following developmental goals: (a) *intellectual growth*; the importance of developing programs and activities that have an intellectual impact on students outside of the classroom, (b) *cultural experience*; the bringing of the arts to the residence halls, and (c) *personal-social values*; developing means to solve social problems and issues.

The researchers pointed out further that one of the most discouraging aspects of life in residence halls was that students used their rooms as *retreats from intellectual thought*. Students spent their days in classes, thinking, reflecting and interacting with others. Their rooms, on the other hand, became places to escape from the pressures of academic and intellectual life. Fifty years later this trend still appears to be true. In fact, students may isolate themselves in their rooms to a greater extent because of television, the internet, video games, and the rise of social networking sites. Current students must be prompted and motivated more than ever to participate in activities outside their rooms. As such, activities must be more interesting, personally attractive, better coordinated and implemented because, “students learn with their hearts as well as their minds, in class and out of class, through thinking and feeling and through thinking about their feelings” (Fried, 2007; p.4). Thinking about feelings and the multi-faceted

purposes of learning different skills has moved from the academic side of higher education and has landed in residence life, where learning can take a more holistic approach (Fried, 2007).

In taking a holistic approach to student development, programming must be designed with the understanding that learning and identify-formations are all interactive and interconnected (Fried, 2007). Students need more opportunities to apply knowledge acquired through coursework in real world situations. In addition, out-of-class settings must provide students with opportunities to consider *why* learning a particular ideas or skills matter, and how they can help improve their personal and/or professional growth (Fried, 2007).

Application and Engagement

The most significant aspect of learning outside of college classrooms is having the opportunity to apply acquired knowledge in engaging and meaningful ways. The application of this acquired knowledge in external activities will result in more meaningful learning (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). As previously discussed, institutions should provide, “ample opportunities for student involvement in educationally purposeful out-of-class activities” (Kuh et al., 1994; p. 6). Kuh et al. (1994) noted as well that few students consciously apply what they have learned in class beyond the classroom. The ability to do so, however, would result in the examination of social and personal values and ultimately help students grow (Kuh et al., 1994).

One form of engagement that strong residence hall programming can provide is personal and professional reflection. Developing the ability to reflect on life experiences can convert those experiences into meaningful learning (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). Meaningful learning, in turn, often leads to making better choices in life, a sign of significant personal growth (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). In order to reflect properly, however, residents must understand what holds their interest and attention. Koch (2004) suggested, for instance, that much of college students’

educational experiences involve *focal learning*. Focal learning refers to when someone directs a person's attention towards a particular subject because it is believed to be relevant. For example, many college classes garner focal attention by stating how important active citizenship is, yet they do not always create a way for this idea to be demonstrated. There is rarely the creation of significant experiences for students to make meaningful connections to their lives (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). Residence hall programming, on the other hand, may offer what college classrooms cannot; relevant real life experiences. Koch (2004) defined this as *salient* or the attention given to a subject that stands out to individuals. By being involved in activities that harness this type of attention, residents are more likely to experience more meaningful learning (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008).

Zeller (1991) brought increased attention to the division between the academic and student affairs sides of many college campuses. Zeller noted, for example, that many universities carry on their business as though they were two separate entities; an outcome that ultimately may cause disconnections between the continuous learning goals from both sides of campus. Zeller argued further that the best way to engage students in significant learning was to have student affairs and academics form stronger partnerships. Zeller suggested that tremendous opportunities exist for residential programs to become *strategic partners* in student learning; particularly where knowledge gained in class was merged with out-of-class experiences.

Living-Learning Communities

In an effort to create more relevant, out-of-class experiences for students, higher education institutions have searched for ways to merge academic curricula with the potential benefits of residence life programming. One way universities have bridged the knowledge and skills learned in class with real-world applications was through the use of *Living-Learning*

programs. Tucker (1995) defined Living-Learning (L/L) communities as environments that were intellectually stimulating for students, and that engaged them in socially exciting, program-sponsored activities. Living –Learning programs not only bridge students’ academic experiences with other aspects of their lives, but they provide living communities (i.e., reserved portions of residence halls) in which students pursue common curricular themes (Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006).

A program similar to Living-Learning communities was established at SUNY Potsdam in 2008. Freshman Interest Groups (FIG) were created to enhance the potential success of first year students (Ratliff, 2008). FIG’s primary focus was holistic in nature; in Ratliff’s words, “weaving together faculty academic knowledge and first year student personal or practical experience to enrich a group learning dynamic” (p. 3). Ratliff specified the importance of seamless instructional experiences of shared classes and opportunities to engage in personal development activities that were likely to enrich students’ academic and personal success. Rather than routinely memorizing content, FIG students were more actively engaged in understanding and merging their new knowledge with personal experiences provided within residence halls. FIG strategies included more frequent use of, “illustrative examples, role-playing exercises, and group problem solving” (Ratliff, 2008; p. 1) that ultimately translated critical thinking into personal views, values, and beliefs.

In a review of institutions, much like the conclusions drawn from FIGs, Inkelas et al., (2006) concluded that students in L/L programs, “are more likely to persist, exhibit stronger academic achievement, interact with faculty, and engage in a more intellectual residence hall atmosphere than student in traditional residence halls” (p. 41). These earlier studies also concluded that Living-Learning programs had positive effects on students’ personal

independence, intellectual dispositions and generalized personalized development (Inkelas et al., 2006). FIG programs similarly focused on critical transitioning skills such as time management and critical thinking (Ratliff, 2008). Additional research indicated that students who participated in Living-Learning communities were more likely to: (a) be more involved on campus (Inkelas, 1999; Pike, 1999), (b) show greater gains in intellectual development (Inkelas, 1999; Pike, 1999), (c) use campus resources and seek assistance from peers, faculty, and staff more often (Brower, 1997), (d) experience a smoother transition to college (Inkelas, 1999), and (e) report that their residence halls were academically and socially supportive (Inkelas, 1999; Scholnick, 1996).

In a later investigation, Inkelas et al. (2006) found additional support for Living-Learning communities. Basically, students who participated in L/L programs had more positive perceptions of their residence hall climates (both academically and socially) and used these residences as resources more often than students living in traditional living arrangements. Living-Learning students also viewed their campus' racial and ethnic diversity as positive contributors to their college experiences. These students were also more likely than their traditional peers to embrace liberal education pursuits, were more open to new ideas, and had greater appreciation of arts, music, and different cultures. The researchers attributed these improvements to students' abilities to engage in relevant residence halls programming which solidified their newly-acquired concepts and made them important to students.

Ratliff (2008) also found that the *integrative perspective* for students to translate theory into practice and take an active role in co-curricular events helped them to achieve greater personal growth. Inkelas et al. (2006) revealed further that L/L students were statistically more

likely than traditional residence hall students to feel competent in their critical thinking skills and more comfortable with their abilities to apply knowledge in given situations.

Collectively, the above findings suggested that first year residential programs like FIG and Living-Learning communities helped to ease student transition from high school to college by giving them support systems that most traditional housing programs cannot provide. Participation in these programs enhanced students' entire college experiences. They achieved full academic support because professors and hall directors worked collaboratively on curriculum integration. They were placed in settings where they were exposed to new information and experiences while living in communities where students shared common experiences such as similar classes and instructional activities. These coordinated experiences, in turn, enabled residents to build study groups, circles of social friends who had common interests, and developed students who were well-rounded, well-cultured and well-educated. Thus in all occurrences over residence hall programming, residents who attended RA programming are learning at RA programs.

The purpose of the proposed project, therefore, was to determine: (a) if students were engaging in meaningful learning opportunities outside of the classroom at residence hall programs, and (b) if quantifiable learning was occurring as a result of residence hall programming.

Method

Participants and Settings

Students attend college to grow academically, culturally and socially. Students living in Residence Hall communities have a greater opportunity to learn and develop because of the structured experiences and programming that residence hall programming has to offer them. By offering a careful balance of diverse and engaging programs and activities to residential students, residents will obtain a more meaningful learning experience while further their ongoing education. In this study, resident learning was investigated through the use of individual Resident Assistant programs. These programs offered a variety of information on diverse topics that interest both the RA creating and executing the program, and hall residents who will attend the events. Resident Assistants designed, advertised, and executed a program based on the pillars from the AWESOME Community Programming curriculum.

After designing their program, Resident Assistants determined which goals were most closely associated with their program activities. Upon choosing these goals, the RAs then developed three- to five-question assessments based on program content. These questions appeared on both pre- (given before the program) and post-assessments (given at the conclusion of the program) to determine what residents knew about the program content before experiencing the program and how much they learned upon its completion. These assessments determined the amount of learning growth that occurred during the program and if it was successful in engaging students in meaningful learning.

This study was conducted at a rural regional state college in Western New York. This liberal arts institution has a student population of approximately 5,700 (Fall 2011) and houses

about 2,500 students in the campus residence halls. The college offers a variety of degree programs including bachelor's, Master's and Certificates of Advanced Studies. The RA programs are held in the lobbies of freshmen corridor-style residence halls. The new freshmen population at this institution was approximately 1,200 students with 90% of new freshmen students residing on campus. These freshmen residence halls house approximately 200 residents and housing is separated by gender. The average age of individuals in freshman residence halls is about 18 years of age, while the average age of students attending the entire college is almost 21.

Study participants, therefore, were college freshmen living in a single-gender, corridor style residence hall at a comprehensive state university in Western New York. This study focused on two freshmen residence halls housing approximately 200 students. The study was completed in one all-female hall and one all-male hall. There were also 10 Resident Assistants (RAs) who participated in the study. Each all-female and all-male staff supervised their 200 residents in their gender-specific halls. Each building had five recreation rooms that were located on each floor and one large open lounge on the ground floor. All settings offered opportunities to host large events in different locations around the building.

Participants were provided with a general orientation regarding the proposed program and were asked to participate in the study by attending residence hall programming. Residents were told that participation was completely voluntary and that no adverse consequences would result from a decision to not participate in the program. Similarly, all residents were told that they could stop participating in the program at any time without consequence. A total of 218 residents (96 M, 122F) agreed to participate in the AWESOME program.

AWESOME Community Programming

AWESOME Community Programming is essentially a curriculum of standards for residence hall programming. AWESOME programming outlines a diverse range of educational areas that help promote personal, academic, and social growth for residential students. Each pillar under the AWESOME Community Programming model was developed to engage students in learning or to help them apply newly-acquired skills taken from classroom experiences outside of the academic setting. The pillars were selected specifically to provide a *balanced* range of learning opportunities to help develop residents into well-rounded individuals.

Each of the seven pillars of AWESOME Community Programming are summarized below:

Artistic- the interaction, exposure, and creation of various art forms. The pursuit of art builds intellectual, emotional, and cultural aptitudes.

Wellness- the promotion of physical and mental well-being. Developing healthy activities that benefit your body such as nutritious eating and exercise. It is taking care of your body.

Emotional- Understanding and adaption to emotional charged situations. Taking care of yourself and developing ways to enhance your inner resources. It's paying attention to elements such as self expression, stress reduction, and relaxation.

Spiritual- building a connection between mind and body. Creating a personalized outlook to life and the world. Being open to teachings and principles that fit individual needs.

Occupational- developing skills for working in a professional environment. Creating short and long term goals that help create more direction in life.

Multicultural- acknowledging different cultures that exist on campus. Recognizing and celebrating those cultural differences to ultimately build community.

Educational- the integration of academic and personal experiences of residents used to further develop preexisting knowledge and skills.

Study Design and Procedures

Five AWESOME programs were assessed in each of the two residence halls for a total of 10 assessed programs. Each RA was responsible for designing and executing one AWESOME program. Each assessed program was created to align with a different pillar. As such, there were assessed programs for each different pillar of AWESOME. There were duplicate pillars assessed across the two separate buildings because there were seven pillars and 10 programs. There were three educational programs assessed and an additional occupational program assessed during the study. By not repeating many pillars, RAs ensured diverse learning opportunities (i.e., breadth versus depth of program content) for all residents.

Resident Assistants filled out program planning worksheets for all activities (see Appendix D). These worksheets documented how proposed activities were aligned to specific program goals. Worksheets also provided RAs with outlines that allowed them to create their intended learning outcomes (ILOs) based on informational program content. For example, an *Artistic* program was being taught about the art of Tango. During the program, the RA planned to teach the residents the initial history of Tango, three specific dance moves, and the names of three popular Tango songs. By setting up particular learning outcomes for what residents learned by the end of the program, planning became easier and the assessment questions were equally easy to create. RAs then developed content-driven assessment questions that directly measured intended learning outcomes. For example, (a) In what country did Tango originate? (b) What were three specific Tango steps you learned today? (c) What is the name of three

popular Tango songs? It was made clear to the RAs that the more directly associated the assessment questions were to the program goals, the more valid the assessment would be.

To ensure that RAs created clear program objectives and corresponding assessment questions, the investigator reviewed all planning and evaluation materials using the proposed rubric (see Appendix E). Program assessment consisted primarily of objective items (e.g., multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short-answer questions) to increase the likelihood that assessment were completed. If learning outcomes and/or assessment questions did not meet acceptable criteria (e.g., lack of content specificity or asking opinion-based questions), then the investigator worked with RAs to modify content and assessment items.

Upon the start of a program, RAs described the nature of the study and asked residents to take all assessments seriously. Residents were also asked to respond independently and anonymously to program assessments. The RAs distributed pre-tests just prior to conduct of each program and collected them immediately after the program was completed. Resident Assistants collected and scored individual pre- and recorded data on programming evaluation forms (see Appendix F). At the end of each program, RA also asked one random resident who participated in the event to complete a consumer satisfaction survey. This survey was administered anonymously to quantitative information about residents' thoughts and feelings towards the AWESOME program. Each assessed program used one satisfaction survey; therefore a total of 10 satisfaction surveys were completed over the course of the investigation.

Data Collection

The primary data were residents' performance on objective, pre- and post-assessment measures. These measures were administered immediately before and after the implementation of the AWESOME program. Each assessment consisted of a minimum of three objective questions related directly to content provided in each program component. Resident Assistants

chose to have more than three assessment questions since the scoring was based on averages and total percentages were given for the overall scoring of a program. RAs administered and collected pre- and post- assessment data and were responsible for scoring all individual assessments. When scoring was completed, RAs calculated average scores for both aspects of the assessments. The average score for pre-tests and post-tests were then recorded on a program evaluation sheet and turned into the investigator. While RAs were involved in data collection process, they did not participate in data entry and/or analysis. Average pre-test and post-test scores were the driving force of sampling used in this study. Measuring resident performance on these assessments truly determined if students had learned something meaningful from the program. Data were used, therefore, to determine if the AWESOME program produced significant gains in resident learning. The data were also aggregated by program and gender. Resident satisfaction with program activities were also assessed using consumer satisfaction surveys.

Results

The primary focus of this study was to determine if residents made noticeable learning gains as a result of their participation in the AWESOME residence hall programming. Data relevant to residents' pre- and post-assessment scores across the 10 components can be seen in Table 1. As shown, residents made noticeable learning gains across all 10 AWESOME programs. Mean pre-test scores were 51% (range = 13% to 75%) while their average post-test score was 89% with a range of 70% to 100%. This represented an average gain score of approximately 38% as a result of the program. It is important to note as well that residents' scored 100% correct on four of 10 post-test assessments. Student performance was then depicted in terms of individual bar graphs. These data can be seen in Figure 1. As shown, residents' made

noticeable learning gains across all 10 programs. They recorded their lowest pre-test scores on Programs E and G and their highest pre-test assessments on Programs A, B, and D. Largest learning gains were noted for Programs E, G, and H.

To examine learning gains closer, data were aggregated by the type of program pillar that they represented. Data relevant to residents' pre- and post-test performance by AWESOME pillar are depicted in Figure 2. As seen, residents earned 100% post-test scores on three pillars: (a) artistic, (b) wellness, and (c) spiritual. Their lowest pre-test scores were reported on the occupational and educational pillars while the highest pre-test scores were again artistic, wellness, and spiritual. To determine if gender differences existed as a result of AWESOME programming, resident data were aggregated and are displayed in bar graph form in Figure 3. As shown, female residents had noticeably higher pretest scores than their male counterparts (female $M = 60\%$ versus male $M = 40\%$). However, both groups performed almost identically on program post-tests (female $M = 90\%$ versus male $M = 88\%$) suggesting that males made larger gains over the course of the AWESOME program.

To further examine the impact of AWESOME program on residents' learning gains, attendance at program activities was collected. Table 2 shows the average attendance in number and percentage of residents represented in their halls. As depicted, a total of 218 residents attended the AWESOME programming events. This represented approximately 11% of the freshman resident population. Attendance at individual events averaged about 22 residents with a range of 12 to 43. In terms of percentages, the lowest attended events represented approximately 6% of the freshman residential population, while the highest attendance was around 22%. Least attended programs were B, C, E, H, and I, while the most residents attended Programs F, G, and A.

The final data set examined residents' feelings toward the AWESOME programs that they attended. Data related to their feelings and perceptions can be seen in Table 3. As depicted, most residents felt that it was important for them and their peers to attend and learn from these residential programs. They rated completing pre- and post-assessments as less important overall. In terms of AWESOME program activities and strategies, residents rated them quite highly (i.e., between 4.0 and 5.0). They reported that they liked attending these programs and the specific out-of-class activities that were provided. In addition, most residents felt that the AWESOME program did improve their overall learning experiences during their freshman year and they reported *unanimously* that such activities should be used with other students.

Discussion

The present findings paint a mixed picture of residential programming with a group of freshman from a small, regional comprehensive college in Western New York. On the positive side, those residents who attended AWESOME program events showed noticeable improvements in their overall knowledge of program content. On average, residents improved their pre- to post-test performance by almost 40% across all programs. Moreover, gains were made across all 10 programs and seven AWESOME pillars. There was, however, quite a bit of variability in resident performance across each program. In addition, most residents felt that AWESOME program goals were important; they liked most program activities; and in general they were quite satisfied with their learning experiences. Any time that one can improve resident learning in important domains and satisfy them in the process, it is worth pursuing. On the other hand, attendance data suggested that many freshmen residents were not attending AWESOME programs. On average, only about 11% of residents attended program events. These data suggest that a potentially positive program was not engaging a significant proportion of freshman who

resided on campus. Future research and practice should obviously target increased resident participation as a legitimate program goal.

Collectively, the data indicated that residents who attended residence hall programming were learning from their experiences. As pre-tests showed, students knew significantly less about given topics before attending program events. However, after participating in activities they showed marked improvements in their understanding on content-specific post-tests. Interestingly, data also showed noticeable gender difference across most, if not all, program content. On average, female residents' pre-test scores were about 20% higher than their male counterparts. Males, however, showed greater increases in post-test scores, making gains of nearly 50% over their pretest performance. While it appears females arrived at their residence halls knowing more about program subject matter, both groups left with almost mastery levels across all topics. One possible explanation for this outcome is that male Resident Assistants provided better planned and implemented programs. Since no direct assessment of individual lesson effectiveness and efficiency was conducted, this may provide a fruitful arena for future inquiry.

Another interesting finding emerged from the AWESOME programming model itself. As noted, residents showed noticeable learning gains across all seven pillars. Residents knew the least about the occupational program at pretest, yet showed the greatest learning gains in this domain. Pre- and post-test assessments such as those conducted here may yield additional information about residents' areas of knowledge strengths and weakness and can provide outcome data that describes learner responsiveness to separate content domains.

Program attendance was perhaps the largest issue throughout the study. Since program attendance was not mandatory at this particular institution, attendance only represented a little

over 10% of freshman residents. These data cannot be interpreted, therefore, as reflective of most or all other freshman residents. Obviously, mandatory participation would increase attendance and potential benefits, yet the “costs” are difficult to anticipate. It is also not known whether AWESOME topics were aligned with attending student interests and/or diverged from non-attendees’ beliefs. Future research and practice in this area should consider the relative costs and benefits associated with various attendance policies. Another area of concern was that the AWESOME program was provided during the Spring rather than Fall Term. From the investigator’s experience as a Residence Director, program attendance is generally lower during the second semester on campus because students become tired of resident-initiated activities and find other forms of engagement outside of their dormitories.

It is also important to point out that those residents who attended AWESOME events rated them favorably. As such, they suggested that others would be inclined to attend them as well. Residents enjoyed program activities, felt that they learned important life skills, and were more confident about their understanding of program content. Together, the AWESOME programs improved resident learning and were generally fun for participants. This is a good start in designing residential programming. Consumer satisfaction data derived from this study and others should be used to refine program content to increase learning gains and enhance resident enjoyment.

In conclusion, the present study found that the AWESOME residential training program, an adapted version of the Wheel of Wellness model, produced noticeable improvements in residents’ understanding of program content as measured by pre- and post-training assessments. In addition, residents rated the program’s goals, activities, and outcomes quite favorably. On the down side, attendance was quite low across all program topics and residencies. As such, program

benefits and enjoyment was restricted to a small sample of freshman residents at the institution. Future research and practice should examine other models and procedures for maximizing resident participation while maintain satisfaction. The residents were generally pleased with program content and reported that the information they learned was a lot of new knowledge and skills. This study suggests that formal residence hall programming can create additional opportunities for learning outside of the college classroom and do so in a socially acceptable manner. Now researchers and practitioners must figure out how to increase resident participation in such potentially meaningful programs.

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Figure 1 shows the average increase in pre- and post-test scores across all 10 resident assistants.

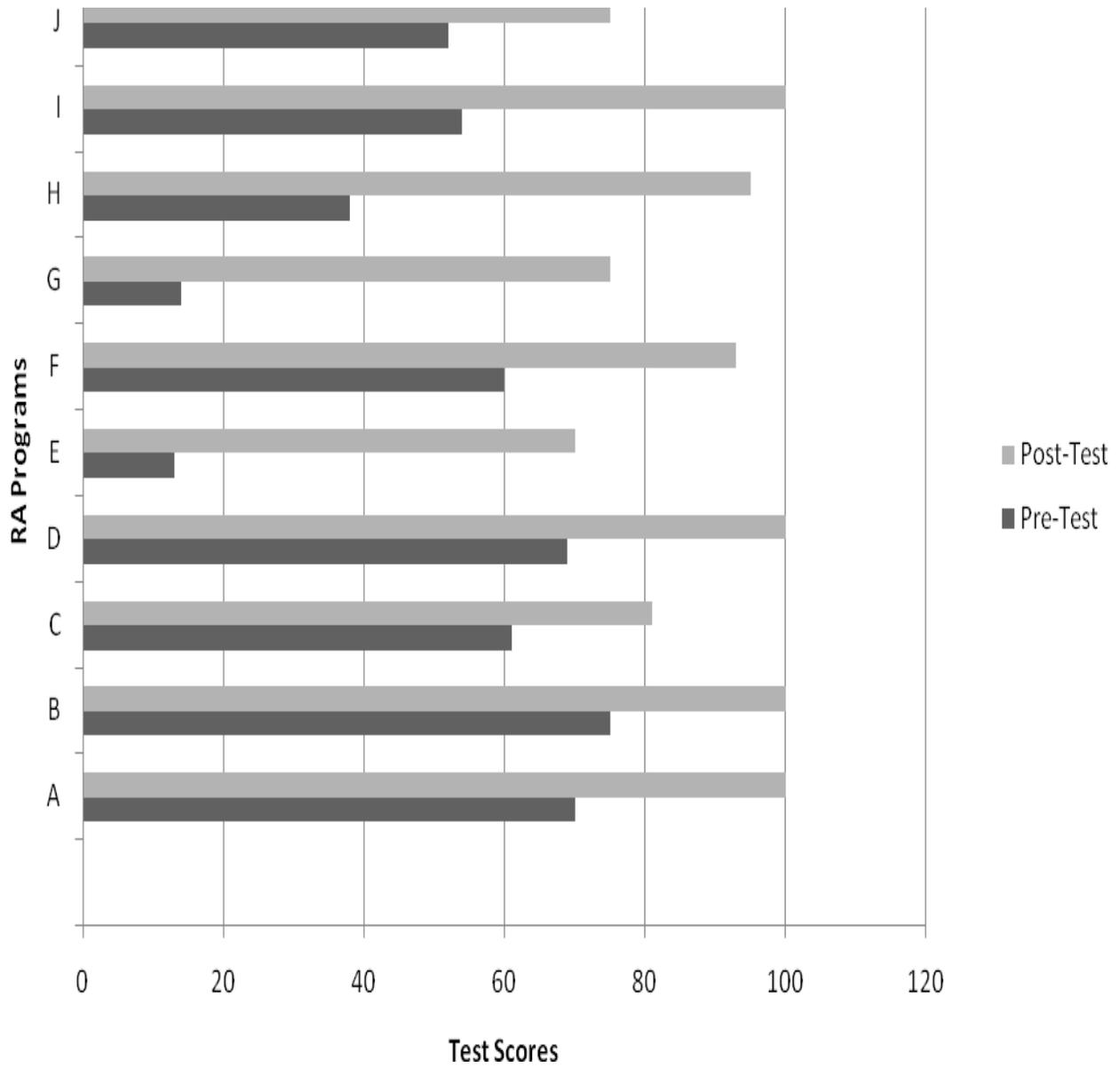


Figure 2 shows the average increase of pre and post-test score across the seven AWESOME Pillars.

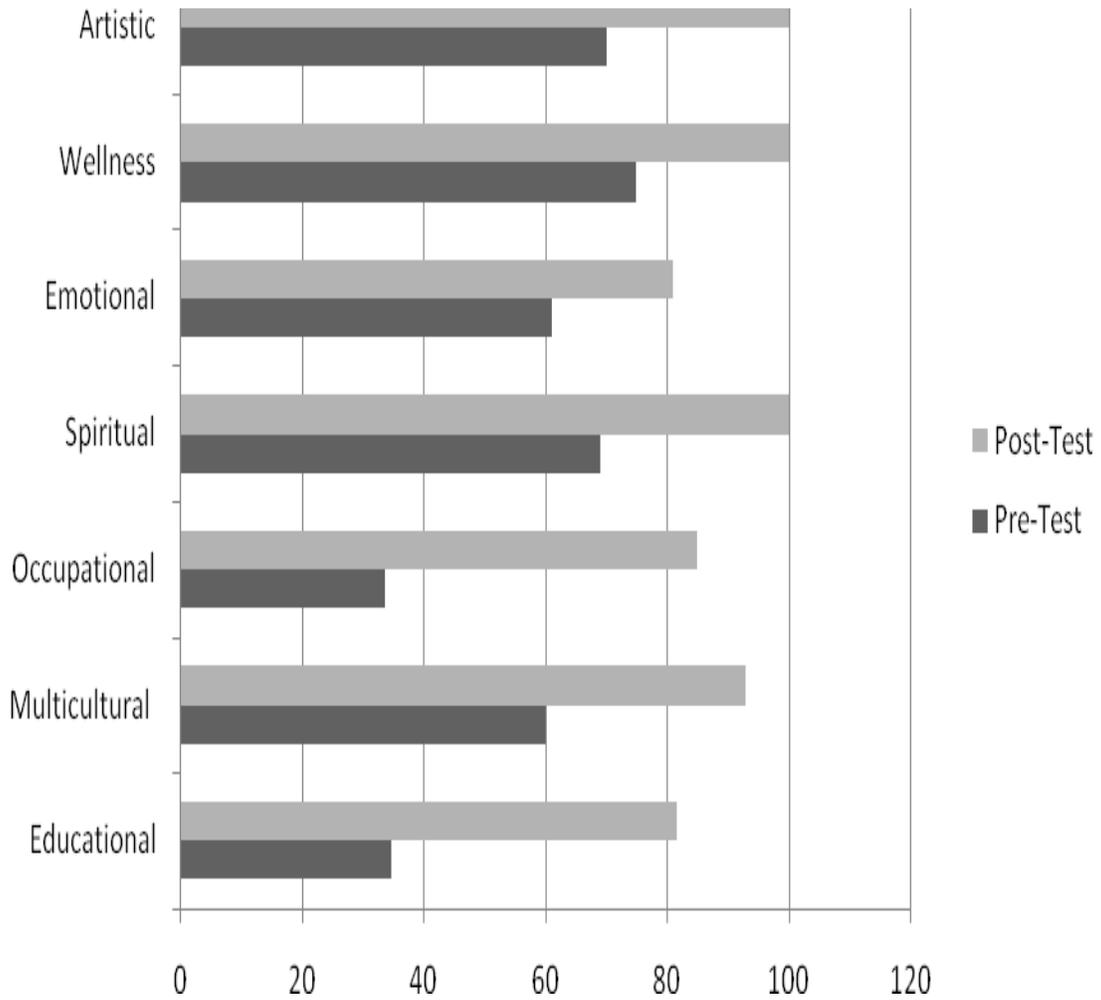


Figure 3 compares pre-test, post-test, and learning gain scores by gender across all residents.

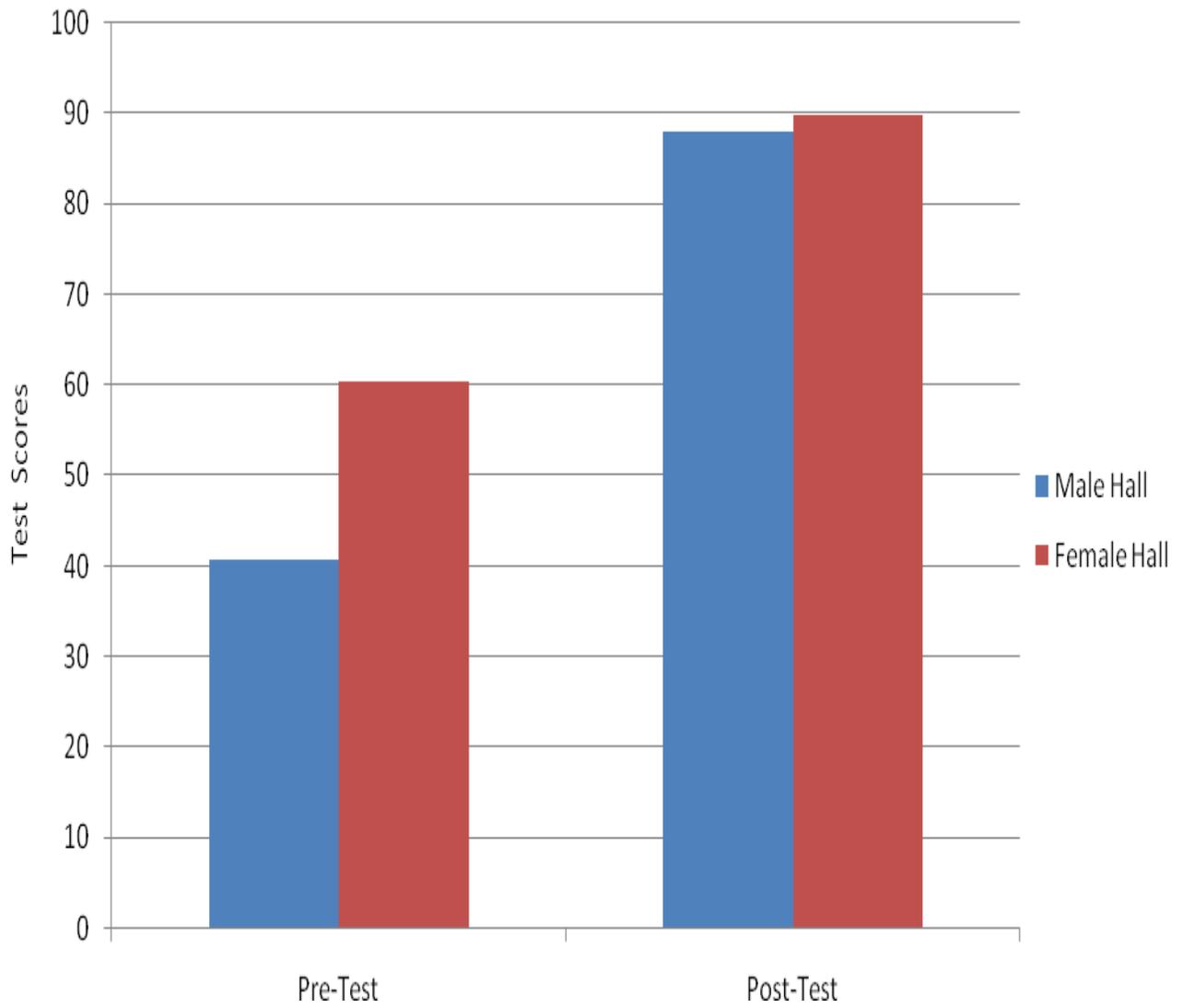


Table 1. Residents' percentage correct on pre- and post-assessments across 10 AWESOME components.

Program Components			
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Average Increase in Score
Program A	70%	100%	+30%
Program B	75%	100%	+25%
Program C	61%	81%	+20%
Program D	69%	100%	+31%
Program E	13%	70%	+57%
Program F	60%	93%	+33%
Program G	14%	75%	+61%
Program H	38%	95%	+57%
Program I	54%	100%	+46%
Program J	52%	75%	+23%
Totals	51%	89%	+38%

Table 2. AWESOME program attendance and percentage of population represented.

	Attendance	Percentage of Resident Hall Population
Program A	37	18%
Program B	12	6%
Program C	14	7%
Program D	20	10%
Program E	13	6%
Program F	43	22%
Program G	39	20%
Program H	13	6%
Program I	12	6%
Program J	15	8%
Totals	218	11%

Table 3. Consumer satisfaction ratings of the AWESOME resident assistants program.

Question	Average
1. How important is it for you to learn at RA programs ?	3.5
2. How important is it for other residents to learn at RA programs?	3
3. How important is it for you to complete assessments at RA programs?	2
4. How important is it for other residents to complete assessments?	2
5. How much did you like attending the RA program this week?	4.5
6. How much did you like having an alternative opportunity to learn available that was separate from classes?	4.5
7. How much did you like completing the activities to help you learn the content?	5.0
8. How much did you enjoy having educational content taught in a different way ?	4.5
9. How satisfied are you with your overall performance on the Pre-Test?	2.5
10. How satisfied are you with your overall performance on the Post-Test?	4.0
11. How much did the activities help you understand the content of the RA program?	4.5
12. How much did the RA program help you to build on a life skill?	4
13. How much did the RA program make you feel more confident about information you may not have known before?	4.5
14. Would you recommend an RA program to other residents if asked?	5.0

Appendix A

Bill Hettler's Wellness Wheel

Six Dimensional Model of Wellness

According to the creator of the Wellness Wheel, Dr. Bill Hettler, wellness is an “active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence.” Wellness is a state of total well-being; a lifelong journey toward holistic health. It is an ongoing process that involves personal time and commitment. Wellness is about creating a balance, and the Wellness Wheel is a visual representation of how different dimensions of health and wellness synergize. Like a bike wheel, if all of the spokes or dimensions are functioning at optimal levels, the wheel rolls along smoothly. If one of the spokes or dimensions becomes weak, the wheel will run off course creating an “unbalanced wheel.” In a university setting, students may be learning to “balance” their time between work, academics, extracurricular activities, etc. Within Student Affairs, services are available that can help students grow and develop in the components of emotional wellness.



Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness includes the degree to which one feels positive and enthusiastic about oneself and life. It includes the capacity to manage one's feelings and related behaviors including the realistic assessment of one's limitations, development of autonomy, and ability to cope effectively with stress.

Intellectual Wellness

Intellectual wellness recognizes one's creative, stimulating mental activities. A well person expands their knowledge and skills while discovering the potential for sharing their gifts with others.

Occupational Wellness

Occupational wellness recognizes personal satisfaction and enrichment in one's life through work. At the center of occupational wellness is the premise that occupational development is related to one's attitude about one's work.

Physical Wellness

Physical wellness recognizes the need for regular physical activity. Physical development

encourages learning about diet and nutrition while discouraging the use of tobacco, drugs and excessive alcohol consumption.

Spiritual Wellness

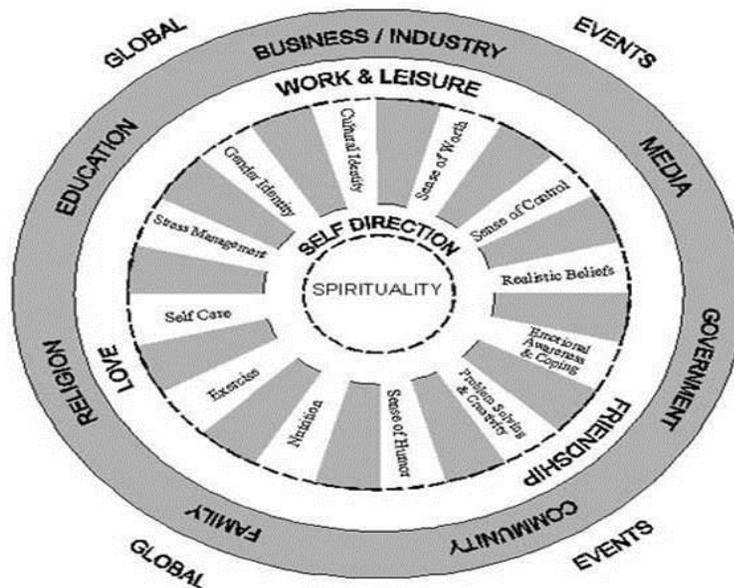
Spiritual wellness recognizes our search for meaning and purpose in human existence. It includes the development of a deep appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.

Social Wellness

Social wellness encourages contributing to one's environment and community. It emphasizes the interdependence between others and nature.

Other wellness models exist which present differing philosophies and components. One example is the concept of financial wellness.

Financial wellness is an intricate balance of the mental, spiritual and physical aspects of money. It is also is having an understanding of your financial situation and taking care of it in such a way that you are prepared for financial changes.



The Wheel of Wellness

The Wheel of Wellness model, first introduced by Sweeney and Witmer in 1991 and Witmer and Sweeney in 1992 was the first theoretical model of wellness based in counseling theory. It is an integrative model based on Adler's Individual Psychology and cross-disciplinary research on characteristics of healthy people who live longer and with a higher quality of life. The Wheel includes five interrelated life tasks: spirituality, self-direction, work and leisure, friendship, and love. In a university setting, this model would be beneficial as it covers different aspects of the campus to include: cultural diversity, problem solving, and stress management which are important for students throughout their academic experience. From a Recreational Sports standpoint, this model ties in work & leisure including exercise & nutrition. Without the understanding of these components individuals will struggle with daily occurrences (i.e. work, school, and personal/social life). Adapted from Witmer, J. M., Sweeney, T. J., & Myers, J. E. (1998). *The Wheel of Wellness*. Greensboro, NC.

Appendix B

Former residence hall program evaluation form.

Program Title: Stereotype Fashion Show

Date: 9/28/10 Time: 8 pm Location: McGinnies Hall lobby

Type of Program (Check One): Educational Multicultural Spiritual Social
 Occupational Physical Emotional

House or Hall (Circle One) Program Planner(s): Nicole, Sam, Mike

Program Goal: to have residents become aware of what a stereotype is, and how they may judge or perceive others

Format Speaker Movie Discussion Campus Event Trip Passive Other

Publicity Posters/Flyers Campus Scroll Door to Door Chalkboard Other

Program Description: Residents who wanted to participate as models signed up and were given a specific stereotype. Models dressed as their stereotype and walked down our "runway" as other residents tried to figure out their stereotypes. A power point and debriefing was given at the end. Mike assessed this program.

Resources / Contact Persons

Name: N/A Address: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Address: _____ Phone: _____

Funding

Funding Source: _____ Hall Council _____ SA _____ Other _____

Total Cost of the Program: \$ 0 (list separate amounts below)

Food: \$ _____ Decorations: \$ _____ Prizes: \$ _____ Equipment: \$ _____

Rental Fees: \$ _____ Other: \$ _____

Final Evaluation

What was the most successful aspect of this program? _____

How could it have been improved? Timing - models needed to be slowed down to give power point debriefing - definitions could have been made more time for

Helpful hints for anyone wishing to do this program: debriefing allows the clear critical thinking residents to reflect and know what a stereotype means

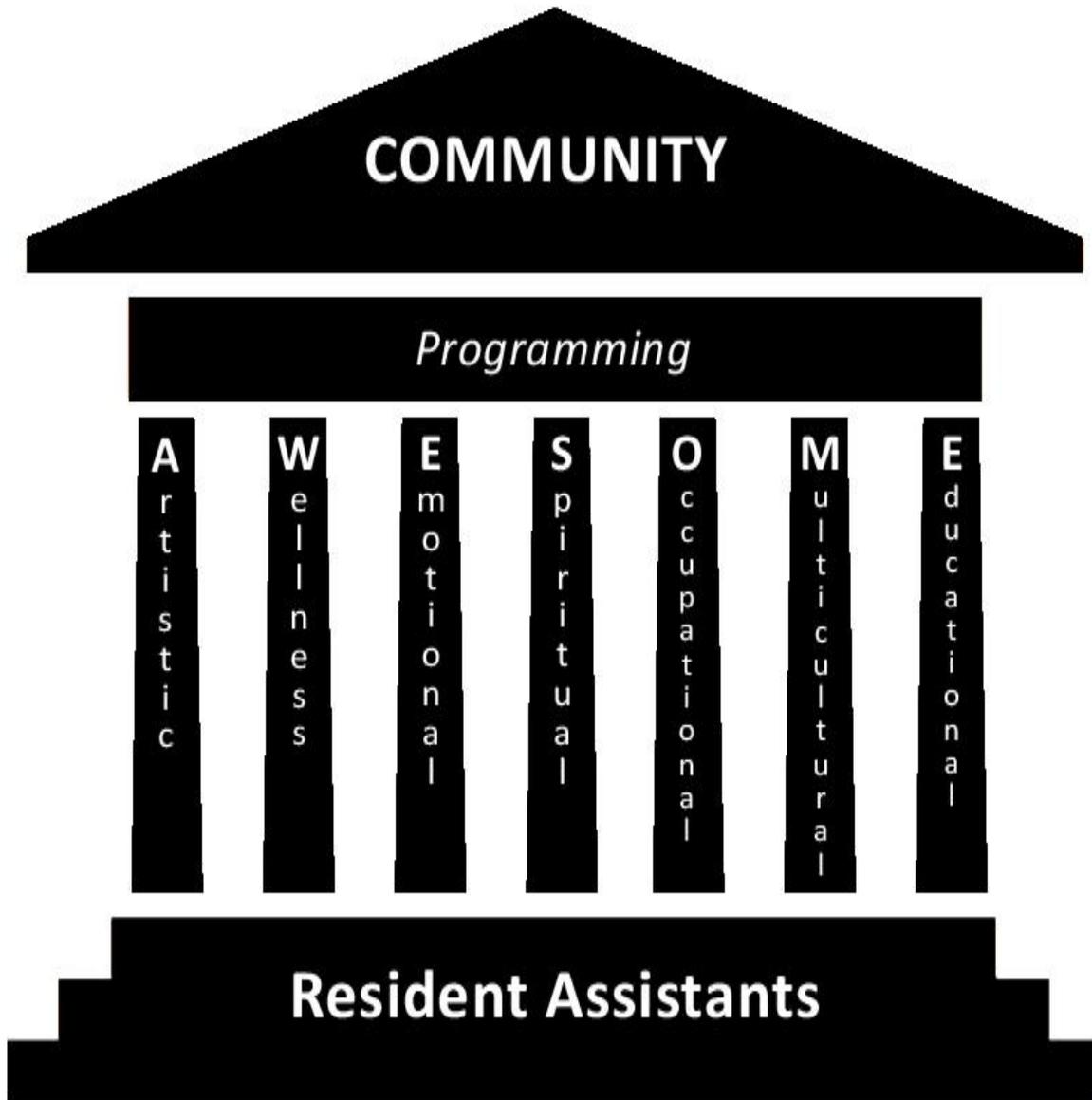
Attendance: Students: 28 Staff: 34 Other: _____ Total: 32

Overall Rating (1 = Poor - 5 = Excellent): 1 2 3 4 5

White Copy - Hall Director Copy - Residence Life FT R.D. Initials

Appendix C

AWESOME Community Programming Model



Programming Expectations

- Each program must use a different pillar of AWESOME
- RA's should try to use as many campus resources as much as possible
- RA's will fill out the AWESOME Program Planning Worksheet
- The RA will budget wisely
- RA's will advertise effectively
- The RA records attendance at their programs
- RAs will assess learning outcomes of their program
- The pre and post surveys will be handed out and taken seriously
- The RA's will fill out the program evaluation sheet which includes the scoring of the surveys

Artistic

The interaction, exposure, and creation of various art forms. The pursuit of art builds intellectual, emotional, and cultural aptitudes.

Goal A: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts

Residents will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.

Goal B: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Residents will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.

Goal C: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Residents will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and aspects of human endeavor and thought.

Goal D: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts

Residents will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Wellness

The promotion of physical and mental well-being. Developing healthy activities that benefit your body such as nutritious eating and exercise. It is taking care of your body.

Goal A: Personal Health and Fitness

Residents will have the necessary knowledge and skills to establish and maintain physical fitness, participate in physical activity, and maintain personal health.

Goal B: A Safe and Healthy Environment

Residents will acquire the knowledge and ability necessary to create and maintain a safe and healthy environment.

Goal C: Resource and Services Management

Residents will understand and utilize their personal and community resources, as well as take advantage of the various campus services available to them in an effort to enhance their experience.

Emotional

Understanding and adaptation to emotionally charged situations. Taking care of yourself and developing ways to enhance your inner resources. It's paying attention to elements such as self expression, stress reduction and relaxation.

Goal A: Understanding Crisis and Conflict

Residents will have the necessary skills and knowledge to confront and create solutions to situations involving crisis or conflict.

Goal B: Fostering Positive Relationships

Residents will acquire the knowledge necessary to foster positive relationships with new individuals as well as the skills required to enhance preexisting relationships.

Goal C: Coping With Pain and Sorrow

Residents will utilize a positive framework that aids in dealing with times of stress, pain, and sorrow.

Goal D: Promoting Happiness and Emotional Well-Being

Residents will gain an understanding of various activities and lifestyle choices that promote happiness and emotional well-being.

Goal E: Nurturing Self Reflection and Awareness

Residents will utilize skills and activities that foster a positive self conception as well as sharpen their own self awareness.

Spiritual

Building a connection between mind and body. Creating a personalized outlook to life and the world. Being open to teachings and principles that fit the individuals needs.

Goal A: Morals and Values

Residents will further develop their personal code of morals and values and use their personal code to positively interact in any situation they may encounter.

Goal B: Relevance and Introspection

Residents will utilize previous experiences as a learning device for future growth.

Goal C: Balance

Residents will gain a fundamental understanding of equilibrium and apply it to their own lives.

Goal D: Connection between Mind and Body

Residents will examine the connection between their physical and mental selves. Residents will practice using rationality to guide their actions and desires.

Occupational

Developing skills for working in a professional environment. Creating short and long term goals that help create more direction in life.

Goal A: Career Development

Residents will be knowledgeable about the world of work, explore career options, and relate personal skills, aptitudes, and abilities to future career decisions.

Goal B: Integrated Learning

Residents will demonstrate how academic knowledge and skills are applied in the workplace and other settings.

Goal C: Universal Foundation of Skills

Residents will demonstrate mastery of the foundation skills and competencies essential for success in the workplace.

Multicultural

Acknowledging different cultures that exist on campus. Recognizing and celebrating those cultural differences to ultimately build community.

Goal A: Communication

Residents will learn to effectively communicate and coexist with members of different cultures.

Goal B: Awareness and Prevention

Residents will examine the measures taken to prevent future instances of intolerance and cultural bias.

Goal C: Acknowledgment and Understanding

Residents will evaluate differences to formulate a greater understanding of human cultures and global perspectives.

Goal D: Conflict and Community

Residents will determine the issues that arise from cultural differences and in response work toward building a better community.

Educational

The integration of academic and personal experiences of residents used to further develop preexisting knowledge and skills.

Goal A: Responsibility and Accountability

Residents will appreciate the need to be responsible and accountable for their actions.

Goal B: Social Skills

Residents will facilitate interaction, developing interpersonal skills such as listening, empathy and eye contact.

Goal C: Learning and Study Habits

Residents will analyze their personal learning styles and studying skills to enhance comprehension and academic performance.

Goal D: Organizational Strategies

Residents will develop and improve their skill set for organizing their personal and academic lives.

Goal E: Financial Management

Residents will practice financial responsibility. Residents will assess personal income, evaluate spending habits, and construct an appropriate personal economic budget.

Appendix D

AWESOME Program Planning Form.

Program Planner(s): _____

Title of Program: _____

Prospective Program Date(s), Time, & Location: _____

Type of Program: (circle one) House Hall

Materials: _____

Budget: _____ **Funding:** (circle one) Hall Council SA N/A Other

Program Description: The overall picture.

Pillar: Artistic Wellness Emotional Spiritual Occupational Multicultural Educational

Program Goals: See the A.W.E.S.O.M.E. Community Programming handbook.

(Circle all that apply) Goal A Goal B Goal C Goal D Goal E

Outcomes: (Include 2-5 learning outcomes) Residents will know/will be able to...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Advertising: How are you going to inform residents about this program? Circle all that apply.

Posters/flyers EMS TV* Door to Door Lobby Board Internet Sources

Ad in the Leader Mailbox Tags Mentioned at Hall Council Flyers around Campus

Other:(Use commas) _____

*All RA's should be submitting their program to EMS via the Resident Assistant Resource page.

Procedure: Plan how you are going to facilitate this program.

Obstacles: What obstacles do you foresee? How can you prevent these obstacles?

*****ONLY COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF THIS IS YOUR PROGRAM TO ASSESS*****

Assessment: These questions should appear on your survey.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Appendix E

AWESOME Planning Rubric

AWESOME COMMUNITY PROGRAM PLANNING RUBRIC

Program Title: _____

Male Hall: _____ **Female Hall:** _____

Number of program learning outcomes: _____

The program outcomes are aligned within the pillar:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

The program outcomes align with the corresponding goals:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

The program outcomes are content specific:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

The program has the required number of assessment questions:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

The program assessment questions align with the learning outcomes:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

The program assessment question styles makes completion of the test simple and quick:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

The program assessment questions are challenging to answer before completion of the program:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree				Agree

TOTAL= _____

Appendix F

AWESOME Community Program Evaluation Form.

Title of Program: _____

Program Planner(s): _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____ Type of Program: (Circle) House Hall

Total Cost of Program: \$ _____

Attendance: _____ Building Residents _____ Other _____ Staff _____ TOTAL

Pillar of AWESOME Community Programming: (Circle one)

Artistic Wellness Emotional Spiritual Occupational Multicultural Educational

Advertising: (Circle all that apply) Posters/flyers EMS TV* Door to Door Lobby Board

Internet Sources Ad in the leader Mailbox Tags Mentioned at Hall Council Flyers around Campus

Program Description: _____

Which type of advertising was the most effective? _____

Why was it important to implement this program: _____

Explain how you met the goal(s) of your indicated Pillar: _____

What were the most successful aspects of this program and why? _____

What suggestions do you have for improving this program? _____

Submit for Program of the Month? (Circle) Yes* No *Please attach program flyer & RA/RD commendations

*****ONLY COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF THIS PROGRAM WAS ASSESSED*****

Pre-Assessment Average: _____ % Post-Assessment Average: _____ %

Average of all pre-test scores

Average of all post-test scores

_____ RD Initials