Reviving the Residential College System: a 7-Point Plan

Alex Gordon, GH '22
Michael Bochkur Dratver, JE '23
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Dining</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Summer Storage</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Inter-college Competitions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Facilities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) College-wide Events</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Resources for Students</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Inter-college Cooperation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BACKGROUND

The **residential college system** is one of the trademarks of the Yale undergraduate experience. It is unique among peer institutions, and offers students a community-focused atmosphere from the moment they step on campus. As noted in the Spring 2019 YCC report, *The State of the Residential College System at Yale*, “there has been growing concern about students’ disengagement with their residential colleges.” **There is reason to be optimistic about the life of the residential college system**, though, as the Fall 2019 YCC Survey found that 86 percent of students are very satisfied or satisfied with their overall residential college experience. But, despite the community, social life, traditions, and amenities offered by the residential colleges, large numbers of students move off campus each year, and over one in four students would consider transferring to a different residential college.

From dining and summer storage, to facilities and college-wide events, in this report, we provide seven areas of residential college life to concentrate resources and attention in order to tackle the challenges of the present to revive the future of the residential college system.
1) DINING

Dining is the aspect of residential college life which leaves the most to be desired. The Fall Survey found that only 59 percent of students are either satisfied or very satisfied with the food in dining halls, and one in every five students is either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. We offer the following suggestions:

1. **A publicized and accessible method for students to provide feedback on each meal.** The current feedback option in the Yale Dining app is underused, as out of the thousands of meals served each day, less than 10 people give feedback, on average. **Students should be encouraged to share their thoughts** and rate which dining options they want to see more often or less often, which will also provide valuable feedback to Yale Hospitality.

2. **Grab-and-go snacks after dining hall hours.** The Fall Survey found that 94 percent of students would take advantage of uneaten fruits, snacks, and baked goods if they were offered in the dining hall or common room in the evenings.

3. **Spring Break dining included into the meal plan or subsidized.** Of students on campus during breaks, 59 percent cited cost as the primary reason for not purchasing the dining supplement. This financial burden is especially pernicious for FGLI students, so subsidization/cost elimination would be impactful.

4. **Dining hall hours during Camp Yale.** Upper-level students are expected to arrive on campus when residences open in order to help first-year students move in. However, no dining halls are open to upper-level students until classes begin, meaning that students have to purchase all meals off campus. This is an unfair cost to students who come to campus early to support their residential college, and it especially impacts FGLI students. **Ninety-three percent** of students would use the dining halls if they were open.

5. **Dining plan flexibility.** The Spring 2019 residential college report found that the lack of diversity in “meal plans is the single biggest contributor to students moving off campus.” As such, we recommend the creation of at least one on-campus meal plan that reflects real flexibility and a cheaper price.

6. **Alternative dinner options.** Students not able to eat lunch during dining hall hours can use lunch swipes at Durfee’s. Because of varying schedules in practices, rehearsals, and coursework, students may miss dinner occasionally during the year. **We recommend the option to use a dinner swipe at Durfee’s once a week.** Or, alternatively, to add to the meal plan 2-3 extra Durfee swipes per month, equivalent to the value of a meal.
7. **Name tags for dining staff.** It would be great for students and staff to be able to call each other by their names and develop relationships.
2) SUMMER STORAGE

Yale students are dissatisfied with summer storage options. The Fall Survey found that only 15 percent of students are satisfied or very satisfied with their storage options. This leaves a huge number of Yale students unhappy with where they store their belongings while away for summer break, instilling anxiety and financial burden on students, particularly those from FGLI backgrounds.

We recommend the creation of a free or heavily subsidized storage option offered for students in each residential college. We found that 67 percent of students would definitely use a subsidized summer storage option, potentially through cooperation between residential colleges, the YCC, and the Yale College Dean's Office to establish a subsidized storage option with a local storage facility.

We additionally recommend a delay in move-out time from noon on the day after examinations conclude to 5pm to allow time for students responsible for storing their own belongings to do so, which is often untenable or anxiety-inducing for students with finals up to the last day.
3) INTER-COLLEGE COMPETITIONS

Intramural sports receive some of the largest participation from students in recent years, but the vast majority of students still do not participate in IMs. Similarly, some residential colleges garner more involvement in IMs than others. To foster more college spirit and camaraderie, especially for those that do not otherwise have an outlet for college spirit, we recommend the creation of a Tyng Cup-style inter-college competition, potentially called the Bulldog Cup.

Each residential college would have two captains, and throughout the year there will be various inter-college events where points are awarded depending on performance. Some potential ideas are trivia nights, the First-Year Olympics, Dwight Hall days of service, sustainability competitions, charity events (such as the Run for the Refugees, selling Havenly in the buttery), etc.

This will bring more engagement for students within the residential college and between residential colleges, offering an alternative for those who are not keen on IMs. At the end of the year, a prize of some sort will be awarded to the champion residential college. This idea will require buy-in from the residential colleges and their heads, as well as the Yale College Dean's Office, but we are interested in a pilot Bulldog Cup for the Spring 2020 semester. This will put into action one of the major recommendations from the Spring 2019 report.
4) FACILITIES

The facilities in each residential college, while sufficient for student living needs, leave room for improvement and better distribution of facilities quality. The Fall Survey found that only two-thirds of students are satisfied or very satisfied with the facilities of their residential college. Funding grants for facility improvement are allocated on a rotating basis, with TD, Saybrook, Branford, and Trumbull undergoing renovations in summer 2020, and Saybrook, Berkeley, Morse, and Stiles receiving their grant for summer 2021.

For residential colleges with upcoming facilities renovations, we recommend that the Heads of College hold forums with students, or seek student input through a survey, in order to assess which areas of facilities students desire improvement. Additionally, we recommend that residential colleges without upcoming renovations, or colleges that have already received their facilities grant, continue to find affordable areas to improve the facilities in the college, similarly by seeking student input. If there are any under-used rooms or amenities, colleges should seek to repurpose these spaces. For example, Grace Hopper’s digital media room was converted into a “Cozy Room” space for students, and student utilization of the space has grown significantly.
5) COLLEGE-WIDE EVENTS

Consistent effort in establishing annual college-wide events both within specific residential colleges and in large community spaces has succeeded in entertaining Yale students and bringing students among varying colleges closer together. There are limited opportunities for students from different colleges to interact with each other beyond classes, extracurriculars, and social events. Events such as the Bulldog Bash, Pierson Inferno, and the Berkeley Glow Party are all very fun and entertaining events, while fostering pride in specific residential colleges and excitement for an on-campus activity. We believe that encouraging and subsidizing residential colleges to plan and throw more of these college-wide events will be successful in increasing social options on campus. We recommend a requirement for residential colleges to hold one college-wide event at least every other year. We also recommend pursuing further YCDO assistance in covering security costs, as that is an often-cited barrier to college councils hosting large, college-wide events.
6) RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

The residential college system is uniquely positioned to offer students resources that make their lives easier on campus. For all students, particularly those from first-generation or low-income backgrounds, access to crowd-sourced and subsidized amenities can improve the student life experience. We recommend a few methods to fully realize this potential:

1. **Expansion of college textbook libraries.** The Silliman Textbook Library has grown in the past few years to now have a collection of over 1000 books. We want to continue to expand this resource into other residential colleges through the addition of dedicated spaces for textbook libraries, as well as to work with residential colleges to sponsor donation drives at the end of each semester.

2. **Maintaining success in providing disposable menstrual products.** This has been a fruitful YCC endeavor, and it is important to continue offering these items to students at no cost.

3. **Communal laundry materials.** While we encourage a lowering of laundry prices to increase accessibility for students, another option to reduce costs is to provide communal detergent and dryer sheets. Harvard has recently implemented this initiative. We expect that only students who need this resource would utilize it, and hope to pilot the program in the future.
7) INTER-COLLEGE COOPERATION

Although the residential college system is a model that many value greatly, one problem that it creates is that colleges often do not have established and easy ways to communicate with each other. As a result, college councils and heads of college run their colleges in widely different manners. To remedy this lack of pipeline for communication, we have worked to establish the College Council Association, which meets monthly for college council presidents to share ideas and discuss issues with each other. This has been fruitful in solving problems and helping councils.

We recommend the continuation of this council, as well as to dedicate resources toward creating a residential college handbook that creates a source of institutional knowledge as to what makes each residential college unique. Some items to include will be the style of the residential college council, college traditions, and amenities offered by the college.