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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Beyond the “Tried and True”: Emergent and Liberatory Residential Life and Housing Practices

Higher education in the United States is having a moment. Each day, a new headline shouts the urgency of redefining what we do and how we do it in the face of renewed public skepticism. The rising price of higher education, coupled with increasing pressure to demonstrate that a college education translates to more earning power, has revived questions about its value (Tough, 2023). Most troublingly, the Supreme Court’s recent decision to roll back affirmative action in college admissions has left many wondering if the gains made by civil rights activists over the last 70 years were all for naught (Liptak, 2023).

It would be tempting to think that these questions lie largely outside the confines of our residential spaces. Because of their centrality to student experience, retention, and belonging, however, we argue that they are more crucial than ever as sites for also engendering liberation. Residential life and housing professionals, along with other key campus leaders (including faculty like us), must assume both guardianship and leadership of equity practices precisely because residential communities are so essential to the work of community-building on campus. In short, the tools we have relied upon—cautious policies informed by neoliberal tropes such as prioritizing heads in beds—are simply incompatible with building worlds where humanity precedes capital.

What inspired this special issue was our collective awareness of the importance of elasticity in our thinking, imagining, and practices. This moment demands not an easy road, but a necessary one. Let us interrupt perennially unquestioned practices in residential life. Now is the time for critical educators to develop more meaningful tools for evaluating the effectiveness of practices for historically poorly served populations

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(Marine & Gilbert, 2021). Practices adopted in the late 20th century—including those related to room assignments and selection, professional and paraprofessional staff training, community-building and residential programming, and even newer technologies like residential curricula—are overdue for examination through critical lenses. The foundation for this special issue was questioning whether these (and other) practices work, to what end, and for whom. Alongside calls for increased critical scholarship from our professional associations (Aho & Quaye, 2018), we argue that it is imperative to engage in individual and collective dreaming and to re-envision and revisit practices and policies that, although time worn, fail to engage with praxis or move towards liberatory possibilities.

For this special issue of *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, we offer a focus on individual and collective dreaming where authors re-imagine and revisit rote practices and policies that either advance or fail to disrupt an inequitable status quo. We invited authors to envision our housing programs in an environment of unfettered freedom *and* collective well-being, where community members enacted values of interdependence, self-determination, generativity, and reciprocity. What does housing work that seeks to center the care and wholeness of staff, residents, and neighbors look like? What must we discard, and which intentions and heart's desires can we imagine and bring to fruition?

What we hoped to achieve in this special issue is the kind of thinking that interrupts static elements of housing and residential life. We encouraged authors to utilize Love's (2018) components for developing a liberatory consciousness: awareness, analysis, action, and accountability. These nonlinear components provide a framework to (re)conceptualize and (re)consider the administrative minutiae that can dominate the work of housing and residential life professionals. We also encouraged the application of small changes approaches offered by brown (2017) in *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*.

We constructed an issue that offers insights from those who occupy researcher positionalities (and thus have experience with systematic analyses and abstraction from the concrete) and from the lived realities of practitioners (those entrenched in the daily realities of supervision, leadership, and management of residential staff, spaces, and policies). We believe that the result of mingling perspectives and voices yields complex and multidimensional conversations. We also upend our own dichotomy of researcher and practitioner as a group of individuals who occupied both spaces in our careers.

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Therefore, we accepted submissions from those with a host of experiences and centered manuscripts that would disrupt staid practices or positions. It is our delight to offer a pastiche of empirical analyses of emergent practices, commentary on practitioner experience with these practices, and scholarly investigation of the assumptions underlying these practices. Authors within this special issue muse, contemplate, and envision residential life and housing programs that center humanity and joy.

The articles in this issue provide vivid examples of the potential for meaningful change embedded in creative re-imagining of the tried and true. Jess Silvia and D. Chase J. Catalano wonder about the radical potential of queering communities to interrupt heteronormative campus spaces through the examination of an LGBTQ+ living-learning program. Rejecting narratives of traditional self-care, Gudrun Nyunt, Yuan Zhou, Emily Sandoval, and Christine Bender draw on an analysis of interviews with professionals to envision new practices for centering residential staff well-being, placing responsibility on leaders and the norms they both set and maintain. The theme of faux wellness is revisited by Emily Braught, Harrianna Thompson, and Cassie Govert, who propose that sustainable work in the profession is achievable only through naming and eliminating practices embedded in White supremacist thinking, including those related to functional stupidity and a manufactured sense of urgency. Jackson M. Matos offers conceptual thinking about how to center Latinx students in residential life, embracing Yosso's (2005) ideas about the value of community cultural wealth.

Calling into question the traditional paradigm of residential sanctioning for behavioral infractions, Kaleigh A. Mrowka, Rafael Rodriguez, Erin Baker-Meno, Ravi Bhatt, Jeff P. Godwoski, and Kelli Perkins advance thinking about the value of restorative practices for advancing the goals of a liberatory community. Carrie Kortegast, Lauren Teso, and Katy Jaekel identify six practices of liberatory supervision: actions that engage supervisees as whole people, which could serve as a game-changing and practical framework for early-career residence hall professionals. Finally, Kelvin Roberts and Susan Marine explore how Black residential life professionals' experiences with duty rounds are occluded by the specter of double consciousness (DuBois, 1940/2012), signaling the imperative to address and eliminate this needless burden borne by Black leaders.

In 2022, the Association for College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I) embarked on an inquiry and discovery project to shape the future of the profession. That work continues as the project is now into its third phase of design. One of the areas of inquiry, creating inclusive communities, leans on the assumption that "residential communities have the potential to serve as sites where members

experiment and rehearse the skills and dispositions needed for a liberatory future” (ACUHO-I, 2023, p. 24). This special edition of *The Journal of College and University Student Housing* operates from that premise and endeavors to describe the practices and possibilities that open up when residential communities prefigure the just, equitable, and humanizing world we all deserve. We invite you to take up this issue, grapple with its ideas and provocations, and discern alongside your colleagues what dreams of a liberatory future you might realize within your program. ■

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