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A Thematic Analysis of Conference Programs for Residential College Professional Associations

MANY PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS in higher education hold conferences and conventions on a recurring basis, often with residential college stakeholders taking part. Using a qualitative historical research perspective, we derived themes from conference program schedules (e.g., program session titles, presenters, presenter affiliations) for two prominent associations related to residential colleges: Collegiate Way International and the Residential College Society. Data were collected from 2014 to 2020, examined, analyzed by thematic content analysis, and then organized by association, year, and location. Findings revealed the professional development topics most relevant to residential college stakeholders: specifically, what constitutes a residential college model, the resident experience, and leadership experiences. We have compared the associations, offered recommendations for practice, including consistency in presentation counts, and presented insights into professional development topics that can advance the field. Finally, we have identified key institutions within the residential college movement and discussed how to diversify the field.

Since their founding in 1249 at Oxford, much has been written about residential colleges and the characteristics of these integrated living-learning institutions. These communities are defined by the Residential College Society as “a collegiate residential environment in which live-in faculty play an integral role in the programmatic experience and leadership of the community” (Residential College Society, n.d.). Concurrently, as the field of higher education has developed over the centuries, its professionalization has led to specializations such as academic advisors and divisions of

academic and student affairs. Housing professionals have not been left out of this professionalization of the field, having adopted competencies (or standards) and functional areas for campus housing professionals (Association of College & University Housing Officers-International [ACUHO-I] Professional Standards Committee, 2017). While there are how-to instructions on building a residential college (O’Hara, 2001) and a burgeoning professionalized field of academic initiatives within housing and residence life, the question remains about where residential colleges belong in the field of higher

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education and its research efforts. The importance of the housing experience is supported by a variety of studies (La Roche et al., 2010; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Spanierman et al., 2013) and continuous research through organizations and research development groups such as ACUHO-I.

Within the last decade, two professional associations have emerged that create a distinct, professional space for residential college stakeholders. The Residential College Society (RCS) and the Collegiate Way International (CWI) have similar missions focusing on the support and development of higher education through a focus on residential college models. We sought to conduct a historical review and content analysis to understand the professional development opportunities afforded to residential college stakeholders in these distinct professional association settings. Our study was informed by discipline-specific analysis in other fields in order to identify professional development themes relevant to residential colleges and to address the present gap in this emergent professional space. Kortegast et al. (2021) suggested that conference material analysis can aid in identifying gaps within professional dialogue. Thus, our research seeks to develop and enhance learning and programming within the residential college community by using themes from conference programs to see what has been, is, and will be important to residential colleges around the world. These findings will direct programming and dialogue related to the residential college model and will help develop and improve residential colleges.

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC CONFERENCE MATERIALS

Content analyses of conference or program materials have been conducted in order to gain deeper insight into specific professions (Barberet, 2007; Kamphoff et al., 2010). Focusing on a singular theme or conference can provide valuable insights, and comparison of multiple conferences within a singular profession offers further depth. For example, through an analysis of the themes and topics of sessions from two annual conventions of the American Psychological Association, Scherer (1985) was able to observe differences in their contents and then connected the observations to historical events that may have been relevant to the trends.

Broader content analyses over a set time frame have also been conducted in order to observe trends over time (Cohen & Suen, 2012; Krause et al., 2020) and yielded results enabling researchers to observe changes in their respective fields. Content analysis can also sometimes reveal the absence of a theme or topic of discussion within a profession; for example, Kortegast et al. (2021) analyzed the conference program content of the Association for the Study of Higher Education and discovered a lack of session topics related to lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-questioning (LGBTQ) knowledge. Lachowsky et al. (2017) assessed trends within the Canadian Sex Research Forum via thematic analysis of annual conference programs. By reviewing and collecting abstracts of conferences between 2013 and 2016, researchers analyzed different factors of interest—presenter and presentation format, sample population,

population subfoci, topic, and methods—and found several descriptive and temporal trends. In these ways, discipline-specific analysis of conference and program materials has provided value to other disciplines beyond housing and residential life.

RELEVANCE OF ANALYSIS TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The content analysis of conference material not only provides value to disciplines but can also be used in a variety of ways to inform professional practice. Some scholars, for example, used research to observe and subsequently diversify discussion within their respective professional contexts (Kamphoff et al., 2010). As Kortegast et al. (2021) generalized, “similar patterns regarding topics potentially reinforce the links between the scholarly literature and professional practice” (p. 18), further reinforcing the usability of a thematic analysis in identifying common and uncommon topics within the field of higher education and in applying the frequency or infrequency of those topics to indicate themes in need of more or less dialogue.

Others have used content analysis research to identify knowledge and awareness of trends or identify areas for future research (Barberet, 2007; Hairon et al., 2017). Thus, thematic content analysis findings within higher education—or, more specifically, the residential college movement—could help determine current trends, identify past influences on the field, aid in planning future research, advance dialogue, and help shape the future direction of the field.

As discussed previously, several studies have analyzed discipline-specific material (Barberet, 2007; Cohen & Suen, 2012; Scherer, 1985), and, within the scope of higher education, many studies have been conducted on particular academic fields like mathematics or physics (Krause et al., 2020) or topic areas like LGBTQ knowledge production (Kortegast et al., 2021). Yet there is a gap as it pertains to college and university student housing and, more specifically, residential colleges. Analysis of the conference programs of residential college professional associations in particular could give directive insight into the increasingly popular residential college movement.

PURPOSE AND RELEVANCE OF STUDY

Residential colleges are not solely the work of student affairs departments, nor that of a particular academic discipline. Therefore, we found in the field and its literature a need to further the professionalization of residential colleges to complement the advancement of professional practice. As Young (1988) posited, “I prefer to think of the field as dynamic and professionalizing, rather than as static and fully professionalized” (p. 16). To aid the professionalization of practice, our purpose was to provide a historical review of conference schedules for Collegiate Way International and Residential College Society. The review included a thematic content analysis of conference programs to identify themes connected to professional development topics relevant to residential colleges,

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as well as trends in participating institutions. Themes aid in the development and execution of the education, training, and scholarship related to the unique living-learning context of residential colleges.

Data collected through the thematic analysis were specifically used to address three primary research questions:

1. *What are the topics of the scheduled sessions?*
2. *What are the similarities and differences in session topics by professional association?*
3. *Which institutions engage with these professional associations?*

METHOD

Design

To address the research questions, we applied a constructivist historical research design utilizing a thematic content analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Best and Kahn (1993) defined history as a “meaningful record of human achievement. It is not merely a list of chronological events, but a truthful integrated account of relationships between persons, events, times, and places” (p. 85). Historical research is the process of examining events in the past in order to interpret them accurately (Wiersma, 1991). Using a constructivist paradigm, we sought to construct meaning from multiple realities from the historical conference programs of residential college professional associations in order to influence the practice and socialization of professionals in campus housing.

Data Sources and Collection

Because the purpose of our study relates to the residential college context, data were collected from two professional associations, CWI and RCS, whose missions explicitly

identify the residential college model. CWI was established in 2014 and seeks to “improve the quality of campus life by creating small, diverse, faculty-led communities within themselves” (CWI, n.d., para. 1). RCS was also formed in 2014 as a stand-alone professional organization pulling in faculty and student affairs professionals committed to the residential college model. One piece of the organization’s stated mission is to “advance scholarship about the residential college experience” (RCS, n.d., para. 17). RCS has an audience primarily in the United States, while CWI tends to be an international association. Data for this study were gathered through a review of professional association websites, conference-specific websites, and email communication with professional association volunteers. Specific data included conference schedules between the years of 2014 and 2020. These data provided the most accurate unified record of the sessions presented. Program schedules were included in their entirety, but varied in content. For instance, almost all conference schedules omitted session abstracts, while others replaced abstracts with topical areas presumably determined by the conference committee. Conference data included in the analysis are organized and presented in Table 1 by professional association.

Analysis

Drawing on inspiration from Black and Ubbes (2009) for our analysis, we employed textual analysis, which examines the occurrence of words and phrases used in a message (Frey et al., 1999). In our analysis, we sought to discover emergent themes from both implicit and explicit interpretations. Similar to Black and Ubbes, “we chose the label *textual* or *thematic content analysis* as a basis for data analysis” (p. 36) with the understanding that thematic analysis is a meth-

TABLE 1
Conferences by Association, Year, and Location

ASSOCIATION	YEAR	HOST INSTITUTION	LOCATION
CWI	2014	Durham University	Durham, United Kingdom
	2016	Australian National University	Canberra, Australia
	2019	Rice University	Houston, Texas, US
RCS	2014	Virginia Tech	Blacksburg, Virginia, US
	2015	Southern Methodist University	Dallas, Texas, US
	2016	Vanderbilt University	Nashville, Tennessee, US
	2017	Washington University in St. Louis	St. Louis, Missouri, US
	2018	University of Oklahoma	Norman, Oklahoma, US
	2019	Baylor University	Waco, Texas, US
	2020	University of South Carolina	Columbia, South Carolina, US

od to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In preparation for analysis, we entered data for 257 individual program sessions (session title and institutional affiliation) into a spreadsheet. Conference sessions like breakfast, lunch, dinner, keynote presenter introductions, tours, networking/social events, and opening/keynotes/panels without titles indicating their content were removed from analysis. Professional association, conference location, and year were recorded to aid in determining trends and other phenomena.

Our thematic analysis followed Braun’s and Clarke’s (2006) six-step method. First, each member of the research team became familiar with the data. This familiarization occurred through our organization of Table 1 and by moving each conference session over to the spreadsheet. The second step was to generate a list of initial codes. Data

in the spreadsheet were reviewed and initially coded by each member of the research team. Codes (themes) were compared and discussed. In step three, we transformed the codes into groups of codes, which were then formed into categories. We then reviewed the emergent themes from the previous steps to ensure that the groups of data and the categories were clearly representative of the initial data. In our work, we addressed grouped data and examined relationships (or lack thereof) between groups. The fifth step required us to label and define each category. For instance, we labeled sessions such as “Well-Being and Mental Health Panel” within the category of inclusion and well-being. Similarly, a session titled “Developing an Academic Peer Advising Program in a Residential College” was placed in the academics category. As these examples illustrate, we transformed titles into codes based on the data and then began to organize them into groups, then catego-

ries, and finally themes, which were further described. The final step consisted of linking the themes to the existing scholarship on residential colleges (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We applied procedures to aid dependability, confirmability, and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, the spreadsheet provided an audit trail for dependability; in each step of the research work, the research team kept field notes and reflective observations for confirmability. For credibility, the team also discussed discrepancies when assigning codes to each conference session title to ensure consistent codes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, this process is outlined here to ensure transferability, and rich, thick, textual descriptions are provided within the findings to aid credibility (Geertz, 1973).

Positionality

We acknowledge that the emergent categories did not derive only from the data, but were also influenced by the literature, as well as our professional experience and values (Call-Cummings & Ross, 2019). Our research team consisted of three undergraduate students, one graduate student, and one faculty member at a university in the United States. Campus leaders are represented on the team in the positions of residential assistant, former residential college leader, and residential housing staff. All researchers were raised in and have only lived in the continental United States. While our team has international experiences, we acknowledge our lack of direct perspective in the international residential college movement. Our involvement in the residential experience in college inspires us to review the residential college model and the conferences.

FINDINGS

We present our findings organized around each research question after providing an overview of the analysis. From our three research questions, we were able to divide our findings into three themes: topics discussed, comparisons of the two organizations, and engaged institutions. Identifying the topics of scheduled sessions helps determine what is and isn't being taught at these conferences. Identifying similarities and differences in session topics by professional association helped us compare the conferences so that we could provide feedback to each professional association on how they could produce more work that is pertinent to the field of residential colleges. Finally, identifying which institutions engage with these professional organizations becomes important when we look at how far these professional organizations have or have not branched out. Neither RCS nor CWI had conference themes, which is important to recognize because there was a possibility that a conference theme could affect the topics that were presented at each conference, but that is not the case with these associations.

Table 2 presents an overview of program sessions by association and year. In 2014, CWI offered 44 program sessions (including paper sessions), which decreased to 34 in 2016 and even further to 19 in 2019. CWI had a total of 97 conference sessions over the three conferences held. In contrast, in its first year, in 2014, RCS held 12 conference sessions. In 2015, the number of conference sessions increased to 25, and the session counts between 2016 and 2020 ranged from 18 to 31. Overall, RCS hosted a total of 160 sessions during the study period.

TABLE 2
Program Session Counts by Association and Year

ASSOCIATION	YEAR	PRESENTATION COUNT
CWI (n = 97)	2014	44
	2016	34
	2019	19
RCS (n = 160)	2014	12
	2015	25
	2016	23
	2017	27
	2018	19
	2019	23
	2020	31

Topics of Scheduled Program Sessions

To answer the first research question, we found 10 emergent themes related to professional development from the thematic content analysis of conference sessions from both professional associations: former resident engagement, leadership experience, resident experience, collaboration, assessment, the residential college model, history and values, organizational structure, inclusion and well-being, and academics. The most frequent topic and therefore the largest theme encountered was the residential college model. The least frequent theme was former resident engagement. Table 3 illustrates the emergent themes, the initial start codes collapsed into the themes, and narrative descriptions.

Within the residential college model theme specifically, both associations utilized

only indirect explanations of the residential college model, using campus-specific examples. We drew this conclusion from an analysis similar to the one performed by Cohen and Suen (2012), who analyzed conference session titles and drew observations from the analysis. For example, a 2014 CWI presentation titled “Arana and Abbey Reflections: The Collegiate Way at the University of Otago” exemplified the residential college model at the University of Otago rather than presenting an abstract discussion of the model throughout history. The same can be said of the 2020 RCS presentation titled “Making a Location a Place: Plotting Residential Colleges in the U.S.A.” Here, instead of exemplifying the residential college model at a specific university, this presentation exemplified the model through examples specific to campuses in the United States. These titles seem to suggest an avoidance of a general or abstract discussion of the model throughout history.

Further, the emphasis on the residential college model found within both associations was expressed only through practical means—as ways to inform the professional practice of student, faculty, and staff stakeholders. To illustrate, conference session titles seemed to imply a focus on the structure, faculty engagement, age, values, academics, etc. within their frameworks. Two examples of conference sessions sharing their models were “Respectful Relationship: Residential Life at St. Andrew’s College” from CWI and “Transitioning from an LLC to a Residential College: Lessons Learned from the Leadership and Social Change Residential College” from RCS. Even with this primary focus on the residential college model, neither association offered an explicit definition of the model, even though this seems of primary concern to both association audiences.

TABLE 3**Theme Names, Start Codes Collapsed Within, and Descriptions**

THEME NAME	START CODES	THEME DESCRIPTION
Former resident engagement	Alumni, former resident engagement	Participation of former students who resided in a residential program. Includes topics surrounding experiences of former residents, current connections and involvement of former residents, and current impact of former residents.
Leadership experience	Leader engagement, programming, and experience, faculty, housing staff, student leaders	Experience and engagement levels of leaders involved with the residential college. Includes not only student leaders, but also faculty and housing staff. Outlines key roles and their functions within the residential college.
Resident experience	Resident engagement, programming, and experience, dining, food, eating	Ways to create the best residential experience possible for students by creative programming, facilitating interactive experiences, utilizing food, etc. Includes how to ensure a student's positive experience in their residential college.
Collaboration	Collaboration, connections, campus administration	Relationship between the residential college system and other on-campus organizations (units/departments), as well as the impact of campus administration on programming and students themselves. Includes the connectivity between university campuses both globally and within the country.
Assessment	Measuring, assessment, evaluation, innovation	Assessment, evaluation, and research related to residential colleges. Measuring or using data to improve students, programs, or institutional success outcomes.
The residential college model	Model, buy-in, space, investing, facilities	Physical investments and resources needed for a residential college model: space, money, and an understanding of the residential college model itself. Includes roundtable discussions openly describing the way that the residential commons model has worked on a per-institution basis.
History and values	History, values, ethics, future	Historical backgrounds of the residential colleges. Exemplifies values and ethics that are important to individual colleges. Includes possible future threats or challenges that may arise.
Organizational structure	Organizational structure, hierarchy, human resources	Internal structure of the organization (university, residential college, department, etc.): hiring, training, or other personnel-related systems and processes.
Inclusion and well-being	Diversity, inclusion, equity, minority, belonging, mental health, identity, well-being	Diversity and physical and mental health. Includes student identity (e.g., gender, race, disability status) tied to bolstering their well-being and success, as well as sexual misconduct administration committed toward student support.
Academics	Academics, courses, classes	Linked courses, classes, certificates, or graduation-related requirements achieved via a residential college, with some explicitly related to traditional living-learning communities.

Similarities and Differences
Between Professional Associations

To answer the second research question, we separated the analysis of CWI and RCS based on the program session titles and their content to discover similarities and differences between the two associations. Table 4 presents this analysis. Each program session was coded, and counts for each theme were added. The themes within Table 4 are in order from most frequent to least frequent.

RCS had higher counts for almost every topic, with the exceptions of inclusion and well-being (*n* = 17), history and values (*n* = 8), and former resident engagement (*n* = 0). However, RCS had almost two times the number of presentations because they held annual conferences, unlike CWI, which held them on an irregular basis during the same period. Both RCS (19%; *n* = 30) and

CWI (27%; *n* = 26) dedicated a considerable number of conference sessions to their top category of the residential college model. RCS's top conference session themes were the residential college model (19%; *n* = 30) and leadership experience (17%; *n* = 27). Notably, RCS did not offer any presentations on former resident engagement, while CWI hosted three presentations related to this topic. This constitutes a similarity between the two conferences, as neither focused extensively on the experience of former residents.

There were also differences between the most frequent presentations at CWI and RCS conferences. It appeared that RCS has had a preference for accepting conference sessions related to leadership experiences (17%; *n* = 27) and collaboration (12%; *n* = 18), while CWI has seemed to favor sessions related to history and values (14%; *n* = 14).

TABLE 4
Descriptive Statistics of Emergent Themes from Conference Session Titles Total

THEME NAME	CWI SESSION COUNT	CWI THEME TOTAL	RCS SESSION COUNT	RCS THEME TOTAL	TOTAL SESSION COUNT
The residential college model	26	10%	30	12%	56
Inclusion and well-being	17	7%	17	7%	34
Leadership experience	6	2%	27	11%	33
Resident experience	13	5%	16	6%	29
Collaboration	4	2%	18	7%	22
Assessment	6	2%	16	6%	22
Academics	6	2%	14	5%	20
History and values	14	5%	8	3%	22
Organizational structure	2	1%	14	5%	16
Former resident engagement	3	1%	0	0%	3
Total	97	38%	160	62%	257

Institutions Engaged with the Professional Associations

Finally, to answer the third and final research question, the unique counts of presenters by their institutional affiliations are presented in Table 5. Note that if a presentation had two or more presenters from the same institution, the presenters' institutional affiliations were counted independently.

From the CWI analysis presented in Table 5, it can be seen that there were 18 unique institutions that presented across the three conferences hosted by the association. The most frequent presenter affiliations were Durham University ($n = 23$), University of Otago ($n = 9$), Rice University ($n = 8$), Trent University ($n = 6$), University of Macau ($n = 4$), and York University ($n = 4$). From the RCS analysis, there were 42 unique institutions that presented across the seven conferences hosted by the association during the study period. The most frequent presenter affiliations were Southern Methodist University ($n = 47$), Baylor University ($n = 34$), Vanderbilt University ($n = 23$), and Virginia Tech ($n = 18$).

Overall, the majority of conference presenter institutional affiliations from CWI were within Western Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia, or the United States. CWI conference attendance seemed to be more diverse and to attract a diverse presenter pool. The conference presenter institutional affiliations from RCS seemed to be predominantly private schools in Texas and the southeastern United States. Three of the four most frequent schools were private universities, with the exception of Virginia Tech.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the thematic content analysis of two professional association conference materials suggest a number of implications for practice and future research. First, we recommend consistency in the number of conference presentations over time to aid in future research and professional development. Next, we discuss the prominent professional development topics and offer insights to advance the field, and, finally, we identify key institutions within the residential college movement and discuss how to improve diversity in the field. We connect our findings and discussion to other discipline-specific conference material content analyses to support our recommendations.

Improving Consistency for Posterity

Notably, RCS had only four sessions in its founding year, 2014, but substantially increased the number of presentations after its first conference. CWI exhibited the opposite pattern. Its founding conference contained more than 20 presentations, but this number steadily decreased throughout its subsequent conferences. This may suggest more of a desire to target professional development topics than to increase the number of offerings. Also, within the United States, it is common to assign professional development funding to individuals who are selected to present at conferences. Thus, the acceptance of higher numbers of conference sessions within the United States might be related to this phenomenon of practice. This implication reflects the findings of Scherer (1985), who compared session topics during two conventions and observed differences between their contents that may be connected to historical events, indicating a need for these historical analyses of conference

TABLE 5

Presenter Count by Institutional Affiliation and Association

ASSOCIATION	INSTITUTION	NUMBER OF PRESENTERS	ASSOCIATION	INSTITUTION	NUMBER OF PRESENTERS
CWI (n = 18)	Durham University	23	RCS (n = 42) (continued)	University of Colorado at Boulder	4
	University of Otago	9		Hanbury Design	3
	Rice University	8		New York University	3
	Trent University	6		Northwestern University	3
	University of Macau	4		Radford University	3
	York University	4		University of Macau	3
	Yale University	3		University of North Carolina Greensboro	3
	Stellenbosch University	2		University of Virginia	3
	University of Cambridge	2		Baylor and Beyond LLC	2
	Universidad de las Americas - Puebla	2		Dartmouth College	2
	Australian National University	1		Murray State University	2
	Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas Architects	1		Oklahoma State University	2
	National University of Singapore	1		Princeton University	2
	New York University - Abu Dhabi	1		Rice University	2
	St. Andrews	1		Skyfactor	2
	University of the Free State	1		Tulane University	2
	University of Virginia	1		University of Southern California	2
	Yale-NUS College - Singapore	1		Biddison Hier, Ltd	1
				Cornell University	1
				Emmanuel College	1
RCS (n = 42)	Southern Methodist University	47		Fairfield University	1
	Baylor University	34		Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas & Co.	1
	Vanderbilt University	23		Impact LLC	1
	Virginia Tech	18		Indiana University of Pennsylvania	1
	Elon University	15		LEED AP	1
	University of South Carolina	15		Marquette University	1
	Appalachian State University	12		The Pennsylvania State University	1
	Michigan State University	8		Syracuse University	1
	Washington University in St. Louis	8		The State University of New Jersey	1
	LEAD LLC	7		University of Miami	1
	Purdue University	4		University of Pennsylvania	1

sessions. Further research should focus on the strategies that associations can utilize to obtain a high number of presenters at their founding conferences and then maintain that number over the years to ensure a consistent experience for conference attendees. Further research should work to help professional association leaders determine the number of program sessions to offer and how many presenters may be expected as a result of the number of offerings, which may provide an estimation of the number of conference attendees.

In addition, one limitation, discussed in more detail below, of the research was inconsistent conference programs between professional associations and from one year to the next. For example, some conference planning committees included abstracts for each program session as well as a broad category or theme into which the program sessions fit, while other conference planning committees did not provide this information and only listed session titles and presenters. This inconsistency negatively affects future historical researchers' abilities to analyze program session content and perform trends analysis. Thus, one recommendation for RCS and CWI—in addition to all professional association conference planning committees—would be that conferences strive for more consistent reporting of sessions in their conference programs. Future researchers will better understand the field's historical context over a given period of time, and conference goers will be aided in their session selection.

Professional Development Themes and Next Steps

Themes that emerged from the analysis of professional development topics are relevant to residential college stakeholders. This analysis revealed that geographic differences have an influence (Barberet, 2007). In the case of CWI and RCS, it appears that leadership experiences and assessment topics are of more interest to RCS's United States audience; only CWI addressed the topic of former resident engagement, which is not surprising since some of the residential college systems in Europe predate those in the United States. This will likely be an area to focus on for both professional associations to attract donors and keep former residents connected to their residential societies.

Secondly, both organizations utilized indirect explanations of the residential college model through campus-specific examples rather than a historical or philosophical discussion of the model. While vivid examples from institutional practice seem to be fruitful for conference attendees based on their numerous offerings, RCS and CWI conference planning committees may be missing an opportunity to create space for robust professional dialogue to frame a shared understanding of the contemporary residential college movement in a philosophical or abstract way. Given the importance of the housing experience on the overall student experience, practitioners should focus on not only securing the *how* of the work but also having a grasp of the *why* (e.g., historical and philo-

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Given the importance of the housing experience on the overall student experience, practitioners should focus on not only securing the how of the work but also having a grasp of the why (e.g., historical and philosophical approach) unique to a residential college model of housing.

sophical approach) unique to a residential college model of housing (La Roche et al., 2010; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Spanierman et al., 2013).

Both professional associations have placed emphasis on the residential college model at their conferences. This emphasis has been expressed via practical rather than scholarly means. The lack of definition or shared elements of a model that such practical emphasis creates should behoove RCS and CWI to develop a joint working group to better articulate and operationalize the residential college movement. Taking it one more step, this joint task force could also identify a research agenda for the reemergent profession (Hairon et al., 2017). The unique living-learning context of residential colleges may also warrant a unique journal or scholarship venue. With the model being of primary concern to both associations, these additional steps for professional practice may prove beneficial to further situate residential colleges within the larger college and university student housing programs.

Identifying the Players and Diversifying Practice

Using the numbers observed in Table 5, multiple conclusions and implications can be drawn. The first of these implications is that CWI and RCS should diversify the number of institutions that speak at their conferences. As can be seen in Table 5, some schools have had as many as 47 speakers, and some have had as few as one. This begs the question: Why do some institutions have so many presenters and others have so few? It could be possible for these organizations to identify

what the institutions with more speakers are considered to have that other institutions do not, what topics the organizations feel are important, or what topics should be prioritized for presentation. This would benefit all of the institutions by creating an understanding of what topics are more likely to be chosen for presentation.

Another conclusion that can be drawn comes from looking at the institutions with the most presenters (Table 5), revealing the main players in the field of the residential college model. This is important because if an institution is a main player in the field, it would make more sense to give them more presentation slots more often because they have more clout as to what should be occurring in this newly developing field. The information in Table 5 is crucial because it can help RCS and CWI identify their own flaws when it comes to the diversity of presenting institutions, which is crucial for the improvement of practice (Kamphoff et al., 2010; Kortegast et al., 2021; Lachowsky et al., 2017). Producing diverse conferences will help ensure that all institution types and situations are represented, making each institution in attendance more comfortable in presenting its own experiences.

LIMITATIONS

While we believe our methodology to be sound, there are two main limitations to this research. First, our team utilized only titles to code the conference program sessions into themes (Cohen & Suen, 2012). This was the result of an inconsistent inclusion of abstracts in the organizations' conferences.

Second, there were differences between the titles of presentations from the United States and those from other countries. These language differences may have inhibited our interpretation of some conference session titles from CWI, as this organization included sessions from both the United States and other countries.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of conference program materials, we sought to determine the values and professional development priorities of two major residential college associations. Overall, conference program sessions focused on 10 key topics presented as emergent themes: former resident engagement, leadership experience, resident experience, collaboration, assessment, the residential college model, history and values, organizational structure, inclusion and well-being, and academics. The most frequent topic was the residential college model, while the least

frequent topic was former resident engagement. Notably, neither CWI nor RCS focused extensively on the experience of former residents, which highlights a possible gap in conference programming. Further, the lack of conference sessions on this topic may indicate a lack of research on former resident engagement. Research development groups should emphasize this topic in future studies. In addition, RCS had higher counts of presentations than CWI did in almost every topic area, as well as a higher count of total presentations. It also appears that RCS has had a more diverse presenter roster overall, as its conferences included 30 presenters from different institutions, while CWI included 23 in the study period. Finally, though these findings reveal valuable trends, we also encourage consistency in the number of presentations and the content of conference programs over time so that further research may also ascertain important insights. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can we learn from analyzing conference programs?
2. This study focused on conferences held by two residential college associations. Of the conferences you attend, what have you noticed regarding program offerings that may align with or differ from the findings of this article?
3. Consider the conferences you attend. Compare and contrast the relative value of the formal program presentations versus the informal conversations with colleagues from the field. What is the relative value of each to your professional development?
4. How do institutional actors at conferences influence the practices of housing units?
5. How might conferences serve as gatekeepers that impede or support the exchange of housing practices?
6. The authors suggest that sponsoring groups develop more consistency in the number and type of program offerings, presentation of conference information, and reporting program proceedings. Discuss how these goals might be realistically realized in an all-volunteer organization.

Discussion questions developed by Kyle Fassett, the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill; Gudrun Nyunt, Northern Illinois University in DeKalb; and Dale Tampke, Texas Woman's University in Denton.