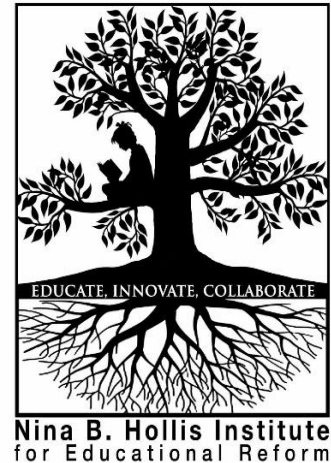


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Innovating Residence Life Experiences for Community Engagement

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Abstract

As higher education becomes more competitive in terms of student recruitment, program delivery models, and student retention, increasing options in housing and residence life has become more critical for institutional sustainability. Traditional institutions with thriving on-campus living programs have made critical enhancements to their housing and residence life departments to enable students to directly connect with peers, faculty, and the community as a whole. This paper describes community living features at Arizona State University, an innovative leader in housing and residence life, which enhance residential life experiences and create opportunities for students to engage with the local and global community. This paper describes four key features of Arizona State University's model, including food access, transportation access, unique customization of housing experiences based on major, and curated majors based on campus and local economy. By engaging with the local and global community, Arizona State University has created a model in their housing and residence life department where students are better prepared for life post-graduation, which can enhance the surrounding community and help to create an economic benefit to the local and global economy.

Keywords

residence life, innovation, residential college model, equity, on-campus living

Arizona State University

Arizona State University (ASU) is one of the largest institutions in the United States, with a Fall 2018 enrollment of 72,709 students (Arizona State University, 2019). Much of ASU's growth has come from a commitment by President Michael Crow's willingness to adapt educational programs to make education more accessible while maintaining high quality in instruction (Faller, 2019). ASU has an 85% acceptance rate, which is higher than the most recently cited national college acceptance rate of 66.1% (Clinedinst & Koranteng, 2017). ASU also draws in a large international population, as well as a large out of state population, primarily from the State of California, where

both public university systems are unable to accommodate many qualified students (Hill, 2017). ASU has also been ranked #1 in innovation by U.S. News & World Report for five years in a row. This has largely been achieved through community partnerships between the Greater Phoenix metro area and ASU. Initiatives such as ProMod (project-based, modular learning), where students can earn general studies credits through collaboration with faculty and peers on real-world projects, and SkySong Innovations, which has issued over 845 patents since 2003, have helped students innovate and learn practical and applied skills while still completing a traditional undergraduate education. The students who perhaps benefit the most from these partnerships are on-campus students, who are able to be immersed in an environment where support is offered to students within their residential community.

Changes in Housing

At ASU, one of the core values of the institution stated in the institutional charter is “assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural, and overall health of the communities it serves” (Arizona State University, n.d. a). In order to accomplish this charge, ASU has strategically connected the housing and residential life experience to enticing community partnerships which have mutual benefit to students and the community at large. The county served at ASU is Maricopa County, the largest county in Arizona, and as of this publication, the fourth largest county in the United States. Maricopa County houses all four of ASU’s campus locations - Tempe, Downtown Phoenix, Polytechnic, and West (Arizona State University, 2018a). The goal of ASU President Michael Crow was to have 100,000 students enrolled by 2020 (Leyson, 2019), and they have steadily increased their enrollment through residential living and the implementation of the residential college model (O’Hara, 2001).

The residential college model creates opportunities for students with shared interests to come together to foster both personal and professional development, while connecting to the local economy in the region where the higher education institution is situated. In Maricopa County, much emphasis has been devoted to connecting the residential life experience to the greater Phoenix metropolitan experience. This mutually beneficial relationship allows students to take advantage of opportunities that exist close to their living spaces, while businesses and nonprofits in the greater Phoenix area benefit from a skilled, ambitious potential workforce living nearby to fill potential jobs.

Four examples of how ASU’s residential college model have connected to the local economy have come from direct accessibility to local food resources, opportunities for off-campus transportation allowing residents to engage with the local community, strategic positioning of both course offerings and majors throughout Maricopa County in-line with the economic demands of the region, and customizable experiences in the residence halls where students can engage in real-life problems of practice in their aspirational fields.

Student Access to Food

Perhaps the most critical resource for the physiological needs of students is food access. Even though students may have better access to food than those not enrolled in higher education, disparities still exist, where students may not have access, or more importantly, not know of the

resources that are available for them to access as a student (El Zein, Mathews, House, & Shelnut, 2018; Gaines, Robb, Knol, & Sickler, 2014; Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, and Arria, 2018). When students do not have adequate access to food, they are impacted by physical and mental health issues and are less likely to succeed academically (Dhillon, Diaz-Rios, Aldaz, De La Cruz, Vu, Asghar, Kuse, & Ortiz, 2019). Residents of ASU's Tempe campus have easy access to two grocery stores, each located at each end of the campus, in addition to retail dining outlets available on campus (*Figure 1*). Residents are notified by their community directors and community assistants of these locations and are encouraged to shop within their residential community with their peers. Accessibility to the local community is critical for students, especially students without personal transportation available on-campus, which is common among both international and out-of-state students. ASU requires first-year residential students to purchase a meal plan in addition to their boarding, as first-year rooms do not contain kitchen facilities. Upper-division residential students on the other hand, are not required to purchase a meal plan, and will occasionally opt out due to lack of meal customization or cost. Therefore, it is important to have nearby options for students to be able to purchase groceries.

In 2013, Walmart opened a college outlet (the second in the country) called "Walmart on Campus" in the Vista del Sol residential community on the Tempe Campus (Shumway, 2013) as part of a pilot program to bring more food options to residential students. The Vista del Sol location was roughly the size of a convenience store, however, it allowed students to grab fresh produce, convenience food, and toiletries walking distance from their apartments. Walmart sold products at the same price as their normal retail outlets, allowing students to shop for essential items on campus within their budgets. Unfortunately, the location closed on June 30th, 2019, and ASU is in the process of strategically partnering with another retailer to potentially fill the location (Toshner, 2019).

In Downtown Phoenix, Fry's Food Store, an Arizona-based grocery retailer, recently opened a downtown supermarket less than a 10-minute walk from campus. Prior to the opening of Fry's, downtown Phoenix had been described as a food desert where students could not obtain produce within a 1-mile radius of campus (LaBerge, 2019). Additionally, Fry's has marketed part-time work to ASU students, and additionally offers tuition assistance for employees. In addition to partnerships with national and regional chains, Arizona State University serves as one of the distribution sites for Borderlands, a non-profit organization whose mission is to reduce food waste. Borderlands hosts Produce on Wheels Without Waste (P.O.W.W.O.W.), an event where ASU students and community members can purchase up to 70 lbs. of fresh produce for \$12 (*Figure 2*). Providing fresh produce at low-cost for students right in their community helps students overcome food insecurity and educates them on the importance of combating food waste. (Arizona State University, 2018b; Stellino, 2019)

At the West and Polytechnic campuses, CVS offers vending machines inside the residence halls stocked with medicine, snacks, and hygiene products (Arizona State University, n.d. b). The placement of these vending machines within the residence halls is significant on the West and Polytechnic campuses, as grocery and convenience stores are not walking distance for students who are unable to drive or do not have cars on campus.

These are just a selection of the partnerships Arizona State University engages in to make Maricopa County a livable environment for students where they are able to easily obtain resources for both their academic success and to support their physiological needs.

Student Access to Transportation

The City of Tempe's transportation division is working to redesign the city to make it easier for those without cars to live and work in the city. Within Tempe, students can utilize public transportation through the light rail system or by bus to navigate Maricopa County. Beginning in early 2021, a streetcar system will connect Downtown Tempe to ASU's Tempe campus (Onodera, 2019) (*Figure 3*). Although the Tempe campus is within walking distance of downtown, transportation is critical, especially in summer months, where temperatures can reach 120F.

Tempe's transportation division has also created traffic calming and streetscaping projects at 11 sites throughout the city to make bicycling a safer option for residents and students to navigate the city. Many ASU students opt to use bicycles or electric scooters to navigate around the city, providing safe spaces for students to travel between ASU and the community. Additionally, beginning in Fall 2020, Tempe will serve as the site of the first car-free neighborhood in the United States (Richardson, 2019). This indicates that future growth and infrastructure will continue to promote public transportation.

The light rail is also conducive to community engagement. In addition to transportation options within Tempe, there are also two light rail stops on ASU's Tempe campus that connects ASU Tempe westbound to Downtown Phoenix (including ASU's Downtown Campus) and Downtown Mesa. The collaboration between the City of Tempe and Arizona State University to maintain sustainable growth and create opportunities for students to explore their community has benefitted students who would otherwise be unable to take advantage of urban benefits.

Curated Majors Based on Campus and the Local Economy

The four campuses of ASU are located across Maricopa County and are connected by a free shuttle service for students who can choose to take classes at any location they desire. Each campus has unique offerings for colleges and majors and offer full services for students – serving not as a satellite campus, but a fully functioning standalone campus. President Michael Crow describes this vision by stating, “And so we pledged to build what we call one university in many places. A university that is connected, engaged and working with leaders around Arizona and in the Valley in a way in which we could build a responsive and adaptive university” (Arizona State University, 2020). This is critical for the success of ASU, as transportation and access bridges the gap between the University and surrounding community for residential students.

As of Fall 2018, ASU's Tempe campus was the largest ASU campus. Established in 1885, the Tempe campus provides a large university setting for a wide variety of colleges and majors including the W.P. Carey School of Business, College of Health Solutions, Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, The College of Liberal Arts, and the School of Sustainability. The Tempe

campus is also home to the Sun Devil Stadium, where the ASU Sun Devil football team plays home games.

For further expansion, ASU created the West campus, which was designed to feel like a small liberal arts college in contrast to the large, traditional college campus setting. The West campus includes the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, and the College of Integrative Arts and Sciences. The West campus is the only ASU campus to operate in Maricopa County's West Valley, where there are more lower income residents. ASU's West campus prides itself on community outreach, supplying adult education programs to local community residents.

Originally known as ASU East, the Polytechnic campus (established in 1996, renamed in 2008), is located 25 miles from the Tempe campus. The Polytechnic campus has evolved into a standalone STEM-based campus, and includes the W.P. Carey School of Business, Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, and the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. The location of the campus is the former Williams Air Force Base, where homes that were formerly a part of the base still remain. Advanced laboratory spaces, facilities for digital manufacturing, and flight simulators are provided for students, which would be difficult to accommodate on the Tempe campus.

The Downtown Phoenix campus, established in 2006 as a partnership between ASU and the City of Phoenix, includes the College of Health Solutions, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, and the Thunderbird School of Global Management. The downtown campus living experience is the campus location most closely connected to community needs, and allows students to live and study close to the field they aspire to work in upon graduation. Downtown Phoenix is home to Arizona PBS, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and also serves as Arizona's capital city. Being integrated in the surrounding downtown community makes it easier for students to find jobs and internships in their field, and eliminates transportation barriers for students to engage in these experiences. Additional residence options are currently being built downtown to accommodate additional students (Yahoo Finance, 2020), representing the commitment to future growth.

Because of ASU's strategic placement of its programs across their four campuses, each part of the county gets a direct economic connection to an emerging skilled workforce. Additionally, students can incorporate internship experiences and job opportunities as part of their university experience. The diversity in campus experiences between the four campuses also allows some students to be able to choose which type of campus experience they would like: urban, suburban, polytechnic, or liberal arts, should their major be offered on multiple campuses. Because the State of Arizona is home to only three public universities, the variety of campus experiences offered at ASU helps students obtain an education within Arizona that is the best fit for them.

Customizable Residence Life Experiences

At ASU, students are housed by college. This practice is referred to as the "residential college experience" (Jessup-Anger, 2012). The purpose is to help students network with their peers and become immersed in an environment centered around their academic interests to help students

persist to graduation. Although this phenomenon is not new, and has become commonplace in many large public universities, ASU utilizes this approach to provide a liberal arts feel at the largest institute in the country.

Many of the residence halls contain features that enhance the residents academic experience by bringing learning into the halls. School of Sustainability students at ASU's Tempe campus live in Adelphi Commons, where a community garden is a central component of the community. Students work together to grow produce in the garden, which creates a community building experience in addition to a learning experience (Murtagh, 2019).

Ira A. Fulton School of Engineering students on ASU's Tempe campus live in Tooker House, a seven-story residence hall designed for engineering majors with exposed infrastructure so students can see the electrical, plumbing, and other systems within the building. Within Tooker House, students can study in digital classrooms, use 3D printers, and enjoy the benefits of Bluetooth-enabled laundry rooms. Costing \$120 million and opening in Fall 2017, Tooker House aspired to be a national leader in STEM resident hall concepts, leading Daniel Ocampo, adviser to the National Association of College and University Residence Halls, to note that no facility was quite like the facility established at ASU (Bauer-Wolf, 2017). Upon opening, every student living in Tooker House was issued their own Amazon Echo Dot device (Lynn, 2018). Students were encouraged to incorporate the device into their studies and program their own commands into the device.

The residential college experience also allows for the colleges to create peer mentoring programs in first-year residence halls. Each college runs different peer mentorship programs in their designated residence hall to specifically for their students. In the Arcadia residential community, Creative Fellows are upper-division students who serve as peer mentors to first-year students in the Herberger Institute for the Arts. Creative Fellows host programming in collaboration with the Herberger Institute and University Housing to promote the arts and artistically develop students in the community. Peer Mentors are also present in the Ira A. Fulton School of Engineering, where they create educational programming and serve as academic and personal mentors. Peer Mentors utilize the features of the residence halls, such as study areas, lounges, or outdoor spaces, to host events in the community (*Figure 4*).

Customizing the residential experience by academic college creates a built-in support network for students who have easier access to their faculty members and peers who serve as role models and mentors. This is especially important for first-generation students who begin their college experience with less cultural capital to navigate the nuances of higher education.

Implications

As Arizona State University is among the largest institutions in the United States, adaptation of these practices at other institution types will appear different. Although factors such as geographic placement and potential community partners are fixed, other modifications can be made to these ideas to incorporate practices such as the residential college model.

One similar institution that has adopted some of these ideas is the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando. At UCF, a downtown campus is being constructed that will include programs that compliment a downtown environment, such as digital media, communication, public service, and health-related programs (University of Central Florida, n.d.) similar to ASU's presence in downtown Phoenix. The presence of UCF's downtown Orlando campus also opens opportunities for businesses and nonprofits similar to ones in Phoenix to form partnerships with UCF and boost the economy. UCF has also partnered with Valencia College, a comprehensive 2-year institution, to create a seamless transition between institutions and share resources such as student housing to better support students.

Options and opportunities for customizable living experiences may only be prevalent in larger, comprehensive institutions. However, certain programs can be easily applied to smaller institutions. The idea of providing food banks within residence halls is something that requires collaboration between residence hall staff and community partners. Additionally, as most private institutions rely on grants and funding from philanthropic entities and businesses, further exploration of private partnerships can only succeed in growing innovative residential life experiences. The one challenge that may not have a solution in rural or smaller higher education institutions is transportation to local cities. This is concern both for cost and liability that institutions must assess whether or not to invest in those options for their students.

Challenges

With the adoption of innovative features, there can be challenges. One of the most significant challenges is the cost associated with these premium features. As the residential college model is a newer approach to residential life, new buildings must be constructed (or old ones must be renovated or retrofitted) to create an environment conducive to the curriculum. However, this can exclude students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are unable to afford the cost of living on campus. The cost of living in each residence hall also varies, and placement in residence halls is determined by major, causing students in certain colleges to pay more for their housing. Ideally, institutions adopting a residential college model will be able to offer housing at the same price across all residence halls so students are not deterred from choosing to live on campus (or choosing certain majors) due to cost, which can drive up the amount of loan money taken out by students.

Another potential challenge is whether or not students understand the increased expenses associated with customizable, premium residential experiences. As student debt continues to increase in the United States, allowing for a customizable "a la carte" residence experience may lead to students selecting options that are out of their means, crippling them with student debt for a significant time in the future.

Conclusion

We are past the point in United States Higher Education where just living on campus and experiencing the resources and amenities available on campus is enough for students. More strides in housing and residence life need to be made to create opportunities for students to be a part of the global community in the city that houses large, Tier I institutions. Arizona State University has

become one the leaders in the United States for innovation; and a large part of their success has been community partnerships that undergraduate students can utilize to connect them to the greater community. Living on campus affords students easier access to nearby community resources, and ASU intentionally creates residential environments to more easily connect students to these resources.

Other large size higher education institutions have a moral and ethical responsibility to connect and create opportunities with the community as a whole. Astute higher education institutions will take the time to understand the demography of their local community and cater opportunities for majors, provide positive community experiences, and offer access to community resources. Ultimately, this will create opportunities for graduates to invest in the local economy and make a seamless transition into the workforce.

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Appendix A



Figure 1. The plaza at the Vista Del Sol apartment complex on ASU Tempe's campus, featuring on-campus dining outlets for students including Domino's, Fatburger, and Zoyo Frozen Yogurt.



Figure 2. The “Gold Dome” on ASU’s Tempe campus provides community space for students and community members to host events. Borderland’s produce rescue event is held at this space, providing easy access to both ASU students and community members to attend the event.



Figure 3. Construction on the Tempe streetcar project outside of the Vista Del Sol apartment complex on the ASU Tempe campus. In the background, the site of the former Walmart on Campus.



Figure 4. ASU's residence halls feature amenities such as pools and lounge areas for students to use during their free time. These common area spaces are also used by Peer Mentors and other student leaders to host events for residents in the community.