Executive Summary
Residential Life Program Review

Purpose of Study
As institutions face new challenges, they often require faculty and staff members to implement their educational responsibilities in new and different ways. Approaches and strategies that were previously successful often need to be amended as institutions and programs evolve and student populations and characteristics change. To ensure Residential Life is meeting the demands of today’s students, a comprehensive review of the unit’s programs and services was conducted during the spring semester 2011. This continuous improvement study was intended to identify current strengths of the department’s services as well as areas in need of improvement.

Structure
Four teams were organized to conduct the review of Residential Life. Each team was comprised of a Student Affairs leader and members who represented residential life, students, faculty, and areas of the University of San Diego related to the set of Standards assigned to the team. In addition, each team contributed to the Assessment And Evaluation standard. The review addressed 12 areas of Residential Life; a summary of the findings for each is presented below.
Mission

Strengths

The sub-committee believes that the Residential Life mission demonstrates that the Standard is FULLY MET for:

- Regularly reviewed (yearly)
- Focus on student learning and development
- Functions as an integral part of USD’s overall mission
- Alignment with USD’s overall mission

Opportunities for Improvement

The sub-committee looks forward to enhancement of the Living Learning Communities and believes this will improve community development and learning, with an emphasis on academic success.

Program

Strengths

The sub-committee believes that the Residential Life program demonstrates that the Standard is FULLY MET for:

- The program has identified student learning and development outcomes for First Year Students
- Staff members provide orientation and community expectations to residents
- Staff members provide information of safety procedures

Opportunities for Improvement

The sub-committee thought it would be appropriate to continue to develop and/or further explore:

- The development of learning outcomes for Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors and graduate students.
- Methods to enhance meaningful interactions with faculty members
- Appropriate and manageable ways to support the university’s strategic initiatives
**Diversity**

**Strengths**

The sub-committee rated diversity MINIMALLY MET because:

- Residential Life contributes to creating an awareness of diversity; for example, RAs and RHA councils hold events to promote dialogue around the topic of diversity.

- Trainings for staff occur regularly (i.e. summer reading program, seminar class, Rainbow Educators trainings, Student Wellness trainings and consultations).

- Roommate agreements allow for conversations regarding individual differences

**Opportunities for Improvement**

The sub-committee believes that it would be helpful for Residential Life to explore:

- The role Residential Life should play, within the larger university community regarding promoting open communication, reflection, and deeper understandings.

- How to increase the evidence that diversity dimensions are considered when establishing and implementing policies and procedures.

**Leadership**

**Strengths**

The sub-committee felt that most criteria in this standard were WELL MET. Some highlights include:

- Leaders have appropriate degrees and experience for their positions.

- Leadership provides a clear vision, mission and goals.

- Residential life staff work successfully with many university departments and staff members.

- Processes and procedures are timely and purposeful.

- Revenue generation contributes to other campus areas.

- Staff and program assessment is regular and on-going and efforts toward improvement regularly occur.
Opportunities for Improvement

The sub-committee felt there were three areas to review:

- Authority for decisions may be at levels higher than necessary or at levels inconsistent with peer institutions.
- Facilities/custodial processes and cost effectiveness when managed centrally.
- Human resource management – particularly since a restructure was completed – risk for burn out (including the level of administrative support of duty).

The sub-committee recommends the following:

- There is concern about the new building on the property across the street and the implications it may have for occupancy. Implications for Residential Life need to be determined and responded to.
- Use the CAS study to inform the strategic plans already established and future processes (the sub-committee assumes this will happen).

Organization and Management

Strengths

The sub-committee found that this Standard was WELL MET due to the following:

- The vision, goals and expectations of the department were clear.
- The staff is dedicated to those vision, goals, and expectations.
- Formal, regular meetings; a timeline/calendar; performance evaluation process, and written formal procedures all existed and were regularly implemented.

Opportunities for Improvement

The sub-committee recommends the following:

- Add Mission/Vision document to Residential Life website with the left hand links.
- Maintain Central office Policies and Procedures in one document (such as the RA manual) versus multiple documents.
- Review/Create clear channels of authority for policies and procedures with residential life and other areas.
The sub-committee recommends the following:

- Determine implications for Residential Life regarding the new building on the property across the street and the implications it may have for occupancy and respond to them.
- Use the CAS study to inform the strategic plans already established and future processes (the sub-committee assumes this will happen).

**Human Resources**

**Strengths**

The sub-committee thought that Residential Life, Student Affairs and Human Resources processes demonstrate that the Standard is WELL MET in these areas:

- Hiring/Selection (Human Resources, Student Affairs and Residential Life polices and procedures are followed.)
- Training (training occurs annually and on-going)
- Supervision (supervision includes regular meetings.)
- Evaluation (completed annually).

**Opportunities for Improvement**

The sub-committee thought it would be appropriate to look into:

- Benchmark expectations for duty coverage of Assistant Dean and Director of Residential Life duty (including the types of calls received) with other universities.
- The day-to-day responsibilities and the time of all staff around crisis management.
- Management of maintenance and upkeep.
- Have Human Resources review compensation levels for Residence Life personnel..

**Ethics**

**Strengths**

The sub-committee found that the Standard was WELL MET because of the following:

- RA standards are published on the and reviewed every year
- Full time professional staff training; Duty to Care emphasized
• Orientation for new benefits-based employees  
• USD Harassment Prevention Training  
• Centralized coordinator for assessment and IRB processes (Margaret)  
• Residential Agreement includes clear community standards which everyone signs (including live-in staff and their live-in families)  
• USD has a clear Conflict of Interest Policy that is followed.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

The sub-committee felt that it would be helpful for all Residential Life Staff to complete the following training:

• FERPA Tutorial  
• Cleary Training

The sub-committee felt that it would be helpful for all full time staff to participate in:

• Oracle Bootcamp/ Noetix Training/Auditing SA policies

Although one criterion was not rated, the sub-committee felt is it was likely met, though it was difficult to identify evidence.

**Financial Resources**

**Strengths**

The sub-committee found most of the criteria for this standard WELL MET because the funding model for Residenial Life, is a self-supporting auxiliary and able to meet most financial obligations. It also contributes much revenue to the university general fund. The committee noted some specific criteria (numbered below).

**6.6 Funding includes adequate reserves for essential repairs, replacements and capital improvements.**

Residential Life does a good job of identifying and funding needs within the 1-5 year period. Funding for day-to-day operations are adequate and overall the unit is well run and managed in accordance with institutional fiscal standards.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

The Sightlines reports indicated a significant need for funding to renovate older residence halls.
Typically donors want to fund new construction not repairs; as such RL and USD must rely more heavily upon internal funding for these projects.

**Recommendation:** Improve funding program for major building renovations perhaps thru recapture of Residence Life - generated funds into a reserve expressly for this purpose.

6.8 **Purchasing procedures are consistent and cost effective.**

Not Rated: Opinion varied widely amongst panel members regarding what constitutes consistent and cost effective. The team was undecided and chose not to rate this element.

**Recommendation:** Residence Life may want to consider giving greater definition to its purchasing practices.

**Facilities, Technology and Equipment**

**Strengths**

Overall, the sub-committee found that in most areas, the needs of students and student programs are FULLY MET. They noted:

- Program facilities, technology and equipment are evaluated regularly.
- Facilities accommodate programs goals and meet student needs for safety and security.
- We found that students had a very high opinion of USD facilities and felt that overall they were receiving good value

7.5 **Spaces are provided for study, office functions, lounging, recreation and group meetings.**

- Certain older facilities, including Maher, Camino and Founders, have very limited areas for group functions. The assumption might be that this would significantly lower the rating for this measure. However, our student members rated this area as well met and the recent resident satisfaction survey also supports a high rating in this area.

7.13 **Grounds are attractively maintained and safe.**

- This is an area rated very high by all panel members and a major reason why students parents and visitors choose USD

7.14 **Access control to buildings is addressed and provides safety to residents.**

- While students expressed some frustration with the system such as card-reader problems, restricted access to certain residence halls at hours/times of the day they note that the added security and sense of feeling safe outweighed other concerns.
This area was considered to be a significant factor in student retention.

7.7 Facilities are accessible, clean, attractive, reasonably priced, properly designed, well-maintained, comfortable and conducive to study, and have safety and security features.

- The sub-committee rated all of these categories fully met, except reasonably priced.

Opportunities for Improvement

- In areas of recreation, students would like to have scheduling access to know when outdoor recreation areas are scheduled. They report having difficulty finding space for pick-up games and having to leave fields when sports teams or other organized activity are scheduled.

**Recommendation:** During master planning, place a high priority on space for student outdoor activity.

- Develop student access to view facilities scheduling.

- Technology: Wireless connectivity, speed issues, more computers in the valley and high def cabling.

The team had extensive discussions and the overall rating provided by residence life indicates some levels of dissatisfaction; in several instances the service provider was not made aware of the problems.

This was also true for contracted laundry services.

**Recommendation:** Work with students to determine course of action and ways to improve feedback to service providers.

Opportunities for Improvement

7.16 A master plan for maintaining and renovating all facilities exists.

Panel ratings were impacted by the fact that the university does not have a current master plan. Therefore, effective Residence Life master planning would be impractical.

**Recommendation:** Residence Life may want to consider inviting key participants, including students, to participate in a visioning exercise concern the future of Residence Life communities on our campus.

Our panel members expressed interest in contributing to the planning process for future Residence Life facilities. This exercise may serve to augment the campus master plan that is currently being development.
Legal Responsibilities

Strengths

Overall rating by the team: WELL MET

- Clear and open communication with university officials, especially Counsel, about legal issues – including periodic meetings to discuss legal changes/updates.
- Senior staff demonstrate ample prudence and caution and integrate prudence and caution into procedures (especially the RA’s responsibilities)
- Residence Life strives to communicate as clearly as possible with users (i.e., students and families). An example was the housing contract, which is available in multiple locations on-line.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Hold regular (i.e., once per semester) meetings with University Counsel to discuss legal obligations and pending reforms.
- Ensure that Counsel continue to review housing contract (and other legally binding documents) on an annual basis
- Ensure that all employees receive FERPA training on an annual basis, including clarity on what it covers
- While staff is informed, it is unclear if students are systematically informed of pending legal reforms, responsibilities, or obligations.

Equity and Access

Strengths

Overall rating by the team: WELL MET

- The staff strive to provide all services and programs on a fair and equitable basis, often going above and beyond to provide outstanding customer service and care.
- Students with special needs receive exquisite attention (e.g., Muslim students were relocated to San Buen and dining provides special foods such as Kosher or gluten free to those with special needs).
- Program has established protocols for appeals (i.e., housing contract) from students who don’t feel treated fairly.
• All facilities and programs are not accessible to every prospective user; however, across the system, there are equitable facilities and programs accessible.

Opportunities for Growth

• Issues may emerge regarding students who do not receive special treatment for their special needs. How should the program decide which special needs receive special accommodations?

• When accommodations are made for special needs, are students potentially faced with increased housing costs?

• Review issues regarding the visitation policy, especially in light of sexual orientation and gender identity.

• The criterion regarding distant learners was not rated

Campus and External Relations

Strengths

Overall rating by the team: MET

• Very good on-campus partnerships with units across campus, and a proactive effort to foster those partnerships.

• Regular gatherings / meetings with those units.

• Senior staff demonstrated strategic approach to building partnerships.

Opportunities for Improvement

• Clarify (likely with Auxiliary Services) which area is responsible for reaching out to specific off-campus units (such as food vendors).

• Strengthen relationship with Associated Students and Student Life

• Senior staff is, at times, overwhelmed and over-stretched. Devise alternative strategies of managing human resources, especially when staff members are managing serious crises.

• Consider additional staff resources devoted exclusively to educational initiatives in the residence halls, so that educational efforts do not have to compete for resources with crises.
Monitor and benchmark how much responsibility RAs are asked to assume, especially the amount of difficult or intense student issues.