

Inside OU's Residential Colleges

As a Rhodes Scholar, David Boren experienced the close-knit academic community of Oxford's residential halls. Now OU students can do the same.

BY MICHAEL WASHINGTON

The Residential Colleges are the University of Oklahoma's newest upperclassmen residence halls. Both Headington and Dunham Colleges were designed to foster community, scholarship and interaction among their students, much like the residential colleges at Oxford or Cambridge.

As a sophomore, I became a part of Headington College's inaugural class, which was a little like building a plane in flight. Everything, from the dining halls to maker spaces and gathering spots, had been carefully designed and beautifully appointed. But, it was up to us to create the community. As president of Headington College, I got to witness this first-hand and was astonished by the remarkable experiences that residents have on a daily basis.

Students gather like family in the dining hall for meals and conversation. While many residents rush off to class after breakfast, dinner is more leisurely. We often congregate in the living room where one of our many talented residents might offer an impromptu piano concert. As some students peel away to tackle that night's homework, others shuffle into the game room for a quick round of cards or game of pool. In the evenings, the colleges often host guest speakers brought in by our Faculty Fellows, many by student request.

The colleges strive to provide events for every kind of student who calls Headington or Dunham home. As Headington's president my mission for this year has been to cultivate a community that fosters the identity of family and future. But first, some background.

Each of the five floors in Headington College is staffed with one Resident Mentor (RM) and one Graduate Tutor (GT), the first three floors are co-ed, the fourth floor is all male and the fifth floor is all female. As well, each floor is

governed by a chair and vice chair that were elected at the beginning of the year. Two outstanding faculty members, political science professor Keith Gaddie and chemistry professor Michael Morvant, live full-time in Headington and Dunham, respectively, as Senior Fellows. The Senior Fellows host weekly teas at which guests of the college from inside and outside the university community discuss a wide range of topics and engage in Q&As, followed by informal socializing.

Headington is comprised of more than 270 fellows from the

United States and around the world, therefore we are home to many cultures and personalities. In the first eight months, the college has offered more than 80 events customized to the growth of our students academically, socially and culturally.

As part of this customized experience, Headington elected a six-member College Council that focuses on creating student fellowship, volunteer experiences and educational opportunities for all students in the college.

The college is an entirely self-governed entity; we have created a constitution that explains the ideals

that are to be exemplified by the residents. Also, each floor has its own constitution that sets them apart from the rest of the college.

My choice to run for president was influenced by the desire to work with senior leadership and students to create the most amazing, one-of-a-kind home. With the colleges providing an upperclassman living community we have students from undergraduates to Ph.D. candidates. Therefore, creating a community that is an accurate representation of all students has been a monumental task.

One of the best ways we found to accomplish this is to provide ample opportunities for residents to engage in informal social gatherings. For example, we often have late-night "snack attacks" where students can get together over a bowl of ice cream and cookies. The colleges are also equipped with a



OU's residential colleges ushered in a new era of fostering community, scholarship and student-faculty interaction. Residents come from 38 different states and 37 countries.



Travis Caperton

Being a member of Headington College’s inaugural class was “a little like building a plane in flight,” says OU sophomore Michael Washington. “It was up to us to create the community.”

Creative Commons that houses a 3-D printer, small shop tools and computers with state-of-the-art processing systems for group projects or spontaneous collaboration. The friendships that the community has cultivated are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. I, for one, have met my two best friends here.

Faculty Fellows contribute to the community spirit in a number of ways. Often you can find them having lunch in the dining hall with students or teaching for-credit seminars in our classrooms. The Fellows have also created a film society and a gardening club.

Both Headington and Dunham provide opportunities that allow their residents to challenge their mind, body and spirit. The colleges are rich with students who have hearts full of passion and love for the community and people close to them. Students commit hundreds of hours a year to giving back to the community through volunteer efforts like the Big Event and Soonerthon. This past April, Headington assembled a group to help with meal preparation at the Oklahoma Food Bank, to provide meals for free- and reduced-lunch students who would

miss meals during a public school teacher walkout.

Headington College has also created an academic curriculum called, “The Three Es” for Engagement, Enrichment and Excellence. As the fellows participate in the community and partake in academics they receive credit toward the Three Es curriculum. Upon completion of the curriculum students will graduate with a distinct honor from Headington College.

President David Boren’s vision for the colleges was to create a home that would enrich both the academic and social success of OU students. While we are undoubtedly young, that has not slowed the progress of building such a community. Our students are full of new ideas and constantly look for opportunities to grow. After our first year of building the plane in flight, it is our hope that each new class of residents will take the bonds of tradition, service and friendship to new and greater heights.



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