

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RESPONSE
Program Review
Student Housing and Residential Education

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
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CAMPUS VISIT:
November 16-18, 2015

The review team read the self-study provided by the department; reviewed the completed CAS Standards or those developed by the appropriate professional association in the field; reviewed benchmarking data and/or a comparison of best practices; interviewed students, faculty and staff; and met with the Interim Vice Provost for Student Life, professional, graduate and student housing staff members, and faculty affiliated with living learning communities. In addition, the team met with SHaRE colleagues in Student Life, Human Resources, Business and Finance, Facilities, Strategic Enrollment Management, and One Stop. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, and University Life's Commitment Statement along with the most recent divisional strategic goals and other university materials.

- 1. How did the external review committee rate the overall quality of the department- excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the department compare with well established/recognized programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.**

The reviewers felt that the department was performing adequately. Necessary elements of a housing program are all in place and there is adequate housing for all required students on campus. There is a burgeoning residential curriculum for the department that is in keeping with trends and best practices for housing operations across campus. The department utilizes StarRez, a quality housing database, for its occupancy management.

However, the reviewers felt that the department is functioning at suboptimal levels resulting in lowered staff morale, poor customer service, and dissatisfaction by students. There is an identified need for stronger leadership, better strategic planning, and more communication and cross-training within the department and with campus partners/colleagues.

Response:

Since the report was written in November, 2015, a departmental restructure was done, adding new support for central operations and filling previously vacant positions. Key to this restructure was the launch of a search for a Senior Director of SHaRE that will have more experience in occupancy management and strategic planning. Additional cross-training for all staff regarding StarRez and occupancy management was scheduled for summer 2016. An "umbrella" group consisting of staff from Admission, One Stop,

Institutional Planning and SHaRE has been created to better project and respond to housing needs.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

Reviewers suggested focusing improvements on four main areas:

- Planning, structure and visionary leadership
- Operations, procedures, and customer service
- Occupancy management and StarRez
- Employment and staff culture

Response:

The department was not surprised by most of the findings of the reviewers. There was an awareness of understaffing and inadequate customer service. Errors in occupancy planning coupled with a lack of shared data with enrollment management had resulted in low occupancy and below target revenue for Fall 2015. Low morale had been an issue for some time, although the department was surprised by a “culture of fear” that was expressed by some staff members.

While the reviewers noted that there had been many improvements in the use and functionality of StarRez by the department, they also expressed concern that the work was being done in isolation by one staff member and there was little lateral transfer of this knowledge to other SHaRE colleagues or collaborative departments.

More detailed responses to each individual issue can be found later in this summary.

3. What specific recommendations for improving the department’s quality has the external review committee made to the supervisor?

Planning, structure and visionary leadership:

- Leadership should articulate and enact a clear vision for SHaRE.
- Develop a data-informed strategic plan for the Department that allows for collaboration with other campus partners.
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each staff member within SHaRE.

Operations, procedures, and customer service:

- Adjust when operational and programmatic activities occur to level workload across the academic year.
- Develop a Resident Handbook that explains community and policy information.
- Create feedback venues for residents/student staff.
- Create manuals and annual reports for transfer of information for all positions.
- Refocus on customer service and achieve 24 - 48 hour response times to inquiries.

Occupancy management and StarRez:

- Hire 2 F/T staff to ensure accurate, accountable, assignments and billing.
- Improve communication and planning with campus partners about occupancy.

- Re-evaluate room rates and fees for different types of housing and different terms.
- Increase summer housing for additional revenue.
- Re-evaluate Gender Inclusive allotment, process and educational components.
- Cross-train all staff in StarRez and establish a plan for annual ongoing training.
- Include ITS in strategic planning around use of StarRez and other technologies.

Employment and staff culture:

- Restructure department and fill vacant positions.
- The Director should meet regularly with all levels of staff.
- Allow staff opportunities for feedback without fear of retaliation.
- Develop a more transparent RA hiring process.
- Enhance staff evaluation process by incorporating peer and resident feedback.
- Utilize more staff meeting time to focus on core operational information sharing.

Response:

We have broken down our response into each recommendation area.

Planning, structure and visionary leadership:

The department has begun a restructure. The current Director was repositioned to focus solely on residential education and student experience. A new Senior Director is being recruited who can provide greater vision to occupancy and revenue planning and focus on building collaborations across campus. This position will be tasked with creating and building that plan when they are hired (estimated Fall 2016). Other position descriptions were reviewed and graduate positions were reallocated so some would focus on residential education and others solely on desk operations.

Operations, procedures, and customer service:

A resident handbook does exist as part of the Fogcutter. As a department, we can focus on other ways to get this information out to students.

There are various venues for students and student staff to provide feedback about their experience. For RAs, there are regular town halls, optional surveys that allow for anonymous feedback, as well as opportunities to give feedback on their supervisor and other central staff members. However, they are rarely utilized, potentially due to this fear of repercussion. Staff and leadership will need to build community and trust in the team to eliminate the reported culture of fear or retaliation for sharing ideas.

Residential education staff have begun the creation of manuals in the form of a Google Drive and have implemented annual reports for RDs and ARDs for the last two years. This process will continue and the operational staff will begin to create and share operational knowledge through these tools as well.

All staff are committed to quality customer service and with new employees and the filling of vacancies, we are hopeful that over time, responsiveness to student inquiries will improve. The future Senior Director will also need to make this a priority and as part

of strategic planning, consider how to balance the highs and lows of the academic cycle so that staff are not overwhelmed and are always primed to respond quickly.

Occupancy management and StarRez:

A new Asst. Director of Occupancy and Data Systems has been hired as has the first of two Assignments Coordinators. A Manager of Service Operations has been hired to support front desk and summer operations. Regular meetings have been set with campus colleagues to improve communication regarding assignments and billing.

Gender inclusive housing was revised for Fall 2016 based on feedback and observations from the pilot year. The new Senior Director will need to continue to look at this program as part of larger planning related to occupancy and revenue.

A summer StarRez training was scheduled for all housing staff in Summer 2016 and the new Asst. Director of Occupancy and Data Systems will create an annual training plan for all staff and end-users of StarRez. Improvements and adjustments to StarRez will be made in collaboration with ITS.

Employment and staff culture:

The department was restructured as described above. Remaining vacant positions should be filled by the end of Fall 2016.

The RA hiring process was completely overhauled in spring 2016 and staff felt more trust in the process. The department will continue to improve that process and tie it to enhanced evaluation processes that will better inform rehire decisions.

Building trust and a strong team takes time. All staff members are devoted to their positions and once vacant positions including the Senior Director are filled, the department will engage in transparent team building activities that will ultimately benefit all aspects of the departmental operations.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the department advancing the University's strategic initiatives and the divisional goals and commitments in the programs and services it offers?

The reviewers felt that the foundational elements of the residential curriculum were very much in line with the University's mission and values as well as divisional goals. Educational programming and collaborations with CASA, CAPS and University ministry are in keeping with providing the experience that USF promises its students.

There is a large disconnect in terms of strategic planning for the growth of the University and how housing plays a role in this. There was no long-term occupancy planning by the department that would support enrollment growth. The department has not adequately adapted to the changing San Francisco housing market. It is challenging for students to find off-campus housing and without additional housing options or support for students, retention may continue to be impacted.

Response:

The department is utilizing the summer of 2016 to review recent student satisfaction data and other assessments of the residential curriculum to refine and plan for the 2016-2017 academic year. The curriculum will continue to be rolled out with new adaptations.

The Interim Vice Provost created a cross-divisional umbrella group of staff to better plan for fall occupancy and because enrollment numbers are high for 2016, reaching occupancy goals will not be an issue. Additionally, adaptations were made to occupancy plans, particularly for space allocated to gender neutral housing, to allow for more adaptability in the housing plan. Earlier assignments and communications to new and returning students were implemented in summer 2016. The Interim VP is also working with Business and Finance to identify additional housing options in SF and working with the Project Management office on the construction of a 500 bed residence hall for Fall 2019.

When the reviewers visited, a Manager of Off-Campus housing support services had recently been hired. The department will continue to provide support and resources to this critical area so that students have more support navigating off-campus housing. Additionally, the department will focus on clear communication and transparency regarding the SF housing market with prospective and continuing students, as well as colleagues in other departments. This should assist in retention of the student body.

5. Is the department in compliance with professionally accepted standards? What best practices have been adopted and implemented?

The reviewers did not mention any compliance concerns. The department was pleased to hear that the reviewers noted the implementation of a residential curriculum as a best practice. The curriculum was on track for a pilot program and the department appreciates the recommendations for improvement provided by the reviewers.

Response:

The department will continue to refine the curriculum based on what was learned in the first year. In the second year, the department will focus on ensuring that all departmental colleagues understand aspects of the curriculum and continue to communicate with campus partners regarding opportunities for collaboration.

Staffing has been adapted in support of this best practice. Front desk and operation services have been pulled from the oversight of the Residence Directors so they can focus on the curriculum and community needs of their halls. Larger buildings will have graduate interns focused solely on assisting the Residence Director in curricular implementation and community development. The live-in staff will continue to assess their efforts and explore non-programmatic ways of delivering the curriculum to the students. An analysis of living learning communities will be done with an eye toward expanding these opportunities in the future.

6. Does the department have adequate space, personnel and budget to carry out its programs and services?

The department appears to have adequate space and budget for operations and services. In-hall staff are definitely adequate, but the reviewers felt that central operations needed more support as the same staffing pattern had been in place despite an increase in the residential student population.

Response:

The department has added 2 FTE positions. A Manager of Service Operations position created and will oversee all front desk operations for all residence halls with the support of three graduate interns who were reallocated from the residential education area of SHaRE. Additionally, a second Assignments Coordinator position has been added and posted. It should be filled by early Fall 2016. Both Assignment Coordinators report to the Assistant Director of Occupancy and Data Systems. The addition of these positions and associated restructure should clear up reported miscommunications and improve response times to student inquiries.

7. Has the department identified appropriate learning outcomes and implemented assessment strategies to measure progress in this area?

The department has typically assessed themselves using the EBI survey every other year. This data is reviewed and action plans are created. Data from this assessment was one of the reasons the department moved forward with a residential curriculum and sought to improve customer service through improvements to StarRez. Programmatic assessments were regularly done during the pilot year of the residential curriculum.

However, there was a lack of a shared departmental vision and dedication to the achievement of specific learning outcomes.

Response:

When a new Senior Director of SHaRE is hired, they will be tasked with departmental visioning and goal setting as well as long term strategic planning that will include clearly identified learning outcomes that will be synergistic throughout operations and curricular implementation.

8. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the Vice President's Office do to appropriately respond to the review?

As this report is written in July, 2016, it is feasible that many of the recommendations could be discussed and planned for implementation in Summer/Fall 2017. The VP for Student Life can aid in facilitating conversations with Facilities and Project Management regarding future housing growth and with other University partners in strategic planning. The VP may also support the collaboration of all student life units in implementation of the residential curriculum.

Response:

As evidenced by items shared earlier in this report, many immediate changes have been made based on the recommendations of the reviewers for the Fall 2016 semester. Longer term strategic planning issues will be addressed by the new Senior Director of SHaRE for the Fall 2017 academic year.

9. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewer's report?

Please see full External Review report.