Unit/Department

HOUSING AND RESIDENCE LIFE

Describe your department’s year.

The 2019-2020 year was filled with significant ups and downs. Work continued on the design for our new housing facility, Maplewood Hall (along with an addition to the residence dining center facility). The residence life team has implemented a new circle around decision making that was used as a sanction for students involved in the conduct process. On the operations side, we launched a new StarRez student online housing portal. This new portal is designed to be mobile-friendly and is significantly more customizable than our legacy portal product was, allowing us to utilize the portal for a variety of functions beyond housing applications. Much of our work came to a screeching halt in mid-March as the impacts of COVID-19 hit the department.

Summarize the impact of COVID-19 on your unit’s operations.

COVID-19 had significant impact on Housing & Residence Life in the spring & summer of 2020. In mid-March, as the University made the decision to move classes online for the 2nd half of the semester, we encouraged students to move out if they were able to do so. We ended up with a small number of students that remained living on campus for the remainder of the spring semester. For our summer season, we did not host any of our traditional summer conference groups or summer housing programs. We did provide housing for a small number of students that remained on campus during this time frame. Many members of the housing staff spent these periods working remotely. We have paused our housing construction project as well as a number of smaller renovation projects that would have normally be completed. The HRL staff (along with our colleagues in our custodial team from Facilities Management) worked to manage a tough situation as seamlessly as possible.
Provide an assessment result that was important and informative for your department. What did you assess and what did you learn?

Our 2019-2020 strategic plan included the following objective - “Finalize and implement a plan for future growth of learning community program”. The assessment strategy for this objective was to complete it. We developed the plan for our learning community program by consulting with a variety of resources and other professionals in the field. We also worked to gain insight from staff in LSBE, who have worked closely with the development of the BizDogs community. We developed a draft plan and shared the plan with the Council of Deans. After making some minor changes to the plan recommended by that group, we launched the plan. We received and have approved one proposal for an additional learning community. We are currently working with that academic unit to determine feasibility of launching that program as planned given the impacts of COVID-19. Additionally, we are working with the staff from the Honors program to explore ways in which we can work to have that program meet the expectations for our learning community programs.

Summarize the condition of your departmental budget at the end of the year. Discuss revenues, expenses, and (if applicable) refunds in broad terms.

Our departmental budget was significantly impacted by COVID-19. We provided credits to students (~$2.6M) and refunded any money paid for summer programs and conferences. Due to the significant reduction in occupancy, we did see a reduction in some of our expenses, such as utilities. HRL did receive a portion of the federal CARES funding (~$1.8M) that helped offset a portion of the reduction in revenue due to the credits/refunds issued to students and summer guests. Thanks in part to the CARES funding and the carryforwards we had available, HRL ended the fiscal year with an operating balance of just over $2,000,000. This balance will be carried into the new year that will certain see continued impacts on our departmental finances.