

Ernest L. Boyer (1987). College: The Undergraduate Experience in America. (pp. 1-5; 206-212). New York: Harper & Row.

The undergraduate college in America, with its long and venerable tradition, has a unique mission to fulfill, one that will enrich and, at its best, transform. Why else make it the prerequisite to professional study? Why else provide college for those who otherwise could be trained on the job or in a corporate classroom? It can only be because of the conviction that something in the undergraduate experience will lead to a more competent, more concerned, more complete human being. . . .

Colleges like to speak of the campus as *community*, and yet what is being learned in most residence halls today has little connection to the classrooms; indeed, it may undermine the educational purposes of the college. . . . Many faculty and academic administrators distance themselves from student life and appear to be confused about their obligations in nonacademic matters. How can life outside the classroom support the educational mission of the college? . . .

At the University of Vermont, a Living-Learning Center—a college within a college—houses 580 students, who live and study together. The Center also has faculty apartments, classrooms, and a dining room. Students go on field trips and have special seminars, in addition to their regular course work. An Integrated Humanities Program, run by three faculty members, meets weekly or biweekly in the residence hall.

At Princeton University, a major effort has been made within the last five years to extend the undergraduate program into residence halls and social lounges. To this end, Princeton created five undergraduate "colleges," whose freshmen and sophomores eat together in units of manageable size, enjoy play and study areas, plan social and academic events, have counseling and guidance services, profit from the presence of selected upperclassmen, invite university professors to meals, and have a distinguished professor as Master, with an office in the college. . . .

Williams College set an example in the 1960s when it abolished fraternities and moved to a residential house system. In 1983, a Commission on Campus Life at Colby College proposed to strengthen the spirit of community on campus. Residential life at Colby had consisted of a centrally operated dormitory system, supplemented by the fraternities. Dormitory life there, as elsewhere, was characterized by a certain rootlessness. Too often, the dorms were not part of a communal setting in which students could plan and share in joint activities, and it was the fraternities that offered an alternative to this anonymity on campus.

The commission concluded that "our current system of anonymous dormitories and insular fraternities falls short of the residential life we would like for Colby. It fails to promote a community which can both reinforce students' sense of themselves and also welcome and incorporate diversity and individuality. It fails to grant all students both the responsibility and the satisfaction of collective control over their environment. We believe the time has come to reorganize the structure of residential life so as to approach the ideals of a collegial community."

Colby regrouped its living units, including the former fraternity houses, into four distinct communities, which are called Residential Commons. Each common houses between three hundred and five hundred students, and varies in makeup from four dormitory units to eight. Each common also has: a dining room, adequate social space, at least one Faculty-in-Residence apartment, a group of eight to fifteen Faculty Affiliates, who commit themselves to working with student leaders to develop activities for the common, and new programming monies for social events as well as for speakers, forums, and the like.

The commission concluded: "We are convinced that the Commons system proposed here will provide for all students the kind of residential experience that will most directly reinforce the College's educational mission and will lead to the kinds of growth—intellectual, social and personal—we seek to foster." This is a goal that should guide the residential arrangements on every campus

It is in the residence hall arrangements . . . that some of the most fundamental values of the college are confronted—or avoided. . . . In the context of student living, the challenge of creating an enthusiastic community of learning must be carefully considered. Are living arrangements simply a convenience or do they contribute to collegiate goals?