



The University of Georgia

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Dear members of the SEAHO Award Selection Committee:

I am pleased to offer my support to the Department of Housing at the University of Georgia for consideration for the SEAHO Housing and Academic Collaboration Award. In my capacity as Associate Vice President for Instruction over the past three and a half years, one of my main responsibilities has focused on a new (to our campus) first-year residential learning community program. The initiative is an authentic partnership, with the Department of Housing representing Student Affairs and our office representing Academic Affairs. The partnership involves shared planning, personnel, budget, and work for implementation. This partnership represents one of several initiatives through which the Department of Housing has contributed to connecting students to the academic life of the institution.

The First-Year Residential Learning Community program is intentional. We seek to enhance the academic experience of students, to increase connection of students to the university, and to provide opportunities for learning to continue outside the classroom. Specifically, the program is designed to assist students in making a smooth transition from learning in high school to learning in college. On the one hand, the program provides students with a small cohort of other students with whom they can study and live. The program also aims to enhance learning through the intentional, structured connection of curricular and co-curricular experiences. Academic engagement is encouraged through increased interactions with faculty and with peer advisors. A focus is the development of community and an understanding of the impact each individual has within the community – a key element is the experience students have in the second semester through service-learning activities involving the broader community.

Participants in the learning community program have a strong record of academic performance. Typically such students surpass their peers in shared academic classes, as seen in assessment data. However, the most powerful impacts of the program are revealed in student testimonials. One such, unsolicited, appears on the web page of one of last summer's orientation leaders, Dennis Byrd. In response to the question, "What has been your best adventure," Dennis answered:

"The best adventure I have ever had was traveling to Thailand the summer after my freshman year of college. I was involved in the global engagement learning community, and for our service project, we decided to go to Thailand and teach English in elementary schools. We traveled with a program called Cross Cultural Solutions, and we stayed for 3 weeks. While we were there, we did so many incredible things. We swam in the Indian Ocean, rode elephants, took a sleeper train for 13 hours through the middle of the rain forest, rode 'tuk tuks' (these are taxis

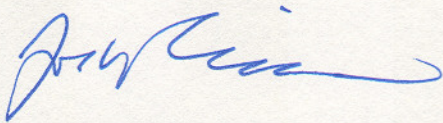
made out of a tiny truck with a lawnmower engine), and so many other wonderful things! Never in my life did I think I would see the largest reclining Buddha in the world or get a Thai message. And you know what? That is what college is all about. It is a chance to put yourself out there and try something new. If you take the time to step outside your comfort zone, you won't regret it. TRUST ME!"

Such a testimonial speaks volumes about the impact of the program.

To exemplify the pivotal roles played by the Department of Housing in collaborations with its academic partners on our campus, let me describe a few select highlights. Housing has provided a vital cornerstone the founding and sustenance of the Franklin Residential College, which has a residential dean and serves a broad spectrum of students in the Arts and Sciences, an initiative impressive for the roles students have played in managing their residence hall. Housing also partnered with Arts and Sciences to establish the Mary Lyndon Language Community, in which students studying either French or Spanish are housed together, along with language labs and programs situated directly in the residence hall. The success of this Language Community inspired a new collaboration between Housing and our office for a Summer Residential Intensive Language program proposed by the Department of Romance Languages this past summer for Spanish immersion; student responses were enthusiastic, both in enrollment and in evaluations. The Honors Program on campus was bolstered immensely by the work of Housing to renovate substantial space in which to house participating students. Such initiatives are augmented by the proactive work of Housing to place advising offices and tutoring services directly in the residence halls of first-year students, tremendously impacting the potential of their academic achievement. It is clear that everyone in Housing is dedicated to the belief that academics are intrinsic to a successful housing program and their actions have abundantly substantiated this view, as illustrated by these few examples.

I am delighted to have continuing opportunities to work with the Department of Housing on behalf of the student experience at the University of Georgia. Housing simply is a great group of people. I am also happy to be able to share some of this happiness with you in this letter of support for their recognition with the SEAHO Housing and Academic Collaboration Award.

Cordially,



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