

TO: Vice Provost Susie Brubaker Cole
Vice Provost Harry Elam
Members of the ResX Task Force

FROM: ASSU Executive President Shanta Katipamula
ASSU Executive Vice President Rosie Nelson

DATE: October 10, 2018

Re: **ASSU Priorities for ResX Task Force**

BACKGROUND

Given the expansive nature of the ResX Task Force's charge of considering the undergraduate living experience, as the ASSU Executives we wanted to ensure that we could present a unified set of priorities on behalf of the ASSU and undergraduate student body. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet with the Task Force and outline four main categories of priorities in response to the Provost's charge. We believe some of the most urgent considerations from a student perspective are around community and belonging, inclusivity, wellness, and fixing the foundations of our current staffing and governance structures. The single most important issue that has come up in our conversations with students, staff and administrators, however, is reforming student staff training, which we also believe encompasses the four aforementioned themes.

COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Being a part of a community is an integral part of the Stanford undergraduate experience. Community provides stability, support, guidance, and helps foster a sense of belonging. Communities at Stanford are expansive - the Native community, the FLI community, the athlete community, Greek life communities, and the freshman dorm community are all a handful of examples of strong communities, tied to shared identities, that students identify with on campus.

One of the challenges to creating community and belonging is overcoming stereotypes. The Task Force should consider methods to counter the stereotypes of various freshman residences that are perpetuated every year, particularly as they are perpetuated throughout the incoming freshman Facebook group. Residences such as FroSoCo, in addition to four-class residences, are heavily stigmatized in the Facebook group which leads many students to feel peer pressured into living in a frosh only residence when that may not be the best fit for them.

We hope that environmental justice and sustainability conversations and programming become a more intentional component of the undergraduate living experience as we see as being integral to creating a welcoming community, especially given the diverse cultural backgrounds that students come from.

There's a need for greater support of a diversity of communities and spaces moving forward. We encourage the Task Force to be more intentional about the design, location, and staffing structure of these spaces. By saying this, however, we do not imply that Okada should be moved from its current location to a location on the Row, nor do we preclude that possibility. We believe that the Task Force should meet with students from all ethnic theme dorms and seek out their needs and preferences, as we do not purport to speak for them.

In order to foster a stronger sense of community, we need to have a greater degree of flexibility available for students. There's a prevalent perception that students "game" the system through OAE and the medical draw process to live in more desirable housing, such as Mirrielees, Suites, or the Row. We agree with R&DE's perspective that the way to remedy this situation is to provide students more apartment and suite-style housing options, to allow students to create their own communities in their upperclass years. We additionally highlight that there are many challenges in the reassignment process, particularly for students with disabilities. Our hope is that by creating a more flexible, choice-enabling housing assignment process we will also provide more accommodations for students with disabilities.

INCLUSIVITY

Recent energy on campus around the creation of new community spaces and resource centers centered on different identities highlights the importance of inclusivity to students. Growing communities of students associated with identities historically marginalized in academia seek recognition and acceptance. The Stanford residential experience should uplift the diversity of voices in our campus community, with dorms or houses promoting interactions between students of different backgrounds, developing intentional community settings that are welcoming to students from historically marginalized backgrounds, and providing leadership and engagement opportunities for all students regardless of financial status or disability.

We believe that providing equity in amenities offered within neighborhoods and residences will enable more diverse communities. When students rank residences in the Draw, they consider friendships and locations, but they also consider access to food, types and sizes of rooms available, prevalence of pests, RF involvement and presence, and social norms. We appreciate the diverse number of options available to students and do not believe that every dorm and every room should be structured similarly. We do believe, however, that there are basic amenities that

every student deserves. We should be able to make a commitment to students that every dorm will have water fountains, no roaches, reliable access to meals on the weekends, accessible structures beyond just first floor access, well-lit pathways. Once we meet these bare necessities, we see a lot of room for creativity in incorporating additional baseline amenities such as makerspaces or self-care spaces.

We encourage the Task Force to be cautious in their approach to neighborhoods. We are wary of overemphasizing neighborhoods to the extent that there is no longer access to amenities outside of the neighborhood. Many students, such as athletes and students who work part-time jobs, often will not return to the residences until the end of the day. We do not want these students to feel isolated because there is no food, no gathering spaces, or work spaces outside of the neighborhood. We recognize that this likely bleeds into the work of the design group considering White Plaza, but nevertheless hope you will keep this consideration in mind.

In thinking about neighborhoods and inclusivity, we suggest that there is an emphasis on examining a currently existing neighborhood, the Row. The Row is a great community, primarily composed of seniors, that perhaps only rivals the freshman dorm neighborhood in terms of cohesiveness and desirability. However, the Row is an exclusive space, both historically and currently, that propagates toxic masculinity. By housing sororities in the Cowell Cluster and housing fraternities on the Row, the neighborhood is distinctly male. Given the historical data on fraternity membership, it also follows that the Row is also predominantly white. When we examine the themed houses present on the Row, the trend continues. The three most desirable self-ops are Casa Italiana, French House, and Haus Mitt - all of which are eurocentric themes. We contrast this with the only ethnic themed house on the Row, Muwekma, which is half native students and one of the least desirable Row houses for students to rank. Co-ops on the other hand, can be strong communities with laudable diversity, such as Kairos and EBF, whose staff actively work toward creating inclusivity. We urge the Task Force to restructure the themes and house distribution on the Row. We believe that if fraternities are housed on the Row, sororities should also be housed on the Row.

Part of creating inclusive communities is making sure all staffing positions are accessible to students. This can only be done through pay equity to ensure that we have diverse students, such as FLI students, able to serve as student staff. Pay equity also needs to encompass other staff such as ETAs who staff ethnic dorms and carry the burden of organizing challenging conversations around race and ethnicity. We need to recognize and validate the significant student labor involved with each of these positions in order to have these positions continue into the future.

Finally, we hope that coterms will not be forgotten in this process. Students who are in their fifth-year are usually transitioned into the graduate population, particularly in regards to housing. This leads to only a third of coterm students receiving on-campus housing and feeling isolated as many of their friends are still undergraduates living on-campus. We hope that the Draw can be reconfigured to be more flexible and inclusive of coterms who wish to still live on-campus with undergraduates, given that they feel much closer to the undergraduate experience than the graduate one.

WELLNESS

Student well-being must be a priority in the reimagined undergraduate residential experience. In considering health and well-being at Stanford, we looked to the World Health Organization's 2006 definition of wellness. This definition emphasized two key focal points, which we expanded upon specific to our campus community. First is the realization of one's greatest potential across a range of dimensions, including economically, environmentally, intellectually, spiritually, socially, psychologically, and physically. Second is the fulfillment of one's expected or desired individual roles in different spaces, including within families, communities, spiritual settings, learning environments, workplaces, and elsewhere. Undergraduate residential communities across campus play a substantial part in guiding conceptions of wellness. For Stanford students to reach their highest potential, the residential experience must support student exploration and health across these dimensions.

While this section overlaps with inclusivity and belonging, there are several issues specific to wellness that we hope this rethinking of the undergraduate residential experience will address, including conceptions of learning in the residences, fostering a sense of home and safety for students on campus, and providing housing security within the draw process.

Learning in a residential space can take many forms, ranging from more formalized academic classes to workshops presented by student staff to casual discussions of current events over pizza and boba. We suggest that the task force look deeply at the myriad ways students engage with learning and the topics of interest to them when developing dorm programming, implementing courses in the residences, and strategizing RF and student staff interactions.

Students often seek a place where they can relax and feel comfortable, particularly in the residential setting. Dorms provide an opportunity for students to connect and feel more comfortable than they may be in an academic setting, particularly if they are struggling with fitting in on campus or feeling that they may not belong at Stanford based on their academic experiences. Undergraduate residences should be idealized as safe home spaces for every Stanford student--places where they feel comfortable in their particular combination of identities

and like they can safely be themselves without fear. Accomplishing this task is essential to promoting student wellness along multiple dimensions.

Finally, housing security is essential for promoting wellness and reducing student stress. Historically, some students remained unassigned after the draw, sometimes until shortly before school starts, and were sometimes placed in residential settings intended for graduate students that lack the same type of infrastructure available to undergraduates. Minimizing the number of students who are unassigned in the draw will promote a sense of safety as well as financial security, both of which are important to student wellness, and will likely reduce the likelihood of students being isolated in residences not designed for their needs. As discussed in the previous section, housing security is also critical for coterms who may struggle with the transition from undergraduate to graduate status and sit in an in-between space where few of their housing or wellness needs are met, and should be considered when thinking about the design of undergraduate spaces and facilitating that transition.

FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

To accomplish these goals, Stanford will need a strong and well-trained team committed to engaging with and responding to diverse student needs. Presently, the training received by student staff and RFs does not meet the needs of students living in undergraduate residences. Future training should include self-awareness components as well as opportunities to practice using learned skills, such as implicit bias training, disability awareness, and practical training in facilitating discussions. We expand upon staff training changes in the next section. Similarly, the future structure of Residential Education should prioritize accountability and encourage partnerships with other offices and student-driven initiatives. Poor communication and at times a lack of transparency in protocols, policies, and associated changes has led to low trust in ResEd by students and student staff. There must be a recognition that students are vital stakeholders and therefore engage with students in developing changes rather than imposing a change from the top that has no student buy-in.

We would also like to see more standardized expectations for RFs. While we understand the tremendous amount of change that has occurred in the past decade with this program and applaud it, we believe further changes are warranted. RFs ultimately set the tone for residences. They determine what policies will be enforced and how, which presentations and activities are mandatory, and what kinds of events will take place within the dorm. We agree that it's important for each RF to have the freedom and flexibility to shape the experiences within their residences, however we wish to see a basic set of norms and expectations for each residence. For example, as students and administrators work hard to generate buy-in and develop curriculums around healthy sexuality or mental health and wellness, it is discouraging to see residences

decide that that information is not of value or worthwhile for their community. We believe there are fundamental issues which every student, particularly in their freshman year, should be required to engage with. ResEd and RFs should not be gatekeepers in this regard, but should set the expectations within each residence that these issues should be discussed and dealt with. At a certain point, that level of expectation must be established across the board as well as at an individual level.

It is our understanding, based on conversations with R&DE, that the present method of renovating residences, which has failed to provide a basic level of standardization and modernization of facilities, will be insufficient for the scale of changes that we hope the ResX Task Force will recommend. We urge the university to provide the increased funding and governance changes in order to more quickly modernize residences, to be able to provide equity in amenities and basic living experiences. We additionally urge the Task Force to advocate for increased funding in conjunction with a support for intentionally using the principles of universal design to make sure we are prioritizing the accessibility and inclusivity for disabled students over frugality.

OVERHAUL STUDENT STAFF TRAINING

The need to rethink how student staff training is conducted was the strongest area agreement from all of the stakeholders we spoke to. The content, timing, length, and involvement of campus partners are all areas in which we recommend significant changes. Student staff are currently ill-equipped to handle issues of free speech that may arise in the residence, as well as countering ableist, sexist, homophobic, and racist language. Staff also have told us how unprepared they felt to accommodate students with disabilities in their communities to ensure that they also feel a sense of belonging. Residents look to their staff to model behavior and not preparing student staff to address these issues disadvantages them in performing their jobs. We believe student staff should receive specific training on why diversity is important and how we can foster it within our residences - a skill that we see present in student staff with marginalized identities but less so within the remainder of staff. We recommend the Task Force consider adopting one (or both) of the following options laid out for reforming staff training structure in order to intentionally cover more of the aforementioned content.

Option 1:

The traditional RA class that is taken in the Spring is offered in the Winter and enrollment is made a prerequisite in the staff application process. We appreciate ResEd's emphasis on student staff first reflecting on their own values, identities and beliefs prior to thinking about how to support their residents. We believe, however, that this system places too much pressure on students to absorb resident related content only in the less than three weeks before residents

arrive in the Fall. Staff feel too much is thrown at them, relevance is not always made clear, and in return fosters resentment of the training and low retention of any presented materials.

Option 2:

As an alternative, we believe the Task Force should explore the possibility of structuring the RA class to be more in line with the PHE class, which spends all of Spring quarter simultaneously encouraging introspection while teaching PHE's content. We hear nothing but praise for the structuring of the PHE program (other than the pay equity component) and believe that there's a lot that could be successfully carried over into training for RAs and for other staff. An important consideration to keep in mind is that every student staff member is a mandatory reporter as well as a resource for students. While administrators may see each staff position (RA vs. PHE vs. RCC vs. ETA etc.) as having distinct roles and responsibilities, this distinction does not exist amongst students as they form connections with particular staff members and will seek them out for support regardless of title. Therefore, every student must be equally equipped as PHEs to discuss issues of mental health and wellness, sexual violence, etc. Ultimately, if every staff member is being expected to be an equal member of the staffing team, then every staff member must receive equal pay for equal work. Anything less is a devaluation of student labor.

We encourage ResEd to have a better, more collaborative relationship with subject matter experts in developing content for student staff training. For example, a partnership that seems like common sense to us but has previously been rejected is requiring all student staff to attend the culmination of the Storycraft: On Sexuality class taught by SARA Office staff. Given that the students who present their stories for the class are the same who will speak at Beyond Sex Ed in the Fall, giving student staff the entirety of the summer to reflect and prepare for how to facilitate conversations in the residences after Beyond Sex Ed would be extremely beneficial, especially in light of how unprepared student staff felt to handle the debriefs this year. We want to see more of these intentional partnerships moving forward.

Attachments:

Letter from Student 1 Thoughts on ResX

Letter from Student 2 Thoughts on PHE Pay Equity