

## **The Alabama Men's Honors Program: Mallet Assembly in Action**

*Thomas E. Ware, Jr.*

The transition to a collegiate environment can be challenging for new students on many levels. The goal of an orientation program is to provide a sense of institutional expectations while developing a sense of community among student groups and subcultures. This discussion focuses on a residence facility—a self-governing men's honors residence hall—which offers a unique vehicle for accomplishing this goal.

The Mallet Assembly Men's Honors Residence Program recently began its 38th year at The University of Alabama. The purpose of the Assembly is to develop the leadership skills of academically talented male students at the university in a residential setting. The students, with little direction from the university's residential life office, are responsible for the administration of the program. An executive committee of elected student officers, using a constitution as a framework of operation, governs the Assembly. Two live-in adviser positions have been occupied at various times by faculty, staff, and graduate students, and are considered "professors in residence" or "professionals in residence."

The Assembly's residence has a minimum capacity of 80 and a maximum capacity of 95 residents. A large number of the residents are upper-class students, with a few graduate students. The typical first year class size is 30.

There has been much discussion of the impact of residential life on the success of college students. Schrager (1986) suggests that student living groups have an impact on academic performance. Thompson, Samiratedu, and Rafter (1993) claim that student residential arrangements affect student persistence. Astin (1993) indicates that living in campus residence halls has positive effects on attainment of the bachelor's degree, satisfaction with faculty, and willingness to re-enroll in the same college. Whatever impact residential life has on college students, the results achieved by the honors residential program are exceptional. The Assembly has the highest grade point average among male residence groups on campus, though, understandably the requirements for entry are also higher than for other residential facilities.

A key element in the retention of upperclassmen is the seniority system for room assignments. As students accumulate semesters in the residence they become eligible for some of the better rooms in the hall. They also may be eligible for a private room, when available. Officers elected by the Assembly make all room assignments.

The requirement for admission into the program is a 27 ACT composite score (or

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**Thomas E. Ware, Jr.**, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration and Resident Director of the Mallett Program at the University of Alabama

equivalent SAT) or a 3.0 college grade point average. Recruitment for the Assembly is an ongoing process administered by the program's admissions committee. The Assembly also has a number of members, including women, who do not live in the residence hall. Alumni support is fairly strong and many alumni of the Mallet Assembly have become Rhodes Scholars, novelists, attorneys, medical doctors, college teachers, and corporate executives.

The program plays a leading role in campus activities. The Assembly was represented in the revision of the Student Government Association constitution. Involvement also includes winning the intramural all-sports championship, the first residence facility to do so in recent years. Community service projects are another priority, and have included tutoring disadvantaged youths in the community and assisting the local Children's Hands-on Museum. The Assembly members and their elected representatives make all decisions about activities.

The Assembly is planning to ask the university for a larger residence hall, although the impact of a larger group of students living together is uncertain. The larger hall would be shared with the women's honors program on campus in order to broaden the perspective of academically talented students (i.e., the female counterpart to the Mallet Assembly, which also has a long history of scholastic excellence). Placing these two highly successful programs in the same facility would enhance the close working relationship the programs have shared over the last few decades.

As the Assembly approaches its 40th anniversary, criteria are being developed to objectively measure its effectiveness and impact. These criteria may include retention and overall grade point average data and student and alumni satisfaction.

For more information contact Dr. Thomas Ware, Professor in Residence, Box 870266, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.

## References

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