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## Students give input on new UD program

### Undergrad leaders help revamp residence life

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NEWARK -- Student leaders at the University of Delaware urged administrators Monday to use a rewrite of its residence hall programs as a chance to enhance -- rather than compete with -- existing efforts by their organizations.

A Monday meeting with the Undergraduate Student Senate came as a Faculty Senate Committee prepares a final draft for fall 2008 residence life programs.

Last fall, a four-year-old program was canceled after critics said it stifled free speech, attempted to indoctrinate students and put too much responsibility in the hands of resident assistants.

After several months spent reviewing, and noting the weaknesses, of the former residence life programs, the committee began working on a new program it hopes to put up to an endorsement vote by the full Faculty Senate at the group's May 5 meeting.

Michael Gilbert, vice president for student life, and Matthew Robinson, chairman of the Faculty Senate's Student Life Committee, came to the Student Senate meeting Monday to get student reactions to parts of the new program and hear their ideas for events that could be held at the residence halls.

"The resident life program is only a small part of the overall residence life experience," said Robinson, who is also director of UD's sports management program. "The residence halls will still be about pizza parties, intramurals, hanging out with your roommate and playing a video game."

Robinson told the students that the draft of the new program emphasizes that all events are optional; a feature the committee found lacking in the old program. The plan calls for events that focus on personal development, such as stress management or career planning, and current events, such as the upcoming presidential election.

"We do not have a final proposal," Robinson said. "There has been a lot of give-and-take and the draft we have now does not look a lot like previous drafts."

UD President Patrick Harker shelved the old program Nov. 1 and called for a new review, a job that fell to the Faculty Senate's Student Life Committee.

Critics have said that drafts of the new program are only minimally different from the old program and don't address their concerns. They have also questioned why the university needs any such residence life programs.

The Student Life Committee collected input and ideas for a new program at a November

student forum. Two students spent winter session working with the committee to discuss what next year's programs should look like.

"We're here to tease out all of those ideas," Gilbert told students Monday.

Most of the students did not take issue with personal development and current affairs as suggested topics for events, but they questioned why administrators would not take advantage of similar, existing events.

"It seems like you're trying to reinvent the wheel," said Tom Schrandt, a member of Students in the Public Interest. "I think discussions about the presidential debate and that stuff are already going on on campus. Why does the administration think they need to step in and spur on discussions that are already happening organically?"

Robinson said the residence life programs are intended to promote existing initiatives and create new opportunities for students. "I don't think it's one or the other, I think we can do a combination of both," he said.

Students said events directed at a single residence hall or floor often suffer from poor attendance. They said university officials could remedy those problems by holding the gatherings in a student center or other public space.

"If we do want to tap into resources that are already there, I wonder if we could have a big program campus-wide that all the groups could work together to put on," Student Government Association President Casey Patriarco said. "Then, if we really want education programs in the residence halls, there could be little discussions that go on after that big program."

Lorraine Makone, a member of the UD chapter of the Campus Alliance de La Raza, wanted to know how officials would continue to make the programs relevant to students.

"How are you going to monitor student interest every year in a technical way?" she said.

Gilbert said officials are considering the creation of a permanent student advisory committee that would review and tweak the programs over time.

"Another recommendation was that our committee would see the program each year and the committee would [vote to] endorse it," Robinson added. "We'd like to see it become a living document."

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