

“I” Know this is a great community
The 6 I’s of Community

Communities should receive a formal **introduction**. New students are unfamiliar with physical surroundings, policies, and practices. Older members of community are responsible for welcoming, orienting, and teaching norms; values and rules of the community. Introductions to community may be formal programs or informal discussions and observations.

Communities should provide opportunities for **interaction**. This provides residents opportunities to share common experiences. They are exposed to difference levels of development, knowledge, and experience, which allow them to both learn and teach. Ideally, staff, faculty, and students participate in these common experiences which promote a feeling of community on campus.

Communities should seek resident **involvement**. A true community encourages, expects, and rewards broad-based member involvement. The environment is characterized by a high degree of interaction with students assuming a multitude of roles. Everyone is needed and important. High involving floors are characterized by supportive interactions with students naturally helping one another with personal and academic concerns and issues.

Communities should allow residents to have **influence**. Control is vested in members and students exert maximum control over their physical and social environments. Students are expected to develop a social contract whereby group standards are affirmed both individually and collectively in such communities. Students know they are important when their perspective is valued, and their contributions are essential to the welfare of the group.

Communities should create, among residents, a sense of **investment**. Investment is a reflection of psychological ownership. It flows naturally from influence and involvement. Institutional or group property is guarded and protected rather than damaged. Students understand and appreciate the need for open, honest, and assertive communication with one another.

Community members should share a sense of **identity**. Students have shared symbols, language, understanding, jokes, etc. Members describe themselves in collective terms such as we and us rather than I and they.

Fostering an Inclusive Community:

It is important that all residence life staff members be sensitive to each person on their floor or in their communities. Because many different groups are represented in our halls, it is important that we meet the needs of each person. We want to help you avoid unintentionally creating an exclusionary environment.

Feedback

If you notice that certain residents do not attend your meetings or activities, ask them if they feel comfortable in your floor environment. Ask input from other staff and your supervisor; they are around you when you interact with residents and may be able to give you honest feedback.

Education

- Learn about your residents and get to know who they truly are. If you feel like you have limited knowledge about how a resident identifies him/herself, seek out books, workshops, activities, advocacy groups, and your supervisor to further educate yourself.
- Don't feel like you need to be an expert on every identity, but become familiar with on and off campus resources that support individuals.

Communication

- You are a role model. What you say and do makes a huge impact. Refrain from any comments of humor that demeans groups or individuals. Be assertive in confronting your residents on these issues.
- Be aware of images, situations, and language that assume all or most members of a particular group are the same. Stereotypes may lead to assumptions that are insupportable and offensive.

Activities

- People enjoy and learn things in different ways. Be sure to use different activity formats. Choose events and activities that all members can participate in, including those with disabilities.
- When choosing guest presenters, be sure you are exposing residents to diverse people!

You are responsible for encouraging interaction between your residents and by leading by example. You cannot force residents to become friends, but you should foster an attitude of mutual respect between individuals on your floor. For some residents, their college years may be their first close exposure to people who are drastically different from them. Strive to create a comfortable environment for all of your residents.

Adapted from "On Duty" (March 1999)