

RESPONSE TO ACADEMIC FUTURES PROJECT 1: A COMMON STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH
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The Academic Futures (AF) draft report stressed the importance of providing “all of our students an excellent first year (FY) at CU Boulder” (p 37). The Residential Academic Programs (RAPs) have a long history (48 years) of providing rich and varied first-year experiences to incoming students, and RAP faculty have an expansive knowledge in working with this unique population. Despite the long-term success of the RAPs, concerns exist about these programs. These concerns are not insurmountable nor are they under the control of the residential programs themselves.

One concern is the cost of the RAPs. Students pay \$850 per year to participate in a RAP, a fee that has been viewed as cost-prohibitive to families with limited financial means. There are several strategies that CU can employ to eliminate or reduce this economic barrier. First, students with financial needs can be identified early in the admissions process by noting applicants whose admission fees were waived due to financial reasons. Second, the housing deposits of these applicants can be dropped, and expedited housing assignments into an appropriate RAP can be made for students wishing to be part of a RAP. Third, financial aid (for example, scholarships and grants) can be offered to needy students. Such actions can help foster diverse communities and increased equity across the RAPs. By making RAPs available to more students, CU also can help provide a rich, multi-faceted experience to all first year students.

Problems of equity and access to RAPs also arise with students who don’t understand the importance of confirming their choice to come to CU early in the admission process. Because CU Housing fills RAPs on a first-come, first-served basis, applicants who provide a late confirmation find that these RAPs are already filled. Often, these applicants are first-generation students or students who are waiting to learn of their financial aid before confirming attendance. Both of these applicant populations lack an understanding of why an early confirmation is important. CU’s system of housing prioritization thus indirectly discriminates against these students. The solution to these problems requires the concerted efforts of various agencies at CU. The Offices of Housing, Admissions, and Financial Aid must all work in an integrated manner to remove financial, social, and cultural barriers to the RAPs. Only by doing so can the university increase access to the RAPs and promote equity.

RAPs deliver an excellent first-year experience in multiple ways. These benefits are extensively documented in Academic Futures white papers (e.g., https://www.colorado.edu/academicfutures/sites/default/files/attached-files/oliveras_et_al._.pdf, https://www.colorado.edu/academicfutures/sites/default/files/attached-files/breed_et_al.pdf, https://www.colorado.edu/academicfutures/sites/default/files/attached-files/pavlicek_wilson.pdf, https://www.colorado.edu/academicfutures/sites/default/files/attached-files/gerland_0.pdf, <https://www.colorado.edu/academicfutures/sites/default/files/attached-files/zizzi.pdf>), The benefits include: (1) offering small classes that allow for increased opportunities for participation; (2) providing academic assistance in the form of tutoring, developing study skills,

review sessions, and more; (3) closely following student progress and intervening at an early stage should a student show signs of struggle; (4) establishing a strong community via co-curricular activities, class events, weekly social gatherings, and many other means; and (5) creating extensive mentoring opportunities such as research, career-building opportunities, and internships that are not typically available to freshmen. All of these high-impact activities are integral to an engaged and successful first-year experience.

Significant and long-term relationships between RAP students and RAP faculty/staff are likely to develop due to the considerable interactions offered by RAPs. These positive relationships are correlated with increased student satisfaction. Perhaps not coincidentally, RAP students outperform their non-RAP peers and retention rates among RAP students are higher than among non-RAP students (<https://www.colorado.edu/rapflc/sites/default/files/attached-files/rapoutcomes2016.pdf>). A first-year student's academic success is intimately tied with their emotional well-being. The RAP model successfully works with the whole student.

The directors of the RAPs found that the RAPs accomplish these goals very efficiently compared to other academic units (https://www.colorado.edu/rapflc/sites/default/files/attached-files/rap_director_arpac_response_rev_11-14.pdf). The average cost of the RAPs' per SCH is about \$123. PBA (a CU data site) analysis defined an academic unit as "efficient" when its cost per SCH is \$275. Not only are the RAPs successful in providing an excellent first-year experience, they do so in an extremely cost-effective manner. (Details of the economic analysis can be found in the Directors' report: https://www.colorado.edu/rapflc/sites/default/files/attached-files/rap_director_arpac_response_rev_11-14.pdf)

RAP faculty collectively have hundreds of years of institutional memory in addressing the unique academic needs of first-year students. We appreciate and support the University's efforts to provide quality academic enrichment to all first-year students, and we are eager to help. We welcome First-Year Seminars, and can help expand them and make them better. We are excited about the prospects of bringing academic experiences into ALL of the residence halls. By having all levels of the university work together, CU can promote access to the RAPs and make these programs equally accessible to all students.