Building Intentional and Efficient Residential Communities

The University of Tampa and Florida Southern College have strengthened their residential communities by integrating their departmental processes into OrgSync.

Staff within Housing & Residence Life find themselves having to prioritize the many facets of their work for the students they serve. Some of these include ensuring safety within the halls, supervising paraprofessional staff, and developing quality programming to enhance the experiences of residents. The University of Tampa and Florida Southern College have identified methods of centralizing their processes in OrgSync, resulting in both institutions being able to focus on what’s important – building community within the halls. According to Christopher Futch, Assistant Director of Residence Life at The University of Tampa, “We wanted to make to make our processes less ‘paper-worky.’ [Resident Advisors] are here to make a difference with the students and build on those relationships.”

The Problem

Prior to using OrgSync, both institutions found themselves using several different methods for executing the day-to-day operations of their departments. From paper or carbon-copy forms to multiple web-based applications, having all processes executed differently was problematic. Florida Southern College did not have everything in one, central, location. This made it difficult for Hall Directors to access important information. “For RA applications, we had to use file folders and pass them along amongst staff,” says Allison Manning, Assistant Director of Residential Education.

Both campuses relied on other departments to run reports for them. This process was problematic as Futch described “The more hands we had on things and the more ways they had to travel, the easier it was for them to get lost or shuffled in the bunch.”

In seeking a solution, both Florida Southern College and the University of Tampa identified the primary needs of their offices. Florida Southern College needed to streamline processes and make information easily accessible. For the University of Tampa, student-staff decision to purchase OrgSync was to “make it easier for them so they can enjoy what they are doing,” says Futch. He continued by adding how the cost benefits also led to the decision in using OrgSync - “[We] cut down on paper copy orders from Kinkos and Office Depot which weighed in on their the decision to secure financing, but overall student satisfaction was the major reason.”Easy-to-access information so staff are informed of what is happening within the department

Christopher Futch
Assistant Director of Residence Life - University of Tampa

Streamlining Administrative Processes and Communicating with Residents

The University of Tampa Department of Residence Life, was the first department to bring OrgSync onto campus followed by the Center for Student Involvement. “It was really cool to see [the department of Residence Life] were the ones to show how to best utilize it,” stated Futch. Tampa’s residential population is 4,200 students which is approximately 60% of their entire student population. It was important to make processes “clear and concise,” says Futch. During the fall,
students can submit a resident intent form to live on-campus in the spring in OrgSync. Through this form, the Department of Residence Life can accurately report data to the Office of Admissions, including available housing options for transfer or newly admitted students. The University of Tampa utilizes OrgSync primarily for administrative processes. Under their Residence Life umbrella in OrgSync, each resident is placed into the appropriate residence hall portal where the Head Hall Directors serve as the administrators.

The original structure of MocSync, Florida Southern’s branded OrgSync community, included a departmental portal and residential community portals, underneath the Center for Student Involvement umbrella. Now, in their second year, they have expanded the structure to include a Community Living umbrella and have seen increased engagement with residents. One departmental goal for The Office of Community Living at Florida Southern, is to have 80% of their residential population attend a program; currently, approximately 1,700 students attend an RA event each semester. In the Florida Southern community, residents are placed into portals based on the floor where they reside and RA’s are included in an administrative group to ensure they have ability to manage key functions in the portal. Manning stated “being able to have the residents have one place to look for events and the ability to share down resources to all portals, makes it easier than having to recreate things multiple times.” They are able to intentionally target communication to their hall staff as well as residents through the use of news posts and messaging.

Ensuring Safety within the Halls

After completing a benchmarking process, many institutions allow residents to self-report damages, which instills a large amount of trust in the residents. The University of Tampa transitioned Room Condition Inventory (RCI) reporting into OrgSync. Prior to integrating this process in OrgSync, RA’s had to fill out RCI carbon-copy forms for each room and hand them to residents and supervisors. With OrgSync, residents receive an email notification welcoming them to the community during move-in and are provided a link to the RCI report where they self-identify any damages or concerns upon inspecting their rooms. All of the RCI’s are customized to each residential community and form logic highlights any issues requiring further maintenance. Uploading photos as evidence allows the office to have a better understanding of the repairs and damages being reported. “This method gives them ownership of the process,” says Futch.

Centralizing Information

Previously, RA’s on duty rotation, carried paper copies of hall rosters. Through the files tool, hall rosters are stored in each residential portal. “The electronic rosters make it easier for RA’s to access from their phones through the mobile app while on duty and for their leadership staff to access from home when responding to larger crises,” said Futch. “It helps in response time.”

Additionally, both campuses utilize OrgSync for managing aspects of their on-call rotation. Florida Southern posts the rotation schedule on the calendar of each portal so that each hall staff member can access the information quickly. Resident advisors submit their duty logs through forms and members of the professional staff are listed as notified administrators.

Establishing a Sense of Community

Creating educational and social programs are at the heart of establishing a residential community. Florida Southern College’s resident advisors are required to host two programs per month and each hall has a community-wide event each month. “Resident Advisors are encouraged to take ownership of the portals for their community,” stated Manning. The Office of Community Living uses the event request feature for RA’s to submit program proposals. The hall staff and members of the leadership team are listed as reviewers. To evaluate resident satisfaction and assess learning outcomes from the program, they use post-event forms sent to residents after being marked as a participant. The residents provide feedback helping to enhance future programs. Following the event, RA’s submit a separate reflection form that is used to assess what they have learned.

Best Practice

Florida Southern has also found success in portals underneath their Community Living umbrella dedicated to streamlining two major processes – Housing Selection and Resident Advisor Selection. By centralizing these processes, students have access to necessary resources such as important dates on the calendar, applications, information about RA interviews, and the overall Housing Selection process. “The separate portals are a good way for students to look for information without it being lost amongst their other departmental resources in the residential portals.”

Allison Manning
Assistant Director of Residential Education
Florida Southern College
Time and Cost Savings

The University of Tampa and Florida Southern College have seen huge benefits in utilizing OrgSync. 75% of the administrative processes for the Department of Residence Life at Tampa are on OrgSync. “This was the first year, we were able to implement a lot of new things in different areas since we were able to get things done a lot quicker and more efficiently,” stated Futch. Tampa used to have a billing process typically taking an average of 18 hours per building to complete. “It was long and laborious, but with OrgSync it only took me 3.5 hours,” said Futch. Manning at Florida Southern explains OrgSync “providing them to move toward a paperless office for their departmental needs and processes.”

Collecting Data for Reports and Assessments

By exporting data from forms and tracking attendance through card swipe, both institutions are able to share data to document student learning and development within the residential communities. Florida Southern College collects data from OrgSync to provide statistics for reports to submit to the Board of Trustees. Manning states, “Forms help gather information from residents and with the use of logic, we are able to get the information we need without bombarding students with questions.” Futch agrees, “through the exports of their evaluations, they have all the data in one place and get the stats and percentages for what kind of students are attending our events.”

The University of Tampa and Florida Southern College have developed best practices with their innovative uses of OrgSync. With the philosophy of streamlining processes to remain student-centered, they have built strong residential communities that enhance the overall college experience for their residents.

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Check out how other campuses use OrgSync for Residence Life

**Loyola University Chicago**

Loyola University Chicago uses OrgSync to communicate with residents, manage professional and student staff, and RHA activities. Loyola creates portals for tasks forces and committees within the office; the portal gives this appointed group the ability to post important files, communicate with members, and set up meetings.

**Washington State University @ Pullman**

Washington State University @ Pullman uses their umbrella/portals just for Residence Life staff to manage a variety of processes including RA training and selection, duty logs, communication, and program planning and evaluations.

**University of Central Arkansas**

UCA has used OrgSync for Residence Life since August 2013. The event request process allows the department to approve programs and track involvement within the residence halls; the office has logged 40,793 hours for 3,670 residents.

**Old Dominion University**

Old Dominion University Housing and Residence create training videos for the Resident Assistants to learn how to use OrgSync more efficiently and understand proper protocol.

**University of Wisconsin River Falls**

The University of Wisconsin @ River-Falls’ Department of Residence Life has residence portals within their FalconSync community as a strategic partner in their campus-wide Pick-One! Initiative. Additionally their RHA uses OrgSync to conduct their board elections and to participate in regional student leadership conferences.

**Santa Clara University**

Santa Clara uses OrgSync to reach out to professional staff, student staff, and residents. Their RA program proposals are accepted through the event request process where RDs serve as approvers. Under their Umbrella portal residents can access roommate living agreements, and equipment checkout forms. Learning Living Community portals also engage residents with events and important communication.