

I.U.'S NEW ASSISTANT DEAN OF STUDENTS  
FOR RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS  
by Les Bennett

"In the broadest terms, the Department of Residence Halls Counseling and Activities is primarily concerned with the interpersonal environment within our eleven residential communities," stated Dr. David A. DeCoster, Indiana University's new Assistant Dean of Students for Residential Programs and Services. Dr. DeCoster added that the basic assumptions for an educational role within college student housing are (1) the influence of environment upon behavior, and (2) that learning is a total process which includes non-classroom as well as classroom experiences. Essentially, his department works with students to establish living environments which support the formal educational process, as well as offering enriching experiences that make a substantial contribution to the total growth and development of college students.

Dr. DeCoster went on to say that there are several problems facing the residence hall educator as he attempts to develop an environment for learning within the residence halls. One problem is the role conflict that residence hall staff members face as they relate to student residents on a day to day basis. The Resident Assistant, for example, must fulfill a number of managerial tasks as well as serve in the capacity of teacher and counselor. "We often talk in terms of developing a 'sense of community' within the living unit, of helping to solve interpersonal problems, and of the various living-learning experiences that are so important to us as educators...but there are also administrative tasks that must be fulfilled with accuracy and efficiency if we hope to meet the total needs of students within a residential community."

Concern regarding student conduct is also viewed by some residence staff members to be in conflict with their educational roles. Dr. DeCoster stressed that "we must do an even better job than we have been in helping staff members to understand...how their concern for the interpersonal environment within each living unit will, of necessity, include the job of providing some guidelines for cooperative community living. If we do not satisfy the basic needs for enjoyable and compatible human relationships, we will hamper our success in meeting other educational objectives."

Dr. DeCoster came to Indiana University from the University of Georgia, where he served as Associate Director of Housing for Residence Education and as an Assistant Professor of Education in the Department of Counselor Education and Student Personnel. Dr. DeCoster has held a wide range of residence hall positions dating from his undergraduate days at the University of Michigan where he was a Resident Advisor. He received his B.A. in Education in 1962 and his M.A. in Guidance and Counseling in 1963 from the University of Michigan.

The University of Florida was Dr. DeCoster's next home; there he began work on his Ed.D. in Counselor Education which he received in 1970. While at the University of Florida, Dr. DeCoster served as a Counselor for the Division of Housing, then as a graduate assistant in the Department of Counselor Education, and finally as Assistant to the Director in the Division of Housing.

Dr. DeCoster's scholarly writings and presentations have been primarily in the area of the educational roles of residence halls. Some of his works include "The Effects of Homogeneous Housing Assignments for High Ability Students," in The Journal of College Student Personnel, 1968, "Some Effects of Coordinating Classroom and Residence Hall Assignments for College Freshmen," presented to the American Personnel and Guidance Association at Las Vegas in 1969, "The Educational Role of College Housing," in the July, 1971, Journal of College and University Student Housing, and "The New Morality," Journal of College Student Personnel, 1970.

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