The Residential Colleges

The most conspicuous advantage of a university is that it presents students with a great breadth of learning and gives them access to scholars who are engaged not only in communicating knowledge but also in discovering it. But the potential disadvantages of a large university are that its size and complexity may discourage communication, and that teachers and students may become less of a challenge to each other. In such an event, the discovery of new knowledge suffers as much as do teaching and learning.

In order to mitigate such disadvantages as it grew from a small college into a modern research university, Yale established residential colleges. Initially made possible through gifts from Edward Stephen Harkness, B.A. 1897, the colleges are more than living quarters; they are small communities whose members know one another well and learn from one another. Each college has its own dining hall, library, common rooms, extracurricular activity spaces, and intramural athletic teams, and each college celebrates the progress of the academic year with various festivities, concerts, and dramatic presentations.

There are fourteen colleges: Berkeley, Branford, Davenport, Timothy Dwight, Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Grace Hopper, Morse, Pauli Murray, Pierson, Saybrook, Silliman, Ezra Stiles, and Trumbull. Leading each one is a resident head of college; and in each college a resident dean advises students on both academic and nonacademic matters. Associated with the head and the dean as fellows are about fifty additional members of the University drawn from different departments and schools. A few fellows reside in the college; others have offices there.

In the summer before arrival, each first-year student is assigned to one of the fourteen residential colleges. Most first-years reside in a quadrangle known as the Old Campus. Whether first-years live there or elsewhere on campus, they participate fully in the life of their residential college. All first-years and sophomores are required to live on campus, and most juniors and seniors choose to do so. Whether they live on campus or off, students normally remain members of the same college throughout their undergraduate careers.