

**STARS Innovation Credit**  
**University of Richmond, Cultural Advisor Program**  
**October 9, 2012**

The University of Richmond has implemented a Cultural Advisor (CA) program since the fall of 2010. Featuring a dozen volunteer student leaders, it places students in the residence halls with the specific role of building inclusive community among the residents alongside the Resident Assistant Staff. With a programming budget and lots of creative community building strategies, the group is charged to connect with residents and help them engage with each other across differences in order to facilitate the campus's commitment to providing an inclusive community for our increasingly diverse student body.

Since the University of Richmond places diversity and inclusion at the core of its strategic plan, the Richmond Promise, the CA program is one visible way that Common Ground, the University's office of diversity and inclusion initiative, can create a leadership opportunity for students to become involved with that work and in a way that directly benefits their own community.

There are a number of factors that make this program unique. First, most other programs have CAs being trained and supervised by the Residence Life department. While this arguably creates a programmatic symmetry with campus resident assistant programs, our program trains and supervises the CAs out of the diversity initiative, Common Ground, which allows the mission of our office to be central in the students' work. Also, the CAs have specific programming requirements including helping students to engage with the community, perform service, or offer cross-cultural opportunities which deepen their residents' understanding of the world around them.

Finally, our University is private, and tucked into the middle of a wealthy neighborhood with minimal public transportation. In the past it has relied on the fraternity party scene for its main social options or the personal vehicles of the students to drive off-campus to find alternative forms of entertainment. But with our increasingly diverse students, many are finding that the fraternity and drinking culture in general is not meeting their needs for a safe and welcoming social scene. So the CAs have now decided, with support from our office, to plan and offer weekly late night alcohol-free programming for the entire student body called [CA Alternatives](#). From carnival nights to coffee houses, scavenger hunts and international trivia contests, they have created successful, inclusive events that allow students to be themselves without the pressures of meeting other students' expectation for partying. One of most creative events was a partnership with the Sustainability Office during Recyclemania that featured making crafts out of recycled materials.

We look forward to welcoming Megan Litke, Sustainability Coordinator, to our CA training next month for a session on Environmental Justice, as our two offices see our work as very similar and connected; we are both trying to create a cultural shift on campus. The CA program has been our most original and arguably effective way of making that happen to date.

Lisa Miles, Associate Director, Common Ground