

Identifying practices to promote character development in university residential settings: The case of Colegios Mayores*

Identificación de prácticas para promover el desarrollo del carácter en contextos residenciales universitarios: el caso de los Colegios Mayores

Juan P. DABDOUB, PhD. Lecturer. University of Navarra (jdbabdoub@unav.es).

Aitor R. SALAVERRÍA. Predoctoral fellow. University of Navarra (caracter@unav.es).

Marvin W. BERKOWITZ. Co Director of the Center for Character & Citizenship. University of Missouri-St. Louis (berkowitz@umsl.edu).

Abstract:

In recent years, several initiatives have attempted to integrate character education in universities. However, it is difficult at the university level to find initiatives aimed at generating communities in which their climate or culture contribute to character development, a relatively common approach at the school level in the character education movement. University residential centers may be an ideal setting for generating such communities. However, studies, guides, or programs along these lines are scarce or non-

existent. A case worthy of study is that of Colegios Mayores, university residential communities in Spain with a centuries-old tradition that aim to contribute to the integral development of students. However, the literature on the educational dimension of this institution is also scarce and outdated. Contributing to outline its educational dimension, this study reports the results of a survey of directors of Colegios Mayores. The aims of this study are to: 1) explore whether the community of Colegios Mayores agrees in considering six practices as characteristic of this institution;

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2) explore the level of implementation of each one of them; and 3) explore if the way in which the community members are involved in these practices responds to the social learning model of Communities of Practice proposed by Etienne Wenger. The questionnaire was answered by 19 directors, representing 15.2% of the population (N=125). Based on the results, it is reasonable to affirm that most directors of Colegios Mayores: 1) consider that the six practices proposed are characteristic of this institution; 2) already implement these practices in their centers; and 3) consider that the Communities of Practice model reflects the way in which the collegial community engages in these practices.

Keywords: Character development, Colegios Mayores, Communities of Practice, character education, residence halls, higher education, university.

Resumen:

En los últimos años, diversas iniciativas están intentando integrar la educación del carácter en el ámbito universitario. Sin embargo, es difícil encontrar a nivel universitario iniciativas dirigidas a generar comunidades en las que el clima o la cultura contribuyan al desarrollo del carácter, un enfoque relativamente frecuente a nivel escolar en el movimiento de educación del carácter. Los centros residenciales universitarios pueden ser un ámbito idóneo para generar este tipo de comunidades. No obstante, los estudios, guías, o programas orien-

tados en esta línea son escasos o inexistentes. Un caso digno de estudio es el de los Colegios Mayores, comunidades universitarias residenciales en España de tradición multisecular que pretenden contribuir al desarrollo integral de los estudiantes universitarios. Sin embargo, la literatura que desarrolla la dimensión educativa de esta institución también es escasa y está desactualizada. Con el propósito de contribuir a perfilar su dimensión educativa, esta investigación aplica un cuestionario a directores de Colegios Mayores para: 1) explorar si la comunidad de Colegios Mayores está de acuerdo en considerar seis prácticas como propias de esta institución; 2) conocer el nivel de implementación de cada una de ellas; y 3) explorar si el modo en que la comunidad colegial se involucra en estas prácticas responde al modelo de Comunidades de Práctica propuesto por Etienne Wenger. El cuestionario fue respondido por 19 directores, representando al 15.2 % de la población (N=125). Partiendo de los resultados, es razonable afirmar que la mayoría de los directores de Colegios Mayores: 1) considera que las seis prácticas propuestas son propias de esta institución; 2) ya implementa estas prácticas en sus centros; y 3) considera que el modelo de Comunidades de Práctica refleja el modo en que la comunidad colegial se involucra en estas prácticas.

Descriptorios: desarrollo del carácter, Colegios Mayores, Comunidades de Práctica, educación del carácter, residencias universitarias, educación superior, universidad.

1. Introduction

The world is changing rapidly. For many institutions, this is a context that generates diverse crises for which they have not been able to prepare. Institu-

tions and their leaders need to rediscover their missions in a new and dynamic context and adapt their means in a strategic and intentional way to fulfill those missions.

This phenomenon is undoubtedly present in the educational field. Society demands from educational centers people capable of understanding and acting in today's world. It is becoming increasingly clear that the type of development demanded of children and young people does not consist solely in the acquisition of knowledge, skills or competencies, or in reaching certain levels of emotional balance. This is a lot, but it is not enough to meet the great challenges of our society, especially when we need citizens with a strong moral compass who are committed to the common good (Bok, 2020). Responding to this need, the character education movement has promoted the integration of the moral dimension into educational systems with a renewed emphasis over the past three decades (Bernal et al., 2015; Dabdoub, 2021; Dabdoub et al., 2020).

This movement focused on character development is beginning to be received at the university level. For years, various initiatives have been promoted to contribute to the character development of college students, such as mentoring, great books programs, service-learning, or leadership programs, among others (Brooks et al., 2019; Lleó et al., 2018; Lorenzo et al., 2019; Torralba, 2022). However, it is difficult to find at the university level initiatives aimed at generating communities in which climate or culture contribute to character development, a relatively common approach at the school level in the character education movement (Berger, 2003; Berkowitz, 2021; Elbot & Fulton, 2007; Lickona, 2004; Novick et al., 2002).

An ideal setting for generating such communities is residential centers that house university students. Their construction has become a particularly lucrative business internationally since 2020 (Kim, 2022). Building on the theory and experience generated at the school level, these residential contexts can be designed to generate communities that contribute to the character development of all their members. However, studies, guidelines, or programs along these lines are scarce or nonexistent, although there are several international associations that group together university residential centers that emphasize the development of their students. These include Collegiate Way International (2022), the European University College Association (2022), and the Residential College Society (2022).

In this reflection on how to generate this type of community, a case worthy of study is that of *Colegios Mayores*, residential university communities in Spain with a centuries-old tradition that aims to contribute to the integral development of university students (Carabias, 2013). In many ways, they can be considered as the Spanish version of the European colleges (de Lario, 2019). We believe that lessons can be learned from the experience of this institution to inspire those who wish to create communities that contribute to character development at the university level. However, the literature that develops the educational dimension of this institution is also scarce and outdated (Lascaris, 1952; Oliva, 2010; Suárez, 1966).

Recently, Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, and Naval (2022) have conducted a prelim-

inary study in which they identify: 1) six essential features of the nature of Colegios Mayores; 2) their educational mission; 3) six practices characteristic of this institution; and 4) the way in which the collegiate community engages in these practices.

The features of the nature of the Colegios Mayores and their educational mission have been easily identified in the current legislation, in the statutes of the Colegios Mayores and in the documents published by the *Consejo de Colegios Mayores Universitarios de España*, the association to which all these centers belong. The essential features of their nature are: 1) non-profit centers of higher education; 2) necessarily integrated into a university; 3) providing non-formal education; 4) to a diverse range of students; 5) belonging to a value-driven community; 6) in a residential context (Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, & Naval, 2022). In the case of the mission, the study refers to the Salamanca Statement (Consejo de Colegios Mayores Universitarios de España, 2018, pp. 135-136) written and signed by all the Colegios Mayores in Spain. Based on this two-page-long text, the following mission statement can be constructed. An emphasis on character development is clearly detected:

To strengthen the civic spirit of students, promoting values such as freedom, participation, equality, solidarity, coexistence, responsibility, tolerance and democracy with a critical and respectful attitude, fostering their commitment to society and instilling an open and constructive attitude towards the great challenges of the future.

Unfortunately, the particular practices of this institution and the way in which the

collegiate community is involved in them has not been codified or delineated. Therefore, such as model has been proposed by the authors based on their professional experience leading Colegios Mayores, and there are no official documents or studies to contrast what they propose (Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, & Naval, 2022; Oliva, 2010). Knowing and defining these elements is necessary to study how these communities can be intentionally and strategically designed to generate a culture or climate that positively impacts character development in Colegios Mayores. In addition, this study focused on Colegios Mayores can also inspire how non-residential university contexts can be designed to promote character development.

For these reasons, a study is needed to conduct an initial exploration to see whether the community of Colegios Mayores in Spain recognizes these practices and the way in which the collegiate community is involved in them as something of its own.

2. Objectives

This research has three main objectives. The first is to explore whether there is agreement in the community of Colegios Mayores on the six practices that Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, and Naval (2022) identify as characteristic of this institution. The second objective is to find out the level of implementation of each of these practices. Third, this study aims to explore whether the way in which the collegial community engages in these practices responds to the Communities of Practice model (Hoadley, 2012; Wenger, 1999).

Exploring which are the practices of Colegios Mayores, their level of implementation and the way in which the collegiate community engages in them contributes to make explicit the educational dimension of this institution. This opens the door to subsequent projects in which this experience can be shared and further deepens how these practices and the way in which students engage in them contribute to generate a type of community in which the climate or culture contributes to character development.

3. Method

To respond to the objectives of this study, a questionnaire was designed and administered online to directors of Colegios Mayores, following the guidelines of Regmi et al. (2016) and Ball (2019) for its design and application, and Grimshaw's guide (2014) to present the results.

The questionnaire was prepared by the authors with the advice of five experts on the subject, one from Spain and four international experts. It was distributed and applied using *Google Forms*. It has 46 items distributed in five sections: 1) profile of the director; 2) profile of the Colegio Mayor; 3) identification of common practices and their level of implementation; 4) Communities of Practice; and 5) comments. The estimated response time was 15 minutes. It was distributed and answered between May 10 and August 10, 2022.

The target population of the questionnaire is composed of directors of Colegios Mayores. It is difficult to determine the exact number of Colegios Mayores in Spain.

Each year the number varies due to closures and new openings. The Council of University Colleges of Spain speaks of 125 centers. Being a small number in relative terms, we tried to send the questionnaire to the entire population. After an arduous review, e-mails were obtained from 116 centers (92.8% of the estimated population).

The questionnaire was sent to each of these centers by means of a personalized e-mail addressed to each director. The body of the message requested their collaboration by answering the questionnaire and invited them to consult additional information on the web page of the research project in which this study is integrated (Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, Power, et al., 2022). The first mailing was sent on May 10, 2022 and a reminder was sent on May 17. No incentives were given.

Table 1 shows the items corresponding to the six specific practices (I1-I6) identified by Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, and Naval (2022), providing a brief description and concrete examples of each: I1. Collaborative governance; I2. Service roles and tasks; I3. Retreats, excursions, trips; I4. Collegial initiatives; I5. Peer mentoring; and I6. *tertulias*, colloquiums, informal meetings. In each of the items, two questions are answered. The first is directed to the level of implementation of the practice: Do you consider that this practice is implemented in your center? As a response option, you can choose one of four levels of implementation: *Level 1*: Yes, and I consider that it is practiced effectively; *Level 2*: Yes, but I consider that we would have to improve the way we practice it; *Level 3*: No, but we would like

it to be practiced; and *Level 4*: No, and we have no interest in practicing it. The second question is: Do you think that this practice can be considered as characteristic of Colegios Mayores? In this case, you can only choose between two possible answers: yes or no. In addition, in each of these six items there is the opportunity to add comments.

TABLE 1. Description and examples of practices characteristic of Colegios Mayores.

Practice	Description	Example
I1. Collaborative governance	This practice consists of the collegiate members participating in the governance of the Colegio Mayor through leadership and management tasks, processes of consultation and deliberation and/or through decision making, following the mission and values of the community and contributing to its common good.	By way of example: in my college there is a College Council or Assembly that brings together college members to deliberate and make decisions; there are working teams such as deanery commissions, committees, boards or clubs that entail leadership and management responsibilities; there is some kind of democratic process for the election of college members' representatives.
I2. Service roles and tasks	This practice consists of students being assigned a role or a task in which they provide a service to the community or contribute to the care and maintenance of the center's facilities.	By way of example: tidying and cleaning common areas; taking photographs and videos of activities; gardening tasks; creating content for the website or social networks; taking care of electronic equipment; library management.
I3. Retreats, excursions, trips	This practice consists of dedicating a few hours or days to withdraw from the ordinary life of the Colegio Mayor with a group of students to deepen or enhance some aspect of the community, such as its needs, mission or values.	By way of example: these experiences can take the form of an excursion to the mountains, a cultural visit, a professional trip, a work day, a spiritual retreat, a ski plan, a work camp, a study day.
I4. Collegial initiatives	This practice consists of listening to the voice of the students about the initiatives they would like to carry out and offering the necessary institutional support to implement them.	By way of example: the initiative of the students gives rise to social volunteering, conferences, round tables, colloquiums with invited experts, sports tournaments, clubs, activities, artistic experiences, debates, workshops, seminars, celebrations, excursions or cultural trips, among others. Institutional support can be provided in various ways: by creating spaces in which these initiatives are encouraged; by reserving a space in the center or in the University; by offering funding, in the event that the Colegio Mayor allocates a budget item for this purpose; by relying on the support and advice of experienced collegians in the organization and development of the initiatives.

15. Peer mentoring

This practice consists of facilitating the opportunity for students to establish an advisory/tutoring/mentoring relationship with another student or member of the Colegio Mayor. Essentially, this is a mentoring system between peers who share collegial status, where the mentee can benefit from the advice, experience and support of a more senior mentor.

For example: first-year students are assigned an advisor for academics; for the first few days of the course, there are senior students who spend time explaining how the Colegio Mayor works, introducing them to the community life, introducing them to other students; undergraduates can turn to graduate students or professors who are part of the collegiate community for academic, professional, or personal advice.

16. Tertulias, colloquiums, informal meetings

This practice consists of periodic informal meetings in which a significant part of the Colegio Mayor meets and has a relaxed conversation in a climate of trust and spontaneity.

For example: having a daily informal meeting in which a significant part of the collegial community meets and talks about what has happened that day; inviting a professional to meet with the community in the context of an informal conversation.

Note: The description of the practices and their examples were written by the authors and coincide with the items in the questionnaire.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 shows the items corresponding to the seven characteristics of Communities of Practice (I7-I13) identified in Hoadley (2012) and Wenger (1999). Each of the items explains how that characteristic is manifested in the context of Colegios Mayores. Since the model of Communities of Practice is relatively unknown in the community of Colegios Mayores, this part

of the questionnaire has a short descriptive text included in Appendix 1. Each of the items in this section answers a single question: do you think this statement adequately describes what happens in Colegios Mayores? There are only two possible answers: yes or no. In addition, each of these seven items offers the opportunity to add comments.

TABLE 2. Characteristics of Communities of Practice in the context of the Colegios Mayores.

Feature	In the context of the Colegios Mayores
17. Access to experts	<p><i>Features extracted from Hoadley (2012)</i></p> <p>Students must have access to experts (we can understand that in the Colegio Mayor the experts would be the senior students) and must perceive themselves as members, or aspire to be members, of a community in which the practices of the experts are central to the mission of the community.</p>

I8. Pre-existing culture

In order for students to be introduced to a pre-existing culture by joining a community of practice, it must already exist, with some sort of common history and identity.

I9. Legitimate peripheral participation

In an educational system there must be room for legitimate peripheral participation. This means that individuals who want to join this community can assume these practices gradually, being able to legitimately choose the pace and times they consider convenient.

Characteristics extracted from Wenger (1999)

I10. Flexible

It is a flexible training modality, in which there is no rigid, fixed, or pre-established program.

I11. Open

It is open because it responds to emerging needs within the community.

I12. Participatory and horizontal

It is participative and horizontal, since its members select the objectives, establish the way of working and support and lead each other.

I13. Self-regulated

It is self-regulating, since its members are the ones who decide how they want to participate, the degree of involvement, and the time of dedication.

Note: The description of the characteristics and their adaptation to the context of the Colegios Mayores were written by the authors and coincide with the items of the questionnaire.

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Results

As noted above, the questionnaire was sent to the directors of 116 centers. Nineteen responses were received. Many institutional e-mails are not regularly monitored in Colegios Mayores. In other cases, those that are monitored do not involve direct communication with the director, which complicates the questionnaire reaching its addressee.

It is also worth noting that it is not common for the directors of Colegios Mayores to dedicate themselves exclusively to this job. In fact, among the par-

ticipants in the questionnaire, only 20% are dedicated full time. This complicates the real possibilities of them attending this type of collaboration. These reasons, together with the absence of incentives, explain the response rate.

The demographic data of the sample are shown in Table 3.

Regarding the representativeness of the sample, it would have been desirable to have a greater participation of public centers. It may seem that public centers would be underrepresented.

TABLE 3. Demographic data of the sample of Colegios Mayores in Spain.

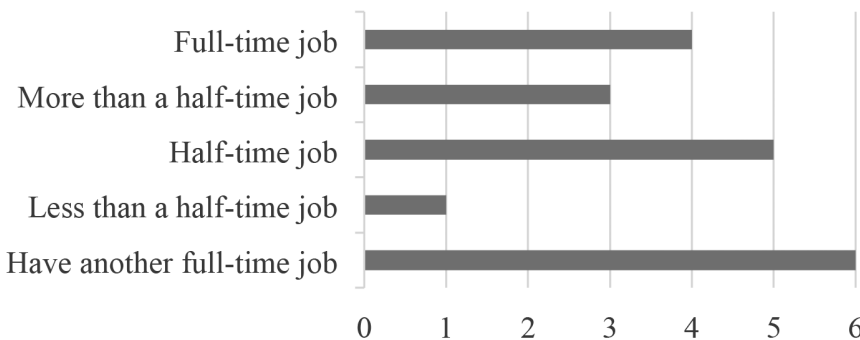
Number of directors (n)	19 (15.2% of the population)
Universities represented	9
Provincial capitals represented	8
Scope	Public (1 5.3%), Private (18 94.7%)
Diversification by gender	Female (6 31.6%), Male (8 42.1%), Mixed (5 26.3%)
Christian Inspiration	Yes (18 94.7%), No (1 5.3%)

Source: Own elaboration.

However, if we take as a reference the university with the largest number of Colegios Mayores, the *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, it turns out that, of its 36 Colegios Mayores, 31 are private (86.1%) and 5 are public (13.9%). The next university with the largest number of Colegios Mayores is the *Universidad de Granada*, which has 12 Colegios Mayores, of which 11 are private (91.6%) and one is public (8.3%). The university with the highest number of Colegios Mayores per student, the *Universidad de Navarra*, has 11 Colegios Mayores, all of which are private. In short, the proportion of public and private centers in the sample does not differ much from the proportion of the population.

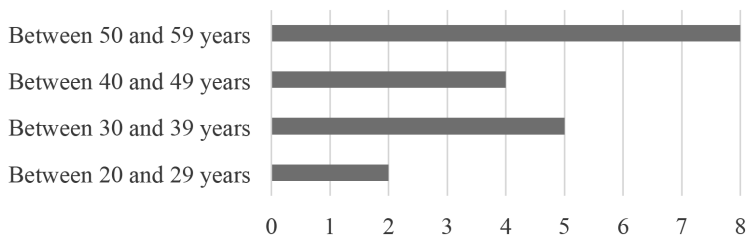
Other demographic data of interest are shown in Graph 1, which presents the dedication of the directors to the direction of the Colegio Mayor, and Graph 2, which presents the age ranges of the directors who responded to the questionnaire. More demographic data were collected, including: the year of foundation, the addresses of the web pages of each Colegio Mayor, the entities or institutions responsible for the management of each center, the residential capacity, and the texts of their missions. These data have not been included because they are not strictly related to the objectives of the article and because their presentation exceeds the permitted length limit.

GRAPH 1. Distribution of directors by dedication to the Colegio Mayor.



Source: Own elaboration.

GRAPH 2. Distribution of directors by age range.

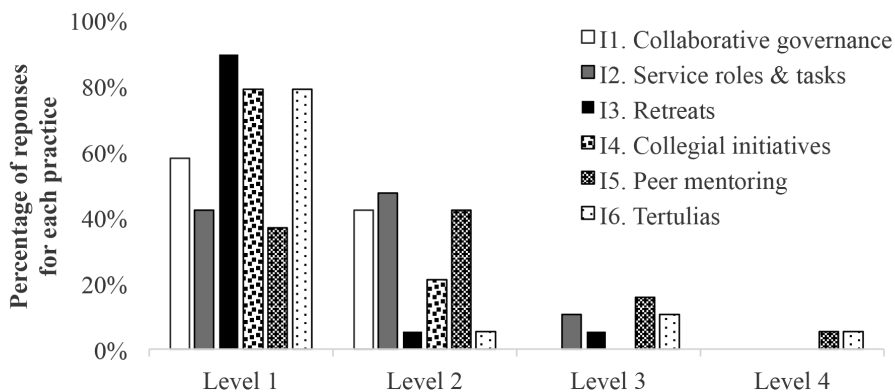


Source: Own elaboration.

Graph 3 shows the percentage of responses that place each of the six proposed practices in each of the four levels of implementation. It shows that most directors consider that the six practices are adequately implemented in their schools (Level 1) or that they can improve their implementation (Level 2).

It also shows that a small group does not implement four of these practices but is interested in doing so (Level 3). Lastly, only one director considers that peer mentoring and *tertulias* are not implemented in his/her Colegio Mayor and is not interested in integrating them (Level 4).

GRAPH 3. Level of implementation of practices in Colegios Mayores.



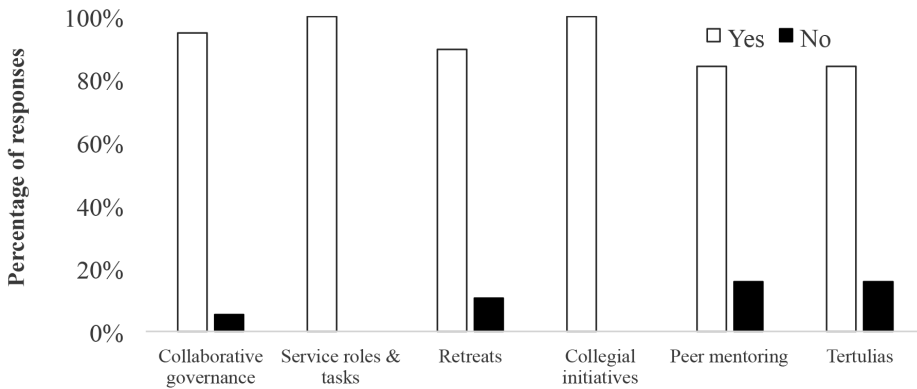
Note: A description of the four levels can be found in the Method section.

Source: Own elaboration.

Graph 4 shows the percentage of responses obtained when asked whether each of the six proposed practices can be

considered as specific to or characteristic of Colegios Mayores. It shows that most directors confirm this hypothesis.

GRAPH 4. Identification of characteristic practices of Colegios Mayores.

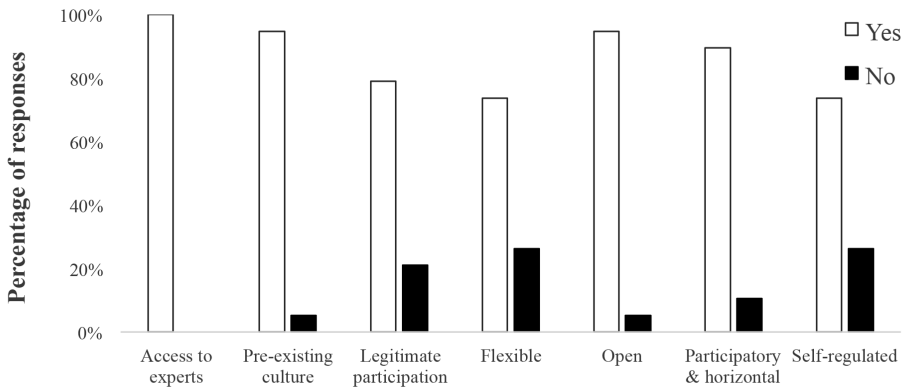


Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, Graph 5 shows the percentage of responses received indicating whether the characteristics of the Communities of Practice represent the way

in which students engage in the practices of Colegios Mayores. It shows that the responses of most directors confirm this hypothesis.

GRAPH 5. Characteristics of Communities of Practice in the context of the Colegios Mayores.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the following, we describe the results obtained for each practice and for each of

the characteristics of the Communities of Practice.

11. Participatory governance (*collaborative governance*)

100% of the directors consider that participatory governance is practiced in their Colegio Mayor. In addition, 57.9% of the directors consider that it is conducted effectively, while 42.1% think that the way in which it is practiced could be improved. Except for one director, the rest consider that it is a practice typical of the Colegios Mayores (94.7%). There were 6 comments on this item. As an example, we show two of them:

- The term “college” refers to the participation of the members in the planning and deliberation of their activities while respecting the values and mission of the Colegio Mayor. It is an excellent way to educate in responsibility.
- They are the protagonists of their own training, and the assumption of responsibilities is a good opportunity for growth and service.

12. Service roles and tasks

A total of 89.5% of the participants consider that this is an integrated practice in their centers, including both those who consider that it is adequately implemented (42.1%) and those who think that it should be improved (47.4%). The rest (10.5%) consider that this practice should be incorporated. 100% agree that this is a practice typical of the Colegios Mayores. There were 6 comments on this item. By way of example, we show two of them:

- In the same way as participatory governance, even at the same level of im-

portance, committees give concrete expression to the spirit of service that we promote.

- Assuming responsibility also means taking on specific tasks for the benefit of all.

13. Retreats, excursions, trips

This is the practice that most directors (89.5%) consider to be the most effectively integrated practice in their Colegios Mayores. The 5.3% consider that its implementation could be improved. The remaining 5.3% consider that they do not practice it but think that it would be convenient to incorporate it. There were 6 comments on this item. As an example, we show one of them:

- It is part of the Colegio Mayor to promote an adequate coexistence, for which it is necessary to get to know each other and to carry out responsibilities together. The retreats and excursions encourage a personal relationship outside the strictly academic issues.

14. Collegial initiatives

100% of the directors consider that their Colegio Mayor encourages initiative by giving a voice to the members of the community and by providing institutional support. The 78.9% say that this is done in an effective way, while 21.1% think that it could be improved. 100% consider that this is a practice typical of the Colegios Mayores. In this section there were 6 comments. By way of example, we show two of them:

- My experience is that the best initiatives that have been conducted in my Colegio Mayor have been proposed by the students.
- It is important that the activities that are carried out come from the initiative of the students, although often it is not clear for them, and sometimes neither for us, which are the appropriate channels to realize them.

15. Peer-mentoring

The 78.9% consider that peer mentoring is practiced in their College. The 36.8% consider that it is done effectively, while 42.1% think that they should improve the way it is done. The 15% say that there is no peer mentoring being practiced in their Colegio Mayor, but they would be interested in having it. Only one director (5.3%) considers that there is no peer mentoring in his/her Colegio Mayor and has no interest in having it. A total of 84.2% think that this is a practice is characteristic of Colegios Mayores. In this section there were 5 comments. By way of example, we show two of them:

- It is one of the things that the first-year residents appreciate the most and is a valuable help to them.
- The senior students are in charge of accompanying the junior students; this accompaniment is essential in the first year of college life.

16. *Tertulias*, colloquiums, informal meetings.

The 84.2% consider that this type of gatherings, colloquiums or informal

meetings are practiced in their Colegios Mayores. The 78.9% consider that it is done effectively and 5.3% that it should be improved. Two directors (10.5%) affirm that these types of meetings do not take place in their center but would be interested in having them. Only one director (5.3%) considers that this type of meeting does not take place in his Colegio Mayor and would not be interested in it being organized. A total of 84.2% consider that this is a practice characteristic of Colegios Mayores. In this section there were 5 comments. As an example, we show two of them:

- These are the best moments of the day, when they share interests, what has happened during the day and they promote more interaction between them. Inviting professionals to these meetings allows them to broaden their horizons and not just focus on talking about what they are studying.
- It is a good opportunity to learn to listen to each other, to respect each other's turn to speak, to express one's opinions and argue them properly, as well as to get to know each other better.

4.1. Characteristics of the Communities of Practice

The most accepted characteristics are: that it allows access to experts (100%); that there is a pre-existing culture into which one is incorporated (94.7%); that it is open, because it responds to emerging needs within the community (94.7%); and that it is participatory and horizontal (89.5%). Those with a lower acceptance

rate are those that describe these communities as flexible and self-regulated, both with 73.7%. The idea that there can be legitimate peripheral participation is accepted by 78.9% of the directors. In any case, all items have a degree of acceptance above 70%. There were 18 comments in this section. By way of example, we show three of them:

- It is not always easy for the students themselves to choose the pace, nor is it always easy for the direction team to work with different rhythms.
- I think the role of senior students in a broad sense is essential. Not only as professional advisors, but also as inspirers of a lifestyle.
- It is important that they all get involved in the Colegio Mayor, but clearly each one will do it in a different way according to their hobbies, tastes, interests, etc. And it is always gradual, the involvement of the senior residents who have been at the Colegio Mayor for years is fundamental for the success of the project.

5. Discussion

A frequently discussed question is whether Colegios Mayores differ from ordinary university residences in terms of their educational dimension. Considering their nature, mission, practices, and the way in which these practices convey collegial life, it can be affirmed that Colegios Mayores are true educational institutions that are distinguished from

a mere accommodation with services. A descriptive analysis of the results invites to affirm that the directors of Colegios Mayores consider that the six practices identified by Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz and Naval (2022) and the Communities of Practice model reflect the educational *praxis* of this institution.

This is not a minor advance, since having categories to present the way in which Colegios Mayores educate allows a theorization and deepening of this peculiar educational model. It is difficult to find previous studies whose results can be compared and discussed with those found in this one. Surely future similar studies will allow to establish a dialogue that will lead to qualify, correct, or deepen the statements of this research.

The number of participants is not high. However, the specificity of the topic could justify this. Of the 19 participating directors, only one of them belongs to a public center. By no means is this single center considered to represent the public Colegios Mayores. Nevertheless, it is significant that the only public center coincides with what most private centers answered, subscribing the six practices and six of the seven characteristics of Communities of Practice. Moreover, in a sector where most centers are private, it is considered that the representativeness of the sample is not compromised.

In the case of the practices, all of them appear at least once mentioned in the interviews that Oliva (2010) conducted with numerous Colegios Mayores, although at

no time did he attempt to verify whether they were practices that were inherent or essential to the nature of Colegios Mayores. One practice that stands out above all others and gives this institution its most characteristic features is collaborative governance. This practice is in direct resonance with approaches such as the Just Community (Power, 1988), the 11 principles framework (Lickona, 1996) or the PRIMED model (Berkowitz, 2021), which allows us to assume that it has a leading role in positively impacting character development.

It is confirmed that the Communities of Practice model, concretized in the seven characteristics drawn from Hoadley (2012) and Wenger (1999), is widely accepted by the respondents as an accurate way to explain how members of the collegial community are incorporated in the practices of Colegios Mayores. These seven characteristics are implicit in Fernando Suarez's *Teoría del Colegio Mayor* (1966), especially in the chapter entitled "*La convivencia y sus ventajas*" (Community life and its advantages). Although the author uses different words, the essential ideas and concepts are practically the same, so that the results of this study coincide with what Suárez proposed more than half a century ago about the educational nature of Colegios Mayores.

6. Conclusions and final thoughts

The results obtained in the questionnaire suggest the following conclusions. First, the community of Colegios Mayores represented by their directors considers that the six practices identified by Dabdoub,

Salaverría, Berkowitz, and Naval (2022) are part of the nature of this institution. Second, that most directors already implement these practices and perceive that they perform them adequately or that they can improve, while a small group does not have some of these practices incorporated but would like to start doing so. Third, most directors believe that the characteristics of the Communities of Practice model accurately describe how students engage in the practices of Colegios Mayores.

This study is a significant advance in the task of describing the educational dimension of Colegios Mayores. It may also help other similar entities that are looking for ways to make explicit the practices they conduct to promote the development of their students and how they implement them. Moreover, it can serve as an example and inspiration for university residential centers that wish to integrate educational purposes into their communities.

A pending study is how these practices should be designed to promote a positive impact on character development. For example, there are directors who exercise collaborative governance in such a way that they are an equal member of the community, acting as experienced consultants, not *enforcing* rules or instilling a particular ideology, but inspiring respect for universal values and principles. In contrast, other directors push through rules and make decisions without reaching agreement with other members of the community, leaving little room for students to make decisions and assume leadership roles. Which of the two approaches con-

tributes more and better to promoting the development of student character?

We believe that the next step in this research line is to inform the design of these practices with the advances that the science of moral and character education has gained over the past decades. Both the PRIMED model for character education (Berkowitz, 2021) and the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education (Lickona, 1996) offer design principles not only for specific practices, but for the design of educational communities, although their proposals are aimed at the school level. Adapting these design principles to university level could help make Colegios Mayores' communities and their practices effective in promoting character development.

One initiative in this line is the research project "Leveraging Colegios Mayores for moral development in higher education through the Just Community approach" (Dabdoub, Salaverría, Berkowitz, Power, et al., 2022). In this project, experts from the Just Community approach to moral development (Power, 1988; Power & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008) collaborate with experts in residential colleges to elaborate a guide to design collaborative governance practices to promote students' moral development in university settings.

With these studies on the specific case of Colegios Mayores we want to open the reflection on how residential university communities can be designed in such a way that they contribute to the development of character. We hope that they can

be one more actor, and a decisive one, in the general effort to make universities places where the integral development of character is favored.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Brief introduction to the model of Communities of Practice in the context of community colleges

We believe that it is difficult to say that students must compulsorily assume the educational practices of a Colegio Mayor. On the other hand, we do not believe that Colegios Mayores are indifferent to their students being involved in these practices that they consider positive for their development. Avoiding obligation and indifference, we believe that there is a better way to explain this reality of Colegios Mayores, in which the individual freedom of each student is compatible with an institutional educational proposal.

One model that can help to understand how students engage in the Practices of Colegios Mayores is Communities of practice. Hoadley (2012) defines it as follows:

A community of practice is an important theoretical construct that underlies a particular model of learning, namely, learning in which people, through a process of legitimate peripheral participation, take up membership and identity with a community which serves as the home of these shared practices. While knowledge communities can take many forms (communities of interest, knowledge-building communities, Delphi groups, etc.), Communities of

practice typically have a degree of informality (low to moderate institutionalization, making them a community and not an organization), and high connectivity (rather tight social relationships between members of the community, and a relatively high degree of identification with the group). (p. 299)

Another approach is to understand Communities of Practice as a novel learning modality aimed at people who: are interested in continuing to learn; believe that they can contribute their knowledge and skills to their community; know that by working and sharing with others they can learn more, go further, and develop better outcomes; are willing to share with the professional community; believe in the social construction of knowledge and feel they are agents of the development of their profession, that is, of the whole community, and of their own development.

In the context of Colegios Mayores, a Community of Practice can be defined as a space of interaction and mediation in which a group of people with a common mission reflect on the practices that lead to their personal and community goals, supporting each other and collaborating to develop and improve.

The following statements show characteristics of a community of practice that help to differentiate this approach from an ordinary course or training program. Please indicate the extent to which you agree that these characteristics represent the way learning and development take place in the context of Colegios Mayores.

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Authors' biographies

Juan P. Dabdoub is Lecturer at the School of Education and Psychology of the Universidad de Navarra, where he defended his doctoral dissertation in 2019. He is member of the Education, Citizenship, and Character Research Group since 2015, Secretary of the Association of Moral Education since 2021, and founder and co-Director of University Communities for Character Development. His lines of research focus on the theory and practice of character education, educational leadership, and the design, implementation, and assessment of interventions that promote character development.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3750-0685>

Aitor R. Salaverría is a doctoral student at the School of Education and Psychology of the Universidad de Navarra, where he obtained his M.A. in Globalization and Social Integration Law in 2011. His research focuses on studying how to

promote character development in university contexts. He collaborates closely with the Education, Citizenship and Character Research Group since 2019 and is founder and co-Director of University Communities for Character Development. He has been a Director and consultant of Colegios Mayores since 2011.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9894-2917>

Marvin Berkowitz is the first Sanford N. McDonnell Endowed Professor of Character Education and co-Director of the Center for Character & Citizenship at the University of Missouri-St. Louis since 1998. His research focuses on character education, moral development, and educational leadership. He is founder and co-editor of the *Journal of Character Education* and founder of the Center for Addiction and Behavioral Health Research in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4335-6405>

Table of contents

Sumario

A renewed character education following the pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine

Una educación renovada del carácter tras la pandemia y la invasión de Ucrania

Editors: José Antonio Ibáñez-Martín, & Josu Ahedo
Editores: José Antonio Ibáñez-Martín y Josu Ahedo

José Antonio Ibáñez-Martín, & Josu Ahedo

Introduction: A renewed character education following the pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine
Presentación: Una educación renovada del carácter tras la pandemia y la invasión de Ucrania 5

Studies

Estudios

Aurora Bernal Martínez de Soria & Concepción Naval

Flourishing as the aim of character education
El florecimiento como fin de la educación del carácter 17

Randall Curren

Overcoming what divides us: Global Civic Friendship and 'Full Development of the Human Personality'
Superar lo que nos divide: la Amistad Cívica Global y «El pleno desarrollo de la Personalidad Humana» 33

Edward Brooks, & Jorge L. Villacís

To educate citizens and citizen-leaders for our society: Renewing character education in Universities
Formar ciudadanos y ciudadanos-líderes para nuestra sociedad: renovando la educación del carácter en las universidades 51

Francisco Esteban Bara, & Carmen Caro Samada

The cultivation of critical thinking through university tutoring: A new opportunity after Covid-19
El cultivo del pensamiento crítico a través de la tutoría universitaria: una nueva oportunidad tras la Covid-19 73

David Hernández de la Fuente

Educational reforms for a crisis. On the education of character in Plato and Aristotle
Reformas educativas para una crisis. Acerca de la educación del carácter en Platón y Aristóteles 91

José Antonio Ibáñez-Martín

The plural concept of good character
El plural concepto del buen carácter 107

Juan Luis Fuentes, & Jorge Valero Berzosa

New digital virtues or virtues for the digital context. Do we need a new model of character education?
Nuevas virtudes digitales o virtudes para el contexto digital: ¿es necesaria una nueva educación del carácter? 123

Zaida Espinosa Zárate, Josu Ahedo, & Miguel Rumayor

Friendship and character education: A systematic review
Amistad y educación del carácter: una revisión sistemática 143

Juan P. Dabdoub, Aitor R. Salaverría, & Marvin Berkowitz

Identifying practices to promote character development in university residential settings: The case of Colegios Mayores
Identificación de prácticas para promover el desarrollo del carácter en contextos residenciales universitarios: el caso de los Colegios Mayores 171

María José Ibáñez Ayuso

The Spanish Colegios Mayores: The pedagogical value of a longstanding institution

Los Colegios Mayores: el valor pedagógico de una institución centenaria

191

Book reviews

Gairín, J., & Castro, D. (2021). *El contexto organizativo como espacio de intervención [The organisational context as a space for intervention]* (Anna Díaz-Vicario). **Ahedo, J., Caro, C., & Fuentes, J. L. (Coords.) (2021).** *Cultivar el carácter en la familia: una tarea ineludible [Cultivating Character in the*

Family: an Unavoidable Task] (Natália De Araújo Santos). **Fukuyama, F. (2022).** *Liberalism and its discontents* (Jorge Valero Berzosa). **Watts, P., Fullard, M., & Peterson, A. (2021).** *Understanding character education: Approaches, applications, and issues* (Dana Atef Jeries). **Balduzzi, E. (Coord.) (2021).** *La sfida educativa della Laudato si' e l'educazione del carattere [The educational challenge of 'Laudato si' and character education]* (Maria Valentini). 209

Instructions for authors

Instrucciones para los autores

229

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