

OTM Writing Guide

Georgia Tech National Residence Hall Honorary | Last Updated: 10/07/2020 | FY21

Section I: What is an OTM?

An OTM, or “Of The Month,” is a premiere recognition tool sponsored by the [National Residence Hall Honorary \(NRHH\)](#) and the [National Association of College and University Residence Halls \(NACURH, Inc.\)](#), which is the leading national organization for leadership development, service, and recognition in post-secondary residential institutions. In short, an OTM is a formal statement of recognition submitted online that explains how one person, group, or program made a positive, meaningful impact during the month for which it is submitted. You can think of an OTM as a pat on the back and a formalized process for saying “great job” to those who improve the residential experience and lives of residents on campus. OTMs are eligible for campus, regional, and national recognition.

Section II: Why should I write an OTM?

OTMs are just one way to recognize others, and recognition is a wonderful way to show appreciation and support to your Hall, Resident Assistants, Communities, Students, Advisors, and more for their hard work. When you write an OTM for somebody or something, you’re saying “I hear you, I see you, and I appreciate you for what you did.” Oprah Winfrey touched on the universality of wanting to be appreciated in her 2013 Harvard commencement speech:

“I have to say that the single most important lesson I learned in 25 years talking every single day to people was that there’s a common denominator in our human experience....The common denominator that I found in every single interview is we want to be validated. We want to be understood. I’ve done over 35,000 interviews in my career. And as soon as that camera shuts off, everyone always turns to me and inevitably, in their own way, asks this question: “Was that OK?” I heard it from President Bush. I heard it from President Obama. I’ve heard it from heroes and from housewives. I’ve heard it from victims and perpetrators of crimes. I even heard it from Beyoncé in all of her Beyoncé-ness....[We] all want to know one thing: “Was that OK?” “Did you hear me?” “Do you see me?” “Did what I say mean anything to you?””

For leaders and employers especially, recognition is valuable. [The Harvard Business Review reports](#) that 53% of people said that receiving more recognition from and feeling more appreciated by their boss would help them stay longer at their company. Despite this, [Gallup reports](#) that “only one in three workers in the US strongly agree that they received recognition or praise for doing good work in the past seven days.” Clearly, there’s a lot to gain by recognizing others and a lot of missed opportunities to do so.

Still not convinced? Take six minutes to watch [this TED Talk on “Everyday leadership.”](#) and pay attention to the importance of recognizing somebody.

Section III: Types of OTMs

There are four broad categories of OTMs: individuals, groups, programs, and spotlight.

Subsection A: Individual OTMs

Within this category, there are 9 OTM subcategories:

- **Advisor:** This category works to recognize the impact any individual who directly advises a residence life organization has made on the residence hall communities. Submissions will highlight outstanding contributions to the organization(s) and residence halls. Examples of



submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: RHA Advisor, NRHH Advisor, Hall Council Advisor, Advisor to a Residence Hall Campus Conduct Board, etc.

- **Student:** This category works to recognize the impact enrolled students have on the campus community in and outside of the residence halls. This category is intended to highlight several areas of student life such as academics, leadership, student engagement, etc. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: general members of RHA/NRHH/Hall Council, residents, neighbors, roommates, etc.
- **First-Year Student:** This category works to recognize the impact a first year student (first-time first-year student, transfer student, non-traditional student) has made on the campus community in and outside of housing campus communities. This category is intended to highlight individuals who excel in adapting to new environments within their residence hall, take an active role in their community, and positively impact those around them. Submissions may also highlight the academic achievements, involvement, and contributions to the campus community. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: general members of RHA/NRHH/Hall Council, residents, neighbors, roommates, etc. who are in their first year of college.
- **Institution Faculty/Staff:** This category works to recognize the impact that institution faculty or staff have on individuals outside of residence life who support students in their academics and/or personal affairs. This category is intended for individuals who have made a contribution to the campus community in and outside of the classroom. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: professors, instructors, teaching assistants, counselors, other academic affairs staff, custodial or maintenance staff, public safety officers, dining services staff, health services staff, administrators, etc.
- **Resident Assistant:** This category works to recognize Resident Assistants (RAs) who impact individuals within housing campus communities. This category is intended to highlight the achievements of RAs who have gone above and beyond the duties as outlined in their job description to support residents in the communities and should focus on the accomplishments within the RA role.
- **Graduate Assistant:** This category works to recognize the impact that housing graduate assistant (GA) staff have on the housing campus communities. This category is intended to highlight the achievements of GAs who have gone above and beyond the duties as outlined in their job description to support housing campus communities. *Note that Georgia Tech does not hire GAs in housing campus communities; thus, you should not submit an OTM in this category.*
- **Student Staff Member:** This category works to recognize the impact that student staff members of residence life have on housing campus communities. This category is intended to highlight the student staff members who have gone above and beyond the duties as outlined in their job description. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: area office assistants, LLC student assistants, in-hall tutors, etc. *Note that RAs do not fall into this category; OTMs for RAs should be submitted under the specific Resident Assistant Category.*
- **Residence Life Professional Staff:** This category works to recognize professional staff members who aid residents within housing campus communities. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: Hall Directors, Area Managers, Assistant Directors, Associate Directors, Support Staff, HRL Administration, etc.

Subsection B: Group OTMs

Within this category, there are 3 OTM subcategories:

- **Organization:** This category works to recognize any student organization that has actively contributed to the student leadership, recognition, or other aspects of on-campus life during the month of nomination. Emphasis should be placed on the successes of the organization as a



whole, not just a few members, and should detail how they have helped their residence life community. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: Hall Councils, NRHH Chapters, RHAs, RSOs, etc.

- **Residential Community:** This category works to recognize the impact that residential communities have on students living on-campus. This category is intended to highlight the achievements of the community (excluding programming) and how the community has benefitted the residents living within it. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: wings, halls, floors, buildings, complexes, group of residents, etc.

Subsection C: Program OTMs

Within this category, there are 5 OTM subcategories:

- **Community Service Program:** A service or philanthropic program that benefits a group, charity, or other organization. The program should focus on the importance of the residents giving back to the communities in which they live. Examples include, but are not limited to: drives, fundraisers, days of service, etc.
- **Diversity Program:** A program that promotes and educates about diversity and understanding. This program illustrates the importance of promoting diversity in the residence halls as well as embracing diversity in the everyday lives of the residents.
- **Educational Program:** A program meant to educate residents about a topic, issue or idea. Programs nominated in this category can include, but are not limited to programming focused on academic success, learning a new skill, promoting global citizenship, etc.
- **Passive Program:** Any program that does not require anyone to actively run it for people to participate in it. This category is intended to recognize residential programming that occurs through bulletin boards, newsletters, pamphlets, etc.
- **Social Program:** Any social program that focuses on resident interaction and their ability to meet new people and socialize.

Subsection D: Spotlight

- **Spotlight:** This category works to recognize the impact of anything that does not fall under any of the other categories that have made notable contributions to the campus community. Individuals or groups that would be eligible for nomination in any other category are ineligible for nomination in the Spotlight category. Examples of submissions in this category include, but are not limited to: advisors outside of residence life organizations, executive board members outside of residence life organizations, student staff members outside of residence life organizations, entire executive boards, physical objects, etc.

Subsection E: OTM Category Flowchart

If you don't know where to start or what category your OTM belongs to, take a look at the color-coded OTM Category Flowchart [here](#).

Section IV: Submitting OTMs

To submit an OTM, follow the below steps:

1. Go to otms.nrhh.org.
2. Click "Log in" from the menu at the top of the screen. If this is your first time writing an OTM, you'll need to create a new account by selecting "Register as a new user." Otherwise, login with your credentials. NOTE: If you had an account with the new OTM Database (prior to 2020), you will need to create a new account for the new OTM Database.



- a. Upon account creation, you may be asked to provide your name, phone number, university, and organization. Be sure to select “Georgia Institute of Technology” as your university and the residence hall you are currently living in as your organization. If you are neither an on-campus resident nor a member of the RHA or NRHH Executive Board, select “Other” as your organization.
 - b. Your account may need to be activated by our NRHH Campus Administrator before you can submit OTMs. Please allow up to 3 business days for your account to be fully activated. If you are still unable to access your account after 3 business days, please email or Advisor, Larry T. Brown, at NRHH.Advisor@rha.gatech.edu.
3. Look at the sidebar. Under Nominations, you’ll see a “Submit” subheader. Under that subheader, select “Program” if you are writing a Program OTM (see categories above) or “General” if you are writing a non-Program OTM (see categories above).
4. Complete the OTM submission form.
 - a. For “Category,” select the appropriate category from the list provided above.
 - b. For “Organization,” select the nominee’s on-campus residence hall. If your nominee is not an on-campus resident, select “Other” or the most applicable category.
 - c. For “Email” and “Phone,” enter the nominee’s contact information (not your own). If you do not have the nominee’s contact information, leave these fields blank. If you populate these fields, your nominee will receive a copy of your OTM at the end of the month.
5. Want to make sure that your OTM was successfully submitted? Click on “Past Submissions” in the sidebar; your OTM should be there if it was successfully submitted.

Section V: Writing a Good OTM

Great OTMs share the following characteristics:

- **Correct Category**—OTMs in the wrong category (see above) can’t be selected as campus winners
- **Month-Specific**—the overwhelming majority of accomplishments or events discussed in the OTM occurred in the month of nomination
- **Outstanding**—the achievements or events demonstrate the nominee’s ability to exceed expectations and go beyond the general call of duty; the event or nominee didn’t simply “check a box” or “do their day-to-day job”
- **High Quality and Word Count**—the OTM provides as many specific details as possible, avoiding generalizations and vague language when possible; the OTM is grammatically correct and as close to the provided word maximums as possible
- **Unique and High Impact**—the accomplishment or event was creative and/or novel, and it had far-reaching effects on or deep value to individuals, communities, or the campus at large

The best way to understand what makes an OTM “good” is to look at some examples.

Section VI: Examples of OTMs

Below are selected examples of various OTMs; some have had identifying details and information removed, and each has been color-coded as follows:

- Gray Text = General language, vague language, or general context
- Green Text = Language regarding month-specificity
- Yellow Text = Specific, detailed language
- Blue Text = Language regarding impact



Subsection A: March 2012 Resident Assistant OTM Submission

"Sandy Manges has been with the Residence Hall Association since entering Georgia Tech four years ago. Currently, she serves as the Staff Representative for the organization and is the Resident Assistant in a freshmen residence hall. Despite being hired by the department of housing, Sandy's true loyalty has always lived with RHA because of its amazing way of bringing a sense of community to campus through leadership and programming.

She has attended almost every Legislative Council, attending every meeting in March. She provides insight from a student staff members point of view. She asks thoughtful questions, utilizing her vast knowledge of the organization to represent the residents as best as she can.

I attended the hall council meeting where Sandy is an RA. I should not have been surprised to see her bring cookies and other snack foods for the residents while they discussed business. She also provided important information from Legislative Council, that her officers forgot. She truly is an important asset for the Residence Hall Association and the Executive Board is thankful for her awe-inspiring dedication, amazing spirit, and positive energy.

On March 8th, Sandy had an Indoor S'mores program where her and her residents made smores indoors and talked about how to register for classes, which professors to take or not to take, summer plans, how to sign up for housing, and reminders about how to have fun and be safe over spring break. With class registration impending, the residents really appreciated the tips and tricks to creating a successful schedule

For Pi Day, she planned an entire party where the residents ate mini-pies. Furthermore, she held a contest where residents attempt to recite the most digits of Pi. She ended the party telling her residents punny math jokes. She had over 30 residents attend, which is about 80% of her residents.

The next day (3/15), Sandy held an event titled Wings, Spring Flings, and Other Free Things. The event focused on cheap or free things to do around Atlanta over Spring Break, useful for residents who lounge around Atlanta for the week. Free entertainment (concerts, shows etc), cheap and delicious places to eat, groupon/scoutmob, and free adventures were the main categories. We also had free wings for everyone who completed the scavenger hunt layout of the event (visiting each station on their treasure map).

On March 30th, Sandy organized for an Exotic Petting Zoo to visit Georgia Tech, allowing residents to de-stress with animals. These were not ordinary animals, these were camels, llamas, kangaroos, foxes, and more! The petting zoo is quite educational as the keepers discuss the characteristics of these amazing creatures. The animals were located in front of certain residence halls to market directly to the residents. This has been the third year that Sandy has planned the event, each time having an audience of over 400 residents. This event has been one of the largest attended events put on by a resident in recent history.

She attends all of the Georgia Tech's RHA events, including the Stone Mountain excursion on March 31st. Having climbed the mountain previously, she was instrumental in helping others hike the slippery mountain. Furthermore, her exuberance and excitement kept everyone smiling.

Overall, Sandy's dedication to the organization has gone unrecognized for four years. Now is the time for recognition, now is the time to thank Sandy Manges for being an amazing Staff Representative, leader, resident assistant, and friend. March 2012 illustrates a small portion of what Sandy has offered to the



organization. She epitomizes the positive relationship between Resident Assistant and residents, which is why Sandy Manges should be Resident Assistant of March.”

Commentary: This OTM was selected as the NACURH Resident Assistant OTM of the Month in March 2012 and is an excellent example of a strong OTM. The OTM begins by establishing context and foundational information that’s important in understanding what role Sandy plays in residential communities at Tech. While exposition in OTMs should be minimized (since exposition is usually broad, general, and not month specific), the exposition here paints a picture of Sandy’s long-term, sustained commitment to residence life on campus. Immediately following the exposition, this OTM details not one, not two, but six different month-specific instances of Sandy going above and beyond to foster community. Each example of Sandy’s “dedication to the organization” is evidenced with numerous details. The OTM, for example, doesn’t merely discuss how Sandy hosted four events in the month of March—it describes exactly what each event was and how Sandy was involved in each event. Further, the impact of most events is discussed, and concrete, quantitative data is provided where available to highlight Sandy’s far-reaching impact.

Subsection B: October 2019 Executive Board Member OTM Submission

“NAME has been nothing less than stellar with his involvement in RHA. NAME can be seen at each of the programs engaging students, and making sure they feel right at home. NAME has been a great leader leading a delegation at the SAACURH conference where he coached around 5 new delegates at this conference. NAME is a team player, and a great arranger of time. NAME makes sure everyone is in the loop with any program happening from RHA. NAME is very spirited, and pays close attention to how he can reach students where they are.”

Commentary: This OTM was not recognized at any level (campus, regional, national) and represents a weak OTM submission. The majority of the language in the OTM is vague, and no achievements or efforts discussed are indicated as month-specific. While this individual’s strengths as a “team player” and “great arranger of time” are likely beneficial to the organization and the residential body at large, specific impacts of those strengths are not provided; further, specific examples of times when those strengths were exhibited are lacking. At only 96 words, this OTM uses less than 20% of the word maximum, and most of the words employed don’t demonstrate any specific outstanding accomplishments but rather general personality characteristics: “a great leader,” “very spirited,” etc.

Subsection C: September 2019 Advisor OTM Submission

“I am nominating NAME for Advisor of the Month for September 2019 due to her outstanding contributions to her role and so much more as advisor of the COMMUNITY NAME community council. NAME has not only served well with her team of 5 Hall Council Officers in providing quality programs for the residential community, she has also gone above and beyond by serving as a lead on our Hall Director advisory committee. In its second year of operation this committee has been charged with assisting the Residence Hall Association with its annual Hall Council Officer Fall Training, which is a comprehensive training geared towards making sure all Hall Council Officers are able to complete their position requirements throughout the year. She has also worked with the RHA Advisor to coordinate a training for all of our 18 hall council advisors including providing sessions on Advising Styles, Risk & Liability Management, and serving as moderator of a peer panel where returning advisors share their past experiences, including successes and challenges, and best practices for advising moving forward. She has also coordinated the flow of the group and has been a beacon of sound decision making and communication when working with the advisors and RHA.

I think NAME is a deserving recipient of this award as she has gone above the call of her position by getting not only her officers and residents involved but also re-instilling the value of advisor involvement. She is well respected among her Hall Director peers and the RHA Executive Board has attested to her greater level of involvement within the advisor group.”

Commentary: While longer than the previous OTM, this OTM suffers from the same problems that the previous OTM suffers from. General, vague language is overused, and specific details and examples of this person’s outstanding accomplishments are lacking. When details are provided, they are provided about a group or organization at large and not about the individual at hand: “In its second year of operation this committee has been charged with assisting the Residence Hall Association with its annual Hall Council Officer Fall Training, which is a comprehensive training geared towards making sure all Hall Council Officers are able to complete their position requirements throughout the year.” Further, it is not clear that any of these accomplishments happened in the specific month at hand. While all of the work discussed could have happened within a one-month span of time, it’s impossible to know without the use of month-specific language.

Subsection D: March 2020 Passive Program OTM Submission

Note: the general structure of Program OTMs has changed since March 2020. There are no longer six unique parts to Program OTMs; nevertheless, this OTM still serves as a great example of the type of language that should be used in a Program OTM.

Origin of the Program

This passive program was created by Ashlyn Alvarado, a Resident Assistant (RA) in Ernest Calderon Learning Community at Northern Arizona University (NAU). This passive program was hosted on a bulletin board where students could easily see it in order to brighten residents’ days and provide students with a positive distraction from their day. Additionally, this program was placed right outside Ashlyn’s door, which allowed Ashlyn to talk to residents who stopped by to read the comics and check in to see how they were doing. To match the theme, Ashlyn primarily posted Snoopy comics, as all her residents’ door decorations and Ashlyn’s personal bulletin board were all Snoopy themed.

Short Description of the Program

This passive program was created to provide students with fun, positive things to read that would brighten their day and get them to smile. This program was started in March and meant to go all the way through May, but due to the Coronavirus, it ended mid-March.

The passive program was displayed on a bulletin board with a blue butcher paper background and orange die-cut letters that said “Weekly Comics:”. Every few days a new comic would be added to the row of comics. The comics were cut out and square so they made a row of comics that were the same size. When the row ended, Ashlyn would start a new row under the row already created. Overall, three rows of comics were created before most of the residents moved out of the hall. The comics were all Snoopy related as well because at the beginning of the year, Ashlyn had chosen to have all of her residents’ things Snoopy themed.

The bulletin board was also strategically placed close to Ashlyn’s room, so Ashlyn could talk to residents who came by to read it. This placement gave Ashlyn the opportunity to check in on residents more often as well as get to know her residents better so she could better support them through their college career.

Finally, flyers that were important to residents were also placed near the bulletin board, so residents would read those as well.

Goals of the Program

There were a few goals for this program. Firstly, Ashlyn truly wanted students to have something available to them that would allow them to smile and bring some positivity to their day. Especially with many projects and midterms occurring at the beginning of March, Ashlyn wanted to create something that would draw students' attention and distract them from the stress of midterms. Overall, Ashlyn wanted to provide her residents with something that they could look at and have fun reading. Additionally, Ashlyn wanted this program to provide her with more opportunities to support her residents. Because the bulletin board was so close to her door, Ashlyn was able to talk to more residents, check in with them, and understand their needs.

Positive and Lasting Effects of the Program

There were many positive lasting effects. First and foremost students were able to find fun, new comics on the bulletin board every few days, which provided residents a chance to laugh, smile, and remain positive. Especially in March with midterms and then immediately after a large amount of changes to daily life, students can remember their favorite comics to smile at during a stressful season. Students were also able to see the positive effects that comics bring and start finding their own comics to help them smile and get through difficult times. Finally, students were able to interact more closely with Ashlyn, their RA, which allowed them greater access to resources, support, and someone who would advocate for them.

Short Evaluation of the Program

Overall, the program went very well. Many residents were very engaged in the program, stopping the bulletin board multiple times to read the new comics or read their favorites. Additionally, this program allowed Ashlyn to gain a closer connection with many of her residents as they stopped by frequently near her door to read the comics; overall, this gave Ashlyn's residents greater support and allowed them to feel more connected to their RA. The strategic placing of the bulletin board close to Ashlyn's door and important flyers close to the bulletin board was ingenious as it allowed residents to gain a lot more from the program other than just reading comics.

Adapting the Program

This program could easily be adapted to other campuses. Because it was through a bulletin board, any RA or organization could create something like this, even though the theme and coloring may be different. If a bulletin board is not handy, butcher paper could be taped to a wall and letters could be cut out for the title. From there, comics can be found on the internet and printed out to whatever theme is desired. If there's a larger space for it, an entire wall could be dedicated to comics or if more time is allotted, it could be an annual project. However, the program can be as small or large/short or long as the organization or person wants it to be.

Commentary: Although this OTM is repetitive, it is a strong example of a Program OTM. Month-specific language helps to clarify that this event happened in the month of nomination (March), and numerous details help the reader understand how the program came to be, how the program was executed, how the program was maintained, and how other schools could adapt the program for their campuses. The impact of the program is clear, and the OTM indicates clear and outstanding effort and intentionality from

the RA (in regards to the placement of the comics, the complementarity of the comics and residents' door decs, etc.).

Section VII: Voting and the Life Cycle of an OTM

OTMs are due on the fifth of the month at 11:59PM following the month of nomination. If an August OTM is being written, for example, the OTM must be submitted by September 5th at 11:59PM (the fifth of the month following the month of nomination—August). After the OTM is submitted, the Executive Board of Georgia Tech's White and Gold Chapter of NRHH will vote on all submitted OTMs by the 11th of each month, selecting, at most, one campus-winning OTM per category.

All campus-winning OTMs will advance to the regional level (SAACURH—the South Atlantic Affiliate of College and University Residence Halls), and the SAACURH OTM Selection Committee will select the top OTM per category from the region to advance to the national level by the 17th of each month. The national NACURH OTM Selection Committee will then select the top OTM per category from the nation by the 25th of each month.

Campus-winning OTMs will be featured on our Chapter social media and receive a certificate of recognition. SAACURH and NACURH winning OTMs will be featured on the OTM website.

If you want to view OTMs that you have written in the past and/or check on what awards your OTMs may have won, you can do so by clicking on "Past Submissions" in the OTMs website's sidebar. If your OTM won an award, you will see it indicated in the "Award" column of the table of your past OTM submissions. Note that only the highest award is indicated; if your OTM won at the campus level, for example, and then proceeded to win at the regional level, the "Award" column will only reflect that your OTM was a SAACURH winner.

Section VIII: Learn More

To learn more about NRHH, OTMs, NACURH, SAACURH, and our campus NRHH chapter, visit the following:

- nrhh.nacurh.org
- nrhh.nacurh.org/otms
- otms.nrhh.org
- nacurh.org
- saacurh.nacurh.org
- saacurh.nacurh.org/nrhh
- rha.gatech.edu/nrhh

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about OTMs, please reach out to our Vice President of Recruitment, Bryan Gomez, nrhh.recruitment@rha.gatech.edu.

