For the three million college students who live in campus housing, colleges and universities are working to ensure their facilities are safe and welcoming places of learning and success. Senior housing officers (SHOs) and student affairs leaders are the chief decision-makers regarding the quality of the student experience within campus housing. They ensure students' well-being and safety while maximizing opportunities for learning in fiscally responsible ways.
Contents

The Case for Campus Housing ..........................................................4
Study Overview ..................................................................................5
Living On Campus Benefits Persistence........................................6
Living-Learning Communities Have Wide Benefits.....................10
Students of Color Benefit from Selecting their Roommates ....12
The Choice to Live On Campus Differs by Background ..........14
Continuing the Conversation .........................................................16
References ........................................................................................17
About NSSE ....................................................................................18
Dear Senior Housing Officers and Student Affairs Leaders,

The year 2020 has been trying for higher education, and certainly so for those who serve in campus housing and residence life departments. However, there has possibly never been a time when the value of campus housing and residence life has been more evident. In a matter of weeks, housing and residence life departments mobilized to de-densify or close campus residence in the name of student and staff safety. Campus housing and residence life professionals are the highest touch-points for students. More and more, we are seeing the overwhelming impact these professionals have on student success.

The Association of College and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I) recently finished a multi-year research engagement with the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University Bloomington. In total, more than 75,000 students from 76 residential campuses, including roughly 33,000 first-year and sophomore students, participated in this study.

The results are undeniable. Living on campus has a clear and profound impact on student persistence and engagement. Regardless of important factors like race, parental education, and finances, students that live on campus are more likely to engage in academic activities relative to their off-campus peers, and these activities in turn, affect retention rates, academic engagement, and feelings of belonging to the university community.

Included in these reports are not only the findings from this study, but also ways that you can take these findings and apply them to your campus. For example—what policies might you consider implementing to increase the number of residential students on your campus? What programs might encourage and improve the academic engagement and retention of residents?

We are excited to share this report with you. These findings send a clear message—despite the challenges surrounding campuses today, the campus housing experience is a critical component to a bright future for campuses and students alike.

Mary DeNiro
ACUHO-I CEO

Peter Galloway
ACUHO-I President
Overview of the Study

In this brief, we share research findings on the impact of student living arrangements on engagement and persistence. In 2018, ACUHO-I launched the Sponsored Research Program, with support from the ACUHO-I Foundation. This program represents the Association’s largest single financial investment in research on behalf of the profession. The inaugural grant was awarded to the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University Bloomington to collect student housing data through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced “Nessie”). The data are from a representative sample of 33,000 first-year and sophomore students enrolled at 76 diverse residential institutions who completed the NSSE in 2018.

Following the core NSSE questionnaire, respondents completed an additional set of items related to their on- or off-campus living arrangements, including residential activities, experiences with roommates, living-learning communities, financial stress, sense of belonging, and the perceived benefits of housing.
Living On Campus
Benefits Persistence
Returning to college for a second year is a critical marker of student success. For decades, living on campus was thought to be the most important predictor of persistence. However, in recent years this belief has been challenged, and many now understand persistence to be conditional upon engagement. Engagement is defined in two parts. It is both the time and effort students devote to studies and other learning activities that generate positive outcomes, and it is how institutions create environments for students to participate in these activities. Due to the timing of the NSSE survey, for this study persistence was limited to spring term students returning in the fall.

First-year and sophomore on-campus residents persisted at a rate 2.0 and 2.2 percentage points higher than their off-campus peers (living independently of their families), respectively.
Living On Campus Benefits Persistence

First-year Students

We found that first-year on-campus residents persisted at higher rates than off-campus students who lived independently of their families. They reenrolled at equivalent rates to students who lived with their families. In other words, first-year students planning to live away from their families were better served by living in a campus residence hall than in accommodations off campus.

Our models show these differences are largely attributable to engagement in learning activities that took place in the residence. Some of these activities include the ability to attend classes, interact with faculty, meet with advisors, study and do projects with other students, use academic support services, and attend social, diversity-related, and wellness activities where they live.

SHOs and student affairs leadership should work to make high-quality engagement and learning opportunities available to all first-year students living in campus housing and develop programming that maximizes student participation.

First-year Student Persistence Rate (Spring-to-Fall)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIVING ON CAMPUS</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING OFF CAMPUS WITH FAMILY</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING OFF CAMPUS WITHOUT FAMILY</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What would a two percentage point increase in retention look like for your campus?

PICTURE IT
Living On Campus Benefits Persistence

Sophomores

The effects on persistence were somewhat different for sophomores. Sophomores living off campus were less likely than those living on campus to return to the institution the following year, and those who lived more than 10 minutes away from campus were the least likely to persist. However, unlike first-year students, this benefit applies to on-campus sophomores in general and is not conditional to their levels of engagement. Consequently, sophomores may not require as much attention from live-in staff or access to developmental programs to persist (although such interventions may have positive benefits for other outcomes not addressed in this study).

While many institutions require first-year students to live on campus, sophomore residency requirements are increasingly under consideration. About half of sophomores in our study lived off campus, and those were more or less evenly divided between students who lived with their families and students who lived alone or with peers. On-campus sophomores were more likely to live in suite-style residences.

Sophomore Spring-to-Fall Persistence Rate by Travel-time to Campus

Sophomore Student Persistence Rate (Spring-to-Fall)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel-time to Campus</th>
<th>Persistence Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIVING ON CAMPUS</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING OFF CAMPUS WITH FAMILY</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING OFF CAMPUS WITHOUT FAMILY</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results suggest that sophomores should be encouraged to live on campus, perhaps with independent spaces provided for them. Campuses should investigate the feasibility of expanding capacity to house sophomore students, and some may consider requiring sophomores to live on campus. Resource allocation for staff and programs need not be as intensive for sophomore residents but may focus more on their concerns such as gaining further independence, continuing academic momentum, major and career intensification, and other developmental issues.
Living-Learning Communities Have Wide Benefits
Living-Learning Communities Have Wide Benefits

Living-Learning Communities (LLCs) unite social and academic components of college, optimizing student engagement in educationally beneficial activities and relationships where they live. One of the most apparent findings in our study is the comprehensive benefits of these programs.

Campus residents who participated in LLCs were more engaged in effective educational practices. For example, LLC participants were up to three times more likely to attend a class, meet with faculty, see an advisor, or use academic support services within the living area. They were also more likely to study with other students, attend social and co-curricular activities, participate in diversity-related activities, and do health and wellness activities. Indeed, these are the distinctive ways living-learning communities shape the college experience. In fact, LLC participation positively influences multiple types of engagement, including student-faculty interaction, collaborative learning, reflective and integrative learning, and a supportive environment.

Additionally, first-year students in living-learning communities were more likely than their on-campus peers to persist in college. Specifically, LLC participants returned at a rate 2.2 percentage points higher than non-LLC residents, net other factors. Interestingly, additional analysis revealed that the effectiveness of these programs is concentrated among males (+4.7 percentage points) and that participation was somewhat less impactful for females (+1.3 percentage points). Of concern, however, is that male students were less likely to participate in LLCs.¹

Institutions should prioritize making LLCs available to as many students as possible, especially during the first year. We also strongly recommend that more communities be designed to encourage male participation.
Students of Color Benefit from Selecting Their Roommates
Students of Color Benefit from Selecting Their Roommates

In the residence hall, many first-year students from majority groups experience diverse interactions for the first time, gaining cross-cultural awareness and learning. Simultaneously, microaggressions are common in social spaces like residence halls, creating difficulties for racial and ethnic minority students and a need for safe counterspaces that embrace cultural norms.

In the past decade, the rise of social media and online roommate-matching sites has changed how students find roommates. The proportion of incoming students choosing their roommates has likewise increased. Lately, however, good intentions to promote diversity have led some institutions to require incoming students to have institutionally-assigned roommates in the hope of increasing cross-cultural interactions among their student body.

Simultaneously, many students of color (Asian, Black, and multiracial) who chose their roommates perceived a significantly and substantially more welcoming campus environment. A possible reason for these findings is that rooms occupied by students of the same race act as counterspaces that embrace the norms of their cultural communities.

However, our results point to another concern. Students of color chose their roommates much less often than White students. On average, 66% of students received their roommates through institution-led matching processes, but this was much higher for Asian (76%), Black (76%), and Latinx (74%) students (Fosnacht et al., 2020).

Thus, we offer four recommendations:

- Allow first-year students to choose their roommates and make this process more accessible for students of color.
- Cultivate and enhance programs for students of color to help them make social connections early, particularly before enrollment.
- Help students of color discover and create safe spaces within the residence halls and on campus more broadly.
- When considering policy changes, be aware of and take precautions against unintended consequences for students of color.
The Choice to Live On Campus Differs by Background
The Choice to Live On Campus Differs by Background

Students’ backgrounds influence their collegiate residential choices. For example, White and Black students choose to live on campus more often than their Asian or Latinx peers (Fassett et al., 2020). Women reside on campus more often than men and gender-variant students. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning or unsure students (LGBQ+) are more likely to live on campus than their straight counterparts. Students reporting mental health disorders were also more likely to live on campus. These differences may be due to varying preferences, financial circumstances, and cultural norms. Factors may also include long-standing initiatives in residence halls to create a welcoming environment for students from minoritized and targeted groups. Still, it is worth asking why students from some groups are more likely to live off campus. What are the missed opportunities, their perceived risks and benefits, and the implications for both students and residential programs?

Students reporting mental health disorders were more likely to live on campus.

Senior housing officers should examine why students from different demographic groups prefer to live on or off campus. They should assess their residential offerings and seek ways to create affordable, safe, and welcoming communities for all.
Continuing the Conversation

While our findings and recommendations may not apply to all institutions, housing and residence life professionals may wish to consider the following questions when using these results in their work:

1. Why do first-year students leave your institution? What can be done within your residential communities to reduce that number?

2. What opportunities do your sophomores have to live on campus? How can your housing programs better market the benefits of the experience to them? What are the possibilities to create housing tailored for sophomores?

3. How can your housing programs strengthen collaborations to recruit students, promote core activities, and bolster the effects of your living-learning communities?

4. How do incoming students, and students of color in particular, find roommates at your institution? What could be done to jump-start the process for students who commit to your institution early?
References


Notes

1. We acknowledge the absence of findings related to non-binary or gender-variant students. The persistence data for these populations were insufficient for reliable analysis. We are hopeful that future studies will address this deficit.
About NSSE

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced “Nessie”) is a trusted and widely used instrument for assessing the quality of undergraduate education—providing institutions diagnostic, actionable information that fosters and catalyzes evidence-based improvement efforts. NSSE annually collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students’ participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

Authors

Researchers at Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research:

Robert M. Gonyea, Ed.D.
Associate Director, Research & Data

Robert M. Gonyea, Ed.D., is associate director of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research where he coordinates research and reporting for the National Survey of Student Engagement and associated projects. Bob spent the early part of his career working in residence life, student activities, and leadership programs where he gained insights about positive student development and effective campus environments. His work has appeared in the Higher Education Handbook for Theory and Research, Research in Higher Education, Journal of Higher Education, Journal of College Student Development, and other higher education publications.

Kevin Fosnacht, Ph.D.
Associate Research Scientist

Kevin Fosnacht, Ph.D., is associate research scientist at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. At the center, Kevin primarily works on the National Survey of Student Engagement one of the largest surveys of undergraduates in North America. Dr. Fosnacht’s research focuses on identifying programs and practices that foster student success. His research has appeared in many journals including The Journal of Higher Education, The Review of Higher Education, and Research in Higher Education.

Kyle T. Fassett, Ph.D.
Project Associate

Kyle T. Fassett received a Ph.D. in Higher Education with a minor in Educational Psychology, Measurement, and Evaluation at Indiana University Bloomington in 2021. He is currently a postdoc with the Center for Innovative Pharmacy Education & Research and also serves on the editorial board for ACUHO-I’s Journal of College and University Student Housing. He previously worked in residence life and academic advising. Kyle’s research focuses on teaching and learning as well as queer collegians.

Polly A. Graham, Ph.D.
Project Associate

Polly A. Graham completed her Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs with a minor in Educational Philosophy in 2020. She is a lecturer at Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business, teaching an undergraduate intensive writing course. Polly has experience as a Resident Director, Living-Learning Center Director, and Project Associate at the Center for Postsecondary Research. Her research interests include the on-campus experience and relational pedagogy.
This research and report was made possible by the ACUHO-I Education and Research Foundation, and all those who generously support it. The ACUHO-I Education and Research Foundation supports resources and programs that further the development of individuals involved in campus housing around the globe. Our primary goal is to be a good steward of financial resources to support the profession and its future, and to provide opportunities and access to resources for all people involved in college and university housing operations. Our vision is to ensure that every person has access to resources of the housing profession and is inspired to invest in its future.

**Foundation Board**
Shannon Staten, Chair
Shana Alston, Chair Elect
Mary Janz, Past Chair
Kirsten Kennedy, Finance and Corporate Records Officer
Tim Touchette, Vice Chair, Regional Cabinet
Tom Hardy, Vice Chair, Individual Giving & Outreach
Terri Gray, Vice Chair, Annual Programs
Jason Taylor, Vice Chair, Corporate Outreach and Giving
Leon McClinton, ACUHO-I Vice-President
Curtis Dugar, Ex officio
Marykatherine Woodson, Ex officio
Mary DeNiro, CEO

**ACUHO-I Foundation Development Staff**
Scott Boden, Director of Development

**Executive Board**
Peter Galloway, ACUHO-I President
Pam Schreiber, ACUHO-I President-Elect
Leon McClinton, ACUHO-I Vice-President
Olan Garrett, Finance and Corporate Records Officer
Lisa Freeman, Inclusion and Equity Director
Josh Gana, Facilities & Physical Environment Director
Kawanna Leggett, Workforce Development Director
Julie Leos, Regional Affiliations Director
Kenny Mauk, Business Practices and Enhancement Director
Frankie Minor, Residence Education Director
Matthew Nelson, Globalization Director
Suzanne Price, Knowledge Enhancement Director
Luis Inoa, Anti-Racism Director, Ex officio
Andrew Peterson, Small College/University Director, Ex officio
Mary DeNiro, CEO
Thank you to our 2020 Corporate Major Donors for their ongoing support of the ACUHO-I Foundation, which funds large-scale research initiatives, educational programs, and practice innovations for campus housing and residence life professionals around the world. Projects like these are only possible because of the generous support of our Corporate Major Donors.

Thank You

The Thompson Family