



The Case for Campus Housing: Results from a National Study

**A Brief for Students,
Parents, and Media**

Polly A. Graham, Robert M. Gonyea, Kevin Fosnacht, & Kyle T. Fassett

Being accepted to a college or university introduces an exciting, anxious, and confusing moment for new students. Where will you live? What is it like to live on campus? Who will you live with? The good news is that the people who manage residential living know what they are doing.

The planning and design of campus housing has been informed by decades of research about how to support new students in their transition to college and help them feel a sense of belonging on the new campus. For the three million college students who live in campus housing, colleges and universities work to ensure their facilities are safe and welcoming places of learning and success.

The research summarized below reinforces earlier work showing that living on campus in the first two years is beneficial for student learning and success.

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The Case for Campus Housing

Dear Students, Parents, and Media,

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.

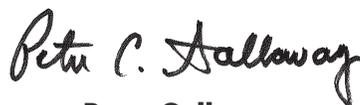
The results are undeniable. **Living on campus has a clear and profound impact on student persistence and engagement.** Regardless of important factors like race, parental education, and finances, students that live on campus are more likely to engage in academic activities relative to their off-campus 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? If you are a parent reading these reports, what questions might you ask during a college visit to ensure your child lands on a campus that is designed intentionally for your student's success?

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



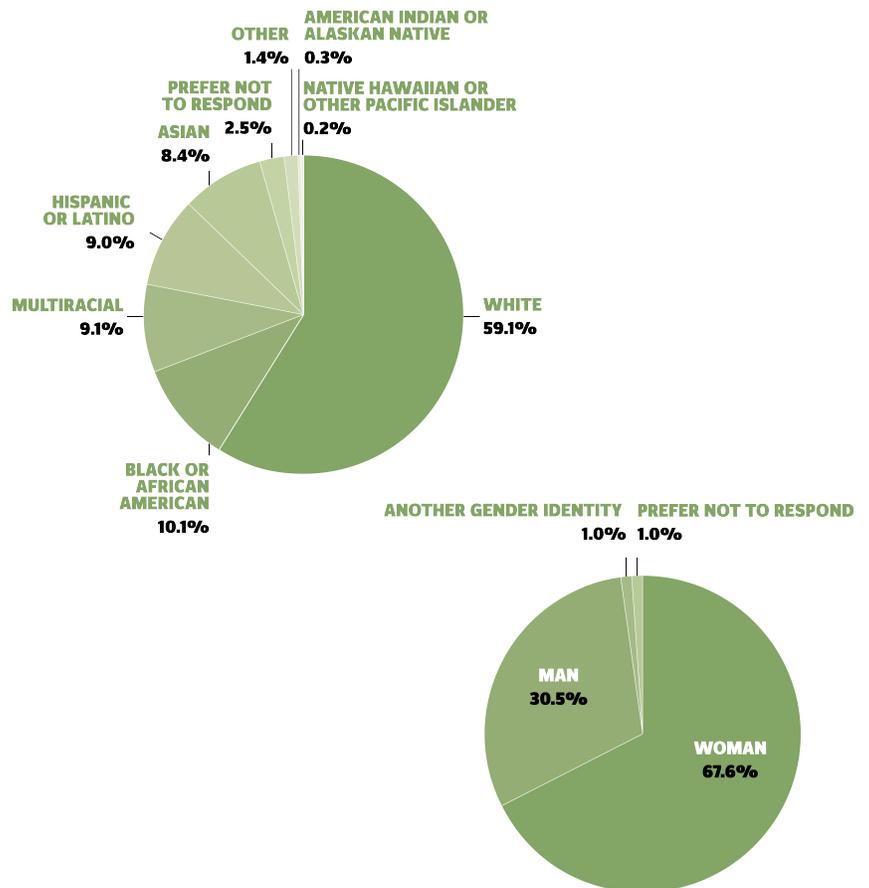
Peter Galloway
ACUHO-I President

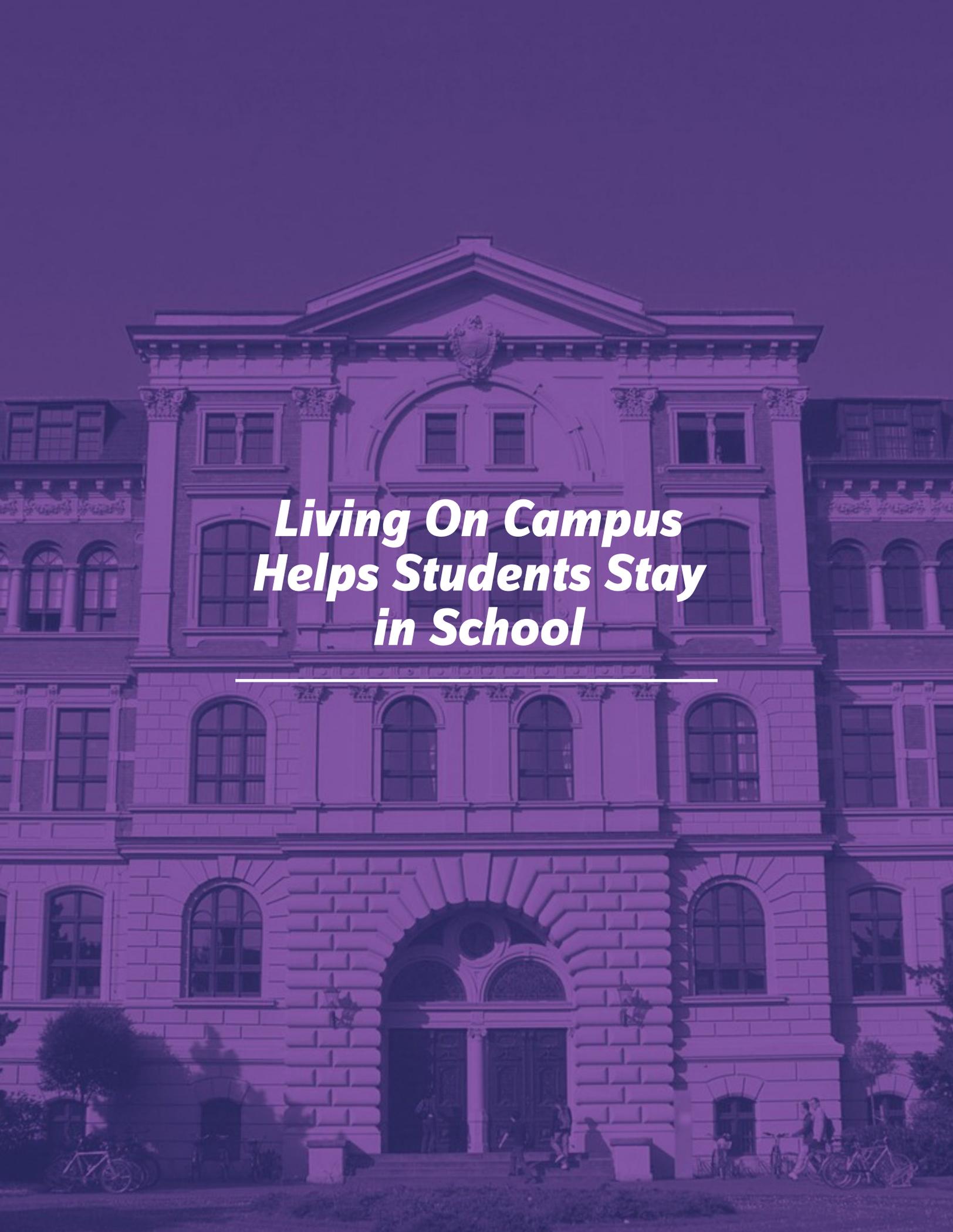
Overview of the Study



In this brief, we share new research on the impact of living arrangements on student 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").

In addition to the main NSSE questionnaire, students completed an [additional set of questions](#) on their on- or off-campus living arrangements, including information about their residential experiences, living-learning communities, roommates, sense of belonging, financial stress, and perceptions of housing quality.





***Living On Campus
Helps Students Stay
in School***

Living On Campus Helps Students Stay in School

First-year Students

Results affirm that living on campus offers many benefits to students by connecting students to educationally beneficial activities, amenities, and people. First-year students living on campus were more likely to return to school the following fall (i.e., they persisted) than were off-campus students who lived independent of their families. These differences primarily occurred because the on-campus students were more engaged—that is, they devoted more time and effort to studies and other learning activities—in their place of residence.

 **First-year students** not living with their families should live on campus, and participate in high-quality programs and services offered through their housing.

Sophomores

Results were somewhat [different for sophomores](#). On-campus sophomores persisted at higher rates than those who lived off campus with or without their families. In addition, sophomores 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, while engagement may have positive benefits for other outcomes not addressed in this study, location appears to be most important factor for sophomores when it comes to persistence.

 **Sophomores** should live on campus whenever possible, or at least within 10 minutes from campus if not.

First-year students and sophomores who lived on campus were more likely to return to college the following year.



A man with glasses is shown in profile, looking down at a laptop. The entire image is overlaid with a blue tint. The text is centered over the image.

***Living-Learning Communities
Have Widespread Benefits***

Living-Learning Communities Have Widespread Benefits

Many campus housing programs offer living-learning communities (LLCs)—specialized living environments that connect students’ in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, and optimize engagement in learning activities within the residence.

Our findings affirm that [students benefit a great deal from participation in these programs](#). Students who participated in LLCs were more engaged in effective educational practices, such as meeting with faculty, utilizing academic support services, and studying or working on projects with other students. Such results are by design—LLCs make classes, faculty, advisors, and academic support readily available to students where they live.

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+2.2%

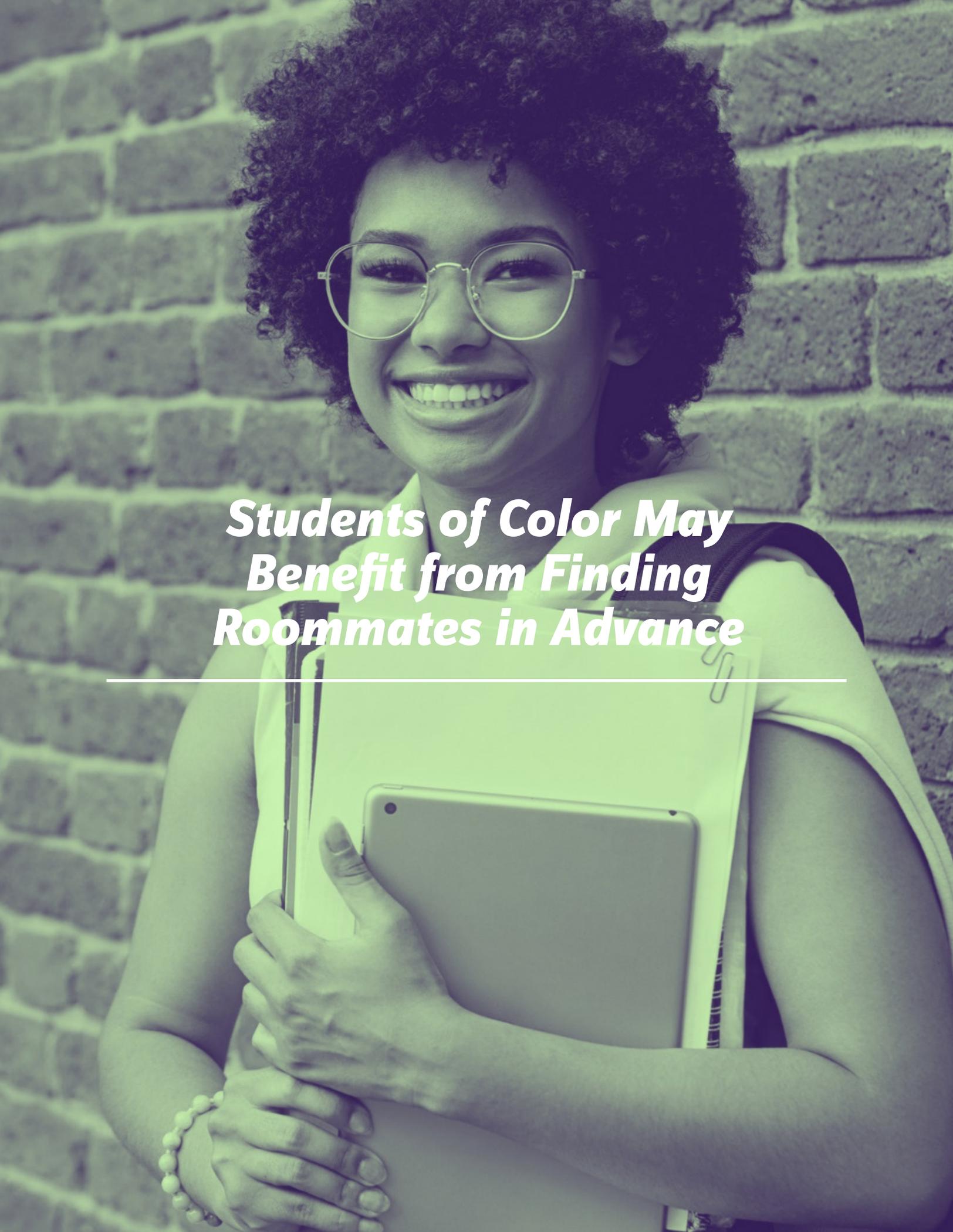
Living-learning communities were associated with a 2.2 percentage point increase in persistence.

+4.7%

Yet, male participants persisted at a rate 4.7 percentage points higher than male nonparticipants.

Additionally, students in living-learning communities were more likely than others living on campus to return to school the following year. Interestingly, the effectiveness of these programs is concentrated more among male students (+4.7 percentage points) than among female students (+1.3 percentage points). Of concern, however, is that males in general were less likely to participate in LLCs.

- 🌀 All students living on campus, and male students in particular, should strongly consider participating in a living-learning program.
- 🌀 Students should review services and programs offered in their housing options before deciding where to live.

A young woman with dark, curly hair and round glasses is smiling warmly. She is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved top and has a dark backpack strap visible over her shoulder. She is holding a tablet computer and several papers or folders. The background is a textured brick wall. The entire image has a soft, greenish tint.

***Students of Color May
Benefit from Finding
Roommates in Advance***

Students of Color May Benefit from Finding Roommates in Advance

Utilizing social media and other online platforms, many new students meet their peers before arriving to campus and some are even able to find compatible roommates. Housing professionals work to create supportive communities for their residents, and help new roommates learn how to communicate, share a living space, find common interests, and respect differences.

While students of color were less likely to find their roommates in advance, many who did so perceived a substantially more welcoming campus environment than their same-race peers for whom the institution assigned a roommate.

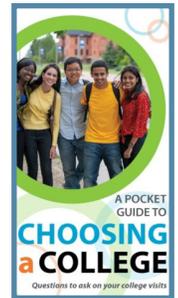
We learned that [finding roommates in advance may benefit some student populations](#). For example, Black or African American, Asian, and multiracial students who find their roommates in advance perceive a healthier campus environment than those who do not. Prior research suggests that rooms occupied by students of the same race may allow students to more easily embrace the norms of their cultural communities. However, our results uncovered a concern—students of color choose their roommates much less often than White students. On average, about 40% of White students find their roommates in advance, but only about a quarter of Asian, Black, and Latinx students do so.

 Students, particularly students of color, should use available networks and social media to find compatible roommates in advance.



Questions to Ask During College Visits

Parents and school counselors play a major role in helping students gather and evaluate information on potential schools. To get a sense of how likely a student is to learn, grow, and develop at a given institution, parents and students need to ask the right questions about the schools they visit or explore on the internet. To help them, the [NSSE Pocket Guide](#) includes suggestions for questions to ask of key people that they will meet—the tour guide, admissions staff, and currently enrolled students. A Spanish version is also available.



References

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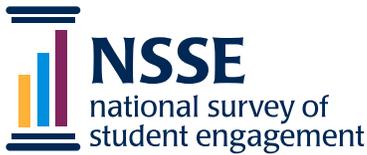
Notes

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.



Presentations and scholarly papers supporting this report can be found at the Indiana University ScholarWorks Database collection: Campus Housing, Student Engagement, and Persistence: A Multi-Institutional Study

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

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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. Foscnacht’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.

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Thank You

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.



