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Contributors to Student Satisfaction With Special Program (Fresh Start) Residence Halls

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Abstract

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Disciplines

Educational Psychology | Higher Education | Longitudinal Data Analysis and Time Series | School Psychology

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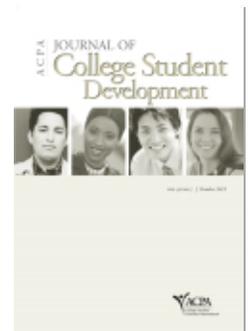
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Contributors to Student Satisfaction With Special Program (Fresh Start) Residence Halls

Yan Li Erin McCoy Mack C. Shelley II Donald F. Whalen

Perceptions of student satisfaction living in special Fresh Start residence halls were collected (N = 1,160, 40% female, 11% minority, 72% freshmen). Satisfaction was influenced by out-of-state residency, satisfaction with two residence staff positions, and Fresh Start policies, as well as house comfort interaction factors and living in a suite or a renovated residence hall.

Measurement of student satisfaction with their residence hall has become an important element of overall program evaluation for housing administrators. When measurement tools are used on a regular basis, changes in programming and facilities can be made to improve students' overall satisfaction. This research focuses on student satisfaction in special program residence halls, termed Fresh Start, where changes in both facilities and programming have been made to improve the academic environment for freshmen students with the hope that an improved environment will help them be more successful academically.

The study of student satisfaction and reports of their perceptions has emerged as one of the most important outcomes of higher education. As Astin (1977) suggested,

Given the considerable investment of time and energy that most students make in attending college, the student's perception of value should be given substantial weight. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that

student satisfaction can be legitimately subordinated to any other educational outcome. (p. 164)

Slepitzka (1987) found that housing professionals most often mentioned assessment of residential living experience outcomes as needed research. Residence halls, as auxiliary offices of the university, are not exempt from deficits and budget cuts. As a result, satisfaction studies are seen as more important by staff and faculty who work with students (Gielow & Lee, 1988). Given that individual students are the primary beneficiaries of housing facilities and services, asking them about their satisfaction with those experiences and services is one way to measure the success of housing programs (Gielow & Lee).

The assessment of student satisfaction is necessary due to pressures from decreasing enrollment, budget cuts, shrinking fiscal resources, and increased competition for government funding and private support, all of which increasingly enhance students' voices among higher educators to support initiatives for improved service, cost efficiency, and customer satisfaction (Astin, 1985; Barr, Upcraft, & Associates, 1990; Coate, 1991; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Love suggested that higher education institutions faced significant financial constraints, so that administrative efforts are needed in all aspects to enhance

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retention and persistence (Love, 1999). What is more, beyond the circumstantial and economic reasons for addressing the importance of careful study of residential satisfaction, Palmer (1988) emphasized the importance of assessment and evaluation in providing the best possible living and learning environments for residents. A living and learning environment has been defined as “bringing about a closer integration of the student’s living environment with his or her academic or learning environment (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994, p. 32).

We focused the current study on satisfaction as a criterion of assessment. Satisfaction has been argued to be one of the most direct tests of postsecondary success, and a positive relation has been established between academic satisfaction and retention. Satisfaction has been defined and measured as involvement and integration into university life (Anderson, 1981). Satisfaction measures have been treated as intervening variables to predict student retention (Bean, 1980; Hendel, 1985). These models suggested that higher levels of student satisfaction increase students’ interaction with peers, enhance academic improvement and social involvement, promote integration within the program or university, and in turn promote students’ involvement and persistence (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Residential Learning Programs

Marchese (1994) suggested that residence halls are a powerful vehicle and possess good potential to improve undergraduate education quality, because a large number of students live in residence halls and there are many opportunities to incorporate and influence students both academically and socially. Blimling (1993) and Terenzini et al. (1996) indicated that no matter what mechanisms are involved, residence hall interventions can be designed

in ways that shape students’ academic, intellectual, and cognitive growth. Living and learning programs were aimed to provide residents with academic support. Organized study-oriented activities and increased student interaction with faculty have been found to enhance a good learning environment and provide more opportunities for social and academic involvement in the residence hall (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). Inkelas and Weisman (2003) found living-learning students exhibited significantly more involvement in college activities designed to be critical aspects of the living-learning experience than students not in the program.

In a study of the effects of residential learning communities on persistence, Pike, Schroeder, and Berry (1997) revealed that students in residential learning communities reported substantially higher levels of involvement and interaction than did students living in traditional residence halls. Stassen (2003) noted, “The particular role of a residential component in learning communities (LCs) effectiveness also needs further study. Much of the research on LCs in recent years concentrated on models adapted in institutions without residential components” (p. 586). She further suggested, “It seems useful to pursue the role learning communities can play in facilitating academic and social integration in a residential learning environment” (p. 586).

To promote academic achievement and increase retention among residence hall students, there is a need to provide college students with out-of-class academic opportunities in the residence halls that enable them to use their surroundings as abundant sources of academic support. Blimling (1993) and Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) found that students who lived in LCs with

academic themes had higher levels of achievement, more involvement with faculty and peers, and informal academically oriented interactions more often than did students not living in an LC (University of Missouri, 1996). One of the tenets of residence hall LCs is that learning occurs outside the classroom as well. By comparing freshmen in living and learning centers (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994) to freshmen in other residence halls, Kanoy and Bruhn (1996) found that residents of the living-learning centers had significantly higher GPAs (while controlling for amount of time spent studying) but did not have significantly different retention rates.

Freshman Interest Groups and the Fresh Start Program

Many residential learning community programs have been developed by higher education institutions, with a focus on academics, social integration, and retention. Tinto and Goodsell (1993) described how nonresidential freshman interest groups (FIGs) contributed to students' interaction with a set of peers who attended the same classes, thereby forming social networks and other academic support mechanisms. Pike (1999) described similar success with the use of residential-based FIGs; however, merely participating in a FIG program did not influence GPA or academic achievement directly, but indirectly did improve students' success by enhancing their incorporation into college. Correll, Ragon, Thieme, and Wilburn (2002) indicated that a social component needed to be considered as well.

Fresh Start residence halls were initiated at the research institution as an attempt to create an ideal residential academic environment for freshmen students. FIG programs were among the ideas that contributed to the discussion. Residence staff members were

determined to use (a) programming, (b) staffing, (c) policies, and (d) facilities designed to create this environment. A limited number of upper-class student residents were also included to offer a positive influence on the living environment. The initiative began with a single traditional high-rise building. The building originally was a traditional residence hall with double-loaded corridors. It was renovated to include private bathrooms, upgraded rooms, as well as study and computer facilities on each floor. Classroom facilities were included on the main floor. As the program increased in popularity, another suite-type building was constructed. It, too, fosters a stronger connection with the academic mission of the university, and includes a number of study rooms and classrooms in the facility. As part of a plan to transition more buildings into Fresh Start halls, two traditional residence halls were made into Fresh Start buildings. In addition to being located close to a new community center that includes study and meeting space, these buildings offer limited academic facilities such as a design lab (limited to use by a learning community), a computer laboratory, and study space.

The residence department already has many residential learning communities scattered throughout its facilities, but the communities are especially concentrated in the Fresh Start buildings. Because the communities are more prevalent in Fresh Start buildings, the researchers also were curious about the relative contribution of learning communities (viewed as an academic characteristic of the Fresh Start halls) toward students' satisfaction with where they live. Therefore, focusing on student satisfaction in Fresh Start program residence halls, this research aimed to assess the effectiveness of the special residential learning community program and whether an improved environment

would help freshmen be more successful academically.

Model for Current Study

The conceptual model for the current study used background variables, environmental variables, and output variables suggested by Astin's (1973) involvement theory and Tinto's (1993) student retention model. Tinto (1993) similarly put forth a student retention model, by making a useful distinction between the academic and social integration of an institution. He argued that given individual characteristics, prior experiences, and backgrounds, it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that are related most directly to his or her continuance in that college. The current model combined the input and environment together to explore variables contributing to residential satisfaction. The model has taken into account not only internal and external measures, but also the possible interaction between those variables, thus providing a more comprehensive model to study satisfaction in the residence hall.

Because perceptions are influenced by both the characteristics of individuals and their residential environment, in developing the model of the current study, we took into account these attributes in a manner that allows for simultaneous interactions between the individuals and the residential environment. This yielded a more comprehensive and insightful study of student satisfaction with residential life.

In contrast to prior studies of residence satisfaction, this study was focused on the uniqueness of the study institution's Fresh Start residence halls that include special policies and staffing. Students' satisfaction with the residence department facilities and services is the focus of this study.

Residents' background characteristics have been used in the I-E-O model put forth by Astin (1973). Some studies have shown perceptions of satisfaction differ among students of different demographic traits, including gender, ethnicity, and classification (Association of College and University Housing Officers-International/Educational Benchmarking, Inc., 2001). Other studies have shown that the level of residential involvement varies with differences in students' background characteristics; if students who are more involved also are more satisfied, then what is distinctive about each student's backgrounds contributes to a distinctly different sense of satisfaction (Chiricosta, Work, & Anchors, 1996).

Astin (1973) suggested that the residential environment could be classified into the living environment and the academic environment. The residence halls living environment plays an important role in levels of satisfaction among the students who live there. Residence hall environments are thought to have a significant impact on several outcomes, including students' satisfaction (Blimling, 1993). Researchers have addressed environmental variables that contribute to students' satisfaction (Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989). Residential policies, and certain residential programs, as integral parts of the residential environment, exert influence on the life of a student in the residence hall, affecting the residential social climate, thereby influencing the level of satisfaction a student will have with residential life (Berger, 1997; Bonnici, Campbell, & Frendenberger, 1992).

In the current study, we attempted to ascertain which predictors contribute to satisfaction with Fresh Start residence halls. We did not compare Fresh Start halls with other residence halls. Rather, this was an exploratory study delimited to current residents of Fresh

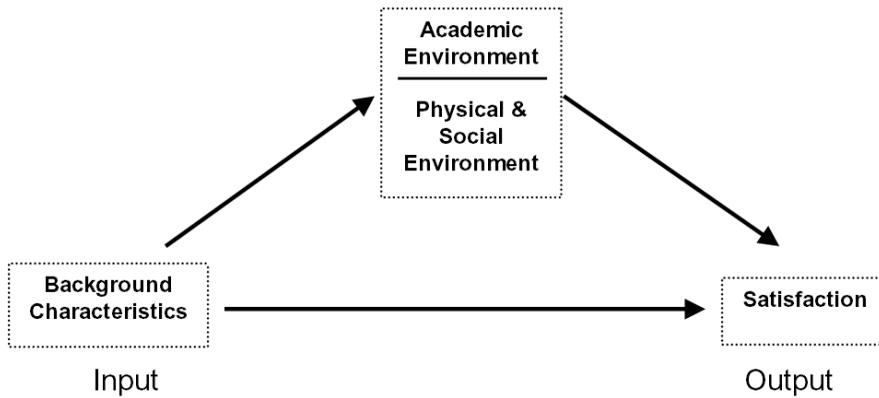


FIGURE 1. Model for the Study

Adapted from Astin, 1977.

Start residence halls. This research was focused on several research questions surrounding the Fresh Start buildings:

1. What background characteristics influence Fresh Start students' satisfaction with their current living situation?
2. What academic characteristics influence Fresh Start students' satisfaction with their current living situation?
3. What environmental facilities, policies, or social predictors influence Fresh Start students' satisfaction with their current living situation?

METHOD

Population and Sample for the Study

This study was conducted with all students living in special program residence halls (Fresh Start halls) at a four-year public land-grant university located in the Midwest with an enrollment of over 20,000 undergraduate and nearly 5,000 graduate students. The composition of the undergraduate student population at the institution was slightly more male (56%) than female, and largely Caucasian (88%).

Freshmen comprised a much higher proportion of the residence population (51%) than of the overall student population of the institution (24%), despite not having any requirements for living on campus. Fresh Start halls, focused on freshmen success, had a much higher proportion of freshmen (72%). The proportion of minority students was slightly lower in the residence halls, including those in the Fresh Start program, than in the general student population.

The institution has a total of 13 undergraduate residence halls. This research focuses on four Fresh Start halls, including a traditional 10-story renovated residence hall comprised of standard and suite-style rooms, a new 4-story suite-style building, and two older low-rise traditional residence halls. Within each of the residence halls are subunits called "houses" that serve as a primary residential focus for students.

One unique aspect of the Fresh Start halls is that, although they are not exclusively for freshmen, they house 3 times as many freshmen as upper-class students. Upper-class students can live in Fresh Start buildings; however, if they previously have been a resident

of a Fresh Start building, they may not have violated any Fresh Start policy during the past year. Similarly, no Fresh Start resident may have any alcohol violations within the previous year. Upper-class students in Fresh Start buildings are expected to serve as citizen leaders and contribute to the house and hall community. They also are expected to serve as positive academic and community role models.

All Fresh Start buildings are substance free, and have restricted visitation. Visitation for members of the opposite sex in student rooms is limited from 9 a.m. to 1 a.m. weekdays, and 9 a.m. to 3 a.m. weekends. Guests may visit 24 hours a day in designated common areas. The limited visitation contrasts with traditional halls where students may select house visitation hours, but many houses elect to have 24-hour visitation every day. In addition, every Fresh Start program participant is required to fulfill cocurricular requirements (e.g., participate in at least one activity from each of three categories: campus organization membership, community service, and personal development; University Department of Residence, 2004).

Each of the four halls has a hall director and an assistant hall director. The building is staffed with the usual complement of community advisors (CAs), but Fresh Start halls also are provided with an academic resource coordinator (ARC). The CA position, similar to a resident assistant position in other halls, has more of a focus on creating a community atmosphere in addition to enforcing Fresh Start policies and providing students with leadership opportunities within the residence hall than does the Resident Assistant (RA) position. The ARCs' primary responsibility is to create and maintain an academic environment in the residence hall by responding to the academic needs of the students and

promoting academic programs and resources at the university.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument is a 58-item survey consisting of three parts. The survey was developed at the institution, and had been previously administered twice at the institution with similar results. Validity measures were calculated using methods of factor analysis to determine the substantive meaning of item clusters in the survey. Face validity was established by professional staff at the institution. Reliability of the instrument was measured using Chronbach's standardized coefficient alpha, which measures the ability to replicate findings (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Validity and reliability values are reported in the Method section. The first two parts of the survey were used in this study. The first part is a group of 34 house feedback questions, which assessed students' attitudes toward their CA, house cabinet (i.e., the executive officers of the house government), and house atmosphere. The second group of 17 questions solicited information on students' attitudes regarding Fresh Start staffing (ARCs) and policies. Both groups of questions used a set of ordered Likert-type alternatives (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *no opinion*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The third portion consisted of seven questions that examined satisfaction with the residential experience and students' likelihood of returning to the residence halls the next academic year. Responses to the satisfaction questions in this portion are measured based on the following ordered Likert-type alternatives: 1 = *very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *unsure*, 4 = *satisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*.

The sampling frame for obtaining respondents for the student survey was constructed

TABLE 1.
Demographic Characteristics and Weighting Scheme for the Population and Sample in the Study

| Demographic Characteristics | Population | | | | Sample | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|------------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| | University Undergraduates | | Fresh Start Students | | Surveys Returned | | Weighted Returns | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Female | 9,497 | 43.9% | 1,014 | 39.9% | 596 | 51.1% | 463 | 39.9% |
| Male | 12,136 | 56.1% | 1,527 | 60.1% | 567 | 48.9% | 697 | 60.1% |
| <i>Class</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Freshman | 5,026 | 23.2% | 1,835 | 72.2% | 844 | 72.8% | 838 | 72.2% |
| Sophomore | 4,603 | 21.3% | 469 | 18.5% | 220 | 19.0% | 214 | 18.5% |
| Junior | 5,233 | 24.2% | 140 | 5.5% | 55 | 4.7% | 64 | 5.5% |
| Senior | 6,771 | 31.3% | 97 | 3.8% | 41 | 3.5% | 44 | 3.8% |
| <i>Minority</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Majority | 19,037 | 88.0% | 2,261 | 89.0% | 1,047 | 90.3% | 1,032 | 89.0% |
| Minority | 2,596 | 12.0% | 280 | 11.0% | 113 | 9.7% | 128 | 11.0% |
| Total | 21,633 | 100.0% | 2,541 | 100.0% | 1,160 | 100.0% | 1,160 | 100.0% |

from undergraduates living in the university's residence halls. Only students who provided their university identification number were included in the sampling frame, to make it possible to match students' survey data with demographic information obtained from the office of the registrar.

The survey was administrated during the latter part of the Fall 2003 semester, with approval of the university's institutional review board. All Fresh Start students ($N = 2,540$) had the opportunity to complete the Web-based survey. A cover letter, including the link for the survey instrument, was sent to those contacted via e-mail to explain the purpose of the survey. Incentives were offered to houses (i.e., floors or wings) with the highest return rate, resulting in a response rate of 52%. This

incentive, coupled with the opportunity to provide feedback for the CA and the ARC, helped to enhance the response rate.

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics and the weighting scheme for the population and sample for this study. Conceptually, weights were chosen to remedy differences between the sample and population for gender, classification, and minority status. In practice, the principal effect of weighting was to remedy gender differences, and minor differences were corrected for classification and minority status.

Because the respondent sample was somewhat different demographically from the overall residence hall population, the data were weighted post hoc to reflect better three demographic characteristics of the residence hall population (gender, academic classi-

fiction, and minority student status). The poststratification weights, W , are calculated as $W = p_p / p_s$, where p_p is the population proportion and p_s is the sample proportion. The total sample size remains the same after weighting ($N = 1,160$), and the adjusted poststratified sample is more representative of the population of each demographic combination. The demographic profile for the weighted data is 39.9% female, 11% minority, 72.2% freshmen, 18.5% sophomores, 5.5% juniors, and 3.8% seniors. The weighted data are used in the following statistical analysis procedures.

RESULTS

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis (principal components extraction, followed by Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization) was performed on the weighted data to find the underlying factors, or latent constructs, that explained interrelationships among key survey questions that shared a common measurement scale and topic, and thereby reduced the dimensionality of the large number of variables in the analysis. The factor loadings represent the simple Pearson product-moment correlation (r) of each item with the assumed underlying factors. Thus, those items with the highest loadings provide the substantive meaning of the content of each factor.

Factor analysis was done with two separate groups of questions. The first factor analysis was conducted on house feedback items related to students' satisfaction with their CA, house cabinet, and academic and social environment. The second factor analysis was conducted on items related to ARC and Fresh Start policies. The four resulting factors from the house feedback items, with their assigned labels, factor scores (in parentheses), and Cronbach's standardized coefficient alpha reliability values, were as follows:

1. Satisfaction with CA had high loadings on: (a) CA shows enthusiasm for job (.80), (b) Resident feels comfortable approaching CA (.73), (c) CA tries to know resident (.72), (d) CA enforces policies in an appropriate manner (.72), (e) CA is knowledgeable of services on campus (.72), (f) CA abides by residence hall rules and regulations (.71), (g) CA promotes respect of individuals' differences (.71), (h) CA is a good resource for help with academics (.66), (i) CA encourages residents to be responsible for their actions (.66), and (j) CA is available in the house (.63). Reliability for the factor was .89.
2. House cabinet had high loadings on: (a) Cabinet members are effective at building community (.80), (b) Cabinet considers the entire house when planning activities (.76), (c) House meetings are run effectively (.72), and (d) Resident feels comfortable approaching house cabinet officers with ideas and concerns (.72). Reliability for the factor was .80.
3. House comfort had high loadings on: (a) Resident feels comfortable living in the house (.76), (b) Resident is able to study in the residence halls (.68), (c) Resident is satisfied with roommate relationship (.63), and (d) There is strong feeling of respect for individuality and beliefs (.47). Reliability for the factor was .65.
4. House interaction had high loadings on: (a) Resident has taken advantage of opportunities to learn about people whose background/beliefs are different (.71), and (b) Resident knows most of the people in the house (.71). Reliability for the factor was .48. Although this is only a moderate level of reliability, that outcome is more likely with a smaller number of items; in addition, it is not unusual for reliability

to be attenuated for the last factor extracted by principal components, where eigenvalues decrease from the first factor to the last (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, pp. 621, 633). This factor was retained because its eigenvalue exceeded one, and because both items have robust loadings and are conceptually related.

Two factors were extracted from the ARC and house policies items:

1. Academic Resource Coordinator had high loadings on: (a) ARC knowledgeable of academic support services on campus and in the community (.81), (b) Resident is comfortable approaching ARC with academic matters (.80), (c) ARC abides by residence hall rules and regulations expected of resident (.79), (d) ARC shows enthusiasm for job (.77), (e) ARC has made an effort to know resident (.73), (f) ARC is available in the house (.71), (g) ARC relates well with people, regardless of values, race, religion, sexual orientation, or background (.70), (h) ARC meets with resident monthly to discuss academic issues (.57), and (i) Resident feels meetings with ARC are beneficial (.51). Reliability for the factor was .87.
2. Fresh Start policies had high loadings on: (a) Resident likes the visitation hours for the building (.85), (b) Resident thinks the limited visitation policies have helped him or her focus more on academics (.83), and (c) Resident finds the cocurricular requirements to live in his or her building beneficial (.70). Reliability for the factor was .72. Although these three items may seem somewhat different conceptually, they all address Fresh Start policies and have the common purpose of bringing together both classroom and nonclassroom academic environment.

The dependent variable was one question from the survey, "How satisfied are you with where you live now?" The students' background (input) characteristics (Step 1), residence hall academic characteristics (Step 2), and physical and social environment characteristics (Step 3) were entered sequentially into the regression model. The method of ordinary least squares (OLS) was used to estimate the model, with the predictor variables entered in successive groups. The analyses determined which predictors at each step were the most strongly significant predictors of the dependent variable and thus explained the most variation accounted for by each of the three blocks of predictors.

The Regression Model

Results from an OLS estimation of a three-step multiple-regression model are reported in Table 2, including the amount of explained variation attributable to the predictor variables in the model at each step, and a comparison across the three steps of model building, to yield a better understanding of the roles that each of the variables plays in the model at each step.

Only one student background characteristic, in-state status, was a significant negative predictor of the dependent variable through all three steps of the model. The students' combined background characteristics explained merely 0.9% of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .009$, adjusted $R^2 = .005$), which indicates that students' characteristics did not offer much explanation of patterns of variation in perceived satisfaction.

Two of the academic environment factors, satisfaction with the ARC and Fresh Start policies, entered in Step 2 of the model were statistically significant predictors of resident current living satisfaction ($R^2 = .094$, adjusted

TABLE 2.
Summary of Models Predicting Student "Satisfaction With Where I Live Now,"
for Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3

| | Step 1 | | | | | Step 2 | | | | | Step 3 | | | | |
|---|--------|----------------|---------------------|--------|------|--------|----------------|---------------------|--------|------|--------|----------------|---------------------|--------|------|
| | B | SE | β | t | Sig. | B | SE | β | t | Sig. | B | SE | β | t | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 4.245 | 0.214 | | 19.812 | *** | 4.161 | 0.282 | | 14.738 | *** | 3.918 | 0.359 | | 10.902 | *** |
| <i>Student Background Characteristics</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 0.008 | 0.061 | 0.004 | 0.132 | | 0.025 | 0.073 | 0.013 | 0.342 | | -0.054 | 0.075 | -0.028 | -0.717 | |
| Minority | -0.123 | 0.096 | -0.039 | -1.285 | | -0.103 | 0.119 | -0.034 | -0.864 | | -0.051 | 0.125 | -0.016 | -0.412 | |
| First-Year Student | 0.062 | 0.065 | 0.029 | 0.955 | | 0.010 | 0.087 | 0.005 | 0.119 | | 0.060 | 0.090 | 0.028 | 0.664 | |
| In-State Resident | -0.197 | 0.067 | -0.090 | -2.951 | ** | -0.179 | 0.083 | -0.086 | -2.166 | * | -0.164 | 0.083 | -0.077 | -1.980 | * |
| ACT Score | -0.007 | 0.007 | -0.031 | -1.001 | | 0.000 | 0.009 | 0.002 | 0.050 | | -0.005 | 0.010 | -0.020 | -0.493 | |
| <i>Academic Environment</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Satisfaction With ARC Factor | | | | | | 0.139 | 0.036 | 0.151 | 3.870 | *** | 0.034 | 0.040 | 0.035 | 0.853 | *** |
| "Fresh Start" Policies Factor | | | | | | 0.223 | 0.037 | 0.240 | 6.035 | *** | 0.216 | 0.038 | 0.231 | 5.756 | *** |
| Learning Community Member | | | | | | 0.002 | 0.090 | 0.001 | 0.024 | | 0.036 | 0.090 | 0.016 | 0.397 | |
| Hours Per Week Studying With Others in the House | | | | | | -0.001 | 0.014 | -0.003 | -0.087 | | -0.015 | 0.014 | -0.042 | -1.049 | |
| <i>Physical and Social Environment</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Satisfaction With CA Performance | | | | | | 0.141 | 0.039 | | | | 0.141 | 0.039 | 0.145 | 3.663 | *** |
| House Cabinet Performance | | | | | | 0.093 | 0.039 | | | | 0.093 | 0.039 | 0.095 | 2.366 | ** |
| Student Government Member | | | | | | 0.110 | 0.084 | | | | 0.110 | 0.084 | 0.052 | 1.305 | |
| House Comfort Factor | | | | | | 0.336 | 0.041 | | | | 0.336 | 0.041 | 0.321 | 8.159 | *** |
| House Interaction Factor | | | | | | 0.119 | 0.041 | | | | 0.119 | 0.041 | 0.119 | 2.911 | ** |
| Number of Hours Spent in House Each Day Not Sleeping | | | | | | 0.026 | 0.063 | | | | 0.026 | 0.063 | 0.016 | 0.410 | |
| Judgment of House Noise Level | | | | | | 0.088 | 0.098 | | | | 0.088 | 0.098 | 0.037 | 0.903 | |
| New Suite Hall Resident | | | | | | 0.282 | 0.092 | | | | 0.282 | 0.092 | 0.127 | 3.060 | ** |
| Renovated High-Rise Traditional Hall | | | | | | 0.284 | 0.106 | | | | 0.284 | 0.106 | 0.109 | 2.669 | ** |
| Dependent Variable: Satisfaction With Where I Live Now | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Statistics for the 3 Models | R | R ² | Adj. R ² | | | R | R ² | Adj. R ² | | | R | R ² | Adj. R ² | | |
| | 0.096 | 0.009 | 0.005 | | | 0.306 | 0.094 | 0.081 | | | 0.503 | 0.253 | 0.228 | | |

$R^2 = .081$ for Step 2). After the academic environment variables were introduced into the model, a total of 9.4% of variation in the model was explained.

Step 3 added the physical and social environment variables. Aside from the input variable, in-state residency, which was a significantly negative predictor, and the *Fresh Start* policies factor, six additional social variables were significant predictors of students' satisfaction with their current living situation. These include students who were: (a) more comfortable in their house, (b) more satisfied with their CA's performance, (c) residing in the new suite residence hall as opposed to the unrenovated residence hall, (d) more satisfied with their interaction in the house, (e) residing in the renovated residence hall as opposed to the unrenovated residence hall, and (f) more satisfied with the performance of the house cabinet ($R^2 = .253$, adjusted $R^2 = .228$ for Step 3). Substantially more variation in the proportion of variation in satisfaction was explained by the social variables than by the student background characteristics and academic variables. An additional 16 percentage points of variation in the model was explained by the introduction of social environment variables into the model. Together with the input and academic variables, the model at Step 3 explained 25% of the variation in students' satisfaction with where they live now.

DISCUSSION

Astin's (1977) I-E-O model in the current research is useful in exploring the contribution of students' background characteristics, as well as their academic, physical, and social residence hall environment, toward their overall satisfaction with living in the special program residence hall. The analyses allow for a more

clearly structured and comprehensive model to be used in indicating what contributes to students' satisfaction with where they live in the special program buildings in the study.

One interesting finding in the first step of the block regression is that in-state students seem to be less satisfied than out-of-state students. One speculation is that in-state students commute home more often, thus having higher expectations of their living situation than is true for students who because of distance would not go home as often. Although this is the only background characteristic in the current study that contributes significantly to students' current living satisfaction in the residence halls, previous studies have found that other demographics play a role in predicting student satisfaction with their current living situation. For example, in the Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (ACUHO-I/EBI, 2001) multiinstitutional study, several demographic correlates were found with students' overall residence halls satisfaction. In that study (ACUHO/EBI), women were found to be significantly more likely than men to express higher overall satisfaction with the residence halls; White American students were significantly more satisfied than minority American and international students; and freshmen and sophomores were more satisfied than juniors, seniors, and graduate students with their current living situation. It is possible in this study that students who made a decision to live in the Fresh Start halls simply were more homogeneous in terms of gender, ethnicity, and classification than was true in the ACUHO-I/EBI study.

On the second step of the regression model, Fresh Start policies constituted the strongest predictor of students' satisfaction. This is somewhat surprising, given that Fresh Start policies, including cocurricular require-

ments and limited visitation hours, are somewhat more restrictive than for other living options. Previous studies have confirmed the effect of residence hall policies on student satisfaction (see Blimling, 1993). Students who were more satisfied with their living arrangement liked the visitation hours, thought the limited visitation policies helped them focus on their academics, and found the cocurricular requirements to be beneficial. A possible explanation of these findings is that residence halls with limited visitation hours provide a quieter atmosphere to sleep and study. Making students complete cocurricular requirements also may provide opportunities to interact socially with peers on their floor, thereby increasing satisfaction.

Residence hall policies and regulations frame interactions between students, thus influencing life in the residence halls and affecting residential social climate and satisfaction with residential life (Blimling, 1993). Students living in Fresh Start residence halls choose to live under special policies that include substance-free living (no substances in public spaces or student rooms) and visitation restrictions (guests of the opposite sex allowed only from 9 a.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 9 a.m. to 3 a.m. on Friday and Saturday).

Curtis (1972) found that students in residence halls with open visitation had more positive attitudes toward the study environment, but Blimling, Wachs, and Reid (1994) found no significant influence on academic performance. Lewis and Sedlacek (1973) found no significant difference in the academic success of students in open visitation residence halls compared to students in closed visitation residence halls.

Among the academic environment variables, the ARC factor was significant in Step 2 of the regression, which suggests that

perceptions of ARCs constitute a significant predictor of students' satisfaction with where they live now. The ARC position was recently created for the Fresh Start program, to help residents, especially freshmen, with academic issues. Students who may not wish to approach faculty instructors, or who may be hesitant to participate in other university tutoring programs, might prefer the peer assistance that is provided by ARCs.

In the third regression step, the house comfort factor plays the strongest role in students' satisfaction with where they live. This factor combines three additional components aside from students' response to the question about feeling comfortable: their ability to study when they want to in the residence halls, their relationship with their roommate, and the perception that each other's individuality and beliefs are respected. These items together make students feel comfortable, and therefore satisfied with where they live. Lower noise levels or number of hours spent studying there were not significant in the model; the interpersonal relationship items in the house comfort factor perhaps contributed more to students' satisfaction. Rather, they probably stayed there because it was home and there was nowhere else the student would rather be. Similarly, a lower noise level did not increase satisfaction, nor was there any relationship between the number of hours students spent studying per week and their satisfaction with where they live.

Students' satisfaction with their CA's performance influences their satisfaction with where they live. This finding supports previous research, in which RAs have been found to have great impact on students' overall satisfaction with residence hall living (David & Joseph, 2004). This underscores the importance of the CA in maintaining a welcoming house environment, so students will want to

live there. It also is noteworthy that the CA overshadows the ARC, as indicated by the loss of statistical significance of the ARC position in influencing students' satisfaction with the living environment in Step 3 of the regression. Thus, although the ARC position is influential, apparently it is not as influential in affecting living satisfaction as the CA position is.

Students' satisfaction with their house cabinet influenced their satisfaction with living in the residence halls as well. This may be due to the influence of student governance in the house on building community within the house. One study showed that students who are more satisfied with their house cabinet also were more likely to be involved in residence halls activities (Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003). An application of Weiner's (2000) theory of motivation suggests several things. The theory first suggests that students who help select their cabinet members may feel more actively involved, and thus feel a higher sense of satisfaction with their living environment. Second, students who will approach the house cabinet with ideas and concerns are more willing to attend house meetings. Finally, the feeling that the house cabinet members can influence the administration on perceived policy or facilities changes also can affect residents' satisfaction with where they live.

Students who have more interaction with roommates and with other peers tend to be more satisfied with the residential experience. This finding follows the results of previous studies. A recent national study indicated that the ability to interact with others in the residence halls is an important consideration in predicting students' overall satisfaction with the residential experience (ACUHO-I/EBI, 2001). A number of studies have found that more engagement with social life enhances

student perceptions of the living environment (Berger, 1997; Bonnici et al., 1992). Students who are more involved with roommates or other students will hold a more positive view of social inclusion, which enhances their sense of community and social integration. The more interaction they have, the happier they are, which in turn promotes more social interaction. More social involvement with peers is beneficial for students' personal development, and results in increased critical thinking and cognitive gains (Terenzini et al., 1996). In either the short run or the long run, the benefits from interaction will enhance student satisfaction with residence living.

Conclusions

This study was conducted at a single university with a largely homogeneous population. However, the Fresh Start program has unique staffing and policies that should be of broad interest to student housing professionals. This research serves as a pilot study to demonstrate the effect of the Fresh Start program, as one form of the general class of special interest residence hall programs, on student satisfaction. We have examined the effect of student demographics, living environment, and academic environment on residents' satisfaction with the residential experience. Satisfaction is an important outcome of higher education. This study has shown that both variables internal to the university and student characteristics external to the institution have a statistically significant effect on student satisfaction.

Although the results from this study are valuable, there are certain limits to what has been accomplished. First, this research represents preferences and attitudes of students from a large Midwestern research-intensive university. It is unclear whether the same results would be found in other institutions

in different geographic locations or at different levels of Carnegie classification. Second, because the current study is focused on the *Fresh Start* residence type rather than on a traditional residence hall, generalization of the results presented here is limited to special housing predominately focused on freshmen. Third, what is being explored here is only a snapshot of a much wider set of ways to measure student satisfaction. In particular, a longitudinal study of long-term satisfaction could expand the scope and usefulness of the research. Despite those limitations, the current study serves as a pilot study into research on special program satisfaction and student outcomes in residence halls.

One implication from the study is that there is no single policy, program, or environmental variable that has as much impact on residential life satisfaction as do the multiple perspectives of the lived experience. Their cumulative influence also accounts for the possible interaction between predictors, leading to a stronger ability to predict the outcome of student satisfaction. The environment clearly is structured into two components—the living environment and the academic environment—and it is possible to see the distinct contributions of each environmental component to the outcome of student satisfaction. With well-defined variables and a comprehensive model, it is possible to get a clear understanding of what explains variation in residence hall satisfaction, and it may become easier to administer changes in the living arrangements if they occur or are required. Ways need to be identified in which the academic environment will be promoted together with a positive social atmosphere in shaping residential experiences to make the residence halls a better living and learning milieu.

Satisfaction is positively related to student

retention; thus it benefits housing departments to assess satisfaction, with a goal of continual improvement. This is well documented by literature that shows students benefit from the residential experience (Blimling, 1993). On-campus residential living may be one type of community that facilitates social integration (Berger, 1997). Students living in residence halls persist at a much greater rate than do commuter students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Therefore, residence satisfaction studies will assist not only with residential retention, but also with retention in the university.

Findings from this study are useful for student affairs practitioners. After all, one of the goals of housing is to improve both the quality and quantity of services provided to students. The assessment and evaluation of performance and policy help to determine whether or not those goals have been accomplished. Knowing what students really think about their residential situation helps to determine what aspects of residential life are problematic and what measures could be taken to make appropriate changes. In addition, in the area of student satisfaction, the results of this analysis help to identify some specific areas of programming and residence hall climate concerns that enter into residence life goal-setting. Changes in these aspects of residential life may be made based on reflection of how the results of the current students' perceptions may be used to benefit subsequent cohorts.

The results of this student satisfaction analysis are important and provide possible assets for planning within residence departments, and for conveying the information to the rest of the university. Staff members such as CAs and ARCs are responsible for responding to inquiries arising from this assessment initiative. It is essential to obtain clear information that provides accurate measurement of student residents' satisfaction and of

the predictors that contribute to their level of satisfaction. With results from the satisfaction assessment analysis in hand, house staff members could communicate the residents' needs to university housing officers and raise funds for those parts of residence life that promote students' development. The predictors of resident students' satisfaction provide the basis of support to advocate for important changes that would enhance student development.

The results of this analysis show the strength of housing staff positions, particularly regarding how their role is related to explaining patterns of variation in individual levels of student satisfaction, and yield ideas about how to create a more harmonious environment. Housing staff will be motivated and encouraged continually to perform their best, knowing that their hard work leads to greater resident satisfaction.

The results of this student satisfaction study will help to reinforce programs provided by the residence hall staff and to allocate resources to areas in need of improvement and areas that have a demonstrated impact on satisfaction. The results may assist with selection, training, and supervision of residence staff and modification of housing staff programs. House staff members have a significant impact on students' perceptions. Based on these results, CAs and ARCs will learn or be trained to work more effectively with students to enhance the quality of their work. The training will be redirected to include more of a customer focus. Above all, staff will have a clearer understanding of elements that cause students to be more satisfied or dissatisfied. CAs and ARCs will be more available in the houses to help residents; they will keep the environment in order, and interact more with residents in ways that enhance residents' satisfaction. A focus on

what students want will help residential staff greatly improve the quality of student services provided.

Also important is the finding that residential policy contributes significantly to student satisfaction. Maximizing residents' satisfaction will require substantial rethinking about the Fresh Start policies and how effective they are. Housing administrators should pursue ways to adjust residential policies oriented toward organizing a sound residential social and academic environment and encouraging social interaction of the residents, so residents will enjoy a better social climate, better academic environment, and greater sense of satisfaction.

There was a significant difference in level of satisfaction between students who lived in renovated and nonrenovated halls. This information will be used to advocate for more renovation and residence hall improvement, which should contribute to heightened overall satisfaction.

The residence hall social environment, including house comfort, house interaction, and the house cabinet, had substantial impacts on how students view their residential life. The results of this analysis confirmed suggestions from Blimling (1993) that a better academic environment, a higher quality social climate, and greater participation in residential activities all help to achieve a better living and learning community with comfort and foster a higher sense of satisfaction. One implication is the need to promote and sustain, purposefully and intentionally with effort, an interactive social and academic environment or culture in the residence halls. House interaction and involvement (with roommates, peers, and staff members) plays an important role in satisfaction. More opportunities should be afforded to promote and encourage residential involvement through current

policies, programs, and services. Residents who are more involved and experience more interaction will have a more positive experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) have suggested that students who are more involved with the institution will achieve a higher level of developmental growth, will be more satisfied, and will be more likely to persist in college. The current study has confirmed that findings reported by Pascarella also are applicable in the residential environment. Environments are more influenced positively when they involve higher-level student-staff interaction, include targeted and intellectually oriented activity, and offer an academic and intellectual peer environment conducive to learning.

Another implication is that an appropriate residential academic environment will pro-

mote satisfaction. The Fresh Start policies, which intentionally focus on creating an academic environment, are statistically significant predictors of resident student satisfaction. This finding shows that the efforts of academic orientation programs are recognized as contributors to satisfaction. Promotion of students' satisfaction will enhance their satisfaction with residence halls, which will contribute to their satisfaction with the university because the residence halls are an integral part of university life. Better learning and living experiences in residence halls help all aspects of students' four-year study experiences in college.

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