

2005

## Contributors to Residence Hall Student Retention: Why do Students Choose to Leave or Stay?

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# Contributors to Residence Hall Student Retention: Why do Students Choose to Leave or Stay?

## **Abstract**

Residence hall occupancy is of concern to housing administrators because higher occupancy leads to financial stability. While many areas are housing more students, some regions such as the Midwest are experiencing enrollment declines primarily due to a decline in high-school graduates and a struggling economy (Meline, 2003). In the Midwest there are daily newspaper reports of declining enrollment, budget cuts, reduction in financial resources, and increased competition for government funding and private support. When occupancy is low, it is especially desirable for housing administrators to learn more about what motivates students in their choice of housing.

## **Disciplines**

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Family, Life Course, and Society | Higher Education | Political Science | Student Counseling and Personnel Services

## **Comments**

This article is published as Yan Li, Mack C. Shelley, II, and Donald F. Whalen, "Contributors to residence hall student retention: Why do students choose to leave or stay?," *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 33(2), 28-36 (2005). Posted with permission.

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# Contributors to Residence Hall Student Retention: Why do Students Choose to Leave or Stay?

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## INTRODUCTION

Residence hall occupancy is of concern to housing administrators because higher occupancy leads to financial stability. While many areas are housing more students, some regions such as the Midwest are experiencing enrollment declines primarily due to a decline in high-school graduates and a struggling economy (Meline, 2003). In the Midwest there are daily newspaper reports of declining enrollment, budget cuts, reduction in financial resources, and increased competition for government funding and private support. When occupancy is low, it is especially desirable for housing administrators to learn more about what motivates students in their choice of housing.

Fundamental questions posed by Upcraft, SchUh, and Associates (1 996) help residence life departments assess program effectiveness and make use of educational outcome assessments to keep students more satisfied as customers and more productive. As much as on-campus living benefits students (Astin, 1 985; Blimling, 1 993; Tinto, 1 993), it is also important to know what contributes to student retention in residence halls.

This study, conducted during late fall semester 2004, asked students their likely living arrangements during the following year. This research examines contributors to students' antic-

ipated living choice for the following year at a major land-grant Midwestern university.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have documented the benefits of on-campus living. Research by Astin (1 973, 1 993) emphasized the benefits of on-campus living in helping students to be more engaged with the academic environment. Key studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1 993) indicated that, controlling for other predictors, students living in the residence halls persisted and graduated at significantly higher rates than did students lacking the residential experience. Studies found that on-campus students, particularly those who lived in residence halls, were more satisfied with the college experience than were those who live off campus (Blimling, 1 993). Students living in residence halls were found to experience greater personal growth and more intellectual and cognitive development (Astin, 1 993; Blimling, 1 993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1 991 ; Schroeder & Mable, 1 994). Residential life possesses certain advantages over off-campus life in terms of social interaction and positive involvement with peers, faculty, and communities (Ballou, Reavill, & Schultz, 1 995).

Other benefits to on-campus living have been identified. Twale and Damron (1 992) found that convenient services and location were primary reasons for students' living choice. Popovics (1 989) found that convenience, independence, security, and privacy were perceived as advantages, although visitation restrictions, rules, and noise were perceived as negative elements of living in residence halls. Similarly, Luna (1 998) found parking, room comfort, noise level, and maintenance to be primary concerns of students living in residence halls. When on-campus living includes a mandatory dining plan, the effects of dining impact students' satisfaction with on-campus living. A recent study by Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (EBI, 2002) found dining satisfaction to be one of the foremost predictors of overall residence satisfaction.

Social elements also are important in shaping the perception of living in the

residence hall (Aleman, 1997; Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Thomas, 2000). These same social factors contribute to students' greater involvement in college activities (Astin, 1993; Blimli 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1996). The ability of residence hall students to interact with other students is also one of the most important factors in predicting their overall satisfaction in residence halls (EBI, 2002).

## METHOD

### Participants

This study was administered to students living in university residence facilities at a four-year, public, research-extensive university located in the Midwest with an enrollment of nearly 28,000 students. The overall undergraduate population at the institution was 56% male; 24% freshman, 21% sophomore, 24% junior, and 31% senior; and 88% white, 9% racial minority; and 4% international. The residence population closely mirrored that of the undergraduate population for gender and citizenship (56% male; 4% international), but had a much higher freshman population (50%) and a slightly higher racial minority population (10%).

Survey data were merged with information from the Office of the Registrar using students' university identification numbers. Data were weighted post hoc to reflect more accurately three demographic characteristics of the residence hall population because the respondent sample was somewhat different demographically from the institution's residence hall population. The poststratification weights,  $W$ , were calculated as  $W = pp/ps$ , where  $pp$  was the population proportion and  $ps$  was the sample proportion represented by any given group in the sample. The total sample size remained the same after weighting ( $N = 2,553$ ), and the adjusted poststratified sample was representative of the POPulation in terms of each demographic combination.

The Web-based survey was administered during the latter part of October 2003. The University's Institutional Review Board approved the survey. Every student received

the survey, which included living-option questions and questions that helped provide performance feedback for residence hall staff members. An electronic cover letter, including the link for the survey instrument, was e-mailed to all residence hall students to explain the purpose of the survey. Incentives were offered to residence hall houses (i.e., floors or wings) with the highest return rate. Of 5,747 surveys sent to residence hall students, 2,553 usable surveys that had university IDs and could be linked to the Office of the Registrar's data were returned (44%).

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### Survey Instrument

The survey instrument, which was developed at the institution, included 78 items, 8 of which were qualitative questions. Half of the survey items allowed students to provide feedback about their residential experience, including attitudes toward their Resident Assistant (RA), governance of their residence hall, and the residence-hall atmosphere.

The remaining survey items were the focus of this research. Three questions focused on students' satisfaction with their current living arrangements in the residence halls, whether they plan to attend the University next year, and whether they plan to work next year. Students were asked to indicate the likelihood (1 = unlikely; 7 = likely) of living next year in various housing situations (e.g., residence halls, off-campus, single-student apartments, family housing, Greek housing). A qualitative question asked respondents to explain their reasons for intended living arrangements. Students also were asked to indicate the importance of each of the 25 listed items in contributing to their preferred living arrangements for the following fall (1 little importance; 7 = much importance). A "not applicable" response choice was available for each group of items. A final question asked students to list their top three reasons for wanting to move off campus. To provide conceptual clarity and to ensure reliability and construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) was employed. Alpha coefficients ranged from .59 to .81 for 7 resulting factors, indicating moderate-to strong reliability. We did not use factors in the

following analysis because individual items rather than more general categories of items provided better insight for housing administrators regarding specific aspects of the living environment.

## Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis procedure used in the current study was multiple linear regression analysis. The dependent variables were two individual questions from the survey: "What is the likelihood of living in residence halls?" and "What is the likelihood of living off campus in the city?" The students' demographic characteristics and SUNey items related to students' likelihood of living on campus or off campus were entered as predictors into the regression model, which was estimated by the method of ordinary least squares (OLS).

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For each dependent variable, a separate equation was estimated with all predictor variables entered at the same time in each equation. This procedure resulted in parameter estimates that controlled simultaneously for the effects of all other variables in the equation (Agresti & Finlay, 1997; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The analysis was intended to determine which predictors explained the most variation in each of the two dependent variables.

## RESULTS

Students indicated the strongest preferences for two housing options for the following academic year. On the ordered seven-point Likert-scale item, returning to the residence halls had the highest rating (mean = 4.15). Living off campus achieved the second-highest rating (mean = 3.91). Students also gave a high rating to living in University single-student apartments (mean = 3.16). Other housing options were rated much lower: (a) Greek housing (mean = 1.69); (b) other living arrangements (mean = 1.55); (c) off campus outside the city (mean = 1.51); University family housing (mean = 1.22); and (e) live at home (mean = 1.21). Those indicating "other living arrangements" were graduating or were not returning to the institution, studying abroad or in an internship, or simply unsure. The

researchers elected to focus on the two most popular living arrangements: returning to the residence halls and living off campus. Comparing those two options focuses on what contributes most directly to residence-hall retention; thus, these two living options served as the dependent variables for further analyses. The other living options were not as much a concern for research and therefore were not included in this study.

## Results from the Regression of Likelihood of Living in Residence Halls

Table I provides regression results that yield insight into variables related to students' likelihood of returning to the residence halls. Demographic variables that predicted a significantly higher preference for returning to residence halls were male gender and learning community membership. Other predictors were sorted first by their degree of statistical significance — by increasing p-value, with the positively significant predictors listed first, followed by negatively significant predictors — and finally nonsignificant predictors.

The following six items were significant positive predictors of returning to the residence halls the following fall: (a) ability to be on a dining plan, (b) leadership opportunities, (c) location close to campus, (d) ability to choose where you live, (e) academic support available, and (f) high-speed Internet connection. Items that were significant negative predictors were: (a) ability to cook meals, (b) length of lease/contract, (c) proximity to campus/town, (d) private bathroom, (e) parking accommodations, (f) ability to live with or near friends, and (g) ability to study where you live. In the regression model estimating likelihood of retention in residence halls, the combined effect of all the predictor variables was significant ( $F = 31.6, p < .001$ ). The  $R^2$  value of .394 indicates that the combined predictors in this model explained 39.4% of the variation in the likelihood of retention in residence halls. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of .382 was very close to the unadjusted value of  $R^2$  • this indicates that the interpretation of predictors in the models was not affected unduly by possible intercorrelations among the predictors

(multicollinearity) or by misspecification of the model.

The most significant positive predictors of returning to the residence halls were also generally significant negative predictors of living off campus (see Table 2). These mirror-opposite regression results serve to establish face validity for the items in the survey instrument as indicators of what influences the living options of students. However, there are three exceptions: satisfying parents' wishes, adequate living space, and social atmosphere (Table 2).

### Results from the Regression of Likelihood of Living Off Campus Within the City

Table 2 shows the regression results, which provide insight into variables that are related

to students' likelihood of living off campus the following year. Demographic characteristics that significantly predicted a higher likelihood of living off campus were male gender and a lower ACT score. Significant positive reasons for students intending to live off campus the following year were: (a) ability to cook meals, (b) length of lease/contract, (c) proximity to campus/town, (d) parking accommodations, (e) ability to live with or near friends, and a (f) private bathroom. Significant negative predictors for students' preference to live off campus next year included: (a) the ability to be on a dining plan, (b) leadership opportunities, (c) academic support available, (d)

**TABLE 1**  
REGRESSION OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND ITEM IMPORTANCE ON LIKELIHOOD OF LIVING IN RESIDENCE HALLS NEXT YEAR

Variables	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Rank	
(Constant)	2.759	0.549		5.030	**	
Learning community membership	0.379	0.128	0.062	2.955	**	
Male	0.195	0.095	0.043	2.049	*	2
Minority	0.241	0.156	0.031	1.545		
Undergraduate classification	0.002	0.061	0.001	0.035		
In-state resident	-0.096	0.101	-0.019	-0.942		
Fresh Start (specially structured living environment)	0.005	0.093	0.001	0.056		
ACT score	0.020	0.013	0.036	1.571		
Importance of ...					Positive	
Ability to be on a dining plan	0.360	0.025	0.334	14.244	**	
Leadership opportunities	0.150	0.031	0.125	4.903	**	2
Location is close to campus	0.178	0.043	0.096	4.171	**	3
Ability to choose where YOU live	0.141	0.040	0.083	3.549	**	4
Academic support available	0.086	0.033	0.074	2.633	**	5

High speed Internet connection	0.095	0.042	0.051	2.233 *	6
					Negative
Ability to cook meals	-0.175	0.029	-0.143	-5.967 **	
Length of lease/contract	-0.149	0.031	-0.119	-4.837 **	2
Proximity to campus town	-0.120	0.029	-0.105	-4.152 **	3
Private bathroom	-0.124	0.030	-0.108	-4.054 **	4
Parking accommodations	-0.099	0.028	-0.081	-3.481 **	5
Ability to live with/near friends	-0.166	0.050	-0.102	-3.298 **	6
Ability to study where you live	-0.082	0.040	-0.050	-2.046 *	7
Fresh Start policies	0.043	0.024	0.040	1.765	
Residence policies other than Fresh Start	0.042	0.025	0.040	1.716	
Ability to meet other students	0.056	0.040	0.041	1.420	
Adequate living space	-0.055	0.049	-0.029	-1.091	
Satisfy parents' wishes	0.028	0.026	0.025	1.091	
To live away from younger students	-0.029	0.027	-0.024	-1.066	
Payment plan	0.034	0.032	0.028	1.064	
Friends who/will live there	-0.046	0.044	-0.031	-1.050	
Single bedroom	0.015	0.025	0.014	0.594	
Cost of room/apartment and/or board	0.012	0.044	0.008	0.286	
Social atmosphere	-0.008	0.040	-0.006	-0.203	
Costs of meals	0.002	0.039	0.001	0.048	

Notes.

Dependent Variable: Likelihood of living in residence halls (Scale: 1 = Unlikely, 7 = Likely)

Scale for independent variables: 1 = little importance, 7 = much importance

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

$F = 31.6, p < .001$

$R^2 = .394$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = .382$

TABLE 2

REGRESSION OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND ITEM IMPORTANCE ON  
LIKELIHOOD OF LIVING OFF CAMPUS IN THE CITY NEXT YEAR

Variables	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Rank
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(Constant)	4.284	0.563		7.604	**	
ACT score	-0.051	0.013	-0.093	-3.861	**	
Male	0.232	0.098	0.052	2.368	*	2
Minority	-0.027	0.160	-0.004	-0.170		
Classification	-0.003	0.063	-0.001	-0.047		
In-state resident	-0.014	0.104	-0.003	-0.136		
Fresh Start (specially structured living environment)	0.056	0.096	0.013	0.586		
Learning community membership	-0.171	0.132	-0.028	-1.292		
Importance of ...						Positive
Ability to cook meals	0.215	0.030	0.177	7.108	**	
Length of lease/contract	0.192	0.032	0.154	6.038	**	2
Cost of room/apartment and/or board	0.230	0.045	0.147	5.117	*	3
Proximity to campus town	0.137	0.030	0.122	4.619	**	4
Parking accommodations	0.095	0.029	0.078	3.246	**	5
Ability to live with/near friends	0.161	0.052	0.099	3.089	**	6
Private bathroom	0.070	0.031	0.062	2.230	*	7
						Negative
Ability to be on a dining plan	-0.199	0.026	-0.186	-7.664	**	
Leadership opportunities	-0.185	0.031	-0.156	-5.908	**	2
Academic available	-0.121	0.034	-0.105	-3.608	**	3
High speed Internet connection	-0.146	0.043	-0.079	-3.364	**	4
Location is close to campus	-0.123	0.044	*0.067	-2.815	**	5
Satisfy parents' wishes	-0.066	0.027	-0.060	-2.492	*	6
Adequate living space	-0.110	0.052	-0.057	-2.130	*	7
Social atmosphere	-0.083	0.041	-0.060	-2.033	*	8
Residence policies other than Fresh Start	-0.039	0.025	-0.037	-1.553		
Costs of meals	-0.059	0.040	-0.042	-1.458		
Single bedroom	0.033	0.025	0.033	1.312		
To live away from younger students	0.037	0.028	0.030	1.307		
Friends who/will live there	0.058	0.045	0.039	1.284		
Payment plan	0.035	0.033	0.029	1.077		
Ability to meet other students	-0.034	0.041	-0.025	-0.833		
Ability to study where you live	0.031	0.041	0.019	0.750		

Fresh Start policies	-0.015	0.025	-0.014	-0.605
Ability to choose where you live	0.014	0.041	0.008	0.334

Notes.

Dependent Variable: Likelihood of living off campus in the city (Scale: 1 Unlikely, 7= Likel

Scale for independent variables: 1 = little importance, 7 = much importance

p < .01; \* p < .05

F = 26.483, p < .001

R<sup>2</sup> = .357; Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .344

.357; Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> —

high-speed Internet options, (e) location close to campus, (f) satisfy parents' wishes, (g) adequate living space, and (h) social atmosphere.

The combined effects for all the predictors of likelihood of living off campus are significant (F = 26.481, p < .001). Thus, one or more of the predictors that were included in the regression model significantly affect students' likelihood of living off campus. The R<sup>2</sup> and adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values are 0.357 and 0.344, respectively; the presence of little difference between these two R<sup>2</sup> values suggests that there are no serious concerns about multicollinearity confounding these model-based interpretations

## DISCUSSION

Previous studies have documented the various predictors that contribute to student retention in residence halls, but few have rank-ordered the predictive significance of these variables. What makes the current study unique is the enhanced ability to understand the significance of various predictors of student residential choices. First, the study focused on the variables that significantly predict students' likelihood of retention in the residence halls for another year. Second, it grouped the significant predictors into those that have positive and negative effects. Each of the separate regression equations estimating the likelihood of returning to residence halls and the likelihood of moving off campus indicates separate groups of significantly important predictors. Structuring the analyses helps

readers understand visually the ranked order of importance of each positively or negatively significant item while controlling for the effects of demographic characteristics and other variables.

Few demographic characteristics showed a significant contribution to living preferences. Men were more likely than women to prefer living both in residence halls and off campus. The finding could mean that women simply had a stronger preference for living elsewhere, such as on-campus apartments. Learning community membership was also a positive predictor for students preferring to return to residence halls. This finding confirms the positive social aspects of learning communities already found in previous studies (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

No significant difference was found for classification, where a difference might have been expected. Although there are no live-in requirements for students to live on campus at any time,

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it seemed likely that upper-class students might have been more likely than lower-class students to prefer living off campus or in on-campus apartments next year. It would seem that upperclass students have the same affinity for remaining in residence halls as lower-class students.

ACT score was a significant negative predictor of preference to live off campus. A likely reason for this is that lower ability students were likely attracted to a less

restrictive off-campus lifestyle, while higher ability students focused more on the more academic environment found on campus.

The ability to be on a dining plan was found to be the most important positive reason students reported for remaining in the residence halls. The dining plan was also the most important negative reason for moving off campus. The influence of the dining plan in these models is much stronger than for any other single item. This finding is supported by the findings of previous studies, which indicated the strong contribution of dining service satisfaction to students' satisfaction with residence hall living (Campbell 1993; EBI, 2002; Watkins, 2001 ). This result underscores the attention that should be given to providing a strong dining program. Previous literature has indicated that dining services should be a major part of students' residential life; instead of being merely meal serving, providing variety and convenience can help achieve this goal (Campbell, 1993). Also, a satisfying dining plan will attract more students to on-campus housing, whereas students who are dissatisfied with the dining program tend to move off campus and can be expected to share their unsatisfactory views of dining services with their peers (Kellogg, 1999).

Leadership opportunities were a second important predictor of retention in the residence halls. Perhaps this connotes the strength of leadership programs within the residence hall community at the institution where the study was conducted. The characteristics of leadership, teamwork, cohesiveness, and sense of identity are qualities associated with a strong residence hall community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Leadership develops from involvement and interaction with peers and the living community. Previous studies by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1996) have suggested that students' interpersonal interaction with peers and faculty, as well as their involvement in community activities, help to promote their cognitive and intellectual development. Residence halls, like Greek housing, afford more opportunities for this interpersonal interaction and for the development of communities than do other off-campus living options (Blimling, 1993). In this institution's

residence structure, there are ample opportunities on the house level as well as broader opportunities for leadership and involvement.

Providing academic support in the residence halls also promotes students' retention. Residential learning communities, as opposed to learning communities that are only coursebased, offer a place for students to incorporate daily living experiences and interpersonal contact with the academic initiative (Tinto, 1993). The residence department's focused academic programming and the opportunities for learning community students to live together both contribute to superior academic performance (Lenning & Ebers, 1999). Academic programming includes support from Community Advisors (CAs) and Academic Resource Coordinators (ARCS) who respond to academic questions and help with academic issues. Some learning communities also include policies that limit alcohol and visitation to promote a better living and learning environment.

Proximity to campus, the ability to choose where to live, and high-speed Internet connection all contribute significantly to the likelihood of retention in the residence halls. These important predictors can be summarized under the heading of convenience of the living environment. Compared with most off-campus living arrangements, residence halls are closer to campus. Off-campus living opportunities that are closer to campus generally are more expensive. In addition, residence halls provide academic year contracts, faster Internet speed, and the ability to choose among living options such as traditional residence halls or suites, single rooms, and various dining plans.

Conversely, significant predictors of living off campus are different from the significant predictors of living in residence halls. The ability to cook meals is the most important consideration in students' likelihood of moving off campus. People who prefer off-campus living believe the length of lease or contract is flexible, despite the predominance of one-year leases. One reason could be the ability to sub-lease. Those same students presume food costs will be less, but also place importance on proximity to campus/town and better parking

accommodations than are normally provided to residence hall students. Private bathrooms, as opposed to community showers found in traditional halls, are also preferred. The preference to live near friends also may indicate how this influences students' housing decisions.

The two lists shown in Tables 1 and 2 often reflect a mirror image of one another. The importance of a dining plan was ranked most important among the predictors related to a higher likelihood of returning to residence halls and a lower likelihood of living off campus. In a similar fashion, the importance of the ability to cook meals was negatively associated with returning to residence halls and most positively associated with moving off campus. Leadership opportunities was ranked as the second most important predictor to living in residence halls and the second least important predictor to the likelihood of moving off campus. Parking accommodations was the fifth most important predictor for those intending to live off campus, and fifth least important for those intending to live in residence halls. The ability to live with or near friends was ranked as the sixth most important for those intending to move off campus, and the sixth least important for those intending to stay in residence halls.

Another noteworthy aspect of this study involves the items that were not significantly influential in predicting students' likelihood of living either in residence halls or off campus. Examples are the cost of room/apartment or meals and friends who would live in residence halls. Prohibitive policies in some buildings housing large numbers of freshmen, such as limited alcohol and visitation, also were not significant.

The items that were most important in predicting students living in residence halls were related to academics, including leadership opportunities, academic support, and high-speed Internet connections. The dining plan can also be viewed as a timesaving item that could be related to academics. Items that are significant in predicting a student's likelihood of living off-campus, on the other hand, were focused primarily on financial considerations that might be gained from cooking meals, the length of the lease/contract, and cost of the room/apartment and/or board. Aspects of the

physical environment (i.e., ability to cook meals, parking accommodations, private bathroom) were also important considerations in the decision to move off campus.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on variables that are related to students' preferences for the two housing options they were most likely to embrace for the next academic year. The regression models took into account control of demographic characteristics and examined the strength of likely contributors to students' decisions regarding where to live. This study is important because it permits examination of the positive and negative predictors from the two models. We also could specify the ranked orders of their importance in relation to preferences for the two living options.

Findings from the current study could be useful to housing administrators. Maximizing residential retention will require understanding the reasons for students' intentions to remain in, or to leave, the residence halls. For example, dining programs are important predictors of residence hall retention. Dining administrators should be highly responsive by providing high-quality and flexible services to customers (i.e., students). A stronger customer-service focus thus may attract more students to continue living on campus. Housing administrators may wish to find out specifically which food choices, meal plans, and dining services contribute to the satisfaction of their own students.

Housing administrators also should actively Pi-JrSUE ways to foster an environment that provides more leadership opportunities and academic support. Organizing a sound social and academic environment and encouraging positive interactions among residents will yield more cognitive and intellectual development in the residence halls. More student organizations and extracurricular activities will help residents develop improved leadership ability. More learning communities should be created and existing learning community opportunities should be publicized to provide residents with all possible academic support.

Learning communities should provide environments within which students study and discuss academic issues together. Therefore, more physical space should be allocated to

accommodate classes and study groups, particularly in places close to where students live. Resident assistants or academic assistants should be trained to offer systematic academic consulting and help to students (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

While this research focused on one ability measure (ACT score), it WOULD be interesting to

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assess the extent to which academic achievement, as measured by grade point average (GPA), is related to where students currently live or intend to live. Future research also could make use of factor analysis to incorporate items into factors, taking into account possible relationships between separate items to form scales that can be tested for reliability.

Although the present study is valuable, it is somewhat limited in several regards. This research represents the preferences and attitudes of students from a large Midwestern, research-intensive university. It remains unclear whether the same results would be found at institutions in different geographic areas, of different sizes and institutional structures (e.g., private or public), and with different types of facilities and programs.

Housing professionals at the research institution were the primary composers of the survey items. Other items may be important to students at other institutions. Even so, this study has provided a foundation for an analytic procedure that might be used with similar survey items constructed at other institutions.

Given the demonstrated role of finances in influencing students' intentions regarding where to live, their financial demographics might also be important variables to consider for future research. This study provides some insight into why students plan to return to residence halls or move off campus. Despite its possible limitations, the study explores variables that are related to residence hall retention and provides useful information for housing administrators.

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