



Student Perceptions of How a Relationship-Based Housing Model Affected Their Residence Hall Experience and Sense of Belonging at a Four-Year Selective University

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STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING can be significantly improved by college and university efforts to implement programs that enrich their residential experience. This qualitative study focused on student housing and a relationship-based housing model, students' perceptions of their residential experiences, the relationships they formed, and how these experiences affected their sense of belonging. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of 15 students from a private university in the Southwest. The results highlight the connection between students' relationships and their sense of belonging, and future research should explore how this model can be improved and perhaps replicated at other higher education institutions. Implications for practice in the field of student housing include promoting activities that build relationships and encouraging staff to nurture a culture of relationship building.

The field of student affairs has focused on enhancing students' collegiate experience and promoting learning outside the classroom as a primary role for housing professionals ever since the publication of *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937; Schroeder et al., 1994). There is ample literature on housing models that integrate faculty into student housing or prioritize learning outcomes for residential students (e.g., Fink & Inkelas, 2015; Kerr et al., 2017; Spanierman et al., 2013). The college years are a dynamic period of psychological, social, and cognitive growth and development, and most colleges and universities utilize housing models that focus on student growth and learning.

Campus housing may have begun as a means of providing residential spaces for students, but many student affairs professionals believed that residence halls could do more than simply provide a physical space for them. When the movement to create residence life programs that promoted student learning began, it was identified as a major challenge for campus housing professionals (Schroeder et al., 1994). Their efforts were based on theories of cognitive development that can be traced to the work of Piaget in 1952 and Perry in 1968 (Komives & Woodard, 1996). In a longitudinal study of Harvard and Radcliffe students, Perry posited stages of intellectual development ranging from dualism (the binary thinking of true/false or good/evil) to relativism (an acceptance of multiple, relative truths). Other student development theorists followed, expanding on these theories, including Kohlberg, who explored moral reasoning and development, and Gilligan, who examined the effect of gender on moral development (Komives & Woodard, 1996). Student affairs professionals use theories like these to help them understand the complex issues students experience as they mature and develop during their college years, and student counseling centers, student conduct officers, and housing professionals utilize student development theory in their daily

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practice. In some respects, student development theory can also be seen in the creation of student housing models, which tend to group students by year, acknowledging that students face different developmental issues as they move through their college years.

Campus housing professionals have used these and other student development theories to illuminate what their residents were experiencing and to provide foundations for programs and services that could improve their collegiate lives. For example, an early learning-oriented model for student housing has its roots in student development theory. Research showed that living on campus improved students' well-being (Mayhew et al., 2016), so housing models based on a wellness approach made sense and were common in the 1990s and still exist in some places today.

Within the residential model, student learning is considered admirable and important, but housing programs often ignore a more important role: to enhance students' sense of belonging. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs illustrated that learning, in terms of self-fulfillment and self-esteem, cannot be achieved when individuals do not feel a sense of belonging. Several scholars have recently examined the importance of this feeling of connection: *The Impact of a Sense of Belonging in College* (Bentrim & Henning, 2022) and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* monograph "Reimagining the Student Experience—How Colleges Can Help Students Connect, Belong and Engage" (Hoover et al., 2022). As enrollment in colleges and universities declines, attrition increases, and the number of high school graduates will decrease in the coming years (Bransberger et al., 2020), a focus on belonging becomes more important than ever (Hoffman et al., 2002; Ribera et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2018).

Student housing has been a part of college and university campuses in the U.S. for more than 200 years, beginning with the Colonial era when initial housing was influenced by the Oxford-Cambridge models (Duke, 1996; Thelin, 2011). Ever since Harvard Hall was established in 1869, student housing "has been condemned, ignored, tolerated, lauded, applauded—but it has never been eliminated" (Duffy, 1977, p. 89). Although these early buildings added to the campuses, the historical literature does not discuss how they contributed to students' sense of community or belonging.

Student housing models have gone far beyond merely providing shelter and basic amenities by also incorporating community building, sustainability efforts, and diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that focus on students' personal development. Dunkel and Baumann (2013) offered three models, or groupings, for college student housing: the sleep and eat model, the market model, and the learning model. The learning model was arguably the most dominant one for student housing in the last 30 years, but now housing professionals are increasingly adopting a learning model focused on the holistic development of students. The most prevalent learning

models include theme communities, living-learning communities (LLCs), models focused on the residential first-year experience or the inclusion of faculty-in-residence, and new and innovative practices such as the residential curriculum model (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013).

THE INTERSECTION OF STUDENT HOUSING AND STUDENT BELONGING

Student housing originally served a basic need for shelter and then evolved into living-learning communities that supported the premise that residence halls and structured residential experiences contribute significantly to a student's sense of belonging (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). In their study on LLCs and belonging, Spanierman and colleagues (2013) found many positive outcomes for increased belonging in these communities, and their central recommendation for practice was to “emphasize residence hall programming that encourages informal peer interactions” (p. 322) and to enhance the residential experience with living-learning programs, faculty-in-residence programs, and career and advising programs hosted in the halls (Kranzow et al., 2015; Schussler & Fierros, 2008).

Though the case for the value of relationships and a sense of belonging seems very strong, the literature does not offer many strategies for creating relationships of substance, and there is some evidence that campuses should be more intentional in supporting a strong culture of caring (Kezar, 2007). Meaningful relationships with peers are important and “serve as the foundation for students' sense of belonging” (Ribera et al., 2017, p. 545), which can provide students with the support they need and promote higher rates of retention. First-year students often report feeling overwhelmed as they enter college life, but “the development of interpersonal ties, on which a student could rely” (Hoffman et al., 2002, p. 237) can improve their coping skills and increase their comfort in classes and on campus in general.

A PRIVATE SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY MODEL

Before 2009, Private Southwestern University (PSU) campus housing was home to roughly 3,000 students. The residential model was a home-grown version of a wellness approach (and a learning model for housing) known as the Community, Academics, Recreation, Diversity, and Social (CARDS) model. Programs and services delivered to residents focused on activities fitting into one of those five categories.

In 2008, members of the PSU housing staff went to Shreveport, Louisiana, to learn about a community development model called Community Renewal, International (CRI). The dedicated team at CRI defined the foundation of society in their model as a network of mutually enhancing relationships; thus, the focus of the model was to build relationships, one neighbor at a time, that would then systematically strengthen communities (McCarter & Muldoon, 2022). The PSU staff believed that this model could be used to build vibrant communities and began working on a new model called Community Renewal University (CRU).

In 2011, the PSU housing leadership decided to rebrand CRU as Knowing, Connecting, and Empowering (KCE). This model serves as a framework for the department and guides all of their practices and procedures, as well as outlining a foundation of mutually enhancing relationships for all the roles and responsibilities of the residence life team. The leadership team developed a resource collection that highlights the theory and principles of KCE and then covers all the major components of how knowing, connecting, and empowering students is accomplished week by week, semester by semester at PSU. By 2013, the KCE model was firmly in place. Resident assistants (RAs) began to tell stories about how they *KCE'd* (a verb they created) with students. Move-in and move-out procedures, student assignments, room changes, staff hiring and training, programming, and communication are all achieved through the lens of this model. PSU gathered data related to students' satisfaction, retention, and conduct, and each measure pointed to positive outcomes. As PSU enrollment has grown, so too has the housing population; by 2019, more than 5,000 students lived on campus, and the KCE model has proven to be scalable as growth occurred. However, an actual research study on the model has not been done.

THE STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

Description of Methods

This was a phenomenological study that explored college students' relationships and how those shaped or influenced their residential experience and sense of belonging. The study was conducted using individual, in-person interviews lasting 45–60 minutes per student. Questions were open-ended (not leading or suggestive) so that students could accurately and completely describe their experience. To improve the questions, they were tested on non-participating students. The researcher listened for statements that were repeated by interviewees, seeking to describe what Creswell (2013) identified as the “essence of the experiences” (p. 105). Major themes were identified: the types of relationships formed, how those relationships developed, how relationships influenced the overall residential experience, and how the residential experience influenced students' sense of belonging.

Description of Procedures

Creswell (2013) recommended that after a phenomenological approach has been chosen, data should be collected from those who experienced the phenomenon. In the present study, data was collected from PSU students who had experience living on campus. An email was sent to current students in their first or second year. As they responded to the initial email, the researcher checked the housing database and determined which hall the students resided in on campus. A purposeful sample of students was selected according to the order in which they responded. As they responded, the researcher skipped over those residing in a hall that was already represented until there was a diverse group of residence halls in the sample. This process continued until a

minimum of 12 students agreed to participate. Some did not schedule promptly, and the decision was made to include them, even though this meant that the sample grew to 15 students.

Each interview began with a verbal review of the purpose of the study, and students were given the opportunity to withdraw if they no longer wished to participate. Each student was asked specific questions on relationships and their residential experience. After reviewing the transcripts, the researcher felt there was a rich narrative from the students about their experiences, their relationships, and their connection to the residential experience. Therefore, follow-up interviews were not needed.

The Institution

The study was conducted at a private university located in the southwestern region of the United States. PSU is a selective 4-year university primarily focused on undergraduate education. According to the PSU Institutional Research web page, females represent nearly 60% of the total undergraduate student body. Just under 59% of the student body are out-of-state students, and roughly 4% are international students. PSU is a Predominantly White Institution, and in 2023 a total of 36% of the undergraduate students identified as non-White, with the largest subgroup identifying as Hispanic/Latino.

Participants

Participants were current full-time students who lived in a college residence hall for at least one semester. They were a diverse group, living in many different residence halls on campus and pursuing a variety of majors, and they were often members of multiple clubs and organizations. Five male students and 10 female students were interviewed. All but two were White, four were sophomores, and 11 were first-year students at PSU. Participants were given a pseudonym for their first names, and the names of halls have been changed (*see Table 1, page 90*).

FINDINGS

Relationships with Residence Hall Staff

All the students interviewed knew their resident assistant, and roughly half of them discussed their RA as a person with whom they had developed a significant relationship. When the relationship between students and their RA was strong, there were positive and, at times, transformational experiences, though this was not true for all students in this study.

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TABLE 1**Participants' Demographic Data**

Student	Gender	Race	Academic standing	Hall name\type	Room type
David	Male	Hispanic	First-year	Sherman\Co-ed	Double
Bella	Female	White	Sophomore	Arthur\Co-ed	Suite single
Sophie	Female	White	First-year	Curtis\Co-ed	Triple
Tim	Male	White	Sophomore	Reynolds\Co-ed	Suite single
Dan	Male	White	First-year	Sherman\Co-ed	Double
Brody	Male	White	Sophomore	Wrigley\Co-ed	Suite single
Morgan	Female	White	First-year	Martin\Co-ed	Double
Kim	Female	White	First-year	Filbert\Co-ed	Triple
Julie	Female	White	First-year	Cortez\Female	Double
Sydney	Female	White	First-year	Filbert\Co-ed	Double
Lainey	Female	White	First-year	Filbert\Co-ed	Double
Jenna	Female	White	First-year	Samson\Co-ed	Suite single
Lisa	Female	White	Sophomore	Wrigley\Co-ed	Suite single
Ava	Female	White	First-year	Royal\Co-ed	Suite single
Tyler	Male	White	First-year	Martin\Co-ed	Double

The RA was often identified as one of the first people students got to know. RAs helped them get settled and shared information about the residence hall, including hall policies; some participants mentioned becoming good friends with their RA, and even those who didn't said they believed their RA was a valuable resource and a kind person. Five students specifically mentioned that their RA made a regular point of checking in on them in their room to see how they were doing with classes, friends, or other issues. Others noted that they would see their RA only in passing or at the residence hall desk. All but one participant acknowledged positive contributions

from the RA staff. Sophie described her RA as not necessarily a close friend, but as a caring neighbor:

I wouldn't say I have the closest connection with my RA, but she always says hi. She always waves. She knows everyone's name on the hall, which I think is super important for everyone . . . to learn people's names. She not only knows your name, but she knows something about you.

Relationships with the hall directors were more intermittent, and, again, students described their hall directors as very caring and supportive. Three participants described their hall director as a friend and strong builder of community in the hall. Julie, a first-year student in an all-female hall, had a good relationship with her hall director, in part, she believed, because she worked at the hall desk. A few recognized that their hall directors occupied an important role: handling difficult situations. Jenna recalled how she approached her hall director about difficult roommate problems, sharing concerns about her roommates and their possible drug usage, and the director responded with empathy and concern. "I think she's excellent. I had a great time talking to her and she was definitely there for me when I could tell her my problems and everything."

Friendships in the Residence Halls

Most students began their conversations about relationships with the first people they met, their roommates. Six participants had a private bedroom, but they viewed their roommate as the person who lived in the 2-, 3- or 4-bedroom suite with them. Roommate or suitemate relationships were often cited by the interviewees as the most important ones, particularly early on in the college experience. Since living with someone who is not a family member is almost always a new experience, this was top of mind when students first started talking about friendships in their residence hall. Sydney knew it was important to find people to connect to in her new home. "For me, that was my roommate. I got to know her really fast, and we instantly clicked." This relationship had a profound effect: "That friendship, for me, it really changed my college experience."

Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of friendships, and while they acknowledged friends in classes or students they met at orientation or new student camp, they consistently came back to the friendships in the place where they lived. Lisa emphasized this point.

I feel like if you don't have friends in your residence hall, it's a totally different experience, and it's very much just somewhere you sleep versus when you do have friends there, it's really a place where you live and [you call] home and you feel comfortable.

All the participants were adamant that their friendships were one of the most important things to come from their time in college. Though their academic success and pursuit of a degree were still their primary goals, they felt this would not be possible

without friendships and the supportive, caring people who live around them. Sophie connected learning and development to her friendships:

It would just be so lonely to go through a whole new experience, knowing no one and not having deep connections. You need someone you can turn to; you need someone you can get advice from. The whole point of college is to branch out and to not only learn more things but also experience new things. And it'd be hard to have experiences if you were on your own.

Lainey explained more about the connection between the place and her relationships with others, saying that her roommate helped her by “getting super close, and since you’re just right there with the person, it’s very convenient to hang out all the time.” She also recognized that the residence hall provided opportunities for new friendships and deepened them, a sentiment that other students touched on as well:

The friends in my sorority who live in Filbert are the ones I’m closest with. And a lot of them don’t live directly on my floor, rather they’re on first floor, and it’s the same thing. It’s nice because I can just on my way out, go knock on their door and see what they’re doing.

Residence hall activities played an interesting role in relationships and the student experience of living on campus. Almost all students confirmed that they knew about and participated in activities in their residence hall, while two or three identified hall programs as something they actively sought out. One of the most interesting findings was that there appeared to be a relationship between programs and activities happening in spaces that students had to pass through and how they evaluated their residential experience and the relationships they made. Three or four participants described encountering an activity that they had not planned to attend and then joined in and ended up seeing friends or meeting people. Participants identified social connection as one of the things they enjoyed most about the programs and activities. It was clear that residence hall staff were very intentional about how they planned activities, sometimes hosting them in spaces that students needed to walk through, capitalizing on the use of these spaces to build and strengthen relationships between residents.

Belonging on Campus

Participants did not hesitate when asked if belonging on campus was important to them. All but one insisted that it was the most important consideration in their persistence at PSU. Lainey made a direct connection between having friends and feeling a sense of belonging:

I would say that I was really worried [about belonging] here. I don't know why. I was just scared that, like every person was going to be very superficial. Having them [my friends] always around definitely contributed to the feeling I belong here.

Feeling a sense of belonging takes time, though. Participants talked positively about how friendships contribute to belonging, but they also noted that this was not a sustained state of being. They had many different definitions for belonging, but all

centered on the ability to be themselves, to be accepted, and to feel comfortable in their environment. Several talked about caring relationships and a caring hall environment as key factors. Kim echoed others when she said, “Belonging, I feel, is being included, without being an afterthought.” For most students, their residence hall had become their new home, and Bella referred specifically to her feeling of connection.

I would probably say that I, first and foremost, feel connected. I feel like I have at least one relationship that's deep . . . and this definitely feels like home now. The dorms have certainly been a huge part of that because I'm going there every day.

Lisa discovered her newfound connections in a new student summer camp and then tied that experience into her residence hall. “It starts in the residence hall, and it’s a web that just spreads out. You just meet more and more people and network from there.” Participants felt comfort in knowing there was always someone around to do something with; Sophie revealed that she kept her door open to let others know to just stop in. “Curtis Hall, the hall I live in, is known as a social dorm on campus. A lot of people leave their doors open and you could just come in and chit-chat. It’s kind of like you’re never alone.” In their simplest form, the residence halls were places to congregate, and students could always know that friends were likely just a door or two away.

Sophie felt strongly that her friendships at PSU were indeed the key to her belonging there. She also tied the concept of friendships to the commonly used word community, which appears often in the literature on belonging. “I need a sense of community everywhere I go. I feel like if I hadn’t made friends at PSU, I probably would’ve transferred.”

DISCUSSION

Much of the literature on campus housing and related models focuses on student learning, and such outcomes as friendships, social activities, and a sense of community are often mere footnotes in defining successful models. However, students interviewed for this study highlighted their friendships and their relationships with staff as integral to their feeling part of the PSU family and community. The literature on student housing models (especially living-learning, residential curricula, and wellness-based models) highlights residence hall programming as a valuable method for achieving learning outcomes (Fink & Inkelas, 2015; Kerr et al., 2017; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). This represents a fundamental difference between common housing models and the model used at PSU. Though student learning is an important goal,

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this is not the primary reason students enjoy their residential experience; their goals included meeting other students, having fun, and developing friendships, and connections were the most significant factor in creating their sense of belonging. The findings about the importance of focusing on social interactions are consistent with those of Spanierman and colleagues (2013), who studied living-learning communities and found that housing models that promoted informal interactions and making friends were most important to students.

As participants talked about relationships, 12 of the 15 interviewed discussed roommates first, since these relationships were particularly important in creating a sense of connection (Dumford et al., 2019). Relationships and friendships (two words they often used interchangeably) with their roommates or suitemates contributed to their sense of feeling connected to others, and knowing their roommate and having a good relationship with that person helped make the residence hall feel like home.

The KCE model at PSU was created using relationships as the foundation for all residential activities. RAs are given detailed plans and allowed to use some of their own strategies for building relationships with students and helping them build relationships with each other. Hall directors focus on creating a presence in their halls and setting specific systematic plans to get to know residents. Helping students with roommate relationships and having regular and planned interactions with residents, the hall directors help students avoid roommate conflicts; if they do arise, the resident assistants and hall directors quickly intervene. Contact with student and professional staff can positively impact student involvement (e.g., Arboleda et al., 2003; Devlin et al., 2008; Garvey et al., 2020), and in the KCE model, this was found to be true.

Student housing cannot claim to be the only setting in which friendships begin, grow, and flourish. Friendships can be cultivated within clubs, classes, fraternities, and sororities, and these forms of out-of-class involvement also contribute to a sense of belonging (Ribera et al., 2017; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). Even as students described friendships that developed outside their residence hall, they acknowledged that other hall residents tended to be the ones with whom they had closer connections. Living in residence halls is in fact extremely important in students' development of relationships with peers (Berger, 1997). The "C" in the KCE model focuses on programming that reinforces the connections students make anywhere on campus or in their residence hall. Students enjoyed talking about friendships in the residential setting, and they smiled and laughed as they shared stories of the good friends they made there. As previously noted, residential programming and the use of spaces to strategically encourage and promote interaction are successful methods to promote relationships and friendships.

Students readily acknowledged that they cared less about how many people they met and more about developing at least a handful of close friendships. When asked about these relationships, almost all of them indicated that they were the most important part of their first year of college. Although recognizing that academic success was necessary for a positive collegiate experience, participants asserted that close friendships were equally important.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Much has been written about the importance of belonging, and most residence life models and programs focus on promoting community or belonging, but little attention has been given to how belonging and community are developed and promoted. Kranzow and colleagues (2015) reported that one of the key implications for housing and residence life professionals was that they need to intentionally help students build relationships. PSU has heeded this call to action, as evidenced by the implementation of their housing model: a relationship-based housing model designed to intentionally build connections among students. Based on the findings of this study, there is evidence to suggest that relationships are indeed being developed intentionally.

The Resident Assistant Role

Students had positive feelings about their RA, though it wasn't necessarily a close relationship. It is not realistic (and perhaps should not be a goal) for RAs to have close relationships with all the students on their floor, though more can be done to build these relationships in systematic and targeted ways. Casual interactions and the mere presence of their RA on the floor often served as an indicator to students that their RA cared for them; even when they felt they didn't need their RA, students appreciated their presence and their serving as an accessible resource. Housing professionals cannot take for granted that all RAs know how to build relationships, so the KCE model teaches simple steps and a strategy for implementing intentional relationship building.

The RA role should continue to focus on planning and implementing activities and events for residents, especially those that are simple, fun, and socially oriented, which is what most of the students talked about, especially first-year students. This is the primary goal for programming in the KCE model. Participants did not discuss outcomes such as higher-order learning and self-actualization but instead asserted that their friendships and sense of belonging were the most important factors early in their college careers. For this reason, it is important that RA training remains focused on strategies to regularly and intentionally demonstrate caring for residents, which can be repeated in activities throughout the semester.

Friendships, Connections, and Belonging

Residence life professionals in both large and small colleges and universities would likely say that their residence halls build community. This researcher believes that they do, even when they are not trying to do so. When people live near each other, some will

naturally make connections and feel a sense of community, which is good. However, there is something missing in many of these residence life programs: intentionality. Models like living-learning programs and the residential curriculum have added the element of intentionality focused on student learning or growth. This is admirable, but it is possible that those models are skipping the intentionality required for other things that students need, like relationships and a sense of belonging. In both Maslow's (1943) model and the KCE model, student learning comes after belonging: an important step often not recognized in other models of student housing.

Students at PSU stated definitively that making friends or finding their people was of critical importance. A residence life model or program could leave that to chance, but, given the importance of this human need, an intentional model yields tangible results. Student interviews provided evidence that this is true, and they highlighted how many of the intentional things done in the KCE model at PSU contributed to their friendships—even if they did not know that the efforts were intentional.

LIMITATIONS

PSU is a small private university, and though it is hard to know what role institutional size might play in students' residential experiences, it is conceivable that it makes a difference, as do the nature of the university (i.e., public versus private) and differences in students' backgrounds and socioeconomic standing.

Participants selected for this study represented primarily first-year students at the end of their first year. While their memories are likely strong, they do not have the benefit of perspective that comes with more time. It is possible that their insight into their own experience would be deeper if they had more time to reflect on what happened in their first year. The four sophomores who participated in the study helped to illuminate possible differences in perceptions, but the first-year student narrative is indeed the dominant voice in the results.

Students who participated in this study did not represent the diversity of the campus, and the experiences of those from underrepresented populations may be different from what was reported. Though diversity based on the halls students lived in was considered, diversity based on race or ethnicity could also be an important factor.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The first topic for future research should be talking to more upper-division students. Sophomores interviewed seemed to have more clarity about how their residence hall experience made a difference. Future studies of sophomores, juniors, and seniors

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would be helpful in revealing how those students recall their residential experience, especially when they can compare it to living off campus as juniors and seniors.

The next recommendation is related to methodology. A quantitative survey of more students might inform practitioners more broadly on how residential experiences and friendships correlate to belonging and ultimately to persistence and graduation. A qualitative study like this one executed at multiple colleges and universities might also provide insight into any differences based on the size and type of the institution.

Finally, conducting a study like this at other institutions using different residence life models is recommended. After implementing KCE at a large institution, it would be valuable to compare the experiences of students and how they describe relationships and friendships to determine if there is a discernible difference between models when it comes to creating friendships and belonging.

CONCLUSION

Relationships do matter. Students in this study stated this unequivocally, echoing what the literature on belonging shows (Strayhorn, 2018). In Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs, belonging is fundamental and comes before the need for self-actualization. This study illuminated students' perceptions of their residential experiences and illustrated how residence halls can systematically and intentionally be used to help students build new relationships and deepen existing ones. These relationships, typically referred to as friendships by the students, are essential to their feelings of belonging and to their personal and academic success. Though thinking about friendships in a planned and structured way might not be common in residence life models, perhaps it can and should be.

Student belonging has become a salient topic in higher education, and it is significantly connected to outcomes that matter to colleges and universities (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). The KCE model lays out expectations for knowing students, connecting to them, and empowering them. The model features specific tasks, programs, and services for accomplishing this work in an intentional and systematic way, and it offers details about regular assessments and benchmarks to evaluate progress. The model also includes student staff, hall directors, and others in the organization. There are other housing models that may have a positive impact on sense of belonging, but the researcher is not aware of any that are specifically designed to do so. Any process, program, or policy that might affect how students build relationships should be examined, since any opportunity to help create and strengthen relationships is a valuable component of the KCE model. The model fits well with institutional missions to be inclusive and welcoming environments for students to learn and grow; student belonging is the key to achieving those goals, and relationship-based residence life can add tremendous value to the pursuit of those ideals. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Students often identify strong relationships as their primary reason for feeling a sense of belonging in the residence halls. How does your institution intentionally cultivate interactions and relationships between residents?
2. What assessment do you have in place on your campus to track residential student engagement and belonging?
3. How could your institution support resident assistants or other student staff in intentionally building community and fostering student interactions?
4. Are there goals your institution can create in order to gauge if students feel a sense of belonging by the end of the term or academic year?
5. What are some quality benchmarks to measure institutional success in residential student engagement endeavors?
6. What procedure could your institution put in place to maximize student inclusion efforts? How would this affect the current dynamics of your institution's residential life operations?

Discussion questions were developed by Bill Hoffman and Dori Wendler, Binghamton University in New York.