



*University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia
Cameron Triggs Photography*

"Bridging the Gap": Relationships and Learning Beyond the Classroom in a Faculty-in-Residence Program



JORDAN P. FULLAM
Associate Professor,
Teacher Education and
Foundations
California State University,
San Bernardino
jordan.fullam@csusb.com



ANDREW J. HUGHES
Associate Professor,
Educational Leadership and
Technology
California State University,
San Bernardino
andrew.hughes@csusb.edu

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FACULTY-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAMS have recently returned to the forefront in higher education. This paper investigates how residential students experienced a recently established faculty-in-residence (FIR) program at a mid-sized public university in Southern California. Drawing on existing research on faculty-student interaction, the paper explores the kinds of interactions students had with faculty in the context of the FIR program and how different types of interactions impacted outcomes for students. The study draws on data from interviews with one graduate student and six undergraduate students who participated in the FIR program. The paper concludes that (1) residential students who had frequent interactions with FIRs tended to share similar experiences of social and academic challenges, and (2) the FIR experience helped students to address these challenges. The study also highlights relationships among students and FIRs that helped students to address the big questions of life and understand that lifelong learning extends beyond the classroom.

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Student success is a goal that faculty and student affairs administrators alike are charged with helping students achieve in higher education. High impact practices (Kuh, 2008) have been recognized as strategies to help students achieve value-added cognitive and developmental goals (Browne et al., 2009; Frost, 1991; Lamport, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Woodside et al., 1999). One type of high impact practice receiving attention in contemporary higher education is the development of faculty-in-residence (FIR) programs, which provide faculty with residential positions as well as opportunities for relationship-building and engagement among residential students and faculty in both academic and social contexts.

Some new FIR programs are driven by increased interest in high impact practices (Kuh, 2008). FIR programs are supported by a voluminous amount of research that points to the benefits students receive when they interact with faculty outside the classroom, including gains in academic self-concept (Kuh & Vesper 1997; Woodside et

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al., 1999), persistence (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Tinto, 1993), academic performance (Terenzini et al., 1996; Woodside et al., 1999), personal development (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1995), retention (Milem & Berger, 1997; Pike et al., 1997), positive attitudes toward learning (Cruce et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), positive multicultural attitudes (Armstrong, 1999), critical thinking skills (Frost, 1991) and general satisfaction with the higher education experience (Lampert, 1993; Wilson et al., 1975). These benefits may be experienced by all students who interact with faculty outside the classroom but may be especially impactful for students of color who have been disproportionately excluded from higher education opportunities (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004).

While much is known about the benefits of faculty-student interaction, less is known about the types of interaction faculty have with students and how different types of interaction impact outcomes for students. For example, some researchers have argued that only academic interactions benefit students (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2003; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005), while others have argued that even social interactions may lead to positive educational outcomes (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Healea et al., 2015). Still others have argued that it is less important to distinguish between academic and social interactions and instead that sustained interactions between faculty and students are most impactful on the student experience; Ellett and Schmidt (2011), for example, suggested that FIR programs should aim to provide faculty with opportunities to have ongoing interactions with the same students.

FIR programs are neither new nor innovative in the timeline of student affairs, let alone higher education. However, a renewed attention on these programs has arisen owing to scholarship on high impact practices (Kuh, 2008) and calls from leading student affairs researchers for institutions of higher learning to bridge the gap between student affairs professionals and faculty (Manning et al., 2013; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA] & American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 2004). Since FIR programs have returned to the forefront in higher education, it is an appropriate time to investigate how these programs bridge the gap and extend learning beyond the classroom (Healea et al., 2015).

Recent scholarship has typically investigated such programs through an input-output model. However, no studies have attempted to get inside the black box of FIR programs to investigate how they provide social-emotional and academic benefits for students. In addition, no studies have investigated the experiences of students in recently established and developing FIR programs. This paper fills these gaps in the literature by presenting a case study of a recently established FIR program at a mid-sized public university in Southern California that serves primarily Hispanic (63%) and first-generation (81%) college students.

The study draws on interviews with students, documents the types of interactions students had with FIRs during the program's first two years, and explores how different types of interactions impacted the student experience. The central question driving the inquiry documented in the paper is as follows: What types of interactions did students have with FIRs,

and how did different types of interactions impact social-emotional and academic outcomes for students? By documenting the investigation of this question, we hope to provide a glimpse into what FIR programs look like in their infancy and how students experience the early efforts of such programs.

CONTEXT OF FIR PROGRAMS AND TYPOLOGIES OF FACULTY- STUDENT INTERACTION

Faculty, academic deans, and advisors who live with and oversee residential students have historically been a distinct feature of residential colleges. For example, beginning in the 12th century, students in medieval Europe were organized into on-campus houses overseen by residential masters (Healea et al., 2015). As a second historical antecedent to present-day FIR programs, deans of men and women were an early form of faculty-in-residence (Herdlein, 2005; Hevel, 2016; Nidiffer, 2000; Sartorius, 2014). In the present day, residential positions for faculty have come back to the forefront as colleges and universities have gotten larger and are looking for ways to connect students and faculty outside the classroom (Healea et al., 2015).

The current landscape in higher education includes three notable variations of programs designed to integrate faculty into the residential life of campus communities. The first variation includes programs descended from the house systems that originated in medieval Europe. House systems were established at Harvard University and Yale University and endured for centuries. The second variation includes faculty fellow and faculty associate programs, where faculty are recruited to be in-

volved in the residential activities of the university but do not live on campus. Faculty fellows and faculty associates can be found on many campuses across the United States, including New York University, Purdue University, and Washington University (Healea et al., 2015). The third variation, and the focus of this paper, is FIR programs.

The faculty member serving as an FIR typically has no oversight role in the residence hall and is not responsible for supervising student staff, intervening in student crises, or addressing student conduct issues. Instead, the role of the FIR includes developing social, cultural, or recreational programming intended to build stronger connections with students and complement the work that is already being done by student affairs professionals (Rhoads, 2009). FIR programming, for example, has included book clubs, film series, speaker series, outdoor activities, music groups, and open houses that serve the larger goal of building community and enhancing the student experience. As Rhoads (2009) pointed out, these activities “are not just fun and games, as they often

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appear to be, but, more important, are aimed at helping students form the connections and social support systems that are helpful for academic success” (p. 21). FIR programs have proliferated in recent decades, and an online search turns up hundreds of these programs on campuses across the United States.

While there is a lack of research investigating faculty-student interaction in the context of FIR programs, three studies undertake this task and are worth noting. These studies make contributions toward developing a typology of faculty-student interaction that can be useful for analyzing interactions in the context of FIR programs. Cox and Orehovec (2007), for example, suggested a typology of interactions that includes (1) *disengagement*, defined as lack of interaction among students and faculty outside of the classroom; (2) *incidental contact*, or informal and unintentional interaction; (3) *personal interaction*, or interaction around common interests or hobbies exclusive of academic purposes; (4) *functional interaction*, or interaction that fulfills some institutional purpose such as advising or collaborating on academic activities; and (5) *mentoring interaction*, or interaction that usually combines personal and functional interaction to achieve a higher level of learning and engagement.

Drawing on the above typology, Mara and Mara (2011) found that the quality of interactions in the context of the FIR program they described often depended on a variety of factors, including physical setting and willingness of faculty and students to interact and connect. More importantly, they documented what they described as a “natural progression from one type of interaction to another” (p. 77) through which lower level interactions progressed to

those higher up on the scale offered by Cox and Orehovec (2007).

In a subsequent study, Sriram and McLevain (2016) categorized faculty-student interaction across two domains. For the first domain, they distinguished between formal (programmatic) and informal (non-programmatic) interaction. *Formal interaction* was defined as interaction that takes place at programs organized by FIRs, student affairs professionals, and student staff. *Informal interaction* was defined as interaction that takes place outside of such programs.

For the second domain, Sriram and McLevain (2016) organized faculty-student interaction into three distinct types of engagement: social interaction, academic interaction, and deeper life interaction. *Social interaction*, in this framework, was defined as casual interaction involving personal hobbies and interests. *Academic interaction* was defined as interaction that involves intellectual stimulation and discussion around academic majors and career choices. Finally, *deeper life interaction* may include “conversations about relationships, family, spirituality, and meaning-making” (p. 607) and engages students in the big questions of life that help them make sense of their lives beyond the classroom (p. 608).

Synthesizing the findings in this emerging literature provides an opportunity to construct a conceptual model that delineates types of faculty-student interaction. The conceptual model (see Table 1) presents a typology of faculty-student interaction that organizes interaction types into five categories: (1) context, (2) substance, (3) purpose, (4) frequency, and (5) learning outcomes. All of the interaction types included in the typology were drawn from the three studies cited above with the exception

that we added infrequent interaction to the frequency category.

METHODOLOGY

Our aim was to explore multiple perspectives on faculty-student interaction at one campus

in order to develop a deep understanding of the FIR culture there (Magolda, 1999). We employed a case study design that sought to understand the dynamics of faculty-student interaction (the object of study) in a newly established FIR program (the subject of study). Distinguishing the object and subject of study

Table 1

Typology of Faculty-Student Interaction	
Context	
Formal interaction	Interactions that take place in the context of formal programming organized by FIRs, student staff, and student affairs professionals.
Informal interaction	Interactions that take place outside the context of formal programming.
Substance	
Academic interaction	Interactions that include discussion of coursework or other academic/ intellectual subjects.
Social interaction	Interactions that include discussion of personal topics such as hobbies, interests, family, and relationships.
Purpose	
Incidental contact	Unplanned or happenstance interactions.
Functional interaction	Interactions that serve a formal institutional function such as academic advising, tutoring, or collaboration on academic activities.
Frequency	
Disengagement	Lack of interaction among FIRs and students.
Infrequent interaction	Punctuated interactions lacking the frequency necessary to build productive relationships and shared experiences among FIRs and students.
Sustained interaction	Frequent, ongoing interactions between FIRs and the same students that allow for relationship-building and shared experiences.
Learning Outcomes	
Mentoring interaction	Interactions that combine academic and social dimensions and allow for a deeper level of learning, including FIRs helping students to understand themselves as learners, clarify career goals, and develop strategies for personal and academic success.
Deeper life interaction	Interactions that combine academic and social dimensions and allow for a level of learning deeper than in mentoring interactions, including FIRs helping students to address life's big questions and make meaning of their beliefs and experiences.

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in this manner is useful for generating a process in case study research that allows for the development of theory (George & Bennett, 2005; Thomas, 2011).

The above literature review raises several theoretical problems related to the dynamics of faculty-student interaction in the context of FIR programs. Do social interactions benefit students, or are only academic interactions beneficial? What do other types of interactions, such as sustained interactions and deeper life interactions, look like in practice, and how do these impact the student experience? Do students distinguish between formal (programmatic) and informal (non-programmatic) interactions, and what, if any, are the implications of these distinctions?

This subset of questions connects our central research question to prior research on faculty-student interaction. Further, it provides an analytical frame (the object of study) that can be illuminated and explicated through close examination of the FIR program (the subject of study; Thomas, 2011). In this manner, the case study design is suited to generating theoreti-

cal knowledge by developing a nuanced view of exemplars of faculty-student interaction in a particular FIR program (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Case Site

During the study, the FIR program was in its first and second years of existence, and four to five faculty served as FIRs during each of the two years. For the first year, the FIR program recruited four first-year, non-tenured faculty to serve as FIRs; two of these faculty members were male, and two were female. For the second year of the program, the FIR cohort included two returning, non-tenured faculty, two non-tenured faculty new to the FIR program, and one tenured faculty new to the FIR program. This second cohort of FIRs included three male FIRs and two female FIRs. Both cohorts of FIRs were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Faculty were required to implement two cocurricular programs per quarter and participate in a variety of functions in the residential community, including student staff trainings and meetings, move-in day activities, open houses, and receptions for students and their parents, as well as walking the halls of the residential villages and eating meals with students in the dining hall. Faculty serving as FIRs were also expected to maintain visibility in the residential community and be accessible to students for advising, support, and referrals.

Participants

As the primary method of data collection, an interviewer conducted one semi-structured interview with each of six undergraduate students and one graduate student who interacted with FIRs (Manning, 1992). Consistent with a case study design, purposeful sampling was used to

identify and recruit students through recommendations by FIRs and outreach to potential participants through email (Patton, 2002).

In identifying participants, we sought information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of faculty-student interaction in the context of the FIR program. The students interviewed included one female foreign exchange

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residential community.

student from Germany working on her Master's degree, one male undergraduate foreign exchange student from India, one Black female undergraduate student, one Hispanic female undergraduate student, two White male undergraduate students, and one Black male undergraduate student.

One participant disclosed that he was autistic. One participant identified as queer. Three participants reported experiencing anxiety or depression during their time living on campus, and at least one sought services at the university counseling center to treat depression. Three participants reported that they were first-generation college students.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews explored how frequently the students interacted with FIRs, the types of interactions students had with FIRs, and how these interactions impacted

students' social-emotional and academic development. The interviews also explored ways students and FIRs formed relationships that allowed the FIRs to serve as intellectual role models. All participants were asked four questions, with other questions arising based on their responses: (1) What are some ways interacting with FIRs impacted your experiences as a student? (2) What are some ways interacting with FIRs impacted your social life? (3) Do you feel interacting with FIRs enhanced your social-emotional growth? If so, how? (4) Do you feel that interacting with FIRs enhanced your academic growth? If so, how?

Data Analysis

The conceptual model presented above, which provides a typology of faculty-student interaction (Table 1), was utilized as an *a priori* coding scheme in the analysis of the interview data. Using NVivo 11 software, two coders separately read the transcripts and coded any references to faculty-student interaction using the types of interaction in the typology. The initial coding resulted in a Cohen's kappa indicating beyond-chance moderate agreement of 71%. Next, the researchers grouped the coded responses according to common themes that were related to the central research question and the subset of questions. We analyzed transcripts as we continued to collect data to compare our initial assumptions with emerging themes and new insights. We adjusted subsequent interviews to further explore these themes and insights (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000).

FINDINGS

Several themes arose from our analysis that together illustrate the impact of faculty-student interaction on academic and social-emotional

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outcomes for students in the context of the FIR program. The following sections detail the themes with supporting data.

FIR Programming as "Interest Groups"

Participants described formal interactions by recounting their experiences interacting with FIRs in the context of programs developed by the FIRs. The activities the students described included a Chai and Crafts series, a Queer Space discussion and support group, programs in which FIRs shared their love of pets with students, and a jam session group for musicians. Some participants described the programs developed by FIRs as interest groups that "cater to a specific demographic" or groups that allowed students to "meet people who are in the same interest field of yours like music." Participants also shared that programs developed by the FIRs were unique because they were more inclusive of the whole residential community. The inclusiveness of the FIR programs, in the participants' view, was a benefit: These programs helped one student, for example, "expand my social group to a group I would not have run into on my own" and "grow my web of people I connect with."

Some FIR activities were implemented through consistent weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly meetings that provided the opportunity for sustained interactions and relationship-building among FIRs and students. One participant shared that the FIRs "make a program out of something fun, something you like that you want to be able to commit [to] a couple hours out of your week or every other week." The regular meetings of some FIR activities facilitated sustained and ongoing interactions among faculty and students.

FIR programming enhances the student experience by opening the door for FIRs to build community in the residence halls and contribute to the holistic learning environment that student affairs professionals have already established—and this is work primarily conducted through relationships.

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FIRs as "First Connection Point"

Many of the formal and informal interactions that participants described were social interactions that helped students gain social confidence within the campus community. One participant, for example, reported that she "came out of her shell" as a result of interacting with FIRs: "Some of my friends said that compared to when they first met me last year, I have completely changed and I seem to be more open, more willing to talk to people, especially people I do not know." The same student reported that because of participating in FIR activities, she felt confident enough to perform with the university dance company. Another suggested that having social interactions with an FIR at jam sessions encouraged her to join another music group and take theater classes. This student suggested that "because of this group I felt more comfortable to try myself out in different group settings."

Participating in FIR activities, therefore, helped some students gain social confidence and try participating in other campus activities. One participant summed up these interactions with FIRs as a “first connection point” that helped students build social confidence that led to personal success in other social and academic contexts.

“Activists of Being Friendly”: Building Community

Many of the FIR programs took place in the FIRs’ residence hall apartments or in other campus residential areas, but students also interacted with FIRs in the dining hall, in academic buildings, and while casually walking around the campus. These interactions, according to the typology above, constitute informal interactions and incidental contact.

Having incidental, non-programmatic contact with FIRs around the campus impacted students’ perceptions of the campus environment in a way that was unique to this type of interaction. One participant reported, for example, “It feels like you are more connected to it all . . . in the overall process rather than just like having strange faces walking around.” Another suggested that interacting with FIRs around campus encouraged him to become an “activist of being friendly” and initiate conversations with strangers on campus. Finally, another reported that this type of interaction enhanced their sense of belonging in the larger campus community: “I feel more a part of the community this year.” Students in the study ascribed to informal interaction the unique benefit of enhancing their sense of belonging and connection in the campus community.

“Humanizing” Professors

Participants also reported that social interactions with FIRs were impactful because they “humanized” their professors and improved students’ confidence in approaching other faculty. One participant reported that getting to know the FIRs personally and under conditions of “reciprocity of respect but also understanding” led to her developing “overall more confidence on how to approach them.”

Other participants reported that interacting with FIRs reduced the “awkwardness” or “tension” they experienced when interacting with other faculty, and they gained more incentive and motivation to be engaged in their courses. One participant, for example, reported that, by getting to know the FIRs, she learned that faculty want their students to be engaged, and since “I know what tricks work with them and what they want in students, when I give that for all my other classes I have seen how . . . it does work.”

Finally, another participant summarized the relationship between humanizing the professors and improvements in academic performance: “You really get to know their interests . . . and how they teach and their personalities, it really does this amazing job of . . . humanizing them, and I think by breaking down these expectations you can perform better.” All participants in the study drew connections between participating in FIR activities and feeling more comfortable interacting with faculty.

“More Lively”: Dealing with Stress and Depression

Participants provided anecdotal evidence of positive impacts on their social-emotional

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growth as a result of social interactions and sustained interactions with FIRs. For example, four participants reported that interacting with FIRs was helpful for relieving stress or depression. One participant who attended both music- and crafts-related FIR programs, for example, suggested, “Just watching people make lanyards compared to actually making one I felt more de-stressed,” and “going to the [jam] sessions helps me to forget about all the issues that I have going on even if it is just for like a few hours.” Another participant reported that he was “more lively” during the time period when he was participating in FIR programs. When he stopped participating, he started “getting a little more depressed and it was starting to hit me more.” Acknowledging this change in his well-being, the student planned to resume participating in FIR programs during the next school year.

“Bridging the Gap”: Learning Beyond the Classroom

In addition to these social-emotional benefits, participants indicated that the most significant academic benefits they received from the FIR experience resulted from interactions that had both social *and* academic dimensions, were sustained over a period of time, and allowed FIRs and students to build relationships. The type of interactions that participants suggested were the most impactful were deeper life interactions.

Participants, for example, described interactions with FIRs that were both social and academic in nature during which students learned a “more educated perspective on things” or a “more mature” way to express opinions and engage in discussion. One participant shared that before meeting the FIRs,

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she understood what it meant for a person to identify as gender non-binary—an identity that is outside the gender binary and rejects cisnormativity. By discussing her opinion with an FIR, however, the student was able to deepen her understanding of the concept and better articulate her own position:

The way [the FIR] said it was so much better ... argued and ... we said similar things but the way you said it even in phrasing things. Yeah, I think it is even small stuff like mannerisms and how to argue, how to have like a respectful debate.

Another participant reported that conversing about music with an FIR helped him engage in intellectual conversations about other topics:

We talked about music and he made me think about music in a different way. And then I would say that helped me bridge the gap. And I can think about everything as a subject on a larger scale. So I can talk for hours about computers. I could talk for hours about a book.

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These interactions were impactful because they helped students see themselves as intellectuals and understand that being a lifelong learner necessarily extends beyond the classroom. The students gained from deeper life interactions an understanding of how to engage in intellectual discussion to make meaning out of topics as diverse as gender identity, music, computers, and books.

"My Second Family": Connection

While the typology of faculty-student interaction presented above was useful for examining interactions the students had with FIRs, the participants also addressed these relationships in ways that moved beyond this typology. One participant, for example, suggested that the FIR program was a "great way to put people together who might otherwise feel left out." Another participant suggested, "I have the feeling that some of the people who come [to the FIR programs] just feel disconnected maybe to the campus as well, like I did at first." Participants who reported feeling "left out" or "disconnected" also described their relationships with FIRs in familial terms: One student characterized the FIRs as "my second family," and another reported that spending time with FIRs was "like a family reunion."

The familial nature of these relationships allowed the FIRs to help students through their common challenges. One participant summarized this aspect of the FIR program: "It shows you the face of the campus. It shows you that I picked a really good campus to be at, and going forward you can start pushing on that energy." In some cases, participants who originally felt disconnected from the campus community gained connections and

social confidence through the FIR programs; they began to form new friend groups and join other clubs and organizations on campus. The students maintained contact with the FIRs and socialized with them on campus but would eventually attend formal FIR activities less frequently.

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... as FIRs and students build deeper relationships, the sustained interactions that result open opportunities for FIRs to serve as intellectual role models and sources of sustained support. In other words, social and academic interactions may be mutually reinforcing in the context of meaningful and productive relationships among FIRs and students.

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Students attending FIR programming less frequently, according to our analysis, was in some cases the result of their gaining connections and social confidence and moving on from the FIR programs, which had previously provided needed social support during a period of social isolation. Three students in the study, for example, suggested that the FIRs were "my

lifelines,” “a helping hand,” or “that shoulder of support.” For vulnerable students, therefore, the FIR program provided a space to form connections and social support systems that are helpful for academic and personal success.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Some researchers have argued that only academic interactions benefit students (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh, 2003; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005), while others have argued that even social interactions may lead to positive social-emotional and academic outcomes (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Healea et al., 2015). We only found one study that investigated faculty-student interaction specifically in the context of an FIR program; the authors argued that it is less important to distinguish between academic and social interactions, and instead sustained interactions between faculty and students are most impactful on the student experience (Ellett & Schmidt, 2011).

Perhaps not surprisingly, our findings affirmed those of Ellett and Schmidt (2011). We found that students experienced positive social-emotional and academic outcomes as a result of having sustained interactions with FIRs in formal and informal contexts. We also found that social interactions led to positive social-emotional and academic outcomes for students, and the most impactful interactions between FIRs and students were both social *and* academic in nature and allowed FIRs to serve as intellectual role models.

These findings are consistent with insights in prior research on FIR programs that challenge prevailing notions about the impact of different types of faculty-student interaction.

Dolby (2014), for example, suggested that the overarching philosophy of FIR work should be to integrate the personal with the academic (p. 30). Similarly, Healea and colleagues (2015) suggested that the work of successful FIRs involves “modeling the crossroads of intellectual and social formation” (p. 474). These insights problematize our tendency in scholarly discourse to understand relationships between faculty and students through the binary thinking of academic versus social interactions.

We also found patterns of interaction among faculty and students like those documented by Mara and Mara (2011) in which infrequent and less impactful interactions progressed to deeper levels of relationship-building and engagement. Such patterns demonstrate that as FIRs and students build deeper relationships, the sustained interactions that result open opportunities for FIRs to serve as intellectual role models and sources of sustained support. In other words, social and academic interactions may be mutually reinforcing in the context of meaningful and productive relationships among FIRs and students.

The present study builds on insights in prior research by being the first to extensively examine the student voice in the context of a recently established FIR program. Through interviewing students and examining their perspectives of the FIR experience, we were able to uncover insights about relationships and student engagement. First, students who were attracted to the FIR program and interacted with FIRs tended to share similar experiences and challenges. Second, students in the study provided anecdotal evidence that the FIR experience led them to feel more connected to the campus community and more confident in approaching faculty on

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campus, helping them to experience less stress and depression. The FIR program, in this way, provided support that helped them overcome their common challenges.

Our findings also provide a glimpse into what deeper life interactions look like in the context of an FIR program that is new and developing. The larger goal of FIR work is to help students “understand that learning occurs everywhere” and to see that “the world is a classroom for exploration, reflection, and endless learning” (Dolby, 2014, pp. 30–31). This kind of learning took place when students had the opportunity to engage in sustained interactions, relationship-building, and intellectual discussion with FIRs. These higher levels of interaction led to some of the most notable outcomes of the FIR program when examined from the perspectives of students, including helping them address the big questions of life

and learn beyond the four walls of the higher education classroom.

The most important practical implication of the study concerns the role of relationships in mediating the social-emotional and academic benefits of the FIR program for residential students. While it is important that formal responsibilities are clearly outlined for faculty serving as FIRs (e.g., implementing programs, eating meals with students), it is equally important that they understand that the most impactful aspect of their work involves building relationships with students that allow for a deeper level of engagement. FIR programming enhances the student experience by opening the door for FIRs to build community in the residence halls and contribute to the holistic learning environment that student affairs professionals have already established—and this is work primarily conducted through relationships.

Building and maintaining relationships with students outside the classroom is complex work, but it may be the most important work of FIRs. These relationship skills are especially important for new FIR programs that serve students of color and first-generation college students, as both groups have been disproportionately excluded from higher education opportunities and may stand to benefit the most from relationships with faculty (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004).

Our case study design is limited in that our sampling strategy included recruiting students who had extensive experiences interacting with FIRs. Using this strategy of examining information-rich cases, we were able to better understand the students who were attracted to the FIR program and how they were impacted by the FIR experience. However, we were not able

to interview students who were disengaged or had infrequent interactions with FIRs. As a result, we were not able to compare outcomes for students with frequent interactions to those of students with infrequent interactions with FIRs. The study, in this sense, is limited in that it examines experiences and outcomes for a particular subset of students.

More research examining the experiences and outcomes of students having less frequent interactions with FIRs is needed to understand the overall impact of FIR programs on campus residential communities. In addition, future research should seek to understand the factors that lead some students to become disengaged from the collaborative work of community-building in residence halls, especially given what we know about the ways that students benefit from forming connections and social support systems through the residential experience.

CONCLUSION

Students who were attracted to the FIR program shared similar challenges of feeling disconnected from the campus community, experiencing stress and depression, and struggling with challenging coursework. They were able to receive support from FIRs who helped them navigate these challenges, including typical types of faculty support such as academic advisement, networking, and referrals.

Students also reported deeper life interactions with FIRs that enabled them to better understand the world and their place in it. They were able to take their learning beyond the classroom through the FIR experience as they navigated the relational space that overlaps the academic and social dimensions of learning and personal growth.

Some students in the study also drew on relationships with FIRs for social support when dealing with social isolation. Taking this insight into account, faculty who serve as FIRs should be made aware of the needs of the most vulnerable students in the residential community (e.g., first-generation students, underrepresented populations) and should develop the relationship skills necessary to engage these students in FIR programming.

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Discussion Questions

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1. In what ways does the typology of faculty-student interaction (Table 1) support holistic growth for students?
2. Which combination of the five categories in the typology is most needed for effective faculty-student interaction? Explain.
3. How might a faculty-in-residence (FIR) program facilitate academic and student affairs relationships on your campus?
4. What additional levels of training do faculty serving in FIR programs need to support residential students? Explain.
5. The authors note that we often “understand relationships between faculty and students through the binary thinking of academic versus social interactions.” How might an FIR be used to break down this dualistic approach?
6. Of the seven themes found throughout the study, which is most imperative for student success? Why?
7. Outline a quantitative study to extend this research.

Discussion questions developed by Denise Davidson, Associate Professor, and Brianna Fulp and Nick Paseano, graduate students in the College Student Affairs program at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania.