

MANUSCRIPT

Voices From the Residence Halls: Faculty Perspectives on the Challenges and Benefits of Serving as Faculty-in-Residence

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Keywords: Residential Education, Faculty

<https://doi.org/10.71348/001c.146854>

The Journal of College and University Student Housing

Vol. 52, Issue 1, 2025

FACULTY-IN-RESIDENCE INITIATIVES CAN FACE MANY CHALLENGES, but when successfully implemented, they can have a positive impact on the experiences of both students and faculty. This study explores how faculty serving as faculty-in-residence (FIR) at a public university in Southern California described their integration into residential communities, the challenges they encountered, and the impact of these roles on the broader faculty experience. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, we conducted in-depth interviews with eight FIRs to develop insights into the implementation of FIR programs. Our findings reveal that while the FIRs faced significant challenges—such as time constraints, low student participation, and differing visions of faculty and student affairs professionals—successful integration into residential communities led to meaningful faculty-student interactions and enhanced connection and engagement. The study concludes with recommendations for establishing successful FIR initiatives and emphasizing the role of personalized support, realistic program expectations, and strong collaboration among faculty and student affairs professionals.

Faculty-in-residence (FIR) programs are often developed as a strategy to improve the collaboration between student affairs and faculty. These initiatives position faculty as residents living within student housing communities, enabling them to work closely with student affairs professionals and extend the learning experience beyond the classroom and into the residence halls (Rhoads, 2009). Prominent researchers and leading professional organizations in student affairs have long advocated for the creation of integrated learning environments that effectively bridge the gap between student affairs professionals and faculty (Manning et al., 2013; NASPA & ACPA, 2004). Achieving this integration, however, remains a significant challenge for many colleges and universities where student affairs and academic departments have traditionally operated in silos—divided by distinct duties, specialized career paths, differing professional cultures, and even physical separation on campus (Browne et al., 2009). This study explores the challenges and opportunities encountered by faculty serving as FIRs, as well as the impact of serving in these roles on the faculty experience.

Faculty-in-residence programs, though not a novel concept, have experienced a resurgence in higher education as a strategic approach to fostering collaboration between student affairs professionals and faculty. These programs trace their roots back to ancient and medieval educational traditions, when faculty and students lived in close proximity, fostering intellectual and communal bonds. Faculty resided alongside students in philosophical academies in Ancient Greece, in on-campus houses overseen by residential masters in medieval Europe, and within the first house systems established at universities in North America during the 1640s (Healea et al., 2015; Perkin, 2007). Today, the growing emphasis on high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2003, 2008) and extensive research highlighting the benefits of faculty-student interactions outside the classroom have contributed to the increasing adoption of FIR programs. Empirical studies consistently show that students who engage with faculty outside the classroom experience significant academic, personal, and social-emotional gains (Armstrong, 1999; Browne et al., 2009; Cruce et al., 2006; Lira et al., 2022; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pike et al., 1997; Woodside et al., 1999).

While the research on FIR programs is still in its early stages and somewhat limited, existing studies provide valuable insights for faculty and student affairs professionals aiming to build and sustain successful FIR initiatives. These studies suggest that a thriving FIR program rests on the foundation of three components: (a) establishing intentional partnerships, mutual understandings, and clearly defined roles that facilitate collaboration between faculty, student leaders, and student affairs professionals (Browne et al., 2009; Ellett & Schmidt, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Golde & Pribbenow, 2000; Jessup-Anger et al., 2011); (b) creating opportunities for FIRs and students to engage in both formal and informal interactions that foster meaningful relationships (Dolby, 2014; Fullam & Hughes, 2020; Manning et al., 2013; McKay & Estrella, 2008); and (c) ensuring that faculty involvement in FIR programs is recognized and valued within the institution's tenure and promotion processes (Healea et al., 2015; Humphrey et al., 2015).

The existing literature lacks a comprehensive examination of the lived experiences of faculty who serve as FIRs. This study contributes to addressing this gap by exploring the experiences of faculty involved in a recently established FIR program at a public Hispanic-serving university in Southern California. Our analysis explores how FIRs effectively navigated common challenges while leveraging opportunities to build strong relationships with students and how the FIR program enhanced their teaching and social connections. The research questions that drove the inquiry are as follows: *How did FIRs describe their experiences integrating into the residential community? How did FIRs understand and address the obstacles and opportunities that arose as they collaborated with students and student affairs professionals to build relationships and community in the residence halls? How did faculty describe the impact of serving as FIRs on their broader experiences as faculty?*

DEVELOPMENT OF FACULTY-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAMS

Research on FIR programs includes several qualitative case studies and reflective essays that delve into the personal experiences of faculty engaged in FIR roles (Healea et al., 2015), as well as quantitative studies demonstrating that FIR programs improve students' academic self-concept and achievement (Lira et al., 2022; Sriram & McLevain, 2016; Woodside et al., 1999). Though limited in both size and scope, this research contains insights for faculty and student affairs professionals working to establish and enhance FIR programs. These studies, for example, support the development of FIR programs, identify potential barriers to the successful implementation of FIR initiatives, and suggest strategies for fostering meaningful engagement of FIRs in the residential community.

Several significant obstacles can impede the development of FIR programs: lack of clarity about the role of faculty, time constraints, and low levels of student engagement. Faculty often do not understand the important role of student affairs in building integrated learning environments, and this misunderstanding can hinder development of the partnerships between faculty and student affairs professionals that are necessary for building successful FIR initiatives (Jessup-Anger et al., 2011; Manning et al., 2013). Some faculty are accustomed to viewing the work of educating students as exclusively within the domain of academic affairs (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000). As a result of this view, they often overlook the important role of student affairs professionals in developing educational and social programming for students, building community in the residence halls, and creating integrated learning environments that support the holistic development of students (Rhoads, 2009).

Faculty also face significant time constraints that may limit their involvement in FIR initiatives (Eidum, 2023; Kennedy, 2023). Compounding this challenge, faculty may be uncertain about how service in these programs will be evaluated in tenure and promotion decisions (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Healea et al., 2015; Humphrey et al., 2015). Even at institutions where a higher priority is placed on good teaching, faculty rarely experience reduced pressure to publish or perish (Diamond, 1999). Without a clear understanding of how FIR service will be evaluated in faculty tenure and promotion decisions, faculty may be disinclined to invest time in the collaborative work that is necessary to make FIR programs successful.

Faculty-in-residence often face challenges soliciting student engagement in FIR programs due to time constraints for students (Eidum, 2023). In addition, many faculty are accustomed to interacting with students according to the norms of classroom teaching, and some report that they are uncomfortable interacting with students outside the classroom (Browne et al., 2009). Many students also experience anxiety about their interactions with faculty, or they simply view faculty as unapproachable (Healea et al., 2015). In some cases, those students who need the guidance of faculty the most are the least likely to seek it out (McKay & Estrella, 2008). This means

that the development of meaningful and productive relationships between faculty and students outside the classroom may be impeded by students' time constraints and unfamiliar and uncomfortable interpersonal dynamics.

Building a successful FIR program involves more than just a focus on programming and should also engage faculty-in-residence in the collaborative work of building relationships and strengthening community in the residence halls: "Creating a shared vision between faculty and residence life staff about what it means to build community in the halls is one way to begin this process" (Ellett & Schmidt, 2011, p. 37). Student affairs professionals and full-time residence hall directors serve as gatekeepers and can enhance the engagement of FIRs in this important collaborative work (Browne et al., 2009; Ellett & Schmidt, 2011; Healea et al., 2015). Generating ongoing dialogue about developing a shared sense of community for the FIR program is an essential starting point. As Ellett and Schmidt (2011) point out, "With a mutual understanding of how to build community, residence life staff and faculty can move forward with a more holistic educational approach to maximize student learning" (p. 35). Clarifying roles and developing a shared vision among faculty and student affairs professionals is an important first step in building a successful FIR program.

STUDY DESIGN

Methodology

This research is a qualitative interpretive study focused on the experiences of faculty involved in a newly established FIR program at a public Hispanic-serving university in Southern California. Qualitative interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed and thus can be understood by gaining multiple insider perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). We adopted this approach to explore how faculty-in-residence assign meaning to their lived experiences in these roles (Petty et al., 2012). More specifically, we sought to gain insight into the implementation of FIR programs through an exploration of how faculty-in-residence make sense of their actions, interactions, and social contexts in these programs.

Program Context and Participants

During the time we began the research, 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 program recruited four first-year, non-tenured faculty (two were male and two were female) to serve as FIRs. For the second year, the new cohort of FIRs included two returning non-tenured faculty, two non-tenured faculty new to the program, and one tenured faculty new to the program. This new cohort included three males and two females, and both cohorts were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The faculty-in-residence were provided with

several benefits: housing in one of several on-campus villages for residential students, a meal plan, and a programming budget of \$900 per year, which were all meaningful incentives for participation in the program.

The FIR contract required that those serving as faculty-in-residence develop and implement two cocurricular programs per quarter and participate in a variety of functions in the residential community. For example, they were expected to participate in student staff training and meetings, move-in day activities, open houses, receptions for students and their families, walking the halls of the residential villages, and sharing meals with students in the dining hall. They were also expected to maintain visibility in the residential community and be accessible to students for advice, support, and referrals. The FIRs were not, however, responsible for handling issues related to student conduct or discipline (e.g., Rhoads, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviewing allows researchers to collect rich, descriptive data to capture the nuances of participants' unique experiences (Seidman, 2006) and plays a vital role in qualitative interpretive research because it allows researchers to gather data on what cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). Thus, interviewing was chosen as the central method of gathering data for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of faculty experiences within the FIR program, including their thoughts, feelings, and reflections on past experiences.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with eight faculty members who served as FIRs during the first and second years of the program's existence. The semi-structured interviews included open-ended questions with a flexible order and wording, which allowed the researchers to be more responsive to each participant as new ideas emerged in the interviews (Merriam, 2009). The interviews focused on understanding the participants' integration into the residential community, the challenges and opportunities they encountered, and the overall impact of this experience on their faculty roles. The interview protocol included questions about the participants' motivations for becoming FIRs, their interactions with students and staff, and their reflections on the benefits and challenges of the role. The interviews were conducted by the third author in-person or over the phone based on participant preference. Each lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed.

To analyze the data, we used an iterative process of analytic induction (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Initial coding focused on identifying themes related to the research questions, such as integration strategies, obstacles, and impacts on teaching. These themes were then further refined through constant comparison, allowing us to adjust our understanding and interpretations as new data emerged (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000). The final analysis resulted in a deeper understanding of the FIR experience at this institution, highlighting both common challenges and individual experiences.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

The first author was a faculty member at the same institution and was actively serving as an FIR at the time of the research. This insider status provided deep insights into the lived experiences of FIRs, but the dual role as researcher and participant may have influenced data collection, particularly when interpreting the challenges and opportunities faced by FIRs. However, these interpretations were also informed by continuous observations and program documents. The second author was not a faculty-in-residence at the time of data collection but was at the time when the manuscript was being drafted, which allowed the faculty member to bring a fresh perspective to the role. The third author was a faculty member at the institution being studied but did not participate in the FIR program. This researcher's position allowed for an insider's understanding of the institutional context while maintaining some level of objectivity regarding the FIR experience. We approached this study with an awareness of these different positionalities and employed strategies such as triangulation to corroborate findings and member checking to increase credibility.

FINDINGS

The following narrative explores the experiences of faculty serving as FIRs that were most relevant to the focus of our research. To preserve the anonymity of those who participated in the study, respondents are referred to by gender-neutral pseudonyms, and the narrative employs "they" in place of gender pronouns. Ari, Quinn, Ren, and Taylor lived on campus with their partners, and with no children. Alex, Blake, and Zuri lived on campus with their partners and children. Dakota lived on campus, while their partner and children lived in a nearby city during the time of the research.

Integrating Faculty-in-Residence into the Residential Community

FIRs used a variety of strategies to become part of the residential community, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of FIR work. Ari, for example, described interacting with residential students in a "whole host of ways" ranging from attending formal training sessions for student leaders to "crossing paths in the hallway and the elevator, entering and exiting buildings, and in the dining hall." Taylor observed that an effective strategy for connecting with residents was engaging with student leaders and professional staff as a "point of entry" that enabled them to meet students in the residential community: "We would talk and then I would meet other people through them." Several other FIRs shared similar insights, suggesting that attending student orientations, training sessions, and meetings was important for building relationships with student staff that could later be leveraged to meet other members of the residential community.

In addition to working with student staff and professional staff, the FIRs became integrated into the residential community through direct outreach and by engaging in informal interactions with students. Dakota, for example, stated that “taking the initiative to go out there and make those connections” was an important strategy. FIRs engaged with students in many ways, often drawing on their own personal interests. Blake, for example, recalled “going down to the community kitchen and baking cookies and anybody that wants to come and hang out and talk . . . can do so” and that “the way I got to know students was really by walking my dog.” Quinn also engaged students in a personal way: “My wife and I started writing songs with the students.” Building on these strategies, the FIRs later implemented programming based on their personal interests. For example, the FIR who began writing songs with students started a weekly music program, and several others developed programs based on sharing their love of pets with residential students through weekly activities such as walking a dog or caring for a pet.

Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles

The obstacles that FIRs discussed as impeding the development of FIR programming were similar to those identified in prior research on this topic: time constraints, poor attendance at FIR programs, discomfort around interacting with residential students in informal contexts, and lack of a shared vision and clarity of roles among FIRs and student affairs professionals. The interview data provided unique insight by highlighting the different perspectives and attitudes that FIRs utilized to understand and address these common obstacles.

Balancing the work of developing programming with their other commitments as faculty was one of the primary challenges for FIRs. Blake noted that they had faculty meetings outside of the FIR program on the same day and time that resident assistants (RAs) in their residential area held meetings. As a result of this scheduling conflict, Blake “could never show up to those meetings, and it meant that I did not become a part of that close-knit community that the RAs create.” Zuri acknowledged that developing FIR programs required a greater time commitment than they expected and that though balancing their time between work and family was important, “that has been a little bit harder to do” after becoming an FIR. The challenge of balancing the work, other faculty commitments, and family commitments was a consistent theme in the interviews, especially for FIRs who lived on campus with their partners and children. Alex, for example, recognized that the role would be much more manageable if they did not have children: “I think for me if I did not have kids, I would be more engaged in later events.”

FIRs also struggled with engaging students in their programs, a challenge that Alex, Ari, and Quinn attributed in part to well-intentioned student affairs professionals providing too much programming and too much supervision for students living on campus. As Quinn said, “For some students it seems like they prefer informal interactions over attending a weekly program.” Alex noted that “There was overbooking . . . and so many

other events . . . there was burnout,” and students seemed to prefer “organic” interactions since “when it is an event, it is almost like a duty and no one wants to go.” Ari felt that the programming developed by student affairs professionals amounted to “helicoptering over kids” or a misguided effort to create “a campus club med environment of all these activities and things to do. Like we are managing preschoolers and kindergarteners that need their time managed.” Ari’s perspective was unique, though, in that they also attributed the challenge of student engagement to student attitudes on campus; the programs were “terribly attended” due to “broad scale apathy across the entire student body.” Reflecting on FIR programs that no one attended despite numerous attempts to accommodate students’ schedules and interests, Ari acknowledged that it was like “literally I got stood up” and that getting residential students to participate was “very frustrating” and “like pulling teeth.”

Other FIRs had different perspectives regarding the challenge of attracting students to FIR programming. Some attributed their challenges and successes in building relationships to their own dispositions and skills; as Blake said, “My challenges have a lot to do with who I am. I am definitely an introvert. I do deal with social anxiety.” Some FIRs had prior experience working with young people as teachers, counselors, and tutors, which helped them build relationships with students. Quinn, for example, had prior experiences as a camp counselor and high school teacher, and Taylor had worked as a therapist, which “positioned [me] differently with students so that they felt really safe and comfortable to talk.” Other FIRs, like Ari, focused on the challenge of engaging students who “seem like they want to be left alone” and felt that it was “a little hard to gauge the level of socialization that we would need to get the students to talk to us.”

Most of the participants described being supported by student affairs professionals, though two of them felt there was no shared vision or clarity about roles among FIRs and student affairs professionals. As Taylor put it, the “lack of clarity among multiple constituents” resulted in “a lot of energy [that] went into sort of clarifying roles and expectations.” This challenge led Taylor to have less energy to devote to developing FIR programming and Ari to feel that the efforts of student affairs professionals to help were ineffective: “Honestly they get in the way . . . [and] do not need to manage me. And when they have tried to, it has just been an imposition on my schedule.” Ari agreed with this assessment and felt “ethically conflicted” as a faculty member and teacher since it was more important to them that students spend time studying than attending residential programs: “It goes back to this . . . forced helicoptering sort of thing that I think is counterproductive to the real value that we provide.”

Taking Advantage of Opportunities

Despite the obstacles, most FIRs were able to successfully build relationships with residential students and to implement events and activities. They accomplished these goals by leveraging relationships with student

leaders and professional staff and by connecting with residential students using technology-mediated modes of communication such as social media and text messaging apps, which are popular with students. Blake communicated often through texts: “I use the RAs and the RAs will send texts on GroupMe for the residents.” When FIRs’ efforts at relationship building and programming were successful, residents benefited from learning how to humanize professors, utilize referrals and networking opportunities, and take advantage of social support and educational programming.

Having informal interactions with students at FIR programs and around campus humanized the FIRs and made students feel more comfortable approaching other faculty. As Blake noted, “My events are pretty good at giving students an informal space to relax and hopefully to get to know me in a way that makes faculty feel more safe,” and seeing them with their family in the dining commons made students feel more comfortable interacting with faculty. “I think it humanizes me for them. And so, I think that the presence of my family on campus has had a positive effect on students.” FIRs also took advantage of networking opportunities and referrals for students. Taylor understood that it was important to have “a mentor relationship” with residents and that FIRs could connect students to appropriate resources on campus but could not serve as a “therapist or counselor.” Dakota emphasized that FIRs could also serve as an important academic link by developing a “pipeline” for residential students into graduate programs on campus: “Many of them reached out to me about their interest in graduate school . . . so I am able to have those conversations with them.”

FIRs also described how the program provided social support for students who may have lacked social confidence or experienced social isolation while living on campus. The programs were “like a hangout for students not having other hangouts” (Alex), and students who were attracted to FIR programs were “new to campus, maybe they did not have a lot of friends” (Quinn). Relationships with FIRs may have provided the kind of social support for these students that created a sense of belonging within the campus community. Quinn explained that some students attended FIR programs when they felt socially isolated but then stopped once they made connections to other students and organizations on campus: “They are going to make new connections and they are going to branch out and they are going to try new things.”

While some FIRs described the support they provided to students mostly in terms of social interactions, others made an effort to infuse educational components into their programs. As Ren described it, they think of “a good takeaway” for a program and then “try to sneak it in there,” so that residential students can have fun and learn new skills at the same time. One program, for example, engaged students in a coloring activity during which they played a game that taught them about good study habits; as Ren explained, “While they are coloring, they are learning about study skills, and then the person who gets the most right wins a prize.” Ari developed a program that was a

“huge success” in engaging students in learning about women in science after hearing stories of personal success from a woman in a science-related career. “We had probably 10 attendees for that, which was huge for my contacts.”

Blake described the educational potential of FIR programming in a way that aligned with the strategic plan of the institution:

The students have a very disconnected experience of higher education because our institutions are organized in these fragmented ways. We have student affairs and academic affairs, but there is a gulf between them. And I think what I really like about being a faculty-in-residence is the way that we can tie activities and the living and learning community and the residential component of their experience to their classes and cocurricular activities. So hopefully ideas are being reinforced across a range of experiences for them.

While several FIRs faced obstacles in attracting residents to programs that had an explicit educational component, some were able to overcome them by leveraging existing relationships with students. Quinn used this strategy to solicit students’ participation in a program featuring guest faculty speakers from various academic departments on campus: “Once I had built relationships with students, I felt I could push the envelope by developing programs that had a more explicit educational component.” Blake recognized the value of connecting academic and student affairs in working together “more strategically so students have a coherent experience . . . I just find that idea thrilling.”

Impact on the Faculty Experience

Many respondents acknowledged that participating in the FIR program impacted their broader experiences as faculty. Most notably, they recognized that they had improved their teaching through learning about students’ lives outside the classroom and gained a deeper sense of connection to the campus community. Participating in the FIR program allowed faculty to learn more about the students they teach and to become more understanding of their unique circumstances. Ren learned more about how some students are “first-generation students and they do not have the opportunities that I had.” Learning about students’ experiences led Ari to become more aware that some students work hard but still struggle in their classes: “Sometimes they are working harder than maybe you think.” Learning about the personal struggles of students helped FIRs understand that there are issues outside the classroom that are impacting students’ work in their courses, an insight that may have led to more flexibility in their teaching. Ari, for example, recognized that without this opportunity to learn about students outside the classroom, they “would not be as sympathetic to them about a matter, a test, a grade, or

something like that.” For Taylor, the FIR program improved relational skills they had previously overlooked in their teaching: “Connecting relationally with students I think is a skill that serves me well as a faculty member.”

The increased opportunities to interact with staff on campus, including other faculty, administrators, food services staff, student staff, and student affairs professionals, gave FIRs greater access to campus events and more incentives to participate in extracurricular activities, thus expanding their social networks and increasing their sense of belonging within the campus community. Quinn appreciated the advantage of living on campus, which made it “easy and low-stress to participate in campus-wide events” and resulted in “a lot of one-on-one interaction with the president, other administrators, other faculty members, and of course students.” Having meals in the dining commons allowed Taylor to get to know “the people who are working in the food services and build friendships with those people.” These connections were valuable in many ways; for Ren it made working at the university feel like “coming from a big family . . . it is a really amazing feeling” and for Quinn it felt like “my place of work is my community.” Taylor noted that working at the university felt like “not just a job,” but that “there is a part of my identity that is in it,” while for Zuri the experience created “a really strong sense of belonging to the campus community,” which impacted how they were serving the university community. Zuri recognized that “the kind of service that I can be passionate about is service that has to do with student engagement and student involvement.”

DISCUSSION

Participants described the obstacles and opportunities inherent in serving as FIRs and the impact this had on their overall experience as faculty. Our findings indicate that because FIR work is often complex and multifaceted, practices and policies should be tailored to the unique needs of individual faculty and the specific contexts of their institutions. The themes that emerged are consistent with prior research and suggest broader implications for FIR programs in similar contexts.

One of the most significant challenges facing FIRs is balancing the time required for this role with the primary demands of research and teaching, particularly in institutions that prioritize these areas over service (also noted in Eidum, 2023). FIRs must integrate deeply into residential communities, build and sustain relationships with students and student affairs professionals, and create programming that supports students’ cognitive and developmental growth. To address these challenges, FIR programs should recognize and support informal strategies for community building, set realistic expectations for formal programming, and ensure that FIR work is valued within faculty evaluation processes.

Participants described poor attendance at FIR programs as a significant obstacle, a challenge confirmed by previous studies (e.g., Eidum, 2023). One factor that contributed to poor attendance was over-programming; there were

often too many programs, and both students and FIRs experienced burnout as a result (e.g., Eidum, 2023; Kennedy, 2023). To remedy this situation, the student affairs professionals overseeing the FIR program revised the programming model and required fewer programs for the following academic year. FIRs were also not required to plan programs around predetermined academic themes and were instead encouraged to develop them around their personal interests. When FIRs incorporated educational components into their programs, many of them were able to “sneak it in” with a fun activity, especially if they had already built strong relationships with students that enabled them to solicit participation.

There were many obstacles related to the unique experiences and dispositions of individual FIRs. Some came to the program with prior experience working with young people outside the classroom. Others had little experience with this or identified as introverts. These discrepancies reveal that FIRs need individualized support to develop strategies for engaging residential students. Another challenge was the disconnect that some participants felt between the visions and goals they had for the FIR program and those of student affairs professionals. Developing a shared vision for building community in the residence halls is an important starting point for FIR programs (Ellett & Schmidt, 2011), but not all faculty who serve as FIRs will necessarily share this vision.

The impact of serving as a faculty-in-residence extended beyond the confines of residential programming, influencing the faculty members’ teaching practices and their sense of connection to the campus community. FIRs learned about the unique experiences of their students, many of whom were first-generation college students facing specific challenges, and they recognized that developing greater sensitivity to students’ experiences made them better teachers. For Blake, living alongside and working with students enhanced their teaching and provided an expanded social network on campus. “Every faculty member, if there were some way to do it, should have to live on campus for a year.” The expanded social network and increased participation in campus events further deepened their sense of belonging, transforming their role at the university from merely a job into a more integral part of their identity.

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge a few limitations of our study. First, even though the relative youth of this FIR program could be seen as a strength in contributing to the ongoing research about FIRs, the experiences captured may not fully reflect long-term outcomes or challenges that could emerge over time. Second, the three authors were faculty at the institution. The kind of data we collected, our findings, and our recommendations were shaped by our positionality as faculty in that we were inclined to be attuned to the experiences and needs of faculty serving as FIRs. Third, our study is limited

to a single institution, which limits the generalizability of our findings to other institutions with different institutional cultures or FIR program structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing a shared vision between faculty and student affairs professionals is essential for the success of FIR programs. Institutions should foster ongoing dialogue and collaboration between these groups to ensure that they are aligned in their goals and expectations for FIRs' engagement in the residential community. FIRs bring diverse personal backgrounds, experiences, and teaching styles to their roles and should have a voice in developing a shared vision and goals for FIR initiatives. Institutions should offer tailored support to help faculty navigate the challenges of this work, such as time management, program development, and student engagement strategies.

To prevent burnout and ensure the sustainability of FIR roles, institutions should establish clear and manageable expectations for FIRs, including realistic goals for programming and community involvement. This includes acknowledging the informal contributions that FIRs make toward building community in the residence halls, which may be just as valuable as formal programming. Institutions should also ensure that participation in FIR programs is recognized and valued in faculty evaluation processes, particularly in tenure and promotion decisions. This will incentivize faculty to invest the necessary time and energy into their FIR roles, knowing that their contributions are appreciated and rewarded.

There are several important steps in building a shared vision for FIR programs: leveraging the strengths of individual FIRs, developing a collaborative approach to planning and problem solving, setting realistic expectations, and ensuring that FIRs' contributions are valued in the tenure and promotion process (see [Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1.
Steps for Building a Shared Vision for FIR Programs

Step	Objective	Action
1. Develop a shared vision.	Align goals of FIRs and student affairs professionals.	Joint orientation; dialogue to develop shared vision; collaboratively address each step below.
2. Leverage strengths.	Use individual strengths of FIRs to foster faculty-student interaction and connection.	Tailor programs to FIRs' interests (e.g., music, cooking) to promote engagement and connection.
3. Provide tailored support.	Align support to the assets and learning needs of individual FIRs.	Provide resources and support based on individual FIRs' assets and areas for growth.
4. Utilize collaborative planning.	Develop a plan that takes into account the experiences and insights of FIRs and student affairs professionals.	Co-plan events and programs; incorporate FIRs into existing orientation, meetings, and programs with student staff and professional staff.

5. Set realistic expectations.	Prevent over-programming and burnout.	Develop a shared calendar with manageable goals; adjust number of programs to enhance student engagement.
6. Improve communication and problem solving.	Solve issues proactively and collaboratively.	Schedule monthly meetings to share feedback and brainstorm solutions for challenges like time constraints and low engagement.
7. Recognize contributions.	Ensure that FIR work is valued institutionally.	Advocate for FIRs' contributions to be valued in tenure/promotion evaluations; develop a shared vision of the role of FIR work in the context of FIRs' teaching and service.

FIR programs have the potential to play a significant role in fostering an inclusive and supportive campus environment where meaningful learning extends from the classroom into residential life. By adopting the steps outlined in [Figure 1](#), institutions can overcome common challenges in developing such programs and can enrich the academic and social fabric of the university. This study provides insights into how these programs can be strategically designed to promote collaboration among faculty and student affairs professionals, develop opportunities for meaningful faculty-student interaction, and enhance the overall faculty experience for FIRs.

Published: December 01, 2025 EDT.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The lack of student engagement was one of the main obstacles for the faculty-in-residence (FIRs) in this study. How might an FIR program consider and evaluate student engagement? Should it be measured by the number of students attending programs or by some other metric? Is engagement the only marker of success for an FIR program?
2. Some FIRs reported feeling a disconnect between themselves and the student affairs professionals they work with. How can a strong relationship between student affairs professionals and faculty be established from the start? How are clear expectations and communication embodied in a role that combines both academic and student affairs?
3. When considering institutional goals and strategic planning, a strong FIR program can help bridge the gap between student experiences in and outside the classroom. How can an FIR program be aligned with an institutional mission, and how does this benefit students?
4. Developing relationships with students outside a classroom can lead to a deeper connection to the campus community and a more understanding approach to students in the classroom. How might these benefits be extended to faculty outside of an FIR program? What are some other ways to engage faculty in student affairs work?
5. Some FIRs lacked previous experience in engaging with students outside a classroom. How should an FIR program take this into consideration when selecting, training, and evaluating them for their program?
6. Residential programming can sometimes result in overscheduling or burnout for students and FIRs. When establishing a new FIR program, how might this be taken into consideration? What support might be possible?

Discussion questions were developed by Ana Bourque, residential life assistant for faculty programs at New York University in New York City.