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The effects of living in a springboard house during one's first year at the University of Northern Iowa

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THE EFFECTS OF LIVING IN A SPRINGBOARD HOUSE DURING ONE'S FIRST YEAR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

Laura Trettin

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects and benefits of college students residing in a Springboard house community at UNI during one's entire freshmen year. Springboard house communities are unique to the University of Northern Iowa as they provide a living environment in which first-year students can self-select to participate. However, there is no common class that complements the community. In addition, the RAs do not go through any separate training to learn how to work with the springboard house students, but they do offer programming that is geared towards first-year students.

This study investigated the freshmen experience by gathering data regarding grade point average, on-campus recontracting rates, and active involvement, both on-campus activities as well as those within the residence hall house. Based on the data collected, students in Springboard houses earn higher GPAs, tend to return to live on campus at a higher percentage rate and are more involved in campus activities. In addition, students turn to their RA as a resource for many common themes with which freshmen students struggle.

The data gathered from both first-year students and resident assistants in Springboard houses shows that there are benefits to living in a Springboard house community at UNI. Based on these facts, this research is relevant as it analyzes the impact of students being placed in a first-year learning environment without any additional components.

Through participation in a springboard community, it is theorized that students feel more supported and, in turn become more involved on campus than the traditional

college student. Additionally, it is believed that students participating in a Springboard house earn higher GPAs and have greater retention rates for returning to on-campus housing. Additionally, through the interview process and the sharing of stories and information, a greater understanding of the RA role is provided.

Overall, the results of this study show that students who participate in springboard house communities have a positive experience that is rewarding to them both academically and socially. The Springboard program provides positive results that impact student participants. Moving forward, further development of the program based on the recommendations in chapter five can continue to benefit students during their first year at UNI.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Residence at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) along with other residence life positions, organizations and experiences that I have had prior to begin my graduate work plays a large part in the development of my professional and ethical framework. It was my work and experiences in residential life in my undergraduate institution that led me to the field of student affairs. Through these experiences, I have found great value in serving as a mentor and resource for first-year students on campus. First-year students go through a transition period when arriving on campus that is both difficult and developmental. By acting as a support for first-year students, I have found great value in my work and a passion for the first-year student experience.

At UNI, there are specific communities, called Springboard houses, which are reserved for only first-year students. Student self-select to reside in these communities and the Resident Assistant provides programming and education for students on a variety of topics pertinent to the first-year experience and transition. Little research has been done on the effects of participation. Based on my observations in supervising RAs who worked in these communities in my first year at UNI, I became interested in learning more about the effects of participation. This study provides valuable information to the Department of Residence regarding Springboard house student experience and also is an opportunity for me to continue to explore the first year experience.

UNI put Springboard houses into place over ten years ago to provide support and

guidance for the first year student. These communities were created as a place where first-year students at UNI could live together, form peer reference groups, and build community based on the shared similarity of being new to the university. In recent years, more Springboard house communities have been added in halls to further support the number of students requesting to live in the community. Springboard house residents have the opportunity to express interest in residing in a Springboard house on their housing application.

Purpose of the Study

Living Learning Communities (LLCs) continue to be a growing trend on college campuses across America. These communities provide students with an environment conducive to studying as well as helping students adapt to college life. LLCs come in many varieties, including all freshmen housing, housing specific to a student's interests or major, as well as communities for high-achieving or honors students as a place where they can continue to excel.

Since the 1920s, many universities have been incorporating the living learning environment into the college experience. By providing educational experiences for students within their residential community, they are able to make connections between classroom learning and on-campus experiences. In addition to this, the Resident Assistants (RA)s within these communities provide students with programing focused on study skills, time management, organization, and many other topics relevant to student success within the first year in college.

This study will examine specifically the Springboard house communities on

campus at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). The term "house" refers to a living community of students within the residence hall that for which one RA is responsible. These Springboard living environments are only available to first-year students and are advertised to students through marketing materials distributed to students when they are accepted to attend UNI.

UNI created five learning outcomes to be achieved throughout the year in a Springboard community. The learning outcomes are as follows:

> (1) enhance entering students' transition to UNI; (2) create peer reference groups; (3) encourage group identity development; (4) provide an integrated learning experience for first-year students by connecting faculty, students, academic disciplines, and campus experiences; and (5) enhance students' academic and social success ("Springboard", n.d.)

UNI currently has eight Springboard houses within five of the residence halls on campus. There are three houses in Noehren Hall, two in Campbell Hall, one in Dancer Hall, one in Bender Hall, and one in Hagemann Hall ("Springboard", n.d.).

This study examines the effects of participation in a Springboard house learning community at UNI. Utilizing data collection through surveys and sampling, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the effects of living in a Springboard house on first semester GPA, on-campus recontracting rates, and achievement of learning outcomes set by the university. This study also examines the role the RA plays in a Springboard house community and ways the RA role fits in with each student's first-year experience. This is done through surveying in-house program attendance as well as topics discussed with the RA pertinent to first-year experiences on campus. This study further examines the idea that students participating in a living learning community during their entire first

year on campus have a positive experience that helps them to be more successful throughout their time at the university.

The research gathered was analyzed in a variety of ways. Data collected regarding GPA and recontracting rates were processed as aggregate data collections. Through RA interviews, themes were identified regarding the role that RAs play in the community for the students. An analysis done as a part of the interviews was used to determine if RAs feel they are prepared for the role the play in a Springboard house as compared to the role filled in a traditional house. Recommendations can be found in chapter five, which are proposed based on theme analysis within the results.

This study was designed using mixed research methods. The use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods allow for data analysis of aggregate GPA, recontracting rates, NSSE results and a portion of the springboard house responses as well as theme analysis of open-ended interview questions. A variety of data was collected as a part of this study in order to capture the overall impact of springboard house participation.

Based on the above research methods, it was predicted that students residing in a Springboard house during their freshman year have a higher first semester GPA, higher recontracting percentages, and a greater involvement on campus and enhanced campus experience. In addition, it was predicted that students attended house programs and utilized their RA as a resource for a variety of topics that freshmen students experience. The RA experiences were predicted to be varied when comparing the springboard house to the traditional house.

Significance

Springboard house communities have been in place at UNI for many years, but assessment is needed to further examine the significance and effects of participation in the communities. Much research has been done to examine the effects of living learning community participation and data has shown a variety of beneficial results for students; however, springboard house communities are not true living learning communities as students do not have a common course enrollment and no faculty engagement.

This study is meant to provide a wide scope overview of the impact of springboard house participation. This study focuses on four areas to gain a large-scale picture of the impact of springboard house participation. By reviewing cumulative GPA, recontracting rates, involvement and engagement on campus, as well as the RA role within the springboard house communities, this research shows the benefits and impact of springboard house participation. Based on the results and recommendations of this study, the Department of Residence at UNI can make decisions on further implementation of Springboard house communities, as well as evaluate further needs of the community and to continue to build upon the initial successes of these communities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews current research and collective knowledge of Living Learning Communities. To best explain the role that Springboard House Communities play at UNI, it is important to first understand the progression that learning communities have made over time. This chapter further examines learning community formats and results, and discusses the current knowledge of learning communities that lead to the significance of this study.

History

Living Learning Communities (LLCs) have been around for approximately 100 years, and during that time have continued to diversify with student needs. The first LLC dates back to the 1920s, when Alexander Meiklejohn created the "Experimental College" at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The institution was reacting to the increased specialization of the curriculum for undergraduate programs. The purpose of the Experimental College was to build community as well as to strengthen the connections between the learning environment in the classroom and the living environment in the residence halls (Stassen, 2003, p. 582). Since that time, LLCs have been implemented throughout the country and are setting a standard for residential learning environments that lead to student success.

In the last 20 years, the development of these LLCs has expanded in nature and variety. Often described as a "grass-roots movement," the past 20 year period focused on improving the student experience during the first year of college (Barefoot, 2000, p. 16).

During this time period, the needs of students have drastically changed from how they used to be. These new students are "disengaged academically, unmotivated, can't write, can't spell, have a ten-minute attention span, [and] expect instant gratification" (Barefoot, 2000, p. 17). Students are not as prepared or engaged in their high school coursework and therefore are underprepared for college level classes. In addition to this, freshmen students are easily overwhelmed by their to-do lists and completing assignments on time. This stress is also increased by competitiveness. Grade inflation plays into this as well as students have higher expectations to achieve at least a "B" average and make honors on campus (Astin, 1993).

Purpose

First-year students are not only coming to college with heightened expectations of their success; they are also facing college underprepared for the course load and expectations of each course. These students have been given false expectations from the media as many movies released in the past 20 years highlight college as a place to socialize with peers, consume vast amounts of alcohol, and occasionally attend class. The media does not take the time in movies or dramas to focus on transition struggles, class and exam preparation, or the time management techniques that are needed to cope to this new lifestyle.

According to James Dillon (2013), "During their first years of college, undergraduates are likely to experience painful feelings of alienation loneliness, and depression, often at much higher levels than do individuals of the same age who are not attending college" (p. 195). Students go through these transitional feelings throughout

their time in college, but first-year college students experience these effects, to a more frequent extent, during their first semester at college. These feelings occur for a variety of reasons, from homesickness, to roommate struggles, to not understanding how to study for courses and how to best prepare for examinations, with many other reasons falling in between.

Because of this under-preparedness as well as looking at the experiences that first-year students are having on college campuses, most colleges and universities have implemented a variety of transitional support programs for first-year students. Purdie and Rosser (2011) support this programming, recognizing that, "…living learning communities are becoming widely viewed by student affairs practitioners as a powerful opportunity to positively affect a variety of student outcomes including retention and GPA performance of first-year students" (p. 96). LLCs are moving from providing an additional component for student learning to serving as a necessary aspect of college learning that directly affects student success.

LLCs are progressively changing, and now look very different than they did when initially implemented by Alexander Meiklejohn. The communities not only serve in some capacity as academic bridges but also create an emotional support resource for students to find comfort outside the classroom. Zhao and Kuh (2004) further support this idea of creating an emotional support system in residence life experiences, stating that, "…the developmental theory literature encourages educators to design learning environments that both challenge and support student to move to higher levels of intellectual and psychological development" (p. 117). Zhao and Kuh (2004) continue on

to describe the definition of development, stating that it "…is conceptualized as a process whereby students grow and change in response to dealing with novel situations that create a mismatch or induce disequilibrium into their routine ways of responding" (p. 117). Living learning environments fill the role of supplementing and supporting student development as students are dealing with the difficult and unexpected situations that arise while they are transitioning into college.

Description

Living Learning Communities can take on many forms and fill a variety of roles on a college or university campus. Dillon (2003) describes learning communities in a basic way that provides a framework for what is happening on most campuses. He states that "…[l]earning is a process of transforming the ways individuals experience and make sense of the world" (p. 197). Dillon (2003) continues on, within his article, to explain that "…[c]ommunity is the shared physical, psychological and social space that people occupy together" (p. 197). These definitions do well to explain what learning communities are in a skeleton function. By combining Dillon's definition of both "learning" and "community," we can understand that learning communities provide a shared space where students are having experiences and understanding how they affect their lives and in turn the world that they will eventually enter into.

Later in his work, Dillon goes more into detail of his shared definition of learning communities:

> In Learning Communities, community is created by living and taking classes together; learning takes place by thematically linking courses across disciplinary boundaries, engaging in active and collaborative learning activities, and increasing the amount and quality of interaction both inside and outside of class

> between students and teachers, students and counselors, and between the students themselves. (Dillon, 2013, p. 197)

When done correctly, a learning community provides an atmosphere conducive to studying, socializing and allowing for personal growth and development. By creating communities that foster student development in these areas, institutions can not only better serve the students, but also create an environment where students feel comfortable and part of the community.

There are three features that should be found in a learning community: psychological, social and academic. Dillon explains the purpose of the psychological aspect is "to create a supportive and nurturing environment" (Dillon, 2013, p. 198). This allows for a community to develop that helps each student involved to feel "accepted and valued as an individual" (Dillon, 2013, p. 199). Dillon further explains in his work that this psychological aspect of learning communities should also "detect and address psychological issues, such as depression and loneliness" (Dillon, 2013, p. 199). If the psychological aspect is found within a living learning community, students should be healthier all around. They should have a lower level of alcohol abuse and should be physically healthier, get more sleep, and have enhanced physical ability and nutrition.

The social aspect of the community development explains that each student is seen as an individual and respected for who he or she is. Within the community, a social atmosphere should exist that allows for students to feel comfortable with those around them. In any residential community, an environment is often created which allows for students to feel comfortable, like a family (Dillon, 2013). The students that live together in a community are not only neighbors, but also share many experiences together and

often depend on one another.

As previously stated, across the country, there are variations of learning communities on campus. These campus communities have a wide-ranging focus. However, learning communities often have been found to have two common elements: "shared or collaborative learning and connected learning" (Rocconi, 2011, p. 179). Rocconi describes the shared or collaborative learning as an environment that is created by students registering for sections of common courses together. He explains that co-enrollment "increase[s] the likelihood of an integrated social and academic experience" (Rocconi, 2011, p. 179). Rocconi further clarifies that the connected learning comes into play as learning communities are focused on a central theme or topic that enrolled students share. This could be anything from a major to a shared interest of the students.

Living Learning Community Framework

The growth of LLCs goes back to research generated by Alexander Astin and Vincent Tinto, including Astin's, EIO Model and Theory of Involvement, and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. Research over the past twenty plus years shows that a structured LLC environment can enhance a students' experience in college as well as help students be more successful in their college career. Both Astin and Tinto's research focused on the factors that affect student success and overall experience. Together, they determined that "students are more likely to remain at an institution if they have opportunities to become connected to the life of the institution" (Stassen, 2003, p. 608). This is important in both their social as well as academic lives through a process of integration between the two areas (Barefoot, 2000). Based on this information, students

tend to remain at an institution if they are provided with a variety of opportunities to become connected and have a place at the university (Stassen, 2003).

As LLCs are still developing and learning outcomes are being created unique to each university and community, it is found that even the most basic community outcomes provide an increased opportunity for students to integrate both their social and academic roles around the "student peer group." Astin describes this group as the "single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (Astin, 1993, p. 398). LLCs help to create peer reference groups for students. We know that students who are able to create a peer reference group soon after they arrive on campus are better able to find success during the first year on campus.

The research of Astin and Tinto provided a framework for LLCs. From this framework and basis of information, the importance of LLCs has blossomed on college campuses. In general, the purpose of LLCs is to increase student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions. This is done by increasing the student involvement and participation on campus, which leads to students spending more time on campus in general. In addition, LLCs tend to link the curriculum to the co-curriculum through extracurricular and residence hall environments (Barefoot, 2000, p. 17). These peer interactions, faculty connections, and involvement in the on-campus environment are supported by the creating of LLCs in the residents halls.

Learning communities should increase a "student's development, achievement, and persistence through encouraging the integration of social and academic lives" (Stassen, 2003, p. 607). It is also found that LLCs help students to have a greater

commitment to their institution, a higher level of intellectual development as well as an opportunity to analyze ideas and generate their own. Students also develop a greater appreciation for differences of others and appreciate diversity (Stassen, 2003, p. 601). In addition to this, LLCs lead to improvements in student retention, student achievement, and student degree progress.

LLCs come in different forms and are chosen for their specific universities based on the community needs and developments. Lenning and Ebbers determined four generic forms that residential learning communities can take on, depending on the universities. These forms are as follows:

> 1. Curricular learning communities are made up of students co-enrolled in two or more courses (often from different disciplines) that are linked by a common theme; 2. Classroom learning communities treat the classroom as the locus of community-building by featuring cooperative learning techniques and group process learning activities as integrating pedagogical approaches; 3. Residential learning communities organize on-campus living arrangements so that students taking two or more common courses live in close physical proximity, which increases the opportunities for out-of-class interactions and supplementary learning opportunities; and 4. Student-type learning communities are specially designed for targeted groups, such as academically underprepared students, historically underrepresented students, honors students, students with disabilities, or students with similar academic interests, such as women in math, science, and engineering. (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, pp. 16-17)

These four LLC types determined by Lenning and Ebbers outline the general areas of learning communities, but each campus branches out and diversify their community to fit their specific needs.

In addition, classroom environments can be restructured so that students are more actively involved in the learning environment (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Faculty members have bought into the residential community model with their classroom environments.

LLCs consistently enhance the student faculty interactions both formally in the classroom as well as informally through connections made outside the structured classroom environment (Shushok & Sriram, 2010).

While LLCs come in many different forms and models, one thing that all communities have in common is they provide students with a needed sense of camaraderie built around course work and the physical and social environment that is created through programming and community goals (Barefoot, 2000; Riker & Decoster, 2008). Harold Riker and David DeCoster (2008) determined five major goals of higher education that provide a framework for learning community environments. These goals include: "1. Social Awareness and Responsibility; 2. Political Awareness; 3. Human Values; 4. Self-Awareness and Growth; and 5. Vocational Learning" (Riker & Decoster, 2008, pp. 82-83). The National Survey of Student Engagement helps institutions to determine if they are meeting the goals of the learning community and higher education. This survey is based on five benchmarks that are related to student engagement. These benchmarks specifically address "areas of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, supportive campus environments, and enriching educational experiences" (LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007, p. 955). According to the survey, residence halls are seen as a prime venue for growth within these learning opportunities.

Participation

In the past few decades, universities began to look past the specific question of "Should we have learning communities?" to "Do learning communities 'work' on our

campus?" (Stassen, 2003, p. 591). Universities cannot make the assumption that because a model worked on one campus, it would have the same effect at another when factoring in student population, community need, faculty involvement, as well as campus culture. In addition, universities never know if results will be the same year after year within a specific community (Stassen, 2003, p. 591). Studies and assessment should be done frequently to determine if the LLC models are effective or need to be changed from year to year.

While there is research that defends the premise that "freshmen who lived in university housing were more likely to achieve above average GPAs and to remain enrolled into the second year" (Schudde, 2011, p. 583), this is not specific to learning communities, but instead the residence life experience in general. Furthermore, this research is not specific to any type of living environment. Therefore, it is not known of how many students within these studies lived in a traditional residence hall or participated in a suite style or single room housing environment.

In some residential living communities, students may self-select to participate, which also may skew results of studies based on incoming intelligence level and coping skills. Past research regarding this topic indicates that "…positive student outcomes among this population may be less related to college or program impact and more related to the innate abilities and preferences of the students who elect to participate in living-learning programs" (Inkelas & Weisman, 2013, p. 337). However, based on this research, there have also been studies done which indicate that "…men, transfer students, and part-time students are less likely to participate in a learning community before they

graduate" (Zhao & Kuh, 2004, p. 131). This research shows that while, participation in LLCs is often based on student self-selection, impacts of participation are evident and it is important to reach out and offer opportunities to all students.

Effects and Benefits

There are many ways for universities to determine if the learning communities implemented on campus are effective. One specific goal of LLCs is to create a realm of shared knowledge and shared knowing for students. This can be done by requiring students to take a course together, organizing coursework around a common theme, constructing a shared experience for students, and creating a varied education in which students gain knowledge in a number of different areas (Tinto, 2003).

In addition to this, educators can look at student satisfaction as a predictor of program success. Universities can measure this satisfaction along with academic performance, with the knowledge that students who perform better academically are often more satisfied with the institution. In addition to this, students who rated themselves better academically on surveys tend to be more satisfied with their house and residential community (Wang, Arboleda, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003).

Faculty and staff on campus can look to three main indicators to determine the effectiveness of their specific living learning environment. These indicators include academic performance, retention rates, and social engagement within the campus environment. While faculty and staff comprise a large group within the campus population, it is important to recognize that the above indicators are primary aspects that

affect a student's experience on campus, and also could lead to increased enrollment rates within the campus population.

Academic Performance

Participation in living learning communities has a great effect on academic progress and the pursuit of high academic achievement. Much research has been done to examine the relationship between living learning community participation and academic performance, often finding a positive correlation. It has been shown that learning community participation is "positively related to faculty-student interaction, interaction and collaboration with peers, interaction with diverse peers, time spent on academics, integrative and higher-order thinking, and perceptions of supportive campus and residence hall environments" (Pike, Kuh & McCormick, 2011, p. 302). Through this research, it is known that there is a correlation between LLC participation and positive student experience.

The above results collaboratively impact grade point average and first-year success on campus. According to Kanoy and Woodson Bruhn (1996), students participating in residential learning communities achieve higher GPAs than students living residence halls but not participating in a community. Residents in the LLCs also perform better than predicted and their GPAs improve each semester.

Based on the above information, it is determined that success in college is about more than studying alone; it is related to the amount of effort that students put into their studies, getting to know faculty, forming relationships with those on campus, and investing themselves in the campus community. Often, participation in a learning

community in the residence halls shows an increase in student GPAs, often higher than even predicted by those supporting the communities (Hotchkiss, Moore & Pitts, 2006).

Another important aspect to note regarding the correlation between living learning communities and GPAs is "…[t]he fact that the living/learning residence hall students achieved higher GPAs while not studying any more than the matched student" (Kanoy & Woodson Bruhn, 1996, pp. 18-19). These matched students are students that reside in a residence hall but opted not to participate in a living learning community The findings from Tinto's research support his conclusions that, "the quality of effort, rather than the quantity of effort, produces student success" (Kanoy & Woodson Bruhn, 1996, pp. 18-19). Because of the support the students residing within the living/learning residence halls received, they were able to earn higher GPAs through the quality effort put forth, and without the need to commit more time to their studies.

Retention Rates

Students that participate in living learning communities during their first year on campus tend to return to campus for a second year at a higher rate than other students. This can be attributed to a variety of reasons, focusing specifically on the overall experience the student is gaining on campus. According to John Purdie and Vicki Rosser (2011), "…[t]he experiences that have been found to most powerfully influence first-year retention include: first semester academic performance, interaction with faculty and peers, initial major, financial aid, time commitments, satisfaction, campus climate, first-year experience courses, and living learning communities" (p. 99). It can be argued that the students who participate in living learning communities are experiencing a higher

amount of the influencers that Purdie and Rosser include through their participation in a living learning community.

Tinto's student departure model further analyzes the internal questions a student goes through when determining whether to stay at an institution or not. In analyzing this model, Schudde (2011) explains that "…the decision to stay at or leave college is a function of the student's personal and academic background and how well he or she integrates into the academic and social life of the campus" (p. 582). Based on this reasoning, students who participate in living learning communities are further supported in becoming a part of campus life and often feel more comfortable on campus. Schudde, 2011, further states that "…by becoming more involved in the campus community, students learn to effectively live in the college environment" (p. 582). It is known that LLCs foster community development and in turn, help students to feel more comfortable on campus.

According to Purdie and Rosser (2011), academic performance, as explained in the previous section, "…appears to be the best predictor of student persistence" (p. 99). In living learning communities, where GPAs tend to be higher than traditional communities on campus, it can then be assumed that students within these communities tend to return to the university for a second year. In addition to increased retention rates at the university, students who achieve higher GPAs tend to participate in living learning communities, and those students tend to not only return to the university, but additionally choose to reside on campus.

Stress is an increasingly common factor that also can be attributed to student

success, performance, as well as retention at the university. In a study titled *Psychosocial factors predicting first year college student success*, Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim and Wilcox (2013) discovered that "…stress is the most commonly reported health impediment to student' academic performance. Several longitudinal studies among first-year college students have confirmed that stress is associated with less positive adjustment to college over time" (p. 251). This is significant as the "…students who experienced more stress tended to be less well-adjusted in that they experienced less satisfaction with academic progress and lower commitment to remain in school" (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013, p. 251). By offering LLCs to aid in student adjustment and transitions, the findings of Krumrei-Mancuso et al. (2013) would not apply to the students reaping the benefits of residing in a LLC.

Social Engagement

In addition, student engagement is also positively related to residential satisfaction. It was found that students involved in "educationally purposeful activities" tend to be more successful in coursework, have higher grades, and tend to be more committed to the university between the first and second year (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008, p. 555). Students who participate in a living learning community during their first year at college tend to become connected to the university at a quicker rate than other first-year students. "Participating in a learning community was positively related to first-year students' perceptions of a supportive campus environment…" (Pike et al., 2011, p. 310). Feeling a part of the community on a college campus helps the students to have a smooth transition and become integrated into the college environment.

It can further be assumed that students participating in a living learning community "…would be more involved in activities and environments designed to be key components of their program, and would exhibit outcomes that mirror the program goals and objectives at higher rates than their counterparts…" (Inkelas & Weisman, 2013, p. 337). This reasoning justifies the idea that students who participate in a living learning community are supported in their academics, and encouraged to participate in on-campus events, tend to be more successful in their classroom endeavors and earn grades that help them to be successful in their programs.

Students who feel supported are often more successful in their goals. Karen Inkelas and Jennifer Weisman found that "….living-learning students tended to find their residence environment to be more supportive than nonparticipants..." (Inkelas & Weisman, 2013, p. 346). This social aspect of the college experience, when combined with academic aspects, leads to an increase in student learning (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). Students who get involved in out-of-classroom activities tend to become more connected with their peers, adding to the positive social experience that students can have on campus (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Not only does extracurricular involvement lead to a more positive and comfortable experience on campus; "…student engagement positively affected grades in the first and last year of college and affected persistence from the first to the second year of college at the same institution" (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013, p. 252). Inkelas and Weisman found that "…extracurricular involvement in student clubs and organizations had a significant positive effect on critical thinking scores" (Inkelas & Weisman, 2013, p.

340). Through on-campus involvement and student engagement, students are able to feel a part of the campus community and find more success.

Engagement on campus can be directly tied back to both first-year academic success as well as retention on campus. According to Kuh et al. (2008), there are two main outcomes of student engagement on campus.

> First, student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between he first and second year of college. Second, engagement has a compensatory effect on first year grades and persistence to the second year of college at the same institution. (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 555)

These involvements lead to "…higher persistence and graduation rates, and greater gains in critical thinking and reading comprehension" (Zhao & Kuh, 2004, p. 118). Residential learning communities tie the above effects together as they tend to foster and create an environment that allows for both social interactions as well as out-of-classroom involvements.

Criticism and Critiques

While much research done regarding LLCs led to positive and encouraging results showing benefits in participating in LLC programs, there are also some criticisms of programs that are not clearly defined in their objectives. This is true of programs that "lacked educational planning, strong internal directions, and a set of educational objectives connected to the goals of undergraduate education" (LaNasa et al., 2007, p. 942). If the programs within a residence hall are not well planned out and organized, they are not effective in helping the students to be successful in their goals.

It has been found that many LLCs have had a positive effect on the student GPA

and experiences, but research thus far has not been as consistent for retention rates. In some studies, no significant differences have been found between LLCs and matched controls (Kanoy & Woodson Bruhn, 1996, pp. 14-15). The national dropout rate at approximately 33 percent (reported annually by the American College Testing Program) and has been consistent for the past several years, which makes scholars wonder what has been done so far to improve retention and what we can continue to do in this area (Barefoot, 2000).

Furthermore, existing literature is limited in that the research that has been done on LLCs have focused on a single type of living learning program as the study group. As stated earlier, institutions cannot directly apply programs that work on a specific campus to their own as there are many external variables that may affect program success. While there are a wide variety of programs in place across the country, it is very difficult to study living learning communities as a national study because each program is unique in implementation and practice (Purdie & Rosser, 2011).

Summary

Overall, data supports the benefits for living learning communities on college campuses, no matter the program or implementation style. By participating in LLCs, students tend to have higher GPAs, retention rates and overall campus experiences. Programs with a well-thought-out mission as well as prescriptive learning outcomes can provide students with a positive college experience and help them to feel supported in the academic goals.

However, there is much more research to be done in analyzing program

effectiveness across campuses. It is unknown if there could be a prescriptive method for living learning communities. It is important for campus housing offices to continue to share best practices to determine changes that can be made to living learning programs from year to year. By analyzing and determining Springboard house participation, determining differences in on-campus involvement, reviewing aggregate GPAs and retention rates, and gaining a perspective of the RA experience, the results from this study can be shared with the Department of Residence at UNI.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

For the purpose of this study, first-year students residing in the residence halls at UNI comprised the population studied. To gain an overall picture of the experience that first-year students had while residing in the residence halls, Springboard houses, made up of freshmen students, were analyzed in a variety of ways. By gathering information regarding academic achievement, on-campus involvement, and on-campus retention, an understanding can be gained of the overall experience that first-year students have on campus at UNI.

GPA and Recontracting Data Collection

There were a few routes taken to gather data for the purpose of this study. Aggregate Grade Point Averages (GPAs) were retrieved from the Office of the Registrar at UNI to determine the comparison between Springboard house students and traditional house students. These aggregate GPAs were gathered based on freshmen students who resided in a Springboard house for the entire 2012-2013 school year, and then additionally, freshmen students who resided in a residence hall but did not participate in a Springboard house at any point during the school year. If a student moved from or to a Springboard house during the year their GPA was not included in the data. In addition, if a student left the university or moved off campus at any point during the year, their data was not included.

A representative within the Office of the Registrar provided aggregate GPAs for

each category. This was done by providing a list of student identification numbers for both students living in the Springboard houses, n=347, as well as students who chose not to participate in the Springboard houses, n=1339. Student identification numbers were retrieved from the Department of Residence at UNI for the two groups of students. These ID numbers were sent to the Office of the Registrar and based on these lists, the Office of the Registrar provided aggregate GPAs for each population list. Analysis of significance between groups was run using independent sample t-tests.

The second portion of this study looked at recontracting rates for freshmen students residing in the residence halls during the 2012-2013 school year to determine if Springboard house residents recontracted at a higher percentage rate. This aspect of the study compared the percentages of freshmen students that had recontracted to live in the residence halls for the 2013-2014 school year by the spring semester recontracting deadline. If a student chooses to recontract, this means that they decided to return to live in the one of the residence halls for the next year. If students decided to recontract for the 2013-2014 school year after the recontracting deadline, they were not included in this data set. All recontracting data, including which students chose to recontract, as well as which halls students chose to recontract was provided through the Department of Residence.

Based on this data, percentage rates were determined analyzing the students who participated in a springboard house and comparing the number of students that chose to recontract to those students who did not choose to return to the residence halls for the 2013-2014 school year. Z scores were computed to see if there was a significant

difference between the percentages of springboard and non-springboard house participants who chose to recontract. Of the students who chose to recontract, the halls the students chose to recontract to were broken down. This was done to determine if there was a specific hall students were more likely to return to or if there was an environment that students were more likely to choose. The same process was done for first-year students who resided in traditional houses during their entire first year at UNI. Again, the students who chose to recontract to the residence halls for the 2013-2014 school year were then broken down based on which hall was most popular. In either group, if a student chose not to return to the residence halls, no data was collected on if this was because they chose to live off campus in an apartment or sorority or fraternity house or if they chose not to return to UNI for a second year. In addition, first-year students living in another learning community, such as one of the honors or substance free communities on campus, were not included in any data collected.

National Survey of Student Engagement

To gain an understanding of on-campus involvement by students both residing in traditional communities and springboard communities at UNI, responses were gathered from the 2012-2013 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that UNI conducts annually in the spring. Responses from both Springboard house and traditional house students were analyzed. This data provided information on Springboard house student on-campus involvement. NSSE is an online survey that students sent a link to complete and is conducted by Indiana University. Permission to use data gathered from the 2012-2013 survey was retrieved from the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana

University. This agreement to use the data can be found in Appendix A.

The three questions selected and used from the 2012-2013 questionnaire provided information regarding student engagement on campus. Two of the questions chosen asked students to identify the number of hours they participated in a number of activities in an average week. The two activities chosen were those thought to best provide information regarding on-campus engagement. These activities were as follows: doing community service or volunteer work, and participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.). The third question asked students to choose the response that best reflected their attendance of an art exhibit, play or other arts performance (dance, music, etc.). Students could respond with the following: never, sometimes, often, or very often. In all the questions asked, students also had the option to not respond to the question.

For each question, responses were broken down based on whether a student resided in a springboard or traditional house during their first year at UNI. Numbers were calculated based on responses and percentages were determined for each response. Chi-square tests of independence were run to determine if the frequencies for each answer were statistically significant between participants who resided in the two types of houses.

Survey Protocol

The third component of this study focused on the role that the Resident Assistants (RAs) of Springboard houses played in engaging the students that lived there. This

survey was distributed to better understand the resident engagement in programming and RA interactions within the hall. The first question asked about attendance at programs put on by the house RA that focused on areas that are important to student success and the freshmen experience. These areas included study skills, getting to know professors, test taking, time management, socializing, getting to know campus and resources available, and getting involved. The second question in this portion asked students about the topics they have discussed with their RA. RAs were all asked to read and agree to a consent form, found in Appendix B, before completing the survey.

This survey, found in Appendix C, was sent out via email to 334 students, all residing in a springboard house during their entire first year at UNI. Of the 334 students the email survey was sent to, 41 students responded, resulting in a 12.28% response rate. No incentives were provided to participants and participants were sent the survey link a total of three times in a two week period.

These questions further identified the resources and information available to students residing in the Springboard houses in the residence halls throughout their freshmen year on campus. The responses of this portion of the survey were analyzed to determine common responses and themes to gain an understanding of the role that programming and resident assistant interaction plays within the first-year experience for springboard house students.

Interview Protocol

The final component of the study was completed through conducting six open-ended interviews with RAs who have been in the position for at least two years. This

qualitative part of the study was completed in order to learn more about the RA experience within Springboard house communities. At least one of those years, the student must have been an RA in a springboard community to qualify to participate in the study. It is important that the RAs interviewed had experience in both a springboard community and a traditional community as they were then able to draw on their experiences in both environments and provide comparative answers. This way, the students were not only able to provide information regarding Springboard house residents and the Springboard community, but also provide some comparisons of what they noticed as trends in working with the two different communities.

Prior to participating in the interview, participants were first given a consent form to review, which can be found in Appendix D. The interviews held were semi-structured. An outline of questions was determined based on the learning outcomes of Springboard house communities. These questions can be found in Appendix E. The interviews were based on those outcomes while also allowing for flexibility within the conversation. Within the questions, the RAs were asked to think about their experiences in both communities and provide some comparison within answers. In addition, at the end of the interview, the RAs were asked if there was anything else they wanted to add about their experiences in a Springboard house. RAs were also asked if there were any areas they wished they had further training on that would help them to be more successful as a Springboard house RA. Based on the interview responses, themes were then determined by looking for common stories, examples and terms used to describe the community experience.

A total of seven open-ended questions were asked to gather information and determine themes. The questions chosen were based off the learning outcomes of the living learning communities outlined in the introduction. These questions provide insight to the experience that Springboard house communities are having within the living community. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and responses were transcribed. These questions and responses provided insight and guidance to the questions above that outlined the purpose of the study.

Design

This study was designed in a way that would provide data collection methods in a variety of ways, from quantitative data, to self-reported survey information, to open-ended interview questions. By utilizing this mixed methods design, the research topic was analyzed from a variety of perspectives. The purpose of this study structure was to combine quantitative data from GPA and recontracting rates with self-reported responses of students, as well as collective opinions of resident assistants based on the experiences they had had in their communities. Based on the data collected, several conclusions were able to be drawn that provide useful insights into the Springboard house community.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

GPA and Recontracting Results

Based on the data provided by the Registrar's office at UNI regarding GPA, results were as predicted. Students who resided in a springboard house during their entire first year at UNI had an aggregate GPA of 3.07. Similarly, students who chose to reside in a traditional house at UNI for the entire year earned an aggregate GPA of 2.97. Based on these two aggregate GPA results, there is a 0.10 difference in GPA between the two populations. This data proved to be statistically significant, $t(1693.5) = -1.801$, $p = .036$. Students with a B average in their courses would have a GPA of 3.00, meaning that students who participated in a springboard house during their entire first year at UNI earned grades that on average, were higher than a B in each class. Of the students who participated in traditional houses during their first year at UNI, on average, they earned lower than or equal to a B in each class.

Recontracting results also followed the hypothesis that students who resided in a springboard house during their entire first year at UNI were more likely to live on campus for a second year and choose to recontract. During the 2012-2013 school year, there were a total of 339 students who chose to reside in a springboard house during the entire year. This includes students who may have moved from one springboard house to another springboard house, which accounted for six students within the population.

Of the 339 springboard house participants who lived in the residence halls, 200 students chose to recontract to another residence hall by the Department of Residence

recontracting deadline. This is a 59% return rate for these students. Of the students who chose to return to the residence halls, 15 chose to recontract to Bender Hall, 31 chose to recontract to Campbell Hall, 24 chose to recontract to Hagemann Hall, two chose to recontract to Lawther Hall, 50 chose to recontract to Noehren Hall, three chose to recontract to Rider Hall, 16 chose to move to ROTH Complex, and seven students chose to move to Shull Hall. The halls listed with the lowest recontracting numbers by Springboard house participants were halls that did not have a springboard house during the 2012-2013 school year. Additionally, when reviewing which halls students chose to recontract to, an average of 58.2% of springboard house students who chose to recontract to live on campus also chose to return to their same residence hall for the following school year.

When comparing the above data to the percentage results of student who lived in a traditional house during the 2012-2013 school year, the results are much lower. There were 1,188 first-year students who lived in traditional houses at UNI during their entire first year on campus. Of those students, 555 chose to recontract to a residence hall for the 2013-2014 school year. This is a 46.72% rate for those students who chose to recontract. Of the students who chose to recontract for the 2013-2014 school year, this means that over half of these students chose to either move off campus or not return to the university. Overall, in comparing the springboard house student recontracting rates to the traditional house student recontracting rates, 12.28% less students chose to recontract out of the traditional house student population. This data is statistically significant (p = 0.04). The Z-score is -3.9888 and the p-value is 6E-05. The recontracting rate of

springboard house students is statistically higher than that of traditional house students.

This means that of the 1188 traditional house students, if the percentage recontracting rate matched the springboard house rate, 146 students who chose to move off campus for the 2013-2014 school year would have instead decided to return to campus and recontract to a residential living space.

National Survey of Student Engagement Results

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is conducted by many colleges and universities across the country on an annual basis. Out of the students the survey was sent to at UNI, 301 students resided in a traditional house during their entire freshmen year. In addition, 69 students resided in a springboard house during their freshmen year on campus. As stated in the methodology, three questions from the survey were analyzed in this project to determine student engagement and involvement at UNI.

Students were asked to respond with the hours per week that they participated in two activities. One of the activities was doing community service work. Of the traditional house students, 153 (50.83%) responded that they did this 0 hours per week, 99 respondents (32.89%) said that they did this activity 1 to 5 hours each week, eight (2.66%) responded with 6 to 10 hours per week, four (1.33%) responded with 11 to 15 hours per week, none of the students said they did this activity 16 to 20 hours per week, and one student (0.33%) responded with 21 to 25 hours per week. The overall average response was 0 hours per week. Additionally there were no responses for 26 to 30 hours per week as well as more than 30 hours per week. Also, 36 (11.96%) students chose not to respond to this question.

Of the 69 springboard house students, only seven (10.14%) chose not to respond to this question. Twenty-eight students (40.58%) responded that they participated in this activity 0 hours per week, 29 (42.03%) responded with 1 to 5 hours per week, no students said they participated in this activity 6 to 10 hours per week, three (4.35%) participated 11 to 15 hours per week, two (2.90%) responded with 16 to 20 hours a week and no students responded to participating 21 to 25 hours, 26 to 30 hours, and more than 30 hours. The average overall response from Springboard house students was 1 to 5 hours per week. Responses to this question can be seen in Figure 1. There was a significant difference between Springboard house and traditional house students in their indication of participation in community service and volunteer work, $\chi^2(5) = 16.067$, $p = .007$. As seen in Figure 1, Springboard house students participated in community service more than the traditional house students.

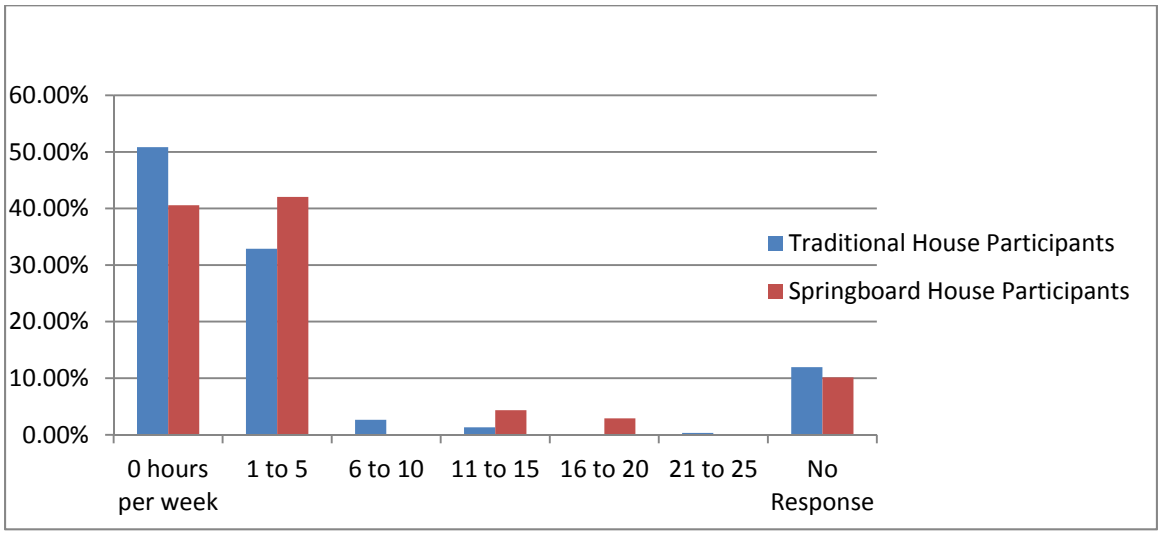

Figure 1. Hours per Week: Doing Community Service or Volunteer Work

The second question analyzed was related to the hours per week that students spend participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.). Traditional house students respondents gave the following answers: 45 (14.95%) responded with 0 hours per week, 126 (41.27%) responded with 1 to 5 hours per week, 55 (18.27%) responded with 6 to 10 hours per week, 23 (7.64%) said the participated 11 to 15 hours per week, two (0.66%) responded with 21 to 25 hours per week, six (1.99%) responded with 26 to 30 hours per week, and two students (0.66%) said they participated in this activity more than 30 hours per week. The average response was 1 to 5 hours per week. Additionally, 35 students (11.63%) chose not to respond to this question.

Of the 69 springboard house students who took the NSSE survey, nine (13.04%) responded that they participated in this activity 0 hours per week, 31 (44.93%) responded with 1 to 5 hours per week, 16 students (23.19%) said they participated 6 to 10 hours each week, four students (5.80%) responded with 11 to 15 hours per week, three (4.35%) said they participated 16 to 20 hours per week, and zero students responded that they participated 21 to 25 hours per week, 26 to 30 hours per week, or more than 30 hours per week. The average response was 1 to 5 hours per week. In addition, six students (8.70%) chose not to respond to this question on the survey. Results of this question can be seen in Figure 2. There was no significant difference between Springboard house and traditional house students on co-curricular experiences, with both groups answering similarly about participation, $\chi^2(7) = 4.233$, $p = .753$.

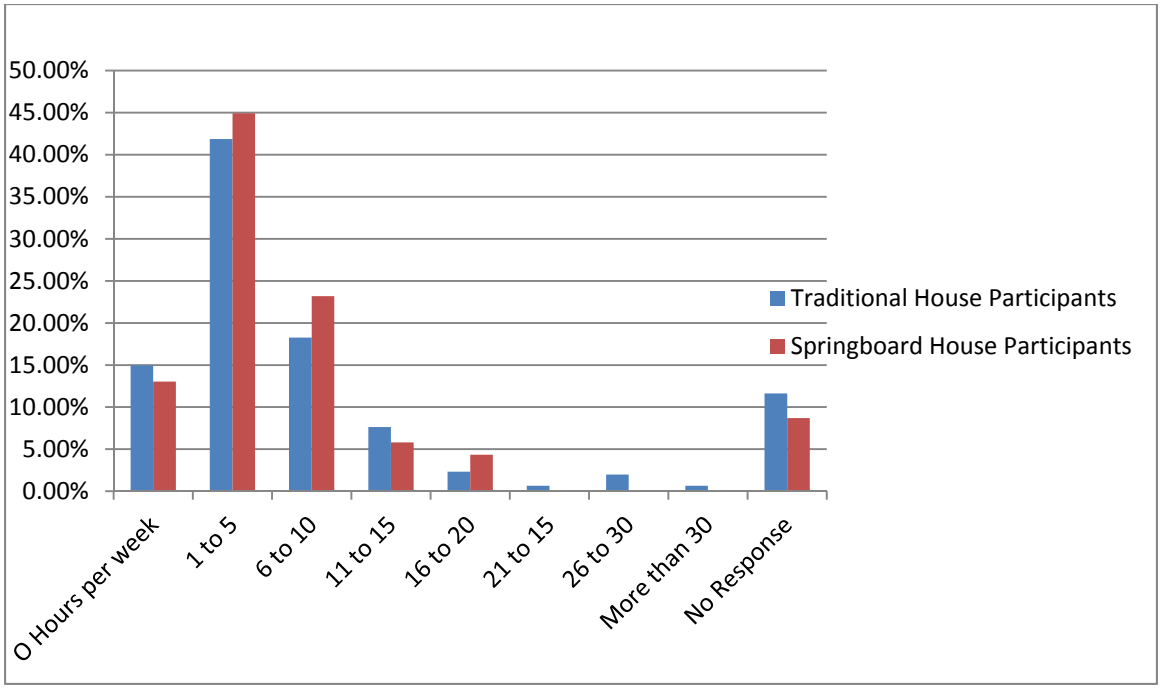

Figure 2. Hours per Week: Participating in Co-curricular Activities

The final question that was analyzed for this study asked students how often they attended an art exhibit, play or other arts performance (dance, music, etc.). The options that students could select in response to this question were: never, sometimes, often, or very often. Of the traditional house students who participated in this survey, 22 students (7.30%) responded with never, 154 students (51.16%) responded with sometimes, 82 students (27.24%) responded with often, and 41 students (13.62%) responded with very often. The average response of the traditional house students was sometimes. Two students (0.66%) chose not to respond to this question.

Of the 69 springboard house students who took the NSSE survey, all chose to respond to this question. The responses were as follows: six students (8.70%) responded with never, 24 students (34.78%) responded with sometimes, 26 students (37.68%) responded with often, and 13 (18.84%) students responded with very often. The average response of Springboard house students was often. Responses to this question can be seen further in Figure 3. Although the Springboard house participants indicated more overall attendance than traditional house participants, the difference was not significant, $\chi^2(3) = 6.387$, $p = .094$.

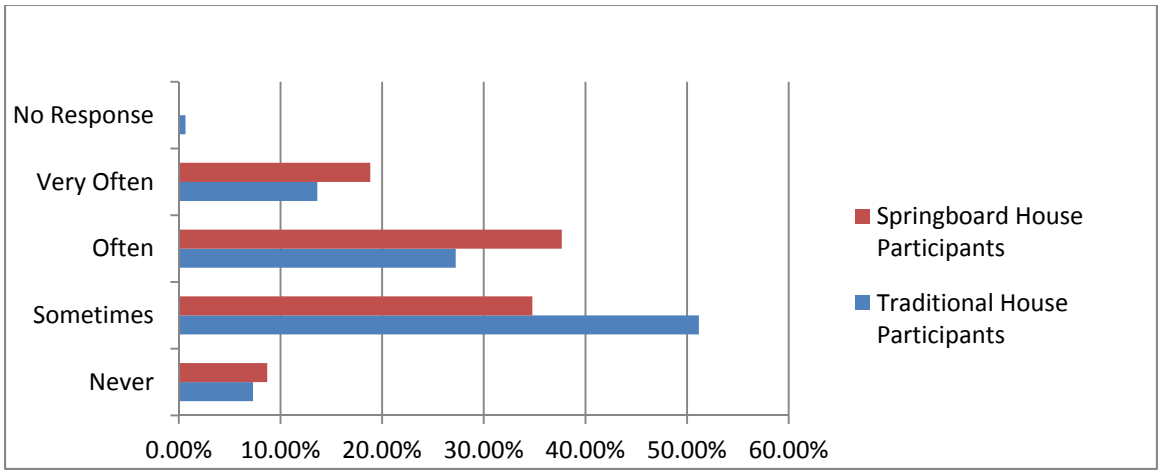

Figure 3. Attended an Art Exhibit, Play or Other Arts Performance

Overall, this data set provides good insight into students' engagement and the difference in levels of engagement between the first-year students residing in springboard houses and first-year students residing in traditional houses at UNI. While two questions

asked were not statistically significant, the data regarding the number of hours students participate in community service or volunteer work was statistically significant. This data supports the idea that the community service and engagement fostered within the Springboard houses results in more hours contributed to volunteer work. This also supports the idea of service learning taking place in these communities.

Survey Results

While campus involvement and participation in activities is a significant factor of student engagement, an important aspect of the experience that springboard house students have within their living community is the programming put on by their RA. In addition, the RA role allows for there to be someone that springboard house residents can go to with questions or if they need support throughout their first-year experience. This component of the study asked questions regarding the student's involvement within their residence hall house. Students were asked to respond with the amount of times they attend programs focused on the following areas: study skills, getting to know your professor, test taking, time management, socializing, getting to know campus and resources available, and getting involved.

For each of these topics, the majority of responders stated that they had attended a program focused on that specific area "0" times. When asked about attending a program focused on getting involved, 26.8% of students said they attend a program focused in this area once, while 17.1% attended 2 times, 4.9% attended 3 times, and 12.2% attended five or more times. Based on these results, 61% of respondents attended a program in this area at least once, making the programs focused on getting involved as the highest

attended program of the topics listed. The second highest was programs focused on socializing, closely followed by getting to know campus resources. Both programs had 51.2% of respondents attend a program in the area at least once. Programs focused on socializing, while having the same number of participants at least once, had a higher number of participants attend a program in this area multiple times with 17.1% attending one time, 14.6% attending three times, 2.4% attending four programs, and 17.1% attending a program focused on socializing five or more times. This data can be seen in Figure 4.

As seen in the previous results regarding the on-campus engagement and involvement of students, of the springboard house participants over half the survey participants attended a program focused on getting to know campus and resources at least one time with 24.4% attending a program in this area one time, 14.6% attending two programs, 7.3% attending a program in this area three times, and 4.9% of participants attending a program focused on getting to know campus and resources five or more times.

The least attended program focus was getting to know your professor with a total attendance of 22% of students participating in a program at least once. In addition, test taking programs were also lower attended programs with only 26.8% of students attending. The two programs with the middle level attendance were programs focused on time management and study skills. In both program areas, students either chose not to attend these programs or only attended a program in this area one or two times. Complete graphs of these results can be viewed in Figure 4.

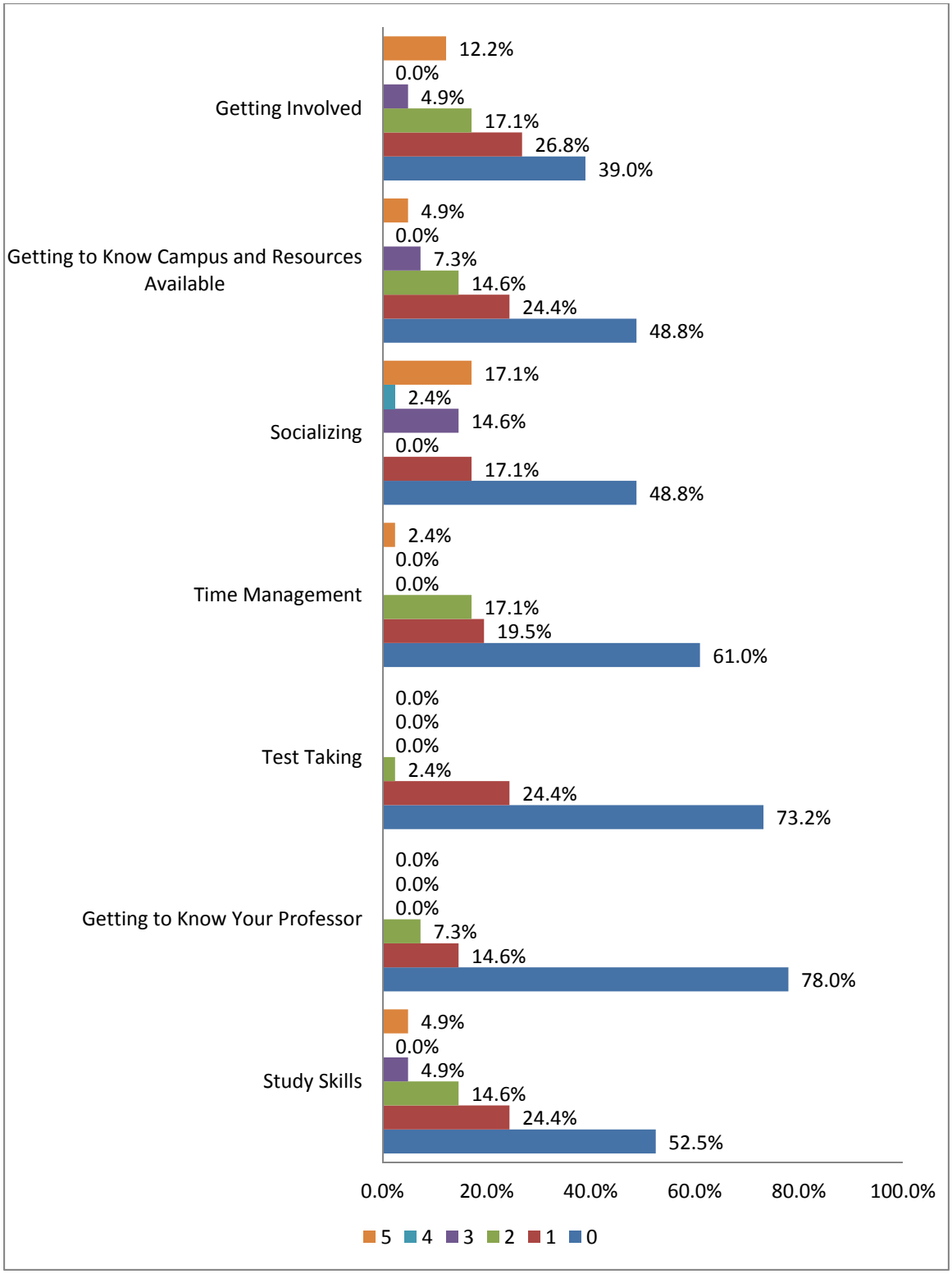

Figure 4. Number of Times in Attendance at House Programs

The final two questions of the survey asked about the number of times students approached their RA to discuss one of the following topics: stress/anxiety, roommate conflicts, meeting people/friends, time management, registering for classes, getting involved, exam preparation, and study skills. Thirty-six out of the 41 participants responded that they had talked to their RA about at least one topic at least one time. Nine students out of the 41 respondents said that they had gone to their RA to talk about time management techniques, which were the fewest responses for a topic. The highest topics of conversation with the RAs in springboard community were getting involved and registering for classes, with 23 students going to their RA for each topic, followed by 18 conversations happening regarding meeting people and making friends, and stress and anxiety, then roommate conflicts with 16 conversations, and then study skills with 12 students approaching their RA for that topic, then exam preparation with ten conversations. Results from this question can be seen in Figure 5.

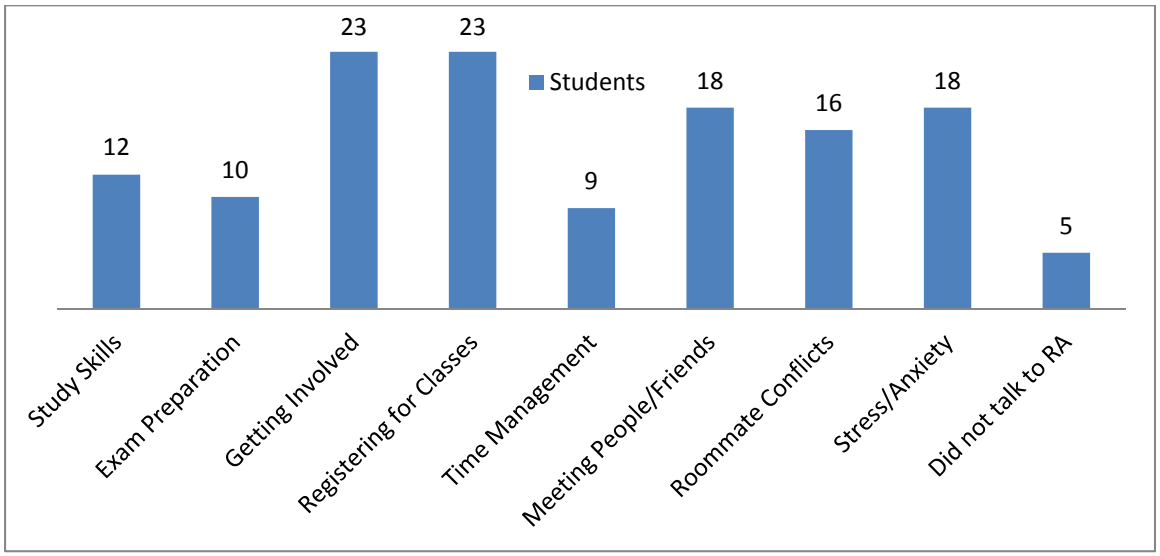

Figure 5. Participant and RA Interactions

Interview Findings

Based on the interview responses, themes were determined by looking for common stories, examples and terms used to describe the community experience. There were six themes in total that best capture trends in responses. These themes include: community experiences, struggles, programming, the resident assistant role and general observations.

Community

Within the topic of community development, it seemed that all RAs placed high importance on the initial interactions that they had with their residents. These connections then helped them to foster relationships amongst their students. Two of the RAs interviewed brought up the "drop and drag" method, stating that they talked with a resident and then introduced that student to another student who had similar interests. This was not a term covered in the RA training, but more a description that seemed common knowledge to the RAs. This was done right away, within the first few days of move-in.

Each RA is required to have a house meeting with all of the students. In the Springboard houses, the RAs stated that they were much more detailed in the information they provided to the Springboard house students. One of the RAs interviewed stated that he, "…was more specific with the information he provided in the Springboard house meetings." He said that he, "…knew it was important to let them know all the policies and information, but also help them to feel comfortable in the community." In traditional

houses, many of the returning students already know much of the information provided during the meetings, which the RAs realize and cater to.

One of the RAs interviewed spoke specifically about the ice-breakers she did during the house meetings. She said that "students opened up much more during the meeting after the ice-breaker. It was a great way to help the students to relax and get to know one another." During the first few weeks of classes, all RAs stated that they spent most of their time having intentional interactions with residents and getting to know them on an individual basis. They took advantage of on-campus programs and events that were taking place, especially welcome week activities where they could introduce residents to campus in a comfortable way.

Overall, it seemed that the RAs understood the importance of building community among their residents. They spoke about how they spent a lot of time in the beginning of the semester, especially the first few weeks, having one-on-one interactions with all their residents. It's evident that the RAs understand the importance of these connections, especially for freshmen communities. This was different from the experiences in traditional houses where they focused on building community, but more with the intention of creating a pleasant environment instead of building new friendships. One of the RAs stated that in her traditional house, she, "recognized soon after her residents moved in, that they already had friends living around and weren't as much in need meeting new people as her traditional house residents."

Struggles

While it is evident that the RAs are placing a high emphasis on building community among their residents, when asked about the struggles that the residents are facing, they were not limited in their answers. The RAs were asked about the common struggles residents were facing as well as the most common issue brought to their attention by their residents. Each RA had a different response to the most common issue brought to their attention, which makes sense as they are all in different communities. However, the common struggles fit along common themes of homesickness, academic concerns, anxiety, roommate issues, and then basic adjustment issues that spun off a wide variety of topics including academic performance, anxiety and stress, as well as the initial transition to college.

Homesickness. A commonality determined was that all RAs reported their Springboard house residents seemed comfortable coming to them with concerns and issues, which many stated was different from the experience they had in the traditional communities. One RA stated that she, "…noticed residents had a hard time adjusting to college at first. Many of them didn't seem comfortable getting to know one another." She continued on to discuss the importance of her role in reaching out to these students.

Along with homesickness, one of the RAs brought up the challenges of the academic transition for first year students. "I noticed that my residents struggled with classes at first and didn't seem to know how to study the material," said one RA. Because of this, he spoke about some of the conversations he had focusing on study tips, how to take notes in a lecture hall, and how to get to know and build connections with

their residents. Homesickness and academic concerns seem to be a common and growing theme with freshmen students across the country. However, some of the other concerns brought up are not as apparent in common first-year experience literature discussed.

Anxiety and communication. Anxiety was a common theme in all RA responses, though seemingly derived from various sources. A few of the RAs commented on this as stemming from the lack of communication that the students are used to because of the importance of social media in their lives.

Anxiety was caused because of miscommunications that happened because of social media as well as lack of interpersonal communication skills. Students experienced anxiety as they struggled to work through communication differences. A few of the female RAs interviewed talked about the online bullying within the community, including tweets and Facebook posts. Some of the posts included roommates fighting or posting concerns, tweeting negative comments about neighbors or others in the hall, and using Facebook or Twitter as way to vent or process without understanding the possible repercussions. "It seems like the girls don't know how to communicate in person," said one of the female RAs. This online communication has a negative impact on the community, especially for those bullied. "Some of the students then start to lose their confidence and motivation to succeed in college," said another RA.

In addition to the communication struggles because of online resources, another RA noticed similar communication difficulties that he assumed "was caused by an ignorance of social justice issues." He said that, "many students come from small towns and have not been exposed to diverse populations." This RA also commented that many

of his students experience anxiety because of the pressure of meeting and forming a relationship with a diverse range of peoples within the community. In addition, students that identify with a minority population on campus also feel anxiety about being accepted on campus and within their community. This RA also spoke about the difficulties of having conversations with the residents when they have no knowledge and experience in reacting to and associating with diverse populations.

The final struggle that merits further discussion are the academic concerns that first-year students experience upon entering college. Many of the RAs spoke about the difficulties of becoming accustomed to the college environment with having less time in class and more homework and assignments to complete between classes. Two RAs brought up that they noticed their male students struggling more with academics and that a higher number of male students showed up as "red" on the MAP-Works survey, a tool utilized to identify students at-risk of leaving the institution. In addition, one of the RAs commented that he noticed that academic concerns, as well as homesickness, were "seen as feminine problems" that his male residents did not want to talk about or see as a problem.

This brings up the most common that students faced, which includes not seeing their problems as problems. Students today were brought up with a sense of security where they can be self-sustaining and not reach out for help. Many of the RAs stated that some of their residents didn't know how to solve their own problems and find a way to move forward. "Some of the students lack the maturity to civilly…or respectfully….find

a solution," said one of the RAs. As the RAs help their students to develop and grow as individuals, it is important for them to reach help them to develop as individuals.

Programming

In an effort to combat some of the struggles their residents experience, the RAs put on a variety of programs for residents to help them to be successful in college. Many RAs said that, while this wasn't necessarily the part of the position they spent the most time on, it was "easier to program specifically for freshmen students." One RA talked about the eagerness of the Springboard house residents saying that, "when [he] programmed for freshmen, many of them came and stayed for the entire program. In a traditional house the residents would either come and go, or not come at all."

"Crafts and social programs are always highly attended," said one of the female house RAs. She said that she usually did programs including these areas, but then also incorporated educational components so that her residents were also learning something during the program. These topics included academics, time management and balance programs, and provided the experiences in a low-risk way that helped the students to feel comfortable.

"Sex in the dark is always a popular program," said one of the male RAs. This was a common theme across the board within interviews as many RAs talked about how discussing the topic of sex and relationships was something new to the freshmen students. "talking about sex is something they weren't able to do in high school," said one of the RAs. "Not only is it new and exciting for the freshmen; it's also really important to talk about because relationships sometimes become more serious in college."

An important comparison between springboard and traditional houses is the frequency in program attendance by Springboard house students. One RA said that "all her residents have come to at least one program". This is partially because of the community aspect of Springboard houses. "No one wants to go to a program alone" said one of the RAs. In Springboard houses, the community among residents is built early on. Because of this, when a program is held in the community, the residents that attend already know someone else who is there. In tradition house communities, it seemed there wasn't as much of a pressure to know someone there but more that students would only attend if there group of friends was going, not just one other. One of the RAs said that "…in a traditional community, attendance at programs is unpredictable. If the program is something that friends are interested in, the whole group will come, but the same is true if they are not interested. Then attendance is much lower."

Some programs, however, are not attended by many residents. These programs include academic focused programs, where the RA said that those he knew needed the information did not attend. In addition, some students come into college thinking they are "too cool for school" and go out frequently, said one of the male RAs. Because of this, they don't attend many programs in the community, especially alcohol awareness programs. Another RA said that her least attended programs are those that focus on personal development. She said that in a traditional house, these programs were attended more frequently because the upper-class students were looking towards their personal and professional future. Many freshmen aren't thinking this far ahead and because of this, don't feel the need to attend programs focused on learning more about themselves.

Resident Assistant Role

Where exactly does the RA come in with all of this? An RA in a springboard community wears many hats. The RAs within a Springboard house have the same job description as those in traditional houses. But according to the RAs interviewed, their job far exceeds those expectations through time spent helping with student concerns, having intentional conversations with students, and being a good listener and support when student issues arose. When comparing their job in the Springboard houses to the experiences had in traditional houses, all RAs stated that the Springboard house job is more difficult. One RA stated that, "…it is the time commitment and meeting the needs of the residents that takes up so much time." He further said that, "in his Springboard house community, the students go through ups and downs and you are there the whole time to be a constant for them." That being said, they all said that they wouldn't give it up and enjoy the position more in the Springboard house.

The RAs interviewed stated that intentional interactions were the most important aspect of the job in a Springboard house. This was how they initially build connections with their residents and then continued to foster those connections so that their residents felt comfortable coming to them with problems. Because of this, the students felt comfortable coming to the RAs with personal struggles and allowed for the connection to be fostered. These intentional interactions fostered among residents also allowed the RAs to provide the best services and resources to their residents as they could. One of the RAs interviewed said that already this year she had referred approximately 25% of

her residents to the counseling center for various reasons. It is because of her relationship with her residents that she was able to provide resources to her residents.

In addition to this, many of the topics listed above that residents struggle with make up a large part of the RA focus. RAs pay attention to academic concerns, homesickness, and anxiety/stress issues, in addition to other topics that may come up along the way, including multicultural competence. As discussed above, students are coming into the university scene with little or no diverse experiences, and the RA then takes on the role of educator as well. One RA specifically focused on this area, stating that his residents often are heard saying "well, my black friend…" instead of just saying "my friend." Others, he said, are heard using the word "fag" as a greeting. The RA went on to say that it is interesting to "watch them maneuver, and then re-maneuver their conversations after being called out [or questioned] on their language."

This brings us to the final theme that was consistent through the interviews with the RAs. The RAs interviewed all had one specific thing in common; they all said that they had struggled as a freshman, whether it was homesickness or coping with academics, or other topics. These struggles inspired them to help and care for the freshmen on their floor as their RA cared for them. One RA said it best when he spoke about the struggles that they face. He said that, while it is sometimes hard to deal with the struggles that his students were going through, "the most rewarding part of the job is watching them grow and succeed."

While students in traditional houses had some of the similar struggles to those in a Springboard house, residents in traditional houses do not require quite as much time and

attention as Springboard houses. Traditional house residents, while not all upper-class students, tend to be more accepting of differences and diversity. This is an interesting thing to note as some traditional houses do have a majority of freshmen students.

With the Springboard house students, the RA must provide lots of the guidance for residents, while in traditional houses, the students seemed more firm in their interests and focus for college. One RA said that, while they still made sure the students were aware of resources and connections on campus, they "didn't have to pay as close of attention as many students were returners and knew the resources." For the freshmen students in non-springboard houses, they looked up to the upperclassmen as role models and did not turn to the RA as often.

General Observations

While it appears that the students interviewed had a great variety of experiences, both positive and negative, it was clear through the interviews that all RAs loved the experiences they had. Based on these findings, the RA role, as expected, looks a little different in Springboard houses, with a large emphasis on intentional one-on-one interactions, and a specific focus on educating the residents and helping them to navigate the struggles faced during the first year of college. No house is exactly the same in need or experience, but it is clear that the main issues that the Springboard house residents face are along the same lines of academic concerns, coping with stress or anxiety, and finding a peer group during the first semester of campus. RAs are well equipped for the position through their training, but realized very quickly that, in comparing the experiences of a traditional house and a Springboard house, the requirements of the RA are much more

evident in helping the first-year students to cope and adjust to the college experience. In traditional houses, while many first-year students were still present, they adjusted much more quickly because they wanted to fit in with the upperclassmen in the house. Because of this, there was less dependency on the RA for those communities.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the data gathered for this study provided opportunity for analysis and review of the effects discovered. This chapter reviews the results and discusses what is learned by analyzing the data. Within this chapter, GPA, recontracting rates, on-campus involvement, survey results, and interview response data is further reviewed and explored.

GPA and Recontracting Analysis

The data gathered for this research topic provided valuable information regarding the overall effects of residing in a Springboard house during one's freshmen year at UNI. Students who selected to participate in the Springboard houses on campus during their entire first year at UNI earned higher cumulative GPAs and opted to live on campus more frequently than those students that chose to live in a traditional house at UNI. Based on this information, something is happening within the Springboard house communities that is positively impacting the students that reside there.

The students are achieving significantly higher scores academically leading to a cumulative GPA that is 0.10 points higher than the students who opted not to participate in the Springboard house. This could be due to many reasons, from feeling more support from the RA, to gaining a better understanding of study skills and learning how to study for college courses to feeling support from peers who are going through the same situations in similar classes.

In addition to this, Springboard house students are recontracting to return to the

residence halls at a much higher rate than those not residing in a Springboard house. Of the Springboard house students, 59% of the students chose to live on campus for a second year, while only 46.72% of students residing in a traditional house came to that decision. While it is not known if those not returning to the residence halls are returning to the university, it is important to realize that the 12.26% difference is impacting on-campus resident numbers and has a large impact. This difference, as determined in the two proportion z-test is statistically significant. Within both groups, of the students who chose to recontract, over 50% in each group opted to return to their same hall as opposed to other halls on campus.

It is important that many students chose to recontract not only to one of the residence halls at UNI, but additionally at least 50% of those recontracting to each building chose to return to that same building for a second year. This makes sense as students are comfortable with that living environment from having lived there for a year already, but especially for students choosing to return to their same hall, they are still required to choose a different room, as their first-year room would be set aside for a new first-year student for the following year.

In addition, second-year students on campus have two additional residence halls open to them that require sophomore status or higher for residency. These halls include Shull Hall and ROTH Hall. Both halls provide an atmosphere that is more private for students, as Shull offers single room spaces while ROTH offers apartment style suites for students. Out of all the springboard house students who recontracted for their second year, 11.5% chose to move to Shull or ROTH while only 8.7% of traditional students

chose to move to Shull or ROTH for their second year. This is interesting as both populations have a significant number of students who choose to reside in the "upperclassmen" facility. In future research, it would be beneficial to examine the recontracting rates of students who chose to move to Shull or ROTH for their sophomore year to determine if, having experienced an upper-class facility their sophomore year, if they would chose to reside there the following years as they continue to study at UNI.

Either way, it is evident that students residing in a Springboard house during their first year had a positive experience to some degree that encouraged them to want to have a similar residential living experience for their second year at the university. This could be explained through the idea that students participating in Springboard houses form a stronger connection to both the on-campus residence population as well as UNI. Because of this connection, students could be more interested in the history, traditions and events taking place on campus. Therefore, Springboard house students may have chosen to live on campus during their second year to continue to engage in campus culture and experience events that will become part of the campus history.

As stated in the Literature Review, students who live on campus while in college often have a more positive experience and tend to become more involved and earn better grades. While we have already discussed the GPA difference, a difference among involvement and overall on-campus experiences was also seen by students residing in Springboard houses as compared to freshmen students residing on campus.

On-campus Involvement

As a part of the research survey, students were asked to respond to three questions

taken directly from NSSE survey looking specifically at involvement on campus and participation in campus activities. The three questions chosen highlight the student engagement in both the campus and community, demonstrating how students can give back to their campus as well as how they can get involved through attendance at events.

The first question asked students how many hours they spend per week doing community service or volunteer work. In the traditional house student responses, over 50% of the participants said they did this activity 0 hours per week. This is a 10% higher response than the springboard house participants. Overall, the students participating in the springboard house were more active with their volunteer work than the traditional house students. Giving back to the community and volunteering on campus is very important to first-year students' ability to acclimate to the campus culture and feel a part of the community. While the responses show that the springboard house students who participated in community service or volunteer work did so at a higher rate than traditional house students, it is important to recognize the high level of involvement in these activities from both groups. When looking at the responses from the survey, and taking away those who chose not to respond to this question, almost 38% of traditional students and 49% of springboard house students chose to volunteer at least 1 hour per week. This is a significant difference between the Springboard and tradition house students that choose to spend their time volunteering either on campus or within the community, with more Springboard students indicating they participated in community service and volunteer work more than traditional house students.

The second question students were asked was regarding the hours per week that

students participate in co-curricular activities. The responses to this question were fairly similar, with the springboard house students being more involved by just 1.91%, which was not statistically significant. While there were again a number of students who chose not to respond to this question, the responses in general show that students who live in either a traditional house or springboard house are inclined to participate in an activity on campus at least one hour per week. Additionally, although not a statistically significant difference, traditional house students chose to participate in co-curricular activities more hours per week than springboard house students, with 10 traditional house students (3.01%) participating in co-curricular activities 21 hours or more each week vs. zero springboard house students.

While these responses again demonstrate that students at UNI are involved in activities, for first-year students, it seems that some students may be over-committing themselves to activities without recognizing the balance that is necessary to be successful both in their involvement on campus as well as in their academic achievement. As noted above, students who chose to participate in a springboard house during their first year had a higher GPA, which could because of their involvement on campus was balanced with their academic time commitments. While the springboard house students did not have the highest involvement in hours per week, there were a greater percentage of springboard house students participating in these activities than of the traditional house respondents. This involvement level could also be attributed to the springboard community RAs who encourage their residents to get involved, while also providing academic and time management focused programs to encourage and teach the balancing

skills necessary for success.

The final question that provided insight into the on-campus involvement and engagement of students on campus asked participants if they had attended an art exhibit, play or other arts performance. This question differed from the above two in that the response options were based on hours where the students have definite options while this question had response options of: never, sometimes, often, or very often. This question had only 1.40% difference in responses for those students who said they never attended an event like this. However, the three following options revealed that springboard house residents attended artistic events at a higher rate. With traditional house resident responses, the highest percentage of responses fell within the "sometimes" category while they highest percentage of responses of the springboard house participants responded that they attended "often". In the "very often" category, 13.62% of traditional house residents responded with this answer, and 18.84% of springboard house residents did as well. While not statistically significant, this is over a 5% difference of involvement.

This difference in attendance showed that students who participated in a springboard house seemed to be more interested in attending arts events and doing so more frequently than students in traditional houses. Arts exhibits, plays or performances not only provide an enjoyable experience but are also educational. These events educate about culture, history, and stylistic performance techniques. As the students who attended arts performances at a more frequent rate tended to reside in springboard communities during their first year at UNI, this also follows that they were receiving a more cultural and diverse educational experience.

Overall, students who participated in a springboard house during their freshmen year at UNI tended to be more engaged on campus and within the community. While students who live in traditional houses are also engaged in the community, it is important to recognize that springboard house students do so at a more frequent rate. RAs within the springboard house communities, during their first few weeks living in the community, teach their residents about the campus activities available to students through programming and taking them to events. By showing the first-year students the variety of activities available on campus, students see the types of activities and opportunities available to them and can then choose which they would like to participate in.

Survey Responses

The first section of the survey asked students about the attendance at Springboard house programs that took place in their community throughout the 2012-2013 school year. Out of 41 responses, it seems that in most categories, approximately 50% of participants attended a program in the specified areas at least one time. The topics chosen reflect the important areas that first-year students are either interested in or struggle with during their freshmen year on campus.

Two of the highest attended programs of those asked about were focused on getting involved and getting to know campus resources. Twenty-five students responded that they attended a program in this focus, which correlates well to the NSSE questions previously discussed. The fact that students are attending programs focused on involvement explains why the springboard house students area engaged in both the campus and community at a higher rate than those who live in a traditional house.

The programs asked about on the survey include those focused on study skills, getting to know your professor, test taking, time management, socializing, getting to know campus and resources, and getting involved. These programs are all important topics to educate first-year students on so that they can be most successful in college. While the socializing topics and programs are important and often times enjoyable, these are activities that often can take place without the RA as well. Socializing often happens naturally with students, and is an important aspect of residential living, but is a good idea for RAs to plan programs as it helps to build community with the residents and allows them to make connections within the house. These connections often provide the opportunity for students to find commonalities between one another, which then allow them to participate in additional activities both inside and outside the residence halls.

Compared to attendance at other events, programs focused on getting to know their professor was least highly attended by the springboard participants. This could be for a few likely reasons. First-year students sometimes do not understand the importance of getting to know their professors on campus. Especially in large lecture type classes, it may seem daunting for students to approach their professor and introduce themselves. In addition, these students often are enrolled in mostly liberal arts courses and have not started their major courses that apply toward their degree. Because of this, first-year students may not understand they should make an effort to get to know all professors and not only major course faculty. Throughout college, students have the opportunity to change their major and many choose to do so at least once throughout their college career. Because of this, the importance of getting to faculty is even more significant for

first-year students.

Programs regarding time management and test taking were attended at least once by less than half the participants. Keeping this in mind, it is important to note that students are not taking advantage of opportunities to strengthen their academic skillset which could help them succeed in their classes. While the above GPA data for the springboard population shows that students in springboard houses earn a higher GPA on average, this could continue to increase if more students take advantage of academic focused programming that RAs put on.

However, while test taking and time management had lower attendance, almost half the participants in the survey attended at least one program focused on study skills. This data presents the idea that the first-year students are recognizing that classes in college are structured differently than in high school. Students are only in class a few days during the week and, depending on the class, may have had to learn in different ways than they had to in the past. Lots of reading is also required outside of class which takes a different level of academic focus than previously necessary for most students. Because of these differences among others, first-year students are taking advantages of the opportunity to improve their study skills.

In addition to the opportunity to attend programs, the RAs within each community play an integral role in the success of their students. The data collected in the survey showed that out of the 41 students who participated in the survey, only five said that they had not gone to their RA to discuss one of the topics provided. Students also had the opportunity in this section to respond with “other” and type in the topic they went to their

RA for, to account for topics not listed. Some of the topics were similar to those that programs were focused on, but there were also additional topics that were important to first-year student success, but were not program type topics. The topics on the survey included study skills, exam preparation, getting involved, registering for classes, time management, meeting people/friends, stress/anxiety and roommate conflicts. Students had the opportunity to select all answers that applied and many chose more than one response.

The top two conversation topics were getting involved and registering for classes, which makes sense as the involvement rate for students as seen in the NSSE data collected. In addition, all the students participating in the springboard community are first-year students and therefore have never gone through registration before. Because of this, they would not have any background knowledge about registering or how to utilize the UNI online system to register and would need guidance to do so successfully.

Stress and anxiety was a topic that almost half the respondents said that they spoke to their RA about. This speaks to the importance of the springboard community in that students who live there feel comfortable enough to reach out to their RA to talk to and express their feelings which are sometimes hard to do. For anyone, it is very difficult to speak and open about mental health concerns with your own success. By feeling comfortable with the RA, the students who were in need were able to reach out to an RA for help and support.

Of the 36 participants who talked with their RA, many of them listed they had spoken with their RA about multiple topics. While the survey did not allow for students

to mark if they had talked to their RA multiple times about the same topic, based on the options provided, the students collectively approached RAs at least 129 times to discuss one of the aforementioned topics, with an average of 3.5 responses per student. This alone demonstrates not only the need for springboard communities to allow the students to feel comfortable in their community, but also the significant role that springboard house RAs play for their residents.

RA Role

Based on the information collected, it is clear that there are many benefits to living in a springboard community during one's first year of college. In looking back at the learning outcomes of Springboard houses, I believe that because of the hard work and dedication of the RAs in those communities, all the learning outcomes are being met. The RAs aid in the student's transition to college, assist in the student's creation of peer reference groups, encourage identity development (though it seems this is an area of struggle), provide a learning experience supported by staff, faculty and experiences, as well as enhancing the overall success of that students. While these learning outcomes are met in a variety of ways, I believe that, based on the stories told by the RAs as well as the efforts and experiences that they put in each day, the learning outcomes are a common focus for the students, either intentionally or not.

RAs do what they do because they truly enjoy it. It is clear that, when the RAs were asked to compare the experiences they had in both a springboard and traditional house, they felt that they were putting in more time and effort in the Springboard house. However, none seemed to feel upset or concerned by this. The job requires more because

the students require more. While not intentional, it is clear that the needs of the first-year students require the attention of the RA at a more frequent rate. While all the RAs interviewed clearly enjoy their Springboard house and the experiences that are able to have there, an important piece of the puzzle is picking an RA who will excel in that environment. As this community continues to progress in the following years, it may be important to reevaluate the RA job description and look at the option of creating a position description specific to the Springboard house communities. This new position description could include the learning outcomes as a focus for Springboard house RAs as well as a more accurate breakdown of the areas that the RAs may spend more time in, highlighting the importance of the intentional interactions as a large aspect of the position.

In the last year, UNI added three Springboard houses as living options for students. As research continues, it will be important to analyze the effects and benefits of Springboard house participation. If it is found that the benefits continue to be relevant for students, it may be valuable to add more communities as options for students in the future.

As previously stated, Springboard house RAs seem to have a more varied and situational based experience in the position as compared to RAs in traditional houses. The final question during the RA interviews asked if there was anything the RAs wished they had more training on to be successful in the Springboard house position. The responses focused on the two main areas of helping students in transition and gaining a deeper understanding of how to support students through academic concerns. Within

these two areas, there is much information that could be provided which would help RAs to better be prepared when concerns come up in their communities.

It is clear through the information collected in the interviews that RAs have a huge impact in the success of Springboard house students. It is through the time and intentionality put in every day that the RAs are able to build connections to their residents and help them to find success in their first year of college.

Limitations

There were a few limitations within the research gathered for the purpose of this study. In gathering the aggregate GPAs for each of the populations, grades were averaged based on the UNI cumulative GPA from the entire 2012-2013 school year. This data was not broken down between the first and second semesters of that school year. Either way, the aggregate GPA would be the same with the data sets, but it is important to recognize that when reviewing this data, it is based on an entire year of class work and not only one semester, accounting for students who may have struggled in their first semester and then adjusted and increased their GPA for the second semester.

Retrieving the NSSE data for the survey resulted in a few limitations when reviewing data. In previous years, the University of Northern Iowa asked additional questions on the survey regarding student involvement that focused on participating in activities to enhance your spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc.), and attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.). These two questions would have provided a broader look at the overall involvement of students at UNI. These questions can be found in Appendix C.

The data utilized to gain an understanding of on-campus involvement was taken from the 2012-2013 NSSE survey and then broken down by on-campus students who either lived in a traditional house or springboard house during their first year at UNI. Of the students who took the survey at UNI, there were 69 survey participants who resided in a springboard house during their entire first year at UNI and 301 students who resided in traditional houses at UNI during their entire first year. This sample size provided reliable information, but it is also a limitation as there could have been a higher number of participants in each section.

In addition, there was also only a 12.28% response rate of springboard house students on the survey sent out regarding their experiences in the springboard house during their first year on campus. This is a good response rate, but is also a limitation as more students could have responded to the survey to gain a more well-rounded understanding of the experience that first-year students have within a springboard house.

Springboard house participants were sent the google survey in November of their sophomore year. The survey was sent at this time as November is a time period when there are several surveys out there administered by the university, to account for survey fatigue that students might otherwise experience. However, because the survey was sent in November and asked the students to reflect back to their first year on campus, a possible limitation to this survey was that students had to look back at their overall experience during their first year. Between their first year and the survey date, six months went by where students were no longer participating in a springboard community.

Because of this, they may not be able to accurately recall their exact participation experiences within the community.

Additionally, the survey was sent out to all springboard house participants who lived in a springboard community during their entire first year. However, there were no questions on the survey asking students if they chose to live on campus for their second year on campus or not. While data was collected regarding overall recontracting rates, there is no way to determine survey participant's current living situation. Based on this, students who participated in the survey may have had more positive or negative experiences based on their decision to recontract, which could have skewed data.

Regarding both the on-campus involvement data as well as the data collected from springboard house residents, participants were not asked to reflect on their outside work commitments. Students who hold a job on or off campus may have had decreased levels of involvement both in their house and within the campus community because of availability and time constraints. In further research, it would be valuable to conduct a time analysis, asking students where they spend their time in an average week to determine if having a job or working while in college leads to lower participation in activities on campus, and furthermore examining the impact of participation or lack of involvement within the community.

While the information gathered throughout the RA interviews provides great insight into the RA position and the role of the RA in a Springboard house, there were a few limitations to this study that may have impacted results. Only six RAs were interviewed for the study, so the information gathered is limited by the specific

experiences of those students. In choosing a number of participants for the study, the six students chosen best represented the diverse range of experiences that RAs might have in the various buildings across campus as well as the specific needs of students who choose to live in different buildings. However, there were still many themes that were able to be drawn between responses of the six students interviewed.

One thing to recognize about interviews is that the information provided is based on the opinions of the RAs. While opinions can provide great information, it also must be noted that the information gathered is not fact. Opinions have great value in that the ideas and knowledge collected is coming directly from the students in those experiences. However, it is also true that the opinions collected may be outliers compared to the norm in the communities.

Additionally, while all the RAs fit the requirements set at the beginning of the study, the RAs interviewed all had a traditional house as their first experience, and the Springboard house as their second experience. So when the RAs got into the springboard community, they already had at least one year of experiences to learn from and build off of. Therefore, some of the successes and knowledge that the Springboard house RAs found in their community may have been attributed to already having one year in the position.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study provided insight into the overall experience of springboard house students during their first year at UNI. However, further research could be done to determine if the results of this study will hold true from year to year. Students who

participated in a springboard house during their entire first year at UNI earned higher GPAs, were more involved in campus activities, and recontracted to the residence halls at a higher rate. This topic had a wide scope of data to gain an overall picture, but in future research, it could be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study of aggregate GPAs, on-campus involvement through NSSE data analysis, and recontracting rates through data analysis within the department of residence.

Based on the research gathered, it is evident that Springboard house participants have a positive experience within their community, which impacts their overall engagement at UNI. In addition to further analyzing data sets from GPA averages, NSSE surveys, and recontracting, it would also be beneficial to further evaluate the springboard house experience from the perspective of residents. Currently, all residents are sent a house feedback survey each semester that is administered by the Residence Life Coordinator in each building. This survey asks a variety of questions focused on determining the experience that students are having within the hall. Questions pertain to front desk experience, RA communication and connections, and programming efforts as well as facility and service satisfaction. While the data from the house feedback surveys was not utilized for this study, it could be beneficial to analyze student experiences based on survey responses to determine the overall impact of the springboard community. These surveys could be evaluated and questions could also be added regarding the RA role within the community in terms of connectedness and programming.

The RA interviews revealed a bountiful amount of information regarding the RA role within springboard and traditional house communities. While it is unrealistic to

interview all RAs each year, it may be beneficial to follow up with springboard RAs to learn more about the cumulative experiences they have as an RA. If the additional training session that was recommended in the results section of this study was implemented, it would be beneficial to conduct an assessment of the additional training for the students. Whether this was a pre and post-test survey or a post training interview, it would be beneficial to learn more about the impacts of that training session.

It would be interesting, in further research, to consider the idea of hosting a focus group with the RAs as well. Information collected in a focus group environment could be more detailed or in depth because the information discussed would be collective thoughts and experiences. One of the benefits of focus groups is that the participants are able to build off of one another's experiences, which could provide more information as thoughts are continuously generated.

Department of Residence Recommendations

While there is much research that can be done to further understand the role and impact of Springboard house participation of the first-year student experience, based on this study, some recommendations can be provided to the Department of Residence to further the community impact. These recommendations will further the experience of Springboard house participants and continue to support the learning objectives set by the department.

Community Service and Volunteer Focus

As noted above, the NSSE data comparison of Springboard house and traditional house students proved to be statistically significant in that students who resided in a

Springboard house participated in community service or volunteer experiences at a higher rate. While more research needs to be done to determine what factors support this difference, the service learning aspect of Springboard communities is significant. To continue to support this experience, an intentional focus should be placed on the springboard house service learning component. While the data proves that community service and volunteer experiences are taking place, this experience can be fostered through the RA intentionally putting on programs and providing information in handouts, posters, and bulletin boards to enhance the service learning experience.

Springboard House RA Experience

All of the RAs who were interviewed in this study worked in a traditional house during their first year and a Springboard house during their second. While this variable was not intentional, in reviewing the responses and reflections of these RAs, all participants seemed to draw on their experiences in a traditional house to better accommodate and meet the needs of the Springboard house students in their second year. As noted, Springboard house residents need vast and varied support from their RA numerous times throughout the year.

Reflecting further on this, it follows that Springboard house RAs may be more successful in that position after gaining experience as an RA in a traditional house. The experiences gained in a traditional house as an RA provide a foundation for the challenges that may arise in a Springboard house. As the interviews identified, Springboard house students have a variety of needs and difficulties. By requiring that

Springboard house RAs have a year of experience in a traditional house first, they will be more prepared for the instances that occur during their second year in the position.

Springboard House RA Training

In the future, it may be beneficial to provide a half-day training specifically for Springboard house RAs to fulfill some of the areas they wished they had more training in. Appendix F provides an example of what this training could look like, incorporating the areas of interest the RAs brought up in the interview. The proposed training found in Appendix F would last approximately three hours and include a variety of topics that specifically compliment the requirements of an RA working in a Springboard house.

The first hour of this training highlights student development theory. The theories covered will be specifically useful for Springboard house RAs as the first-year students they work will are going through a transitional period as they arrive and adjust to college. The suggested theories covered in this training are Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development. Schlossberg's Transition Theory identifies the three types of college student transitions, discussing how some transitions are anticipated, some may be unanticipated, and others may be anticipated but never take place, labeled nonevents (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Perry's theory focuses more on the intellectual and ethical development that students' progress through as they arrive on campus. This theory identifies four stages of intellectual and moral development and explains that individuals journey through the four stages, with nine positions, throughout their life, and can be at different points in regards to different situations or beliefs (Perry, 1999). Both Schlossberg and Perry's theories provide a

framework that can assist RAs with better understanding the transition their first-year residents are going through.

After the theory based information will be more informational, the next part of the training is reflection based, providing time for students to reflect on the experiences they had as a first-year student at UNI and then recognize how their own personal experiences can aid in their Springboard RA experience. In addition, interacting with introverts was a topic that came up in all interviews as an area RAs wished they had more experience and knowledge in. This portion will be led through continued reflection and sharing of experiences and ideas.

An overview of the liberal arts core is included in this training as all first-year students go through the liberal arts core, and at one point or another, have a question about it. While RAs should still practice referring students to their advisor or the Office of Academic Advising, it will be beneficial for the RAs to have a basic training to answer questions that first-year students may have about the required courses. The final part of the training will then build on everything discussed earlier by providing RAs with case studies of scenarios they may encounter as a Springboard house RA. They will be broken up in pairs to discuss each case study and then share their prompts and responses with the group. All the information needed to respond effectively to the case studies will have been discussed at some point during the RA fall training or the Springboard RA training.

Additionally, as highlighted above, the community service and volunteer aspect of Springboard house communities is statistically significant and an area that should be

focused on. During this training, supplemental material regarding service learning and community service opportunities should be provided to further support these efforts.

Conclusion

By implementing these changes, the Springboard house student experience will continue to be enhanced. This study supports the implementation and purpose of Springboard house communities. By referring to the learning outcomes set by the Department of Residence, Springboard house students are being supported through their transition to UNI. By continuing to support Springboard house students and implementing the above recommendations, this experience will be further enhanced. As enrollment and retention continue to be "hot topic" issues on campuses across the country, the intention and effort focused to further support the first-year student experience will not only support the Department of Residence goals, but also those of the university.

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APPENDIX A
NSSE PERMISSION LETTER

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national survey of
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The College Student Report
Item Usage Agreement

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In consideration of the mutual promises below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

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3) In exchange for the license granted in section 1, Licensee agrees:

   a) there will be no licensing fee to use NSSE items for the purposes described in Exhibit A;

   b) to provide to NSSE frequency distributions and means on the licensed item(s);

   c) on the survey form itself, and in all publications or presentations of data obtained through the licensed item(s), to include the following citation: "Items *xx* and *xx* used with permission from *The College Student Report*, National Survey of Student Engagement, Copyright 2001-14 The Trustees of Indiana University";

   d) to provide to NSSE a copy of any derivatives of, or alterations to, the item(s) that Licensee makes for the purpose of Licensee's survey ("modified items"), for NSSE's own nonprofit, educational purposes, which shall include the use of the modified items in *The College Student Report* or any other survey instruments, reports, or other educational or professional materials that NSSE may develop or use in the future. Licensee hereby grants the University a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable, royalty-free license to use,

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e) to provide to NSSE, for its own nonprofit, educational purposes, a copy of all reports, presentations, analyses, or other materials in which the item(s) licensed under this Agreement, or modified items, and any responses to licensed or modified items, are presented, discussed, or analyzed. NSSE shall not make public any data it obtains under this subsection in a manner that identifies specific institutions or individuals, except with the consent of the Licensee.

4) This Agreement expires on November 30, 2014.

The undersigned hereby consent to the terms of this Agreement and confirm that they have all necessary authority to enter into this Agreement.

For The Trustees of Indiana University:

Alexander C. McCormick
Director
National Survey of Student Engagement

11/6/2013
Date

For Licensee:

Laura Trettin
Graduate Student
University of Northern Iowa

10/30/2013
Date

Dr. Michael Waggoner
Professor
University of Northern Iowa

10.30.13
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APPENDIX B
SPRINGBOARD RESIDENT SURVEY CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a research study regarding the effects of residing in a Springboard House at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). This research project is being conducted by Laura Trettin, a graduate student in the Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs master's program at UNI. The objective of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the effects that living in a Springboard House during one's entire first year at UNI has on GPA, on-campus recontracting rates and extracurricular and on-campus involvement.

To participate, you will complete a short (5-10 min) questionnaire regarding your involvement in on-campus organizations as well as participation in events. There will also be a few questions regarding the support and resources provided by your house Resident Assistant.

There is a very small degree of risk to participate in this study. Students will be asked to complete the survey. Questions on the survey ask you about your involvement on campus, participation in residence hall events, and communications and interactions with your RA. If you had a negative experience in one of these areas, the survey may cause negative feelings to resurface. There are no other known risks to participating in this survey. There are no direct benefits to participation in the study. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

The information you provide will help to better understand the impact of residing in a springboard house. The information collected on this survey will be compared to the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement of freshman/first-year students residing on campus at UNI throughout the entire 2012-2013 school year. If at any time during the survey you do not wish to continue, please close the browser window. If you do not complete the survey and hit submit at the end, your responses will not be recorded.

The results of this study will be used for educational purposes only. The data from this study will be used in a thesis outlining the effects of residing in a Springboard residence community during the freshmen year of college. Data may also be presented in educational settings. If you have any questions or concerns regarding either this study or the survey, please contact Laura Trettin at trettinl@uni.edu or the faculty advisor of this project, Dr. Michael Waggoner at michael.waggoner@uni.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights in regards to this study, please contact Anita Gordon, UNI IRB Administrator, 319-273-6148, anita.gordon@uni.edu. By checking the box below, you acknowledge that you have read and agree to the above information. Again, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. Please click the link below to continue. If you do not wish to continue, please close the browser window.

APPENDIX C
SPRINGBOARD RESIDENT SURVEY

For the following questions, please choose the option you agree with most. These questions are taken from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE 2012), with permission from Indiana University.

During the 2012-2013 school year, how often did you participate in Community Service or Volunteer Work? *

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very Often

During the 2012-2013 school year, how often did you attend an art exhibit, play, dance, music, theater or other performance? *

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very Often

During the 2012-2013 school year, how often did you participate in activities to enhance your spirituality (worship, mediation, prayer, etc.) *

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very Often

During the 2012-2013 school year, how often did you attend campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.) *

- Very Little
- Some
- Quite a Bit
- Very Much

In an average 7-day week, how many hours did you spend participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intermural sports, etc.) *

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- More than 30

When responding to the following questions, please think specifically about the experiences you have had in your house during the 2012-2013 school year.

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Study Skills? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Getting to Know Your Professor? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Test Taking? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Time Management? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Socializing? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Getting to Know Campus and Resources Available? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

How many times did you attend a program focused on: Getting Involved? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5

During the past year, did you talked with your RA about the following? *Please choose all that apply

- Study Skills
- Exam Preparation
- Getting Involved
- Registering for Classes
- Time Management
- Meeting People/Friends
- Roommate Conflicts
- Stress/Anxiety
- Other:

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a research study regarding the effects of residing in a Springboard house at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). This research project is being conducted by Laura Trettin, a graduate student in the Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs master's program at UNI. The objective of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the effects that living in a Springboard house during one's entire first year at UNI has on GPA, on-campus recontracting rates and extracurricular and on-campus involvement.

To participate, you will be asked a series of interview questions regarding your experiences as a Resident Assistant in a Springboard house community as compared to a traditional house at UNI. Your responses will help to discern the RA responsibilities in a Springboard house and gain a better understanding of the differences between that community and a traditional community at UNI. You will be asked to speak about the most common struggles that students faced in your community and what you did to provide programming and strengthen the student experience within the community. Direct quotes from the interview may be used in reporting research results.

There is a very small degree of risk to participate in this study. Questions in the interview ask you about your experiences in both a Springboard and traditional house in UNI. If you had a negative experience in one of these areas, the interview may cause negative feelings to resurface. There are no other known risks to participating in this survey. There are no direct benefits to participation in the study.

The information you provide will help to better understand the impact of residing in a Springboard house. The information collected in this interview will be compared to other RA responses. If at any time during the interview you do not wish to continue, please let the interviewer know. You can choose to stop at any point within the survey. Your responses to the interview questions will in no way be connected with your name. Your personal responses will only be known by the interviewer.

The results of this study will be used for educational purposes only. The data from this study will be used in a thesis outlining the effects of residing in a Springboard residence community during the freshmen year of college. Data may also be presented in educational settings. If you have any questions or concerns regarding either this study or the survey, please contact Laura Trettin at trettinl@uni.edu or the faculty advisor of this project, Dr. Michael Waggoner at michael.waggoner@uni.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights in regards to this study, please contact Anita Gordon, UNI IRB Administrator, 319-273-6148, anita.gordon@uni.edu. By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and agree to the above information. Thank you in advance for your participation!

_____

Name

_____

Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX E
RESIDENT ASSISTANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviewer reads the following prior to start in the interview: Thank you for participating in this interview regarding the effects of living in a Springboard house during ones freshmen year of college. You have been asked to participate because you have been an RA for at least two years, with at least one year in a Springboard house and at least one year in a traditional house. When answering the following questions, please think about the experiences you had as a Springboard house RA and what you may have done differently as an RA in this house as compared to being an RA in a traditional house. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Questions:

1. As a Springboard house RA, what did you do to initially build community with your residents? Is this any different than what you did in a traditional house?
2. What are the common struggles that a Springboard house resident faces? What was the most common issue brought to your attention by the residents?
3. What type of programs did you put on for your residents? Which ones were highly/least highly attended?
4. As an RA in a Springboard house, what things did you have to pay more attention to than in a traditional house? What things did you do differently?
5. What was your favorite part about working in a Springboard house? Least favorite?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences as a Springboard house RA?
7. Based on the answers you have given, did you feel that the training you went through during the fall semester adequately prepared you to meet the needs of your residents? Is there any area you wish you had more training in?

Topics:

- Freshmen Struggles
- Programming Theme
- Building Community
- RA Focus
- Student Success
- Training/Resources

APPENDIX F
SPRINGBOARD HOUSE RA TRAINING TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, August 13th, 2014

1:00pm	Student Development Theory (Students in Transition) *Schlossberg's Transition Theory *Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development	TBD
2:00pm	First Year Reflection *Time to reflect on your first year at UNI. Think about the experiences you have had and how they might apply to experiences that incoming students might have.	TBD
2:30pm	Interacting with Introverts *Many students in the Springboard house will be outgoing, but some will not. How do you plan to work with Springboard house students in your community might not be as outgoing.	TBD
3:00pm	Academic Advising Training *Provide a review of the Liberal Arts Core and advising requirements for first-year students. Have advisors go over the basic answers to commonly asked questions of first-year students.	TBD
3:45pm	Intentional Interactions *Provide case studies for RAs to discuss in pairs of difficult situations that they might face when working with students. Have the partners discuss in depth and practice the conversation. Then present the discussion in class.	TBD