



# **Insights on the Value of Interactions with Housing Student Staff**

Benchworks Research Note  
March 2024

## Introduction

Housing student staff play a vital role in on-campus housing, particularly in supporting residents. As part of this effort, many housing programs are shifting towards emphasizing student-staff interactions with residents, ranging from intentional and structured one-on-one conversations to informal connections. Both the staff and the residential environment in which they serve can be leveraged to achieve key outcomes, considering the nuances needed by various student groups. Specifically, staff are uniquely positioned to encourage deeper learning, including learning that challenges the notion of merely "getting along" and aims towards more meaningful transformative experiences.

Using a national dataset from the 2022-2023 ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment of over 127,000 undergraduate students from 168 colleges and universities, findings show that more frequent interactions with housing student staff was associated with higher levels of satisfaction in the overall housing experience and greater perceived gains in skills and outcomes commonly associated with the on-campus housing experience.

### Key Questions:

1. How often do residents interact with housing student staff?
2. How does the frequency of interactions differ across campus populations?
  - Academic year
  - First-year residents
  - Transfer students
  - Living-learning community members
  - Room type
  - Number of roommates
3. How does the frequency of interactions relate to key housing outcomes?
  - Satisfaction with student staff
  - Learning outcomes related to personal interactions
  - Learning outcomes related to academic success
  - Overall learning outcomes
  - Satisfaction with overall housing experience



## How Often Do Residents Interact with their Student Staff Member?

Figure 1 displays the responses to a survey question asking, “In an average week, how many times do you interact with your student staff member?”

Key findings from figure 1:

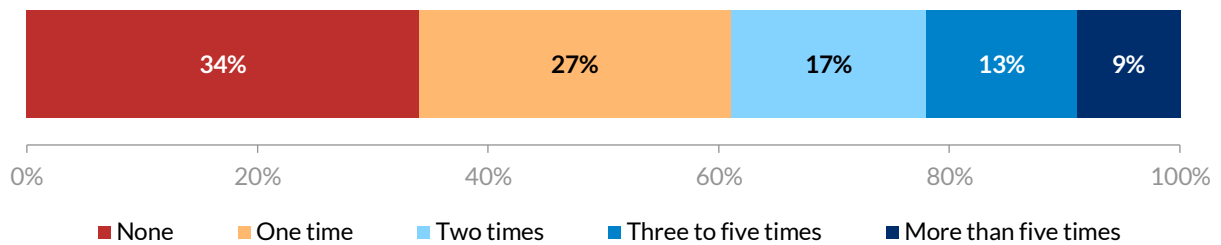
- Most residents (66%) reported interacting with their student staff member at least once per week.
- One-third of residents indicated they did not interact with their student staff member in a typical week.

These interactions may be between the person (student) and the environment (housing environment) as suggested below.

**FIGURE 1.**

### Number of Interactions with Student Staff Per Week

Distribution of responses to the survey question “In an average week, how many times do you interact with your student staff member?”



## How Does the Frequency of Interactions Differ across Campus Populations?

Results from the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment indicated differences in frequency of reported interactions with student staff across by a variety of housing-related characteristics.

Key findings from figure 2:

- **Academic Year:** Nearly 30% of first year students reported at least one interaction per week, with an additional 20% reporting at least two interactions. This resulted in about half of first-year students reporting two or fewer weekly interactions with student staff.
- **Resident Type:** 71% of those who were new residents interacted with student staff at least once and perhaps as much as five times each week. By comparison, 59% of returning residents interacted with student staff from one to five times each week.
- **Transfer Students:** For transfers, 27% reported at least one interaction; 17% reported at least two interactions, for a total of 44% reporting two or fewer weekly interactions with student staff.
- **Living-Learning Community (LLC) Member:** Students living in LLCs seemed to have more reason to interact with their student staff. Only 22% of those living in LLCs did **not** interact with their student staff at least once a week. There was less student staff interaction for those living outside LLCs; 36% of students outside LLCs did not interact with their student staff at least once a week.
- **Room Type:** Those living in apartment style environments interacted with their student staff less frequently; indeed 49% of those living in apartments did not interact with their student staff at least once each week.
- **Number of Roommates:** Those with one roommate interacted the most with student staff: 70% interacted at least once each week. Those who lived by themselves tied with those who lived with three or more other students, 61% interacted with student staff at least once per week.

**For further thought:** What are some possible nuances in the type or content of interactions each student group may need or welcome from student staff? For instance:

- Might transfer students initially welcome resources that ensure a successful transfer and somewhat later emphasis on student activities aligned with their interests?
- What implications in staff time commitment and/or areas of professional knowledge needed might there be, depending on the “newness” of a demographic?
- By focusing on a common topic, do LLCs provide more natural shared conversation topics and therefore, an easier entry to shared conversations between residents and student staff? How might student staff in non-LLCs foster common topics and a similar easy entry into conversation?

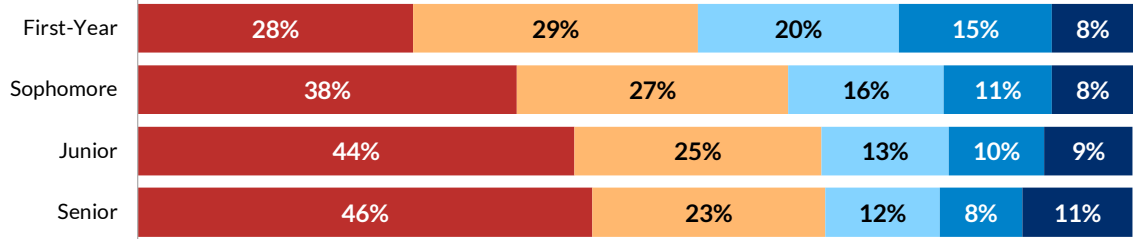


**FIGURE 2.**

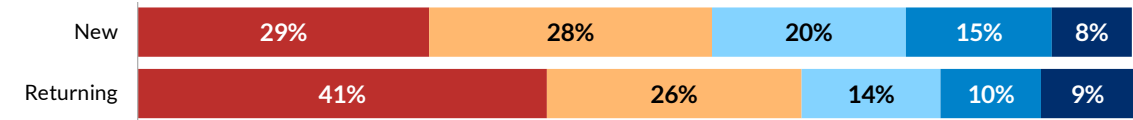
**Number of Interactions with Student Staff by Populations**

Differences in the number of student staff interactions per week across various populations

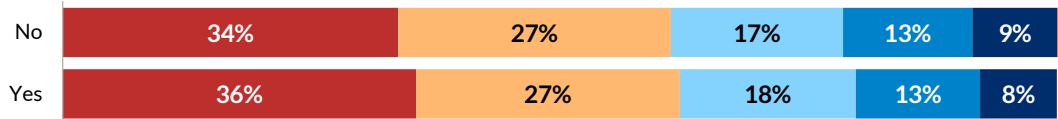
**Academic Year**



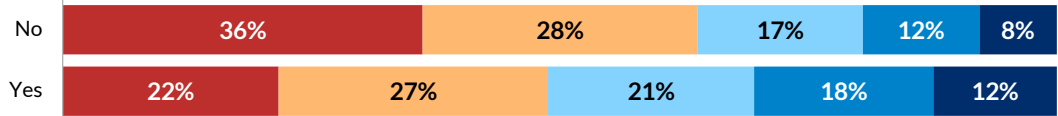
**Resident Type**



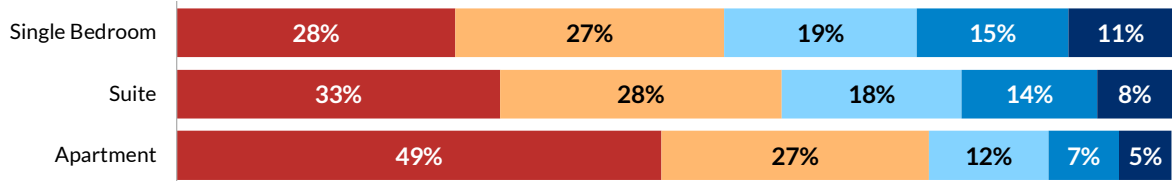
**Transfer Student**



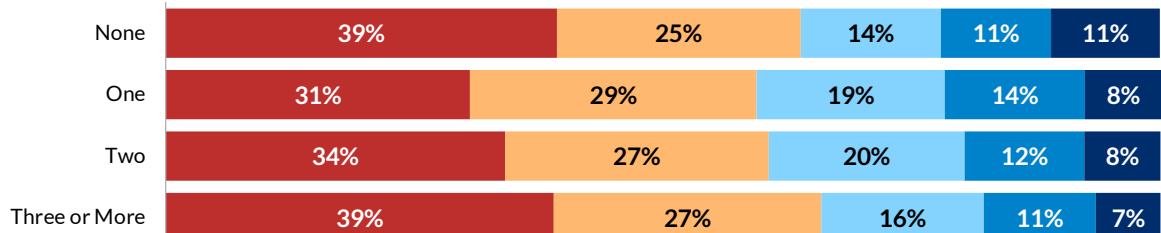
**LLC Member**



**Room Type**



**Number of Roommates**



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ None ■ One time ■ Two times ■ Three to five times ■ More than 5 times



## How Does the Frequency of Interactions Relate to Key Housing Outcomes?

Does the frequency of interactions with staff “matter” in terms of housing outcomes? What outcomes might we already be seeing and where might we work to encourage deeper, more insightful outcomes? And how might those outcomes be related to larger-than-campus goals?

To explore this question, we’ll examine the relationship between the frequency of interactions and the following topics addressed on the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment:

- **Satisfaction with Student Staff:** Questions measuring the degree to which on-campus residents were satisfied with their student staff member across a range of topics
- **Personal Interactions:** Questions measuring the degree to which on-campus housing helped students improve relationships, resolve conflict, and live cooperatively
- **Academic Success:** Questions measuring the degree to which on-campus housing contributed to learning outcomes related to academic success, such as applying classroom content outside the classroom and making connections with students in their courses
- **Overall Learning:** Questions measuring the degree to which residents reported their housing experience contributed to their learning and academic performance
- **Overall Satisfaction:** Questions measuring the degree to which residents were satisfied with their overall housing experience

Each section contains a figure visualizing the relationship between those five topics and the number of interactions in a typical week:

- The colored bars represent the response option to the survey question on the resident’s number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week
- The percentage represent the percent of that group that scored high (i.e., answered “6” or “7” on a seven-point scale, “7” being labeled “Highly satisfied” or “Extremely”) on that survey question



## Satisfaction with Student Staff

Results from the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment showed that on-campus residents were more likely to report increasingly high satisfaction with their student staff member as the number of interactions in a typical week increased.

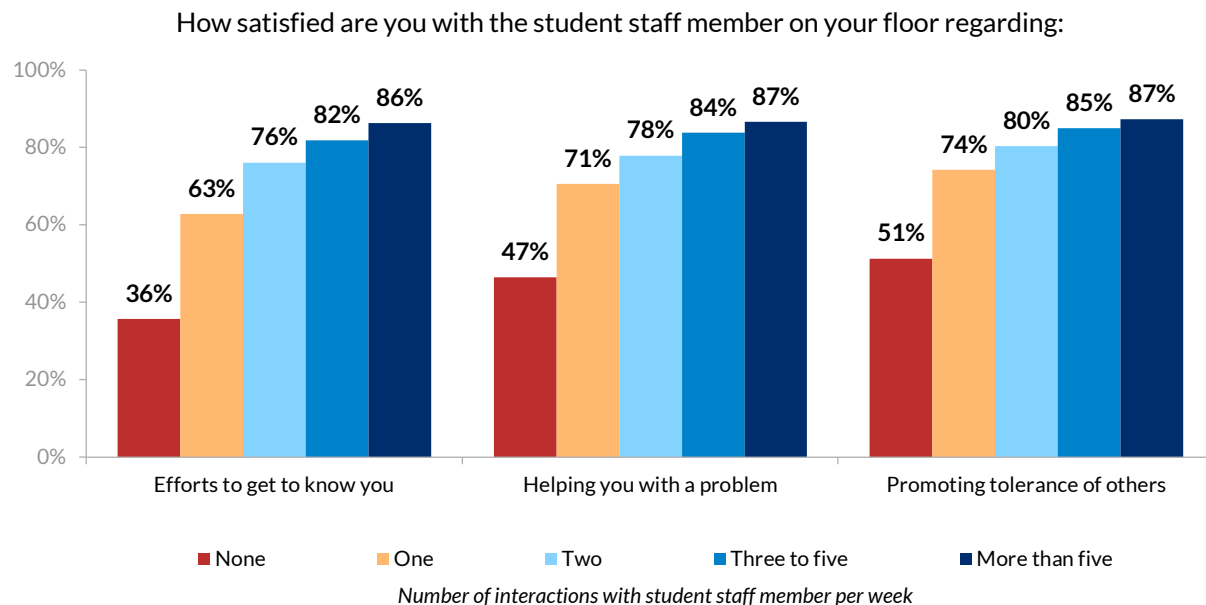
Key findings from figure 3:

- Only 36% of students reporting no interactions were extremely satisfied with their student staff member’s efforts to get to know them. In comparison, 63% of those reporting one interaction and 76% reporting two interactions reported high satisfaction.
- At least 80% of residents reporting three to five interactions (82%) or six or more interactions (86%) in a week were extremely satisfied with their student staff member.
- Fifty-one percent of students who reported no weekly interaction with student staff were “highly satisfied” with that staff member’s promotion of tolerance.

**FIGURE 3.**

### Percent Highly Satisfied with Student Staff Member by Number of Interactions

Percent of residents responding “Highly satisfied” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the *Satisfaction: Student Staff* survey factor by the number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week



**For further thought:** Satisfaction with staff interactions may be nuanced by the depth of the interaction. Is the interaction a general “getting to know you” or does it perhaps delve deeper, helping the student to solve a problem or promoting greater understanding of others who may be different from the student’s experience?



## Personal Interactions

Results from the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment showed that on-campus residents were more likely to indicate their housing experience contributed to learning outcomes related to personal interactions as the number of interactions with student staff in a week increased.

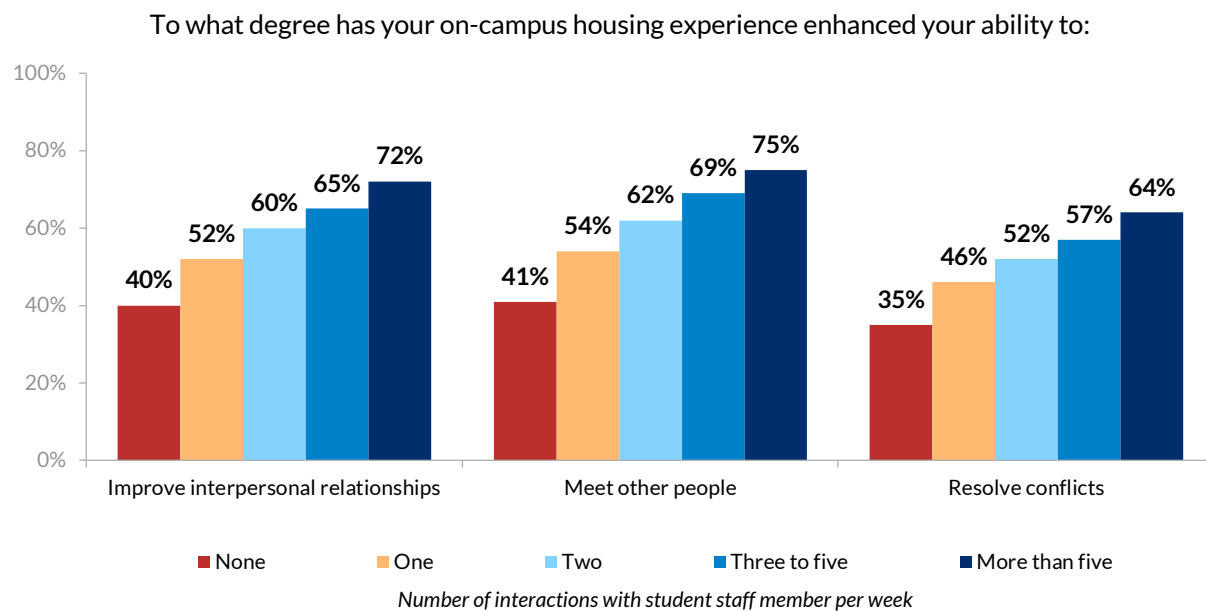
Key findings from figure 4:

- Just four in ten students reporting no interactions indicated their housing experience enhanced their ability to improve interpersonal relationships. In contrast, 52% of those reporting one interaction with their student staff member per week and 60% for those reporting two interactions per week indicated the same.
- While fewer residents indicated their housing experience enhanced their ability to resolve conflicts, the strength of the relationship between that and the number of interactions per week with student staff was similar; the more interactions a resident reported, the more likely they were to indicate their housing experience enhanced their ability to resolve conflicts.

**FIGURE 4.**

### Personal Interactions by Number of Interactions

Percent of residents responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the *Learning: Personal Interactions* survey factor by the number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week



**For further thought:** What are the differences between “resolving conflicts” and “ignoring conflicts and just being nice”? How might this vary based on characteristics like race/ethnicity? What support do we provide to students and staff in navigating these conversations?





## Academic Success

Results from the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment showed that on-campus residents were more likely to indicate their housing experience contributed to learning outcomes related to academic success as the number of interactions with student staff in a week increased.

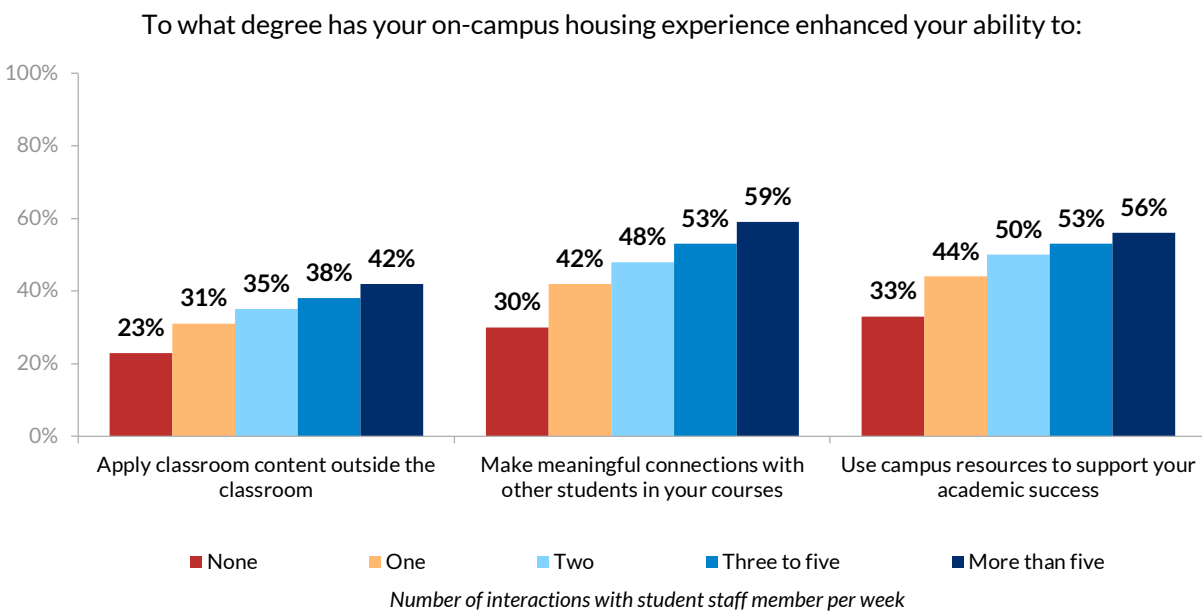
Key findings from figure 5:

- 42% of students who interacted with their student staff member once in a typical week indicated their housing experience enhanced their ability to make connections with students in their courses. In comparison, 48% of students who interacted with their student staff member twice in a typical week and 53% of those who interacted with their student staff member three to five times indicated the same.
- Applying classroom content outside the classroom was a bit more challenging, regardless of the number of interactions a student had with their student staff member per week. For example, 31% of students who interacted with their staff member just once in a typical week indicated high satisfaction in applying classroom content outside the classroom.

**FIGURE 5.**

### Academic Success by Number of Interactions

Percent of residents responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the *Learning: Academic Success* survey factor by the number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week



**For further thought:** Are there class topics that might be common to specific class years or campus events of an academic nature that could form this common dialogue and opportunity for “real world” application conversations within residential settings?



## Overall Learning

Results from the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment showed that on-campus residents were more likely to indicate their housing experience contributed to overall learning outcomes related to academic success as the number of interactions with student staff in a week increased.

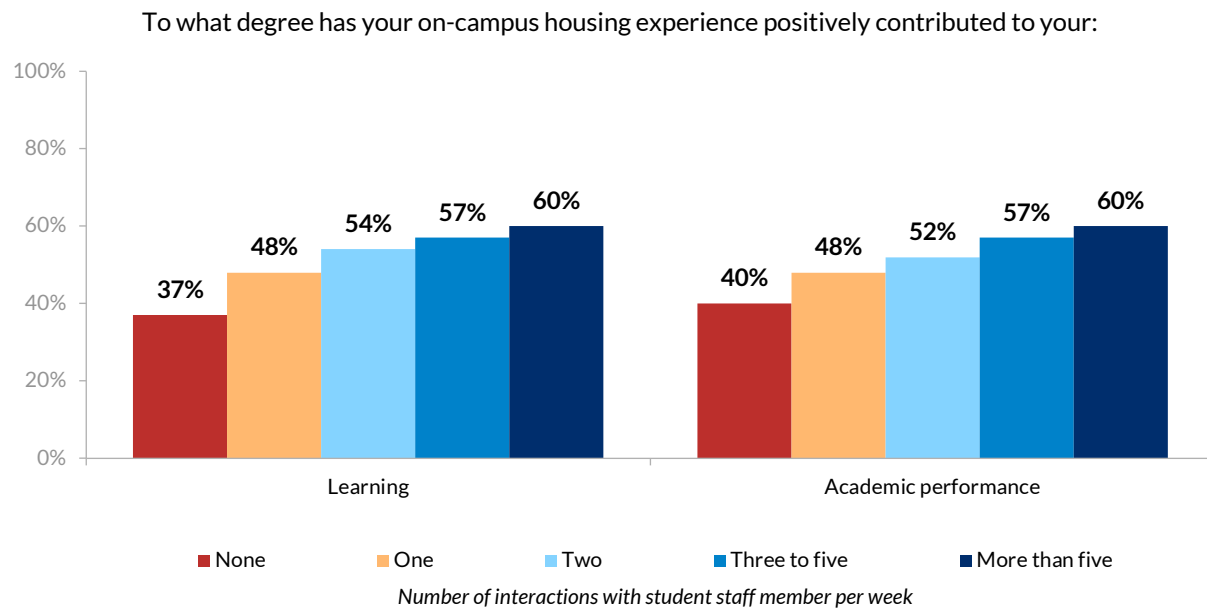
Key findings from figure 6:

- About four in ten residents who did not interact with their student staff member in a typical week reported that their housing experience positively contributed to both their learning and academic performance.
- In comparison, 48% of residents who interacted with their student staff member once in a typical week and six in ten who interacted more than five times in a typical week said their housing experience positively contributed to both their learning and academic performance.

**FIGURE 6.**

### Overall Learning by Number of Interactions

Percent of residents responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the *Overall Learning* survey factor by the number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week



**For further thought:** How can interactions with student staff be part of intentional learning? What training might staff need to fill the “educator” role more intentionally within a residential environment? How does that training overlap with and differ from that for other roles of residential staff such as para-professional counselor, operations manager, and social organizer?



## Overall Satisfaction

Results from the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment showed that on-campus residents were more likely to report high satisfaction with their overall housing experience as the number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week increased.

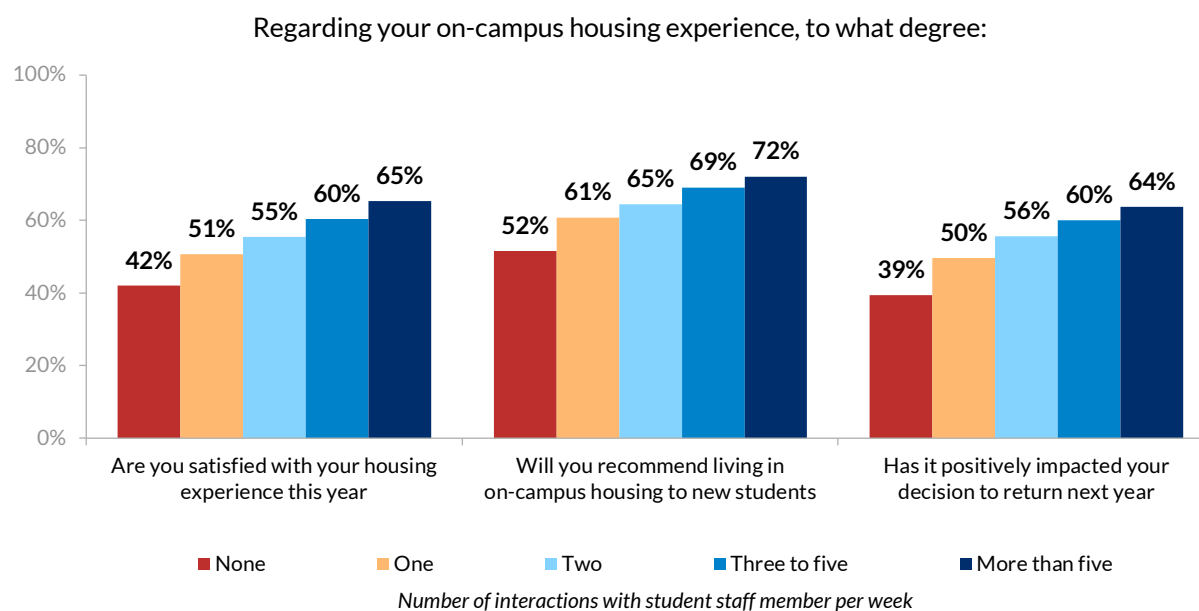
Key findings from figure 7:

- 42% of residents who did not interact with their student staff member in a typical week reported high satisfaction with their housing experience. In comparison, just over half of those with one interaction per week and 60% of those with three to five interactions per week said they were highly satisfied with their housing experience.
- 72% of residents who interacted with their student staff member more than five times per week would recommend living in on-campus housing to new students.

**FIGURE 7.**

### Overall Satisfaction by Number of Interactions

Percent of residents responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the *Overall Satisfaction* survey factor by the number of interactions with their student staff member in a typical week



**For further thought:** How might staff leverage amenities in a given residential setting to encourage not only satisfaction but also the cognitive and emotional growth that often accompanies that satisfaction? For example, if a residential setting is near campus recreational facilities, could staff partner with recreation staff to offer in-residence programs that build community as well as personal satisfaction?



## Conclusion

On-campus residents who interacted with their student staff members regularly were more likely to report that housing positively contributed to various learning outcomes and more likely to report high satisfaction with their overall on-campus housing experience than residents who did not report regular interactions. Beyond *frequent* interactions, *deeper* interactions may leverage more profound learning outcomes. Increased training and experience with “difficult dialogues” may be helpful not only for students but for staff as well. These interactions may be nuanced by the type of “newness” experienced by first-year students as compared with transfer students.

Overall, these findings suggest that a positive connection with student staff serves an important role in fostering connections amongst residents, supporting learning in housing, and increasing satisfaction with the on-campus housing experience.

As residence life staff continue to transition back following the COVID-19 pandemic, formal programming efforts might focus on face-to-face interactions and leveraging those to enhance skill development:

- Face to face interactions offer an important opportunity for deeper, more nuanced conversations and learning. What areas of learning might be especially supported by face-to-face interactions?
- How may we continue to train and support staff in managing “difficult dialogues” with and between students?
- What support do we provide for staff when those dialogues inevitably encounter resistance from some students?
- How might staff from marginalized groups experience heightened challenges and pressure based on their own identities and the perception and degree of student experience with members of those groups?



## Methods

### Survey

The ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment enables institutions to evaluate the experiences of on-campus residents. The survey focuses on satisfaction with the housing experience, facilities, staff, dining, and roommates; as well as the degree to which students indicate their housing experience contributed to learning related to community interactions, programs, diverse interactions, academic initiatives, sustainability, and practical competencies. The assessment is mapped to both the ACUHO-I Standards and Ethical Principles for College and University Housing Professionals and the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) student learning and development outcomes.

### Dataset

The findings in this research note are based on aggregate analysis from the 2022-2023 academic year administration of the ACUHO-I/Benchworks Resident Assessment. In total, 134,442 students from 168 institutions in the United States and Canada completed the assessment. Institutions could choose whether to administer online or via paper; 155 institutions administered online using the Benchworks survey system and 12 administered via paper surveys. The average online response rate was 30%.

For this research note, the focus was on undergraduate students. With a filter to include only students who indicated they were undergraduates, the total number of respondents reflected in the analyses for this research note was 127,427.

### Analysis

The insights shared in this research note were developed based on a wide range of statistical analyses, including descriptive analysis (frequencies, means, standard deviations), correlational analysis and cross-tabulations with chi-square analysis, and regression models. The findings in this research note are presented as descriptive analysis, specifically percentages. Results do not indicate whether differences between groups are statistically significant. All figures reflect the number of responses to a question and do not include missing data. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent; therefore, some totals may not exactly equal 100.



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