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IMPACT OF RESIDENT ASSISTANTS AND COMMUNITY ON STUDENT GRADES

by

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Abstract

On-campus student housing at any university has the opportunity to positively impact student experiences. This exploratory study looks at how frequency of interaction with the Resident Assistant (RA) and interaction with the residence hall community, sense of community, social self-efficacy, and academic self-concept correlate with academic success. This study is intended to show the effect the Resident Assistant has on students' academic and social experiences in apartment-style housing. Therefore, this study also looks at how variables are related to each other in order to give Resident Assistants a better understanding of their sphere of influence in a community. The relationships between these variables are partly facilitated with an understanding of the Symbolic Interactionism perspective. This theory states that how people view themselves influences how they interact with others and react to ideas, concepts, objects, etc. Results show positive correlations between the number of interactions with the community and sense of community and also between GPA and academic self-concept. What was unexpected was the moderate negative correlation between GPA and sense of community. Further work should be done to flesh out the connections between variables.

Keywords: sense of community, resident assistant, frequency of interaction, apartment, on-campus housing, dorm

On-campus student housing at any university has the opportunity to positively impact student experiences. The question is how to adequately demonstrate the effect that the undergraduate staff members, usually called Resident Assistants, have on students. Resident Assistants (RAs) are usually undergraduate student staff given the task to build community in a certain geographic area of a residence hall, sometimes known as a dorm. This area for which they are responsible to build community then becomes known as 'their' community. The reason these students have a job building community and helping students, also known as residents, is because it is supposed to improve students' lives.

However, many things that RAs do can be difficult to measure like how often they talk to a student or how significant that interaction was for the student. There are many factors that can affect student academic success, and sometimes the effect of an RA is not in academics, but in students' personal growth. This can be difficult to measure in apartment-style housing because much previous research has been conducted in traditional-style housing and those measures may not easily work in apartment-style housing. Ideally, supervisors of RAs would base RA performance on student impact, but those significant factors used to measure student impact need to be reliable, valid, and within the power of the RA to influence. Factors that measure student impact are the primary focus of this study. The second focus comes from interaction logs that Professional Staff members (ProStaff) currently use to get more information about the communities. This system is not necessarily unique to only the university in this study, but the particular way it is used was created to address individual needs of this university on-campus housing department. Hopefully, these interaction logs can be a useful indicator in the future. Communication studies theories, especially the Symbolic Interactionism perspective, can shed light on how Resident Assistants and community impact student academic success.

Literature Review

Academic Success

Blimling (1991) conducted a meta-analysis on studies of students at colleges and universities from 1966-1987 and found that students in residence halls were likely to perform slightly better academically than their counterparts in fraternity or sorority houses and other off-campus apartments. It is evident that college and university residence halls have the opportunity to positively impact the student experience because they can reach many students outside the classroom. However, student satisfaction is an important aspect of student housing. While conducting a study in four learning communities at a Midwestern university, Li, McCoy, Shelly and Whalen (2005) found that the overall academic and social environment meant more to student satisfaction than any one policy. It is critical that housing programs know how to make an impact because many programs are feeling pressure to do more for their students with fewer financial resources while students and parents expect higher quality services (Li, McCoy, Shelly & Whalen, 2005).

There are two ways to define academic success outside of tracking student learning in the classroom. One is by looking at GPA and the other is by looking at retention. Retention can be measured by how many credits students take per semester or by how many students return to the college or university the next semester or year. For the purposes of this study, academic success refers to students' GPAs because this is measured numerically and is easier to track than factors for retention like whether students stay in school at their current university, do not take any leaves of absence, are transfer students, etc.

Frequency of Interaction with the Resident Assistant and Community

Resident Assistants (RA), also possibly known as Community Assistants or Advisors, have the opportunity to play an important role in residence halls. The idea is that a peer resource can help students in their academics and student development. In Astin's (2003) longitudinal study with over 25,000 participants from over 200 colleges and universities, he found that the peer group is a strong factor influencing academic and personal development. It is logical that RAs and people in the community can be part of that peer group.

Resident Assistants also have the responsibility to build community in the geographical area of the residence hall for which they are responsible and encourage social interaction. However, there is not strong support that the number of interactions with the RA during the semester is a predictor for student success (Yongyi, Arboleda, Shelley II, & Whalen, 2004). In surveying 37% of undergraduates at a Midwestern university, they did not find a strong correlation between frequency of academic conversations with peers or faculty and academic success. Only satisfaction with academic progress, amount borrowed for educational loans, and high school rank, which is partially determined by GPA, were significant predictors of academic performance for both genders in the study. However, they did not look explore other kinds of conversations, especially with RAs, and their potential correlation with student grades.

Sense of Community

McMillan and Chavis created a measuring instrument called the Sense of Community Index or SCI, which has four elements: membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection (Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008). This has since been revised to improve reliability and the SCI has been a predictor for behaviors like participation in a given group. So if a student is more likely to participate in a group, their frequency of interaction is likely to be

higher. The question is how this measure relates to the other factors, especially because the community looked at in this study is not the university in general, but limited to a small geographic area.

Sense of belongingness does correlate to higher GPA, at least in international students (Glass & Westmont, 2013). Belongingness referred to sense of connection to the university and having a strong support network. They looked at 415 international students and 816 domestic students from eight universities in the United States. If student's had a greater sense of belonging, they had more cross-cultural interactions. Specifically, cultural events, leadership programs and community service increased students' sense of belonging. Belongingness seems similar to sense of community because with greater sense of community or sense of belonging, people are more like to participate. If sense of community is connected to belongingness, this could suggest that this measure could correlate with higher GPA.

Social Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's concept of their abilities in a given situation. This measure has been used recently in a college context to examine Course, Roommate, and Social self-efficacy (Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Murdock, 2013). They use responses from the beginning and end of fall semester from 401 first-year students. The study found that Course self-efficacy, students' perceptions of their abilities in classwork, was a significant predictor for academic performance and degree persistence but did not find a strong correlation between academic success and the social self-efficacy subscale.

Because there was not a separate measure for social self-efficacy, Wright, Wright, and Jenkins-Guarnieri (2013) developed one and tested it with 486 undergraduate university students. An example of a self-efficacy item is "I am confident that I have the skills to interact in social

relationships.” This study tried to show connection between social self-efficacy and social outcome expectations. Social outcome expectations are understood to be an individual’s expectations that their involvement in social activities will give them specific relational outcomes. For example, one of the outcome expectation items was “talking with others will increase my social relationships.”

This study found preliminary information that measuring both social self-efficacy and social outcome expectations appears to measure the larger concept of social self-efficacy in relationships (Wright, Wright, & Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2013). They also concluded that social self-efficacy does influence social outcome expectations as expected from Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy. Only their social self-efficacy items are used as a measure in this study because it looks at students’ perception of their capabilities and is simpler to look at than also looking at social outcome expectations.

Academic Self-Concept

Reynolds conducted a study with 589 undergraduates from three New York State colleges and had them self-report their academic self-concept, locus of control, general self-concept and social desirability. They found that the academic self-concept is positively correlated with student GPA, and is related to general self-concept (1988). Cokely, Komarraju, King, Cunningham and Muhammad discuss that academic self-concept is a person’s self-beliefs and feelings about one’s academic skills and does encompass academic self-efficacy (2003).

Symbolic Interactionism

Influence from the factors above is expected to impact student success and retention because of symbolic interactionism. Littlejohn discusses its three main tenets (1977). The first is that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.”

The second tenet is “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.” The last one is “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, and interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Littlejohn, 1977, p. 87).

The first tenet alludes to the fact that meanings can be positive, negative, neutral, foreign, etc. People that have positive meanings associated with an object, person, or idea are going to behave very differently than if they had negative meanings attached. Therefore, if a student has a positive feeling toward the role of student, it makes sense that they will behave differently and possibly do better as a student. The second tenet explains how meanings are obtained through interactions with people, objects, or ideas. A lack of interaction can also create certain meanings. If student think that an RA’s role is to reach out and get to know that student, the student could think the RA is lazy or uncaring if the RA never tries to contact the student. The third tenet describes how the meanings people have toward objects and people are modified through internal conversations. A person may be told that they are a good student, but may not actually believe it because they choose not to do so. Thus, this third tenet leaves room for variation.

Historically, Kuhn expanded symbolic interactionism with his theory on self-concepts, which describe that an individual can act toward himself as an object. This can include identities (social roles and status), likes, goals, philosophies, etc. For example, if people believe that they are a good student, how they think of themselves and act toward themselves will be different from if they believed they were a terrible student. Kuhn furthered the idea that all other actions toward other objects are based on aspects in the self-concept (as cited in Littlejohn, 1977, p. 89). Essentially, how people think about themselves can affect how they act toward anything else.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The variables explored in the literature review above all have the potential to influence student academic success. The hypotheses and research questions below detail expectations for correlations between the variables.

Hypotheses

H1: Academic success and academic self-concept will have a positive correlation.

Because of symbolic interactionism, it is understood that how a student perceives themselves can influence their identity and self-concept (Littlejohn, 1977). In addition, Reynolds (1988) found a positive correlation between academic self-concept and academic success.

H2: Frequency of interaction with the RA and frequency of interaction in the community will have a positive correlation.

The second tenet of symbolic interactionism discusses how people gain meaning through interactions with others (Littlejohn, 1977). Given that an RA's purpose is to build community and the RA is a member of the community, it is expected that those who interact more with the RA will interact more with the community, and vice versa.

H3: Frequency of interaction with the RA and sense of community will have a positive correlation.

H4: Frequency of interaction with the community and sense of community will have a positive correlation.

The second tenet of symbolic interactionism discusses how people gain meaning through interactions with others (Littlejohn, 1977). Therefore, it is expected that students who interact more with the RA and community will have a stronger sense of community because they have

more opportunities to create meanings for themselves about the community, their role in it and their relationship with the RA.

H5: Frequency of interaction with the RA and social self-efficacy will have a positive correlation.

H6: Frequency of interaction with the community and social self-efficacy will have a positive correlation.

As in the first hypothesis, how a student perceives themselves can influence their identity, self-concept, and their actions (Littlejohn, 1977). If a student sees themselves as being socially capable, they are likely to think that interacting with others will increase their social relationships, as shown with Wright, Wright and Jenkins-Guarnieri's study (2013) on social outcome expectations. If students expect that interacting with others will help them, it is logical to expect them to interact more with their RA and community.

H7: Sense of community and social self-efficacy will have a positive correlation.

As in the first and third hypothesis, it is understood that how a student perceives themselves can influence their identity and self-concept (Littlejohn, 1977). Therefore, it is logical to think that students who have a better sense of community will perceive themselves as more socially capable because they have a place to create and assert that identity. A positive correlation is expected here.

Research Questions

RQ1: What relationship is there between frequency of interaction with their RA and academic self-concept?

RQ2: What relationship is there between frequency of interaction with the community and academic self-concept?

Students' actions depend on how they perceive themselves and others (Littlejohn, 1977). Therefore, it is logical to expect that students who interact more with the RA and community will have more opportunities to create and assert their identity as a student. However, this identity can also be created by a lack of interaction. It is common to hear that people do not come to activities, in any situation in college, because they have homework.

Also, RAs at the university in this study are supposed to be able to direct students toward academic resources and are expected to be mindful of students' academics. This academically-oriented role of the RA could impact the academic self-concept. Either way, a correlation between these items is expected.

RQ3: What relationship is there between frequency of interaction with their RA and academic success?

RQ4: What relationship is there between frequency of interaction with their community and academic success?

Yongyi et al. (2004) did not find a statistically significant relationship between GPA and factors like frequency of interaction with the RA, involvement in the residence hall, or frequency of academic conversations with peers. However, due to symbolic interactionism, residents may choose to enact their identity as a student by reducing the number of interactions in the community or by having more academic conversations with the RA. With these possibilities, a correlation is expected, but the direction is unknown.

RQ5: What relationship is there between academic success and social self-efficacy?

While Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri and Murdock (2013) found that college self-efficacy (which included Course, Roommate, and Social self-efficacy) plays a role in academic success,

only the Course self-efficacy subscale was a significant predictor. In this study, if there is a relationship, a positive correlation is expected between these factors.

RQ6: What relationship is there between academic success and sense of community?

Glass and Westmont (2013) looked at international students' sense of belongingness on their academic success and found a strong positive correlation. However, the study looked at their sense of belongingness to the university at large, and not a small geographic community. It is expected that these types of community are different enough that the relationship between academic success and sense of community is uncertain.

RQ7: What relationship is there between sense of community and academic self-concept?

Sense of community implies involvement in the community, and self-concepts are created and reinforced through interactions with others, but academic self-concept can be created through a lack of interaction (Littlejohn, 1977). Because involvement in a community seems to be a prerequisite for sense of community, it is unclear what correlation exists.

RQ8: How consistent are perceptions of sense of community between residents, RAs, and ProStaff?

There is a computer system in place that allows RAs to record interactions in the community. One potential function of this exercise is to give Professional Staff members (ProStaff) a sense of the community by proxy. The first tenet of symbolic interactionism states that people react toward people and things based on what they think about them. In their interaction logs, RAs will talk about their interactions within the community based on what they think about it. However, representations of knowledge are not always accurate, and can be especially limited in certain forms of communication, like text-only. The question is how well this method conveys information about the community to the Professional Staff. It is anticipated

that ProStaff perceptions of the communities will not be as accurate as the RAs' because of the small amount of information RAs are required put into interaction logs. However, ProStaff and RA perceptions are expected to have some consistency.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from four different on-campus communities and kept in the study if this was their second semester in the same community at the time of the study. Two communities have a capacity for about 34 residents while the other two have a capacity for about 70 residents. One of these smaller communities and one of these larger ones have more returning students while the other two communities are geared for first-year students. Information from 34 participants was used in this study where 12 (35.3%) were male and 22 (64.7%) were female. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 23 ($M= 19.76$, $SD= 1.615$). Year in school ranged from 1 (freshman) to 4 (senior) ($M= 1.91$, $SD= 1.055$). 91.2% were U.S. Citizens and 8.8% were international students.

Procedures

Participants were asked to type in a web link on any computer, agree to the informed consent form on the survey, and then answer a series of questions. For residents, they were asked their GPA, course load, ethnicity, gender, age, experience in their community, experience with their RA, how they perceived themselves as students, and how they perceived their social self-efficacy for fall 2013. This survey is found in Appendix A.

For Resident Assistants (RAs), they were asked for their community, gender, age and experience with their community for fall 2013. This survey is found in Appendix B.

Professional Staff (ProStaff) were asked for their gender, age, and then asked to run a report on the all of the interaction logs that the Resident Assistant had made during fall 2013. The ProStaff read all of these logs and then answered questions about the experience with the community. These logs were kept in a password protected online system called eRezLife, used by Housing and Residence life staff members to keep track of sensitive information about residents. Only ProStaff were able to see all of the interaction logs that all RAs in an area submit. This survey is found in Appendix C.

Measures

Academic success refers to GPA. Participants who were residents were asked in Question #7 (Appendix A) for their fall semester 2013 GPA and overall university GPA. This study ran Pearson correlations for both the semester and overall GPA with all other variables in the study. The mean overall GPA was 3.34 on a 4.0 scale ($SD = 0.58$). The mean for the fall semester GPA was 3.28 ($SD = 0.70$). These measures were positively correlated and were statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($r = 0.96$ and $p = 0.00$).

Frequency of interaction with their Resident Assistant (RA) and community was measured by Questions #8 and #11 (Appendix A). Frequency of interaction with the Resident Assistant (RA) was determined by giving participants a range between never seeing their RA and 8 or more times a week to choose from ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.96$). '1' meant they never saw their RA. A response of '2' meant the residents saw their RA 1-3 times per week, while a response of '3' meant the residents saw their RA 4-6 times per week. A '4' meant they saw the RA 6-8 times per week and a '5' meant they saw their RA 8 or more times per week.

Frequency of interaction with the community was determined by giving participants the same range to choose from as in the frequency of interaction with the RA ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.164$).

'1' meant they never saw people in the community. A response of '2' meant the residents saw people in their community 1-3 times per week, while a response of '3' meant the residents saw community members 4-6 times per week. A '4' meant people in the community 6-8 times per week and a '5' meant they saw people 8 or more times per week. It makes sense that residents would see other people in their community more than the RA because there is only one RA per community and many more community members.

Sense of community was measured by a 14 item scale taken from the Sense of Community Index (SCI) by Chavis et al. (2008). This was found in Question #14 with 14 sub-questions (see Appendix A). Two subsets from this index (Membership and Shared Emotional Connection) were taken all together because they related to sense of belonging better than Reinforcement of Needs and Influence. However, there are two single item questions (one from Reinforcement of Needs and one from Influence) that were thought to be relevant because they touch on specific Housing concerns. Accuracy between residents, Resident Assistants (see Appendix B) and Professional Staff (see Appendix C) was determined by looking at each groups' sense of community score. This sense of community overall score (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) was determined by averaging the responses for each of the 14 items ($M= 3.56$, $SD= 0.69$, $\alpha = .93$).

Social self-efficacy was measured by a 14 item scale in Question #15 with 14 sub-questions (see Appendix A) taken from Wright, Wright & Jenkins-Guarnieri's Social Efficacy Expectations scale from 2013. For each participant, a social self-efficacy overall score (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) was determined by averaging the responses for each of the 14 items ($M= 4.15$, $SD= 0.71$, $\alpha = .97$).

Academic self-concept was measured by a 12 item scale called the Educational and Psychological measurement in Question #16 with 12 sub-questions (see Appendix A) (Cokely et al, 2003). This study only included the subscales of Study Habits and Rewarded Efforts due to the length of the survey and the breadth of this exploratory study. For each participant, an academic self-concept overall score (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) was determined by averaging the responses for each of the 12 items ($M= 4.02$, $SD= 0.38$, $\alpha = .80$). All three alpha scores (α) from the multiple-item scales (sense of community, social self-efficacy, and academic self-concept) were .80 or above, which shows good reliability.

Results

Hypotheses

All correlations can be found in Table 1 in Appendix D. Correlations between academic success and academic self-concept were first examined to give or deny support for Hypothesis 1. A positive correlation was found, as expected, for both fall semester GPA ($r= 0.41$ and $p= 0.014$) and overall GPA ($r= 0.38$ and $p= 0.03$) with academic self-concept. What is interesting is that the strength of the relationship between these variables was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 2 looked at the correlation between frequency of interaction with the RA and frequency of interaction with the community, and found a positive correlation as expected ($r=0.37$ and $p=0.03$). This relationship was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

In looking at Hypotheses 3 and 4, positive correlations were found for both frequency of RA interaction and sense of community ($r= 0.30$ and $p= 0.09$) and frequency of community interaction and sense of community ($r= .57$ and $p= 0.00$). Frequency of interaction with the community was significant at the 0.01 level while interaction with the RA was a moderate positive correlation that was marginally statistically significant. Given that both results were

positive correlations, even with one at marginal significance, this study counts these hypotheses as supported.

While a positive correlation was expected for Hypotheses 5 and 6, no statistically significant correlation was found between frequency of RA interaction and social self-efficacy ($r= 0.17$ and $p= 0.35$) and frequency of community interaction and social self-efficacy ($r= -0.04$ and $p= 0.83$). Even though a minor positive relationship was found between frequency of RA interaction and social self-efficacy, the lack of statistical significance means this value may not indicate anything.

Hypothesis 7 expected a positive correlation between sense of community and social self-efficacy and received support for this based on the correlations between the variables ($r= 0.34$ and $p= 0.049$). This moderately positive relationship was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Research Questions

Now, this paper seeks to answer the research questions proposed earlier. Research Questions 1 and 2 ask what relationship there is between frequency of interaction with the RA and community and academic self-concept and assumed that there would be a relationship. Unexpectedly, no statistically significant relationship was found between RA interaction and academic self-concept ($r= 0.07$ and $p= 0.69$) nor between community interaction and academic self-concept ($r= 0.00$ and $p= 0.99$).

Research Questions 3 and 4 asks what relationship exists between frequency of interaction with their RA and community and academic success. Similar to the study cited in the literature review, no statistically significant correlation was found, though a relationship was expected. Correlations between frequency of community interaction and GPAs (fall semester GPA: $r= -0.07$ and $p= 0.68$; overall GPA: $r= -0.09$ and $p= 0.60$) and correlations with frequency

of RA interaction (fall semester GPA: $r= 0.02$ and $p= 0.90$; overall GPA: $r= -0.04$ and $p= 0.84$) were all not statistically significant.

As in the previous research questions, Research Question 5 expected a relationship between academic success and social self-efficacy, but no statistically significant relationship was found between fall semester GPA ($r= -0.14$ and $p= 0.45$) or overall GPA ($r= -0.10$ and $p= 0.56$) and social self-efficacy. If the results were to be statistically significant, it would be interesting to note the minor negative correlation.

The variables of academic success and sense of community were then examined to answer Research Question 6. Fall semester GPA and sense of community ($r= -0.32$ and $p= 0.06$) and overall GPA and sense of community ($r= -0.30$ and $p= 0.09$) were both marginally statistically significant, and are moderately negative correlations.

Research Question 7 assumed that there would be a relationship between sense of community and academic self-concept. However, this was not supported with the data, given that no statistically significant relationship was found ($r= -0.07$ and $p= 0.71$).

The final research question sought to answer how consistent perceptions were between residents, RAs, and ProStaff and the sense of community. It was originally anticipated that ProStaff perceptions of the communities would not be as accurate as the RAs' perceptions because of the small amount of information RAs are required put into interaction logs. As shown in Table 2 in Appendix D, there did not seem to be much difference between RA and ProStaff perceptions, though this study had limited data points. The two largest differences from the community average are marked with asterisks.

Also noteworthy were the sense of community averages. Communities 1 and 3 had lower averages and their facilities are apartments with doors that open to the outside. Communities 2

and 4 had higher averages and their facilities are apartments with doors that open to lounges on the inside of their building.

Discussion

Four of the six noteworthy correlations from this study are intuitive and fulfill predictions from the theory of symbolic interactionism. Residents that think of themselves as good students are likely to have higher grades, which makes sense in the context of the symbolic interactionism perspective. Also, students that interact more with the community will have a stronger sense of community and are more likely to interact with the RA because the meanings they assign to the community and RA are created through interaction. There is also a marginally statistically significant positive correlation between frequency of interaction with the RA and sense of community. This correlation makes sense in that people that interact more with the community are more likely to interact with the RA and vice versa.

This study has given correlations between variables, but future work can now explore causation. With the understanding of the symbolic interactionism perspective, it is easy to build possible cause-and-effect relationships out of some of the variables. If one were able to improve the academic self-concept of a person, this could result in higher grades. On the flip-side, one could hypothesize that helping a student improve their grades will improve their academic self-concept, which in turn helps their grades. Likewise, if an RA were able to increase how often they interact with community members, this could increase how often residents interact in the community, which could then increase their sense of community. This situation could then be reversed to say those residents with a higher sense of community could interact with people more often and with the RA more often. It is definitely possible that these factors reinforce each other,

but only some variables are easily influenced by RAs, specifically the frequency of interaction with the RA and community.

The last statistically significant positive correlation is not as easily understandable in terms of possible cause-and-effect relationships. Social self-efficacy is positively correlated with sense of community, but has no statistically significant relationship with frequency of interaction with either the community or RA. Therefore, if social self-efficacy is not related to sense of community through quantity of interactions, it may be that social self-efficacy and sense of community are related through the quality of interactions. Quality of interactions was not explored in this study, which makes this an opportunity for further research.

If the true value of interactions with RAs is dependent on the quality of the interactions, it would benefit supervisors to assess quality of interactions with residents rather than purely quantifying the interactions. The implications of such a finding would mean that RA training should focus more on giving Resident Assistants the tools to communicate to residents in meaningful ways. This could also result in a shift in mentality away from quantity to quality, which could justify hiring more staff members. This would be possible because they would then have fewer residents in each community, and each staff member would have more time to devote to quality interactions.

Another finding worth noting was a marginally statistically significant negative correlation between sense of community and academic success. Essentially, this was the only link connecting the social variables with the academic ones and the result was a negative correlation. This does not seem to bode well for Resident Assistants except for the possibility that RAs may be affecting student retention rather than academic success. It seems that the impact of RAs is not on academics, but that they improve the social life of students. By

providing opportunities for social interaction, RAs encourage integration into the university, which helps students finish their degree. Retention is equally important to student success, but is more complex to measure than just GPA, which is why it was not explored here. If the case is that RAs do positively affect retention, this would cause housing programs to look at long-term progress from year to year rather than just short-term progress at semester. This area merits more study.

Finally, the results from the interaction logs showed that the ProStaff were close to the communities' average sense of community. In some cases, they were closer to the average than the RA of the community. However, there were not enough data points or obvious trends to make many conclusions. Again, it was interesting that the type of facilities appeared to have an effect on the sense of community, especially because this finding fits with the common perception among RAs that communities with internal lounges are more social than those whose apartments open to the outside. Depending on if sense of community and social interaction can be linked to academic success, this information could provide justification when constructing new buildings for those with internal lounges.

Sense of community was a critical variable in this study because it is closely related to three other variables and was the only one that had a marginally statistically significant correlation with an academic variable. It was also used to evaluate RA and ProStaff perceptions of community with those of the residents. If sense of community is to be used as an indicator of the effect RAs have in students' lives, it should be correlated, preferably in a positive manner, with some form of academic success, whether that be grades or retention.

Limitations and Future Research

There are many opportunities for further research, the first one being that more responses from each of the four communities would give future research the ability to look at correlations between all of these variables by community. This research was also unique in that it only looked at apartment-style housing while most residence hall academic literature looks at traditional-style 'dorms.' Using measures well established in traditional-style residence halls and applying them to apartments can give useful information of how well the measure apply across facility types.

Given that the purpose of this study is to help Resident Assistants improve students' college experiences, it is important to consider how to measure that effect. If future research were to compare these variables, especially grades, between a population of students living off-campus and a population of students living on-campus, the effect of the RA may be more visible.

The third point, as has already been mentioned, there is further work to be done with the social self-efficacy measure to identify potential independent variables. There is also potential to positively tie sense of community and other social measures with academics through retention. Retention and course load should be looked at separately from grades as measures of academic success. While students' life may not correlate with their grades, it can impact their motivation to continue in school.

The final area for future research, as mentioned in the discussion, is to look at how quality of interactions is correlated with social self-efficacy and sense of community. Social self-efficacy does not relate to sense of community through quantity on interactions, given that this would have been seen through a correlation with frequency of interaction.

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Appendix A

Resident Survey

Please answer the following questions. It is expected that the survey process will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

1. Which community do you live in?

Note: Your 'community' includes the apartments for which your RA is a leader.

- 1) Bullen 2nd Floor North (BU 201-206)
- 2) Davis Hall
- 3) Merrill 2nd Floor West (ME 201-206)
- 4) Reeder Hall

2. Is this your second semester in this same community? Y or N

Note: Your 'community' includes the apartments for which your RA is a leader.

(If you answer No, skip to the end of the survey and turn it in.)

3. You identify as:

- 1) Male
- 2) Female
- 3) Prefer not to answer

4. How old are you?

5. You describe yourself as:

- 1) American; my ethnicity is: _____ 2) International; my country of origin is: _____

6. Class Standing

- 1) Freshman
- 2) Sophomore
- 3) Junior
- 4) Senior
- 5) Graduate Student

7. USU Fall 2013 Semester GPA _____
Number of credit hours for Fall 2013 at USU _____

8. On average, how many times per week last semester did you personally interact (face to face) with your RA?

- 1) I have never seen my RA face to face (If you answer 1, skip to question 6)
- 2) 1-3 times per week
- 3) 4-6 times per week
- 4) 6-8 times per week
- 5) More than 8 times per week

9. Of the personal (face to face) interactions with your RA, how often did they include the following:
- 1) Information about housing sponsored activities
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
 - 2) Information about housing or university policies (cleaning checks, check-outs, quiet hours, etc.)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
 - 3) Personal information (friends, family, ect)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
 - 4) Academic information (grades, tutoring, ect)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
10. Other than face to face interactions, what types of communication did you have with your RA?
- 1) Facebook (or other social media)
 - 2) Text message
 - 3) Phone call
 - 4) Email
 - 5) Other. Please Specify _____
11. On average, how many times per week do you personally interact (face to face) with other people in your community?
- Note: Your 'community' includes the apartments for which your RA is a leader.**
- 1) I have never seen other people face to face (If you answer 1, skip to question 9)
 - 2) 1-3 times per week
 - 3) 4-6 times per week
 - 4) 6-8 times per week
 - 5) More than 8 times per week
12. Of the personal (face to face) interactions with other people in your community, how often do they include the following:
- Note: Your 'community' includes the apartments for which your RA is a leader.**
- 1) Talking about housing sponsored activities
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
 - 2) Talking about housing or university policies (cleaning checks, check-outs, quiet hours, etc.)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
 - 3) Personal information (friends, family, ect)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
 - 4) Academic information (grades, tutoring, ect)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

13. Other than face to face interactions, what types of communication do you have with other people in your community?

Note: Your 'community' includes the apartments for which your RA is a leader.

- 1) Facebook (or other social media)
- 2) Text message
- 3) Phone call
- 4) Email
- 5) Other. Please Specify _____

14. How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about your community?

Note: Your 'community' includes the apartments for which your RA is a leader.

*****This question was randomized*****

1) It is very important to me to be a part of this community
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

2) I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

3) I expect to be a part of this community for a long time
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

4) Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

5) I feel hopeful about the future of this community
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

6) Members of this community care about each other
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

7) I can trust people in this community
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

8) I can recognize most of the members of this community
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

9) Most community members know me
 1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

10) This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

11) I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

12) Being a member of this community is a part of my identity

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

13) When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

14) If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

15. How well do you agree with each of the following statements?

*****This question was randomized*****

1) I am confident that I have the abilities to successfully engage in social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

2) I am confident in my skills to be in social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

3) I am confident expressing my opinions in social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

4) I am confident that I have the abilities needed to establish social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

5) I am confident in my skills to share my feelings in social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

6) I am confident in my abilities to tell others when I am upset

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

7) I am confident that I have the skills to interact in social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

8) I am confident in my abilities to maintain social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

9) I am confident in my ability to disagree in social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

10) I am confident I have the ability to reach an agreement in my social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

11) I am confident I have the skills needed to establish successful relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

12) I am confident I have the abilities to maintain happiness in my social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

13) I am confident in my skills to talk to others about things that are important to me

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

14) I am confident I have the abilities needed to develop social relationships

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

16. How well do you agree with each of the following statements?

*****This question was randomized*****

1) My study habits are poor.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

2) I don't study enough.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

3) I don't study enough before exams.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

4) I schedule my study time well.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

5) If I try, I will get good grades.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

6) Studying hard pays off.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

7) My school efforts are rewarded.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

8) I don't do well in school.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

9) I do well given the time I study.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

10) I am a capable student.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

11) Being a student is rewarding.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

12) I get the grades I deserve.

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

Thank you for your participation! Please fill out your name in the box below and click the button at the bottom of the page. You will be able receive a free lockout from your area office within two business days. Remember to bring your ID. If you have questions, please email Kayla Arrington at kayla.arrington@aggiemail.usu.edu.

NOTE: Your name will be separated from your survey responses promptly after submission.

Appendix B

RA Survey

Please answer the following questions. It is expected that the survey process will take 5-10 minutes to complete.

1. Which community do you live in?

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

- 1) Bullen 2nd Floor North (BU 201-206)
- 2) Davis Hall
- 3) Merrill 2nd Floor West (ME 201-206)
- 4) Reeder Hall

2. You identify as:

- 1) Male
- 2) Female
- 3) Prefer not to answer

3. How old are you?

4. How many interaction logs a week are you required to do? _____

5. On average, how many times per week last semester did you personally interact (face to face) with residents in the community?

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

- 1) I never interacted with residents face to face (If you choose this answer, skip to question 6)
- 2) 1-3 times per week
- 3) 4-6 times per week
- 4) 6-8 times per week
- 5) More than 8 times per week

6. Of the personal (face to face) interactions with residents in the community, how often did they include the following:

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

- 1) Information about housing sponsored activities
 1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
- 2) Information about housing or university policies (cleaning checks, check-outs, quiet hours, etc.)
 1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

3) Personal information (friends, family, ect)
 1-Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

4) Academic information (grades, tutoring, ect)
 1-Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

7. Other than face to face interactions, what types of communication did you have with residents?

- 1) Facebook (or other social media)
- 2) Text message
- 3) Phone call
- 4) Email
- 5) Other. Please Specify _____

8. How well do each of the following statements represent this community?

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

*****This question was randomized*****

1) It is very important to residents to be a part of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

2) Residents are with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

3) Residents expect to be a part of this community for a long time

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

4) Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

5) Residents feel hopeful about the future of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

6) Members of this community care about each other

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

7) Residents can trust people in this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

8) Residents can recognize most of the members of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

9) Most community members know other individuals

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

10) This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

11) Residents put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

12) Being a member of this community is a part of residents' identity

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

13) When residents have a problem, they can talk about it with members of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

14) If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

Thank you for your participation! Please click the button at the bottom to submit your responses. If you have questions, please email Kayla Arrington at kayla.arrington@aggiemail.usu.edu.

Appendix C

ProStaff Survey

1. Which community is this survey being filled out for?

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

- 1) Bullen 2nd Floor North (BU 201-206)
- 2) Davis Hall
- 3) Merrill 2nd Floor West (ME 201-206)
- 4) Reeder Hall

2. You identify as:

- 1) Male
- 2) Female
- 3) Prefer not to answer

3. How old are you?

Instructions: Please generate a report in the eRezlife system on the resident interaction logs of the community from Fall 2013. Please read these interaction logs and pay attention to information that you deem important. You will then be asked to close down that interaction log report and fill out this survey regarding your impressions of the community based on the interaction logs you just read.

When you are ready, please click the button at the bottom of the page to continue.

4. How many interaction logs per week do you require your staff to do? _____

5. On average, how many times per week last semester did the RA personally interact (face to face) with residents in the community?

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

- 1) This RA never interacts with residents face to face (If you choose this answer, skip to question 6)
- 2) 1-3 times per week
- 3) 4-6 times per week
- 4) 6-8 times per week
- 5) More than 8 times per week

6. Of the personal (face to face) interactions with residents in the community, how often do they include the following:

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

- 1) Information about housing sponsored activities
- 1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

- 2) Information about housing or university policies (cleaning checks, check-outs, quiet hours, etc.)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
- 3) Personal information (friends, family, ect)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always
- 4) Academic information (grades, tutoring, ect)
1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

7. Other than face to face interactions, what types of communication does the RA have with their residents?

- 1) Facebook (or other social media)
- 2) Text message
- 3) Phone call
- 4) Email
- 5) Other. Please Specify _____

8. Please choose the option that shows how much you agree with each statement about this community:

Note: The 'community' includes the apartments for which the RA is a leader.

*****This question was randomized*****

- 1) It is very important to residents to be a part of this community
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree
- 2) Residents are with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree
- 3) Residents expect to be a part of this community for a long time
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree
- 4) Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree
- 5) Residents feel hopeful about the future of this community
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree
- 6) Members of this community care about each other
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree
- 7) Residents can trust people in this community
1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

8) Residents can recognize most of the members of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

9) Most community members know other individuals

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

10) This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

11) Residents put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

12) Being a member of this community is a part of residents' identity

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

13) When residents have a problem, they can talk about it with members of this community

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

14) If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved

1-Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neither Agree nor Disagree 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

Thank you for your participation! Please click the button at the bottom to submit your responses. If you have questions, please email Kayla Arrington at kayla.arrington@aggiemail.usu.edu.

Appendix D

Table 1

		Fall GPA	Overall GPA	Frequency of Interaction with RA	Frequency of Interaction with Community	Sense of Community	Social Self-Efficacy
Overall GPA	Correlation	.956**					
	Significance	.00					
Frequency of Interaction with RA	Correlation	.02	-.04				
	Significance	.90	.84				
Frequency of Interaction with Community	Correlation	-.07	-.09	.37*			
	Significance	.68	.60	.03			
Sense of Community	Correlation	-.32	-.30	.30	.57**		
	Significance	.06	.09	.09	.00		
Social Self-Efficacy	Correlation	-.14	-.10	.17	-.04	.34*	
	Significance	.45	.56	.35	.83	.049	
Academic Self-Concept	Correlation	.41*	.38*	.07	.00	-.07	.18
	Significance	.014	.03	.69	.99	.71	.30

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 2

	Community Average Sense of Community	RA Difference	ProStaff Difference
Community 1	3.07 (out of 5)	0.29	0.14
Community 2	3.56 (out of 5)	0.15	0.08
Community 3	3.35 (out of 5)	-0.49*	0.01
Community 4	3.72 (out of 5)	-0.01	0.42*

*Denotes one of the two largest differences from the community average