

Affinity Housing

Fall Semester 2013 Report

Introduction

In Fall 2013, the University of New Orleans implemented an Affinity Housing program as a collaborative effort between the Office of Student Housing, the Office of Student Involvement & Leadership, and the Office of Enrollment Services. Four Affinity Wings were offered in Pontchartrain North Hall: Honors, Transfer Students, New Orleans Culture, and iLEAD (a student involvement-oriented wing). For the fall semester, each wing had one dedicated resident assistant (RA) and three staff members to aid in implementation of the program.

Astin's involvement model (1993) and Tinto's student departure model (1993) suggest that learning communities such as UNO's Affinity Housing program increase students' development and persistence by integrating their social lives and their academic lives. In alignment with CAS standards for Housing and Residential Life Programs, learning outcomes for students involved with the program "promote student learning and development that is purposeful and holistic" and include:

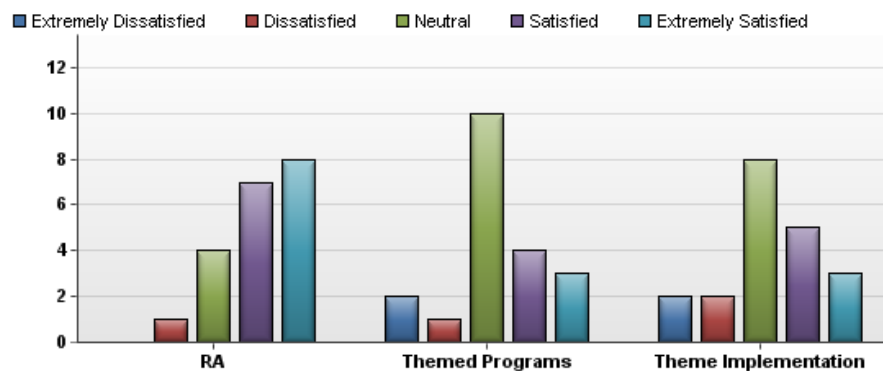
- meaningful interpersonal relationships
- realistic self-appraisal
- appreciation of diversity
- development of personal values and ethics
- social responsibility

In order to gauge the success of the program, a survey was emailed to all residents at the end of the Fall term. All responses were self-reported. Of the total number of residents participating in Affinity Housing wings, 22 students participated in the survey.

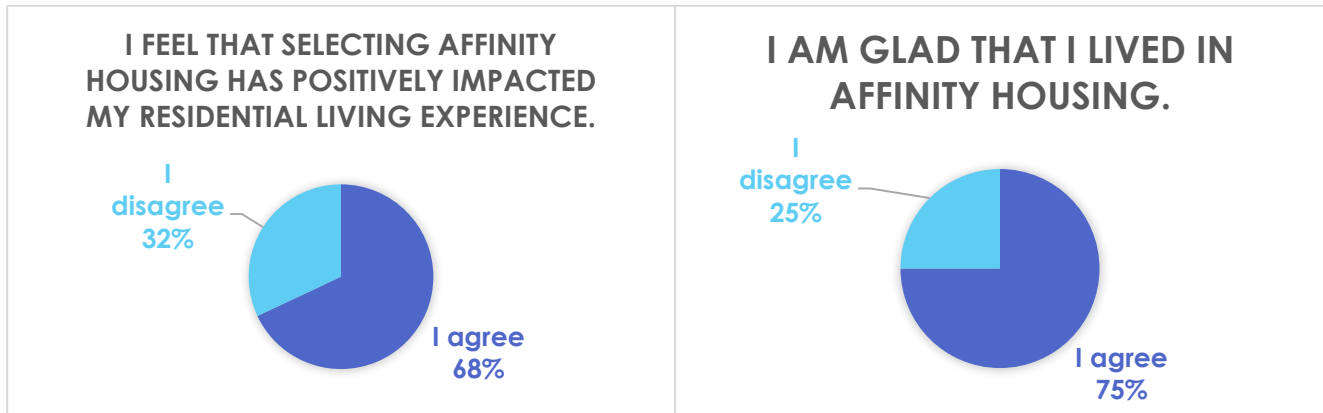
Student Satisfaction

When asked to rate satisfaction with the Affinity Wing experience, student responses were overall favorable. More than two-thirds (68%) of students agreed with the statement "I feel that selecting Affinity Housing has positively impacted my residential living experience." When asked to elaborate, many students cited building connections with other students as a positive outcome of living in housing. Furthermore, students reported that these connections "pushed [him/her] into being a big leader" and "helped [him/her] to succeed" by being with like-minded individuals, particularly in the Honors and iLEAD wings.

Of the students surveyed, 75% reported being either satisfied or extremely satisfied with his/her RA; most other students were neutral to their RA. Only one student reported dissatisfaction with his/her RA. Half of the students who participated in the survey reported neutral satisfaction with theme implementation and programs,



Overall, 75% of student respondents agreed with the statement "I am glad that I lived in Affinity Housing." Of those students who disagreed with the statement, some felt as though the efforts were no different than on other floors or felt that they "should have lived of [sic] campus and saved... 6 grand." However, most students reported positive relationships with their peers as the primary reason that they agreed with the statement. One student reported: "It made it so much easier to make friends with people that have similar interests, and to find out about leadrrship [sic] opportunities on campus [sic]." Another student reported: "I feel my dorm experience wouldn't have been nearly as successful."



When asked to provide other comments regarding Affinity Housing, students also expressed satisfaction. "I don't want to let it go next year. If I could live on affinity wings every year I could. I would live on the honors wing next year, but I don't want to live with a bunch of freshmen. Those of us on the iLEAD floor want to still live together."

Quality of Living

When asked a variety of questions regarding the quality of living in the residence hall, student responses were positive. When asked to what degree they agreed with the statement "I like living in a residence hall," 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed; 71% of respondents actively participate in residence hall programming and interact with peers; 70% of students can easily study in their rooms; 68% of students live well with their roommates; and 76% of students feel that their hall is kept clean. Based on these responses, students in Affinity Housing report higher quality of living compared to the responses of all students living on-campus.

	Affinity Housing (Agree or Strongly Agree)	ALL Housing (Agree of Strongly Agree)
I like living in a residence hall.	70%	61%
I actively participate in programming and interact with other people who live on campus.	71%	55%
I can easily study in my room.	70%	72%
I get along with my roommate(s).	68%	63%
My hall is kept clean.	76%	64%

Personal Growth & Development

Students were also asked to self-report their personal growth and development in a number of areas including: relationships with others; self-knowledge; understanding people from different backgrounds and belief systems; personal values and ethics; and contributing to community. Again, responses were generally positive and students reported higher levels of growth and development compared to the responses of all students living on-campus.

To what extent is your campus living experience contributing positively to your growth and development in...	Affinity Housing (Agree or Strongly Agree)	ALL Housing (Agree of Strongly Agree)
relationships with others.	63%	56%
understanding yourself.	83%	62%
understanding people of other backgrounds.	67%	62%
understanding people with different beliefs, opinions, or values.	78%	65%
developing your personal values and ethics.	68%	62%
contributing to the welfare of your community.	58%	48%

Academic Success

Students in Affinity Housing were generally successful in their academic endeavors; all four wings had an average cumulative GPA above 2.5.

Affinity Housing Wing	Average Cumulative GPA
Honors Wing	3.38
iLEAD Wing	2.79
New Orleans Culture Wing	2.72
Transfer Wing	2.88

Retention

Of the 178 students living in Affinity Housing in Fall 2013, 137 remained in their respective wings for the Spring 2014 semester (a 77% retention rate).

Affinity Housing Wing	# of Residents Fall 2013	# of Residents (# Returning) Spring 2014	Retention Rate (%)
Honors Wing	47	45 (41)	87%
iLEAD Wing	46	44 (35)	76%
New Orleans Culture Wing	44	49 (41)	93%
Transfer Wing	41	31 (20)	49%

The retention rate does **not** reflect the retention statistics of the University, but the number of students on each wing who remained on their respective wing. Students lost to attrition may have moved to another wing or moved off campus rather than withdrawing from the University.

It is important to note that a University of Louisiana System policy requires that all unmarried, full-time undergraduate students regardless of age or emancipation status, live in campus residence halls as long as space is available. The Honors and New Orleans Culture wing residents are all new students who are required to live in on-campus housing. The iLEAD and Transfer Wings also housed transfer students who were **not** required to live in on-campus housing. When asked by their resident assistant why they moved off of the Transfer Wing, most responses included: moved off-campus/home for financial reasons, moved to another room in student housing due to room consolidation, transferred to an institution closer to family (for out-of-state students).

Limitations

Although this information is helpful to the Affinity Housing program at the University of New Orleans, there are a number of limitations to this assessment. The survey was emailed to all residents of on-campus housing at the end of Fall Semester. The timing of the survey may have led to a low response rate as students recover from the stress of finals and are less likely to check their emails when school is not in session. However, to get a full picture of their on-campus living experience for the term, the assessment cannot be completed until the end of the term.

Because many of the students in Affinity Housing are first-year students who are required to live on campus, wing retention numbers are not necessarily reflective of program success. While some students may choose to remain in Affinity Housing because of the program, others may choose to stay rather than the inconvenience of moving rooms mid-year. The lower retention rate reflected in the Transfer Wing may be more indicative of other factors, such as student satisfaction, room consolidations, or student financial stress. Additionally, not every student who resided on an Affinity Wing selected Affinity Housing. Though students applied for the program, empty beds were filled with other eligible students.

Overall, 22 students who participated in Affinity Housing responded to the survey; 92 students participated in the University student housing survey overall (as compared to 55 student participants in Spring 2013). (Privateer Place is not included in these assessments.) With so few participants responding specifically to Affinity Housing-related questions, it is impossible to make firm conclusions from these results.

Recommendations

Theme Implementation

Though students reported positive reactions to residing in a community of like-minded individuals, many reported that they were indifferent toward the theme of their respective wings. Building a community of academic and social support is a primary goal of Affinity Housing; this goal can be further cemented by making the theme of each floor more clearly integrated into the community.

Ongoing Assessment

In order to assess and improve the Affinity Housing program, routine and intentional student feedback is necessary. Development of an exit survey for students who move out of an Affinity Wing is important to determining whether or not the program is meeting its goals and can also direct the training and development of Affinity Housing staff.

Additionally, continuous and intentional student input should continue to develop the themes for each wing. While students were surveyed for their interest in a number of pre-selected themes, student-directed themes could increase impact and interest. Student organizations may be a good place to begin collecting input as they are students who have organically grouped themselves based on their personal interests.

Strategic Plan

The Affinity Housing program began with the intention of building community and increasing student success. Now that the program has been established and early student self-reported data is positive, the Affinity Housing committee should create a strategic plan with short-term and long-term goals to foster the ongoing success of the program to ensure that student needs are being met.

Sophomore-Focused Affinity Housing

Recent studies in higher education explore the "sophomore slump," highlighting that many institutions offer a great deal of support to their new students, leaving students feeling lost in their second year. In the September/October 2013 issue of the *Journal of College Student Development*, a recent study completed by Xueli Wang and Lance Kennedy-Phillips found a number of predictors of success in sophomore students: interaction with faculty, living on campus, peer interaction, institutional commitment, and classroom engagement.

In the January/February 2014 edition of the *Talking Stick*, Lance Kennedy-Phillips and Elizabeth Fines explore institutions that provide tools for second-year student success in "Now starring: Sophomores." One highlighted program is the Second-Year Transformational Experience Program (STEP) at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The program creates "cohorts" of second-year students that each has a faculty-liaison who participates in small group discussion and a variety of educational experiences designed to support student academic and social goals. Similar programs at NYU include faculty-in-residence.

In the coming months, the Affinity Housing committee should further research the needs of sophomore students and begin to explore options for serving second-year students in on-campus housing. In particular, further faculty involvement should be encouraged to promote the academic success of students.

Conclusion

The first semester of the Affinity Housing program at the University of New Orleans has been a success. Students reported being more satisfied and more successful than students living in on-campus housing without theme-specific communities. Retention on each wing was relatively high and students residing in Affinity Housing demonstrated academic success in the first semester. The degree of success will be seen in time with ongoing programmatic and community building efforts and with continued, intentional assessment. Spring semester 2014 is an opportunity to capitalize on fall semester successes and provide further direction to the Affinity Housing program.

References

Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tinto, V. (1993) *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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