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Changes in Student Engagement: The Relationship Between Place of Residence, Gender and Engagement

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Changes in Student Engagement:
The Relationship between Place of Residence, Gender and Engagement

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Kendall J. Stanislav

May 2011

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**Higher Education and Student Development
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Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTERS THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

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entitled

Changes in Student Engagement:
The Relationship between Place of Residence, Gender and Engagement

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the
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ABSTRACT

The residential college campus model has been in existence in North America since the days of early Colonial America. Students living in dormitories and residence halls were the norm until the 1950s and 60s when students began to move off-campus. As this trend has continued research has examined the merits both of living on and off-campus and in general found that living on-campus is more closely associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, including engagement or involvement (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Involvement theory states that the more time and effort invested in academically enhancing practices, the more likely the student is to be successful in college (Astin, 1984). In general, students living off-campus have been found to be less engaged than their on-campus counterparts (Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer, 2001).

This study examined the changes in student engagement by using data collected by the National Survey of Student Engagement in the spring of their freshmen and senior years. A single graduating class was studied with 156 participants in the study. The study found that there were no statistically significant differences between students living on-campus or off-campus during their senior years. A comparison of the means found that four of the five engagement benchmarks were positive, indicating an increase in engagement between freshmen and senior years. The lone negative mean, a lowering of engagement, was in the Supportive Campus Environment benchmark. These findings prompt discussion of the possible causes of the findings and the implications for practice and research moving forward.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	3
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
INVOLVEMENT THEORY.....	5
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.....	6
OFF-CAMPUS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.....	6
GENDER DIFFERENCES.....	7
ON AND OFF-CAMPUS RESIDENCE DIFFERENCES.....	8
ACADEMIC DIFFERENCES.....	8
RETENTION DIFFERENCES.....	10
INTERACTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY.....	10
MOTIVATION FOR MOVING OFF-CAMPUS.....	12
SUMMARY.....	13
METHODOLOGY.....	15
PARTICIPANTS.....	15
MEASURES.....	16
LEVEL OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGE.....	16
ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING.....	17
STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION.....	17
ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES.....	18
SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT.....	18
VARIABLES.....	18
RELIABILITY.....	19

PROCEDURES.....19

RESULTS.....21

 RESEARCH QUESTION #1.....21

 RESEARCH QUESTIONS #2 AND #3.....22

DISCUSSION.....25

 LIMITATIONS.....26

 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....27

 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....29

 CONCLUSION.....30

REFERENCES.....32

APPENDIX.....36

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: MANOVA Results: Interaction effect of Gender and Place of Residence on Engagement Changes.....21

Table 2: MANOCA Results: Main effects of Gender and Place of Residence on EngagementChanges.....22

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviation of Five Benchmark Change Scores.....23

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Colleges have long offered more than just classroom lessons and lectures. From the beginning of American higher education students have combined their living and learning through the use of residential campuses where students lived and studied in the same location (Rudolph, 1990). In early Colonial American higher education, students resided with their teacher; it was through the formal and informal lessons that students were able to get a complete education in both a specific discipline as well as life. These living arrangements did not necessarily come out of a philosophy of holistic education, but rather out of necessity. Ringenberg (2006) states that the communities in Colonial America that housed the original colleges could not have supported the influx of students so the colleges had no choice but to be residential in nature. Since that time many colleges have continued to offer places of residence in conjunction with their educational offerings.

In the last fifty years there has been a slow shift away from the norm of students living on-campus. Chickering (1974), in his landmark comparison of commuter and resident students, reported the trends of the 1950s and 1960s when campuses dramatically expanded their residency by adding new residence halls. By the mid-70s this trend had halted due to increased costs, rising interest rates, decreased federal support, and a change in the residential nature of colleges (Chickering). This change in the residential nature of colleges was undoubtedly fostered by a variety of external forces, including, but not limited to, the increase of non-traditional students, the increased perception of entitlement, and a general dissatisfaction stemming from the activism of the

1960s (Thelin, 2004). It is important to note that today's students are faced with the choice of whether to live on- or off-campus. Students living off-campus are making their decisions based on a variety of reasons, such as socioeconomic backgrounds, degree aspiration levels, commitment to the institution and levels of social involvement (Inman & Pascarella, 1997). In the 2007-2008 academic year 15.4% of all college students resided on-campus; at the same time private, non-profit universities had 46% of their students residing on-campus (Staklis, 2010).

As college students have moved away from campus, the academy has been forced to reconsider how this change in residence is affecting students. Numerous studies have looked at the differences between students who live on- and off-campus. Some have focused on academics and cognitive growth (Blimling, 1999; Inman & Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella et al., 1993), while other studies have focused on other relevant topics, such as diversity and retention (Pike, 2002; Pike et al., 1997). The overwhelming majority of these studies have shown there to be an advantage for on-campus students in terms of positive outcomes associated with college.

A specific area of advantage for students living on-campus has been in the realm of involvement. Chickering (1974) made the assertion that "students who live at home, in comparison with those who live in college dormitories, are less involved in academic activities, extracurricular activities, and social activities with other students" (p 40). This statement predates the official involvement theory pioneered by Astin in 1984 but has been verified in numerous studies since then (Astin, 1984; Blimling, 1999; Kuh, 2003, 2009; Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer, 2001; Pascarella et al., 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2002).

Problem Statement

There is a trend for students to live off-campus, especially upper-classmen. One recent study suggests that nearly 80% of seniors are now living off-campus (Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer, 2001). Because of the benefits of living on-campus and the trend towards moving off-campus, this study examined if college seniors who live off-campus differ from their on-campus counterparts in terms of involvement. This current study used data collected from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to look at changes in the levels of engagement between students' freshmen and senior years. This study specifically examined the relationship between the changes in engagement and whether a student lives on- or off-campus, as well as looking for a relationship between changes in engagement and a student's gender.

The research questions which guided this study were developed to determine the implications of students moving off-campus and changes in their levels of engagement. The questions sought to look at the specific context of a residential campus to determine if these trends were true in this setting and if a connection between gender, place of residence, and engagement can be found through examining the changes in engagement between a student's freshmen and senior years. The three specific research questions are as follows:

1. Do place of residence and gender combine to have an effect on the change in engagement levels between freshmen and senior years?
2. Is there a connection between gender and changes in engagement between freshmen and senior years?

3. Is there a connection between a student's place of residence and his or her changes in engagement between the freshmen and senior years?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature will include an overview of Involvement and Student Engagement Theory, looking specifically at issues of gender and on or off-campus residency. This will be followed by an analysis of the literature connected to on- and off-campus student differences. The review will conclude with an examination of the motivation for students leaving campus residency.

Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984) developmental theory of Student Involvement states that the more a student is involved, the more likely he or she is to succeed. He defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p.297). Special focus is placed on student behavior because involvement theory is an active construct, not just a cognitive theory, unlike terms such as motivation or aspiration (Astin). This active approach to development mandates that students not only be exposed to an idea or concept, but they must truly engage in it to grow and develop a skill or knowledge. This theory suggests that possibly the most coveted institutional resource is not money but students' time (Astin). It is a student's time for which every program, professor, and peer must compete and, this resource is a limited one. It stands to reason that students who live on-campus have more time to be involved by nature of the fact that they need not travel to campus and that the programs and offices on the campus are often within a short walk.

Student Engagement

The theory of student engagement builds upon Astin's theory of involvement and is a construct used to understand where and how students are involving themselves or being engaged in academically meaningful practices. The importance of this concept is supported throughout the literature; Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that "it appears, individual effort or engagement is the critical determinant of the impact of college" (p 602). However, student engagement not only refers to what the student is doing but also to what the institution is doing to help facilitate engagement on campus (Kuh, 2009). The concept of student engagement evolved into the central focus of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 1998. NSSE measures how much students are engaged in academically meaningful practices (Kuh, 2001). This assessment reports how engaged individuals are, as well as the aggregate of campus involvement which is a reflection of the institution's ability to engage students.

The terms involvement and engagement are often used synonymously and rightfully so. They are based on the same underlying principle that the more a student is engaged or involved the more successful he or she will be in college (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2009; Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer, 2001). Involvement and engagement are so similar that they will be used interchangeably throughout this document with the exception of when engagement is used in direct connection with NSSE.

Off-campus student engagement.

Off-campus or commuter students, as defined by NSSE, are those who do not live in a residence hall, fraternity, or sorority. NSSE categorizes off-campus students into two groups: those who live within walking distance and those who live within driving

distance. Data from the 2000 and 2001 NSSE responses found that almost 80% of college seniors live off-campus and that these students were less “engaged in effective education practices” (Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer, 2001). The data also reported that students who had to drive to campus had fewer interactions with faculty and took part in fewer educationally enriching experiences (Kuh et al.). It appears that convenience could play a role in these two categories. The students who live on-campus have an advantage because the physical distance between themselves and faculty or educationally enriching experiences is minimal or at least diminished as compared to those who are off-campus. On-campus students also were found to have made more gains in personal and social competence than those who walk or drive to campus (Kuh et al.). This finding seems obvious in light of the fact that on-campus housing is predominantly communal, forcing various levels of social interaction.

Commuter students did score similarly to residential students when it came to several academic engagement issues, such as working with other students on projects, asking questions and contributing in class, discussing ideas from readings outside of class, and writing papers of at least 20 pages (Kuh et al., 2001). This finding is not surprising due to the fact that all students have the same academic responsibilities and expectations placed on them regardless of where they reside.

Gender differences.

The big picture of student engagement shows that men are less engaged than women (Kuh, 2003). A study using nationwide results from the 2005 and 2006 NSSE found that men were less likely to be prepared for class and more likely to be involved in non-academic activities and co-curricular activities (Kinzie et al., 2007). Females were

found to devote more time to academic activities and communicate more often with their faculty via email (Kinzie et al.). Women also attended more theatrical and artistic events, and they participated in learning communities at a higher rate than men (Kinzie et al.). The one area in which men outscored women was in relation to discussing ideas with faculty outside of the classroom setting (Kinzie et al.). While some studies find nuanced instances of men who score higher in specific measures of engagement, the overwhelming majority of research finds women more engaged (Hu & Kuh, 2002).

On- and Off-Campus Residence Differences

It is essential to understand some of the traditionally fundamental differences between on- and off-campus students. Existing research suggests students who live off-campus are less likely to achieve positive outcomes, including involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The following portion of the literature review will explore the differences between students who live on- and off-campus.

Academic differences.

When studying the effects of place of residence on a student's academic performance, some researchers have focused on Grade Point Averages (GPA) (Blimling, 1999), while others have looked at different measures of critical thinking or cognitive growth (Inman & Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella et al., 1993).

Pascarella (1985) found that students who live on-campus are more likely to have interactions with their peers and faculty. These interactions are important in light of Astin's (1984) assertion that there is a connection between student involvement and personal development in the area of their involvement. Thus, living on-campus will place

students in settings that encourage more interaction with faculty, leading to their academic development and success.

A study of first year students who live on-campus found that they grew more in critical thinking abilities than their off-campus counterparts; however the differences in mathematical ability and reading comprehension growth were not significant (Pascarella et al., 1993). This conclusion stems from the fact that cognitive growth can be fostered by more interaction with peers and faculty, both of which are more easily accomplished when a student lives on-campus (Pascarella et al.). Inman and Pascarella (2006) built upon the previously mentioned study and looked at the area of critical thinking skills of freshmen who were on- and off-campus. This study found that the general college experience, not the place of residence, affects cognitive growth and critical thinking. However, living on-campus often puts students in positive positions to gain an advantage by utilizing the wide variety of campus resources that are at their disposal and in close proximity to their residence.

Blimling's (1999) meta-analysis of the studies using GPAs found that there was some advantage to living on-campus, as compared to commuting. These findings, while significant, were minimal and could be found insignificant if two additional studies of negative or neutral impact were included in the meta-analysis (Blimling). These findings show that place of residence has some impact on GPAs, but it is difficult to isolate exactly what that impact is. It would stand to reason that many factors play a role in the effect of residency on GPA.

Retention differences.

Retention is an important issue for both students and the institutions they attend. For the student, retention equates to progress towards a degree, while for the institution it equates to enrollment. Pike, Schroeder, and Berry (1997) found that there was an indirect tie between some residence halls and retention at the university level. Their findings suggested that halls with communities of students focused on a particular discipline, topic, or theme fostered more interaction with faculty members and that these interactions contributed to student persistence (Pike et al.). While residence halls can increase student-faculty interactions, they have traditionally been considered as places that increase students' social interactions, which have also shown to affect student persistence. A study of freshmen attrition found that males are influenced in their decisions for retention or attrition by the students with whom they live (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1984). This study found that these decisions are influenced by "the level of institutional and goal commitment" of those living with them (p. 120). These studies highlight the importance of the environmental influences that residence halls can provide to students in regards to their commitment to an institution and their education.

Interaction and acceptance of diversity.

Another hallmark of living in a residence hall is the acceptance of and interactions with a diverse set of people. Pike (2002) looked at college students' openness to racial diversity and found that students who lived on-campus were more likely to be open to issues of diversity than their counterparts who lived off-campus. The study found that both living in traditional residence halls and affinity groups, such as freshman interest groups, have a positive effect on openness to diversity. That openness can be increased

when focus is given to intentionally facilitating diverse interactions and creating educational opportunities surrounding diversity issues (Pike). While there seems to be some natural tendency to increase in one's openness to diversity, it appears from this study that the desired change can be enhanced with specific educational programming about diversity and intentional interactions with people who are different than one's self (Pike). It would be logical to conclude that other positive gains could be made when students who are living together in defined spaces take part in specific educational programming or engage in intentional conversations on a particular subject matter.

A study of democratic outcomes found interacting with diverse populations leads to openness to diversity in general (Zuniga, Williams & Berger, 2005). This study found that opportunities for diversity interactions within the residence halls and other campus settings helped students already inclined to be sympathetic to social justice ideas increase in their understanding and convictions in these areas (Zuinga et al.). Another study supporting on-campus residence because of its connection to positive diversity outcomes found that living on-campus was one of the strongest predictors of openness to diversity at the end of the first year of college (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini, 1996). Students' "interpersonal environment" has been shown to have very significant impact on their lives, and the connection with a diverse set of people over a long period of time is often more impactful than a single interaction (Pascarella et al., p.175).

These studies make a strong case for the importance of living on-campus in order to be more inclined to grow in openness to diversity. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note that there is not a uniform impact across housing types and individual campuses, but

that in general living on-campus is more conducive to growing in this openness to diversity.

Motivation for Moving Off-Campus

Despite the benefits of living on-campus, more than half of all students enrolled in higher education now reside off-campus (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001). These students can be broken into two main groups: those who can live on-campus and those who cannot. Intuitively, there are reasons that students may not choose to not live on-campus, including finances, marital status, dependants, health concerns, and a variety of other issues. The other group of off-campus students is comprised of those who could live in university housing but have chosen to live elsewhere. A study at a public, four-year research university found that students chose to move off-campus for a wide range of reasons (Li, Sheely & Whalen, 2005). They found that the option and ability to cook meals, length of lease, cost of housing, proximity to town, parking situations, living with friends, and private bathrooms were all statistically significant variables in the decisions to move off-campus (Li et al., 2005). An additional study found that the quality of food on-campus, cost, desire for independence, privacy, and size of residence rooms were listed as the top reasons students choose to move off-campus (Cleave, 1996). These studies, when put together, help paint the picture of why students choose to leave on-campus living situations that have been shown to have benefits in academic performance, degree completion, and a host of other positive outcomes.

In their comprehensive synthesis of 30 years of research, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conclude that students' place of residence plays an important role in their college experience, but that their specific housing is not the key. Rather, it is the fact that they

reside on-campus and near the many services that the campus offers. While proximity to campus services is good, the impact is only achieved when students become involved and engaged with these offerings and services.

Summary

It is evident that student involvement or engagement is an important key in helping students succeed (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2003). Engagement leads to success for students in the form of increased critical thinking, GPA, openness to diversity and other positive outcomes (Blimling, 1999; Pascarella et al., 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2002). Institutional success, such as retention, also stems from involvement (Pike et al., 1997). It appears, based on the many positive outcomes, that living on-campus is the best option of residence for college students. The vast majority of studies have found an advantage for on-campus students as compared to those who live off-campus. Yet, in spite of the many correlations between on-campus residence and positive outcomes, the desire for freedoms and independence often prompts students to choose to move from on-campus housing (Li, et al., 2005). This has resulted in over half of all undergraduate students living off-campus (Kuh, et al., 2001). This study examined the changes in engagement of students from their freshmen to senior years and sought to find a relationship between changes in engagement and place of residence and or gender. The hypotheses that guided this research are as follows:

1. Students who reside on-campus all four years will have higher levels of engagement than those who live off-campus.
2. Women will have higher levels of engagement than men.

3. Men living on-campus will have a more positive change of engagement score as compared to men living off-campus.
4. Women living on-campus will have a more positive change of engagement score as compared to women living off-campus.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between gender, place of residency, and the change in students' levels of engagement between their freshmen and senior years. The study used existing National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data to measure the change between the participants' freshmen and senior levels of engagement for the graduating class of 2008 at a single institution. The change scores were the dependent variables while gender and on- / off-campus residence composed the two independent variables. This 2 (male and female) x 2 (on- and off-campus) factorial design looked to see if a relationship exists between place of residence and the changes in engagement, as well as how gender relates to the changes in engagement. The longitudinal approach is an acceptable use of this data and allows for a study of the differences in an individual student's experience (NSSE, 2010b). A Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to test the significance of the independent variables (gender and place of residence) on the dependant variables (changes in engagement). The MANOVA was used because of the multiple dependent variables (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002).

Participants

This study was conducted at a small four-year, highly residential Christian liberal arts college located in the Midwest. The undergraduate enrollment is approximately 1900 students, with a requirement for non-married undergraduate students to live on-campus. When on-campus housing is at maximum capacity, upperclassmen are allowed to apply to live off-campus. There were 340 students living off-campus at the start of the 2007-

2008 academic year when the data was collected. At the time of the data gathering there was one off-campus apartment building that was university staffed and programmed. This building holds 90 students when at maximum capacity, leaving the remaining portion of off-campus students in non-university programmed housing in the surrounding community.

Measures

Since 1999, NSSE has recorded more than 2.3 million student responses (NSSE, 2010a). The survey based on Astin's (1984) involvement theory was created in an attempt to "document the conditions that promote student learning" (Kuh, 2001, p 12). The NSSE data was used in conjunction with institutional housing data to compare on- and off-campus students in the five different engagement benchmarks which NSSE assesses: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment (Kuh, 2001). These benchmarks are created using responses to 42 of the questions from the NSSE (Kuh, 2009). The benchmarks are described as follows.

Level of Academic Challenge.

This benchmark assesses the degree to which students are challenged and expected to achieve high levels of academic performance. NSSE takes into consideration how much time a student spends in preparation for class, the amount of papers whose length is in one of three categories (1-5, 5-19, 20+), and the amount of assigned textbooks or resources for a course (Kuh, 2009). The benchmark is also based on the degree to which the student's coursework emphasizes analysis and synthesis of ideas, the evaluation of ideas, and the application of theories (Kuh). The final areas included in

level of academic challenge are the degree of work which a student puts forth and the overall campus environmental emphasis on study and academics (Kuh). This study used the adjusted score at the advice of a NSSE research consultant (personal communication, January 26, 2011).

Active and Collaborative Learning.

Working with other students and faculty is the main focus of this benchmark. This area looks specifically at student participation in classroom discussion, class presentations, collaborating on class projects, preparing with other students prior to class, and collaborating within the classroom on group projects (Kuh, 2009). This benchmark is also shaped by a student's involvement with or performance as a tutor, his or her participation in community-based projects connected to specific courses, and discussions of class materials outside of the classroom (Kuh).

Student-Faculty Interaction.

This benchmark measures the interactions of students and faculty. NSSE looks for instances of a student and faculty discussing grades, conversing about career paths, and discussing readings or ideas (Kuh, 2009). This measurement also examines if the student is collaborating with faculty on projects outside of coursework, if he or she serves on committees with faculty, and if prompt feedback is received from faculty on class assignments (Kuh). NSSE produces two student-faculty interaction benchmarks: one is created using the data pertaining to the student's experience conducting research and is abbreviated SFI, while the second score omits this information and is abbreviated SFC (NSSE, 2010b). A NSSE research consultant advised the researcher to use the SFC benchmark for this study (personal communication, January 26, 2011).

Enriching Educational Experiences.

The experiences included in this benchmark are those that come alongside the curriculum to help the student deepen his or her learning while in college. These experiences include participation in co-curricular activities, community service, internships, studying abroad, senior experiences, meaningful interactions with people of differing backgrounds and values, involvement in learning communities, and a host of other activities (Kuh, 2009). Each experience serves to enhance at least one area of positive educational engagement.

Supportive Campus Environment.

This benchmark assesses the amount of support that a student receives in academic and social areas (Kuh, 2009). Supportive campus environment is also determined by the quality of relationships that the student has with peers, faculty, and administrative personnel (Kuh). The student's satisfaction, commitment, and performance area all tied to this measure (Kuh).

Variables

The independent variables for this study were gender (female or male) and place of residence (on- or off-campus). The dependent variables were the change in the five engagement benchmark scores. These scores were formed by subtracting students freshman (2005) scores from their senior scores (2008) to determine the amount and direction of change a student may have in terms of engagement, as defined by the NSSE. A positive score indicated that the student has become more engaged, while a negative score indicated a decrease in engagement. A NSSE research consultant confirmed that the

benchmark scores have not changed between 2005 and 2008 and that the change score was an appropriate use of the data (personal communication, January 26, 2011).

Reliability

The NSSE has been found to be very reliable and valid. Cronbach's alpha for the 22 college activity items in the NSSE was 0.85 (Kuh, 2009). The reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, measures how well the instrument measures what it claims to measure. The closer to 1.0 the more reliable the instrument is; a score of 0.7 is acceptable, but a more desirable score is that of 0.8 or above (Muijs, 2004).

Procedures

This study utilized pre-existing data collected from the NSSE survey administered in the spring of 2005 and 2008 to the freshmen and senior classes. Thus, the study looks at a single cohort, the class of 2008.

The 2005 and 2008 data was collected through the Web+ mode. This mode sends an email to the entire population and then sends a paper survey to a subgroup of the non-responding participants after three attempts to communicate electronically (NSSE, 2011). The populations for these years are comprised of the entire freshmen and senior classes. The response rate for the 2005 freshmen was 67% (323 total) while the corresponding rate for the 2008 seniors was 76% (261 total).

Of the 261 possible participants the study included a total of 156. The researcher used student identification numbers to sort the 2005 and 2008 data and to see how many students had successfully completed both surveys. A total of 157 students had completed both surveys with one student's data being eliminated because of an incomplete response. This left a total of 156 participants who had successfully completed the NSSE in the

springs of both their freshman and senior years. This sample had 61 males and 95 females, with 50 students living on-campus and 106 living off-campus.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Research Question #1

A 2 (Gender) x 2 (Place of Residence) Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to answer the research questions. The MANOVA was first used to look for an interaction effect between the two independent variables. This failed to produce a finding significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (see Table 1). The first research question asked if place of residence and gender combined to have an effect on the change in engagement levels between freshmen and senior years. The lack of any statistically significant findings resulted in a negative response to the first research question for this study.

Table 1

MANOVA Results: Interaction Effect of Gender and Place of Residence on Engagement Changes

Variable	DV	Mean Square	F	P
Gender and POR Interaction	Change in Academic Challenge	.045	.000	.984
	Change in Active and Collaborative Learning	312.194	1.339	.249
	Change in Student-Faculty Interaction	228.595	.591	.443
	Change in Enriching Education Experiences	77.539	.418	.519
	Change in Supportive Campus Environment	59.738	.210	.647

Research Questions #2 and #3

The MANOVA was then used to examine the main effects of a student's gender and place of residence on his or her change in engagement. Again, the test failed to find any statistically significant main effects for either gender or place of residence at the $p < 0.05$ level (see Table 2). Research questions two and three asked if a connection existed between students' gender or place of residence and their changes in engagement between their freshmen and senior years. The lack of a statistically significant finding resulted in a negative response to these research questions.

Table 2

MANOVA Results: Main effects of Gender and Place of Residence on Engagement Changes

Variable	DV	Mean Square	F	P
Gender	Change in Academic Challenge	130.112	1.225	.270
	Change in Active and Collaborative Learning	99.642	.427	.514
	Change in Student-Faculty Interaction	33.381	.086	.769
	Change in Enriching Education Experiences	20.093	.108	.743
	Change in Supportive Campus Environment	58.851	.207	.650
Place of Residence (POR)	Change in Academic Challenge	49.165	.463	.497
	Change in Active and Collaborative Learning	105.098	.451	.503
	Change in Student-Faculty Interaction	198.309	.513	.475
	Change in Enriching Education Experiences	534.346	2.878	.092*
	Change in Supportive Campus Environment	9.286	.033	.857

*= $p < 0.1$

The MANOVA did yield a significant finding for the main effect of place of residence and changes in Enriching Education Experiences at the $p < 0.1$ level with a P score of .092 (see Table 2). The mean for students living on-campus was a 22.25, and for those off-campus it was 26.54, showing that students who live off-campus became more engaged in enriching educational experiences than those who lived on-campus for the duration of their collegiate careers. A Cohen's D was calculated and found to be .34, showing a small to medium effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Means and standard deviations were calculated for the five benchmarks but yielded no statistically significant findings. However, when looking at these means one score stands out. The Supportive Campus Experience benchmark mean was -3.08 (see Table 3). The negative mean score is a result of the freshmen score being higher than the senior score. The mean scores for the other benchmarks were all positive (see Table 3).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviation of Five Benchmark Change Scores

Benchmark	Fr. M	SD	Sr. M	SD	Change M	SD
Academic Challenge	54.41	11.09	58.45	12.21	4.03	10.29
Active and Collaborative Learning	47.71	13.92	54.81	13.71	7.10	15.30
Student-Faculty Interaction	36.21	15.59	46.75	19.24	10.54	19.59
Enriching Education Experience	30.42	10.32	55.33	13.96	24.91	13.67
Supportive Campus Environment	73.32	14.86	69.51	15.75	-3.08	16.72

In conclusion, the MANOVA found no statistically significant relationships at the $p < .05$ level. This resulted in negative responses to all three of the research questions asked at the onset of the study. The guiding hypotheses also were not confirmed in the

results of the study. A reporting of the mean scores for the changes in NSSE benchmark scores showed a positive change in four of the five measures. The Supportive Campus Environment benchmark was the lone negative score, signifying a decrease in the amount of support students felt between their freshmen and senior years.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are not congruent with the broader literature on engagement and involvement and do not support the hypotheses which were based on that literature. As such, this study warrants a close examination with some conservative explanation of the unexpected results and their possible causes.

As previously noted, students who lived off-campus appeared to become more engaged in enriching educational experiences than those who lived on-campus (see Table 2). One of the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark measures is internships, which includes the student teaching experience of education majors (Kuh, 2009). The studied institution requires all student teachers to live off-campus in an attempt to prepare them as future teachers. Their responses to questions about internships may have bolstered the enriching educational experience benchmark for the off-campus population and may be one reason that the on-campus population scored lower.

Another interesting finding of this study was the negative change in the Supportive Campus Environment score (see Table 3). Both on-campus and off-campus students as individual groups reported lower scores in this benchmark. Though the score was not statistically significant, it does separate itself from the other benchmark means which were all positive. This negative change may speak to a very successful first year experience which has placed the bar at a high level, a lack of support for students in their senior year, or a combination of the two. These findings should give pause to university officials, as this benchmark is a measurement of the support that comes from academic faculty, student affairs professionals, administrators, and other students. The studied

institution has given a considerable amount of focus to freshmen through a strong first year experience program, considerable programming geared toward freshmen, and a strong residence life department with multiple policies set forth to invite freshmen into the campus and residence hall communities. While there are some specific programs directed at seniors they fail to compete in scope and reach with the freshmen programs which may explain why senior students feel less supported.

Limitations

A serious limitation to this study is the distribution of participants. There were 156 student responses used in this study, and the gender breakdown closely mirrored the composition of the entire population: 39% were male (61) and 61% were female (95). The participant distribution limitation occurred with the ratio of students living on and off-campus. Only 50 of the students lived on-campus, while a total of 106 were off-campus, which is 32% on-campus and 68% off-campus. In 2008, when the data was collected, there were 83% on-campus and 17% off-campus. The great disparity of proportions makes it difficult to make a fair comparison between these two groups and the entire population.

It is also important to recognize that this study only looked at one graduating class allowing for a history effect on the results. A history effect is characterized by specific occurrences between the two assessments which could influence both positively or negatively the results (Creswell, 2009). The internal validity of a study like this is lessened when such an effect is present.

The residential nature of the studied institution may also have affected the final results. While there is not a dedicated office to working with off-campus students, there is

still a strong commitment to keep these students connected through small class sizes, intimate relationships with academic advisors, a wide variety of campus programs (e.g. student activities, intramurals, and chapel) as well as a student union and other common areas that foster connections between students who reside on- and off-campus. All of these attempts, programs, and services work to keep off-campus students engaged with the many facets of the college campus. Thus, this study's external validity is limited because of the unique nature of the residential campus. Other highly residential schools in small rural communities may discover the findings of the study to be useful, but large, commuter institutions will have issues applying these findings to their specific situation.

The university's location may also play a role in this study, as it is located in a small, rural community. Many of the off-campus students live within a 6 city block radius of campus and spend a great deal of time on-campus. This proximity allows some students who live off-campus to be closer to some on-campus services than students who may live on the opposite side of campus and are classified as on-campus.

Implications for Practice

Whether the decrease in engagement is the result of a high freshmen score or a low senior score, it is evident that there is a need to increase the support that seniors perceive at this institution. Literature has shown that off-campus seniors are less engaged, which has led to efforts to help engage this population (Kuh, et al., 2001). Based on the results of this study there appears to be a need at the studied institution to give this same kind of focus to seniors who live *both* on- and off-campus.

A first step to increasing this level of support could be a self-assessment of campus programming. The assessment could focus on the programming directly aimed at

seniors in an attempt to find gaps and to ensure an ample amount of programs are present which assist seniors and provide a level of support that appears to be lacking. This assessment should be in cooperation between Academic Affairs and Student Development professionals. This will allow both to operate efficiently and effectively by focusing on the unique support that each can provide. This stands in contrast to offering similar programs that do not complement or build off each other, as can sometimes be the case with programs from these two areas of the college, as seen in Senior Capstones and Career Development offices.

In addition to looking for gaps in programming, there may be a need to change current programming that affects all students in order to ensure its effectiveness for every class of students. For example, the studied institution has numerous traditions in the residence halls that are very beneficial at connecting strangers of the opposite gender to one another in an enjoyable manner. Freshmen may feel that these traditions are very helpful and supportive to their first year experience, but not hold them in such high regard by the time they become seniors. A changing perspective on a tradition or program that has not changed during their college career may be one reason that they feel less supported. Academic Affairs and Student Development must be aware of changes they can make to help this population. Offices such as Alumni Relations and Development should also look at how they currently assist seniors and assess how they can provide better support to this group in ways that they may not yet be doing.

Finally, beyond examining programming gaps and shortcomings of current programs, there could also be a need to re-examine policies in relation to supporting senior students. One such policy worth re-examining at the current institution is in

relation to how residence directors prioritize their focus when dealing with students who are struggling academically. As it currently stands, there is a requirement on hall directors to meet with all freshmen who are at risk in multiple classes, to send an email to freshmen struggling in a single class, and to email non-freshmen regardless of the number of classes in which they are at risk. While personal contact is encouraged for all students at risk, only freshmen with multiple classes of concern are expected to be dealt with face-to-face. This policy may open the door for a student to feel strongly supported during their freshmen year only to have that level of support dwindle as they continue through the remainder of college. Other similar policies may include requirements among resident assistants to attain certain levels of participation from seniors at floor programs and requiring that speakers be brought to campus who can speak to specific issues that seniors may be facing.

Implications for Future Research

There is a need to flesh out why students report a decrease in feeling supported on campus, as measured in the Supportive Campus Environment. Future research should re-examine the freshmen and senior scores in relation to the benchmarks provided by NSSE to gain a better understanding of why this change was negative and how it compares to other institutions. Beyond using additional NSSE data, there may be cause for incorporating a qualitative element to this study. Focus groups and personal interviews could help researchers understand where support is lacking and the implications of that lack of support.

Due to the small sample size for this study, it would be prudent to combine the current data with additional future NSSE results. The results of a study with more student

data could do a better job of painting the complete picture and would be more generalizable and useful for the studied college and similar institutions. The compiling of additional cohorts would enhance this study and would carry more internal validity and guard against the history effect. The history effect, the situation where significant, unplanned events take place prior to or in the midst of assessment, could have come in the form of a new set of initiatives, a change in campus programs or offerings, or any other variety of offerings (Creswell, 2009).

Additional research could also focus on the motivation to move off-campus. The literature claims that the absence of a supportive campus environment has a negative influence on a student's success (Kuh, 2009). Studying students' motivation for living off-campus may reveal that there is a desire to break away from supportive services in an attempt to better transition into a post-college lifestyle. Further research could determine if living off-campus and being less supported could possibly prepare students for life after college.

Lastly, there appears to be a need for more understanding of how to support students in their final year of college. A qualitative study of seniors and recently graduated students may yield such information. A study incorporating both populations could be helpful in attempting to raise the amount of support that seniors feel at this particular institution.

Conclusion

In summary, this study focused on changes in student engagement between their freshmen and senior years by using the National Survey of Student Engagement. Students' freshmen scores were subtracted from their senior scores, leaving a change

score which indicated the amount and direction of the change. Gender was isolated, as was the student's place of residency.

The study found that students living off-campus their senior year had become no more or less engaged than their on-campus counterparts as they progressed from their freshmen year. This finding diverges from the majority of current literature which equates off-campus residency with a diminished level of engagement.

Students in this study became more engaged in four of the five engagement benchmarks. The lone benchmark that showed a negative change was in relation to the supportive environment created on campus. This negative change leads to more questions about the reason that scores change, and why this particular score decreased.

This study was limited by the sample size and by nature of its study of a single cohort. A larger sampling size could assist future researchers in a similar study and may have provided this study with a different result. Despite these limitations, the study does a good job of exploring the changes in student engagement as they relate to a student's gender and place of residence.

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APPENDIX

NSSE Questions Comprising the Five Benchmarks

Level of Academic Challenge Benchmark Questions

In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

NSSE Question 1.r: Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities?

1 = Very little, 2 = Same, 3 = Quite a bit, 4 = Very much

2.b: **Analyzing** the basic elements of an ideas, experience , or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components

2.c: **Synthesizing** and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships

2.d: **Making judgments** about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions

2.e: **Applying** theories or concepts to practical problems in new situations

During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done?

1 = None, 2 = 1-4, 3 = 5-10, 4 = 11-20, 5 = 20+

3.a: Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings

3.c: Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more

3.d: Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages

3.e: Number of written papers or reports fewer than 5 pages

About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

1 = 0 hrs/wk, 2 = 1-5 hrs/wk, 3 = 6-10 hrs/wk, 4 = 11-15 hrs/wk, 5 = 16-20 hrs/ wk, 6 = 21-25hrs/wk, 7 = 26-30 hrs/wk, 8 = More than 30 hrs/wk

9.a: Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)

To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following?

1 = Very little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a bit, 4 = Very much

10.a: Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark Questions

In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

1.a: Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions

1.b: Made a class presentation

1.g: Worked with other students on projects **during class**

1.h: Worked with classmates **outside of class** to prepare class assignments

1.j: Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)

1.k: Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course

1.t: Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

Student-Faculty Interaction

In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

1.n: Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor

1.o: Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor

1.p: Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class

1.q: Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance

1.s: Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)

Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution?

(Recoded: 0 = Have not decided. Do not plan to do, Plan to do; 1 = Done. Thus, the mean is the proportion responding “Done” among all valid respondents.)

7.d: Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements

Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark Questions

In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

1.l: Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment

1.u: Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own

1.v: Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values

Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution?

(Recoded: 0 = Have not decided. Do not plan to do, Plan to do; 1 = Done. Thus, the mean is the proportion responding “Done” among all valid respondents.)

7.a: Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment

7.b: Community service or volunteer work

7.c: Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

7.e: Foreign language coursework

7.f: Study abroad

7.g: Independent study or self-designated major

7.h: Culmination senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)

About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

1 = 0 hrs/wk, 2 = 1-5 hrs/wk, 3 = 6-10 hrs/wk, 4 = 11-15 hrs/wk, 5 = 16-20 hrs/ wk, 6 = 21-25hrs/wk, 7 = 26-30 hrs/wk, 8 = More than 30 hrs/wk

9.d: Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)

To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following?

1 = Very little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a bit, 4 = Very much

10.c: Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds

Supportive Campus Environment Benchmark Questions

Select the circle that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at your institution:

1 = Unfriendly, Unsupportive, Sense of alienation. 7 = Friendly, Supportive, Sense of belonging.

8.a: Relationship with others.

1 = Unavailable, Unhelpful, Unsympathetic. 7 = Available, Helpful, Sympathetic.

8.b: Relationship with faculty members.

1 = Unhelpful, Inconsiderate, Rigid. 7 = Helpful, Considerate, Flexible.

8.c: Relationship with administrative personnel and offices.

To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following?

1 = Very little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a bit, 4 = Very much

10.b: Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically.

10.d: Helping you cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.).

10.e: Providing the support you need to thrive socially.