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**THE IMPACT OF RESIDENCE HALL CONSTRUCTION TYPE
ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

by
Gene Jabar Washington

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education
at
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Thesis Chair: Andrew S. Tinnin, Ed.D

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Abstract

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THE IMPACT OF RESIDENCE HALL CONSTRUCTION TYPE
ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
2019-2020

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Master of Arts in Higher Education

College and university student housing has changed dramatically since the opening of Harvard College in 1636. Despite these changes, student housing professionals are still tasked with engaging their students. This can sometimes be difficult depending on outside forces such as the physical structure of a building. The purpose of this study was to determine what physical aspects of a residence hall do students and undergraduate live-in student staff value in terms of engaging their students and building a community. For this study focus groups were conducted for student and staff of traditional residence halls and public-private partnership residence halls. Common themes were that ample community space, such as larger lounges, a community kitchen, and amenities in study rooms were valued by staff and students in order to feel engaged in the community. This study will be beneficial for departments who are looking to develop new residence halls on their college campuses, while still engaging their students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Living on a college campus in a residence hall has shown to provide many benefits for its students who opt to live on as opposed to commuting from a parent or guardians place of residence. Students who live on campus have the convenience of being in close proximity to their academic buildings, opportunities to develop long friendships in their community, and the chance for personal growth. Students who live on campus also achieve a higher grade point average overall than students who commute from a different place of residence (Rowan University). Despite all of the known benefits of living on a college campus, many individuals only recognize the residence hall as a place to sleep, not as a place to grow as a student.

Student involvement has been a researched topic in the area of student affairs and higher education. Alexander Astin has been credited as a leader in the area of student involvement research since the publication of his 1999 article *Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education* (Astin, 1999). Though there is significant research on student involvement, there is still more that needs to be uncovered about student involvement in the residence halls.

In addition to the further research needed related to student involvement in the residence halls, there also a need for more information pertaining to the various types of residence halls types and how these types of residence halls impact a student's involvement in the residence halls. One such type of residence hall to explore further are public private partnerships. As universities and colleges continue to grow, they can tend to outgrow the space that they currently are occupying. These expansions cause

universities to think of strategic ways to manage the growth of a university. One such way that a university will look into expanding with the increase in enrollment is to partner with private contractors to build housing and other complexes to meet the needs of the growth they are experiencing. These public private partnerships typically consist of a long-term contractual agreement to construct a partnership between a private contractor and public agency in an effort to accomplish multiple tasks associated with a public project (Bruce & Williams, 2017). In these partnerships, universities collaborate with private firms, real estate developers, and builders to construct new campus residence spaces that are maintained by a private company (Marks & Sparkman, 2019).

Statement of Research Problem

There is significant research discussing student involvement within residence halls. Studies have shown that students who live on campus have a greater chance of connecting their in-classroom experience with their out of class experience (Graham, Hurtado, & Gonyea, 2018). Additionally, the use of living learning communities has been used to help student develop a sense of community with their environment. However, there seems to be a gap in the literature comparing involvement between student in traditional residence halls and public private partnership residence halls.

College and university housing offices utilize public-private partnership housing for a variety of reasons. First is to meet the demand for students housing. Second, this allows a university to obtain a new building without incurring the debt of a capital project as these halls can cost millions to build. Lastly, colleges, especially colleges that do not already have housing options for students, may utilize a public private partnership residence hall company as it is partnering with a company that has a proven track record

of managing student housing on a growing college campus (Bronstein, Taylor & Samuels, 2010).

Sometimes the competing visions that the institution has versus the vision that the public partner has can get in the way of the overall students' experiences, even with features as small as elevator placement in a building. Though both groups have different goals to meet, the student experience is still in the minds of all those involved.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to discover what physical aspects of both traditional style residence halls and newer public private partnership residence halls do students value when it comes to helping students become engaged in their residential communities. This study can inform university housing offices who are considering building a newer residence hall about what aspects of a residence hall are most important to students. Additionally, this study will also look at live-in student staff members who are also working to build and engage their residential communities by involving their residents.

Significance of the Study

As more schools look into building new partnerships with private contractors, it is important to understand what goals each member of a particular agreement has and how to best meet each member goals. Partners from a higher education institution's main focus is to best service the students to be able to help them succeed. The private partner and contractor on the other hand wants to service the student, however their main focus may be on creating the most cost-effective building that generates revenue for the parties. Though each party may have different goals, neither is above the other. The hope is that

this study will be used for both higher education institutions and private companies to determine what physical aspects of a building contribute to student involvement in college, and how to meet the needs of students in a way that both parties can succeed.

Assumptions and Limitations

Many public private partnership residences halls are typically apartment style complexes, which are limited to upperclassmen students as opposed to freshman students, which is the preferred population for this study. Due to this, there are not many students who would have lived in a public private partnership hall who would have known what amenities of a public private partnership residence hall as of the target population, only 1400 students have lived in the only public private residence hall on Rowan University's campus.

Operational Definitions

1. Traditional Style Residence Hall: Residence halls designed to serve as a double or single occupancy space with a community bathroom which includes shared sinks and showers (Grimm, Balogh, & Hammon, 2003)
2. Adjoining Suite: Two single or double occupancy residence hall bed spaces connected by a single bathroom (Grimm et al., 2003)
3. Involvement: The amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to his academic experience (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009)
4. Engagement: The amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009)

5. Public private partnership: A long-term contractual agreement to construct a partnership between a private contractor and public agency in an effort to accomplish multiple task associate with a public project (Bruce & Williams, 2017)
6. Student Satisfaction: Attitudes resulting from an evaluation of students educational experiences, services and facilities (Weerasinghe, S., & Fernando, R. L. S., 2017)
7. Super Suite: A cluster of rooms that share a private living area and a private bathroom but does not have kitchen units (Grimm et al., 2003)

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. Do first year students who live in traditional residence and first year students who live in a public-private residence hall differ regarding how they value the physical structure of residence halls?
2. Do live-in staff who live in a traditional residence hall and staff who work in public-private partnership residence halls differ regarding how they value the physical structure of residence halls?

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter II will provide relevant literature related to involvement in the residence halls, differences in residence hall types, and benefits of living on a college campus.

Chapter III will cover the methodology of the study which will include population sample, focus group protocol, and data collection tools.

Chapter IV will provide a look at the findings of the focus groups that were used to gather information from students and staff.

Chapter V will summarize the findings and provide recommendations for future research and best practices.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Student housing and higher education has been an ever-changing topic since it was founded. With that, there is much research to show how far higher education has come from. Additionally, there is a significant amount of research to explain how student housing has made an impact on the wellbeing of students who live on campus as opposed to living off campus. This review will provide a historical overview of student housing, explain the types of student housing that universities have to offer, explore a growing trend in higher education through privatized housing, and explain relevant theories that impact students who live on campus.

A Brief History of Higher Education

The demographics of higher education has changed since it was started in Colonial America. Colonial institutions such as Harvard College, now known as Harvard University, which was formed in 1636, started to form in present day America after European settlers arrived in the western world. Colleges and universities now have many goals such as creating strong leaders in their communities and educating students both in and outside of the classroom. However, prior to this goal, institutions of higher learning such as Harvard, Dartmouth, and William and Mary had one goal in mind; educating men to become clergy and leaders of the church (Gratto, 2010).

During the middle of the 18th century, higher education in America started to shift in its beliefs in the purpose of the education. The passing of the Morrill Act of 1862 established Land Grant Colleges in the United States. These institutions, while still having an established coursework related to ministry, started to add coursework related to

agriculture. Land grant institutions also received land from the federal government for the purpose of the university to grow and sell to receive funding (Gelber, 2011).

With the turn of the 20th century, the field of higher education started to see an increase in the number of college and universities that started to form in America in addition to the increase in the number of universities that were created for scholars to attend. There was also a great debate on what the purpose of higher education would become. However, the primary focus of the university remained the same, the students. In a 1984 study on what was the real purpose of higher education, students, professors and staff all agreed that the purpose of higher education was to move those associated with the university towards self-actualizing behavior (Cangemi, 1984). Those involved with the study specifically believed that the university was specifically motivated in helping individuals become fully functioning, independent and autonomous. In addition they agreed that the university is responsible for making sure that students were knowledgeable about a particular academic discipline (Cangemi, 1984).

Overview of Residential Programs and Student Housing in Higher Education

In 1636, Harvard University was the first university to open up a residence hall on campus (Blimling, 2017). During this time though, these living facilities were not known to be the same types of residence halls that we have grown accustomed to today. These halls were known to students as dormitories because at the time the halls were only for sleeping during the evening. A more residential experience in college education was introduced in 1690. Harvard University, the oldest university in the United States of America, introduced tutors who were live in staff members at the university. At this time, the main purpose of the tutors who lived on were to teach the religion, there was not

much of the social aspects of residence life that we recognize today. The roles of the tutors that lived on were also very educational as they provided an educational approach to the roles they played in the residence halls. Tutors were also charged with being responsible for the curricular and extracurricular activities of the residence halls that the students lived in (Burton, 2007).

Following the event of World War II and the increasing enrollment of war veterans, more and more individuals felt the need to live on their college campus. Nearly 60 percent of all enrolled college students live on a college campus (Blimling, 2017). During the early stages of this the spaces that used lived in were called dormitories, coming from the Latin word dormant meaning to sleep. It was not until recent years that the buildings that we know today are called residence halls because student in the present day do more than just sleep in the buildings (Blimling, 2017). We now strive to create an environment where our students can learn, lead and belong.

Privatized Housing

History of privatized housing in America. Since the inceptions of colleges and universities in the early 1600s, student housing was around to meet the needs of their students by providing places for students to sleep at night. This allowed for student to be in close proximity to their classes and allowed administrators the opportunity to be in close range to their students (Frederiksen, 1993). After the end of the Civil War, resources became scarce and not many resources were used to build newer residence halls for students. However, after The Great Depression and World War II, the need for college housing spiked to allow for soldiers who were attending university through the G.I Bill to live on their college campus and take classes (Frederiksen, 1993). During the

turn of the century, higher education saw the largest influx of college students attending college. The increase in students, especially students opting to live on campus forced college and universities to build larger residence halls to fit the needs of their students and of the university (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Colleges tried to build efficient and affordable housing in a timely manner, however, due to the increase in enrollment, time it took to build a new building, and resources needed, colleges were not able to meet the demand for student housing. Without housing options, students opted to live off campus in neighboring town in housing known as “student ghettos”. These homes were owned by homeowners who chose to not invest in their housing and let them quickly deteriorate (Blair & Williams, 2017).

Rationale and goals for privatized housing. The decision to build a privatized housing complex on a college campus is that that needs to mutually benefit both a college and the private company involved in the project. In a 2017 study, Blair and Williams looked at the motivation for building a private building through the lens of the contractor, and housing office. Using a frequency table of code, Blair and Williams determined that the most prevalent goals of housing offices to partner with contractors is that the physical environment and maintenance of the physical facility would be monitored by the contractor, whereas one of the goals of the private contractor was to maintain a long term partnership with the university (Bruce & Williams, 2017).

Recent private housing complexes. As a growing trend in higher education, more universities, both locally and nationally are investing in private companies to build housing developments on their college campus. Rowan University is no stranger to the

area of privatized housing as the university partners with three different organizations to house its students: The Michael's Organization, Nexus Properties, and Sora Holdings, LLC.

The first privatized housing company that Rowan University partnered with was with Sora Holdings, LLC. Sora Holdings, LLC is a New Jersey real estate development firm that specializes in downtown redevelopment, college campus development, hospitality projects, and college campus student housing (Sora Northeast, n.d.). Sora Holdings, LLC has provided renovations projects for universities such as the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia Pennsylvania as well as the University of Maryland, in Princess Anne, Maryland. Sora Holdings, LLC was also a key developer in multi-million dollar senior housing and luxury condominium complexes (O'Keefe Consulting, 2010). Through a partnership with the Borough of Glassboro, Rowan University, and Sora Holdings, LLC a \$300 million deal was initiated for begin the process for buildings new student housing, retail space, and hotel space. During the first two phases of the partnership with Rowan University and Glassboro, Rowan Boulevard Apartments was built for the purpose of providing more housing options for the students of Rowan University. Rowan Boulevard Apartments provides housing for 884 students in 230 apartments. Apartments consist of 4-single bedrooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms and living rooms. Through the partnership agreement, Rowan Boulevard Apartments is staffed by a Residential Learning Coordinator, two Resident Directors, and twenty Resident Assistants. The physical structure of the building is maintained by Sora Holdings, LLC who provides maintenance to the buildings and housekeeping services to the common areas of the building (Rowan University).

In addition to the main apartment complex that was built during phases one and two, The Whitney Center was added to the Rowan University portfolio in 2011. The Whitney Center housing 280 students in 96 apartments (Rowan University). The Whitney Center also houses the university's Honors College and holds 8,000 square feet of multipurpose space in the building. In addition to the residential space, The Whitney Center offers roughly 22,000 square feet of retail space located adjacent to the main university campus (Stewart, 2012).

Due the success of the partnership between Sora Holdings, LLC, the Borough of Glassboro, and Rowan University; Rowan University entered its second privatized housing contract with Nexus Properties into. Nexus Properties manages several buildings where students can enjoy the convenience of vibrant downtown living, all while experiencing the many shopping and dining venues adjacent to the Rowan University campus (Rowan University). 220 Rowan Boulevard was built as part of a \$74 million dollar contract with the university to expand Rowan Boulevard by providing housing and retail space adjected to the campus (Romalino, 2015). 220 Rowan Boulevard created housing for 456 undergraduate students as well as opened retailed locations underneath the apartment complex. In addition to the 220 apartment complex, Rowan expanded their partnership with Nexus Properties to add four new apartment complexes to their portfolio which were added in 2017: 114 Victoria, 57 North Main, 223 High, and 230 Victoria apartments.

As enrollment as enrollment increased to 16,000 students, Rowan University partnered with The Michael's Organization to construct a 303,000 square foot residential and dining complex which houses over 1400 students (Torcon, 2015). Holly Pointe

Commons is comprised of two interconnected buildings located adjoined to the first privatized housing complex on Rowan's campus. Holly Pointe Commons houses a 500-seat dining facility, which serves as one of the main dining facilities on campus (The Michaels Organization, 2019). In addition to the physical structure of the building, Holly Pointe Commons houses various learning communities such as Pre-Med, Honors, LGBTQIA+, Engineering, and Writing Arts. These learning communities are used to connect students classroom experience, to their outside living.

Student Involvement Theory

Alexander Astin developed the Theory of Student Involvement in 1999. Astin believed that students who are involved are more successful in college and university. For the purpose of his theory, Astin described student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to their academic experience (Astin, 1999). Involvement can be categorized into many different aspects of a person's involvement in college. Involvement can include sporting events on campus, going to and participating in your classes, or attending events on campus. Conversely, students who stay in their room and do not attend classes or events would be considered students who are not involved on their college campus.

In his theory, Astin described his theory having five basic components or postulates. Astin's first component is that involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energies in various objects. These objects can either be very broad such as the overall student experience in college or can be very specific such as spending a few hours a night focusing on a final paper that is due for a class. The second component to Astin's theory is that student involvement is based on a continuum (Astin,

1999). No student will have the same level of involvement as another student. Though students may still have the same level of physical involvement, a student's psychological needs to be involved will be different for each individual person.

The third component to Astin's theory is that involvement is both qualitative and quantitative (Astin, 1999). The amount of time that a student puts into studies and what a person actually does are two different pieces of involvement. A student can set aside three hours of time to do school work, however if the student only spends one hour studying and the other two hours looking at social media, that would not be an effective use of a student's time and limit their involvement in regard to their spending time involved with their studies. Additionally, if a student were to go to a residence hall event and is fully engaged during the event, that the student would be completely involved with their programming.

The amount of student learning and personal development that a person wishes to obtain in college is directly proportionate with the quality and quantity of involvement that the student wishes to put into their programming is Astin's fourth component in his Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1999). Resident Assistant, undergraduate paraprofessional staff members employed to live in the residence halls, are tasked with creating fun and engaging residential programs for their residents throughout the academic year. For programs that are meant to teach students about controversial topics such as safe-sex and diversity are better taught by experts in their field as opposed to learning from another student who is also learning the material at the same time. Greater level of learning and involvement is gathered when the person teaching the materials have a significant amount of knowledge. The last component of Astin's Involvement

Theory is that the effectiveness of any educational program/policy is directly related to the strength of that program/policy to increase student involvement (Astin, 1999). One thing to note in term of Astin's policy is that he does not always consider the fourth and fifth components of his theories as full postulates because there is still research to be done with both postulates. He does, however, believes that they are good guides in terms of designing effective programs for students. As mentioned, one reason for that involves the way that the information is presented to students and participants.

Physical Environment of Residence Halls

The study of physical environments on college campuses is not a new area of study. It has been a long debate between institutions and student on how best to utilize physical space to meet the needs of students, as noted by Strange and Banning (2015) in their book *Designing for Learning: Creating Campus Environments for Student Success*. According to Strange and Banning, attending college results in college students being able to explore themselves, and that the impact of the physical environment of a college campus can impact a student's goals, values, and interests. This can be connected to students living on campus as well, as students who live on campus are more likely to returned to campus from year to year as opposed to students who live off campus. This has been noted to be affected by not only the ability to live on campus, but also to the connection that a student's makes in college (Schudde, 2011).

Since the 2000s there have been three major types of residence halls that have been built, all of which have their own unique style about them and meets the needs of the student differently. The first style of housing is the traditional residence hall. These types of residence halls are designed to serve as a double or single occupancy space with

a community bathroom which includes a sink and shower. The second type of residence space is an adjoining suite style space. This is when two double or single occupancy bed spaces are connected by a single bathroom that the suite of students will utilize and be responsible to cleaning and stocking. Lastly, many colleges and university have created super suites in some of their residence hall spaces. A super suite consists of a cluster of rooms that share a private living area and a private bathroom. Most super suites do not have a full-size kitchen, but some are designed with an attached non-cooking kitchen. In addition to the traditional residence hall design that many colleges utilize, many also have opened apartment style complexes to allow for a more independent living environment (Grimm, et al., 2003).

The design of a residence space can cause a significant impact on the students development in college. In a 2010 study, a doctoral researcher wanted to investigate if a residence hall design type played a role in the psychosocial development of first-year students. First year students consisted of students who had fewer than 24 credits at the completion of the study. A multivariate analysis was conducted on the 87 first year residential students who volunteered out of the almost 500 first year residential students who lived on in either a modified traditional, adjoining suite style residence hall, or a super suite style residence hall (Ownes, 2010). Researchers utilized a Student Development Task and Lifestyle Assessment, which is an assessment that is designed to assess psychosocial development in students (Winston, Miller, & Cooper, 1999). Following collection, the researcher was able to determine that students who live in a modified traditional residence style room had a greater level of autonomy and purpose than students who lived in either an adjoining residence room or a super-suite style

residence space. Students who also lived in a traditional residence hall space was shown to have a higher level of mature interpersonal relationships with their peers as opposed to students who live in super-suite construction types (Owens, 2010).

Conclusion of Review

Student housing has been a heavily researched topic pertaining to college students. However, there are still gaps to the literature in regard to seeing the impact that various styles of housing has on college students. Research has been conducted showing that students who reside in styles of housing such as suites and traditional corridors have higher levels of interpersonal growth. Additionally, with the currently changes in the new styles of residential housing, this offers more opportunities for research to be conducted on living style or building style. By conducting further research, this offers the opportunity for student affairs and housing professional to better be able to provide and serve out students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to discover what physical aspects of both traditional style residence halls and newer public private partnership residence halls do students value when it comes to helping students become involved in their residential communities. This study can inform university housing offices who are considering building a newer residence hall about what aspects of a residence hall are most important to students. Additionally, this study will also look at live-in student staff members who are also working to build and engage their residential communities by involving their residents.

Research Questions

1. Do students who live in traditional residence and students who live in a public-private residence hall differ regarding how they value the physical structure of residence halls?
2. Do live-in staff who live in a traditional residence hall and staff who work in public-private partnership residence halls differ regarding how they value the physical structure of residence halls?

Context of Study

Setting. The study will be conducted at Rowan University. Rowan University is a medium-sized, national doctorate research institution dedicated to the excellence in undergraduate education. Founded in 1923 as Glassboro Normal School to train future educators, Rowan University has since grown to an extraordinary level. Rowan

University offers a variety of degrees ranging from Bachelor's to Doctoral degrees.

Rowan is one of three universities in the nation to award both a Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine. During the 2018-2019 academic year, Rowan University had a total enrollment of over 19,400 students across their four campus around New Jersey located in Glassboro, Camden, Stratford, and Mantua. Rowan University also ranked 91 in top public schools and 171 in national universities according to U.S. News and World Report (Rowan University).

The main campus located in Glassboro, New Jersey is home to over six thousand five hundred residential students in 18 residence halls and apartment style complexes. Many of Rowan University's residence halls and apartments are buildings that are owned and operated by the university including halls such as The Townhouse Complex, Triad Apartments and Chestnut Hall. In addition to the university owned and operated residence halls, Rowan University also houses students in a variety of residential spaces that are managed by outside private companies such as Holly Pointe Commons, Rowan Boulevard Apartments, and 220 Rowan Boulevard.

Two different residential areas will serve as the primary location for the study. The first residential location will be Holly Pointe Commons. Holly Pointe Commons is a tradition residence hall style Public-Private Partnership Residence Hall that is managed by staff of The Michael's Organization. Holly Pointe Commons was constructed in 2016. Holly Pointe Commons holds approximately 1415 students with single and double occupancy bedrooms. The building is co-ed by room with the availability to have mixed gender bedrooms. Holly Pointe Commons is a predominately freshman residence hall with about 300 upperclassmen transfer students living in the halls as well. Holly Pointe

Commons was built with the needs of first year students in mind. To keep the needs of the students in mind Holly Pointe Commons had its own dining hall, a convenience store, as well as its own Starbucks on the first floor (Rowan University)

Holly Pointe Commons is broken up into “pods,” each of which houses approximately 40 students. Each pod makes up a community with a Resident Assistant living in the pod with the residents. Each pod has a study room, a mixture of student bathrooms, laundry rooms and lounges with televisions in the room. Holly Pointe Commons also has a number of living learning communities including honors, engineering, LGBTQIA+, Writing Arts and Pre-Medical. Holly Pointe Commons is built entirely on swipe access, residents would need their student identification cards to both enter the building but also enter their bedrooms. Residents who live in Holly Pointe Commons also have the option to opt into Gender Inclusive Housing. With this option, students can match with any roommate, regardless of gender. Holly Pointe Commons is supervised by one Residential Learning Coordinator, three Resident Directors, three Assistant Resident Directors and 33 Resident Assistants (Rowan University).

The second primary location of my study will be the remaining first year traditional residence halls: Chestnut Halls, Magnolia Hall, Willow Hall, Mimosa Hall, Evergreen Hall, and Mullica Hall. These residence halls are all traditional residence halls that are owned and operated by Rowan University and the Residential Learning staff members. Over one thousand three hundred first-year students live within these residence halls. Mullica, Evergreen, and Mimosa Halls are all suite style residence halls. Students who reside in these halls have a bathroom located in their individual suites. Magnolia,

Willow, and Mimosa Halls are traditional communal style space where the bathroom is located in the hallways.

Population and sample. The target population of this study will consist on the 2700 first year residential students who resides in Holly Pointe Commons, Chestnut Hall, Magnolia Hall, Willow Hall, Mimosa Hall, Evergreen Hall, and Mullica Hall during the 2019-2020 academic year. This population will also include the student staff members who reside and work with the first-year residential communities. The target sample size I will study will include five student staff members from each residential area and ten first year students from each area.

To obtain participants in the study, a building wide email will be distributed to all students in the first-year traditional halls and in Holly Pointe Commons, through a building wide listserv, explaining the purpose of the study and call for participants to participate in the study. In addition, a separate but similar email will be sent to the student staff members in each area through the Resident Director of each area calling for volunteers from each staff to come and participate in the study. After obtaining participants for the study, two separate focus groups will be held: one focus group for student staff and one focus group for first year students.

Data Collection and Instrument

A qualitative data analysis will be conducted using focus groups analyzing students and staff members who live in either a first-year traditional hall or Holly Pointe Commons. Students will complete individual consent forms before participating in the focus groups. The instrument that will be used in this study will be a questionnaire that

focuses on questions pertaining to students satisfaction in their residence spaces, their involvement both in and out of their residential community. The development of the focus group questions will come from research developed by Kader in her study on developing student surveys on living-learning programs (Kader, 2017). Due to limited research on the impact of residence hall construction types on student involvement, this focus group instrument will be constructed specifically for the study.

Following receiving the approval of the Institutional Review Board at Rowan University for the research study, a call for participants for both first year students and student staff will be sent to all students via email. The students will be emailed via building listserv, thus eliminating the personal email addresses of all students. The email will include an overview of the study and the location, time and contact information for the focus groups. At the beginning of each focus groups, students will sign two separate consent forms: one form for the participation in the study, the second form the focus group to be recorded. Students will then be asked a series of questions that were made for the study. Following the focus groups, the common themes for each question will be used to analyze the results of each questions.

Data Interpretation

In Chapter IV the results of the focus group will be provided. Following the responses of each questions, key themes that students spoke about frequently will be recorded including excerpts from individuals in the focus groups.

Chapter 4

Findings

Profile of Study

Students in the study were students of Rowan University who were divided into four distinct groups: Resident Assistants of Traditional Residence Halls, Resident Assistants of a First-Year P3 Residence Hall, First-Year Residents of Traditional Residence Halls, and First-Year Residents of a First-Year P3 Residence Hall. Students and Resident Assistants were recruited through to emails. All recruitment methods were approved through the University's Institutional Review Board before reaching out to participants and conducting the study. Four different focus groups were conducted, one for each of the individual groups described above. Residents and staff were asked questions related to experiences living in their individual residence halls, what areas of their residences halls they felt were under or over utilized, and if they were responsible for building their own residence hall what kind of amenities would they include to promote engagement in their communities. Following the initial focus groups, the recordings were examined, and common themes were found between the various focus groups as it related to both research questions.

A total of 20 participants participated in the four different focus groups. Half of the focus group sample consisted on Resident Assistants (50%) and half of the sample consisted on residents of first year halls (50%). Of the entire population, six Resident Assistants (30%) came from Holly Pointe Commons, four Resident Assistants (20%) came from the First-Year Traditional Residence Halls which consist of Chestnut Hall, Magnolia and Willow Halls, Mullica and Evergreen Halls, and Mimosa Hall. In

additional to the Resident Assistants, three residents (15%) from first year traditional halls participated in the study, and seven residents (35%) came from Holly Pointe Commons.

Analysis of the Data

Resident Assistant focus groups. After conducting the focus groups, common themes were looked at based on the questions that students were asked in the process as it related to the research questions. The first research question explored *do the values of the physical structure of residence halls differ between live-in staff who live in traditional residence halls differ for staff who work in public private partnership residence halls?* From there, questions were asked of the Resident Assistants to gauge how their community was engaging with one another. The same questions were asked to both Resident Assistants of Traditional Halls and Resident Assistants of P3.

During the focus group, the first question asked of the Resident Assistants was, how would they describe their experience trying to build an engaging community in the residence hall? From this, a common theme that came up was that having first year residents, it was easy to build a community because those were the students that are trying to get involved from the beginning of their college experience. One Resident Assistant went as far as to mention that having the residents being in such close proximity to each other, it helps because students are seeing what other residents are doing and want to get involved also.

(Public Private Partnership) In Holly it's really easy for them to get involved because they are so close. With my residents, during the first week or so they would knock on every single door and get to know everyone, which I think built

community in my pod because my whole pod is like best friends with each other.

I feel like they did that on their own based on the proximity of where they are living. Even though Holly Pointe is a huge building, everything is very compact.

A second Resident Assistant from the P3 area also mentioned that Holly Pointe has so many small lounge spaces, it's not uncommon finding small groups of students either studying together or playing video games with one another.

Resident Assistants in Traditional Residence Halls echoed a similar message when it came to their residents being engaging in their community. What stood out during their answering was not related to the physical structure of the building but the community itself playing a major role in the community aspect of the residence halls:

(Traditional) My residents for the most part all came in through the ASCEND (Achieving Success through Collaboration, Engagement, and Determination) PCI (Pre-College Institute) program during the summer. So many of my residents knew each other from the start of the semester. For them, it was easy trying to build a strong community because it was already strong when I got it. The only thing I really had to do was work to get my students who didn't go through the summer program involved in the community as well.

During the focus group, another common theme that was mentioned was the impact that living-learning and themed learning communities had on their students. Both groups of Resident Assistants mentioned how by having learning communities, it helps with students becoming more engaged because the residents within the communities already have a shared interest that helps Resident Assistants program towards their

individual communities. Those learning communities mentioned included the ASCEND learning community and the Engineering Learning Community.

During the focus groups Resident Assistants were also asked about the physical structure and how they felt it helps them build a community with their residents. Resident Assistants were asked what areas of their community they felt were utilized the most, the least, and if they believed that the space they had in their building helped when it came to programming for their residents. From the discussion it was clear that lounge space was a space that was used the most in both residence hall types. However, the design and layout of the lounges caused a divide in the between the different focus groups.

(Traditional) In my building, we have large community lounge on the first floor.

There is a ping-pong table, air conditioning, and a lot of couches and chairs. For us, students are always in the lounge doing homework or hanging out.

When speaking to Resident Assistants of P3 residence halls, they had a similar message of how the lounges are a good space for residents to come and do homework as many of the lounges are smaller, have dry erase boards for doing homework, and windows that students draw on to write out larger engineering problems.

Within the traditional residence halls, another space that was mentioned as being used more frequently is the community kitchens in Evergreen. These kitchens are open for students to store their personal food belongings or to cook.

(Traditional) My residents on my floor tends to cook for one another and have small family dinners with each other. For us since the kitchen is right next to the lounge, it also allows us to have movie nights that are close to the big television

where we keep the food and can pop popcorn. The fact that it was also recently renovates is also a plus.

The last question asked of the Residents Assistants was if they would build their own residence halls to promote community engagement, what would they add and why. There was a variation of answers from the Resident Assistant staff of ideas that they would add if they were to build their own residence hall. One comment that was mentioned was to continue to have communal bathrooms in the residence halls:

(Traditional) What I like about the communal bathrooms is that it forces people to talk to one another. You can be walking down the hallway and run into someone you know. It also forces people out of their bedrooms which is also a good thing.

Another Resident Assistant from another area within the P3 area mentioned having larger lounges for programming:

(Public Private Partnership) I would like to see larger lounge spaces. I think I do a good job with programming now, but my attendance isn't really high for a lot of my programs. I think if I have a larger lounge space where I can have large events for my residents, I can have a larger turn out for my programs.

Another suggestion from the group of Resident Assistants included having dining options in all the residence hall:

(Traditional) When I was a freshman in Holly, I would come to Starbucks a lot to get coffee before class or when I was studying. So, I would want to build a small café or coffee stand in the halls for days when we don't want to walk from Evergreen to Holly Pointe for meals.

Other options such as more televisions in the lounges and more furniture in some of the larger space was also mentioned by staff members when asked for their input in describing their ideal residence hall. In addition to more laundry facilities within the residence halls.

Student focus group. Similar to the Resident Assistants, first year students living in both traditional residence halls and students living in a P3 residence hall were asked during a focus group to discuss their experience living on a college campus. The focus group with the first-year students assist in answering the second research question presented, *Do the values of the physical structure of residence halls differ between students who live in traditional residence and students who live in public private residence halls?* Similar to the Resident Assistants, questions were asked to determine how their residence hall makes them feel a part of their community.

During the focus group the first question asked of the resident students focused on their experience living in the residence halls and if living in their residence halls made them feel a part of a community within the building they are in.

(Public Private Partnership) I personally have a really good relationship with my RA, so I am always either with her or going to other resident's programs and I do have a lot of friends here, so I am always here. I love my friends here, so we have gotten kind of close.

(Public Private Partnership). A lot of my friends live in different pods on different floors and we always hang out together in each other room. So, I think this year has been good so far.

(Traditional) I am the President of my buildings hall council and I think that being in a small that is very open and in the had a lot of outside space it helps us feel like we are a community because we can go outside and hang out or we can stay in the building. Earlier in the year we had a program in our lounge, and we had the doors open into the courtyard, so we had activities in the lounge and outside.

Students were also asked to comment on areas within their residence halls that they felt they utilized the most. Similar to the Resident Assistant staff that had been questioned earlier, the first-year residents mentioned that community spaces such as the study rooms and lounge space are more utilized than other spaces. Students also mentioned that there was not a specific space in the building they could think of when it came to what area of the building was not utilized the most.

(Public Private Partnership) I'm not really sure, I mean it's a lot of space in the buildings, I guess you can say the bridges. People hang out there for a few minutes but other than that, the bridges are usually empty when you walk off the elevator. The only time we really use them is when we are having floor meetings.

In the same fashion as the Resident Assistant Staff, the first-year students were asked if they were in charge of building their own residence halls, what kind of amenities would they add to their hall. In speaking with all of the students, the majority wanted some kind of recreational equipment in the larger lounges. One resident compared their residence hall to a peer's residence hall and how there was a difference in the lounge space between the halls:

(Public Private Partnership) Whenever I visit my friend in Whitney, one of the things we like to do is either play ping pong or shoot pool. In their lounges they

have games for students to use. If I was in charge of designing my hall and I had the money for it, I would want to buy equipment for the lounges.

(Public Private Partnership) For me, I don't like the food on campus that much, so I would want to have a kitchen in the residence halls so I can cook my own food if I wanted to.

(Traditional) I would want to add air conditioning to the halls. When the semester first started it was hot in the lounges so we for the most part just sat in our rooms with fans since it was a little cooler in our rooms.

The overall findings of all four focus groups provided the important information on how Resident Assistants and first year students view their residences halls as a place of community buildings and how they felt that the residence halls played a part to their engagement on a college campus. The next chapter will further discuss information from the focus groups, offer recommendations, and areas for further research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This final section discusses the findings from the focus groups about the experiences of first year residents and Residents Assistants who live in both public private partnership residence halls and traditional style residence halls. This section also looks at limitations of the study, such as areas that impacted the success of the study. This section also looks at recommendations for housing offices to consider when building newer residence spaces on campus, as well as provide areas of further.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: *Do the values of the physical structure of residence halls differ between live-in staff who live in traditional residence halls differ for staff who work in public private partnership residence halls?* From talking to the live-in staff in both the traditional style residence halls as well as the public private residence halls, there was not much difference in terms of areas of the residence halls that live in staff value in terms of building a community within their buildings. One common theme that stood out was that the live-in staff valued community spaces that could also double as space to do programming for their residents, as well as space for students to hang out or work on their own. Within the traditional halls and the public private partnership halls, what was noted that the smaller lounge spaces, generally the ones of the corner of the individual hallways, tended to be utilized as homework spaces.

Other things to note when looking at the Resident Assistants and the area of the hall that they value the most, the staff felt that having more communal building features such as a communal bathroom helped promote engagement in their community. Staff felt

that by having a communal space in the residence halls, it pushed students to come out of their residence spaces and interact with one another in their community, as opposed to staying in their rooms.

Research Question 2: *Do the values of the physical structure of residence halls differ between residents who live in traditional residence halls differ for staff who work in public private partnership residence halls?* From speaking to students of traditional halls and students of public private halls, there were slight variations of things that students valued in their residence halls in terms of what they feel would build a strong community. Residents who live in the public private partnership residence hall on campus reported having space to connect with one another, however much of what they do to engage themselves involved bringing equipment from their own bedrooms into the open lounge space, such as gaming consoles or other equipment. Students in the public private area suggested adding amenities to the residence halls such as a community kitchen where students can cook their own meals if they so desired. Besides adding air conditioning to the residence halls, students who were in the traditional residence halls did not seem to want to add much to the residence halls. From speaking to the students who are in the traditional residence halls, as well as their resident assistants, I believe that in the traditional halls, there is a greater sense of family and community. I suspect that from those students' perspectives, there is not much to add because their residence hall already feels like a community among their building.

Limitations

From this research, I believe there were a few limitations that impacted the results of the study. The first limitation I believe that played a role in the focus groups was the

lack of engagement, particularly during the student focus groups. While speaking to the students, most of their answers echoed that of their peers, specifically in the traditional residence hall group. Another limitation that I believe played a role was that during the public private focus groups, most of the students involved were from the same area of the building, and these students who volunteered to participate were acquaintances of one another prior to the study. As such, I believe there was a small level of groupthink when it came to this particular group of students coming together to participate in the focus group. Another limitation that I believe played a role in this study is that the questions asked of the students were not thought provoking enough to get down to a deep meaning when it came to answering the questions asked during the focus group. The last limitation that I believe impacted the study is that looking at the first-year residence halls on campus, there are six traditional residence halls on campus, as opposed to one public private partnership hall on campus, thus making the conversation about public private buildings strictly about the one building.

Recommendations and Further Research

From conducting this study, I recommend the following for schools building residence halls in the future:

- Create lounge space that is adequate enough to cater to the needs of 20 residents or more at a time.
- Provide means of entertainment in the residence hall spaces such as televisions, gaming consoles, pool tables, or tabletop games that students can sign out to use.
- Provide more communal spaces in the residence halls such as community kitchen and bathrooms.

From conducting this study, I recommended the following areas of further research on the topic:

- Explore the difference between traditional residence hall complexes and public private complexes
- Explore the differences between apartment living and first year residence hall living
- Add more demographics of students, in regards to class level, to the study as opposed to first year students to broaden the level of engagement and experience within the focus groups.

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Appendix A

Resident Recruitment Email

Hello Residential Students!

My name is Gene Washington, and I am a current graduate student in the Higher Education Administration graduate program here at Rowan University. I wanted to reach out to you all and invite you all to participate in a focus group to talk about your experiences living in your residence hall and your engagement with on the Rowan University Campus. This focus group will take place in the Holly Pointe Commons Conference Room located on the first floor of E-Pod and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The purpose of the focus group is to hear from you all what physical aspects of your residence hall do you value when it comes to helping you build a strong community and allowing you to feel more engaged with the campus. Your response to the questions will be beneficial when it comes to building future residence halls. Your responses to the questions will be confidential and if at any time you do not feel comfortable answering a question, you can stop answering without consequence.

If you would like to participate in this focus group, please reply back to washingtg8@rowan.edu expressing your interest.

Thank you for your consideration,
Gene Washington

This study has been approved by Rowan University's IRB (#Pro2019000777)

Appendix B

Resident Assistant Recruitment Email

Hi RAs!

I know many of you all know me, but for those who do not, my name is Gene Washington, and I am a current graduate student in the Higher Education Administration graduate program here at Rowan University. I am also a former Resident Director for the department who worked in Holly Pointe Commons during the '17-'18 and '18-'19 academic years. I wanted to reach out to you all and invite you all to participate in a focus group to talk about your experiences living in your residence hall and how you help your students become engaged with the Rowan University community. This focus group will take place in the Holly Pointe Commons Conference Room located on the first floor of E-Pod and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The purpose of the focus group is to hear from you all what physical aspects of your residence hall do you value when it comes to helping you build a strong community and allowing you to assist your residents feel connected to the entire campus. Your response to the questions will be beneficial when it comes to building future residence halls. Your responses to the questions will be confidential and if at any time you do not feel comfortable answering a question, you can stop answering without consequence.

If you would like to participate in this focus group, please reply back to washingtg8@rowan.edu expressing your interest.

Thank you for your consideration,
Gene Washington

This study has been approved by Rowan University's IRB (#Pro2019000777)

Appendix C

Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to discover what physical aspects of both traditional style residence halls and newer public private partnership residence halls do students value when it comes to helping students become engaged in their residential communities. Additionally, this study will also look at live-in student staff members who are also working to build and engage their residential communities by involving their residents.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you will not be penalized for participating. During this focus group you will be asked a series of questions regarding your time living on campus and the impact it has had on your involvement. If you agree to participate, you must be given a signed copy of this document and a written summary of the research. This focus group should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. If at any time you do not feel comfortable answering a question, do not feel obligated to answer and we can move on. All responses will remain confidential and only shared with thesis chair Dr. Andrew Tinnin.

You may contact Gene Washington at washingtg8@rowan.edu any time you have questions about the research.

You may contact Dr. Andrew Tinnin at tinnin@rowan.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research subject or what to do if you are injured.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D
Focus Group Instrument

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Focus group questions will be divided by research questions as two different will utilized during the course of this study: one study for first-year students, one study for live-in student staff

Research Questions 1: Do the values of the physical structure of residence halls differ between students who live in traditional residence and students who live in a public-private residence hall?

1. How would you define your experience in your residence hall?
2. Do living in your residence hall make you feel like part of the community and why?
3. How often do you spend in your residence hall connecting with other students? Staff?
4. Are there areas within your residence hall that you feel you utilize the most? Area that you feel you use less often?
5. Are there areas in your space that you wish you utilized more?
6. If you could design your own residence hall, what kind of amenities or area would you consider adding to the building?

Research Questions 2: Do the values of the physical structure of residence halls differ between live-in staff who live in a traditional residence hall differ for student who work in public-private partnership residence halls?

1. How would you describe your experience trying to build an engaging community?
2. How often does your residents spend time in their connecting with other students?
With other staff members?
3. Are there areas in the residence hall that you feel are utilized the most? Area of your hall that's that you feel can be utilized more?
4. When you comes to programming, do you feel you have the adequate amount of space to put on a large successful program?
5. If you could design your own residence hall, what kind of amenities or areas would you consider adding to the building?