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## Freshman Year Living Arrangements and College Experiences for Local Students

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Freshman Year Living Arrangements and College Experiences for Local Students

by

Sara E. Sanchez

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Barbara Y. LaCost

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# Freshman Year Living Arrangements and College Experiences for Local Students

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University of Nebraska, 2012

Adviser: Barbara Y. LaCost

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate and compare the freshman-year college experiences of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students based on whether they lived in a residence hall or at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Specifically, the study's participants were students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska; this group was selected in order to focus on the lived experiences of students who had the option between remaining to live at home or moving onto campus for their freshman year. This is not an option for all incoming UNL freshman as there is a first-year live-on requirement with few exceptions. With this in mind, this research sought to make a contribution to the literature on the relationship between college housing and first year experiences with a focus on students who could qualify for an exemption to a first year live-on requirement. Findings from the quantitative portion of the study concluded that a statistically significant difference existed in on-campus involvement between students who live in a residence hall or at home with parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Statistically significant differences were not found for GPA, work hours per week, amount of faculty and staff contact, family income, or status as a first generation college student. Findings from the qualitative portion of the study pointed to shared and differing themes among the two

groups of students that influenced living choices and how these living situations positively and negatively influenced the freshman-year college experience.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### ***Background***

The question is often raised as to the wisdom of a high school senior's decision to reside at home and attend a local college or university.

Similarly, the question is raised as to the wisdom of a local student's decision to live in a college or university residence hall. (Grosz & Brandt, 1969)

As Grosz and Brandt indicated, first-year college students often face a difficult decision in determining where they will live during the commencement of their college years. And even more important than the decision itself, is the potential outcomes that can result from particular living arrangements during the college years, especially the first year. In this study, the researcher investigated the effects that living on campus in a residence hall or at home had on local-area students during their freshman year of college. Factors that influenced where a student lived their first year of college were also examined.

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the freshman-year college experiences of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students based on whether they lived in a residence hall or at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Specifically, the study's participants were students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska; this group was selected in order to focus on the lived experiences of students who had the option between remaining to live at home or moving onto campus

for their freshman year. This is not an option for all incoming UNL freshman as there is a first-year live-on requirement with few exceptions. This researcher sought to make a contribution to the literature on the relationship between college housing and first year experiences with a focus on students who could qualify for an exemption to a first year live-on requirement.

### ***Conceptual Framework Guiding Study***

The conceptual framework guiding this study is that of higher education environments as detailed by Strange and Banning, 2001 in *Educating by Design: Creating Campus Learning Environments that Work*. Strange and Banning present four components that make up the higher education environment: the physical environment, the aggregate environment, the organizational environment, and the constructed environment.

The physical environment consists of physical design and spaces, layout, and accessibility, among other factors that can influence impressions and behavior. In the case of this study the space and surroundings in which students live as first year college students were considered in terms of how this aspect of their environment influences academic success, on-campus involvement, and the role that actual physical distance plays in having access to people and other resources on campus.

The aggregate environment considers the impact of human characteristics on environments and specifically the way in which “human characteristics influence the degree to which people are attracted to, satisfied within, and retained by those environments” (p. 35). For the present study, the aggregate environment was considered by investigating the presence and role of people in the life of a first year student. People

could include parents, friends, housing staff, faculty and staff, and roommates. The people regularly present in the students life and influencing their freshman-year experience would be dependent on where they lived their first year of college.

The organizational environment consists of the way in which power is distributed in order to achieve a common goal. The organizational environment was considered in this study in terms of who the students felt had power or oversight over them as a cause of where they lived their freshman year. And the common goal that is in place is that of educating students.

The constructed environment consists of “subjective views and experiences” (p.86) as well as “impressions and intuited understandings” (p. 85) that influence “whether individuals are attracted to a particular environment, or satisfied and stable within that environment” (p. 86). For the present study the constructed environment concerned how where a student lived their freshman year influenced their overall college experience and their view and feelings about their college experience. The constructed environment prior to entering college, may have also influenced the decision that students made about where to live in.

### ***Research Questions***

The research was guided by the following overarching research question: *How does the freshman-year college experience compare for students who live in a residence hall and for students who live at home with their parents?* With this question in mind, two additional, more focused questions were crafted:

***Sub-research question 1:*** What effect does living in a residence hall or at home with parents have on GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact?

***Sub-research question 2:*** How do these students compare in terms of background characteristics such as family income level and status as first generation college students?

### ***Research Hypotheses***

A total of six hypotheses were crafted for the study. The following four hypotheses related to research sub-research question one were proposed in the null form to assist significance testing.

H<sub>01</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between GPA's for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

H<sub>02</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between scores for on-campus involvement for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

H<sub>03</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between number of work hours per week for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home.

H<sub>04</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between amount of faculty and staff contact for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

The following two hypotheses relating to research sub-research question two were proposed in the null form to assist significance testing.

H<sub>05</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between family income for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

H<sub>06</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between status as a first generation college student for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

### ***Definition of Terms***

***Residence Hall.*** Students who self-identified as living in a residence hall during their freshman year at UNL. Traditional-style residence halls (dorms) are available to freshman students at the University. UNL offers seventeen residence hall options between its City and East Campus (UNL University Housing, “Residence Halls,” 2012). UNL’s On-Campus Residency Requirement states: “All unmarried students who are enrolled for seven or more credit hours, and who are under the age of 19 as of the first day of the fall semester of the current academic year, are required to reside in on-campus housing” (UNL University Housing, “Residency Requirements,” 2012). First year students may also live in approved fraternity, sorority “and other approved co-operatives” (UNL University Housing, “On-Campus Residency Requirement Policy,” 2011) however, students who responded as having lived in a Greek house their freshman year were not included in the study.

***At Home:*** Students who self-identified as living at home with parent(s) or guardian(s) during their freshman year at UNL. UNL’s On-Campus Residency Requirement has the following option: “A student may live with his/her parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and commute from that home.” With commuting distance defined as “being

within a 30-mile radius of the UNL campus” (UNL University Housing, “On-Campus Residency Requirement Policy,” 2011).

***Grade Point Average (GPA):*** Students self-reported their grade point average after their first two semesters at the University.

***On-Campus Involvement:*** On-campus involvement included the outside of class activities that students participate in within the college environment. Such activities include participation in: student organizations including social sororities and fraternities and residence hall associations, student government, and club, intramural, or recreational sports. Time dedicated to participating in student organizations and frequency of visits to the Student Union were also considered as was frequency of attendance at art exhibits, plays, dance, music, theatre, or other performances and frequency of participation in physical fitness activities on-campus such as sports clubs, intramural sports, and use of the campus recreation center.

***Work Hours Per Week:*** Students self-reported whether they worked for pay during their freshman year at UNL and subsequently self-reported how many hours, on average they worked per week on campus and/or off campus.

***Faculty and Staff Contact:*** Faculty and staff contact included whether a student established a relationship with a UNL staff member or administrator their freshman year as well as frequency of interaction with faculty or instructors via email, office hours, or outside of office hours. Topics of conversations with faculty and staff were also considered, specifically the topic of grades and assignments and future career plans. The frequency of interaction with academic advisors/counselors and graduate students/teaching assistants was also considered.

***Family Income:*** Students self-reported their family's/household's annual income range. This range was from "under \$20,000" to "\$80,000 or above."

***First-Generation College Student:*** A student whose mother nor father had graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States. Students were asked whether their mother graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States and a second question of whether their father graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States. Answering "no" to both questions would indicate status as a first-generation college student.

### ***Delimitations***

Delimitations of the study included (a) the survey instrument having been created by the researcher and (b) a single university as the site for the study. The exclusion of students who lived on-campus in approved Greek housing is also a delimitation.

### ***Limitations***

Data collected for this study were to come from students who would have been eligible to live on-campus or at home with their parents for their freshman year at UNL due to living within 30 miles of the University. However, due to the scope of the data collection methods that took place with assistance from UNL's Office of Registration and Records, students who did not fit this geographic category were also included in the study. This is due to the fact that student email addresses were requested from students with current permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska as opposed to permanent address at the time they applied or first enrolled in college. That said, students could have established a permanent address of Lincoln, NE between their first and second year of college and thus not have originally been able to remain living at home with parents.

However, a survey question did try to control for this by asking whether the student had graduated from high school in Lincoln, NE. The quantitative analysis for this study controlled for local students by using data from respondents that marked “yes” to having graduated from high school in Lincoln, NE. The analysis of open-ended survey questions did not make this same consideration. The interview subject declared that he had graduated from high school in Lincoln, NE.

A second limitation to this study is the proportion of students that lived in a residence hall their freshman year that responded to the survey compared to the students who reported that they remained living at home with parents or guardians. The difference was 84 residence hall students compared to 23 students who lived at home. Also regarding demographic characteristics, more female students (71.4%) compared to male students (28.6%) participated in the survey.

For the qualitative portion of the study the researcher conducted a single interview. Three students initially came forward to volunteer for an interview but completion of said interview was accomplished with only one student due to the other two student not following through on multiple requests to schedule a meeting time for an interview.

Finally, some students may have chosen not to participate due to the ascribed definitions of the varying living situations that they had to choose from on the survey. Some students may have been more familiar with the term “dorm” as opposed to “residence hall” for example. Other students may not have seen themselves living within the confines of a traditional nuclear family that was suggested by the option of living “at home with parent(s) or guardian(s).

### *Significance*

The significance of this study lies in the contribution it makes to the literature on college student housing and more specifically, the housing decisions and outcomes of students from the local area of where the college or university resides. Although numerous studies have been undertaken throughout the years on college student housing, this research also takes into account the first-year residency requirements implemented by colleges and universities and specifically how this plays out for students who could be exempt from the rule because they already live locally. The results of this study are of interest to university housing professionals for the insight provided into the experiences, both positive and negative, of students who lived on campus in a residence hall their freshman year. Housing professionals may also be interested in the factors that influence other students to remain living at home if they are eligible to do so. Administrators involved in coordinating student activities, freshman student orientation programs, and other programming targeted at first year students will also benefit from the insight that this study provides into the experiences of freshman students. Further, other professionals and researchers may be interested in how a seemingly similar group of students—students who geographically originate from the local area of where the college or university resides—make different decisions about where they will live as they commence their college years and how this varying decision shapes a student's experience in college.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The question is often raised as to the wisdom of a high school senior's decision to reside at home and attend a local college or university.

Similarly, the question is raised as to the wisdom of a local student's decision to live in a college or university residence hall. (Grosz & Brandt, 1969)

#### ***Research Problem***

As Grosz and Brandt indicated, first-year college students often face a difficult decision in determining where they will live during their first year. And even more important than the decision itself, are the potential outcomes that result from particular living arrangements during the college years, especially the first year. The researcher investigated the effects that living on campus in a residence hall or at home had on local-area students during their freshman year of college. Factors that influenced where a student lived during the first year of college were also examined. Although numerous studies have been undertaken throughout the years on college student housing, this research takes into account the first-year residency requirements implemented by colleges and universities and specifically how such requirements play out for students who could be exempt from the rule because they already live locally.

#### ***Research Questions***

The research was guided by the following overarching research question: *How does the freshman-year college experience compare for students who live in a residence*

*hall and for students who live at home with their parents?* With this question in mind, two additional, more focused questions were crafted:

***Sub-research question 1:*** What effect does living in a residence hall or at home with parents have on GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact?

***Sub-research question 2:*** How do these two groups of students compare in terms of background characteristics such as family income level and status as first generation college students?

### ***Overview of Methodologies Encountered***

The literature related directly to the housing environment of first-year college students is primarily quantitative in nature. In fact, this was the case for 22 of the 25 studies discussed below (e.g., Pascarella et al., 1992; Inman & Pascarella, 1998; Fenzel, 2001; Pike, 2002; Bozic, 2007; Schudde, 2011). The quantitative research methods utilized included administering pre and post tests (e.g., Welty, 1976; Pascarella et al., 1992), surveys and questionnaires (e.g., Fenzel et al., 2001; Inman & Pascarella 1998; Pike, 2002), inventories (Welty, 1976; Valliant & Scanlan, 1996), and using methods of analysis on pre-existing data from national datasets (e.g., Inman & Pascarella, 1998; Bozick, 2007; Schudde, 2007). Pre-existing data came from sources such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) (Pascarella, 1984), the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) (Schudde, 2011), and the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) (Turley & Wodke, 2010), among others. Blimling (1997) utilized a meta-analysis of existing literature. The three featured studies that utilized a

qualitative research strategy involved the use of focus groups (Johnson et al., 1995; Krause, 2007) or open-ended interviews (Chrisite & Dinham, 1991).

### ***Population Encountered***

The literature descriptions primarily focused on first-year or freshman students (term used interchangeably) as the study participants (e.g., Nowack & Hanson, 1985; Wolfe, 1993). Researchers tracked first-year students into their sophomore year (May 1974; Pascarella, 1984) and others collected data on students of all class standings but primarily on freshmen (Hountras & Brandt, 1970). Also studied were student populations in Australia (Krause, 2007) and Canada (Grayson, 1997).

The literature review is divided into four categories: academics, experiences and interactions, specific student populations, and additional foci.

### ***Academics***

Academics have been a primary topic of investigation in comparisons of outcomes for on-campus versus off-campus first-year college students. Studies often focused on a comparison of grade point average (GPA) after a particular amount of time during the freshman year (e.g., Grosz & Brandt, 1969; Bowman & Partin, 1993).

Although also within the category of academics, progress toward degree completion and persistence (Levin & Clowes, 1982; Schudde, 2011) and instances of academic probation also have been studied (Nowack & Hanson, 1985).

The research on the impact of college residence hall living on academic performance has been in place for many decades. Blimling (1987) employed a meta-analysis to “integrate and summarize the empirical research from 1966 through 1987 regarding the influence of college residence halls on the academic performance of

undergraduate students” (p. 298). Literature included in the Blimling study controlled for past academic performances. Results indicated that, in studies that controlled for differences in past academic performance, living in a residence hall did not show to be notably influential in academic performance compared to living at home. There was also no evidence that residence hall living negatively affected students’ academics. The literature that merited inclusion for the Blimling study analysis had to have controlled for past academic performances.

***Grade Point Average (GPA).*** Comparisons of GPA have not garnered consistent results. GPA’s were found to be higher for students who lived off-campus (Grayson, 1997). Differences in GPA’s have also been found to be non-significant, minimal or nonexistent (e.g., Grosz & Brandt, 1970; Pugh & Chamberlain, 1976; Turley & Wodke, 2010). However, higher GPA’s for students who live on-campus have also been demonstrated in a number of studies (e.g., Hountras & Brandt, 1970; May, 1974; Nowack & Hanson, 1985).

Grosz and Brandt (1969) studied three groups of 87 total freshman matched on sex, SAT scores and three different living arrangements. Results for this study indicated that where a student lived freshman year had a minimal impact on first and second semester grade point averages. The authors pointed to academic ability as playing a greater role than place of residence in helping students obtain a high GPA. Hountras and Brandt (1970) studied 270 male undergraduate students, but not exclusively freshmen. Results for this study indicated that college residence did impact the academic performance of students, with students who lived in residence halls having higher GPA’s than those who lived off campus at home or in another arrangement. Perhaps some of the

differences can be attributed to Hountras and Brandt only studying male students but also including students with class standings beyond their freshman year.

Pugh and Chamberlain (1976) also investigated the relationship between academic achievement and college residence. The class standings and SAT scores of the student participants were controlled for in this particular study at a large state university. Off-campus housing was not specific to living at home with parents, and the students studied were of all undergraduate class standings. The analysis of the data disclosed that academic achievement, in the form of GPA, among students living in three types of housing was not readily different. Pugh and Chamberlain controlled for pre-college characteristics that aided the reliability of their findings.

In another quantitative study that looked at the relationship between residence hall living and academics for freshmen, Bowman and Partin (1993) found no significant differences in the GPA's of students who lived in residence halls compared to those who lived off campus. Off campus living included fraternity or sorority housing, off-campus apartments or living at home with parents. Although the findings did indicate higher grade point averages for students who lived on campus, the difference was not statistically significant.

Grayson (1997) investigated outcomes in the form of involvement and GPA for first-year students based on where they lived. Students who lived in residence halls were more involved on campus, but commuter students were more involved in the classroom. And contrary to other studies, on-campus students actually had slightly lower grades than the commuter students, which, as the authors indicated, could be attributed to commuter student's greater classroom involvement which was also a finding of the study. However,

important to note in this quantitative study is that a majority of the participants (74%) lived at home with their parents, which may have influenced in the reliability of the findings as one group of students dominated the sample size. This the study took place at a Canadian university, which allows one to question of whether the findings are generalizable to students at postsecondary institutions in the United States.

Are all students affected the same way by living or not living on-campus? This question was addressed by Turley and Wodtke (2010) who investigated the ways in which living arrangements during college vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and multiple institutional characteristics. Turley and Wodke used pre-existing data on first-year students. Results included, in general, that living arrangements had no significant impact on academic performance during freshman year. However, this finding did not include Black students and students in attendance at liberal arts institutions; findings for these two groups indicated a significant impact on academic performance. For these students, those who lived on campus in residence halls as opposed to off campus with family had considerably higher GPA's.

***Progress Toward Degree.*** Levin and Clowes (1982) sought answers to questions related to the impact of living environment “on progress toward educational goals” (p. 100). They implemented an analysis of pre-existing data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972. Although there was “no significant relationship between aptitude and residence” (p. 101) there was support for higher four-year graduation rates for students who lived on campus (66%) versus those that lived at home with their parents (55%). However, an independent residence effect was not established due to the fact that, in general, pre-college characteristics, such as high SES and high

school grades, are connected to living on-campus and higher college graduation rates. Also, criteria for inclusion as a study participant included an aspiration to attend graduate school after completing the baccalaureate degree.

Looking into persistence through college, Schudde (2011) used existing data from the Educational Longitudinal Study and IPEDS to determine if not living on campus represented a “lost opportunity” (p.581). Schudde compared students who lived on-campus to those who lived off campus. Findings indicated that students who lived on campus experienced “a 3.3 percentage point increase in their probability of persisting into their second year” (p. 600).

***Academic Probation.*** Nowack and Hanson (1985) authored a quantitative study that examined the academic achievement of freshmen based on their college housing situation. This study differed from others previously mentioned (e.g., Grosz & Brandt, 1969; May, 1974) in that “prevalence of probation” (p. 23) was measured in addition to GPA as a category of academic achievement. Residence hall students (n=1,302) had higher GPA’s and were less likely to be on academic probation than non-residence hall students (n=740).

### ***Experiences and Interactions***

Several researchers have investigated the way or degree in which first-year college students become integrated into their colleges and universities based on where they lived during this early time in their college career. For example, Chickering and Kuper (1971) sought to address whether different living arrangements “influenced the personal development of college students and eventual educational outcomes” (p. 255). Findings indicated that first-year students who lived in on-campus residences were more

likely to belong to a fraternity or sorority, to discuss religion and politics more frequently, and to participate in intramural sports and social activities at a greater rate.

Welty (1976) also was interested in evaluating the differences in intellectual and personal development for students based on their living arrangements and attendance at a public four-year university in the Midwest. The two groups of students differed not only in pre-college demographic characteristics (ACT scores, parental education, SES), but data demonstrated that students who lived in residence halls “grew on selected measures of intellectual and personal growth in their freshman year to a greater degree” (p. 467) than commuter students. The importance of interpersonal relationships with other students, faculty, and administrators in aiding student growth during the freshman year was also stressed.

Pascarella (1984) utilized a causal modeling approach and pre-existing data in a multi-institutional (n=74) study of all Caucasian students (n=4,191) after two years of college at public and private four year universities via data from the 1975 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). Results indicated that resident and commuter students differed on seven background characteristics including aptitude, aspirations and previous educational experiences with resident students holding an advantage in these areas. Differences in non-background characteristics related to the college experience were also found. Living on campus was shown to have its greatest effects on promoting interaction with other students and with faculty members but living on campus had no “significant direct effects” (p. 257) on the four different outcome variables of degree aspiration, satisfaction with college, progress through college, and college persistence plans. Overall, it was also found that level of social integration in the form of the

aforementioned interactions had a greater impact on college outcomes as opposed to “the mere fact of residing on campus” (p. 258).

Qualitative research methods have also been utilized, although sparingly, to study differences in the college experiences and outcomes of early college students based on their living arrangements. Christie and Dinham (1991) explored student persistence based on Tinto’s model of college student departure. Research was conducted at a large, public, research university and consisted of open ended interviews with 25 freshmen students. All participants were White. Data divulged that on-campus living increased students’ chances for becoming assimilated into the social systems of their colleges or universities, specifically in the areas of meeting other students, developing student friendships, gaining information about social opportunities on campus, and shifting away from high school friends. These qualitative findings were based on information derived directly from students’ voices, thus adding value to the recommendations derived from the findings.

In another qualitative research study, Johnson, Staton, and Jorgensen-Earp (1995) analyzed the communication standpoints of freshmen during their first academic term in college. The researchers utilized the students’ place of residence, as the focal point for analysis. Through a series of focus groups, participating students (n=19) addressed questions relating to seven general areas. The findings indicated that students who lived in Greek houses and dorms “felt that they had a built-in forum for meeting new people” (p. 348), while commuter students had more difficulty making friends because they had less access to peers with which to interact. The reverse was true in regard to maintaining

relationships with family members, with this being more prevalent for commuter students.

Although positive effects of living on-campus as a new college student have been cited by multiple studies above (e.g., Chickering & Kuper, 1971; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Schudde, 2011), Fenzel and Hessler (2001) specifically found benefits for students who lived off-campus. Fenzel and Hessler focused on investigating the positive effects of becoming involved on campus and participating in first year seminars. Findings showed that commuter students benefited from less involvement in binge drinking and thus experienced less problems tied to alcohol consumption. However, the commuter students were also found to be less involved “in the social and co-curricular life of the college” (p. 6).

### ***Specific Student Populations***

In addition to studying academic and experience and interaction outcomes for early college students based on their living arrangements, researchers have also focused on outcomes for specific student populations. For example, May (1974) presented a quantitative exploratory study addressing the impact of type of living arrangements during college for disadvantaged students. The study sample consisted of participants of a student support program. Results indicated that there was a difference in GPA for students in the support program based on where they lived; higher grades were earned by those students who did not live at home or in their own apartment. In this study, unlike the Grosz & Brandt (1969) study, the researcher was able to rule out differences in ability as impacting the differences in GPA.

Wolfe (1993) avoided the typical comparison of resident and commuter students; Wolfe compared these two groups using the lens of participation in a first-year intervention program. Results indicated that the group of students who lived on-campus was more socially integrated on their campus compared to two groups of students who commuted to campus. Data supported peer-interactions representing “the most relevant dimension of social integration and that residents and commuters were different on peer-group interactions” (p. 324). These sets of results concurred with those found by Pascarella (1984) and Johnson et al. (1995), respectively. Support for academic differences among the participant groups was not found and nor were higher persistence rates found for the students in the first-year intervention program.

Thompson, Samiratedu and Rafter (1993) looked into differences in overall academic progress in the form of credit hours earned and retention specifically for developmental students and African-American students at a Primarily White Institution (PWI). Developmental students were defined as “those who do not meet requirements for regular admission to a university because of inadequate skills in reading, composition, and/or mathematics” (p. 42). The results of this quantitative study showed support for greater progress and retention for students who lived on-campus no matter their race or admission status. The African-American students who lived on-campus were retained at higher rates even when they also demonstrated lower GPA’s and less credits completed. This study more clearly defined the different living categories, (unlike those shared by Welty (1976)) and also specified that the greatest proportion of off-campus students lived in apartments.

A recent, example of a quantitative study that used pre-existing datasets was used by Bozick (2007). He utilized data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Study of 1996 (N=10,614). Bozick found that low-income students utilized the strategies of living at home and working while going to college to manage the high cost of a postsecondary education. This study's results are significant because the researcher presented data on reasons why students commute to college from home, or at least, how living at home is a strategy to manage other concerns.

Krause (2007), in a qualitative study, focused on the experiences of commuter students in Australia during their first six months of college utilizing focus groups. Examined was "the role of social involvement in the form of interactions with peers in their early experiences of higher education" (p. 28). A finding that was highlighted in this study was that the student participants consider classroom interactions in small groups and outside-of-class occasions as facilitating student involvement with their peers more so than large lecture hall classes. One-fifth of participants were 25 years of age or older, which is beneficial for obtaining data on non-traditional students but may impact the applicability of the findings to higher proportions of traditional-age undergraduate populations.

### ***Additional Foci***

Beyond the three aforementioned focus areas (academics, experiences and integration, and specific populations), researchers have studied a variety of other outcomes for students based on where they lived in their first year of college. In a single-institution quantitative study that examined cognitive growth, Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, Zusman, Inman, and Sesler (1992) analyzed data on 210 freshmen students at a large

research university in Chicago. Cognitive growth was measured by improvements in reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning and critical thinking. The research findings indicated that resident students had significantly greater gains in critical thinking abilities for their freshman year in comparison to commuter students in their freshman year.

Inman and Pascarella (1998) used a quantitative method and analysis of pre-existing data to examine the critical thinking skills of college freshmen resident and commuter students. These findings were not in alignment with the findings from Pascarella et al. (1992). Concluded here was that place of residence during college “did not significantly contribute to the explained variation in end of freshman year critical thinking” (p. 564).

Valliant and Scanlan (1996) considered the impact of living arrangements of freshmen college students on alcohol consumption. Findings indicated that a greater proportion of students who lived off-campus, but not with their parents, “were at risk for alcohol addiction” (p. 154). Students who lived off campus with their parents were least likely to be at risk for alcohol addiction and consumed the least amount of alcohol overall. The results of this study are comparable to those of Fenzel and Hessler (2001) in which commuter students were found to have less problems tied to alcohol consumption.

Finally, Pike (2002) presented the results of a quantitative study administered at a single, four-year institution (n=502) that addressed the impact of living on- or off-campus on students’ openness to diversity. Support resulted for the notion that “living on campus was directly associated with significantly higher levels of openness to diversity than was living off campus” (p. 283).

## *Discussion*

Academically, a greater amount of research has demonstrated that first-year college students who live on campus have better outcomes (e.g., Hountras & Brandt, 1970; Levin & Clowes, 1982) although no or non-significant differences have been found (Pugh & Chamberlain, 1976; Bowman & Partin, 1993) as well as better outcomes for commuter students (Grayson, 1997). For studies that focused on academics, attention must be paid to (a) the role that pre-existing academic ability has on a student's academic success in college and (b) whether researchers controlled for pre-existing characteristics such as high school GPA's and test scores. Due to the result of conflicting findings, influence of pre-existing academic ability, and controlling (or not) for pre-existing academic characteristics, the research on academic achievement being related to living situation during the freshman year of college is not entirely convincing.

When it comes to becoming socially integrated into the college campus, the results of qualitative research can be influential. Such research has presented support for on-campus students becoming more easily integrated into the social life of the institution (Christie & Dinham, 1991) and being able to more easily meet new people (Johnson et al., 1995). As for commuters, they benefit from being less exposed to alcohol thus having lower levels of alcohol consumption (Fenzel & Hessler, 2001) and also being less susceptible to alcohol addiction (Valliant & Scanlan, 1996).

Studies of specific student populations revealed that disadvantaged and developmental students both benefited from living on-campus (May, 1974; Thompson et al., 1993) as did African American students (Thompson et al., 1993). Additional researchers found mixed results for growth in critical thinking for students (Pascarella et

al., 1992; Inman & Pascarella, 1998) based on their living arrangements. But a greater openness for diversity (Pike, 2002) was found for on-campus students.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the freshman-year college experiences of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students based on whether they lived in a residence hall or at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Specifically, the study's participants were students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska; this group was selected in order to focus on the lived experiences of students who had the option between remaining to live at home or moving onto campus for their freshman year. This is not an option for all incoming UNL freshman as there is a first-year live-on requirement with few exceptions. This researcher sought to make a contribution to the literature on the relationship between college housing and first year experiences with a focus on students who could qualify for an exemption to a first year live-on requirement.

#### ***Research Design***

This project was designed as a non-experimental, mixed-methods study. Mixed-method research involves using “qualitative and/or analytical approaches and quantitative designs in the same study” (McMillan, 2008, p. 14) “to examine the very same content” (Stake, 2010, p. 87). Through mixed-methods “the researcher is better able to match the approach to gathering and analyzing data with the research questions” (McMillan, 2008, p. 14). The main reason for using mixed methods in the first place, “is to improve the quality of the evidence” (Stake, 2010, p. 125).

The quantitative portion was obtained from a web-based survey administered via SurveyMonkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Quantitative research implies a positivist/postpositivist approach where the phenomena under investigation is “studied objectively with the goal of obtaining a single true reality. . . and where the researcher takes a neutral role, one that does not influence what is observed” (McMillan, 2008, p. 4). “Quantitative researchers have a great asset in inferential statistics in that they can quantify the confidence they have in rejecting the null hypotheses they have tested” (Stake, 2010, p. 126). A survey “is a set of questions or statements or scales—on paper, on the telephone, or on the screen—usually asked the same way of all respondents” (p. 99). For the present study, the screen (web-based survey) was the method of communication.

Qualitative research relies on the qualitative researcher who is “interested in understanding the meaning that people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). The qualitative portion for this study was completed via the data collected from the open-ended survey questions and a one-on-one interview with a participant who had completed the quantitative survey and volunteered for a follow-up interview. Qualitative research implies an interpretive/constructivist approach in which multiple realities can be present and represents “a less structured and more interactive mode of data collection” (McMillan, 2008, p. 5). Qualitative research also “stresses a phenomenological model in which multiple realities are rooted in the subject’s perceptions” and where a “focus on understanding and meaning is based on verbal narratives and observation rather than numbers” (p. 11).

### ***Research Questions***

The research was guided by the following overarching research question: *How does the freshman-year college experience compare for students who live in a residence hall and for students who live at home with their parents?* With this question in mind, two additional, more focused questions were crafted:

***Sub-research question 1:*** What effect does living in a residence hall or at home with parents have on GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact?

***Sub-research question 2:*** How do these two groups of students compare in terms of background characteristics such as family income level and status as first generation college students?

***Variables.*** Related to the research questions, the dependent variables analyzed in this research study consisted of: (a) student self-reported grade point average, (b) on-campus involvement, (c) number of work hours per week, (d) amount of faculty and staff contact, (e) family income, and (f) status (or not) as a first generation college student. The independent variable was site of residence: specifically, whether a student participant resided on campus in a residence hall or at home during their freshman year at the university.

### ***Research Hypotheses***

A total of six hypotheses were crafted for the study. The following four hypotheses related to research sub-research question one were proposed in the null form to assist significance testing.

H<sub>01</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between GPA's for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

H<sub>02</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between scores for on-campus involvement for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

H<sub>03</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between number of work hours per week for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home.

H<sub>04</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between amount of faculty and staff contact for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

The following two hypotheses relating to research sub-research question two were proposed in the null form to assist significance testing.

H<sub>05</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between family income for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

H<sub>06</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between status as a first generation college student for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.

### ***Research Site***

The research site for this study was the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) in Lincoln, Nebraska. UNL is the flagship institution of the University of Nebraska system

and functions as “both the land-grant and the comprehensive public University for the State of Nebraska” (UNL Institutional Research, 2011, p. 2). UNL’s three primary missions are teaching, research and service. Total enrollment in Fall 2011 was 24,593 with undergraduates representing 19,345 students (p. 52); there were 4,093 first-time freshmen (p. 55). Lincoln is the capital of the state of Nebraska and has a population of 258,379 residents. Lincoln is the county seat of Lancaster County where the median age is 32.6, and unemployment was at 4.2% at the end of 2010 (Nebraska Public Power District, 2012). The survey and interview was collected and analyzed at UNL.

### ***Population and Sample***

A volunteer sample from a population defined by the researcher was utilized to collect the data for the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study. The population (N=625) was defined as students who lived on campus their freshman year and those who did not but who all originated from the same community in which the university is located. The sample was a sub-set of respondents who volunteered to participate in the study after an email invitation was extended. The sample consisted of 107 students who responded to the survey and lived either on campus or at home during their freshmen year.

The population of students from whom data were collected was obtained with the assistance of UNL’s Office of Registration and Records. In accordance with the purpose of the study the parameters for the population drawn by Registration and Records were: (a) current, full-time enrolled UNL undergraduate students who entered UNL as first-time, full-time enrolled undergraduate students in the Fall of 2010, and (b) students 19 years of age or older and with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska. It was

important to limit the population to students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, NE in order to be able to narrow the population to students who originated from the 30 mile radius acceptable to UNL Housing for students to remain living off-campus during their freshman year (see Appendix A). All other students, including transfer students and international students, were excluded from the requested population.

With the parameters of the requested population set, the Office of Registration and Records was able to draw a list of 625 student email addresses to which the link to the web-based survey was sent for study participation by a third party. One hundred twenty-two students followed the link, and of these, 114 agreed to the electronic informed consent and commenced the survey, for a response rate of 18.24%. Seven did not meet the residency requirement desired to have data included in the analysis, bringing the sample to 107 students. Of these 107 students, eighty four reported living in a residence hall their freshman year participated in the survey and 23 students who reported living at home with their parents participated in the survey.

The interview sample was also a volunteer sample since it consisted of those students who volunteered to be considered for a follow-up interview by following the instructions at the end of the survey. Important to note is that “volunteers differ from nonvolunteers in important ways” such as education level, socioeconomic status, intelligence, among others and “may respond differently than non-volunteers because of these characteristics” (McMillan, 2008, p. 122). The instructions at the end of the survey asked the students to email the researcher stating that they would be interested in participating in an interview and stating where they lived their freshman year. This resulted in three students volunteering themselves for an interview, two who lived in a

residence hall their freshman year and one who had lived at home with his parents. Of the three possible interviews only one was obtained; it was with the student who lived at home his freshman year.

### ***Instrument***

Two instruments were utilized in the collection of data for this study, one for the survey portion and another for the interview portion. Surveys represent a “popular method of collecting data for nonexperimental designs” (McMillan, 2008, p. 204). Further, “in addition to being descriptive, surveys are also used to investigate relationships between variables, with a comparative or correlation design” (p. 204). In the case of the present research there was a comparative focus, that of students who lived in a residence hall their freshman year compared to those that remained living at home with their parents. The researcher created the survey based on the conceptual framework derived from Strange & Banning’s (2001) four higher education environments and incorporated refined questions from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2008) and the Your First Year College Survey (YFYC) (UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2011). The survey was a web-based internet survey (see Appendix B). Web-based internet surveys are the most common type among internet-based surveys and this type of survey “directs the respondent to a specific website that contains the survey” (McMillan, 2008, p. 208). The survey questions addressed the areas of demographics, work, academics, on-campus involvement, living arrangement decisions and experiences, faculty and staff contact, and overall experience. The survey contained multiple choice (select one and select all that apply were options, depending on the question), fill-in, likert-type, and three open-ended

questions that encouraged more elaborate responses. There were a total of 46 questions on the survey.

The survey instrument was tested for face validity as it was peer-reviewed and changes and corrections were made based on critiques from colleagues. A student of sophomore standing also reviewed the online survey before it was made available to the study participants. The survey was created with the assistance of a professional researcher who also reviewed it before its implementation. Also, the responses to the open-ended survey questions very much fit the questions that were asked, thus confirming validity.

“The interview allows for greater depth and richness of information” (McMillan, 2008, p. 177). Interviews also are used to “explain the participants’ point of view, how they think and how they interpret and explain their behavior within a given setting” (p. 281) The follow-up interview for this study consisted of semi-structured questions. “Semistructured questions do not have predetermined, structured choices. Rather, the question is open-ended yet specific in intent, allowing individual responses” (p. 177). The first interview questions asked the participant to re-address responses to the three open-ended questions from the end of the online survey. Three additional interview questions were asked; they addressed why the student lived at home their freshman year and what the outcome was from this living situation in regard to their freshman-year experience.

### ***Data Collection***

Before the collection of data commenced, approval for this study was obtained from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board under IRB# 20111112150 EX (see Appendix C). Once approval was obtained, Registration and

Records obtained the email addresses of the requested student population. An Excel Spreadsheet with the 625 email addresses was emailed to a secretary in the Department of Educational Administration. This secretary served as the third party that emailed the population students about the opportunity to complete the survey. The researcher prepared the text for the email invitation to participate and a reminder about participation that the secretary used when emailing the students. The students were sent an initial email with instructions and the link to the survey and one week later were sent a reminder email about completing the survey. A total of two weeks was available for the students to complete the survey. When following the link to the survey, the first page that appeared was an Electronic Informed Consent. Participants agreed to the terms of the consent before they answered any actual survey questions. They understood that submission of the completed survey implied consent to use their responses.

At the end of the survey participants were notified about the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview. If they wished to be considered for interview participation, the participants were instructed to email the primary investigator with their contact information, where they lived their freshman year, and stating their wish to be considered for a follow-up interview. Sample text for this email was available for the student to copy and paste into their own email. Three students volunteered for interviews but only one followed through with the actual interview. The interview participant was sent an Informed Consent form as an attachment before the interview meeting. The interview took place in a conference room in an academic building on the UNL campus. Prior to commencing the interview, the researcher reviewed the Informed Consent with the participant, the participant signed the form and kept a copy for his records. Consent to

audio-record the interview was also obtained via this form. A single audio recorder was utilized to record the interview, which was transcribed by the researcher.

### ***Data Analysis***

The goal of data analysis is “to discover patterns, ideas, explanations, and ‘understandings’” (McMillan, 2008, p. 283). The data collected for this research represented three areas for analysis—the general survey questions, the open-ended survey questions, and the interview. The survey data were downloaded from surveymonkey.com for initial, general observation and comparison. The Nebraska Evaluation and Research (NEAR) Center at UNL provided assistance in the analysis of the survey responses. The data and the research questions guiding the study were presented to a staff member at the NEAR Center for statistical analysis.

***Statistical Tests.*** The statistical measures for data analyses the data were independent-samples *t* tests and Pearson’s Chi Square test. Cronbach’s Alpha was also used for a test of reliability.

***Independent Samples t-Test (Independent-Measures t-Test).*** Independent samples *t*-tests, also known as independent-measures *t*-tests, were utilized to compare the survey responses and thus the freshman-year college experiences of the student participants based on whether they lived on campus in a residence hall or at home with their parents.

An independent-measures *t*-test “is a hypothesis test that uses two separate samples to evaluate the mean difference between two treatment conditions or between two different populations” (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009, p. 308). In the case of the present study, two populations were evaluated, one being students who lived in a residence hall

their freshman year and the other, students who lived at home. An independent-measures  $t$ -test “combines the variance from the two separate samples to evaluate the difference between two separate sample means” and that is what was done with the data collected for this study. Independent-samples  $t$ -tests were used to test Hypotheses  $H_{01}$ ,  $H_{02}$ ,  $H_{03}$ ,  $H_{04}$ , and  $H_{05}$ .

***Chi-Square Test.*** A chi-square test for independence was also utilized in the data analysis. “The chi-square statistic may be used to test whether there is a relationship between two variables. In this situation, each individual in the sample is measured or classified on two separate variables” (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009, p. 617). For the present study, a chi-square test for independence was used to test whether there was a relationship between where students lived their freshman year of college (in a residence hall or at home with their parents) and whether or not they were also first generation college students. Here, for  $H_{06}$ , a chi-square test was utilized rather than an independent-samples  $t$ -test since status (or not) as a first-generation college student was categorical; it could not be measured in the same way as the other variables that were statistically analyzed, but, nonetheless, the relationship between status and where a student lived during their first year of college could be tested for significance.

***Reliability-Cronbach's Alpha.*** Cronbach's Alpha was utilized for a test of reliability. Cronbach's Alpha, also known as Coefficient Alpha, is a type of “internal consistency estimate” (McMillan, 2008, p. 152). A Cronbach Alpha is “used with instruments that contain a range of possible answers for each item, such as agree-disagree, that constitute scale rather than right/wrong scoring” (p. 152). The survey

instrument for this study indeed contained questions with a range of possible answers and no questions were categorized as right/wrong.

The responses to the open-ended survey questions were coded using open-coding. Coding involves searching the data for themes, ideas, and categories, and marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they can easily be retrieved at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. Coding the data makes it easier to search the data, to make comparisons and to identify any patterns that require further investigation. The researcher reviewed the data from the open-ended survey questions and made a list of ideas and categories of information for each of the three open-ended questions. From each of the lists, initial themes were deduced for each of the three questions and the supporting data was organized within its corresponding theme. After further analysis, some themes were also combined and in all, resulted in the themes presented in Chapter 4. The interview was analyzed and coded in a similar manner, including the use of highlighting and making notes in margins. The interview transcript was reviewed for recurring ideas and content related to what was represented in the responses and themes from the open-ended survey questions. Data from the interview corresponded to the themes from the open-ended survey questions and also presented new information.

### ***Validity and Reliability***

In addition to establishing face validity and utilizing expert opinion for the survey instrument, the research study as a whole was guided by a professional researcher and was also subject to the review of a second professional researcher. Both professional researchers have provided validation for the interpretation of the results.

Reliability was also incorporated into the validation of the research study.

“Reliability is the extent to which what is recorded as data is what actually occurred in the setting that was studied, as well as whether interpretations and conclusions are accurate” (McMillan, 2008, p. 297). Cronbach’s alpha test for reliability was utilized for of the hypotheses tests that were implemented. Member checking was utilized to enhance the reliability of the interview that was conducted. Member checking represents “a useful method for enhancing reliability. . . in which the researcher gives his or her notes to the participant so that the participant can verify that the recording was accurate” (p. 297). In this study the participant was sent the transcript of his interview and invited to confirm its accuracy. Further, the interpretations of the open-ended survey responses and the interview were also subject to the expertise of two professional researchers.

## Chapter 4

### Results and Analysis

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the freshman-year college experiences of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students based on whether they lived in a residence hall or at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Specifically, the study's participants were students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska; this group was selected in order to focus on the lived experiences of students who had the option between remaining to live at home or moving onto campus for their freshman year. This is not an option for all incoming UNL freshman as there is a first-year live-on requirement with few exceptions. This researcher sought to make a contribution to the literature on the relationship between college housing and first year experiences with a focus on students who could qualify for an exemption to a first year live-on requirement.

#### *Research Questions*

The research was guided by the following overarching research question: *How does the freshman-year college experience compare for students who live in a residence hall and for students who live at home with their parents?* With this question in mind, two additional, more focused questions were crafted:

*Sub-Research Question 1:* What effect does living in a residence hall or at home with parents have on GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact?

*Sub-Research Question 2:* How do these two groups of students compare in terms of background characteristics such as family income level and status as first generation college students?

***Results from Survey Data Quantitative Analysis***

***Statistical Tests.*** The statistical measures used to analyze the data were independent-samples *t*-tests and Pearson's Chi Square test. Cronbach's Alpha was also used for a test of reliability for the one analysis with statistically significant findings. Independent-samples *t*-tests were used to test Hypotheses  $H_{01}$ ,  $H_{02}$ ,  $H_{03}$ ,  $H_{04}$ , and  $H_{05}$ , regarding GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, faculty and staff contact, and family income. A chi-square test for independence was used to test  $H_{06}$ , whether there was a relationship between where students lived their freshman year of college (in a residence hall or at home with their parents) and whether or not they were first-generation college students.

***Sub-Research Question 1.*** What effect does living in a residence hall or at home with parents have on GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact? An independent-samples *t*-test was used to address the first four hypotheses associated with sub-research question one.

$H_{01}$ . *For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between GPA's for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.* An independent-samples *t*-test found no significant difference,  $t(82) = 1.728$ ,  $p = .088$ ,  $d = 3.0071$ , between the grade point averages of students who lived on-campus in a residence hall their freshman year and those that remained living at home. The descriptive statistics indicated that students who lived on-campus had a higher mean

GPA, 3.3653, compared to those students who lived at home, GPA 3.0646, but again, this mean difference was not statistically significant.

*H<sub>02</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between scores for on-campus involvement for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.* An independent-samples t-test found a significant difference,  $t(100) = -1.220$ ,  $p = .045$ ,  $d = -1.35802$ , between the on-campus involvement of students who lived on-campus in a residence hall their freshman year and to those that remained living at home, thus the null hypothesis is rejected. The students who lived on-campus in a residence hall had more on-campus involvement than those students who lived at home. A test of reliability using Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the 11 survey items that made up the category of on-campus involvement. Cronbach's Alpha was .632, indicating adequate reliability

*H<sub>03</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between number of work hours per week for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home.* An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference,  $t(73) = -.157$ ,  $p = .876$ ,  $d = -.45000$ , between the number of work hours per week of students who lived on-campus in a residence hall their freshman year compared those that remained living at home. The descriptive statistics indicated that students who lived at home worked slightly more hours, 11.85 hours per week, compared to those students who lived in a residence hall, 11.40 hours per week, but again, this mean difference was not statistically significant.

*H<sub>04</sub>: For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between amount of faculty and staff contact for students who lived on campus and those*

*that lived at home their freshman year.* An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference,  $t(100) = -1.220$ ,  $p = .225$ ,  $d = -.35802$ , between the faculty and staff contact of students who lived on-campus in a residence hall their freshman year compared to those that remained living at home. The descriptive statistics indicated that students who lived at home had slightly more faculty and staff contact but again, this mean difference was not statistically significant.

***Sub-Research Question 2.*** How do these two groups of students compare in terms of background characteristics such as family income level and status as first generation college students?

*H<sub>05</sub>. For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between family income for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.* An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference,  $t(81) = 1.814$ ,  $p = .073$ ,  $d = .942$ , between the family income of students who lived on-campus in a residence hall their freshman year compared to those that remained living at home. The descriptive statistics indicated that students who lived on-campus had a higher family income compared to those students who lived at home but again, this mean difference was not statistically significant.

*H<sub>06</sub>. For the sample of students surveyed, there is no significant difference between status as a first generation college student for students who lived on campus and those that lived at home their freshman year.* A Chi-Square test for independence found no significant difference,  $\chi^2(1, n = 104) = 1.867$ ,  $p = .225$ , between status as a first-generation college student for students who lived in a residence hall their freshman year and to those that remained living at home.

### *Summary*

In summary, one of the six hypotheses tests yielded statistically significant results; specifically, a statistically significant difference for students who lived in a residence hall compared to those that lived at home with their parents on the variable of on-campus involvement. Statistically significant differences were not shown for GPA, work hours per week, amount of faculty and staff contact, family income, or status as a first generation college student

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD
GPA-Residence Hall (RH)*	3.365	.587
GPA-At Home (AH)*	3.065	.942
On-Campus Involvement (RH)	14.765	3.903
On-Campus Involvement (AH)	12.818	4.272
Work Hours Per Week (RH)	11.400	10.080
Work Hours Per Week (AH)	11.850	13.160
Faculty and Staff Contact (RH)	17.309	4.482
Faculty and Staff Contact (AH)	18.667	4.789
Family Income* (RH)	6.32	2.006
Family Income* (AH)	5.38	2.202

\*RH=Residence Hall; AH=At Home

\*\*Family Income: 1=Under \$20,000; 2=\$20-29,000; 3=\$30-39,000; 4=\$40-49,000; 5=\$50-59,000; 6=\$60-69,000; 7=\$70-79,000; 8=\$80,000 or above

Table 2. Chi-Square Analysis

Variable	Percentage
First Generation Student (RH)	21%
First Generation Student (AH)	35%

### ***Results from Open-Ended Survey Questions***

Survey participants were asked three open-ended questions at the end of the web-based survey that they volunteered to complete. The questions were as follows:

1. The factors that influenced where I lived during my freshman year at UNL were:
2. My living arrangements my freshman year positively affected my college experience in the following way(s):
3. My living arrangements my freshman year negatively affected my college experience in the following way(s):

These open-ended survey questions addressed the overarching research question of: How does the freshman-year college experience compare for students who live in a residence hall and for students who live at home with their parents? For all of the student quotes below, the numbers in parentheses correspond to student participant numbers.

#### ***Open-Ended Survey Question 1: The factors that influenced where I lived my freshman year at UNL were:***

In responding to this first open-ended survey question, the residence hall students and the students who lived at home shared three themes: *The College Experience*, *Family*, and *Convenience*. Responses from the residence hall students also produced the



from the family home, Student #45 declared this a necessity, saying, “I needed to get out of the house and away from my parents for the first time in my life” (45).

In responding to this question students also specifically mentioned the “college experience” (67) as playing a role in them living in a residence hall, with one student responding, “having a real college experience” (46) as to what influenced their housing decision. Another student cited “wanting to be on my own” (94) as what influenced them to live on campus. Other residence hall students specifically mentioned wanting to experience “dorm life” as an influence in them living on campus, with one student declaring, “I wanted to move out and see what dorm life was like” (73) and another who, “wanted to experience dorm life” (49).

*The College Experience-At Home Students.* Students who remained living at home during their freshman year also cited college experience factors as influencing this circumstance, mostly ways in which they were not attracted to such experiences. These students shared that not living in a residence hall was a “preference” (43) with one student specifically sharing, “I didn’t think I wanted. . .to move into the dorm” (83). Students who remained living at home with their parents were repelled by the thought of “dorm life” with thoughts such as, “sharing a room with a stranger wasn’t very appealing, because I am an introvert” (71) and simply, “I did not want to go through dorm life” (85).

**Family.** The second theme that emerged as to what influenced a student to live in a residence hall or to remain living at home with parents was the influence of family, and parents specifically.

*Family-Residence Hall Students.* For students who lived in a residence hall their freshman year this circumstance was influenced by their family and their parents

specifically. Multiple students simply cited “family” (115, 119) as influencing where they lived, others specified their parent’s role. Student #21 cited: “Parents wanting me to live on campus so I would attend class” as a factor that influenced where he lived his freshman year. One student simply noted “my parents” (34) as a factor. Student #96 experienced a more direct influence from her parents saying that living in the residence hall was “where my parents would allow me to live.” And for other students parental influence *and* their own desires were influential in their housing outcome saying things like, “I wanted to live in the dorms, and my parents wanted me to live there as well” (101) and “My parents and I both wanted me to live on campus” (112).

*Family-At Home Students.* For the student survey respondents who remained living at home with their parents their freshman year the family theme appeared to involve more of a family influence overall as opposed to parent influence specifically, although this was also present. Student #29 shared: “As far as where I lived my freshman year at UNL, it was mostly because we as a family felt like I didn’t need to spend money on housing when we had housing here at home for almost next to nothing.” This student used the collective “we” in referring to the family and the decision they reached together as to the college housing situation. “Obligations to family” (80) and “family issues” (30) were also family-related influences that helped determine where a student lived their freshman year. For Student #98 her obligation was the following: “My mom has had health problems, and living at home makes it easier and possible for me to care for her.” Other students who remained living at home cited more positive family-related influences for continuing to live at home. Student #85 declared: “I love my family, and the relationship I have with my mother made me want to stay” and Student #75 stated: “My

parents are fun and nice.” And yet for other students cultural factors within her family served as an influence in her freshman housing outcome with one student saying: “My parents are Asian and would not let me leave the nest. They are also paying for my tuition” (120).

***Convenience.*** The third theme that was present for both groups of students as to what influenced them to live in a residence hall or at home with their parents their freshman year was *convenience*.

***Convenience-Residence Hall Students.*** A number of students plainly stated “convenience” (54, 58, 67, 69, 102) as something that influenced them to live on campus. Others elaborated more, stating that they were influenced by the “convenience of living on campus” (39) or stating, “I wanted to be on campus because of convenience” (61) or that living on campus was “where was convenient” (114).

***Convenience-At Home Students.*** A couple of students, from those that remained living at home with their parents, also simply stated “convenience” (102) as being influential in creating this circumstance. Most others cited a series of convenience-related factors that influenced them to remain living at home. For example, simple geography and “distance” (18) was one of these factors. Students mentioned that they “already lived in Lincoln” (24), or were a “close distance to campus” (30). Then there was the factor of “practicality” (107) in remaining to live at home. Student #30 shared “could ride my bike” as being influential. “Comfort” (57, 102) was also mentioned by multiple students.

***Perception of Requirement.*** The fourth theme that emerged from students’ responses to the question about factors that influenced living choice the freshman year is unique to the students who lived in a residence hall. The theme is that of the *perception*

*that they were required to live on campus.* These students were influenced to live on-campus in a residence hall due to (a) a scholarship requirement, (b) parameters set out by a program they were participating in, or (c) because they did not actually meet the specifications to remain living at home with a parent within 30 miles of the campus. Others simply thought that this was what they “had to do.” Some students demonstrated knowledge about the first-year housing requirements set by the institution. As Student #50 reported, “Incoming freshman are required to live on campus unless family resides in Lincoln. Mine do not” and Student #8 knew that freshman students were “required to live in dorms or with parents.” Student #89 answered that she: “Lived out of town, [and was] required to live on campus the first year” as a factor that influenced living choice the freshman year.

Other students had a different view of the first-year housing requirement with comments such as: “I had no other choice; UNL requires all freshmen to live on campus,” (13) when in reality freshman students who meet certain requirements are indeed able to remain living at home. Other students viewed living in a residence hall during freshman year as a part of particular programs in which they were participating or as a response to the receipt of scholarships. For example, multiple students cited “Honors Program,” (7, 65, 74, 119), one student declared “scholarships” (115), and another shared: “I was in the Honors Program, so I lived in Neihardt,” (74) as influencing where she lived. Other students had more particular situations, such as Student #105 who shared: “My roommate got a scholarship to live in a learning community, so we were required to live in Selleck,” and Student #27 who said, “[I] didn’t sign with a Greek house until I arrived on campus, so I had to.” In fact the “I had to” (66) feeling was prevalent among a number of student

respondents as illustrated by: “I had to live in the dorms” (42, 68), and “We were supposed to live on campus” (44). The response of Student #103 combined multiple factors from the *perception of requirement* theme: “My family lived out of town, so I had to live on campus. I was in the Raikes School of Computer Science and Management, so I was required to live in the Kauffman Academic and Residential Center.” This student understood that living on campus was required because she did not meet the geographic exception and also due to her participation in a specific academic program.

***Friends-Residence Hall Students.*** A fifth theme, and one that is unique to residence hall students as well is that of *friends*. Students who responded to the survey who lived in a residence hall their freshman year stated that “friends” (16) influenced where they lived. The influence of friends had multiple dimensions. Some students were influenced to live in the residence halls because that was what their friends were doing. These students shared their influencing factors as being: “Me wanting to live on campus in Knoll with high school buddies” (21), wanting to live “where my friends were living” (56), “living with my friend” (60), “I had many friends who were going to live on campus” (77), “all my friends were living in the residence halls” (81), and “where my friends wanted to live” (96). However, some students had an opposite inclination in wanting to distance themselves from already-established friendships. For example, Student #59 said, “I wanted to meet new people and not just hang out with my high school friends from Lincoln.”

Other students also hoped that living in the residence halls would mean that they would make new friends. As Student #26 said, “I wanted to live somewhere where I could meet plenty of people and make new friends.” Student #44 was also very conscious

about what influenced her to live on campus: “I could have lived at my dad’s house, but I chose to live on campus to make new friends.” This student acknowledged that remaining living at home could have been an option, but the thought of making new friends by living on campus was an attraction to living in the residence hall.

A number of respondents did not go as far to say that they wanted to make new *friends* by living in a residence hall, but rather they made reference to the opportunity to meet new people. “Even though I’ve lived in Lincoln my whole life, I wanted to branch out and meet new people” is what Student #25 had to say. Others cited “opportunities to interact with others” (28), “getting to meet new people” (39), and wanting “to live on campus in order to meet new people” (91) as factors that influenced where they lived their freshman year.

***Finances-At Home Students.*** The sixth and final theme that emerged from the responses to the first open-ended survey question is that of *finances*. This theme is unique to the students who remained living at home with their parents their freshman year. Of 20 student respondents who lived at home with their parents their freshman year and responded to the first open-ended survey question, 18 mentioned finances as a factor that influenced their living situation.

Several students simply used the term “money” (18, 24, 30, 51, 99, 102) when sharing factors that influenced their living situation. Others used “money” and other descriptors, for example, “lack of money” (43), “it saved money” (98), “it was the cheapest route” (111), and “I saved money by living at home” (76). Other students elaborated even more, stating: “Money was the main issue; I didn’t want to take out student loans to live on campus” (71), and “we as a family felt like I didn’t need to spend

money on housing when we had housing here at home for almost next to nothing” (29). Other modes that referred to finances as influential in determining a student’s living situation included: “the cost” (57), “living at home was free” (75), “financial limitations” (80), “costs are a lot cheaper” (85), and “price” (107).

***Open-Ended Survey Question 2: My living arrangements my freshman year positively affected my college experience in the following way(s):***

In coding the responses to this second open-ended question, the two groups of students shared one theme: *accommodations and facilities*. From the responses of students who lived in a residence hall three themes emerged: *interpersonal relationships*, *student development*, and *convenience of the college network*. From the responses of students who remained living at home three themes also emerged: *family*, *finances*, and *not living on-campus*.

Table 4. Themes from Open-Ended Survey Question Two

Themes: Residence Hall	Themes: At Home
Accommodations and Facilities	
Interpersonal Relationships	Family
Student Development	Finances
Convenience of the College Network	Not Living on Campus

***Accommodations and Facilities.*** The theme that emerged for both residence hall students and students who lived at home during their freshman year regarding what positively impacted their college experience was the theme of *accommodations and facilities*.

*Accommodations and Facilities-Residence Hall Students.* Concerning *accommodation and facilities*, Student # 4 praised the availability of study areas, proclaiming that there were “study rooms everywhere.” Students also “liked the dining halls” (114) or as another student put it the “cafeteria” (66). For Student #28 “spacious room for my belongings” was a positive factor and for Student #103 it was bathroom space, saying, “Kauffman also has really nice dorms with private bathrooms, which I found to be a strong positive.”

*Accommodations and Facilities-At Home Students.* Regarding *accommodations and facilities*, Student #24, who lived at home during his freshman year, commented that he “always had a quiet place to work” and Student #29 shared similar thoughts, proclaiming, “I always had a productive study space, and had all the comforts of home too.” Student #71 said, “I always had some place to study, and I didn’t worry about food or money.” Student #85 summarized the comforts of physically living at home in the following way:

My grades were good due to quiet places to study and a loving home to live in. I had a place to be alone, and a place to invite my friends over and hang out or have a party. I was extremely comfortable with my living arrangements therefore that positively affected my view on college.

This student clearly testified that in itself, living at home positively affected her college experience, and this in part had to do with the *accommodations and facilities* present in the home.

*Interpersonal Relationships-Residence Hall Students.* The first theme that emerged exclusively from the responses of students that lived in the residence halls as to

the positive ways that their living arrangements influenced their freshman year college experience was that of *interpersonal relationships*. Relationships included (a) making new friends, (b) meeting new people, (c) solidifying existing friendships, and (d) positive relationships with roommates.

Living arrangements freshman year positively influenced the college experience of residence hall students in the form of friendships. Students described “meeting” and “making” friends” (7, 13, 15, 69, 70, 73, 88, 103, 112) in various forms as a positive aspect of their living arrangements during their first year of college. As Student #65 put it, “I met all of my closest friends in the residence hall” and Student #44 said, “I became close friends with four girls on my floor. We bonded and had a blast. We all miss living together,” and Student #45 also added, “I met the people who are now my closest friends in my residence hall.” These students cited not only making friends as a result of living in a residence hall but emphasized that they made “close” friends in this living environment.

Also according to the student respondents, the residence hall environment was conducive to establishing and solidifying friendships, as exemplified by Student #100 who said that living in a residence hall, “made it easy to meet new friends and interact with people all the time,” and Student #77 who declared, “I got to see friends every day, make new friends, and have a lot of fun.” Student #38 shared that “living in the residential hall was an excellent way to meet a lot of new people, because of the floor activities and shared living space (lounge, bathroom, etc.).” This student was specific in pointing out aspects that facilitated making friends by living in a residence hall. These established friendships were not temporary either because as Student #123 put it, “I made

many friends, which I still have,” indicating that his friendships have continued beyond freshman year.

Other students described forming “new relationships” (16) with others and “meeting new people” (8, 40) as “a positive thing” (61) related to their living arrangements as freshmen that positively affected their college experience. Some of these students quantified their friendship encounters by saying that they met “many” (48) or “tons of new people” (50). Student #59 described this situation by saying: “I met so many people living in the dorms” and Student #97 said, “I got to know many people by living in the dorms.” Student #42 described the experience of meeting new people as meeting “some cool people” and Student #108 simply “enjoyed living on a floor with a lot of people.” Meeting new people was also not limited to those that lived in the same residence hall because as Student #39 declared: “I was able to meet people that not only lived in my dorm but other dorms as well.”

For other students, forming relationships and friendships with other students in the residence hall environment spurred multiple benefits. This is exemplified by Student #41 who said: “I was on a floor with lots of people from my major, which was fantastic to get to know them. I made so many new friends, and became friends with their friends, joined groups they joined.” This student benefited from meeting people in her major, making friends, and becoming involved on campus through student groups. Student #68 described the experience with others in the residence halls with the following: “I was exposed to types of people I don’t have a lot of experience being around (vegetarian, sexual orientation, demographic area-city, etc.)” Being that this student response was to the question of *positive* outcomes from living arrangements the freshman year, this

student attributed being exposed to different “types of people” as something positive. Further, Student #96 acknowledged: “I was living with people who supported my academic efforts and success.”

For other students who lived in a residence hall, relationships with roommates were a way in which their living arrangements during freshman year positively affected the college experience. These roommate relationships prompted students to say things like: “My roommate was great, and I loved spending time with her in our room” (74), and “My roommate is fantastic (we’re still living together), and so that definitely helped my transition into life in the dorms” (95). Important to note is that student saw their relationships with their roommates as positive, declaring that they “liked” their roommate (114) or “had a good roommate” (121). Student #105 described her roommate relationship by saying, “I [became] very close friends with my roommate. We are roommates again this year, and I know we will be life long friends.” The positive aspect of a roommate relationship was also exemplified by the Student #101:

Second semester, a girl in my sorority moved into my room, and we became best friends because of it. She is still my closest friend today.

Living with a person who I was friends with and shared a lot of common activities and interests with made my college experience 10 times better.

***Student Development-Residence Hall Students.*** The second theme that emerged in regard to how living arrangements positively influenced the freshman-year college experience of the student respondents who lived in residence halls was that of *student development*. Development for college students can consist of “a positive growth process in which the individual becomes increasingly able to integrate and act on many different

experiences and influences (Sanford as cited in Evans et al., 2010, p. 6). In the present responses, student development was expressed in the form of personal growth and gaining or experiencing independence.

Learning experiences in regard to interpersonal relationships in a shared living space encompass the growth and development that several students acknowledged experiencing. Learning experiences took place directly in the residence hall environment, as Student #10 said, “I realized I could live with someone else without there being conflict,” and Student #25 elaborated, “I learned what it is like to live with a roommate and share a space. I learned I am responsible for studying and doing school work.” Also related to the experience of living with others, Student #64 indicated that residence hall living, “allowed me to see life from another person’s perspective,” and Student #68 reported, “I was exposed to people I don’t have a lot of experience being around (vegetarian, sexual orientation, demographic area-city, etc.).” Student #26 detailed, “living in a dorm helped me grow up in certain ways, such as, I didn’t have my mom around to take care of me when I was sick; I had to always clean up after myself, etc.” Student #38 acknowledged that living in a residence hall “helped me feel more independent, as well as pushed me outside my comfort zone.” While these last two students admitted that they were somewhat inconvenienced by living in a residence hall due to not having parents around to care for them or having to be pushed outside their “comfort zone,” ultimately, they attributed these circumstances as aspects of their freshman-year living arrangements that positively affected their college experience.

Other students gave special consideration to the feelings of “independence” (116) that they experienced by living in a residence hall. Students supported their feelings and

outcomes of independence by sharing: “I learned to live on my own” (27), and that they “gained independence” (46). As Student #54 expressed, “good to be on my own, feel independent but still very safe and part of a family,” and for Student #69, residence hall living “was a very good transition to living on my own.” The “college experience” (48, 87) was also acknowledged in responses to this second open-ended survey question as to how living arrangements positively affected freshman-year college experiences, with Student #59 saying, “I got the ‘college experience’ because my parents weren’t there telling me when to come home/clean my room.”

***Convenience of the College Network-Residence Hall Students.*** The third theme that emerged from the student responses as to the ways(s) in which their living arrangements their freshman year in a residence hall, positively affected their college experience was that of the *convenience of the college network*. The *convenience of the college network* was illustrated by students who said that living on campus kept them “close to campus” (13) which also meant that living in a residence hall kept them “on campus, always thinking about school” (34). Living on-campus provided Student #21 with “perfect access to class/professors” and a “sense of college community.” Student #4 praised “close to classes, study rooms everywhere, access to many things” as ways in which living arrangements positively influenced her college experience. Proximity to classes also formed part of the *convenience of the college network* as Student #38 declared, “it also made going to class much more convenient,” and Student #115 shared, “I was able to get to class even when it snowed or was really cold. Even if I was running late, I was only 5 minutes away from all of my classes.” Student #61 reported, “I was on campus almost all the time, so I was only a short distance from classes and other

activities.” This student was not unique in praising the accessibility of factors beyond academic classes that made up her college experience. As Student #67 shared, “I was close to my classes, sorority, and other organizations and it was very convenient,” and Student #72 declared, “I was immersed in college life. It was convenient to be located right on campus. Everything I needed was right there.” Student #73 said, “It helped me make friends and get involved with activities on campus that I wouldn’t have heard about otherwise.” Combining multiple factors, Student #96 proclaimed, “I lived very close to campus, so I was able to attend all of my classes, and I was living with people who supported my academic efforts and success.”

A couple of students specifically praised their particular residence hall communities. As Student #95 pronounced, “as for Neihardt itself, the sheer proximity to the middle of campus was wonderful. Plus, the people in Neihardt rock beyond belief, so that helped, too.” Student #103 also communicated, “the community in Kauffman in really great. . . living on campus was nice because it was easier to get to class and other activities.” Other students commended the convenience of not having to commute; Student #77 affirmed, “It was also convenient to not have to drive to get to campus,” and Student #81 said, “I was always in (sic) campus which made the commute easy.”

Another portion of student respondents emphasized resources as being a part of the *convenience of the college network*, with Student #59 declaring, “I loved the resources on campus like the rec and library and living at home would have caused me to use these less.” “I got help adjusting to college life and college academic life,” said Student #49. And Student #69 thought that “resources were more abundant” from the perspective of a student who lived in a residence hall.

***Family-At Home Students.*** The first theme that emerged from the responses of students who remained living at home with their parents during their freshman year in regard to the way(s) in which their living arrangements their freshman year positively affected their college experience was the theme of *family*. Student #18 specifically referred to parents, seeing positively the fact he had “parents to talk to.” Other students referred to their families in general responding, “I got to see my family a lot” (24), and “I had family support” (102). Student #107 praised that living at home “helped me have less worries and stay close to my family,” and Student #111 declared, “It allowed me to . . . keep my family in my life more often.”

***Finances-At Home Students.*** The second theme that emerged from what the responses of the students who remained living at home with their parents in addressing the question of how their living arrangements positively affected their freshman-year college experience was the theme of *finances*. Student #51 appreciated that living at home, “kept costs down and closer to my job.” Not only did this student think that she saved money by living at home but that she was also aided financially by being in closer proximity to her place of employment, which could aid her income. The relationship between finances and work was also present for Student #102 who communicated, “I was saving money, so I didn’t have to work as much.” For Student #99, the theme of *finances* emerged in the form of not having “to worry about spending money on housing.” Overall, Student #111 thought that living arrangements at home “allowed me to have more money” and thus viewed this circumstance as positive.

***Not Living On Campus-At Home Students.*** The third theme that emerged from the responses of student who remained living at home with their parents their freshman

year regarding how their living arrangements positively influenced their college experience was the theme of *not living on campus*. The student responses that make up this theme address the positive aspects of not living in an on-campus environment. Student #30 replied, “It was a good way to get away from campus during stressful times. I didn’t have to live with anyone else. Had my privacy.” Solitude was also important for Student #75 who appreciated that he “could have time alone.” Bringing academics into this theme, Student #43 proclaimed, “I felt I had more time to focus on homework where I lived instead of on campus.” As for a component related to interpersonal relationships, Student #98 thought positively about not having “to worry about roommates.”

***Open-Ended Survey Question 3: My living arrangements my freshman year negatively affected my college experience in the following way(s):***

In coding the responses to this third open-ended survey question three total themes emerged. The theme of *interpersonal relationships* was shared by students who lived in the residence hall and those that lived at home with their parents. The two groups of respondents also possessed a unique theme each, *dorm life* in the case of residence hall students and *inconvenience* in the case of students who remained living at home.

Table 5. Themes from Open-Ended Survey Question Three

Themes: Residence Hall	Themes: At Home
Interpersonal Relationships	
Dorm Life	Inconvenience

***Interpersonal Relationships.*** The first theme that emerged from the responses to the third open-ended survey question was the theme of *interpersonal relationships*. The

codes from the responses of students who lived in a residence hall and from those that lived at home both emerge into this theme.

*Interpersonal Relationships-Residence Hall Students.* Multiple student respondents attributed negative relationships with their roommates as a way in which their living arrangements negatively affected their freshman-year college experience. This situation is exemplified by Student #45 who disclosed: “I had a terrible roommate first semester. It seemed that the information I provided for the random roommate placement questionnaire was completely ignored. As a result, my first semester living on campus was often uncomfortable, unhealthy, and dangerous” (45), and by Student #87 who communicated, “I had one crazy roommate that didn’t clean, made a lot of noise, and was very rude and inconsiderate.” Another serious situation was shared by the Student #82:

1 (sic) of my roommates and I immediately clashed. When I would ask her to help do chores, she accused me of ‘personally attacking’ her and made me cry in an argument where she yelled at me for a good 20 minutes. After that, our relationship fell apart. The other roommates were close to her and eventually, by the end of the year, I didn’t feel connected with them or even welcome in my own dorm room, with their mean stares, snide remarks, and sometimes pretending I didn’t even exist for no apparent reason other than siding with the girl I originally didn’t get along with. It was pretty bad.

Another particularly negative experience is detailed here as encountered by Student #26:

I lived with a sorority girl who was very dirty, rude, and always had her rude sorority sisters over, which made me hate living there. I also lived on a floor that was full of sorority girls and they were all rude. It was impossible for me to meet anybody that I could actually maintain a relationship with and that made me hate my freshman-year college experience at UNL.

Beyond generally citing that roommate problems negatively affected their college experience, these three previous students detailed the circumstances that made up their unpleasant roommate relationships. Words such as “bad” (81), “annoying” (123), and “on my nerves” (49) were also used to describe less than ideal relationships and interactions with roommates.

Then there were students who longed for more contact with their roommates and better relationships with them overall, as illustrated by the following responses: “My roommates weren’t around as much as I hoped” (40), and “My first semester roommate wasn’t exactly friendly, and we didn’t really get along. We never got to bond like many roommates do, and I often spent time at home because she wasn’t fun to be around” (59). In the second example cited here, a negative roommate relationship actually led a student to spend more time at home as opposed to on-campus.

Other students in the residence halls cited issues within their residence hall floors as negatively affecting their college experience. For example, Student #17 mentioned, “not a lot of floor interaction” as a negative aspect, and Student #42 pronounced, “my floor was not very social and my RA’s did nothing to promote anything” and Student #115 said, “my floor was very anti-social.” These students saw the lack of interaction and

activities within their floors as a way in which their freshman-year living arrangements negatively affected their college experiences.

Also related to this theme of *interpersonal relationships* playing a role in the way living arrangements negatively affected students' freshman-year experiences is ways in which students felt that they lacked connection and interaction with others. For example, Student #90 shared that she "felt isolated and lonely," and Student #101 detailed, "First semester I had a roommate that was never there so I was always by myself and got pretty lonely." Additionally, more specific circumstances also contributed to feelings of isolation, as illustrated by Student #74: "I didn't get along with many girls on my floor. I tended to stay shut off in my room because of that." Student #110 "felt like I was an outcast, my roommate was in honors and I was not, we lived in Neihardt, I felt inferior," and finally Student #112's thought: "I didn't meet anyone from my building besides my roommates helped to isolate us from college life." In these previous three citations, roommate relationships, the make-up of a specific residence hall, and most likely the layout of another, contributed to student feelings of loneliness and thus a negative factor attributed to freshman-year living arrangements.

*Interpersonal relationships* in the residence hall environment played a role in the form of "lots of distractions" (70) that also negatively affected students' freshman-year college experience. Students were "always around friends" (62) and "easily distracted to hang out with friends" (4). Academics suffered due to distractions, as Student #81 indicated, "I was always distracted in the dorms and was never productive resulting in a GPA I was not happy with" and Student #100 disclosed, "my grades were not good because there was always something to do that was fun and distracted me from my

coursework.” Here, a roommate also played a role as a negative influence for Student #97:

My roommate never went to class, and it started to affect me because it made it easier for me to skip class. Sometimes I also felt like it was hard to focus, because it was so easy to skip studying and go hang out with friends.

A negative influence from a roommate combined with the temptation to always hang out with friends led study habits to suffer.

*Interpersonal Relationships-At Home Students.* Students who lived at home their freshman year also asserted that *interpersonal relationships*, in various forms were also a feature of their living arrangements that negatively affected their college experience. However, for the students who lived at home the *lack* of interpersonal interactions and social involvement is what they perceived as negatively affecting their college experience. This perception is illustrated by students who said, “it was difficult to make friends, felt isolated from campus life” (24), “didn’t get as involved socially as I could have, which has really affected me” (71), and “I felt as though I couldn’t get involved in as many activities and rarely even heard of many activities” (98). Student #85 summarized her experience in the following way: “I suppose in some ways it detached me from social life on campus in the dorms and so on. I didn’t get involved in as many social things as I might have if I lived on campus.” This student attributed living at home as negatively affecting her college social life.

Other students attributed home relationships as negatively affecting their college experience. Student #18 complained that he had “not as much freedom” because he lived

at home. Student #43 cited, “there was some interference, at inconvenient times, due to family problems.”

*Dorm Life-Residence Hall Students.* From the survey responses of students who lived in a residence hall their freshman year, they were uniquely attributed the theme of *dorm life* as a function of their living arrangements that negatively affected their college experience.

Student #28 protested that his living facility was “relatively far from classes;” others complained about the bathrooms, saying that they were “uncomfortable” (54) and also that, “communal bathrooms were a little hard to put up with at times because of lack of respect for property and the messes left by others” (38). Student #61 brought multiple factors to light: “Dorms are loud and not extremely clean. Sometimes, you just want to get away from other students, and that is difficult in the dorms. Also, there were not enough places to study in my building.” Noise, wanting to get away at times, and lack of study space are what this student emphasized as how living arrangements negatively affected her college experience. Multiple students also testified about privacy, with Student #108 declaring, “I felt that I had no privacy.”

Also with *dorm life* students objected to rules and restrictions that were imposed on them. As Student #8 pronounced, “There are a lot of rules. Food is only available at certain times of the day.” Student #10 shared, “even though I was living in the dorms, I still felt babied and felt like there wasn’t enough freedom.” Student #88 felt like she was “being caged on campus.” Student #117 disclosed multiple factors that led to negative feelings about her freshman-year college experience:

Scheduled eating hours, no food in weekends, and I share 15 square feet with another person. . . living with so many people and having a shared cafeteria made me sick constantly, I had the stomach flu almost once a week and made life more difficult (ask my roommate, she's now phobic of vomiting).

These factors were all related to the student's freshman-year living arrangements in a residence hall and the negative impact on her college experience.

***Inconvenience-At Home Students.*** From the survey responses of students who lived at home with their parents their freshman year, they were uniquely attributed the theme of *inconvenience* as a function of their living arrangements that negatively affected their college experience. For some students, "commuting daily" (24) and "driving in the ice and snow" (102) were particularly inconvenient. Getting to class was also a related challenge because as Student #29 indicted, "It was difficult to make it to class on time sometimes due to traffic," and Student #75 realized that living off campus "made getting to class more arduous." Feeling as though she was limited in where she could go on campus Student #102 stated, "I couldn't just go home during breaks between classes," and Student #71 elaborated:

Not having a place to go other than the union in between classes was a pain in the butt, and when I wanted to eat on campus without packing a lunch, the extra cost to eat in the dining halls or the union was quite a bit.

This student saw as *inconvenient* being limited in where they could go between classes and also the money she would have to spend on meals while on campus. Finally, Student #30 communicated, "I could have had better study arrangements if I lived on campus. It

would have been easy to walk to the library or a quiet place. I have a big family so my house can get quite loud. This student longed for a space that would have played a factor in study habits—a space that she felt was not available at home.

### ***Results from the Student Interview***

***Overarching Research Question.*** The interview conducted for this study primarily addressed the overall research question of the study: What does the freshman-year college experience look like for students who live in a residence hall compared to that of those students who live at home with their parents? However, in this case insight is limited to the experience of a single student who lived at home with his parents because this was the only interview accomplished for the study.

***Re-addressing Open-Ended Survey Questions.*** The coded data analysis of the interview resulted in themes that reinforced those responses to the open-ended survey questions. There were also some ways in which the themes present in the interview added new dimensions and insight into the first year college experience of a student based on their living arrangements.

The interview participant, who chose the pseudonym “Frank,” was asked to elaborate on his responses to the open-ended survey questions that he encountered at the end of the survey that he completed for the study. Frank’s re-iteration during the interview of his thoughts and experiences in response to the open-ended survey questions match closely to the experiences and thus themes that emerged from the responses of the other student participants.

In responding to the question, “What factors influenced where you lived during your freshman year at UNL?” Frank’s responses fit well with the themes established from

the open-ended survey responses. Frank's experiences and responses emphasized the four themes of the *college experience*, *family*, *convenience* and *finances*. Frank started his response by saying, "Well, my parents live in town, so it was free." Present here are the factors of *family* and, specifically, parents as an influence in where Frank lived his freshman year, as was the *convenience* of geography and *finances*, since as Frank said, living at home was "free." Frank shared:

The idea of living (inaudible) so it's like, you know. You just read stories about like meningitis and toe fungus and I didn't want to live with other people on some old bed. It just seemed unpleasant to me, you know. I had a perfectly nice bedroom in Lincoln, you know.

Pointing out that he had a "perfectly nice bedroom in Lincoln," Frank emphasized the *convenience* and comforts of remaining to live at home. With these words above, Frank also touched upon the theme of the *college experience*, and, in his case, not being attracted to living on campus. At another point Frank iterated his aversion to living on-campus:

It wasn't a real concern, just like, sort of, the dorms seemed rather dingy and I don't know, it seemed unpleasant, sort of. And you know, people talk about, like, the beds are uncomfortable and small and, you know.

As is apparent, Frank imagined that living in a residence hall would have many negative consequences for his comfort and satisfaction and thus was influenced in making a related living choice during his freshman year of college.

In responding to the interview question, "In what ways did your living arrangements your freshman year, positively affect your college experience?" Frank's

responses reiterated the themes of *family* and *accommodations and facilities*. Referring to his parents as a part of the *family* theme, Frank stated, “I got to talk to them about college which was helpful because they’re professors. . . there’s the added support of having one’s parents around close, you know.” Frank associated his proximity to his parents as a part of his living arrangements that positively affected his freshman-year college experience. In regard to *accommodations and facilities*, Frank elaborated, “I could be by myself to do homework if I wanted in a place where I could be guaranteed that no one would bother me or you know, like, any, you know, I could be alone to do things.” For Frank, it was important that he had space to himself and saw this need fulfilled at home and potentially not available to him had he lived in a residence hall his first year of college. This was further elaborated when Frank was asked to identify what made him appreciate his living arrangement during his freshman year; he stated:

I’m an Art major, so I had to, you know, it gave me room to like set-up. Get a good set-up where I didn’t have to be like crammed with all my supplies into half a room, trying to be courteous to someone else while trying to get my things done like late at night or something. I had tons of space to spread out where I could do my work without bothering anyone or being distracted which was helpful.

Here Frank specified that due to his major, it was especially important for him to have adequate *accommodations and facilities* in which he could complete his work, and he reported that he had this at home.

In responding to the interview question, “In what ways did your living arrangements your freshman year negatively affect your college experience?” Frank’s

experiences reflected the themes of *interpersonal relationships* and *inconvenience*. Frank cited,

Well I live far away. Like, I don't know, I think it's like six or seven miles, and I bike in. So [if] I didn't feel like riding in, I would just not go to class, you know. If it was early in the morning, and I was more prone to skip or be late rather than, you know, running from the dorm to a [class on campus], which would take like five minutes or something like that, so. . .

Not only did Frank have to ride his bike to campus a significant distance, but then this also caused him to be “more prone to skip or be late” than, as he acknowledged, he would have had he lived on campus in a residence hall. This circumstance is also what Frank acknowledged as being a freshman-year situation that could have made him wish that he lived in a residence hall:

I had a French class at 9:30 in the morning which was five days a week which seemed very arduous to have to go to a class every day at what seemed very early to me. Because, you know, I had to ride my bike no matter the weather. So, in that instance I might have done better in that class if I lived in a residence hall.

Frank recognized that on-campus living could have been advantageous in facilitating getting to class every morning and thus performing better in this particular class.

Regarding *interpersonal relationships*, Frank recognized that his social life was negatively impacted by not having lived on-campus. Frank communicated, “I didn't get the added social benefit that I suppose [comes with] being surrounded by your peers.”

Here Frank realized that there could have been some “social benefit” from living in a residence hall among his “peers.”

Beyond reinforcing the themes of *interpersonal relationships* and *inconvenience*, Frank also indicated that his living arrangements during his freshman year negatively impacted his college experience due also to distractions that he faced at home. Frank admitted, “I had many diversions at my house. I had all my favorite books and movies and things like that. I was, it was, I was more prone to procrastination, perhaps.” These “diversions” as Frank called them, had their own negative consequences in that they aided procrastination in presumably completing school work.

***Other Insight from the Interview.*** Several other themes were identified in the interview that corresponded to the themes from the open-ended survey questions, one of which was the *college experience*. The *college experience* theme from the open-ended survey questions corresponded to the ways in which residence hall students praised that living on-campus represented a “real” college experience or the ways in which students that remained living at home were not attracted to “dorm life.” In Frank’s case, when asked to reflect on his overall freshman-year college experience, he shared:

It’s possible I didn’t get the full college experience, you know, of being off on your own for the first time, you know. Having to deal with everything yourself. Although, you know, it’s not like I, you know, I did sort of do that but, you know. But I didn’t get the, I suppose, the prototypical college experience. Which, I don’t know, might have been useful or fun or something. But I think I got, you know, I had more resources, sort of, to do well.

Frank admitted that perhaps there were some things that he missed out on, for example, “the full college experience” by not moving on to campus. However, he did commend the fact that he felt that he “had more resources” at his disposal. The concept of resources corresponds more to the theme of the *college network* that was derived from the open-ended survey responses of residence hall students who reflected about how their living arrangements positively impacted their freshman-year college experience.

Reflecting upon his own freshman-year college experience and the role that living at home played and the advice that he would give to a student who could choose between the two living situations, Frank revealed:

I’d do the same thing I did again, but I’d be maybe more active in like, I don’t know, campus activities or something. To gain some of the benefits of living on campus without having to like, you know, meeting people outside of class and having time to do things. Getting connections at the university. But, you know, either is good, but I like what I did for me. . .

Frank realized that he could do things differently if given the chance and specifically would possibly become more involved in “campus activities or something” and find ways of “getting connections at the university.” Both of these factors are very prominent in illustrating the different experiences of students based on their freshman-year living arrangements. This is especially so because of the statistical significance found with the survey data in the comparison of on-campus involvement.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This chapter consists of conclusions and recommendations that have developed from this research study. These conclusions and recommendations have evolved from the statistical analysis of various variables from the survey, from the coded data from the open-ended survey questions, and from the coded data from the participant interview. Recommendations will be put forth for higher education institutions and student affairs professionals to make college experiences more equitable for both students who live in residence halls as they transition into college and those students who remain living at home.

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the freshman-year college experiences of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students based on whether they lived in a residence hall or at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Specifically, the study's participants were students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska; this group was selected in order to focus on the lived experiences of students who had the option between remaining to live at home or moving onto campus for their freshman year. This is not an option for all incoming UNL freshman as there is a first-year live-on requirement with few exceptions. This researcher sought to make a contribution to the literature on the relationship between college housing and first year experiences with a focus on students who could qualify for an exemption to a first year live-on requirement.

## *Conclusions*

*Overarching Research Question: How does the freshman-year college experience compare for students who live in a residence hall and for students who live at home with their parents?* The overarching research question has been addressed throughout this study with the three forms of data that were collected. First, the quantitative data analysis revealed that experiences for students who lived on campus compared to those that remained living at home, were only statistically significant for on-campus involvement even though the descriptive data did reveal differences in all of the variables considered. Among the variables for which a statistically significant difference was not found was GPA. This result fits well with those presented in the literature that revealed inconsistencies in GPA comparisons between students who lived on campus and those that did not. For example, literature indicated that GPA's have been higher for students who live off-campus (Grayson, 1997), that there are non-significant, minimal or no differences between the two groups of students (e.g., Grosz & Brandt, 1970; Pugh & Chamberlain, 1976; Turley & Wodke, 2010), or that higher GPA's are found for students who live on-campus (e.g., Hountras & Brandt, 1970; May, 1974; Nowack & Hanson, 1985).

The overarching research question was then addressed via the analysis of the open-ended survey questions. Students who lived on campus and those that remained living at home with their parents shared similar reasons (three shared themes) as to what influenced their housing decision in the first place, but they shared only one theme when addressing the way in which their living arrangements positively affected their freshman-

year college experience, and one theme was shared when addressing the way in which living arrangements negatively influenced their college experience.

Perhaps it is that the two groups of students share the most themes in the area of what influenced where they lived their first year because pre-college factors are more easily shared between the two groups of students. Responses from both groups of students were categorized into themes of influence: *the college experience*, *family*, and *convenience*. Both groups of students were influenced by *family*, and parents specifically, in determining what was ultimately their living arrangements their freshman year. Both groups believed that the living environment that they preferred would be most convenient. And while the residence hall students wanted to make sure that they were having the ultimate or most “real” college experience by moving on to campus, students who remained living at home wanted to avoid “dorm life.” Responses from residence hall students formed the themes of *perception of a requirement* and *friends*, while students who remained living at home had their own theme of *finances*.

Residence hall students thought that they had to live on campus because of a *perception of a requirement* and were also strongly influenced by existing *friendships* or the possibility of making new *friends* in wanting to move on to campus. The prospect of meeting new people and making friends was highlighted by Johnson et al. (1995) when speaking to students who lived in Greek houses and dorms. The theme of *friends* reflected the desire for some students to distance themselves from existing friendships and establish new relationships. This desire also was featured in Christie and Dinham’s (1991) study that students were aided in assimilating to the social system of the college or university partly by shifting away from high school friends. *Finances* strongly influenced

the other group of students to remain living at home; this included the perception that they were saving money by living at home or that they did not have enough money to live on campus in the first place.

Once the students featured in the study began their college careers and either moved into a residence hall or remained living at home, more differences emerged that resulted in the majority of the themes for the two subsequent open-ended survey questions. In responding to the question about the ways in which living arrangements positively affected college experiences, responses from both groups of students created the theme of *accommodations and facilities*. Both groups of students thought that their living arrangements were ideal, including the availability of study space.

Responses from residence hall students to the second open-ended question also created the themes of *interpersonal relationships*, *student development*, and *convenience of the college network*. Residence hall students identified *interpersonal relationships* as positively affecting college experiences in the form of meeting new friends, establishing close friendships, and meeting new people in general. Pascarella (1984), in his study of students after two years of college, also emphasized that living on campus was shown to have its greatest effects on promoting integration with other students (and with faculty members) and that this sense of integration was more impactful than “the mere fact of residing on campus” (p. 25). Therefore, the interactions that are facilitated by living on campus are what is truly significant. The theme of *student development* consisted of the personal growth, new experiences, and feelings of independence that residence hall students encountered as a result of their living environments. This theme pairs well with findings previously established in the literature such as that of Welty (1976) who found

that students who live in residence halls grow “on selected measures of intellectual and personal growth in their freshman year” (p. 467) and with findings from Pike (2002) who found that “living on campus was associated with significantly higher levels of openness to diversity” (p. 283). The *convenience of the college network* was illustrated by the accessibility of classes, activities, and resources that residence hall students had at their disposal. This is related to Christie and Dinham’s (1991) findings that demonstrated that living on campus aided students in becoming aware of information about social opportunities on campus.

Responses from the students who lived at home to the second open-ended survey question illustrated that *family, finances, and not living on campus* were factors related to their living arrangements that positively affected their first year college experience. Family was a positive influence in that these students had parents and family nearby for support and were able to remain close to them in the first place. This is related to findings from Johnson et al. (1995) who found that students who commuted to school were better able to maintain relationships with family members. *Finances* were once again a theme that emerged and positively influenced their college experience by lessening worries about money and costs for housing. Students who lived at home also praised *not living on campus* as a positive factor in that they could get away from campus and could have time to themselves.

The student interview also helped to address the overarching research question by reinforcing the themes related to the experiences of student who live at home during their first year of college. The themes of the *college experience, family, convenience, finances, accommodations and facilities, and inconvenience* were also brought to the surface as

ways in which living arrangements create unique experiences for students who live at home while they start college.

***Sub-Research Question 1: What effect does living in a residence hall or at home with parents have on GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact?*** The qualitative data analysis related to sub-research question one, examined various outcomes for students from their freshman year: GPA, on-campus involvement, work hours per week, and faculty and staff contact. Only differences in on-campus involvement were shown to be statistically significant through the statistical analyses. The data from the open-ended survey questions brought some attention to students' thoughts about succeeding academically, such as the praise that both groups of students had for the study spaces that were available to them within the theme of accommodations and facilities. Also related to academics and faculty and staff contact within the theme of convenience of the college network, was the emphasis by residence hall students on the accessibility to faculty and resources. In the case of students who lived at home, the theme of "inconvenience" brought light to the fact that academics were at risk when getting to class is made inconvenient. At-home students also approached the topic of work within the theme of finances and how they were able to be closer to work by living at home. The variable of on-campus involvement was highlighted by the theme of *convenience of the college network*, which allowed for easy accessibility to college activities. As for the interview, Frank acknowledged that, while he would not change his decision to remain living at home, he would have become more involved on campus if he were able to re-live his experience.

***Sub-Research Question 2: How do these two groups of students compare in terms of background characteristics such as family income level and status as a first generation college student?*** The qualitative data analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences between the two groups of students in terms of family income and the prevalence of status as a first generation college student. Specific mention of family income or socioeconomic status was not mentioned in the responses to the open-ended survey questions nor the interview, not even when the theme of finances appeared, as was there no mention of parental educational achievement. However, finances played a strong role in the living decision and positive satisfaction with such living decision for students who lived at home. The results of the present study differed from that of Welty (1976) where pre-college demographic characteristics in the form of ACT scores, parental education, and socioeconomic status were found.

### ***Recommendations for Implementation***

Given that the only statistically significant result from the present study was that related to differences in on-campus involvement for students who lived on campus and students who lived at home, attention should be paid to addressing deficiencies in on-campus involvement for students who do not live on campus. Although university administrators may prefer that all incoming students live on campus their freshman year, this is not a reality and efforts should be put forth for providing equitable opportunities for on-campus involvement for students who do not live in university residences. Student activities offices can take the lead in encouraging equitable opportunities for involvement by all students, regardless of their living situation, by encouraging student organizations to hold meetings on reasonable days and times. For example, holding organization

meetings in the late afternoons so that students who live at home may stay on campus to attend a meeting as opposed to have to go home and return to campus and thus risk not returning to campus once at home. Also regarding student activities, entire student organizations can be created that are exclusively devoted to the special needs and of first year students who do not live on campus. These potential student groups can serve as a support system and offer opportunities for social involvement where students who remain living at home as they transition to college may meet new people and make friends in similar fashion to what the students who live in residence halls experience.

Local students who do not move into residence halls as they transition to college may have the false impression that a traditional *college experience* is unavailable to them. And for some of them, as supported by student responses to the open-ended survey questions and the student interview, parts of the traditional *college experience* is exactly what they want to avoid. However, during pre-enrollment workshops and events, such as new student enrollment or first-year orientation programs, students who are not going to be living in residence halls can attend special sessions during orientation that will educate them on how not to let their living situation be a barrier to their on-campus involvement. Important here would be to have upperclassmen who never lived on campus to share their involvement experiences and outcomes with the incoming freshmen.

Other ways in which on-campus experiences can be improved for freshmen students who do not live on campus is through facilities and other *conveniences*. Both groups of students had some praise for the study spaces that were available to them through their living situation. However, one student respondent from those that remained living at home drew attention to what she saw as a lack of facilities where she could go in

between classes and presumably to study. The student union was mentioned as the one available facility. It may be that the campus libraries need to be made more attractive, available, and user-friendly to students, not as places to where to go and find books but as places to study and lounge. As for conveniences, making lockers available to commuter students and offering commuter student meal plans are ways in which experiences can be improved for this group of students.

### ***Recommendations for Further Research***

For future research that will make comparisons between the experiences and success of freshman college students, based on whether they lived on or off campus, efforts should be made to further study this subject using qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research on this subject would add substantially to the literature for at least two reasons. First, it would complement the abundance of quantitative research that already exists. Second, much insight is likely to be gained from speaking directly to students about their housing and college experiences and perhaps a greater depth of information can be gathered as to the strategies and circumstances that facilitate success for first-year students.

Academics has been a major focus of studies involving the first-year experiences of college students based on their living arrangements. However, some attention should be paid to the fact that not all students entering college may be aiming to get the highest grade point averages for which they are capable. Undoubtedly, there are students who just want to pass their classes, the notion that “C’s get degrees,” and others who are more interested in having the best overall college experience possible, which may include frequent involvement in out-of-the-classroom activities and thus less of a focus on

academics. For future quantitative academic-related (GPA) studies in this topic area attention should be paid to this possibility and perhaps a question on a survey or questionnaire should ask whether students are aiming to obtain a high GPA in the first place or into what GPA range they aspire. Also, for consideration regarding the ties between academics and college living environment is whether a student is receiving a scholarship or is a part of a special program that requires them to maintain a certain GPA and thus influences their academic effort.

### ***Final Conclusions***

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the freshman-year college experiences of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students based on whether they lived in a residence hall or at home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Specifically, the study's participants were students with permanent addresses of Lincoln, Nebraska; this group was selected in order to focus on the lived experiences of students who had the option between remaining to live at home or moving onto campus for their freshman year. This is not an option for all incoming UNL freshman as there is a first-year live-on requirement with few exceptions. With this in mind, this research sought to make a contribution to the literature on the relationship between college housing and first year experiences with a focus on students who could qualify for an exemption to a first year live-on requirement. Findings from the quantitative portion of the study concluded that a statistically significant difference existed in on-campus involvement between students who live in a residence hall or at home with parent(s) or guardian(s) their freshman year. Statistically significant differences were not found for GPA, work hours per week, amount of faculty and staff contact, family income, or status

as a first generation college student. Findings from the qualitative portion of the study pointed to shared and differing themes among the two groups of students that influenced living choices and how these living situations positively and negatively influenced the freshman-year college experience.

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**Appendix A**

**UNL Housing Residency Requirement Form**



## UNL CAMPUS RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

**NEW INCOMING FRESHMEN: This form MUST be completed and returned if you are an incoming freshman under the age of 19 and are NOT planning to live in the residence halls.**

*This form does NOT need to be returned if you are over the age of 19.*

If you do not plan to live in University Residence Halls and will be under the age of 19 as of the first day of fall 2011 classes, indicate your plans and complete the information in the space below. If you select from options 2-6 below, you will receive additional instruction to complete the necessary paperwork to be in compliance with this University policy.

Due to the significant relationship between on-campus living and academic retention/graduation, the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln adopted the following On-Campus Residency policy: **ALL UNMARRIED STUDENTS WHO ARE ENROLLED FOR SIX OR MORE CREDIT HOURS, AND WHO ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 19 AS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE FALL SEMESTER OF THE CURRENT ACADEMIC YEAR, ARE REQUIRED TO LIVE IN UNIVERSITY-APPROVED HOUSING FOR THE ENTIRE ACADEMIC YEAR.**

Besides living in UNL Residence Halls, the following options are available to students:

Students selecting any of these options MUST return this form with a parental signature.

- A student may reside in other University-approved housing. This includes approved fraternities, sororities, and co-ops.
- A student may live with his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and commute from that home, provided that this residence is within 30 miles of the UNL campus. Students living with legal guardians will need to provide documentation of guardianship.
- A student may live with a close relative (grandparent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle) provided that individual is over 19 years of age, and the residence is within 30 miles of the UNL campus.

**Please note:**

- Financial aid award budgets are adjusted to reflect that the student is commuting.
- Exemption from the policy is granted for students who are married, have children, have previously lived in University Housing for two semesters (excluding summer school), or have completed 27 or more hours of post-secondary education. Documentation is required for all exemptions.



**YOU MUST COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS FORM IF YOU DO NOT PLAN TO LIVE IN UNIVERSITY RESIDENCE HALLS.**

*(Additional paperwork will be required for all options except #1. Options 2-5 require University approval before becoming effective.)*

1. I am planning to live at home with my parent and our home is within 30 miles of the UNL campus.
2. I am planning to live in a sorority or fraternity (refer to Greek Affairs website for specific deadlines).
3. I am planning to live in an approved cooperative.
4. I am planning to live with a legal guardian and our home is within 30 miles of the UNL campus.
5. I am planning to live with an immediate relative who is over 19 and lives within 30 miles of the UNL campus.
6. I wish to request a special circumstance exemption from the policy for the following reason:

I will begin courses at UNL this semester:

- Fall 2011
- Spring 2012

*(Please note: If you have already submitted a housing contract, refer to the Housing policy booklet for cancellation deadlines. Email your cancellation to housing@unl.edu.)*

Student signature \_\_\_\_\_ NU ID# \_\_\_\_\_  
 Printed name \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Permanent address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s)/Guardian(s): Your signature below verifies that your student will commute from your home or that you approve his/her request as described above.

Parent or legal guardian signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 (required)

Return completed form to the University Residency Compliance Office, 1115 North 16th Street, Lincoln, NE 68588-0622.  
 Questions should be directed to the Office of Residence Life: 402-472-3885.

**Appendix B**  
**Online Survey**

## INFORMED CONSENT

University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB Approval #2011112150 EX

### Identification of Project:

A master's thesis project is addressing freshman-year experiences of UNL students based on their living arrangements.

### Purpose of the Research:

This research project will be used to describe the freshman-year college experiences of UNL students based on whether they lived on or off-campus their freshman year. You were selected for participation in this project because you are a current, full-time enrolled UNL undergraduate student who entered UNL as first-time, full-time enrolled undergraduate student in the Fall of 2010. You are also 19 year of age or older and have a permanent address of Lincoln, Nebraska. This information was provided by the UNL Office of Registration and Records. This research will lead to a master's thesis which will be completed by May 2012.

### Procedures:

You will be directed to an online survey that will ask you to address questions regarding your experiences during your freshman year at UNL. There will also be some demographic questions for you to answer and some open-ended questions. The survey will take up to 20 minutes to complete.

### Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks associated with this study.

### Benefits:

The survey questions will allow you to recall your freshman year experiences at UNL and the open-ended questions will allow you to further describe your experiences. Your responses will be used to further research into the area of first year experiences of college students.

### Confidentiality:

Your responses will be confidential and identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address will not be collected. The information you provide via your survey responses will be used by the primary investigator in this study to complete a master's thesis. Results may be published in a professional publication and/or presented at a professional conference. The data will be stored on the primary investigator's password protected computer and will be deleted one year after the completion of the project in May 2013.

#### Compensation:

There is no compensation.

#### Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may call Sara Sanchez, the primary investigator, any time at (562) 480-6345 or the secondary investigator at (402) 472-0988. Please contact the investigator: If you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:

- You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant
- To voice concerns or complaints about the research
- To provide input concerning the research process
- In the event the study staff could not be reached

#### Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the survey at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

#### Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By selecting “agree” and “next” below, you certify that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented and that you meet the 19 years of age or older age requirement to participate in this study. Participating in this survey implies consent to use your responses as part of the summary of responses from all participants. You may print out a copy of this page now for your records.

#### Name and contact information of investigators:

##### Principal Investigator:

Sara Sanchez

ssanchez@huskers.unl.edu

Secondary Investigator:  
Dr. Barbara LaCost  
blacost1@unl.edu

\*1. Electronic Consent: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 19 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

- Agree
- Disagree

\*2. Where did you live your freshman year at UNL? (select one)

- Residence Hall
- Greek House
- At home with parent(s) or guardian(s)
- Off campus with other family
- Other

3. I graduated from high school in Lincoln, Nebraska

- Yes
- No

4. My mother graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States.

My mother graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States.

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

5. My father graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States.  
My father graduated from a four-year college or university in the United States.

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

6. I have an older sibling (brother or sister) who I grew up in the same household with.

- Yes
- No

7. I have an older sibling (brother or sister) who: (if more than one older sibling, select highest education completed by any)

- Is currently attending a four-year college or university
- Has attended a four-year college or university but did not complete their studies
- Has graduated from a four-year college or university
- None of the above apply

8. Sex:

- Female
- Male

9. Race or Ethnicity:

- African American/Black

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American

Other (please specify)

10. I was offered and accepted the following form(s) of financial aid my freshman year at UNL: (select all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Grant(s)   | <input type="checkbox"/> UNL Scholarship(s)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Grant(s)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Scholarship(s)      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Loan(s)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Work-Study | <input type="checkbox"/> I received no financial aid |

11. I was offered a Pell Grant (type of federal financial aid) my freshman year at UNL?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

12. My family's/household's annual income:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Under \$20,000    | <input type="radio"/> \$50,000-\$59,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$20,000-\$29,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$60,000-\$69,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$30,000-\$39,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$70,000-\$79,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$40,000-\$49,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$80,000 or above |

13. Number of individuals who make-up my family/household and supported by income from #12 above:

Individuals

14. After my first two semesters at UNL my GPA was:

15. I worked (for pay) during my freshman year at UNL

- Yes
- No

16. On average, I worked \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week (for pay) ON CAMPUS

Hours

17. On average, I worked \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week (for pay) OFF CAMPUS

Hours

18. I had more than one job (for pay) at a time during my freshman year

- Yes

No

Reminder: Questions apply to your experiences your freshman year.

19. During a typical week, I visited the union on City and/or East Campus:

- Almost every day  
 A couple of times a week  
 Once a week  
 Almost never

20. I actively participated in \_\_\_\_\_ student organizations (for example: Recognized Student Organizations-RSO's, Greek Life, Residence Hall Association-RHA, etc.):

- 0  
 1  
 2  
 3  
 4 or more

21. During my freshman year, I had a major or decided a major

- Yes  
 No

22. During my freshman year I:

	Yes	No
Decided to pursue a different major	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Remained undecided about a major	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changed my career choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participated in student government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Joined a social fraternity or sorority	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Played club, intramural, or recreational sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participated in student organizations/groups/clubs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. During my freshman year, I spent \_\_\_\_\_ hours during a typical week doing the following activities:

- |  | less<br>than 1<br>hour | 1-2<br>hours          | 3-5 hours             | 6-10 hours            | 11-15 hours           | over 15<br>hours      |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Participating in student organizations         | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Attending to household/childcare/family duties | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
24. I made new friends my freshman year at UNL
- Yes
- No
25. I attended art exhibits, plays, dance, music, theatre, or other performances
- Very often       Often       Sometimes       Never
26. I exercised or participated in physical fitness activities on campus (sports clubs, intramural sports, campus recreation center)
- Very often       Often       Sometimes       Never
27. I knew where to go for help on campus (for example: tutoring, counseling, career advice, etc) my freshman year
- Yes
- No
28. I lived at home with my parent(s) or guardian(s) my freshman year
- Yes
- No
29. I lived at home with my parent(s) or guardian(s) my freshman year because: (select all that apply)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I had no other choice                | <input type="checkbox"/> I already lived close enough to campus, pointless to move |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It's what my parents wanted me to do | <input type="checkbox"/> It was convenient   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It's what I wanted to do             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It saved money                       |  |
30. I lived on campus in a residence hall my freshman year
- Yes
- No
31. I lived on campus in a residence hall my freshman year because: (select all that apply)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I had no other choice | <input type="checkbox"/> It was convenient |
|--|--|

- It's what my parents wanted me to do  Other
- It's what I wanted to do
32. My level of satisfaction with my living arrangements my freshman year was:
- Very satisfied  Satisfied  Unsatisfied  Very unsatisfied

33. My living situation is the same my sophomore year as it was my freshman year

- Yes
- No

34. I established a relationship with a UNL staff member or administrator my freshman year

- Yes
- No

35. I used email to communicate with an instructor

- Very often  Often  Sometimes  Never

36. I discussed grades or assignments with an instructor

- Very often  Often  Sometimes  Never

37. I talked about career plans with a faculty member, advisor, or other staff member

- Very often  Often  Sometimes  Never

38. During a single semester my freshman year, I interacted with the following people at the following rate:

	Daily	2-3 times a week	once a week	1-3 times a month	1-2 times a semester	Never
Faculty during office hours	<input type="radio"/>					
Faculty outside of class or office hours	<input type="radio"/>					
Academic advisors/counselors	<input type="radio"/>					
Graduate students/teaching assistants	<input type="radio"/>					

39. Utilizing the following scale:

- 1= unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation
- 7= friendly, supportive, sense of belonging

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I rank the quality of my relationships with other students as:	<input type="radio"/>						
I rank the quality of my relationships with faculty members as:	<input type="radio"/>						
I rank the quality of my relationships with administrative personnel/staff and offices as:	<input type="radio"/>						

40. During my freshman year, I felt:

	Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all
Isolated from campus life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
That my work responsibilities interfered with my schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
That my family responsibilities interfered with my schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family support to succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

41. I skipped class my freshman year:

Frequently       Occasionally       Not at all

42. I felt a sense of belonging to my campus my freshman year

Strongly agree     Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree

43. My level of satisfaction with my overall college experience my freshman year:

Very satisfied     Satisfied       Not satisfied     Very unsatisfied

Next are three open-response questions. Please be as detailed as possible.

44. The factors that influenced where I lived during my freshman year at UNL were:

45. My living arrangements my freshman year positively affected my college experience in the following way(s):

46. My living arrangements my freshman year negatively affected my college experience in the following way(s):

Thank you for completing the survey! In order to further enhance the research being produced for this study, follow-up interviews will be held with select participants.

\*\*\*If you are interested in being considered for a follow-up interview send an email to [ssanchez@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:ssanchez@huskers.unl.edu) with the following text and subject line (that you may copy and paste):

Subject: Follow-Up Interview

I am interested in being considered for a follow-up interview.  
I lived \_\_\_\_\_ (indicate where you lived your freshman year; residence hall or with parent(s)/guardian(s))

Name  
Email Address  
Phone Number

If you are interested in the follow-up interview send the email or make note of the recipient email address before exiting the survey. Thanks again for your participation.

**Appendix C**  
**IRB Approval Letter**

Sara Sanchez  
 Department of Educational Administration  
 5002 R Street Lincoln, NE 68504

Barbara LaCost  
 Department of Educational Administration  
 127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20111112150 EX  
 Project ID: 12150  
 Project Title: Master's Thesis

Dear Sara:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 11/15/2011.

1. The approved interview informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with - Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.
2. Please include the IRB approval number (IRB# 20111112150 EX) in the survey consent documents. Please email a copy of these messages to [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu) for our records. If you need to make changes to the messages please submit the revised messages to the IRB for review and approval prior to using them. Please make sure to use this new number rather than the number assigned to the previous protocol.

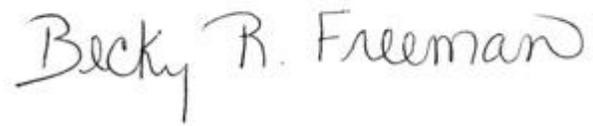
We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- \* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- \* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- \* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- \* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- \* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Becky R. Freeman". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Becky R. Freeman, CIP  
for the IRB