



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rachel C. Nelson for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on July 15, 2008.

Title: Defining the Gap: A Case Study of the On Campus Residential Options at Oregon State University

Abstract approved:

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The decision to attend a university creates many important decisions for a young adult, with one of the most important being the choice of where to live while they make the transition into independent adults. Many choose to live on campus during this critical time. The differences that exist, and the impacts on the students as a result of this choice, are crucial to the experience the students have during their time spent at the university and the impact on the students during their liminal time.

This study was conducted with the purpose of providing a better understanding of the influential factors within the three different on campus residential programs at Oregon State University (OSU), focusing on the community and relationships built between the student residents, the beginning of the liminal transition students embark on, and the impacts their residential environment have on that transition; gender differences and issues the students

perceive in their residential environment; and the impacts of the role of the RA, both on the student residents, the university, and on the RAs themselves. In total, 17 students were interviewed for this study, with 5 respondents being RA's.

One of the greatest factors that can influence the experiences of the residents in the buildings and residential options discovered through this research is the gap that exists between the students and the university. The RAs, and the importance and difficulties of the role they hold within the programs, is also another one of the major findings of this research. The students also go through an important transitory time during the first couple of years at the university, another significant factor learned through this research. These factors are integral to the experience that each student has and as such the university may find value in implementing some of the recommendations that arose from the findings:

- Implement programs and events whereby the university's idea of what the freshman experience contains is explained to the freshmen and an infrastructure is created whereby the students can anonymously take their concerns and find help. The freshman experience is a very real and important time for the students during their liminal time.
- Increase the level and amount of communication and interaction with the RAs on campus. The RAs are the link between the university and the students, and as such the gap that exists between the university, the RAs, and the students is dependant on the RA's role.
- Increase the differences between the themes of the buildings in an effort to provide a differentiation between them.

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Defining the Gap: A Case Study of the On Campus Residential Options at Oregon  
State University

by  
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APPROVED:

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Rachel C. Nelson, Author

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## CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

Chris Bates, M.A., assisted with data collection for the respondents for the Residential College, Weatherford Hall.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1 Introduction .....	1
2 The Setting .....	10
3 Literature Review .....	21
4 Methodology .....	45
5 The Residential Environment – A Community within the University. 61	
6 College: The Crossroads Between Adolescence and Adulthood.....	110
7 The Most Important Thing I Learned During My University Experience – Me .....	134
8 Gender .....	150
9 Conclusion and Recommendations .....	161
Bibliography.....	185
Appendices.....	188
Appendix 1: Interview Topic Guide .....	188
Appendix 2: Student Informants .....	192
Appendix 3: UHDS Letter of Approval .....	193

# **DEFINING THE GAP: A CASE STUDY OF THE ON CAMPUS RESIDENTIAL OPTIONS AT OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY**

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

*“I think it is part of the life lessons you do learn at college, not just being independent and meeting new people, but finding you” – Student Resident Living On Campus at Oregon State University*

The first few years a student spends at a university can be the most influential years in a student’s life. Life-long friends are made, careers chosen, relationships formed, lessons learned, and decisions made all in the space of a few short years. The lessons learned during the collegiate years are very important and influential for these students.

When students enter a university, they are embarking on so much more than just a journey through the collegiate system – they are beginning the transition that will lead them to the incorporation of a new sense of self and begin the next phase of their life. Because of this aspect, the ramifications of the time they spend at the university means so much more than simply what degree they choose and whether or not they graduate.

In the university system of today, the administrators need to know not only who their students are before they arrive at the university, but also what effect their university system has on them. These influences can range from life changing to trivial, from positive to negative. One of the responsibilities of the administrative

system within the University Housing Program is to ensure that these experiences and changes are as educational and positive as possible. To this end, the staff of the residential system has a duty to its residents to know what life is like within the housing options at their university.

The Housing and Dining System at Oregon State University is not substantially different from the other university systems across the nation. The University Housing and Dining System (hereafter referred to as UHDS) is responsible for the buildings it has under its programs, including the activities, administration, maintenance, physical environment within the buildings, the recruitment of students, and the management of the buildings throughout the school year. These tasks can often be very difficult, especially when considering the impact even a seemingly minute change can make.

While the structure of the programs themselves is important to study and know, the perceptions of the students/residents themselves are perhaps even more important. In past research, studies focused mainly on the physical aspects of the buildings: the size of the rooms, room layouts, capacity, etc. Surprisingly, the perceptions of the residents tend to be overlooked when research projects are conducted.

### *Purpose of Research*

The purpose of this research study at the broadest level is to ascertain the perceptions and opinions of the residents, both current and past, of what they feel the impact of their residential situation has been on their life and their overall

collegiate experience so far. These impacts can be both academic and personal. I also researched the overall structure of the UHDS as it relates to the impact it has on the residents within the program. The structure of the residential halls as designed by the UHDS can have a serious impact on the culture and environment within the buildings. This study will focus on the women residents within the residential program in order to narrow the field of study and limit the variables possible within the findings.

Women are becoming a growing factor in the life and culture of the university campuses. While there are still stereotypes in society regarding women and college life, studies have shown that women are increasing in numbers on campus, and in some cases even out numbering the men (Intini 2006). Because of this, the dynamics and decisions surrounding the women students have changed considerably in the past few decades, affecting not only the students themselves but also the responsible administrations. These changes need to be recognized, and more importantly, understood.

Another one of the goals of this study is to provide a glimpse into the world of the residents living in the buildings. The following are the general topic questions used as the basis for the structure and analysis of this study: How important is the community within the building to the student? Is the building simply a place to live, or is it more than that? How do students balance their academic responsibilities with their social life? Does school feature most prominently in their lives, or is their social life more important? What is the student perception and opinion of the general focus of their specific building? Is it

focused more predominantly on academics or social life and do they feel this makes a difference in their experience? For the RA's and RD's, the questions were asked both in context of being a student and then again while asking the RA or RD to answer from the perspective of her/his work role within the building.

This study will specifically compare the differences in the impacts of the various types of residential buildings and programs: the residential halls, the residential college, and the cooperatives. The structure and programs vary considerably by the type of building. These differences in the types of buildings will be explained in detail later on.

The results from this study will be given to the administrators responsible for the operations within the residential programs at OSU. While the administrators do have day-to-day interactions with their residents, and thus are familiar with their programs, the results from this study will prove beneficial in that they provide an outsiders' viewpoint on the system and an analysis of the perceptions of their residents. The hope is that by providing the administrators with these findings they will be able to better structure their programs for future residents.

The results from this study will also be made available for the UHDS to provide to future students faced with the decision about where they want to live. The information provided by the past residents about their time spent in the halls will provide future students with a better understanding of the options available to them within the on-campus residential system. The process of self-selection of the placement of students within the buildings is an important part of the residential

system here at the university. While a few of the residents are placed (RA's, for example), most of the residents choose the building they believe is the best fit for their years at the university.

While conducting the literature for this study, I was surprised by the lack of information on the residential programs within a university system from the residents' perspective. This is a major oversight by universities in general, as the students are their customers and can later become their supporters, both emotionally and financially. This study is designed to help eliminate some of this information deficit and provide a better understanding of the students' perspectives and lives within the halls and cooperatives at OSU.

### *Research Perspective*

The concept for this study began when I first considered the idea of what a residential college was in comparison with a traditional residential hall. As the graduate assistant in the Close to the Customer Project (C2C) I have had the privilege to work in Weatherford Hall for the past two years. During that time I have been able to observe first hand some of the events that go on within a residential college and to become acquainted with some of the residents and the administrators of the building. As a result of my involvement with the C2C I had the opportunity to be a part of conducting a year-long ethnographic study on the entrepreneurship program within Weatherford, the AEP. There was another ethnographic researcher involved in the gathering of the data, Chris Bates, as well as an ethnographic researcher involved in the analysis and write up, Professor Jim

McAlexander. The findings from this study are currently under review for publication in a scholarly journal.

While this previous study focused on the entrepreneurship program within the halls, the opinions of the students were gathered regarding the residential program. In this report, I utilized a portion of the data gathered during the previous study as well as obtained new information from the students.

When I first started working with and hearing about the program within the building, I was curious as to what a residential college actually was in practice. This curiosity led to the concept of a research study to compare the various options among the residential buildings.

As a graduate of OSU, who attended for 4 years and did not live on campus at all, I have a unique perspective. I graduated with my bachelor's degree in Business Administration, focus in Marketing, from the College of Business at OSU. When I had to make the decision in regards to housing, I first researched all of my options, both on campus and off. Due to many reasons, I did not feel the residential halls were a good fit for me personally. Because of this, I never experienced the UHDS within OSU. However, as I was an undergraduate student, I went through many of the same experiences as the residents did.

As mentioned, this study focuses on the female students within the residential system. This focus was chosen based on the increasing importance of women's experiences in the academic setting. As previously mentioned, a growing number of university students are female, and hence their impact on the residential settings is growing (Intini 2006). Because of the changing gender ratio

now on university campuses, administrators are re-examining the structure of their on-campus residential programs and adjusting them if needed.

College is playing an ever-increasing role in shaping the future for many young women ( Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine 2003). In addition to the general changes, the ratio of women to men in the on-campus residential halls is also changing significantly, with women now outnumbering men on a significant number of campuses (Meadows 2007). Because of this, the importance of not only understanding how they impact the university, but also understanding how the university impacts them, is growing for the administration. In addition to focusing the study on women, other reasons for narrowing the field of study include the physical constraints of the time period, number of participants, and the continuity provided by the focus in the findings. Also, as a female student myself, I have an insider's perspective on student life as a girl within the OSU environment.

I also have a unique perspective in that I am in the same age demographics as my informants. Unlike a different researcher who may be in another generation all together, I share many of the broad life experiences of my informants, which gives me a similar perspective to my informants as a researcher.

### *College: The Beginning of a Journey*

Through the journey a student begins when entering the university, she/he will learn so much more than just sciences and arts. The life lessons learned during this time are critical to life, and the liminal state begun with this transition ends in adulthood. During this journey, the university has the opportunity to play

a significant and important role in the lives of the students as they navigate these changes and make crucial decisions for their future.

One of the ways the university can reach the students is through the on-campus residential options. There are several important factors that can affect a student in the residential program, including what structure of residential option they initially choose and the subsequent choices for the following years.

In addition to the factors of the university influencing the students, there are also several major aspects of change that occur in the student while residing there that the university can influence, although it does not directly control. These lessons are learning to deal with the changes of embarking on life on your own, creating and navigating through new social networks, discovering just who you are, and learning to deal with gender differences in life.

### *The Gap*

While a student is dealing with these challenges and working through this stage in life, the university has the opportunity to positively influence and provide a safe environment for their residents. However, there is a significant barrier in the way of these opportunities: a gap exists between the students and the university.

While the university does have the opportunity to influence the students residing on campus, the administrators must first overcome and close the gap that exists between the university and the residents. This gap between the administrators and the students exists because of the differences between their

goals and perceptions. While some of this gap is unavoidable, as it is an inherent part of the liminal transition the students are going through, part of it is a result of the lack of direct and indirect communication between the university and the students.

This especially affects the RAs as they are the ones responsible for communicating the university's goals and perceptions to the students while at the same time being a student themselves. The RAs are essentially stuck in the middle of the gap between student residents and the university due to their role of representation, rule enforcement, and communicating between the two groups.

Within the structure of the residential options, the RAs are charged with the task of representing the university for the general student residents. This effectively places the RAs in the difficult role of both being a student, with student cares and concerns, and university ambassador, responsible for communicating ideals and goals that they themselves have only recently learned. Along this channel of communication, a gap has been created between students and administration which negatively affects the university's ability to influence and shape the lives of the residents living in the on-campus programs.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SETTING

The history surrounding a university shapes its current culture. The decisions made throughout the life of a university impact the structure, organization, and administration and have a heavy influence the type of students who choose to attend. To understand the present day university, we must first understand its history.

### *The Setting: An Important Backdrop*

While at first it may seem non-applicable, the history surrounding OSU and the UHDS very much affects and shapes the culture within the university and the on-campus residential programs. The structures put in place create the foundations for the programs of today and any changes made for the future. The students often select a college based on its history, thereby affecting its future. Other universities have seen these changes happen within their programs as well, and numerous studies have been conducted to better understand the effects these changes can have.

### *Oregon State University*

OSU is located in Corvallis Oregon, a medium-sized town with a quaint downtown community with local businesses. Within the university system at OSU, there are a total of 13 academic colleges offering more than 200

undergraduate degrees and more than 80 graduate degrees. OSU boasts of a 400-acre campus and beautiful architecture in their historic buildings.

Oregon State University was founded as a state university in Oregon on October 27, 1868 as Corvallis College. It was originally founded as the state agricultural college with a land grant from the State of Oregon in 1868. At the time of the land grant, the State of Oregon gave Corvallis College the authority to confer three types of degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, and Master of Arts.

The decisions made at Oregon State University impacted not only the way the academic colleges developed, but also the residential options. A few key points in the history of OSU as found among the historical highlights published by OSU, with specific attention on events relating to the residential program and women students, include (OSU, 2007):

- The name was changed to State Agricultural College in 1876.
- In 1885 the state officially assumed complete control over the State Agricultural College of Oregon.
- In 1890 the college became one of the national leaders in gender equality by being one of only three land grant universities to offer scientific courses to women. During this year, the college also changed its name to Oregon Agricultural College.
- In 1905 the first permanent Greek letter social organization was established at OSU: Gamma Delta Phi

- In 1921 campus residence was provided for by the president of the college. The gender of the first campus residence programs was not noted.
- In 1924 Oregon Agricultural College was accredited by the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools. Subsequently, OAC was accepted into the American Association of University Women.
- In 1927 the name changed again to Oregon State Agricultural College
- In 1928 Weatherford Hall was opened as a men's dormitory
- In 1933 the name was unofficially changed to Oregon State College, which was later made official in 1937
- In 1948 Sackett Hall, a residential hall, was opened
- In 1953 Azalea, the women's cooperative house, was opened
- In 1954 both Heckart and Reed cooperative houses were opened
- In 1957 Weatherford Dining Hall was completed
- In 1960 West Hall was opened
- 1961: The name was officially changed to Oregon State University
- In 1963 McNary Hall opened
- In 1964 Callahan and Wilson Halls were constructed
- In 1966 Avery and Dixon cooperative lodges were created. Avery is the male cooperative house.
- 1967: Finley Hall was constructed
- In 1972 Arnold and Bloss were constructed
- 1983: All the schools within OSU changed their name to colleges
- 1988: The Baccalaureate Core was approved

- 1997: McNary and West reopen after renovations
- 2004: Weatherford Hall reopens as a residential college after extensive renovations.<sup>1</sup>

One of the recent changes on the OSU campus has been the increased focus on being a “green” campus. In 2004 OSU was one of five centers named in the Sun Grant Initiative. The Sun Grant Initiative provides OSU with an \$8 million grant over four years to fund the research and development of sustainable and environmentally friendly bio-based energy alternatives (Firing 2005). On campus, the students have already begun to see the changes that the Sun Grant has funded, specifically the focus on the development and promotion of bio-diesel. In addition to the focus on bio-diesel, OSU students recently voted to pay an extra fee each term to switch the sourcing of the energy OSU uses to green energy.

### *The UHDS*

The University Housing and Dining Services is the central administration organization responsible for overseeing the university-run residential options at OSU. The campus residential program began in 1928 with the completion of a men’s dormitory hall, Weatherford. Throughout the years the program has been in existence it has strived to provide a productive and healthy environment for the students who choose to live in the campus residential housing.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorm names listed are all standard Residence Halls with the exception of Weatherford and the ones marked as Cooperatives.

The UHDS has a set of core values that are held throughout their programs as a standard to strive to achieve. These core values are visible in the UHDS records going back to the very beginning of the program. While the actual wording of these statements changed slightly over the years, the concepts and values expressed do not change. These values are visible through the mission statement, strategic goals, customer service philosophy, and diversity values. These values are exemplified in the mission statement of the University Housing and Dining Services:

The mission of University Housing and Dining Services is to provide housing and dining environments through facilities, programs, and services that support the academic and personal success of our residential students and other OSU community members.

Over the years, the UHDS has grown to include 12 residential halls, 4 cooperative houses, and 1 residential college. Each concept of housing is different in its own unique way, with the level of university involvement in the structure and programming varying based on the type of housing.

### *Cooperative Housing*

The cooperatives have the least amount of university involvement and are set up based on gender, with three of the four houses as women's cooperatives. Each house has a distinct personality that attracts students of like interest. Unlike

the residential housing, however, this personality is not dictated by a program but rather develops from the students who live there and the programs they have developed.

### *Residential Halls*

The residential halls have a moderate amount of university involvement in the day to day operations and structure. While the overall structure of the halls is set by the UHDS, the individual halls have their own student councils to run the events and student programs for the year. The individual halls are themed with different areas of interest to provide a greater level of community with the students who choose a theme that best suits their personality and values. These themes are: the first-year experience, the upper classmen experience, substance free, ROTC, engineering, honors, community service, and international. These represent all of the themes in the residential halls at OSU.

### *Residential College*

The residential college has the highest amount of university involvement, with most of the involvement coming from the college who runs the academic program within the hall. Currently OSU has one residential college residing in Weatherford Hall.

In addition to the campus housing, the UHDS also runs the on-campus dining programs for the residents of the campus housing. While the dining is set up for the residents, other students can eat at the dining halls, although non-campus

residents do not receive the discount that the students with the campus meal plan have. In addition to the several campus residential-specific dining halls, the outside restraints located in the Memorial Union and other buildings across campus also accept the meal-plan card offered through the University Housing and Dining Services.

*The Weatherford Residential College: As a Residential College,* Weatherford is a unique aspect of the residential options at OSU. These differences are what make Weatherford a unique choice for students, and as such are important to understand.

Weatherford is one of the most prominent and impressive buildings in Oregon State University. Located on the back corner across from the commons area of the Memorial Union in the heart of campus, Weatherford Hall is a historical landmark on campus. Built in 1928 as a residential dorm for men, it was originally divided into several sections. Each of the sections within the building had its own community and name. In 1957, the dividing walls were torn down and the building was thereafter known as Weatherford Hall. In the years that followed, the Weatherford residents became known for their "...unusual creativity, loyalty, and entrepreneurial spirit." (Weatherford History 2007, AEP 2007) However, as the years went on, Weatherford fell into disrepair and had to be shut down in 1994 amidst protests from students. According to one of the informants, who I shall from now on refer to as "Dave", during the years that followed Weatherford being shut down, a "theme" was being sought for the building.

During one of our talks, Dave, one of the administrative staff at Weatherford, told me the story of how the Austen Entrepreneurship Program came to be housed in Weatherford Hall. The renovation of Weatherford had an estimated price tag of \$20 million dollars. When it was determined how much it was going to cost to renovate it, it was not known exactly what Weatherford would be.

According to another one of the administrative informants, the dean of the College of Engineering asked the Provost for Weatherford for an entrepreneurship themed college. Together with the College of Business, the partnership of the two colleges started looking for donors and partners from whom the money for the renovation could be raised. With a \$4 million donation from the Austen family, and \$6 million total, the partnership of the College of Business and the College of Engineering was able to secure the building for their program. The renovation of Weatherford started in January of 2003 and was finished in September of 2004. It opened its doors to students that September and launched the AEP residential college.

The Austin Entrepreneurship Program (AEP) has two components to the curriculum: formal and informal. Both of the components are designed to both instruct in general business and entrepreneurship theory and to provide an experiential learning conduit through which the students can learn through doing.

The formal curriculum is defined by any program officially recognized and supported by Oregon State University. The primary component of the formal curriculum currently is the entrepreneurship minor offered through the College of Business (COB). While this minor is not required to be a resident in Weatherford,

it is integrated considerably into the AEP and informal curriculum that resides in the building. Designed into the building are two classrooms. These rooms are most often used for entrepreneurship themed courses.

While the AEP is a relatively new program for the COB, the college has changed its structure to fully support the AEP. This change in the structure is evidenced by the new “Pillar” of focus for the college: experiential learning. With the addition of this pillar, the college has committed to provide opportunities for experiential learning to its students, and a major avenue to provide this is through Weatherford and the AEP. The College of Business actively encourages students to participate in experiential learning, explaining on their website: “Being active in these experiential learning activities, as well as internships, helps increase the opportunities of finding a job after graduation.”

The informal curriculum consists of events and programs designed and conducted through the AEP program. The aspects of the informal curriculum are designed to focus on fostering the theory and spirit of entrepreneurship in the students residing within Weatherford as well as the students who choose to participate in the activities. While the informal curriculum does focus on the residents of Weatherford, participation in the program is open to all students of Oregon State University. The aspects of the informal curriculum include:

*Visiting Fellows:* The administrators host visiting fellows to talk and interact with the residents and students. These professionals are chosen for their life experiences and relevance to the students’ interests. These visiting fellows

include entrepreneurs, CEO's, Vice Presidents, and executives with interesting experiences.

*The TICK Program:* Completion of the TICK program earns a student a certificate in Entrepreneurship from the AEP. Residents complete “competencies” in the 4 areas through submission of experiences that pertain to each area; Teamwork, Individual Development, Community, and Knowledge. (See attached flyers for more information)

*Hall Mentors:* Each hall is given a mentor to help interact with and mentor the residents in the section. The hall mentors presented a unique challenge and opportunity to the RA's of Weatherford, as will be explored in detail later.

*Special Events:* Special events are conducted focusing on entrepreneurship including guest speakers, barbecues, and special award ceremonies.

#### *The Buildings: Only the Beginning*

While the physical environment and structural programs in place make up the environment of on-campus residential programs, it is the students who live in them that give personality and can determine their overall perceptions and reputations. The living environment of each building can vary depending on the students who live there, the RAs that are responsible for it, and the level of connection the university has with the RAs and students. This level of connection,

or lack of connection, can be very influential in affecting how the living environment within the building shapes as the year progresses.

### CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

When a young adult leaves for college, she/he leaves behind family, friends, and the environment where youth was spent and the feeling of safety reigned. In exchange for all this, the young adult takes the first steps in a journey that will ultimately lead to being considered a full adult. College can be the major liminal transitional phase that begins the journey from youth to adult.

A liminal phase is “..a limbo between a past state and a coming one, a period of personal ambiguity, of non status, and of unanchored identity” (Turner, as quoted by Schouten 1991:49). Students entering university life are indeed entering a stage in their life when their identity becomes unanchored to some extent and they have the opportunity to change it and establish a new identity, affirm their existing identity and truly make it their own, or create a hybrid of their own with a mix of their current and new characteristics. During this phase a student can explore areas of character and personality that the student may otherwise never have experienced.

During this period of transition when a student begins to build her or his own repertoire of self characteristics, many aspects of the university have the ability to influence the student. One of these aspects is the residential environment the student lives in during the first few years at a university (Schouten 1991). The importance of the residential setting has long been acknowledged and researched by many different fields and perspectives including anthropology, academia,

psychology, etc (Pascarella 2006, Astin 1993, Li et al. 2005). One university professor even went so far as to enroll as a freshman and live in the dorms herself (Nathan 2005). Professor Rebekah Nathan wanted to understand her students completely, so she used her experience as an anthropologist and “went native” to get to know her students first hand.

### **College: A New World and Identity**

“Being at a university means being a newcomer in a strange, and possible lonely community” (Budny & Paul, 2003:2). When a student leaves for the university, she or he leaves behind the familiar world and embarks on a journey that ultimately ends in self discovery and a new stage in life – adulthood (Budney & Paul 2003, Arnett 1996). This journey can take many years, often extending past the time spent at a university (Arnett 1996). While the length of the journey can depend on the individual student, it often starts with the departure to college.

Students entering life at a university are entering a liminal transition period in their life. Author John Schouten discusses Van Gennep’s theory regarding important life passages stating:

..Important life passages generally consist of three phases with their attendant rituals: (1) separation, in which a person disengages from a social role or status, (2) transition, in which the person adapts and changes to fit new roles, and (3) incorporation, in which the person integrates the self with the new role or status (1991:421).

Leaving for a university is the first phase of the journey: separation. A student disengages from their life as they previously knew and begins to establish their own identity.

The next phase, transition, begins in college, but can extend beyond the time spent at a university. Arnett explains that for American youth, the “..transition to adulthood takes place across a long range of years extending through the late twenties for many young people in the American majority culture.” (1998:304) During this transition phase, young people often will experiment with varying aspects of their persona in their search for their sense of self. This experimentation is often conducted during the first couple years a student spends at a university, as “it takes very little time for a college freshman to understand and embrace their newfound freedom” (Budy & Paul 2003:4). This sense of newfound freedom is heightened by the state of liminality that a student is in. Schouten explains that “Liminal people appear to be more likely than others to engage in “identity play,” that is, to formulate, elaborate, and evaluate possible selves.” (1991:421) While some of student experimentation with freedom can be attributed to college, there is more involved in this transition than just the new experiences of the academic life (Hunter 2006).

The last phase in this transition, incorporation, is where a young person integrates her or his new found self with the new status as an adult. But what marks the completion of this transformation? What are the traits that define an adult? For American youth, there is a commonly held list of personal

characteristics that a young person must develop to be considered an adult

(Arnett 1998).

In sum, individualism is the predominant feature of young people's conceptions of the transition to adulthood in the American majority culture. The three top criteria for becoming an adult – accepting responsibility for one's self, independent decision-making, and financial independence – all signify the developing capacity of the individual to be independent, self-reliant, and self-sufficient (Arnett 1998).

While incorporation is ultimately the final result of the liminal stage, Schouten points out that there may be several new self concepts before a final choice is made.

People can respond to their possible selves in one of three ways: (1) with inaction, (2) with active rejection, or (3) with actualization and the incorporation of the possible self into a revised self-concept (1991:422).

### **The Overall Impacts of the Collegiate Experience**

While there are many factors that affect a student during this liminal phase beginning with college and life on their own, the college environment plays a significant role in the transition phase. It is because of these impacts that the environment and culture of the university experience is an important area of research.

#### *The New Generation*

One of the factors that have a big impact on the residential setting, the culture within the university, and the experiences of the students as a whole is the actual student population. "Student attitudes, behaviors, and experiences are not

static. With each entering class the world events and culture that shape their growth and development differ” (Hunter2006:9). The character traits and behaviors of the student body can change drastically from generation to generation, and administrators need to know what the current behaviors of the students are to better structure the programs (White 2005). In their article “Welcoming a New Generation To College: The Millinial Students”, authors Elam et al (2007) explain a few of the reasons the administrators need to pay attention to the differences in generations, and what they are currently doing to adjust to these changes. These changes can take the form of many different factors, such as a tendency to follow through with plans, the willingness to follow the rules of the university, political opinions, and the tendency to desire a higher level of involvement from university officials. As the authors point out:

Some predict that, as a result, members of this generation may be obedient of university faculty and administrators, looking to them for their knowledgeable guidance and support (Murray, 1997). Toward this end, Murray (1997) suggests that university administrators be prepared to display authoritative expertise, reinforce motivation, invest in outcome, and celebrate victories. (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson 2007: 24)

Just as parents know that different children require different methods of handling to effectively reach them, so many administrators need to realize that each generation of students require different methods and programs to maximize their academic experiences. These adjustments from the university for the millennial generation include a higher level of structure to the programs, higher communication with the students’ parents, a greater degree of disclosure between

the university and the students, providing a greater level of definition of the goals and opportunities for the students, and providing more opportunities for involvement as millennials are more accustomed to group projects and involvement (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson 2007). As Hunter points out, “Attention to student characteristics, needs, behaviors, and experiences is central to creating and sustaining successful transition initiatives.” (2006:9)

Rebecca Nathan also noticed the differences between the generations, which prompted her decision to become a student again. Nathan explained in her book “After more than 15 years of university teaching, I found that students had become increasingly confusing to me.” Because of this distance between herself and her students, Nathan decided to become a student again to better understand them. While she was not fully able to integrate due to unchangeable factors (e.g. her age), she was able to live with them for a year and learn from them (Nathan 2005).

As mentioned, the generation currently attending and beginning their academic life is different from the past generations and university administration needs to recognize this and make adjustments accordingly. Some of the adjustments can be including relevant pop culture in the curriculum being taught at the university (Millman 2007). While some of these characteristics will impact the student’s personal professional lives more, others will have a direct impact for universities: “Today’s parents and families are more likely than those of past generations to blame institutions for their students’ lack of success.” (Hunter 2006:7) However, not all traits of this generation are negative:

They are the next “great” generation, according to demographers, who have warned all who have gone before that members of this up-and-coming group are entering college and the workforce expecting instant gratification and the ability to make a difference before paying their dues. (University Magazine2006:17)

### *Culture of Campus*

Another major topic of study is the culture of a university and the various methods of communicating the culture to prospective students, indoctrinating current students into the culture, and the way the culture changes with time and new students. The area of culture is a fascinating subject to look at, as it is ever-changing and can be a compilation of so many unique and individual subcultures. Rebekah Nathan stated: “College culture, like any culture, is neither singular nor monolithic. There are subcultures and alternative cultures that have long existed within American colleges and universities. They still do.” (Nathan 2005:107)

One method of communicating the culture of a university to potential students is through the campus tours commonly taken by students and their parents prior to choosing an institution to enroll in. Peter Magolda (2000) looked at this method in particular as a means of attracting students who would fit in with the current university culture. He took the campus tour at a university and examined the various ways the tour conveyed the culture and attitude of the university. One of the major means of communication was through the stories told by the tour guide about the programs and buildings of the institution. After listening to a story about an event in the campus’s history, and the most recent in a series of several

tales about the university, Magolda states “The brief tale conveys to prospective members of the campus community the seminal campus values and ideals, such as community service, teamwork, and close faculty-student interactions” (Magolda 2000:27).

Once a student has enrolled in the college, the next step is to induct the student into the university culture. This step is an important one in the academic series of events, as it can build a community and a support network for the incoming freshmen. As Nathan noted “As a student, one is immediately enlisted to join the group, to get involved, to realize that one has become a part of the AnyU ‘community’” (Nathan 2005).

Involvement in the university can promote not only the culturalization of the student to the college, but also provide the student with a needed aspect of the experience.

Tinto’s (1993) theory of student departure suggests that students are more likely to remain at an institution if they have opportunities to become connected to the life of the institution, in both their social and academic lives, through a process of social and academic integration (Stassen 2003:582).

However, not only is the community within the university a challenge the students have to face, they also have to navigate every other change that is currently happening in their transition to college. Roe Clark studied the transition to college and the various factors that went into the transition, and had this advice to give

Making the transition to college also requires that students negotiate challenges and influences in their lives outside of college. In order to facilitate students' success in college we must appreciate the complexity of their lives; understand the dynamics, both positive and negative, that are associated with their transitions; and look for ways to foster and promote effective strategies among them (Clark 2005:314).

One of the challenges facing researchers is to determine which factors to study out of the plethora of factors that have the potential to affect a student (Clark 2005; Elam, Stratton, & Gibson 2007). While there are many different directions and themes suggested, there is one common thread among them: they all acknowledge the need to better understand the phenomena known as the university experience and the impact it has on the student population.

### **Life in an On Campus Residence Building**

Life on campus is an experience that is unlike other living environments that exist in a life experience. This experience involves living in a building with over a hundred other people who are around the same age and going through the same changes in life and dealing with the same issues. These similarities can create a bond between strangers that under different circumstances would not have existed, and communities are formed in the halls between the students (Nathan 2005, Astin 1993). The residential halls and other on-campus living arrangements are the subject of millions of dollars and research each year in the attempt to provide the optimal environment for students to thrive and grow in, while at the same time learning more about themselves and becoming a self-sustaining

individual. It is because of the effects that these environments have on the students that so much attention and effort is focused on them. "...students living in the residence halls persisted and graduated at significantly higher rates than did students lacking the residential experience" (Li, Sheely, & Whalen 2005:28). It is important to know the effects of these programs as it is a vital part of the evaluative methods that the administrators use for measuring the success of their programs (Li, McCoy, Shelley II, & Whalen 2005).

### *Involvement*

Student involvement has long been understood to contribute to student success, feeling of community, and overall positive aspects in the academic experience (Huang & Chang 2004, Li et al. 2005, Svanum & Bigatti 2006, Wang et al. 2003, Stassen 2003, Inkelas & Weisman 2003, Astin 1993). When looking at the research on the effects these involvement opportunities can have on the students, authors Huang and Chang stated that they "...all suggest that the more involved that college students are in the academic and social aspects of campus life, the more they benefit in terms of learning and personal development" (Huang & Chang 2004: 391).

### *Programs*

One of the outcomes of students living in the halls is a better understanding and integration into the culture and community of the university (Nathan 2005, Li

et al. 2005). While this effect maybe intentional or unintentional, it is a side effect never the less.

Other researchers have suggested using the residential halls and programs housed within them to intentionally influence the students in a particular subject. Author Christopher Healea suggests using the programs to foster character development within the residential assistants and students, explaining “To this end, I believe that divisions of student affairs, which are intentionally structured to facilitate the holistic development of student life, can serve as effective catalysts for character education” (Healea 2006:67). Healea defines character education to be

...an intentional initiative that directly attempts to foster a caring environment where persons are taken seriously as responsible individuals, and where persons are challenged to explore and encouraged to apply essential ethical principles to their own lives and to their relationships with others (Healea 2006:66).

By providing this type of education, universities can help young people to better achieve the balance in life they seek to establish while at college. Other suggestions for programs have included leadership-fostering programs, encourage community involvement, and foster all around social and support networks (Huang & Chang 2004; Li, Sheely, & Whalen 2005; Wang et al. 2003).

### **Living/Learning Communities**

Living and learning communities is a style of residential living and academic programs that has been gaining in popularity over the years. In order to

understand the concept, it needs to be defined in a two step process: first define the concept of a learning community, and then define a living learning community.

A learning community, as defined by authors Inkelas and Weisman, is

Broadly construed, learning communities link together learning opportunities – whether they be courses, co curricular activities, special topics, or interactions and conversations with faculty and peers – to help students integrate and obtain a deeper understanding of their knowledge” (Inkelas & Weisman 2003:335).

Throughout the research, this definition is generally accepted as a broad, encompassing concept defining a learning community (Zhao & Kuh 2004). A living and learning community is one that integrates a learning community with a residential building to provide students with a more structured integration of academics and life.

The critical difference between living-learning programs and other types of learning communities is that the participants not only partake in coordinated curricular activities, but also live together in a specific residence hall where they are provided with academic programming and services” (Inkelas & Weisman 2003:335).

Most living-learning communities incorporate social life, academic life, and general experiences to integrate the residents into a community (Zhao & Kuh 2004).

### *Reasons for a Living-Learning Community*

While there are benefits to a university in establishing a living-learning community, the main focus is on the benefits for the students.

Done well, the interdisciplinary and interactive nature of learning communities introduces students to complex, diverse perspectives, as contrasted with expecting students to come up with the 'right' answer, which is characteristic of traditional pedagogical approaches such as the large lecture class. The structure of learning communities also promotes critical thinking and contextual learning, skills that are increasingly important in an era of information overload (Zhao & Kuh 2004:118).

Living-learning communities also fit with the over-all goals of universities, namely the goals of providing students with life experiences that ultimately enrich and educate the students.

The creation of smaller communities within the larger institutional structures through which meaningful connections are more likely to occur feeds the core of the educational enterprise – learning, discovering, and disseminating new knowledge through research and collaborative investigation (Garrett & Zabriskie 2003:43).

The benefits of the living-learning programs are widely acknowledged, and

...the more students are involved in the social and intellectual life of a college, the more frequently they make contact with faculty and other students about learning issues, especially outside the class, the more students are likely to learn (Tinto 1993 as cited in Garrett & Zabriskie 2003:38).

Living-learning programs seek not only to provide a positive environment for the students to live in, but also to provide a stimulating and educational atmosphere for the students to learn. In fulfilling these requirements, living-learning programs fill a vital need in the campus community:

To promote academic achievement and increase retention among residence hall students, there is a need to provide

college students with out-of-class academic opportunities in the residence halls that enable them to use their surroundings as abundant sources of academic support (Li, McCoy, Shelley II, & Whalen 2005:177).

One of the aspects of a living-learning program is the faculty that resides within the residence building with the students. The close proximity allows not only open access to the faculty member, but also provides a sense of community to the student. The author explains that the interactions students have with the faculty both inside and outside of the classroom are critical to the development of the students (Garrett & Zabriskie 2003). Other aspects of a living-learning community include academic services, social events, and structured programming within the hall (Inkelas & Weisman 2003).

A living-learning program is generally centered on a theme or concept, and the programs and activities are focused to coordinate with the specific topic. Students can then choose a living-learning community that fits with their interests and goals for future development within their university experience. A few of these themes include fresh start/transition programs for freshmen, academic honors programs, and curriculum based/academic themes (Inkelas & Weisman 2003, Li et al. 2005, Garrett & Zabriskie 2003). Each of these themes serves a purpose to the students who reside within the halls, and each provide the students with the options to choose what best fits her or his needs.

One of the factors the administration does need to be aware of is the interests of the students they are creating a program for, and the interests of the university the program resides in. In order to better plan and conduct these

programs, authors Zhao & Kuh suggest two steps a university should take in regards to their living-learning communities:

First, every campus should take stock of how many and what kinds of learning communities are operating and the numbers of different groups of students (e.g. first-year students, men, students of color) who are participating in them. .... Second, efforts should be targeted to creating additional learning communities and attracting students to them, especially those who tend to be underrepresented at the present time. (Zhao & Kuh 2004:131)

### **Gender: Society, Feminist, and Change**

The concept of gender differences is one that has received much attention throughout the years, yet is still an area with so many questions left unanswered. As a fundamental and inescapable aspect of social life, gender is something that influences every student. However, while it does influence all students, the extent and effectiveness of this influence is perceived to be different depending on the specific paradigm that is held.

While there are schools of thought that believe this gender influence is minimal or passive, there are others that believe the discrimination against women is so deeply rooted in society that the only way to effectively change it is to radically reform it (Tong 1998). “Radical feminist” is the term given to this school of thought, and while there are differing opinions within this concept, the basic idea and paradigm is the same for both: gender discrimination is fundamentally integrated into society and there must be a radical overhaul of the social and cultural institutions (Tong 1998).

Despite the differing paradigms in the feminists’ world, there are common threads that link them. One such thread is the agreement that there are

characteristics that have been stereotypically and historically attributed to women. Whether or not these traits are biological and physically inherent or socially taught is still under discussion. Another aspect that feminists from differing schools of thought agree on is certain changes and outcomes. One such outcome is where “authority, autonomy, and universalism would no longer be the exclusive property of men; love dependence, and particularism would no longer be the exclusive property of women” (Tong 1998:6). While these character traits are not inherently wrong, it is the act of delegating them to a specific gender that creates the issue.

### **Gender and the University**

As previously discussed, when a student leaves for the university she/he embarks on a journey of transition. During this time, the influences a student encounters can have a profound impact on the rest of the student’s life. Because of this, the impacts in regards to the gender differences and interactions are very important. The university itself can have a very big role in the influence a student receives, and as such universities have been the subject of numerous studies throughout the years resulting in differing schools of thought. “According to the usual rhetoric, schools are the gateway to social and economic opportunity for those who are willing to study and learn. In the critical literature, the reverse is argued: schools maintain class, race, and gender structures (Holland 1990:6)”

The influence of the university is more what is not said – what remains unspoken and in the shadows – than what is actively taught. Within a social group

the tendency for men and relationships to dominate the conversation can subconsciously influence a young women by setting what is valued (men, relationships) and what is not (academics, careers) through the amount of time each concept deserves (Nathan 2005, Holland 1990). A social support structure is very important to the students, and if a specific area of their development is neglected, or has a lower value placed on it by a students social support network, by default that area will receive less focus from the student. For the women students, with the tendency to focus on men and relationships, the academic and professional side of their university experience quite often is the area that is pushed aside.

The women were more or less left on their own by the university, by their peers, and to a lesser extent by their parents, to develop – or not – careers, to prepare themselves – or not – as future breadwinners. (Holland 1990:8)

While schools may be responsible for some of these influences, there is a greater influence that affects the gender paradigm: society.

Because society has the false belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men, it excludes women from the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. As a result of this policy of exclusion, the true potential of many women goes unfulfilled (Tong 1989).

The influence that society has on the interactions, perceptions, social norms, and general overall view of gender is vast and deep. The influences from society carry over into the academic realm and can sometimes counter the subculture and

teachings of the university (Holland 1990). Because of this, the larger aspect of gender differences in society has been the focus of the feminist community and to a lesser extent society in general, for a number of years.

### **A Different Perspective: Women**

It is a commonly acknowledged fact that there are differences between genders within the collegiate campus environment. However, exactly what these differences are and how they manifest themselves has always been, and probably will always be, a topic of great debate. The differences between the genders can include differences in needs within a residential environment, perceptions of social aspects, structures of organizations, reactions to interpersonal conflict, causes and reactions to stress, and needs within the classroom.

#### *Women and Structure*

One of the basic differences between the genders is the way women react to certain influences as compared to men. Levels of stress can be influenced by the way women react to situations, with certain situations either being classified as a social support or a stress-causing dissonance interaction (Handwerker 1999). The way women react to situations can also impact the way they fit in with an organization, depending on the organization's specific structure (Rao & Stuart 1997).

How gender works within an organization is also an important aspect to consider, particularly for this study because a university is an organization. As

authors Rao and Stuart explained of their findings during a conference in

Canada surrounding women and organizations:

The image that captures our experience of introducing a gender perspective in organizations is the peeling of an onion. An onion must be peeled to release its flavor, yet the process brings tears; and as you peel, you encounter layers after layer. (1997:11)

As the authors point out, gender differences within an organization are often embedded deep in the layers of the inner workings. These differences must be revealed to accurately assess exactly how gender works within each organization and to design strategies for effectively using gender for the benefit of both women and men. In order for an organization to be effective in regards to equality between the genders the structure for fairness has to be built into its very existence, and become evident not only in the espoused values but in the enacted ones as well.

As an organization, the university needs to pay attention to the structures in place that can impact the way genders work. However, not only do aspects need to be in place for equality, there also needs to be regular monitoring of these factors to ensure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.

To have an effective organization, you need to pay attention to accounting all the time. Similarly, you always need to pay attention to gender equity and to deep structure: inherently political processes. (Rao & Stuart 1997:16)

The university as an organization needs to have such accounting methods in place among the various organizational structures on the campus and within the various colleges. The residence environment is one such organization.

### *Women in the Residence Halls*

“The residence hall community affords a particular environment that provides students with more social interaction with peers and faculty” (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991 as cited in Wang et al. 2003:16). As authors Wang et al. (2003:16) explain, the residential halls on campus can be a place where students can find the new network they need during their transition to life on their own. However, the authors are also quick to point out that male and female students have different needs and view points when it comes to communities:

However, because of different gender preferences, males and females have different patterns of involvement and interaction with peers and with the environment in their college community. Males’ interest in their environment allows them to experience a greater sense of community than is true for women (Chiricosta, Work, & Anchors 1996). For women to develop a sense of community, and probably thereby to enhance their level of involvement, they expect a more stable environment and set of interpersonal relationships.

As the authors point out, men and women react to their environment differently. While men are more likely to be interested in their environment which allows them to be more comfortable and establish a community more quickly, women need more time to establish a more stable environment before creating a sense of community. One reason for this is the differences in the types of communities formed by men and women. While men will quickly form a community of acquaintances and teammates, women create a community that is emotionally deeper, more relationship-oriented, thus taking longer to form. For the residential

program at universities, this means that men are more likely to form a community within the buildings more quickly than women. The university can help encourage the community by fostering a stable environment for the women residents.

Nathan also noticed the differences between the genders during her stay in the dorms. She noted that differences in the genders existed in things ranging from the decorations on the doors in the dorms, to eating habits, to differences in conversation topics, to personal relationships (Nathan 2005). She noted that “Some of my late-night talk results are probably “gendered,” in the sense that the topics of relationships and bodies are more likely to dominate women’s conversations” (Nathan 2005:98-99) She noted that topics relating to “boys”, “relationships with boys”, “sex”, and “bodies” instead of academics and careers were more likely to be the subject of women’s conversations. As her study did not focus on gender, these specific differences were not broken down in her findings, although a few, such as conversational topics, were presented.

Nathan also noted the uniqueness of the college experience in regards to community. As she points out, a student earns membership to a college community simply by being a student. Nathan states “As a student, one is immediately enlisted to join the group, to get involved, to realize that one has become a part of the AnyU “community”.” (Nathan 2005:41) Nathan explains that while gender does play a factor in the college residential community, simply the fact of being a student resident earns a spot within a community.

Because differences can exist between genders and their approaches to the university experience and residential living arrangements I chose to focus my research on the female perspective. One of the big changes the on-campus residential housing programs have gone through in the past few years have been in regards to gender. Specifically, the housing administration programs are noticing an increase in the ratio of female students to male students living in the on-campus housing options (Intini 2006), as well as in the university in general (Pollitt 2006). At OSU, the gender ratio is still slightly leaning towards men, with 10,165 male students and 9,197 women students. However, the ratio at OSU is nearly even, and may tip towards women in the next few years. The breakdown of male and women students accepted into the residential programs at OSU is not publicly released information, so further analysis cannot be made.

### *Women in the Classroom*

Gender issues within the classroom are also changing the structure and feeling of the university. Women learn in different ways than men do, and as the ratio of women rises in the classroom professors may unconsciously or consciously tailor their lectures to the women students just as they have been tailored towards the men in the past (Poe 2004). However, as other authors are quick to point out, the traditional stereotypes of “men’s degrees and women’s degrees” are false, and women can learn anything men can, if they simply know they can (Turk 2004). The increase in the ratio of women is also affecting the majors within the university, with few degrees left that are still seen as “men’s”

degrees, most notably being the field of engineering and hard sciences (Intini 2006).

All in all, the involvement and roles women play in the field of higher education has changed considerably in the past few decades (Spencer 2004, Poe unknown, Intini 2006). These changes range from the role women have in the classroom to the general impact women are having on campuses around the world.

#### *OSU: An Example for Others*

As exemplified by the research conducted throughout the years, on many different aspects, the time spent at a university is important in the lives of the students who experience it. When a student leaves for college, she/he begins the first step on the journey that will lead to life as an adult. While a student is in this liminal transitional stage, the environment surrounding that student can influence the changes that occur. One of the ways this is possible is the nature of the college experience: when a student enters the university she/he leaves behind the familiar and enters a world full of new and unknown experiences. The student is now responsible for setting rules and deciding how to manage time, and the balance between academic life and social life is something that each student has to figure out for themselves.

While the physical structure of the residential program can influence the student (i.e. the differences between a residence hall and living/learning community), other factors can have a serious influence as well. One such factor is the differences in the way men and women react to and shape their living

environments. Women tend to react to human interactions and deal with relationships differently from men, placing more importance on the relationships. Because of this, the method and time it takes to create a community within the building is different for the women residents than it is for the men. This is an important factor for the university to recognize, as a failed relationship, or simply a negative one, can have a serious impact on the women residents.

While there are many different factors that can affect the students during this transitional time, a few of them can be controlled through the environment and support structures surrounding the students. These factors are important to understand as they can be influenced by the university, though many studies have been conducted to determine how these aspects affect the students.

While there are many studies on residential programs at universities, there are few that approach the concept looking through the eyes of the students who live it. Through this study I hope to provide this perspective to the university administration at OSU and at other universities who desire to have a positive and effective impact on their students through their on-campus residential programs.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### *The Research Project: Goals*

The goal of this research project is to ascertain the perceptions and viewpoints of the female students living on campus at Oregon State University.

The goals of learning the students' perceptions are to understand:

- The impacts the residential programs have on the students'
- The role the RAs play in the residential life on campus
- The relationship between the RAs and the university administration
- How the role of being an RA impact the lives of the RA students residing in the dorms
- How the RAs impact the lives and experiences of the other student residents
- The gap that exists between the university, the RAs, and the student residents
- How the students perceive the experiences they had in the residential building
- What effects these experiences had on their liminal time at the university and life in the on campus residential programs
- Any differences the students perceive in interactions and in the buildings as a result of gender differences
- The impact gender has on the environment and life inside the on campus residential programs

Not only can these student perceptions help in designing and implementing new residential programs, they can also be used as measures of success for the current administrators and programs in place (Li et al. 2005).

Another one of the goals of this study is to compare the differences of the types of residential options in regards to the impacts on the lives of the students and their time spent at Oregon State University. The differences between the programs housed within the residence halls, Residence College, and cooperatives are significant to both the administration and the students. The goal is to gain a better understanding of these differences.

### *Research Questions*

Students' experiences in their residence buildings can be varied and broad. To better narrow the topic and assist them in focusing their answers, a set of open-ended questions was used. To see the full questionnaire used, see appendix 1. Primary questions for the students include: What is life like here in your building? What have been your favorite and least favorite aspects of living here? How did you choose your building when you first came here? Are there any reasons for choosing your specific building? Do you think living here has made an impact on your life here at OSU so far? How has the experience of living here been different from living in other buildings on campus? How is your residential program (residence hall, cooperative, residence college) different from the other programs on campus? What impact, if any, do you think these programs have on the

students who reside in the buildings? What advice would you give someone in regards to the residential options coming to college for the first time? What are your plans for next year? The RA's were asked the same questions as the student residents as well as how their role as an RA impacted their life and experiences within the halls.

As previously mentioned, this study also focuses on the female gender to narrow the focus of the study and results. The primary gender-related questions include: Do you think it is any different for the girls living here in the building? Are there any gender specific rules or advice? Do you think the experience is any different depending on gender? If you had the option to share a room with a guy, would you? Why or why not? Why do you think there is such a debate about gender-neutral dorms? What are the sides/discussions? What makes it different, if it is, to room with the opposite gender than with the same? If given the choice, do you think there would be more guys than girls who would choose the gender-neutral rooms? Has there ever been a time or experience in the dorms when you thought, "It's a bit difficult being a girl in this situation?" Or has there ever been a time or experience in the dorms when you thought, "It's an advantage to be a girl in this situation." or "I'm glad I'm a girl."? Do you prefer male or female RA's and why?

The concept and stories around the gender neutral dorms and men and women rooming together arose during the course of my conversations with the students. As this was a concept that is very applicable to the gender issues within the halls, I explored this concept with the students.

*Desired Outcomes from Study*

There are several desired outcomes from this study. The overall outcome is to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts living on campus, in the residential program, has on the students who choose to live there. In specific, I seek a better understanding of the students' perspectives, as they have the ultimate say in the success and effectiveness of the various programs that are created and maintained within the University Housing and Dining Services at Oregon State University. Through this research study I seek to provide a working explanation for what these differences are for the students and the impacts the different options have on the student residents.

One of the main outcomes desired is to provide the university administration with a better understanding of the impacts their programs have on the students residing in the residence halls on campus. With a deeper understanding of their programs, the administration can better reach the students residing in the residence halls with their residential and academic programs.

An additional desired outcome is to provide future students with examples and past experiences of student residents to make a more informed decision of where they want to live. The students self-select what programs and residence hall they live and participate in, and the knowledge of the experiences of past students who actually went through the programs will help the future students to choose the right fit for their interests.

The difference for the RAs and RDs in regard to the impact of their roles on the experiences within the buildings is an additional outcome from this study. The study also focuses on how the responsibilities of the RA position impact the individuals who hold them, as well as the impacts the RAs have on the system they are in. The RAs, as a large part of the program, are in a unique position to both be affected by the system and to affect the system itself. How they impact it and what they impact within the system can show where the structure is working and where it breaks down.

Another outcome will be a comparison and explanation of the differences between a residence hall, Residence College, and the cooperatives. One of the most common questions I have answered when talking about my research is “What is a Residence College and how is it different from a dorm?”

### *Limitations*

As a student who went all 6 years of her college experience without ever living in the on-campus residential options, I had little to no idea of what to expect when talking with the students. I had my theories; based on either stereotypes or stories I had heard, but no real experiences on which to base my own opinions. I had stereotypes established of the students who chose to reside in the on-campus residential housing, including the perception that most of the students who choose this option are freshmen, they mostly desire a sense of community, they are willing to experiment with their lives, and that they have a desire to party to a certain

extent. Because of this, the stories I heard and the lessons the students taught me were new and sometimes surprising.

While this study was not initially designed to focus on RAs and their roles, it was modified after it was noted that a significant number of the self-selected participants were RAs. While at first it seemed like a limitation, the focus on RAs is an added advantage to the results of this study as the RAs have a significant role in the on campus residential programs. When it became apparent that there were a considerable number of RAs in the participants, I took advantage of the opportunity and shifted the focus of the research slightly.

I was a little unsure at first what reaction I would get when I asked a student to talk with me, a complete stranger, about their experience living over the past year. To my delight, the students were all very friendly and outgoing; in many instances treating me as a good friend and even in some cases behaving as if they were “confiding” in me what they had learned over the year.

There were several factors present that served to constrain the boundaries of this study, including limited resources, a finite period of time, and the inherent biases of the population studied and myself as a researcher.

Ideally, this study would involve a statistically significant number of participants and be longitudinal in nature, following participants throughout their academic career and sampling multiple years of students. This study would also ideally factor in a quantitative aspect involving a life/satisfaction survey of a larger number of the residents of the programs.

In studying the residential options at one university, the data is relevant mostly for that university. While it is mainly applicable for this university, others can use the data as a base of comparison and suggestions for what they should research in their own programs.

As a researcher, there are also biases that I bring into the research and analysis of the data. I was a transfer student into the university, and as such did not experience the “freshman” year at a university. I also never resided on campus, choosing instead to house off campus with friends. As such I did have a preconceived notion about what life would be like within the buildings, although these impressions were not negative, simply not something I cared to experience. I did not care for this experience based mainly on my own introverted personality, as I perceived the on campus housing to be suited for more extroverted personalities.

Future areas of study that would be beneficial for the housing programs to learn more about would include: A longitudinal continuation of the research I have started here, as the students would be able to pay more attention to the impacts to better communicate them; a study that focuses more specifically on segregating the students based on major to see if a student’s major impacts their residential experiences at all, and a greater in-depth study of the culture of the students residing in the halls and the societies they create within them. Other areas for future research center around dividing the students up into various other focuses, including exploring the gender divide in more depth (continuing with

women, or adding men into the study) or subdividing women based on interest, physical, or psychological differences.

### *Methods*

For the purpose of narrowing the field of participants, the population was defined to include female students who are currently residing or have resided within the on-campus residential options at OSU within the past 2 years. The population also includes the administrators of the buildings, including Residential Assistants (RA's) and Residential Directors (RD's).

To accurately attain the perceptions of the students, individual interviews were conducted with 17 current female students spread out across the various residential programs, with the classifications of participants being 11 current student residents, 5 RA's, and 2 past resident. The limited number of respondents was due in large part to the limitations of time and money for this study. While the number of respondents is a limitation, thematic redundancy was attained in the data.

Because participation in the study was voluntary, student respondents were entirely self-selected. Because of this, there was a leaning towards the RA's more than towards the regular residents. I noticed a tendency of the regular residents to either ignore a request or simply not be interested in participating, whereas the RA's were more willing to give their time and be a part of the study. This could be attributed to the fact that RA's could see this as part of their responsibility as an RA in the UHDS, or simply it is more in their personality to volunteer for things

such as a study, and being an RA aligns with that. While this leaning towards the RA's and RD's provided for interesting analysis, it did change the focus of the study slightly, as it no longer focuses solely on student residents and broadens the focus to include the student administrators. However, while the fact that a sizable portion of the data came from the RAs and RDs was initially a limitation, it turned out to be an advantage when the data was separated based on student roles and then analyzed for differences.

While female students were the focus of the study, male students were interviewed if they were in administrative positions, such as the Residential Assistants (RA's) or Residential Directors (RD's). For a detailed chart of the students interviewed, including building and year in college, see appendix #2. The students interviewed and their categories are as such:

- For the Residential College, 4 female students, 1 female RA, and 2 male RA's were interviewed.
- For the Residential Halls, 4 female students, 4 female RAs, 1 male RD, and 1 male RA were interviewed.
- For the Cooperatives, 3 females of women's housing and 1 male VP of the men's house were interviewed.
- Two female students were interviewed who had resided off campus for at least a year but were former on-campus residents in the residential halls. These students were interviewed to obtain a future perspective looking back at the residential programs.

- Three administrators for the residential college were also interviewed to obtain the viewpoint of the faculty within the building. As this study focuses on the student's viewpoints, the data gathered from the administration was limited and is labeled as coming from the administration within the findings.

The interviews conducted were in-depth and semi-structured. A questionnaire was used, but the interview itself was organic in nature and therefore evolved according to the specific experiences and personalities of the participants (See Appendix 1 for Interview Topic Guide).

For this study, the qualitative ethnographic approach was chosen to better ascertain the perceptions and opinions of the students. A qualitative study was chosen for the ability to be more exploratory in nature and to go in-depth into the participants' perceptions and opinions (Bernard 2006).

In addition to individual interviews, participant observation was also used to gather data. As a student worker in one of the programs within Weatherford, I was able to observe the day-to-day activities within the Residential College. For the Residential Halls and the Cooperatives, I attended several student functions that took place within the buildings. I was also able to attend several official student functions put on through the administration of the programs. Through all of the events, I was a participant observer. That is, I followed the students around but did not actively take part in the festivities as a student (Bernard 2006). For this study, I attended several student events with the residential buildings, toured the student housing, was given a tour of a few

of the buildings by the residents, and attended several student-led activities within the residential buildings.

The samples were chosen in part for their applicability to the study. The purpose was to attain the perceptions of the students living on-campus; specifically looking at the effects living on campus has had on their collegiate life. Because of the size and methods of the data collection, I was able to attain more in-depth interactions with the informants. As a result of using these methods of data collection – individual interviews with both students and administration, and participant observation– triangulation of the findings was possible.

### *Sampling*

For the selection of participants, a purposive or judgment sampling method was used. A non-statistical sampling method was chosen because of the in-depth nature of the research study. In a purposive or judgment sample, the participants are chosen based on a few specific reasons, one being the experiences of specific cultural phenomena that a researcher wishes to study (Bernard 2006). For this study, the specific population targeted was students who were currently residing in the residential halls, the residential college, or a cooperative. A judgment sample selection process was chosen because of the self-selecting process the students go through and the in-depth nature of the study. Each building houses a different number of students, with a total population of on-campus students at approximately 3,500. The majority of these students (approximately 3,000) reside

in the residence halls, with around 200 living in the cooperatives and the remaining in the residential college.

The Snowball sampling method was also utilized once a participant had been identified who fit the criteria. The use of student referrals was especially helpful because of the skeptical nature of some of the students residing on campus; if a friend had recommended they talk to me, they were less apprehensive about meeting.

To begin recruiting the residential students within the UHDS, I first contacted the administrators of the program to obtain permission to contact and talk to their residents. Once permission was granted (see appendix #3 for the approval letter), I contacted the students I knew who also knew students residing within the halls. I then contacted the residents themselves, and either asked them if they would be willing to be a part of the study or if they knew someone who would be willing, depending on if they fit the criteria to be an informant. For the initial contact, the popular student community site Facebook was often used as a means of communication. The students contacted through Facebook were first recommended to me through a mutual friend and then I would use the messaging option to contact them, always including the name of the mutual acquaintance in the message. I also utilized email quite frequently, as well as phone calls. While the phone calls were used exclusively for contacts, the emails were used for the interviews when necessary, as explained below. Once a student agreed to participate, we set up a meeting time at a public spot on campus chosen by the student. After the interview was completed, the participant was then asked if she

knew of anyone else who would be willing to participate. Through these methods the participants for this study were located and recruited.

### *Interview Structure*

The interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour long. As a pre-cursor to the interview, a brief chat regarding the students' day, courses, etc was conducted, and while these chats were not an integral part of the research, they gave me a better idea of who my participants were and what they valued in their university experiences.

As stated previously, the interviews were semi-structured in format. A questionnaire was developed to lead into the areas of interest that I wished to cover in the interviews. The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to provide common questions up front to help the informant feel more at ease in the interview. Each question chosen for the questionnaire was structured in a way to be open-ended and encourage as much discussion as possible. By the end of the interviews, the students seemed at ease and would often volunteer information. Furthermore, at the end of each interview the student was asked if there was any information she could think of that we had not covered in the interview and in each case the answer was no.

In a few of the cases for the interviews, three to be precise, the students were unable to meet with me in person for the allotted time due to conflicts in schedules. Because of this, the student spoke with me briefly, then answered the questionnaire via email. Due to the necessity of following up with the respondents

and further discussing certain points of their answers, the students who responded via email agreed to be contacted multiple times to fully explore the questions.

During each personal interview, audio recording was taken as well as extensive notes. In each case, the student was asked if she was comfortable with the interview being recorded and in each case the participant gave consent.

### *The Interviews*

As a student myself and as a peer of the current generation and demographic set, the students all seemed relatively at ease at the beginning of the interviews, and completely at ease by the end. I also believe being a female myself caused a level of “connection” between myself and my informants that assisted in fostering camaraderie. I also made a point of dressing “like a student” to further promote the perceptions of similarity.

Interviews with the students were typically conducted at a location on campus of the students choosing. One of the reasons for allowing the student to choose the location was to put the student more at ease. In some instances, the students also gave me a tour of the building they resided in.

In all cases, the students were very friendly and were more than willing to not only help me out with their time, but also recommend several friends and acquaintances to also be participants. This attitude seemed to also be representative of the overall culture within the residential program and will be discussed in detail in the chapter covering the Residential Halls.

### *Analysis*

For the analysis, all audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions and notes taken during the interviews were then analyzed for themes using the grounded theory method (Bernard 2006). The grounded theory approach is one whereby the data is analyzed through a series of 6 steps: 1: Transcribe and read through the interviews. 2: Identify and code themes. 3: Pull all information about the themes, compile and compare them. 4: Analyze commonalities among the themes. 5: Use the commonalities to build findings. 6: Present these findings using quotes and data from the interviews (Bernard 2006:492). The discovery of the themes was very much a learning process, as each of the interviews was first transcribed, then analyzed and compared with each other.

For the discovery and analysis of the themes, a process was followed. Once all the interviews had been transcribed and the data collected, I went through and created a spreadsheet of the participants, including a brief bio (appendix #2). I also assigned pseudonyms for each participant to protect their confidentiality.

Using the grounded-theory method from Bernard outlined above, I analyzed the transcripts from the interviews for themes in the interviews. While conducting the interviews, I had begun to notice emerging themes. These themes were written down during the interview process and later compared to the transcriptions from the recordings. If the themes were verified through the transcriptions they were then added to a list. Themes from the notes and

transcripts were coded and then added to the list for the write up. These themes were pulled from my notes and transcriptions and marked down with the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. Once the themes had been identified, I listed them in a separate document. I then went back through the data and pulled quotes and supporting data for each theme. If there was not enough supporting data for a specific theme, it was removed from the themes list. The themes were also compared with each other for similarities and connections.

The themes list with supporting quotes was used in the write up of the data later on in this study. I also would review the data specific to the area I was focusing on during the write up to ensure consistency and accuracy.

*Objective: Students' Perspectives*

The methods selected and employed in this study were chosen with one goal in mind – to accurately obtain and report on the students' perspectives of their experiences residing in the on-campus residential housing at Oregon State University. Through the various methods employed, repetition was achieved and the picture of what life is like within the buildings emerged through the voices of the students who live in them.

## **Chapter 5: The Residential Environment – A Community within the University**

When first beginning the journey through college, one of the first and very important decisions a student is faced with is choosing where to live. The living environment chosen can shape the direction and influencing factors of the rest of the time spent at the university. Not only are the roommates a factor, but also the immediate support structure and interaction with the university is determined by the design and purpose of the specific residential option chosen. While this new environment can be exciting and filled with opportunities, it can also be a challenge to navigate and adjust to.

The new environment can take its toll on many students. The changes, although they may appear obvious and/or trivial, can be very significant. The student will be experiencing a number of important lifestyle changes. (Budny & Paul 2003:5)

For students beginning life at Oregon State, there are three main choices for the on-campus living options: the Residential Halls, the Cooperatives, and the Residential College. Each choice provides a reasonably different living experience at the university.

While the students' self-select in what style of residential living they would like to begin their collegiate years, the actual building is most often left to university assignment. The placement method employed at OSU is a method whereby students select their top choices of buildings on their application and the university then places the students according to either their selections, need for

student numbers in a certain building, or administrative judgment. This means that while the student can choose which structure to reside in (residence hall, coop, or residence college) the actual theme is most often chosen by the university administration. There are exceptions to this rule, as students who fit a certain requirement (i.e. honors students) who apply to their specific building are most often placed there. However, while the university does attempt to match students to the theme of the building that they believe would be a best fit for both the student and the overall building environment, this method for placement can serve to further the gap between university officials and campus residents as the students do not always see the reasoning behind their placement. Sam, an RA in Weatherford, was placed there even though Weatherford was not on his list of preferred buildings. He expressed confusion as to why he was placed there, although he did enjoy his placement and was an active member of the Weatherford community.

### *The Residential Halls*

The residential halls at Oregon State University comprise most of the on-campus residential options. There are 13 residential halls, as compared to 1 residential college and 4 cooperatives. The halls are the “traditional” choice of housing, being commonly and stereotypically referred to and known as the “Dorms”.

In each residential hall, there are several Residential Assistants (RAs), a Residential Director (RD), and the occasional residential faculty or other

administrative resident. The number of RAs in a particular building depends on the number of students the building can house. The Residential Assistants (RAs) report directly to the Residential Director (RD), who then reports to the UHDS person who is responsible for the RDs specific building. The process of placing the RAs, RDs, and resident faculty is a combination of choice and administrator-determined assignment. The applicants designate their top choices, and while weight is given to their choices, the decision is ultimately up to the UHDS administrators.

While there are 13 residential halls at Oregon State, four of the “halls” actually comprise the four corners of one building, unofficially titled “The quad” (composed of Buxton, Cauthorn, Hawley, and Poling). When asked which hall they live in, the residents of any one of the four may reply with either the official name of their hall, or simply respond “I live in the quad”.

While the other buildings are generally referred to by their name, they are occasionally grouped together based on geography, such as “the dorms on the east side”, or “the buildings over here on the west”.

#### *Designation: Residence Halls*

When looking at the residential halls, it is important to first note how they are referred to. While officially called “Residence Halls”, most of the students simply called them “the dorms”. At first glance, this does not seem like that important, but after studying the way the students use the words, it seems to

represent the way they feel about their particular residential choice. The differences between the administration and the students in the way they addressed the buildings is a good example of the gap that exists in the residential program between the residents and the university. The students would most often refer to the halls as “dorms” when talking as if the halls had no particular distinctiveness to them, when simply referring to them as the stereotypical collegiate on-campus residential building. When the students used the term dorm, they were simply using it as a term they had always used to refer to the on-campus residential buildings – not much thought was put into the term. However, to the students the word may simply be a word, but this is not the case with everyone, as it had been explained to the RAs. As one of the RAs explained, the word “Dorm” was considered by the administration as containing too many negative connotations, as meaning exactly what the students were referring to – the stereotypical dorm experience. The RAs explained that the concept had been explained to them by the administration as a term implying a “party” experience, a residential environment that does not have a true academic or “responsible” focus and instead has the atmosphere of drinking and aimlessness. By using the term “residence hall”, the RAs explained, the administration seeks to imply more of a serious, responsible, “academic” feel within their buildings.

For one of the RAs in the residential college the difference between the building she was in and the regular “dorm” was a very real and important factor in her decision to live on campus. Trischa is a senior student in the College of Business residing in Weatherford as an RA. During her junior year she resided off

campus, but decided to move back on due to the creation of the Austin Entrepreneurship Program in Weatherford Hall. During our conversations she made it clear the only reason she decided to move back on campus during her senior year was because Weatherford was a residential college, not an average dorm. As a residential college, the AEP and Weatherford held a distinction within the professional community and collegiate program that the other residence halls did not. Trisha felt that this distinction – both during her time in college and afterwards on a resume’ – was enough of a difference for her to move back onto campus for her senior year. She also valued the experience and lessons learned through the programs within Weatherford. These programs and knowledge gained through the residential college are what make the difference between Weatherford and the other residence halls.

The differences that set apart a hall can be a point of pride to a student and help to create a sense of belonging. This was true for all the halls, not only Weatherford. The students who appeared to have greater connections to their buildings more often referred to them according to their proper name (Wilson, McNary, etc) and the students with a lower connection referred to them more often as simply the “dorms”. This connection between the students and their buildings is most apparent in their involvement with their building community, including (but not limited to) their fellow residents and the overall social community, including building events and activities. Because of this distinction, the university should focus on changing the way the students refer to their halls, though not from

dorm to another generic name, such as residence hall, but on having the students refer to the buildings by their name.

The name by which the residents referred to them seemed in large part dependent on their role within the building: the residents simply called them dorms, while the RAs called them Residential Halls, correcting themselves when they would mess up and say dorm. As the university's connection to the students, the RAs and RDs feel the pressure from the administration to change the name of the buildings. The RAs feel the burden of trying to communicate something they have not completely assimilated themselves. While they understand the idea of changing their vocabulary, they do not fully see the need for it, and when talking refer to it as just another one of the university's rules that they are required to follow. When asked why they were not supposed to use the term, they replied that it was something the university required, so they did. They did not see that much of an impact on how the students perceived the residential programs, as the official name had little meaning. This tends to further the gap of understanding that exists between the residents and university – when the university is trying to communicate a concept and the students whose job it is to pass this information along do not fully understand the concept. I even noticed several RAs making it a game to catch and correct each other. I observed three RAs chatting and the interaction that ensued when one of them messed up and used the title of dorm:

RA 1: Really just depends on what their style and personality is. I think the UHDS does a really good job of just diversifying their dorms, just to fit different needs

RA 2: Residence halls!!

RA 3: Oh, snap!!

One of the interesting things about this interaction was the manner in which the RAs were conversing with each other. These RAs were residing all in one building together and had established an obvious rapport with one another. They had camaraderie created by the fact that these students were facing the same challenges, namely being the face of the university to the students, and attempting to span the gap that exists. While the RAs are willing to try to span the gap that exists between the university and the students, they are often at a loss as to how to effectively do that. One of the reasons this is difficult is little communication between the university and the RAs themselves as to exactly how the university should be represented to the students.

During one of the interviews conducted with an RA of the university housing system, I mistakenly referred to the building as a “dorm”. The RA was quick to correct me: it was a residence hall, not a dorm. Throughout my research of the official documentation of the UHDS, the title of “Dormitory” is rarely used, and the buildings are almost universally referred to as “Residence Halls”. However, through my interviews with residents it became apparent that this change was a result of a switch with the official administrative accepted terminology, and not a result of changes among the students. When talking, the residents mainly referred to the buildings as dorms, with the RAs being the most noticeable group who would refer to them as residence halls.

Lauren is a student who had spent her freshman and sophomore years on campus in different residential halls. She had spent time becoming actively involved in her halls, serving on the hall council and other activities. She recalled her time spent on hall council and the words within the halls when she remembered the policy regarding the use of the word dorm: “If you were on hall council, you couldn’t call them dorms; you had to call them residence halls.” She then explained that the reasons behind this shift were a result of the implications of a dorm, of the perceptions held by society regarding a “dorm”. She explained that the perceptions of the stereotypical dorm life (including partying, alcohol, little to no focus on academics, drugs, sex, etc) was something the administration was wanting to avoid having associated with the residential programs within the halls. Therefore, the administration referred to the buildings as halls in an attempt to move away from that stereotype and create a different perception of their on-campus residential programs. She referred to the word “dorm” as “taboo” within the hall council. The RAs mostly reacted to this shift with the attitude of “this is just something the university wants done”, and did not seem to have a strong opinion one way or the other.

The RAs are faced with a difficult situation in attempting to impart a change to the students that they themselves are new to and often do not fully understand as they are also students. In their role as RA they are expected to be the face of the university for the other student residents. This can become difficult when the ideals and concepts they are supposed to represent are often new for them.

This gap between the students' perspective and the administrators' desires for the intentions of the buildings is a perfect example of the disconnect that exists on campus between the residents and the university. The administrators have an ideal for the buildings they want to communicate to their students and the outside community, and therefore they have implemented a name change throughout the on-campus residential programs. However, this ideal the administrators have has not been communicated effectively to the residents, as the only aspect they have seen of this is the name change. As a result, the change is not felt by the students and is not shared by them, making the administrations' struggle to re-brand the buildings very difficult to the point of impossible and perhaps misguided. If the students have a differing opinion, desire, and goals for their residential programs, then any attempt by the university to change the structures contrary to these needs is not going to be effective and could in fact alienate the students even farther from the university. The administration needs to take the students' opinions and perspectives into consideration when making any alterations and needs to effectively communicate any changes and reasons for these changes to the students, both current and future.

### *The Hall Themes*

In addition to changing the official reference of the buildings as residence halls instead of dorms, the UHDS also implemented "themes" within each hall. These themes were implemented by the university and while theoretically exist in every building, they only practically occur in a few. The reason for this difference

between theoretical and practical implementation lies in the communication gap between the university and the students who actually make up the community within each building, as what the university has in mind for the theme may not be what the students actually enact throughout the year. The themes implemented are practical focuses for the living environment and social activities within the buildings. The residence halls' themes functionally exist where the UHDS gives priority to students with certain majors or interests in order to create an atmosphere within the building. The UHDS also instructs the RAs to focus the programs and events within the hall on the theme that is assigned within the building. The themes typically are evident in the characteristics of the students residing within the halls. Some of the students did research online and in university literature on the dorms and use these themes in deciding where they wanted to live (See chapter 2 for a full list of themes). Beckie, a freshman in McNary, chose to live there because of the theme of the building. As she puts it "Well, I was accepted into the honors college, and I figured that McNary is the honors dorm, so I figured it would be a good place for me because people wouldn't be coming in and partying all the time, and it would be quiet, and there would be people kinda like me."

No matter what form they took, the students knew about the themes and said that based on the characteristics of the students residing in the halls it had a real impact on the community and feel of the building, whether these impacts were positive or negative. For example, the freshman experience themed hall was more of a party hall than McNary, the honors themed hall. The freshman experience theme for the students equated to more of a non-theme in that it focused on

university life and becoming involved, and less of a focus on an actual concept. This focus works well for the freshmen who are just coming to the university as it does not involve them in another subset of activities to distract from the goal of becoming generally integrated with the university community. The idea of the freshman experience is explored in the following chapters. This theme, as well as a few of the other themes in the various buildings, has an effect on the over all culture within the hall. The other themes made impacts as well, with the freshmen experience focused hall being seen as more of the “party hall” while McNary, as the honor’s hall, is seen as more academic and studious. The RAs in Wilson, the engineering themed hall, also mentioned the impacts the theme has on their building. They explained that some of the characteristics of this include “socially awkward” residents, a majority of males in the building, and the popularity of “gaming”. The RD also felt the impacts of the gaming preference of his building, stating

... it’s just like literally any hour of the day, half of the people that are awake are playing video games. I mean, if it’s noon and the entire building is awake, half of our building is playing video games, and if it’s 4am in the morning and 4 people are awake, at least 2 of them are playing video games. That’s just the way it works.

Beckie is a student in the residence hall McNary. She explained to me that she chose her building because of the perceptions that exist around the communities within each hall: Callahan with the freshman experience theme was seen as more of a party hall and Sackett, the substance free themed hall, has a reputation for students getting into trouble with alcohol, party due to the focus, as

the university is more strict within this building on alcohol and substance.

Beckie explained that she chose McNary with an honors theme because she wanted a place where she could get away from all the noise and have a quiet place to study when she needed to, and as the honors-themed building McNary was her choice.

### *RAs and RDs as the Administrators*

While each building had a unique theme, the basic structure remained the same: RAs, hall council, RD, and the faculty administrative staff. When looking at the overall living environment the students are in, it is important to note the methods by which the administration and university interact with the students. Not only is communication important for the day-to-day interactions, the way the decisions of the administration are communicated to the students is also very important.

For the students, the RAs and RDs were the administration of the university. They laid down the law; they were the face of the UHDS. The students did not know any of the university employees or faculty members. However, even the RAs are distanced from the UHDS, mainly receiving their information from either their RD, or the RA-specific events. One of the RDs, Brad, stated this very directly:

I think the RAs are a lot more separated from the UHDS than obviously I am, but all their feedback, like 99% of what they are going to hear is going to come from me. I mean, I get everything. I have weekly meetings with people from the University. From their perspective, yes, they are very separated from the upper levels. But I on the other hand feel

very connected to them, and I hear all sorts of input from that side of things, and I just pass it on to the staff. And I don't tell them if it came from me, or is coming from my boss, so they have no way of telling if I'm telling them what they need to be doing, or if the director of the UHDS is telling them this is what you need to be doing.

One of the main areas for disconnect occurs within the roles of the RAs. As the face of the University for the students, the RAs have the responsibility of communicating the ideals of the university to the students, which can be difficult for the RAs as they personally have limited contact with the university administration. With such a disconnect between the students and the UHDS there are numerous areas where miscommunication can occur. This disconnect effectively creates a gap between the students and the university. This can heavily impact the effectiveness of the programs and decisions put forth by the University Housing and Dining Services.

The RAs also echoed this statement, saying:

I kinda get what they [RDs] say, and I feel like I know what they want it to be, like a good community, and a good experience, and all the academic stuff, and the engineering theme. But I don't feel like we get a lot of input, like, everything comes through [her RD], and even then we don't feel like it's coming from the university or people up in housing, so I don't really think I get a lot of input from them about how they want it to be.

The residents also felt disconnected from the UHDS, many simply stating "I don't know the UHDS" when asked about the official structure or programs from the university. This apparent lack of conscience knowledge of the

community/structure the student belongs to also correlates with their changes in vocabulary and the apparent lack of actively recognizing the residents.

The communication divide between the RAs and university is the most significant of the disconnects that exists within the residential programs, as the RAs are the face of the university to the main population of student residents. This is a significant issue because if the RAs do not fully understand the program objectives and ideals, how then are they to effectively communicate these to the main student body? Throughout the stories the student would tell, there was a common theme among them: if the RA was effective in connecting with her or his students, then the students were more likely to enjoy the time spent in the program and have a sense of community in their building. The exceptions to this are when students form a group themselves, although in these instances the students tend to associate with their group and not their residential building. The involvement of the RAs was more likely to create a connection between the students and the university within their perceived community. To create this connection is one of the main goals of the university because it can lead to increased involvement in the programs and increased retention, as many of the students cited a need for a closer “family” feel as one of the main reasons they were moving from campus housing. This need for a family and community is explored in detail in the Findings section.

*Weatherford: A Residential College*

“I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.” Confucius, 551

B.C.

This is the theory behind the partnership between the UHDS, the College of Business and the College of Engineering to create the residential college housed inside Weatherford Hall. The Austin Entrepreneurship Program (AEP) is the official and unofficial curriculum that is provided to the residence within Weatherford. The partnership between the UHSD and the College of Business seeks to close the distance of the gap that exists between students and the university by embedding an academic college within the residential building; thereby creating what is designed to be an effective bridge between residents and administration.

As the only residential college at OSU and one of the largest in the nation, there is considerable attention focused on the building and the program. The majority of this attention is focused on whether or not the program will succeed. Therefore, the AEP is under tremendous pressure to create a successful program. One of the measurements of this success is the amount of involvement the program is able to achieve with the residents of the building. Because of this measurement, the focus on students is readily apparent in the overall structure of the program.

For the AEP, the Weatherford building itself is a prominent aspect of the residential college program. As such, the building was, and continues to be, a crucial aspect in its success. As this is the case, the AEP has a great advantage in its location, as Weatherford is one of the prominent and impressive buildings in Oregon State University.

The theme that was chosen, the residential college program, went through a long process before it was approved. The theme itself is different from the regular

residence halls and the cooperatives, and as such it is interesting to look at the history of the building. During one of our talks, Dave, one of the administrative staff at Weatherford, told me the story of how the Austen Entrepreneurship Program came to be housed in Weatherford Hall. The renovation of Weatherford had an estimated price tag of \$20 million dollars. When it was determined how much it was going to cost to renovate it, it was not known exactly what Weatherford would be. According to another one of the administrative informants, the dean of the College of Engineering asked the Provost for Weatherford for an entrepreneurship themed college. Together with the College of Business, the partnership of the two colleges started looking for donors and partners from whom the money for the renovation could be raised. With a \$4 million donation from the Austen family, and \$6 million total, the partnership of the College of Business and the College of Engineering was able to secure the building for their program. The renovation of Weatherford started in January of 2003 and was finished in September of 2004. It opened its doors to students that September and launched the AEP residential college.

#### *The Newness of Weatherford and the AEP*

Once the theme was chosen for the building, the program was created and started. Because the building had been recently renovated, and the program was new enough it had not gained much momentum, the attractiveness of the building was a significant theme that came up in the data. This is another example of the gap between the university and the students: the university implemented a new

overall living environment structure and the perception the students had of the overall effect was focused on the physical remodeling of the structure. The message of the program housed within the building was lost for a good portion of the students.

The respondents mentioned multiple times throughout the interviews, from both the residents and the administrative staff, how new Weatherford is, both as a building and as a college. On the other side, the administrative staff focused more on the newness of the program, but also acknowledged the appeal of Weatherford as a new building.

The quality of a building is something that also came up frequently in the interviews with the resident hall students, as they would mention the state of the building in their descriptions. The students would be describing the buildings as “oh, but that’s the ghetto building”, “the apartment style ones are really nice”, or “and then there’s Weatherford, which is the nice one”. The over-all state of repair of a building is important to the students.

The residents also acknowledged the newness of the AEP within Weatherford as a college, but that didn’t come up as often as did the building itself. In regards to the program, one of the residents, Trisha, mentioned that she has noticed the attendance of the Fireside Chats increase with time. She said that in the beginning, only like 2 or 3 students would attend, whereas now there are usually considerably more than that.

However, the administrative staff focused on a different issue with Weatherford. Within Weatherford, the administrative staff is a mix between the

UHDS and the COB, with the standard RAs and RD from the UHDS and the remaining majority from the COB. While the staff did acknowledge the appeal and newness of the building, they were more focused on the newness of the program. Three of the administrative staff likened the program to an entrepreneurial start-up. One of them mentioned that one of the attractive aspects of the job was that it is a startup, that it excites him. Another one of the staff, Dave, said, "...in a way, we are very much an entrepreneurial model ourselves. None of this has been done before."

However, because it is such as new venture, several of the staff also brought up the trial and error part of creating the program. As one of the informants, Tim, put it, "...we tried things in the first year that didn't work." As a result of the trial and error, he mentioned a few of the changes that had been made. A new program, the AEP TICK program, was implemented this past summer. He also mentioned that the new program "was kept under the radar" this year. One of the other residential staff, Mat, mentioned that this is really the "start-up year of Weatherford", so it has the usual start up difficulties.

The AEP TICK program stands for Teamwork, Individual Development, Community, and Knowledge. The TICK program is the formal academic program designed and implemented specifically for the AEP, and is one of the crucial elements that makes Weatherford stand out from the other residential buildings. Within the program, students complete "competencies" by writing a one-page paper on one of the given subjects. These papers can be written about anything the student feels has taught her or him the lesson of the specific competency. As one

of the RAs explained, these applications to fulfill the competency can be about anything – from learning to interact with people from your girlfriend to what you learned from the most recent visiting fellow.

### *The Building is the Reason*

While the administrative staff endeavors to fill the hall with students who have an active interest in entrepreneurship, for some of the residents it's a different reason all together. Weatherford itself as a building came up several times as a reason for choosing to live there, apart from the academic program housed within. One of the students, mentioned "...standing under the arches, I was like 'Wow, I got to go here'". Weatherford is also a draw for students, with one of them stating "Cause I saw this place, and I was like 'You know what, I'm only going to Oregon State only if I can live in Weatherford'." Another of the resident informants mentioned when asked if she liked it here "Yah, it's super close to everything and super new".

Although the building can be a positive draw for students, it can also be a difficult issue for trying to build an active student program. The main difficulty for the RAs in this case is closing the disconnect between what the students perceive the building to be and what the program is intended to be by the UHDS and the COB. Closing this gap is one of the biggest challenges the RAs face. One of the RAs, Mark, said that "...a lot of, excuse my language, a lot of students just

BS the application. A lot of students love the building. That's just it; a lot of students love the building. Like, I, you know, why did I want to be an RA in this building? Well, cool location, it's a nice building, and that's pretty much it." He also said "A lot of the students look at the building in that way. In that they don't really see the entrepreneurship program. It's like 'Eh, I should be doing this entrepreneurship program'. They're like 'Eh, this is a cool building' and so they'll, you know, write the, you know, the pretty answers on the application to get in that door." Mark is an RA that was placed within Weatherford, and though he started out living here rather indifferent to the program, he now actively participates and encourages other residents to do the same. Another student, Pat, when asked if she knew about the program within the building before she chose to live there, replied "Not at first. When we applied we knew. The building was a big draw. We heard it was going to be the international dorm, and that would have been ok too. There wasn't a whole lot explained to us when we applied for it. It was a tiny form. It wasn't hard to get in... as you can see with some of the people already in the program."

However, while some of the residents who came to live here because of the building are now active participants, this is not the case with all of the residents: two of the other residents did not apply specifically for Weatherford, are not active members of the program, and do not plan on returning here next year. Both of them are members of sororities (although different ones), and mentioned that their sororities do have a requirement that they live in their sorority house for a period of time. This does play a factor in their decision to participate, as one of them

mentioned that because she is not living here next year, she sees no reason to participate.

*The Uniqueness of the Residential College Program.*

For some of the residents the building was the main reason for choosing Weatherford, while for others the message of the university was heard and the residential college was a very real draw. The uniqueness of Weatherford as a residential college also emerged as a theme. As a concept, the idea of a residential college is different from any other residential housing option at OSU and in the Oregon University Network. As one of the residents, Trisha, put it, “Weatherford is so unique. I wouldn’t live on campus if I didn’t live here. You know, it would be beneath me.” Trisha also sees Weatherford as being an “elite” residence hall. This is a considerably different view from the residents in the other resident halls, as they quite often see the halls as very similar to each other. Mat, one of the administrative staff, also brought up how unique Weatherford really is. He said that it is the only residential college in the West Coast and the only entrepreneurial residential college in the nation. He also mentioned that he does think the uniqueness has an effect on the students who want to, or currently do, live here. Jackie, another one of the administrative staff, mentioned that besides a school in Maryland, the AEP is really the only other option for someone who is looking for this kind of program.

Other residents expressed this in different ways, with one of them stating that she expected the students who lived there to be more “studious”, because they

had to fill out the extra application essay in order to be accepted to live there.

Jackie also mentioned that Weatherford and its programs and events are designed to help the students network, mentioning, "...these networks last forever." One of the RAs mentioned that if the AEP had not been housed within Weatherford, had it not been a residential college, she would not have chosen to live there and become an RA. Trisha explained "I chose to live in Weatherford. I didn't consider any other hall. I probably wouldn't be excited about other halls."

The goal of training the students for the future is also one of the frequently mentioned aspects. This is to be expected as Weatherford is a residential college. I asked the students what they thought the main goal of the program was, and most of them had a pretty good idea of what they saw the aim of the program to be. One of the students, Pat, explained the main goal: "I think just to get people thinking about business. Give them the skills they can't learn in the classroom. We're going to be running companies some day, so us planning and doing things now, will develop our skills to achieve our goals. These objectives are being accomplished. They are moving in the right direction."

### *Student Participation*

As a result of the uniqueness of the program, there is a considerable amount of pressure on the administrative staff of Weatherford and the AEP to succeed. One of the very critical areas necessary for the success of the AEP and Weatherford is the level of participation they can achieve with the students. Without the students, the program does not succeed and the residential college

becomes just like any other resident hall. Involvement from the students – a closer living/learning environment that closes the gap between university and students – is one of the main reasons for implementing this new residential structure. Because of this, the type and amount of student involvement is something that is very important to the administration, and as such the RAs are very aware of it. The level of participation came up in quite a few different ways through out the interviews and chats. Trisha, one of the residents, mentioned that she believes that the objectives of Weatherford “...are being accomplished by the people who are involved.”

However, she also had quite a bit to say about how the residents are encouraged to become involved. She mentioned that the RAs are pushed and pushed to increase the level of participation among their residents, and she doesn't agree with this practice. Tim, one of the administrative staff, also brought up this concept by stating that “something we learned in the first year was the importance of the RAs. They are the ‘face’ of Weatherford, you know?” The RAs and students both mentioned that the level of participation among the RAs varied considerably, with the level ranging from heavily involved to not at all. While the RAs do go through more training from the university as a result of both the UHDS and the COB contributing and more access to COB staff within the building, their level of active involvement still varied from RA to RA. Another of the residents, Ben, mentioned that if you just get out there and do the competencies, the aspect of the TICK program that consists of students submitting page-long written proposals for the completion of a specific learning area, then you would “all of a sudden

learn a lot.” One of the interesting aspects of the TICK program and competency completion is that both the students and the RAs are completing it at the same time, so there is little distinction among them. This will change as the program matures and RAs apply that have lived in the program and completed it, but for now the RAs are going through the program at the same time as the regular residents. This does create a bit of a controversy as the program administrators are trying to use the RAs as the “face” of the program when they themselves have not completed it and are at best one step ahead of the students. The RAs did mention a frustration in this, but also expressed a hope that as the program matures and students who have completed the program become RAs, the level of experience and knowledge of the program would be at the level the position requires to help out the residents. Ben also pointed out in regards to the level of participation, that the general level of interest in the topic can play a big part, saying that “some people just got placed here”, while others are learning a lot from the program.

The perception of the level of participation and investment in the program by the students was something both the RAs and the students had noticed. Trisha, a resident, mentioned that sometimes “it seems like it’s the same 12 people coming to the dinners and chats”, whereas Tim, an administrative member, said that he was satisfied with the number of people who are participating and filling out things such as the blog-and-bank and the competencies.

*Differences for the RAs as a Result of the Program*

While student participation is needed for the success of the program, other areas in the structure of the environment are necessary as well. Another such area is the RAs, as they are still the main connection between the students and the administration and have the most opportunity with the students to close the communication gap. Because Weatherford is a partnership between the UHDS and the College of Business, there are unique characteristics about being an RA in Weatherford that makes it different from the other halls that the students have noticed. One of these differences for the RAs is in the level and type of training they receive. In addition to the standard university housing training, the RAs for Weatherford and the AEP also receive training specifically for the academic program housed within the building. One of the RAs pointed out the difference in RA training, explaining

There's a general training for being RAs. But we had a staff retreat last spring. We talked specifically about entrepreneurship. We went somewhere in Newport for a weekend. We had an intense discussion about entrepreneurship and UHDS -- Lots of commitment and respect and hope from the management, a lot of meetings and conversations. Four out of the seven RAs are not business majors in Weatherford. Teach the language and terminology. They like the fact that people were catching them up. Someone brought up that it would be nice to make RAs take an intro to entrepreneurship or something like that. They don't really know what's going on. They're not comfortable with the knowledge.

Another one of the differences for the RAs is in the level and amount of responsibilities they have within the building. Because there is also an academic program within Weatherford, the RAs are expected to not only fulfill the duties of an RA for the university; they are also expected to play important roles in the

program itself. All parties had recognized this, with the administration, students, and RAs citing this as an area that needs recognition and resolution, because they all acknowledged that the RAs were almost to the point of being overburdened. This was an issue that was resolved in the subsequent year, with more RAs added to the building, thus breaking down the number of students per RA and effectively spreading out the workload. This change was needed as the RAs in Weatherford have more responsibilities but, aside from the opportunity to be involved in the program, receive no other additional compensation for their time.

### *Communication*

Communication is the critical area the administration needs to fully establish for the program to become truly effective. Because Weatherford and the AEP is such a new concept, one of the main barriers to the success of the program the students perceive is actually communicating the ideas of the program to the students. Many of the residents felt that if the concept of a residential program could be properly communicated, not only would the reputation and respect for Weatherford increase, but more students would be interested in the program.

While the newness of Weatherford was cited as the main reason the communication was not effective, this gap is echoed across the other residential programs on campus. However, because this is a common challenge, Weatherford is being watched very closely for the level of success they can achieve with closing the gap between students and the university.

Because of this pressure, the difficulties in communication are often a source of much frustration for the RAs. Trisha explained, saying “Lack of communication has been the biggest reason that the students don’t know about the offices in Weatherford. I don’t even think if Madonna came to talk, the lack of communication would cause them to not know. They’re all poster blind. They don’t read my e-mails, or posters. They said that the best way to communicate is through face book. It’s an issue. It’s a question we don’t necessarily have a good answer to. Communication and motivation are our top issues.” The students were also aware of the communication issues, with the evident application being that the more involved a student was in the program the more attention she or he would pay to the emails and communication from the RAs and the program. One of the students, when asked about the emails she had mentioned the RD sends out, replied “Yeah I kind a just skim over them, updates and that stuff... I am sure that the people that go to them really pay attention, but sometimes I read them and sometimes I don’t.” A student also cited a conflict of interest as her reason for not reading the emails, stating that her major and goals in life had nothing to do with entrepreneurship, and as such she was simply not interested in their programs or communications.

### *Experiential Learning*

While the factors necessary for success are crucial to the program, the concept of experiential learning is one of the cornerstones on which the residential college is built . The idea that students learn by doing is key to what the program

is about. The students also conveyed this idea to me when asked about the goals of the program, with one student, Val, explaining “It seems to me that they want to create an awareness of what we can do, creating awareness about business. Not really the in-depth stuff of it, but making people aware that business is almost critical to everything you’re going to be doing. Getting hands on practice with it, not just sitting in a classroom listening.”

The concept of experiential learning is also very heavily supported by the College of Business, with their administration citing Weatherford as a way for students to obtain experiential learning. In this way, the COB’s academic goal is designed to support the AEP program housed within Weatherford. Classes held solely through the COB often offer extra credit to students who attend AEP events, thus boosting attendance and participation, which ultimately helps the AEP as it creates credibility and critical mass with attendance. This support helps out the program by re-enforcing the image in the minds of the students.

### *The Cooperatives: A Family*

In contrast to the Residence Halls and the Residential College, the Cooperative Houses offer a different living situation for students who feel they fit there the best. The cooperative housing at Oregon State University consists of 4 houses located on the very edge of campus. These houses can hold around 50-60 students each, and are segregated according to gender. While they are technically under the administration of the UHDS, the cooperatives have their own category and atmosphere to them. While the students did acknowledge being a part of the

UHDS, they seemed to treat the cooperatives as a separate entity on campus, with a few students even considering the houses as “off-campus”. As evidenced by the students’ perceptions, the gap between university and students is most pronounced here in the cooperatives. The number of university representatives is considerably lower here (there are no RAs, simply one RD from the university within each house). However, for the cooperatives this level of detachment from the university is part of the design and goals of the residential program. The cooperatives are designed to function as a separate house – they vote for their own house government, clean their own houses, and provide their own food.

In the cooperative program, there are 3 women’s cooperative houses and 1 men’s cooperative house. They are located right next to each other, which in turns affects certain aspects of their community which will be explored in greater depth in this chapter.

All in all, the experience of living in a cooperative seemed to be pretty consistent among the students, with many of them using the same words, phrases, and concepts to describe what life was like in their house.

### *Community and Family*

One of the main differences in the Cooperatives from the other options was the concept of community and family. The idea of a community is also one that the students perceive as being promoted in the program structure. Emily, a resident of 2 years, sees this focus in the houses: “It definitely promotes community—it’s not really meant for one to come in and stay a hermit. There are socials that

everyone is highly encouraged to attend, to be a part of the community.” Emily goes on to explain “We had a girl who “lived” at Azalea but was rarely at the house. However, if you’re not going to be a part of the community at ALL, then why live at a co-op? For the price? There are sacrifices everyone must make when living in a co-op. We strive for house unity and understanding.”

### *A Family*

The house unity and community the residents spoke of was mentioned among all the student respondents who resided in the Cooperative. For them, their house is more of a group: they do activities as a house, they have house traditions, they know each other, they all eat dinner together, and they have house meetings. For them, living in the co-op means more integration, more of a “family” experience. This close-knit feeling came up quite frequently in the students’ discussions of their experiences within the cooperatives. Annie, one of the students living in Azalea (the girl cooperative) explained, saying “I love the girls I live with, the house environment, and the house organization. Azalea is one of the main reasons for my positive experiences at OSU..... The community feeling is one of the things that make the co-ops unique. Everyone looks out for each other, works together to complete house chores, socializes together, and studies together.”

The idea of “family” was a common thread among the residents. Shannon is a first year resident in Azalea and also sees the house as a family, explaining “It’s more of a family style. Since we’re in a house, it has a different atmosphere.”

Emily has been a resident of Azalea for the past two years and plans on coming back next year. When asked how this year has been, she replied “It’s been really great! Azalea House is a welcoming and family environment. Although there are 54 other girls living in close proximity with you, there are people to help support you when you’re feeling down, help you with studies, celebrate life victories, etc.”

While the family feeling is overall a positive one, each family always has their own little arguments, and it is no different with the family created within a cooperative house. As one of the residents, when asked what her biggest challenge of the year was, stated “Probably getting along with everyone. Not everyone is always meant to live in the same room.”

The community felt within the Cooperative spanned more than just within each building – there was a larger community existing amongst all of the Cooperative houses. At OSU, there are a total of 4 cooperatives at Oregon State University: 1 guy house and 3 girl houses. Because of a number of reasons - including physical proximity, organization of the houses, community, etc – the houses go on outings together quite often. I have seen a number of pictures from these events, seen quite a few bulletin announcements for upcoming events, and heard stories from the students who participated in past events. The houses set up events where by the students residing in the houses go on a trip/do activities together. Not only does this foster the community feeling between the houses, it also helps provide an active social life for the residents. The houses are all located on the same street, which also contributes to the unique feel of the cooperative houses.

These planned social events can provide the students living in the houses with unique experiences. One of the residents, Emily, really enjoys the socials, explaining “The co-ops are very social. There is a guys’ house right next to Azalea as well as a block down the street, so we always have male company of some kind over at the house. I experienced things I never would have, nor have I before, without the planned socials.”

These interactions are also very apparent in the students other means of communication, namely the social online community of Facebook. The students post pictures of general life in the houses, the planned events, and create and join groups (such as the one entitled “Co-Op Socials Rock My Socks!”) devoted to keeping the students connected and informed about upcoming social activities. Online social sites such as Facebook are also one of the main ways the students keep in touch with each other over breaks and during the summer.

### *The Leadership of the House*

In addition to the sense of community, one of the other areas the Cooperatives differ from the other on-campus options is in the structure of the governing system within each house. The cooperatives set up a house governing system on their own. The students vote on the officers in charge of setting and enforcing house policies. One of the students I spoke with, Shannon, was a freshman living in one of the cooperatives and was planning on returning the next year as the active Social Chair for her house.

One of the unique aspects of the leadership within the cooperatives is the fact that, other than the co-op director, the officers of the house are all elected through a house vote. Not only do the students get to choose their leaders, they also feel more invested in the house because their decisions do affect their day-to-day life. The other major difference in the leadership is the student leaders in the cooperatives are not considered RAs. The students are simply known by their leadership titles, such as vice president.

### *Coming Back*

One of the unique themes that I discovered among the students living in the cooperatives was their tendency to return to live in the same house multiple years in a row. All of the students I spoke with either had lived in their specific cooperative for multiple years, planned on coming back, or both. When asked if she had lived somewhere else besides her cooperative, Emily answered “No, this was my second year living at Azalea House, and I shall be living here for a third year as well. I have not lived anywhere else on or off campus, but I have experienced dorm life on different campuses with different week camps during the summer.” She then went on to explain that she loves her house and was not sad that she had not lived in other places.

### *All Together: A Comparison*

All in all, there truly is a different experience depending on where a student chooses to live. The differences between the Residence Halls, the

Residential College, and the Cooperatives have an impact on the students living within each of the buildings and houses. Each option provides a path for a different living experience on campus. The cooperatives are designed to be somewhat detached from the university and in place of university involvement the students create a community within each house. In contrast, the residential college is built on the basic foundation of a high level of interaction and involvement between students and administration, both COB and UHDS. The residence halls are still somewhat ambiguous and vary based on specific building and students from year to year. Each level of involvement creates a different atmosphere and a different experience for the students. With the residential college, a higher level of structure is offered to the student, thus creating more of a theme around academics, and more of a structured, focused life whereas with the cooperatives it is more about connecting with the people you live with and figuring out the academics on your own. Each building program has its own set of goals in regards to the impact desired for each student. While some of the goals established within the residential program structures are being met (family feel within the cooperatives), others (such as many within the residence halls) fall victim to the communication gap that exists between the students and the university.

Emily, one of the residents in the cooperative housing, talked about some of these differences in the goals, explaining that when talking with new students about choosing a living arrangement she would encourage them to find a fit that is best for them: "I'd tell them to check-out all possibilities before making a decision. Co-ops are not for everyone; dorms are not for everyone...Dorms offer a

different type of experience and environment. I want them to find the place that suits them the best.” Emily also noted some of the differences in the residential halls versus the co-ops, explaining to me some of the aspects she felt would have impacted her life, saying:

Because of our sleeping situation, we don't have to worry about roommates keeping us up at all hours of the nights, or having boyfriends come over and staying the night. We have one big sleeping room we call the sleeping porch where it is quiet 24/7 and is for sleeping only. There is no sleeping allowed in the rooms.... You would have to deal with a roommate(s) and work sleep/work schedules so you wouldn't bother the other person. You don't have to clean up after yourself in the dorms (ie: don't have to clean the bathroom, don't have to clean dishes, don't have to vacuum, etc.). However, you're paying a LOT MORE for someone else to do those things.”

A few of the students in the residential halls also noticed a difference, although the perception of what these differences were varied widely depending on the student and the particular residential option the student currently resides in. These differences in perceptions are part of the communication gap, as the concept of what each building is becomes lost. One of the students residing in the residence halls, Carrie, explained her view on the cooperatives: “I think they're a little bit different, I think they're more like a sorority house, without the stereotypical sorority-ness I guess. They're a good option, they're a lot cheaper than the dorm, they have their own chef, so the foods a little better, so there's a sleeping porch, and you get like a study room with like 3 or 4 other people, so I think it's not as personal, but some people like that, and it's a really good option if you like that sort of environment.” Carrie's view, while in part correct, misses

one of the main concepts the majority of the residents of the cooperatives valued: the feeling within the houses of family.

More often than not the students who lived in the residential halls reinforced the idea of this gap, and knew very little or nothing at all about the cooperative houses, responding with “I don’t know much about the co-ops” when asked what they thought of them. The residents within the cooperatives also knew this division existed between the residential options, explaining “The co-ops are definitely separated from the dorms. In the past year, we have really tried to do more things with the dorms, because the dorms don’t know about the co-ops, and the co-ops don’t know what’s going on in the dorms.” The differences between the cooperatives and the rest of the on-campus residential housing – the idea that each house is its own unit within a somewhat larger community of the four cooperatives but somewhat separate from the university – becomes apparent when talking with residents from each option. There is a noticeable disconnect between the cooperatives and the rest of the university on-campus housing, creating an environment that is more close, more personal than one found in a residence hall or college.

While the difference between the halls and the cooperatives was pronounced, the difference between the residential halls and Weatherford as a residential college was more difficult to see. Many of the students did not distinguish between the halls and Weatherford, calling them both dorms and listing the only appeal of Weatherford over the other halls as being the niceness of the building. Drew is a resident in Weatherford and has been for a little while, but

when asked about the difference in Weatherford simply responded with “Yeah I think just the fact we have a lot more respect towards each other and our dorm itself. Just one thing, keeping our music down and others complaining about people staying up until 3am, playing loud music, and their dorms and bathrooms are trashed. Besides the furniture being mixed up, everything is clean. Everybody hangs out together.” As is evident, she does not perceive the Austin Entrepreneurship Program housed within the residential college to be a significant factor or aspect that creates a significant difference between Weatherford and the other residential halls. One of the RAs in the residence halls also didn’t see that big of a difference, citing stories and information learned from friends who were living in Weatherford: “Honestly, it feels just like another residence hall. I had two friends that lived there last year, and they said it was the exact same feel. I mean they never used the library upstairs, or any of the special features.” The gap that exists here between the students and the university, both within each building and between the programs as a whole, is something Weatherford and the AEP is seeking to close with the new structure placed within the building. The majority of the students are still perceiving Weatherford as an average residence hall and do not actively consider the program in place to be a differentiator. This is a serious gap for the university to overcome as from the university viewpoint there is a considerable and significant difference in Weatherford as a result of the AEP.

Other students did see some difference, although the extent of the perceived difference varied. Carrie, an RA in the residence halls, knew some of the difference explaining “Weatherford is in the middle of campus and I think it’s

like the business and entrepreneurship building, it's more upper classmen, it's brand new, so they don't put many freshmen over there, and you have to fill out an application for that one too."

When looking at the students' viewpoints from a removed perspective, certain themes start to emerge. The students generally chose the residence hall for the standard and traditional dorm experience, while Weatherford and the AEP were seen as more of a serious, somewhat more academic decision. The students who did choose the residence hall were pleased with the experience they had, but overwhelmingly decided against returning, with the notable exception being the students returning as RAs or RDs. The students were very enthusiastic about their hall, but stated that it was good for the first year, but not somewhere they would want to stay. The cooperatives were mostly chosen by the students who wanted more of a "family" experience on campus, as well as desired a smaller setting.

#### *Level of University Involvement: A Sliding Scale*

Each of the on campus living options have unique aspects that appeal to different students. Some of these are designed into the structure, while others are created by the students who reside in the building. One of the aspects designed into the structure is the level of university involvement and structure that is present within each of the housing options. The level of involvement from the university evident in a building works out to be a sliding scale, with the highest level being present in the residential college (Weatherford), and the lowest involvement being the cooperative housing. Brad, a current RD in the residential halls and a past

cooperative director, explained the differences between the halls and co-op in detail:

“From UHDS, there’s very, very much less [structure]. The coops are completely different. Like from a community standpoint, the community that is formed in a co-op happens like, you move in and you are part of this group, because they eat every meal together, because they just have the kitchen that makes a meal. Unlike us, where we can go to all the different dining centers on campus, and you don’t necessarily sit together unless you’re with a small group of friends. There you’re eating with everyone that lives in your house, they have bathrooms where you’re using the same bathroom as everybody as the house, they’re doing chores together to keep the houses clean, and so in all reality, their community forms without anyone really even trying to, or even if people don’t want to the community is going to form. In the residence halls you can very much just live there and not meet anyone if you don’t want to. So that’s different. As far as a structure, the coops run themselves and they’re very, very autonomous from the university. The coops directors get a little input from the university, but in all reality it’s how the house decides they want to run it. And the coop director, when I was hired as a co-op director we were told “you’re an advisor, you do what the house needs”, but I don’t structure the house as a coop director. I gave them very little direction.

The level of involvement did influence the actual running and influence on the students. As the cooperatives have the least amount, they self-elect their student leaders. Because of this, they are the only housing option where the

students' choices can practically influence the day-to-day rules and regulations set forth in the house.

Weatherford, as the residential college, is at the highest level of university involvement. The reason for this is the partnership with the College of Business: the UHDS is not any more involved in Weatherford than any other hall. The increased level of university involvement comes from the academic programs from the College of Business housed within the building. The programs ensure a greater level of interaction, with a Faculty in Residence, weekly meetings with the faculty, and many opportunities for interaction through the various events conducted for the program. These increased levels of interaction are part of the design of the program to close the gap that exists between the students and the university and is one of the main areas of focus for the program.

### *The RAs are Different*

While some of the differences are obviously designed by the university, others are a mix between university involvement and the students shaping their own residential surroundings. One such student-shaped aspect that was consistent across the different options was the distinctiveness of the RAs and RDs as opposed to the regular residents. The RAs were seen as different, set apart from the residents, while at the same time the RAs themselves noticed a change when they became RAs. These changes impacted many different aspects of the students' experiences, including general knowledge of the programs, knowledge of the UHDS, and overall social life, both with the residents and other staff. During one

of my conversations with two RAs, one of them mentioned how much easier it has been to meet people this year. The other RA replied:

RA 2: Could just be because that's our job too

RA 1: Yah, could be that too

RA 2: Probably would have been easier last year if we had to go meet everybody

RA 1: Oh my God, yah

Other RAs also brought up how close they feel with "my staff", and how they really like the group they have formed with the other RAs in their building.

Through my participant observation, I also noticed how close-knit the RAs among all the buildings become, and how they do seem to form a tight group with each other. This could be one of the causes of the perceptions among the regular residents that the RAs are not really residents, and seem to have an "us versus them" attitude. The cooperatives were a notable exception to this theme as they do not have RAs, and while their governing members were seen as slightly different ("he's the VP") they were still treated as a regular house member.

The roles of the RAs within Weatherford have a unique situation among the various options. While they have the normal duties assigned to them from the UHDS, they also have the responsibilities from the AEP pertaining to the program housed within the building. The students living in Weatherford also saw this, explaining "I think that they have a lot larger role than any of the other RAs. They have to do all the normal RA things, plus they have to participate in all their program stuff. They have LOTS of responsibility. They're doing a good job, but it might be kind of a big role. They're not getting anything extra out of it." The

RAs also noticed the added responsibilities of being an RA in the residential college, explaining about their involvement in the events that take place within the building. Trisha talked a bit about the events, saying “There’s at least one RA at the fireside chat. It’s good. I think residents see that RAs are part of the program. There’s so much time an RA can dedicate to the whole thing.... RAs were supposed to be the ambassadors. It works in the short run. But it doesn’t work in the long run, when there are midterms and everyone is exhausted and tired.” The overall time commitment was also seen as difficult to balance, one of the RAs explaining “The responsibilities for Weatherford include more stuff than just a regular RA. In other halls RAs have just the usual stuff. Here, you have to do all that, plus host visiting fellows, and inform students about TICK, and make sure they do competencies. Stuff like that. One day of the week is yours. Have to do rounds and work at the desks. It’s hard. Have to make sure everything is alright. To me personally, the duties of being an RA makes you really tired over time. When you get little sleep, you become indifferent to stuff. It’s not an easy balance at all.” While the RAs did see their responsibilities as being a little overwhelming, they did not have any other ideas for what to change. However, the administration did listen to them, and for the next year upped the number of RAs that are in the building, effectively spreading out the responsibilities among more people.

The RAs within the various buildings have their own vocabulary changes that are different than the traditional resident within their building: they have technical vocabulary changes that have been passed on to them from their training, from their weekly meetings, and simply in the course of their responsibilities. As

one RA stated “I notice I call them ‘residents’, not students. I find myself saying ‘oh, my residents’, not ‘oh, the other students.’” Another example of an RA specific word is “carefrontation”. The RAs explained that this is a term they learned in training, and refers to the methods they are supposed to use in their duties: instead of confrontation, which denotes conflict, use “carefrontation”, which implies a caring attitude about their residents and the resident’s concerns. While the idea behind the term seemed a little humorous to them, judging from the tone of their voice when they explained it to me, they also seemed to know this term and use it.

While the student’s opinion of her RA varied drastically based on who the RA was and the interpersonal interactions on her floor, there was overall a general feeling of “us versus them” when it came to the RAs. The students did not seem to share the “carefrontation” idea of the RAs, and whenever they mentioned confrontation with the RAs, it was always in a negative way, stating perceptions such as “the university always sides with the RAs and does not listen to us.” These perceptions of the students held true for Weatherford as well, as well as the one university admin placed in the cooperatives, the RD. This disconnect between the perceptions of the students and the intentions and perceptions of the RAs is an example of the gap that exists between the roles, regardless of the fact that both roles are played by students. The regular student residents see the RAs as being a part of the university, as they are in fact the university representatives for the students. As a result, the students often will emotionally deepen the gap by distancing themselves from the RAs and the perceived rivalry between the RAs

and the regular residents that exists on occasion. However, the cooperatives do not face these issues, as there are no RAs within their buildings and instead the residents self select a governing body. As the students are selected by other residents they are not perceived to be on the “them” side of “us versus them” but instead are seen as students who have been elected to a leadership position.

### *Staying Connected*

While there definitely were differences between the options, there were aspects of residing on campus that spanned all the options. One of the main reasons all of the students cited for living in the on-campus residential options is to stay connected to the events and life of the university. They liked knowing about all the programs and events and all in all feeling like a part of campus. One of the students explained why she liked living on campus, saying “Cause it’s a good way to meet people, it’s your first year, really just get to know the campus, cause you’re on campus all the time, get to know lots of people, friendly, outgoing, just want to be with a lot of other people.” Other students also echoed these sentiments, stating “Just because you meet people, you feel like you’re involved in things, and you hear about activities going on because of all the posters and things and you have resources really close” and “I think they’re a lot more likely to know about resources and get connected with campus.”

The RAs also saw staying connected as one of the benefits of living on campus. They saw their role in providing this information, stating “I think there’s a lot of information about campus too, in the dorms. I mean, we try and post stuff

about campus, so they probably gain at least a little information about the dorms and campus...and we do plan a lot of events for them, so they're a lot more stuff for them to do, just for a UHDS housing people, there's tons of events throughout the year, just gives them a chance to have fun."

This feeling of staying connected was also one of the reasons one of the students gave for not wanting to live off campus, explaining that she would feel disconnected from the campus if she was physically located off of it. This sentiment was also echoed by other students as one of the reasons they chose to remain in the on-campus living for multiple years. In some ways, this desire to remain physically close to campus demonstrates the perception that while there is a gap between students and university, the very act of residing in an on-campus residential house does close this gap in some way. However, for the residence halls, the diminishment of this gap is done through the students interactions and perceptions of closeness with the campus and not, in the majority of cases, with a closeness to the building community itself. This does not fully close the gap, however, and the residential programs still have further work to create a closeness with their students and bridge this gap.

### *Coming Back – Different Among the Options*

The decision of where to live the following year is an important one for the student, as she now knows the various options and has to make a choice based on where she believes she will be the most comfortable and happy. The students in my study all had to decide where they would be living for the next year, and I was

able to talk with them around the time they were making that decision. While there were several factors that played a factor in their decision (friends, joined a sorority, etc), there were definite differences based on the option the student was currently residing in.

For the students in the residential halls, the overwhelming opinion amongst the students was that the halls were not a place they would choose to live in for multiple years. There were several reasons for this, one of them being the overall experiences in the hall and the concept of the “freshman experience”. While the “freshman experience” was a major draw and reason for choosing the halls in the first place, it also played a negative role in that the students perceive the halls to be a one year only experience. As one student explained “If you’re going to live in dorms again, you want to step up. Like, I would not live in McNary a second year, that would just be not progressive.” Other factors affected this decision as well, as one student explained “But I would never move back into a dorm. It’s kinda like, there’s 4 girls, my roommate and the girl across the hall and next door, and we all kinda live together, and we all know each other’s schedules, and where each other is, and if some one’s not back at a certain time, we call them up and go “where are you?”, so it’s kinda like I live with three other people. I don’t think I’d want that experience again. It gets kinda intense.” For these students, the desire to develop their own personal experiences, and to move onward in their liminal state towards a more independent lifestyle is a driving factor in their residential choice.

While some students were adamant in their decision to choose a different residential option, others choose to instead physically change their role within the

buildings and become RAs. One of these such students described her reasons for choosing to remain in the halls, saying “They changed a little bit I guess in that, it’s a fairly convenient location on campus, and the facility itself is pretty nice, in that it’s a lot nicer than other buildings on campus, and it’s on campus, with my sophomore year, looking at my class load, and yah, it was cheaper to live off campus, but I just didn’t want to have the other things you have to think about, and even this year I chose to be an RA because I didn’t want the extra things you have to think about living on your own.”

One of the interesting things to note is that of the informants who are residents in the halls, only the residents who were either currently RAs or planning on becoming RAs chose to remain in the halls for another year. All other students who are simply residents were decidedly against returning, citing reasons such as “this is great for the freshman experience, but not for another year.” The factors that make this experience undesirable for the students to return for an additional year would make an interesting area for future research.

The residential college, Weatherford, by comparison had a fair number of students who chose to return for another year as just a resident. The reasons for this seemed to be their level of involvement in the program. Of the informants, the ones who expressed little to no involvement were not planning on returning, whereas the students who were very much involved had either lived there for several years or planned on returning. This did contradict the opinions of some of the students, who cited too much involvement with the girls on her floor as one of the reasons she wanted to leave (it was “too intense”). This could be an example

of a different personality, or it could be indicative of a deeper, more complex issue surrounding the right kind of involvement. Future research in this area could help reveal what involvement is positive, what is negative, and what makes the difference.

For many students, the freshman experience is an intense experience where they are exposed to many new ideas and concepts, experiment with relationships and philosophies. During this time they are able to select the new concepts and characteristics they wish to incorporate into their own lives, and the sheer volume of exposure to new things is one of the appeals of the residence halls. However, after this first year and gaining this exposure, a sizable portion of the students choose to move on to other forms of housing, to either experience new things; to move along in their liminal state and leave the freshman transitional period; or to further develop in their liminal state and become more independent.

On the other end of the spectrum, the cooperatives had the highest level of returning students among the participants. All of the students I spoke with or knew among my friends, were planning on returning to their specific cooperative house, some going on multiple years of residency. One of the residents in the cooperatives explained a little about her experiences, saying “I wanted to get into Oxford as my first choice because the house itself seemed to have more character than Azalea. However, once I walked through that Azalea door, I have never looked back; I have had no regrets not living at Oxford.” The community these students had built within their house was a major draw for them.

*In the Gap: The Students' Solution*

Quite often the absence of something that is desired, whether it is tangible or intangible, creates an opportunity for the creation of something else. This is proving true within the on-campus residential options: the gap that exists between the students and university has left an opportunity for the students who come each year to create something entirely different from the goals and objectives of the UHDS. While some of the students are in fact creating their own communities and goals, others are simply falling through the cracks that are created by this gap. Regardless of what the students choose, the fact remains that there exists a disconnect between them and the university. In order to be an effective influence on the lives of the students, the university needs to overcome this gap and reconnect with their students, one year at a time. This is especially important as the students who come here are undergoing a significant change in their life as they enter the liminal state that will ultimately lead to adulthood.

## **Chapter 6: College: The Crossroads Between Adolescence and Adulthood**

When departing for the first year at a university, a student is embarking on a journey that takes them to a place with new surroundings, social system, support structure, teachers, mentors and even close friends. While some, if not many, of these changes are new and exciting for the student, they can also be intimidating and stressful as the absence of what was previously there can create a void. The student no longer has everything figured out; instead one must establish a new system for oneself within the university. It is the loss of familiarity and the state of ambiguity and flux that defines the liminal state for these students (Schouten 1991). While in the liminal transition state, students must create new social networks, support structures, and a new sense of self.

However, this sense of loss and reconstruction is not a negative aspect of the students' lives. Rather, it is a necessary step during their transition to adulthood.

Making transitions is an integral part of life. It is important that all participants in the student's life, including parents, faculty and university staff, understand that during the transition from high school to college, students often experience a sense of loss for what has changed in their life or despair over relationships that have changes or have been replaced. (Budny & Paul 2003:1)

The students who reside in the residential options are in a liminal stage and have often just experienced this sense of loss. The university needs to realize this and make every effort to provide support systems or programs to help encourage the students in the creation of their own new structures by taking into consideration

the different roles the students can have within the buildings (regular students, RAs, RDS) and the impacts their roles have on their experiences.

When first beginning this transition, the students experience the most amount of loss and uncertainty. Within the collegiate community, this has come to be known as “the freshman experience.” In addition to beginning the academic activities, students are faced with the transitions in their personal lives. Other studies conducted at other institutions have discovered the same thing, namely that “...the central issues were more about student transitions than simply about the transition to the first year of college” (Hunter 2006:9). There are several factors that can influence the experiences a student has on campus during this transition time. These factors include the freshman experience, the generational differences and impacts, connections formed on campus, and whether or not a student consciously recognizes the changes that occur during this time.

### *The Freshmen Experience*

The “Freshman Experience” is a concept that has been created and perceived throughout the years yet is still only vaguely defined. The general idea centers around the choices and options a student has when first entering university life. For the students, as they explained it to me, it is an entirely new experience: being away from home, setting your own rules, finding your own discipline, experimenting with different activities, and discovering who you are. This view is also shared by other researchers (Nathan, Budny & Paul, Arnett, and White)

studying this phase, who also stress the importance of providing resources for guidance and support for the students during this time.

The concept of the first year or freshman experience has been around for a while, with the title first applied around the 1970's and gaining in recognition since then (Hunter 2006:8). While the impacts on students going through this experience were a focus for studies around the concept, the activities and structures the university needs to have in place to support the students has also been an area of concern. It has become clear through these studies that “deliberate and intentional efforts to assimilate new students into the institutional culture and environment are essential if institutions are to expect transitional students to thrive.” (Hunter 2006:10)

For the UHSD, the “freshman experience” means the students who come to the university are beginning their journey through their collegiate experiences, while at the same time entering a new stage in their life. As the administrators of the environments where the students live during this time, the university has the opportunity to influence the students and integrate them into the university through the programs within the residential buildings. While the university has the opportunity to influence the students, this influence is not always obvious or straightforward.

One of the critical outcomes of being a part of the freshman experience is the sense of connection it creates among the students. Through the loss of their existing foundations and social structures, the students are brought to a level where they are all the same. This loss then becomes a great equalizer among the

students, serving a very needed role in creating new bonds and communities among the students in the residential options. These new structures and ways of dealing with things the students learn through this process is one of the important lessons the students will gain while at the university.

While these lessons could arguably be learned at other institutions that force an abrupt transitory phase, such as prison, the university differs from these other institutions because of the nature of the environment and the stage in a young persons' life during which it takes place . The beginnings of the collegiate years occur during the phase of a young persons' life when he/she is transitioning to an adult. Not only does this help this transition (assists in an abrupt change and loss that the student must then work to replace), it also brings together a considerable amount of people who are in the same stage in life. Because of this, the university is in a unique position to not only help support these students but also help to shape the outcome of this liminal phase.

*The Freshman Experience in the Residence Halls:* At OSU, the university has created a residence hall with the theme focused on the idea of the freshman experience. For the hall, the concept centers on integrating the students with campus life and providing the various options for them to choose from. It is also characterized by a lack of a different focus (i.e. academic, outreach, etc), thereby allowing the students to focus on the university and the changes that are going on in their life.

The idea of the freshman experience, whereby students are in an experimental and new time in their life, was more apparent with the students of the Residence Halls than the Cooperatives or the Residential College. It can be argued that the reason for this is the Residence Halls have the least amount of organized university structure to them, and as a result the students are more able to experiment with their newfound freedom. For the students desiring the university experience, living in the halls is an important part of being a freshman. While there is a hall themed to be the “Freshman Experience”, all of the halls have a flavor of the university life about them.

Part of the “freshman experience” is simply meeting other people and just being around other students who are at the same place in life. For the students, existing in the same liminal state as other students can create a bond between them; a “we are in the same boat” state of mind. Madison is a freshman residing in Bloss. She came to OSU desiring a more social place to live. She explained that she wanted the social aspect, that “It’s important because I came from a really big high school, and a lot of people I was friends with came here, but I wanted to make new friends, I wanted to be around other freshmen who were in the same boat as I was.”

The desire to be around other people who are at the same point in life was expressed by other students as well. Lindsey is a freshman who found herself living in Finley on a floor with students from out of state. She explained how she felt a connection with these students, explaining “You feel like you’re never alone there, and so, it’s nice to know there’s always people around you who are going

through the same thing. At least the nice thing about living with the Hawaiians is that they were away from their homes too, and I hadn't been home since winter break, and so it was nice because both of us had had that."

The freedom the students experience being away from home for the first time is something that is felt by many of the students. While some students, one RA in particular, felt that this can be distracting for students who have had little practice in self discipline, other students felt it was a great experience. For Madison, this experience was an important part of her freshman time, as for her it means not only finding new friends, but also experimenting with the freedom to make her own decisions and not having her parents define the parameters. She mentioned this freedom as her idea of what her freshman experience had been about, saying "It's just like, you get to know new people, you get to experience new things, you do new things, you have a lot more freedom, you don't have parents telling you that you need to be home by a certain time, you don't have a curfew, and you're pretty relaxed in everything you do. I've really enjoyed the dorms." However, like many other college freshman, Madison realizes that this is a temporary state, explaining that her time in the dorms was "...like so much fun that you never want to have again." The idea that the freshman experience lasts for just the freshman year was acknowledged and expressed by the freshman themselves. While they described having a great year and learning many things throughout their time, they also acknowledged that they were ready to move on.

While both students and administrators acknowledge that the freshman experience occurs, there are varying perceptions of the value of this process. The

freshmen who were currently going through this time were more likely to place a higher value on the experience than the RAs who were tasked with the responsibility of overseeing these freshmen. The different level of value placed on the freshman experience is another example of the gap that exists between the university administrators and the students, as the overall perception of which aspects of this experience are important is included in the value. This difference in opinion and how to handle it especially affects the RAs.

The conflict between their experiences as a student and the responsibilities as an RA is an interesting dilemma. They lived the freshman experience not too long ago, and are still in a liminal state themselves, but now are responsible for getting the new freshman involved in the structured aspects of the residential program. Several of the RAs expressed confusion over how to best reach the freshman, with a few acknowledging "...they're just freshman, they have so many other things going on right now." How to best reach the freshmen and incorporate them into a community is a major dilemma facing the RAs – one they do not yet have an answer for.

While the university is aware that the freshman experience happens – and provides programs intended to help foster that experience (such as the themed halls) – what actually occurs during this time is in many ways a black box for the university. This "black box" is created by the freshman experience itself, as it is a time for exploration and learning for the students.

The university is aware of the factors influencing a student during the freshman experience and has programs in place to help integrate these students

into the campus. In addition to the programs and community fostered within the buildings themselves, the university conducts several activities geared towards the students to help introduce them to the campus. One of these activities takes place at the beginning of the school year. At Oregon State University, this week is called “Connect Week”, or “Start Week”. During this week, there is a plethora of events going on, ranging from group BBQ’s, organizational events to introduce students to the programs, and a Connect fair, where all the major programs, groups, locations, and community businesses are present with informational booths. These booths come stocked with free give-away’s, which are quite popular among college students. Students, regardless of their residential option (halls, residential college, cooperatives, or off-campus) would come to this fair and learn about the various groups and resources around campus. Not only would the freshmen attend, but the returning students would as well, helping to integrate the student community. However, one of the interesting things to note about these events is while the UHDS puts a considerable amount of time and effort into holding these, the student residents did not mention them when talking about their time on campus.

*The Freshman Experience and the Residential College:* While the students who reside in the Residence Halls mainly saw the freshman experience as positive, the students who were actively involved in the program within the residential college (the AEP) saw these influences as being difficult at the very least. One of the senior RAs expressed her frustration with these influences, saying “In my

opinion there should be more careful selection of people to live here. UHDS wants more people here. As far as curriculum goes, freshmen just aren't interested. I don't blame them. We all know how it goes. First time you're on your own. You don't think about starting your own business. I really think that program would benefit sophomores and juniors." The RAs within Weatherford also expressed frustration and confusion at how to best reach the freshmen students living in their building.

While some of the students saw the difficulties in involving the freshmen in the program, other students saw benefits. The residential college provided a different freshman experience for the residents who were actively involved in the program as it very much focused the path the students took during the year. Lindsey, a student in one of the regular residence halls, explained "It seems like though if you bring in freshmen then they, coming into college you're trying out all these different programs, and they might volunteer for it, where upper classmen are already like "I have this going on."

Other administrators and students within Weatherford also saw the advantages of involving freshmen in the program. They cited the advantages of getting students involved early, so they would continue to be involved in the program all 4 years of their collegiate experience. Some of the students also see this advantage, starting and running programs designed to spread awareness to high school students about to enter college.

When a student leaves for college, the student is most likely leaving a high school system of some kind and moving into the world of collegiate academia.

This in and of itself is a considerable transition to manage, let alone coupling this struggle with all the challenges of navigating the journey to adulthood.

### *Generations*

The fact that students undergo a change while attending college has held true across time and universities, however, there is one fact that must be taken into consideration by the administration each year: how the students change based on their generational cohort. “Student attitudes, behaviors, and experiences are not static. With each entering class the world events and culture that shape their growth and development differ.” (Hunter 2006:9) Each class of students differs from the previous class; sometimes classes may have slight differences between them while others may be considerably different from each other. In order to effectively reach the students, the UHDS needs to adapt their support programs and methods according to what will best reach the current residents. “Attention to student characteristics, needs, behaviors, and experiences is central to creating and sustaining successful transition initiatives.” (Hunter 2006:9) Without this attention the structures in place will not be as effective in supporting the student, and the university will not be reaching their students as well as they can.

The tendency to become disconnected from the students spans more than just the residential housing, but on the university level as well. This disconnect was the main reason that prompted Rebekah Nathan to take a break from being a professor and become a student again. She explained that after 15 years as a professor her students were becoming increasingly confusing to her, so she choose

to become a student again in order to learn more about the young adults she was teaching.

Because so much change is going on in the students' lives during the few years they spend at a university, any change can have a considerable effect on their overall perceptions, experiences, and changes. This is considerably different from the university environment for the faculty and staff, as they can be at the same university for many years, often more than fifteen. In contrast, most students are only at the university for 4 or 5, with typically only a couple of those years spent residing on campus.

While professors have an influence on their students, it is the support systems the students come to rely on that can truly make a difference. The residential programs are in a critical and ideal position to provide the most support for the students. However, adapting for each change in student population can be difficult for the university, as this requires time and resources devoted to learning each cohort of students and changing the programs to fit. While this may not be feasible for universities, there does exist middle ground where the students and the administrators can meet. One of these compromises is for the university to know the general generational characteristics instead of student classes.

The students in this study are members of the so-called Millennial generation. This generation has several characteristics that have become widely known, namely the concept of "helicopter parents" and an overall characteristic trait of caring about their surrounding environment, be it the natural environment or social environment (Hoover 2007 & J.M.A . 2006). However, while these traits

do exist for this generation, researchers explain to people dealing with this generation:

They are the next “great” generation, according to demographers, who have warned all who have gone before that members of this up-and-coming group are entering college and the workforce expecting instant gratification and the ability to make a difference before paying their dues. (J.M.A. 2006:17)

It is also warned to not generalize about this generation based on the stereotypical concepts: this generation is complex and stereotyping them is an iffy situation at best (Hoover 2007).

These complexities should not be underestimated and basing assumptions on them can prove tricky at best. One of the complexities of this generation is their attitude towards the gender divide, roles, and responsibilities as compared to the generations before them.

### *Connections*

The differences that separate each class of students can also serve a positive role, as these aspects can serve to create a bond between them, as they all experienced the same world events and major social influences. As the students who come to the university enter into an automatically created community because of the transition liminal phase they have begun together, the similarities that exist among all the students can help create links that in turn assist in the creation of new social networks and support systems. Nathan found this to be true as well: some of the similarities that existed in the students as a result of generational

factors were responsible for forming the students into a group that only “insiders” could join.

This also corresponds with the state of liminal transition the students embark on, namely the journey to adulthood. During this transition to adulthood, the students are learning many of the personal characteristics that will define them as adults. As the older generations have already gone through this rite of passage, that connection does not exist. There are many lessons learned during this transition, and the students are aware of the significance of the outcomes of their choices, although quite often this awareness is only achieved in retrospect. Another such change students are not always aware of is the change that can occur in their vocabulary.

#### *Changes: Not Always Visible*

While new social networks, freedom boundaries, and lessons learned are significant aspects, not all of the impacts or the effects are apparent to the residents. Before I started conducting my interviews, I initially had this idea that living in the halls would impact a student’s basic vocabulary and the students would at least be able to identify a few words that they picked up through their life in the building. The theory I had initially held was created around the concept that as a lesson is learned there are markers within a person’s vocabulary. In the same way that business majors have different vocabulary elements from engineers, and engineers from sports science majors, the theory held that a group of students who had been through a shared set of events and lessons would have a shared set of

vocabulary elements. This initial hypothesis was proven very wrong over the course of my interviews with current residents. When asked about specific changes in their vocabulary due to their residential situation, the majority of the residents had to repeat the question and think about it for a little while. A good portion of them also responded with answers that signified no change as a result, or that they were not aware of any changes that had occurred in their vocabulary.

Specific words and phrases noted as being different and results of the residential programs within the residence hall included “Beaver Tale”, “Hall Trial”, “Wing”, etc. These words were a result of community interactions and events, and are interesting in that the students don’t even actively acknowledge them as changes. When asked about them, they were able to mark them as words specific to their residential situation, but did not actively identify the words with the groups or community they were from. Words such as these are simply the more obvious ones, with other questions still lingering: about the changes in their everyday word usage. What changes come about as a result of their specific building versus their experiences within their classrooms? Both of these areas would be useful areas for further studies, as they would reveal an even deeper understanding of the influences

The challenging part for this study was uncovering these changes within the students’ vocabulary, as these changes are not overt and the students usually cannot create a list. Instead, the changes had to be listened for and gathered from the general conversation transcripts. The benefit of using this method assures that the changes analyzed from the students were spontaneous and real. Because of

this, it is interesting to note the levels of change across the different residential options. The low level of change in the residence hall is evidence of the gap that exists between the students and the university, as it becomes obvious here that the concepts and ideals the UHDS wants to communicate to the students are not becoming part of their everyday life. This gap was evident through the differences between what the RAs explained and what the regular students noticed. The RAs had a list of words they knew and used that were from the university. However, when residents were asked if there were any words or vocabulary changes as a result of their residential program, the majority of regular residents answered “no, no specific words”. This disconnect is an example of the gap that can occur between the university and the student residents.

In contrast with the residence hall, the Residential College had an impact on the students who were actively involved in the program, as Weatherford as a community had a fair amount of program specific words that the students would use as regular vocabulary throughout their talks with me. Some of this vocabulary was a result of the program-specific events and level of student participation, as previously discussed, while other changes were simply a result of the student living in the community within the building.

The Weatherford program and the student residents seemed to have the most technical vocabulary out of the on-campus residential options, which makes sense as the AEP program contains a curriculum and a regular series of events a resident can choose to participate in. A few of the words the student would use in everyday conversation included: AEP, TICK, competency, E-challenge, “pop-the-

door”, visiting fellow, and the Weatherford Wipe. A student’s use of these words is interesting in that it is a sign that something of the culture and structure has influenced the student, at least to the point where they can use the program-specific lingo in their everyday conversations. This was evident by the fact that when talking with the residents I had to interrupt the flow of their conversation, which indicated that they were used to saying these words and having people understand what they meant. The students generally would not explain a new word unless I made it obvious to them that I did not know what the word meant.

The technical nature of these vocabulary changes in the students reflects the focus of the program within the residential college: academics, business, and self development. While the changes in the vocabulary of the students in the residential college were mostly technical and academic in nature, the amount of change indicates a level of involvement from the students that was not generally present in the students in the residence halls.

The residents from the cooperatives had a different influence on their vocabulary from either the residential college or the residence halls and, when asked about it, they acknowledged themselves to be considerably different from the halls on-campus. The main difference seemed to be in the individuality and personality of the co-operative houses, with Avery being a prominent example. Within Avery, there is an obvious community that exists between the residents, and they have created a distinct culture. One aspect of this culture, as explained to me by a resident, is a cynicism to things politically-correct or bureaucratic. This

appears to be one of the aspects that can hamper the adoption of certain words over the other, although they have a unique vocabulary that belongs to Avery.

One of the interesting vocabulary themes in the cooperatives was the use of the word “family”. Independent of each other, many of the student’s in a variety of residential options chose the word to represent their community of students in their building. They also closely knew the other co-ops, and seemed to use a very “us versus them” word set when referring to the residential halls.

While differences did exist between the options, there were several concepts that were true for all of them. One of these aspects to note is the reasons and factors behind the changes in the vocabulary. For example, if a student participated in a particular group or event, that student was more likely to use that vocabulary in her daily life. This suggests that the more “ownership” a student feels towards a specific group or activity the more a part of her she will make these changes. While this is to be expected, it is also something that should be considered as it does affect the students. This effect can be considerable in that it can serve to make a student more included and involved, while at the same time distancing the student from the rest of campus, from the “outsiders”.

These changes to the students’ inherent vocabulary are changes that the students have accepted and incorporated into a revised self concept, which is one of the three possible outcomes to changes made during a liminal state (Schouten 1991). While these changes are sometimes subconscious and made as a secondary result to a different choice (i.e. what clubs to join), other choices and changes the students make are more direct decisions. One such decision the students must

work through during their stay at the university is the construction of a social network.

### *Social Network Very Important*

There are several factors that influence a student's overall perceptions of the experience in the halls and the choice of where to live for the following year. An important one of these factors is the level of and characteristics of the social network that is developed within the building and floors. A community can be created through activities with the students or through the residential program within the building. The programs that can successfully create a community with the residents can narrow the gap between the university and the students, as the gap between the RAs and the students is diminished considerably. The university should foster and encourage these community-building programs, as they help build a social network among the students and help to collapse the distance between the parties. The RAs also play an important part in creating these social networks as they are the one interacting with the residents on behalf of the university.

For some of the students, their social network that is developed within the halls is a main factor in deciding where they want to live, their overall experiences within the university, etc. Lindsey came to OSU from out of state, and as such explained that she wanted to live on campus because she didn't know anyone and wanted to meet people.

The sense of community, of “family”, is really important to some students. Beckie, one of the freshmen in McNary, explained her reason for joining a sorority and moving into the sorority house for the next school year, saying

I’ve been thinking about how different next year is going to be from this year. Cause like, the thing I’m really looking forward to that I really wanted in the dorms but I didn’t get is like a sense of community in my wing, close around me. I didn’t have that at all in McNary, just cause of the setting, the small setting I was in the wing. Whereas the people on the second floor totally have that, they’re all a family and they’re all like really good friends and it’s kinda like a sorority. I’m really looking forward to having that like sense of community in a sorority.

A social network developed in the residence halls can also benefit a student throughout her collegiate experience. Among other things, the friends found in the halls can become future roommates. One of the RA’s explained “A lot of people meet each other, like living in the dorms and then they move off campus together. So I think in that aspect that’s a good thing, they’re not going to find those people otherwise if they didn’t live on campus. They’d just scrounge up some people.”

The network developed during the time a student resides on campus can last a lifetime. As the network can compose a significant portion of a student’s support structure, this serves a very real role in moving through the liminal phase of the student’s life. Several factors can influence the creation of this structure however. One of the major influential factors is the decision of which building the student chooses to reside in.

### *The Choice of Where*

As mentioned before, the way the university assigns students to specific buildings is a mix of students' choice and university judgment. With all the impacts the actual building and program can have on a student, where a student lives is important to their overall perceptions of the university. As some buildings offer more of the "freshman experience", or the concept of "community" than others, the effects this choice can have on the students can be sizeable. This is also a point of conflict within the university, as some of the choice is left to the student, while a sizable portion of the decision belongs to the university. The major factor – cooperative, resident hall, or residential college – is left to the student, but exactly which building the student winds up in is left to the university. Where a student lives is a very important factor, because if a student "fits" with and connects with a specific building then she is more likely to become involved. The greater level of involvement with a residential program the smaller the gap between the student and the university becomes.

The students do seem to have some influence in the decision, particularly the buildings with strong themes such as McNary and Wilson. McNary houses the honors program, and the honors students who apply are given priority in order to fill the building according to the theme.

The same method for placement is used for the RAs as well. Where a student resides is a more important factor for the RAs, as the connection and investment they feel with their building influences the connection and level of involvement the residents they are responsible for feel. However, of the RAs I spoke with, very few of them actually chose the building they were residing in.

When asked why they chose their hall, all of the RAs but one stated “Because I was placed here.” The lack of choice for the RAs as to which building they wind up in is also interesting, given the importance of the RAs as the practical “face” of the university to the students. As the RAs simply mark down a preference and the UHDS administrators make the final decision of where to place the RA, an RA is not always guaranteed to be placed in a building she or he likes. Whether or not an RA likes the building she/he winds up in impacts far more than just their experiences. As the face of the university for the students, the RAs have the ability to either narrow the gap between the administration and the students or widen it, and the level of disconnect an RA feels with the university is magnified for the students in their hall.

Once a student has chosen where to reside, the rest of the year’s experiences can begin. Whether or not a student is beginning the entire collegiate time, or returning for another year on campus, all of the students agree that the time spent on campus is different from residing off campus. There were several reasons given for this, with one of the main ones being the sense of connection a student feels with the university when living on-campus. While a disconnect still exists between the residents and the administration, it is less for the students living on campus than with the ones who reside elsewhere. Because of this, the limited amount of time a student spends living on campus is a crucial time period for the university to connect with a student and create a sense of belonging.

*“For Sure On Campus”*

All in all, the students had similar thoughts and feelings about their experiences in the residence halls. They liked the atmosphere and experience for one year, but few students who currently reside in the resident halls would entertain the idea of returning for a second year. They felt the residence halls were a good experience for beginning university life, but wanted to “grow” from there. For some of the students, the responsibility of being an RA was a good area to grow with and for some it was a different on-campus residential option or off campus, while a few felt they still had things to learn from the halls or simply enjoyed their time there and chose to return.

At the end of every interview, I would ask the student informant if she had any advice for a student who is coming to OSU and is trying to figure out housing options. In almost every case, the student responded with a definite “live on campus.” Their reasons were generally the same, consisting of experiencing the “freshman experience”, getting to know people, and learning the lessons the residential halls have to offer. This definitely coincides with the ideas and themes the students had expressed during their interviews, with the major idea of the impact of living on-campus as simply being the experience of living in their building. This is part of the disconnect with the university, as certain programs within the buildings have goals for what specific concepts should be learned and in contrast the students see the general life experience as being the main impact.

One student, Beckie, was very adamant in her opinion. Beckie is a freshman residing in McNary, the honors hall. She originally chose this hall

because she was an honors student and desired less of a party hall and figured that as honors students the residents of McNary would offer this. She was a little surprised when she was placed in the all girls wing of the building, a section the residents have dubbed “the nunnery”. Beckie explained that this created a difficulty for her, as she perceived a lack of community, a lack of “family” among her floor. The lack of this feeling was a fact she attributed to the gender segregation and the type of personality of residents that would choose a gendered floor. She would tell stories of walking down the hall and attempting to catch the eye of one of her fellow residents to say hi. However, the resident would avoid eye contact and instead walk on by. Instances like this were a source of frustration for Beckie during her stay on campus. However, even with all the unexpected aspects of living on campus, Beckie still had an overall positive experience of the hall, offering advice to any incoming freshmen who are trying to decide where to live for their first year: “Oh, I would definitely say on campus, for sure on campus, for sure in the dorms. But as far as like between dorms, that would be more difficult, but definitely on campus, definitely in the dorms.” For the students, the freedom and new possibilities offered by going away to a university is a powerful draw. What direction these experiences takes, however, is where the university residential programs comes in. With students, the university has the opportunity to influence a student when she/he is most willing and able to experience new things and experiment. The RAs also have an important part to play as they are the ones who will be interacting with the students the most from the university side and in this role they have the ability to be a guiding influence for their residents.

During the time spent on campus, a student is navigating through significant changes occurring in her life. Many of these changes occur during the first year, as this is when the familiar is left behind and the student begins the journey. Throughout this time the university has an opportunity to influence these changes through the living environment and structure surrounding the students. While this influence has to be done in such a way as to be effective on the student, the university has the opportunity to influence a student's basic world view, such as with students like Lindsey, who learned to connect with the students from out of state because of the similarities they had with leaving their home and entering OSU. She acknowledged that she would most likely not have met them were it not for living in her building. While this is an example of the students creating a network, the UHSD has the opportunity to foster these interactions and introduce the students to concepts and life experiences they may not have otherwise seen.

The success in creating a community within the building varies widely depending on the specific building, RDs, RAs, and residents. While sometimes a community is successfully created, other times (and more often) it fails to be created. The university needs to encourage these communities by providing a greater level of communication with the RAs and students, providing more resources for the residents to develop programs within the buildings, and providing greater access to university-run programs.

## **Chapter 7: The Most Important Thing I Learned During My University Experience - Me**

When students embark on their journey through college, the students develop, adopt, and incorporate a new sense of self, a sense of “me”. This developed sense of self is a needed step on the journey to adulthood, the ultimate outcome of the liminal state begun with the freshman year.

During the time spent at the university while discovering a new sense of self, the students go through many influential experiences that can be directly influenced by the university and the residential environment. These include learning to handle the newfound freedom of being on your own, navigating a new living environment, establishing a new social network, creating new support structures, and discovering just who you are. Of these, the students residing on campus felt that the last, discovering who they are, is the most important learned at the university.

### *As Important as a Course*

For many of the students, the experience of living in the halls, of dealing with your roommates and developing those inter-personal skills, were as important, and perhaps more vital, than many of the academic courses they will take. This was true across the range of living environments, and was not felt more in any particular one. The students felt that during this lesson, not only do you learn about dealing with other people and developing social skills, you also learn more about yourself. This lesson the students felt was a vital aspect of themselves,

that they had only recently discovered and learned to establish during their time spent at the university. However, as important as they felt this lesson was, they all expressed a sense of realizing this in retrospect, as it was a lesson they had to learn through experience and could not be taught in a classroom. A few students, such as Lindsey, felt that this lesson was best learned in an on-campus residential situation, as it is a unique environment. Lindsey is a freshman finishing her first year at OSU. As discussed in previous chapters, Lindsey came to the campus from out of state and chose a hall with the desire to meet people on campus. Lindsey was overall happy with her experience in the Residence Halls, and the people she met here. She explained to me: “I think everyone should live in the dorms at least once... It seems like something that I think is a really good experience for people, just learning to live with a roommate, makes you learn a lot about yourself, and how you deal with other people, and I think it’s just good, you find what you need to fix and where, and how much you like being your own way.” Lindsey also felt she had learned a lot during her time in the hall, explaining that living in this environment forces a student to figure out who she is as she learns to live with and interact with other people. Carrie also expressed this, saying “Just as a person, when you’re forced to live around so many different people you learn about different interactions and different ways to deal with things socially.” Lindsey continued “I think it is part of the life lessons you do learn at college, not just being independent and meeting new people, but finding you.” While the students acknowledged that the academic side of the university was important, it was their residential situation (i.e. building, program, roommates, RA,

social interactions) that really helped them to learn the most important lesson of who they are. The RAs also saw the importance of this lesson and of social interactions in learning it, as they themselves were freshmen not too long ago and were in many ways still learning this lesson themselves.

Many of the students who lived in the cooperatives felt that simply living in the cooperative provided a valuable lesson about life. While the students felt this, it had a different effect from the other residential programs and the residents acknowledged that this experience may not occur for everyone. Emily is one of the residents who sees the cooperatives as providing this lesson, explaining: “It teaches one to learn how to deal with so many people and the drama that comes with it. It teaches one responsibility, since we all have assigned chores that we do per term. For some, the environment is too distracting to study, so they must get out of the house. For others, it doesn’t bother them.”

### *Academics and Discovering Self*

The residential environment has a significantly influential part in the never-ending battle a student faces in establishing a working balance between academic responsibilities and an active social life. The impacts of the programs’ structure can be either positive or negative on the student, and quite often change based on the building and program a student resides in.

Even between the halls, the students felt the difference, with McNary as the honors building being perceived as more studious and quiet than the other buildings, which had acquired a party reputation. As one of the RA’s explained: “I

mean, I'm in the honors college, and I don't have lots of friends who like to go out and party and stuff. I think it's the responsibility part of it, because if you're more academically inclined you're probably a little more responsible than the next person. I think that plays a huge factor, if you're drinking in your room, or if you like to get done with your homework, I think if you care about academics, that's part of it."

The other residence halls had perceived distinctiveness as well, with many of these differences in characteristics being attributed to the themes housed within the halls. One RD explained about his hall, saying "The kind of problems that we're going to deal with in Wilson is because of the type of people that are going to go there because it's an engineering building, we're not going to have a huge party where half the building is up in their room with a keg in their room versus some buildings where that could be a scenario that could play out. Here, it's just like they're up too late playing video games, it's too loud. I mean, there's all the normal stuff too, I mean yes people drink in the building and stuff like that, but in all reality we're not dealing with the same stuff that a lot of buildings are."

Weatherford as well had already acquired a more studious and quiet reputation among the students. One of the students who lived in Weatherford explained "I thought I was going to move in with the stereotypical people, computer nerds or people really involved with school, but it's not, everybody is cool...I thought just because you had to apply to get in that people were a little more serious about school in general." This also held true with the regular residence halls, as some of the students who lived there talked about the students

who also lived in the halls as the more typical students, with several residents mentioning their “friends who kept getting into trouble for alcohol and partying”.

While the cooperatives had an acknowledged community and family aspect to them, the student perceptions of the impacts on their academic life was usually positive, with students citing the availability of help from other students or a classmate living in the house as positive influences for them. While they all really enjoyed the social aspect of living in the co-op, the challenge of balancing their social life and their academic life was a very real issue for them. Emily was one of the students who faced this struggle during the year, explaining: “My biggest challenge was balance—trying to be a part of the community, yet at the same time getting all of my work done for classes. Sometimes I had to sacrifice a social or having dinner with the house, or an adventure/outing with co-op friends in order to get my work done.” Emily also saw the impacts on her academic life, going on to explain: “It’s been both negative and positive. No matter where one lives, one has to balance work and social life. But when I see my housemates or roommates studying hard for a test, or just for their class, it makes me want to study so I can do well in my classes too.

Other students see it as a mixed impact, with one student, Shannon, explaining: “I have been able to find a lot of people that are helpful. On the other side, it has made me really social so sometimes my grades aren’t the best!”

While for some students this is a struggle, other students simply see it as the benefit of living in the co-op. Annie liked the impact of her experiences in her

house, explaining “Azalea has been a great place to study, meet others in similar classes, and get advice from older students on classes to take in the future.”

Regardless of the structure of housing they were in, all of the students perceived some kind of influence on the lesson they had learned about balancing academic responsibilities from the housing environment they were in, as well as the students they were living with. However, the living environment can influence more things than just the lesson of self-discovery, dealing with social interactions, and balancing life responsibilities.

This balancing act can be tricky for not only the students, but for the RAs and university as well. The RAs have to learn to balance not only their academics and other personal life responsibilities, but also their responsibilities to the university as an RA. The university has a difficult time helping the students to find this balance as well, as this balance represents the gap that exists between them and their students. This gap between the students and the university exists between the students’ personal/social lives and their involvement with the university and the official housing programs. The more interconnected these two are, the narrower the gap, and the more involved a student is with the university.

### *Focus*

Another lesson the students discussed while in the first few years at university was simply learning how to prioritize what they focused on and spent their energy and time on. “It takes very little time for a college freshman to understand and embrace their newfound freedom. For many it is the first time in

their lives they encounter the challenge of prioritizing their activities.” (Budny & Paul 2003:4)

While there were slight differences among the options, there was a common theme among all the students regardless of the housing program they were in: they all agreed self discipline and the ability to focus on academics was a very important and necessary lesson each student had to learn on coming to the university. One of the students who struggled with this explained this learning process a little bit, stating that the biggest challenge she had over the year was probably “learning how to focus on what’s really important. Because like the first term, I was like “oh my gosh, it’s college” and I met all these new people and I wanted to hang out with everyone and become friends with everyone, because there were so many people to become friends with, and I just wanted to hang out all the time, and I didn’t think of the reason why I was at school, which is school work.”

The RAs and RDs for the halls also noticed this balancing struggle from their own experiences and in the current experiences of their residents. One of them explained:

I think if you’re trying to focus on learning and studying and your academics, I think it’s a lot easier to do so on-campus if that’s what you want to do. Cause there’s like study groups in all the lounges, like if you go by at night there’s a bunch of people in there studying, so I think if you want to study, then it’s a great way to do it. But if you don’t want to, then there are too many distractions, and it’s too easy to get sidetracked.

While acknowledging the difficulty in managing this balancing act, the RAs did not have a simple solution, instead stating that is a lesson each student had to learn for herself. However, while each student does have to learn this, the RAs did offer advice and support for their students from the lessons they had learned.

While an academic focus seems secondary for many of the Residence Halls, the Residence College is different. As a partnership between an academic college and the UHDS, the students residing in Weatherford perceive a stronger focus on academics in the building as compared to the residents of the other halls. As mentioned earlier, one of the RA's explained how she would not have moved back on campus if it had not been for the focus and uniqueness of the AEP. Other students would tell stories of hearing about the fireside chats, visiting professionals, classes, and activities. While some of these stories were positive, not all were. Alex, a freshman residing in Weatherford, felt alienated by the program within Weatherford as she was a pre-pharmacy major and perceived the AEP to be a business-only focus. She explained that she saw no relevance to her field within the academic focus of her building, and as such was not interested in participating. She liked living there, but was not planning on returning for a second year, as she joined a sorority during the year and would be moving into the sorority house for the next year.

Weatherford has a main focus on academics, specifically on entrepreneurship and business. However, the students explained one surprising aspect of Weatherford -- the fact that the main focus seems to be on the individual

and individual accomplishment and growth, rather than on creating, or helping to create, new start-up companies. While this is acknowledged as one of Weatherford's goals, neither the staff nor the residents listed it as a primary one. One of the administrative staff, Jackie, acknowledged it as a goal when asked about the objectives of Weatherford as a college. She said that one of the measures of success of the program was to see "...increased economic development in the region." However, she also mentioned that Weatherford was more about "creating an environment" for the students. She put it this way: "We want to create a place where Bill Gates could create Microsoft while still earning a degree." Another one of the administrative informants, Tim, mentioned the four pillars of their new TICK program: Teamwork, Individual Accomplishment, Community, and Knowledge. While creating new start-ups is not one of the main pillars, Tim stated that it falls under the "Knowledge" category, as "Knowledge" refers to entrepreneurial knowledge. One of the residents, Trisha, specifically mentioned that the "objective is not so each student has a business", adding that they want to make it so each student has a basic knowledge, so they will be on the lookout for ideas.

The expectations of the goals of the program add to the concept of the gap, as the perceptions of the administration do not completely coincide with the perceptions of the goals by the students. This could be a result of their position, or it could be the result of the differences in who they are: business professionals from a different generation versus students who are just beginning their transition to adulthood and are still discovering who they are and what they want. When

establishing the goals of the program, the university needs to acknowledge these differences and work with the students to overcome them.

In addition to providing an environment for learning these needed lessons, the students also perceived the on-campus residential options as providing them with a safe spot. The students felt the residential structures provide an environment that provides a place for them to experiment with and experience freedom while still taking care of some of the responsibilities that come with living on your own, responsibilities that the students would have to deal with if they were living off campus. Providing this “safe” environment is the ultimate responsibility of the RAs and the university - a safe environment for the students to experiment and learn in.

*“I don’t want the cares of living on my own”*

Living off campus was an interesting option for more students. When asked about whether or not they had considered living off campus, they had all thought about it. Many times they also had a very prompt response to the question, answering very decidedly why they had not chosen to live off campus. The responsibility of living on their own was a key deterrent to living off campus for many of them. The hassles of having to pay bills, cook food, and figuring out the day-to-day transportation were worries the students would gladly live without. Carrie expressed some of these concerns explaining “Well, I’m a little forgetful, so paying bills and things like that, I think, and cooking your food, like I’m the type of person who likes to take my time, and if I have to spend a whole hour cooking

food and then eating it, like that's a while hour that I could just run down to the dinning center come back and keep working.”

In addition to keeping track of everything, the students explained that living on campus made them feel more connected, and living off campus would not provide the same thing. They explained that living off campus would be different in that they would be more “on their own” instead of living on campus in a community. Beckie explained this saying “I imagine off campus living, I would just feel like really disconnected and like far away, and I would feel like resources would be more difficult to get to, and people would be more difficult to connect with, and I would just feel like I was on my own, and it would be hard to find people to help. “

While the students all talked about discovering the new freedom they felt now that they were not residing under their parents' roof, they all agreed that they did not want the responsibilities that living off campus would have given them. This is an interesting situation the students are in, as they want freedom but not the responsibility that comes along with it. This fits with the transition they are going through, as they are basically constructing a new sense of self. They want the ability to experiment with different aspects of their character and environment without the hassle of having to take care of the other responsibilities that come with life. However, these responsibilities are something that the students do eventually have to learn how to handle. This comes as a progression though, with most of the students moving off campus after a year or two, as they now desire more of the freedoms and responsibilities than they had as a freshman. This

progression fits in the natural flow of the liminal state and transition the students are going through, with the end result of becoming an adult and shouldering the responsibilities of life. With these lessons in becoming an adult, the university plays an important role of providing the environment for the students to transition to adulthood in, including the support structures within this environment. This role – providing a safe environment for the students to experiment and learn in – is one area where the university can effectively connect with their residents, as their goals here are the same. Furthermore, this provides an area for the RAs to better reach the students, as in this they do not have to choose one side and can instead help further the goals of both their residents and the university.

### *Becoming an Adult in America*

For the students, the progression of gradually taking on the responsibilities of all life's aspects is part of the journey to adulthood.

Individualism is the predominant feature of young people's conceptions of the transition to adulthood in the American majority culture. The three top criteria for becoming an adult – accepting responsibility for one's self, independent decision-making, and financial independence – all signify the developing capacity of the individual to be independent, self-reliant, and self-sufficient. (Arnett 1998:308)

This ideal of what the requirements are for adulthood matches with what the students residing on campus at OSU perceived as well. As their time at the university passed, the students felt that a progression was needed in their living

arrangements, that some kind of movement towards more responsibility was needed, whether that be as an RA, alternate form of on-campus living environment (sorority, cooperative), or moving off campus. The students all expressed this idea of a progression, with several stating that it would just seem like going backwards if they chose to live in their same hall for another year. They felt that in order to grow students need to progress to gain more experiences during their university stay.

While becoming an RA or an RD was seen as taking on responsibility, moving off campus was perceived by students to have the most amount of individual responsibility involved. The students talked about the kind of decisions that have to be made if one is to live off campus, and the impacts they can have. These decisions include choice of roommates, monthly bills, commuting to campus, staying connected to campus, and keeping a social life active. Madison, a freshman in the Residence Halls, knew about the cares of living on your own and had opted for on-campus the first year and had joined a sorority for the second. She explained about why she had made this decision, explaining: "It's completely different. You have to go grocery shopping for yourself, and you have to pay your own rent. This way it's all on campus, it's all in you're account." The RA's also perceived this difference between on campus and off-campus. Carrie, an RA in the Residence Halls, explained this difference and why she chose to remain on campus:

With my sophomore year, looking at my class load, and yah, it was cheaper to live off campus, but I just didn't want to have the other things you have to think about, and even this year I

chose to be an RA [because] I didn't want the extra things you have to think about living on your own.

While these lessons are clearly something the students have to learn and figure out for themselves, there are required roles the parents of the students and the administration of the university must play in supporting the students during this time.

*Support Required: Parents and the Administration*

The students who enter this liminal state are faced with one of the biggest challenges they will face in their life: deciding who they are. In addition to this, they are also trying to succeed in their chosen academic career. This is quite often a lot to ask of a student, and can be overwhelming from time to time. Because of this, parents and university administration need to understand their roles as supporters of the students during this time.

As supporters, the parents should understand that the students need to be able to make their own decisions in life, but also need to know they have the support of their parents when needed. These support systems can be crucial to a smooth transition for the students.

Adolescence is indeed a tenuous period for all students. Recognizing the many challenges young adults arrive to a university with is only part of the pre-college process. Familial support systems must be educated on transitional challenges and information on university resources must be clearly conveyed. (Budny & Paul 2003:7)

The importance of parental support was evident in the student residents at OSU. At the end of an interview, one of the students started talking with me about her frustrations with the UHDS. She felt that she didn't know fully what she was signing up for with the housing department and it was expensive given what it was. Towards the end of the discussion she mentioned "My parents agree with me, they're not big fans either." It was clear that while she felt this, the fact that her parents also agreed with her gave her the support she needed to express this. She could not define exactly why her and her parents were unhappy with the university, other than there being a lack of complete communication between what the university was offering and the goals of the residential programs and her and her parents' understanding.

In addition to parental support, the university needs to understand its role in supporting the students. The environmental structure of the halls has an impact on the students through the focus on academic responsibilities, taking the responsibilities of life off the shoulders of the students, placing the students in a unique environment with other students who are sharing the same experiences, and providing support systems to help the students through this transition they must face.

While students are trying to figure out their path in life and balancing academics and life, the university has the opportunity to either connect with the student or distance them, thus narrowing or widening the gap that exists between them and the students. By understanding where the students are at and the challenges they are currently facing the university can connect with them.

However, if the university tries to channel the students in a direction the students are not yet ready for or desire, they effectively push the students away and widen the gap.

While each residential program provides a unique experience for the students, there are varying levels of success in connecting with the students and creating a community. The cooperatives had the greatest success at creating a community among the residents. The students who lived in the cooperatives all felt a sense of community and “family” with their house. While the students felt a connection with each other, they also had the greatest disconnect with the university out of the residential options. However, this level of disconnect is acceptable as that is the option of the cooperatives – a house still on campus but set apart, a smaller building, more of a group setting. In contrast, the residential college, Weatherford, had the greatest level of connection with the university and academic life through the program housed within the building. The program also served to foster a community among the students. However, the community within the residential college was focused on the academic program and had considerably less of a social feel. The third option, the residence halls, had little noticeable community or connection between the university and the students. While this did vary by building and floor, the overall effect was not a community or academic focus, and hence the gap between the university and students was still very present in the residence halls.

## Chapter 8: Gender

While the organizational structure of the building plays a role in the overall impact of the hall, there are other factors that can influence the students that are not dependent on the structure. One of these factors is the influence of gender differences and the resulting interactions. While some of these gender differences are very obvious, others can be very subtle, and not always visible. The students perceived these differences during their stay at the halls, and learning how to interact with the opposite gender was seen as part of the lesson learned in social interactions. However, these lessons and differences were often subconscious and not noticed immediately.

### *Gender: The Same, Yet Different*

When asked if gender influenced a student's experience within the halls, the majority of the students would get a quizzical look on their face, think about it for a minute, and then respond with "No, not really." The general consensus among the students was that there is no difference in the way girls are treated from the university or official structural side of things. With little to no perceived differentiation from the university, the students held the opinion of "we're all just residents". Sarah Cunningham, a PhD student at OSU who recently conducted research on women college students and drinking at Ball State University, also discovered through her research that women college students definitely espouse the value that there is little to no difference perceived, "we're all just students" (Cunningham 2006).

As discussed previously, the perceptions that there are no differences between the genders from an administrative aspect may be a new generational development. When asked about the possibility of rooming with a student of the opposite gender, the students most often brought up their parents' objections, or the objections of the administrators, who were all at least one generation older than the residents. The residents did bring up the fact that the main objections of co-ed rooms and houses come from the older generations, and stated that as the main cause of the arguments against it.

A few students did mention that there were some differences in the interactions among the students. However, the students were not surprised by these differences in interactions, and even expected them to occur. Lindsey is an RA within one of the halls and explained the differences, stating: "My inclination is to say no, but at the same time I feel that there is. Just because I think a lot of people haven't lived with the opposite gender before, unless they had a brother or sister who they shared a room with. For me personally it didn't make that much of a difference. In every aspect at least the housing department can control there's really no difference, but I'm sure within interactions socially I can almost guarantee there's some sort of difference." A few other students also echoed these sentiments, citing "social awkwardness" as a main reason for any differences in how the genders were treated.

One of the more interesting perceptions in regards to gender is that a few of the residents felt that girls are treated with a little more assistance from the men in the halls than the men tend to give each other. For example, the men were more

likely to walk a girl back to her hall across campus, whereby a guy would be allowed to cross campus by himself. They mentioned this as being a very general, over-all gender interaction issue and were not surprised to see it actively present within the university system.

The topic of gender is an especially interesting one when talking with the students who live in the engineering hall (Wilson). Because Wilson is an engineering hall, the majority of the residents are male students. As a result of this leaning, the subject of gender comes up more frequently than in the halls where resident female-male ratios are more even. The RAs responsible for this hall noticed the gender difference, and concepts such as “social awkwardness”. They described this awkwardness as not knowing how to behave towards the opposite gender and how to behave in the social life of the hall. They cited such examples as the students preferring to sit in their rooms by themselves playing video games to all hours of the night instead of interacting with other people. The students described this social awkwardness as one of the reasons the genders did sometimes segregate themselves from each other, and why the residents did not know how to behave towards the opposite gender. Other students also brought this up, and while they didn’t use the exact term, they described the same concept as the RAs.

The social awkwardness was also apparent to the RAs in the engineering hall, with one of the aspects of this awkwardness being the engineering male students not knowing how to casually interact with the female residents. One of the RAs explained “I feel bad for the girls sometime because there aren’t any other girls to talk to. The RAs also explained to me that there was an all girls wing

within Wilson, with a male RA joking that he “gets that wing next year.” The RD was very prompt with a response of “No you don’t” and the RAs all laughed, with a female RA telling him “Nice try though”. These gender differences do not seem specific to the engineering residence hall – they appear to be consistent with the overall engineering college. One of the students who is an RA in McNary mentioned these issues in her courses. She is an engineering major, and explained a little bit of this saying “I mean, my experience as an engineer is different just because there’s no girls in my classes. And so, it’s a little bit different atmosphere.” This idea also corresponds with what the RA’s in the engineering resident hall expressed. Due to the lopsided gender ratio in the field of engineering the subject of gender arises more frequently than in the halls where gender is more even.

One of the interesting changes the UHDS is implementing in regards to gender and the residence halls is a new structure they are implementing in Bloss. As one of the current UHDS RA’s explained, one of the floors in Bloss is going to have gender-neutral bathrooms. Gender-neutral bathrooms are where no distinctions are made on the floor regarding gender. The university treats all students simply as “residents”. This means the residents share the bathrooms with all the students on the floor, regardless of gender. When asked about any controversy over this new program, she replied “Oh yah, there’s been lots of controversy. But it’s an option, like there’s only one floor like that in the building, and you have to request to live there, so you have to want to be there, to live on there, I think that’s a good step for gender neutrality, to make sure that people are

treated equal. Some people think it's a step back, some people think it's great.

It's controversial." The controversy surrounding this change exists between the parents and the university and among the different sections of the university itself.

While there did appear to be some controversy among the students, the overall opinion from the residents was generally neutral, with the students who didn't like it still expressing "it's optional. It's not for me, but you don't have to live there if you don't want to". Overall, the students expressed an over-arching concept of tolerance surrounding the gender neutral concept.

While this floor is progressive in regards to gender neutrality, the UHDS also offers less "progressive" alternatives with their all-girl wings. The subject of the all-girls wings did come up in my talks with the students. They mentioned that they thought it a bit weird for there to be all girls' wings but no all boys' wings. I also talked with a student who lived in an all girls' wing even though she had not requested to be put there. She was a little confused as to why they had placed her there, was not happy with her experiences over the year, and was not planning on returning.

For the students, the idea of regulating gender within the halls is a contradictory and difficult concept. In some ways they feel the university should not be interfering, as the act of navigating gender interactions was a vital lesson learned during the time spent residing in the halls. However, they did want the feeling of safety within their halls and privacy (i.e. gender specific bathrooms). In regards to gender, the university has a fine line to walk with providing an ideal

environment for their students and not restricting the students' freedom and ability to explore the gender differences.

The subject of living with the opposite gender was an interesting point to talk with the students about, as they all had certain aspects that they agreed on while also having certain aspects that they all disagreed with. Whether or not the student would be willing to live with a roommate of the opposite gender was divided relatively evenly with some of the girls saying they would actually prefer it because they get along really well with their guy friends and generally see guys as less dramatic than girls, and some saying they would never live with the opposite gender because of moral issues and they see interacting with the opposite gender as being more difficult than interacting with their same gender. While there were contradicting opinions of the students, nearly all seemed to think this was a valid option for students who choose to live with the opposite gender and did not think there would be a greater leaning towards this option from a specific gender. One of the students did mention that she did not want to speculate which gender would prefer this option more because she felt it would be too much like gender stereotyping.

When talking about their perceptions and feelings around a gender-neutral hall, the opinions of their parents and other administrators arose. Compared to the feelings of the administration and their parents, the students often cited a generational gap as the reasons for the differences between their opinions and the opinions expressed by their parents and by members of the previous generation.

Kira, an RA in one of the Residence Halls, is open to the idea of living with a male

roommate and does not see an issue with mixed gendered halls. However, she has noticed the objections to the idea by administrators and parents, and explained that she thought

Parents and older administration members are against it based solely on what they are used to. I used to give housing tours and often parents are surprised that the buildings are co-ed because when they attended school it was separated by building and that is what they have kept with them. I think it is way beyond their expectation that it could even be possible for buildings to have co-ed rooms.

Amy, another RA, also perceived the main objections as something of a generational objection, explaining: “I think the main concern is coming from the parents, not the students themselves.”

The cooperative housing is inherently different from the other options in that it is divided based on gender, and as such the students within it self-opted to live in a single-gender environment. The students who resided there did mention that aside from this they did not really see a big difference in being a woman on campus. The students had interesting, and sometimes conflicting, perceptions of what the administrative and structural differences are in regards to gender. Overall, there seemed to be a feeling of “we’re all just residents” among the students, with no structural differences being perceived. This perception was the same between the resident halls and the residential college, with slight variances for the cooperatives, as we shall see below.

*Living in the Girls Co-Op*

One of the interesting themes that developed through my talks with the students is the difference that exists between the girls' cooperative houses and the guy house. The girls residents I spoke with all said there was a difference in the experiences between the girls and the guys. These differences were all regarding the behavior and personality characteristics of the girls and not in the structure or rules that guided the houses.

Emily noticed this difference and explained her take on the reasons behind it saying: "At least in my experience at Azalea, there seems to be a higher turnover rate at the girls' co-ops than the guys'. This might have to do with the drama and cattiness of girls and girls can only take it so long. Many people move out after one year, and most are gone after their second year. I will be coming back for my third this coming year. The guys seem to learn how to live with each other even if they're not the best of friends. They work it out and are fine with it. A lot has to do with girls' personalities versus boys'. Also, the girls' rooms in the co-ops tend to smell better, and apparently the house as a whole is cleaner and safer (clean wise) than guys." Her statement that many girls tend to move out after their first year is interesting in that the students I spoke with all were planning on remaining for an additional year. This may be a skew in my sample, and would be an interesting aspect to research further. One of the aspects that could be studied with future research is to focus specifically on the students who do move out to discover why they moved out, if they were unhappy with their living

arrangements, and if so, why. Another student, Shannon, also echoed this statement, saying: “Girls usually don’t last as long in co-ops. Guys are not as particular about living situations.” This fits with the opinion the students expressed that while there is not a big difference in regards to gender from an administrative stand point, there is a difference among the interactions of the students.

Annie had a similar opinion to Emily’s of the differences between the girls’ houses and the guys’, although she explained more of the reasons behind it. She explained “The girls’ co-ops are generally a bit cleaner and detail-oriented than the guys’ houses. The experience is similar although it seems that more girls make long-term friendships in the co-ops. Most of the time, girls in Azalea live here 1-2 years and then groups of girls move out into houses off campus while many guys live at Avery for longer.” Annie agreed that most of the girls only live there 1 or 2 years, but explained that this was because they formed friendships and moved out together. She also agreed with Emily that the women’s house was generally a bit cleaner (smells better).

The men’s and women’s cooperatives are located physically close to each other (on the same street, in a row), and are also socially close to each other, as they do many events together. It is interesting, therefore, to look at the differences that exist between the perceptions of the male student residents and the female residents. I spoke with the VP of the guys’ cooperative house, Avery Lodge, and asked him if he saw any difference in the experiences of living in the houses. He did not, responding with “No, I wouldn’t say so. We have the same kind of drama,

socials, conflicts, and fun times. As I have observed, it's all the same experience." This may be a simple case of not having lived in a girls' house and therefore not knowing the other experience, or it may be caused by something deeper. This is an area for future research to fully explore the reasons behind these differences.

The cooperatives also had more of a gender aspect to them than the other residential options because of the nature of the houses – the students who live in the cooperatives had chosen to live in a gender segregated house. When asked if they would be willing to live with a person of the opposite gender, the residents who currently lived in the cooperative house had an aversion to it. This could be a factor of who the students are (they had already chosen not to live in a co-ed building), or it could be a partial result of the structural influence on the students. More research would be beneficial for looking into what affects these preferences of the students.

Overall, however, the choice of which gender to live with did not seem to be major aspect for the students. Rather they emphasized the importance of having a personal choice that should not be dictated by the university. This echoes the opinions expressed by the students in other areas: the students' desire personal choice above structural obligations set by the university. Quite a few of the respondents were open to the idea of rooming with the opposite gender, some of the residents even saying they would prefer living with some of their guy friends as they perceive guys as having less "drama" than girls. One of the students has

since moved to a co-ed house, and told me she loves it there and in fact gets along better with her guy roommates than the girls.

Even with all the issues surrounding rooming with the opposite gender, all of the students agreed that gender does not make a difference when it comes to performing the roles within the university, specially the roles of RA and RD. Regardless of the housing program a student resided in, the ability to carry out the responsibilities of the administrative roles was not seen to have any gender specific variances, with both the regular residents and the RAs expressing this opinion.

The students did not perceive a difference between the genders with regard to the ability to grow and accept responsibility for life. The end result of the transition, adulthood, was not impacted by the university in regards to gender differences among the students.

## CHAPTER 9: Discussion and Recommendations

When students enter a university, they are embarking on so much more than just a journey through the collegiate system – they are beginning the transition that will lead them to the incorporation of a new sense of self and begin the next phase of their life (Budney & Paul 2003, Arnett 1996, and Schouten 1991). Because of this aspect, the ramifications of the time they spend at the university mean so much more than simply what degree they choose and whether or not they graduate. During this time, the students experience a new sense of freedom as they leave the familiar, they begin to establish for themselves a new structure of support and social network, and eventually incorporate a new sense of self as they learn who they truly are.

The students, while admitting they had not known exactly what to expect from their time residing on campus, had come to develop a deeper understanding of the lessons they had learned through their experiences. One of the things the students shared with me through this study is that even though they can be from different backgrounds, have different personalities, and be very diverse, they still have many areas of similarities. It was often these similarities that drew the students together and created a bond that formed a new community within their new environment of college. These bonds and sense of new community helped each student find her way through this time in her life and ultimately to find her place on campus, whether it was in a sorority, Cooperative, Residence Hall, RA for the UHDS, or off-campus.

The university has a significant responsibility to the students during this transition time as the role it plays can have a significant influential role in the students' time of experimenting with who they are. One of the important ways the university uses this influence is through the support structures of the living environments and roles it plays in the transition of the students.

### *The Gap*

While the university has the ability to influence the students during this transition, there are barriers that hinder the effectiveness of this influence. One of the most significant barriers is the gap that exists between the students and the university. There are many ways this gap is created and deepened, some that are avoidable and thereby fixable and others that are inherent to the transition the students are going through and thus unavoidable.

The fixable areas occur within the interactions (or lack thereof) between the university and the student. The university has program goals and messages to communicate to the students while the students have their own preset perceptions and opinions of the residential options. The differences between these two can create a significant gap. While this area gap can be overcome with the right amount of communication and interaction with the university, this mix is not adequately understood by the university and subsequently the right recipe for a solution to bridge this gap is not being developed. Because of this, the gap still very much exists within the on-campus residential programs at OSU.

While communication and interaction between the student and university is one area that can be corrected, there is a disconnect inherent to the liminal nature of the transition the students are going through. The liminal phase, as explained previously, is the stage in a student's life whereby the familiar is left behind and the student embarks on a journey that ultimately ends in adulthood (Budney & Paul 2003, Arnett 1996, and Schouten 1991). The disconnect that occurs as an inherent part of this liminal phase is a result of the desire and needs of the students to be able to make their own decisions and not have the university make them for them. This need is fundamental to the liminal transition the students enter during their time at college, and the UHDS needs to recognize this and work around these needs while still connecting with their residents.

#### *The Halls: A Middle Ground*

One of the key aspects of the liminal stage the students are in is the amount of freedom they now have on their own. They enjoy experimenting with this new autonomy and cite learning how to balance freedom with discipline as one of the major lessons they learned while at college. However, the students were still not prepared to handle the full weight of responsibility of life, and instead desired a middle ground, one they found in the on-campus residential programs at OSU: The UHDS takes responsibility for the structural requirements such as food, housing, and monthly bills, and the student is free to focus on navigating through the changes that have just occurred. With this role, the university has a responsibility to the student to provide support to help the transition go as smoothly as possible.

“Deliberate and intentional efforts to assimilate new students into the institutional culture and environment are essential if the institutions are to expect transitional students to thrive” (Hunter 2006:10). However, while the students want the university to have these responsibilities, they also want the feeling of choice; they want to feel in control during this time in their life. While this may seem contradictory – the students don’t want the responsibility for many things but want the feeling of choice and control – the main desire of the students is to be able to learn how to handle these life responsibilities without becoming overwhelmed in the first year. By taking care of these things until the students feels ready to assume them, the university provides a much needed, if often overlooked, role. This echoes the opinions expressed by the students in other areas: the students’ desire personal choice above structural obligations set by the university.

### *A Very Real Impact*

Because of the role the university plays in taking on these responsibilities and allowing the students to focus on dealing with the transition, the residential options and programs have a very real and influential impact on the lives and experiences of the students who reside within them (Nathan 2005, Astin 1993). While these influences are real, there are aspects of the residential program and life at a university that can change them. These aspects include the understanding of the generational differences between the cohorts of students, the culture of campus as found by the student, and the actual life and interaction within the

residential building. These impacts include effects on the student's social network, life lessons learned, and self-realization. The level of effect the residential programs have on the student does vary by student and program, but all students feel and realize at least some amount of change as a result of their experiences. The changes the students notice are the result of both the official programs with the university and the informal interactions with the other students in the halls. It is the difference in these changes that creates the gap between the university and the students. This gap ultimately separates the student residents from the university and RAs, creating a barrier the university has to overcome when trying to connect with the students and impeding the overall effectiveness of the residential programs.

Some of the factors that influence the extent and areas of impact for the students in the residential programs include which building they chose to live in, how involved they became in the program housed within the building, how important their social life was, and how focused they were on their academics. The level of importance of social involvement to a student had a significant effect on the overall satisfaction with a program as well as influencing which program a student chose. How involved a student became in a residential program also made a significant impact on the student's perceptions of the UHDS and the over-all structure of the house – the more involved a student was the more likely the student was to be satisfied with her experiences. Subsequently, a student's choices about the level of social life versus focus on academics also made a significant impact on the student's overall perceptions of the collegiate experience. If a

student placed a high level of importance on her academic life she was more likely to be bothered by a more rowdy, party oriented residential setting. A high level of social activity in a residence hall gave more of a sense of involvement for a student, unless the student was very academically focused. If a student was very academically focused then a high level of social activity in the hall did not enhance her experience within the hall.

All in all, the students generally agreed that a reasonable balance between academics and social life was an essential part of succeeding in college. It was brought up multiple times that the students who become studious hermits and the students who constantly live the party life are at the extremes and striking a balance is something the students all struggled with. This struggle for balance is something that every student must learn for her or his own self, and was discussed as one of the essential life lessons learned at a university. While the students agreed that the residential programs were not directly responsible for a student's choice, they all talked about the culture within the buildings as being a big factor on the overall academic/life balance of a student, as a very social hall can be a tempting distraction.

### *There is a Difference Between the Options*

While overall the on-campus residential programs have an influence, the individual options also make a difference on this influence. The residential option/program that a student chooses to reside in affects the overall experience and perceptions the student has of the UHDS and residential programs at the

university. While the student initially choose her option based on the reputation and information available, the majority of a student's opinion of his or her residential program is derived from their personal experiences within the buildings.

The students saw the Residence Halls as more of the “freshman experience” – more of a party atmosphere, more of a stereotypical college dorm experience. While a few of the halls were seen as more studious (i.e. McNary and Wilson), the halls were very much perceived as, and practically were labeled as, the standard dorm life. This overall perspective of dorm life as highly social was perceived by the student regardless of the theme the building had, including the residential college. This perception was due in part to the fact that life on-campus was being compared to life off-campus, which has a lower social-intensity factor. While some of the students desire a social experience, the overall perception of the halls can be too social and party-ish, an image the residential programs and the UHDS have to counter and work to overcome in two areas. First, the UHDS has to overcome this image to attract students to choose the on-campus residential options initially. Second, these initial impressions affect the way the students interact with the building and the university, so the administration need to effectively communicate with the students a different idea of what the experience actually is in order to better facilitate becoming involved in the building programs. These stereotypes held by the students contribute to the gap between the students and the university. The students arrive at the university with a preconceived idea of what the building is and the university must first counter these ideas before the

new ideas (i.e. theme of the hall and university goals of community and academics) can be effectively communicated.

Weatherford and the AEP together comprise the Residential College option. While the program run by the College of Business is seen as a definite influencing factor, the newness of the program was seen as a barrier to its efficacy, as students were living in the building just for the building and not participating in the program. While the program also puts more of the burden on the RA's, they did not resent these duties, several of them even choosing to return for a second year. The students were also confident in their opinion that as soon as the program gains momentum it will provide a very beneficial and unique experience that students will not be able to find in a traditional academic setting. This perception that the program will undoubtedly be successful is unproven as of now, but the students had faith in the program and were very hopeful that it would be successful and gain the momentum that it needs.

The Cooperatives provided the most distinct experience out of the residential options. These houses, while being an official offering of the university, were instead seen to be more similar to a Greek house (sorority or fraternity), just without the Greek system. The students living in these houses perceived more of a community than the student residing in the halls, with most of the cooperative students describing their house as a "family". However, there were a few students in the cooperatives that found it to be a bit too much for their preference and wound up moving off campus either on their own or with a few close friends.

*Finding Myself: A Life Lesson*

Where a student chooses to live during her first few years at the university plays a part in the overall impact and perceptions she will have about the university as a whole. However, there is more going on during this time than just where a student lives. While it is universally acknowledged that the main reason a student attends a university is for the academic side of their experience, the extra lessons learned by the students are just as important as the degree they will earn.

One of the most important lessons the students learn in their first years at a university is about themselves. Several students mentioned the process of “finding myself” as one of the biggest concepts they had learned while living at the university. The students explained this concept as a process learned through the interactions with other people, learning how to be on your own, and just dealing with everything. The RA’s also mentioned this as one of the things they noticed in their residents.

*The Freshman Experience*

One of the main aspects for the students of discovering this sense of self during this first year living on campus is very much dedicated to the concept of “the freshman experience”. This is seen as the idea of getting out on your own, meeting new people, forming lasting friendships, and learning how to deal with people. The students I spoke with saw this as an integral part of the university experience, with both positive and negative impacts.

The positive aspects of the “freshman experience” consisted of the life lessons learned and the friends and relationships formed during their time spent on campus. This experience, the students explained, is a valuable time period and phase of a student’s life and academic career.

There are also negative impacts from this experience, namely the lack of focus on the academic areas of the student’s life. Because one of the main reasons a student attends a university is the academic programs, the distractions a student faces can be seen as a deterrent to the real reason a student is there. As mentioned earlier, the ability to focus and time-manage oneself is also one of the factors and lessons that are a part of the whole experience.

The conflict between the academic side of the university and the goals with a social network/life is one of the areas where the gap between the university and the students can be created. The university has more of a focus on academics and if a student wants more of the social life it can increase the gap that exists between them.

### *A Community*

The level of community is influenced by such factors as a student’s transition, freshman experience, perceptions, and overall satisfaction with their residential setting. The students with a higher perceived level of community were overall more satisfied with their residential programs and seemed more likely to return than the ones who felt they had little to no community in their wing or hall. The impact a community can have on the success of a student is something that is

not unique to OSU and has been acknowledged as a significant factor in the impact of the collegiate experience (Astin 1993).

The particular option a student chose did have an impact on this level, with the students who resided in the cooperative houses having a higher perceived level of community. The residential halls had some of the lowest levels, depending on the wing or hall the specific student resided in. While Weatherford's level of community varied depending on the specific wing a student lived in, the overall community feel of the whole building was higher than the regular residence halls.

While the level of community was affected by the particular option the student was residing in, there also appeared to be a level of randomness, simply depending on the specific set of people that happened to live together during a given year. As the level of community a student perceived had an impact on the student's satisfaction and overall perception of the hall, the community aspect should not be left to chance. The university should actively try to encourage and foster the community within the halls. The administration should foster this community by seeking ways to narrow the gap that exists between them and the students by understanding where a student is in life and creating programs that meet the students' needs while at the same time guiding them in the direction of the goals of the university.

The over-all community, the social network the students are able to create has an impact on their level of success within the university and during their liminal transition. When they leave for college, a student leaves behind the support structure and social network they had in their parents, family, and friends.

While this loss and change are part of the liminal transition, it does leave a void that needs to be filled with a new support structure, a new social network. For the students at the university, they need to create an adequate social network within their new environment and friends. While a new social network does not need to be extensive for every student, the student needs to at least be able to have someone to turn to for any crisis that arises, whether it be physical, emotional, financial, or otherwise.

### *Gender Differences*

The students' opinions and perceptions around gender were interesting, and fit with the conclusions from prior literature. When asked, the students did acknowledge a certain level of gender differences but could not actively describe what these differences were. As emphasized in previous research, it is this lack of emphasis and non-communication that can propagate specific gender viewpoints, regardless of the ultimate effects of these views (Holland 1990).

The tendency of the women residents to talk about the relationships and social interactions of their residential situation also fit with the findings from previous literature. The women residents, when asked a general question about life in their building, were more likely to start the conversation – and have the majority focus on – the social relationships found inside the halls and not on the academics or career aspects of the university. The women residents who had a positive perception of their residential situation often referred to their environment as being like a “family”, or close-knit community, whereas the women residents

who had a negative perception simply referred to their environment as a building, or room. This exemplifies the areas within the residential environment that women residents place a higher priority on. Within the residential options, the students residing in the cooperatives were the most likely to express a satisfaction with the “family” factor of their building, and the students in the residential halls were the least likely. The university can help to foster this feeling in the residential halls by creating smaller, more interactive sub-groups within the halls that enables students to more easily get to know their neighbors.

While the students may not consciously realize it, the act of assigning one area more value/time in conversations can unknowingly influence their life decisions and methods of interaction. The university needs to realize that by not focusing on something they can actually in fact influence the perceptions and actions of the students. The university can inadvertently give credence to a concept or theme by spending more time focusing on it, thus influencing what the students perceive as important or not important. One possible way the university can help to positively influence the gender ideals held by the students is to actively and more often encourage discussions around gender, academics, and professional careers with their women residents. By doing so, the university can also help to shrink the gap between their administration and students. However, the university has a fine line to walk when starting and influencing conversations as the students desire autonomy and the ability to choose for themselves. Attempts to influence conversations can actually backfire and push students farther away from the university if the students perceive the university as overstepping their role.

Because of this, the university has to find a balance when implementing these changes.

**Recommendations:**

Because the university does have the ability to influence the outcomes of this transition the students are going through, it has the obligation to make the most of this role and provide the best possible support for these students. In addition to the steps the university is already taking, they may want to evaluate implementing the following suggestions based on the perceptions of the students.

*Freshmen and the Freshman Experience*

The concept of the freshman experience is one of the hardest to quantify and therefore one of the hardest to predict and effectively influence. The students who come to the university are looking for an experience of freedom, of discovering who they are, and of establishing their own rights to becoming an adult. This period of transition will occur naturally in a young adult's life around this time, but the transition to college marks the beginning of the liminal state clearly and precisely. One of the aspects of this time is that the students themselves don't really know what they are looking for or expecting. The unknown, the adventure, the excitement, are some the main traits the students are looking for during this time. This is one of the most difficult aspects for the university as they try to find the right balance of structure and freedom for the students. For many of the students, if they perceive the university as enforcing

rules and regulations too strictly, it will cause the student to pull away from the university and widen the gap that exists, making effective communication and impact on the student's life difficult, if not impossible.

However, as difficult as finding the right balance is during this time, it is still a very important time for the student and as such there is value for the university to explore the various ways they can connect with each group of students. Exactly how the university chooses to do this is obviously up to the specific departments and groups, however, they may find value in exploring what the students here have said and recommendations based on their experiences.

Overall, there are 3 recommendations the university may want to consider:

1. *Provide more open and direct communication with the incoming students around what the freshman experience and what the expectations are during the first year, thereby directly confronting the stereotypes surrounding what the experience is and how a freshman is supposed to act according to these stereotypes.* The concept of what all the freshman experience includes is an elusive one for administration and students alike, and as a result, the idea held by each was found in this research to be different. This misalignment of ideas can widen the gap that exists between the university and the student, and can cause programs the university has in place to be less effective for the over-all student population. If presented with the stereotypes of how a freshman is assumed to want to act and what a freshman is supposed to do, the students can become empowered to choose what to do with their time spent during their collegiate years, whether or

not to conform to the stereotypes applied to them. The knowledge of what is perceived as expected behavior allows the students to make a conscious decision to comply and match the stereotype, or to choose a different route.

2. *Arrange for specific talks during freshman orientation or connect week, flyers posted in strategic locations such as in restroom stalls or inside of dorm lounges outlining “What does it mean to be a freshman?”; Instruct the RAs to talk to their freshman students about what it means, and hold activities specifically aimed at helping freshmen realize what it means to be freshmen.* While these activities do currently go on at the university, they are usually aimed at the general collegiate experiences and do not explain how the university views the freshman experience or what being a freshman means.
3. *Provide a faculty or counselor who students can go to with problems they are experiencing. Allow the student to be anonymous: any action that is taken as a result of the student’s information is not directly tied to the student or situation, thus allowing the student to have any problems taken care of without fear of repercussion or social retaliation from fellow residents.* One of the main concepts a young adult desires in the freshman experience, and in this transition’s liminal state, is freedom: Freedom to do what they want, make their own decisions, set their own rules, and make their own mistakes. However, one of the unique aspects of this is that the students actually desire freedom without the responsibility that goes along

with it. They want the freedom of living on their own without the responsibility of taking care of the day-to-day tasks of grocery shopping and utilities; they want the freedom to interact with who they want to and how they want to, but not the responsibility of having to deal with it if something goes wrong, or it becomes confrontational or dangerous. The students want the university, in essence, to function as a safety net as they are learning to walk in this new role. The challenging part of creating this infrastructure is making sure the students know what is available to them and how to access it without seeming like it is a structure forced on them.

4. *Another method the university may consider implementing is through scheduling freshmen activities throughout Connect week, the first week of school when all the students are present on campus but the academic time-commitment has not been fully reached yet.* These activities can include meetings where club or program representatives come and give an introductory overview of what their group offers, having the RAs from the other residential options show what their option offers so the students know what is out there for the future, and having the university administration meet with the students and give an overview of the way the university works and the perceptions held by the administration to help close the gap between the students and university. During this week, if scheduled correctly, the students can be introduced to what is expected of them as a freshman and as a student at the university, as well as introduced

to a number of clubs, programs, resources available, and ways to become involved in the university.

### *The RAs*

The RAs are one of the critical links in the connection to the students for the university. If the RAs do not connect with the students, either intentionally or unintentionally, the university has lost its main and most effective means of communicating with the student. The RAs are, in effect, the face of the university to the general student resident. How the university connects with the RAs, therefore, is one of the very important areas for the administration.

1. *Increase the time the administration spends with the RAs, both in quantity and frequency.* One of the main ways the university can connect with their RAs is through the training that all of the RAs attend and complete each school year. This training can be a very effective way to reach the RAs, as it is usually a retreat of some sort where time is spent with just the university administration and the RAs. The RAs are the connection to the students on campus, and one of the ways the ideals and concepts of the administration can be effectively communicated to the RAs is for the administration to spend time conversing with the RAs and allowing them to get to know them *on a personal level*.
2. *Schedule formally planned events with the administration, such as training, to an informal gathering, such as a soda-happy hour, coffee in the mornings, or any form of social event.* Several of the RAs in this study

expressed a sense of not really knowing the administration, of enjoying opportunities to get to know the administration, and a desire for an increase in the amount of time spent with the administration. These activities can also be used for increasing the amount of communication that occurs between the administration and the RAs. Communication between these two is a critical step in having an effective housing program. The administration may want to increase the amount and frequency of communication with their RAs, as increased communication would help to ensure that all RAs understand what the university is trying to say and allows the RAs a method by which to communicate feedback to the administration. This feedback can be incredibly valuable to the university, and by fostering personal relationships with the RAs, the administration can encourage more informal, day-to-day feedback about programs and residents.

3. *Recognize who the RAs are as students and the often difficult position they are in as the university's representative to the students.* As students themselves, the RAs not only have to balance their academic obligations, but the ones from the university as well. They also have to balance enforcing the rules of the university and being a student with all the pressures of belonging to the student community and peer pressure from fellow students. The balance between being a student and having to act as the university for other fellow students is not an easy one to find for the

RAs. The university can find value in recognizing this and helping the RAs to find that balance.

4. *Offer special classes or work sessions on creating a plan to achieve that balance, or providing an administration person who can be the rules enforcer if a situation becomes too complicated for an RA to easily deal with.* This enforcer can also serve as the voice of the student residents as mentioned previously, thereby serving a valuable role in the on-campus housing programs.
5. *Get to know each individual RA and find the programs or clubs within the residential programs that fit each RA's specific interests.* These interests can then be matched to the right program or theme of a building and the RA can be placed there. Not only will this positively affect the RAs experience, it will also help the student residents who are in that building. One of the key characteristics the students found important with the RAs was the level of passion they had for their building, for their students, and for the university as a whole. This passion tended to show itself in the level of involvement the RAs had with the university and also had a tendency to rub off on the other student residents, causing a more community-like feeling among the residents. This passion can be a difficult thing to cultivate among students. However, the effect of this passion can be well worth the effort it takes.

*Make it Different*

1. *Implement a more rugged process of student placement for the buildings.*

While there does need to be a diverse mix of students in order to provide a new experience for the students, a more rugged grouping process *according to overall interests or life experiences such as majors and year placement in college* would provide a common ground for the students to connect with and form a community. The students may be able to connect more effectively if they are placed with other students of like interests and stages in life. While there are different and individual themes for each of the residential buildings on campus, few of them are able to effectively implement these so they are visible and practical for the students who reside in them.

2. *Create a building that is dedicated to a “student chosen theme” that rotates every  $x$  amount of years, with the actual amount being set by the university.* The idea behind this is to allow the residents to become involved in the actual programs in the buildings and choose one of the themes for one of the buildings. This theme would be something that is relevant to them and something they feel they are invested in. The reason for rotating every  $x$  amount of years is to keep the theme current for each generation and group of students, as well as keeping them involved in the process. A few possible themes include a Green/Sustainability theme, Public Service/Political, and Agricultural.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

During this study, other areas have become apparent as possible areas for future research. These areas would provide a deeper understanding of the students and their experiences at a university. These areas and questions to focus on are:

- Examine the relationship between a student's major and the experiences that student has within the residential options
- Follow a group of students from different housing options through their entire collegiate career and compare their experiences to obtain a more in-depth analysis
- Follow a group of students from one university and a similar group of students at a different university to compare the impacts a specific university can have
- The average time spent in a certain housing option in relation to gender would also be an area for future research. Do women tend to live in one place longer? Or do the men? Are men all around more satisfied with their housing? Or are the women?

### **Conclusion**

“I think it is part of the life lessons you do learn at college, not just being independent and meeting new people, but finding you.” These were the words of one student who had lived this lesson. For her, the time spent here was important. She explained to me about all the friendships she had formed through all her experiences, and the lessons learned in juggling her academic life and her social

life. These are the lessons that many college students will learn while at the university. Because these lessons are so important and influential for these students, the factors that influence the residential experience--and can indeed make or break a student--are important for the university to know. These lessons will occur during this stage in the students' life anyway. What is important is for the university to provide the best possible environment for the student to learn and make mistakes in. The critical aspect of a successful environment setup is allowing the students to make choices and make their own mistakes, but being there to catch them and set them back on their feet. In other words, provide a safe environment. This type of a structure is very much like helping a child learn to walk – they need to be allowed to venture on their own and take a few steps, but they need someone behind them to catch them if they fall and stand them back up. The university is in an ideal place to do this, as students leave the protective net of their parents and are taking their first few steps into adulthood. The university can provide this safety net while at the same time not appearing to be “protecting” the students, as the feeling of freedom and autonomy is important to the students during this stage.

If a university is aware of these impacts, they can put in place programs, or ways to help the students in understanding these lessons. These programs can include aspects such as faculty to discuss academic problems and issues with, counselors or upperclassmen to ask about interpersonal issues, and financial advisors to help students with decisions they have to make about loans. All in all, the university needs to be there for the students, providing support and access to

people who have been through these lessons and can provide advice on how to best deal with them. The university also needs to be there as a safety net in case the students have not quite found the balance they need. Providing this net is one of the functions the UHDS serves in this liminal transition. The students who reside on campus choose this living arrangement in part because they want this middle ground to help them along their way during all the changes they are navigating through.

Throughout this study, the students who were my informants continued to surprise me with the level and depth they had thought about these lessons and what they had realized they had learned throughout their year. Sometimes, when describing the importance of learning how to live with people and the integral part those lessons play throughout the rest of their life, the students sounded much older than their sophomore status.

If the university can provide this support for the students, it has the potential to create a much more effective college transition and success rate for the students within the programs. A higher success rate not only helps out the residential program with higher retention rates, it also helps out the university as a whole with higher student retention rates and an overall higher level of student satisfaction. The students who currently reside in the residential option are, truly, the future. As such, they deserve all the help and guidance we can provide.

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### Appendix 1: Interview Topic Guide

- How has your year been so far in your building?
  - Experiences?
  - Has it had any impact on your educational experiences?
- What is life like here in your building?
  - Community feeling in the building?
  - Overall emphasis in your building? (educational, community, party, individual, residential)?
- What do you like about living here?
- What is your favorite aspect of living here?
- What is your least favorite aspect of living here?
- What has been your biggest challenge this year, living arrangement related or otherwise? Tell me briefly what are your top 2-3 challenges this year?
- Is this your first year living here? In this building? Have you lived somewhere else (on-campus, different building) before here?
- How did you choose your building in the very beginning, before you came to OSU?
  - Was there something specific that made you choose this one?
  - Were there any significant factors that affected your decision?
- Do you think living here has made an impact on your life here at OSU so far? In what ways?
  - Impact on grades/school work?
  - Impact on social life?
  - Impact on overall academic success?
- In your opinion, how has the experience of living here been different from living in another building on campus? Based on your perceptions of the other buildings, stories you have heard, etc.
  - How would life/experiences be different in other buildings?

- Do you think those impacts (if any) would have been different had you been in a different building?
- In your opinion, what makes living in a (insert their category here) different from living somewhere else? Other places on campus, and off campus.
- What makes it different from living in a (insert other categories here)?
  - What do you think creates those differences?
  - Which ones are positive? Negative?
- If you knew someone who was coming to attend OSU for the first time, what advice would you give that person about where to live?
- If you had the option to share a room with a guy, would you? Why or why not?
- Why do you think there is such a debate about gender-neutral dorms? What are the sides/discussions?
- What makes it different, if it is, to room with the opposite gender than with the same?
- If given the choice, do you think there would be more guys than girls who would choose the gender-neutral rooms?
- Has there ever been a time or experience in the dorms when you thought, "It's a bit difficult being a girl in this situation?"
- Or has there ever been a time or experience in the dorms when you thought, "It's an advantage to be a girl in this situation." or "I'm glad I'm a girl."?
- Also, do you prefer male or female RA's and why?

## Appendix 2: Student Informants

### Administrators:

Pseudonym	Position
Dave	Administrative Staff within the AEP
Tim	Administrative Staff within the AEP and Residential Faculty
Lizzie	Administrative Staff within the AEP

### Residents:

Pseudonym	Building	Year	Gender	Role	Future Plans?
Madison	Bloss	Freshman	Female	Resident	Sorority
Kira	Wilson		Female	RA	Unknown
Mandie	Wilson		Female	RA	Unknown
Amy	Wilson		Female	RA	Unknown
Carrie	McNary		Female	RA	Unknown
Beckie	McNary	Freshman	Female	Resident	Sorority
Lindsey	Finley	Freshman	Female	Resident	Apartment
Lydia	McNary	Freshman	Female	Resident	Unknown
Brad	Wilson	Grad	Male	RD	RD
Ben	Wilson	Junior	Male	RA	RA
Lauren		Senior	Female	Past	Graduating
Trisha	Weatherford	Senior	Female	RA	Graduated
Alex	Weatherford	Freshman	Female	Resident	Sorority
Drew	Weatherford	Freshman	Female	Resident	Sorority
Val	Weatherford	Sophomore	Female	Resident	Off-Campus
Pat	Weatherford	Sophomore	Female	Resident	Off-Campus
Sam	Weatherford	Junior	Male	RA	RA next year
Matt	Weatherford	Grad	Male	RD	RD
Emily	Cooperative	Sophomore	Female	Resident	Azalea
Annie	Cooperative	Freshman	Female	Resident	Azalea
Shannon	Cooperative	Freshman	Female	Resident	Azalea Social Chair
Dan	Cooperative	Junior	Male	VP	Avery

**Appendix 3: UHDS Letter of Approval**

May 11, 2007

Institutional Review Board  
Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance  
Oregon State University

To Whom It May Concern:

Dr. Nancy Rosenberger and Rachel Nelson, Anthropology Graduate Student, have permission to utilize OSU resident student information for the purposes of the research study titled: Life on Campus: A Case Study of the On-Campus Housing Choices at Oregon State University. This information will be limited to:

**Student Names:** Used for individualized emailed invitations  
**Emails:** Used for individualized emailed invitations.  
**Residence hall name:** Used to determine whether students are in a hall with a living-learning program or one without a living-learning program.

This individual information with responses will remain confidential for researchers only and will not be provided to University Housing and Dining Services (UHDS) practitioners in anything other than aggregate data.

For questions about this research, please contact Eric Hansen, Associate Director of University Housing and Dining Services at 541.737.7708 or [eric.hansen@oregonstate.edu](mailto:eric.hansen@oregonstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Tom Scheuermann, Director