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# Evolving Landscape of Residential Education

Enhancing Students' Learning in  
University Residential Halls

 Springer

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Residential Halls


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# **Part I**

## **Introduction**

# Chapter 1

## A Review of Current University Residential Settings



Michelle Wing-tung Cheng and Samuel Kai Wah Chu

**Abstract** This chapter first gives a brief introduction of the aims of this book, providing a global overview of current residential hall systems. It then looks at the rich tradition and history of university residential halls from an educational perspective. A review of the relevant literature with regard to the university residential setting is also provided to illustrate the importance of university residential halls. The chapter concludes by examining current difficulties and challenges encountered by residential communities.

**Keywords** University residential hall systems • Educational value • Difficulties and challenges • Residential communities

### Introduction

Most universities around the world provide residential accommodation; yet, only a few, such as Harvard University, the University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge, perceive residential halls as part of the higher education curriculum and as providing educational value. Since interpretations of residential education vary among universities and countries, this chapter first describes the history of university residential halls. Then, it provides an overview of current residential hall systems worldwide and examines them from an educational perspective. At the end of the first chapter, a review of relevant literature in regard to the challenges encountered in university residential settings is elaborated upon, so that educators and researchers who are interested in the field may further work on the identified issues to enhance the educational value of university residential halls.

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## The Origins of the University Residential System

‘Residential university’ is a concept that was newly raised by the end of the thirteenth century. Neither Oxford nor Cambridge was established as a residential university when it was founded. However, a university residential model named the Oxbridge model emerged from these two medieval universities, in the hope of providing a better and safer teaching and learning environment for scholars and students.

As one of the oldest universities in Western society, Oxford grew rapidly after 1167, when students were banned from attending the University of Paris by the British government (Morris, 1978). Social conflicts between students and townspeople arose during the medieval period, as the British King granted more privileges regarding food and shelter to Oxford students. These privileges directly harmed the interests of merchants in the town, as well as deepening social inequality, which resulted in intense relationships between the town and the university in the late twelfth century. Fierce riots broke out when town authorities did not consult orthodox bodies and hanged two Oxford scholars after accusing them of causing the death of a woman. These events resulted in the suspension and reform of Oxford, including the establishment of primitive halls of residence to protect students. Therefore, this context led to the founding of the two oldest colleges in Oxford: Balliol College (1263) and Merton College (1264).

During the suspension of Oxford, some scholars took refuge from hostile townspeople by moving from Oxford to Cambridge (Morris, 1978). This migration led to the establishment of the University of Cambridge (Leedham-Green, 1996). However, students in Cambridge were exploited by townspeople there and had to pay for overcharged rooms and food (Roach, 1959). To prevent similar incidents from occurring again in Oxford, the British King tried to ensure the protection of scholars by providing shelters for students through the absorption of hostels in the town. As a result, colleges were able to house students and the first college in Cambridge, Peterhouse (1284), was founded.

## The Existing Residential System Worldwide

With the colonisation of North America, nine colonial colleges, including intuitions such as Harvard and Princeton, were founded based on the Oxbridge Model (Blimling, 2014). In the 1930s, Harvard implemented their residential college system: ‘the housing system’. It was the first university in the United States to put forth a residential college and has kept the housing arrangement to this day to mitigate socioeconomic disparities. Substantial efforts and resources are invested in the development of the Harvard community, including the provision of academic, personal, and social counselling and community services for students. Academic advisers, peer advising fellows, resident deans, and proctors help first-year students with both academic and personal matters. Under the housing system, all first-year students

are required to live in Harvard Yard, which has shared suites and dining halls that are exclusive to freshmen. After their first year, freshmen enter the housing lottery through blocking groups (Under the current upper-class housing system, “blocking groups” are self-selected groups of one to eight freshmen who are placed into the same house) (Herwitz & Siegal, 2017); then, each group is sorted into one of the 12 Harvard Houses. The author of this chapter randomly interviewed several students at Harvard. According to the respondents, over 95% of undergraduate students often choose to stay in residential houses throughout their undergraduate years at Harvard, although it is not compulsory to do so after freshman year.

At Princeton, all freshmen are assigned to one of six colleges, and upper-class housing is employed after their first year. On-campus housing for undergraduate students is guaranteed and the school has organised academic workshops and seminars in residential halls to provide academic support to students through residential education (Hageman, 1879). The author also interviewed students at Princeton. According to the respondents, residential life is central to the Princeton experience, with 98% of undergraduates living on campus. Intellectual exchange is emphasised at the college; students function as small groups, interacting with and being inspired by academic tutors and senior students.

In the above residential systems, every student at each institution has the opportunity to experience the residential system for at least one academic year. Residential experiences are not limited to lodging; they also provide opportunities for personal and social development, as well as career and academic support. Later in the twentieth century, the US National Institute of Education proposed the construction of ‘living-learning programs’ (LLPs) in university residential halls (Inkelas, 2008; Inkelas et al., 2008; Inkelas et al., 2008; Inkelas & Soldner, 2011). LLPs are defined as academic and/or extracurricular programmes that are tailored for undergraduates who live together in halls of residence (Soldner & Szelényi, 2008, p. 15). To put the idea of LLPs into practice, external parties, such as faculties and student affairs offices, take the initiative to host various LLPs in halls for student residents (Inkelas et al., 2008).

The long history of campus residency in Western countries and the concept of the residential university have slowly become more popular around Asia. For instance, the University of Hong Kong took reference from the Oxbridge model and was established as a residential-based university in 1912. However, LLPs are not a new concept in Asian countries. The University of Macau has transformed itself into a residential-college university since 2014, providing all undergraduate students with at least one year of residential experience. The school requires all full-time academic staff members to commit one hour per week to resident development services, such as providing support for student learning beyond the classroom and organising activities that challenge students to take responsibility and grow, according to Chen (2017). Prior to that, the National University of Singapore (NUS) clustered residential spaces and learning facilities to launch its University Town in 2008, in order to promote the nexus of living, learning, and working in residential colleges (Chan & Ng, 2008). This system is different from conventional residential halls in Singapore, which have minimal learning activities structured within their operations.

In 2011, a partnership between Yale University and the NUS gave rise to the Yale-NUS College. Never intended to be a carbon copy of Yale University, it has incorporated Singapore and South East Asian contexts into its curriculum. However, its residential college system mirrors that of Yale and other leading universities in the United States, effectively infusing liberal arts and science education into residential living (Bailyn, 2020). The Yale-NUS College creates ‘nested communities’ that support lifelong learning in liberal arts and sciences by combining academic, intellectual, social, cultural, athletic, and artistic life. It encourages students to pursue a co-curricular life of student governments, clubs, and organisations, so as to develop leadership, independence, agility, and strength of mind. The student-government system enshrines core values of transparency; all meetings are open to the student body, student concerns are effectively reported to all administrative arms, and accountability is employed, with all committees having student members acting as monitors for input and oversight. The college also sponsors education programming events, invites guests for tea, and offers programmes to enhance students’ intellectual and cultural experiences. The intercultural engagement of the college activates diversity consciousness and enables dialogues among students to cultivate greater bravery and inclusiveness. The college advocates a culture of self-discovery through knowledge sharing and self-exploration. In case students need any help, there are professional support staff standing by. Emotional safety plans, solidarity meals, and meditation are offered monthly as spaces for healing. The living-and-learning experience between classroom and community defines the residential model of the Yale-NUS College.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore, on the other hand, has opted to layer a residential education scheme over its existing conventional residential halls, starting in 2014 with two pilot halls and progressively expanding to all 22 undergraduate halls by 2018. Although most residential activities remain extra-curricular, creative projects leveraging links between hobbies and academic disciplines have been weaved into the overall fabric of the NTU residential halls, carving a co-curricular learning niche to strengthen holistic education (Pang et al., 2016).

## University Residential Education

Residential colleges, which are responsible for providing residence, catering, socialising activities, and academic support to students under the Oxbridge model, have paved the way for university residential education. In the history of campus residency, the possibility of bringing the potential of education to students’ residential environment among education institutions was raised long ago (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 1969; O’ Hara, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroeder & Mable, 1994), particularly in its roles and impacts on student residents. For instance, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) compared undergraduates who were and were not living on campus. The results demonstrated that university residential experiences led to better persistence and a significantly higher graduation rate among students. Another key study, which followed 101 undergraduates for five

years to track their personal development, found that social competencies and the appreciation of diversity were higher among those who had residential experience (Magolda, 1992). In addition, Astin (1999) mentioned that students who participate in residential activities to support and build hall communities engage in learning experiences that have a positive impact on their education and personal development. However, Blimling (1989) found that simply living in residential halls does not necessarily support the contention that halls have a significant effect on students' attitudes, values, academic performance, or intellectual or psychosocial development. Current research related to university residential education is scarce, particularly in regard to student residential learning outcomes and different structured/unstructured residential programmes. Although some residential universities claim to facilitate residents' whole-person development via student residential experience, a formal evaluation of whether or not residential halls have achieved these goals is lacking, and there are now doubts that such goals can actually be fulfilled (Cheng & Chan, 2019).

### *Sense of Belonging*

Past research has reached a consensus that residential experience promotes a sense of belonging to one's university. According to Hughes (1994), residence halls are the home in which students can develop an identity during the intensive learning period. Past research has investigated the differences between commuter students and resident students in regard to their social development on campus (Lima, 2014; Winston & Anchors, 1993). Studies revealed that, compared to resident students, commuters generally get involved less in on-campus activities and student organisations. As a result, commuters generally feel more isolated and less socially active on campus. Residential halls serve as a safety net for students to explore campus. According to Rinn (2004), 'the safety a student feels within a residence hall community can thus serve as a starting point for student exploration' (p. 69). Residents create different social circles and build peer relationships with each other in residential halls. According to the review panel on residential hall education and culture, 'hall members work hard to sustain their particular hall culture, values and identity, often encapsulated in distinctive names' (The University of Hong Kong Media, 2017, p. 1). A close-knit community can be created within each hall (Spanierman et al., 2013). When residents are strongly committed to it, a sense of belonging and bonding are created. Social identification within the residential hall can help residents to adjust to university life both academically and socially (Braxton & Mundy, 2001). Residence halls provide a social platform for residents' interactions and further encourage a sense of community, thereby reducing levels of university student departure.

## *Academic Achievement*

The relationship between residential experience and academic achievement is uncertain. A meta-analysis was conducted by Blimling (1989), which selected 21 studies among published research regarding halls of residence in higher education across 20 years. The results suggested that students living in halls generally have better academic performance, but this result became insignificant when prior academic achievement was controlled. These results are aligned with a study in America that studied the quality of residential education by distributing questionnaires to 2678 residents (Pike et al., 1997). There was no significant increase regarding students' interactions with faculty staff or the frequency with which they accessed academic resources on campus. Students' first-year college experiences revealed that academic achievement and persistence were not directly or indirectly improved by their residential experience. However, Astin (1973) found a positive relationship between living in residential halls and GPA. Similarly, another study shows that on-campus accommodation with living-learning centres can positively affect students' academic development (Inkelas et al, 2007). Thus, the results of previous literature are not only inconclusive, but were also conducted a long time ago. The latest related research concerns how the architecture of residence halls may affect students' academic outcomes (Brown et al., 2019), but there is still a lack of current studies examining how different types of residential experiences may affect students' academic performance.

As mentioned above, there is an absence of current research on the effectiveness of residential education. López et al. (2010) noted that the actual mechanisms of how student residents benefit from their residential experiences are still unknown and there is a lack of standardised assessment addressing how student residents benefit from residential experiences. University residential halls provide unique student involvement in the collegiate setting, which may have a distinct influence on students' development and learning, different from in-class or other out-of-class experiences. Given that actual residence life outcomes are still doubtful, the effectiveness of university residential experiences in student development remains as a question. López et al. (2010) believed that there are still missing pieces in the puzzle of why some students benefit from residing on campus and some do not. It is believed that students' social activities in residential settings should be examined to understand the actual mechanisms underlying this issue, as Terenzini et al. (1996) stated that the real advantage of university residential halls does not necessarily stem from the hall itself, but rather from the opportunities and activities for socialisation facilitated by the living space. Without a thorough understanding of how residents may benefit from residential experiences, it is difficult to design and create educational and meaningful residential experiences for students.

## Challenges to Creating Educational Residential Experiences

Although residential systems are different in various countries and universities, similar challenges have been identified in creating meaningful residential education that facilitates student development. First, internationalisation efforts within higher education have led to rapid increases in non-local students. Students with diverse life experiences, such as in their political, cultural, racial, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, are housed together (Crisp & Turner, 2011). Although this presents opportunities to promote cultural integration, it requires extra efforts to integrate people from different walks of life. As cultural diversity in residential halls may lead to lifestyle conflicts and language barriers among residents, this may further discourage or inhibit students in regard to becoming involved in residential hall life (Blimling, 2014). Yet, some studies suggest otherwise, stating that conflicts are short-lived and students can become more open and accepting of cultural differences by living with very different people (Levine & Dean, 2012). Despite this possibility, it is unclear how cultural integration can be facilitated in hall communities.

Second, peer influence is a double-edged sword in regard to students' residential experiences. It is no wonder that residential halls were described as containing cohesive social atmospheres (O'Hara, 2016), as they are places where students build friendships and meet new people. According to Blimling (2014), this complex social system of the residential peer environment has the potential to create positive learning experiences for students. Unlike living at home, where students can take a break from socialising with their peers, living in residential halls forces residents to interact with and befriend others who are living under the same roof, especially their roommates, people who live on the same floor and residential tutors (Cheng & Chan, 2021). Residential halls provide students with many opportunities to practise interacting with others in different situations. However, residential halls also have the power to create negative peer influence on student residents. For instance, past studies have found that occurrences of binge drinking and drug abuse are significantly higher among hall residents than among commuters (Brower et al., 2003; Novik & Boekeloo, 2013; White et al., 2006).

Third, a clear and updated list of factors affecting student involvement in residential halls has not yet been established. The latest lists were developed a decade ago, reporting that intangible factors, such as students' gender, subject of study, relationships with resident tutors, and frequency of interactions with peers and faculty members have significant impacts on students' involvement in residential halls (Arboleda et al., 2003). It is not certain if such lists are still applicable today; for example, current studies have found that gender no longer plays a significant role in student hall involvement (Chu et al., 2019), while the quality and quantity of resident assistants may have more influence on residents than expected (Cheng & Chan, 2020). Thus, there is a lack of consensus regarding how various factors affect student involvement, leading to challenges in creating educational residential experiences that attract students to participate in halls.

Fourth, researchers do not have a clear understanding of the residence life outcomes that students can develop through residential hall experience. Although structured LLPs are popular around the world, Inkelas and Soldner (2011) have criticised these residential hall programmes for lacking a systematic focus of research on their effectiveness in delivering the student residence life outcomes the programmes are designed to promote. Without knowing what residence life outcomes can be developed, it is difficult to create the kinds of residential experiences that can facilitate student development. According to Bronkema and Bowman (2017), evidence proving connections between specific characteristics of residence halls and desired residence life outcomes is almost non-existent. Although Cheng and Chan's (2019) study provided an updated reference with which to understand students' residence life outcomes in non-LLP residential settings, their work was not tested in LLP settings.

Fifth, despite there being residential educational aims that have been commonly shared by local universities, the particular residential educational aims of institutions generally diverge from one another. Stated or unstated residential educational aims have not been measured regarding their alignment with each university's educational aims. Therefore, it is still unclear whether or not residential activities are conducted in a way that facilitates the achievement of university educational aims.

This chapter has presented the history of residential halls, as well as their current development. It has also discussed the lack of research on student residential experiences and residence life outcomes. After describing the challenges that university residential communities encounter, it is hoped that future studies will be conducted to address the identified problems, as well as to provide evidence-based recommendations for the development of better residential environments that are beneficial to student development and the advancement of university residential education.

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## **Part II**

# **Models and Outcomes**

## Chapter 2

# A New Theoretical Model Through Which to Examine Student Residence Life Outcomes



Michelle Wing-tung Cheng

**Abstract** To understand students' development through their unique residential experiences, a new model is proposed to explain factors that affect students' hall involvement, particularly in regard to how various residential experiences may result in different student residence life outcomes. The model is built upon a preliminary framework that consists of the input-environment-output model (Astin's student involvement theory) and the presage-process-product (3P) model. It is crucial to first understand how the residential environment has impacts on student involvement and development, before any practical recommendations or interventions are given to the residential community. Adopting this new model can enable researchers and stakeholders to better understand student dynamics in university residential settings.

**keywords** Residential experiences · Residential outcomes · Theory of student involvement · Presage-process-product model

## Introduction

Various university residential systems exist around the world; yet, no consensus has been reached regarding how to understand student residential experiences and their residential outcomes. There is an absence of a structured framework with which to investigate student development in non-academic contexts. To better understand student residential outcomes after living in halls, this chapter combines two existing theories—the theory of student involvement (specifically, the input-environment-outcome model) and the presage-process-product (3P) model—to propose a new student involvement model for university residential halls. The new model complements the I-E-O model by including the cognitive elements of students, while also taking into account the 3P model by considering the impact of the environment.

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