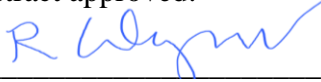


AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Charles E. Crawford Jr. for the degree of Doctor of Education presented on July 26, 2024.

Title: Housing and Residential Life Staffing: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Residential Life Professional Staff

Abstract approved:



Roxana Wright PhD
Dissertation Committee Chair

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at two University System of New Hampshire (USNH) institutions. An initial survey was conducted to gain insights into the characteristics of these individuals and perceptions of their lived experiences. Interested participants were then invited for virtual individual interviews to delve more deeply into these perceptions. The verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed thematically, which included two coding rounds to identify key themes. Participants viewed their experiences positively and identified motivating factors for pursuing roles in housing and residential life programs. Participants described barriers related to work-life balance while also sharing potential improvements related to the functions of their roles. Several sub-themes highlighted the importance of academic and behavioral interventions and student connections through programming and crisis response, underscoring these aspects as vital components of their roles. The participants emphasized that making meaningful impacts on students' lives by balancing enforcement with mentorship, providing resources, and building significant relationships contributes to a sense of fulfillment. The study concluded that the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are complex and multidimensional. For higher education and housing and residential

life leadership, the findings suggest a need to consider these complexities when recruiting, training, retaining, and developing staff in these roles. Understanding residential life staff members' experiences can enhance the overall effectiveness and satisfaction of people in these positions, ultimately benefiting the students they serve.

Keywords: housing, staffing, residential life, higher education, and student affairs

©Copyright by Charles E. Crawford Jr.

August 9, 2024

All Rights Reserved

Housing and Residential Life Staffing: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Lived
Experiences of Residential Life Professional Staff

By

Charles E. Crawford Jr.

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

Plymouth State University

In partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

Defended July 26, 2024

Degree Conferred August 9, 2024



Dissertation Approval Page

Plymouth State University

Dissertation of Charles E. Crawford Jr.

Presented on July 26, 2024

APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Wright", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. Roxana Wright, Dissertation Committee Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Norris", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. Kathleen Norris, Dissertation Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Weintraub", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. Susan Weintraub, Dissertation Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Bowditch", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Plymouth State University, Lamson Learning Commons. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles E. Crawford Jr.", written above a horizontal line.

Charles E. Crawford Jr., Author

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Katie, who has consistently shown me the love, compassion, and understanding that soulmates should and for always being there no matter how tough things get and what life has to throw at us. To my sons, Micah and Tristan, this is to show you that anything is possible and that your dad is pretty cool after all. To my sister Christina, you have always been there for me even when times were tough, and I am forever grateful to you. To my grandfather, you made me the man I am today and always believed in me and my success. To my grandmother, who instilled in me a passion for education, I know you would have loved to have been on this journey with me. To my father-in-law, Bruce, for taking me into your family and knowing I would give my all. To Aunt Bonnie for believing in me when I was younger, even when other educators did not. Finally, to Aunt Kathy and Uncle Jack, who would have loved seeing the man I became.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation and the journey it took would not have been possible without the support of so many individuals. While I will do my best to acknowledge and appreciate everyone who contributed, I will never be able to express the depths of my gratitude fully. I want to thank my committee members for their patience, encouragement, and support during this dissertation process. Dr. Roxana Wright, I am beyond thankful for your unwavering support during all of this; your humanistic approach to getting me to the finish line will always be something I carry with me. To Dr. Annette Holba, a good dissertation is a done dissertation, and I finally did it. Dr. Scott Mantie, I wish our paths had crossed sooner, but I am forever grateful for your mentorship and guidance. Dr. Marcel Lebrun, you and your program took a chance on me, and I know I am a better person because of your support.

To my friends, extended family, and colleagues, your contributions to this journey have had a profound impact, even if you may not fully realize it. Amanda Grazioso, your critical role in the completion of this work, from the one-on-one meetings where you allowed me to vent about this and work to ensuring I had the support necessary to balance this and Residential Life to finally pushing me to take the time away necessary to finish this “chapter” in my life, I will be forever grateful for what you have poured into me personally and professionally. To my ResLife Central Office crew, Dave, Linda, Kathy, and Debbie-Do, your willingness to listen to me during OT, even when it included a quick vent or rant about getting this done, has been invaluable. To my past ResEd family, Mike, Hannah, Shaylah, Kyle, Jasmin, Liza, and John, your unwavering support as I balanced leading the team and completing this journey has meant the world to me. To my

current ResEd family, Ashley, Sam, Meara, Ray, Ariel, Mac, and Anna, I appreciate your continued understanding and support during this journey.

I knew going into this process that completing a dissertation would be challenging, but I am confident that I made it to this point with the support of so many. To my friends and colleagues at PSU, I appreciate the care and support you each provided me. Frost and Friends, specifically Maria, Kara, and Janette, thank you for always listening when I felt I had hit a dead end. Student Financial Services, Mac, Jeff, and Regan, I appreciate you always letting me pop in and vent about where I was along the way. Thank you to the Registrar's Office for supporting Tonya first and always having my back. Tonya, I cannot begin to express my deep gratitude for your friendship, mentorship, and unwavering support; thank you for everything you have done to get me to where I am today. To my friends and colleagues outside of PSU, you made a difference in this journey. Dan Z., you were there for many late-night chats between coursework and research; thank you and Betsy for being there for me. Lori P. and Dan T., you both took a chance on this guy in 2008. Thank you for that and for always being the friends and family that my family and I needed.

To all of my Residential Life and housing professionals, the work we do is not easy work, but it is so very rewarding. There are so many of you I have worked with in the past who have contributed to this, and I am forever grateful. Student Affairs is a field I never imagined I would end up in, but here I am. There are so many student affairs professionals I need to thank for where I am today, but I thank the ones who have consistently been invested in my journey: Jim Earl, Scott Ansevin-Allen, and Chris Johnson. Each of you took a chance on a younger version of who I am today, and because

of that, I got to where I am. To my Barrier Buster cohort members, you were with me every step of the way, and I could not have finished this without your continued support.

Finally, I was able to persevere through this doctoral journey with the support of my wife. This was not just a goal I set for myself but one we set as a family. I am forever grateful for your understanding and proactive support, which resulted in shifts in household duties, missed family events, late nights, not seeing each other some weekends, a steady supply of caffeine, and you raising our boys. Katie, I love you most.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	xv
Chapter One: Problem of Practice	1
Global Perspectives	4
Local Contexts.....	13
Advocacy and Ethics	22
Focused Problem of Practice.....	25
Central Research Question	25
Chapter Two: Review of Knowledge for Action.....	28
Theoretical Analysis.....	29
Theoretical Framework	29
Involvement Theory	30
Empirical Analysis	34
Residence Hall Administrators.....	34
Job Satisfaction, Recruitment, and Retention	38
Competency Development of Housing Professionals.....	43
The Impact of COVID-19.....	45
Staff Well-Being	46
Professional Identity	48

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Housing and Residential Life Programs	51
Living-Learning Communities.....	52
Curricular Approach to Residential Education	54
Academic Interventions	57
Individual Interventions	58
Residence Hall Involvement.....	59
Residence Hall Design.....	61
Stakeholder and Organization Data.....	63
Summary	65
Chapter Three: Methods and Design for Action.....	68
Study Purpose and Design.....	68
The Phenomenon.....	69
Participants and Data Sources	70
Data Collection and Specific Practices	71
Data Analysis and Evaluation	73
Targets and Timeline.....	74
Limitations	75

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Summary	77
Chapter Four: Descriptions of Findings and Recommended Actions	78
Discussion of the Findings	78
Organization and Field Impacts	112
Recommendations for Advocacy	114
Reflective Summary	118
References.....	122
Appendices.....	137
Appendix A. Permission to Recruit – Keene State	137
Appendix B. Permission to Recruit – University of New Hampshire - Durham	139
Appendix C. Participant Recruitment Communication.....	141
Appendix D. Personal Interview Communication	142
Appendix E. Entry-Level Live-In Professional Staff Survey	143
Appendix F. Informed Consent - Survey	147
Appendix G. Informed Consent – Personal Interview	151
Appendix H. Virtual Interview Protocol and Questions	155

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Astins I-E-O Model	29
Figure 2.2 Theoretical Framework	66
Figure 3.1 Data Collection Process.....	73
Figure 3.2 Thematic Data Analysis	74
Figure 3.3 Targets and Timelines	75
Figure 4.1 Survey Results - Institutions.....	79
Figure 4.2 Survey Results - Educational Level	81
Figure 4.3 Survey Results - Advanced Studies or Courses	82
Figure 4.4 Survey Results - Student Populations.....	83
Figure 4.5 Survey Results - Specialized Populations	85
Figure 4.6 Survey Results – Position Months.....	86
Figure 4.7 Survey Results - Supervision.....	87
Figure 4.8 Survey Results - Hall Council/RHA.....	89
Figure 4.9 Survey Results - Statements	90
Figure 4.10 Survey Results - Individual Interview Interest	93

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Survey Results - Age80

Table 4.2 Survey Results - Number of Residents84

Table 4.3 Survey Results - Motivations.....92

Table 4.4 Participant 1 - Initial Codes and Themes95

Table 4.5 Participant 2 - Initial Codes and Themes96

Table 4.6 Participant 3 - Initial Codes and Themes97

Table 4.7 Participant 4 - Initial Codes and Themes98



Doctor of Education: Administrative Leadership

Housing and Residential Life Staffing: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Residential Life Professional Staff

Charles E. Crawford Jr, Plymouth State University

Dissertation Defense: July 26, 2024

Executive Summary: August 8, 2024

Introduction: This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at two University System of New Hampshire (USNH) Universities.

Problem of Practice: The lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are essential to understanding student experiences, housing and residence life programs, and student-facing positions. In an ever-changing higher education landscape, it is vital to begin to explore these often misunderstood positions.

Research Method: This research used a qualitative phenomenological approach with a theme analysis to explore the rich experiences of the individuals who hold these entry-level live-in residential life professional staff positions.

Summary of Findings: The data collected from the participants discusses that the field of higher education is constantly evolving, requiring professionals to be adaptable and proactive in their learning. The study's participants noted the cyclical nature of changes in higher education, emphasizing the importance of being prepared for both predictable and unexpected shifts. In addition to this, the study presented a desire for these individuals to experience professional growth and development, but they are at times met with challenges in accomplishing this in their roles. The demands of the position and trying to balance their work create an immediate challenge to finding the time for continuous training.

Limitation(s) of Study: This research was focused on two residential colleges/universities in New England, specifically within the University System of New Hampshire. In addition, this research excluded individuals classified as entry-level live-in residential life professionals from the third residential university in the University System of New Hampshire due to a conflict of interest as the researcher was a direct supervisor of those individuals.

Implications/Significance of Study: Individuals seeking these roles should understand that the lived experience of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff is complex and multidimensional. Understanding the complexities of these roles will help higher education and housing and residence life programs take a closer look at how these roles are created, recruited for, onboarded, and trained.

Chapter 1: Problem of Practice

The management and oversight of residential students and on-campus housing, often referred to as dorms or residence halls across the United States, is often the responsibility of what higher education administration classifies as entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are full-time bachelor's or master's level experienced professional staff who live in and have administrative responsibilities for residence halls. These staff members would not include paraprofessional staff, e.g., community advisors and resident assistants, typically undergraduate students (Weintraub, 2018). Housing and residential life programs' primary responsibilities are to provide healthy, clean, and safe environments that support the institution's academic mission (Dungy, 2003). The variety of programs and services provided by and facilitated by housing and residential life programs varies greatly but typically consists of social, recreational, cultural, and academic programs (Schuh, 1996). For this research, entry-level live-in residential life professional staff will be abbreviated and referred to as simply ELPs (entry-level professionals), as this is a simplified moniker to refer to the subjects at the center of this doctoral research.

Traditionally, the housing and residential life staff charged with overseeing the management and facilitation of these programs and services rests with the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. In addition, these staff members often focus on student engagement, development, and the educational needs of the residents in their assigned area or building on campus. Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and housing and residential life programs play a critical role in developing students as well as the field of student affairs (Collins & Hirt, 2006). Entry-level live-in residential

life positions are the most common entry-level positions in student affairs, often serving as an entry point into the profession (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Collins & Hirt, 2006). The nature of the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member role requires that they live in the community for which they are directly responsible. Frederiksen (1993) noted that residence life often serves as a training ground for work in other student affairs areas.

Entry-level positions in housing and residence life are considered the entrance for new professionals to enter student affairs (Henning et al., 2011). Even in many student affairs preparation programs, students are typically graduate assistants in housing and residence life. As Frederiksen (1993) noted, the "housing and residence life career field has become a primary provider of basic student affairs and professional work experiences and in doing so offers an excellent experience foundation for other career fields within student affairs" (p. 176). Individuals attracted to entry-level live-in residential life professional staff positions often seek positions that will provide them with skills and opportunities to write reports, develop programs and initiatives, create innovative training for graduate and student staff, manage budgets, and utilize technology (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). In addition to these job responsibilities, these professionals also seek ways to balance personal and work commitments (Henning et al., 2011).

Although employment in housing and residence life programs is considered the gateway into the profession, staffing issues, such as policies regarding the quality of life and expectations that staff lives in the communities where they work, have produced a shortage of entry-level residential life professionals (Belch & Mueller, 2003). In addition, studies have highlighted the stressful work environment and demanding hours of

residence life staff, which can lead to burnout and negatively influence staff retention (Rankin, 2013; Reed, 2015; St. Onge et al., 2008). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a rapidly growing issue in these positions. As a result, higher education has seen a more significant departure of staff from housing and residence life programs and, more specifically, from these demanding entry-level live-in professional staff roles over the past few years. Student affairs administrators, specifically those in entry-level live-in professional staff roles, are called upon to assist students in succeeding at their institution (Sandeem & Barr, 2014). This charge may seem simple, but meeting it involves addressing today's college students' complex and evolving needs and expectations (The Compass Report, 2022).

This researcher aims to understand more about these positions and the individuals that hold a role often referred to as critical for housing and residential life units. Therefore, this study investigated the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at two universities in the University System of New Hampshire (USNH). This chapter gives background information on this problem of practice and will offer a rationale for this research study. The following section will provide an overview and historical perspective of housing and residential life programs. It will introduce the audience to information on the history of American higher education institutions and the evolution of campus housing. Then, the researcher will discuss the local context and give the reader an understanding of housing and residential life program staffing structures at the two residential colleges/universities in USNH. Furthermore, this problem will be considered from an advocacy and ethics lens, discussing present experiences that frame

the specific problem of practice. Lastly, this chapter will outline the specific focus of the research study and the central research question.

Global Perspective

As higher education institutions in America evolved, so did the environments beyond the classroom setting. The Harvard University catalog from 1863 shared that "students live together in the college building in constant contact with their teachers" (Thelin, 2004, p. 7). This statement reflects the Oxford-Cambridge system, often credited as the foundational model for campus housing. The Cambridge Model was the most influential model for campus housing until the Civil War (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). Cowley and Williams (1991) indicated that college dormitories in early colonial colleges were to maintain the institution's emphasis on religion and permit constant surveillance of students. Both Veysey (1965) and Cowley and Williams (1991) noted that faculty would conduct inspections of student rooms to ensure compliance with religious learning. Veysey (1965) described the approach as paternalistic, which is reasonable considering students were in their early teenage years and traveled a considerable distance from home (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981; Palmer et al., 2008).

The campus housing model has evolved alongside higher education through the years. While the original intent of college residence halls may have been to make faculty supervision and care of students more manageable and to allow students to engage in intellectual debate and discussion of their academic pursuits, Rudolph (1990) noted that this did not always come to fruition. Staff from early iterations of college residence halls reported many behavioral issues, including riots, gambling, drunkenness, and damage to facilities (Schuh, 1996). Veysey (1965) shared that a paternalistic approach to student

conduct and confronting student behavioral issues eventually weighed heavily on the strict faculty oversight in the colonial college period.

The first concrete separation of residence hall duties and oversight in the United States occurred at Harvard. Due to spending a significant amount of time meeting with students regarding various issues, its President appointed a dean of the college (Brandel, 1995). This newly created position freed the President and faculty from the responsibilities of campus residence halls, allowing them to return to their focus on instruction. With the success of this new position, similar positions were created at other institutions, like the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago (Rhatigan, 2000). The creation of these new positions began to separate student life and classroom work further, as noted by Sandeen (1991). Roles that resemble some of the responsibilities now associated with traditional student affairs work and that of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff emerged.

The early dean positions took on many responsibilities that are still reflected in the field today, specifically vocational counseling and guidance as primary responsibilities (Rhatigan, 2000). In addition, between the 1880s and 1930s, college student enrollment increased significantly, resulting in university presidents' continued acknowledgment that someone was needed to oversee the non-curricular concerns and affairs (Rentz, 2009). Schroeder and Mable (1994) noted a change in focus for American faculty during this period. Faculty focused more on academic disciplines and less on students' day-to-day concerns or management. With the creation of the dean position, the responsibilities of residence hall management were beginning to shift from the faculty, prompting the creation of professional staff who dealt predominantly with non-curricular

concerns in the areas of student life and residential life (Haggerty, 2011; Palmer et al., 2008).

Schroeder and Mable (1994) noted that the next period of changes in the staffing of housing and residential life programs was seen during the GI Bill in the 1950s. This was a fast-paced period of residential construction. However, the oversight of residence halls had become a principal function of the college or university's business and finance staff (Frederiksen, 1993). This oversight model appears to result from a lack of focus on students' educational and personal needs and simply a focus on food and shelter. The 1960s brought changes in student activism, and residence life, in particular, saw even more changes, including introducing co-ed residence halls and more liberal curfews and dress codes (Haggerty, 2011; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). In terms of residence hall staff, it was during the 1960s that housemothers were replaced with professional residence life staff who held advanced degrees (Frederiksen, 1993; Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

Schroeder and Mable (1994) described a more highly specialized professional staff within student affairs and residence life that offered a range of new residence life programs. These programs included greater weight on student development and connections between academic and student affairs. Frederiksen (1993) noted that following this period and into the 1990s, there came a renewed commitment to the residential experience as a critical piece in the student's college education. As Dunkel and Bauman (2014) shared, "Four distinct philosophies have influenced our interactions with students: (a) student control, (b) student services, (c) student development, and (d) student learning" (p. 23). In student control, the overarching theme was *in loco parentis*, with the primary function of housing staff being on student discipline. In *in loco parentis* is

the idea that colleges should act in the place of the parent, responsible not just for students' education but also for their physical and moral safety. The *in loco parentis* approach dominated most of the 20th century (Patel, 2019). The era of student services ended *in loco parentis*, and students had a contractual relationship with housing staff. Students are now being viewed more from a consumer lens; Patel (2019) shares, “The modern-day relationship between colleges and their students is highly influenced by consumerism.” (Patel, 2019, p. B39). As colleges transitioned to an emphasis on student development, the campus housing staff were responsible for creating environments to support student growth. Finally, an emphasis on student learning highlighted the importance of campus housing in supporting an institution's academic mission (Patel, 2019). Through this philosophy, higher education professionals and faculty must work collectively and collaboratively to support student learning, retention, and satisfaction. As shifts in student interactions have occurred over the years for the professional staff of housing and residential life programs, so have the expectations for a more integrated role in the student experience of all levels of campus housing staffing. Students’ learning and ultimate success depend on staff and their support, which can be seen in current iterations of professional standards, like the ones produced by the Council on the Advancement of Standards (CAS, 2019).

Since replacing housemothers as the primary staff in residence halls, student housing has evolved into a specialized profession, focusing on residential education in an environment where living and learning occur (Frederiksen, 1993). The student affairs functional area has developed over time to encompass a variety of functional specializations within it, including residential life, food service, and maintenance, to

name a few (Frederiksen, 1993). Closely examining the diverse professional development workshops and conferences offered annually by the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I) highlights the diversity of professional foci and interests amongst residence life professionals. In recent years, housing and residential life programs have been challenged to incorporate new facility designs, focus on student satisfaction, track future housing trends, cope with economic demands, and accommodate cultural shifts (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013).

While these new specialized positions have offered a greater focus on working with students in non-classroom settings, there is little consistency with the titles of these roles. Horvath and Stack (2013) noted that housing operations do not use universally recognized standard titles. Because of this, titles vary from “residence director” to “area coordinator” to “assistant director.” The most common term used to summarize the positions in the field and within housing and residential life programs is that of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff members (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). The responsibilities within the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position commonly consist of supervising undergraduate student staff in resident assistant or student employee roles, resolving conduct violations through informal conferences or formal hearings, developing community through programming, supervising resident assistant programming, advising student organizations, serving in after-hours crisis response rotations, and managing the administrative functions of the community they are assigned to or live in (Horvath & Stack, 2013).

The development of ethical and professional standards helps highlight the shift in student-facing positions. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher

Education (CAS, 2019) was founded to develop and promote standards and professional practices for higher education. CAS standards cover the most common functional areas for colleges and universities. The guiding standards for housing and residential programs specify that "the mission of housing and residential life programs must be to provide for a living environment that promotes learning and development in the broadest sense and emphasizes supporting the institution's academic mission" (CAS, 2019, p. 289).

Housing and residential life programs must contribute to a student's formal education, including curricular and co-curricular experiences (CAS, 2019). Therefore, housing and residential life programs are more than just centralized offices that deal with student assignments. Instead, housing and residential life programs are dynamic units that employ various staffing levels to accomplish the expectations of their respective university and the standards outlined by CAS. These CAS (2019) standards emphasize housing and residential life programs, specifically housing and residence life professionals, and their role in fostering learning through individual interactions. CAS standards show that this part of the undergraduate educational experience is critical.

CAS (2019) standards stress the importance of housing and residential life staff members and the support of students' educational experiences. Therefore, one critical vehicle for meeting the expectations of this standard has been through the creation, implementation, and support of living-learning programs/communities. Living-learning communities are residentially-based programs that offer intentional student-faculty connections, provide an active learning environment with co-curricular opportunities to bridge coursework with co-curricular experiences, and involve an academic component that transcends basic residential educational programming (Weintraub, 2018). Living-

learning programs/communities have been extensively researched, and studies show that students living in these communities/programs have higher levels of interaction and involvement (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013, p. 10). The conversation around living-learning programs/communities commonly focuses on faculty connections; however, entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are absent from professional discourse and research. Instead, the focus for these professionals has been on creating conditions for student success. While living-learning communities are one aspect of that, staff are also charged with making student engagement come to fruition through programs, events, and other initiatives (Palmer et al., 2008).

Higher education professionals play a crucial role in promoting student success. Kuh et al. (2006) shared that "creating the conditions that foster student success in college has never been more important" (p. 1), and housing and residence life staff are key in creating those conditions. Kuh et al. (2006) further explained that living on campus has been long associated with student persistence and success. While living on campus might be considered a condition for student success, that success depends on more than just proximity to campus resources. Otherwise, there would not be the need for changes in housing and residential life programs' pedagogy and implementation of different staffing structures and educational experiences. The residential experience for college students is much more than just the four walls of their assigned residence hall space (Dunkel & Baumen, 2013).

As students bring a high degree of enthusiasm, energy, and a sense of discovery to higher education institutions, they also bring challenges that housing professionals must address. Housing professionals must be prepared to deal effectively with many student

aspirations, concerns, and developmental issues by increasing their competencies and skillsets (Dunkel & Baumen, 2013). ACUHO-I core competencies (Cawthon & Schreiber, 2012) outline what campus housing professionals need to know and be able to do to be successful. The ACUHO-I core competencies established 12 knowledge domains and several subdomains (Goldman, 2013). In recent years, concepts of power, oppression, and social justice have become focal points for institutions. To support this shift, the ACUHO-I created competencies focused on social justice for housing and residential life professionals and programs (ACUHO-I Core Curriculum). The social justice competency calls for professionals to understand concepts of power, oppression, and social justice to be effective housing and residential life professional staff (Cawthon & Schreiber, 2012). The social justice competency also aligns with CAS (2019) access, equity, diversity, and inclusion standards.

Campus housing operations have traditionally played a prominent role in developing campus community (McClusky, 2013). However, in recent years, this approach has changed and evolved. The pedagogy of housing and residential life programs has shifted to support curricular approaches to developing students and supporting university missions. Campus housing has played a critical role in student development, and one crucial area is aiding students as they grapple with issues of inequity (McGowan et al., 2017). As more students from historically marginalized cultures attend college, the need for well-trained and educated staff to support these changing student populations is imperative. Issues of access, equity, diversity, and inclusion are not simply relinquished to just the four walls of the classroom. These are areas that students experience in all aspects of their college experience. While supporting

social justice, focusing on equity, diversity, and inclusion are handled through formal departmental programs, initiatives, and other high-impact practices in many housing and residential life programs (Schuh, 1996).

Housing and residential life programs are unique aspects of institutions of higher education. While this researcher has discussed briefly the varying roles and staff within these departments and units, it is imperative to look further at the notion of entry-level live-on professional staff. Entry-level refers to professional staff as individuals with zero to five years of employment after completing their undergraduate or master's level coursework. The titles of these roles vary depending on institutional and departmental focus and priorities. For example, at the researcher's current institution, these roles are titled Community Directors, while their title at another USNH institution is referred to as Hall Director, with a private liberal arts institution in the researchers' state referring to these roles as Residence Directors. While other positions may be classified simply as entry-level, the roles defined as entry-level live-in vary from those in some fundamental ways. These positions require individuals to live on campus within the same residential communities as the students for whom they are responsible. More often than not, these roles include after-hours or outside-normal business hours requirements, like crisis response, conduct or care-based interventions, and, at some institutions, student programming.

As housing and residential life programs have evolved with a more direct focus on the development of students, many institutions have added to the responsibilities of entry-level live-in professional staff positions rather than looking at overall staffing models for delivering these outcomes. As a field, residential life professionals must look

at how these new focuses, initiatives, and programs have shaped the lived experiences of entry-level live-in professional staff. Likewise, while much of the evolution in higher education administration has been student-centered, we must strike a balance and focus on the positions and people expected to do this work.

Local Contexts

Having had the opportunity to explore the evolution of higher education and look at the development of student affairs, readers can see the creation of comprehensive housing and residential life programs that employ a variety of staffing roles that aid in the administration of the missions and visions of institutions and their programs.

Understanding the unique responsibilities of entry-level live-in roles while acknowledging the importance of these units and roles supporting students and their success while on their educational journey, this role must be examined. While higher education in America has shifted and evolved to meet the various changes and demands, how has this change been handled in these local contexts? This research will look closely at entry-level live-in residential life professionals and their lived experiences in USNH.

USNH provides post-secondary education to 30,000 students annually (<https://www.usnh.edu/about-usnh>). USNH includes the University of New Hampshire-Durham, the University of New Hampshire School of Law, the University of New Hampshire at Manchester, Plymouth State University, Keene State College, and Granite State College. The focus of this research will be the University of New Hampshire-Durham and Keene State College. The USNH institutions that provide on-campus housing to students in attendance are the University of New Hampshire-Durham, the University of New Hampshire-Manchester, Keene State College, and Plymouth State

University. The residential experience at each institution varies among the University of New Hampshire-Durham, Keene State College, and Plymouth State University, which all provide comprehensive residential experiences, including departments specifically dedicated to housing and residential life and entry-level live-in staff.

Keene State College

Keene State is a public university located in Keene, New Hampshire. Keene State's Carnegie classification is a medium and highly residential institution with an enrollment of 3060 undergraduate students and a small graduate student body of 90 graduate students (Carnegie Classification, 2021). Keene State College is one of four public institutions in USNH. Approximately 59% of the student population resides in on-campus housing (Carnegie Classification, 2021).

In 2019, Keene State College named its 11th President, Melinda D. Treadwell. President Treadwell has outlined three strategic goals for the College: the improvement of recruitment, retention, and academic achievement; improving fiscal planning and stewardship; and rethinking work as student-centered (Keene State College, 2021). Of most interest, goal three is that one of the priorities is centered around a redesign of work and efficiency to create a more student-centered approach. President Treadwell had this comment: "We are challenging ourselves to ask what structure the campus of the next decade needs, which academic programs will serve the students of tomorrow, and what opportunities we can potentially offer as professional growth for our staff and faculty" (Keene State College, 2021, "Goals - Presidents Office" section).

A closer look at the Keene State College organizational chart shows that campus housing falls under the responsibility of The Transitions and Community Living Office and is located within the division of Student Engagement (Keene State College, 2021). The Transitions and Community Living Office at Keene State houses approximately 1,800 students in 23 physical campus housing buildings, making up five distinct residential communities. The Transitions and Community Living Office considers the experience of living on-campus to be a valuable developmental tool designed to enhance the mission of the College by helping students develop critical thinking and communication skills along with a heightened appreciation for diversity and service-learning. In addition, this office reminds students that they are expected to actively participate in and support the programs and procedures employed by Community Living staff. The Transitions and Community Living office publicly shares several key reasons students should reside on campus during their time at the college. One item of interest within this list is that all on-campus students are supported by professional residential life and housing staff. Keene State's Community Living staff members are trained to assist students individually and develop communities where safety, respect for others, and positive living and learning environments are the top priorities. The entry-level live-in residential life professional staff includes five individuals with the Community Director title.

The Community Director position in the office of Community Living at Keene State College is considered an entry-level live-in residential life position and reports directly to the Assistant Director of Community Living (Keene State College, 2021). Additionally, the Community Director position is a 12-month, live-in professional

position with primary responsibility for direct supervision and leadership in an assigned residence hall. Community Directors are responsible for overseeing and administering a residential area of 200 to 350 students, supervising six to 12 staff members, and working to promote and provide for their students' educational and co-curricular needs. The Community Director is expected to operate from a foundation that incorporates student development theory, institutional and organizational priorities, and their best professional sense of what their Head Community Assistant, Community Assistants, and students need.

In a recent posting of this position in the USNH Jobs portal (<https://jobs/usnh.edu>), the public-facing position summary indicates that there is a renewed focus on building strong communities for residential students. Community Directors now serve as team leads for their Community CARES initiative and serve as First Year Seminar Facilitators. This focus is intentional, student-centered, and dynamic in meeting the ever-changing needs of students. Further along in the position description, there is an emphasis on the Community Director being responsible for serving as a point person, resource, and support for students in crisis. The role includes the following duties:

- Participation in On-Call Rotation
- Act as “first line” contact for crisis intervention
- Provide personal support and serve as a counseling resource for area staff and students
- Refer residents and student staff to the Wellness Center and other campus professional services when needed

While much of the current Community Director role remains similar to the description on the Office of Transitions & Community Living webpage, there is an emphasis on supporting students from the beginning of the position description all the way through to the end.

University of New Hampshire - Durham

The University of New Hampshire-Durham is the flagship public university in of USNH and is located in Durham, New Hampshire (Carnegie Classification, 2021). The University of New Hampshire-Durham is a large and highly residential institution with an enrollment of 13,000 undergraduate students and 2,400 graduate students. (“Facts and Figures,” 2021). The University of New Hampshire - Durham students are 44% from the State of New Hampshire, a figure not easily located for the other institutions discussed in this section. Approximately 57% of the student population resides in on-campus housing (Carnegie Classification, 2021).

In 2018 the University of New Hampshire-Durham named its 20th President, James W. Dean Jr. President Dean outlined four strategic priorities: enhancing student success and well-being, expanding academic and research excellence, embracing New Hampshire, and building financial strength (University of New Hampshire, 2021). Of most interest, looking more closely at the President's strategic priorities, one is to enhance student success and well-being. This strategic goal was planned so that UNH will become a national leader in designing the educational experience from the first year to graduation (“The Future of UNH,” University of New Hampshire, 2021). Part of this strategic priority emphasizes ensuring all University of New Hampshire students are engaged in the out-of-classroom experience.

A closer look at the University of New Hampshire organizational chart shows that campus housing falls under a shared responsibility of the Department of Housing and the Department of Residential Life (University of New Hampshire, 2021). The department of Housing and the Department of Residential Life are located within the Division of Academic Affairs. Housing and Residential Life houses approximately 6,862 students in 35 physical campus housing buildings. Residential Life at the University of New Hampshire-Durham is dedicated to creating engaged communities and supporting individual student development. This office strives to challenge, nurture, and support students and the community through educational goal areas: involvement and leadership, academics and career, inclusion and equity, and health and wellness. Residential Life's established goals are accomplished through active and passive delivery methods, casual and directed developmental contact with students, and intentional supervision of professional and student staff.

The University of New Hampshire - Durham Housing and Residential Life offices have 27 entry-level live-in professionals who either hold the title of Apartment Manager or Hall Director (University of New Hampshire, 2021). The hall director in Residential Life is a generalist position that provides a good foundation for future work in student affairs. Hall directors focus on various job tasks in their halls, many of which focus on individual contact with students. Residential Life strives to create an experience that is fun, diverse, challenging, autonomous, and holistic. In addition, about half of a hall director's time will be spent engaging in either a reactive manner (conduct, roommate conflicts) or a proactive manner (individual conduct, programming, curriculum planning). Finally, the other 50% of a hall director's time should be sufficient for the remaining job

expectations, but there will be times when more than 40 hours per week will be necessary and other times when less than 40 hours per week may be appropriate. Under the general supervision of the Assistant Director for Apartment Living, the apartment manager position creates and manages an environment conducive to community and neighborhood development and is supportive of student academic success. The apartment manager is responsible for the supervision of between four and ten community assistants and student desk staff of four to eight, key inventories and loaner system, mail and package sorting and tracking, and maintaining student behavioral standards within a community of 400-1000 residents living within the apartment complex. The apartment manager provides personal support and guidance to student live-in staff and residents when appropriate. Beyond these entry-level live-in staff, 12 other administrative staff members comprise the central office staff for Housing and Residential Life with various responsibilities.

In a recent posting of this position in the USNH Jobs portal (<https://jobs/usnh.edu>), the public-facing position summary indicated that there is an emphasis for the Residence Hall Director to initiate one-on-one developmental contact with residents and provide learning opportunities through educational outreach, develop a sense of community within a residence hall, provide innovative educational and social programs and initiatives in the hall, promote the department's four major learning areas through a curricular approach (Academics and Career, Inclusion and Equity, Involvement and Leadership, and Health and Wellness), connect students with leadership opportunities, promote staff/hall government unity, write and distribute a bi-monthly newsletter, and finally, to participate in ongoing curriculum planning group. The current

position posting continues to support what is shared on the UNH Housing and Residence Life public-facing webpage when discussing this position.

The State of Higher Education in New Hampshire

In a presentation from August 2018 at Plymouth State University's annual University Days Workshops, a grim picture was painted by the Educational Advisory Board (EAB) regarding the state of higher education, specifically in New Hampshire. In the demographics portion of the presentation, PSU staff and faculty learned that "New Hampshire high school graduate numbers declined from a peak of ~17,500 in 2009 to ~12,000 in 2031" (EAB, 2018). Between 2005 and 2015, there was a -2% change in the number of high school graduates, and the prediction for 2016 to 2031 indicates a -20% change (EAB, 2018). In addition to the decreasing number of high school graduates, New Hampshire colleges and universities have also witnessed a generation of students requiring more support than the generation before them. Furthermore, on the financial side of student support, New Hampshire continues funding higher education per student at -30% below pre-recession levels, with 79% of educational revenues coming from tuition in 2016 (EAB, 2018).

Innovations arise as colleges and universities struggle with declining enrollments and budget crises. As we look at the higher education landscape in New Hampshire, one such innovation is the proposed merger of the Community College System of New Hampshire and USNH (USNH, 2021). The merger is part of a comprehensive budget plan by New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu. Governor Sununu explained that "this is about providing a better opportunity for our students and making ourselves competitive in what will be an incredibly competitive market" (as cited in USNH, 2021). In addition,

the USNH Board explained that this proposed merger is the best possible approach to securing the state's capacity to offer all residents affordable, accessible, and diverse pathways to high-quality education (USNH, 2021). The proposed merger would add community colleges into the USNH fold, some with a residential experience. For those community colleges without a residential experience, this merger provides a pathway to four-year residentially based institutions, which may result in more students residing on-campus in the years to come. Some of the key staff members that these individuals will connect with during their transition to campus living will be the various entry-level live-in residential life professional staff.

While the proposed merger potentially adds pathways for community colleges into the four-year colleges and universities, with an enrollment cliff on the horizon, institutions must focus resources on student engagement and retention, emphasizing student success (Grawe, 2021). Student success is woven into the priorities and goals of the USNH presidents previously discussed. While institutions typically have focused a great deal of time and energy on student success from a classroom lens, it has never been more crucial to look for connections beyond the classroom seats and at positions interwoven with all aspects of students' lives. Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff members in USNH serve a unique role by living on these residential campuses and serving students. Therefore, learning more about these staff members and their positions is imperative. In addition, it is essential to look at how these positions are perceived by the individuals who hold them and where they fit into the jigsaw puzzle of student engagement, support, and success.

Advocacy and Ethics

The traditional path for higher education professionals who seek work within the functional area of housing and residential life usually takes those individuals from work at the undergraduate level in roles such as resident assistants or community advisors. From these preprofessional roles, individuals must decide whether to enhance their pedagogical knowledge immediately or begin their professional journey by job searching for an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position. Individuals who choose to further their pedagogical knowledge must look for graduate programs in higher education and become graduate assistants in residence life and housing programs. Both paths lead these budding professionals to the same goal of becoming housing and residence life professionals. The entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position often serves as the main entry point for individuals seeking a career in higher education student affairs (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Collins & Hirt, 2006).

In the context of this problem, the researcher has extensive experience in housing and residential life programs. The researcher began their career in housing and residential life programs as an undergraduate student staff member at a small private liberal arts college in New Hampshire and then transitioned to a graduate assistant role at a medium-sized private institution in New Hampshire. One of the first professional roles held by the researcher was that of Residence Hall Director at Old Dominion University, a mid-sized public research university in Norfolk, Virginia. This role required the researcher to be the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member responsible for a first-year student population of 300 and an undergraduate staff of eight in their first professional year. The researcher held an entry-level live-in professional staff role with progressive

responsibilities for four and half years. These progressive responsibilities included managing on-campus apartment communities, supervising graduate assistants, supervising student staffs as large as 22, and implementing high-impact practices in housing residence life. The researcher's consistent and progressive involvement in professional housing and residence life organizations within the Commonwealth of Virginia and the southeastern United States rounds out their professional knowledge of housing and residential life programs.

In 2013, the researcher transitioned from an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member to a mid-level management position as the assistant director of the first-year communities. This role included additional implementation of high-impact residence life and housing practices and the supervision of entry-level live-in professional staff, a role the researcher held for four and half years. Currently, the researcher is the Associate Director for Residence Education at Plymouth State University and is responsible for supervising all entry-level live-in residential life staff, managing and implementing all academic initiatives, and other departmental functions. This information serves as the contextual background and sets the stage for why entry-level live-in staff serves as a core focus for this research.

The researcher notes that through years of experience in residence life and housing, observations from personal interactions with other student affairs professionals, faculty, and staff contributed to this problem. While working on implementing high-impact practices, the researcher observed several instances where facets of the university lacked an understanding of the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position. One conversation with faculty in which the entry-level live-in staff were

referred to as “babysitters” rather than educators resonated with the researcher. Often, there is confusion between roles in residence life and housing and other parts of the university. For example, entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are often viewed as interchangeable with undergraduate and graduate student staff. Additionally, entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are often viewed as less educated and prepared to support undergraduate students than counterparts in other functional areas by campus administrators. Even within the researcher's current role, there has been information directly from the entry-level live-in professional staff on how their role is viewed at the university in the context of student learning and success. These staff members often share both positive pieces and, more often, negative pieces from other university faculty and staff who view their roles as purely administrative.

Blimling (2015) emphasized the importance of residence life and housing staffing supporting student learning. However, the researcher’s lived experiences show a lack of understanding among different university areas regarding how entry-level live-in staff supports student success. Through these lived experiences, a desire grew within the researcher to understand more about the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professionals beyond their own experience and the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff he supervises at Plymouth State University. Ethical considerations are abundant in the work of all higher education professionals. In housing and residential life programs, the ethics of care for entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and the ethics of care that these professionals often provide to students in their realm of responsibility shape this problem of practice in more specific terms. As the higher education landscape has shifted due to changes in college enrollments and the

impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to look at this notion of a duty of care to entry-level live-in residential life professional staff by looking at their lived experiences.

Focused Problem of Practice

This research investigates the experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. While there is research and data on the paraprofessional staff known as resident assistants, it is imperative to look at entry-level live-in residential life professional staff positions and how they perceive their role at the university. This research comes at a critical time, given that the pandemic has impacted the past few years in higher education and housing and residential life programs as it relates to overall staffing, training, and operational functions. The lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are essential to understanding student experiences, housing and residence life programs, and student-facing positions. In addition, the knowledge gained from this research may benefit and influence how entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position descriptions are created and provide guidance on how these staff members are trained for their student-facing positions.

Central Research Question

The central research question that has been developed to help guide this research and further explore the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff is as follows:

- 1) What is the lived experience of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff, and how do they perceive their positions?

The implications from this research will paint a current picture of the lives of individuals who hold a unique role, both at the university and within higher education. These implications will begin to help balance the approach to supporting students by understanding what these individuals are experiencing and what these positions may need as the landscape of higher education continues to shift. To better understand the problem of practice and answer the question above, this research will utilize a phenomenological approach with a theme analysis. In addition, a qualitative approach to this research is necessary as it aims to understand the meaning that entry-level live-in residential life professional staff ascribe to their role in student affairs and in the larger context of higher education administration. Qualitative methods are considered superior to quantitative methods for understanding complex processes such as student change and development (Marshall & Rosman, 1989; Morgan, 1986). Therefore, the researcher will survey and interview staff identified as entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. The goal was to survey and interview 20-25 entry-level live-in residential life professional staff members at the University of New Hampshire - Durham and Keene State College in USNH.

Summary

The duty of care for students living on college campuses has evolved. In the current model, this duty of care currently falls under the responsibility of a specialized population of professionals in housing and residential life programs. In addition, the duties of entry-level, live-in residential life professional staff members have evolved into a role encompassing administrative functions while supporting the many needs students bring to their college campuses. USNH must also prepare for the potential consolidation

with the Community College System of New Hampshire. This could mean a new pipeline of students who will be channeled into the four-year institutions through guaranteed admission to four-year institutions with residential live-on requirements. This new pipeline will potentially mean additional students to the duty of care these entry-level live-in residential life professionals are charged with through their roles.

Chapter 2: Review of Knowledge for Action

As discussed in Chapter One, the management and oversight of residential students and on-campus housing is often the responsibility of what the field higher education administration classifies as entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. Previous research focuses on residence hall design, the interaction between faculty and students outside the classroom, and high-impact practices. Therefore, looking at one of the more overlooked positions in a residential campus setting is imperative. University residence halls and the staff assigned to students' care can significantly shape college student outcomes (Bronkema & Bowman, 2017). Furthermore, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that living on campus is the single most crucial college experience, explicitly addressing that this contributes to a wide range of learning, cognitive, attitudinal, psychosocial, and educational attainment outcomes (as cited in Bronkema & Bowman, 2017). Riker and Decoster (2008) further defined the educational role that college and student housing administrators play by elaborating that the environment influences behavior and that learning is a holistic process.

The purpose of residence life programs is to “provide educational programming, nonclinical counseling, and support for student learning” (Blimling, 2003, p. 341). Housing and Residence Life staff are then focused on the student's general well-being, community building among the students, and increasing student learning (Washington, 2017). Contained within these residence life programs are entry-level live-in residential life professional staff positions, with fully formed position descriptions developed over time to create a pool of professionals to facilitate and manage multiple aspects of students' experience while they live on campus. The following review of research will

reveal what has made these positions the cornerstone of most housing and residence life programs. The following major theory and empirical studies relative to residential life staffing, high-impact residential life practices, sense of belonging, and student success provide a framework for this study.

Theoretical Analysis

Higher education professionals often frame positions, programs, and experiences as aspects of student development, producing an abundance of student development theories throughout the past few decades. Today, student development theories are often categorized as psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typology, and person-environment (Evans et al., 1998). Theory results from people's need to make sense of life (Evans et al., 1998) and is framed in context with student development. Thus, higher education professionals need to make sense of and categorize experiences. Student development theories provide context for student affairs research and practice and underpin the educational experiences and programs that student affairs professionals create (Long, 2012). The theoretical framework that will be implemented for this research will use Astin's (1984) input-environment-output (IEO) model.

Figure 2.1

Astin's (1984) Input-Environment-Output (IEO) Model

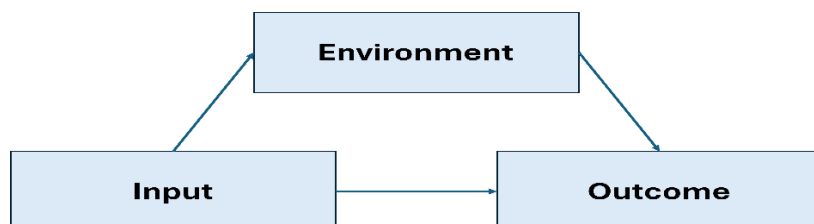


Figure 2.1 visualizes the IEO Model, with the following section explaining in detail this model and its applications as the theoretical framework for this study.

A Development Theory for Higher Education: Student Involvement

Astin (1984) stressed student involvement's vital role in a college student's educational process. Student involvement is an aspect of student support, with student support being one of the core responsibilities of entry-level live-in residential life professionals. One of the involvement theory's basic elements is that student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy students devote to the academic experience (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) further explained that the involvement theory has five basic postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. An object can be generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 519)

Astin (1984) argued that the theory of involvement requires that a particular curriculum, to achieve the intended effects, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development (p. 522). In comparison, other student development theories focus on the *what* of student development, and Astin's involvement theory focuses on the *how* of student development.

Astin's (1984) involvement theory has its roots in a longitudinal study of college dropouts (Astin, 1971, as cited in Astin, 1984). Specifically, factors that contributed to the students remaining in college suggested involvement, whereas those that contributed to the students dropping out implied a lack of involvement. One of Astin's involvement theory's most striking aspects is recognizing that one of the most significant environmental factors is the student's residence. Astin further explained that living in a campus residence was positively related to retention, and this positive effect occurred in all types of institutions and among all types of students regardless of sex, race, ability, or family background.

In the practical application portion of his theory, Astin (1984) asserted that if an institution commits itself to achieving maximum student involvement, counselors and other student personnel workers will probably occupy a more important role in

institutional operations. The involvement theory provides a unifying construct for universities to focus on institutional personnel's energies on a shared object (Astin, 1984).

At the core of Astin's (1984) involvement theory is the amount of energy a student dedicates to parts of their educational experience. Astin identified the importance and impact of on-campus housing on a student's experience. What makes up a student's on-campus experiences is not just their physical residence hall or the peers within their community but a well-orchestrated staffing structure that includes an entry-level live-in professional staff member. Additionally, Astin discussed university personnel and a focus on student involvement. Higher education institutions are now considered an integrated system that supports learning in various contexts throughout and, in some cases, beyond the confines of campus (Keeling & Dungy, 2004).

Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are educators who provide learning and development through various avenues and opportunities (Horvath & Stack, 2013). Core positional responsibilities for entry-level live-in residential life professionals speak to the environment in which they are to support and provide their residents, but using the lens of the IEO model and reframing to this research, the environment in which these individuals reside, or for the purpose of this study, what is the lived environment or experience of these staff members. Using the IEO model allows the researcher to consider the input that these individuals receive for direction through position descriptions, onboarding, training, and overall institutional support. The environment is housing and residence life programs, residence halls/dorms, and the overarching college/university, all where these positions exist. The output is what we learn or gain an understanding of related to the lived experiences and perceptions of the individuals who

hold these positions and roles. Using the IEO model presented by Astin to investigate these staff members charged with the live-in care of students at universities across the country and beyond is essential.

While the involvement theory helps provide a framework for this research, it should be noted that Astin's (1984) work has been criticized. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) discussed whether Astin's propositions constitute a theory and asserted it is open to question. The propositions probably do not meet generally accepted definitions of theory (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). A theory is a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that present a systemic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables to explain and predict phenomena (Kerlinger, 1986, as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Astin offers a general dynamic rather than any detailed, systemic description of predicted behaviors or phenomena (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Nevertheless, Pascarella and Terenzini stated that Astin has provided the field of higher education with a wealth of research that has provided faculty and administrators with a helpful way of thinking about college impacts.

While much of the involvement theory focuses on students and what they bring to the equation of engagement, student affairs professionals often create these meaningful opportunities and experiences for engagement and involvement. Therefore, exploring the lived experiences of entry-level live-in staff, professionals who are directly involved with student outcomes, was imperative. The input for this research came from interviewing individuals with entry-level live-in residential life positions. The environment was on-campus housing, especially given the live-in nature of the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member position, which is unlike many other higher-education

administrative positions. Finally, the output was the stories shared by these individuals and what their lived experiences are in one of the most unique roles in a university setting.

Review of Educational Research Literature: Empirical Analysis

The following section explores empirical studies on residence hall administrators and housing and residential life programs. These constructs help further explore the need to look more deeply at the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and Astin's (1984) IEO model. Empirical studies in the overarching construct of residence hall administrators serve as the input aspect of the IEO model, as we need to understand more about these roles through past research and literature. Finally, looking at housing and residential life programs connects directly back to the environment aspect of the IEO model, as these are the units in which the entry-level live-in residential life professional resides and works.

Residence Hall Administrators

The management of residence halls across the United States is often left in the hands of what the field classifies as entry-level live-in staff as described by Horvath and Stack in the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHOI-I) Campus Management Series (Horvath & Stack, 2013; Dunkle & Baumann, 2013). These are often young professionals connected to a housing and residential life program as undergraduate or graduate-level staff members. The nature of their role requires that they live in the community for which they are directly responsible. Their role consists of many aspects, and one of the most important is student engagement and

development. While this role is known and understood in most student affairs circles, university faculty and administration often misunderstand it.

Understanding the differences in university administrators' work-life is important (Collins & Hirt, 2006). Collins and Hirt (2006) set the stage for looking at the work-life differences between residential life professionals and other student affairs professionals. One of the authors' first focus areas was past research conducted and what administrative life is like for student affairs practitioners. The authors articulated three general areas: nature of the work, relationships, and finally, rewards (Collins & Hirt, 2006). It is essential to understand the nature of the work that entry-level live-in residential life professionals perform as the environment they perform it in and live in is structured differently than other entry-level positions at colleges and universities across the country and beyond.

Collins and Hirt's (2006) methodology involved analysis of data they had previously gathered in 2004 on the nature of professional life in student affairs. The instrumentation was a survey that initially consisted of 99 items that measured the nature of work, the nature of relationships, and the nature of rewards utilizing a 7-point Likert-type scale (Collins & Hirt, 2006). Sampling was handled by collecting a membership directory from a national student affairs organization and utilizing a random sample of participants to take the anonymous web-based survey. Collins and Hirt stated that the final sample yielded 506 respondents with a response rate of 33%. The 33% response rate included responses from 34% residence life professionals and 66% other student affairs administrators.

In the data analysis, Collins and Hirt (2006) described sorting the respondents into two groups: residential life professionals and other student affairs professionals. First, the mean score for each item for each group was calculated, and then those mean scores were compared through a series of t-tests. Next, in the implications and recommendations section, the authors stated that this study provides excellent insight into residential life staff's professional life, a sub-set of student affairs professionals whose experiences differ from those of their general student affairs colleagues. Collins and Hirt (2006) discovered three main themes and differences for residential life professionals. Those themes are as follows:

- Nature of Work
 - Residence life professionals are more likely to work with graduate students and paraprofessionals, have fluctuating workloads, and work evening/weekend hours.
 - Residence life professionals are less likely to serve on campus committees or have input into office decisions.
 - Residence life professionals spend less time serving students and more time on administrative and communication tasks.
- Nature of Relationships
 - Residence life professionals are less likely to work with or socialize with faculty, academic administrators, or other student affairs colleagues.
 - Residence life professionals report higher turnover rates and feel more isolated within their departments.

- Residence life professionals are more likely to work with law enforcement agencies.
- Nature of Rewards
 - Residence life professionals reported greater support for professional development activities such as taking classes and attending conferences.
 - Residence life professionals reported lower levels of intrinsic rewards, feeling less appreciated by students, colleagues, clerical staff, faculty, and academic administrators. (p. 16)

Collins and Hurt (2006) discussed that the response rate was somewhat concerning and mentioned that this limited their ability to generalize the results to all professionals who work in student affairs. While the response rate is low, valuable information was gained for institutions and housing and residence life programs. For senior housing officers, an emphasis is placed on recruitment, retention, staff development, and rewards while also promoting cross-campus relationships and collaborative projects. Professional organization leadership capitalize on residence life professionals' administrative and communication skills. As aspiring professionals search for these roles, it is essential to understand the dual nature of institutional and professional life in residence life. For graduate programs, it is time to focus on preparing graduate students for the realities of professional life in housing and residence life programs. Overall, this study highlights the unique professional life of residence life administrators, which is marked by institutional isolation and professional engagement.

Addressing these differences can help improve job satisfaction and retention among residence life staff.

Job Satisfaction, Recruitment, and Retention. Davidson (2012) set out to explore the development of a profile on entry-level residential life and housing professionals and their level of satisfaction. The author sought to understand factors of staff departure and areas of focus for mid-level managers and chief housing officers related to increasing staff retention. Davidson began the discussion with some critical points related to the importance of entry-level residential life and housing professionals and their role in promoting student learning and development. One area of interest for Davidson was that a lack of continuity and disruption of a residential student's experience could be seen as a direct cost for residential life and housing programs.

Davidson (2012) further provided several definitions of job satisfaction. Davidson concluded by arguing that satisfaction has more than one component, setting the stage for discussing the different factors accounted for in the study. Davidson asserted that job satisfaction is only one factor to consider when discussing entry-level residential life and housing professionals' retention. This study's overall purpose was to report levels of job satisfaction from a national sample and explore differences in job satisfaction levels related to several other factors. The study's data was derived from a more extensive quantitative study performed by the American College Personnel Association in the Spring of 2009. Of the 766 participants, only 118 identified themselves as entry-level residential life and housing professionals.

The Davidson (2012) study identified new insights into job satisfaction levels of entry-level residential life and housing professionals. Overall, the study showed that

entry-level residential life and housing professionals enjoy the work that they engage in. The identified limitations were of most interest in this study. Davidson noted that findings should be generalized with care, given that the sample did not include all entry-level residential life and housing professionals. Davidson (2012) further discussed that replication using a sample from ACUHO-I would likely yield a more significant number of responses.

In a commissioned report from ACUHO-I, Wilson (2008) took an in-depth look at the recruitment and retention issues of entry-level staff in housing and residential life programs. In the first part of the report, there is a discussion centered around the perceptions of senior housing officers' perceptions of the recruitment and retention of entry-level residential life staff. The data for this area of the report was obtained through a survey sent to 938 senior housing officers. All senior housing officers were from ACUHO-I member institutions within the various ACUHO-I regions. Of the 938 surveys sent, 417 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 44.5% (Wilson, 2008). In general, it appears that the perception of the recruitment and retention problem of entry-level housing and residence life staff is worse than the actual problem. This may be true in general, but smaller housing programs are identifying problems in recruiting and retaining staff that larger schools are not. This is an important issue, as smaller institutions need to develop the resources and processes most likely to positively impact their success in recruitment and retention efforts and must allocate limited resources strategically (Wilson, 2008).

Recruitment and retention of entry-level professionals in the housing and residence life profession is an ongoing challenge for housing leaders (Wilson, 2008).

Programs to retain current staff may help reduce the time and money spent recruiting, selecting, and training new staff. Increased retention of staff may lead to more efficient and stable programming and services. In a systematic study, Belch and Mueller (2003) found that senior housing officers reported retention issues in the resident director position. Christopher (2008) further shared that a deeper dive into the actual work experiences of these staff members is needed. Christopher's (2008) study was created to measure and examine aspects of the residence director's work experience to predict their commitment to a career in housing and residence life. To research this, measures of several aspects of the work experience were tested for their relationship to measures of career commitment and loyalty among entry-level and senior housing professionals. A web survey of career and work-related attitudes was distributed to those in professional positions at 231 ACUHO-I member institutions. These institutions were recruited through announcements at ACUHO-I, regional newsletters, and direct mail brochures. From a master list of staff members, 3,101 individuals were invited to complete the survey. Of these, 1,574 returned a survey with a response rate of 50%. Of these surveys, 1,243 were usable for final analysis (Christopher, 2008).

The data included regression coefficients to identify the impact of various work experiences on career measures (Christopher, 2008). Mean scores for work experiences were analyzed to determine areas needing improvement among resident directors and all housing and residence life professionals in the sample. The key findings from this study were as follows:

- Job burnout was identified most frequently as the work experience measure for having a high impact on career measures and needing

improvement among housing and residential life professionals and residence directors

- A second group of work experience measures – Job Involvement, Workload Dissatisfaction, Satisfaction with Promotion Opportunities, and Professional Development Outcome Fairness - were identified as having an impact on career measures and needing improvement.
- For residence directors alone, role ambiguity was identified as having an impact on career measures and needing improvement. (Christopher, 2008)

While burnout is an outcome often associated with the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member and their experience, an area often overlooked by research is that of work/life management, specifically of those who hold positions in housing and residence life programs. Rankin and Gulley (2018) shared that residence life professionals are a fascinating population, as they often live alongside the staff and students they are responsible for. Providing these services creates significantly more work and home domains that overlap with residence life professionals compared to similar populations. The intensity of this overlap makes residence life professionals an excellent population to explore regarding their management of work/life boundaries (Rankin & Gulley, 2018).

Using a grounded theory approach, Rankin and Gulley (2018) approached this work/life research on residence life professionals, emphasizing how the participants view their situations. Participants were recruited using a survey sent to two national listservs for residence life professionals: ACUHO-I and the National Association of College and University Residence Halls, Inc. (NACURH). The survey collected relevant demographic

information and was used to identify possible participants based on three criteria: All participants were required to be residence life professional staff currently living-in and supervising a residential facility and to have been in a professional role for at least six months. The final sample population in this study consisted of 12 individuals: six men and six women. Nine identified as White or Caucasian, two as Southeast Asian, and one as Multiracial. Participants represented a balance of public and private institutions of varying sizes. Rankin and Gulley (2018) shared that when a person lives where they work, the simple act of going through the front door brings work front and center, whether or not a person is supposed to be working. Furthermore, if a residence life professional's child or pet runs into the hallway, they, too, have crossed a threshold into the workspace. Also, an essential part of work in residence life involves supervising people who live in the same community. Thus, students and staff can knock on the door at any time. When a person lives where they work, the simple act of going through the front door brings work front and center, whether or not a person is supposed to be working.

Rankin and Gulley (2018) found that one consequence of living in an integrative environment is experiencing a constant flow of stressors that push against any home boundaries and, in the process, shrink or destroy those boundaries. The work of creating and maintaining boundaries becomes that much harder to do. The experience of working hard to maintain boundaries was true for the sample of residence life professionals who participated in this study. All participants answered work emails, phone calls, and text messages when at home. Additionally, all participants dealt with situations when work forced its way into personal time, no matter what they had planned. Ultimately, all the

participants recognized that living where they worked meant that they were always on duty while in the building outside their apartment.

Work in housing and residential life programs is unique compared to other positions within a traditional student affairs division. There is a wealth of studies that have consistently shown that residence life professionals have a high rate of burnout and turnover, and student affairs supervisors are reporting difficulty in recruitment for entry-level positions (Barham & Winston, 2006; Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009; Collins & Hirt, 2006; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) Additionally, senior-level staff often misunderstand the nature of the live-in experience had by entry-level live-in residential life professional staff within housing and residential life programs. The nature of living in a residence hall comes with benefits for both individuals who occupy these positions and the institution. However, it is essential to note that these roles take a toll on individuals due to continually being observed by the students and staff for whom they are responsible (Rankin & Gulley, 2018).

Competency Development of Housing Professionals. Dunkel and Schreiber (2018) reiterated their 1992 study on staff attrition in the field of higher education within student affairs. The authors diverged from other grim pictures painted by higher education professionals on attrition in previous studies that emphasized burnout and satisfaction by discussing competencies and competency development. The authors discussed the idea of professional development plans as a strategy used by the field to help combat attrition. However, they honed in on standard descriptions, and they pointed out that guidelines for these plans and overall staff development are scarce to nonexistent (Dunkel & Schreiber, 2018).

Dunkel and Schreiber (2018) offered some critical notes related to the stressful work environments of housing and residential life professionals. In addition to the type of work environment, there are inadequate reward systems, career mobility, and inadequate professional development. They noted that "the need for guided professional development is important, if not essential, for housing professionals" (Dunkel & Schreiber, 2018, p. 100). From discussing attrition to noting the importance of professional development and professional development plans, the authors focused on competencies. The methodology used by Dunkel and Schreiber (2018) consisted of a survey mailed to 800 chief housing officers who were members of the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (Dunkel & Schreiber, 2018). The final survey utilized a list of 49 competencies broken down into three categories and six demographic questions. Participants were asked to rate each competency from the lens of what would be necessary to become an effective housing professional. The ratings were done by a Likert-type scale, with ratings defined as 1 = Serious Importance, 2 = Moderate Importance, 3 = Slight Importance, and 4 = Not At All (Dunkel & Schreiber, 2018).

In discussing the study's results, Dunkel and Schreiber (2018) pointed out the highest and lowest competencies before sharing that the most essential seven were in the administrative category, six were in the developmental category, and two were within the foundational category. The authors' lowest-rated competency from the results was understanding and using basic statistical tools in educational research. The frequency tables and mean were used to show the data. The authors point out that housing professionals require specific competencies to address the unique demands of working with resident students, such as assignment information, roommate mediation techniques,

and crisis management. There is a strong need for well-defined professional development plans to help housing professionals achieve their career goals and reduce burnout. The study's results have informed the development of the National Housing Training Institute, which uses a competency model to assess and develop housing professionals' skills. In concluding the study, the authors emphasized a lack of literature on the skills necessary to become a successful housing professional (Dunkel & Schreiber, 2018).

The Impact of COVID-19. Nyunt (2021) asserted that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to drastic changes in the operations of higher education institutions and their residence life departments. Nyunt shared an understanding that the recruitment and retention of residence life staff had been challenging for years before the pandemic. With this understanding, Nyunt (2021) conducted an exploratory quantitative research study to examine residence life staffs' social-psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and their intention to continue working in residence life.

Data for the Nyunt (2021) study was collected via a survey sent to ACUHO-I members. The final sample consisted of 107 respondents, who were diverse in gender, race/ethnicity, position type, and housing arrangement. To be eligible to participate, individuals had to be professional staff in a residence life/housing department, including live-on and live-off staff, at an institution of higher education at the time of the data collection (Nyunt, 2021). A total of 120 individuals responded, a response rate of 3%. Participants who did not complete the 8-question measurements for social-psychological well-being were excluded from the analysis. This resulted in a sample of 107 respondents. Participants were diverse regarding gender identity, race/ethnicity, and position type (entry-level staff, mid-level managers, and senior leadership). Most of the

participants (79.4%) highest level of education was a Master's degree. Housing arrangements varied, with about half the respondents living on campus and the others off-campus. About half (whether on or off campus) were living alone, while others lived with family, a partner or spouse, and/or dependents. The vast majority of respondents (93.1%) worked in the United States; 33 different states and the District of Columbia were represented. More than two-thirds of respondents (67.3%) worked at public institutions. Most of the respondents' institutions (79.2%) used a hybrid model, with an increased number of online courses but some hybrid or face-to-face course options during the Fall 2020 semester (Nyunt, 2021).

Nyunt (2021) noted that residence life staff experienced a significant decrease in social-psychological well-being from before to during the pandemic, regardless of demographics, position type, and housing arrangement. The results indicated that entry-level staff and mid-level managers reported significantly lower social-psychological well-being during the pandemic than senior leadership. Overarching concerns about health were related to lower social-psychological well-being while having a supportive supervisor was associated with higher levels of well-being. Concerns about health and low social-psychological well-being were associated with the intention to leave residence life, indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic may have negatively affected staff's social-psychological well-being and retention.

Staff Well-Being. The section on COVID-19 and its impact contained instances where staff well-being was a component of staff members' experience. Nyunt et al. (2024) examined how residence life departments can embed staff wellness into their operations. The study utilized elements of participatory action research and drew on data

from interviews with 17 residence life staff during the pandemic (Nyunt et al., 2024). The research team consisted of a faculty member and three practitioners with diverse backgrounds, engaged in collective visioning to re-imagine residence life operations.

The researchers utilized guiding frameworks, including Hettler's holistic wellness model and the concept of radical love based on the work of Freire and Hooks (Nyunt et. al., 2024). Research revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges in higher education, particularly in housing and residential life departments (Nyunt et. al., 2024). These challenges, such as heavy workloads, late nights, and stressful work environments, have long been known to lead to staff burnout and decreased mental well-being. The pandemic highlighted the unsustainable nature of current practices and prompted a re-evaluation of how residence life departments operate to prioritize staff well-being. The findings from this research identified three key areas of concern:

- **Workloads and Responsibilities:** Staff face long hours, emotionally draining work, and additional responsibilities that often fall outside their job descriptions. The pandemic further intensified these challenges, causing many to re-evaluate their career choices.
- **Negative Impacts on Wellness:** The demanding nature of the job affects emotional, occupational, physical, and social wellness. Many staff reported feeling isolated, burnt out, and unsupported.
- **Retention Issues:** A significant number of staff are considering leaving the field due to the increased pressures experienced during the pandemic. Addressing wellness comprehensively is essential for retention.

Through the study, the researchers identified several key recommendations for housing and residential life leadership in an environment coming out of COVID-19 as its main concern and issue. The key findings and the rationales behind them are as follows (Nyunt et al., 2024):

- **Radical Love:** Leaders should adopt a radical love approach, focusing on open communication, care, and respect. Role modeling healthy work-life boundaries and recognizing quality over quantity in work are crucial.
- **Evaluating Workloads:** Regularly assess job responsibilities to ensure they can be managed within a typical workweek. Engage staff in problem-solving to find creative solutions for workload management.
- **Structural Support:** Develop policies that allow staff to truly take time off, provide access to mental health resources, and foster social wellness through community connections. Financial wellness should also be addressed by regularly adjusting salaries and offering financial literacy training. (p.37)

Housing and residence life programs must incorporate wellness into daily practices and organizational structures to foster staff well-being. This research and the article associated with it appear to serve as a starting point for ongoing conversations and actions to transform residence life work environments.

Professional Identity. Working in housing and residence life presents an important pivot point for LGBTQ+ professionals as a gateway to launching lifelong careers in higher education or steering individuals out of the profession altogether (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch et al., 2009; Vaughn, 2013). LGBTQ+ professionals in housing and residence life do not receive a manual on what to anticipate in their professional roles

regarding the consideration of their identities within a new institutional culture. Many professionals enter housing and residence life as their entry point into the profession without guidance or trust from LGBTQ+ peers, supervisors, or role models who can share examples of what they might expect to encounter (Johnson, 2009; Smith, 2013).

Bosch (2020) set out to research and share a glimpse into the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ professionals working in housing and residence life. In providing suggested considerations and recommendations for change, the participants shared their employment experiences as points of action, advocacy, and accountability for housing and residence life departments. Bosch noted that a growing body of research illuminates factors within residence hall environments that influence the development of LGBTQ+ students, but there is little focus or research on LGBTQ+ staff that lives and work in these environments as entry-level live-in residential life staff.

Bosch (2020) used interviews to conduct a qualitative analysis of 10 LGBTQ+ higher education professionals with full-time professional experience in housing, residence life, and student conduct. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and were recorded via video and audio. Professionals selected their own pseudonyms and were asked a series of questions using an interview protocol, including time for follow-up questions. Questions focused on which experiences LGBTQ+ professionals perceived as helpful or hindering to their careers in higher education. The participants offered important considerations and recommendations for change across their departments and institutions.

From the Bosch (2020) study, six key themes emerged that illuminated the experiences and challenges of LGBTQ+ professionals working in housing and residence

life (Bosch, 2020). These themes included safe spaces with unsafe traces, coming out to colleagues, the inclusion of live-in partners, access to residential amenities, written and verbal threats, and LGBTQ+ identities as strengths, not deficits. By exploring the challenges encountered by employees, important considerations and action steps can be implemented to improve the professional lives of LGBTQ+ professionals in housing and residence life. Many considerations and recommendations emerged for housing and residence life colleagues and departments from analyzing the responses from the study participants. This study revealed seven key implications for leadership and future practice for housing and residence life professionals. These include providing explicit information on benefits, strengthening an inclusive hiring process to avoid assumed heterosexuality, using specific language around relationships and live-in partners, acknowledging the fluidity of gender pronouns and identity terms across a professional's career, addressing threats and bias incidents, honoring LGBTQ+ identities as strengths instead of deficits; and serving as more vigorous advocates of LGBTQ+ inclusion across the larger institution. Identity is an essential factor in who an individual is and what their roles are. Identity is vital in the IEO (1984) lens, as identity is part of the Input; it is how individuals see and portray themselves. It is critical to understand that entry-level live-in residential life professional staff have a professional identity while living with their personal identity in the same location.

This section focused on who entry-level live-in residential life professionals are from job satisfaction, recruitment, and retention through professional identity, as a way to further explore the input portion of Astin's (1984) IEO model as a theoretical framework for this study. For the context of this research, this researcher needed to understand more

about the environment in which residence hall administrators or entry-level live-in residential life professional staff exist. These environments include housing and residence life programs, residence halls/dorms, and colleges/universities. Therefore, the next section will examine housing and residential life programs.

Housing and Residential Life Programs

The previous sections' empirical studies have excluded the positive impact that campus housing has on student engagement and success. This section will focus on those programs and the environments fostering student engagement. Authors Graham et al. (2018) sought to explore the benefits of living on campus in their exploratory study of undergraduate living arrangements, several student engagement measures, and perceived gains. Data for the study came from the National Survey of Student Engagement, a large-scale, multi-institutional survey administered annually to first-year and senior bachelor's degree-seeking students (Graham et al., 2018).

The primary independent variable of interest was the student's living arrangement (Graham et al., 2018). The study showed that living on campus had statistically significant and positive effects on all dependent variables, especially when compared to living farther than within walking distance from campus (Graham et al., 2018). The researchers selected dependent variables based on literature that connects living on campus to positive interactions with others, personal development, and a supportive environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Dependent variables included five engagement indicators: collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, student-faculty interaction, quality of interactions, and supportive environment.

While living on campus was found to have positive effects in three social integration areas, there were no meaningful effects on a supportive environment, quality of interactions, time spent preparing for class, or perceived cocurricular gains (Graham et al., 2018). Residence halls are presumably hospitable and supportive spaces that foster quality resident interactions (Graham et al., 2018). The researchers shared that if residence halls are no more supportive than other living environments, it is incumbent upon student affairs practitioners to understand better why this is the case to ensure they enact the missions they embrace (Graham et al., 2018).

Living-Learning Communities and Programs. While Graham et al. (2018) found a limited correlation between the impact of living on campus and the impact on student success, there have been decades of research focused on a specific high-impact practice within housing and residential life programs: living-learning communities, which are residence hall environments designed to deliver educational and social benefits (Hurtado et al., 2019). Therefore, Hurtado et al. (2019) sought to better study and affirm the connection between living-learning communities and the student experience. Their study involved collecting data from the 2018 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement. While none of the estimated relationships were significant, results suggest that living-learning communities offered real benefits for engagement and perceived learning outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2019).

Weintraub (2018) looked at living-learning communities closely in her dissertation. In a single-site qualitative case study, Weintraub (2018) sought to examine both faculty and residential life professionals' experiences as participants in residential learning communities. As a result, Weintraub found that faculty and residential life

professionals shared rich information about their experiences in the RLC and their roles at the institution and in the residential learning community.

In their 2003 research, Inkelas and Weisman conducted a quantitative study. This study utilized a stratified random sample of 4,269 students living in the residence hall system of a large, highly competitive public research university in the Midwest through a survey instrument of 44 primarily multiple-choice questions (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003). Inkelas and Weisman (2003) examined three research questions associated with participation in different living-learning programs. They found that participants in living-learning programs are more involved than nonparticipants in college activities designed to be critical aspects of the living-learning experience. One of the most exciting findings was that living-learning students tended to find their residence environment more supportive than nonparticipants.

Living-learning communities are part of a more significant push for seamless learning across all aspects of a student's experience while enrolled as part of a living-learning program. Brower and Inkelas (2010) discussed this further in relation to the Liberal Education and America's Promise initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The LEAP initiative defines an undergraduate degree's practical and aspirational goals and the educational experiences that lead to achieving those goals (Brower & Inkelas, 2010). In their 2006 research, Inkelas et al. investigated living-learning programs and their outcomes. Utilizing data from the National Study of Living-Learning Programs, Inkelas et al. (2006) facilitated a quantitative analysis of the results to determine the correlation between outcomes and involvement in living-learning programs.

Inkelas et al.'s (2006) analysis revealed that living-learning program participants were statistically more likely to discuss academic/career and sociocultural issues with their peers than students not involved in living-learning programs. Students participating in living-learning programs were statistically more likely to have mentoring relationships with a faculty member in the category of faculty interactions. However, they were less likely to interact with their professors on course-related matters than students not involved in a living-learning program. Additionally, students participating in living-learning programs had significantly more positive perceptions of their residence hall climates, both academically and socially, and tended to use their residence hall resources more often than students not involved in a living-learning program. The correlation between participation in living-learning programs and residence hall perceptions was confirmed in the 2007 National Study of Living Learning Programs findings by Inkelas (2008): students found their residence halls more socially and academically supportive than did their comparison group peers.

Living-learning communities and programs continue to be a crucial, high-impact practice in most housing and residential life programs. Unfortunately, much of the research on this topic focuses heavily on faculty engagement. In contrast, some of the research indicates that students participating in living-learning communities and living-learning programs have a higher satisfaction rate with their residence hall environment and using resources, which appears to be missing links between these environments and the live-in staff responsible for their management.

Curricular Approach to Residential Education. The curricular approach to student learning beyond the classroom is a strategic way to be proactive in designing,

executing, and assessing student learning (Lichterman & Bloom, 2019). The curricular approach originated at the University of Delaware. Kerr and Tweedy authored *Beyond Seat Time and Student Satisfaction: A Curricular Approach to Residential Education* (2006), which featured the University of Delaware's journey of adopting a residential curriculum. Lichterman and Bloom (2019) were guided by a central research question with two subset questions: What were participants' perceptions of adopting a curricular approach? The first sub-question was, what did the participants perceive as positive in this transition? The second sub-question was, what did the participants perceive as challenging in this transition?

Lichterman and Bloom (2019) applied a qualitative approach via a descriptive case study. Given the research questions and case study design, site selection was conducted using purposeful and criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2002, as cited in Lichterman & Bloom, 2019). Criteria for the site selection included the adoption of the curricular approach for three years and the continued use of the curricular approach. The selected site for the study was a public, midsized, coeducational institution located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Data was collected from the site location using a series of in-person interviews and focus groups. The data collected was then processed into two coding cycles, which included the creation of a codebook. Lichterman and Bloom (2019) identified patterns and then themes to tell the story of participants' perspectives regarding their units shift to the curricular approach.

The Lichterman and Bloom (2019) study revealed that participants perceived the following benefits of adopting a curricular approach: improved clarity on the department's direction, better strategic standards and structures for staff, and an enhanced

sense of voice for some staff. On the other hand, participants perceived the downsides of adopting a curricular approach to be the following: not all student populations benefited equally from a one-size-fits-all approach, physical space limitations, and lack of communication and clarity about the curricular approach language. Importantly, this research is the first empirical research published on the curricular approach to student learning in student affairs; this study contributes to understanding how residence life departments and student affairs units can enhance the implementation of curricular approaches and/or change initiatives in general. As previously discussed in this chapter, the management of residence halls lies in the primary hands of entry-level live-in residential life professionals, the in-hall extension of housing, and residential life units. As part of this day-to-day management, which consists of the development of students, it is vital to understand how this development has shifted from simple programming models to a curricular approach, and this research helps us explain the current shift.

A curricular approach shifts the model for residential education. Previous approaches to residential education included but were not limited to, the intervention strategies model from Morrill et al. (1980), which guided the following three types of programming in the residence halls: (a) remedial programming, (b) preventive programming, and (c) developmental programming. Mosier's (1989) health and wellness model influenced programming along the following six dimensions: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, occupational, and spiritual development. Furthermore, residence hall programs in the past were initiated based on the social desires of students and the interests of staff to fulfill programming requirements and standard practices adopted by residence life professionals (Blimling, 2010; Kennedy, 2013). Curricular

approaches to student learning in housing and residential life programs are emerging models for engaging students and focusing on student success (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Kerr et al., 2017). A curricular approach emphasizes the educational value of residential life staff in the student learning process, emphasizing that residence halls are an extension of the classroom (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Kerr et al., 2017). As residence halls become an extension of the classroom experience, the connection is clear between entry-level live-in residential life staff members and their almost faculty-type role in their lived experiences.

Academic Interventions. As colleges and universities work toward supporting all students both in and outside the classroom, an area of focus has been strategic interventions for students experiencing academic challenges. In these new models of academic intervention, there has been an emphasis on including residence hall staff (Shaffer, 2009). Shaffer (2009) explored this topic in greater detail in an online survey of senior housing officers. The results of this effort identified that early warning programs existed at 187 of the 278 responding institutions. Of the 187 responding institutions, 119 utilized residential life staff in their implementation. Shaffer's results indicate that early warning programs that utilize residential life staffing are more likely to provide direct and meaningful interactions with residential students.

Shaffer (2009) reported that his data indicated that participants in early-warning academic programs included academic and student affairs practitioners and that collaboration was a vital characteristic of program success. Shaffer concluded that utilizing the relationships formed between students and residence hall staff is crucial because staff are positioned to be directly impactful in providing early warning intervention programs. Residence hall staff members are more than just administrative

staff. Shaffer clarified that these staff members are educators of students outside the classroom and should be considered equal partners with academic affairs when promoting student success.

More often than not, academic interventions are a collaborative effort incorporating housing and residential life staff (Shaffer, 2009). The practice of academic intervention is an additional aspect of high-impact housing and residential life practices. Shaffer (2009) stated that housing and residential life programs are part of the student success equation, specifically housing and residential life professional staff.

Individual Interventions. While academic interventions constitute one aspect of housing and residential life staff interventions and interactions with students living on campus, there is more to the live-in nature of many roles that make up a housing and residential life program. Therefore, it is important to consider the other interactions and interventions these staff members have and the meaning of these interactions and interventions. Bernard (2017) conducted original research on individual interventions by live-in residential life professionals. Bernard's study and research aimed to understand the meaning that live-in residential life professionals made of the effective individual interventions they experienced with first-year students.

Bernard (2017) conducted interpretative phenomenological analysis qualitative research by interviewing six live-in professionals who worked with first-year students throughout the Northeast United States. Bernard's research established the following conclusions:

- Genuine feelings of caring are critical for live-in residential life professionals in providing individual interventions.
- Connecting students through institutional engagement is a strategy used by live-in residential life professionals during interventions.
- Live-in residential life professionals are guided by foundational values during individual interventions.
- Seeing the outcomes of individual interventions impacts the personal and professional development of live-in Residential life professionals.

Beyond academic interventions, housing and residential life staff, specifically live-in staff, play a crucial role in supporting students through informal interactions. Bernard's (2017) focus was primarily on making meaning of these interventions and interactions to move beyond mere anecdotal evidence with higher education. The study indicates the importance of these staff members as part of the university. Students are much more than their physical presence in the classroom, and Bernard's study showcases this and their interactions with key members of the university community—residential life staff.

Residence Hall Involvement. Simply living on campus has been shown to impact students' success (e.g., Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). In addition, student involvement outside the classroom has been linked to students' learning, development, persistence, and retention (Astin, 1977, 1999; Tinto, 1993, as cited in Arboleda et al., 2003). Arboleda et al. (2003) further explored involvement in students' living community and what influences their involvement. Arboleda et al.'s study was conducted at a large Midwestern land-grant university. The

study included undergraduate students living in campus residence halls who had completed a residential environment survey.

Arboleda et al. (2003) found that residence hall students' involvement in their living community is influenced significantly by pre-college student characteristics, classification, attitudes, and environmental variables. The researchers noted that students who tended to be more involved had better connections with their hall director and preferred to study in groups (Arboleda et al., 2003). In addition, connection with the hall director, the only indicator in the data set measuring contact with that staff level, was connected significantly to student involvement in house activities.

Webber et al. (2013) took the conversation on involvement further to explore this topic and its relation to student success and satisfaction. Webber et al. stated that while existing literature provides essential information on the benefits of participation and the theoretical rationale for engagement, there is insufficient evidence of the direct links between students' frequency of involvement in college tasks and the educational benefits received from time devoted to academic endeavors. Data from the spring 2008 facilitation of the National Survey of Student Engagement and specifically from one research-intensive U.S. university in the Mid-Atlantic region were used for their analysis. The study found that first-year students who reported more interactions with faculty earned a higher cumulative GPA, and for seniors, high-quality relationships with faculty, staff, and students, higher levels of engagement in community service, and living on campus were significantly and positively associated with cumulative GPA.

Astin's (1984) involvement model indicates that while there is a focus on input and environment, there is an emphasis on outcome, that being involvement. The research

conducted by Arboleda et al. (2003) looked further into the input and environmental aspects of student involvement in residence halls and what factors specifically impact their involvement. Webber et al.'s (2013) work showcases aspects of involvement related to interactions with faculty that correlate to a higher GPA. What is of interest related to Arboleda et al. (2003) was that the researchers included rating participants' connection with their hall director. However, not much else is discussed related to what types of connections students have with these staff members or the overall sense of belonging created or supported and its impact on their success. Furthermore, Sriram et al. (2020) sought to investigate faculty interactions and sense of belonging. The researchers discovered that students do not differentiate between their academic, social, and deeper life interactions with faculty versus staff, more often viewing the interactions as the same.

Residence Hall Design. Living on campus has been shown to impact students' success (Bronkema and Bowman, 2017; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). One concept of student success in housing and residential life programs has been focused on the actual design and layout of residential communities on campus. Devlin et al. (2008) took on the challenge of looking at residence hall architecture and a sense of community by surveying 600 students, all class years, of a small residential liberal arts college in the Northeast. The response rate varied from a high of 57.1% in one of the small residence halls to a low of 16.4%, also in another of the small residence halls. The average response rate for the three sizes of dorms was small, 36%; medium, 42%; and large, 34%.

The Devlin et al. (2008) study revealed that cluster housing that has been upgraded is related to higher student ratings of basic residence hall functions, such as

thermal comfort, adequate bathroom facilities, and room storage than is true for dorms that have not been upgraded. Devlin et al. (2008) also indicated that creating small pockets of students in pods or suite-like clusters appears related to a lower sense of community. The research was most striking because the traditional corridor design of residence halls appears to offer friendship formation opportunities among a more extensive base of residents than may be the case for clusters and suites.

Where students live on campus is a topic that ebbs and flows with research, and it was primarily studied in the 1960s and 1970s when there was an increase in building housing on college campuses (Suitor, 2013). Flash forward to the present day, and colleges/universities are in an amenities race for student attention and dollars. In the amenities race, one must consider whether focusing on those components genuinely impacts students' sense of community and success. Devlin et al. (2008) researched housing types that appear more apt to support a sense of community. However, the community is built by individuals who facilitate specific programmatic aspects of a housing and residential life program and facilitate interactions among students and staff. What is lacking from this study is a connection to the staffing structure. While Devlin et al. (2008) shared that not all variables could be accounted for in their study, it is imperative to study residence hall design while considering the building's staffing structure.

Housing and residence programs are complex units often composed of programs and experiences designed to support a student's residential experience. Housing and residence life programs to facilitate student learning utilize entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. While housing and residence life programs have these positions,

what is unknown is what this looks like from the lens of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and how managing these programs and experiences contributes to lived experience in their roles.

Data from Stakeholders and Organizations

Housing and residential life professionals across the country will be stakeholders for this research, given that it has implications for the purpose and focus of their work. However, the empirical sources allude to a lack of research on this problem and the research question identified in Chapter One. While data exists on a sense of belonging, student success, and residential life professional staff competencies, there is an overwhelming lack of data from the lens of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. There are several instances in which professional standards direct the role and function of housing and residential life programs and professionals regarding student success and supporting students in their experience of being at a college or university. One of the primary sources of standards for all administrative functions in higher education organizations is the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2012). These standards specifically address housing and residential life professionals and their role in fostering learning through individual interactions. CAS (2012) asserted that this part of the undergraduate educational experience is critical (as cited in Bernard, 2017).

The breadth of interest and research conducted by ACUHO-I is also observed from the review of empirical sources. ACUHO-I has a stake in this research, given that this organization focuses on housing and residence life programs and professionals in and outside the United States. This research relates directly back to the organization's

professional competencies derived from original research. The ACUHO-I (2023) core curriculum is an emerging resource for housing and residential life professionals and develops these core competencies in three critical ways:

- It identifies knowledge, skills, and understandings that every housing and residential life professional should have about the total operation (e.g., generalist knowledge) and expertise in their individual role/area of work.
- It is focused on individuals, not the Association. It will assist individuals in identifying specific knowledge, skills, and understandings they should have or need to improve in their personal development plans.
- It is progressive. The Core Curriculum identifies the knowledge that every housing and residential life professional should have based on where they are in their career trajectory. (ACUHO-I, 2023, “ACUHO-I Core Curriculum” section)

In a 2019 collaborative assessment between ACUHO-I and Skyfactor Benchworks, the two groups implemented a national study of housing academic initiatives and focused on academic-related learning outcomes and efforts commonly used by housing professionals to drive learning. Combined with data from the national assessment, the results paint a broader picture of how housing supports learning and academic success (as cited in Venaas, 2019). The survey results indicated that more than half of on-campus residents attended two or more programs or activities in their hall or building during the academic year (as cited in Venaas, 2019). Additionally, nearly seven in 10 on-campus residents reported interacting with their student staff member at least once in a typical week (as cited in Venaas, 2019). What is missing from the recent survey

is the impact of housing and residential life professional staff, specifically those classified as entry-level live-in residential life professional staff.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted all aspects of higher education in recent years. Housing and residential life professionals have been significantly impacted by the virus, which has impacted the relationship-building aspect of all live-in positions. According to Baumann (2021), "Housing and student affairs professionals know how to engage their students. Faculty who want students to get excited about class activities can learn a lot from the student affairs side of the house" (p. 3), and "the best predictor of persistence for college students is a relationship with someone on campus. Although there is a ton of literature on the value of student-professor relationships, a relationship with anyone on campus can truly make a difference" (p. 3). Baumann's (2021) words reinforce the necessity of looking further at the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professionals, how they perceive their role, and what impacts they believe they make through this unique role.

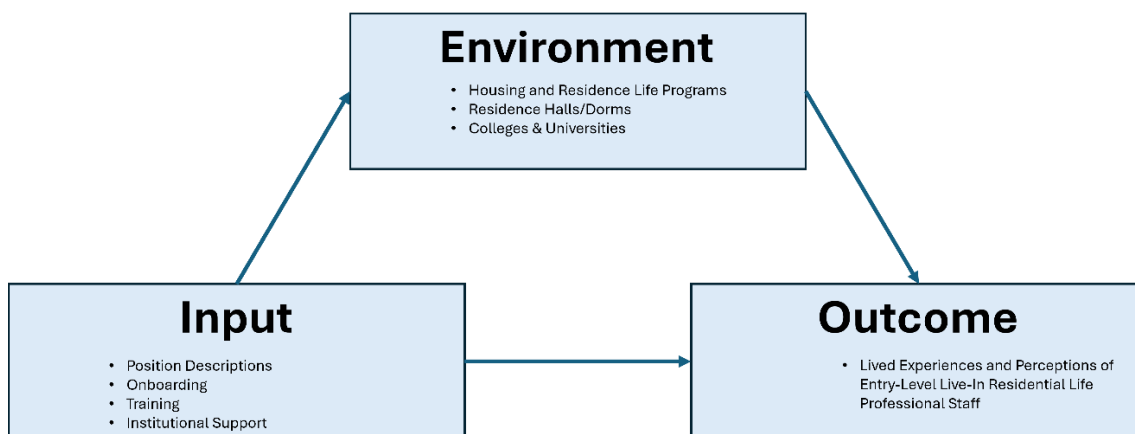
Summary

The empirical analysis within this chapter discussed the importance of residential life professional staff and the professional competencies that support and develop these educators. In addition, research indicates the connection between housing and residential life programs and student success. The analysis shows the input factors of an entry-level live-in residential life staff member's role. In addition, the analysis includes their role and the competencies associated with those positions. At the same time, exploring housing and residential life programs involves examining the environmental aspect of the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member experience. Astin's (1984) IEO

model draws connections to pieces of the empirical sources presented in this chapter. Still, a piece of this model is missing in past empirical literature: the outcome.

Figure 2.2

Theoretical Framework



While there is evidence of how organizations work to create, recruit, and support these positions, helping us understand the input in the IEO model, and information exists that discusses the varying types of environments through the discussion of housing and residence life programs, little information exists to make the connection back to the IEO model section of outcome. The outcome of this study is the rich experiences and perceptions of the individuals who hold these positions and roles. Therefore, to address this knowledge gap, this study will dive more deeply by directly researching the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff through the narratives of the staff members that hold these roles to shine a light on a role deemed critical in many housing and residence programs across the country and beyond. The next chapter will focus on identifying and describing the methods of inquiry used to examine this problem of practice.

Chapter Three: Methods and Design for Action

This research investigates the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at two residential universities in the University System of New Hampshire (USNH). In addition, the study was designed to explore further the role of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff as it relates to the perception of their role, responsibilities, barriers, training, and connections. This chapter will discuss the purpose of the study and outline the research design. This chapter will begin with a rationale for the research design and then describe the participants and participant recruitment procedures. Next, methods for collecting data from participants are described, followed by data analysis methods. A proposed timeline follows from IRB approval through data analysis. Lastly, this chapter discusses the limitations of the research study and design.

Purpose and Design

As explained in the previous chapters, the management of residence halls across the United States is often left in the hands of what the field classifies as entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. These are full-time bachelor's or master's level experienced professional staff who live in and have administrative responsibilities for the residence halls. These staff members would not include paraprofessional staff (e.g., community advisors and resident assistants, typically undergraduate students) (Weintraub, 2018).

While looking at the approach to this research design, the researcher worked diligently to consider his own experiences in higher education and his progressive responsibilities in the functional area of housing and residence life. The researcher's background, coupled with experiences in the field, initially led him to consider a purely

quantitative approach by looking at correlations and relationships in pre-identified variables related to entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and their positions. However, while considering a research approach, the researcher had to reflect on the nature of the role of the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and the higher education landscape. Through reflection, the researcher discovered that this research would focus on individual staff members' experiences and perceptions in their entry-level live-in residential life professional staff positions.

Narrative research suggests a procedure that uses stories as a narrative and examines the deep context of the participants' lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). The stories shared often are chronicled into a narrative for reporting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Grounded theory research seeks to conclusively present a theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). As a result of the interviews and analysis, a theory is generated (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). The investigator must avoid employing other theories and allowing a theory to emerge from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). Ethnographical research studies describe an entire cultural group and demand that the investigator be immersed in the participants' lives and sites for an extended period (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). Finally, phenomenological studies report on a subject's lived experiences and the commonalities found within the experiences (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). Therefore, this research used a qualitative phenomenological approach with a theme analysis to explore the rich experiences of the individuals who hold these entry-level, live-in, residential life professional staff positions.

Participants and Data Sources

Engaging with individuals who hold this type of position was essential to investigating the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. Therefore, participants of this study were entry-level live-in residential life professional staff for housing and residential life programs at the University of New Hampshire - Durham and Keene State College in USNH. These individuals possessed a bachelor's degree. In addition, some possessed a master's degree and were all full-time USNH benefited employees. Each participant's socioeconomic background, longevity, and job experience varied greatly, but all participants were no younger than 21 years of age. The age range for entry-level live-in residential life professional staff ranged from 23 to 32. Participants served in the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff role between six months and four years.

Individuals excluded from this research included staff and students who were not entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at the University of New Hampshire - Durham and Keene State College. As this research focused on the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at those institutions, those who were not entry-level were not suited for the research. Additionally, the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff at Plymouth State University are excluded from this research as the researcher had a direct supervisory function over the individuals who hold those positions.

Data Collection and Specific Practices

Participants were recruited and selected purposefully, given the need to understand the unique perspectives of their lived experiences. Through collaboration with departmental leadership in housing and residence life programs at the University of New

Hampshire - Durham and Keene State College (see Appendices A and B), emails were sent to their entry-level live-in residential life professional staff, with the researcher copied on that email communication. The call for participants emails sent by the directors on behalf of the researcher to participants included information about the study, including the purpose, eligibility criteria, and scope of participation (see Appendix C). The participant recruitment email communication also included a link that directed interested and eligible participants to the informed consent form if they were willing to participate.

The Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey was administered electronically via Qualtrics (see Appendix E). Once eligible participants had completed the informed consent form (see Appendix F), they were prompted to complete the Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey, an online qualitative survey created by the researcher. The survey consisted of 23 questions with a mix of 4-point Likert scale measured and open-ended questions. Within the survey, participants were provided the opportunity to identify if they wanted to move on to a virtual personal interview to further discuss their lived experiences; participants were able to select "yes" or "no." Participants who identified the desire to participate in a virtual personal interview received a follow-up email communication from the researcher to schedule their virtual meeting (see Appendix D). The researcher created the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff interview questions. The virtual personal interviews consisted of seven pre-set questions, with room for follow-up questions, that were asked in a 60-minute scheduled period (one session per opted-in entry-level live-in residential life professional staff) and conducted via the Zoom platform (see Appendix H).

Participants were reminded that participation in the study was voluntary and that at any time they felt discomfort or had any desire to end their participation in the study, they were entitled to do so. For survey participants, this information was contained within the informed consent, the initial recruitment email, and at the beginning and end of the survey. For virtual personal interview participants, information on minimizing risk was contained within the informed consent and the initial recruitment email at the beginning and end of the survey, where they opted into virtual personal interviews and were discussed again at the beginning of the virtual personal interview (see Appendix G). Participants were told that every effort would be made to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the data collected. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained by referring to participants in the findings, publishing, and presentation of the data collected by pseudonyms and referring to institutions such as Institution A and Institution B. In preparation for participants who may experience discomfort, a link to the USNH Employee Assistant was prepared and provided at the end of the Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff survey.

All data collected from the study was coded to protect participant names and identifying information. No names or identifying information were used when discussing or reporting this research. Pseudonyms were used instead. Access to participant data was limited to the researcher and, if necessary, the researcher's dissertation committee and chair for analysis. Data was stored and accessed on the researcher's password-protected laptop, and data was not available to be accessed on public devices. Data will be kept for three years and then destroyed. Any written or printed documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. After audio recordings were

transcribed and coded, they were held until the conclusion of the doctoral program. All recordings were destroyed once the researcher has concluded the doctoral program.

Figure 3.1

Data Collection Process



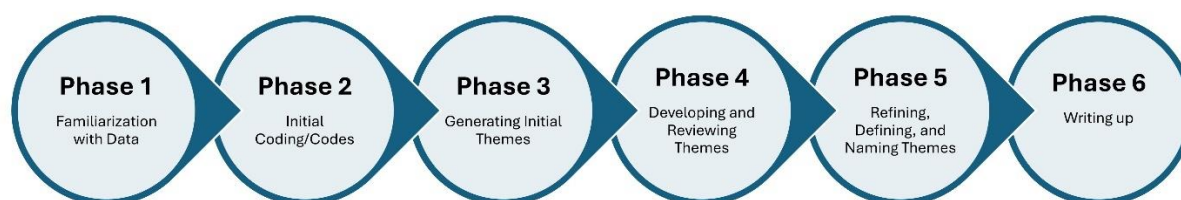
Data Analysis and Evaluation

As shown in Figure 3.2, data analysis followed a thematic data analysis approach. In addition, recorded audio data from interviews was transcribed and coded. The researcher utilized Microsoft Word, specifically the built-in transcription capabilities, to translate the audio files from each interview into editable Word files. Once the initial files were transcribed using Microsoft Word, the researcher went through each Word file line by line with the audio to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed words. Data were analyzed through an inductive process to identify codes through an analytical process that included careful examination and reexamining of the rich conversations from each of the individual interviews. (Cohen et al., 2018). A code is most often a word or short phrase

that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2021). Codes were examined and organized into categories. The data, through the lens of the developed codes, was then analyzed for evidence of patterns and emerging themes (Cohen et al., 2018). The analysis followed a systemic transcript-based analysis described by Krueger (1994). Both written notes and digital data recordings were used to ensure the researcher could review important aspects of the interviews.

Figure 3.2

Thematic Data Analysis



Targets and Timeline

1. IRB proposal prepared and sent to the Institutional Review Board on April 1, 2022.
2. The dissertation proposal was prepared and presented to the dissertation committee in October 2022.
3. Participant recruitment began once the Institutional Review Board and dissertation committee approved the research and proposal.
4. Participant recruitment began in October 2022 and concluded in December 2022.
5. Initial data collection occurred from December 2022 through January 2023.

6. Data analysis began in February 2023 and concluded in May 2024.

Figure 3.3

Targets and Timeline



Limitations

There were several limitations to note with this research. The results of this study may provide insights into the role of the entry-level live-in residential life professional, and commonalities and themes may emerge. However, different populations or individuals within the same population may have differing experiences. This research's purpose is exploratory, so a qualitative design that sought to understand individual perspectives was appropriate. As a follow-up to this study, if recurring themes are identified and theories are hypothesized, it may be appropriate to use another approach with a larger sample of participants.

Another factor considered was the issue of researcher bias throughout the research study. As noted in Chapter One, the researcher has served progressively in the field of

higher education within housing and residence life programs and once held an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position. The researcher has also given considerable thought to his own stories and experiences he brought to the research and how this may influence his role as a researcher. The researcher approached this research with openness and curiosity. To this extent, the researcher remained conscious of his preconceived ideas and past experiences with the subject. When the researcher drafted and asked questions, he considered if any biased opinions were embedded within what he asked or did not ask participants. One way the researcher checked his own bias was to ask for feedback on questions from his committee members and members of his doctoral cohort. As the researcher kept field notes during interviews, he focused on keeping separate observations from impressions and reflected on why he had a particular impression. As a narrative inquirer studying others' experiences, the researcher also had to consider how he was experiencing the participants' stories. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested, the researcher kept a column in his field texts for reflections on how he was "experiencing the experience of being in the inquiry" (p. 88).

One of the final limitations was that this research was focused only on two residential colleges/universities in New England, specifically within USNH. In addition, this research excluded individuals classified as entry-level live-in residential life professionals from the third residential university in USNH due to a conflict of interest, as the researcher was a direct supervisor of those individuals. Therefore, the data collected from those institutions may not reflect the experiences of those individuals at an institution with a different Carnegie classification focus. The goal was to generate research that can be replicated beyond the initial sample of institutions to continue

exploring the experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff members.

Summary

This qualitative research study with a thematic analysis examines how entry-level live-in residential life professionals perceive their role. In addition, this study aimed to understand the connections between entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position design/descriptions and how those staff members perceived their positions. The insights gained will be of value to housing and residential life programs. In addition, the knowledge gained from this research may benefit and influence how entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position descriptions are created and provide guidance on how these staff members are trained for their student-facing and interacting positions. Finally, the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff that participated benefited from sharing their stories and having the opportunity to reflect on their impact on students as higher education professionals.

Chapter 4: Description of Findings and Recommended Actions

This chapter will first explore the results and key findings from the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and then the theme analysis of the information,

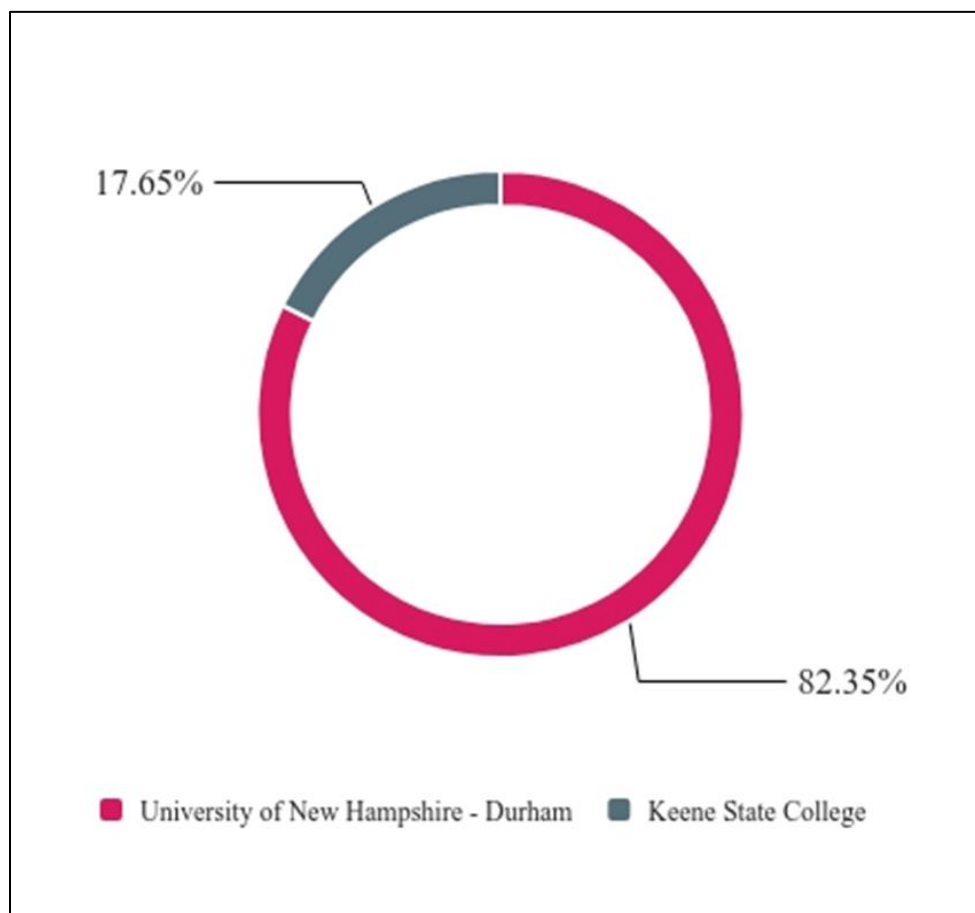
answers, and stories of the four individuals who opted into the semi-structured individual interviews. After an in-depth discussion of the findings, we will explore the impacts on USNH and the field of higher education, specifically housing and residential life programs. Additionally, this chapter will explore future advocacy recommendations for housing and residential life programs, specifically around training, developing, and supporting entry-level live-in professional staff. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a reflective summary of the process of conducting this research and completing this study.

Discussion of Findings

Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff remain individuals who are on the front lines of most housing and residential life programs. To connect with these individuals for the individual interviews portion of this research, the Entry-Level Live-In Residential Professional Staff Survey was administered to all individuals who hold this type of position at Keene State College and the University of New Hampshire – Durham. With the assistance of the senior-most leadership in both universities' housing and residential programs, the call for participants (Appendix C.). This communication was sent to 31 individuals, with five receiving this communication at Keene State College and 26 at the University of New Hampshire–Durham. A total of 17 entry-level live-in residential life professionals completed the survey, with three from Keene State College and 14 from the University of New Hampshire – Durham.

Figure 4.1

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Institutions



<i>INSTITUTION</i>		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Keene State College	3	17.6	17.6
	University of New Hampshire - Durham	14	82.4	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	

The total response rate indicated that more than half the individuals who held an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member position completed the survey.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the typical age range for entry-level live-in residential life professional staff would be between 22 and 26 years of age. The results from this survey show that the youngest individual to complete the survey was 23, with the oldest being 32 and an average age of 26.

Table 4.1

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Age

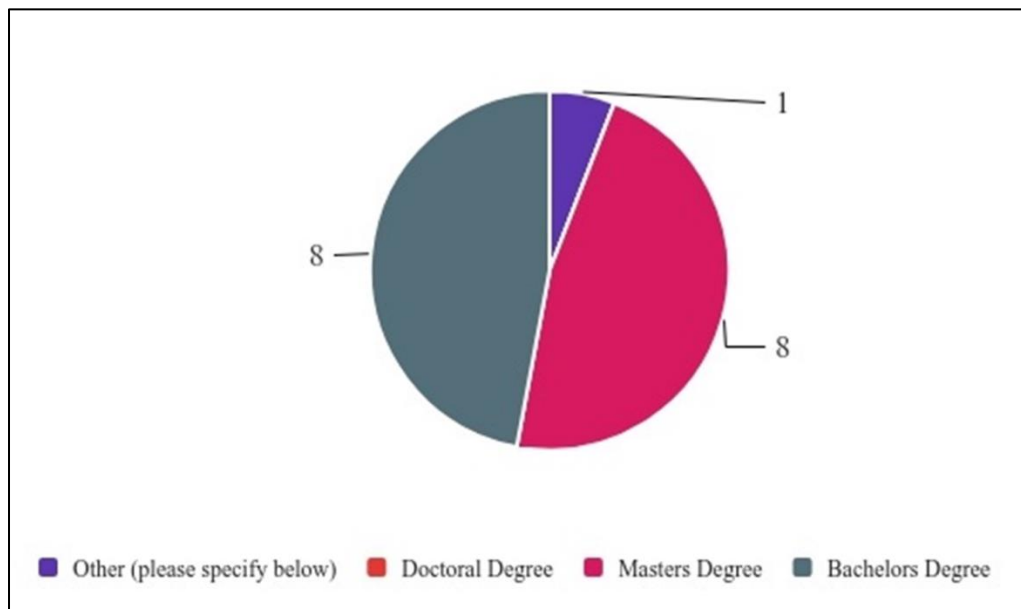
<i>Age</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	23	1	5.9	5.9	5.9
	24	3	17.6	17.6	23.5
	25	1	5.9	5.9	29.4
	26	4	23.5	23.5	52.9
	27	3	17.6	17.6	70.6
	28	4	23.5	23.5	94.1
	32	1	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	100.0	

The educational background of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff varies depending on position requirements set by individual institutions; both Keene State College and the University of New Hampshire – Durham positions require a minimum of a bachelor's degree. The education breakdown of the survey participants indicated that 8 of the participants hold a maximum of a bachelor's degree, with 8 holding

a master's degree and one indicating holding a bachelor's degree but only being weeks away from completing their master's degree.

Figure 4.2

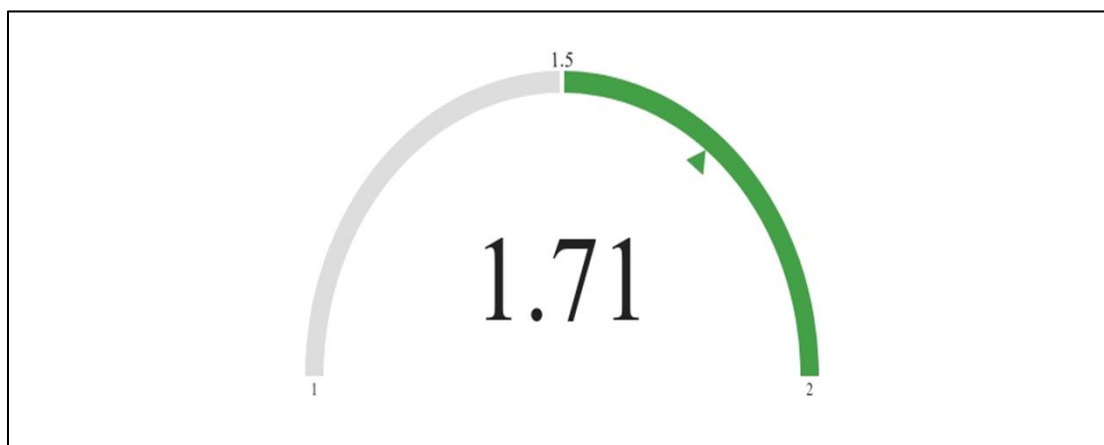
Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Educational Level



One of the key benefits for all full-time staff members in USNH is the Tuition Benefit Program (<https://www.usnh.edu/resource/tuition-benefits>). This program allows USNH full-time staff to pay for courses within USNH and provides up to five-course waivers per year. Knowing this information and that the minimum degree required is a bachelor's degree, the researcher sought to find out from the survey participants if they were currently enrolled in any advanced studies or courses. The survey results indicated that five of the 17 participants were enrolled in advanced studies or courses.

Figure 4.3

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Advanced Studies or Courses

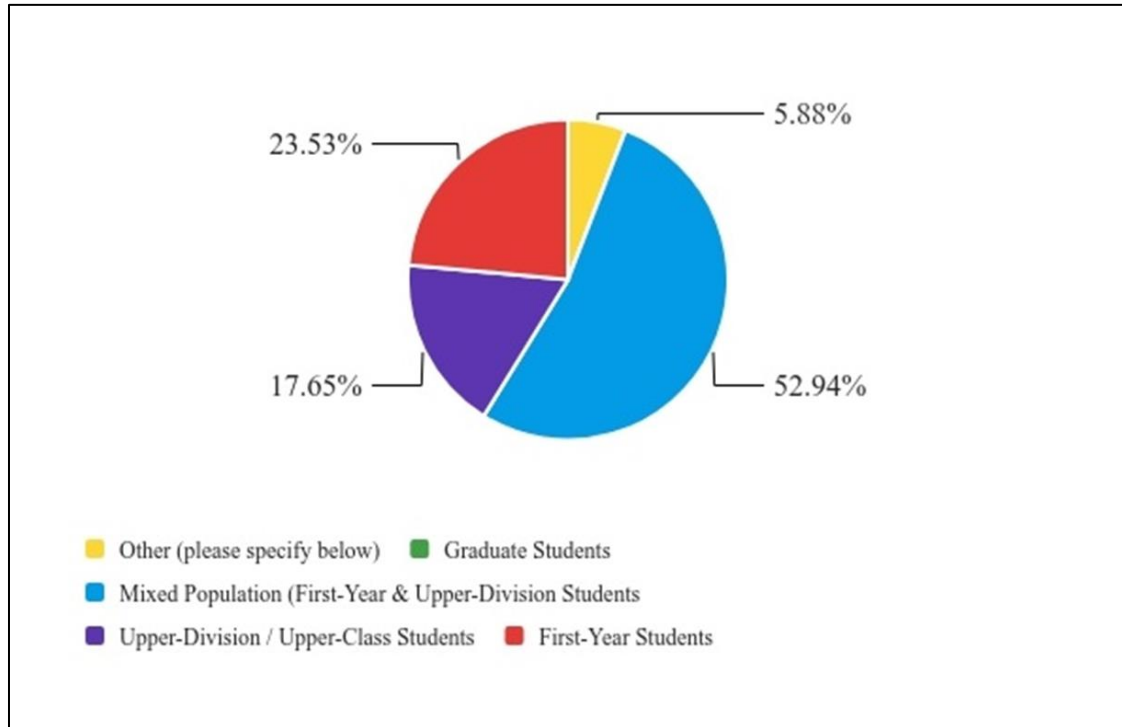


#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	29.41%	5
2	No	70.59%	12
	Total	100%	17

Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are responsible for thousands of young adults' care, safety, and personal development. Therefore, it was imperative to understand what student types these individuals who completed the survey were responsible for. The results of the survey indicated that four participants were responsible for a student population of first-year students, three participants were responsible for upper-division/upper-class students, nine participants were responsible for a mixed student population of both first-year and upper-division/upper-class students, and finally one participant indicating that they were responsible for a community of upper-division/upper-class students, transfer students and graduate students.

Figure 4.4

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Student Populations



Additionally, the researcher asked the survey participants the total number of residents for their respective buildings/residential communities. Residence halls can all vary in size, so it was important for the researcher to know the population size for which each individual was responsible. The information provided to the researcher from the survey results indicated that the minimum number of residents was 120, with the maximum being 1200, resulting in a mean of 301.76.

Table 4.2*Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Number of Residents*

<i>Number of Residents</i>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Residents	17	120	1200	301.76	254.748
Valid N (listwise)	17				

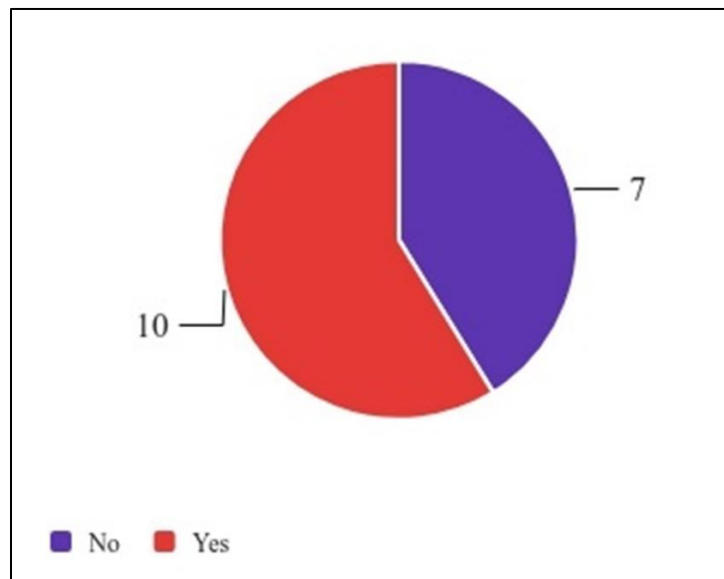
<i>Number of Residents</i>				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	120	2	11.8	11.8
	122	1	5.9	17.6
	130	2	11.8	29.4
	190	1	5.9	35.3
	193	1	5.9	41.2
	230	1	5.9	47.1
	250	1	5.9	52.9
	275	1	5.9	58.8
	288	1	5.9	64.7
	300	1	5.9	70.6
	360	1	5.9	76.5
	375	1	5.9	82.4
	387	1	5.9	88.2
	460	1	5.9	94.1
	1200	1	5.9	100.0
	Total	17	100.0	

The makeup of each entry-level live-in residential life professional staff members community beyond numbers could include specialized populations such as living-learning communities, special interest housing, and faculty-in-residence. Therefore, the

researcher asked the survey participants if their residential community included specialized populations. The results indicated that seven of the 10 participants had some specialized population.

Figure 4.5

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Specialized Populations



Participants who answered yes were asked to specify what kinds of specialized populations in an open-ended format. The results from this indicated the following:

- *I have one RLC (residential learning community) that is undeclared liberal arts majors*
- *My hall is home to the Scholar Residential Learning Community*
- *Sports and Recreation themed housing*
- *High accommodation building and students with many types of disabilities*
- *Environmental Sustainability Residential Learning Community*
- *Students interested in Arts - Students interested in Outdoor Education*

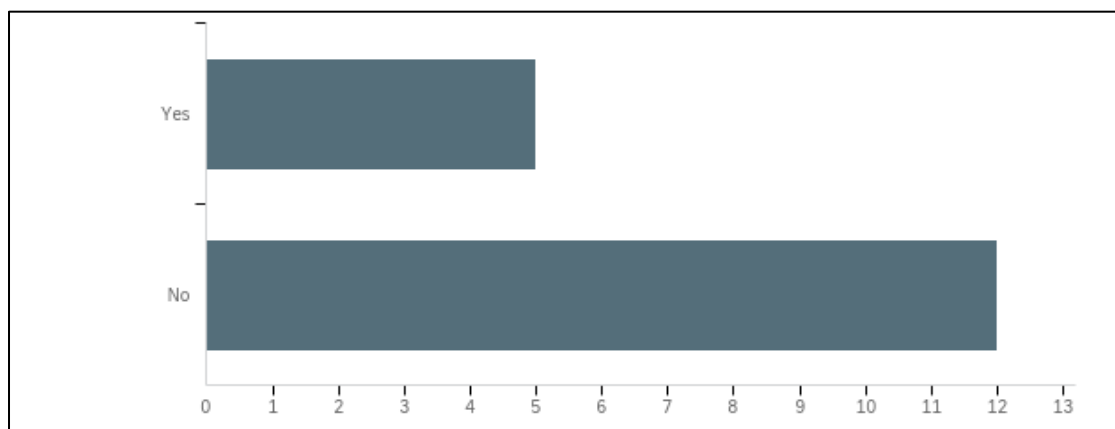
- *On-Campus Apartments, Transfer Student Population*
- *First-year engineering floor*
- *Living-Learning Communities, Themed Housing, Faculty-in-Residence*

The duration of these full-time roles can vary and is set by individual institutions.

The following survey question asked participants to indicate if their position was 12 months. The survey results indicated that five participants had a 12-month position, and 12 did not have a 12-month position.

Figure 4.6

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Position Months



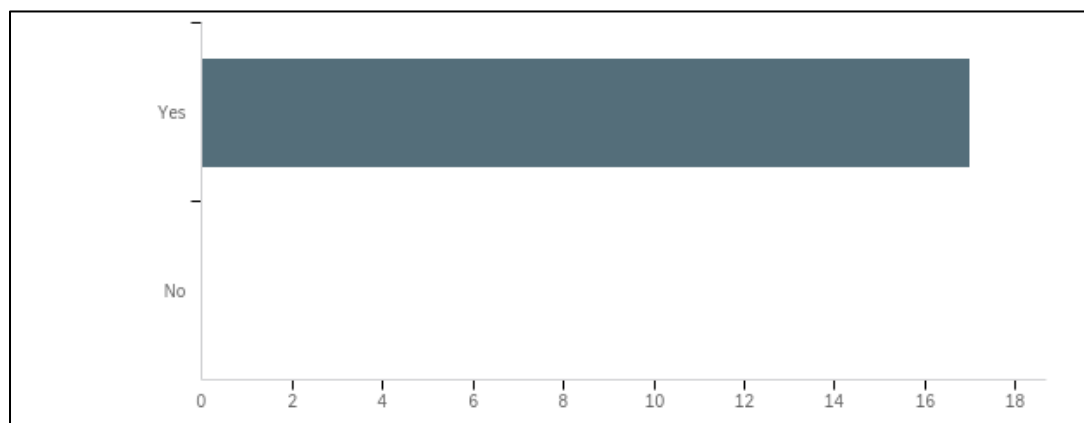
Participants who answered no were asked to specify how many months their position was. In reviewing the responses, 11 of the 12 participants indicated that their position was not 12 months and had positions that were ten months long, with one participant indicating that their role was five months long. What was interesting in this section of the survey was when participants were asked to share the title of their position, as these titles can vary greatly depending on institutions. In reviewing the responses, 12 individuals indicated that their title was Residence Hall Director, three individuals indicated that their

title was Community Director, one individual indicated the title of Apartment Manager, and one participant indicated that their title was Apartment Manager and Summer Conferences Manager.

Learning more about the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life staff and how they perceive positions is the core of this research. In analyzing perceptions from the initial survey, specific responsibilities were revealed. Entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are often responsible for more than just the hundreds of residents in their buildings or residential communities; they are often also responsible for supervising student staff or student employees. All 17 survey participants indicated that they were responsible for supervising student staff.

Figure 4.7

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Supervision



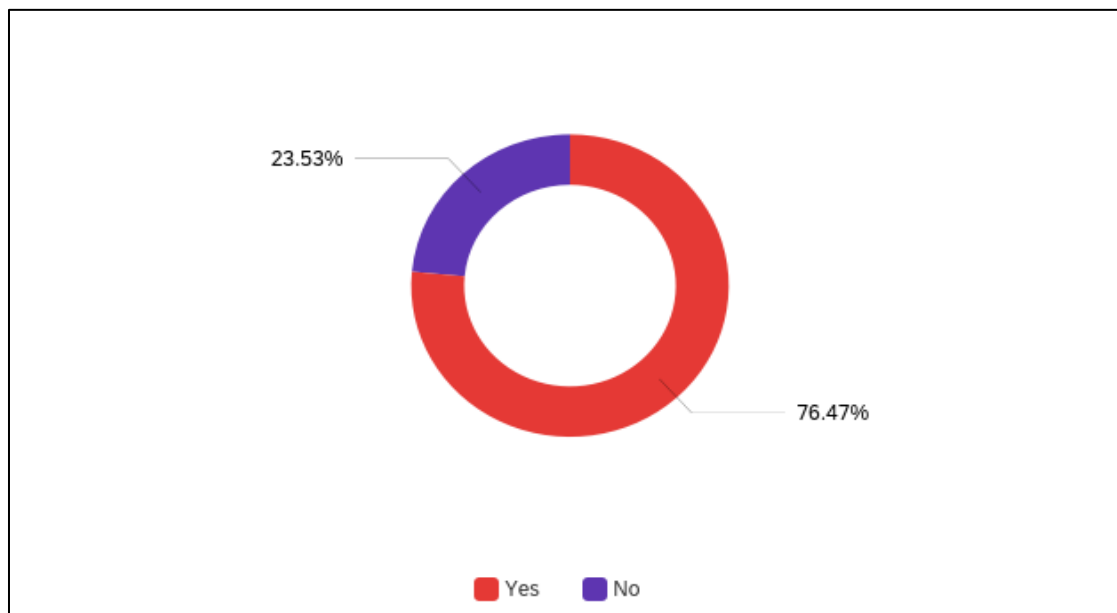
Participants who answered yes were asked to specify how many student staff they supervised and their titles in an open-ended format. The results from this indicated the following:

- *I have five Resident Assistants*
- *10 Resident Assistants and one Administrative Assistant*
- *Three Resident Assistants*
- *Three Resident Assistants*
- *Eight Resident Assistants, one Administrative Assistant, and I run a group that supervises the three Assistant Hall Directors (in addition to the supervision they receive)*
- *Eight Resident Assistants*
- *Four Resident Assistants*
- *16 Resident Assistants, one Assistant Hall Director, and one Administrative Assistant*
- *10 Community Assistants*
- *Four Community Assistants*
- *Four Resident Assistants*
- *Nine Resident Assistants and one Administrative Assistant*
- *Four Resident Assistants*
- *10 Resident Assistants and one Administrative Assistant*
- *12 Community Assistants and one Area Manager*
- *12 Community Assistants*
- *Five Community Assistants and one Area Manager*

In addition to supervising student staff, entry-level live-in residential life professional staff often advise hall councils or a residence hall association. The survey results indicated that 13 participants had this level of responsibility in their role.

Figure 4.8

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Hall Council/RHA



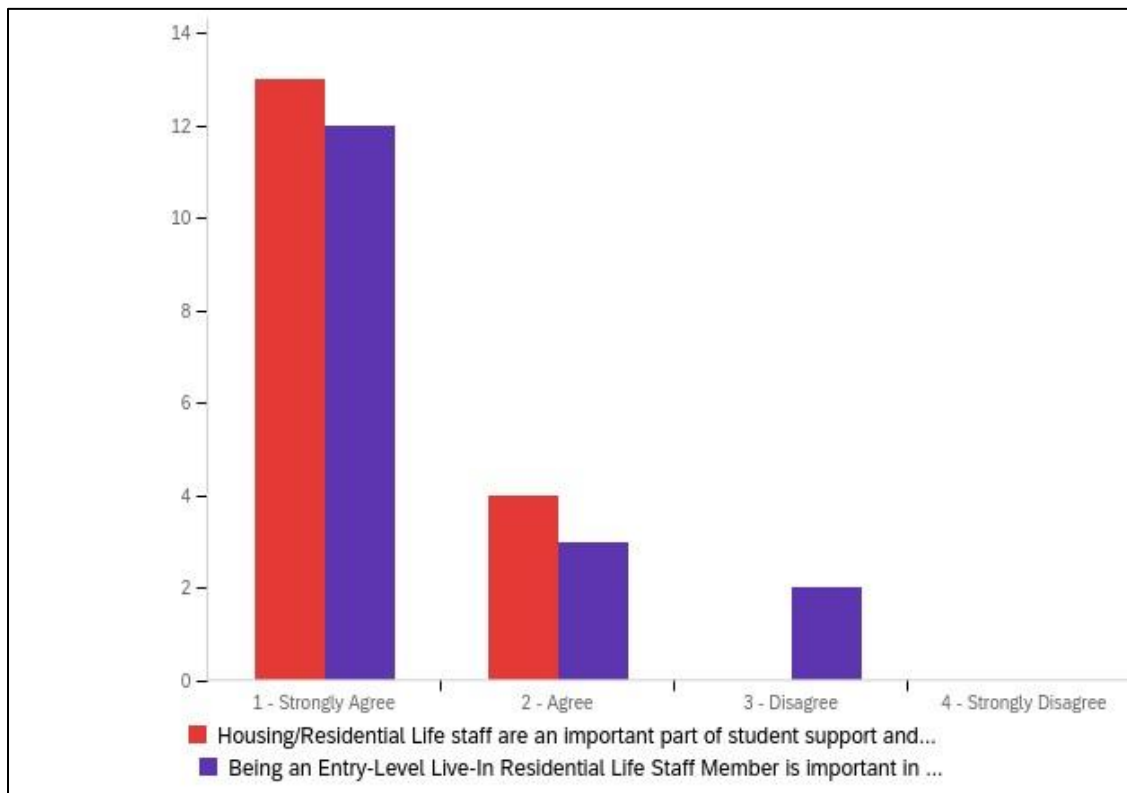
Moving into the end portion of the survey, all participants were provided the following statements and asked their level of agreement with them:

1. Housing/Residential Life staff are an important part of student support and development.
2. Being an Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Staff Member is important in supporting and developing students.

All participants reported in the affirmative for the first statement, with 76.47% of participants sharing a strongly agree and 23.53% indicating agree. The results of the second statement get more interesting. The majority reported in the affirmative for the statement, with 70.59% strongly agreeing and 17.65% agreeing. However, in this statement, 11.76% (2 participants) indicated that they disagree with the statement.

Figure 4.9

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Statements



In an open-ended response section, each survey participant was asked what motivated them to become an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member. Looking closely at the responses, several common themes emerged related to what motivated these individuals to seek a career in higher education, specifically in housing and residential life. A breakdown of these common themes is as follows:

- **Career Development:** Many participants were motivated by professional growth, skill development, and career advancement opportunities.
- **Personal Experiences:** Previous roles significantly shaped motivations, particularly as Resident Assistants and influential mentors.

- **Impact on Students:** A strong desire to positively impact student lives and support their development is a recurring motivation.
- **Educational Goals:** Pursuing advanced degrees and making education more accessible are important factors for several participants.
- **Job Benefits:** Practical benefits like free housing and financial stability are crucial in decision-making.

Participants' motivations for working in residence life are diverse, encompassing personal growth, educational opportunities, professional development, community engagement, and a deep-seated passion for student development. These insights reflect the multifaceted appeal of residence life positions and underscore the importance of supportive environments, tangible benefits, and meaningful student interactions in attracting and retaining entry-level staff in housing and residence life roles.

Table 4.3*Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Motivations*

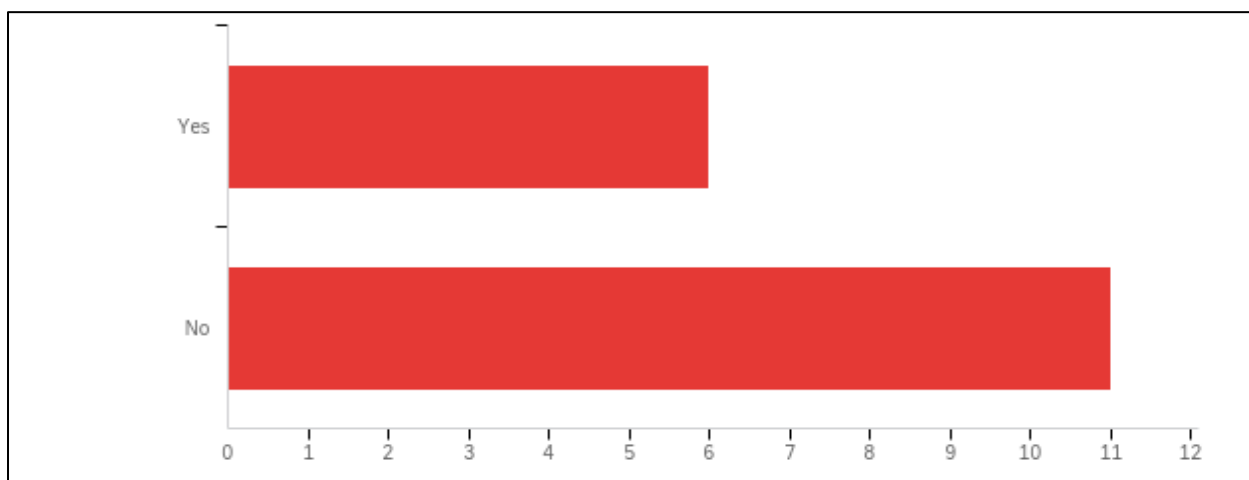
Key Motivation	Participant Information
Community and Professional Growth	Participant 1: Enjoyed the community of young professionals and appreciated the space for personal and professional growth.
Student Contact and Career Advancement	Participant 2: Sought maximum student contact, free housing, and transferrable skills for future career advancement.
Accessibility to Higher Education	Participant 3: Wanted to pursue a graduate degree, believing that working at a university would make it more accessible.
Impact and Career Opportunities	Participant 4: The impact of education and out-of-classroom learning during undergraduate studies influenced the career choice. The role offered benefits like housing and meal assistance.
Education and Career Progression	Participant 5: Aimed to get a master's degree for free while working, to continue a career in higher education. Previous experience was insufficient for career advancement without a master's degree.
Passion for Higher Education	Participant 6: Previous experience as a Resident Assistant (RA) and passion for the role motivated the career choice, encouraged by a supervisor.
Interest in Active Education	Participant 7: Wanted to work with college students and had a passion for active education, stemming from experience as a summer camp instructor.
Influence of Role Models	Participant 8: Inspired by their own RD, sought to replicate that positive influence on students.
Rewarding Experience of Supervising Students	Participant 9: Valued the rewarding experience of supervising and supporting students, recognizing the potential to significantly impact their lives.
Previous RA and Student Affairs Experience	Participant 10: Motivated by experiences as an RA and involvement in student affairs and ResLife during undergraduate studies.
Supportive Living Environments	Participant 11: Aspired to create supportive and engaging living environments for students, continuing from positive RA experiences.
Student Success	Participant 12: Desired to help students achieve success in their education and personal lives.
Attractive Job Benefits	Participant 13: Found the live-in position attractive due to recent relocation and positive past experiences as an RA.
Financial Considerations	Participant 14: Sought student contact and appreciated the financial benefit of free housing due to significant student loans.
Skill Enhancement	Participant 15: Saw the position as an opportunity to enhance skills and bring previous professional experience to community living.
Personal Development	Participant 16: Influenced by impactful undergraduate experiences and mentors, sought to provide similar support to others.
Passion for Working with Students	Participant 17: Passionate about working with and supporting college students, aiming to eventually become a professor.

The entry-level live-in residential life professional staff survey yielded some essential information and insight into what these positions look like from a surface level related to the size of the community, primary position responsibilities, and finally, the motivating factor(s) related to seeking out these types of roles; there was a need to look further, therefore the final question of the survey asked participants if they were

interested in a 60-minute virtual individual interview to explore further their lived experience as an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member. Six of the 17 survey participants shared that they were interested in discussing their experiences further.

Figure 4.10

Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey – Individual Interview Interest



Of the six participants who expressed interest in a virtual individual interview, four scheduled their interview. The researcher will discuss the results of those individual interviews in the following few paragraphs of this section.

As discussed in Chapter Three, data analysis of the virtual individual interviews followed a thematic data analysis approach. In addition, recorded audio data from interviews was transcribed and coded. While the researcher's focus during the individual interviews was to collect that data through the semi-structured questions and strategic follow-up, a richness of shared experiences from each participant was discovered when

listening back on the recordings. Participant 1 interview emphasized their role's dynamic nature, adaptability, and challenges in supporting students and managing their responsibilities. Participant 2 interview emphasized their adaptability, the dynamic nature of their role, the importance of boundaries, and the evolving needs of students in a post-COVID-19 environment. The interview with Participant 3 highlights their role's complex and multifaceted nature, emphasizing their responsibilities, challenges, and the importance of community building, crisis response, and interdepartmental communication. The interview with Participant 4 stresses the importance of flexibility, mentorship, setting boundaries, and the dynamic nature of working with students. Participant 4 also emphasized the significant impact of COVID-19 on the role and the need for ongoing training and professional development.

While the conversations yielded genuine conversations between the researcher and participants and unearthed the richness of their experiences, each one of the interviews required digging deeper. Data was analyzed through an inductive process, and codes were defined upon careful examination and reexamining of the data (Cohen et al., 2018). Codes were examined and organized into categories. The data was then analyzed for evidence of patterns and emerging themes (Cohen et al., 2018). The first round of coding involved looking at each individual participant to find codes and supporting information for those codes. Tables 4.4 through 4.7 highlight each participant's initial codes and themes.

Table 4.4*Participant 1 – Initial Codes and Themes*

Key Words/Phrases	Code	Theme
Types of meetings: standing, student, community standards. Frequency and variability of meetings.	Meetings and Interactions	Daily Responsibilities and Routine
Crisis situations handled. Perception by students during crises. Balancing disciplinarian and support roles.	Crisis Management	Role Perception
Building relationships with students. Acting as a resource and connection point.	Support and Connection	
Interactions with faculty and staff. Faculty-in-residence program.	Community and Relationships	Institutional Environment
Role of the student intervention program. Faculty and staff collaboration.	Institutional Support	
Emotional impact of crisis management. Specific crisis examples.	Handling Crisis Situations	Challenges and Adaptability
Adjustments during COVID-19. Changes in policies and daily tasks.	COVID-19 Impact	
Teaching and academic involvement. Student engagement strategies.	Skill Development	Professional Development and Learning
Personal hobbies and activities. Setting boundaries for work-life balance.	Self-Care	Self-Care and Work-Life Balance
Importance of not being available 24/7. Learning to value personal time.	Professional Boundaries	
Impact of understaffing on job performance. Seeking specialized support.	Staffing and Support	Institutional Processes and Structure
Development of student programs. Adjustments post-pandemic.	Program Development	

While highlighting the codes and themes from the interview with Participant 1, table 4.4 begins to help paint the picture we have been seeking to paint for the outcome section of the IEO model. This participant focused on their lived experience through much discussion on their specific position and responsibilities. This interview was the first of the four and assisted in framing the role of an entry-level live-in residential life professional from the lens of someone who holds this role at a unique time in higher education.

Table 4.5*Participant 2 – Initial Codes and Themes*

Key Words/Phrases	Code	Theme
Description of daily activities and tasks. Scheduling and time management. Interaction with students and staff.	Daily Routine	Daily Routines and Responsibilities
Staff and faculty understanding of the participant's role. Misconceptions about the job responsibilities.	Role Perception	
Participant's love for the job and its meaningful aspects. Enjoyment and fulfillment from the role.	Job Satisfaction	
Learning on the job. The importance of humor and flexibility.	Professional Development	
Varied roles depending on student needs Importance of meeting students' needs.	Student Needs and Support	Student Support and Engagement
Nature and variety of student interactions. Building connections and fostering a sense of belonging.	Student Interactions	
Communication issues within the department. Adapting to pre-established systems and policies. Balancing personal and professional boundaries.	Challenges and Frustrations	Institutional Challenges and Adaptations
Adjusting to students' evolving needs post-COVID. Updating outdated practices and policies. Continuous personal and professional development.	Adaptation and Change	
Changes in student behavior and academic performance post-COVID. Ongoing effects of the pandemic on job responsibilities.	Impact of COVID-19	
Team dynamics and support. Live-in position benefits and challenges. Setting boundaries with students regarding living arrangements.	Work Environment	Work-Life Balance and Boundaries

While the interview with Participant 1 primarily focused on positional responsibilities, the interview with Participant 2 focused on challenges and adaptability. Additionally, this interview showcased the importance of balancing the role with their personal life and the uniqueness of being a staff member who lives where they work and works where they live. The codes and themes with this participant begin to widen the perception of individuals holding the entry-level live-in residential life professional position.

Table 4.6*Participant 3 – Initial Codes and Themes*

Key Words/Phrases	Code	Theme
Daily tasks of apartment managers Summer conference management	Operational Tasks	Job Responsibilities and Tasks
Overseeing mailrooms and student conduct	Student Services Management	
Differences between residential life and housing roles Animosity between departments due to pay disparities Lack of integration and collaboration between departments	Institutional and Departmental Dynamics	
Conduct policy and managing large student gatherings	Student Needs	Interactions with Students
Community building vs. hands-off management Handling mental health crises and roommate conflicts	Student Support	
Lack of resources and support from other departments Communication barriers between departments	Challenges and Frustrations	Challenges and Issues
Mental health and crisis response inadequacies Personal health issues affecting job performance	Adaptation and Change	
Difficulty separating personal life from work	Separation	Work-Life Balance
Impact of job stress on mental health Strategies to manage burnout and stress	Mental Health and Stress	
Importance of DEI in job roles and responsibilities DEI initiatives compared to other institutions	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Professional Development and Training
Need for more crisis response and mental health training Lack of formal training for current role Importance of learning on the job and having accessible resources	Training	

As the outcome of the lived experience is framed, the interview and data analysis with Participant 3 has several codes and themes overlapping with the previous participants. Additionally, this interview showcased the importance of community building, crisis response, and interdepartmental communication. The codes and themes with this participant expand further what we see as the perception of individuals holding the entry-level live-in residential life professional position.

Table 4.7*Participant 4 – Initial Codes and Themes*

Key Words/Phrases	Code	Theme
The role is characterized by varied daily activities and a lack of monotony.	Daily Activities	Daily Routine, Job Description & Development
Common tasks include email management, meetings, independent work time, community engagement, and after-hours commitments	General Tasks	
Hall directors are perceived as essential, versatile roles within the university community. Sense of belonging and identity tied to being well-known and integral to the campus environment.	Role Perception and Identify	
Ongoing need for training and development due to evolving higher education environments. Barriers to training include time constraints and scheduling difficulties.	Training and Development	
The challenge of maintaining a work-life balance due to the nature of live-in roles. Strategies to create separation include setting clear expectations, physical separation, and engaging in hobbies.	Separation Strategies	Work-Life Balance & Challenges
Balancing job expectations with personal time. Adapting to the dynamic nature of student needs and institutional changes.	Challenges and Barriers	
COVID-19 blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Shift towards digital communication and the ongoing impact on daily operations.	Impact of COVID-19	
This position is seen as key resources and mentors for students. Regular interactions with students extend beyond housing issues to personal and academic advice.	Student Interaction	Community Management and Development
Collaboration with campus partners for curriculum development and community programs. Interaction with maintenance staff, faculty, and other departments.	Community and Campus Partnerships	

A number of the codes and themes from the interview and data analysis related to Participant 4 with the other three participants show that many of the experiences from these individuals are somewhat standard. Additionally, this interview showcased the dynamic nature of working with students. The codes and themes with this participant

expand further the perception of individuals holding the entry-level live-in residential life professional position.

The final review of all the interviews combined identified five key themes, including several sub-themes and codes related to the overarching themes. This section will provide an in-depth review and discussion of those findings and how they relate to the central research question.

Core Responsibilities. A central theme extensively discussed in all interviews reflected the multifaceted nature of the positions held by individuals classified as entry-level live-in residential life professional roles. This theme underscores the complexity and breadth of tasks that hall and community directors handle. Their roles encompass administrative duties, student interaction, crisis management, program planning, and collaboration with other departments. The comprehensive nature of the entry-level live-in role requires individuals to be highly organized, responsive, and adaptable, ensuring the residence halls' effective management and the student community's well-being. Within the theme of core responsibilities, several sub-themes were discovered to support the overarching theme:

- *Administrative Duties:* Many interviewed individuals shared that their day is dedicated to administrative tasks such as checking emails, reviewing reports, and attending various meetings. These tasks are essential for the smooth functioning of the residence halls and for staying informed about ongoing issues and developments.
- *Student Interaction:* Daily responsibilities included significant interaction with students. This involves addressing their concerns, resolving conflicts, and

providing support. Participants highlighted the importance of being available and approachable for students.

- *Crisis Management:* Handling crises and emergencies is a recurring responsibility. Participants mentioned dealing with student crises, which require them to be responsive and adaptive, often outside regular working hours.
- *Program Planning and Implementation:* Planning and executing educational and community development programs is a key responsibility. This involves coordinating with other departments and ensuring that programs meet the needs of the student community.
- *Dynamic Nature of Work:* Participants described the role as dynamic and varied, with no two days being the same. Participants appreciated the role's nature, as it kept the job engaging and allowed for continuous learning and adaptation.
- *Collaboration:* Coordinating with other departments and staff members is crucial for the role. This ensures that all aspects of student life and residence hall management are addressed comprehensively.

Supporting both the overarching theme and sub-themes are the following excerpts from the virtual individual interviews:

- Participant 1: "I can have anywhere from three standing meetings in a day versus days that get filled more with things like student meetings."
- Participant 2: "My day-to-day involves checking emails, reviewing reports, attending meetings, and handling student crises."
- Participant 3: "I also spend a significant amount of time coordinating with other departments and ensuring the smooth operation of the residence hall."

- Participant 4: "No two days look identical ... I enjoy being a part of the role is that lack of monotony."

Student Interaction and Support. This theme is prevalent across all interviews, highlighting the multifaceted role of hall directors and community directors in their interactions with students. This theme demonstrates the importance of hall and community directors in fostering a supportive and well-managed living environment. Their ability to balance enforcement with mentorship, provide resources, and build meaningful relationships significantly impacts students' campus experiences. Within the theme of student interactions and support, several sub-themes were discovered to support the overarching theme:

- *Dual Role:* Participants often have dual roles as both enforcers of rules and supportive figures. This duality is reflected in their interactions with students, where they balance maintaining order with providing support.
- *Mentorship and Support:* According to the participants, students perceive these professionals as mentors and confidants. The hall and community directors play significant roles in guiding students through personal and academic challenges, indicating a deeper level of trust and reliance in them as university staff members.
- *Resource Connection:* A significant part of their role involves connecting students to various resources, whether for academic, personal, or health-related issues. This reinforces their position as essential support figures at the university and in the student experience.

- *Building Relationships*: Establishing and maintaining relationships with students is a recurring sub-theme. Participants emphasized the importance of being approachable and building connections that go beyond administrative duties.
- *Perception by Students*: Students consistently perceive these roles as crucial for their day-to-day well-being. They see hall directors and community directors as accessible resources for various issues, which enhances their sense of security and support within the campus environment.

Supporting both the overarching theme and sub-themes are the following excerpts from the virtual individual interviews:

- Participant 1: "Folks do recognize that my role here as another staff member in the buildings is to be able to connect with people where they live."
- Participant 2: "Students see me as both the person who enforces rules and someone who helps them."
- Participant 3: "A lot of my interactions with students involve helping them navigate challenges and connecting them with resources."
- Participant 4: "Students at my institution see their hall directors as day-to-day managers and mentors."

Work-Life Balance. This theme is a common concern across all interviews, highlighting the importance and challenges of maintaining a healthy separation between professional responsibilities and personal life. This theme underscores hall and community directors' ongoing efforts to maintain a healthy separation between their professional duties and personal lives. Setting boundaries, engaging in hobbies, and finding ways to create physical and mental separation are key strategies. The impact of

COVID-19 has intensified these challenges but also led to new approaches to managing work-life balance. Despite these challenges, the intrinsic rewards of community engagement and positively impacting students' lives provide motivation and fulfillment. Within the theme of work-life balance, several sub-themes were discovered to support the overarching theme:

- *Setting Boundaries:* Participants emphasized the need to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. This includes setting expectations with colleagues and students about availability outside working hours. For example, one participant mentioned not answering texts late at night to ensure personal time is respected.
- *Importance of Hobbies:* Engaging in hobbies and personal interests is highlighted as a crucial strategy for maintaining work-life balance. Activities like riding horses, as mentioned by one participant, provide a structured and enjoyable break from work responsibilities.
- *Physical and Mental Separation:* Finding ways to physically and mentally separate from the work environment is essential. This includes leaving the campus, even temporarily, to rejuvenate and prevent burnout. Participants noted the importance of creating both physical and mental distance from their work environment to maintain their well-being.
- *Impact of COVID-19:* The pandemic exacerbated the work-life balance challenges by blurring the lines between work and home life. Increased reliance on technology and remote work made it more difficult to establish clear boundaries.

However, it also highlighted the need for innovative approaches to maintaining balance, such as leveraging technology for flexible work arrangements.

- *Community Engagement:* Despite the challenges, an intrinsic motivation derives from being well-known and connected within the campus community. This sense of belonging and the ability to make a meaningful impact on students' lives can sometimes blur the boundaries between work and personal life and provide a sense of fulfillment.

Supporting both the overarching theme and sub-themes are the following excerpts from the virtual individual interviews:

- Participant 1: "Creating boundaries is very important. I set clear expectations with my job responsibilities, my department, my peers, my coworkers, and the community that I'm serving."
- Participant 2: "Creating separation between work and personal life is crucial ... I try not to answer texts late at night."
- Participant 3: "The challenge truly is finding ways to create separation. Because I truly believe that there has to be that balance between those two areas of your life."
- Participant 4: "Finding ways to create physical and mental separation is very important."

Impact of COVID-19. This theme is pervasive across all interviews, reflecting the profound changes and challenges brought by the pandemic. This theme highlights the significant and multifaceted challenges brought by the pandemic. From blurring work-life boundaries to shifting to technology-based operations, the pandemic profoundly affected

the roles and responsibilities of hall directors and community directors. Despite the difficulties, it also drove innovation and adaptation, leading to more flexible and effective delivery of student services. The long-term effects of COVID-19 continue to shape the working environment and practices in higher education. Within the theme of COVID-19 Impact, several sub-themes were discovered to support the overarching theme:

- *Blurring Work-Life Boundaries:* COVID-19 blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, making it difficult to maintain a clear separation. This challenge is frequently mentioned, emphasizing the struggle to manage professional responsibilities while being confined to home settings.
- *Shift to Technology-Based Operations:* The pandemic necessitated a shift to technology-based operations. Participants noted that pre-COVID, much of their work was in-person and connection-based. The adoption of platforms like Zoom became essential, and many found these new methods to be effective alternatives for delivering student services. The need to explore new technologies and methods of engagement led to creative solutions for maintaining student services and support. This period was seen as an opportunity to rethink traditional approaches and adopt more flexible, technology-driven solutions.
- *Fear and Uncertainty:* The pandemic induced fear and uncertainty, impacting mental health and job performance. Participants described the initial stages of the pandemic as scary and intimidating, particularly when transitioning to new roles or adapting to new working conditions.
- *Impact on Hiring and Education:* The pandemic affected hiring processes and educational pursuits. Budget freezes and hiring delays were common,

complicating job searches for recent graduates. Additionally, the shift to online education posed challenges for completing degrees and transitioning into the workforce.

- *Long-Term Effects:* The residual effects of COVID-19 continue to influence operations. Although the immediate crisis has passed, the experience has left a lasting impact on how work is conducted, with a greater reliance on technology and a continued need for balancing personal and professional lives.

Supporting both the overarching theme and sub-themes are the following excerpts from the virtual individual interviews:

- Participant 1: "COVID was very, very scary. It was a little bit intimidating to step into a brand-new role during the pandemic."
- Participant 2: "COVID-19 blurred the lines between work and home, made operations more technology-based."
- Participant 3: "COVID-19 changed how we conduct day-to-day business. Pre-COVID, our operations were very in-person and connection-based. Now, delivery methods through technology are just as effective."
- Participant 4: "COVID-19 created fear and possibly exclusion or individuality, focusing on home life maybe more than the work job."

Professional Growth and Development. This theme is consistently discussed across the interviews, highlighting the ongoing efforts to stay competent and effective in their roles. This theme stresses the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in hall and community directors' roles. Balancing work responsibilities with the need for ongoing training is a significant challenge, but it is essential for staying competent and

effective. Involvement in departmental tasks, resilience in decision-making, and proactive adaptation to changes are critical components of professional development in this field. Ensuring adequate resources and structured opportunities for training can help address these challenges and support the growth and success of these professionals. Within the theme of professional growth and development, several sub-themes were discovered to support the overarching theme:

- *Balancing Work and Training:* A common challenge is balancing the daily work schedule with the need for continuous training and education. Participants find it difficult to allocate time for professional development amidst their regular responsibilities.
- *Continuous Learning:* Staying updated with new policies, practices, and changes in higher education is crucial. The dynamic nature of the field requires hall directors and community directors to learn and adapt to new developments continuously.
- *Decision-Making and Resilience:* Making decisions during crises and standing by those decisions is highlighted as a significant challenge. Participants discuss the mental resilience required to handle difficult situations and ensure the best outcomes for students.
- *Departmental Involvement:* Hall directors and community directors are involved in various departmental tasks, including committee work, focus groups, and training sessions. This involvement is essential for staying informed and contributing to the institution's broader goals.

- *Resource Allocation:* Finding the time and resources for professional development is a recurring issue. Participants express the need for more structured opportunities and support for training and education to enhance their skills and effectiveness.
- *Adaptation to Change:* The field of higher education is constantly evolving, requiring professionals to be adaptable and proactive in their learning. Participants note the cyclical nature of changes in higher education, emphasizing the importance of being prepared for both predictable and unexpected shifts.

Supporting both the overarching theme and sub-themes are the following excerpts from the virtual individual interviews:

- Participant 1: "Balancing the regular work schedule with the need for continuous training is challenging."
- Participant 2: "Continuous learning and adapting to changes are crucial parts of the role. We need to stay updated with new policies and practices."
- Participant 3: "The biggest barrier is finding time for continued education and training."
- Participant 4: "Continuous training and education are always a challenge in this role."

To create educational systems where entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are successful and supported, this research provides insight into what these individuals currently experience in higher education. One of the main empirical sections from Chapter Two discusses residence hall administrators and the importance of the work behind finding, retaining, developing, and ensuring the well-being of entry-level

live-in residential life professional staff. Survey results indicate the motivating factors in finding these types of positions, while the virtual individual interviews showcase a positive outlook on these roles, with each participant indicating what they like in the role and the part that it plays on their campus. While the participants were positive about their experiences, they also had a healthy critical lens of where barriers existed and what improvements could be made to enhance their experience and the overall experience of the position for others.

The structures in which these positions exist were examined, housing and residential life programs, from approaches to student learning through a curricular approach to several types of interventions, and the role entry-level live-in residential life professional staff play in all parts of housing and residential life programs. Several of the sub-themes showcase interventions and student connections as a critical part of the lived experience of these staff members while also surveying as a mentor and a resource. Participants involved in the individual interviews connected to the ability to make a meaningful impact on student's lives as providing a sense of fulfillment.

The lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are characterized by diverse responsibilities, significant student interactions, challenges in maintaining work-life balance, and the impacts of external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. The roles of entry-level live-in residential life professionals are multifaceted, involving a mix of administrative duties, student interaction, crisis management, program planning, and collaboration. Chapter Two discusses the critical role of residential life staff in shaping student outcomes, citing Bronkema and Bowman (2017), who emphasize that university residence halls and the staff assigned to students' care significantly

influence college student outcomes. This aligns with the diverse responsibilities outlined in the findings, underscoring the importance of these roles in creating supportive and engaging environments for students.

Student interaction is a core component of the role, where staff members act as mentors, confidants, and resource connectors. Astin's (1984) involvement theory, discussed in Chapter Two, highlights the importance of student involvement in educational experiences. Astin argues that the amount of physical and psychological energy students invest in their academic experience is directly proportional to their learning and development. Residential life staff are essential in facilitating this involvement by providing mentorship and support, thereby enhancing student engagement and success. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is a significant challenge for residential life staff. Participants emphasized the importance of setting boundaries and creating physical and mental separation from their work environment. Chapter Two elaborates on the unique challenges residential life staff face, particularly the overlap between work and home life. Rankin and Gulley (2018) discussed the constant stressors that residence life professionals experience due to the integrative nature of their roles, making it difficult to maintain personal boundaries. This further highlights the necessity of establishing work-life balance strategies to prevent burnout and ensure well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the roles and responsibilities of residential life staff. Participants described how the pandemic blurred the lines between work and home, increased reliance on technology, and necessitated innovative approaches to maintaining student services. The empirical information and data from

Chapter Two discusses the broader impact of COVID-19 on higher education institutions and their residence life departments. Nyunt (2021) highlighted the drastic changes in operations and the increased challenges in recruiting and retaining staff. The pandemic exacerbated existing issues, leading to decreased social-psychological well-being and heightened concerns about health and safety.

Continuous learning and adaptation are crucial for residential life staff.

Participants noted the importance of staying updated with new policies and practices and the challenges of balancing work responsibilities with professional development.

Connecting this to the empirical information and data from Chapter Two, there is an emphasis on the importance of professional development for residential life staff. Dunkel and Schreiber (2018) highlighted the need for guided professional development plans to combat attrition and enhance the skills necessary for success in these roles. Such development is essential for retaining staff and ensuring they can effectively support student success.

The lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are deeply intertwined with the empirical insights provided in Chapter Two. These roles are essential for fostering student engagement and success, requiring a balance of diverse responsibilities, meaningful student interactions, and continuous professional development. The challenges of maintaining work-life balance and the impacts of external factors like COVID-19 further underscore the complexity of these positions. Understanding and addressing these experiences are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and well-being of residential life staff, ultimately benefiting the student communities they serve.

Organization and Field Impacts

The outcome of this research provides insights into the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff and how they perceive their positions. This research considered the experiences of USNH individuals holding these positions and allowed them to openly share their experiences, stories, and perceptions of their roles. From scratching the surface in the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff survey to diving deeper with four participants in virtual individual interviews, the picture was painted of what these, often marked as mission-critical positions, look like and how the individuals holding those roles perceive themselves and the work that they do. The findings of this research may be valuable for student affairs leadership, housing, and residential life program leadership and supervisors, as well as the field of higher education as a whole.

Many respondents were motivated by the community, professional growth opportunities, and benefits such as free housing and access to graduate education. These factors should be highlighted in recruitment campaigns to attract candidates. Personal experiences as resident assistants or similar roles significantly influenced participants' decision to pursue a career in residential life. This suggests that targeting individuals with prior RA experience has been and will remain effective. Beyond recruiting these individuals, this research highlights the importance of career development. The opportunity to pursue advanced degrees while working is a significant attraction. Emphasizing tuition assistance or partnerships with academic programs could enhance recruitment and retention.

The staff holding these positions have diverse educational backgrounds and a mix of bachelor's and master's degree holders. Providing pathways for professional development and education can help retain staff. This research highlights a strong belief in the importance of their role in student support and development. Acknowledging and supporting this perception through recognition programs and professional development can improve job satisfaction and retention. Many residential communities host special populations, such as living-learning communities and themed housing. Organizational structures should be flexible to accommodate these diverse needs. Creating specialized roles or task forces to manage these unique populations can ensure better support and program success. A majority of positions are 10-month appointments. Considering the workload and responsibilities, there might be a need to evaluate whether 12-month contracts could provide better continuity and support for staff and residents.

As a field, this is a critical moment as budgets get tighter and remaining positions take on additional responsibilities. Regular training on conflict resolution, diversity, equity, and inclusion can equip staff to handle a variety of situations, enhancing their effectiveness and job satisfaction. Establishing channels for regular feedback from residential life staff can help identify issues early and improve overall program effectiveness. This research shines a greater light on positions misunderstood by faculty, staff, and students and provides ways to gain insight into these individuals and roles. It would be imperative for student affairs leadership and housing and residential life program leadership to continue exploring these roles and the part that they play in their organizations. The information and stories shared by these individuals showcase how interconnected the positions are with both academic and non-academic aspects of the

university experience that students have while in attendance. While this study was limited to USNH and only to positions at two of the system's three residential campuses, its results yielded vital insights into the role of entry-level live-in residential life professionals. While four interviews were conducted, it would have been ideal to hear from more individuals who completed the initial survey to capture a larger view of these lived experiences. The lived experience of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff is complex and multidimensional. Recommendations for advocacy are discussed in the following section.

Recommendations for Advocacy

This study has several recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research. The findings of this research suggest it may be advantageous to acknowledge the importance of the role of entry-level live-in residential life professionals inside housing and residence life programs and the larger setting of higher education. One of the key themes identified in this study was around work-life balance, especially given that these roles require individuals to live where they work and work where they live. While there was much positive reflection from participants about the nature of the role, there were some critical comments about setting clear expectations with other staff and students and finding ways to create separation. It is essential for staff that supervise these roles to consider this theme when considering onboarding, training, development, and setting expectations. It may be necessary to engage entry-level live-in residential life professionals in discussions about work-life balance and to identify ways the institution can contribute and support this for those individuals and the role while potentially considering how to blend some of the technology-based operations components to aid in

work-life balance without sacrificing being a visible resource for their communities and residents.

In Chapter One, a duty of care was identified. Taking this a step further, we can see that these individuals discuss their role in caring for the community they are responsible for, the students within those communities, and even beyond when they discuss the role that crisis response and duty play. However, we can see from the data analysis that these individuals are also owed a duty of care from the programs and institutions they work and reside in. These programs and institutions must look at ways that they are contributing to this duty of care in an environment post-COVID-19, as this was identified by all participants when considering the profound changes and challenges brought in their roles. It is clear from this research that COVID-19 induced fear and uncertainty, impacting mental health and job performance. Participants described the initial stages of the pandemic as scary and intimidating, particularly when transitioning to new roles or adapting to new working conditions. Institutions of higher education and housing and residential programs are at a critical crossroads to engage with staff around this topic and ways that they can continue to prepare to support these individuals and roles, as there are still some residual feelings around what occurred during that period of their experience.

Chapter One established that entry-level live-in residential life positions are the most common entry-level positions in student affairs, often serving as an entry point into the profession (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Collins & Hirt, 2006). In addition to this, this study showed that there is a desire for these individuals to experience professional growth and development, but they are at times met with challenges in accomplishing this in their

roles. The demands of the position and trying to balance their work create an immediate challenge to finding the time for continuous training. As higher education and housing and residential life program leadership look at the structure of these positions, and the responsibilities of these positions, they need to consider the duty of the profession and ensure that not only are these individuals prepared for their current roles but also create the time to prepare these individuals for advancement beyond the entry-level live-in role. While the ACUHO-I Core Competencies (Cawthon & Schreiber, 2012) outline what campus housing professionals need to know and be able to do to be successful, it would be imperative for leaders to consider ways also to incorporate Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA) professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners as this guiding document outlines a broader set of competencies for higher education professionals that may decide to take a career path beyond housing and residential life.

The changing landscape of higher education was already on the horizon pre-COVID-19, but with the pandemic hitting when it did and now living in a post-COVID-19 world, change is occurring at an accelerated rate. The data collected from the participants demonstrates that the field of higher education is constantly evolving, requiring professionals to be adaptable and proactive in their learning and development. The study's participants noted the cyclical nature of changes in higher education, emphasizing the importance of being prepared for both predictable and unexpected shifts. A critical read for all higher education leaders and supervisors, not just the ones responsible for entry-level live-in residential life professionals, is *The Compass Report: Charting the Future of Student Affairs* (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher

Education, 2022). This report outlines the shifts while identifying key steps necessary to embrace and prepare for those changes. In order to provide a stable environment and experience for individuals being recruited for entry-level, live-in residential life professionals, remaining educated on topics that will impact these individuals is critical.

Future research may include expanding the scope beyond USNH and taking either a regional or national approach to include various types of institutions. Expanding on the survey would be essential to incorporate some questions based on the themes identified in this study to help engage with professionals who may take the future survey and entice them into an interview. ACUHO-I serves a global membership of campus housing professionals from institutions of all types and sizes. While a great deal of research has been developed around student positions often titled resident assistants, this organization and its leadership must consider how they expand on their research related to entry-level live-in professional staff, as the individuals who hold these positions are the profession's future in years to come. The research has highlighted several key areas that require attention to ensure these professionals are effective in their roles and experience fulfilling and sustainable careers. This research underscores the importance of entry-level live-in residential life professionals in fostering student development and maintaining a supportive residential environment. Addressing the highlighted areas through targeted advocacy and institutional changes can enhance these crucial staff members' effectiveness, satisfaction, and retention, ultimately benefiting the entire higher education community.

Reflective Summary

As someone who has been actively supervising entry-level live-in residential life professional staff for the past 11 years, one might think one has a grasp on the experiences of individuals holding these roles and positions. This research allowed me to step outside the supervision role and actively engage with these individuals through the researcher's lens. When I began the EdD journey, I was convinced I knew exactly what direction I was headed; however, it has significantly changed over the last few years. Throughout this process, I have been allowed to engage with some truly inspiring individuals inside and outside my organization. Working in housing and residential life is not easy work, but it is enriching and fulfilling. Coupling my passion for working in housing and residential life with being a doctoral student has opened the door for further inquiry into housing and residential life programs, staffing, and student success.

Although several insights were gained and recommendations for advocacy have been identified, the study had noteworthy limitations. If more time had allowed, it would have been beneficial to have expanded on the research question and looked at how the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position is perceived by faculty, resident assistants/community advisors, housing and residential life program leadership, student affairs leadership, senior institutional leadership. It would also be beneficial to look at even potentially looking at how residential students at each of the universities view these positions. It would have been interesting to incorporate schools in New Hampshire that fell outside USNH to look at these staff members from institutions with different profiles, settings, and university classifications. Additionally, as there becomes even more of an emphasis on supporting a student's sense of belonging, I would have

enjoyed exploring this further from both the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member lens and that of the students they care for in their roles.

One of the main barriers I encountered during this research was navigating being a full-time professional in housing and residential life and conducting this research and navigating COVID-19. While this research occurred, several staff member transitions occurred, resulting in having to pause pieces of this research process to ensure that I was living up to my duty of care to the staff I am responsible for, especially during significant changes and challenges. I reflect on the late nights working through email concerns about shifting responsibilities with navigating COVID-19 on our campus while working to ensure all of my staff had what they needed to be safe. Many of the same concerns pointed out by the participants of this study were concerns my staff shared with me directly as we worked to perform all aspects of our role but care for our own personal safety. I hope that in the future, when conducting research, I will not encounter a barrier like COVID-19, but now that I have, I feel more equipped to navigate it while supporting my staff and fulfilling my role.

A secondary barrier to conducting this research and completing this study was often feeling like an imposter and realizing that I was suffering from imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is defined as “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). It is also characterized by individuals not internalizing their success, contributing achievements and accolades to external factors. For me, this resulted in instances of second-guessing my work as a researcher when working to recruit participants, reviewing and coding the data, and finally sitting down to complete Chapter Four of this dissertation. However, now that I have found the support necessary and

positive affirmation from peers, supervisors, and direct reports, I have developed confidence in the work I have done with this study that I hope to carry over into future work and studies.

Throughout my dissertation and doctoral journey, I have learned much more about housing and residential life and myself as a researcher and advocate for change. My pathway to working in higher education, specifically in housing and residential life, was a mix of traditional and non-traditional. There were times prior to beginning the doctoral and dissertation journey that I felt both like an expert in some areas and ultimately lost in others. Taking on the doctoral and dissertation journey was something I knew from a young age would be part of my life. However, I would have never imagined trying to tackle this at a time when a global pandemic was happening and trying to tackle the many challenges of work and my personal life. The end part of this journey has reignited my passion for advocacy, specifically for those individuals within housing and residence life programs. Having had the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff from the lens of a researcher has given me valuable insight on how to enact specific changes within my immediate organization while continuing to share the themes from the analysis with stakeholders all around me.

I am reminded of one of my favorite quotes when it comes to the reflection of this journey and the completion of this document:

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”

(Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*, 1971)

I remain thankful for the experiences I gained along this journey and for helping change my lived experiences as a mid-level live-on residential life professional staff, as I care a whole awful lot.

References

- Association of College & University Housing Officers-International. *ACUHO-I core competencies: The body of knowledge for campus housing professionals*.
<https://www.acuho-i.org/resources/core-competencies>
- Devlin, A. S., Donovan, S., Nicolov, A., Nold, O., & Zandan, G. (2008). Residence hall architecture and sense of community: Everything old is new again. *Environment and Behavior*, 40(4), 487-521.
- Arboleda, A., Wang, Y., Shelley, M.C., & Whalen, D.F. (2003). Predictors of residence hall involvement. *Journal of College Student Development* 44(4), 517-531.
doi:10.1353/csd.2003.0036
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297–308.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college?
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40, 518-529.
- Baumann, J. A. Exceptional engagement. *ACUHO-I Talking Stick*, April/May 2021.
https://read.nxtbook.com/acuhoi/talking_stick/may_2021/exceptional_engagement.html
- Barham, J. D., & Winston, R. B. (2006). Supervision of new professionals in student affairs: Assessing and addressing needs. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 26, 64-89.

- Belch, H. A., & Mueller, J. A. (2003). Candidate pools or puddles: Challenges and trends in the recruitment and hiring of resident directors. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(1), 29-46.
- Belch, H. A., Wilson, M. E., & Dunkel, N. (2009). Cultures of success: Recruiting and retaining new live-in residence life professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal, 27*(2), 176–193.
- Bernard. (2017). interpretative phenomenological study of effective individual interventions by live-in residence life professionals [Dissertation].
<https://doi.org/10.17760/D20265000>
- Blimling, G. S., & Miltenberger, L. J. (1981). *The resident assistant: Working with college students in residence halls*. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Blimling, G. S. (2003). College and university residence halls. In J. W. Guthrie (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Education* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 340-344). New York: Macmillan Reference USA.
- Blimling, G. S. (2015). *Student learning in college residence halls: What works, what doesn't, and why*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bosch, M. A. (2020). We're here, we're queer, we persevere in this career: experiences of LGBTQ+ housing professionals. *Journal of College and University Student Housing, 46*(3), 92-109.

- Bronkema, R., & Bowman, N.A. (2017). A residential paradox?: residence hall attributes and college student outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development* 58(4), 624-630. doi:10.1353/csd.2017.0047
- Brower, A. M., & Inkelas, K. K. (2010). *Living-learning programs: One high-impact educational practice we now know a lot about*. *Liberal Education*, 96(2), 36-43.
- Carnegie Classification. (n.d.). *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* ®. Carnegie Classifications - Keene State College Institution Lookup. <https://tinyurl.com/2yfcapk7>
- Carnegie Classification. (n.d.). *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* ®. Carnegie Classifications - University of New Hampshire Institution Lookup. <https://tinyurl.com/ewwte9wh>
- Cawthon, T. W., & Schreiber, P. J. (2012). *ACUHO-I core competencies: The body of knowledge for campus housing professionals*. Association of College and University Housing Officers.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity*. Jossey-Bass.
- Christopher, J. (2008). Career commitment among housing professionals: a position analysis. *Higher Education and Student Affairs Faculty Publications*. 29. https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/hied_pub/29
- Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 15(3), 241–247. <https://doi-org.unh.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/h0086006>

- Clandinin, J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27(1), 44-54.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed). Routledge.
- Collins, D., & Hirt, J. B. (2006). The nature of professional life for residence hall administrators. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 34(1), 14-24.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2019). *CAS professional standards for higher education* (10th Ed.).
- Cowley, W. H., & Williams, D. (1991). *International and historical roots of American higher education*. Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Davidson, D. L. (2012). Job satisfaction, recruitment, and retention of entry-level residence life and housing staff. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 38(2), 78–93.
- Devlin, A. S., Donovan, S., Nicolov, A., Nold, O., & Zandan, G. (2008). Residence hall architecture and sense of community: Everything old is new again. *Environment and Behavior*, 40(4), 487-521.
- Dungy, G. J. (2003). Organization and functions of student affairs. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr. & Associates (Eds.), *Student services. A handbook for the profession* (4th ed., pp. 339-357). Jossey-Bass.

- Dunkel, N. W., & Baumann, J. A. (2013). *Campus housing management: Vol. 1. past, present, & future*. Association of College & University Housing Officers-International.
- Dunkel, N., & Schreiber, P. (2018). Competency development of housing professionals. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 22(2), 98–107
- EAB. (2018). State of the Union for Higher Education. University Days Presentation at Plymouth State University, Plymouth, NH, United States
<https://digitalcommons.plymouth.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1101&context=univdays>
- Fitzgerald, Brian L., "Forecasting competencies for college and university chief housing officers in the United States: A Delphi study" (2016). Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations. 667
- Frederiksen, C. F. (1993). *A brief history of collegiate housing*. In R. B. Winston Jr., S. Anchors & Associates (Eds.), *Student housing and residential life* (pp. 167-183). Jossey-Bass.
- Goldman, J., (2013) *Core Competencies for campus housing*. In Dunkel, N. W., & Baumann, J. A. (Eds.) *Campus housing management: Vol. 1. past, present, & future*. (pp 51-115) Association of College & University Housing Officers-International.

- Graham, P. A., Hurtado, S. S., & Gonyea, R. M. (2018). The benefits of living on campus: do residence halls provide distinctive environments of engagement? *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 55(3), 255–269.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2018.1474752>
- Grawe, N. D. (2021). How to survive the enrollment bust. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 67(10).
- Haggerty, B. J. (2011). *An exploratory study to identify competencies for entry-level residence life professionals* [Dissertation].
<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdwweb?did=2494291971&sid=5&Fmt=6&clientId=39334&RQT=309&VName=PQD>
- Henning, G. W., Cilente, K. M., Kennedy, D. F., & Sloane, T. M. (2011). Professional development needs for new residential life professionals. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 37(2), 26–37.
- Hurtado, S. S., Gonyea, R. M., Graham, P. A., & Fosnacht, K. (2020). The relationship between residential learning communities and student engagement. *Learning Communities: Research & Practice*, 8(1).
- Inkelas, K.K., & Weisman, J.L. (2003). Different by design: an examination of student outcomes among participants in three types of living-learning programs. *Journal of College Student Development* 44(3), 335-368.
doi:10.1353/csd.2003.0027

- Inkelas, K. K., Vogt, K. E., Longerbeam, S. D., Owen, J., & Johnson, D. (2006). Measuring outcomes of living-learning programs: examining college environments and student learning and development. *JGE: The Journal of General Education*, 55(1), 40–76.
<https://doiorg.libproxy.plymouth.edu/10.1353/jge.2006.0017>
- Inkelas, K. (2008). National study of living-learning programs: 2007 report of findings.
- Johnson, R. B., & NC Digital Online Collection of Knowledge and Scholarship (NCDOCKS). (2009). Workplace climate, degree of outness, and job satisfaction of gay and lesbian professional staff in higher education [Dissertation, [University of North Carolina at Greensboro]]. <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/listing.aspx?id=2495>
- Keeling, R. P., & Dungy, G. J. (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. ACPA, NASPA.
- Keene State College. (2024). *CD position description*.
<https://www.keene.edu/office/reslife/working-in-res-life/rd-job-description/>
- Keen State College Office of Institutional Research & Assessment. (2022). *Factbook*.
<https://www.keene.edu/office/ir/assets/document/factbook/>
- Keene State College. (2024). *President's Goals*.
https://www.keene.edu/administration/president/svp/goals/#goal_1_improve_recruitment_retention_achievement

Keene State College. (2024). *Working in Community Living*.

<https://www.keene.edu/office/reslife/working-in-res-life/>

Kennedy, K. (2013). *Programming and education*. In N. Dunkel, & J. Baumann (Eds.), *Campus housing management, residence life & education* (pp. 60-87).

Association of College and University Housing Officers-International.

Kerlinger, F. (1986). *Foundations of behavioral research* (3rd ed.). Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Kerr, K. G., Tweedy, J., Edwards, K. E. and Kimmel, D. (2017). Shifting to curricular approaches to learning beyond the classroom. *About Campus*, 22, 22–31.

Kerr, K. G., & Tweedy, J. (2006). Beyond seat time and student satisfaction: A curricular approach to residential education. *About Campus*, 11(5), 9-15.

Krueger, R.A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (2nd ed.) SAGE Publications, Inc.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature*. National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

Lichterman, H., & Bloom, J. L. (2019). The curricular approach to residential education: Lessons for student affairs practice. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 37(1), 54-67.

- Long, D. (2012). *Theories and models of student development*. In L. J. Hinchliffe & M. A. Wong (Eds.), *Environments for student growth and development: Librarians and student affairs in collaboration* (pp. 41-55). Association of College & Research
- Lovell, C. D., & Kosten, L. A. (2000). Skills, knowledge, and personal traits necessary for success as a student affairs administrator: A meta-analysis of thirty years of research. *NASPA journal*, 37(4), 553-572.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- McGowan, B. L., Zerquera, D. D., & Tu, D. L. (2017). Introduction to the 2017 special issue of the journal of college and university student housing: Social justice. *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 43(3), 8-13.
- Moiser, R. (1989). *Health and wellness programs. Educational programming in college and university residence halls*, 122-138.
- Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of organization*. Sage.
- Morrill, W. H., Hurst, J. C., & Oetting, E. R. (Eds.). (1980). *Dimensions of intervention for student development*. John Wiley & Sons.
- NASPA & ACPA. (2015). *Professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners*. College Student Educators International.

- NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. (2022). *The compass report: Charting the future of student affairs*.
<https://naspa.org/futureofstudentaffairs>
- Nyunt, G. (2021). Working in residence life during a pandemic: impact of COVID-19 on residence life staff members' mental well-being and intention to continue working in residence life. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 48(1), 10–29.
- Nyunt, G., Zhou, Y., Sandoval, E., & Bender, C. (2024). Envisioning a residence life department that prioritizes staff well-being. *Journal of College & University Student Housing*, 50(3).
- Palmer, C., Broido, E. M., & Campbell, J. (2008). A commentary on "the educational role in college student housing." *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 35(2), 86-99.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students*. Jossey-Bass.
- Patel, V. (2019). The New In Loco Parentis'.(THE TRENDS REPORT 2019)(law that says institutions such as colleges may act in place of the parent). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 65(23), B34.
- Patton, M. Q., (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

- Rankin IV, P. R. (2013). *Work/life boundary management in an integrative environment: A study of residence life professionals who live at their place of work*. University of San Diego.
- Rankin IV, P. R., & Gulley, N. Y. (2018). Boundary integration and work/life balance when you live where you work: a study of residence life professionals. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 44(2), 64-81.
- Reed, T. L. (2015). *The relationship between supervision, job satisfaction, and burnout among live-in and live-on housing and residence life professionals*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College.
- Renn, K. A., & Jessup-Anger, E. R. (2008). Preparing new professionals: Lessons for graduate preparation programs from the National Study of New Professionals in Student Affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(4), 319–335.
- Rentz, A. L. (2009). *A history of student affairs*. In G. S. McClellan, J. Stringer & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration*. Jossey-Bass.
- Rhatigan, J. J. (2000). *The history and philosophy of student affairs*. In M. J. Barr, M. K. Desler & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration* (2nd ed., pp. 3-24). Jossey-Bass.
- Riker, H. C., & DeCoster, D. A. (2008). The educational role in college student housing. *Journal of College & University Student Housing*, 35(2). 80-85.
- Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American college & university: A history*. University of Georgia Press.

- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed). SAGE.
- Sandeen, A. (1991). *The chief student affairs officer: leader, manager, mediator, educator*. Jossey Bass.
- Sandeen, A., & Barr, M. J. (2014). *Critical issues for student affairs: Challenges and opportunities*. Jossey Bass.
- Schuh, J. H. (1996). *Residence halls*. In A. L. Rentz & Associates (Eds.), *Student affairs practice in higher education* (Vol. 2nd). Charles C. Thomas.
- Schroeder, C. C., & Mable, P. (1994). *Residence halls and the college experience: past and present*. In C. G. Schroeder, P. Mable & Associates (Eds.), *Realizing the educational potential of residence halls* (pp. 3-21). Jossey-Bass.
- Seuss, & Random House. (1971). *The Lorax*. Random House.
- Shaffer, J. L. (2009). *Role of residence hall staff in offering early warning academic intervention*. ProQuest LLC.
- Smith, J. C. (2013). *Cracking the lavender ceiling: lesbian, gay, and bisexual student affairs professionals and their personal perspectives on career trajectory* [Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles].
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/73p6p21n>
- Sriram, R., Cheatle, J., Weintraub, S. D., Haynes, C., Murray, J.L., & Marquart, C. P. (2020). The influence of students' academic, social, and deeper life interactions on their psychological sense of community. *Journal of College Student Development* 61(5), 593-608. doi:10.1353/csd.2020.0057

- St. Onge, S., Ellett, T., & Nestor, E. M. (2008). Factors affecting recruitment and retention of entry-level housing and residential life staff: Perceptions of chief housing officers. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 35(2), 10-23.
- Suitor, D. T. (2013). *Social support, sense of community, and psychological distress among college students: Examining the impact of university housing units* [Dissertation, University of Kansas].
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1335896997>
- The University of New Hampshire. (2020). *Facts & Figures*.
<https://www.unh.edu/main/facts-figures>
- The University of New Hampshire. (2021). *The Future of UNH*.
<https://www.unh.edu/main/facts-figures>
- Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- The Future of UNH. University of New Hampshire. (2021, May 6).
<https://www.unh.edu/main/future-of-unh#studentwb>.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). The University of Chicago Press
- University System of New Hampshire. *About the Proposed USNH/CCSNH Merger*. (2021). <https://yours.usnh.edu/proposed-usnh-and-ccsnh-board-merger/>

University System of New Hampshire. *About USNH* (2024).

<https://www.usnh.edu/about-usnh/publications>

University System of New Hampshire. (2024). *Tuition benefits*.

<https://www.usnh.edu/resource/tuition-benefits>

Venaas, M. (2019, November 20). *Supporting Academic Success in Housing: Findings from a National Study* [Video]. <https://go.skyfactor.com/191119-Supporting-Academic-Success-in-Housing-Findings-from-a-National-Study.html>

Veysey, L. R. (1965). *The emergence of the American University*. The University of Chicago Press.

Washington, William III. (2017). *Perceptions of cultural competency skills among professional housing and residential life staff at postsecondary institutions*. Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations. 778.
<https://commons.emich.edu/theses/778>

Webber, K.L., Krylow, R.B., & Zhang, Q. (2013). Does involvement really matter? indicators of college student success and satisfaction. *Journal of College Student Development* 54(6), 591-611. doi:10.1353/csd.2013.0090

Weintraub, S. D., & Plymouth State University Graduate Studies in Education. (2018). *The space between us: A case study exploring faculty and residential life professionals participating in a residential learning community in a small college* [Dissertation].

Wilson, M. E., "Recruitment and retention of entry-level staff in housing and residence life: A report on activities supported by the ACUHO-I Commissioned Research Program" (2008). Higher Education and Student Affairs Faculty Publications. 29.
https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/hied_pub/29

Appendices

Appendix A. Permission to Recruit Participants from Keene State College

Date

Dear Mrs. Justice,

I am requesting written permission to recruit participants for my dissertation research study from Keene State College's Residential Life Entry-Level Live-In Professional Staff. The purpose of my study is to examine the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. This study will explore entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position design/descriptions and how these professional staff members perceive their positions.

I will be looking to recruit entry-level live-in residential life professional staff, or as defined by your program, Community Directors, working in your department at Keene State College. The data collection methods for the entry-level live-in residential life profession staff will consist of a qualitative survey instrument and personal virtual interviews. Participants who meet eligibility and complete the survey will be prompted at the end to opt into a virtual personal interview.

I am seeking permission from your department to allow me to recruit participants for this research study, pending my Institution's IRB approval. I would ask you to send the initial recruitment email to your entry-level live-in residential life professional staff (Community Directors). This recruitment letter will explain the purpose of the study to the participants and include a link to the informed consent form and survey for those eligible and interested in participating.

Please let me know if I can provide further information regarding this research study and permission request. If this request is acceptable, I would kindly ask if you could sign, date, and return this letter to me at your earlier convenience so that I can submit it to my Institution's IRB.

Sincerely,

Charles "Chuck" Crawford
Plymouth State University
Doctor of Higher Education & Administrative Leadership
cecrawford@plymouth.edu
603-548-3169

.....

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed a request for Charles "Chuck" Crawford to recruit participants from [College/University] 's Housing/Residential Life Department for his dissertation research. When Charles receives IRB approval, I agree to provide access for the approved research project.

Name [Print]_____ Date:_____

**Appendix B. Permission to Recruit Participants from the University of New
Hampshire - Durham**

Date

Dear Mrs. Abelmann and Mrs. Perkins,

I am requesting written permission to recruit participants for my dissertation research study from the University of New Hampshire – Durham Residential Life Entry-Level Live-In Professional Staff. The purpose of my study is to examine the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. This study will explore entry-level live-in residential life professional staff position design/descriptions and how these professional staff members perceive their positions.

I will be looking to recruit entry-level live-in residential life professional staff, or as defined by your program, Hall Directors and Apartment Managers, working in your departments at the University of New Hampshire – Durham. The primary data collection is expected to occur between May 2022 through November 2022. The data collection methods for the entry-level live-in residential life profession staff will consist of a qualitative survey instrument and personal virtual interviews. Participants who meet eligibility and complete the survey will be prompted at the end to opt into a virtual personal interview.

I am seeking permission from your department to allow me to recruit participants for this research study, pending my Institution's IRB approval. I would ask you to send the initial recruitment email to your entry-level live-in residential life professional staff (Hall Directors/Apartment Managers). This recruitment letter will explain the purpose of the study to the participants and include a link to the informed consent form and survey for those eligible and interested in participating.

Please let me know if I can provide further information regarding this research study and permission request. If this request is acceptable, I would kindly ask if you could sign, date, and return this letter to me at your earlier convenience so that I can submit it to my Institution's IRB.

Sincerely,

Charles "Chuck" Crawford
Plymouth State University
Doctor of Higher Education & Administrative Leadership
cecrawford@plymouth.edu
603-548-3169

.....

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed a request for Charles "Chuck" Crawford to recruit participants from [College/University] 's Housing/Residential Life Department for his dissertation research. When Charles receives IRB approval, I agree to provide access for the approved research project.

Name [Print]_____ Date:_____

Appendix C. Recruitment Communication for Entry-Level Live-In Residential Professional Life Staff

Date

My name is Chuck Crawford, and I am a doctoral student at Plymouth State University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation to understand better the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. As an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member, your experiences are valuable to this research study.

There may be no direct, tangible benefits of participation in this study; however, the knowledge gained will be of value to housing and residential life programs. In addition, the knowledge gained from this research may benefit and influence how the position descriptions of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are created and provide guidance on how these staff members are trained for their student-facing and interacting positions. Finally, the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff participating will benefit from sharing their stories and the opportunity to reflect on their impact with students as higher education professionals.

Participation in this research study includes:

- A 23-question survey (may take up to 25 minutes to complete)
- Opt-In Personal Virtual Interview (option available at the end of the survey)

To be eligible to participate, you must:

- Be currently employed at Keene State College or the University of New Hampshire – Durham in housing/residential/residence life as a Community Director, Hall Director or Apartment Manager

If you would like additional information about this study, please contact: **Charles Crawford** at cecrawford@plymouth.edu or 603-548-3169.

If you meet the eligibility criteria and are interested in participating in this research study, please click the following link for the informed consent and survey link: [Click Here to Proceed](#)

I appreciate your consideration, and I look forward to your participation in this research project.

Charles "Chuck" Crawford
Principal Investigator/Doctoral Student
Plymouth State University

Appendix D. The Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Virtual Personal Interview Follow-Up

Date

Thank you for completing the Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff survey. You are receiving this communication as you identified at the end of that survey that you would be interested in a virtual personal interview to discuss further your lived experience as an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member.

In order to facilitate this next phase of the research and to conduct your virtual personal interview, please respond to this email by [INSERT DATE] with the following information:

- Available Interview Dates
- Available Interview Times

Once your response has been received, the researcher will schedule your virtual personal interview via zoom, and you will be sent a follow-up email with the following information:

- Date/time of the virtual personal interview
- Zoom link for the virtual personal interview

There may be no direct, tangible benefits of participation in this study; however, the knowledge gained will be of value to housing and residential life programs. In addition, the knowledge gained from this research may benefit and influence how the position descriptions of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are created and provide guidance on how these staff members are trained for their student-facing and interacting positions. Finally, the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff participating will benefit from sharing their stories and the opportunity to reflect on their impact with students as higher education professionals.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you to schedule your virtual personal interview session.

Charles "Chuck" Crawford
Principal Investigator/Doctoral Student
Plymouth State University

Appendix E. The Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey

Section 1 – Informed Consent	
Informed Consent Language in this Section	
I have read and understand the informed consent. I also understand that any questions or concerns that I may have can be directed to the investigator or faculty supervisor and that I may stop the survey at any time or not submit it upon completion with no consequence or penalty.	<i>Select One</i>
	Yes
	No

Section 2 – Research Focus
The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of Entry-Level Live-in Residential Life Professional Staff. This qualitative survey research will be conducted in the University System of New Hampshire with Entry-Level Live-in Residential Life Professional Staff at the University of New Hampshire – Durham and Keene State College.

Section 3 – Survey Title
The Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Survey

Section 4 – Participant Background Information	
INSERT INSTRUCTIONS	
1.	Select your Institution
	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
	Keene State College
	University of New Hampshire – Durham
3.	Age
	<i>Text Box</i>
4.	Education Level
	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
	Bachelor's Degree
	Masters Degree
	Doctorate Degree
	Other (please specify below)
4.A	Other:
	<i>Text Box</i>
5.	Are you currently enrolled in any advanced studies or courses?
	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
	Yes
	No

6.	What student population(s) are you responsible for?	<i>Select all that apply</i>
		First-Year Students
		Upper-Division / Upper-Class Students
		Mixed Population (First-Year & Upper-Division Students)
		Graduate Students
		Other (please specify below)
6.A. Other:		
		<i>Text Box</i>
7.	How many residents live in your residential community	<i>Text Box</i>
8.	Does your residential community have any special populations (i.e., living-learning communities, special interest housing, faculty-in-residence, etc.)	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
		Yes
		No
8.A. Yes: please specify what types of special populations (i.e., living-learning communities, special interest housing, faculty-in-residence, etc.) you have in your residential community		
		<i>Text Box</i>
9.	Is your position 12 months?	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
		Yes
		No
9.A. No: How many months is your position?		
		<i>Text Box</i>
10.	What is the title of your position?	<i>Text Box</i>
11.	Do you supervise student staff?	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
		Yes
		No

11.A.	Yes: Please share how many and their position title(s)	<i>Text Box</i>
12.	Do you advise a Hall Council or Residence Hall Association?	<i>Drop Down Selection</i>
		Yes
		No
13.	What motivated you to become an Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff Member?	<i>Text Box</i>
14.	Housing/Residential Life staff are an important part of student support and development.	<i>Rate your level of agreement</i>
		<i>1 = Strongly Agree / 2 = Agree / 3 = Disagree / 4 = Strongly Disagree</i>
15.	Being an Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Staff Member is important in supporting and developing students.	<i>Rate your level of agreement</i>
		<i>1 = Strongly Agree / 2 = Agree / 3 = Disagree / 4 = Strongly Disagree</i>

Section 6 – Follow-Up Interview Interest		
INSERT INSTRUCTIONS		
16.	Would you be interested in a 60-minute virtual individual interview to explore further your lived experience as an Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff member?	<i>Select</i>
		Yes
		No
If "Yes" is selected		
16.A.	Please provide your preferred email for the researcher to schedule time with you for your virtual personal individual interview	<i>Email Address Text Box</i>
16.B.	If you have further questions about this study, you may contact Chuck Crawford (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Roxana Wright (Faculty Chair) at cecrawford@plymouth.edu or rwright01@plymouth.edu . If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may call the Chairperson of the Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board at 603-535-2915 (Valid until July 1, 2024).	

	<p>If you experienced any level of discomfort while completing this survey, a list of University System of New Hampshire Employees Assistant Program (EAP) can be found here: https://www.usnh.edu/resource/employee-assistance-program-eap</p>
If "No" is selected	
14.C.	<p>Thank you for your participation.</p> <p>If you have further questions about this study, you may contact Chuck Crawford (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Roxana Wright (Faculty Chair) at cecrawford@plymouth.edu or rwright01@plymouth.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may call the Chairperson of the Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board at 603-535-2915 (Valid until July 1, 2024).</p> <p>If you experienced any level of discomfort while completing this survey, a list of University System of New Hampshire Employees Assistant Program (EAP) can be found here: https://www.usnh.edu/resource/employee-assistance-program-eap</p>

Appendix F. Informed Consent for Eligible Entry-Level Live-In Staff Participants - Survey

INFORMED CONSENT FORM CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE VOLUNTARILY IN A
RESEARCH INVESTIGATION PLYMOUTH STATE UNIVERSITY

INVESTIGATOR(S) NAME: Chuck Crawford, M.S., EdD Candidate

STUDY TITLE: The lived experiences of Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life
Professional Staff

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation research aims to investigate the lived experiences of Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff at two residential Universities in the University System of New Hampshire. This phenomenological research with a theme analysis will be conducted by surveying Entry-Level Live-in Residential Life Professional Staff at the University of New Hampshire – Durham and Keene State College in the University System of New Hampshire.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This is a qualitative research study. Eligible individuals who choose to participate can expect to participate in a 23-question survey that will consist of a mix of open-ended and 4-point Likert scales. The Survey may take up to 25 minutes to complete and focuses on the lived experiences of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff. At the conclusion of the survey, participants will be provided the opportunity to opt into a 60-minute audio-recorded virtual personal interview that will consist of 7 open-ended questions. The Principal Investigator, Charles Crawford, has prepared the survey and interview questions. Participants at Keene State College will receive the survey from the Principal Investigator after the Informed Consent has been affirmed.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There will be minimal risk associated with this study. The study is not expected to expose participants to any risk, but there is a chance that some participants may feel a level of discomfort in discussing their experiences through open-ended survey questions. Some possible types of discomfort experienced by participants may be the potential for negative affective states such as anxiety, depression, guilt, shock and loss of self-esteem, and potential loss of confidentiality as this research involves human subjects. In addition, the survey and interview questions could potentially trigger the previously mentioned discomforts in the subjects given past traumatic experiences when sharing their lived experiences with the researcher.

BENEFITS

There may be no direct, tangible benefits of participation in this study; however, the knowledge gained will be of value to housing and residential life programs. In addition, the knowledge gained from this research may benefit and influence how the position descriptions of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are created and provide guidance on how these staff members are trained for their student-facing and interacting positions. Finally, the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff participating will benefit from sharing their stories and the opportunity to reflect on their impact with students as higher education professionals.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

The alternative to participating in this study is to not participate in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The data generated by the study may be reviewed by Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board, which is the committee responsible for ensuring your welfare and rights as a research participant to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with university regulations. If any presentations or publications resulting from this research, you will not be identified by name. As per federal guidelines, the information collected during your participation in this study will be kept for a minimum of three years.

I plan to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. There are, however, rare instances when I may be required to share individually identifiable information with the following:

- Officials at Plymouth State University (PSU),
- Regulatory and oversight government agencies

I also may be required by law to report certain information:

- To government and/or law enforcement officials (for example, child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, or hazing). If I believe that such a report is required, I will follow the guidance of the PSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (and of the University's General Counsel) in making any such report in order to provide as much protection for your privacy as possible while still complying with the law.
- To appropriate PSU authorities (e.g., disclosures involving Sexual Violence - which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, relationship abuse, stalking [including cyberstalking], and dating violence - must be reported to the PSU Title IX Coordinator or PSU Police).

Further, any communication via the internet poses minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality. To help protect the confidentiality of your information, all data collected from the study will be coded to protect participant names and identifying information. No names or identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting this research. Pseudonyms will be used instead. Access to participant data will be limited to the researcher and, if necessary, the researcher's dissertation committee and chair for analysis purposes. Data will be stored and accessed on the researcher's password-protected laptop, and data will not be accessed on public devices. Data will be kept for three years and then destroyed. Any written or printed documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Once audio recordings have been transcribed and coded, they will be held until the conclusion of the Doctoral program. Once the research has concluded the Doctoral program, all recordings will be destroyed.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

You may choose to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. If you choose to drop out of the study, you may contact the investigator, and your research records will be destroyed. Please note that data collection is being done by anonymous survey, which means that research records cannot be destroyed following the submission of the survey.

COMPENSATION

You will not receive payment for being in this study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There will be no cost to you for participating in this research.

INJURY COMPENSATION

Neither Plymouth State University nor any government or other agency funding this research project will provide special services, free care, or compensation for any injuries resulting from this research. The treatment for such injuries will be at your expense and/or paid through your medical plan.

QUESTIONS

If you have further questions about this study, you may contact Chuck Crawford (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Roxana Wright (Faculty Chair) at cecrawford@plymouth.edu or rwright01@plymouth.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may call the Chairperson of the Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board at 603-535-2915 (Valid until July 1, 2024).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You are free to withdraw or refuse consent, or to discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty or consequence.

You voluntarily give your consent to participate in this research study. You will be given a

copy of this consent form.

I, the undersigned, certify that to the best of my knowledge, the subject signing this consent form has had the study fully and carefully explained by me and have been given an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the nature, risks, and benefits of participation in this research study.

Investigator's Name

Charles E. Crawford Jr.

Plymouth State University's IRB has approved the solicitation of participants for the study until January 20, 2023.

**Appendix G. Informed Consent for Eligible Entry-Level Live-In Staff Participants –
Virtual Interview**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE VOLUNTARILY IN A
RESEARCH INVESTIGATION PLYMOUTH STATE UNIVERSITY

INVESTIGATOR(S) NAME: Chuck Crawford, M.S., EdD Candidate

STUDY TITLE: The lived experiences of Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life
Professional Staff

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation research aims to investigate the lived experiences of Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff at two residential Universities in the University System of New Hampshire. This phenomenological research with a theme analysis will be conducted by first surveying Entry-Level Live-in Residential Life Professional Staff at the University of New Hampshire – Durham and Keene State College in the University System of New Hampshire and then conducting audio recorded virtual interviews with participants that opt-in at the conclusion of the survey phase.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This is a qualitative research study. Individuals may choose to participate beyond the 23-question survey by opting in for a 60-minute audio-recorded virtual personal interview. The optional 60-minute audio-recorded virtual personal interview will consist of 7 open-ended questions. The Principal Investigator, Charles Crawford, has prepared the survey and interview questions. Participants at Keene State College will receive the survey from the Principal Investigator after the Informed Consent has been affirmed.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There will be minimal risk associated with this study. The study is not expected to expose participants to any risk, but there is a chance that some participants may feel a level of discomfort in discussing their experiences through open-ended survey questions. Some possible types of discomfort experienced by participants may be the potential for negative affective states such as anxiety, depression, guilt, shock and loss of self-esteem, and potential loss of confidentiality as this research involves human subjects. In addition, the survey and interview questions could potentially trigger the previously mentioned discomforts in the subjects given past traumatic experiences when sharing their lived experiences with the researcher.

BENEFITS

There may be no direct, tangible benefits of participation in this study; however, the knowledge gained will be of value to housing and residential life programs. In addition, the

knowledge gained from this research may benefit and influence how the position descriptions of entry-level live-in residential life professional staff are created and provide guidance on how these staff members are trained for their student-facing and interacting positions. Finally, the entry-level live-in residential life professional staff participating will benefit from sharing their stories and the opportunity to reflect on their impact with students as higher education professionals.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

The alternative to participating in this study is to not participate in this research study

CONFIDENTIALITY

All documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The data generated by the study may be reviewed by Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board, which is the committee responsible for ensuring your welfare and rights as a research participant to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with university regulations. If any presentations or publications resulting from this research, you will not be identified by name. As per federal guidelines, the information collected during your participation in this study will be kept for a minimum of three years.

I plan to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. There are, however, rare instances when I may be required to share individually identifiable information with the following:

- Officials at Plymouth State University (PSU),
- Regulatory and oversight government agencies

I also may be required by law to report certain information:

- To government and/or law enforcement officials (for example, child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, or hazing). If I believe that such a report is required, I will follow the guidance of the PSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (and of the University's General Counsel) in making any such report in order to provide as much protection for your privacy as possible while still complying with the law.
- To appropriate PSU authorities (e.g., disclosures involving Sexual Violence - which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, relationship abuse, stalking [including cyber-stalking], and dating violence - must be reported to the PSU Title IX Coordinator or PSU Police).

Further, any communication via the internet poses minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality. To help protect the confidentiality of your information, all data collected from the study will be coded to protect participant names and identifying information. No

names or identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting this research. Pseudonyms will be used instead. Access to participant data will be limited to the researcher and, if necessary, the researcher's dissertation committee and chair for analysis purposes. Data will be stored and accessed on the researcher's password-protected laptop, and data will not be accessed on public devices. Data will be kept for three years and then destroyed. Any written or printed documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Once audio recordings have been transcribed and coded, they will be held until the conclusion of the Doctoral program. Once the research has concluded the Doctoral program, all recordings will be destroyed.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

You may choose to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. If you choose to drop out of the study, you may contact the investigator, and your research records will be destroyed. Please note that data collection is being done by anonymous survey, which means that research records cannot be destroyed following the submission of the survey.

COMPENSATION

You will not receive payment for being in this study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There will be no cost to you for participating in this research.

INJURY COMPENSATION

Neither Plymouth State University nor any government or other agency funding this research project will provide special services, free care, or compensation for any injuries resulting from this research. The treatment for such injuries will be at your expense and/or paid through your medical plan.

QUESTIONS

If you have further questions about this study, you may contact Chuck Crawford (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Roxana Wright (Faculty Chair) at cecrawford@plymouth.edu or rwright01@plymouth.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may call the Chairperson of the Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board at 603-535-2915 (Valid until July 1, 2024).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You are free to withdraw or refuse consent, or to discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty or consequence.

You voluntarily give your consent to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

I, the undersigned, certify that to the best of my knowledge, the subject signing this consent form has had the study fully and carefully explained by me and have been given an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the nature, risks, and benefits of participation in this research study.

Investigator's Name

Charles E. Crawford Jr.

Plymouth State University's IRB has approved the solicitation of participants for the study until January 20, 2023.

Appendix H. Virtual Personal Interview Protocol and Questions

Welcome & Informed Consent Review:

Researcher

Thank you for coming today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research study and take part in today's focus group. I want to begin today by reviewing the informed consent form you completed prior to today's session and answering any questions or concerns you may have.

Review the informed consent form

Researcher

Do you have any questions or concerns?

Answer/address any questions or concerns

Purpose/Overview:

This dissertation research aims to understand your lived experiences as an Entry-Level Live-In Residential Life Professional Staff member. There are no right or wrong answers, and nothing said will impact your time or experience at [INSERT UNIVERSITY]. I will not be sharing what you say with Housing/Residence Life or Administrators. Your openness and willingness to share thoughts, ideas, and experiences will enrich this discussion and contribute to the research project.

Outline of Time

Researcher:

This individual interview is designed to further explore your experience as an entry-level live-in residential life professional staff member. Thank you for taking the initial survey and volunteering to meet with me for this interview. Now that I have reaffirmed the Informed Consent and reviewed the Purpose/Overview, I will move into the question portion of the interview.

Researcher:

I want to record today's session to avoid missing any of the essential comments and points you make. The recording will be kept on my personal laptop device. After I have transcribed and coded the information, I will keep the recording until my doctoral program has concluded. Every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the data collected. Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained by referring participants in the findings, publishing, and presentation of the data collected by pseudonyms and institutions referred to as institution A and institution B. Do you have any concerns about being audio recorded?

Interview Questions:

- What does a typical day as [Insert Official Position Title] look like and consist of?
- What do you believe students think your role is?
 - Follow-up: What do other staff and faculty think your role is?

- Looking at your position description, does this reflect what you do in your role?
 - Follow-up: Are there pieces that you feel are outdated or not connected to your role as a Residence Life staff Member?
- How does your role interact with students, faculty, and other staff at [Insert Institution Name]?
- What does duty/on-call look like for your role at your institution
- The live-in role is unlike most positions at the university; you live where you work and work where you live; how do you balance that challenge?
- What, if any, barriers exist related to you fulfilling the functions of your position?
- Do you feel adequately trained and prepared to fulfill all aspects of your role:
 - Follow-up: Are there areas that need additional focus
 - Follow-up: What do you think are the best ways to prepare individuals for roles like these?
- COVID-19 – how did this impact your role and time as an Entry-Level Live-In Professional Staff member
 - Follow-up: Is COVID-19 still impacting your role in any capacity, how so?
- Is there anything else you want to share about your lived experience as [Insert Official Position Title]?
- Follow-Up Question
 - I noticed you mentioned a sense of belonging; tell me more about that.
 - I notice you have not mentioned a sense of belonging; tell me more about that.

Concluding Remarks

Researcher:

We are coming to the end of the interview. Thank you for attending and participating in this research.