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FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: EXAMINING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT
OF ROOMMATE PAIRINGS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

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FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: EXAMINING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT
OF ROOMMATE PAIRINGS

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to examine the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. Conducted at a faith-based, liberal arts university in the southeast, this study captured and shared the stories of its participants and their lived experiences as first-generation college students living with randomly assigned continuing-generation roommates. The research question for the study addressed what effect first-generation college students perceive being paired with continuing-generation students in university housing has on their overall first-year experience.

The conceptual framework for this study was guided by Alexander Astin's input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model. Participants' generational status defined the *input*, their residential experience and roommate pairing defined the *environment*, and an examination of their overall first-year experience defined the *outcome*. This study used a survey and follow-up semi-structured interviews to capture the impact of roommate pairings as perceived by participants. The participants' responses were organized and analyzed using the predetermined categories of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development.

The primary finding of this study revealed a mixed opinion concerning the perceived impact of pairing roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of college. The results demonstrated: 1) an indirect influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on

academic success, 2) a direct influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on social integration, 3) some influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on retention, and 4) inconsistencies concerning the influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on student development. These results are significant for residence life and housing professionals as they provide insight on student perceptions and inform practitioners as they aim to meet the needs of first-generation college students. First-generation college students benefit from a roommate experience that is supportive and from a thriving connection to the university and its community. It is important for practitioners to examine the overall student experience when implementing and designing new initiatives. Recommendations for action include a review of institutional roommate pairing processes and proposed increased collaboration in educational programming.

Keywords: Higher Education, Residence Life, First-Generation, Academic Success, Retention, Student Development, Social Integration

University of New England

Doctor of Education
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

First-generation college students face a number of challenges as they navigate the college experience (Astin & Astin, 2015; Blimling, 2015; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Studies show that first-generation college students are less involved with other students and are less likely to persist to graduation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). “Only 27 percent [of first-generation college students] will attain their degrees within four years – markedly lagging behind their continuing-generation peers” (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018, p. 6). Campus residential status reportedly has a significant impact on the academic performance of underserved groups (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010). Students that live on campus are more likely to graduate on time, earn higher grade point averages, and express a higher satisfaction for their college experience (Blimling, 2015). In addition, residential students are more involved with co-curricular activities, exhibit increased interactions with faculty and staff, and demonstrate an easier transition from high school to college (Purdie & Rosser, 2011).

One-third of college students identify as a first-generation college student (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018, p. 2; Skomsvold, 2015; Whitley et al., 2018, p. 13). As diverse as the student population demographics are, so are the varied interpretations of the first-generation college students. The language of *first-generation* college student was first used by the Council for Opportunity in Education prior to its first appearance in federal legislation in 1980:

The term was intended to identify underserved students, like those from low-income, racial minority, or rural backgrounds, who did not have the benefits of cultural capital and college-going knowledge because their parents did not complete a four-year college degree. Moreover, the term “first-generation” aimed to identify underserved students without referring to race or ethnicity. (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 20)

The 1998 Amendments of the Higher Education Act of 1965 defined a first-generation college student as:

- (A) An individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or
- (B) In the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree. (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, para. f1)

Concurrently, according to the Center for First-Generation Student Success, “the majority of institutions ... define first-generation students as those from households where neither parent has obtained a four-year undergraduate degree” (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 17).

Representing one-third of college students, first-generation college students are at the center of conversations across higher education institutions nationwide (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 13). According to Engle and Tinto (2008), first-generation college students “experience less success than their peers right from the start” (p. 2). First-generation college students encounter barriers often due to a lack of cultural capital gained through parental education (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Whitley et al., 2018). As a result, institutional administrators are exploring high-impact practices to meet the needs of first-generation college students who are recognized as an underserved student population (Kuh, O’Donnell, & Schneider, 2017; Padgett et al., 2012; Toutkoushian, May-Trifiletti, & Clayton, 2019; Whitley et al., 2018). High-impact practices are also being adopted by a wide array of student affairs departments in an effort to design programming and resource efforts to meet the needs of underserved student populations, including first-generation college students (Blimling, 2015; Whitley et al., 2018). Residence Life and Housing (RLH) professionals recognize the importance of the residential experience and its influence on the overall experience and success of college students. Commonly, “residence halls

are presumably hospitable and supportive spaces, seeking to foster quality interactions among residents” (Graham, Hurtado, & Gonyea, 2018, p. 264). This study focused on the residential experience of first-generation college students, specifically, how roommate pairings affect the college experience.

A student’s residential experience starts in RLH with the housing assignment and roommate pairing process. For first-year students, common roommate pairing practices result in the pairing of random students based on their responses to a brief housing and roommate matching questionnaire (McEwan & Soderberg, 2006). Some RLH offices also consider residence hall preferences and date of commitment to the institution. According to Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005), “where first-year students live can significantly influence the overall quality of their collegiate experience” (p. 410). The college residential experience for first-year students provides increased opportunities for student-to-student interactions and fosters a sense of belonging within their community of peers (Blimling, 2015; Upcraft et al., 2005). Many first-generation college students “seek a closely knit community and the support that a roommate can provide” (Upcraft et al., 2005, p. 414).

With increased attention on the progress and development of the first-generation college student population, the additional emphasis on the housing assignment and roommate pairings of first-generation college students has the potential to provide another layer of support for this student population. Supported by developmental theory and studies, the residential experience and college roommate experience greatly affects the college student’s progress on their education journey (Blimling, 2015; Upcraft et al., 2005). An intentional focus on the design and contributing components of the roommate pairing process has the ability to enhance the college

residential experience and to foster development among residential students (Hudson, 2018; Upcraft et al., 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Existing literature supports the positive impact of the residential experience during the first year of college (Upcraft et al., 2005). As demonstrated in a landmark study conducted by Astin (1977), “residence hall living added 12 percent to a first-year student’s chance of finishing college” (as cited in Upcraft et al., 2005, p. 42). Additional studies have upheld the findings of Astin (1977) (Upcraft et al., 2005). However, gaps in existing literature demonstrate a need for further research exploring the perceived impact of the residential and roommate experiences as they relate to the overall college experience for first-generation college students. Low-income, first-generation college students are “more than five times as likely to leave in the first year [of college] than their most advantaged peers in private, not-for-profit four-year institutions” (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The residential experience can have both positive and negative influences on a first-generation college student’s perceived successful transition to college (Means & Pyne, 2017). Previous research suggests that RLH professionals “should seek to better understand how differing populations experience on-campus living, with the intention to address inequity” (Graham et al., 2018, p. 266). The residential experience provides a type of environment that is conducive to supportive and community building behaviors while also nurturing assimilation and skills for ease of navigating college (Blimling, 2015; Padgett et al., 2012). University housing and intentional roommate pairings of first-generation students facilitate a natural support system for this student population as they navigate the college experience and adjust to college (Blimling, 2015).

The problem studied here was the effect of roommate pairings for first-generation college students and how first-generation college students perceived the impact of roommate pairings on their first-year college experience. It was hypothesized that pairing first-generation college students with continuing-generation college students (college students whose parent(s)/guardian attained a bachelor's degree) in university housing provides "both the residential environment and the peer interaction ... [to] assist first-generation students in learning the adaptive skills necessary to adjust sooner and fully engage their college experience" (Blimling, 2015, p. 54). Research, assessment, goal setting, and an evaluation of housing assignment processes through methods such as service blueprinting are essential to understanding institutional processes, how those processes can be altered to improve the college student's residential experience, and how to best integrate intentional roommate pairing practices (Bitner, Ostrom, & Burkhard, 2012; Blimling, 2015; Kerr & Tweedy, 2006).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. The problem is not unique to any one institution, but the findings are applicable to any institution of higher learning with a residential environment, particularly institutions that are private, faith-based, liberal arts universities. In comparison with similar higher education institutions, existing roommate pairing approaches should be acknowledged and reviewed in light of current student needs and in alignment with the institution's mission.

Research Question

Literature suggests that the pairing of first-generation college students with continuing-generation college students would positively impact the performance of first-generation college students (Padgett et al., 2012). It also suggests that this intentional roommate pairing practice would influence the overall college experience for first-generation college students. The primary research question for this study was:

What effect do first-generation college students perceive being paired with continuing-generation students in university housing has on their overall first-year experience?

Conceptual Framework

The suggested positive impact of the residential experience, specifically for first-generation college students, is grounded in student development theories. The conceptual framework for this study was guided by Alexander Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model (Astin, 2001; Blimling, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Winston, Anchors, & Associates, 1993). Astin (2001) defined the components of the I-E-O model as follows:

Inputs refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution; *environment* refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed; and *outcomes* refers to the student's characteristics *after* exposure to the environment. (p. 7)

Modeling the conceptual framework of Astin's (1993) I-E-O model for this research, a college student's generational status defined the *input*, their residential experience and roommate pairing defined the *environment*, and an examination of their overall first-year experience defined the *outcome* (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). This study examined the experience of first-generation college students and

the perceived effects of their on-campus residential experience and roommate pairings on their overall first-year college experience.

Assumptions

This study was conducted under several assumptions. First, it was assumed that the participants in the study would respond truthfully. Second, it was assumed that the participants had an on-campus residential experience of one or more semesters on the campus of the study site. Third, it was assumed that the study site's residential student population included first-generation college students. Lastly, it was assumed that roommate pairings would influence the residential experience and overall college experience of first-generation college students.

Limitations

There were several identifiable limitations of this study. Using only one institution resulted in a small sampling of participants, excluding a variety of participants reflective of public versus private, large versus small, profit versus non-profit institutions, and so on. Thus, many participant groups were underrepresented or altogether absent. Data collected in the surveys and interviews reflected the opinions and perceptions of first-generation college students in a private, faith-based, liberal arts university in the southeast. The opinions and perceptions of continuing-generation college students and faculty/staff were not represented in the data collection process. In addition, all data was self-reported providing a chance for misinterpretation and/or misunderstanding.

Scope

This study was conducted at a study site best described as a private, faith-based, liberal arts university. The participants of the study self-identified as first-generation college students. This study included participants with varying amounts of semesters lived on campus; thus,

leading to the influence of additional contributing factors to their overall experience. This study did not intend to include first-generation college students that also identified as transfer students.

Significance

There is a lack of literature examining the influence of the residential experience on first-generation college students (Whitley et al., 2018). Even with an intentional focus on first-generation college students, “deficits remain in higher education literature regarding first-generation student success and, in particular, the current approaches proving effective” (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 14). Even more so, there is a lack of literature exploring the influence of roommate pairings (Padgett et al., 2012). By collecting data focused on the experiences of first-generation college students and roommate pairings, the findings of this study may assist practitioners to improve practices in the fields of RLH, student affairs, and higher education. This study has the potential to identify the outcomes and benefits of intentional roommate pairing practices of first-generation college students. In addition, this study has the potential to expand the understanding of the impact of such practices on the overall college experience of first-generation college students. The goal of the study and its significance is that the findings and results would provide information beneficial to various stakeholders and benefactors, students most importantly.

With an understanding of the perceived impact of roommate pairings on the first-year college experience, intentional roommate pairing practices have the opportunity to better represent and serve the institution’s student population, including first-generation college students, while emulating the institution’s mission and values (Dunn & Dean, 2013; Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). Moreover, “academically supportive campus residence hall environments are being viewed as critical to the attainment of institutional missions and goals” (Upcraft et al.,

2005, p. 411). The reason for conducting this study was to understand how first-generation college students perceive their college roommate and residential experiences, specifically their influence on students' overall first-year experience. As a result, RLH professionals will better understand how to support this student population.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions were used in this study:

First-Generation College Student. A *first-generation college student* is a college student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) did not attain a bachelor's degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

First-Year Experience. The *first-year experience* describes an undergraduate college student's first year of college. A successful first-year experience would encompass "successful student development ... academic success, positive social integration, and retention" (Padgett et al., 2012, p. 262). In addition, the first-year experience would also provide opportunities for students in the areas of involvement and leadership (Blimling, 2015).

Continuing-Generation College Student. A *continuing-generation college student* is a college student whose parent(s)/guardians did attain a bachelor's degree (Cataldi et al., 2018; Whitley et al., 2018).

Generational Status. *Generational status* represents the identification of a college student as either a first-generation college student or a continuing-generation college student.

Persistence. *Persistence* is the act of continuous enrollment; it is not to be interpreted as completion of a program or attainment of a degree (Blimling, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Residence Life and Housing Staff. A *Residence Life and Housing staff* is a group of professional and paraprofessional staff selected to serve within university housing; primary roles

include serving as administrators, facilitators, role models, campus resources, community builders, et cetera (Blimling, 2010; Winston et al., 1993). Live-in hall staff most commonly includes resident directors and resident assistants/advisors (Blimling, 2015).

Residential Student. A *residential student* is an undergraduate college student that resides in university housing while enrolled as an undergraduate student (Upcraft et al., 2005). An undergraduate college student that lives off campus while enrolled is a *commuting student*.

University Housing. *University housing* consists of facilities on a college campus where students reside while enrolled. Most university housing is made up of residence halls, apartments, and fraternity/sorority houses with numerous amenities and features (Blimling, 2015; Winston et al., 1993). Current university housing is not to be confused with the image of dormitories from the past (Blimling, 2015).

Conclusion

The common goal among student affairs professionals is to assist in the development of students in a manner that fosters success both inside and outside of the classroom and puts them on a pathway to lifelong learning. University housing, including the overall residential experience, provides an environment conducive to this sort of student development. In recent years, increased attention has been given to the performance of first-generation college students. On average, first-generation college students face more barriers for achieving academic success and graduating from college than their continuing-generation college student peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These challenges are being recognized by university leaders, specifically those in student affairs divisions. RLH professionals recognize the influence that the residential experience can have on the progress of first-generation college students. Pairing continuing-generation college students with first-generation college students can provide an additional level

of guidance and support for first-generation college students. RLH staff should be purposeful when designing the roommate pairing process, as well as when conducting assessments to ensure that the roommate pairings are achieving the desired outcomes.

This study began with a discussion on the emergence of language surrounding first-generation college students, as well as the positive influence produced by the residential college experience. Framed by the problem statement and an introduction to the research focus, Chapter 1 also examined the purpose and significance of the study while providing an introduction to the study's conceptual framework. Chapter 2 will expand on the literature review providing an understanding of the field of RLH in higher education and support for increased attention to the practice of roommate pairing, especially for first-generation college students. Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology of the study. This includes details of the data collection, data sources, data analysis processes, and the identification of any data limitations. Chapter 4 reveals the findings and results of the research. Chapter 5 offers a summary, implications of the findings, conclusion, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature supports the notion that providing appropriate residential environments has long been a component of higher education (Blimling, 2015; Fink & Inkelas, 2015; Winston et al., 1993). History demonstrates that these residential environments have evolved into centers for learning and development. While university housing and residential programming are not a key factor in most college selection decisions, most students can attest to spending a large amount of time in their residence hall and the effect it had on shaping their overall college experience (Blimling, 2015, p. xv). Even more so, university housing provides the unique opportunity for college students to reside with peers for an extended amount of time (Blimling, 2015). For many college students, this is their first experience living with non-family members (Blimling, 2015). Students who live on campus are more likely to graduate on time, earn higher grade point averages, and express a higher satisfaction for their college experience (Blimling, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The residential experience also has an impact on a student's demonstrated level of persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Purdie & Rosser, 2011). Residential students are more involved, exhibit increased interactions with faculty and staff, and demonstrate an easier transition from high school to college (Purdie & Rosser, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of roommate pairings of first-generation college students. Furthermore, the objective was to understand and describe the relationship between a student's residential experience and its influence on the overall college experience. Enhancing the residential experience for first-generation college students through intentional roommate pairing with continuing-generation college students is believed to have positive effects on their "learning the adaptive skills necessary to adjust sooner and fully engage their college experience" (Blimling, 2015, p. 54). Additionally, existing literature suggests that

such roommate pairings would nurture academic, cognitive, and psychosocial development (Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). An intentionally designed housing assignment process, including roommate pairing, recognizes the potential influence the college residential environment has on a student's overall college experience (Blimling, 2015). The influence is even greater for underachieving groups, such as first-generation college students (Blimling, 2015). Supported by developmental theory and studies, intentional roommate pairing processes have the potential to meet the first-generation college students' needs sequentially as they progress on their educational journey (Blimling, 2015).

This chapter features the following topics to provide support for the study: a) historical review of student housing in higher education; b) an examination of student progress influenced by residential environments; c) support for first-generation college students through residential environments; d) review of RLH assignment and roommate pairing practices; and e) student development theories serving as the foundation for the conceptual framework. This study aimed to provide practical contributions to the field of residence life and housing, as well as student development in higher education.

Higher Education and Student Housing

From the beginnings of higher education in America, the need for and benefits of a residential component were present (Blimling, 2015; Fink & Inkelas, 2015). The residential college model was inspired by English universities and exhibited by the nation's first universities (Fink & Inkelas, 2015; Winston et al., 1993). As the growth of the nation continued and wars occurred, colleges and universities were inspired by the German education model; thus, resulting in a decrease in on-campus housing (Winston et al., 1993). Throughout the country's history, external factors, such as war, have shaped the landscape of higher education (Blimling, 2015).

As the number of higher education institutions and college-seeking individuals change, so does the demand for residential services (Ong, Petrova, & Spieler, 2013). During the twentieth century, the growth of the nation's population and college enrollments resulted in the return of student housing (Winston et al., 1993). While universities and colleges invested in the construction of residential facilities, the influence of architectural environments and the opportunity for designing housing assignment and roommate pairing practices were realized (Blimling, 2015; Winston et al., 1993).

Student Development and Student Housing

One of the first residential college models embraced the philosophy of co-locating educational resources and spaces within residential buildings to aid in the formation of a holistic learning environment (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). As residential facilities reemerged during the twentieth century and a public call for accountability arose, higher education witnessed the surfacing of reformers that influenced the development of intentional residential experiences (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). In 2006, the terminology *high-impact practices* was first used to describe educational practices that foster student success (Kuh, O'Donnell, & Schneider, 2017, p. 8). By definition, student success collectively describes academic success, personal development, and a multitude of other achievements (Kuh et al., 2017). High-impact practices are often viewed as interventions and include practices such as first-year seminars and experiences, undergraduate research, living communities, and service learning (Kuh et al., 2017). While exploring high-impact practices, it is important to understand that student learning and development occurs beyond the classroom and often within student housing (Blimling, 2015; Kuh et al., 2017). Residence halls provide an environment conducive to peer learning and personal development

(Blimling, 2015). In addition, residence halls provide support in the areas of transition to college, civic engagement, and appreciation for diversity (Blimling, 2010; Brower & Inkelas, 2010).

In response to a public call for accountability and quality education, many universities embraced initiatives designed to improve college success rates (Fink & Inkelas, 2015; Purdie & Rosser, 2011). Higher education professionals made it a priority to examine their rates of retention, persistence, and graduation (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; Schudde, 2011). Adopting the notion that a college campus as a whole is a learning community, student affairs professionals and others examined the effects of students' residential experience on their academic performance (Blimling, 2015; Dunn & Dean, 2013; Schudde, 2011). Multiple studies demonstrate that students living on campus are more likely to persist and graduate than their non-residential peers (Blimling, 2015; López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Likewise, residential students are also more likely to have higher GPAs (Blimling, 2015; López Turley & Wodtke, 2010). Student affairs professionals have long held the belief that the unique combination of a shared living environment fosters academic growth (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010); however, a recent study examining the persistence of first-year college students uncovered that more of today's college students were non-residential students (Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016). These findings suggest that residential status may be less of a predictor of academic growth than once assumed.

First-Generation College Students and Student Housing

First-generation college students face a number of challenges as they navigate the college experience (Astin & Astin, 2015; Blimling, 2015; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Such challenges include a lack of academic preparedness and limited financial resources (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Padgett et al., 2012). As an underrepresented sociocultural group, first-generation college students have a

different college experience than their continuing-generation peers (Hudson, 2018; Pascarella et al., 2004). Studies show that first-generation college students are less involved with co-curricular activities and are less likely to persist to graduation (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004). According to Means and Pyne (2017), “college persistence and attainment gaps [continue to] persist between low-income, first-generation students and their more affluent counterparts with a family history of college” (p. 907). “The first year of college is ... a particularly powerful time for shaping students’ learning” (Hudson, 2018, p. 18). Data further demonstrates that “60 percent of low-income, first-generation students who leave postsecondary education without attaining a degree do so after the first year” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 25).

First-generation college students are more likely to live off campus (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Padgett et al., 2012). According to Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Leonard (2006), a residential experience improves “first-generation students’ social and academic transition to college” (as cited in Purdie & Rosser, 2011, p. 100). Those first-generation college students living on campus during their first year are living in an environment conducive to student development (Blimling, 2015). This out-of-classroom experience provides the opportunity to embrace the influence of the college residence hall on a student’s level of comfort, belonging, and overall satisfaction (Hudson, 2018). In addition, integrating a first-generation college student initiative within RLH provides supportive programs and aids in the reduction of barriers and challenges faced by this student population (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Furthermore, such an initiative has the ability to “highlight the strengths of first-generation students” by encouraging their qualities of “grit, ambition, [and] a track record of beating the odds” (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 26). In support, one study asserted “first-generation students derived greater outcome benefits from extracurricular

involvement and peer interaction than other students *even though they were significantly less likely to be engaged in these activities during college*” (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 278).

Assignment and Roommate Pairing Practices

The assignment and roommate pairing practices are considered one of the key operations of RLH divisions (Winston et al., 1993). When performing this operation, RLH professionals must have an awareness of the implications of housing policies and processes (Blimling, 2015; Winston et al., 1993). As stated in Winston, Anchors, and Associates (1993), “institutions must realize that the assignment of students has important developmental and academic consequences” (p. 199). It is also important for RLH professionals to acknowledge the “normal developmental stages of roommate relationships” (Erb, Renshaw, Short, & Pollard, 2014, p. 53). According to Erb, Renshaw, Short, and Pollard (2014), “roommate conflict is a widespread experience among college students” (p. 44). RLH staff are trained to recognize and respond to conflict (Blimling, 2010). Roommate mediation facilitated by RLH staff is a popular technique used to positively address conflict (Blimling, 2010).

Common assignment and roommate pairing practices include the assignment of students and roommates based on student preferences. These practices generally consider the designation of housing based on gender, classification, academic major, and/or interest in living-learning communities to name a few (Blimling, 2015; Winston et al., 1993). Information needed to make assignments and roommate pairings are generally collected on a sort of housing application following a demonstration of intent to enroll at the institution (McEwan & Soderberg, 2006; Winston et al., 1993). In addition to collecting information needed when making the assignment and roommate pairing, the housing application process also ensures that only eligible individuals are applying for university housing. The actions and decisions of RLH professionals during the

housing assignment and roommate pairing process lead to the beginnings and formation of each student's initial peer group (McEwan & Soderberg, 2006). According to Hudson (2018), "if our goal as educators is to ensure students interact and develop relationships with culturally diverse peers ... matching first-year roommates across sociocultural differences may be an especially powerful intervention" (p. 18).

Student Development Theories and Higher Education

There is no shortage of student development theories in higher education. Many of these student development theories highlight the importance of the student experience. When focusing on the residential experience, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of development and Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student departure theory bring attention to the role this part of the student experience has in the overall college experience (as cited in Blimling, 2010, p. 138; as cited in Blimling, 2015, p. 38; as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 20-56).

Seven Vectors of Development

Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that college students progress through seven vectors of development during their college years (Blimling, 2010; Blimling, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The seven vectors of development are: "(1) developing competence; (2) managing emotions; (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence; (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (5) establishing identity; (6) developing purpose; and (7) developing integrity" (Blimling, 2015, p. 38). These seven areas of development span across a student's freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years (Blimling, 2010; Blimling, 2015). An individual may experience and re-process the seven vectors of development multiple times throughout their lifespan (Winston et al., 1993). The seven vectors of development also suggested that institutional factors could influence the journey through each vector (Winston et

al., 1993). As the seven vectors of development relate to the college residential experience and college roommate pairings, Chickering (1969) suggested that residence hall arrangements are a significant institutional factor (as cited in Winston et al., 1993, p. 74).

Student Departure Theory

Tinto's (1993) student departure theory suggested that a student's departure from college is influenced by the student's background as well as their level of student involvement (as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 54-56; as cited in Schudde, 2011, p. 582; Tinto, 2012; as cited in Upcraft et al., 2005, pp. 30-31). Moreover, Tinto's (1993) theory suggests that students are continually on the journey of more or less integration into the institution (as cited in Purdie & Rosser, 2011, p. 98). This theory further suggested that the higher the level of integration, the higher the level of probability of persistence and retention (Upcraft et al., 2005; Winston et al., 1993). A student's level of persistence is shaped by their connection to the institution and their community of peer learners (Blimling, 2015). Tinto (1993) also recognized the responsibility of the institution and its role in cultivating environments that foster academic and personal growth (Upcraft et al., 2005, p. 31).

Conceptual Framework

The positive impact of the residential experience, specifically for first-generation college students, is grounded in student development theories. This study aimed to identify the impact of roommate pairings on the first-year college experience for first-generation college students through the lens of Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcome model (Astin, 2001, p. 7; as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 20-56). Alexander Astin (1993) developed the input-environment-outcome model (I-E-O) suggesting that a student's outcome is a result of their inputs and environments (as cited in Brower & Inkelas, 2010, p. 38; as cited in Dunn & Dean,

2013, p. 17; as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 53-54; as cited in Upcraft et al., 2005, p. 30). Astin's (1993) I-E-O model was based on the premise that one had to understand a student's environment and individual characteristics in order to understand the student's college achievements or lack of achievements (as cited in Purdie & Rosser, 2011, p. 98; as cited in Upcraft et al., 2005, p. 30). Based on this theory, college residence halls and intentional college roommate pairings are key examples of environments that promote outcomes of student development (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Upcraft et al., 2005).

Student development theories, such as Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of development and Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student departure theory, support the importance of the residential college experience (as cited in Blimling, 2010, pp. 138; as cited in Blimling, 2015, p. 38; as cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 20-56). Such theories provide the foundation for understanding the effects of the residential environment on the outcomes of a first-generation college student. Primarily through the lens of Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, this study examined the first-year experience of first-generation college students and the effects of their on-campus residential experience and roommate pairing. By studying the roommate pairings of first-generation college students, this study aimed to demonstrate the influence of the residential and roommate environment on the outcome of the first-year experience (see Figure 1). Applying Astin's (1993) I-E-O model in this study, a college student's generational status defined the *input*, their residential experience and roommate pairing defined the *environment*, and an examination of their overall first-year experience defined the *outcome* as illustrated in Figure 1 (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005).



Figure 1. Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model applied to this study.

Input. Astin's (1993) input factor was interpreted for this study as the students' generational status as a first-generation or continuing-generation student.

Environments. Astin's (1993) environment factors were interpreted for this study as the students' residential experience, roommate experience, and extracurricular experience. The residential experience encompasses a student's time lived on campus, their residence hall preference, and their assigned residence hall style. The roommate experience encompasses the roommate's generational status, the student's roommate preference versus a random roommate assignment, and the roommate's academic major. The extracurricular experience encompasses the student's involvement in the first-generation student club, employment on or off campus, and their responsibilities at home.

Outcomes. Astin's (1993) outcome factor was interpreted for this study as the influences on persistence and returning for a second year of enrollment, academic major and/or change of major, self-reported grade point average, roommate experience, first-year experience, and assimilation.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed existing literature in the field of residence life and university housing, with a focus on roommate pairings. Beginning with an overview of the evolution of the residential landscape on higher education campuses, the review continued with an examination of published findings concerning the effect of the residential experience on student development, as well as the effects on first-generation students. A review of housing assignment and roommate pairing practices was also explored. Concluding the chapter was a review of student development theories that have shaped the landscape of the residential experience, including the framework guiding residence life and university housing practices today. Little literature currently exists concerning the intentional roommate pairings of first-generation college students with continuing-generation college students (Blimling, 2015; Padgett et al., 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology of the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Current literature surrounding the field of residence life and housing focuses on the programming components, including such emergent ideas as living-learning communities and residential curriculums (Blimling, 2015). Seldom does current literature include the philosophy and approach to the roommate pairing process (Padgett et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience.

The research design of this qualitative study was guided by Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model as described in Chapters 1 and 2 (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). Modeling the conceptual framework of Astin's I-E-O model for this research, a college student's generational status defined the *input*, their residential experience and roommate pairing defined the *environment*, and an examination of their overall first-year experience defined the *outcome* (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). To capture the input, environments, and outcomes of participants, a survey and semi-structured follow-up interviews were chosen as the data collection methods. A survey allowed for a larger participant sample in which the researcher included open-ended questions to "tap into personal experiences and shed light on participants' perceptions" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 157). The use of a survey also provided demographic information for the researcher to confirm a participant's eligibility to participate in the study. The choice of conducting semi-structured interviews was grounded in their ability "to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 155). This in-depth form of qualitative research provided

“perceptions, attitudes, and emotions” as they related to the participant and their first-year college experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 155).

Applying Astin’s (1993) I-E-O Model, the following research question guided this study:

What effect do first-generation college students perceive being paired with continuing-generation students in university housing has on their overall first-year experience?

Considering the purpose of this study, a qualitative research design was used to explore the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, phenomenological in design, the research focused on the experiences of first-generation college students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research method and techniques chosen for this study included a survey and interviews. These methods focused on the college roommate and residential experience, specifically exploring the perceived impact on the first-generation college student’s overall first-year experience.

Setting

All research was conducted at University X (UX), a pseudonym for a private, faith-based, liberal arts university in the southeast. Located in a rural setting on 850 acres, UX extends its reach to three additional in-state locations as well as online. UX offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs with a full-time enrollment of approximately 6,800 students collectively with approximately 3,500 undergraduate students on its main campus. In the fall of 2018, 23% of UX’s enrolled freshman identified as first-generation. In the fall of 2019, 25% identified as first-generation. With a student-to-faculty ratio of 16:1, UX promotes its small class size and close-knit community atmosphere.

Since its beginning, UX has been known as a residential campus offering on-campus housing to its students. Managing and overseeing the on-campus housing for the undergraduate, main campus student population is the Office of Residence Life and Housing (RLH). The RLH seeks to provide an on-campus environment that fosters a lifestyle of scholarship and personal growth. UX has the capacity to provide housing for approximately 2,000 undergraduate students. Historically, the RLH operates at an 85% occupancy rate providing housing to approximately 1,700 students and 50% of its total main campus, undergraduate student body. The RLH manages 11 residence halls, three apartment facilities, and four fraternity/sorority houses.

UX recognizes the importance of a residential experience and continues to offer this opportunity to its students. Current UX leadership has identified the residential experience as one with opportunity, specifically including it in its five-year strategic plan as a critical component to student success. The beginnings of a student's residential experience start in RLH with the housing assignment and roommate pairing process.

The researcher has been employed at UX for 18 years, with 14 years of the employment in a leadership role in RLH. This experience provides a relationship to both the institutional setting and to the study's participants. Permission to conduct the study at the selected site was gained from the institution's Institutional Review Board. The researcher gained exemption for the study from the University of New England's Institutional Review Board. First-generation college students with no less than one-year on-campus residency experience at UX were studied.

Participants/Sample

The participants of the research study were on-campus residential students that self-identified as first-generation college students. These participants were full-time enrolled undergraduate students at UX with at least one-year of on-campus residency experience. The

sampling of participants was chosen based on responses to requests for participation from residential students. In addition, participants needed to meet all of the conditions described below:

- Must identify as a first-generation college student,
- Must have lived on campus in a traditional residence hall for at least one academic year,
- Must have lived with a roommate that identified as a continuing-generation college student,
- Must be enrolled full-time at UX, and
- Must be 18 years of age or older.

The researcher anticipated being able to conduct interviews with five to eight willing participants. All participants volunteered their time while participating in the survey and/or interview component of the research. The participants should be diverse and representative of the student body population.

Data

The phenomenological research approach, existing literature, and the conceptual framework shaped the research methods of this study, including the survey instrument and interview structure. Aspects of a first-year experience were captured in both elements to understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings on the overall first-year experience of first-generation college students. The survey and interview instruments focused on the inputs (I) and environments (E) of first-generation college students to understand their experiences/outcome (O) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Input, Environments, and Outcomes of First-Generation College Students

Category	Description
Input	Generational Status
Environments	Residential Experience Roommate Experience Extracurricular Experience
Outcomes	Persistence and returning for a second year of enrollment Academic major and/or change of major Self-reported grade point average Roommate experience First-year experience Assimilation

Note. Adapted from Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model.

Survey

After receiving site permission from UX, second-year students were contacted by the researcher with an invitation to participate in the research study (Appendix A). As suggested by the study site, the researcher extended the invitation to participate through an email from the Office of Student Life. The invitation included a request to complete a survey (Appendix B). The researcher used REDCap for the survey research. Applying Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model, all survey questions aligned with possible inputs, environments, and outcomes perceived of first-generation college students.

The first portion of the survey provided informed consent information. Students who elected to continue with the survey acknowledged their consent to participate, as well as acknowledged their eligibility to participate in the study. Using branching logic in REDCap, survey respondents were only able to view the consent question at the start of the survey. If the respondents volunteered their consent for the study a second question concerning the criteria for

the study appeared. If the respondents met both the conditions of consent and eligibility then the full survey appeared. The second portion of the survey focused on demographic questions concerning the participant. The demographic inclusion criterion consisted of the participant's generational status, residential status (living on campus versus commuting), and admittance status (new student versus transfer student). A third section asked questions to examine perceived outcomes as they relate to the environmental experiences of the participants. This section consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Included in the survey was the option for participants to elect further involvement through participation in an interview with the researcher, and the final question on the survey asked for contact information if the survey respondent volunteered for a follow-up interview.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview process (Appendix C) was structured to maintain consistency throughout all participant interviews and to capture comparable data. The survey data was used to refine the semi-structured interview questions. All survey respondents had the opportunity to indicate an interest in participating in an interview. The concurrent data collection process permitted the researcher to begin conducting interviews once survey respondents volunteered for a follow-up interview. The researcher anticipated being able to conduct interviews with five to eight willing participants. The researcher chose those students interested in participating in an interview randomly as survey instruments were submitted. Those volunteer students were contacted by the researcher to schedule their interview. The researcher conducted 30-minute interviews with each participant on the campus of UX in a previously reserved and secured meeting space outside of the RLH offices to minimize research affiliations and biases. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder for future transcription and analysis.

Analysis

The study's data collection included survey data and interview data. The questions for both the survey and interview instruments were rooted in the framework guiding the phenomenological research.

Survey

The survey consisted of questions that provided descriptive data to understand the variables that influence the overall first-year experience for first-generation college students. Using REDCap, the researcher analyzed the survey responses looking for frequency of responses and commonalities.

Semi-Structured Interviews

While conducting the personal interviews, the rich data collected was recorded. The interviews were transcribed using a secure web based transcription company. Once transcribed, the researcher coded the interview transcripts to organize responses according to the categories designed by the study's conceptual framework. Common experiences were used to understand how first-generation college students perceive their college roommate and residential experiences, specifically their influence on their overall first-year experience.

In an effort to validate the data collected and provide credibility, the researcher used the processes of member checking and triangulation (Creswell, 2015). Through the process of member checking, the transcripts of the interviews were shared with participants to ensure accuracy of the transcription process (Creswell, 2015). Through the process of triangulation, the researcher integrated the responses from both the survey and individual interviews from multiple participants to tell the stories of first-generation college students (Creswell, 2015).

Participant Rights

It is of utmost importance that all research be conducted ethically with high consideration given to the participants and their responses (Creswell, 2015). Informed consent information was included at the beginning of the survey. By taking the survey, participants acknowledged consent. The consent portion of the survey informed participants that their participation was voluntary and that there were no foreseeable risks as a result of their participation. The participants were informed that their responses were confidential and only available to those involved in the research study (the researcher, the researcher's dissertation committee, and the University of New England's IRB). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to further remove any individual identifiers from the research and its findings. As was noted in the consent portion, any participant desiring to cease their involvement with the research could do so by contacting the researcher. All research files and collected data were managed by the researcher, as well as stored electronically with password protection on the researcher's personal computer.

Potential Limitations

Limitations included the potential for a small sampling size; therefore, influencing the diversity of responses. The qualitative research design examined the perceived residential experiences of first-generation college students. Thus, the opinions and perceptions of continuing-generation college students and faculty/staff were not represented in the data collection process. Additionally, all data was self-reported providing a chance for misinterpretation and/or misunderstanding.

In addition, the researcher has worked in RLH at the site institution for 14 years. To minimize any biases during the research study, the researcher relied solely on the data methods and responses. The researcher kept a reflexive journal to maintain awareness of potential biases

and to mitigate those biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “Maintaining a reflexive approach ensures a critical review of the involvement of the researcher in the research and how this impacts the processes and outcomes of the research” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 55). In addition, the researcher employed the method of bracketing to set aside personal biases and assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher was dependent on existing literature to guide the study in an attempt to remove any misleading and conflict of interest.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the research methodology used in this study providing rationale and insight for the research design. Phenomenological in design, this qualitative study was guided by existing literature and a conceptual framework rooted in student development theories. Beginning with an overview of the research design, the chapter continued with an exploration of the study site and its potential participants. The discussion of the study’s methodology included details of the data collection instruments and analysis processes. The chapter concluded with a review of the participants’ rights and the potential limitations of the study emphasizing the importance of credible and ethical research. Chapter 4 will reveal the findings and results of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

While higher education research and literature is focused on student development and involvement, there remains a lack of research and literature in the area of college roommate pairing methods and outcomes. More specifically, there is lack of literature about roommate situations influencing the growth of first-generation college students and a deficiency of college roommate data. This researcher sought to understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically on the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience.

This chapter features a summary of the results collected from both the survey instrument and follow-up interviews with volunteer participants. The results were analyzed and interpreted as guided by the research question and conceptual framework for this study. Participant interview responses were used to identify common experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study's data collection included both survey data and interview data. The researcher used REDCap to build the survey instrument and to collect survey responses. Survey results were calculated through REDCap. The researcher exported the results into an Excel worksheet for additional analysis. Seventy-three participants completed the survey. After removing survey submissions that did not meet the criteria for participation in the study, only 53 participants' responses qualified for the study. To understand the variables that influence the overall first-year experience for first-generation college students, the survey design intentionally captured inputs, environments, and outcomes perceived by first-generation college students who had completed their first year.

At the end of the survey, participants had the option to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview with the researcher. Sixteen of the 53 survey respondents volunteered for a follow-up interview. Each volunteer was contacted by the researcher to schedule an individual follow-up interview; the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with five student participants. To build on the data collected through the survey instrument, individual interviews with volunteer participants were conducted to form the narrative of each participant's story and lived experiences as a first-generation college student. Each interview participant expanded upon their survey responses and offered additional insight into their experiences and outcomes as a first-generation college student. Following the transcription of the interviews, the transcripts were shared with the participants for transcript review. Participants were given two weeks to respond to the researcher concerning the accuracy of the transcripts. Three out of the five participants verified the accuracy of their interview transcript, while the remaining two did not respond. The researcher read each interview transcript multiple times to increase familiarity with the interview responses. This process allowed the researcher to organize responses according to the categories designed by the study's conceptual framework; thus, the research findings and results were formed.

Participants and Responses

The Office of Student Life at UX sent the survey link by email to all main campus students. The survey was open for 10 weeks and generated 73 responses. Out of the 73 survey responses, five of the respondents did not consent for the survey and, therefore, did not proceed to the survey. In addition, 15 respondents indicated that they did not meet the required criteria to participate in the study and, therefore, did not continue with the survey. This resulted in 53 qualified survey responses.

The participants of this study were on-campus residential students at UX who self-identified as first-generation college students. The participants were full-time enrolled undergraduate students at UX with at least one year of on-campus residency experience. In addition, the intentional focus for sampling was on students that lived with a roommate that identified as a continuing-generation college student.

Survey Participants

The criterion to participate in the study included required demographic criteria. The required criteria included the participant's generational status, as well as living on campus instead of commuting to campus. Additional demographic information was collected through the survey. The demographic information collected included age, gender, ethnicity, admittance status, current classification, residence hall experience, and roommate selection.

Age. The 53 survey respondents self-reported ages of 19 years and older: 38% reported an age of *19*, 34% reported an age of *20*, and 28% reported an age of *21 or older*. No survey respondents reported an age of *18*.

Gender. Out of the 53 survey respondents, 21% reported *male* and 79% reported *female*.

Ethnicity. Of the 53 survey respondents, 70% identified as *Caucasian/White*. The remaining 30% identified as *African American/Black* (9.5%), *Asian* (9.5%), *Pacific Islander* (1.5%), and *Multi-Racial* (9.5%).

Admittance status. At the time of acceptance and admittance into UX, 12 of the 53 (23%) survey respondents reported they came to UX with some college experience. Of these 12 survey respondents: 42% reported being *dual enrolled in college courses while in high school*, 42% reported being in *early college*, 8% reported being a *transfer student from a community*

college, and 8% reported being a *transfer student from another university*. Forty-one of the 53 survey respondents reported they did not attend another college/university before attending UX.

Current classification. The current classification of survey participants captured their current classification and how many semesters they had attended UX. The 53 survey respondents reported their current classification: 43% reported being a *second-year student*, 31% reported being a *third-year student*, and 26% reported being a *fourth-year student*. The survey respondents also reported how many semesters they had attended UX: 2% reported having attended for *1 semester*, 2% reported having attended for *2 semesters*, 42% reported having attended for *3 semesters*, and 57% reported having attended for *5 semesters or more*. No survey respondents reporting having attended for *4 semesters*.

Residence hall experience. Of the 53 survey respondents, 8% reported having lived on campus in a residence hall for *2 semesters*, 37% reported having lived on campus in a residence hall for *3 semesters*, 8% reported having lived on campus in a residence hall for *4 semesters*, and 47% reported having lived on campus in a residence hall for *5 semesters or more*. The survey respondents also reported what type of residence hall style they lived in during their first year living on campus: 45% reported living in a *couplet style* (shared bathroom with one other room), 47% reported living in a *suite style* (shared bathroom with 3-4 other rooms), and 8% reported living in a *hall style* (shared bathroom with entire hall).

Roommate selection. Of the 53 survey respondents, 64% reported *I was assigned to live with a random roommate* and 36% reported *I was assigned to live with a roommate that I requested*.

Interview Participants

The researcher conducted follow-up interviews with five volunteer participants. All interview participants were asked to verify the generational status of their first-year roommate. For the purpose of this study, the findings and the results will highlight the responses of those first-generation participants with self-reported continuing-generation roommates during their first year of college. It is important to note that all interview participants reported having been assigned a random roommate. This was a random roommate pairing with a continuing-generation college student and not an intentional pairing by the institution. It is also important to note that the institution is intentional in only pairing first-year students together. As shown in Table 2, identified with pseudonyms, interview participants included Ruby, Ruth, Luke, Vera, and Lacy. All interview participants were given the opportunity to discuss their environmental experiences during their first year of college: residential, roommate, and extracurricular. All interview participants were asked about their thoughts on being a first-generation college student; whether their roommate's generational status had an impact on their overall experience, and whether it might have been different if their roommate also identified as a first-generation college student. Interview participants were then given the opportunity to share experiences they had with their roommate as they influenced academic success, social integration, and retention. Furthermore, interview participants were asked to reflect on their roommate's influence as it related to the outcome of student development. Interview participants were asked if they felt their roommate helped them develop competence, manage emotions, move through autonomy toward interdependence, develop mature interpersonal relationships, establish identity, develop purpose, and develop integrity. Finally, interview participants were given the opportunity to share any additional thoughts or experiences as they reflected on their roommate pairing during

their first year of college. Table 2 demonstrates the demographics of each of the interview participants.

Table 2

<i>Interview Participant Demographics</i>					
Name	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Roommate Selection	Roommate's Generational Status
Ruby	19	Female	Caucasian/White	Random	Continuing-Generation
Ruth	19	Female	Caucasian/White	Random	Continuing-Generation
Luke	19	Male	Caucasian/White	Random	Continuing-Generation
Vera	20	Female	Multi-Racial	Random	Continuing-Generation
Lacy	19	Female	Caucasian/White	Random	Continuing-Generation

Interview Responses

Ruby. Ruby described herself as a first-generation college student and a second-year student at UX. She spoke with pride as she described what being a first-generation college student meant to her. Ruby said:

Being a first-generation college student has probably been one of my biggest achievements in life so far. I'm the first person to go to college in my family. Some of my other relatives went to community college, but getting accepted into a four-year private university was a big leap for me. I've been very blessed in my experiences so far of being able to have such supportive parents and family and friends.

Ruby was assigned a random roommate and spoke positively when describing her roommate experience during her first year of college. Ruby stated:

I went through a random pairing of roommates, and I can honestly say I got the best one. I love my roommate to death. We really had a very good connection, clicking, and understanding of each other. We didn't have a single fight all year. We did everything

together in the sense that we still had this friend group that was there, but if I needed anything she was always going to be there, and we had so many adventures and different things that we did. She was an out-of-state student, so I really brought her into my family a lot being very local and close, and she came to Thanksgiving with me. We would go out with my parents. We really just brought her in and had her be like kind of another family member.

Ruby continued the positive remarks when describing her roommate's impact on her first-year experience. Ruby shared:

She helped me through a lot of things – schoolwork, motivation, and stuff like that--in class, outside of school, and stuff like that. I really got to connect with her, and we really got to lean on each other in a very supportive way that really did impact me. I know if I wouldn't have had that type of connection, there had been a lot of times where I've felt basically alone in a situation of not knowing what to do, and especially with her not being a first-generation student – both of her parents went through law school – so having that knowledge come from her parents saying that this is what we did in college and stuff like that was a big help as well.

When asked if she thought her first-year experience would have been different if her roommate also identified as a first-generation college student, Ruby shared:

Yes and no; [my roommate's] parents provided some advice and stuff like that, but a lot of it was that she came here to get independence from her family, so she didn't reach out to them with a lot of problems. I guess both of us were kind of lost coming into our first semester as freshmen and not really knowing what to do, but we both adapted very well.

Ruby also recognized the different economic statuses present among college students. Ruby perceived that most first-generation college students do not come from affluent families, so that might be one difference if her roommate shared her generational status.

Ruth. Ruth described herself as a first-generation college student and a second-year student at UX. Ruth portrayed herself as a normal college student when describing her experience as a first-generation college student. Ruth said:

Neither of my parents graduated from a four-year university. So, just getting that college degree means a lot to my parents and me just to get that first step in our family going. But other than that, it doesn't really take me away from other college students. I see myself as a regular college student.

Ruth discussed the adjustment of moving to college as a first-generation college student and as an only child. She was assigned a random roommate and described her first year and roommate experience as a period of transition. Ruth shared:

I'm an only child, so having a roommate in my personal living space was kind of difficult to begin with. I like my alone time and as an engineering student, I kind of need my alone time just away from all the work and everything. My roommate would be in the room a lot, which was strange to me to begin with but then I got used to it and found other places to go study. When I had breaks from homework or projects, then me and her would go hang out somewhere.

Not seeing a difference between herself and continuing-generation college students, Ruth did recognize the impact her roommate had on her first-year college experience. Ruth stated:

At the beginning, it was kind of rough just because of that alone time and adjusting from being an only child. But once we talked about things and became friends, I saw her as a

sister, and my parents saw her as a sister, also, just because of how close we've grown over the year. And she would help me de-stress. She would know that I would be stressed over engineering stuff and she would take me away from it for a bit and then give me my time to work on homework. And, we're still friends this year.

When asked if she thought her first-year experience would have been different if her roommate also identified as a first-generation college student, Ruth once again emphasized that she did not view herself as a first-generation college student. Ruth shared:

I don't think so just because me and her would probably go through things together. I don't really see myself as a first-generation student. But if we had problems relating to college, in general, because of that, then we would probably be there for each other.

Luke. Luke described himself as a first-generation college student and a second-year student at UX. As a student whose parents attended community college and graduated with associate degrees, he identified as a first-generation college student and discussed the confusion that often is associated with the label of first-generation college student. When asked to share what being a first-generation college student meant to him, Luke said:

Having a lack of knowledge, maybe, about the college process. My parents did earn associate degrees, but again, that's different from having a four-year degree. So, there were experiences that I had that were different from what they experienced. My sister, she was kind of the guinea pig for the family. She got her four-year degree. I'm trying to make my journey a little bit different from hers, because hers was a little bit more difficult just because she didn't have any knowledge of the process.

Luke was assigned a random roommate and described his roommate experience as one that encouraged him to get involved on campus and find a level of comfort with the new environment of college. When describing his room experience, Luke stated:

We got in touch over the summer when I found out my assignment, and we established boundaries. And, of course, as the semester started and went on, I could notice a couple of changes in personality and stuff like that, just as he was growing as a person here. And, I kind of contrasted that with a lot of my friends' experiences, because a lot of them had selected their roommate. They were friends from high school. And, it was a different experience for me, especially since being out of state; I didn't have anybody that I knew. So, it forced me out of my comfort zone and forced me to try and make friends in classes and get involved on campus. But overall, I think it made me adjust to people of different backgrounds and everything like that.

Furthermore, Luke continued these sentiments when describing his roommates' impact on his first year of college. Luke stated:

My roommate did help me make some friends because he already had a group of friends that he had known when he went to high school down the road. So, he introduced them to me. We kind of made friends with those people. We're not close friends, but you know, if I see them, I'll say, "Hi, how are you doing?" And, that kind of made me more comfortable on campus. And, he was very involved with intramural sports, so that just gave me something else to go to outside of class and when I wasn't working.

When asked if he thought his first-year experience would have been different if his roommate also identified as a first-generation college student, Luke thought that a roommate pairing of the same generational status may be beneficial for some. Luke did not feel that it

would have been different for him personally since he did have his sister's college experience for reference.

Vera. Vera described herself as a first-generation college student and a third-year student at UX. Vera spoke about having a different college experience than continuing-generation college students when describing what identifying as a first-generation college student meant to her. Vera stated:

It kind of sets you up for a different experience because you do not have anybody in your family that can tell you what it is like or what to expect, so it is a little bit different coming in than having a family that already knows everything like, you are going to have a roommate, and this is what it is going to be like. Especially, as an only child, having a roommate was crazy. To me, it kind of sets you up for a different experience than everybody else, because you are not really prepared or have any kind of background for what is to come.

Vera was originally assigned a random roommate and is the only interview participant that experienced a room change during her first year at UX. Due to roommate differences, Vera sought out a room change to improve her residential experience and self-selected her second roommate. When asked about her roommate experience during her first year, Vera shared:

My first roommate came from a family of eight children, and I was an only child, so move-in day was interesting having her whole family in there with my few people trying to move things in. That was pretty wild. Her family did come to visit a lot, so constantly having siblings in the room was pretty crazy. We had different sleep schedules. I came in later. She was asleep by 8:00 p.m. every night and up at 6:00 a.m. in the morning, and I

was still sleeping. It was kind of different to see how our schedules worked out and how our living situation was so impacted by that.

Having two roommate experiences during her first year of college, Vera recognized how both influenced her first year of college. Vera spoke positively about her second roommate experience. Vera said:

My first roommate did not go great. Changed rooms, and my second roommate was actually like my best friend, so that was absolutely wild. We still hang out together a lot. Our boyfriends are friends; we are friends. It is just great. I think that having a roommate, that first roommate, it might have—it distracted me a lot from my homework, but the second roommate, I got right back on it. We did not have any kind of discrepancies or anything.

When asked if she thought her first-year experience would have been different if her roommate also identified as a first-generation college student, Vera shared:

I feel like if both of my first-year roommates were first-generation college students, they would be able to help a little bit as far as the transition into college life and having a roommate and working. I feel like it would have helped a lot to be able to share experiences and walk each other through it, but not having that, it was okay, but I still feel like I was missing something.

Lacy. Lacy described herself as a first-generation college student and a second-year student at UX. Lacy recognized the achievement of being a first-generation college student and described continuing-generation college students as privileged due to their parents' college experience. When asked what identifying as a first-generation college student means to her, Lacy said:

So, for me, that term is very meaningful to me, not necessarily as a freshman, but especially this year knowing that neither of my parents went to school and neither of their parents went to school either is a big deal in my family that I am the first of three children to go to college. So, for me, it's more than just a category but an achievement as well as something that I'm achieving that nobody else in my family has.

Lacy was assigned a random roommate and described the experience as one that was not ideal. Lacy shared:

I went into [UX] with a random roommate, didn't really know her. And it was just one of those things where we coexisted, but we never really got along. We were never friends. I don't think she ever intended for us to be friends, which was fine, but living in that kind of situation forced me to look outside of my room for other friends and find places elsewhere that I could get involved and have community.

Not having a positive roommate experience, Lacy shared how that impacted her first-year college experience. Lacy stated:

I think that now as a sophomore looking back I think it did [have an impact] because just talking with my other friends who had really good roommates and loved it. I think that having somebody to live close with you that also knows you a little more than just there's this girl in my room would've been beneficial for me because I'm very community oriented. I think that I thrive around people so having a room where I didn't feel like I could thrive there was just very different. So I think if I had that it could've been better, a little more beneficial, but then I also see the other side. If I did have a good roommate would I have been as outgoing and got involved, so you never really know.

When asked if she thought her first-year experience would have been different if her roommate also identified as a first-generation college student, Lacy shared:

Maybe. I don't know that it would've been hugely different, but it would've been nice to have somebody to relate to on the fact of we were both first gen and we can understand that we don't really have anybody outside of who we know at college to guide us.

The five participant responses represented both positive and negative impacts of roommate pairings during the first-year college experience. Interview responses supported data from the surveys and created a narrative for each participant's story.

Findings

The researcher used the research question and conceptual framework of the study to design the survey instrument and semi-structured interviews. Guided by the research question and conceptual framework, the researcher analyzed the results of the 53 survey responses and five follow-up interviews. The researcher identified four main categories, along with seven sub-categories. The factors of input, environments, and outcomes were used to establish the identifying variables of the survey instrument using REDCap. These variables were then correlated with one of the four identified categories. The four categories used in the data analysis of the study were academic success, social integration, retention, and student development. The seven sub-categories fell under the category of student development and included competence, emotions, autonomy toward interdependence, interpersonal relationships, identity, purpose, and integrity. The researcher used the input of generational status and environments of residential and roommate pairings to uncover the outcomes as provided by participants. Each of the four main categories is connected to the outcomes of the participants: academic success, social

integration, retention, and student development. These categories and sub-categories are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

<i>Categories and Sub-categories</i>	
Categories	Sub-categories
Academic Success	
Social Integration	
Retention	
Student Development	Competence, Emotions, Autonomy toward Interdependence, Interpersonal Relationships, Identity, Purpose, and Integrity

Categories

After data were collected through the survey instrument and follow-up interviews with volunteer participants, the process of coding was used to organize the data into identified categories as influenced by the study's conceptual framework. These categories respond to the purpose of the study and demonstrate the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Category 1: Academic Success

The category of academic success was represented in both the survey responses and interview conversations. As an outcome of their input and experiences, participants referenced academic success when discussing the perceived impact of their roommate pairing on their overall first-year experience. Forty-three percent of survey respondents replied *yes* and 57% replied *no* when asked if they changed their academic major during their first year of college. When asked about their grade point average (GPA) at the end of their first year of college, survey respondents self-reported the following averages: 6% reported a 4.0 GPA, 51% reported a

GPA of 3.0-3.9, 32% reported a GPA of 2.0-2.9, and 11% reported a GPA of 1.0-1.9. No survey respondents self-reported a GPA *less than a 1.0*.

Interview participants were asked about the influence of their roommate pairing on their academic success during their first year of college, specifically due to the difference in their generational status. When the researcher asked Ruby to share an experience she had with her roommate based on their difference in generational status as it related to academic success, Ruby stated:

Being a first-generation student and trying to make it through the first semester, my grades definitely did slip. I was very overwhelmed with having been signed up for 18.5 credit hours—being a freshman and not even knowing you can drop or withdraw from classes and the struggles with that, working at the same time, and trying to manage everything. My roommate definitely made straight A's the whole time, so I feel like academically there was a difference with that. I feel like I was doing homework and studying, but I felt like she was studying a lot more because she had a lot of pressure from her family.

Similarly, Luke also recognized a difference in the academic success of himself and his roommate due to their difference in generational status. Luke shared:

My roommate was able to reach out to his parents just for guidance on what he should be paying attention to, especially when we were selecting classes. Whereas, my parents kind of left it to me to decide what I wanted to do. And, I actually switched my major by myself. I didn't really consult my parents; I just went and did it. My roommate was thinking about doing that, but his parents are both military, and they wanted him to get involved with criminal justice. So, I feel like he had an external pressure to do well in

those classes. Whereas, my parents of course wanted me to succeed and wanted me to do well, but they were understanding that I'm not an English person, so I'm not going to love English. So, they were very understanding of that, but they expected me to do well still. The lack of guidance when it came to switching my major kind of helped me in making my decision quickly, but kind of hurt me in the same way.

Similarly, Lacy noticed an apparent difference in the academic success of herself and her roommate based on their difference in generational status. Lacy shared:

I can just very clearly remember this. So during the first week, I guess it was the second week of school...people asked me what was the hardest thing about being first gen, and I think that it is those first three weeks of figuring out what does the schedule look like? How do I get books? What does financial aid mean to me? Those were the three hardest questions I had and still I don't really know, but we're figuring them out. We did much better this semester, but I just remember my roommate already had all of her schedule down. She knew where all of her books were. Her parents had helped her plan what it looks like to study. This is how you should divide your time in your room versus time studying, and I was just at a complete loss, like what do you mean? You're just in here studying and you already have all your books and you're so prepared and I felt like seeing her be prepared but not having a relationship I was like I'm doing all the wrong things. There has to be something wrong with what I'm doing. So it kind of created an internal stress of everyone around me is doing all the right things and they're prepared, but I felt like I wasn't.

When the researcher asked Ruth to share an experience she had with her roommate based on their difference in generational status as it related to academic success, Ruth shared that her

roommate would recognize when she was stressing over academics. Ruth's roommate would encourage her to take a break from her homework assignments and hang out with suitemates before returning to her homework. When the researcher asked Vera to share a roommate experience as it related to academic success, Vera reflected on both of her roommate situations. Vera shared that she spent most of her time in the library since she and her first roommate had different schedules. She stated that her first roommate experience "held me back from being more successful my first year." Vera continued by speaking positively about her second roommate experience. Vera shared that she and her second roommate shared the same schedule, so they could sit in the room and study.

Interview participants recognized a clear difference in their academic success and the academic success of their roommates, specifically as it related to their difference in generational status. Participants described feelings of unpreparedness and lack of knowledge when approaching college academics. They described visible advantages as demonstrated by their continuing-generation roommates.

Category 2: Social Integration

Social integration was a category explored through both the survey responses and interview discussions. As an outcome of their input and experiences, participants referenced social integration when discussing the perceived impact of their roommate pairing on their overall first-year experience. Nineteen percent (19%) of survey respondents replied *yes* and 81% replied *no* when asked if they were involved in the First-Generation Student Club during their first year of college. When asked about employment during their first year of college, 19% replied *yes* and 81% replied *no* when asked if they worked on campus. Thirty-two percent (32%)

replied *yes*, and 68% replied *no* when asked if they worked off campus during their first year of college.

First-generation college students often have continued responsibilities at home. These responsibilities can affect the positive social integration for first-generation college students. When asked about responsibilities at home, 49% survey participants responded *yes* and 51% responded *no* to having responsibilities at home during their first year of college. Similarly, undergoing a roommate change during their first year of college can also affect the positive social integration for first-generation college students. Seventeen percent (17%) of survey respondents replied *yes* and 83% replied *no* when asked if they changed roommates during their first year of college. Roommate changes can occur for various reasons. Some of the survey respondents shared the following reasons for experiencing a roommate change during their first year of college:

- My roommate switched rooms because she was never in the room and wanted to room with her friend.
- My roommate and I did not share similar traits/differing lifestyle choices/cleanliness issues.
- We got separated after some issues with the room, and she got put with someone random and I chose a private room.
- My first roommate dropped out.
- My roommate moved in with a friend so I lived alone.
- We did not get along.

When asked to describe their roommate experience during their first year of college, 38% of survey respondents replied *my roommate experience was better than I expected*, 32% replied

my roommate experience was worse than I expected, and 30% replied *my roommate experience was what I expected*. When asked to describe the influence of their roommate on their first year of college, 40% responded *my roommate positively influenced my first year*, 19% responded *my roommate negatively influenced my first year*, and 41% responded *my roommate had no influence on my first year*.

The researcher asked interview participants to share an experience they had with their roommate based on their difference in generational status that influenced their positive social integration. Ruby shared:

I feel like both of us were very positive and socially active. We both really had the same friend group, so in a sense we were always with each other a lot of the time, but at the same time she would go off to the library for a few hours and I'd be by myself and we were perfectly fine doing stuff like that. Both of us had friends from very different academic backgrounds. Some of the people in our friend group had parents who went to college and stuff like that and some other ones were first-generation students that were just like me that were in the same mentoring program that I was. I felt like we were both very interactive with people with the same background but also not.

Vera experienced two different roommates during her first year of college; both were continuing-generation college students. When asked about the influence of her roommate on her social integration, Vera referenced the differences between herself and her first roommate. Vera stated:

I really had a hard time with that my first semester. At [UX], my first roommate, she was really to herself, and I did not really like being in the room with her by myself, so I would go out a lot. I was kind of forced out of the room and forced to go do things, so I feel like

it kind of gave me that push to get out there that I may not have had, but at the same time, it was kind of annoying to not be able to stay in my room when I wanted to be. I did feel like it kind of helped a little bit, but at the same time, I kind of had to find friends where I could.

When describing her social integration during her first year of college, Lacy highlighted her status as a first-generation college student and the support she had from her parents to get involved and to experience college. Lacy said:

I think being first-gen, my parents were very supportive of me going to college. But they were also like, if you're going to go to college, at least experience it all the way. So they wanted me to study. They wanted me to do well, but they were like if you go to school and you don't get involved it's your loss. So I think having parents who had never experienced college and wanted me to experience everything was beneficial and the fact that their drive behind me to be outgoing kind of pushed me forward in that whereas I feel like possibly if you were not first-gen your parents could say I want you to study. I want you to be committed to your major, but I think that has also allowed me to explore multiple different things, not just things related to my major.

When asked about the influence of his roommate on his social integration, Luke shared that his roommate experience pushed him outside of his comfort zone. Luke acknowledged that he did not come to college with friends but got involved on campus to make friends. Ruth reflected on the difference in majors between herself and her roommate as an influence on her social integration. Ruth shared that she was able to meet new people outside of her major because of her roommate experience.

Interview participants varied in their involvement in organized extracurricular activities during their first year of college, such as student clubs, intramural sports, employment, etc. Several interview participants highlighted an increase in their involvement during their second-year of college as they continue their assimilation into the college community. Regardless, their positive social integration and the impact of their generational status were evident in the responses of the interview participants. Involvement in extracurricular activities was not captured on the survey.

Category 3: Retention

The category of retention was consistent in both the survey responses and interview conversations. As an outcome of their input and experiences, participants referenced retention when discussing the perceived impact of their roommate pairing on their overall first-year experience. All survey respondents and interview participants returned to UX for a second year of college. One hundred percent of survey respondents replied *yes* when asked if they planned to graduate from UX. Interview participants were asked about the influence of their roommate pairing during their first year of college on their retention, specifically due to the difference in their generational status. When asked to share an experience had with her roommate based on their difference in generational status as it related to retention, Ruby stated:

I came back to [UX] because I really established things for myself. I had a club that I was getting support from, and I had friends here that I really developed deep connections that had a great impact on me. I felt like I was at home here, like I really enjoyed the connections I made with professors and stuff like that. My roommate didn't in a sense. I definitely reached out and got more involved with things than she did.

When describing her reasons for returning to UX for a second-year, Ruth emphasized the connections she made with her roommate and friends during her first year of college and the community environment. Ruth shared:

Just because we like hit it off at the beginning...just finding friends and then, making connections with her friends. Just finding a community aspect among those connections helped me retain here at [UX]. And then, she would also become friends with my engineering friends so, that was good, also. And then, those engineering friends would invite both of us to either games or whatever else they were doing.

Likewise, Lacy recognized the connections she made during her first year of college and the support she felt from the college community as an influence on her retention. Lacy said:

My roommate did not come back to [UX] this year, but the reason I...well I didn't really think about why. I just love [UX] so much. There's no question about it for me to come back, but I think that since I was outgoing I was involved on campus. It just seemed like the obvious choice to come back to [UX] and knowing that I had parents who had never been to college but were supporting me but also a university staff that was involved in what I was doing on campus and friends that supported me through that.

When asked to share an experience had with her roommate based on their difference in generational status as it related to retention, Vera shared that she did not want to leave UX because she and her roommate "were in it together." Vera continued by sharing that her roommate helped her find a balance between family and school. Luke described encouragement from his parents and connections to the campus community as reasons for his retention. In doing so, Luke also recognized the difference between his encouraging parents and the pressure his roommate felt from his parents to do well academically.

When describing their reasons for returning to UX for a second year of college, interview participants did not clearly make a relationship between their retention and the difference in generational status between them and their roommate. For some interview participants, their roommates also returned to UX for a second year and for others, their roommates transferred to other colleges. More consistently, interview participants referenced their involvement in the campus community and connections with faculty, staff, and fellow students as reasons for their retention. The survey did not capture reasons for why participants returned to UX for a second year nor why they plan to graduate from UX.

Category 4: Student Development

Providing a foundation for understanding the effects of the roommate pairing and difference in generational status on the outcomes of first-generation college students, the category of student development was evident in both the survey responses and interview discussions. Rooted in the seven vectors of development as described by Chickering and Reisser (1993), survey respondents were given the chance to rate the level of impact their roommate had on each of the seven areas of development (Blimling, 2010; Blimling, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, interview participants were given the opportunity to further expand on the level of impact their roommate had on each of the seven areas of development.

Competence. The development of competence involves knowledge and understanding of skills and tasks, mastering content, and making sense out of observations (Blimling, 2010).

When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *no influence* and 5 being *a great extent of influence*, how did your roommate help you to develop competence, survey respondents replied as follows: 47% responded 1 – *no influence*, 11% responded 2 – *some influence*, 23% responded 3 – *average influence*, 11% responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 8% responded 5 – *a great extent of*

influence. In the follow-up interview, Luke shared about his roommate's influence on his development in the area of competence. Luke stated:

We both brought different skill sets to the table. We had different study strategies and everything like that. But he brought different experiences that he's had up to that point, and he just kind of gave me that as a guide, in addition to what I had already. So, I definitely think that he added something. One hundred percent (100%) guiding me, not really, but definitely just giving me a different outlook at some things.

Lacy had a different experience and described her roommate's lack in this area as a reason for personal growth in competence. Lacy shared:

I think kind of in a reverse effect, so my roommate was never like you have to do this or that. But the fact of her not doing anything socially or even basic tasks in our room made me more competent and aware of what I needed to do.

When asked about her roommate's influence on her development in the area of competence, Ruby focused on her knowledge and awareness of herself as an individual as well as her influence on others. Ruby discussed her feelings of needing to make a difference in her family by attending college and setting an example for future generations. Ruby also discussed the potential influence she may have on other students. Continuing her thoughts, Ruby talked about her roommate being pressured to follow in her parents' footsteps.

When asked about her roommate's influence on her development in the area of competence, Ruth spoke about her roommate's interest in Ruth's academic major. Describing a metacognition strategy for learning, Ruth described how she was able to learn course content by sharing information with her roommate. Ruth's roommate would ask her about homework assignments and projects which Ruth found helpful.

Vera recalled her second roommate experience when asked about her roommate's influence on her development in the area of competence. Vera shared that her second roommate helped her understand "the basics of college life." Her roommate encouraged Vera to take college one day at a time.

Emotions. The development of managing emotions includes the awareness of emotions and learning to control them and balance them (Blimling, 2010). When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *to a great extent*, how did your roommate help you to manage emotions, survey respondents replied as follows: 32% responded 1 – *no influence*, 19% responded 2 – *some influence*, 21% responded 3 – *average influence*, 15% responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 13% responded 5 – *a great extent of influence*. Ruby addressed the support she received from her roommate when describing her roommate's impact on her development of managing emotions. Ruby shared:

I definitely feel like I had a lot of dramatic things go on. I have a tendency of worrying about things that my mom says I shouldn't, that are going on at home and stuff like that...My roommate was like; oh, things are going to get better. I'm here to support you. I'll be able to push you through that, and it means a lot to have somebody that you're around 24-7 knowing that they're compassionate toward you and wanting to help you and really caring about you. She helped me a tremendous amount.

Likewise, Ruth shared a similar story of receiving support from her roommate when emotions were heightened. Ruth stated:

Yes, during all of the stressful situations. If she knew something was bothering me, then she would try to either take me away from the situation or encourage me to talk about it. And then, if she was down, I would try to follow up and do the same thing for her.

When asked about her roommate's influence on her development in the area of managing emotions, Vera shared about her second roommate experience. Vera said:

We were both having relationship issues at the time, so we would just sit in the room together, talk about it, get it out, cry about it, have a full mental breakdown, and then we were okay. We went through the whole emotional thing together. Whenever we were homesick, we went out to dinner somewhere or did something that reminded us of home. We went through everything together.

When asked about his roommate's influence on his development in the area of managing emotions, Luke shared that his roommate was not influential in this area. Luke recognized that his roommate was a very emotional person, so he avoided getting too caught up in his roommate's emotions. Luke did not share how he personally managed emotions nor if he noticed a change during his first year of college. Lacy also felt that her roommate was not influential in the area of managing emotions. Lacy shared that she and her roommate did not discuss their emotions, but that her other friend groups were helpful in her learning how to manage and balance emotions.

Autonomy toward interdependence. The development of moving through autonomy toward interdependence includes the ability to take ownership of self and recognizing when help from others is needed (Blimling, 2010). When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *to a great extent*, how did your roommate help you to move through autonomy toward interdependence, survey respondents replied as follows: 40% responded 1 – *no influence*, 21% responded 2 – *some influence*, 9% responded 3 – *average influence*, 19% responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 11% responded 5 – *a great extent of influence*. In the follow-up interview

conversation, Vera highlighted the transition of being an only child to having a roommate in college. Vera shared:

I grew up being pretty independent being an only child. I had to do everything, so I kind of grew up independent, but when I got here, I was so homesick. I needed my mom...I was kind of independent, but at the same time, I needed help balancing the workload with the classes and with work and everything else. [My roommate] kind of had to help me keep that on track and not fall behind in any one class. It took a lot of give-and-take. I kind of had some of it down pat, but some of it, she definitely had to help me with.

Similarly, Ruth recognized her roommate's contribution to her personal move through autonomy towards interdependence. Ruth highlighted her need to set goals for herself each week to aid her in completing her assignments and accomplishing everything she wants to for each week. Ruth went on to describe how she would ask her roommate for help when she recognized the need to reach out to others. Ruth shared, "if I was having trouble in chemistry, because [my roommate is] a pre-pharmacy major, I would ask her for help."

When asked about his roommate's influence on his development in the area of moving through autonomy towards interdependence, Luke shared:

[My roommate] exposed me to what it would be like if I had that constant support system. He did show me that it's important to do things on your own, since we are adults now and we're meant to try and take more steps. I tried to push myself to do things on my own. I don't think he 100% made that for me. I think I kind of discovered that by myself. But he definitely was a piece of that, just to have a contrast and comparison between me and him. I felt like I was more independent because he had so much support from his

parents. He would call them about everything, whereas I would just kind of make the decision.

When asked about her roommate's influence on her development in the area of moving through autonomy towards interdependence, Ruby felt that she had more of an influence on her roommate. Ruby described herself as a very driven person and recalled personal situations that may have influenced this trait. She shared about her personal drive to make good grades in high school and now in college. Ruby also shared about her parents and how their divorce fostered her need to learn how to be interdependent. As a first-generation college student, Ruby also reflected on her need to look outside of her parental unit for help with academics. Drawing from these experiences, Ruby recognized the differences between herself and her roommate. Candidly, Ruby spoke about having to teach her roommate how to do laundry.

When asked about her roommate's influence on her development in the area of moving through autonomy towards interdependence, Lacy shared that her roommate may have helped her recognize the importance of taking ownership of herself and her own path. However, Lacy did not reach out to her roommate when Lacy felt like help was needed from others. Instead, Lacy felt that she was more of a help to her roommate. Lacy did not elaborate on ways she helped her roommate.

Interpersonal relationships. The development of mature interpersonal relationships includes an appreciation of others' differences and the ability to develop friendships beyond a surface level acquaintance (Blimling, 2010). When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *to a great extent*, how did your roommate help you to develop mature interpersonal relationships, survey respondents replied as follows: 42% responded 1 – *no influence*, 9% responded 2 – *some influence*, 15% responded 3 – *average influence*, 26%

responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 8% responded 5 – *a great extent of influence*. Ruby described the development of mature interpersonal relationships with faculty and staff more so than with her roommate. Ruby shared, “[My roommate] encouraged me with the things that I was doing, but a lot of those mature relationships were with my mentor and my faculty and staff and my professors...I had to do that on my own. It wasn’t her job.” Likewise, Lacy did not have the experience of a mature interpersonal relationship with her roommate. Lacy stated, “the fact that we didn’t have that relationship made me look elsewhere.”

Luke also described a similar experience and explained how other experiences influenced his development of mature interpersonal relationships. In fact, his roommate experience only led to surface-level friendships. Luke said, “I made all those deeper-rooted friendships on my own, just through my opportunities as an orientation leader and peer mentor. Those really are where I made my deeper connections.”

When asked about her roommate’s influence on her development of mature interpersonal relationships, Ruth recognized this type of relationship with her roommate. Ruth shared that she thinks of her roommate as a sister and her roommate was often included in Ruth’s family visits. Ruth described a personal connection with her roommate that was beneficial during her first year of college. Likewise, Vera also recognized the development of a mature interpersonal relationship within her roommate experience. Vera spoke of how their relationship grew from the early stages of getting to know one another to the deep friendship they developed as roommates. Vera also shared how she and her roommate have remained best friends in the time following their first year of college.

Identity. The development of establishing identity includes an understanding of oneself and a comfort in oneself (Blimling, 2010). When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *not at all*

and 5 being *to a great extent*, how did your roommate help you to establish identity, survey respondents replied as follows: 46% responded 1 – *no influence*, 15% responded 2 – *some influence*, 13% responded 3 – *average influence*, 13% responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 13% responded 5 – *a great extent of influence*. While reflecting on the impact of her roommate on the establishment of her identity during her first year of college, Ruth recognized the growth in herself. Ruth stated:

Coming into college, I was kind of shy just because I didn't know anyone and no one else from my high school came to [UX]. So, getting those first friendships were important to me. So, finding those friendships and then growing in those, helped me identify [with] myself better.

Lacy described a similar experience, but reflected on an awareness of independence at college and the differences between her and her roommate as influences on her identity. Lacy shared, "I think that being independent in that sense of like we were just individuals made me think a lot about who I actually am and what do I hold true to." Vera recognized how her second roommate experience fostered an exploration of her identity. Vera shared stories of how she and her roommate would experiment with clothes and hair color until they found their personal style. Vera described her roommate experience as an experience that helped her discover herself and develop a comfort with herself.

When asked about the impact of her roommate on the establishment of her identity during her first year of college, Ruby shared:

Most definitely; [my roommate] supported me through a lot of things, but she was also not afraid to say you need to do this or that's wrong don't do that. I definitely feel like

she helped me become a more centered person. I really outgrew a lot of relationships that I had. Caring about other people pushes you to move forward.

When asked about the impact of his roommate on the establishment of his identity, Luke shared:

I think [my roommate] helped me with definitely having that experience - living with somebody for eight months, me becoming more sociable, more independent, and being able to make decisions on my own. I think he did help with some of that.

Luke also reflected on his and his roommate's different view on money. Luke's roommate's family was local, so he had a regular source of money to replenish his food and activities. Whereas, Luke recalled having a limited source of money and learning how to budget wisely and save money to make it through each semester until he could visit his family during semester breaks.

Purpose. The development of purpose includes a knowledge of personal interests, values, and what is important to oneself (Blimling, 2010). When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *to a great extent*, how did your roommate help you to develop purpose, survey respondents replied as follows: 49% responded 1 – *no influence*, 11% responded 2 – *some influence*, 15% responded 3 – *average influence*, 11% responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 14% responded 5 – *a great extent of influence*. During the follow-up interview, Lacy explained that her own purpose became stronger after seeing her roommate live out her own purpose. Lacy stated:

I think that's something that as a first-gen student I kind of came in with the idea of if you're going to go to college you have to have a purpose behind it. So I think that she

helped me. She didn't physically help me, but by her seeming like she had her own purpose it made me kind of define clear lines of what my purpose was.

Similarly, Ruby described her roommate's influence on her development of purpose.

Ruby's roommate was an out-of-state student, so Ruby used a feeling of responsibility for her roommate as a source of purpose. Ruby shared:

I felt very responsible for her. She supported me through everything that I wanted to do that was of reason. I won't say that she was the person that made me go out and get involved with clubs and stuff like that, but I definitely felt like I had a purpose in helping her and being there for her and bringing her into my family. I'd go as far as to say that she definitely helped me get closer to religion. We went to church together. She helped me with stuff like that and she helped me develop purpose.

When asked about the impact of her roommate on the development of her purpose, Ruth felt that her roommate did contribute to the development of her purpose. Ruth described her roommate's presence and accountability as factors for keeping her focused on her achieving her academic goals. When asked about the impact of her roommate on the development of her purpose, Vera continued her reflection on her identity as it related to her purpose. Vera spoke about her comfortableness with herself and her confidence in herself as an individual. She described her purpose as going to class, getting things done, graduating, and getting a job.

When asked about the impact of his roommate on the development of his purpose, Luke also spoke about his purpose as it related to his academics. Luke shared:

I think academics was a big deal for both of us. So, I think we put that above a lot of stuff. Socially, [my roommate] definitely helped me develop the soft skills that I need for my major and what I want to do with my life. Since I'm [studying] healthcare, I definitely

need soft skills. Problem solving between me and him definitely helped me develop conflict management skills.

Integrity. The development of integrity includes a strong sense of self and a lifestyle that aligns with one's values and purpose (Blimling, 2010). When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *to a great extent*, how did your roommate help you to develop integrity, survey respondents replied as follows: 44% responded 1 – *no influence*, 11% responded 2 – *some influence*, 11% responded 3 – *average influence*, 23% responded 4 – *a lot of influence*, and 11% responded 5 – *a great extent of influence*. When asked about the influence of his roommate on his development of integrity, Luke spoke about the importance of being genuine and true to oneself. Luke stated:

Seeing how different he was interacting with different friends, he would put on a different face for different people. That made me understand how important it is to be a genuine person and people will value that way more than trying to change yourself for them specifically. A really cool thing about being genuine and me trying to be genuine is that a student...told me, "I really appreciate how genuine you are. I feel like I can talk to you." She literally came up to me with a personal issue and asked for my opinion. That was really powerful...But I think that kind of stemmed a little bit from [my roommate], from me seeing how that can damage friendships and relationships. Just try to be genuine and just try to do the right thing all the time.

Likewise, Lacy also spoke about the importance of being true to oneself. Lacy recognized the differences between her and her roommate, but also recognized the importance of coming together when needed. Lacy shared the example of regular room checks in the residence hall as a time where they had to work together as roommates while also maintaining integrity.

Vera described learning more about herself during her first year of college. Vera also recognized her roommate's influence on her discovery of herself and the development of her integrity. Vera shared:

After we became friends, I kind of had a full epiphany. I started learning more about myself and what I wanted, how I am as a person, and my own individuality. I also learned a lot about my own emotions and my own personality coming out of that, and my own confidence and comfort. I have kind of made a spiritual turn, too. My roommate helped me go through all these changes in my life. My roommate definitely gave me a push in the right direction.

When asked about the influence of her roommate on her development of integrity, Ruby also described her roommate's impact on her spiritual growth. Ruby stated:

[My roommate] was responsible. If I did something stupid she'd be like; well, that was your fault. She helped me get closer to faith [because she] shared a lot about her relationship with God. Being around people who are positive and doing the right things makes you want to do the right thing. You know the people that you are around are the people that you end up becoming usually, and so I feel like having her around me helped me bump that up.

Ruth shared a mixed opinion concerning her roommate's influence on her development of integrity. Positively, Ruth felt that her roommate influenced her integrity development out of an interest in Ruth's academic major and always wanting to learn more about it. Negatively, Ruth witnessed the greater amount of free time that her roommate had due to the difference in their academic majors.

Survey respondents and interview participants reflected on their first year of college and the level of impact their continuing-generation roommate had on each of the seven areas of development. The findings of this study demonstrated inconsistencies concerning the influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on the student development of the first-generation participants. Survey data of all 53 participants demonstrated a small majority of participants felt that their roommate pairing had *some to a great extent* of influence on their student development, specifically their development in the areas of competence, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, mature interpersonal relationships, identity, purpose, and integrity. For the area of managing emotions, survey data of all 53 participants demonstrated mixed results of perceived impact of their roommate pairing. The results of the survey data are inconsistent with the interview data. Interview data of all five interview participants demonstrated a small majority of participants felt that their roommate pairing had *some to a great extent* of influence on their student development, specifically their development in the areas of competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, identity, purpose, and integrity. For the area of mature interpersonal relationships, interview data of all five interview participants demonstrated mixed results of perceived impact of their roommate pairing. Figure 2 illustrates the perceived levels of influence of roommate pairings on the seven areas of student development as reported by all 53 survey participants.

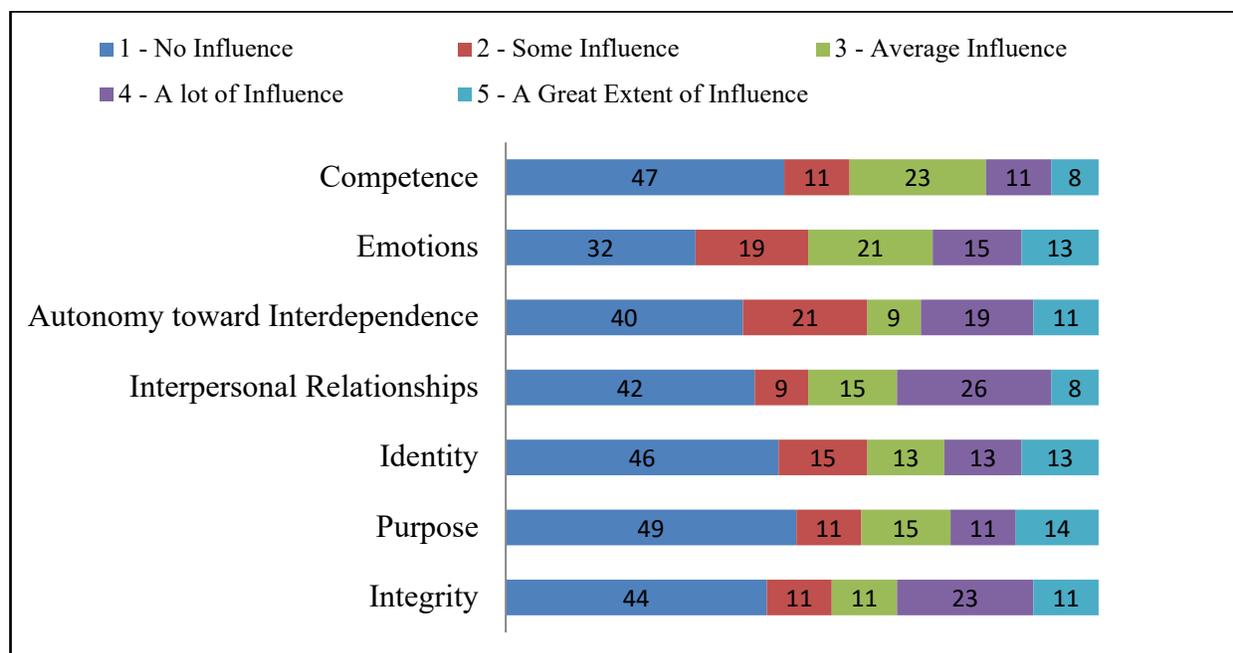


Figure 2. The seven areas of student development and survey responses.

Conclusion

This chapter presented participant demographics and the results and findings of the research conducted through a survey instrument and follow-up interviews. The results were used to form the narrative of each participant's story and lived experiences as a first-generation college student, focusing on the perceived impact of the roommate pairing on the overall first-year experience. Data from both the survey responses and the participant interviews were organized and presented using categories influenced by the conceptual framework. The primary finding of the study revealed a mixed opinion concerning the perceived impact of pairing roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of college. Chapter 5 presents a conclusion of the study, including an interpretation of the findings, implications of the findings relevant to practice in the field, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

First-generation college students represent one-third of all college students (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 13). This student population faces several challenges as they navigate the college experience (Astin & Astin, 2015; Blimling, 2015; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Furthermore, gaps in literature exist concerning the perceived effect of the first-generation college student's residential experience and roommate experience on their first year of college. As a result, a better understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation college students during their first year of college would aid higher education practitioners in better supporting this student population.

To address this lack of knowledge, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to examine the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. A sample of 53 first-generation college students was used as participants for this study. Five of the 53 participants also participated in a follow-up interview with the researcher. In addition to their common generational status, the participants in the study were on-campus residential students at UX and full-time enrolled undergraduate students with at least one year of on-campus residency experience. Critical to the focus of this study, all participants lived with a roommate during their first year of college that identified as a continuing-generation college student. The study, including both the survey instrument and interview questions, was influenced by the literature review and conceptual framework. Participants shared their lived experiences as first-generation college students paired with continuing-generation college students during their first year of college. Using the lens of Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcome model (I-E-O), the predetermined categories of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development were the basis for understanding the outcomes of their lived experiences.

Interpretation of Findings

A first-year college student's residential experience can significantly influence their overall first-year experience (Upcraft et al., 2005). Guided by existing literature and a conceptual framework rooted in student development theories, this researcher sought to understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. The following research question guided the study:

What effect do first-generation college students perceive being paired with continuing-generation students in university housing has on their overall first-year experience?

Applying Astin's (1993) I-E-O model in this study, a college student's generational status defined the *input*, their residential experience and roommate pairing defined the *environment*, and an examination of their overall first-year experience defined the *outcome* (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). Thus, the perceived effect of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience was measured by the outcomes captured through both the surveys and follow-up interviews. As interpreted for this study, the participants' responses (outcomes) were organized into the categories of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development.

Academic Success

In this study, academic success was identified as a variable for influence by a first-generation college student's roommate pairing during the first year of college. Existing literature demonstrates a lack of academic preparedness among first-generation college students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Studies also show that residential students are more likely to perform well

academically than their non-residential peers (Blimling, 2015; López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). What is missing from literature is the impact of the roommate pairing on academic success for first-generation college students during their first year of college.

In the current study, as an outcome of participants' input and experiences, the category of academic success was measured by the participants' self-reported grade point average (GPA), their change or no change of academic major, and the influence of roommate pairing. Almost all survey respondents reported GPAs of 2.0 or higher, and over half (51%) of respondents reported a GPA of 3.0-3.9. These self-reported GPAs support previous research. Earlier studies found that first-year students living on campus earn higher GPAs than students who live off campus (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Schudde, 2011). Although over half (57%) of respondents reported that they did not change their academic major during their first year of college, participants did experience the rigors and pressures of college. One participant described her feelings of being overwhelmed while trying to balance her course load with work and felt that her roommate helped her with schoolwork and motivation. The same participant recognized her grades were slipping while her roommate's grades remained consistently high. She also discussed the pressure her roommate felt from her parents to do well academically. Another participant also recognized the difference in pressure from parents between himself and his roommate stating that his roommate had pressure from his parents to do well while the participant's parents were more encouraging. Another participant described a feeling of being behind their roommate by not knowing how to navigate the first year of college, including not knowing how to understand a course schedule, where to buy books, and how to study. This caused more of an internal stress for the participant rather than lack of support and guidance from the roommate. Another

participant reported that her roommate would recognize when she was stressed over schoolwork and encourage her to take breaks. In addition, one other participant spoke of two roommate pairings during her first year. The participant changed rooms due to incompatibility with her first roommate but spoke of a more positive experience with her second roommate as they would study together.

As demonstrated in Table 4, the category of academic success was partially measured by the survey respondents' self-reported GPAs and their change or no change of academic major. In addition, interview participants shared their perception of their continuing-generation roommate's influence on their academic success. Participants in this study discussed feelings of unpreparedness and lack of knowledge when approaching college academics. The participants recognized advantages displayed by their continuing-generation roommates, as well as differences in external pressures. Some of the participants received support and encouragement from their roommates, while others sought help and guidance elsewhere. These results align with previous research that recognized the academic disadvantages first-generation college students have over their continuing-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017). Previous studies have also examined the influence of roommates during college and have found that roommates "may influence academic performance" (Blimling, 2015, p. 79). Previous research does not inform the field on the influences of intergenerational roommate pairings. The findings of this study demonstrated an indirect influence of intergenerational roommate pairings. The first-generation participants recognized their academic disadvantages through the observations of their roommates. Therefore, further study of these findings through the lens of social learning is recommended.

Table 4

<i>Category of Academic Success and Survey Responses</i>	
Variable	Percentage of Responses
Self-Reported GPA	
Less than 1.0	0%
1.0-1.9	11%
2.0-2.9	32%
3.0-3.9	51%
4.0	6%
Change of Academic Major	
Yes	43%
No	57%

Social Integration

In this study, social integration was identified as a variable for influence by a first-generation college student's roommate pairing during the first year of college. Previous research shows that the college residential experience for first-year students provides increased opportunities for student-to-student interactions and fosters a sense of belonging within their community of peers (Blimling, 2015; Upcraft et al., 2005). Specifically, for first-generation college students during their first year of college, the college residential experience facilitates a natural support system for this student population as they navigate the college experience and adjust to college (Blimling, 2015). Even so, existing literature does not address the impact of the roommate pairing on social integration for first-generation college students during their first year of college.

In the current study, as an outcome of participants' input and experiences, the category of social integration was described through the participants' involvement in the First-Generation Student Club, on-campus and off-campus employment, responsibilities at home, their change or no change of roommate, and the influence of roommate pairing. The majority of survey respondents (81%) were not members of the First-Generation Student Club. One participant

shared that the First-Generation Student Club was a new club just beginning at UX, so this may be one explanation for low participation rates. Additionally, the survey data showed that most participants were not employed during their first year of college; this included both on-campus (81%) and off-campus (68%) employment. These employment rates are higher than rates demonstrated in recent research; the Center for First-Generation Student Success recently reported 44% of first-generation college students were not employed during the academic year (RTI International, 2019a). In addition, the survey data showed only a marginal difference among participants when asked about responsibilities at home during their first year of college with 49% of participants having responsibilities at home. Another variable of social integration was the college roommate experience. Most participants (83%) did not change roommates during their first year of college. Furthermore, the margins were minimal when participants were asked about their roommate experience. Participants reported that their roommate experience was better than expected (38%), worse than expected (32%), or was what they expected (30%). Additionally, 40% of survey respondents reported that their roommate positively influenced their first year and 41% reported their roommate had no influence on their first year. One interview participant felt that she and her roommate both experienced positive assimilation into the college community. She shared about their friendship and how they both had other friend groups that included both continuing-generation students and first-generation students. Another participant recognized that a negative experience with her first roommate pushed her to get out of her residence hall room and get involved on campus. The same participant spoke of shared interests with her second roommate and how they always did things together. Similarly, one participant also shared that his roommate experience pushed him to get involved on campus and make friends outside of his residence hall. One participant shared that her parents encouraged her to

get involved on campus since they did not have a college experience. Another participant shared that her roommate experience allowed her to meet students in different majors.

As demonstrated in Table 5, the category of social integration was partially measured by the survey respondents' involvement in the First-Generation Student Club, on-campus and off-campus employment, responsibilities at home, their change or no change of roommate, and the influence of roommate pairing. In addition, interview participants shared their perception of their continuing-generation roommate's influence on their social integration. Participants in this study discussed their involvement on campus during their first year of college and how their assimilation into the campus community was a positive experience. Although the survey data recognized some connection between social integration and roommate pairing, it was more apparent in the interview responses. Whether the roommate experience was positive or negative, all interview participants expressed positive social integration during their first year of college. These results contradict existing literature that recognizes the difficulty first-generation college students have with "navigating the social environment of university" (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017, p. 40). Previous studies conducted by Engle and Tinto (2008) also "showed that first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the social experiences of the university" (as cited in Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017, p. 40). However, these results do align with existing literature that recognizes the college residential experience facilitates a natural support system for first-generation college students as they navigate the college experience and adjust to college (Blimling, 2015). Previous research does not inform us on the influences of intergenerational roommate pairings. The findings of this study demonstrated a direct influence of intergenerational roommate pairings. The first-generation participants recognized the influence of their continuing-generation roommate on their social integration at the university.

Table 5

<i>Category of Social Integration and Survey Responses</i>	
Variable	Percentage of Responses
First-Generation Student Club Involvement	
Yes	19%
No	81%
On-Campus Employment	
Yes	19%
No	81%
Off-Campus Employment	
Yes	32%
No	68%
Responsibilities at Home	
Yes	49%
No	51%
Change of Roommate	
Yes	17%
No	83%
Roommate Experience	
My roommate experience was better than I expected	38%
My roommate experience was worse than I expected	32%
My roommate experience was what I expected	30%
Roommate Influence	
My roommate positively influenced my first year	40%
My roommate negatively influence my first year	19%
My roommate had no influence on my first year	41%

Retention

In this study, retention was identified as a variable for influence by a first-generation college student's roommate pairing during the first year of college. Previous research shows first-generation college students are less likely to persist to graduation than their continuing-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In fact, a previous study conducted by Engle and Tinto (2008) found "only 11% of first-generation students earn a bachelor's degree after six years of higher education, compared to 55% of continuing-generation students" (as cited in Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017, p. 40). The persistence and college degree attainment gaps between first-generation and continuing-generation college students continue to be apparent (Means & Pyne,

2017). Although recent research demonstrates a narrowing of this gap, the Center for First-Generation Student Success recently reported a 9% gap for “bachelor’s degree students who persisted at their first institution after the first year” at private, not-for-profit, four-year institutions (RTI International, 2019b). Existing literature also recognized the residential experience influences a student’s demonstrated level of persistence and continuous college enrollment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Purdie & Rosser, 2011). However, current literature does not address the impact of the roommate pairing on retention for first-generation college students during their first year of college.

In the current study, as an outcome of participants’ input and experiences, the category of retention was measured by the participants’ plans to graduate from UX, their return to UX for the current academic year (2019-2020), and the influence of roommate pairing. All participants had returned to UX for a second year and all participants planned to graduate from UX. One interview participant spoke about her connections to her college friends and professors as a reason for her retention. Similarly, another participant also shared that her connections with friends and her roommate, as well as the feel of community, were reasons for her retention. Another participant spoke about her involvement on campus and the support she had from her parents and the college community. Likewise, one participant also shared his parents’ encouragement and his connections to the campus community as reasons for his retention. One participant recognized her close connection with her roommate and the support she felt from her roommate.

As demonstrated in Table 6, the category of retention was partially measured by the survey respondents’ plans to graduate from UX and their return to UX for the current academic year (2019-2020). In addition, interview participants shared their perception of their continuing-

generation roommate's influence on their retention. Participants discussed feelings of connections when describing their reasons for retention. Most interview participants attributed their retention to their involvement with and connection to the campus community. Some participants recognized connections with college friends and some participants recognized connections with the campus community, including faculty and staff. In addition, some participants identified their parents as influencers on their retention. Two participants specifically recognized their roommates as an influence on their retention. These results align with existing literature, specifically Tinto's (1993) student departure theory that recognized the higher the level of integration, the higher the level of probability of persistence and retention (Upcraft et al., 2005; Winston et al., 1993). Existing literature also recognizes that a student's level of persistence is shaped by their connection to the institution and their community of peer learners (Blimling, 2015). Previous research does not inform us on the influences of intergenerational roommate pairings. The findings of this study demonstrated some influence of intergenerational roommate pairings. The first-generation participants recognized their connections to the institution (faculty and staff) and to their community of peers (college friends and roommates) as an influence on their retention.

Table 6

<i>Category of Retention and Survey Responses</i>	
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Percentage of Responses</i>
Return for second year	
Yes	100%
No	0%
Plan to graduate from UX	
Yes	100%
No	0%

Student Development

In this study, student development was identified as a variable for influence by a first-generation college student's roommate pairing during the first year of college. Existing literature suggests that the roommate experience has the potential to nurture academic, cognitive, and psychosocial development (Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004). More so, student development occurs beyond the classroom and often within student housing (Blimling, 2015; Kuh et al., 2017). Previous research demonstrated roommate pairings have the capability to influence the first-generation college students' progress on their educational journey (Blimling, 2015). Regardless, a gap in literature remains surrounding the understanding of the impact of the roommate pairing on student development for first-generation college students during their first year of college.

In the current study, as an outcome of participants' input and experiences, the category of student development included the participants' development in the areas of competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, mature interpersonal relationships, identity, purpose, and integrity (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). Participants also referenced the influence of roommate pairing when reflecting on their student development progress during their first year of college.

Competence. Survey responses demonstrated marginal differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their development of competence during their first year of college: 47% felt that their roommate had no influence, 11% felt that their roommate had some influence, 23% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 11% felt that their roommate had a lot of influence, and 8% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. One participant felt that both he and his roommate contributed to this variable and shared how they both had

different skill sets and knowledge coming into their first year of college. Another participant shared how her roommate's weakness in this area increased her personal awareness and encouraged growth. One participant discussed her personal awareness of herself and her ability to influence others. Additionally, one participant shared that her roommate's interest in her academic major fostered growth in the area of competence. Another participant spoke of her roommate's influence on her ability to navigate college during her first year of college. While a small majority of participants felt their roommate had no influence on their development of competence, some interview participants perceived an impact from their roommate pairing.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the subcategory of competence was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of competence during their first year of college. A large minority (47%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their development of competence. The remaining participants, a small majority (53%), perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their development of competence.

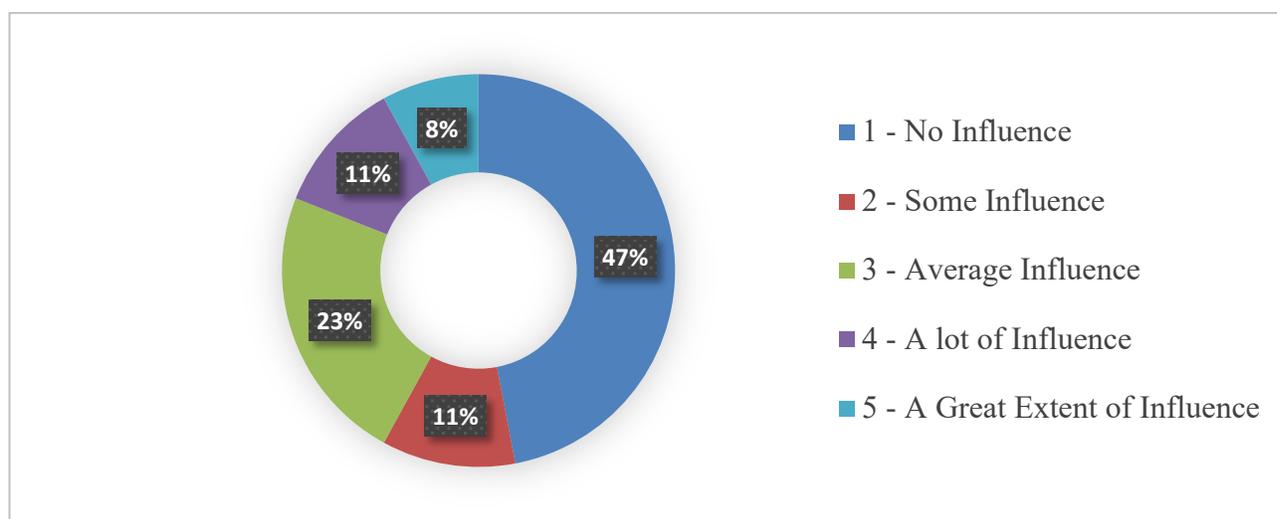


Figure 3. The survey participants' perceived impact of roommate pairing on their development of competence.

As demonstrated in Table 7, the subcategory of competence was partially measured by the interview participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of competence during their first year of college. Table 7 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 7, the participants' perceived impact of environment changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants' responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 7

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Development of Competence

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	5 – A Great Extent of Influence	Ruby discussed her personal awareness of herself and her ability to influence others.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth felt that her roommate's interest in her academic major fostered growth in the area of competence.
Luke	2 – Some Influence	Luke felt that he and his roommate both contributed to one another's development of competence.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera felt that her first roommate had no influence, but her second roommate helped her understand college life.
Lacy	1 – No Influence	Lacy felt that her roommate experience fostered personal awareness and encouraged growth.

Emotions. Survey responses demonstrated nominal differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their ability to manage their emotions during their first year of college: 32% felt that their roommate had no influence, 19% felt that their roommate had some influence,

21% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 15% felt that their roommate had a lot of influence, and 13% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. One participant described feelings of support and encouragement from her roommate when her emotions were heightened due to worry and stress. Another participant felt that her roommate helped her manage emotions when she was overwhelmingly stressed. Likewise, one participant recognized her roommate's influence on her ability to manage emotions when she was experiencing relationship issues or homesickness. However, one participant described his roommate as an overly emotional person and did not recognize any roommate influence on his ability to manage emotions during his first year of college. Another participant shared how her friend groups helped her manage and balance emotions instead of her roommate. While a small majority of survey respondents felt that their roommate had no influence on their ability to manage emotions, interview participants were mixed. All but two interview participants perceived an impact from their roommate pairing on their ability to manage emotions.

As demonstrated in Figure 4, the subcategory of emotions was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their ability to manage emotions during their first year of college. A minority of participants (32%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their ability to manage emotions. The remaining participants (68%) perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their ability to manage emotions.

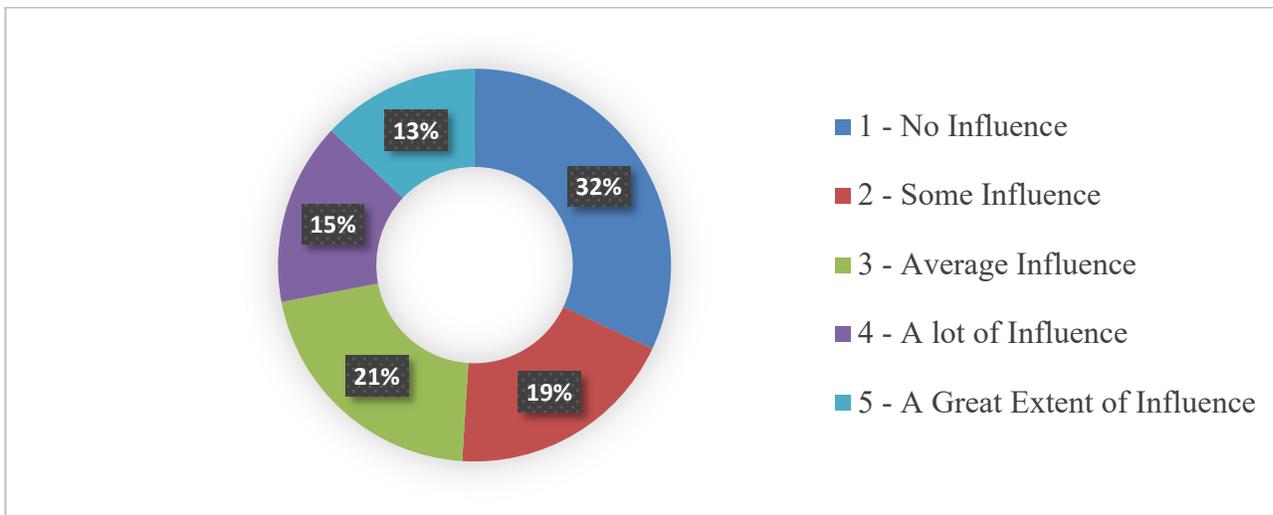


Figure 4. The survey participants' perceived impact of roommate pairing on their ability to manage emotions.

As demonstrated in Table 8, the subcategory of emotions was partially measured by the interview participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their ability to manage emotions during their first year of college. Table 8 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 8, the participants' perceived impact changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants' responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 8

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Ability to Manage Emotions

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruby felt support and encouragement from her roommate when her emotions were heightened due to worry and stress.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth felt that her roommate helped her manage emotions when she was overwhelmingly stressed.
Luke	2 – Some Influence	Luke did not recognize any roommate influence on his ability to manage emotions during his first year of college.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera felt her roommate influenced her ability to manage emotions when she was experiencing relationship issues or homesickness.
Lacy	2 – Some Influence	Lacy felt that other friend groups helped her manage and balance emotions instead of her roommate.

Autonomy toward interdependence. Survey responses demonstrated minimal differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their move through autonomy toward interdependence during their first year of college: 40% felt that their roommate had no influence, 21% felt that their roommate had some influence, 9% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 19% felt that their roommate had a lot of influence, and 11% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. One participant spoke of her transition from being an only child to living with a roommate once at college. She spoke of adjusting to living with a roommate and how her roommate helped her navigate college. Another participant described how her roommate helped her stay on track with classes and assignments. The same participant also shared that the roommate experience helped her recognize when she needed help and that it was okay to ask for help. One participant recognized growth in this area from observing his

roommate. He recognized the importance of being independent while also needing a support system. Additionally, one participant felt that she was more of an influence on her roommate in this area due to personal situations and needing to learn interdependence early in life. Another participant made a small connection of growth in this area with her roommate experience but stated that she sought help and guidance outside of this experience. A small majority of interview participants perceived an impact from their roommate pairing on their move through autonomy toward interdependence while most survey respondents did not.

As demonstrated in Figure 5, the subcategory of autonomy toward interdependence was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their move through autonomy toward interdependence during their first year of college. A minority of participants (40%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their move through autonomy toward interdependence. The remaining participants, a slight majority (60%), perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their move through autonomy toward interdependence.

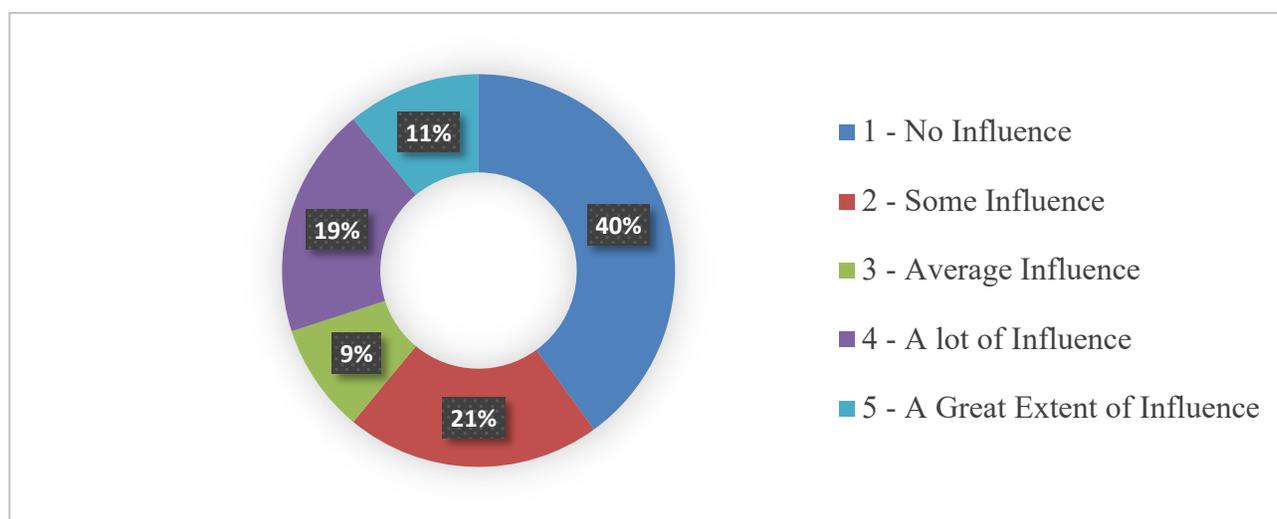


Figure 5. The survey participants' perceived impact of roommate pairing on their development of moving through autonomy toward interdependence.

As demonstrated in Table 9, the subcategory of autonomy toward interdependence was partially measured by the interview participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their move through autonomy toward interdependence during their first year of college. Table 9 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 9, the participants' perceived impact changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants' responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 9

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Development of Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	5 – A Great Extent of Influence	Ruby felt that she was more of an influence on her roommate due to personal situations and needing to learn interdependence early in life.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth felt that her roommate helped her stay on track with classes and assignments and helped her recognize when she needed help and that it was okay to ask for help.
Luke	2 – Some Influence	Luke recognized the importance of being independent while also needing a support system from observing his roommate.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera spoke of adjusting to living with a roommate and felt that her roommate helped her navigate college.
Lacy	1 – No Influence	Lacy made a small connection of growth due to her roommate experience but stated that she sought help and guidance outside of this experience.

Interpersonal relationships. Survey responses demonstrated moderate differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their development of mature interpersonal relationships during their first year of college: 42% felt that their roommate had no influence, 9% felt that their roommate had some influence, 15% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 26% felt that their roommate had a lot of influence, and 8% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. One participant recognized the influence of faculty and staff more so than her roommate's influence on her development of mature interpersonal relationships. Similarly, another participant felt that she sought mature interpersonal relationships elsewhere on campus since she did not have that sort of relationship with her roommate. Additionally, one participant believed his leadership positions on campus influenced his development in this area. Another participant did recognize an impact from her roommate on her development of mature interpersonal relationships. Additionally, one participant also spoke of how her roommate experience was an example of a surface level friendship that developed into a mature interpersonal relationship. Both survey and interview responses demonstrated an inconsistent perception of the roommate pairing's influence on their development of mature interpersonal relationships.

As demonstrated in Figure 6, the subcategory of mature interpersonal relationships was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of mature interpersonal relationships during their first year of college. A minority of participants (42%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their development of mature interpersonal relationships. The remaining participants, a slight majority (58%), perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their development of mature interpersonal relationships.

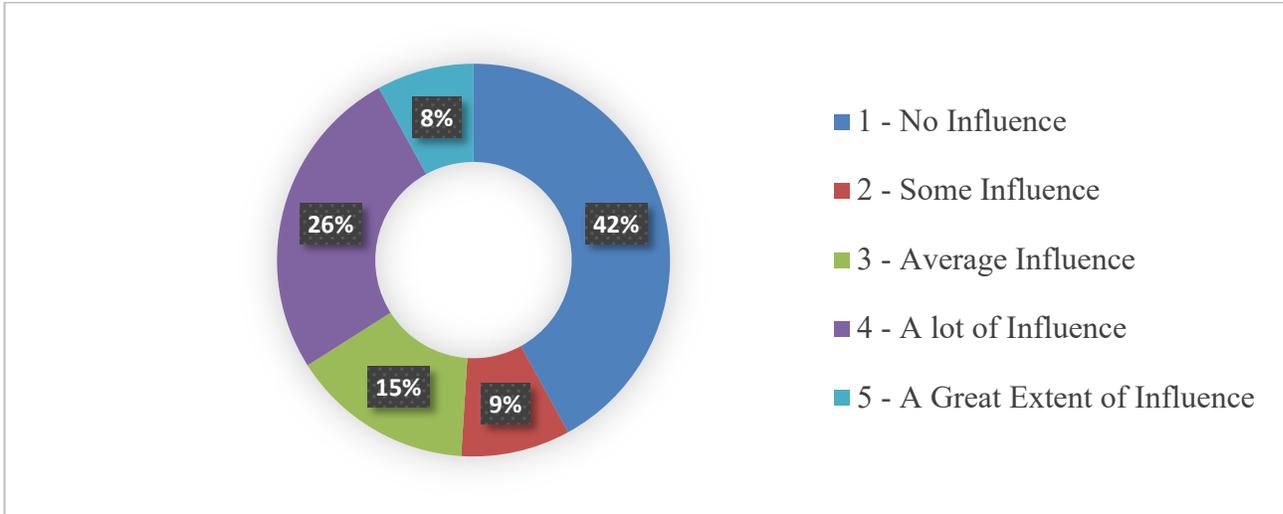


Figure 6. The survey participants’ perceived impact of roommate pairing on their development of mature interpersonal relationships.

As demonstrated in Table 10, the subcategory of mature interpersonal relationships was partially measured by the interview participants’ perceived impact of their roommate’s influence on their development of mature interpersonal relationships during their first year of college. Table 10 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 10, the participants’ perceived impact changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants’ responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 10

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Development of Mature Interpersonal Relationships

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	3 – Average Influence	Ruby recognized the influence of faculty and staff more so than her roommate's influence.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth recognized an impact from her roommate on her development of mature interpersonal.
Luke	4 – A lot of Influence	Luke believed his leadership positions on campus influenced his development in this area.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera spoke of how her roommate experience was an example of a surface level friendship that developed into a mature interpersonal relationship.
Lacy	1 – No Influence	Lacy felt that she sought mature interpersonal relationships elsewhere on campus since she did not have that sort of relationship with her roommate.

Identity. Survey responses demonstrated moderate differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their establishment of identity during their first year of college: 46% felt that their roommate had no influence, 15% felt that their roommate had some influence, 13% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 13% felt that their roommate had a lot of influence, and 13% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. One participant recognized personal growth during her first year of college and attributed her new friendships as a contributing factor. Another participant discussed the differences between herself and her roommate as an influencing variable on her identity. One participant described a roommate experience that fostered self-discovery and a new comfort with herself. Additionally, another participant felt that her roommate influenced her identity establishment by supporting and caring for her as a person. Another participant recognized that the differences between himself and his

roommate impacted the establishment of his identity. He referenced how the shared living experience influenced individual identity. While most of the survey respondents did not perceive an impact of the roommate pairing on the establishment of identity, most of the interview participants did perceive an impact and connected their identity establishment with the roommate experience.

As demonstrated in Figure 7, the subcategory of identity was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their establishment of identity during their first year of college. A large minority of participants (46%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their establishment of identity. The remaining participants, a small majority (54%), perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their establishment of identity.

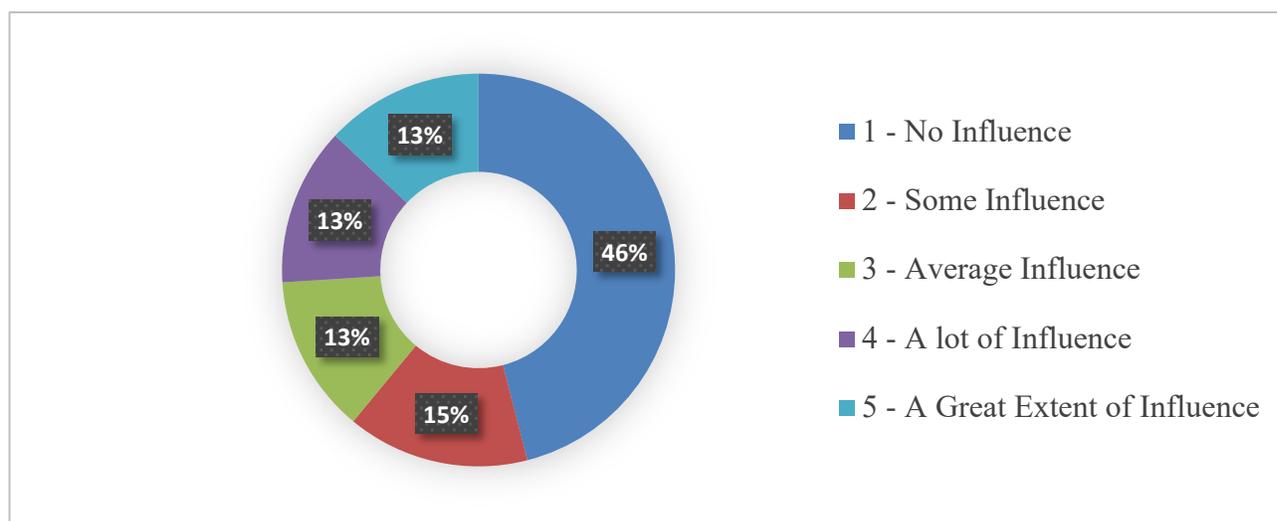


Figure 7. The survey participants' perceived impact of roommate pairing on their establishment of identity.

As demonstrated in Table 11, the subcategory of identity was partially measured by the interview participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their establishment of identity during their first year of college. Table 11 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 11, the

participants' perceived impact changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants' responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 11

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Establishment of Identity

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruby felt that her roommate influenced her identity establishment by supporting and caring for her as a person.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth recognized personal growth and attributed her new friendships as a contributing factor.
Luke	2 – Some Influence	Luke recognized how the shared living experience influenced individual identity.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera felt her roommate experience fostered self-discovery and a new comfort with herself.
Lacy	3 – Average Influence	Lacy recognized the differences between herself and her roommate as an influencing variable on her identity.

Purpose. Survey responses demonstrated differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their development of purpose during their first year of college: 49% felt that their roommate had no influence, 11% felt that their roommate had some influence, 15% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 11% felt that their roommate had a lot of influence, and 14% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. Almost half of the survey respondents felt that their roommate had no influence (49%) on their development of purpose. One participant described that the development of her purpose was greater because of the confidence that her roommate had in her own purpose. Another participant felt a sense of

responsibility for her roommate and used that as a source of purpose during her first year of college. One participant felt that her roommate's presence and accountability was an influence on the development of her purpose. Another participant described her roommate experience and the confidence she had gained during the experience. She described her purpose through tangible tasks and accomplishments. Additionally, another participant recognized how his roommate influenced his development of purpose as it related to his academic goals. Many of the survey respondents felt that their roommate had no influence on their development of purpose; however, all interview participants perceived some impact from their roommate pairing on their development of purpose.

As demonstrated in Figure 8, the subcategory of purpose was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of purpose during their first year of college. A large minority of participants (49%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their development of purpose. The remaining participants (51%) perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their development of purpose.

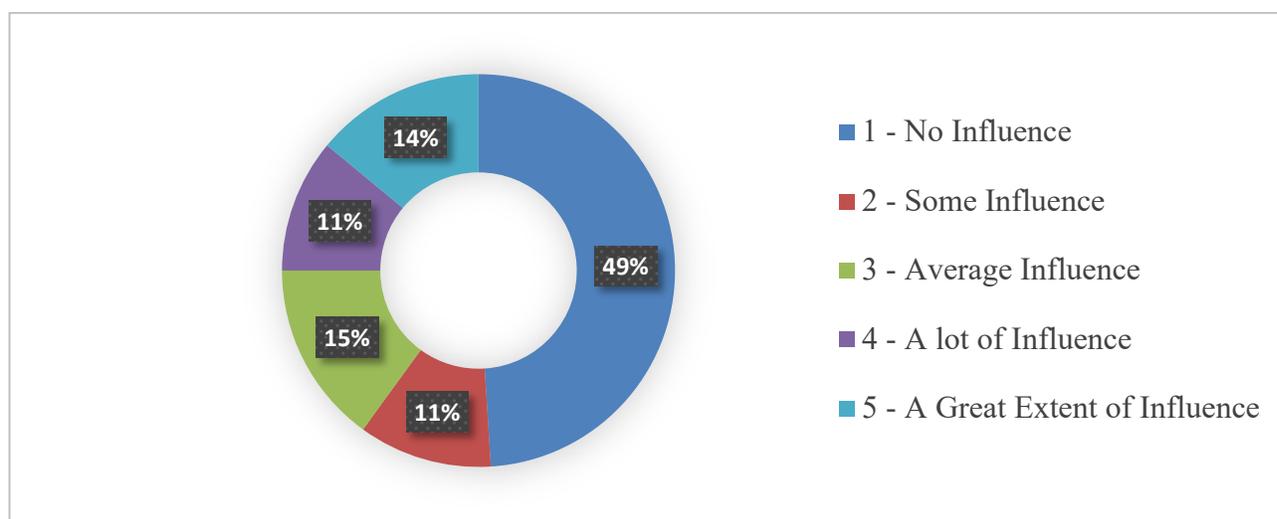


Figure 8. The survey participants' perceived impact of roommate pairing on their development of purpose.

As demonstrated in Table 12, the subcategory of purpose was partially measured by the interview participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of purpose during their first year of college. Table 12 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 12, the participants' perceived impact changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants' responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 12

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Development of Purpose

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	5 – A Great Extent of Influence	Ruby felt a sense of responsibility for her roommate and used that as a source of purpose.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth felt that her roommate's presence and accountability was an influence.
Luke	3 – Average Influence	Luke recognized how his roommate influenced his identity establishment as it related to his academic goals.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera described her roommate experience and the confidence she gained during the experience.
Lacy	4 – A lot of Influence	Lacy felt her development was greater because of the confidence that her roommate had in her own purpose.

Integrity. Survey responses demonstrated nominal differences when asked about their roommate's influence on their development of integrity during their first year of college: 44% felt that their roommate had no influence, 11% felt that their roommate had some influence, 11% felt that their roommate had an average influence, 23% felt that their roommate had a lot of

influence, and 11% felt that their roommate had a great extent of influence. One participant spoke of his roommate experience in addition to his overall college experience and described the importance of being genuine and true to oneself. Similarly, another participant described elements of sharing a room with her roommate and recognizing the importance of being true to oneself. Another participant described her roommate's influence on her self-discovery and how their relationship influenced her development of integrity. One participant spoke about her roommate's impact on her spiritual growth. Additionally, another participant recognized both a positive and negative impact from her roommate experience. The participant described differences in the rigor of their academic majors as an influence on her development of integrity. Both survey and interview responses demonstrated an inconsistent perception of the roommate pairing's influence on their development of integrity.

As demonstrated in Figure 9, the subcategory of integrity was partially measured by the survey participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of integrity during their first year of college. A minority of participants (44%) perceived their roommate had no influence on their development of integrity. The remaining participants, a slight majority (56%), perceived their roommate had some to a lot of influence on their development of integrity.

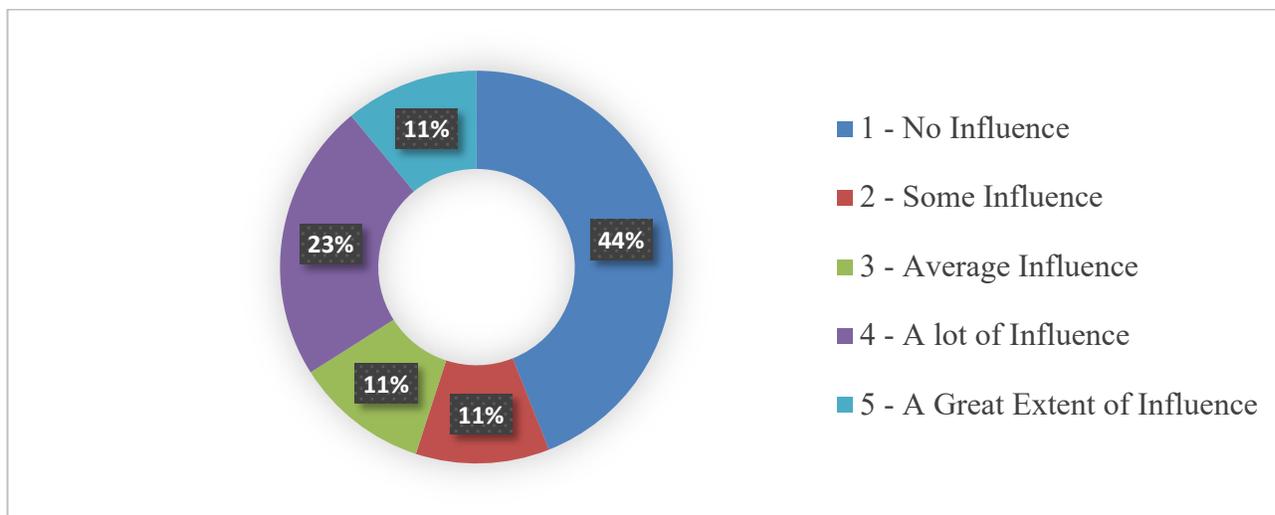


Figure 9. The survey participants' perceived impact of roommate pairing on their development of integrity.

As demonstrated in Table 13, the subcategory of integrity was partially measured by the interview participants' perceived impact of their roommate's influence on their development of integrity during their first year of college. Table 13 illustrates the responses of the interview participants for both the survey and the follow-up interview. As depicted in Table 13, the participants' perceived impact changed from the time of the survey to the follow-up interview. The researcher believes the interview participants' responses changed once the participants reflected on their roommate experience and were given the opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences.

Table 13

Interview Participants' Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairing on their Development of Integrity

Participant	Survey Response	Interview Response
Ruby	5 – A Great Extent of Influence	Ruby spoke about her roommate's impact on her spiritual growth.
Ruth	4 – A lot of Influence	Ruth recognized both a positive and negative impact from her roommate experience and described differences in the rigor of their academic majors as an influence on her development of integrity.
Luke	3 – Average Influence	Luke described the importance of being genuine and true to oneself.
Vera	1 – No Influence	Vera described her roommate's influence on her self-discovery and how their relationship influenced her development of integrity.
Lacy	4 – A lot of Influence	Lacy described elements of sharing a room with her roommate and recognized the importance of being true to oneself.

Astin's (1993) I-E-O model was used in this study to understand the perceived effect of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). Each participant expressed their perceived impact of their roommate pairing as it related to the categories of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development. Very little literature currently exists concerning the intentional roommate pairings of first-generation college students with continuing-generation college students (Blimling, 2015; Padgett et al., 2012).

Overall, the primary finding of this study revealed a mixed opinion concerning the perceived impact of pairing roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of

college. The findings of this study demonstrated an indirect influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on the academic success of the first-generation participants. The first-generation participants recognized their academic disadvantages through the observations of their roommates. The findings of this study demonstrated a direct influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on the social integration of the first-generation participants. The first-generation participants recognized the influence of their continuing-generation roommate on their social integration at the university. The findings of this study demonstrated some influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on the retention of the first-generation participants. The first-generation participants recognized their connections to the institution and to their community of peers as an influence on their retention. The findings of this study demonstrated inconsistencies concerning the influence of intergenerational roommate pairings on the student development of the first-generation participants. Survey data of all 53 participants demonstrated a small majority of participants felt that their roommate pairing had *some to a great extent* of influence on their student development, specifically their development in the areas of competence, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, mature interpersonal relationships, identity, purpose, and integrity. For the area of managing emotions, survey data of all 53 participants demonstrated mixed results of perceived impact of their roommate pairing. The results of the survey data are inconsistent with the interview data. Interview data of all five interview participants demonstrated a small majority of participants felt that their roommate pairing had *some to a great extent* of influence on their student development, specifically their development in the areas of competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, identity, purpose, and integrity. For the area of mature interpersonal relationships, interview data of all five interview participants demonstrated mixed results of

perceived impact of their roommate pairing. Figure 10 illustrates the perceived levels of influence of roommate pairings on the seven areas of student development as shared by the five interview participants in their follow-up interviews. Figure 11 illustrates the perceived levels of influence of roommate pairings on the seven areas of student development as reported by all 53 survey participants.

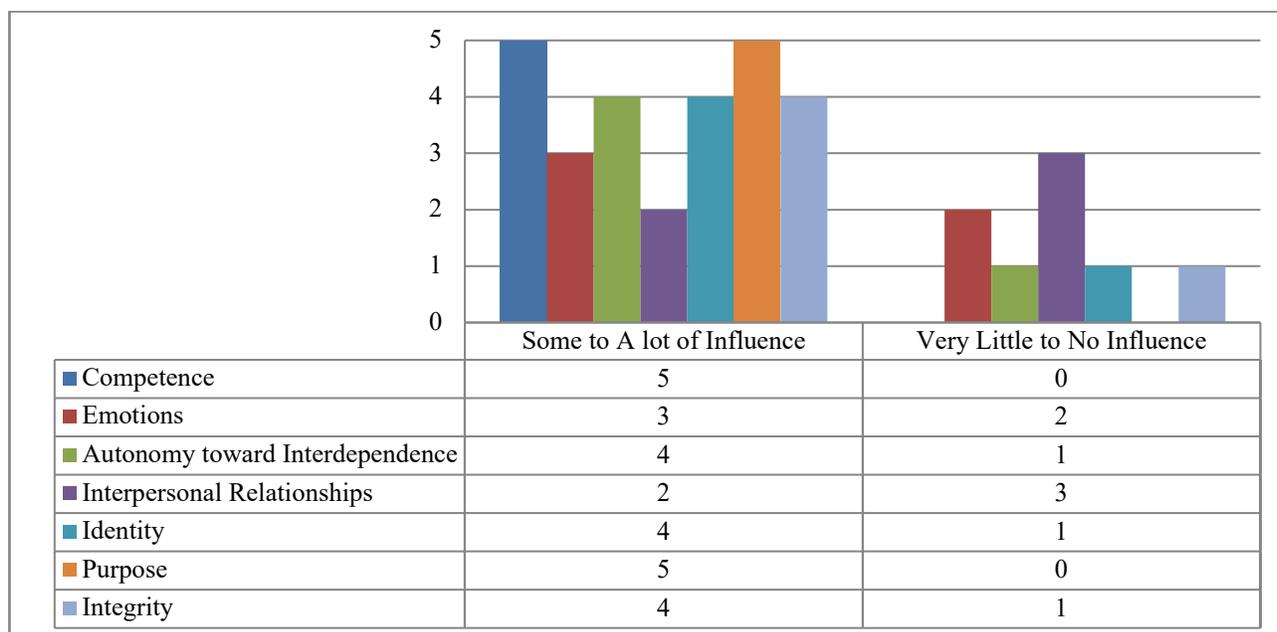


Figure 10. The seven areas of student development and the perceived impact of roommate pairing from the five interview participants.

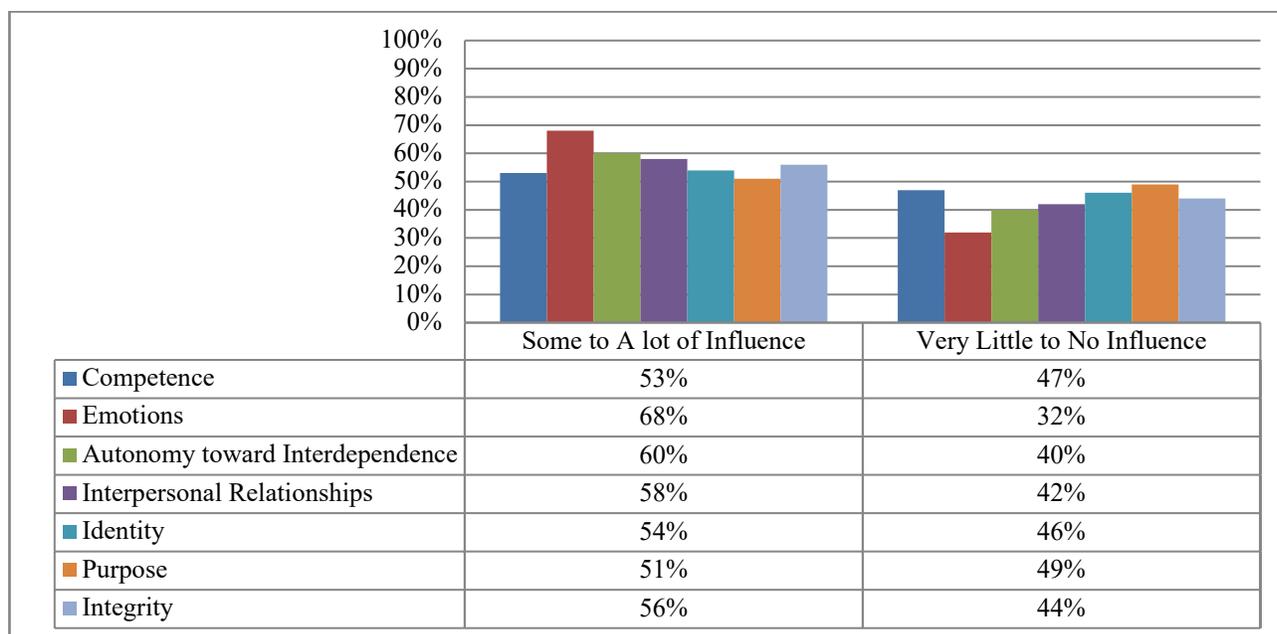


Figure 11. The seven areas of student development and the perceived impact of roommate pairing from all 53 survey participants.

Implications

First-generation college students have a different college experience than their continuing-generation peers (Whitley et al., 2018). This study used the conceptual framework of Astin's (1993) I-E-O model to understand the perceived effect of roommate pairings within university housing as shared with the researcher by first-generation college students paired with continuing-generation college students during their first year of college (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). Both roommates were first-year college students but with different generational statuses. The primary finding of this study revealed a mixed opinion concerning the perceived impact of pairing roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of college. The findings of this study are important as the number of first-generation college students on college campuses represent one-third of the student population (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 13). First-generation college students demonstrate a need for support as they navigate college during the first year (Blimling, 2015; Upcraft et al.,

2005). While a small majority of survey participants felt that their roommate pairing had *some to a great extent* of influence on their student development, the majority of this study's interview participants felt support and encouragement from their continuing-generation roommates. The findings of this research are an important resource to higher education professionals, including student services and residence life and housing. Leaders in higher education are exploring practices to meet the needs of first-generation college students (Kuh et al., 2017; Padgett et al., 2012; Toutkoushian et al., 2019). Even though this study was conducted at a private, faith-based, liberal arts university, the findings may be applicable to other institutions of higher learning with a residential environment. The findings may bring awareness to the lived experiences of first-generation college students and their perceptions of the impact of roommate pairings. By doing so, the findings may assist practitioners in understanding the perceived effects of roommate pairings. The findings suggest that generational status may not be as influential as other variables when determining roommate pairings. Furthermore, the lived experiences of the participants in this study may assist administrators and educators in a better understanding of how to support this student population and has the potential to improve the residential experience. These implications influence both the recommendations for action and recommendations for further study.

Recommendations for Action

This study examined the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. This study recognized that the pairing of roommates was done at random by the institution and both roommates in each roommate pairing were first-year students. The results of this study revealed a mixed opinion of the perceived impact of pairing

roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of college. The findings of this study suggest first-generation college students benefit from a roommate experience that is supportive and from a thriving connection to the university and its community. Acknowledging that students are the most important stakeholders at institutions of higher education, it is important for practitioners to examine the overall student experience when implementing and designing new initiatives. Therefore, the researcher suggests a review of institutional roommate pairing processes and proposes increased collaboration in educational programming as the recommendations for action.

Roommate Pairing Processes

Existing literature claims that an intentional focus on the design and contributing components of the roommate pairing process can enhance the college residential experience and foster development among residential students regardless of roommate pairing criterion (Hudson, 2018; Upcraft et al., 2005). Prior studies also claim that “roommate relationships significantly affect students in their overall satisfaction and success” (Coleman, 2006, as cited in Logan & Roberts, 2013, p. 108). Considering the research findings and existing literature, the researcher suggests a review of institutional roommate pairing processes to determine the efficacy of generational status among roommate pairings. The results of this study revealed mixed opinions concerning the perceived impact of pairing roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of college, but nonetheless there was some perceived influence on the participants’ academic success, social integration, retention, and student development. Even so, there remains a lack of research surrounding other roommate pairing conditions. Therefore, residence life and housing practitioners may want to consider a variety of commonalities among students when creating roommate pairings. To include the possibility of extending the focus to a collective

group of roommate pairings within a larger community, such as those seen in living-learning communities and special-interest communities. Pairing students of same generational status within a special-interest community may offer students with a common experience and educators with the opportunity to provide additional support to this specific student population. Enhancing the residential experience for first-generation college students through an intentional residential experience is believed to have positive effects on retention, persistence, and graduation rates, as well as influence the personal growth of first-generation college students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Purdie & Rosser, 2011). By focusing on other roommate pairing identifiers, this student population may demonstrate greater achievements in the areas of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development.

Collaboration in Educational Programming

Existing literature claims “intervention programs for first-generation students should include an academic integration component” due to the academic disadvantages first-generation students experience as they navigate college (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017, p. 40). Due to the research findings and existing literature, the researcher suggests collaboration among academic services and student services. Participants expressed a visible difference between themselves and their continuing-generation roommates in academic preparedness. First-generation college students demonstrate a need for support but are using student services at a lesser percentage than their continuing-generation peers (RTI International, 2019c). Partnerships between academic services and student services would allow professionals to join efforts and work alongside one another to better support first-generation college students. Outside-of-classroom, student-learning experiences such as organized educational programming provide the opportunity to develop campus partnerships while meeting educational goals (Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, &

Kimmel, 2017). Such programming and partnerships can meet the needs of this student population as they experience college for the first time. Intentional programming efforts within university housing contribute to the development of the student, both academically and personally (Blimling, 2015; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Kuh et al., 2017). By focusing educational programming on first-generation college students, increases in the areas of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development may be demonstrated and “can be an integral part of institutional efforts to promote ... student success” (Upcraft et al., 2005, p. 426).

Recommendations for Further Study

This study focused on first-generation college students and their roommate pairing with continuing-generation college students. Specifically, this study focused on the impact as perceived by the first-generation college student. To expand on this research, the impact as perceived by the continuing-generation college student could be examined in future studies.

To better understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings, the researcher recommends additional study examining other roommate pairings. Further studies could examine the perceived impact of roommate pairing among roommates of the same generation status:

- Pairing first-generation college students together.
- Pairing continuing-generation college students together.

This study was conducted using the definition of first-generation college student as a student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) did not attain a bachelor’s degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). It did not capture the influence of older siblings in college. Therefore, additional studies could examine the experiences of first-generation college students that have siblings with some college experience and their perceived impact.

This study examined the perceived impact on the overall first-year experience. Future studies could focus on specific areas of the first-year experience and the perceived impact of roommate pairings. In addition, future studies could examine the experiences of first-generation college students through the lens of social learning theory to better understand the perceived impact through observation. Lastly, the same study could be used at different institutions to examine the perceived impact of roommate pairings on larger campuses and/or public institutions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine students' perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience. Furthermore, this research sought to fill gaps in existing literature concerning the influence of the residential experience on first-generation college students. Focusing on roommate pairings, the results revealed mixed opinions on the perceived impact of pairing roommates of different generational statuses during the first year of college for first-generation students. These perceptions were analyzed using the predetermined categories of academic success, social integration, retention, and student development (Astin, 2001; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005). These results are significant for residence life and housing professionals as they provide insight on student perceptions and inform practitioners as they aim to meet the needs of first-generation college students. This study captured and shared the stories of its participants and their lived experiences as first-generation college students living with randomly assigned continuing-generation roommates.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

My name is Jodie Gay, and I am a Doctor of Education candidate at the University of New England. My dissertation topic is “First-Generation College Students: Examining the Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairings”. My interest in this topic is a result of 13+ years in the field of residence life and housing. Additionally, my interest in this topic stems from my own experience as a first-generation college student and the benefits experienced from the residential college experience.

I am looking for second-year students to participate in my dissertation research. To be eligible to participate in the study you must meet the following criteria:

- Identify as a first-generation college student (a college student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) did not earn a college degree),
- Have lived on campus in a traditional residence hall for at least one academic year,
- Have lived with a roommate whose parent(s) attended college and earned a college degree,
- Be enrolled full-time as an undergraduate student, and
- Be 18 years of age or older.

To participate in my dissertation research, please complete the survey by clicking on this link: <https://redcap.une.edu/redcap/surveys/?s=ENY9MAHHX9>. The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes. For more information about my dissertation research, click on the survey link. After learning about the study, you may choose to continue with the survey or exit and not participate.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with my dissertation.

Jodie Gay
jhurley4@une.edu

APPENDIX B: SURVEY WITH INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN ANONYMOUS SURVEY RESEARCH

Project Title: Dissertation Survey - First-Generation College Students: Examining the Perceived Impact of Roommate Pairings

Principal Investigator(s): Jodie R. H. Gay, Doctor of Education Candidate, University of New England

Introduction:

- Please read this form. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete.
- Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived impact of roommate pairings within university housing, specifically the first-generation college students' residential experience and its influence on their first-year experience.

Who will be in this study?

- Participants will identify as a first-generation college student (a college student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) did not earn a college degree).
- Participants will have lived on campus in a traditional residence hall for at least one academic year (fall/spring semesters).
- Participants must have lived with a roommate whose parent(s) attended college and earned a college degree.
- Participants must be enrolled as full-time undergraduate students.
- Participants must be 18 years of age or older.

What will I be asked to do?

- Students will be asked to complete a survey focused on their experiences living on campus and living with a roommate.
- The survey will contain both closed-ended and open-ended questions.
- The survey will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.
- You have the freedom to skip/decline any question.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks and/or discomforts that may result from participation in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- There is no direct benefit for participation in this study.

What will it cost me?

There are no costs associated with the participation in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- This study is designed to be confidential.
- Responses will be confidential and only available to those involved in the research study (the researcher, the researcher's dissertation committee, and the University of New England's Institutional Review Board).
- Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym to further remove any individual identifiers from the research and its findings.
- Please note that the UNE Institutional Review Board may review the research records.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- This survey is confidential. Any information that can identify you will not be used in reporting this study, and you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your privacy.
- All research files and collected data will be managed by the researcher, as well as stored in an electronic format with password protection.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Jodie Gay. For questions or more information concerning this study you may contact her at (919) 631-0276 or jhurley4@une.edu.
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Marylin Newell, Ph.D. at (207) 345-3100 or menewell@une.edu.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You may request a copy of this consent form from the researcher.

I understand the above description of the research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I understand that by proceeding with this survey I agree to take part in this research and do so voluntarily.

1. I have read the consent to participate
 - a. and I volunteer my consent for this study and will proceed to the survey.
 - b. and I do not volunteer my consent for this study and will not proceed to the survey.
2. Do you meet the following criteria for participation in this study?
 - Identify as a first-generation college student,
 - Have lived on campus in a traditional residence hall for at least one academic year,
 - Have lived with a roommate whose parent(s) attended college and earned a college degree,
 - Are enrolled as full-time undergraduate students, and
 - Are 18 years of age or older.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Participant Demographics

3. Age
 - a. 18 or younger
 - b. 19
 - c. 20
 - d. 21 or older
4. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
5. Racial/Ethnic Identification
 - a. American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - b. African American/Black
 - c. Asian
 - d. Pacific Islander
 - e. Hispanic/Latino(a)
 - f. Caucasian/White
 - g. Multi-Racial
 - h. Other: _____
6. How many semesters including this one, have you attended this university?
 - a. 1 semester

- b. 2 semesters
 - c. 3 semesters
 - d. 4 semesters
 - e. 5 semesters or more
7. What is your current status at this university?
- a. First-year student
 - b. Second-year student
 - c. Third-year student
 - d. Fourth-year student
8. Did you attend another college/university before attending this university?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. If yes to the previous question, what was your admittance status to this university?
- a. Dual enrolled in college courses while in high school
 - b. Early College
 - c. Transfer student from a junior college
 - d. Transfer student from a community college
 - e. Transfer student from another university

Environmental Experiences & Perceived Outcomes

10. Were you involved in the First-Generation Student Club during your first year at this university?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. Did you work on campus during your first year at this university?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
12. Did you work off campus during your first year at this university?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. Did you have responsibilities at home during your first year at this university?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. Did you change your academic major during your first year at this university?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
15. What was your Grade Point Average (GPA) at the end of your first year at this university?
- a. 4.0
 - b. 3.0-3.9
 - c. 2.0-2.9
 - d. 1.0-1.9
 - e. Less than a 1.0
16. Do you plan to graduate from this university?
- a. Yes

- b. No
17. How many semesters, including this one, have you lived on campus in a residence hall at this university?
- 1 semester
 - 2 semesters
 - 3 semesters
 - 4 semesters
 - 5 semesters or more
18. How would you describe your residence hall style during your first year living on campus at this university?
- Couplet Style – My roommate and I shared a bathroom with one other room.
 - Suite Style – My roommate and I shared a bathroom with 3-4 other rooms.
 - Hall Style – My roommate and I shared a bathroom with the whole hall.
19. How would you describe your roommate selection during your first year living on campus at this university?
- Random roommate – I was assigned to live with a random roommate.
 - Preferred roommate – I was assigned to live with a roommate that I requested.
20. Did your roommate's parent(s) graduate from this university?
- Yes
 - No
21. Did you change roommates during your first year at this university?
- Yes
 - No
22. If yes to the previous question, please describe why you changed roommates during your first year at this university?
23. How would you describe your roommate experience during your first year at this university?
- My roommate experience was what I expected
 - My roommate experience was better than I expected
 - My roommate experience was worse than I expected
24. How would you describe the influence of your roommate on your first year at this university?
- My roommate positively influenced my first year
 - My roommate negatively influenced my first year
 - My roommate had no influence on my first year

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent, how did your roommate help you to:

Develop competence?	1	2	3	4	5
Manage emotions?	1	2	3	4	5
Move through autonomy toward interdependence?	1	2	3	4	5
Develop mature interpersonal relationships?	1	2	3	4	5

Establish identity?	1	2	3	4	5
Develop purpose?	1	2	3	4	5
Developing integrity?	1	2	3	4	5

25. In your own words, how would you describe the impact of your roommate on your first year at this university?

Optional Interview

If you would like to participate in a follow-up interview, please complete the questions below. This interview will allow for the researcher to ask additional questions based on survey answers.

26. Would you like to participate in a follow-up interview?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If you indicated your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview in the previous question, please provide your contact information below.

First Name:

Last Name:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RQ: What effect do first-generation college students perceive being paired with continuing-generation students in university housing has on their overall first-year experience?

1. What does identifying as a first-generation college student mean to you?
2. Describe your residence hall experience.
3. Describe your roommate experience.
4. Describe your extracurricular experiences (clubs, work, etc.).
5. Do you feel that your roommate had an impact on your first-year experience?
 - a. If yes, how? If no, why not?
6. Do you feel that your first-year experience would have been different if your roommate had also identified as a first-generation college student?
 - a. If yes, how? If no, why not?
7. Please share an experience you had with your roommate based on your difference in generational status that influenced your:
 - a. Academic success?
 - b. Positive social integration?
 - c. Retention?
8. Do you feel that your roommate helped you:
 - a. Develop competence?
 - b. Manage emotions?
 - c. Move through autonomy toward interdependence?
 - d. Develop mature interpersonal relationships?
 - e. Establish identity?
 - f. Develop purpose?
 - g. Developing integrity?
9. Do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share?