Face to Face: Does Residence Hall Design Make a Difference in Student Interaction?

By

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Student persistence has long been valued by higher education administrators (Glynn, Sauer, & Miller, 2003). Persistence rates are significantly impacted by student interaction (Tinto, 1975). The environment can have a major influence on how students interact with one another (Lewin, 1936). One way in which the environment can influence interactions is by a building design (Strange & Banning, 2001), including residence hall building design. Despite theories that building design impacts interactions, there is little research that explores how student interaction is influenced as a result of residence hall building design.

The purpose of this study was to understand how residence hall spaces that differ by architectural style impact college student interactions. Specifically, this study examined the interactions that took place among residents in traditional and suite style residence halls. For purposes of this study, an interaction was defined as face-to-face contact between two or more individuals that was more significant than a simple greeting.

The results of the study first revealed that residents of traditional and suite style residence halls have mostly social interactions in their hall. Secondly, the results revealed that students in traditional style residence halls have an easy time meeting other people in their residence hall environment. Lastly, the results showed that students who live in suite style residence halls have a more difficult time meeting other members of their community.
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