



Cal State Northridge new cluster-style housing

Cluster-Style Housing Supports 1st-Year Students' Adaptation to College

This research has been presented at:

- ACUHO-I annual meetings: 2010, Austin TX
- SCUP Pacific Regional meetings: 2011, Seattle WA
- WACUHO annual meetings: 2011, San Diego CA





Freshman-Engagement Housing Supports 1st-Year Students' Adaptation to College

CSUN Northridge built a 400-bed facility specifically designed as freshman-engagement housing for a campus that previously had only apartment-style housing. Statistically significant results from a behavioral post-occupancy study show that, compared with apartment residents, 1st-year students living in the new cluster-style, freshman-engagement housing have higher Academic, Personal/Emotional, and Overall adjustment scores on an adaptation-to-college assessment.



View of CSUN's Suites cluster-style housing from the Courtyard

RESEARCH CONTEXT

- First-year college students are the most likely to drop out of school: they face the greatest challenges and are least prepared to meet them. National research shows that students' experiences in campus housing are a key factor in supporting retention and engagement in the campus community¹.
- Current neurobiology research indicates that young students' brains are not yet mature enough to support an entirely independent life-style. Brain functions crucial to success in higher education--the executive functions of decision-making, organizing thoughts, setting priorities and weighing consequences—are not developed to adult levels when a student enters college. Students' ability to make friends within their living environment strongly predicts adjustment to college².

CLUSTER HOUSING @ CSU NORTHRIDGE: 'THE SUITES'



'Extended Family' Cluster:
32 students + R.A.

CSUN's new Suites cluster-style housing model was designed to support students' adjustment and adaptation to the university experience by encouraging friendship formation and supporting the development of social bonds among its residents.

Small communities of 32 students and a Resident Assistant share a semi-private wing within the larger residence hall. Double bedrooms are grouped around a 'living room' which serves as the cluster's own informal gathering place. Each cluster includes a quiet study room and laundry facilities shared with the adjacent cluster. Eight clusters occupy the L-shaped facility which, with a one-story community building, encloses a large courtyard.

RESEARCH DESIGN

AC Martin conducted a behavioral post-occupancy study comparing 83 freshmen in student-engagement housing with 122 freshmen in campus apartment housing; on-line surveys included the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), a nationally-normed, standardized assessment of students' adjustment to college; and the Student Housing Questionnaire (SHQ), designed to assess various aspects of students' campus residential experience. Students and RA's participated in telephone interviews and focus groups.

¹Tinto, V. (1993) *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* (2nd Ed.) University of Chicago Press.

²Wilcox, P., Winn, S., Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005) "It was nothing to do with the University, it was just the people": The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, v30 n6 p707-722.

RESEARCH RESULTS SUMMARY

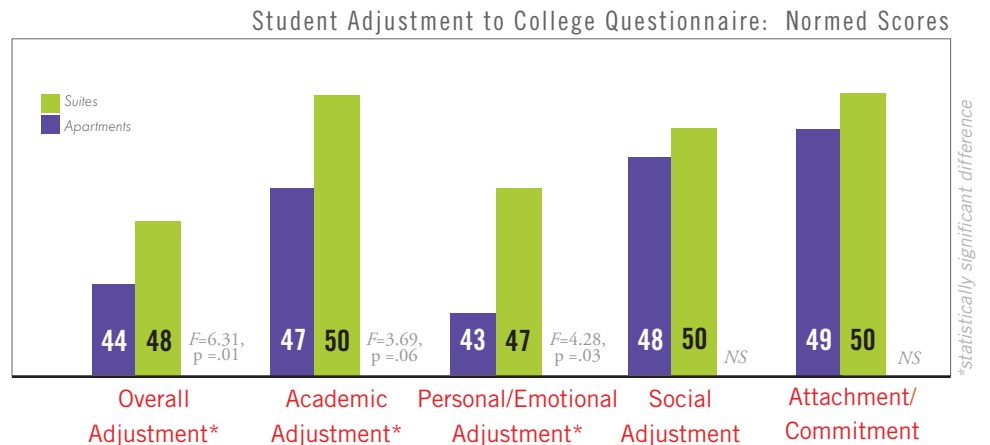
Suites' students show better adjustment to college.

Suites' freshmen have higher Overall, Academic and Personal/Emotional Adjustment scores.

Suites' freshmen have higher first-year GPA's than campus Apartments' students.

Suites' freshmen are more likely to sign up for campus housing next year.

Suites' housing had fewer crimes (thefts, etc.) reported to campus police than Apartments housing.



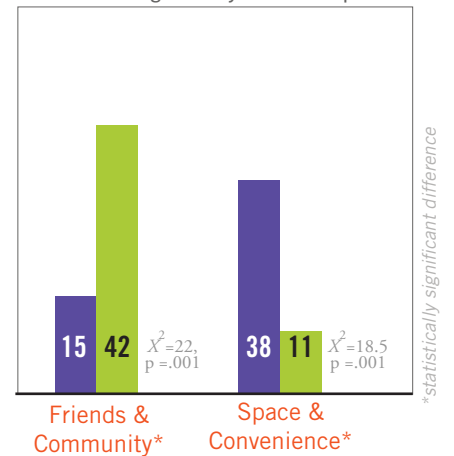
Suites' students have stronger social networks.

When asked, "What is the BEST thing about where you live on campus?"

Suites students say it's Friends & Community. They are more likely to have several close friends, to have a 'best friend' in their building, to feel a strong sense of community, and to do activities with their friends every day.

In contrast, **Apartments students say it's Space & Convenience.** They like having a large apartment with plenty of personal space, but they are less likely to have close friends on campus, to use the common space in their residence hall, or to want to live with their apartment-mates next year.

Student Housing Survey: % of responses



Suites' students have more positive group connections.

Suites RA'S report their groups are more cohesive and that there are many close friendships within the group. They see the campus as giving their students 'a place to call home.'

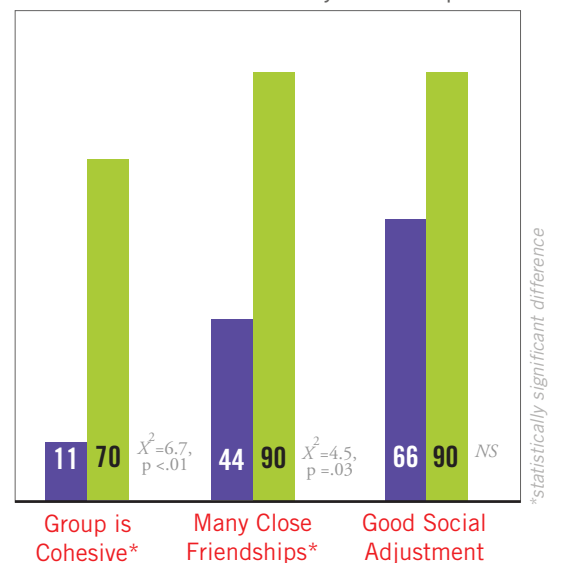
"My freshmen are making friendships that will last, even to next year." (Suites RA)

"...they tend to go home on the weekends so they don't make friends at school..." (Apartments RA)

"...the Living Room is a place for everyone to hang out and get to know each other..." (Suites RA)

"...their rooms are big so they stay inside and hide...it's hard to get them out for group meetings." (Apartments RA)

Resident Assistant Survey: % of responses





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