

## Review Article

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# The work of faculty-in-residence: An introduction and literature review

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### Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** The unique work of faculty-in-residence (FIRs) is premised on a substantial amount of research, which demonstrates that faculty-student engagement benefits students positively. Still, there is a dearth of literature that focuses on FIR work. In particular, there is no published research on the historical context for FIRs and no published research that provides an overarching analysis of literature germane to FIR work.

**OBJECTIVE:** The objective of this article is to fill these gaps in the research literature by producing a historical study of FIR work and a review of research about FIR work.

**METHODS:** Qualitative methods were used for this study; namely, the authors employed both historical research methods and a literature review.

**RESULTS:** This study is the first of its kind to trace the history of FIR work and to provide an overarching analysis of the limited literature on this topic.

**CONCLUSIONS:** By filling in the gaps in the research literature and describing the current state of FIR work, this study contributes to a research base for future, iterative studies of FIR work. This study also offers a discussion of future directions for both the research and practice of FIR work on college campuses.

Keywords: Occupation, history, faculty, college, university, residence hall

## 1. Introduction

Since the turn of the twentieth century, faculty members at North American institutions of higher education have oriented their careers around research, teaching, and service. Research, however, has gradually gained greater significance to those careers. As historian Frederick Rudolph has said, the modern university “fed on research . . . regurgitated research . . . promoted research” [60, p. 404]. Given today’s institutional demands for research in the promotion and tenure process, many faculty members have had little choice but

to distance themselves from the student experience. While there have certainly been exceptions to this modern trend, most faculty have readily acknowledged that they are too preoccupied to interact with students in any meaningful capacity outside the classroom [26, 28, 50]. After all, it has been “publish or perish” on many campuses.

The work of Faculty-in-Residence (FIRs) has offered a formidable counter-balance to modern trends in the professoriate. FIRs have generally consisted of faculty members who, in addition to their research and teaching endeavors, have agreed to contribute directly to the residential education of students outside the classroom. Various types of FIR programs have existed. A few FIRs, while still living off campus, have contributed actively to a residential program, lingering

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on campus later than their faculty colleagues to conduct programmatic work with students. Many FIRs have chosen to live right alongside students in campus residence halls, thereby modeling the crossroads of intellectual and social formation in dynamic living-learning communities. Most FIRs, though, have chosen this unique line of work because they believe their efforts can have a profoundly educational influence of college students.

The work of FIRs has become increasingly premised on a growing body of evidence, which has demonstrated that students benefit considerably when they interact with faculty outside the classroom. Numerous studies (including some studies that have entered their fourth decade of research on this topic) have shown that faculty-student interactions outside the classroom are positively correlated with enhances in student learning, personal development, cognitive thinking, problem solving, student satisfaction, and academic achievement [4, 5, 15, 39, 53, 71]. In sum, and though infrequent, when faculty have chosen to interact with students outside the classroom, those interactions have contributed substantially to student success.

Given the research on faculty-student interactions, FIR programs have posed an important ray of positivity amid the increasing criticisms slung at colleges and universities today. Indeed, public outcry has surrounded the ever-escalating cost of attending college [2]. Some have also cited the limited learning that has taken place in college with one frequently-quoted study showing that nearly half of all college students failed to demonstrate marked gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing [4]. Others have pointed to the rise of online learning as a disruption that could force the hand of the university [16, 63]. The importance of FIR work has been that it stands in sharp contrast to these criticisms, offering value to a college education at a time when that value has been questioned.

This article presents an understudied examination of a unique occupation within academe. Indeed, and though variations of FIRs have existed throughout the history of higher education, there is a relative dearth of published research about their work. In particular, no published research has attempted to trace the historical context for FIRs and no published research has provided an overarching analysis of literature germane to FIR work. This article has attempted to fill those gaps. Moreover, this special section has provided a series of case studies that offer rich, thick descriptions of the kind of work that FIRs conduct on college campuses.

## 2. The history of FIR work

The earliest antecedents of FIR work have been rather obscure. According to historical records, sententious masters have long taught their dutiful understudies amid the tablet-houses of early Mesopotamia, the House of Life and House of Books in Egypt, the Confucian schools of China, the Aztec and Inca temple schools, and in Plato's Academy during Greece's Golden Age [43, 54]. Those records, though, have provided little information about the actual residential components of ancient institutions of higher learning.

During the Middle Ages, institutions of higher education in Europe did develop a system for culling students and housing them alongside faculty mentors. Previously, students had migrated to urban centers and settled for low-rent lodging near, but not on, their campuses [43]. Such itinerant housing districts became rife with problems. Landlords of unkempt accommodations exploited their tenants, and wayward students often reacted by causing disruptions in town. Based to some extent on the practice of monastic communities, some Medieval schools then began to house students in *hospitia*, houses that were endowed by a benefactor and overseen by residential masters. These early house systems originated in Paris during the twelfth century, and eventually became the dominant model of residential education, or *collegia*, at Oxford and Cambridge [43, 54]. As a result, students benefited from proximity to class, frequent interaction with tutors, shared meals with classmates, and controlled rents while at college; in turn, university educators were given the opportunity to keep watchful eyes on their charges [43].

The act of pairing students with selected faculty in residential colleges at Oxford and Cambridge was an ideal that many colonial colleges aspired to construct in America. Historian Frederick Rudolph eloquently dubbed this act, "the collegiate way." He defined it as "the notion that a curriculum, a library, a faculty, and students are not enough to make a college. It is an adherence to the residential scheme of things. It is respectful of quiet rural settings, dependent on dormitories, committed to dining halls, permeated by paternalism" [60, p. 87]. The colonial colleges were only able to partially realize the Oxford-Cambridge ideal, but they did establish a pattern for residential education where students lived and learned alongside faculty [60, 68].

As the oldest college in America, Harvard sought to realize the collegiate way by instituting tutors as

early as the 1640s. Tutors lived in the college, taught courses throughout the curriculum, and supervised students' extracurricular pursuits. As unmarried men, tutors were later distinguished from professors. When they first appeared at Harvard in the 1720s, professors were allowed to marry, taught more specialized disciplines, and lived off campus [13]. Tutors, however, took an active role in the governance of the college from the start and their ranks professionalized well into the mid-1700s. Though this early variation of faculty-in-residence had a considerable influence on colonial Harvard, they were eventually disbanded in the early 1800s as Harvard reorganized itself into academic departments that were headed by professors [13].

As American settlers in the 1800s spread westward across their new republic, they established more colleges, some of which would later evolve into modern research universities during a reformation of higher education that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. Some colleges in the 1800s sought to establish house systems like Harvard, but all institutions of higher education employed faculty who took on a paternalistic role in their quest to mentor young students into adulthood. By the early 1900s, however, many faculty had gradually distanced themselves from interacting with students outside the classroom and redirected their attention to research [10, 43, 58, 60]. In the wake left by faculty, student affairs professionals moved in to fill the void on campuses across the country and built an infrastructure for tending to students' wholistic development [43, 56, 60]. At Harvard, though, the house system enjoyed a renewal in the 1930s with the well-endowed construction of seven houses in the Georgian Revival style [60, 68].

### 3. The current landscape of FIR work

Stemming from the rich history of "the collegiate way," the contemporary landscape of American higher education has been dotted by an array of programs where faculty have contributed actively to the residential education of their students. Three variations of this work have generally been the most prevalent. The first variation, and the primary focus of this paper, has been faculty-in-residence (FIR) programs. In these programs, faculty members have contracted with colleges or universities to live alongside students in campus residence halls [30]. The roles of these FIRs differ across institutions, but they have largely offered social, intellectual, personal, and even pre-professional devel-

opment to students in a manner that augments the work of their allies in the student affairs ranks. FIRs have tended to partner directly with student affairs professionals in residence halls to conduct their work, a distinguishing characteristic of this first variation. A simple Internet search has found scores of FIR programs across the country, but surprisingly no centralized national database. As such, the authors of this Introduction have recently sought to catalogue these programs via an open-sourced directory of FIR programs [25].

The second variation of this work has involved direct descendants of the Oxford-Cambridge house systems. In house systems, highly regarded scholars, or Faculty Masters, have directed the overall administration of a house. Supporting faculty, or Deans, and often their graduate students, or Tutors, have assisted the Faculty Master in the administration of the house [49, 61]. House systems have been well-established at Harvard and Yale for centuries, but they have also appeared at Cornell, Middlebury, Princeton, Rice, and the University of Pennsylvania among other institutions.

The third variation of this work has consisted of programs where faculty members have actively engaged with students outside the classroom (even in residence halls); however, these faculty members have not actually resided on campus. More common titles of these programs have been "Faculty Associates" and "Faculty Fellows." These faculty members have offered advisement, programmatic services, and residential-based education to students on campus [23, 24]. Such programs have been found at many institutions including New York University, Purdue, and Washington University.

### 4. A review of the literature on FIR work

The authors have categorized the research on FIR work into three sections. The first section pertains to literature on faculty-student engagement. This literature base has been broad and voluminous. As such, it has served as a foundation for any study of FIRs. The second section pertains to living-learning communities. Though less broad than the literature on faculty-student engagement, a formidable line of studies has been published and many have been germane to FIR work. The third and final section pertains to literature that speaks directly to FIR work. This literature has been relatively small and limited in scope, but it has merited an overarching analysis.

#### 4.1. Faculty-student engagement literature

For decades, scholars have cited the positive impact of faculty-student engagement on students' academic performance, social integration, motivation, and persistence [5, 41, 53, 70]. A number of scholars have built upon these findings in an attempt to identify essential factors to effective faculty-student relationships. The body of research on these factors can be categorized into four general groups.

First, a number of researchers have examined the types of interactions between faculty and students. One study yielded a typology of five types of faculty-student interactions, and discussed the conditions that encourage or inhibit each type of interaction [20]. A more focused study identified the different roles that faculty exhibit outside the classroom and explained the value of each role [7]. While researchers in both studies agreed that faculty-student engagement was beneficial, they disagreed about what types of interactions were most effective. In fact, some scholars have argued that strictly social interactions have had little to no effect on students' motivation, educational gains, or persistence [19, 40, 71]. Others have concluded that every type of interaction, even incidental interactions, have had a positive impact upon students [6, 20].

A second group of studies has examined the impact that faculty-student engagement has had on specific student populations such as low-income, first generation, high-risk, and underrepresented racial/ethnic groups [17, 44, 45, 59, 62, 72]. Researchers in these studies tended to agree that different populations needed different kinds of support to persist [59, 72]; however, they disagreed about what type of faculty-student interaction were best when the student was a member of an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Some scholars found that faculty interaction was one of the strongest predictors for academic success for all students (especially for non-Caucasian learners) [44]. However, another scholar has argued that students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups did not respond well to faculty who sought to discuss the quality of their work [17]. Additionally, this same scholar also found that the racial/ethnic background of the faculty member did not play a significant role in the effectiveness of their interaction with students [17].

A third group of research addressed the attributes of highly engaged faculty members. In this body of literature, scholars highlighted that such faculty members have made it a priority to interact with students, have viewed these relationships as part of their professional

identity, and have genuinely enjoyed interacting with students [62]. Highly engaged faculty members held students to high expectations and invested an equal amount of effort themselves [15, 41]. They made an effort to be responsive so that students would perceive them as kind, compassionate, and helpful [6]. A 2014 Gallup-Purdue National Index Report bolstered these findings by showing that graduates who made meaningful connections with professors were twice as likely to be engaged in their work after college and were three times as likely to be thriving in terms of their well-being. The findings of the Gallup-Purdue Index found no difference between graduates of public and private colleges, highly selective colleges and more accessible institutions, or the top-100-ranked colleges and less prestigious schools, thus indicating that meaningful faculty-student interactions have transcended institution-type [14].

A fourth group of studies has examined the barriers to faculty-student engagement. For instance, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has consistently asked first-year students and senior-year students to report on the frequency of their discussions with faculty regarding career plans, academic performance, course topics, and how often they worked on an activity other than coursework. The most recent annual report from NSSE has noted that certain student populations were more likely to interact with faculty members than others. For instance, full-time students and athletes interacted with faculty at higher rates than other students. Students taking courses online had fewer faculty interactions than students on campus. Seniors who lived on campus were more likely to have meaningful interactions with faculty members than students who were veterans. And students attending smaller schools were more likely to interact with faculty members than their counterparts at larger institutions [47].

As with earlier NSSE reports, many have wondered why faculty-student engagement outside the classroom has remained so infrequent despite its obvious benefits [48]. When administrators at Cornell University polled professors about this issue, they found that lack of time, lack of institutional support/incentives (especially credit towards the promotion and tenure process), and limited social skills were the most common concerns that kept faculty from engaging with students outside the classroom [18]. When they examined the issue from the student perspective, they found that timidity, anxiety, and negative in-class experiences had led students to perceive faculty as unapproachable. More concern-

ing, some scholars found that students who needed faculty the most were also the least likely to seek them out [45].

Researchers have made suggestions for educators at colleges and universities who are looking to cultivate fruitful faculty-student engagement. Many, for instance, have recommended that institutions adopt programs to promote consistent faculty-student engagement outside of the classroom setting and that those programs should emphasize quality of interaction over quantity [40, 45, 62, 71]. In particular, a number of scholars have recommended that college and university administrators consider facilitating faculty-student interactions within an infrastructure of living-learning communities on campus [20, 41].

#### 4.2. *Living-learning communities literature*

Though not as voluminous as the literature on faculty-student engagement, literature on living-learning communities (LLCs) has grown substantially. LLCs have been grounded fundamentally in residence-based learning [64]. They have varied in programmatic structure, but they have collectively involved students who live together, participate in intentional curricular or co-curricular activities, and who interact closely with both residence life staff and faculty members [32, 53].

LLCs have been established largely as a response to calls for undergraduate reform in American higher education that date to the 1980s. In many instances, these calls for reform have envisioned a seamless blend of learning through strategic partnerships between student affairs professionals and academic faculty members [1, 38, 67]. While their historical antecedents can be traced at least as far back as the turn of the twentieth century, LLCs popularized over the past two decades with more than 600 programs now existing at several hundred colleges and universities. In that time, LLCs have garnered the support of major associations for student affairs and academic affairs such as the Association of American Colleges & Universities, ACPA-College Student Educators International, NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the Association of College and University Housing Officers International. LLCs have subsequently served as a promising model for promoting positive student development and faculty engagement on campus [53].

Researchers have touted the benefits for students who participate in LLCs. Two decades ago, some researchers found that students involved in LLCs were more likely

than traditional residence hall students to experience desirable student outcomes in the form of persistence, academic achievement, and faculty interaction [52]. Though the literature has largely been comprised of small and single-institution-based studies, the trend of positive student development outcomes and greater faculty interaction than comparison groups has also been a relatively consistent finding of more recent studies [22, 29, 32, 35, 42, 51, 55, 66].

The National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) has offered a substantial amount of data from many variant institutions of higher education over the past decade. The 2004 NSLLP alone involved over 24,000 undergraduate survey responses from 34 institutions to a wide variety of student input (demographics, student descriptors) and student development/academic and college environment factors. Factors were analyzed and compared with traditional residence hall participants [33]. The 2007 NSLLP follow-up study, included longitudinal analysis and highlighted significant differences in comparison groups. In particular, students who participated in LLCs reported statistically higher levels of engagement than their comparison group in a number of college environment measures and student development and learning outcomes. These outcomes included positive interaction with faculty as well as positive perceptions of social and academic climates in the residential setting [34]. Moreover, findings of the longitudinal survey indicated that the LLC participants increased in their faculty interaction and reported higher levels of student development and learning growth than in 2004. The NSLLP also collected baseline data of structural trends, generating a comprehensive LLC typology. Faculty engagement in LLCs in the 2007 NSLLP study were reported in 64% of the participating 600 programs and involved between 1–3 faculty members. Teaching courses and academic advising were two of the most reported faculty activities [11].

The NSLLP national database and subsequent studies have pointed toward a developing understanding of faculty engagement and positive outcomes for students in LLCs, including specific student populations. For instance, one study of the NSLLP data highlighted the importance of faculty involvement in the successful academic and social transitions of first-generation college students [35]. However, another study of the NSLLP data found that faculty involvement did not significantly correlate with positive student outcomes for women of color majoring in STEM disciplines [37].

### 4.3. Faculty-in-residence literature

The authors of this article found that the literature base directly focusing on FIR work was limited in size and scope. This finding was also echoed by another, more cursory, survey of the literature, which noted the dearth of empirical studies to inform higher education practitioners [9]. The literature unearthed for this review was relatively recent. It also concentrated on single institutions, employed qualitative methodologies, included reflective essays, noted obstacles to faculty involvement, and highlighted benefits to both students and faculty.

Each study of FIR work focused on a single institution and utilized qualitative methodologies. In almost all instances, large, research-intensive public and private universities comprised the institutions being studied. Most researchers defended their choice of focusing on a single institution by appealing to the case study method—an attempt to more fully understand a phenomenon by focusing on a single FIR program and drawing out rich, thick descriptions of that program [21, 27, 46, 69, 74]. Researchers constructed their cases after collecting data via various forms of qualitative methodologies: observations, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and document analysis [3, 8, 24, 28, 36, 65, 73].

A few researchers produced manuscripts that were less of an empirical study and more of a reflective essay on FIR work. In these instances, researchers employed ethnography as a means to capturing vivid descriptions of their personal experiences as FIRs [12, 23, 26, 31, 57]. With these descriptions in place, some authors simply highlighted the obstacles and opportunities of FIR work [12]. Others challenged institutions to leverage FIR work as a means to recovering its core mission [23].

Much of the research on FIR work discussed its benefits for students. Researchers grounded their studies in the aforementioned literature base on faculty-student engagement and cited its positive correlations with student learning, personal development, cognitive thinking, problem solving, student satisfaction, and academic achievement [4, 5, 15, 39, 53, 71]. One study focused more directly on FIR work, and concluded that even a functional role between students and faculty (such as a resident assistant who works with an FIR on a campus event) can be a gateway to a more substantial interaction that includes the development of pre-professional skills [8]. Simply put, the studies gave reason to argue that students stand to benefit from FIR work [30].

A smaller number of studies on FIR work discussed its benefits for faculty members. These studies cited positive outcomes in terms of faculty members' personal and professional development [28, 36, 57]. Though some faculty subjects were surprised by the depths of personal involvement that students expected [28], other faculty subjects deepened their appreciation for student life, enriched their teaching, or felt personally fulfilled [57, 65].

Despite finding tangible benefits for faculty who engaged in FIR work, researchers were quick to cite obstacles to FIR work. In a number of studies, researchers noted frequent miscommunication between faculty and administrators about learning outcomes for FIR programs, or they noted that many faculty members were uncomfortable engaging with students outside the classroom [12]. In at least one instance, some faculty members even discouraged their colleagues from FIR work because they perceived it as "career-damaging" [12]. One common finding among studies included the fact that FIR work lacked clear recognition in faculty members' promotion and tenure process [26]. As one study concluded, "In a sense, faculty at research universities who engage in these activities are performing a counter-cultural, even revolutionary, act" [28, p. 38].

Some research on FIR work also discussed the importance of critical partnerships between faculty members and student affairs professionals. One study, for instance, noted that student affairs professionals were uniquely positioned to serve as gatekeepers for faculty who were attempting to navigate the residence halls [3]. Another study argued that FIRs' most critical resource were full-time, professional residence hall directors who had the ability to either hinder or enhance FIRs work on campus [12]. And a third study found that faculty felt the role of the resident assistant was integral to success [24]. While the work of student affairs professionals and residence life staff seemed to be largely appreciated by FIRs [26, 57], some faculty in one residential college noted that they were still largely unaware of what student affairs professionals do [36].

## 5. Summary

The unique work of FIRs has been established upon a voluminous amount of research on the positive benefits to students when they engage consistently and meaningfully with faculty. Despite the positive findings of that literature base, there has been relatively little research focused on FIR work in particular. Specifically, there

has been no published research on the historical context of FIR work and no overarching analysis of literature germane to FIR work. This article has attempted to fill those gaps, to describe the current state of FIR work, and to introduce readers to the six informative case studies about FIR work that follow.

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