FIGs: A Comparative Study of the Residential Component of Freshman Interest Groups

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This study examines whether membership in a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) provides the same level of peer influence on academic and social integration when the residential component is absent, compared to FIGs that are residentially based. For the purposes of this study, academic integration is displayed through activities such as the formation of study groups, class attendance, and anticipated grade point average. Social integration is exhibited through such factors as friendships, emotional support from peers, college transition and campus involvement.

Introduction

College and university professionals aim to develop and engage students through the integration of curricular experiences with co-curricular activities (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). Because students living on campus spend a majority of their time in a residential environment, residential programs and services are often viewed as a primary means to achieve this goal. One such program experiencing growing popularity and attention is the learning community. Traditionally, a residential learning community places students with similar interests or academic goals within the same residential unit. A recently popularized version of the learning community is the Freshman Interest Group (FIG).

Researchers in higher education have discussed the positive impact of FIGs on the academic and social integration of first-year college students (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993; Pike, Berry, & Schroeder, 1997). A student's transition from high school to college in the first year can often serve as a predictor of whether or not they will persist through graduation (Hossler & Bean, 1990). Many postsecondary institutions, especially large, residential universities, have implemented a variety of programs whose sole purpose is promoting student retention and persistence beyond the first year. Because of their size, these institutions often struggle to help first-year students integrate academically and socially (Astin, 1993; Hossler & Bean, 1990).

Through his research on college impact, Astin (1993) developed a conceptual model for studying college student development. Astin's input-environment-output (I-E-O) model can be used to understand the effects of FIG membership on the development of first-year college students. Astin (1993) writes that inputs refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution. This suggests that all first-year students bring with them a variety of different backgrounds, which shape their approach to the college environment. In this study, the environment-the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed-was identified as the acts associated with FIG membership, such as attending class and living together. According to Astin (1993), outcome refers to the student's characteristics after exposure to the environment. For the purpose of this study the outcome measures were students' perceived levels of academic and social integration.

This report begins with a literature review containing past research pertinent to understanding the influence of FIG membership on first-year students. A methodology section, outlining the research methods used in this study follows. Finally, results are provided, which compare and contrast experiences of students belonging to residential and non-residential FIGs.

Literature Review

Residential Component

An examination of peer influence and the impact of the residential component on students' social and academic integration would not be complete without a discussion of the concept that students who live in residence halls have a more fulfilling college experience than those students who live off campus (Tinto, 1993). Residence halls are often designed with the intention of aiding in the development of the whole student. Strange (1993), describes a residence hall as "a group of individuals who live together, share common goals, and pursue common activities in a campus setting" (p.134). Fredriksen (1993) suggests a residence hall promotes students' intellectual, social, moral, and physical development. Blimling (1993) reports that students living in residence halls have a better college experience, are more involved, and are more likely to attain higher educational goals than those who do not live in residence halls. Blimling (1993) also states "the most powerful influence operating in residence halls is the peer environment" (p. 290).

As Douvan (1981) writes, proximity, as experienced by residents within a residence hall, emerges as a major force in determining friendships during the first year of college. For instance, relationships established earlier in college stem primarily from where a student lives, instead of personality similarities or extra-curricular commonalities (Douvan, 1981). This suggests that the proximity provided by the residential FIG structure would have greater influence on the establishment of relationships by its members than would the structure of the non-residential FIG. Strange and Banning (2001) discuss the development of a community and state that it "may depend on the attraction of a critical mass of involved participants whose common interests create a momentum that becomes self-sustaining" (p.165). FIG membership stems from the same type of situation, as students who participate in a FIG share a variety of common interests beginning with the theme and growing through class participation and a common living environment.

According to Tinto (1993), the activities and interactions that take place in the residence halls can be considered among the many influential informal interactions that occur during college. Because these interactions are most often informal, students are more inclined to become integrated into the environment through everyday activities, such as interactions in the dining hall, study lounges, common areas, and on their residence hall floors. Love (1995) refers to these informal interactions as the indirect influences on a student during his or her college experience. Newcomb (1962) suggests peer groups are more likely to be found wherever local arrangements, such as dining or studying, result in very frequent associations among a given group. The different experience of FIG members living among each other, compared to those living in various locations across campus, demonstrates the different levels of influence institutional program structures can have on student integration. FIG membership provides another component to the benefits of the residential structure through shared academic involvement.

Academic Component

Historically in the educational culture of America, students were taught to study alone and that collaboration was unimportant to the learning environment (Lazar, 1995). Through numerous studies, Lazar (1995) found students grow through active discussion and face-to-face

interactions. According to Lazar (1995), these interactions offer students the opportunity to engage in social language and academic discourse. By engaging in group discussion, students acquire a myriad of skills, as well as grow academically and intellectually (Horn, 1997).

Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1996) state frequent out of class encounters with other students exert a positive influence on those students, both academically and socially. FIG membership is designed to specifically enhance the out of class encounters students have by way of academic support outside the classroom. Students who take the same classes together, as in the FIG structure, are more likely to share class notes, provide homework assistance (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993), and encourage class attendance (Wilcox & delMas, 1997). Horn (1997) states students may find their best support among their peers and suggests student camaraderie and academic support produce higher grades and higher retention rates as a possible externality of FIG participation.

Research has shown that a student who performs well in the first year of college is more likely to maintain a high level of academic performance in the second year (Terenzini & Wright, 1987). Guiding students toward a more positive academic experience during their first year, thus increasing retention and grade point averages was on of the primary goals in the development of the FIG program. Students who are members of FIGs have higher credits earned and also somewhat higher GPAs according to Wilcox and delMas (1997). However, some research has indicated that participation in a FIG does not directly or indirectly enhance a student's academic achievement (Pike et al., 1997). Another contributing factor to the positive experience of FIG membership is connected to the social component of peer influence.

Social Component

Peer group influence is almost certain to be affected, for better or worse, if there is an overlap between membership in formal college activities and in living units (Newcomb, 1962). Peer groups in college are highly influential and responsible for much of the socialization and learning that occurs in the university environment (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). As Newcomb (1962) points out, the more homogeneous the peer group, the more influence or power it has over its members. FIG groups composed of all first-year students with similar interests exemplify this homogeneous environment. Additionally, the influence of peer groups is amplified as frequency and intensity of contacts increase (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Therefore, students living with each other and attending class together, such as those in a residential FIG, would have much more influence on each other than would a peer group who solely attended classes together, as do non-residential FIG members.

Astin (1993) defines a peer group as a group of individuals in which members identify, affiliate, and seek acceptance and approval. The numerous social interactions provided by FIG membership, which include class attendance, living in the same residential environment, and sharing a common theme, allow it to serve as a true peer group. Love (1995) reports true peers-students who are going through the same experiences-are among the strongest socializing agents in a student's college experience. Love (1995) further suggests determinants of influence in the socializing process include intensity of feelings for and frequency of interaction with the socializing agents. The frequency of interaction associated with participation in a residential FIG would make it a stronger socializing agent.

Studies performed by Pike et al. (1997), on enhancing the impact of residential living, found that FIG membership produces significantly higher levels of social integration for its participants. In discussions on persistence, Nora (1987) and Attinasi (1989) both suggest that students must locate at least one community in which to find membership and the support that membership provides. FIG students participate in a wide variety of activities together, both social and academic, which would increase the likelihood that a student finds an area in which to participate and succeed. According to Schlossberg (1989), the creation of environments that clearly indicate to all students they matter, will urge them to greater social involvement. In regards to student development, Astin (1993) found that a student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years. Because FIG members have both formal and informal academic and social interactions, the likelihood that students feel they matter and are involved in their community is increased.

Astin (1997) defines involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience. Astin (1997) also suggests this energy can be demonstrated through relations with faculty, peers, community development, and coursework, which are all characteristics of membership in a FIG community. In relation to Astin's (1997) definition, FIG members exert a great deal of energy toward their academic experience, both academically and socially, and would thus prove to have greater involvement. The ideal FIG, which includes the residential component, lends itself to higher levels of social integration and therefore persistence.

Methodology

Sample

The purpose of this study was to measure the impact of the residential component on the academic and social integration of students in a FIG. The sample studied included 269 first-year students enrolled in FIGs at a large, public, residential, Research I university located in the Midwest during the fall semester of the 2001-2002 academic year. The sample used was a non-random convenience sample and represented a close approximation of most characteristics of the population. In total, 29 of the 52 FIG groups were surveyed. Students were chosen based on their placement in a FIG, either residential or non-residential. An attempt was made to survey each FIG participant regardless of the FIG type hoping to increase sample size and generalizability.

The sample was comprised of 34% male participants and 64% female participants. Eighty-four percent of the participants were Caucasian, 5% African American, 4% Latino/a, 3% of the participants were Asian, and 4% identified as Other. Ninety-six percent of the respondents lived on-campus, 3% lived in an off campus apartment, and 1% lived in the home of a parent or relative. Sixty-five percent of the participants were in state, 34% were out of state students, and 0.5% were international. Thirty-four percent identified as living in a residential FIG, and 66% indicated they lived in a non-residential FIG.

Procedure

A FIG is defined as a small group of first-year students (usually 10 to 20) who participate in common coursework during the first year of college. Students in a residential FIG live in the same residential unit, while students in a non-residential FIG live in a variety of locations, both on and off campus. All FIG participants must enroll in a one semester, one-credit seminar course facilitated by a Peer Instructor (PI). A PI is an upper class student who may or may not live in the residence hall with the FIG members. The seminar meets once a week and serves as a way to introduce students to the institution and the campus culture. The researchers decided to use a portion of this seminar time to distribute the survey instrument. The same survey was administered to students participating in residential FIGs and non-residential FIGs during the seminar unless the student indicated that he/she did not want to participate.

The survey consisted of 37 Likert scale questions, which elicited information regarding students' perceptions of their FIG experience in terms of academic and social integration. Within the Likert scale, responses ranged from strongly disagree to strong agree on a scale of one to five, respectively. Three short answer questions were also included in the instrument asking respondents if they enjoyed their FIG experience, if they would recommend it to other first-year students, and if they believed living in the same residential unit as their FIG members would be/was beneficial. Finally, questions pertaining to demographic information were posed to better understand the sample, although students were not asked to provide any personal identification information on the survey. All questions aimed to determine the level of academic and social peer influence the residential component of a FIG had on students.

Academic peer influence was measured by analyzing students' study habits, including with whom they study and where they study, with the goal of identifying their study peers and group study patterns (Horn, 1997; Lazar, 1995). The pattern of a student's class attendance and the anticipated GPAs of students were also examined. Social peer influence was measured by looking at with whom students spent their free time with, who they sought for emotional support, how often students went home, and students' social eating patterns in order to identify how socially integrated they were within their FIG program and within the greater context of the college environment (Astin, 1997).

Results

The findings in this study were based on data self reported by FIG members. However, a mislabeling of residential and nonresidential FIGs occurred in the student assignment process and held true for the publications, which were used as resources for this project, and by potential FIG members enrolling in the program. Thus, respondents may have indicated living in a residential FIG inaccurately, simply because

they were misinformed. The researchers discovered this discrepancy and made adjustments in how the survey was introduced to the FIG members. In addition, the data compiled for this study were self-reported by the FIG members.

Academic Integration

This study was designed to measure the academic and social integration of participants and to analyze whether results varied according to student participation in either a residential or non-residential FIG. A t-test comparing residential and non-residential FIGs showed that eight variables were statistically significant. The statistically significant results of the study are included in Table 1.

In reference to study patterns, the participants in this study preferred to study alone. When FIG members were asked if they studied with fellow FIG members, the majority of all participants disagreed (M=2.33), indicating they preferred to study alone. However, at the $p<.05$ level, a significant difference was found between residential students who preferred to study alone (M=2.58) and non-residential FIG members who preferred to study alone (M=2.20). Although neither group preferred to study with their fellow FIG members as often as they preferred to study alone, non-residential FIG members were even less likely to study in groups than residential FIG members.

Although many students study alone, both residential and non-residential FIG members indicated that they preferred to study in their residence hall, where other students may have been present to help them (M=4.15). Students in residential FIGs (M=4.21) and non-residential FIGs (M=4.13) specifically stated that they preferred to study in a residence hall, as opposed to the library or an off campus location.

The survey also asked respondents to report their patterns of class attendance and anticipated GPA. Participants were asked if they attended their FIG classes more often than non-FIG classes. Responses on this question were fairly neutral (M=2.82), but overall respondents stated they did not attend their FIG classes more often than their other classes. At the $p<.05$ level no significant difference was found between residential (M=2.79) and non-residential (M=2.84) FIG participants. There were also no statistically significant differences found between residential and non-residential FIG participants in regard to anticipated GPA.

Table 1. Significant Differences Between FIG Types

Area	FIG Type	N	Mean	SD	SEM	T
Study with FIG Members	Residential	89	2.58	1.10	0.12	2.77*
	Non-Residential	177	2.20	1.06	0.08	
Spends Spare Time Usually Hanging Out with FIG Members	Residential	90	2.91	1.24	0.13	2.34*
	Non-Residential	177	2.55	1.15	0.09	
Spends More Time Hanging Out with FIG vs. Non-FIG Individuals	Residential	90	2.46	1.18	0.12	2.19*
	Non-Residential	176	2.13	1.16	0.09	
Usually Eats Meals with FIG Members	Residential	90	2.54	1.27	0.13	2.87*
	Non-Residential	177	2.09	1.11	0.08	
Go Home Most Weekends	Residential	90	1.84	1.13	0.12	-2.36*
	Non-Residential	176	2.22	1.36	0.10	
Socialize Daily with FIG Members	Residential	90	3.78	1.12	0.12	2.16*
	Non-Residential	176	3.43	1.29	0.10	
Socialize Daily with FIG Members Outside of Class	Residential	90	3.72	1.24	0.13	3.70*
	Non-Residential	176	3.10	1.34	0.10	
Usually Receive Emotional Support from FIG Members	Residential	90	3.32	1.22	0.13	2.50*
	Non-Residential	174	2.90	1.36	0.10	

* Indicates a significance at the $p<.05$ level.

Social Integration

Most of the statistically significant results from this study came from questions that inquired about student's patterns of social integration. These results included significant answers about a number of variables, including with whom students spent their spare time, with whom they ate, the emotional support that stemmed from FIG membership, and the ease of transition from high school to college.

The students enrolled in a FIG were asked if they spent their spare time with members of their FIG, the majority of both residential and non-residential FIG members disagreed (M=2.68) with this statement. At the $p< .05$ level a significant difference was found between residential FIG members who stated they spent their spare time with members of their FIG (M=2.91), compared to non-residential FIG members (M=2.55). This indicated students enrolled in residential FIGs were more likely to spend their spare time with fellow FIG members than those enrolled in non-residential FIGs.

There was also a statistically significant difference ($p< .05$) between the two types of FIGs when participants were asked to record whether or not they spent more time with people from their FIG or people from their residence hall. Respondents in residential FIGs spent more time with their own FIG members (M=2.46), as they lived in the

same residence hall. Non-residential members indicated they were less inclined to spent more time with members of their FIG than people in their residential unit (M=2.13). These results are not surprising, as proximity made it easier for residential FIG members to socialize with other FIG members who also lived in their residence hall than non-residential members who may have had to travel across campus to find their fellow FIG members. Proximity also played a role in student response in regard to eating patterns. While residential and nonresidential FIG members indicated that they did not eat most of their meals with members of their FIG, participants in residential FIGs (M=2.54) were more likely to eat with members of their FIG than were non-residential FIG members (M=2.09).

Participants were also asked to rate how often they go home on weekends. Overall, participants disagreed that they went home on most weekends (M=2.09). There was, however, a significant difference ($p<.05$) between the residential and non-residential groups. Residential members stated that they strongly disagreed that they went home most weekends (M=1.84), while non-residential members disagreed (M=2.22). This significant difference indicates that students enrolled in a residential FIG may have had a better affiliation with students and programs on campus, which promoted their staying on campus instead of going home most weekends. Furthermore, students who had a stronger affiliation with fellow FIG members may have gained emotional support from these individuals. A statistically significant difference at the $p<.05$ level between the residential and non-residential FIGs showed that residential FIG members gained more emotional support (M=3.32) from other members of their FIG than did non-residential FIG members (M=2.90).

A major goal of the FIG program is to help students make the transition from high school to college. Overall participants stated (M=3.30) that they were undecided whether their enrollment in a FIG helped their transition, although the responses erred on the positive. Those students enrolled in a residential FIG appeared to have gained slightly more transition assistance (M=3.51), as compared to non-residential members (M=3.19). When asked if their enrollment in a FIG helped them make friends in college, FIG participants responded positively in both categories. Residential (M=3.44) and non-residential (M=3.34) FIG members generally agreed that friendships were made through FIG membership.

Short Answer Responses

In calculating the responses to the three short answer questions student responses were divided by their participation in a residential or non-residential FIG. Results from the short answer items can be found in Table 2.

When asked if they enjoyed the FIG experience; 67% of all participants indicated that they had enjoyed their experience while 17% indicated they had not. Seventy-two percent of students participating in a residential FIG responded they enjoyed their FIG experience compared to 64% of the students in a non-residential. Reasons stated by FIG members for enjoying the program were varied. Most commonly recorded was that students were able to make friends for social and academic support. Seventy-three percent of residential FIG members stated they enjoyed the FIG program because it helped them make friends and gave them someone to sit with during classes, while only 58% of non-residential FIG members enjoyed the program because it helped them make friends.

One student responded the reason why he or she enjoyed the FIG experience was, "It is helpful to know a group of people in almost all of my classes. Then we can discuss other teachers, tests, and we can help each other study if needed." Another student added, "Yes, it helps for study groups/projects or if you miss a class and need notes. It is a good way to meet people that you can sit next to in your class, not as lonely."

Seventy-four percent of the participants said they would recommend freshmen participate in the FIG program, 16% said they would not, and 10% of the sample claimed neutrality on the issue. Residential and non-residential FIG members shared similar responses in recommending the FIG program to freshmen (75% and 74% respectively). In terms of academic support, 44% of non-residential FIG members stated they would recommend the program because of the academic support it offered. Sixteen percent of participants from a residential FIG also listed academic support by way of studying together, working on homework together, and attending class together. A non-residential FIG member stated, when asked if he or she would recommend the FIG program to freshmen, "Yes because if you [are] here not knowing anyone or you live off campus, it's a good way to make friends and form study groups."

Table 2

Short Answer Results

	Residential N	Residential Percentage	Non-residential N	Non-residential Percentage
Enjoyed Participation in FIG	66	72	111	64
Made friends from participation	67	73	99	58
Academic benefits from participation	31	34	76	44
Would recommend to freshmen	74	75	123	74
Recommend because of friends	37	37	67	40
Recommend because of academic support	27	16	73	44
Living together beneficial	70	76	85	51
Beneficial because of friends	36	39	51	31
Beneficial because of academic support	35	21	49	29

Sixty percent of the participants indicated they thought it would be/is beneficial for students to live among their FIG members. Seventy-six percent of residential and 51% of non-residential FIG members stated they find it beneficial to live among their fellow FIG members. Students listed a variety of benefits from living among fellow FIG members such as safety when walking to the FIG seminar, making friends, and study support. In response to the question of how beneficial living in the same residential unit as other FIG members would be, one residential FIG member stated, "Very. I didn't have to call someone or meet someone for homework help, I can just walk down the hall." Another student responded, "Yes, I wish that we all did live together that way it would be easier for us to spend time together, study, etc. instead of having to travel across campus." A non-residential FIG member stated, "Yes, because I don't live among them. I am in another residence hall, but if I did live with them I could see us [being] better friends."

Discussion

The purpose of conducting this study was to determine if the residential component of a FIG provided more social and academic integration to first-year students than to those who resided in a non-residential FIG. Eight different elements of the program were found to be statistically significant, when comparing residential and non-residential FIGs. The short answer responses provided more in-depth understanding of students' experiences.

Academic Integration

The academic component of the instrument examined students' patterns of study group formation, class attendance and anticipated GPA. Overall, participants indicated no preference when asked if they preferred to study alone or study in groups. When dividing the responses into the residential and non-residential living components, residential students were slightly more likely to study in groups than non-residential students. This pattern of group study is academically beneficial, promoting intellectual growth (Fredriksen, 1993) and helping students acquire intellectual skills (Horn, 1997). While the study group component exhibited statistical significance, the implications are few for students. The mean responses elicited from students in a residential FIG was slightly higher than non-residential students, however both were generally in disagreement that participation in the FIG program prompted the students to study with members of their FIG. While there may be academic benefits to students living in close proximity, the survey results do not prove this increased academic success.

Class attendance did not prove to be a significant variable as most participants indicated they were no more likely to attend class due to their participation in the FIG. There was also no statistically significant difference between residential and non-residential FIG members on this question. This lack of difference was also evident in an examination of students' anticipated GPAs in regard to the residential and non-residential components. Previous research by Wilcox and delMas (1997) stated students who participate in learning communities have increased class attendance. This study on FIGs illustrated students' academic achievements were not necessarily increased by participating in a learning community, which supports the research of Pike et al. (1997). Over a longer period of time, the results may provide conclusive evidence, but in one semester no significant difference was noted.

Social Integration

The social variables examined during this study consisted of the following: with whom students spent their spare time, student friendships, level of emotional support students received from their FIG members, and assistance in the transition from high school to college. The majority of the statistically significant variables were found in the social portion of the survey results.

Overall, residential FIG membership had little influence on with whom students preferred to spend their spare time or eat their meals. Residential students were consistently more positive in their responses in these areas, but were not in complete agreement with the statements. Proximity to each other seemed to have the most influence. Since residential FIG members lived with one another the opportunity for interaction was more likely than for non-residential FIG members. According to Newcomb (1962), this frequent interaction is a benefit of a residential learning community. Newcomb (1962) also suggests the more interactions there are between group members, the greater the likelihood strong friendships will develop. As Douvan (1981) stated, proximity is a major force in determining friendships during the freshmen year.

In the short answer responses the majority of both groups stated membership in their FIG helped them make friends, however the number of residential students who agreed with this statement was much higher than those students in a non-residential FIG. A similar result was derived when reviewing the level of emotional support students gained from the FIG program, members of a residential FIG felt they had gained more emotional support than the non-residential students. As Tinto (1993) stated, students' informal interactions are among the strongest socializing agents, thus these informal interactions among the residential FIG members helped them integrate more than non-residential students.

Another factor determined to impact social integration was students' transition to college. Residential FIG members once again responded more positively than non-residential students that the program aided in their transition to college. In the short answer response students stated that the program helped make the large university feel small. By the results of these areas it is reasonable to determine that proximity and increased interactions from living among one another again proved beneficial for these students.

Overall, students stated they enjoyed their FIG experience, and when residential and non-residential members were asked if they would recommend the program to other freshmen, both groups responded positively. The high level of enthusiasm for the program illustrates the impact it had on students. The short answer responses provided more insight into whether or not students thought living with their FIG members would be/is beneficial. Overall, the majority of the sample stated living with their FIG members would be/ is beneficial. Once again the majority of residential students stated they thought it was beneficial whereas only half of the non-residential students said it would be beneficial. The fact that the residential students stated they would recommend FIG participants live together provides another example of the impact the residential component has on perceived integration. This recommendation is demonstrated by a comment made by a non-residential student who stated, "I wish we did all live together that way it would be easier for us to spend time together, study, etc. instead of having to travel across campus." This quote illustrates the desire some students had to be with their FIG members more often.

Non-residential FIG members provided unique explanations as to why they did not want to live with their fellow FIG members. For instance, students stated they did not want to have only one set of friends and if they lived together they thought they would have difficulty meeting other students. Some students stated they were tired of seeing their FIG members all the time and enjoyed having other friends in their respective residential unit.

The Likert scale questions used in this study resulted in eight statistically significant findings, one academic, the remaining seven social. It is important to point out that comparatively, in terms of both social and academic integration, residential FIG members tended to answer the scaled questions in a more positive manner than did non-residential FIG. As aforementioned, the short answer questions elicited much more useful and reflective answers. From this set of questions, the majority of both residential and non-residential FIG members indicated they enjoyed the FIG experience, would encourage other first-year students to participate, and felt living together would prove beneficial in terms of academic and social integration.

This study allows for several implications to be drawn from its findings. Primarily, universities, especially larger institutions like the one used in this study, may want to look at implementing first-year programs similar to FIGs within their institutions. If such programs already exist, the effects of including a residential component should be examined, as residential living within first-year programs is not commonplace. Finally, the length of first-year programs resembling a FIG-type structure should be studied, as most are only semester long programs instead of year-long. Many students indicated a preference for more time with FIG members, thus it would be interesting to examine the effects of semester versus yearlong programs. Because students involved in this study felt they benefited from the four months of FIG participation, the effects of a yearlong program warrant additional research.

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The Impact of E-mail Use on Student-Faculty Interaction

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While research demonstrates that contact between students and teachers can positively affect students, new forms of technology are transforming the way that students and faculty interact. This paper will examine some of the positive and negative effects that the increased use of e-mail communication has on the interactions between students and faculty. Implications and recommendations for policy and practice are presented.

Close and frequent interaction between students and teachers has long been a central value of education (Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, & Bavry, 1975). Contact with faculty both in and out of the classroom has many positive impacts on students, and there is a wealth of research spanning several decades that supports this assertion. Studies have demonstrated that student-faculty interactions may enhance student development (Alberti, 1972), foster social and academic integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978), and positively affect students' academically related self-concepts (Woodside, Wone, & Wiest, 1999), educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, academic achievement, intellectual and personal development, and institutional persistence (Pascarella, 1980).

However, with the exception of one study, all of the research referenced was conducted before the advent of many of the technological advances that are now taken for granted, such as e-mail, satellite videoconferencing, Internet-based teleconferencing, and interactive multimedia classrooms. This new technology is transforming "the very nature of how higher education institutions are communicating with and educating students" (Roach, 1999, p. 92). The impact that these new forms of technology will have on student-faculty contact requires further exploration (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2000). As such, this paper will examine some of the positive and negative effects that the increased use of e-mail has on the interactions between students and faculty, and their implication for policy and practice.

Positive Aspects of E-mail Use

E-mail is increasingly becoming the preferred means of communication between students and faculty. In 1994 about 8% of