

Quest for Success: On Campus Housing Versus Off Campus Living at Kennesaw State University



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INTRODUCTION

Living situations are an important decision when attending college or university. According to Kennesaw State University's website, living on campus is a way to "meet new people and, possibly, graduate faster and with better grades." On campus living, as shown in Figure 7, is the "traditional" university living situation, which for many schools is a requirement for freshmen. Many "non-traditional" students live off campus (Figure 3) or commute (Figure 5) to campus. This study asks, does how where a student lives effect their college experience. College living experiences seem to be dependent upon three major and interlinked factors: financial, academic, and social. Financial reasons consist of gas, rent, and food prices. Academic entails overall grades and study habits. Social includes accessibility to social events and social groups (Figures 4 & 6). For some this means that "the better one adapts to a new physical and social environment, the quicker they will develop place attachment to the campus and thus improve their academic performance" (Xu et al. 2015, 103). Overall, the choice to live on or off campus could provide a satisfactory college experience or lead to one choosing to drop out or transfer to another institution. Finding the right combination of financial savings, academic opportunities, and social supports has much to do with where one lives.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research incorporating six pile sorts (Figures 1 & 2), eight semi-structured interviews, and three surveys were used to gather data. All data was collected from KSU students due to the fact that there are a variety of living situations available to students. The pile sorts and surveys were collected from an equal amount of all three categories of living: on campus housing, off campus living, and commuters. These methods were conducted over a time span of two months. The approaches were useful in gathering information from a small sample of students. Triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and member checking were used throughout the data collection process to enhance the overall validity of the study. The sample was a result of non-probability, quota sampling.



Figure 1. Data Collection: Pile Sort

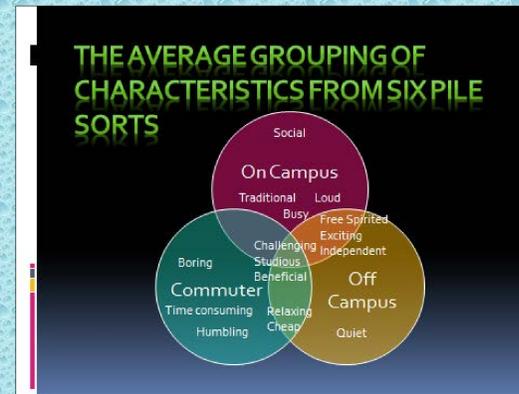


Figure 2. Result of Pile Sort



Figure 3. Off Campus Living

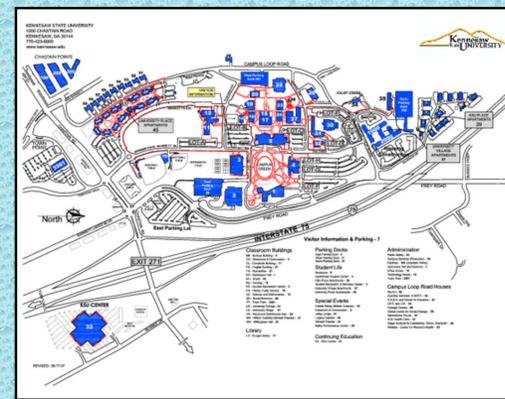


Figure 4. Map of Kennesaw's Campus



Figure 5. Commuters



Figure 6. Campus Event



Figure 7. On Campus Housing: Freshmen dorms, the Village Suites

RESULTS

Findings from the semi-structured interviews and surveys were mixed suggesting diverse reasons for choosing living arrangements in higher education. In *Does It Matter Where College Students Live?*, Long states that "GPA is greater in their first year than those who live further away due to a sense of belonging" (2014, 69). However, students favor one aspect over another, so living preferences rely heavily on the individual. Choices include enjoyment of being able to get away from campus, but still feel connected through social outings and technology. On the other hand, on campus housing may appeal due to motivations to get involved in campus activities with an increased likelihood to attend classes.

DISCUSSION

There are themes within each living preference. Those who stay on campus enjoy the ease of it. They claim everything they need is already there including classes, food, and friends, and it brings a sense of belonging to the students as well as improves their desire to do well in classes. This direct immersion in higher education leads to higher graduation rates (Ong et al. 2013:152). For the off campus individuals, they prefer the maturity of living apart from the campus. As Susan stated, "I'm an adult; I pay my own bills and have my own job. The last thing I would want is a babysitter [referring to an RA]" (March 10, 2016). Lastly, commuters do not really enjoy the trip back and forth to campus due to "spending half my day stuck in traffic" (March 15, 2016) and having no social life with students already living at or near the university. Commuters enjoy time with their family while bemoaning the time it takes them to get to and from campus.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this research indicate that people are picking housings based on personal experiences and self conclusions on what they deem as the their best learning and life environment. Some stick to what they know, for instance, only living on campus, but most people eventually experience more than one type of living situation due to curiosity or a way to show maturity.

REFERENCES

See author for full list of references.

Photos:

Figure 1: Taken by author; Figure 2: Made by Author; Figure 3: trulia.com; Figure 4: mappery.com; Figure 5: theloop.ca; Figure 6: ksuhousing.kennesaw.edu; Figure 7: kennesawlife.com.