Motivations and Consequences of Students Going Home on the Weekends: An Ethnographic Study of Illinois State University

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• Our project centered on the observation that many students who live in the residence halls go home for the weekends.

• We learned that ISU administrators were concerned about this trend and its implications for student involvement.
The Residential Campus

- Illinois State University has considered itself a residential campus from very early on
- Over 30% of the student body has lived on-campus since 1933
Why is this important?

- Residence halls were created as a place where students would:
  1. Remain immersed in their studies
  2. Interact with other students and professors

- We predicted that ISU would try to keep students on campus because of the belief that it was beneficial to the student and his or her studies to remain involved with the university.
Previous research about residence halls has included:

- Ethnic Diversity
- Racial Segregation
- Resident Assistants Roles
- Community Within the Halls
- Effects of Dorm Living on Study Habits

As far as we can tell, our topic has never been explored before, making this very unique and interesting!
Research Questions

• What are the main reasons that students chose to return home frequently throughout the semester?
• Does Illinois State University try to encourage students to stay on-campus over the weekend?
• If so, in what ways does the university attempt this? And how is it failing?
Research Tactics

• Informed consent was obtained for every interview and survey completed, and all data was taken from within the guidelines dictated by our IRB protocol.

• Interviews with 13 students and 3 members of the faculty at Illinois State University.

• We also conducted a survey of 60 students (45 females between the ages of 18-20 and 15 males between the ages of 18-22) who live in the residence halls at Illinois State.
Themes Discovered

- Students return home mainly to visit their families
- The University attempts to keep students on campus by providing residence hall spaces that “feel like home” yet offer amenities for communal living
- The University is concerned with its residence hall students and whether or not they are getting involved in campus activities
Family Ties

- Students maintain frequent, often daily, contact with their parents and going home on weekends is a large part of how students maintain family ties while living at college.
- 57% (34 out of 60) of students reported that their parents affect their decision to go home.
Life at ISU

- Illinois State’s goal is to make the dormitories feel like home for the residing student.

- They provide study areas, game rooms, fitness centers, and kitchens which are meant to encourage the student to stay in the dorms and feel at home.
Campus Involvement

• The university is very concerned with whether students are getting involved because that is how students can meet other students, get educated, and become exposed to diversity.

• 47 out of 60 students surveyed said that they were involved in extracurricular activities.
Conclusion #1

- Over all, we found family ties are very important to students and is the main reason students return home.
- With an increase in new technologies such as texting and facebook, it is easy for students to remain dependent on and in contact with their parents.
Conclusion #2

- Students said they felt comfortable in the dorms, but there were complaints about the dorms and possible ways to improve them.
- We believe that inconveniences (such as a lack of common areas, or uncleanly common areas) within the dorms often prompt students to return to the comforts of home when they can.
Conclusion #3

- The University provides programs and activities to keep students on campus and in the residence halls.
- The University is concerned with student involvement because they believe it will provide an enriching experience that goes beyond the classroom.
Success!

- Students report being involved in campus activities, which means that the university is achieving their goal of providing an enriching experience for every student.

- 99% of students reported that they have made a connection to the university.
Improvements

• Students have complaints about the residence halls, which should be addressed to make halls feel more like “home”

• Students are still returning home on the weekends, which suggests that either family ties are too strong or the university needs to provide different events or programs to encourage them to stay.