

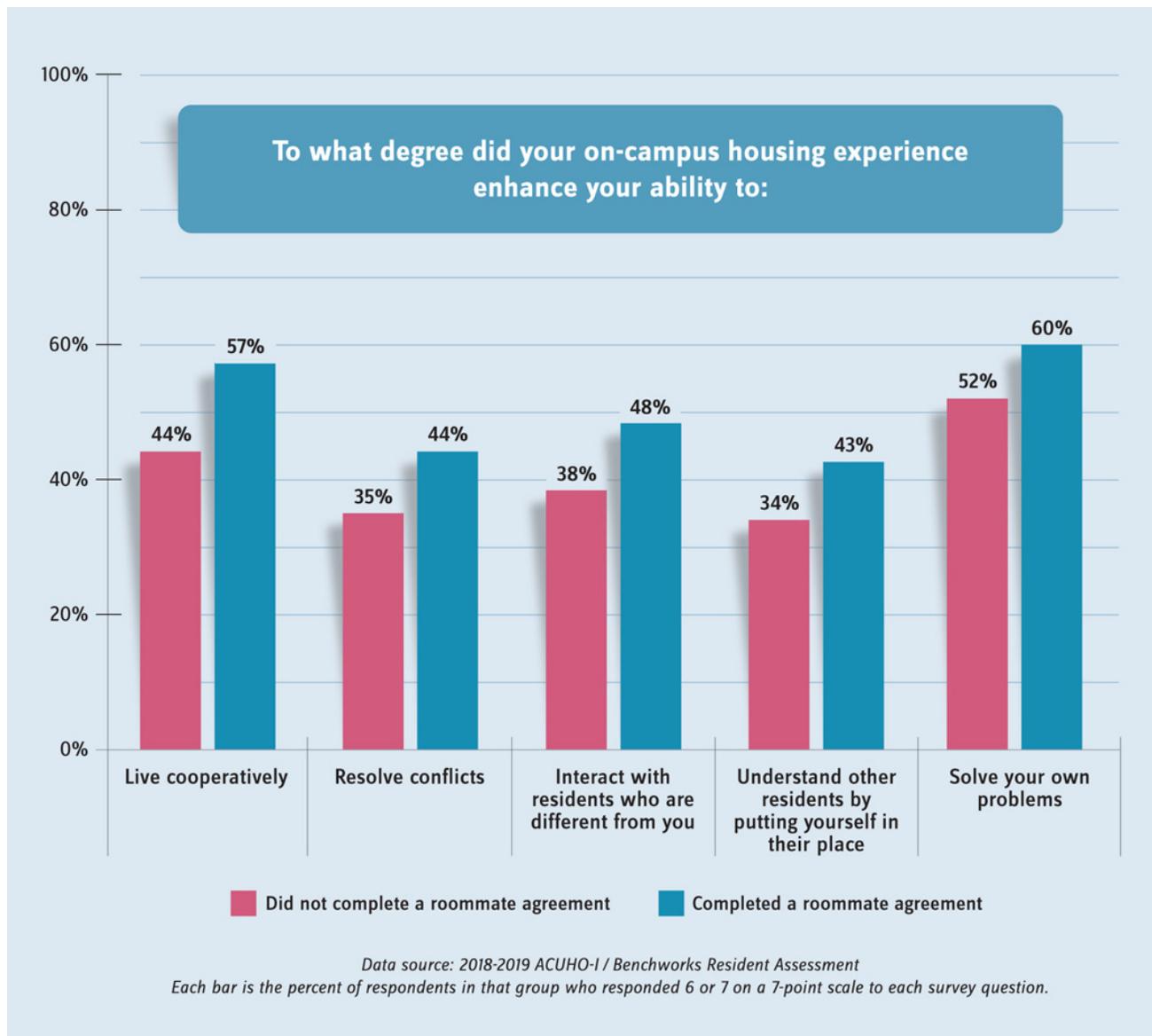
IT FIGURES

Agreeing (how) to Disagree

by Matthew Venaas and Cate Morrison

Room assignments are far from a foolproof science. While housing departments implement a variety of strategies to inform the assignment process, it can be difficult to assess what factors contribute to a positive assignment. The ability to improve the success rate of this process is valuable as roommate assignments can amplify a positive student experience. Conversely, when a student has a roommate concern, they talk to everyone about it. Their parents know, their professors know, and their friends know. Meanwhile, it often falls to the staff to resolve the issue, resulting in additional work for everyone from the resident assistants to the front desk staff to the assignments clerks.

Beyond the initial roommate assignment, the roommate agreement process, practiced by many campuses, is a resource to help students understand how to proactively and effectively address current and potential problems in order to reduce harm. In fact, in a recent Skyfactor survey, 73% of respondents completed a roommate agreement during the current academic year. These roommate agreements serve to start a conversation and introduce the RA as the first point of contact when things start to go sideways.



Roommate agreements vary in length and can cover a wide range of topics. Often, the agreements address sleeping preferences (early bird versus night owl), study preferences (morning, afternoon, evening, or throughout the night), and guest preferences (need permission first, okay during the day, okay overnight). Years of experience have shown the aforementioned elements to be essential to discuss when sharing a room with others. As times have changed, though, housing and residence life programs have also experienced success when asking roommates to discuss additional topics and document their thoughts in a formalized agreement. Some of these topics include preferences for stress management strategies (need alone time, listen to music, etc.); communicating feelings and frustrations (prefer to write notes, text, talk face-to-face, etc.); social media guidelines (can you post images of each other or from your room?); and safety and security and the willingness to share, borrow, or use personal belongings (will you let your roommate know if you're not going to be home? Do you need to lock the door?).

Through this past year, roommate agreements have even had to consider provisions to address issues like wearing masks, the limit on the number of visitors in a room or suite, cleaning, and communication about potential exposure and if someone has symptoms.

These conversations make a difference. Data from Skyfactor's Resident Assessment indicate that students who completed a roommate agreement were more likely to report high satisfaction with their roommates and greater

satisfaction with their overall housing experience and were more likely to indicate that they learned from their housing experience (including outcomes like resolving conflicts, solving problems, and understanding other residents by putting yourself in their place). From this information, it's clear that roommate agreements have a definite impact on the holistic satisfaction of resident students.

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