

## CASE STUDY **University of Central Florida**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CENTRAL FLORIDA**



The University of Central Florida (UCF) is a metropolitan research state university that serves over 70,000 students annually, over 11,000 of whom live on campus in UCF-owned, UCF-managed, or UCF-affiliated student housing. In addition to its main campus in Orlando, the Hispanic Serving Institution enrolls students in UCF Online and Connect Campuses throughout the region. UCF harnesses the power of scale, inclusive excellence, and innovative practice to improve outcomes for all students across the socioeconomic spectrum, particularly low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color.

"The ACUHO-I / Benchworks Resident Assessment enabled us to showcase our department's contributions to UCF's retention, persistence, and graduation goals by helping residents to develop a strong sense of belonging and providing supportive learning environments."

*Virginia Koch, Assessment and Research Specialist*

### GOALS

UCF's strategic plan emphasizes leading with innovation and creating partnerships at every level to foster a culture of shared ownership. The Department of Housing and Resident Life contributes to this strategic plan through their efforts to make early connections, maintain engagement, and close the assessment loop. In particular, they connect students to the UCF community which requires sustained effort informed by relevant data.

### SOLUTION

To accomplish their institutional and departmental goals, the Department of Housing and Resident Life used ACUHO-I/ Benchworks Resident Assessment to:

- ◆ Understand resident needs during the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ Show the impact of the changes they had made in pivoting to a virtual experience
- ◆ Communicate the value of the on-campus housing experience to key stakeholders



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## KEY INITIATIVES & INSIGHTS

### A FORMATIVE APPROACH

Historically, UCF conducted the Resident Assessment each spring; however, in 2020-21 they moved their administration to the fall semester. This allowed UCF to measure resident perceptions and needs during the pandemic and take a formative approach by using data to motivate improvement opportunities during the rest of the academic year.

### CONTRIBUTING TO BELONGING

UCF connected early and often to maintain student engagement during fall 2020. As such, the fruits of their labor were reflected in survey results. The percent of on-campus residents indicating that their housing experience contributed to their sense of belonging increased from 77% in spring 2018 to 92.5% in fall 2020.

### THOUGHTFUL ADJUSTMENTS

To prepare for virtual and contactless engagement, UCF made many adjustments including modifications to their residential curriculum, adding new programming during the summer for incoming residents, and adjusting staff training to educate them on learning outcomes, new policies, and modified procedures.

### VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

With the return of students to campus in fall 2020, UCF shifted their student outreach to virtual formats. From summer open houses with incoming residents to over 30 community programs in the fall, data collected from the Resident Assessment helped UCF highlight how residents positively perceived those changes during the pandemic.

### SHARING RESULTS

Housing and Residence Life staff share key insights from their survey results with stakeholders through bi-weekly department newsletters. Articles have covered topics like personal interactions, the influence of student staff, increases to sense of belonging, and satisfaction with services.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Housing and Residence Life staff collected contact information from interested students to easily enroll them in a campus-wide Learning and Interacting with New Knights (LINK) program designed to encourage first-year student involvement and combat pandemic-fueled "cabin fever." An October 2020 survey of 897 residents found that more than half (52.8%) were involved with campus clubs or activities outside of their residence hall.