



ENGAGE TO ACHIEVE MORE

# Winning at Residence Life: Tales of Success



This whitepaper has been adapted from an original presentation by Richard DeShields, Dean of Student Engagement and Auxiliary Services at Miles Community College; Scott Helfrich, Director of University Housing & Conference Services at Millersville University; Joseph Moon, Dean of Campus Life & Michele Hempfling Associate Dean of Campus Life at Oxford College; Nathan Bodenstadt, Director of Residence Life at the University of Alaska Southeast; Virginia Koch, Assessment and Research Specialist at the University of Central Florida; Michael Klitzke, Assistant Director for Curriculum & Assessment, Housing & Residential Education at the University of Northern Colorado; and Nora Jarmon, Director of Residence Life at The University of Tampa.

# Introduction

## **How do you measure the effectiveness of your resident life programs?**

Whether you're creating the programs, aligning practices with institutional goals, or are a team member carrying out initiatives, you need data to know that what you're doing is resonating with students. Without proper student feedback and the ability to collect the same types of data each year, you can't analyze how the changes you make impact student success at any level.

**Skyfactor Benchworks** can help make this happen, and many higher education institutions using Skyfactor's market-leading assessments and benchmarking are seeing notable results. With Skyfactor, these institutions are identifying areas of success and addressing areas needing improvement to ensure maximum impact on student outcomes.

In 2019, Skyfactor began awarding the Assessment and Impact Award for Housing & Residence Life, to honor the achievements of these institutions. This award highlights housing programs who are effectively utilizing assessment data to improve their services and programming.

Among the 2021 winners, we see examples of outside-the-box programmatic strategies that specifically address what the institution's students need. As our recipients tell their stories, they also offer up advice on how to best use data in these specific situations. It's the perfect combination of positive outcomes, food for thought, and suggestions on how to use assessments at your own institution.



# Miles Community College

Miles Community College is a small school with 400 full-time employees and only 150 students on campus. It is located in a rural community and many students have ties to agriculture and sustainability, which the Housing Program used to shape its sustainability initiative. They now offer a year-long service project where students volunteer within the local community to help with projects related to food and sustainability.

Because of the traditional agricultural population, sustainability can sometimes be a touchy subject. But student feedback and focus groups have led to conversations about locally-sourced foods, food availability, and food equity, which gave Residence Life a better understanding of students' needs for meal selection on campus. As a result of this data and student feedback, Miles Community College now provides more vegan choices on campus.

Collecting data every year has enabled Miles Community College to see a clear path when it comes to their dining halls and meal options. They use assessments to help make sure they're moving in the right direction and understand what steps are necessary to get to their end goal.



**2021 Skyfactor Benchworks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

Recognized for high performance on survey scores related to sustainability



# Millersville University of Pennsylvania

One of 14 public institutions in the Pennsylvania system of higher education, Millersville is about two hours west of Philadelphia. With around 6,800 students, 2,200 students live on campus in suite-style housing.

To align with the university's strategic plan, the Housing Department implemented a new resident engagement model focused on transforming the student experience and fostering innovation. Modifications were made to training and a new priority of creating "living learning" communities emerged.

Assessment data focused specifically on student outcomes helped to inform Millersville's strategic planning process. A selection of key metrics were chosen to look at more carefully, including those related to staffing, wellness, diversity, equity, inclusion, and "living learning" initiatives.

## **To date, six "living learning" communities exist across campus:**

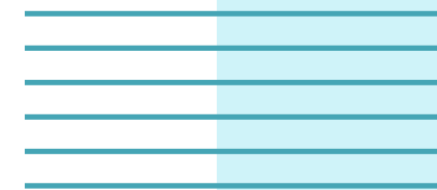
- Honors College
- Social Advocacy
- Women in STEM
- ROTC
- Support Services Department
- LGBTQ plus allies

Current goals include growing these communities and encouraging one out of every five students to join one of these communities by 2025. Assessment data helped to tell the story



**2021 Skyfactor Benchworks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

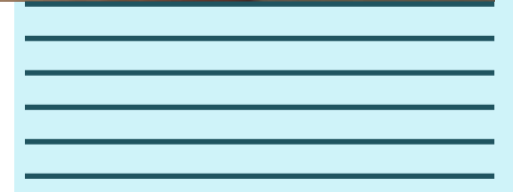
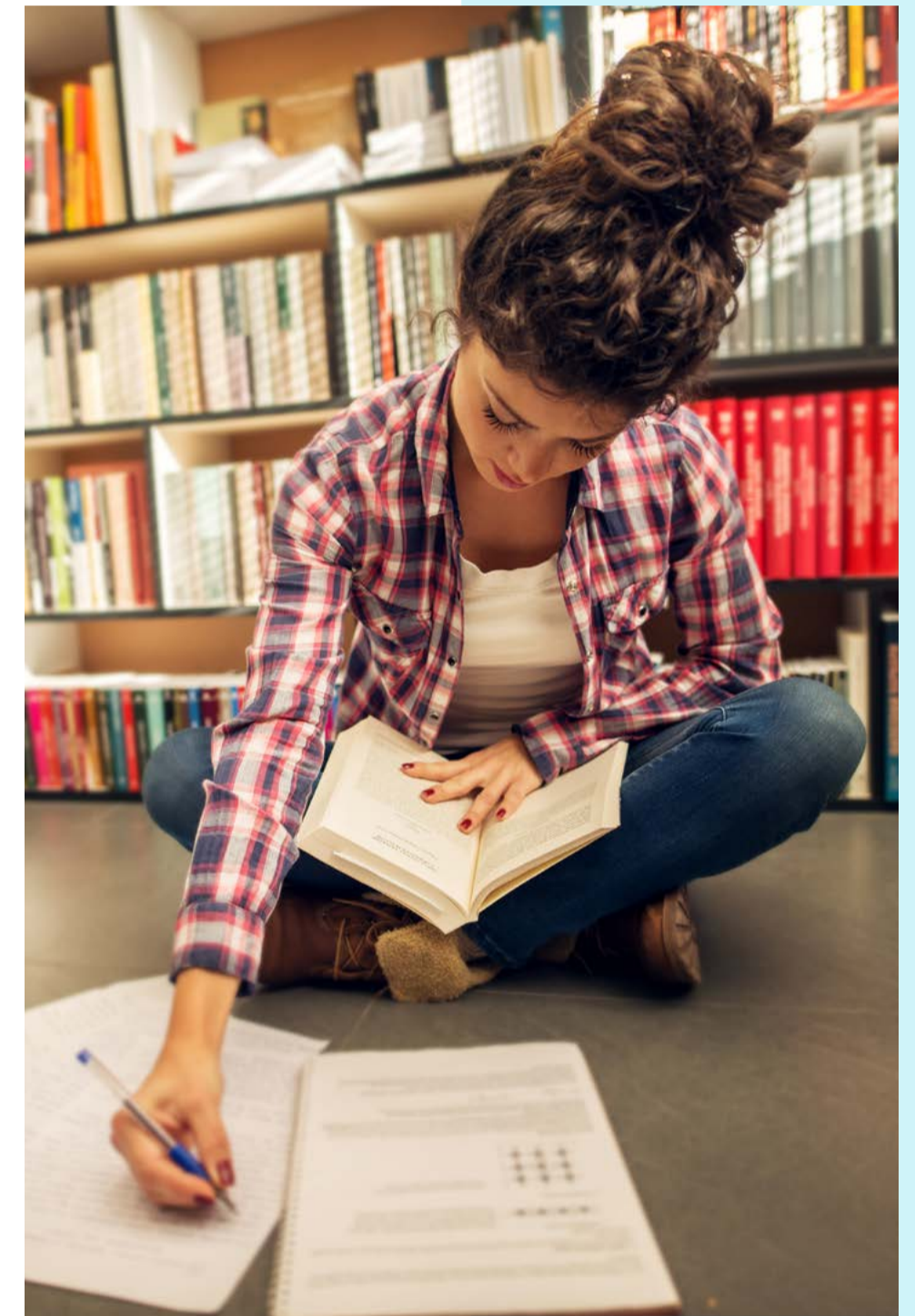
Recognized for significant improvements  
on surveys related to personal interactions,  
diverse interactions, and student satisfaction



of the growth of this program and enabled the department to prove they're maintaining their mission of providing safe and engaging living learning experiences throughout their residence halls.

**TIP**

When focusing on metrics, pick a few key ones to concentrate on. Looking at too much information gets overwhelming. Even if your department touches on every aspect of campus life, narrowing your focus helps you get good at serving students in a select area first. Then, you can move on to another set of factors.



# Oxford College at Emory University

Oxford College is a unique part of Emory University in that it only works with first-year and second-year students, 99% of which live on campus. Although the campus population is already diverse, adding a program that embedded the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout Oxford proved to be of significant value to those students' housing experiences.

Being a small school within a larger university, it's not often possible to only work with freshman and sophomores. Through residential education and training, and with a student population open to telling their stories, Oxford was able to weave diversity into everything they do.

By using assessment data from the previous ten years, Oxford was able to make student feedback a primary factor in shaping this program. Data helped ensure that diversity, inclusion, and equity were a part of everything and that this core value is very visible.

Today, these core values are a draw for students to attend Oxford College.



EMORY  
OXFORD  
COLLEGE



**2021 Skyfactor Benchworks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

Recognized for high performance on survey scores related to diverse interaction and satisfaction



# University of Alaska Southeast

As a school with a very small campus and a tight-knit community, the University of Alaska Southeast takes pride in being able to connect with every student on an individual basis. Recent changes to the Housing Department allowed them to better address conflict management.

Students are now encouraged to take a proactive, involved approach to conflict management. They are required to complete roommate agreements at the start of each academic year, which both introduces students to each other and serves as a preventative measure for common conflicts.

In addition, staff members are now trained to help students address conflicts on their own. Instead of calling to make a complaint, parties gather with the support of an RA to have a meaningful interaction. Training teaches staff how to lead an educational, supportive, and instructive conversation.

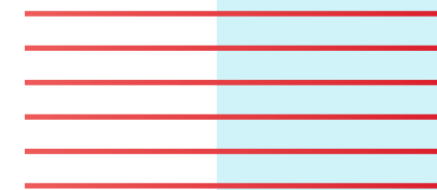
Outreach is also taking place for students living off-campus as well. Resident advisor (RA) at the school serve as supplemental orientation leaders for new students so they can get to know a broader array of students, not just those that live in their building. This is important since the school does not have a student union—students typically gather in communal areas within residence halls and the housing lodge. Now, those students have a touchpoint with staff when they're socializing on campus.

Each aspect of this shift helps to maintain an environment that's supportive and safe from the very start of a student's college career.



**2021 Skyfactor Benchworks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

Recognized for significant improvement in  
survey scores related to resident status



# University of Central Florida

The University of the Central Florida is an exceptionally large school—over 70,000 students, with 11,000 living on campus. Collecting data from this size population makes it possible to see every student. This, in turn, allows the Department of Housing and Residence Life to make specific adjustments and then confirm that those changes are working.

This was crucially important when UCF reopened their campus residences after the COVID-19 shutdown. The primary focus was understanding how students felt about their remote learning experience and the transition back to campus life. Looking at assessment data after the campus re-opened, the Department could see that programs they had in place were having a positive effect. The overall sense of belonging of on-campus students was at its highest level in years.



UNIVERSITY OF  
CENTRAL FLORIDA



**2021 Skyfactor Benchworks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

Recognized for significant improvement to  
survey scores related to a sense of community





# University of Northern Colorado

About 45% of University of Northern Colorado's students are the first of their families to go to college. In addition, the school is also emerging as a Hispanic-serving institution, and around one-third of the population is eligible for Pell Grants.

To address this population, UNC moved away from a traditional model of engagement to one that provided one-on-one conversations between students and RAs. This was especially important to help first-year students make the transition to college.

Making this change meant changing how RAs are trained. They're now responsible for facilitating continuing dialogues with students throughout the first year. Starting out with how students are adjusting both academically and socially, conversations then shift to whether the student knows how to find appropriate campus resources, what their social involvement is like, whether they feel included, and finally, how they would assess their overall first-year experience.

Roughly 87% of the UCF student population participates in these conversations for an average of 30 minutes. Additional assessment shows that with this program, students feel more supported and have a greater sense of community. Results have also helped shape RA training and recruiting, and have even influenced the mapping of skill development.

Student Affairs, academic colleges, and Success Centers are now also involved with the program. The more traditional RA roles have also been shifted to full-time neighborhood coordinators and faculty-in-residence.

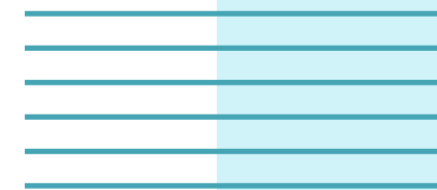


UNIVERSITY OF  
**NORTHERN  
COLORADO**



**2021 Skyfactor Benchmarks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

Recognized for significant improvement  
to survey scores related to community  
environment satisfaction



# University of Tampa

At the University of Tampa, a four-year private institution with about 10,000 students, most undergraduates live on campus. To support this large on-site population and to align with campus-wide competency development goals, the school introduced a new residential education model, with academic advisors conducting sessions in residence halls.

The school also instituted monthly “Spartan Chats”—conversations led by RAs covering a variety of topics related to academic initiatives. Assessments after implementation showed high marks from students, who felt like no one was asking/answering these questions previously. Students also appreciated the personalized attention.

Having access to so much data allowed review of personal interaction across residence halls. One clear finding: most of the halls with lower scores didn’t have a full-time or live-in staff member. The data made a compelling case for adding staff and now there’s someone in every first-year building.

## **TIP**

Using and sharing assessment data is key, especially when it comes to training. Sharing this data helps everyone understand what behaviors are useful and meaningful to students. This then makes interactions more purposeful and intentional.

THE UNIVERSITY  
OF TAMPA



**2021 Skyfactor Benchworks  
Assessment and Impact  
Award Recipient**

Recognized for significant improvement in  
survey scores related to academic initiative  
and personal interaction





## Don't work in a residence life vacuum

Being intentional and innovative when it comes to residence life can positively shape each student's entire collegiate experience. But in order to make sure your programming works, you need to hear from the students. Skyfactor assessments help you streamline the process of collecting data, identifying trends over time, and measuring impact.

To learn more about Skyfactor, visit [skyfactor.com](https://skyfactor.com).

You can also request a demo at [skyfactor.com/request-a-demo/](https://skyfactor.com/request-a-demo/).