



# The Impact of Roommates on First-Year Students

Skyfactor Research Note

# The Impact of Roommates on First-Year Students

Having a roommate is a normal part of a first year student's college experience, since 87% of students have one or more. With this in mind, it is important to consider the potential impact of having a roommate on students, both in terms of their perception of their experience as well as in terms of their outcomes including retention and academic performance.

This note explores the relationships between having a roommate and other aspects of a student's first-year academic experience, using a national dataset of 112,438 first-year students from 128 institutions in the United States.

### Key Questions:

1. How many roommates do first-year students typically have?
2. What are the characteristics of students who have roommates vs. those who do not?
3. How is having a roommate or number of roommates related to key outcomes?
4. Does the number of roommates a student have matter?

### Key Points:

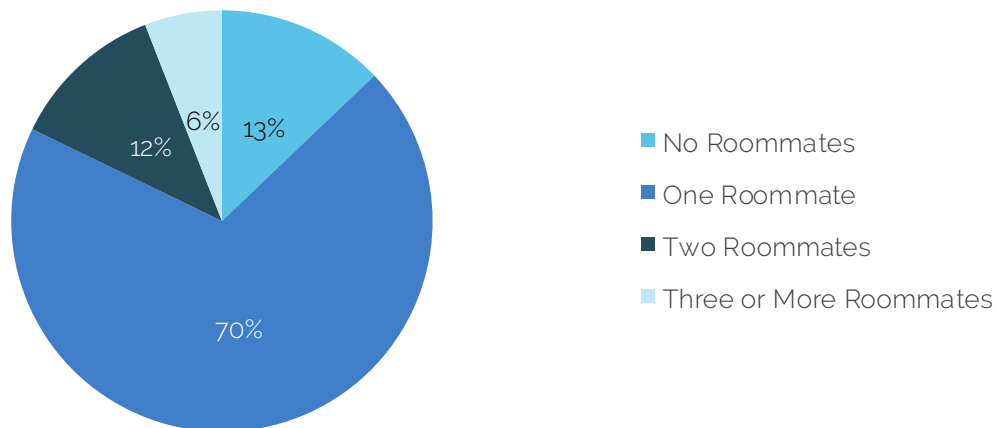
- Most students typically have one roommate.
- There is a relationship between having or not having a roommate and various aspects of the first-year student experience—including commitment, satisfaction, connections, and homesickness.
- Having a roommate is related to key outcomes, including academic performance and retention.

## How many roommates do first-year students typically have?

The most common situation for first-year students is to have one roommate, with no roommates and two roommates being nearly tied for second at only 13% and 12% respectively. Only 6% of students have three or more roommates.

**Figure 1: Number of Roommates for First-Year Students**

Percentage of first-year students having each number of roommates



## Roommates and the First-Year Experience

Does having a roommate or not relates to various factors associated with first-year student transition such as institutional commitment, satisfaction, social engagement, and homesickness distress? Our data indicates that there is a small but significant connection between them, with having a roommate always being preferable to not having a roommate.

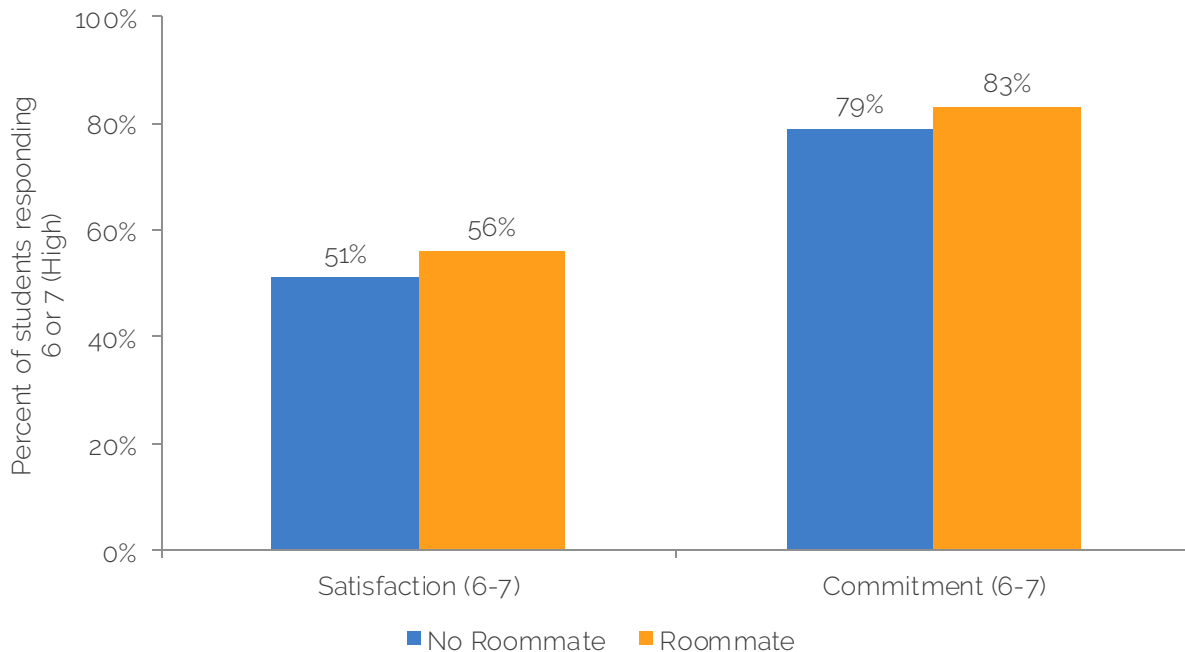
### Commitment and Satisfaction

Figure 2 below shows the percentage of first-year students responding averaging 6 or higher (extremely) on questions related to institutional commitment and satisfaction by whether they have a roommate or not. Students with roommates are more satisfied and more committed than those without roommates.

- When asked questions about their intent to return to the institution for the spring and fall semesters and their level of commitment to finishing their degree at their current institution, students with roommates were more likely to rate themselves as highly committed than those without roommates by 5%.
- When asked whether they would choose their current institution again, recommend it to others, and what their overall satisfaction with the institution was, 4% more students with roommates were again more likely to rate themselves as highly satisfied%.

### Figure 2: Commitment and Satisfaction

Percentage of first-year students responding averaging 6 or higher (extremely) on questions related to institutional commitment and satisfaction by whether they have a roommate or not.



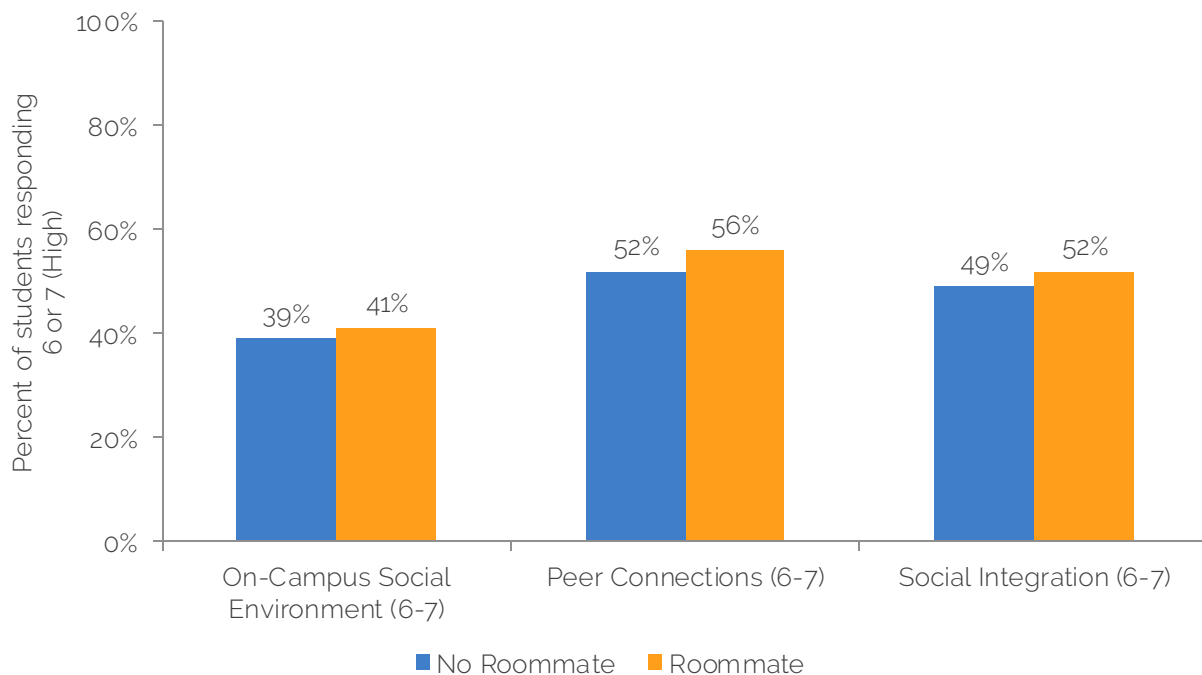
## Social Engagement

Figure 3 below shows the percentage of first-year students responding averaging 6 or higher (extremely) on questions related to social engagement by whether they have a roommate or not. Each of these factors addresses different aspects of students' social experiences by looking into their degree of engagement into their social environment as well as their satisfaction with their social situation.

- Students were asked to rate their on-campus social environment and those with roommates were 2% more likely than those without roommates to rate it very highly.
- When asked questions about the peer connections they were making, 4% more students with roommates consistently rated themselves higher than those without roommates.
- When asked about social integration, 3% more students with roommates rated themselves highly than those without.

### Figure 3: Social Engagement

Percentage of first-year students responding averaging 6 or higher (extremely) on questions related to social engagement by whether they have a roommate or not.



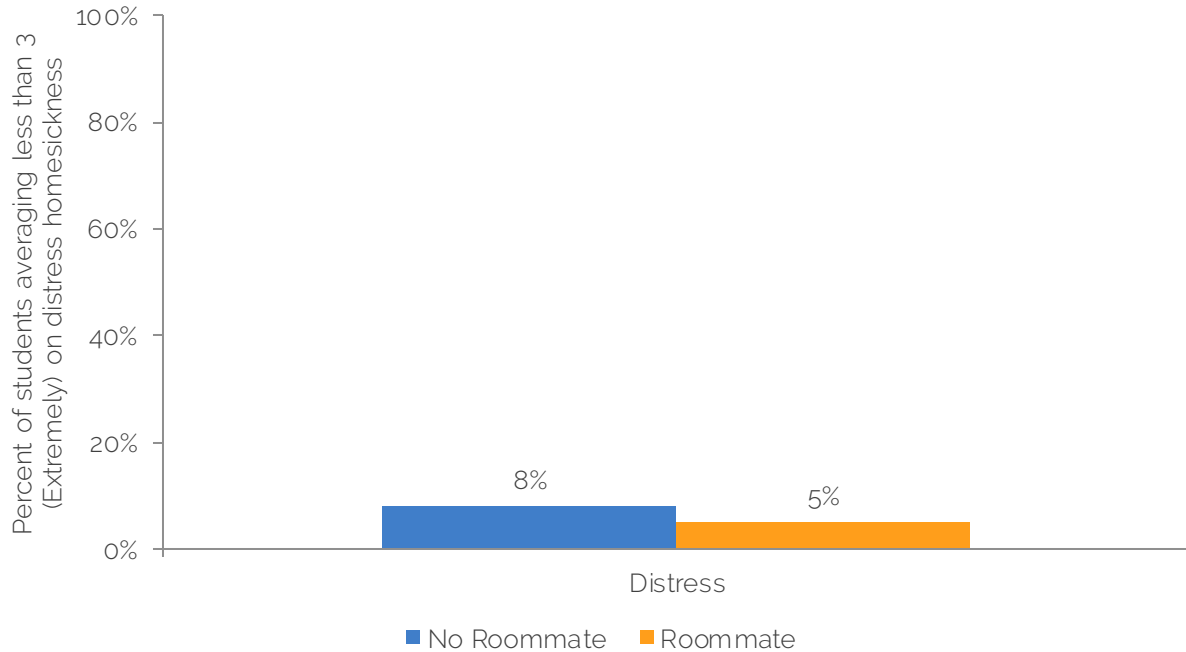
## Homesickness Distress

Figure 3 below shows the percentage of first-year students responding averaging 3 or lower (extremely) on questions related to homesickness distress by whether they have a roommate or not. While overall prevalence of homesickness distress is relatively low (less than 6% on average), 3% fewer students with roommates have homesickness distress than those without roommates.

- 8% of students with no roommates report high homesickness distress.
- Only 5% of students with roommates report high homesickness distress.

### Figure 3: Homesickness Distress

Percentage of first-year students responding averaging 3 or lower (Extremely) on questions related to homesickness distress by whether they have a roommate or not.



### Roommates and Student Outcomes

Does having a roommate have an influence on student outcomes? Our data indicate that there is a small but significant connection between having a roommate and student outcomes.

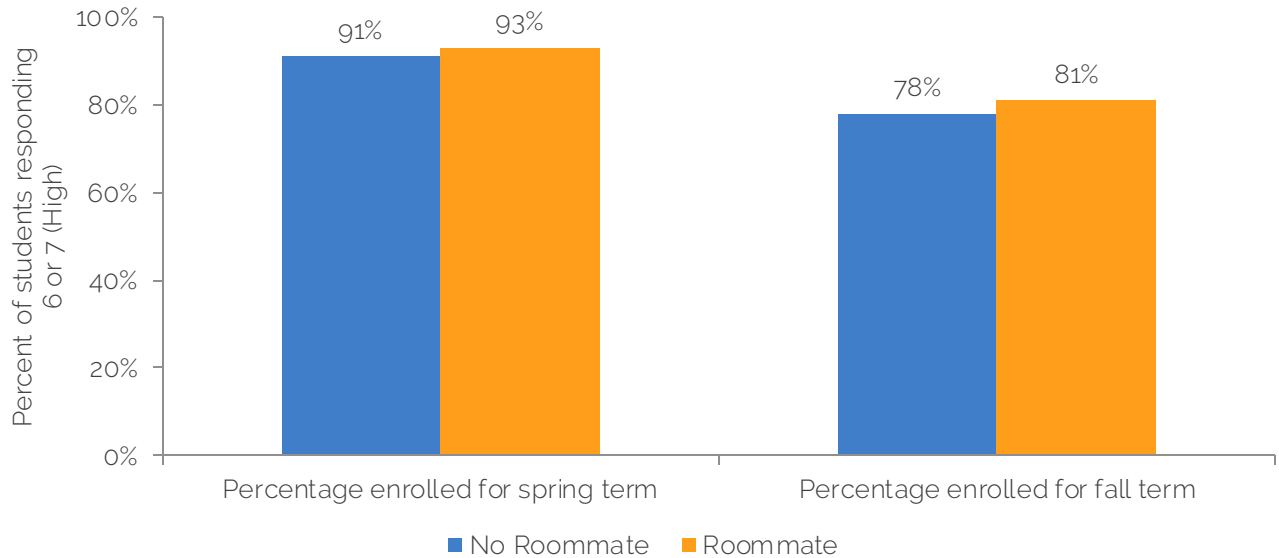
#### Persistence and Retention

Figure 3 below shows the percentage of first-year students returning for the spring semester or the fall semester by whether they have a roommate or not.

- When looking at which students continue on to the next spring semester, 2% more students with roommates were likely to continue than those without roommates.
- We see this slight trend continue during the following fall semester, with 3% more students with roommates continue on than those without.

### Figure 3: Persistence and Retention

Percentage of first-year students returning for the spring semester or the fall semester by whether they have a roommate or not.

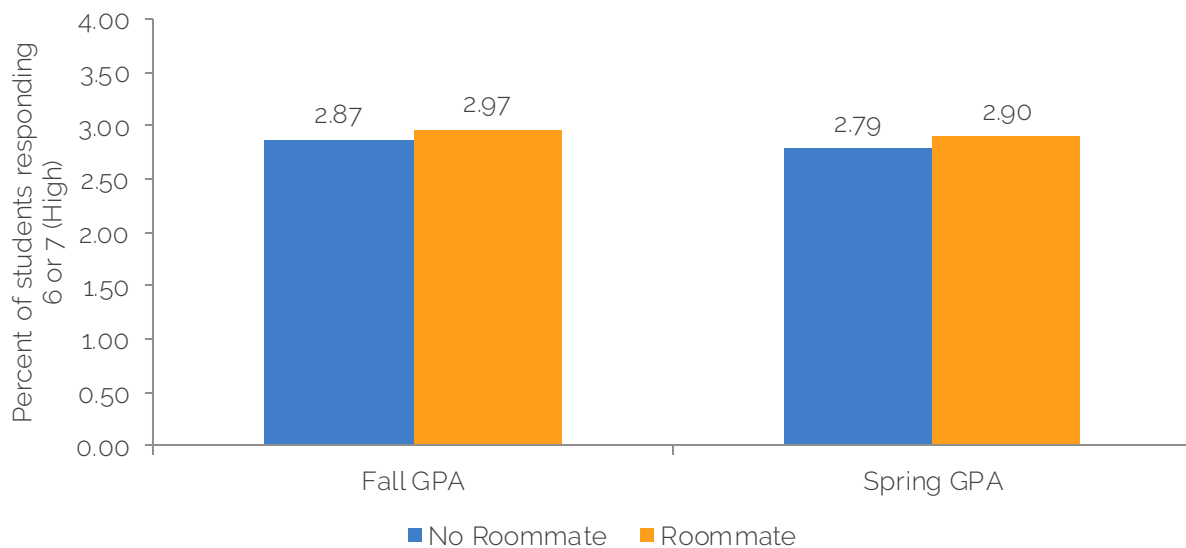


### Academic Performance

Figure 5 below shows the average GPA for the fall term and the following spring term by whether or not they had a roommate. Those with roommates during their first semester have a somewhat higher GPA for both their first semester and the following spring semester. This is seen by a GPA difference of around .10 GPA points bringing the students closer to a 3.0 GPA.

### Figure 4: Academic Performance

Average GPA for the fall term and the following spring term by whether or not they had a roommate.



## Conclusion

Overall, there is a difference in the first-year transition experience and key student outcomes between students who do and do not have roommates.

Students who have at least one roommate are more likely to report higher levels of institutional commitment, peer connections, social integration, and satisfaction with their on-campus social environment than students who do not have a roommate. Additionally, students who have at least one roommate are less likely to report high levels of distress homesickness.

When looking solely at outcomes, students with at least one roommate are more likely to have a higher first-term GPA and are more likely to re-enroll for both their second term and their second academic year when compared to students who do not have a roommate in on-campus housing.

Considering that out of all of the factors measured in our survey the ones that showed significance are largely related to social factors, it appears that roommates are important to the building of a social network or support system. This can, in turn, serve to increase students' overall satisfaction with their experience and commitment as well as improve their performance and retention.

## About the Data

The data used in this research note is from the 2014-2015 Mapworks Fall Transition Survey. The survey was jointly designed by the survey development team at Skyfactor and researchers at Ball State University. The Transition Survey measures the behaviors and expectations of students entering a college or university. Data is typically collected beginning three to four weeks into the fall term via Skyfactor's online survey system. The data in this note is from 112,438 first-year college students from 128 two and four-year institutions in the United States. The note also used student profile data uploaded by participating institutions during the 2014-2015 academic year, including but not limited to term GPA and retention.

## About Skyfactor

Skyfactor (formerly EBI MAP-Works) and Ball State University partnered to create Mapworks. Mapworks capitalizes on Ball State's 20 years of experience with the original MAP (Making Achievement Possible) and Skyfactor's 14 years of experience with national benchmarking assessments.

Mapworks® is a research-based, comprehensive, student retention and success platform created through a partnership between Skyfactor and Ball State University. It capitalizes on Ball State's 20+ years of experience with the original Making Achievement Possible (MAP) program and Skyfactor's expertise in national benchmarking assessments. Mapworks leverages predictive analytics to identify at-risk students. It presents that information in a format that makes it easy for an institution's faculty and staff to focus on the needs of students early in the term and to have a positive impact on student success and retention.





For more information about Skyfactor Mapworks and services, to schedule a demonstration, or to sign up for a webinar, please write to us at [info@Skyfactor.com](mailto:info@Skyfactor.com) or visit [Skyfactor.com](http://Skyfactor.com)