

1st Edition



Intentional Conversations & Customized Care

In Residence Life and Education

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This book is part of a series. The first book in the series “A Residence Life and Education Framework: Three C’s: Community, Competencies, & Care” sets the stage, providing a guide on how to think of residence life practice. This book does a deep dive in the “Care” aspect of the 3C Framework. To download all the books currently available in the series (and more) head to book.roompack.com.



About The Author: Dr. Paul Gordon Brown (he/him/his) is a scholar, consultant, and speaker specializing in residence life and higher education and its intersection with technology. Paul has 25 years of professional experience in higher education and student affairs, holding positions within residence life ranging from Resident Assistant to Dean of Students. Paul holds a PhD in Higher Education from Boston College and has taught in the Higher Education Programs at Boston College and Merrimack College. Paul currently serves as the Director of the Campus Experience for the residence life and education software company, Roompack. An experienced presenter, Paul has given over 100 refereed presentations at international and regional conferences. He has also offered residence life practice workshops at nearly 50 different institutions. Paul served as a faculty member for the ICA/RCI Institutes for 14 years, was a faculty member for ACUHO-I’s Professional Standards Institute, ACUHO-I’s STARS College, and is a graduate of ACUHO-I’s National Housing Training Institute. Paul is a prolific author, writing self-published work on residence life and numerous peer-reviewed book chapters and articles on technology and student learning. Paul currently serves as a reviewer for The Journal of College and University Student Housing.

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Introduction

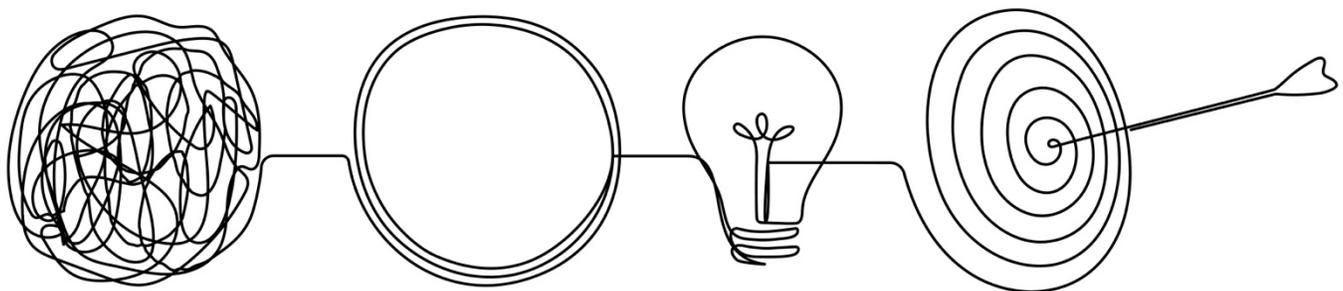
Generations change and so must residence life. We can't rely on the tacit assumption that if we put students in a building together, hire RAs, and hold events, community will happen. When we need to intervene or educate, we can't rely solely on one-size-fits-all solutions as the answer to every issue. Lonely residents? Host a pizza party. Academic struggles? Plan a study session. Although these events still have value, the toolkit needs to be expanded. The landscape of higher education has shifted. College is a fundamentally different environment than it was even ten or fifteen years ago. The competition for student time is fierce, and the complexity of student needs has increased. Students today live in a world curated by algorithms that customize their social feeds and smart assistants that manage their lives. In this context, a generic flyer on a bulletin board isn't enough. To engage residents effectively, we must move away from relying on hoped-for exposure and move toward strategies that are personal, proactive, and intentional.

This book is a deep dive into the "Care" component of the 3C Framework (Community, Competencies, and Care) which was introduced in the first book in this series. This book is about developing a Care Infrastructure so that the well-intentioned, hard work of staff connects to broader institutional systems and goals. Although Care is more than just Intentional Conversations, these conversations are nevertheless a critical component of it. This book dives deep into these Intentional Conversations as a strategy but also places them in a broader context and system.

I've been writing about Intentional Conversations for nearly a decade now. I've thought about it deeply. I've learned from other schools' experiences, and I can see the power of Intentional Conversations and systems of care when they're done well. As my thinking has evolved, so has the advice I give schools. There is no "one way" to structure Intentional Conversations and Care systems. It's far more complex than that. When the culture of an institution is ripe, when staff are receptive, and when smart people develop balanced systems, the impact can be profound.

When people approach this topic, they're sometimes looking for an exact model. Something they can just copy and paste. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. There is a spectrum of different practices and ways that you can structure this type of work. Although there are learned and proven strategies that can help, there is no one specific way it works for all institutions. An effective system is going to be based in your culture. It's going to be based in your staffing structures. It's going to be based in the needs of your students. This book offers guideposts, spectrums of practice, and structural options, but not one clear packaged solution. My hope is that it gives you the raw materials to build a system that you can make your own.

For readers who use Roompack software, I have included specific sections on how to leverage our unique features to make this process efficient and effective. I am obviously biased. I believe our solution is the best (if not the only) system expressly built for this type of work. However, if you do not use our software, there is still content for you. I have structured this book so that the philosophy and the frameworks stand on their own, whether you are using sophisticated software or a homegrown system.



Care: One of The 3Cs of Residence Life



The main book in this series introduced the “3C Framework for Residence Life Practice.” The Framework helps focus thinking about what residence life is and could be. The three C’s in the Framework are: Community, Competencies, and Care. This book does a deeper dive on the “Care” aspect of the Framework.

So what is “Care”? Explained more in-depth below, at its core, Care is the aspect of residence life practice that focuses on residents as individuals to provide mentorship and ensure they’re connected to support networks and resources to help them succeed. As one of the 3Cs, Care is intertwined with other aspects of residence life practice. Community helps residents make connections, build relationships, and feel like they belong. Competencies focuses on helping residents learn, grow, and develop. Although they’re presented as distinct categories, all three Cs are intertwined and mutually supporting.

But *why* is “Care” important, *what* is “Care,” and *how* can one put “Care” into practice?

Why? Individualized Support

Help residents who are struggling overcome obstacles and help residents who are thriving to reach higher levels of success.

Students today are used to technology customizing everything in their lives. The algorithms that power their social feeds, the smart assistants that help them get tasks done, and the AI chat bot that answers specific questions they have. The globalized world of today is also infinitely more complex than the world of 10 or 20 years ago. Students expect, and rightly so, to have a college experience that is customized and flexible for their needs, wants, and goals.

In simpler times classes could all be lectures and residence life could put up a simple poster to advertise events. Today, however, the competition for student time and attention is different. Classroom techniques have moved beyond the one-to-many lecture style, offering group work, experiential activities, and more. Previous approaches in residence life relied on a captive audience and used similar approaches. This no longer works like it used to.

Additionally, more than ever, colleges and universities are focusing on student retention as a key goal. Even raising retention by 1 percentage point can have a big impact on an educational institution. Residence life has a key role to play in helping with student persistence. Through research, it is already known that students who live on campus are more likely to be retained. Residence life, however, can help further this through intentional efforts.

Residence life departments are perfectly positioned as early warning systems for students who may be struggling. Residence life has an opportunity to work with students who may fall through the cracks of our current systems. Residence life can act as a feeder for our behavioral intervention teams, CARE teams, and academic support services. Beyond that, residence life is also its *own* network of support for students who don't exhibit the more severe concerns. A student who has a GPA that is not at a formalized warning level, but not high enough to be considered thriving, can use additional support. And it's not just students who are struggling who can benefit from this attention. Students who are succeeding can reach even higher levels of success. Any effective residence life framework needs to include some form of individualized support. This starts from the on-the-ground level with a student staff member or mentor and extends to systems that can elevate students to increased levels of support as necessary.

What? Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residents will receive proactive support when they encounter difficulty or to further enhance their success.• Residents will be connected to offices and support services according to their needs.

So now that we've established *why* Care is important, what are we working towards? There are two main goals associated with Care as it is defined in the 3C Framework.

Residents will receive proactive support when they encounter difficulty or to further enhance their success.

College life comes with both predictable and unexpected challenges: academic stress, mental health concerns, homesickness, roommate conflicts, identity development, and more. Waiting for students to ask for help can mean missing crucial intervention windows. Many students (especially first-years, first-generation students, or those from marginalized backgrounds) may not know when or how to seek help. This help needs to be provided *proactively*, not just *reactively*.

Residents will be connected to offices and support services according to their needs.

Students often face complex challenges that no single office can fully address. Many students don't know about the full range of campus resources (academic tutoring, food pantries, identity-based centers, disability services, career offices, etc.). Personalized guidance makes it easier for students to get the right help at the right time and to coordinate that help.

Together, these goals highlight a resident-centered approach to residence life work by anticipating needs, building strong staff-resident relationships, and integrating the residential experience into the broader student support network. When done well, these practices contribute significantly to retention, well-being, and student success. So how does a residence life department go about these Care goals?

How? Care

Student Staff meet for intentional/mentorship conversations at regular intervals and check in with supervisors about individual residents.

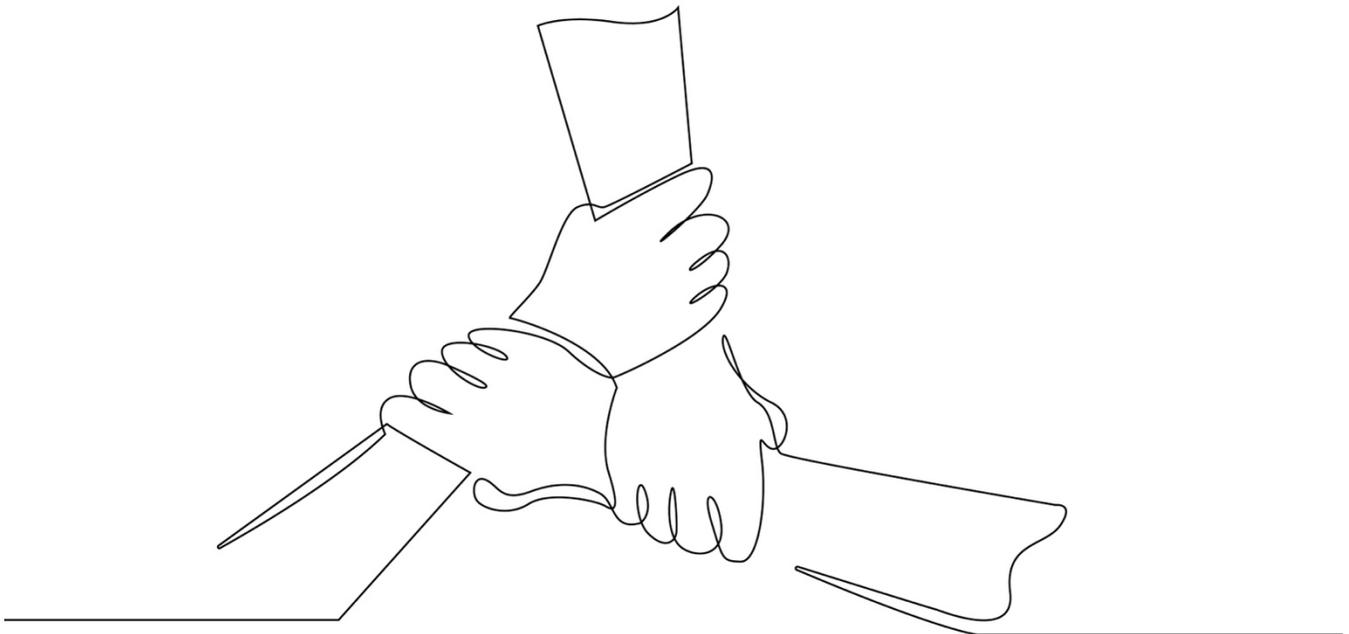
Professional Staff do escalated outreach and refer to behavioral intervention teams, academic support teams and other offices as appropriate.

Care is about customizing a student's experience and providing individualized support. All students come to the residence halls with a diverse background of life experiences and identities. This is an opportunity to support them individually, especially when our broader-based approaches may fail. It's also an opportunity to catch students who are slipping through the cracks. It's where residence life functions not just as a programming and engagement office but as a student support network.

Student staff are observers and connectors. Through one-on-ones, casual check-ins, and community engagement, student staff members notice who in their community is thriving and who's withdrawing. Student staff don't need to solve every issue, but they need to listen, ask the right questions, and know when (and how) to document, elevate, and refer concerns.

Professional staff are case managers and referral experts. They take what student staff notice and provide follow-up, triage, and connection to additional resources. Sometimes this means working with behavioral intervention teams or counseling services. Sometimes it means a series of quiet check-ins and coordination behind the scenes. Their role is to ensure that no student slips through unnoticed.

Care isn't just about when students reach a crisis point. It's about catching the in-between and the before. It also isn't just about helping students who are struggling. The student who's thriving might need help stretching to the next level, just as much as the student in distress needs help. Individualized support is what makes the residence life experience feel personal.



Developing Your Care Infrastructure

Good intentions are not a replacement for a systematized plan for focusing on Care. While we all want our residents to feel supported, a well-developed program needs to build systems for supporting its residents. Without a structure, students can fall through the cracks.

At the foundation of your “Care Infrastructure” are your RAs or student staff members. They are the peers closest to your students and are best positioned to know your residents most deeply. They are observers and connectors, noticing who is thriving and who is withdrawing. They also act as part of your early warning system as the eyes and ears for students who may not exhibit severe concerns but are struggling enough to need help.

Developing a Care Infrastructure means moving beyond hoping staff connect with residents to creating a framework where those connections are expected, supported, and follow-up is ensured. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to structuring your approach to Care. Below are three spectrums that can help you think through critical aspects of your Care Infrastructure. In looking through these spectrums, they move from low complexity (on the left) towards high complexity (on the right). Develop a system that’s too low on these spectrums and you risk developing an ineffective system. Develop a system that’s too high on these spectrums, and you risk losing the meaning, intention, and people behind the process. That doesn’t mean you should aim for the middle, either. Remember what your goals are and engage staff in discussions to help build a system that works for your campus instead of imposing it.

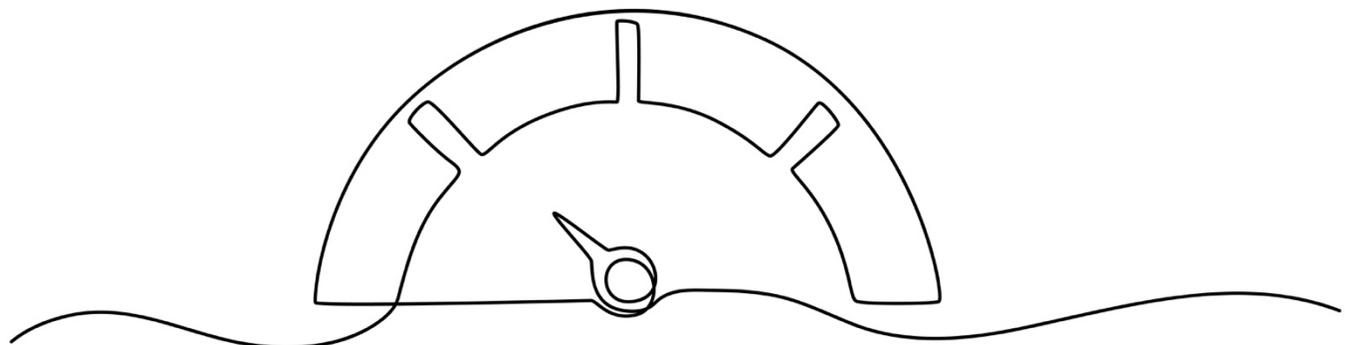
Contact Spectrum

How often and how deeply should staff interact with residents? This is the **Contact Spectrum**. Departments must decide where their expectations lie on this scale to ensure consistency.



Low Structure (Broad Directive)	Medium Structure (Informal Check-ins)	High Structure* (Intentional Conversations)
On this end, there are no formal expectations beyond a general directive to “get to know your residents.” Interactions are entirely organic.	Here, student staff are expected to do informal check-ins with <i>all</i> of their residents, ensuring no one is ignored.	Student staff meet for mentorship conversations at regular intervals. These are not just “how are you” chats but are guided by training and themes timed to the resident's journey.

** Even within the High Structure/Intentional Conversation box, there can be varying levels of complexity. These are addressed later in this book when talking about how to structure these conversations.*



Information Spectrum

If a conversation happens in a hallway and no one shares it, does it help the wider support network? The **Information Spectrum** addresses how information is collected and shared.



No Collection	Verbal Sharing	Systematized Data Collection
Information is not collected or shared. It stays between the RA and the resident. This protects privacy but prevents the department from identifying trends or disconnected students.	Information is shared verbally during meetings, typically during a 1-1 supervision meeting, but not systematically tracked.	Regular supervision check-ins review all residents and their success. Utilizes a software solution (like Roomcompact 😊) that tracks who has been met with, who hasn't, who needs support, and who is thriving.

Supervision Spectrum

Supervisors are critical for supporting student staff members, but they are also an opportunity to coordinate support for residents. The **Supervision Spectrum** shares supervisory approaches for coordinating this care.



Staff-Led Reporting (Passive)	Supervisor-Led Inquiry (Active)	Integrated Care and Case Management (Systemic)
Supervision is characterized by general availability rather than specific inquiry. During one-on-one meetings, a supervisor may ask general open-ended questions like, "How is your floor?"	Supervision is more intentional. Supervisors do not wait for the student staff member to raise concerns. Instead, they utilize the information to ask about specific residents by name.	Supervision connects the residence hall directly to the institution's broader support network. This involves the integration of specialized groups such as CARE Teams, Behavioral Intervention Teams (BIT), and case managers.

The Escalation Pathway: Connecting to Campus Partners

A strong Care infrastructure does not exist in a silo. Residence life acts as a feeder for behavioral intervention teams (BIT), CARE teams, and academic support services.

- **Student Staff Role:** They identify the issue and listen. They do not need to solve every issue, but they must know when to document and elevate concerns.
- **Professional Staff Role:** They execute escalated outreach. This ensures that high-level concerns move from the residence hall to the appropriate campus experts, such as Counseling Services or the Dean of Students.

By defining where your department sits on these spectrums, you move from "hoping" students are cared for to "ensuring" they are supported. This systematic approach allows you to catch the student who is slipping through the cracks and help the thriving student reach higher levels of success.

Intentional Conversations

Intentional Conversations are one-on-one conversations between student staff and their residents guided by a suggested set of themes, prompts, or questions that are developmentally timed to the resident's circumstances and journey. Intentional Conversations can provide educational and developmental challenge and support for students and aid in their retention by acting as an early detection system for students who may be struggling.

A key feature of Intentional Conversations is that they are *intentional*. (It's in the title!) They are not just free flowing conversations about the weather, or surface-level small talk. (Although that may be how they start and establish rapport.) They are more akin to mentorship conversations that are guided by the knowledge of what a resident may be experiencing and common areas of struggles and success. For example, conversations with a first-year student in the first month of their college career may focus on issues of homesickness, adjustment to the rigors of college academics, and navigating campus cultures around alcohol and other drug use. In contrast, the conversations with a rising sophomore may focus on choosing an academic major, an adjustment towards more independent living, and being more intentional about campus involvements.

Intentional Conversations as a Care strategy can support efforts to help build stronger Community bonds, and further educational outcomes that are identified as part of a department's Competencies. (The three Cs!) Not all schools will structure their processes around these conversations the same way. There will be different structural expectations for student staff, varying levels of documentation and information sharing, and different campus support network structures available to connect residents into. Even the name of the strategy will vary. Some campuses will use the more generic terms "Intentional Conversations" or "Intentional Interactions" to describe these learning opportunities, while others may incorporate their school names, mascots, or mottos into a uniquely branded experience (ex. Eagle Chats). Whatever they may be called or however they are structured, the goals are the same: connect residents to offices and support services according to their needs and provide proactive support to students who are struggling or to enhance their success.

Benefits

There are several benefits to using Intentional Conversations as a method of supporting students, building stronger communities, and helping residents learn, grow, and explore opportunities.

For departments and institutions, these conversations:

- **Community:** Customize the residence life experience to the student, empowering the student and helping them build relationships.
- **Competencies:** Provide learning and exploration experiences for students according to their developmental level and their stage in the college journey.
- **Care:** Identify students who may be struggling before they reach an inflection point.

For residents, these conversations:

- **Community:** Help develop a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- **Competencies:** Allow residents to practice the development of interpersonal relationships, advocacy for needs, goal setting, and other psychosocial skills.
- **Care:** Provide more purposeful, meaningful, and targeted resources and support.

For staff, Intentional Conversations are:

- **Community:** An opportunity to connect with residents in a more thoughtful, personal way.
- **Competencies:** An opportunity to utilize student staff members' strengths and abilities to be a peer mentor and advisor.
- **Care:** Provide insights in the successes and struggles of residents, thus helping direct future support and resources.

Structure

So you want staff to do Intentional Conversations, how do you go about it? The first step is to build out a guiding structure. This is sometimes where departments can go wrong. You don't want to overly structure them, in which case they can be seen as inauthentic or even invasive, but you also don't want them to be so unstructured that they become a checklist item with no meaning. Perhaps the simplest way to think about it is to focus on two things: your goals and your staff time.

How frequently should Intentional Conversations occur?

There are two things that should be top of mind when deciding frequency of intentional conversations:

- What are we trying to achieve? What are our goals?
- What about staff time and responsibilities?

Many schools will require student staff to complete 1-3 conversations per resident per semester. This may vary if a school is on a trimester or quarterly system or if a school uses an academic calendar that deviates from the typical August/September-to-May calendar. Furthermore, when designing Intentional Conversations, the workload for individual staff members should be considered. If the student-to-staff ratio in a particular community is high, it may be unreasonable to expect that a staff member complete multiple conversations with each resident in a semester.

These expectations may also vary based on the student population and demographics in a community. For instance, upper division students may require fewer touch points than first-year students. Or, if a community has a high proportion of first-generation college students, one may wish to increase the frequency of formalized contact between staff and students. Additionally, if a community is a part of a formalized living learning program, there may be opportunities to leverage other resources that may impact how Intentional Conversation expectations are structured. For schools on a semester-based academic calendar, a schedule of Intentional Conversations may look like the following:

Fall Semester

- August/September – Entering into the community and setting goals
- November/December – Reflecting on the first semester experience

Spring Semester

- January/February – Returning to the community and revising goals
- April/May – Reflection and closure on the academic year

The benefit of this type of schedule is that it allows for pre- and post- reflections at the beginning and end of each semester. At the beginning of the semester, a student staff member can help a student set goals and prepare for the challenges and transitions ahead. This also sets the stage for the staff member to be able to check in on a student and their progress throughout the semester. An end-of-the-semester meeting allows for a student to reflect on their achievements and begin the process of setting new goals or revising prior goals. These expectations are also typically reasonable for a staff member with 25-30 residents in their community.

How long should Intentional Conversations be?

Intentional Conversations should be organic, not forced conversations. Therefore, although guidelines about the frequency and length of these conversations can help in setting minimum expectations for staff, it should be stressed that these conversations may take longer or be more frequent depending on the student. If a staff member is expected to have a minimum of two Intentional Conversations per semester, it is probable (and preferable) that they may have additional conversations throughout the year.

You may be tempted to put a number on the length of these conversations, for example a minimum of X minutes. While this may work for some schools, it can cause some student staff to “force” conversations to meet this goal. Nobody wins if these conversations become a checklist item. Spend some time through training to help student staff to really understand what the goals of these conversations are and how there is no hard and fast rule about how long these conversations should be. Trust your staff (but hold them accountable). The conversations should be “as long as they need to be.”

Communication and Marketing

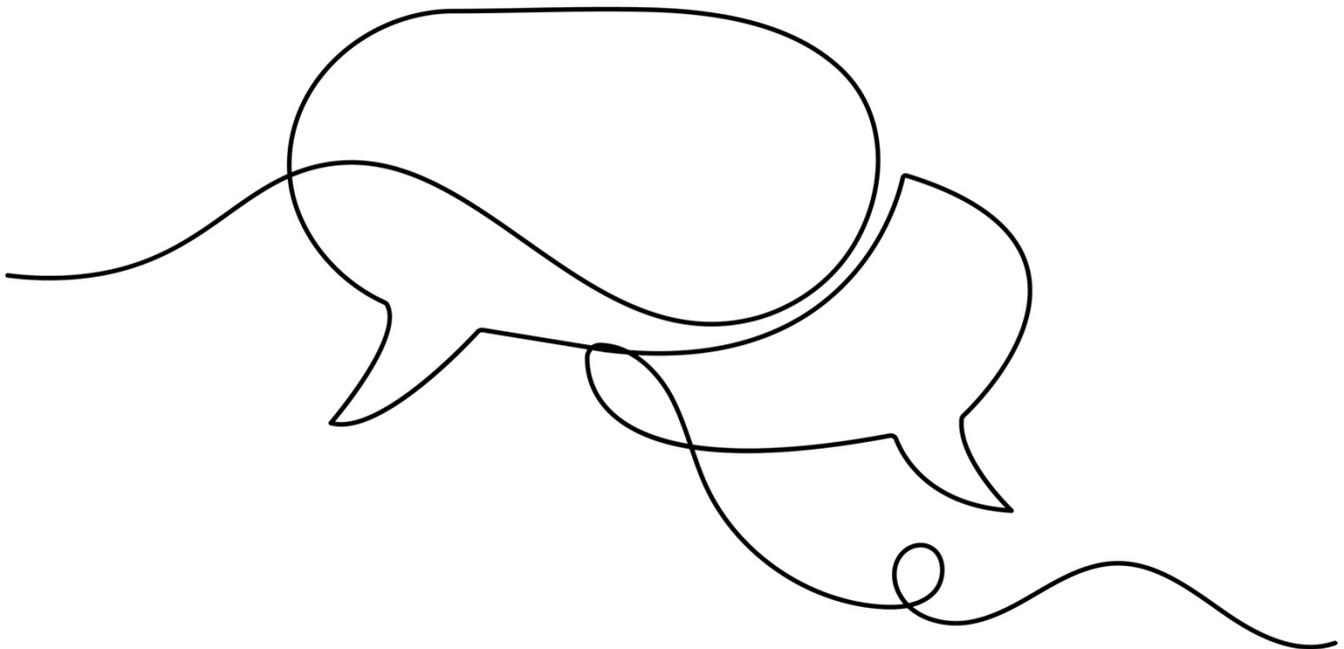
Schools that successfully implement Intentional Conversations are typically very transparent about the process and communicate the opportunity, value, and intent for Intentional Conversations directly to residents. Some schools report that residents come to welcome and expect that these types of scheduled check-ins will occur on a regular basis. (Although this is by no means universal.) If you decide to communicate to residents about Intentional Conversations, you may consider sharing a message like the following:

Residents Assistants and Community Assistants are in the halls to act as informal mentors and help guide you through your time in residence and in navigating college life in general. At periodic points in the year, your staff member will reach out to you to have a conversation about your goals and your progress towards achieving them. Although staff are always here to help at any time, these conversations are opportunities for you to interact with another student leader on campus who can help guide and advise you. Although these are not required, most residents welcome and find these opportunities helpful.

Some schools take these efforts a step further by giving Intentional Conversations a more formalized, campus-specific name. A school may market them as “Eagle Chats” after their mascot, or call them “Leadership Check-Ins.” How Intentional Conversations are marketed to residents can be guided by and folded into the overall marketing efforts a department makes in communicating the value of residence life.

Conversations Should ALWAYS Be Happening

Just because you may build a structure for Intentional Conversations does not mean conversations and interactions don't happen in-between. Intentional Conversations are merely a vehicle for ensuring that all residents are connected with and that the interactions are more than surface-level. Consider how (or if) you might document these moments in-between. For Roomcompact software users, the **Notes** feature can be especially great for this!



Training Student Staff Members

In the previous sections, we examined Intentional Conversations as a strategy and discussed how they could be structured. However, the success or failure of these conversations rarely rests on the quality of the form or the clarity of the administrative deadline. It rests entirely on quality human interactions. To ensure that Intentional Conversations are authentic, transformative interactions rather than awkward interviews or administrative checkboxes, the rollout of these systems and strategies must be accompanied by training and guidance. And that training needs to be for *skill*, not just compliance. The structures provide a map, but training provides the ability to drive the car.

A Mindset Shift

Before you can teach a student staff member how to have authentic and intentional conversations, you must first address their understanding of their role. Many RAs and student staff members enter the position with preconceived notions. It could be that they are expected to be policy enforcers and/or event planners. While these roles may be part of the job, successfully implementing Care practices requires staff to see themselves as facilitators, mentors, and connectors.

When implementing Intentional Conversations, your staff may push back. And part of that push-back could relate to a misunderstanding of their role. Training for Care should highlight the difference between surveillance and support. This is often the biggest psychological hurdle for staff who worry that documenting a conversation feels “creepy” or invasive. Surveillance is watching students and capturing every detail of their life (not what is trying to be achieved here). Support is looking for ways to catch students and help them as appropriate. It may help to teach and remind student staff members *why* a department may focus on Intentional Conversations.

We use intentional conversations as a strategy to...

- *Develop a mentoring relationship and safe space for conversation with a peer leader.*
- *Engage with residents on relevant topics relevant to their college journey.*
- *Aid residents in navigating conflicts, life decisions, and other issues.*
- *Aid residents in setting goals and creating action plans to achieve these goals.*
- *Identify students who could use extra help or support to be successful and thrive.*

When staff understand the *why* they become more invested in the *how*. They also need to understand that they are not expected to solve every issue, but they are expected to notice who is thriving and who is withdrawing. This alleviation of pressure (the “need to fix”) often frees them to be better listeners.

Training for Listening and Connection

The most common pitfall for new staff is treating Intentional Conversations as something that is scripted or a checklist. When a staff member asks questions like a robot, the interaction feels clinical and forced, which is the antithesis of the goal of creating authentic relationships. Craft a training program that focuses on low-level counseling and active listening skills. This involves teaching staff to be comfortable with silence and to listen to understand, rather than listening to respond. A core skill to develop is the ability to take a resident's surface-level answer and gently guide it toward the suggested topics you'd like students to explore. For example, a resident might say, “Classes are fine.” A staff member trained only in compliance will check the box labeled “Academic Success” and move on. A staff member trained in active listening will notice the brevity of the answer and pivot: “You say ‘fine.’ Is there a specific class that’s making you feel that way, or one you’re really enjoying?”

You should also train staff on the importance of environment. Intentional Conversations should occur wherever a resident feels most comfortable and do not necessarily need to be formalized. Walking on campus, grabbing a meal, or sitting in a lounge can change the power dynamic and lead to more open disclosure. The goal is to make the resident feel known and valued, not interviewed.

Staff should also be trained to look for subtle indicators that precede a crisis. This goes beyond the spoken word. Training should include case studies on environmental cues: a room that has suddenly become messy, a student

who stops attending community events, or a change in peer groups. Whatever staff observe, they need to know *what* to do with what they see. They do not need to diagnose mental health concerns or solve financial crises. Their role is to identify and refer. Training should clearly delineate the boundaries of the student staff member role so they know when to document and elevate a concern to a supervisor.

Role-Playing and The “Fishbowl.” Utilize returning staff to act out scenarios. Create “fishbowl” exercises where a pair of staff members models a conversation in the center of the room while the rest of the team observes. Pause the interaction to ask the observers questions like “What did you notice about their body language?” or “What follow-up question would you ask here?”

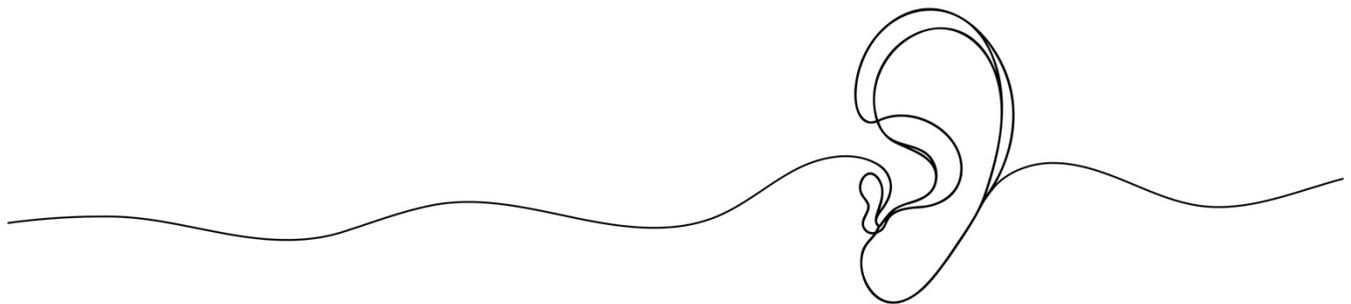
Training On Documentation, Documentation as Advocacy

Perhaps the most difficult part of training is documentation. RAs often view logging notes as administrative bureaucracy (a task they do just to prove they are working) or as invasive (thinking they are supposed to log every detail of a resident’s life). If this is the prevailing culture, you will end up with data that is lacking detail or includes too much detail, not focusing on the information that matters.

To get better data, think about reframing documentation as an act of advocacy. Documentation helps with proactively identifying risk factors. It helps ensure students get the help they need. If a conversation happens in a hallway and no one shares it, it does not help the wider support network.

Training should be hands-on regarding *how* to write a note. Staff need to learn to distinguish between objective observation and subjective opinion. Furthermore, if your department uses software like Roomcompact, training should not just be technical (which buttons to click) but strategic. Explain *why* they are tagging a resident with “Academic Difficulty” or “Homesickness.” Show them how these tags aggregate into reports that allow professional staff to spot trends across the building. When staff see that their data inputs lead to real outputs (like a tailored program or a check-in from a Dean) they understand the value of the administrative task.

Data Review. Use real (anonymized) data in your training. Show staff what a “good” note looks like versus a “bad” note. Show staff the “timeline” view of a student so they can see how a history of notes tells a story about a resident’s journey. This visual reinforcement helps staff understand that they are writing for the future. They’re helping the next staff member or the professional staff understand the student’s context.



RA? CA? CM? What’s in a name? In this book I’ve used the term “RA” as a catch all, but many campuses are tinkering with, breaking up, or reconceiving of this traditional student staff position. Some are choosing to segment off resident mentor-type responsibilities (like those described here) into a new position. Roomcompact’s has a great blog series, podcasts episodes, and webinars on reconceptualizing the “RA” role. Many institutions are doing interesting experiments that may be relevant to your work.

On-Going Training and Supervision

Training for Intentional Conversations does not end with Fall training. Because these conversations are organic and may change with the rhythm of the academic year, continuous training and feedback can help staff gain skills and knowledge over time. Consider some of the following strategies for on-going training and supervision:

- **Just-in-Time Training.** Rather than front-loading every possible conversation scenario, utilize “just-in-time” training. The concerns a first-year student faces in September (homesickness and social integration) are vastly different from those they face in April (housing selection and summer anxiety). Align your staff meeting agendas and in-service training schedules with your Intentional Conversation timing.
- **Supervision as “Micro-Training.”** Supervision is the ideal space to review specific resident interactions and coach for improvement. If a staff member is struggling to get residents to open up, use the meeting to role-play.
- **Data-Informed Coaching.** Your documentation system reflects the quality of your staff’s work. Supervisors should review the data *before* the staff member enters the office. This allows for specific, data-informed coaching around writing quality notes and resident engagement.
- **Caring for the Caregiver.** On-going supervision must acknowledge the emotional labor of this work. Intentional Conversations can surface heavy topics, from mental health crises to deep personal struggles. Supervisors must balance accountability with support.

Developing Guides and Supporting Your Staff

In addition to your training efforts, you may consider developing guides for each “round” of Intentional Conversations. An Intentional Conversation guide provides context and suggested topics that student staff member should explore with a resident based on where residents are in their journey through college.

Guides can be tricky. There is a delicate balance to strike. If a guide is too loose, you risk conversations becoming surface-level that miss critical warning signs. If a guide is too rigid, staff become interviewers reading from a script, destroying the authenticity of the relationship. The goal is to create a guide that acts as a compass. It should point them in the right direction but allow them to navigate the terrain in a way that fits their personal style.

There are a number of elements you might include in a guide:

- **The Why.** The context of the conversation and why it’s important.
- **The What.** Goals of the specific conversation.
- **Topics.** Examples of themes to look for and probe for.
- **Resources and Escalation.** Where to refer students to and when/how to escalate based on their answers.
- **Documentation.** Tips on what would be helpful (and not) to include in the written record.

Effective guides shouldn’t be scripts. Previously in my learning journey on this topic, I often suggested adding questions in the guides to give staff examples. Even though the questions were meant to be suggestions, not explicit directions, I found that student staff work better with themes. Through complementary training you could trial questions but writing them into the guide made many staff members feel they needed to ask each question verbatim.

Crucially, these guides cannot be static. One guide does not fit all. A first-year student navigating their first weeks away from home has fundamentally different needs than a senior preparing for the job market. Differentiate guides by class year and the time of the year. Beyond class standing, consider additional customizations for unique student populations (ex. first-generation or international students), or for those in living-learning programs.

Check out the suggested topics in this book’s appendix! If you’re looking to get started with developing a guide or just need something to reference for on-going training efforts throughout the year, you can find an example in the appendix. The appendix gives suggested topics and context for multiple conversations, broken out by a student’s class year and the time of year for the conversation.

Tracking, Data, and Assessment

While a conversation itself has immense value, the data from that conversation is what transforms a singular interaction into a system of care. Documentation done well is not just administrative bureaucracy. Documentation is the mechanism that allows a department to answer questions such as:

- Which residents have been met with and which have not? Who is engaged and who isn't?
- How many touch points have the staff had with residents?
- What themes arose out of these conversations and how frequently?
- Who are our residents that need professional staff follow up?

Data collection is a balancing act. Document too little, and you have no actionable insights. Document too much, and your student staff may revolt. Common objections from student staff to Intentional Conversations typically arise from documentation processes. These can include time requirements, a feeling of “invasiveness” eroding privacy, and a concern that the authenticity of the peer-to-peer relationship could be lost.

When it comes to documentation, there is a balance and a range. No one approach will be right for every institution. It will be dependent on departmental and student culture, staffing structures, and institutional capacity and goals. On paper, one could design a “perfect” process, but it should be mediated by the practicalities on the ground. Additionally, if you're embarking on this journey for the first time, it's important to remember that introducing too much change too rapidly can be difficult for staff to adjust to. Focus on building a strong foundation where staff understand the meaning and goals of the program before introducing more complex administrative processes.

Documentation Spectrum



<p style="text-align: center;">Minimum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • Date • Open Text for Notes 	<p style="text-align: center;">Medium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • Date • Open Text for Notes • Tags • Escalation Mechanism 	<p style="text-align: center;">Maximum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • Date • Open Text for Notes • Tags • Escalation Mechanism • Conversation-Specific Questions
<p style="text-align: center;">Low Burden, Low Insight</p> <p>Pro: Fastest method for staff. Feels the least “invasive.”</p> <p>Con: Shifts the work burden to the professional staff. Requires reading every single note individually. No easy method for pulling a report on trends.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Medium Burden and Insight</p> <p>Pro: Allows instantly generated quantitative reports while still having open text for depth. Identifies students requiring further support.</p> <p>Con: Requires more training for staff. Requires a protocol and staff buy-in for handling escalations.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">High Burden, High Insight</p> <p>Pro: Incredibly granular, consistent data that is excellent for high-level assessment and longitudinal studies.</p> <p>Con: Can feel bureaucratic. The quality and meaning of conversation may suffer.</p>

When deciding on what information to collect, consider the tension between student staff member time and assessment and case management needs. A more minimal information collection method may be easier for a staff member to complete, but may not result in the information needed to accomplish your goals more completely. It may shift the work burden onto the staff responsible for parsing and analyzing the data. A more maximalist approach to the data collection will give a department deeper insights by being more specific and targeted in the type of information collected. Because of the built-in structure, analysis will be easier and staff will input the type of information needed more consistently than would if confronted with an open text box. You student staff, however, may find it too time consuming.

Potential Components:

- **Name.** Who the conversation was with.
- **Date.** When the conversation happened. (Helps for context and timeline.)
- **Note.** A paragraph response summarizing the interaction. (Provides the qualitative data).
- **Tags.** Choose from pre-selected options. Could be themes in the conversation (positive or negative indicators), offices referred to (for later check-in follow-ups), or other important data based on your goals (Retention risk? Future student staff member? etc.).
- **Escalation mechanism.** Mechanism for alerting a supervisor or a follow up team.
- **Conversation-specific questions.** Could be open text, a rubric, etc. Specifies topics to evaluate or elaborate on. Likely timed to the point in the resident's journey.

Intentional Conversations are not meant to be invasive. Collect only what you need to accomplish your goals. RAs and student staff members may push back on collecting this information, fearing privacy concerns. This is legitimate. Through training, help them realize what the goals are and what's important. They don't need to log every detail of their conversations with residents. Only those that further the goals. Teach staff to collect only what is necessary to support the student. They do not need to transcribe the conversation verbatim. They need to capture the themes, the referrals, and the action items. It may help to clarify the difference between surveillance and support (mentioned earlier):

- **Surveillance** is watching students and capturing every detail of their life.
- **Support** is remembering their story so we can provide support.

Ensuring Clean Data (You'll Thank Yourself Later)

Data is only as powerful as it is precise. If you treat documentation purely as a compliance task (something staff do just to prove they are working) you will likely end up with "dirty data." Dirty data is data that is aggregated, vaguely labeled, and/or inconsistent. When the time comes to write your annual report, dirty data requires a lot of work to "clean" and forces you to rely on anecdotes rather than evidence. It also precludes you from easily running real-time reports and gaining insights. Designing for clean data means designing for the *output* (the report), not just the *input* (the form). When you enforce data hygiene standards, you can save yourself a lot of headaches. This helps with assessment, student support, and... your sanity.

Additionally, achieving clean data also means training your staff on the goals of documentation and *how* and *what* to document. The training of student staff, addressed earlier, is only a part of this equation. This training is not a one-time event. Through ongoing training and discussions during supervisor 1-on-1 meetings, you can help staff become better at documenting towards a goal. Sharing real-time data, showing staff the impact of their work, what can be learned from their documentation processes is also an important reinforcement mechanism.



Roompack and Tracking, Data, and Assessment

The next few sections, highlighted with a page border, apply to users of Roompack's software. If you're not a Roompack member, you may find these sections less useful (although maybe you may gain some inspiration).

There are two main methods that Roompack members utilize when documenting intentional conversations:

Resident-Level Notes

The screenshot shows a profile card for Irma Graham. It includes a profile picture of a woman with a headband. The card lists the following information: Name: Irma Graham; Student ID: N/A; Pronouns: she/her/hers; Age: N/A; Roommate Agreement: Unsigned; Phone: N/A; Email: paul+IrmaGraham@roompack.com; Labels: ESA, Student Athlete, and an Add Label button; Assigned Staff: RA: Paul Rodriguez. Below the card is a text input field with the placeholder "Leave a note about this resident." and a "Submit" button. There are also options for "Pin to top" and "Who can see this?" (Resident Advisors and Higher).

Pro: Easy student staff member input.

Con: More difficult to interpret and work with data and no automated workflow option.

Intentional Conversation Form

The screenshot shows the "Intentional Conversation Form" interface. It has a header with "View Submissions", "File Form", and "Manage Templates". The main content area includes a "Resident Name:" field with a red asterisk, a "Tag Residents" field, and a "Date of your conversation:" field with a red asterisk and a date input field (mm/dd/yyyy). There is also a "Submit" button.

Pro: More detailed responses and easy one-click assessment reports and escalations.

Con: May require more effort from student staff.

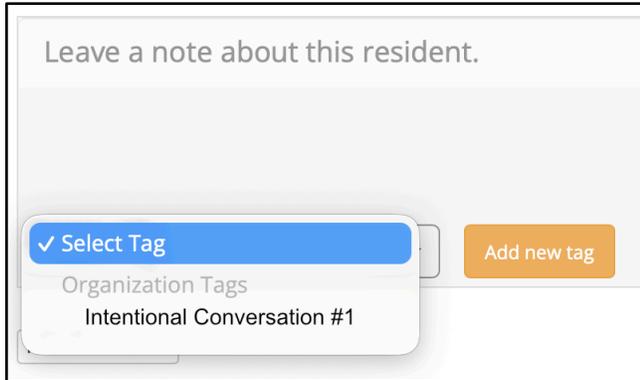
When advising campuses, I strongly suggest using the form-method as opposed to the note-method. Both allow you to accomplish the task but given the structured nature of a form (as opposed to the singular open text box of a note) there are a lot more options for interpreting the data and building in workflows. Your Care Infrastructure can be far more sophisticated with the form-method including the ability to:

- View who has been met with (and how often) and who hasn't been met with in one click.
- Immediately notify a supervisor or administrator of a concern through an automated process.
- Utilize artificial intelligence and tag groups to better identify emergent trends and themes.

Despite these advantages, some schools choose to use the note-method because student staff may find it easier and less time consuming. It may also be more immediately intuitive for staff. Some schools also choose to do a hybrid method whereby more formalized conversations are tracked through a form, but informal in-between check-ins are left as a note.

Check the Roompack Support Portal for help! The following sections provide advice on how to use Roompack features for intentional conversations. If you have more technical questions, like "how does a feature work" or "how can staff navigate the software," check out the tutorials in our support portal. It's accessible to you in the Help section of our software. (It's also the most up-to-date!)

Method 1: Resident-Level Notes



Leave a note about this resident.

✓ Select Tag

Organization Tags

Intentional Conversation #1

Add new tag

If utilizing the resident-level **Notes** method, staff can navigate to a resident’s profile by either searching for their name or visually navigating through the **Campus Dashboard**.

Any **Note** left allows the user to leave subject **Tags**. These **Tags** act like qualitative codes. They can help you more easily make sense of and organize your data. Administrators can set what **Tags** staff can select from in the dropdown list. When **Notes** are exported, these **Tags** are included and can be used in sorting and analysis.

If your staff are doing multiple conversations, you may want to have them tag what conversation they are having (ex. time of year, number, etc.). This will allow you to sort out each conversation separately, later. You can also add “subject” tags (ex. homesick, retention risk, etc.) which can help in your understanding of trends or identifying students who may be struggling. **Notes** has some additional features that you may find helpful, such as escalating the staff permission required to view the note (if the notes are sensitive) or pinning a note to the top of a resident’s **Timeline** so it is the first item that staff members see when looking up a student.

Tasks, discussed later in this book, is an additional separate feature you might find useful with the **Notes** method.

Working With Resident-Level Notes Data

Individual Students

If you want to understand the experiences of a specific student, you can navigate to their profile to view the timeline of any interactions with the residents along with notes captured by intentional conversations. If you have it enabled, **Wolfie^{AI}** can help you summarize all the information known about a particular student. Clicking the **Wolfie^{AI}** button on a resident profile will give you an overview of all interactions with that student (including notes, attendance, mentions in forms, etc.).

In Aggregate

If you want to understand your intentional conversations, there are several **Insights** reports that can help. **Insights** allows you to look at your data from multiple angles and allows you to download your data for analysis and manipulation in other software programs. Relevant reports include:

- **Notes - Frequency Count by Resident** – A listing of resident names with the number of notes left on each resident. This report can help you identify students who have been interacted with frequently *and* infrequently. This can be useful in identifying unengaged students.
- **Notes - On Residents (with Note Tags)** – A raw list of all notes and their tags.
- **Notes - Tag Count** – Counts the tags used on notes. This is a quick way to determine trends through tag use frequencies (ex. How many conversations occurred? How many mentions of “homesickness”? etc.)

Roompack’s **Wolfie^{AI}** features are designed to assist staff by summarizing and organizing information. Final interpretation, decision-making, and any actions taken based on AI outputs must be conducted by qualified staff who review the original source data and apply their professional judgment. Your institution likely has policies and procedures in place in such cases. Make sure you familiarize yourself with these and ensure that staff are appropriately trained. Additionally, make sure your staff are trained on what notes and data are appropriate to be logged into a system, such as Roompack, in the first place.

Method 2: Intentional Conversation Form

If you're creating a form for intentional conversations, you can find an example template in the **Forms** feature within Roompack's software. These are available at the bottom of the page on the "Manage Templates" tab. The example discussed below comes from the template labeled "Intentional Conversation" and can serve as a starting point.

Who Is The Conversation With?

Resident Name: *

Tag the resident name here. If you see more than one resident that has the same or a similar name, hover over their name to see the hall and room number.

Tag Residents

Utilize a **Tag-Resident** question type for this. Tagging the resident name has multiple benefits:

1. When a resident is tagged, it will be logged on their **Profile Timeline**, allowing you to look up interactions by resident. Any documentation will also be included in **Wolfie^{AI}** Timeline summaries.
2. Through **Insight Reports** you can find out who was met with and who was not. You can also find out the percentage of residents a staff member has met with in a specific community. More on this later.



Data Hygiene Tip

Although you can tag more than one resident in this field, your data and reports will work better if it is one form submission per resident conversation. Although there may be a temptation to allow staff to record multiple in one submission, this will come at the expense of cleaner data. This is also why it is important to keep this form as short as possible to lessen the burden on staff.

Tracking "Non Contacts"

Some schools ask staff to complete a form if they did NOT have a conversation with a resident. This may ask questions like, "How many attempts did you make?" and other details. If you want to collect this information, make it a separate form or process and do **not** include it in your regular intentional conversation form. Why? Roompack's **Insights Reports** look for tagged residents and staff submissions. If you combine contacts and non-contacts in the same form, your **Insights Reports** will no longer be able to pull actionable data. It is best to keep these separate.

Details Of The Conversation

Date of your conversation: *

mm/dd/yyyy



Summary Notes: *

Describe the conversation that you had with the resident. Include where and when the interaction took place, what you talked about with the student, and any impressions from that conversation.

Paragraph response

Next, have staff record the date of the interaction and summary notes. Through training, you can direct staff what's important to include (or exclude) in the summary notes. Helping staff understand the goals behind your conversations will help them better identify what to highlight here.

Should I Have One Generic Question or Ask Specific Questions?

Rather than have one open text box which would be open to multiple interpretations on what to highlight, you could choose to have more targeted questions (ex. How is this resident doing in their classes?). More targeted questions will give you better, more actionable data, but it will also place a heavier administrative burden on staff. This is part of the balance that needs to be weighed when designing the form. A simple rule might be: If you won't use this data, and it's nice to have but not need to have, don't collect it.

Themes, Tagging, and Coding

What theme(s) arose in your conversation?

Tag RP Intentional Conversation Themes

- Homesickness
- Academic Success +
- Academic Difficulty -
- Involved On Campus +
- Not Involved On Campus -
- Academic Goals Clear +
- Academic Goals Unclear -
- Health Concern

What offices (if any) did you refer the resident to?

Tag RP Office Referrals

- Dean of Students
- Counseling Center
- Career Services
- Disability Support Center
- Writing Center
- Academic Support Services
- Student Health Center
- Multicultural Affairs

Utilizing a **Custom Tag Question** can allow you to track themes much more easily. It is also administratively easier for staff than open text. Utilizing this question type, you can create different custom tag sets. In the examples above, tags are used to identify themes that arose and offices referred to. By using this specific question type, there are **Insights Reports** that can auto-calculate the frequencies in a click. Examples of themes and offices are provided in the Example Template, but these can be adjusted to fit your needs.

Connecting Conversations Into Broader Systems of Support

Any follow-up actions required?

Paragraph response

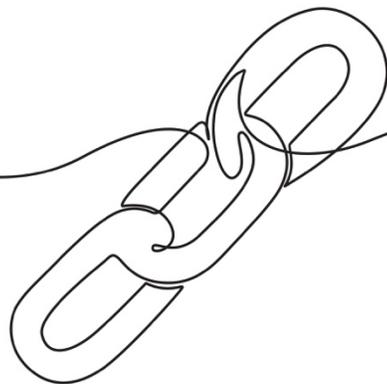
If this requires immediate attention from your supervisor, please tag their name here.

 Sharing Enabled

An email will be sent to the staff member you tag.

Tag Staff

Sometimes an Intentional Conversation surfaces something that a professional staff member should be notified of immediately or that requires a specific follow up action. You can utilize a **Tag-Staff** question type, so that submitting staff can tag their supervisor's name (or any staff member who has a Roompack account that needs to be notified). If you turn on the **Enable Sharing** option for this question, whomever is tagged will be sent an immediate email when the form is filed. This alerts them to follow up quickly.



Should I Create One Form or Multiple by Class and/or Time of Year?

There are benefits and challenges to creating one form versus multiple. One form will make it simpler for staff (read: fewer complaints about administrative work) and allow you to analyze all your data in one big set. This comes at the expense of your being able to be more intentional with targeted questions and doesn't allow you to as easily segment your data. Utilizing multiple forms, however, allows you to better customize the questions for each round of conversations and allows you to be more intentional, but your staff may find the process more cumbersome. This can be compounded if you have mixed class-year floors and you break out Intentional Conversation forms by class-year. Both strategies will work and it depends on your campus culture and what you hope to do with your assessment data.

Staying Organized and Tracking Progress

Task	Description	Deadline	Assignee Completion	Task Completion
Intentional Conversation	Complete conversations with each one of your residents. Refer to the...	06/12/2030	0 / 31	0 / 393

Roompack's **Tasks** feature can help student staff members stay organized and track their own progress while also allowing supervisors and administrators to check on overall progress at-a-glance. In the above screenshot, you can see that the Intentional Conversation task was assigned to 31 staff members and they collectively need to complete 393 conversations (the overall number of residents).

Intentional Conversation

Complete conversations with each one of your residents. Refer to the guide for help!

🕒 6/12/2030, 12:00 AM
👤 Revised by Ima Administrator

Filter by Building ▾ Detailed Grouped

Assignment Group 1

Assignee	Role	Completion Status
Katelyn Duncan	Resident Advisor	Not Started 0 / 31
Martina Robertson	Resident Advisor	Not Started 0 / 18
Kristina Watters	Resident Advisor	Not Started 0 / 16
Karen Jones	Resident Advisor	Not Started 0 / 16

Supervisors and administrators can click into a task to see a more detailed view for each staff member assigned. They can see how many they have completed and how many more conversations need to occur. Staff members assigned to complete the task are presented with a list of their residents. Staff can check off residents names as they meet with them and track their progress.

Assessment and Making Meaning of Data

Review Mode

[Switch to Summary Mode](#) [Review a different form](#)

Intentional Conversation

Form revision created on **Sep 11, 2024 1:07 pm** [Older](#) [Newer](#)

Show / Hide Columns Filter by building ▾ Filter by floor ▾ Submitted after... Submitted before... Search...

Displaying entries from **Braun Hall - 1 Floor** from **Braun Hall** [Clear Filters](#)

[Prev](#) [Next](#) [Download](#) [WolfieAI](#)

If you utilize **Forms** for your Intentional Conversations, your raw data is easily accessed within **View Submissions>Review Mode**. You can filter this data, search through it, and download it for analysis in another software program. You can also analyze it within Roompack's software by clicking the **Wolfie^{AI}** button. This feature will summarize your data and identify trends and themes across all filtered submissions.

Insights

Forms - Tag Count - Resident Percentage (Selected Form) ▾

Select a Form*

Intentional Conversation ▾

Form Submission Start*

06/12/2030



Form Submission End*

01/01/2031



Active Date*

06/12/2030



* indicates a required field

Run Report

What is in this report?

A listing of each building / floor in your Roompack environment, the number of residents in that building or on that floor, and the percent of residents on that floor that were tagged at least once in the form.

Why would you want this report?

- To track completion of intentional conversations by floor or building.
- To determine the percentage of residents showing up in duty reports, or have noise complaints, etc.
- Use cases will vary by how an institution uses and designs forms, it can only be used on forms filled out by staff members.

Insights allows you to look at your data from different angles. The following reports are the most relevant ones when working with Intentional Conversations data collected via a form:

- **Forms - Custom Tag Count** – Provides counts and frequencies for any custom tags used in a form. This allows you to quickly quantify themes and trends that your staff members identified (tagged), offices they referred residents to (tagged), or any other question you designed with this question type. A second report, “By Building,” is the same data but is broken down by hall or community.
- **Forms - Submission Count to a Specific Form by Staff Member** – Provides a listing of all your staff and the number of times they submitted a specific form. This allows you to see how many intentional conversations your staff have documented.
- **Forms - Tag Count - Resident (Selected Form)** – Provides a listing of all your residents and the number of times they were mentioned (tagged) in a form. This allows you to see which residents had an intentional conversation with a staff member (and which ones did not). A second report, “Percentage,” will display completion rates for each floor in a percentage format (numerator: number of students tagged; denominator: total number of residents on a floor)

👍 Wolf-flow Export API

Roompack provides access to an export API that allows schools to “get their data out” of the software and into other institutional databases and programs. Working with a campus IT department, this data can be added to data warehouses, retention solutions, and other types of programs. While most software companies will charge for access to an API, Roompack makes this completely free at no additional cost.

Contacting Students Directly

Schedule a Microsurvey SMS

Survey Name
Roompack Microsurvey

Question Type
 Open
 Sentiment Scale
 Multiple Choice
 Likert Scale

Target Zone
Roompack University [DEMO]

Scope
All residents

Message
What is your question?

Schedule a date
mm/dd/yyyy

Schedule a time*
9:45 AM

Roompack’s **Microsurvey** functionality can function as a supplement to your intentional conversations. **Microsurveys** allows you to send quick, one-question, pulse checks directly to residents. This could include questions like:

- How are things going with your roommate(s)?
- How has your term started? How can we help?

Data from **Microsurveys** are recorded on the individual resident’s **Timelines** and can also be downloaded in aggregate. These can be reviewed as another means for identifying and acting on students of concern.

Effective Supervision

Effective supervision turns a “conversation” into a “support system.” Some models of supervision focus on administrative tasks: Are the bulletin boards up? Is the duty schedule covered? In Care-focused supervision, while administrative accountability remains, the primary focus shifts toward student support. Effective supervision ensures that the data and stories arising from Intentional Conversations don’t just sit in a database. They trigger action. By moving from passive updates to active inquiry and case management, a more robust student support network can be created.

The Supervision Spectrum was previously addressed in the previous section on building a Care Infrastructure, but what does this look like in practice for individual supervisors?



Staff-Led Reporting (Passive)	Supervisor-Led Inquiry (Active)	Integrated Care and Case Management (Systemic)
<p>While this allows for autonomy, it leaves the responsibility entirely on the student staff member to identify issues and decide what is worth bringing up. This risks a student staff member not recognizing a “minor” issue as a precursor to a larger crisis, and the student of concern may not be discussed until it is too late.</p>	<p>In this model, student staff are expected to check in with supervisors about individual residents regularly. The supervisor drives the conversation, ensuring that quiet residents or those with subtle warning signs are discussed, rather than just the residents who are “loudest” or most disruptive in the community.</p>	<p>In this structure, when a student staff member identifies a concern, the supervisor does not just offer advice. They perform escalated outreach and refer the student to other intervention offices as appropriate. Residence life acts as a true feeder for the university’s safety net.</p>

Practical Steps for Supervisors:

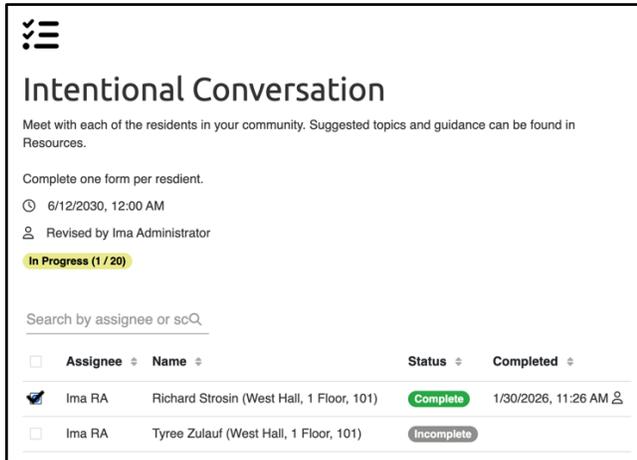
- **Review the Data:** Before a supervision meeting, look at the data. Who has been met with? Who hasn’t? If a staff member has low engagement numbers, it’s a supervision issue that impacts resident care.
- **Track Themes:** Look for trends in the conversation notes. If multiple residents are reporting “Academic Difficulty,” it may be time for a hall-wide intervention or a specific resource workshop.
- **Close the Loop:** If a staff member identifies a student of concern, ensure you follow up with the staff member. Let them know you’ve handled it (and how, if possible), so they know their reporting matters.
- **Check for Skill Gaps:** Help staff members learn how they can be more effective in their note taking and conversations with residents. If a staff member is documenting too much, too little, or is not identifying what’s important, discuss a resident and model what a good note would look like. If a staff member is struggling with the conversations themselves, help in skill building by role-play active listening or open-ended questioning during your one-on-one.
- **Support your Staff member:** Supervisors must ensure they are supporting the *staff member* as well as the resident. This balances support and accountability. If a staff member has a difficult conversation, the supervision meeting should be a space to debrief that experience and provide emotional support.

Supervision is a critical element in developing a Care Infrastructure. All supervisors may have their own stylistic differences, but there must be a uniform understanding about how to use supervision towards departmental Care goals. Developing training and having supervisor-peer discussions can help build capacity and consistency across staff teams.

Roomcompact and Supervision

Administrative Check-Ins

There are two features that can help supervisors determine if administrative tasks are being completed. Before a supervision meeting, these can be reviewed.

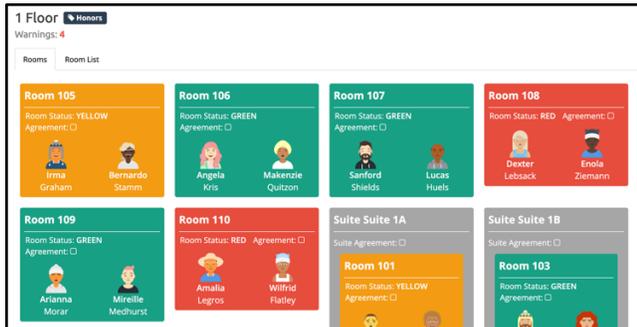


Tasks. The Tasks feature allows staff to keep track of their own progress, checking off conversations as they're completed. It also gives supervisors the ability to check progress of their overall teams and individual staff members.

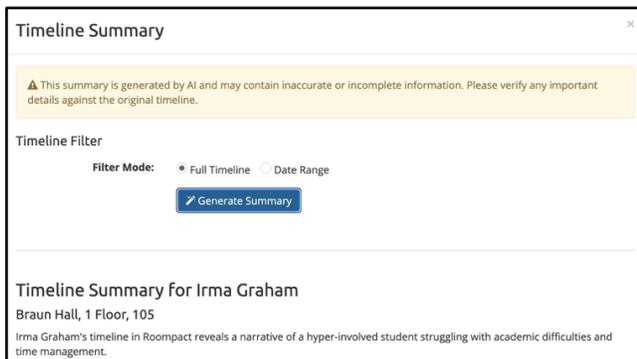
Insight Reports. Before 1-1 meetings supervisors can also run Insights reports (ex. Forms - Submission Count, Forms - Tag Count) to see how many conversations a staff member has documented and which residents have been met with (and which ones have not been met with).

Individual Resident Check-Ins

The Campus Dashboard and Suite, Room, and Resident Profiles can be of particular use to supervisors.



You can use the visual layout of the **Campus Dashboard** as an organizing tool during 1-1 meetings. When it's time to discuss the community, pull it up and share your screen with your staff member. Discuss residents. If something noteworthy comes up, write a note with the staff member present, in real time. Color code rooms for later follow up. It's a way to keep organized while also modeling for the staff member. It can also be pre-1-1 "homework."



When viewing residents (or suite or rooms), you can use **Wolfie^{AI}** to generate a summary of the **Timeline**. This can be an efficient way to get up to speed (or just remember) the details of a resident or space you may be discussing. It can also sometimes surface issues you may miss.

If you use **Forms** for Intentional Conversations, you can also access the raw data for all the residents in a particular floor or community directly within the Forms feature. Utilizing the filters, you can bring up all the conversation data submitted by a staff member in one accessible spreadsheet.

Student Support Networks and Case Management

Residence life staff have a unique vantage point that no other office on campus has access to. An academic advisor knows a student is missing class, but they don't know the student hasn't left their room in three days. Residence life does. Residence life's proximity and intimacy with students provides an opportunity to identify and support students who may be struggling *before* they reach a crisis point. Residence life can act as the bridge between the residential experience and an institution's specialized support services overcoming silos and ensuring greater equity in support.

To support students well, however, there needs to be an intentional approach and system in place. Without a formalized system, information stays trapped. The RA knows about the student's social withdrawal; the Bursar knows about the unpaid bill; the Professor knows about a failed midterm. Separately, these are minor bumps. Together, they paint a picture of a student in crisis. Integrating residence life into your overall institutional Care Infrastructure can help with this.

BIT and CARE Teams

Up until this point, this book has addressed care infrastructure from "the ground up." To function effectively as a feeder, professional staff must understand where to send information and connect students. Referrals are helpful but coordinated follow-up response is even better. Most campuses have formalized bodies to handle students of concern. Two of the most common are BIT and CARE teams. Sometimes these teams may be combined.

Behavioral Intervention Teams (BIT) (sometimes called Threat Assessment Teams) typically focus on **safety and risk**. These teams assess threats to self, others, or the community. They often deal with high-level conduct issues, potential violence, or severe psychological distress. Residence life can act as the "eyes on the ground." Staff members can identify who is isolating, whose behavior is erratic, or whose room condition signals a mental health crisis. Residence life's role is immediate escalation to ensure safety.

CARE Teams (sometimes called Student Support Teams) typically focus on distress and well-being. These teams engage students who are not a safety threat but are struggling to thrive. This includes financial insecurity, grief, academic probation, or food insecurity. Residence life can act as the "connectors." Intentional Conversations are an incredible tool for identifying students who are homesick or struggling academically, but there needs to be a system in place to make sure these conversations translate into support. This support also needs to be coordinated to ensure it is effective and that the student (and the institution) follow through.

Roompack + Conduct and Case Management Software

This is one area where Roompack's software is unmatched. It is purpose-built for this kind of work. Working in tandem with the software you have for tracking students of concern and care team efforts (ex. Maxient), Roompack functions as an informal system for early detection and coordinating proactive interventions. Together both pieces of software can help you extend your web of support for students. Roompack's AI tools and Insights reports can be particularly useful. This is why Dean of Students offices, although not primary users of our software, often have a deep interest in integrating it into their overall systems and practices.

Coordinating Care

Developing your Care Infrastructure requires Residence life staff to engage in some level of case management. Some larger departments may have specific staff members dedicated to this task, where in others it may be more diffused within the organizational structure. When a student staff member flags a concern, the professional staff member acts as a case manager, either conducting or coordinating outreach, or moving the concern to a dedicated person or team. Creating a communication flow and ensuring staff know their role within it is crucial to ensure the integrity of your Care Infrastructure.

In addition to outlining a communication flow, it helps to set staff expectations within their role. Set expectations around active versus passive support. A passive approach relies on the hope that a student will follow through on a referral or that a single email resolves a crisis. Active support assumes that barriers exist and works proactively to remove them.

Find ways to make sure staff actions receive follow up. There must be a mechanism to verify that an action was taken. This prevents the “bystander effect,” where multiple staff members are aware of an issue, but everyone assumes someone else has handled it. Equally important is making sure actions are followed up upon by the student. It is not enough just to provide a resource. It is important to guide a student toward it and through it. Students often feel anxiety about utilizing new resources. Knowing that a staff member is going to check back in with them can provide the gentle accountability and encouragement they need to take that first step.

Finally, student struggles are rarely isolated. There may be deeper or other causes and effects. If new needs emerge, that may require additional support or a pivot in the resources provided. An effective Care Infrastructure is not a “one-and-done” transaction, but a relationship that evolves. As you peel back the layers of a student’s experience, you must be ready to pivot, connecting the student to different or additional resources.

Roompack’s Staff Alert

Send Staff Alert ✕

Staff Alert is only for messaging staff (If you want to message a resident, use Message Center). If you want to directly send a message to a staff member, type their name. If you type a Building, Floor, Room, or Resident, you can send it to the staff member who oversees that location or resident.

Notify Relevant RA(s) HD(s) Admin(s)

Send as

The **Staff Alert** feature allows staff to rapidly contact other staff members from anywhere in Roompack’s software. When you click on the red Staff Alert button, a pop-over window appears that allows you to message staff members.

You can search for staff members by name, or you can indirectly select your recipients by searching for a resident, room, floor, or building. Doing the latter will notify the relevant staff members who oversee those residents or spaces. You can also select multiple recipients with each staff alert you send.

Closing the Loop

A frequent failure point in a Care Infrastructure is not the software or the crisis response itself, but rather the lack of feedback provided to the person who reported it. Student staff serve as your primary reporters in the community, but when they document a serious concern and are met with silence, they may assume that no action was taken. Over time, this silence erodes trust in the system, causing staff to feel their efforts are futile and leading them to stop reporting concerns altogether.

While privacy laws prevent staff from sharing details or specific outcomes, find ways to validate student staff member’s actions. Simply acknowledging that the report was received and is being handled confirms that their observation was valuable and explicitly releases them from the emotional burden of trying to “solve” the student’s problem. This validation allows the staff member to return to their primary role of noticing changes in the environment, confident that the broader support system is working as intended.

Conclusion

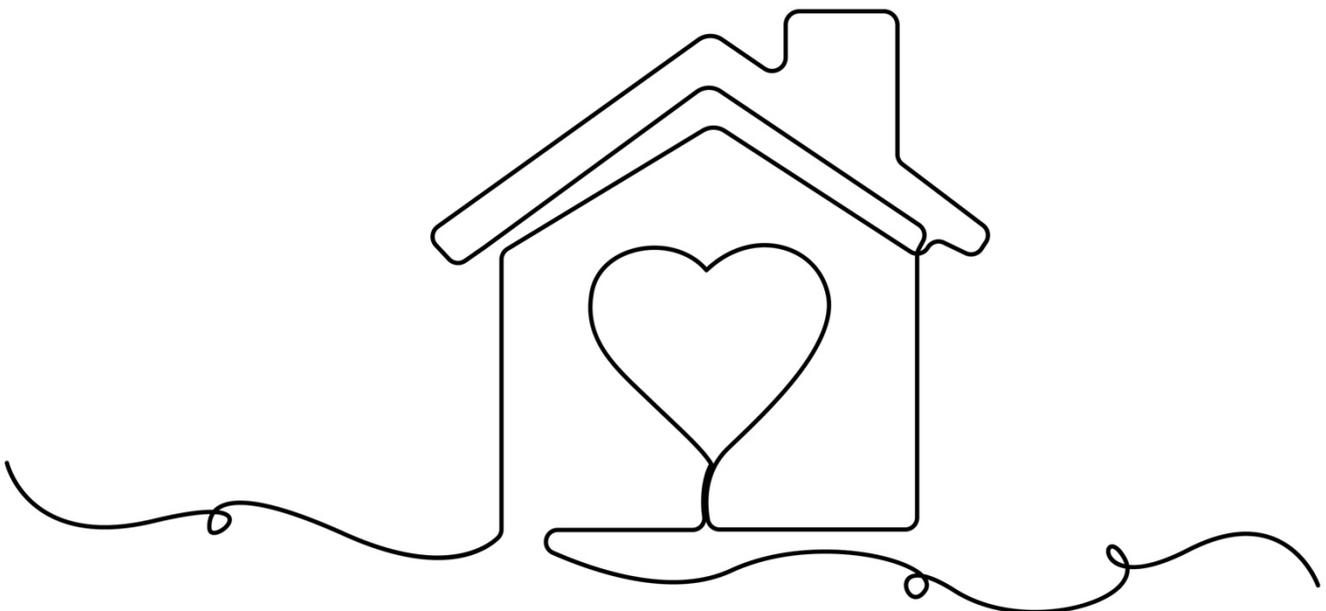
This book focused on how residence life can operationalize Care. Specifically, how to develop a “Care Infrastructure” starting at the ground level, with student staff as mentors connecting with and having intentional conversations with their residents, up through the systems and support networks that work at an institutional level. Residence life departments have a critical role to play in institutional efforts to advance Care, and ultimately student retention and persistence. By documenting interactions, residence life can act as an early warning system for an institution and act as a feeder for a university’s broader safety net.

If a department fails to systematize Care, it relies on luck and serendipity. By implementing Intentional Conversations and robust systems, it removes “chance” from the equation. These changes move a department from a model of passive availability to one of proactive support. Simple, right? Far from it. You might get some pushback from student staff members if this is a new initiative on your campus (or even on-going). Some staff may see it as invasive or inauthentic. Intentional Conversations implemented poorly *can* slip into these routines. So how do you avoid this? Here are some quick tips I touched on in this book series:

- Be clear about your goals. Make sure all staff understand the *why*.
- Hire and train staff with the right dispositions and skills for this work.
- Make sure your position descriptions align with your goals and the skills and work required of your staff.
- Overly structure your Intentional Conversations and they can become robotic. Under-structure your Intentional Conversations and they can lose intentionality. Find a balance that works for your department.
- Don’t collect data and feedback just for the sake of collecting it. Make sure you use it in real-time to improve your practice, close the loop with reporting staff, and look for longitudinal trends.
- Ensure that handoffs to institutional support teams and case managers are tight and effective.
- Make sure that your support of students is active, and not passive.

And finally, as you move forward, do not let the process, the forms, and the data obscure the heart of this work. Use the structure to free your staff to be present. Although there was a heavy focus on the mechanics of the process, it is important to remember that these systems do not exist to create more administrative work or to turn student staff members into data-entry robots. They exist to help students thrive.

Ultimately, the integration of Community, Competencies, and Care can be a powerful framework for residence life practice. Community helps students feel like they belong. Competencies helps them grow, develop, and learn. Care ensures they are supported through the inevitable obstacles of the college journey.



Appendix: Sample Topics

First Year Student Conversations

<p style="text-align: center;">Early Fall</p> <p>Themes: Homesickness, Transition to College-Level Academics, Building Community and Making Friends</p> <p>For this conversation, focus in on the resident’s transition to living with a roommate, their academic performance, and their college experience overall. Help them set some preliminary goals and ensure that they are connected on campus and getting involved. Pay attention to warning signs of homesickness, poor choices regarding alcohol and health-related habits, and lack of involvement on campus and in the community.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the resident’s roommate relationship status, any transition issues, and their goals for the semester.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Late Fall</p> <p>Themes: Returning Home After a Semester of Change, Setting Goals for Semester Two</p> <p>For this conversation, a student will be beginning to think about going home (perhaps for the first time) and will be preparing for finals. Help them think through what “going home” will be like. (And be careful not to assume everyone has a “home” as you may conceive of it, or that it is necessarily a positive environment.) Help your resident think through the academic choices (and mistakes) they made this semester so they can adjust and improve.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight what has changed for the student throughout the semester, what they’ve learned, their involvement and connectedness on campus, and any anxieties they may have about returning “home.”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Early Spring</p> <p>Themes: Reflections on Academic Performance, Setting Goals for the Semester</p> <p>For this conversation, your residents will be returning from break and will have received their first formal college grades. Help them process through what they did well, as well as where they could improve. Some students may be surprised that college-level work requires different levels of effort and habits. Students may also be questioning their choice of major. This conversation is an excellent time to revise and set new goals after a semester of learning.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight how the resident’s break went, how they feel about their academic progress and achievement thus far, and their new and revised goals for the semester.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Late Spring</p> <p>Themes: Closure and Moving Forward, Setting Goals for the Summer and Fall</p> <p>For this conversation, it will be the final one you have for the year and occurs at the end of a student’s first year in college. Because of this, students may be reflecting on how their first year went, will be gearing up for a summer job, internship, or vacation, and will be making plans to say goodbye to, and stay in touch with, friends over the summer. This is a great time to plan closure activities for your community.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight what your resident learned over the course of their first year in college and what their goals are for the summer and next academic year. Also note whether the resident plans on returning to college next year or if they are considering stopping or transferring.</p>

What student characteristics, campus cultures, living learning communities, and other factors might guide the questions you include in your Intentional Conversations? Are there certain touchpoints or events in the semester that you might want to incorporate into your questions?

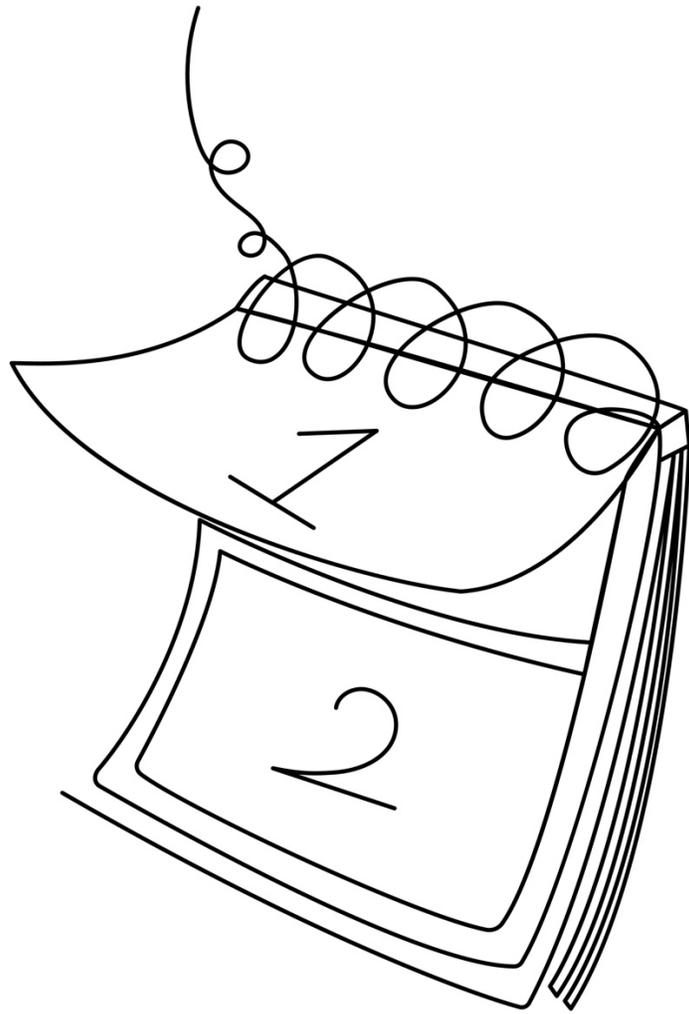
Second Year Student Conversations

<p style="text-align: center;">Early Fall</p> <p>Themes: Setting Goals for the New Academic Year, Making Commitments to A Major</p> <p>For this conversation, residents will be returning from their summer and will begin to re-establish friendships or readjust to changed relationships. They will have received their final grades after their first full year in college and may be considering declaring or changing their majors. They will likely want to set new goals for the academic year and may feel like they made mistakes or didn't focus enough during their first year.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the student's commitment to their academic programs and major, their goals for the year, and how they are connecting to their new communities.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Late Fall</p> <p>Themes: Thinking about Study Abroad, Internships, and Other Opportunities, Academic/Co-Curricular Check In</p> <p>For this conversation, your residents will have begun to make some deeper level commitments to their majors, involvement on campus, to internships, and may be preparing to study abroad. This is an opportunity to check in on their progress towards their goals.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the student's co-curricular involvements and any planning they may be doing for their academic major and related programs.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Early Spring</p> <p>Themes: Living Plans for Next Year, Academic/Co-Curricular Check In</p> <p>For this conversation, your residents will be recommitting to their goals for the year and altering them as necessary. In many cases they may begin to think about moving off campus for their housing. Help your students understand everything this entails and discuss resources available to them.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight their academic performance from the previous semester, changes to their goals, and plans for housing next year.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Late Spring</p> <p>Themes: Closure and Moving Forward, Setting Goals for the Summer</p> <p>For this conversation, your residents are completing their second full year at college. They hopefully have direction for their future and are actively making and following through on plans to achieve their goals. Discuss your resident's summer plans with them, how they fit into the larger picture of their major and career aspirations, and how they have done and are doing academically.</p> <p>When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the resident's plans for the summer and their progress towards achieving their goals for this year.</p>

Third and Fourth Year Student Conversations

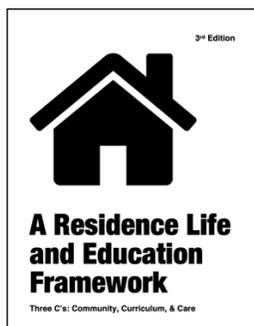
Themes: Academic Success, Transitions, Internship, Study Abroad, and Other Opportunities, Career Preparation, Graduate School Preparation, Closure

Since residential requirements and rates of return to campus housing for third and fourth year students can vary based on the institution, the following are some themes that may be present during a student's final two (and maybe three) years. Depending on how you structure your Intentional Conversations, it may be more appropriate to have one conversation per semester (as opposed to two) as students begin to become more self-reliant and independent.



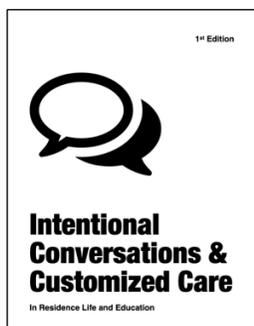
Additional Books In This Series

This book is part of a four-book series. To access all the books electronically, head to book.roompact.com



A Residence Life and Education Framework Three C's: Community, Competencies, and Care

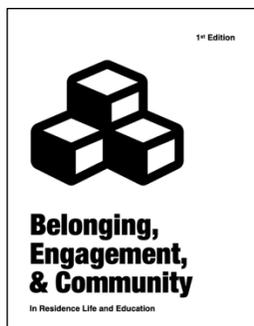
This is the foundational book in this series. It provides an overview of the 3C Framework and how Community, Competencies, and Care work as a whole. It provides a rationale behind the framework and a broad plan for how to implement it. You should read this book first.



Intentional Conversations & Customized Care In Residence Life and Education

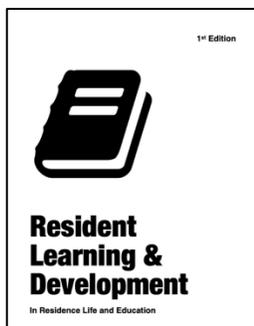
This book does a deep dive into the Care component of the 3C Framework. Learn about building a Care Infrastructure including how to connect residence life to CARE and BIT teams. Also learn how to leverage and structure intentional conversations to provide customized support for students.

Future Books



Belonging, Engagement, & Community In Residence Life and Education

Coming 2027.



Resident Learning & Development In Residence Life and Education

Coming 2028.