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Idaho university puts professors in dorms

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By **Jessie L. Bonner**, Associated Press Writer

BOISE, Idaho — On the west end of the Boise State University campus, professor Michael Humphrey lives on the third floor of a residence hall with his wife, 2-year-old daughter, the family dog -- and nearly 30 college students.

Humphrey, a 35-year-old with a doctorate in special education, has lived at the state university for the past year as part of a campus housing program created four years ago to help retain students and enhance their college experience.

The basic premise: If students feel like they belong, they'll be more likely to stick around.

On a the school's riverside campus, Humphrey is one of five faculty members who live in dorms and oversee the academic and personal well-being of about 125 students between them.

"When I went to school, there was no such thing," said Humphrey, who was an undergraduate at the University of Iowa. "I'm getting to know students on a level I wouldn't normally."

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The professors organize movie nights and camping trips, they give advice on classes and resumes, and they get used to knocks on their doors at all hours from students, some of whom are living away from home for the first time.

Humphrey has lent his neighbors cups of sugar -- condiments are a typical request -- and introduced them to his parents. He was home when a student stopped by room 302 and needed help with his tie for a formal event. He knows Michael Roberts, a 25-year-old sociology major who lives down the hall on the third floor, hasn't been feeling well.

"On the other floors, people are just complete strangers," said Roberts, a senior who moved into the residence hall last year. "I think last year, there's maybe a handful of professors who I can remember their first name."

Students in the residential college earn a credit per semester for participating in weekly activities and classroom discussions with their professors. They also complete assignments, such as essays and community service.

Nationwide, about 200 colleges have developed more than 600 living-learning residential programs, such as Michigan State University, in an attempt to further engage students outside the classroom and allow them to live on campus with others who have similar interests. In some cases, faculty and academic advisers have offices in the same residence hall.

But an analysis of these programs in 2007 found only 7 percent in the United States integrate faculty into the living arrangements, said Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, principal investigator for the National Study of Living-Learning Programs at the Center for Student Studies in Ann Arbor, Mich.

"Faculty living alongside students in the residence halls, even in a living-learning context, is not very prevalent," said Inkelas, who is also a professor at the University of Maryland.

In Idaho, Humphrey signed a contract agreeing to live in the campus residence hall for two years. The university pays for rent, a meal plan and parking pass. The couple lives in a university suite designed to hold four students, with 10-feet by 12-foot bedrooms, a small kitchen and a 13-feet by 24-foot kitchen and living room area.

A video game poster hangs in the hallway, next to their front door.

"I did worry about feeling out of place, with a baby, and a dog," said Marcy Humphrey, a 34-year-old therapist. "It's been much less isolating than I thought it would be."

On campus, the family has access to art openings, lectures, a recreation center and a playground for their daughter, Annelise. The Humphreys have gone cross-country skiing, snow shoeing and painted pottery with students on the third floor.

"The basic the concept goes to roots of Oxford and Cambridge; when they were founded the 16th century they had faculty that lived with the students," said W. Robert Midden, a Bowling Green State University chemistry professor who helped found the first residential learning community on the Ohio campus in 1997.

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"Harvard and Yale still have residential colleges," Midden said.

Most such communities have been created in the past decade and the small number that have incorporated faculty usually include older professors rather than young families, Midden said.

Boise State, with an enrollment of more than 19,000, is now studying whether the residential college program has been successful in keeping more students compared to other housing programs.

The residential college opened in 2004 with a professor from the College of Business and Economics. The program has since grown to include faculty from arts and humanities, health professions, civic leadership and engineering.

The program is capped at about 125 students, or about 25 for each faculty member, said Melissa Winrow, assistant director for residential education.

"Once you get past 25, it's hard for the faculty to build relationships," Winrow said. "It's a massive commitment."

Zeynep Hansen, a 35-year-old economics professor, is one of two faculty members who have completed two years in the residential college and now plan to sign on for another year.

Hansen lives in Taylor Hall, where the university has converted a 4-bedroom campus suite into a small apartment for her and her husband Beau, 37, who teaches biology at the university. The couple has a 4-year-old son, Korbin.

Photographs of the Hansens rock climbing and camping with the students hang in the hallways.

"We looked at it as an adventure," Hansen said. "Nobody knew what to expect."

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