DOING MORE WITH LESS

Student insight for stretched res life teams

Anna-Natalia Moustakas · Co-founder and CEO, Coly

Troy Noeldner · Director of Housing & Residence Life, University of North Dakota

Introductions



Anna-Natalia Moustakas

Co-founder and CEO

Coly



Troy Noeldner

Director of Housing & Residence Life

University of North Dakota

Learning outcomes

01.

Connect the relationship between limited student insight, reactive workflows, and staff burnout in residential settings.

02.

Examine how psychographic data helps teams shift from crisis response to proactive outreach without adding to existing staff workload.

03.

Identify at least two practical strategies for integrating student insight into existing residential life structures at your home institution.

University of North Dakota at a glance

3000+

Students living on campus

9

Residence halls

24

Apartments

23

Professional Housing & Residence Life Staff

81

Student Live-inn Staff

INSTITUTION TYPE

Public research university & flagship of the state system.

WHAT SHAPES OUR WORK

- UND LEADS – Campus Strategic Framework. Currently finalizing a new 10-year campus planning exercise. Housing is listed as top priority
- Previous two years we saw historic growth with our first-year student class

Managing more with less

How 194 housing and res life departments responded in ACUHO-I Dec 2025 Straw Poll

65%

implemented hiring freezes

48%

eliminated positions

45%

consolidated jobs

15%

reported layoffs



How many of you are managing more with fewer staff than three years ago?

ACUHO-I Straw Poll, September 2025 (194 institutions).

Burnout is a balance problem

WHAT CAUSES IT: EXAMPLES STUDIED IN HOUSING AND RES LIFE (JD-R)

Job demands what costs energy



Work pressure
Too much to do in too little time



Cognitive demands
Juggling information, problems and decisions



Emotional demands
Supporting people in distress while managing your own emotions



Role conflict
Competing expectations, like being the supporter and the enforcer



Hassles
Small obstacles, interruptions and admin that get in the way

Job resources what helps you meet them and recover



Autonomy
Control over how and when you work



Social support
Colleagues and supervisors who have your back



Feedback
Knowing whether your work makes a difference



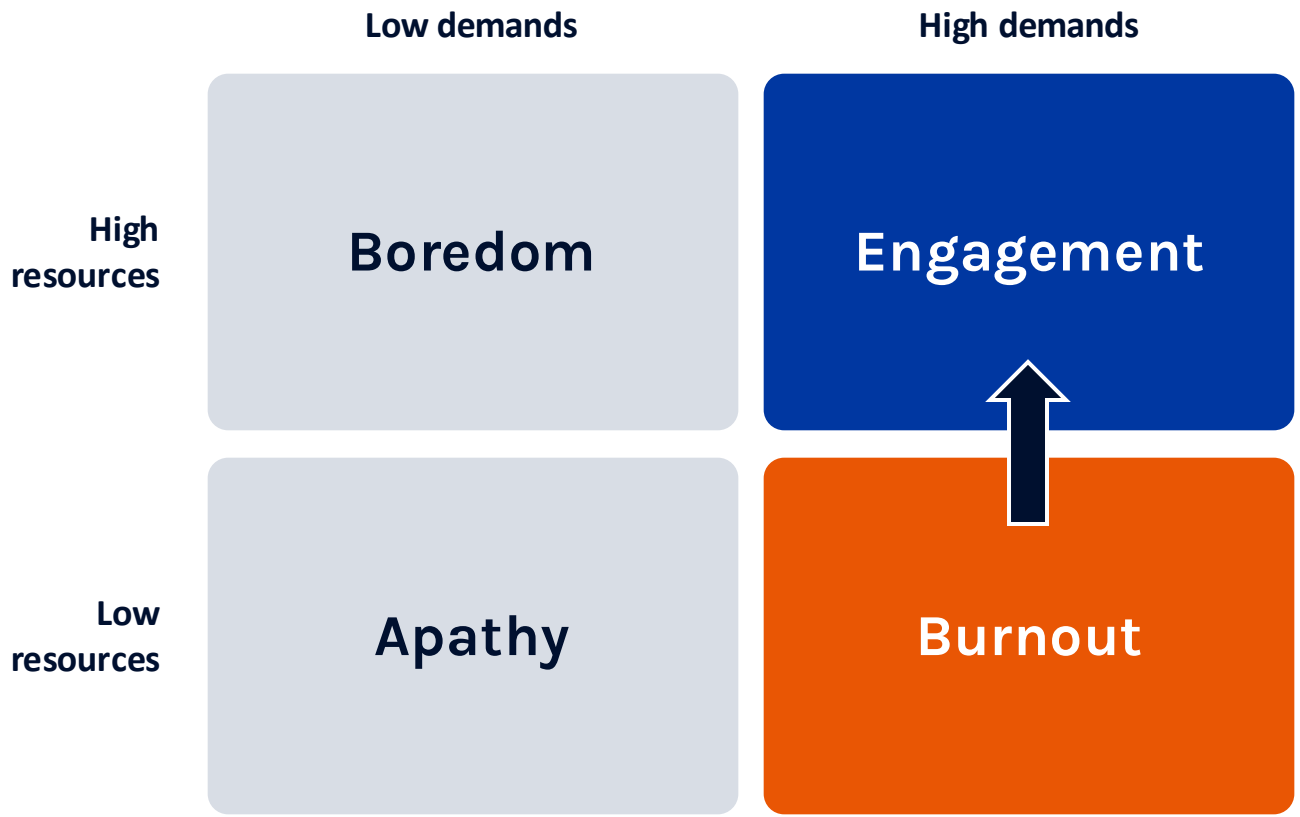
Development
Room to grow your skills



Coaching
Guidance when you need it

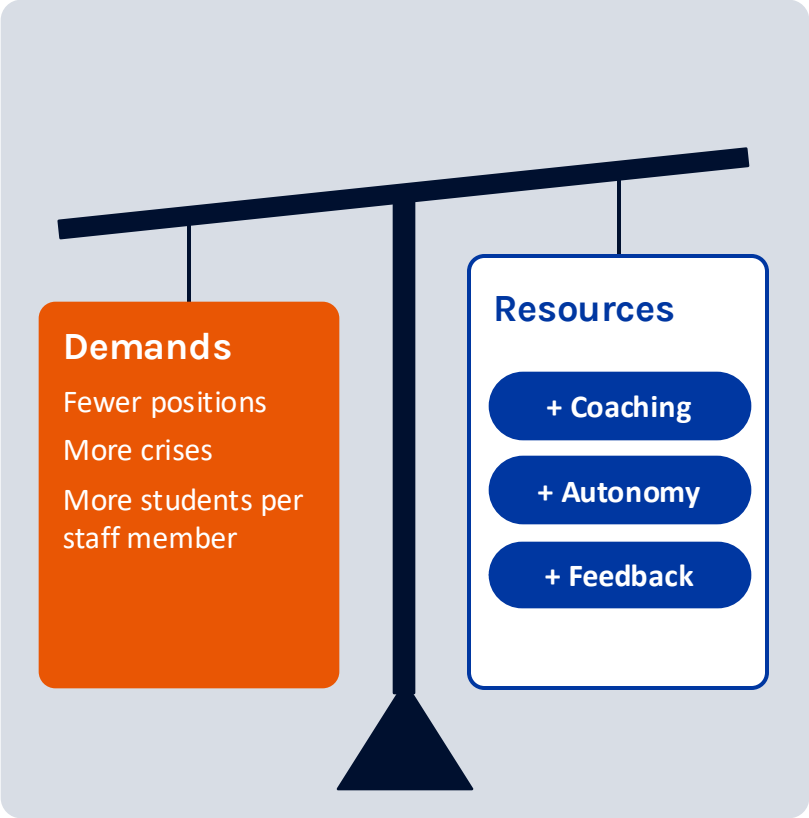
Maslach & Jackson (1981); Demerouti et al. (2001); Wilson & Kunk-Czaplicki, Journal of College and University Student Housing 49(3), 2023.

High demands don't have to lead to burnout



Demerouti et al. (2001); Wilson & Kunk-Czaplicki, Journal of College and University Student Housing 49(3), 2023.

Doing better with less - enhancing resources



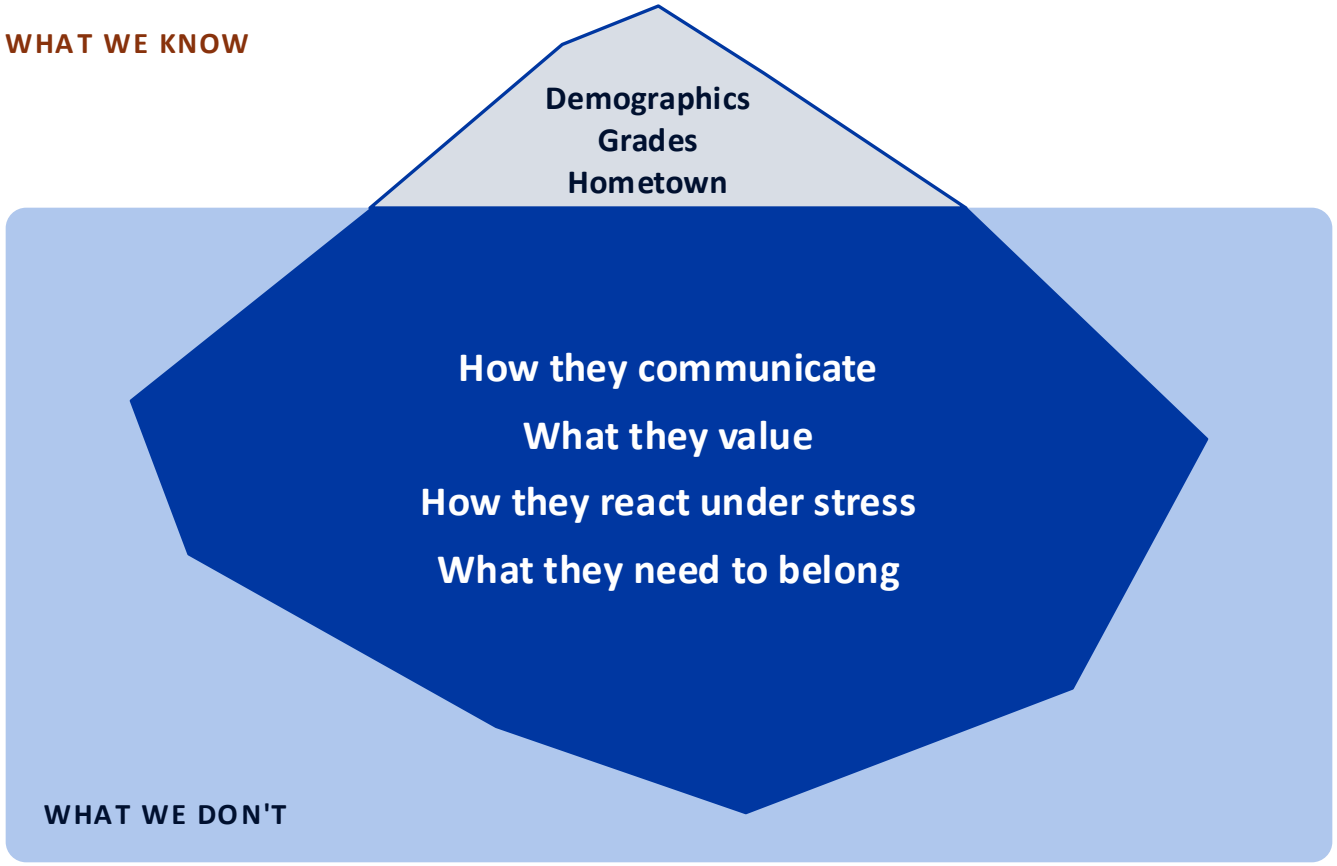
	WHAT IT MEANS	WITHOUT ADDING STAFF
Coaching	Guidance tailored to the moment you need it	Conflict playbooks, conversation scripts, peer consultation, decision guides for common situations
Autonomy	Control over what you prioritize and when	Knowing students early enough to plan, not react, plus clear decision rights and processes that adapt to each situation
Feedback	Knowing whether your work is making a difference	Pulse check-ins on **who's made a friend** and **who's struggling**, conflict and room change trends, attendance

The second lever: lower demands upstream. Build students' skills to navigate small conflicts themselves, so fewer reach staff.

Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001).

We can't act on what we don't see

Every student and every situation is different. But we only see the tip of who they are.



What changes when we see below the surface

FOR STAFF: STRONGER RESOURCES

- **Coaching** adapted to context & the student
- **Autonomy** to plan, not react
- **Feedback** on who's connecting

FOR STUDENTS: LOWER DEMANDS

- Students who understand themselves handle more on their own

The Foundation of Self-Understanding

> ***"The more you discover about yourself, the more you can become secure with it. And that obviously leads to greater self-confidence because you become comfortable with who you really are."***

— Recorded in Baxter Magolda's *Knowing and Reasoning in College* (1992/1994), illustrating the shift toward self-authorship.

1

The Core Philosophy

College serves as the ultimate engine for personal discovery.

2

Neutral Framing

Growth-oriented snapshots without judgment of weaknesses or flaws.

3

Accelerated Navigation

Understanding operational styles to navigate campus life effectively.

Reassessing the residential experience

Shifting focus to intentional connection.

01.

The Catalyst

Originating as roommate matching, expanding into total community design.

02.

An Evolving Vision

Heavy compliance burdens distancing staff from core community building.

03.

Beyond the Room

Establishing a shared communication language across entire residential floors.

LIVE POLL

How do you currently determine floor programming/residential curriculum needs?

Day One Intentionality

1

Pre-Move-In

- Map operational characteristics of the floor.

2

First weeks

- Launch targeted programming replacing reactive surveys.
- Empower students with AI conflict coaching.

3

Mid-semester

- Micro Check-ins

4

Staff Refocus

- Shift RA time from mediation to mentorship

1. Pre-Move-In Intelligence

Know the floor before day one.

Incorporate into training

- RAs get some insight into the “personality” of their floor before they arrive.
- Create opportunities for RAs discuss how they interpret and will use their floor information.

Establish Baseline Dynamics

- Review roommate matching scores to identify potential outliers
- Establish programming ideas before the students even get to campus

Psychometric data in action

TWO ROOMMATES

Lower demands

Deciding how to respond

↑ **A: Agreeableness** higher

↓ **B: Agreeableness** lower

MAY MEAN

A may bottle it up until it explodes. B is direct and may not know there's a problem.

TRY

Check in with A privately first, then bring them together.

Illustrative examples. Personality: Big Five. Values: Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). Every trait level has strengths and challenges.

2. Programming Evolution

Expanding data applications beyond the traditional residential floor.

Residential Curriculum

Data-Driven Engagement: Replacing reactive interest surveys.

Tailored Interventions: Matching events to floor operating styles.

Living Learning Communities

Intentional Cohorts: Balancing behavioral diversity within academic groups.

Enhanced Collaboration: Pre-empting friction in project-heavy disciplines.

Career Services Integration

Career Readiness: Bridging residential life to professional development.

Articulating Value: Translating operating styles into employer strengths.

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A FLOOR

Coaching

Choosing the right program

↓ **Conscientiousness** lower

↑ **Power (value)** higher

MAY MEAN

May skip events that need advance sign-up, and respond to competition and recognition.

TRY

Swap the sign-up workshop for a drop-in challenge with a floor leaderboard.

Illustrative examples. Personality: Big Five. Values: Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). Every trait level has strengths and challenges.

3. Mid-Semester

Empowering student autonomy and ongoing temperature checks / support

Early Detection

Email check-ins

Preventing minor friction escalation.

Instant Support

Accessible mediation guidance.

Shared Framework

Neutral language for conflict.

*"My RAs have found it helpful in planning events and further connecting with residents as they are able to learn more about them and specific things that they may be interested in talking about or seeing for events. It has also been nice to know how residents are doing and the checkups have been a way for the RAs to check in with people that they don't usually talk to**

Eleanor Puzzo, West Hall Resident Director

Ongoing Check-In Questions

Short, recurring pulse questions that keep the picture current, not a one-time snapshot.

In general, how satisfied are you with your roommate(s) right now?
Rated on a scale of 1 to 5

How would you describe your current roommate experience?
Positive · Mostly positive · Challenging (experiencing tensions or conflict)

Have you thought about changing rooms?
No · Yes, because of my roommate(s) · Yes, for other reasons

So far, have you made friends at UND?
Yes · No, not yet

In general, are you thriving at UND?
Yes · No, I'm struggling and need support · No, I'm struggling and thought about leaving

Psychometric data in action

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ONE STUDENT

Autonomy

Timing a hard conversation

- ↑ **Emotional Depth** higher
- ↑ **Security (value)** higher

MAY MEAN

May react more intensely and feel more stress and anxiety when things feel unstable.

TRY

Plan the conversation for when you have the energy to meet those emotions.

Illustrative examples. Personality: Big Five. Values: Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). Every trait level has strengths and challenges.

4. Refocusing the RA Role

Returning time to the work they actually signed up for.

The Energy Drain

- **Conflict:** Mediating minor roommate friction.
- **Compliance:** Managing heavy reporting burdens.
- **Burnout:** Executing constant reactive interventions.

The Core Mission

- **Mentorship:** Guiding individual student success.
- **Connection:** Designing engaging floor programming.
- **Integration:** Directing residents to campus opportunities.

The Business Case for Belonging

Retention is the ultimate metric.

Housing is a Business

Operating with clear goals. Retention depends entirely on students feeling safe and supported.

Accelerating Belonging

Tools for self-understanding resolve friction early, securing foundational psychological needs.

Unlocking Engagement

Meeting basic security needs opens students to broader educational and leadership opportunities.

TAKEAWAYS

01. Coaching

Adapt your playbookd to your students needs. Example: programming based on who they are.

02. Autonomy

Use the data you already have before move-in to plan your first month, instead of waiting reactive incidents to surface.

03. Feedback

Know if you’re progressing. Example: Add one pulse question on who has made a friend and who is struggling.

04. Lower demands

Give students one tool to understand how they communicate, before the first conflict.

FINAL REFLECTION

1. What data do you have access to today already which could inform programing practices to make them more effective and tailored to each student group?

2. How do you work with increase your students self-awareness and communication skills so they can navigate conflict independently and navigate campus life more effective?

Thank you!



Anna-Natalia Moustakas

Co-founder and CEO

Coly

anna@coly.io



Troy Noeldner

Director of Housing & Residence Life

University of North Dakota

troy.noeldner@und.edu

PDF Presentation

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