



# Retrieving Lost Rites of Passage

Even before the pandemic, there was evidence among some 18- to 22-year-olds of a pendulum swing away from some technology. These digital natives recognized a need for in-person social interaction and a real-life community. Generation Z may have proven that they could form meaningful relationships in the digital realm, but they also understand that it was not a full replacement for human contact.

The good news is that the Gen Z's tech-savvy nature made this cohort of students somewhat more prepared for the rapid shift to online education that took place in 2020. On the other hand, this necessary shift was met with varying degrees of success in part because of its troubling impact on social interaction.

When schools shut down in the spring of 2020, Scion saw many students opt to remain in their educational communities. For those already in off-campus student housing, there were only modest drops in occupancy during the height of the pandemic. In April 2020, as the nation shut down, Scion observed physical occupancy rates in the low 80% range in off-campus, purpose-built student housing. Citing the need to stay connected to write papers, take exams, and so on, young people often did not return to their families' homes. They stayed in the environment most conducive to their studies and where they hoped to retain some sense of community among peers.

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## Grieving lost moments

In interviews, students who opted to stay home for the 2020-2021 school year tended to express regrets about this lost opportunity for in-person social interaction as their friends moved onto campus. Graduating high school seniors were “ready to launch” and those who started college in Fall 2020 reported profound sadness from being denied earned rites of passage including such momentous events as high school graduation ceremonies, prom, and significant parts of the first-year college process.

While a year may seem like a brief moment in time, for incoming college students it was a highly formative time they expected to spend creating lasting memories. Students who stayed home delayed that first roommate or residence hall experience, or the fun of hanging out on the quad with new friends. For many students, losing a single year might mean losing the opportunity to play a college sport or study abroad.