

## Balancing in-person and online social interaction

Another result of this loss has been a shared desire across Gen Z to reclaim a sense of youthfulness. For a generation that had long been considered to have lost its childhood—having been pushed to compete at a young age in preparation for higher education, suffered high rates of stress, and had their play time carefully scheduled by parents to provide balance to screen time—this sense loss has been deeply felt.

This yearning for an elongated adolescence has left this generation wanting a “typical” college experience. Students today talk about their desire to live more fully, once COVID-19 vaccinations are more widespread. They anticipate hanging out in crowded bars, going dancing, and attending concerts, ballgames and religious services—being out in the world and together with their peers.

Longing for connection could drive an uptick in craving for communal activities. Housing officers will want to consider the impact this may have on campus housing and provide housing offerings that make space for this generation to rejoin the college or university community—and perhaps regain some lost rites of passage.

It is important that housing professionals be mindful of amenity and common area usage, as the tendency may be for residents to not comply with recommended social distancing requirements that may remain in effect. In focus group discussions, many students assumed that most of their peers will get COVID-19. It is an attitude both dismissive of the risk, but also defeated by it, and it impacts their willingness to comply with safety recommendations.

For all their talk, this generation is not known for its partying attitude. After all, Gen Z has placed an incredibly high value on higher education. This is a generation that drinks less, and is statistically less sexually active, than other generations. It is also a generation that has been long accustomed to building meaningful relationships through technology. While they are craving opportunities to be together in person, prioritizing these types of community outings may be a big shift for many GenZers accustomed to having most of their social interactions on a screen.

This is a trend that housing officers will want to watch carefully. The higher education experience is well known as a time of transition, but housing officers will play a key role in keeping students safe during their evolution.

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