Building Global Citizens: A Longitudinal Study of the I-House Experience 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over a century, International House (I-House) has brought together graduate students and young professionals from across the world to "live, learn, and grow together." Located in New York City, I-House fosters a diverse residential community that cultivates meaningful dialogue, empathy, open-mindedness, and cross-cultural understanding, qualities essential for bridging global polarization and reducing division.

In 2023, we conducted a survey of 1,600 I-House alumni. The alumni scored extremely high on a number of validated measures of pro-sociality and reported frequent and high-quality interactions between members of different backgrounds and robust social norms valuing inclusion and belonging during their time at I-House. In their view, these elements contributed to a unique and enriching environment.

One limitation of the alumni survey was the inability to determine the impact of I-House on current residents because it was correlational and focused on residents from the past. Therefore, we conducted a longitudinal study with I-House in 2024-2025 to assess the impact of its culture and programs on current residents' personal and professional growth. We followed residents over a 9-month period, measuring changes in key domains, including empathy, emotional intelligence, intellectual humility, global citizenship, pro-sociality, interpersonal trust, and affective polarization.

This report describes the participants, research methods, and key findings from the longitudinal survey. We also include a number of conclusions and recommendations for I-House.

Key Findings

- **Very High Pro-sociality:** I-House residents scored higher on pro-social measures than global benchmarks, and were even higher than I-House alumni (from our previous study). For instance, if I-House was a country, it would rank among the top three worldwide for volunteering and helping strangers.

- **Significant Personal Growth:** Residents who deeply engaged with I-House through programming, peer interactions, and identification with the community showed the most growth in empathy, intellectual humility, and global citizenship.

- **Transformative for Residents with "Room to Grow":** Residents who began the year with lower baseline scores exhibited the greatest improvements across all positive traits and also reported a 19% reduction in affective polarization.

- **Programming Impact:** Different types of programming foster different outcomes. For instance, Legacy events strengthened emotional intelligence, while Resident-led events enhanced global citizenship. The variety and intentionality of offerings appear to be key to residents' overall development.

- **Inclusive Culture:** Our data suggests that I-House has created a psychologically safe space where residents can engage in open conversations about complex issues and deepen their understanding of one another and the world. Its environment is characterized by diverse interactions, strong social norms of inclusion, and respectful cross-cultural dialogue, all of which are crucial in shaping residents' growth.

- **Admissions Insights:** The admissions process effectively attracts individuals aligned with I-House values and most applicants receive top evaluation scores. However, a lack of variation in those scores makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of the admissions process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our conclusion is that I-House is more than just a residence. Rather, it is a place that acts as a catalyst for transformation, fostering emotional intelligence, empathy, and pro-sociality. Its success appears to rest on three key pillars:

1. Diversified programming that cultivates a range of pro-social traits and skills.
2. A vibrant, inclusive community that cultivates psychological safety and norms of openness and respect.
3. Strong resident identification with I-House, which motivates alignment with its norms and values.

Moving forward, refining the admission process, fostering strong social identities, increasing engagement with I-House's culture, and reinforcing social norms of inclusivity will help sustain and amplify I-House's transformative impact.

We also believe that the I-House model offers a framework for organizations aiming to nurture globally conscious and socially responsible citizens.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

For over one hundred years, International House (I-House) has brought together graduate students and young professionals from around the globe to *"live, learn, and grow together."* Nestled in the heart of New York City, I-House provides a unique residential experience where individuals from diverse backgrounds live side by side and participate in programming designed to build "*social and cultural intelligence*". At its core, I-House seeks to cultivate individuals who will help bridge the polarization, isolation, and division our world continues to face.

In 2023, we completed a large-scale survey of 1,600 I-House alumni. Former residents reported that living at I-House was life-changing. Alumni enthusiastically expressed that their time at I-House positively shaped their values, perspectives, and ways of living. They also reported strikingly high levels of the qualities I-House strives to cultivate, including emotional intelligence, pro-sociality, and intellectual humility. These traits and skills were particularly strong among alumni who reported being heavily identified and involved with I-House during their stay.

Overall, our findings from the alumni survey suggested that I-House positively influences residents in ways that endure for years, and even decades. However, as the study relied on alumni's retrospective reports, it did not permit strong causal conclusions and was potentially limited to people who had lived there years earlier. After presenting these results to the I-House leadership, we agreed that it would be useful to conduct a follow-up longitudinal study with current residents.

Therefore, we surveyed residents at the beginning of the academic year (August 2024) and again when they left I-House (mostly in May 2025). This allowed us to examine whether residents experienced *changes* in positive traits throughout the year at I-House. Therefore, we examined differences in these traits from the beginning to the end of the year. We also analyzed whether certain residents were more impacted by the experience and what aspects of the culture and programming had the greatest influence on their personal growth.

In total, we surveyed 456 residents (232 completed both pre- and post-survey). This pre/post study design allowed us to analyze changes within residents during their time at I-House, and more directly test the effect that living at I-House has on them. Altogether, this research offers a deeper understanding of residents' experiences and insight into the impact of I-House.

METHODS

Study Design and Data Collection

Our research team developed a survey in close collaboration with I-House leadership, including Sebastian Fries, Ph.D. (President & CEO) and Lucinda Acquaye-Doyle, Ph.D. (Interim Vice President, Programs and Resident Experiences), building on the methodology of our earlier study of alumni. We conducted an in-depth longitudinal study tracking the development of current I-House residents over the course of an academic year (approximately 9 months) to assess how living at I-House is associated with personal growth across a range of positive outcomes.

The "pre" and "post" design of this study was critical to identifying how residents change, and the impact that I-House had on them. By surveying the same residents at both the beginning and end of the academic year, we could directly observe how individuals' views change over time. In contrast, if different groups of residents completed the survey at each time point, any differences could simply reflect differences between the particular residents who took the survey, rather than real change. A pre–post longitudinal design addresses this issue by intentionally following the same residents across both time points. This approach makes it easier to connect any changes to living at I-House, providing stronger evidence of its potential impact.

We measured several key traits and attributes, including empathy, emotional intelligence, intellectual humility, global citizenship, pro-sociality, interpersonal trust, and affective polarization (feelings towards opposing political parties) using validated measures from the scientific literature. These measures were administered to residents twice: First at the beginning of the Fall 2024/25 semester (wave 1) and then again at the end of the academic year (wave 2). In addition, application data from 2,664 applicants, including data from many study participants, were analyzed. By combining quantitative metrics from survey and admissions data with qualitative reports from residents' open-ended responses, the current study provided a holistic view of the I-House environment, experience, and impact.

As seen in Figure 1, we collected survey responses from 352 residents at Wave 1, which is about 50% of the entire I-House population. This was an excellent participation rate. Nine months later, we surveyed residents a second time. We collected survey responses from 336 residents at Wave 2, again nearly 50% of the I-House population. Having data from nearly half of the entire population allowed us to make stronger claims about how I-House impacted residents. In total, we had 456 unique residents complete our survey (either at Wave 1, Wave 2, or both).

Importantly, most of the residents who took Wave 2 had also taken Wave 1. This was a key goal on our part, as the primary design feature of our longitudinal survey. Specifically, we had "pre-" and "post-" data from 232 residents. This represents a 66% retention rate of residents from Wave 1, an excellent number given the 9-month gap between the two surveys. Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate the study design and data collection.
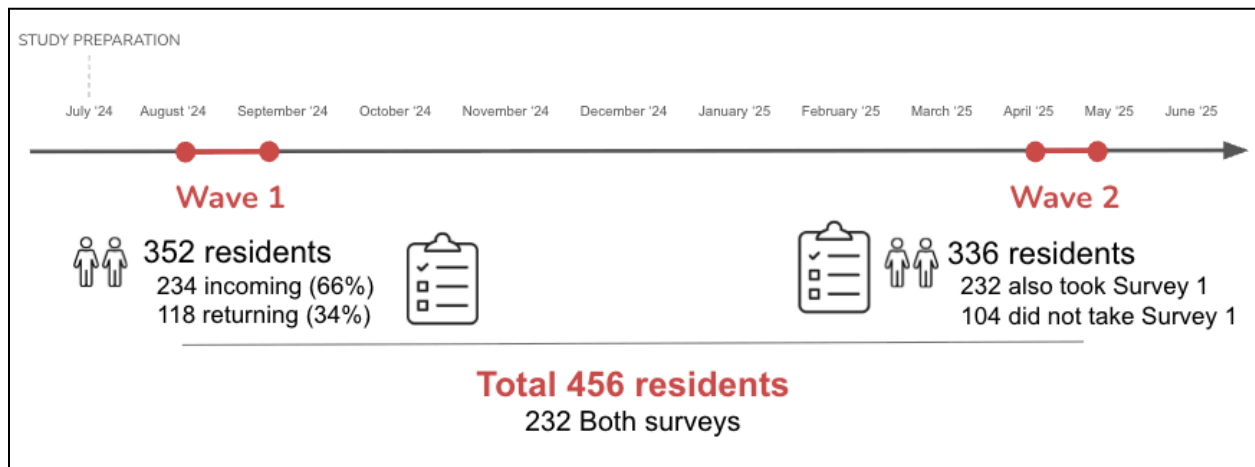
Figure 1. We surveyed residents at the beginning (August 2024) and end (May 2025) of the 2024/25 academic year to examine whether residents experienced any changes throughout their time at I-House. In total, we surveyed 456 residents (232 completed both pre- and post-survey).
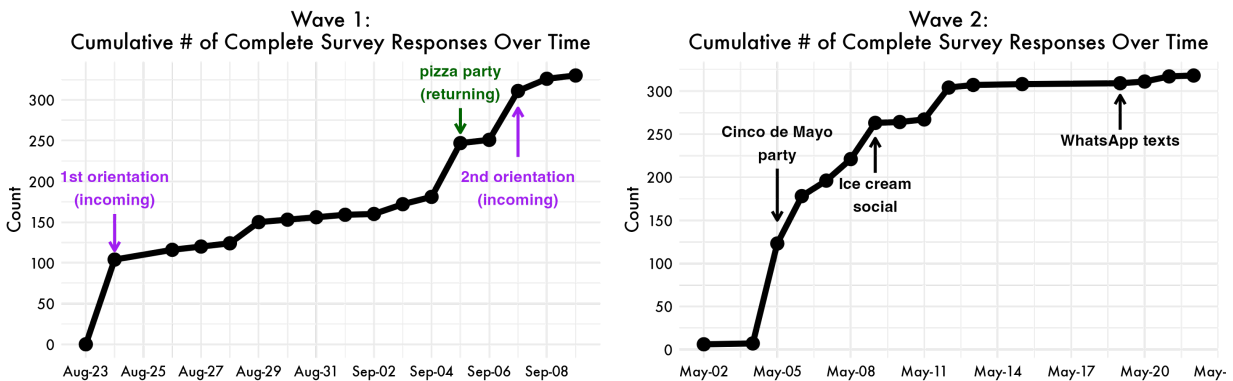

Figure 2. The cumulative number of survey responses from survey launch to survey conclusion are plotted for each wave. Each data point reflects the cumulative number of survey responses received by the end of each day. Large upticks in survey responses can be seen on days when special recruiting events were held with the purpose of encouraging residents to complete the survey (e.g., orientation, pizza party).

Respondent Demographics

A total of 456 residents completed at least one of the two surveys. The total sample included residents from 81 different countries (see the map in Figure 3 below), with an average age of 26 and diverse gender representation (54% females, 38% males, 8% non-/other-specified gender). The sample was skewed towards the left of the political spectrum (13% very left-leaning, 42% left-leaning, 35% moderate, 9% right-leaning, <1% very right-leaning). Most residents had either a Bachelor's (49%) or Master's (42%) degree, with a few holding a Doctorate degree (5%). Most residents thought of themselves as middle class (39%; 4-6 on a 0-10 scale) or upper-middle class (41%; 7-8 on a 0-10 scale).

Around half of these residents completed both surveys. Because the first survey was conducted at the beginning of the semester, the wave 1 sample of 352 residents included both returning (34%) and new incoming residents (66%). The wave 2 sample included 336 residents, all of whom had lived at I-House for a sustained period of time (i.e., at least since the start of the academic year).
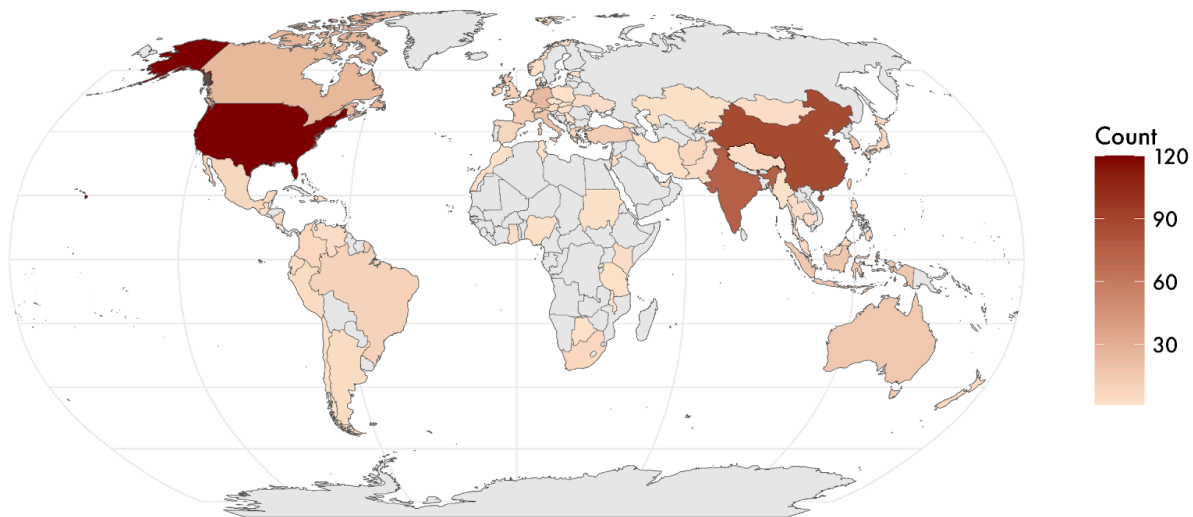
Sample of residents represented 81 countries

Figure 3. The sample was culturally very diverse and included residents from 81 countries. The countries represented in the sample are highlighted in red. The intensity of the color corresponds to the number of survey participants from each country, as shown in the color legend on the right.

Survey

The survey included validated psychological measures assessing identification with I-House, engagement with I-House's culture (intergroup contact, social norms, attending I-House activities and events), prosocial traits and skills (empathy, emotional intelligence, global citizenship, intellectual humility, prosociality, interpersonal trust), and affective polarization, as well as demographic questions, and open-ended questions. If not noted otherwise in the measures section below, all measures were administered at both waves. *For copies of the full surveys, please see the Appendix.*

As wave 1 was conducted at the beginning of the semester, it included both incoming and returning residents, who received slightly different versions of the survey. Specifically, incoming residents reported their *expectations* of living at I-House while returning residents reported their experiences of living at I-House. For instance, incoming residents reported how many programming events they intended to attend and the social norms that they expected at I-House. Returning residents, on the other hand, reported their actual event attendance and their actual observations of social norms at I-House. The key outcome measures (pro-sociality, intellectual humility, empathy, etc.) were identical for both incoming and returning residents. In

wave 2, as all residents had spent significant time at I-House by that point, the phrasing of the survey was the same for everyone. The original surveys are available in the Appendix.

MEASURES

Identification with I-House

People belong to different groups and communities (e.g., nation, religion, social class, race, political party). These social groups are often part of how people define or think about themselves. Importantly, people who strongly identify with a group tend to be more loyal to that group and show higher commitment to its values, and are more likely to adhere to its social norms (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Terry & Hogg, 1996; Van Bavel & Packer, 2021). In other words, highly identified group members conform more strongly to social norms, which can create greater intergroup tolerance and cooperation if they are inclusive rather than divisive (Packer & Van Bavel, 2022).

To measure residents' identification with I-House, we assessed the degree to which they saw their individual self overlapping with I-House (Aron et al., 1992; Schubert et al., 2002). This is a popular and effective measure of identification in the social psychology literature.

Survey item for Identification: *Residents were shown the image below and were asked "Which picture best represents how much you identify with I-House? "Self" refers to you and "I-House" refers to International House. The more the circles overlap, the stronger your identification with I-House."*
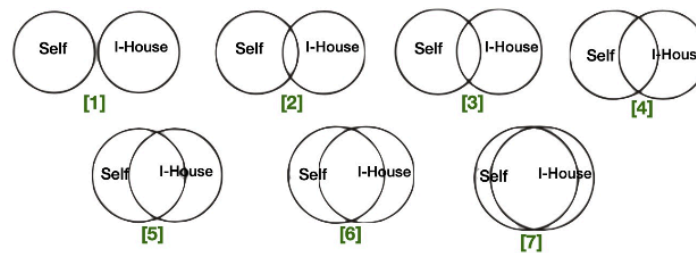

Figure 4. *The self-group overlap scale asked residents to choose which picture best represented how much they identified with I-House. The more the circles overlapped, the stronger their identification with I-House.*

Intergroup contact

I-House brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds to form a vibrant, inclusive community where residents share and broaden their global perspectives. It provides frequent opportunities for positive intergroup contact, long recognized as one of the most effective strategies for fostering better intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Paluck, Green, & Green, 2018). An extensive body of research suggests that intergroup contact reduces outgroup prejudice and intergroup anxiety (Pettigrew et al., 2006; 2011), and hostility towards outgroup members (Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). Further, studies indicate that positive intergroup contact can

increase empathy, perspective taking, and intergroup trust (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011) and reduce polarization (Voelkel et al., 2024).

As such, the experience of positive intergroup contact at I-House might be one of the most important sources of long-term social change. We therefore asked residents about the frequency and quality of contact they had with residents who belonged to different groups (e.g., residents that are using different cultural practices, residents with different geo-political beliefs).

Example survey item of Frequency of Intergroup Contact: *As a resident at I-House, how much contact did you have with residents from other countries? (1 = No contact, 5 = A lot of contact).*

Example survey item of Quality of Intergroup Contact: *When you interacted with certain groups of people at I-House, how did you find those encounters? (1 = Very hostile 5 = Very much friendly).*

Social Norms

A social norm is a commonly accepted guideline for behavior that helps maintain cohesion and predictability in social interactions. Norms can be explicit (clearly stated, like laws or policies) or implicit (understood without being formally taught). Social norms are a combination of "the way we do things around here" (a descriptive social norm) and "the way we think things ought to be done" (a prescriptive social norm; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Sherif, 1936). People who strongly identify with their group are more likely to internalize and adhere to their group's social norms (Terry & Hogg, 1996; Van Bavel & Packer, 2021). It is therefore important to measure residents' perceptions of I-House's social norms, because those perceptions can influence their own thoughts and behaviors.

Our prior survey of alumni found strong perceptions that intergroup contact is valued at I-House along with empathy, respect, and open-mindedness. Research suggests that exposure to such norms fosters an inclusive social climate that can reduce prejudice and polarization. For instance, one study found that perception of strong norms of inclusion at universities was associated with more positive attitudes toward minorities and outgroup members, engagement in inclusive behaviors, support for policies that promote diversity, and less intergroup anxiety (Murrar, Campbell & Brauer, 2020). Moreover, underrepresented minority students were more likely to feel a sense of belonging and succeed at college when they were aware of this inclusive norm.

Example survey item for Social Norms: *At I-House, it is expected to be welcoming to members from all backgrounds. (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)*

Example survey item for Valuing Diversity: *Approximately how many I-House members value diversity? (0% = None, 100% = All)*

Engagement with I-House's programming and activities

We asked residents how many events they attend on average per month, as well as how often they attend specific types of events. Events at I-House can broadly be sorted into formal events (Legacy events, Social Events, House Events, and Resident-led events), and informal activities and events (e.g., conversations in the dining hall; see Figure 5).

Legacy Events: Sunday Supper, Night of Nations, Fall Fiesta

Social Events: Ballroom Dance, Ice Cream Social, Pub Nights

Informal Events: late night conversations, floor interactions, dining hall engagement etc

House Events: Dining programs, Fireside Chats, Roundtable Discussions, Distinguished Speaker Series

Resident-led Events: Clubs, Floor Events, Cultural Nights

Figure 5. I-House's formal and informal activities and events. I-House offers a variety of formal activities and events, and creates space for informal engagements such as conversations in the dining hall.

Example survey item of Event Attendance: *Approximately how often did you attend Legacy Events (Sunday Supper, Night of Nations, Fall Fiesta) during your time at I-House? (1 = Never, 5 = All of the Time)*

Finally, we asked them through which channels they hear about events and the reasons why they might not attend events.

Global Citizenship

Engaging and forming connections with people from diverse groups and regions of the world is fundamental to global citizenship. Through these interactions, individuals come to appreciate how people from different cultural, religious, and social backgrounds share common human bonds.

Being a global citizen can be thought of in terms of three interrelated pillars: (1) having a sense of social responsibility, including addressing global injustices, being altruistic and empathic, and seeing people all over the world as interconnected and interdependent, (2) having global competence, including having self-awareness about one's own limitations in intercultural contexts, possessing good intercultural communication skills, and having knowledge of world issues and events, and (3) being civically engaged on a global scale, including involving oneself in volunteering or civic organizations, caring about politics and actively contributing to the public discourse, and engaging in local civic activism to advance global agendas (Morais & Ogden, 2011).

Global citizenship predicts prosocial values of intergroup empathy, valuing diversity, social justice, environmental sustainability, intergroup helping, and a felt responsibility to act for the betterment of the world (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). We therefore measured the degree to which residents exhibited traits of global citizenship.

Example survey item of Global Citizenship: *I am able to communicate in different ways with people from different cultures. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)*

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EQ) captures a set of skills involved in perceiving and understanding one's own and other people's emotions, and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and in others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Grewal, 2005). People with higher emotional intelligence tend to have better social relationships, as well as family and intimate partner relationships. They are also more positively regarded by others and have higher psychological well-being (see Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008). Although emotional intelligence is typically treated as a personality trait (i.e., as relatively stable), various interventions increase it (Hodzic et al., 2018). As a result, people with higher EQ should be more savvy about navigating social situations, especially when managing emotions is important to success.

It is possible that a setting like I-House tends to attract people with higher EQ, but also possible that the experiences they have there may increase these abilities. We therefore measured the degree to which residents possess emotional intelligence (Davies et al., 2010).

Example survey item for Emotional Intelligence*: I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree).*

Intellectual Humility

Intellectual humility captures the degree to which people recognize that their own knowledge is limited and that their beliefs might be wrong (Alfano et al., 2017). Research suggests that people high in intellectual humility are more open to opposing views (Porter & Schumann, 2018), less dogmatic and less prejudiced (Leary et al., 2017). They are also more motivated to read about opposing political perspectives (Porter & Schumann, 2018), evaluate the quality of arguments more thoroughly and impartially (Leary et al., 2017; Bowes et al., 2022), and befriend political opponents (Stanley et al., 2020). Recent studies have linked intellectual humility to decreased affective polarization (Sgambati & Ayduk, 2023) and people are more willing to have a discussion with people who hold opposite political beliefs, even about highly polarized topics, when these people exhibit intellectual humility (Knöchelmann & Cohrs, 2024).

At I-House, residents are surrounded by staff and peers who role-model intellectual humility and can engage in events that encourage this trait. This may be an ideal environment to cultivate intellectual humility. We therefore measured residents' intellectual humility

Example survey item for Intellectual Humility: *I reconsider my opinions when presented with new evidence. (1 = Not at all like me, 5 = Very much like me).*

Empathy

Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the internal states of others. It has been linked to a range of positive outcomes, including greater individual well-being (Davis, 1983; Wei et al., 2011) and increased prosocial behavior (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Nook et al., 2016). Empathic individuals are often sought out for social support (Morelli et al., 2017). Although empathy has traditionally been viewed as a stable personality trait that some individuals possess more than others, contemporary perspectives suggest a more dynamic view. Modern theories conceptualize empathy as a flexible capacity that can expand or contract depending on context and motivation to engage with others (Zaki, 2014). Over decades of research, numerous interventions have been developed to foster empathy (Weisz & Zaki, 2017). Living in an environment like I-House may function as such an intervention; as such we measured empathy (Ingoglia et al., 2016).

Example survey item for Empathy*: "When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to 'put myself in their shoes" for a while. (1 = Does not describe me at all, 5 = Describes me very well)*

World Giving Index

The World Giving Index (Charities Aid Foundation, 2024) is a measure in Gallup's World Poll that assesses rates of prosocial behavior around the world. It is administered every year to people in more than 115 countries. A very simple measure, it asks people whether they have helped a stranger, donated to charity, or volunteered their time within the last month. The global nature of his index provides a benchmark for assessing prosocial behavior among I-House residents.

Example survey item for World Giving Index: *Have you done any of the following in the past month?: Helped a stranger, or someone you didn't know who needed help? (0 = no, 1 = yes)*

Interpersonal Trust

Trust is a fundamental aspect of human relationships that enables cooperation, intimacy, and social cohesion. It involves a willingness to be vulnerable to another person's actions, based on the belief that they will act with goodwill or reliability (Mayer et al., 1995). People typically trust those who are part of their ingroup far more than those who are seen as part of an outgroup (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). Importantly, certain contexts and experiences such as positive interactions with people from different groups can "spillover" and lead to a more generalized trust toward other people (Vermue et al., 2019).

As I-House residents are living and interacting with people from all over the world (both at I-House and in NYC more broadly). Importantly, they do so in an environment that values respectful, moral courage, and empathy, facilitating daily, positive interactions between people from different backgrounds. Therefore, residents' trust toward people from other backgrounds may increase over the course of their stay. As such, we measured interpersonal trust using a hypothetical yet realistic scenario. Residents were asked to imagine that they had just moved

into a new neighborhood and that one day a foreign person with a heavy accent came up and asked if they could borrow their mobile phone to make a call. Residents decided how likely it was that they would let this stranger borrow their phone.

Survey item for Interpersonal Trust: *How likely would you be to hand over your phone for them to presumably make a call? (0 = Not at all likely, 10 = Definitely Likely)*

Affective Polarization

Affective polarization refers to the tendency of people to dislike and distrust one another based on political differences. If people view the world through the lens of "us" vs. "them" and have too much antipathy for people who they deem as part of their political outgroup, it prevents them from seeing others as worthy of respect. This can be a barrier to having productive dialogue. Thus, affective polarization can stand in the way of various I-House values and goals. Unfortunately, over the past few decades, affective polarization in the U.S. has increased, and dislike of political outgroups is increasingly the dominant emotion in American politics (Finkel et al., 2020). More specifically, while people's positive feelings toward their own political ingroup have remained relatively constant over time, their feelings toward their political outgroup have become more negative year-after-year (Polarization Research Lab, 2025). Similar trends can also be observed in other countries (Boxell et al., 2022; Polarization Research Lab, 2025).

A central mission at I-House is to build global citizens and reduce polarization, overcoming divides across lines of difference. We therefore asked residents how they felt towards people on the political left and people on the political right in the United States, and calculated each person's affective polarization score by taking the absolute difference between the two (Druckman et al., 2019).

Survey item for Affective Polarization: *How do you feel towards people on the political left in the United States (i.e., Democrats and liberals)? How do you feel towards people on the political right in the United States (i.e., Republicans and conservatives)?* (0 = unfavorable/coldest, 100 = favorable/warmest)

Demographic Questions

We also collected demographic information such as residents' age, gender, nationality, their country of primary residence, level of education, field of study or work, school or place of work, subjective social status in society, and political ideology.

Political Climate (Wave 2 only)

Our longitudinal survey spanned from August 2024 through May 2025. During that time, the United States' Presidential election was held (November 5, 2024) and Donald Trump was named the 47th President. Political animosity was heightened during this time, and during his first few months in office there were a number of actions that the Trump administration took that

could have plausibly impacted many I-House residents. For example, Trump publicly expressed negative views about immigrants, deployed ICE agents across the US (including New York City), paused or terminated funding of universities, and pushed to revoke immigrant visas. These and other events could have plausibly affected international residents who were studying or working in the United States, including many I-House residents.

As such, we asked residents how they felt about the recent US political climate and whether it had impacted them. We further asked if the recent US political climate had impacted their perceptions of I-House.

Survey item for the impact of the Political Climate on Residents: *Has the recent US political climate impacted you? Have you noticed any changes in how you're feeling, thinking, and behaving? If so, please describe how it has impacted you. Your responses are kept confidential. (optional)*

Survey item for the impact of the Political Climate on Residents' View of I-House: *To what extent, if at all, has the recent US political climate (e.g., immigration issues) impacted how you feel about I-House? The recent US political climate has _____ my view of I-House (1 = Very much worsened, 4 = Not changed, 7 = Very much improved)*

Open-ended Questions

Finally, we invited residents to write responses to the following four open-ended questions:

1. What were the activities or experiences at I-House, if any, that you found particularly meaningful or that you feel opened your mind?
2. What knowledge or skills, if any, have you gained from living at I-House?
3. How has that knowledge, or how have those skills, affected your work and your life?
4. What is your hope for the future direction of I-House?

Admissions Data

We analyzed admission data from 2,663 applicants for the current academic year, of whom 855 were considered for admission (I-House's capacity is roughly 700 residents). Because current residents must reapply each semester, the dataset also includes admission scores from individuals who were already residing at I-House.

For their application, applicants complete a series of demographic (e.g., citizenship) and logistical (e.g., intended length of stay) questions and submit a short essay. Based on the responses, I-House creates an Inclusion Score and an Essay Score for each applicant. The total score is then calculated as a weighted average of the Inclusion Score (weighted 40%) and the Essay Score (weighted 60%; as illustrated in Figure 6).

The Inclusion Score is designed to promote diversity within the resident community. It considers factors such as applicants' country of origin, academic institution and program, field of study, intended length of stay, and other diversity-related priorities (on a 0–5 scale).

The Essay Score assesses applicants' alignment with I-House's culture and mission. Applicants choose one of three essay prompts and submit a short essay—typically 400–700 words—which is scored using artificial intelligence (on a 1–5 scale). Broadly speaking, the prompts ask applicants to describe how they embody I-House's values (prompt 1), how they have handled challenges to their existing beliefs (prompt 2), and the unique skills and perspectives they would contribute to the I-House community (prompt 3). Not all applicants had essay scores due to a variety of reasons (e.g., they applied through partnership programs). The original prompts are provided in the appendix.

Admission decisions are primarily based on AI-generated evaluations, supplemented by staff review and interviews.
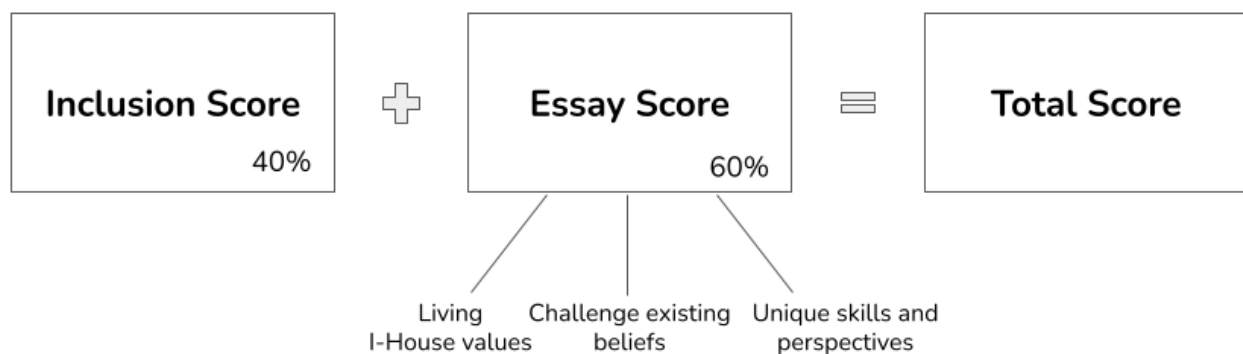

Figure 6. *I-House's admission score is the weighted average of applicants' Inclusion score (weighted 40%) and applicants' Essay score (weighted 60%). Applicants can choose from three essay prompts which focus on how they embody I-House's values (prompt 1), how they have handled challenges to their existing beliefs (prompt 2), and the unique skills and perspectives they would contribute to the I-House community (prompt 3).*

RESULTS

Descriptive Findings

In both waves, residents reported strong identification with I-House, high engagement with I-House's culture, and perceptions of inclusive social norms (see Figure 7). Furthermore, residents in both waves scored very highly across all measures of prosocial traits and skills and relatively low on polarization. The scores for many residents were at or near the top of many scales and therefore had little room for improvement.

Figure 7 displays the means and distributions of identification with I-House, engagement with I-House's culture, and perceptions of I-House's social norms for wave 1 (blue) and wave 2 (orange). In wave 1, incoming residents reported their anticipated engagement while returning residents reported their actual engagement. We therefore only used programming data (i.e., event attendance, frequency and quality of intergroup contact) and data on perceptions of social norms from returning residents. [Since some residents only participated in wave 1 and others only in wave 2, the two samples only partially overlap rather than representing identical groups.]
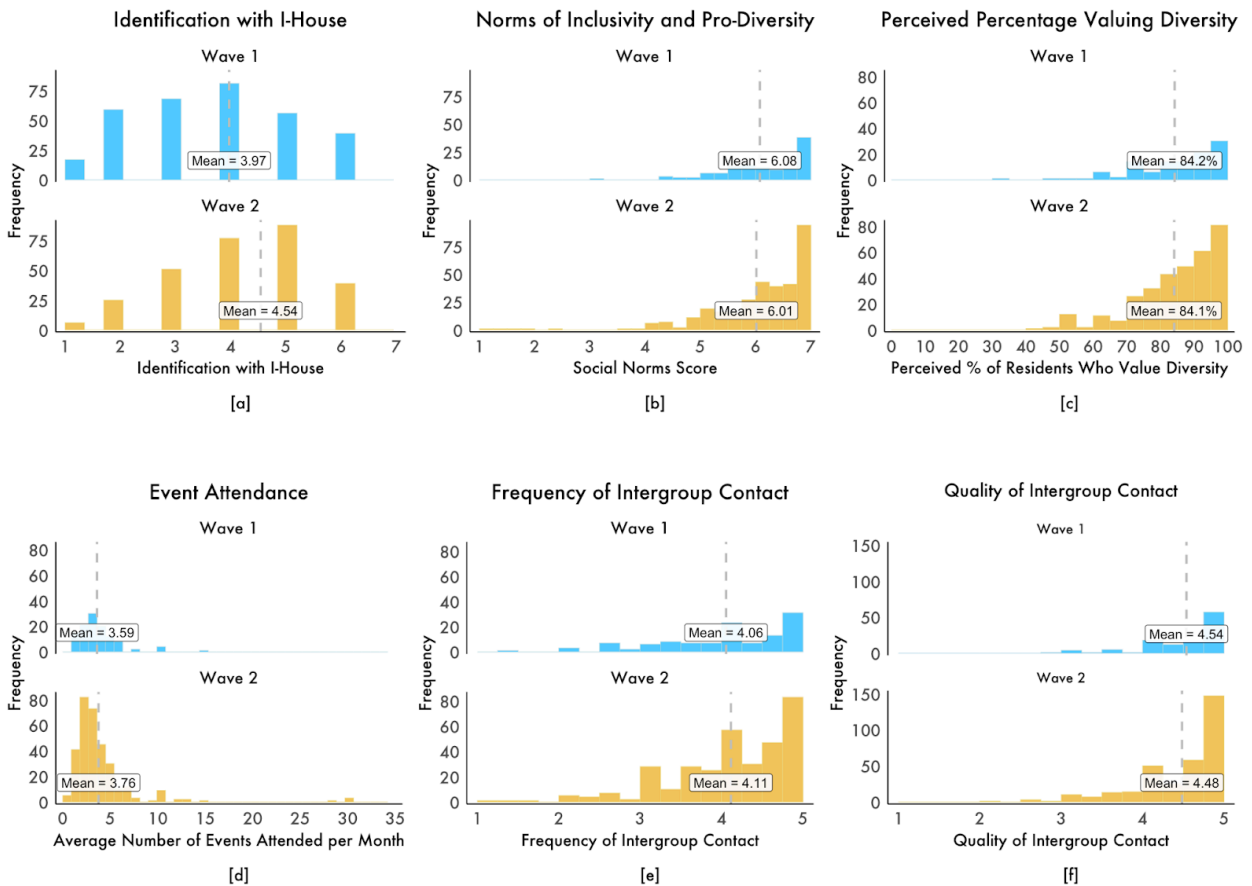

Figure 7. *Distributions of residents' identification and engagement with I-House and their perceptions of I-House's social norms across the two survey waves. For each variable, score distributions are shown for wave 1 (blue, top) and wave 2 (orange, bottom). Grey dashed lines and info boxes indicate the mean for*

each distribution. In both waves, residents reported strong identification with I-House, active engagement with its culture—through frequent, positive intergroup contact and event participation—and perceived I-House as reinforcing social norms that value diversity and inclusivity. In wave 1, incoming residents reported their anticipated engagement while returning residents reported their actual engagement. With the exception for the identification measure, all wave 1 graphs display data only from returning residents. Since some residents only participated in wave 1 and others only in wave 2, the two samples only partially overlap rather than representing identical groups.

In wave 1, residents already reported relatively strong identification with I-House, with an average of 3.97 on a 1–7 scale (see Figure 7[a]). Identification further strengthened over the course of residents' stay. In wave 2, the average identification with I-House was 4.54 with the vast majority of residents rating their strength of identification with I-House as 4 or higher.[1] For most residents in our survey, I-House became a meaningful part of who they were.

Moreover, the vast majority of survey participants rated I-House's social norms as maximally inclusive and pluralistic, selecting the highest possible score of 7 on a scale from 1–7 (see Figure 7[b]). The respective mean ratings were a remarkable 6.08 in wave 1 and 6.01 wave 2. By the same token, most residents believed that virtually everyone at I-House values diversity. On average, residents estimated that more than 84% of their peers valued diversity (see Figure 7[c]). These reflect highly inclusive social norms near perfect scores on our measures.

Residents in both waves also appeared to be actively engaged with I-House's culture—through event participation (see Figure 7[d]) and frequent, positive intergroup contact (Figure 7 [e] & [f]). Specifically, in both waves, residents attended at least 3 events per month on average, a finding that we will further analyze in the programming chapter of this report. Likewise, residents in both waves reported frequent and positive contact with residents from different backgrounds, including residents from other countries and residents with different perspectives on major issues. On a scale from 1 (no contact) to 5 (a lot of contact) the average frequency of intergroup contact was 4.06 in wave 1 and 4.11 in wave 2 (see Figure 7[e]). The majority of residents described these interactions as highly positive: on a scale from 1 (very much hostile) to 5 (very much friendly), average ratings of the quality of intergroup contact were a remarkable 4.54 in wave 1 and 4.48 in wave 2 (Figure 7 [f])

Residents also scored very high on several pro-social traits (and low on affective polarization). Figure 8 displays the means and distributions of residents' key prosocial traits and skills, as well as polarization, for wave 1 (blue) and wave 2 (orange). As noted above, some residents only participated in wave 1 and others only in wave 2, so the two samples only partially overlap rather than representing identical groups. Figure 9 displays the results for prosocial behavior among residents, indicating the percentage of respondents who have reported engaging in each of the three prosocial acts.

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[1] It is important to reiterate that not all participants took part in both waves; some residents completed the wave 1 survey only, while others participated only in wave 2. When analyses were restricted to residents who participated in both waves, we observed a similar pattern: identification with I-House significantly increased over the course of their stay, indicating that residents' sense of connection to the community deepened over time.
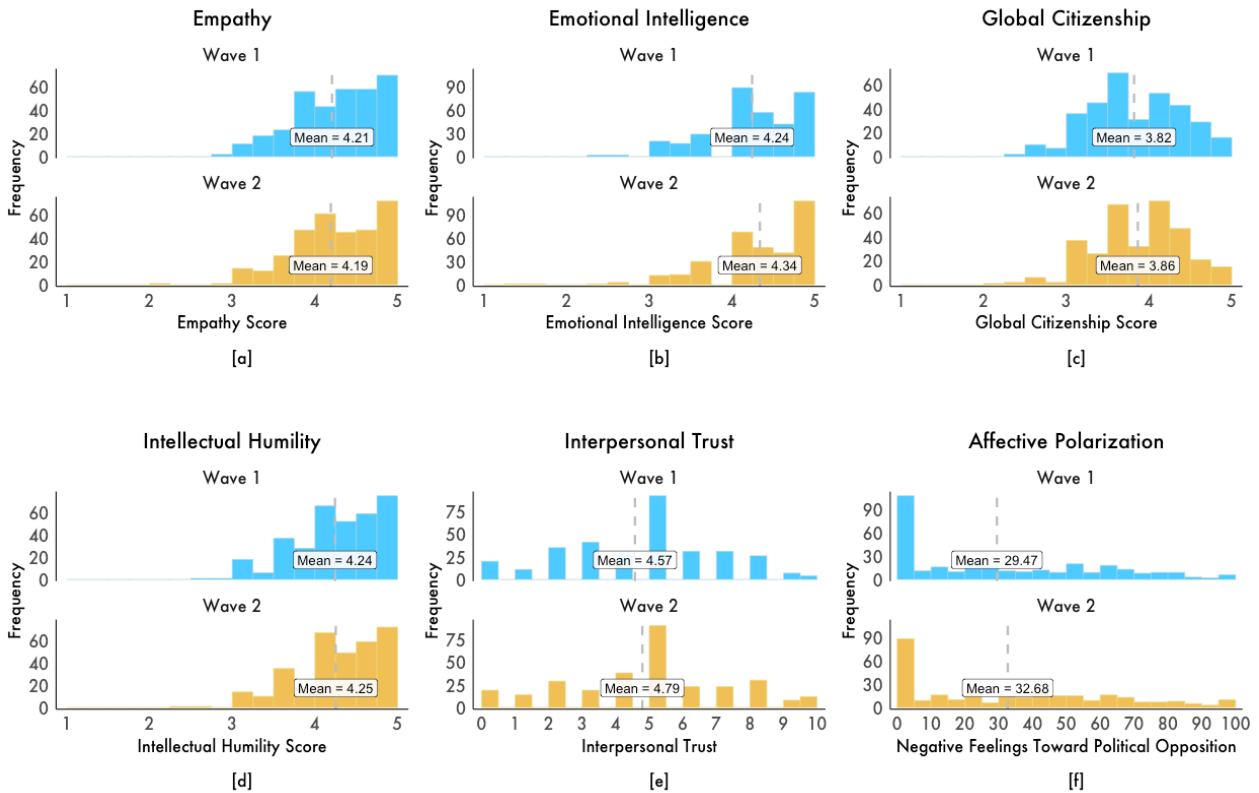
Figure 8. Distributions of residents' traits and skills of interest across the two survey waves. For each variable, score distributions are shown for wave 1 (blue, top) and wave 2 (orange, bottom). Grey dashed lines and info boxes indicate the mean for each distribution. In both waves, we found that residents scored high on all desirable traits and skills we measured. Conversely, they scored low in affective polarization, reporting relatively low negative feelings towards the opposing political party. For each variable, score distributions are shown for wave 1 (blue, top) and wave 2 (orange, bottom). Grey dashed lines indicate the mean for each distribution.

Residents show particularly high levels of empathy, emotional intelligence, intellectual humility, and prosociality (see Figure 8 [a–d] and Figure 9). Specifically, on a scale from 1–5, average scores of empathy (wave 1 = 4.21; wave 2 = 4.19), emotional intelligence (wave 1 = 4.24; wave 2 = 4.34), and intellectual humility (wave 1 = 4.24, wave 2 = 4.34) all exceeded a score of 4, and residents' global citizenship was also relatively high (wave 1 = 3.82, wave 2 = 3.86).

Residents' willingness to hand over their phones to a stranger (capturing interpersonal trust) was moderate (see Figure 8[e]). On a scale from 0 to 10, average scores in wave 1 (4.57) and wave 2 (4.79) were slightly below the mid-point.

I-House residents also showed relatively low levels of polarization (see Figure 8 [f]). On a scale from 0 (not polarized) to 100 (highly polarized), the vast majority of residents in both waves received a score near zero, indicating minimal affective polarization. Moreover, the average polarization scores were only 29.47 in wave 1 and 32.68 in wave 2, substantially lower than the U.S. population, as we discuss in later sections.

Similarly, when asked about their prosocial behavior in the past month, residents in both waves reported high prosocial engagement (see Figure 9). Specifically, in wave 1, 93% of I-House residents reported that they had helped a stranger, 40% had donated money, and 53% had volunteered. In wave 2, 93% of I-House residents reported that they had helped a stranger, 65% had donated money, and 55% had volunteered.

Figure 9. *When asked about their prosocial behavior in the past month residents in both waves reported high prosocial activity. In wave 1, 93% of I-House residents reported that they had helped a stranger, 40% had donated money, and 53% had volunteered. In wave 2, 93% of I-House residents reported that they had helped a stranger, 65% had donated money, and 55% had volunteered..*
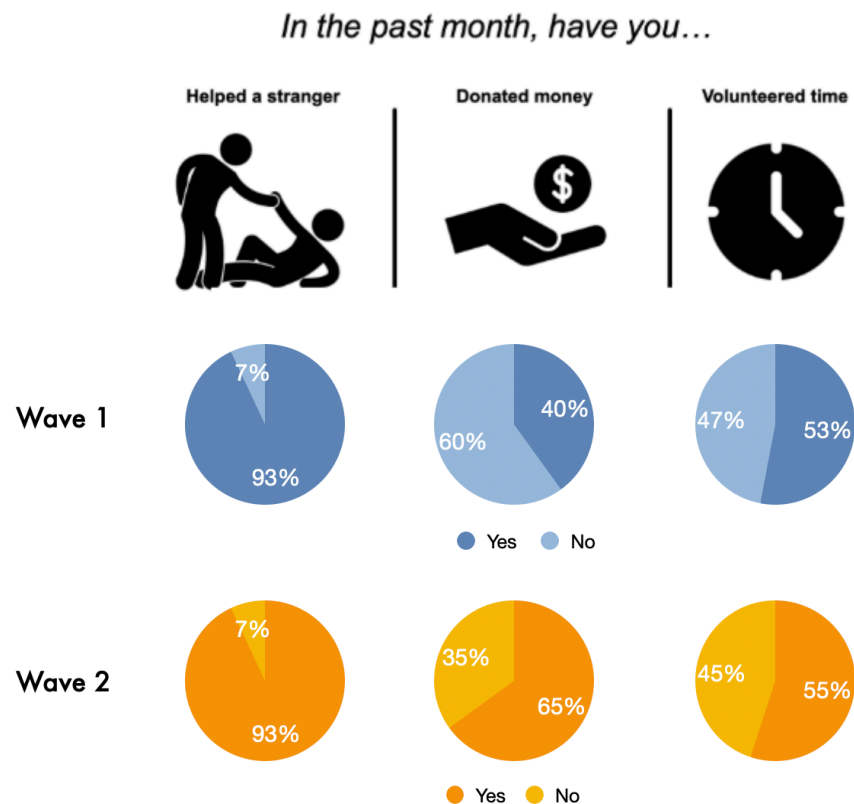
I-House vs. Benchmarks

We examined how I-House residents, after having spent time at I-House (wave 2), compared to other populations on the outcomes of interest. Residents were evaluated against benchmarks composed of I-House alumni and available samples from the academic literature[2]. This provides

---

[2] We employed the same benchmarks as in the previous study of alumni. These benchmarks were derived from values reported in prior peer-reviewed research. For example, for inclusive norms, we identified a study conducted at a U.S. university that used the same scale to assess students' perceptions of their campus's inclusivity norms. The mean score from that study (mean = 5.35) served as our

a sense of how I-House residents and alumni score on these measures compared to other populations.

While alumni already scored consistently higher than other benchmark groups, current residents scored even higher on most of the measures (we plotted their wave 2 data). For example, current residents exhibited remarkably high levels of giving and volunteering, empathy, intellectual humility, emotional intelligence, and global citizenship compared to other adult populations. Notably, if I-House residents were a country, they would rank as best in the world in terms of helping a stranger and among the top 3 for volunteering compared to citizens in 119 countries. Figures 10 and 11 below summarize these results, highlighting how both I-House residents and alumni excel in pro-social traits and skills. Across all prosocial traits and skills, I-House residents score significantly higher than the benchmarks and also somewhat higher than alumni.
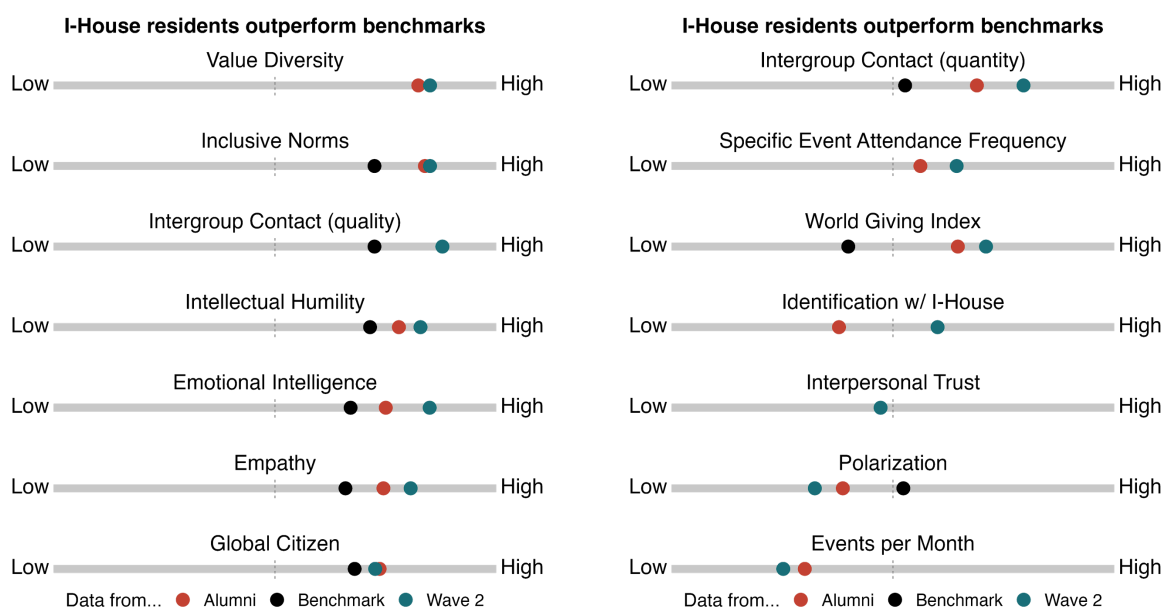

Figure 10. *I-House residents outperform benchmarks and score high across all measures and score even higher than I-House alumni. Dots represent relative scores for residents at wave 2 (blue), alumni (red), and benchmarks (black). Alumni's event attendance, intergroup contact, and social norms scores are based on retrospective reports. All measures were normalized to fit on the same "low-to-high" scale.*

benchmark for inclusive norms. While these benchmarks are not perfect points of comparison, they provide valuable context for interpreting our findings.
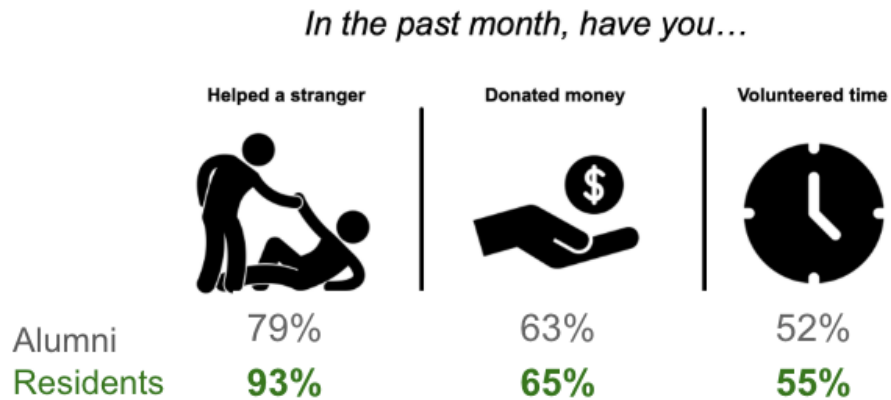
In the past month, have you...

	Helped a stranger	Donated money	Volunteered time
Alumni	79%	63%	52%
Residents	93%	65%	55%

Figure 11. *Both I-House residents at wave 2 (green) and alumni (grey) reported remarkably high levels of prosocial behavior. As mentioned in the previous chapter, when asked about their prosocial behavior in the past month, 93% of I-House residents at wave 2 reported that they had helped a stranger, 65% had donated money, and 55% had volunteered. If I-House residents were a country, they would rank as the best in the world in terms of helping a stranger and among the top 3 for volunteering compared to citizens in 119 countries.*

Wave 1 of the survey was conducted a few months before the 2024 U.S. Presidential election and wave 2 took place a few months after the new administration assumed office in 2025. This period was marked by an intensely heated political climate and strong polarization. Several universities in New York were also experiencing increasingly politicized and divisive campus climates. Although the United States had reached near-historic levels of political polarization at time of data collection, I-House residents exhibited notably low levels of affective polarization and hardly any increase in affective polarization from wave 1 to wave 2. This pattern may reflect a combination of I-House's success in attracting open-minded and less polarized individuals and its culture of bridge-building, which might buffer against broader societal polarization and political tension. Figure 12 shows that residents were approximately 17% less polarized than the general U.S. population.
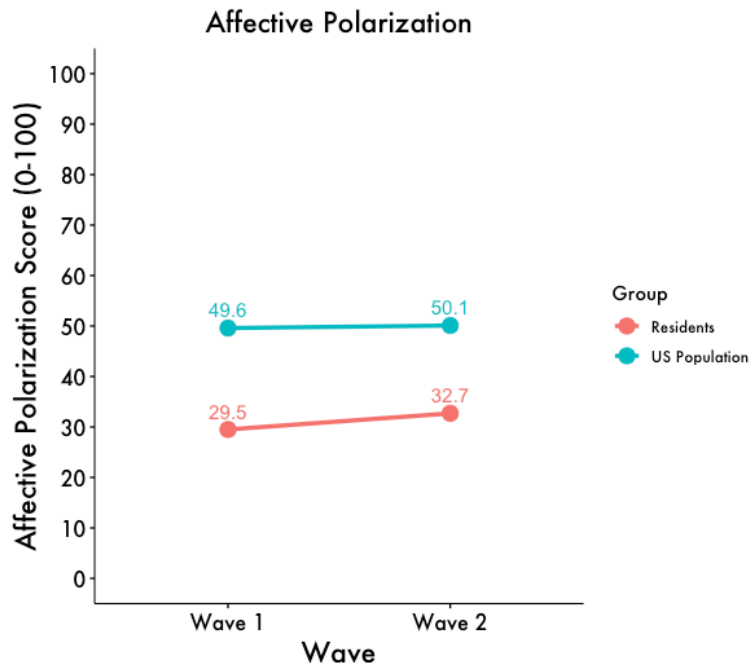
Affective Polarization

Figure 12. *I-House residents (red) are substantially less polarized than the general U.S. population (blue). On a scale from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger affective polarization, mean polarization scores were approximately 30 across both waves. This is noteworthy, particularly in light of the highly charged political climate in the US, where polarization levels were close to an all-time high at the time of measurement.*

Wave 1 included both residents that were incoming and residents that were already residing at I-House (returning residents). When we compared these two types of residents, both groups had similar scores across our outcome measures with the exception of identification with I-House. Returning residents reported stronger identification with I-House than incoming residents. A more detailed comparison of incoming and returning residents from wave 1 can be found in the appendix.

The Culture of I-House

Our study found that I-House's culture is characterized by frequent and positive interactions among residents from diverse backgrounds, supported by strong perceived social norms that emphasize inclusion and belonging (see Figure 7 [b,c,e,f]). This environment is further enriched by intentional programming that includes a wide range of events and activities designed to facilitate respectful cross-cultural dialogue and learning. Together, these elements create a vibrant and intellectually rich community that is characterized by positive intergroup interactions, open-mindedness, and curiosity.

Our quantitative findings, combined with residents' responses open-ended responses suggests that I-House is exceptionally effective in cultivating psychological safety, an atmosphere where individuals feel safe taking "interpersonal risk-taking" (Frazier et al., 2017) such as expressing opinions, discussing difficult issues, and admitting mistakes without fear of social judgment or

exclusion (Edmondson, 2004). Psychological safety is a key feature of effective teams and inclusive organizations as it nurtures a sense of belonging, trust, learning, and active engagement (Frazier et al., 2017). The experience of psychological safety at I-House allows residents to explore and share different perspectives, deepen their understanding of one another and the world, and facilitate their personal and professional growth. We included some of the relevant comments testifying to this culture below.

> "
>
> I-House means the world to me. It's my home, our home. I feel respected, valued, seen, and cherished here. I just wish it stays the way it is. Thank you.
>
> [A skill I developed here was] learning to ask for help from people and not being afraid to express when I need help.
>
> It has made me less stressed about certain situations and that I am safe and valued.
>
> [I-House has] definitely made me more confident in expressing my views, knowing that people generally mean no harm and that it's all about understanding their perspectives.
>
> I feel safe and at-home here...moving here gave me a lot of comfort and peace and allowed me to gradually adapt to this country.
>
> I believe I-House should continue doing what it has been doing for another 500 years… the world needs to see how remarkable it is that people from 100+ countries can live in harmony under the same roof.
>
> "

This is particularly noteworthy given the broader U.S. climate where organizations and institutions, including in higher education, often fail to create this kind of open, trusting environment. In a recent survey, about 60% of college students reported that their campus climate discourages open expression for fear of offending others (Knight Foundation, 2024). Against this backdrop, I-House stands out as a space that actively fosters dialogue across differences and encourages discussion of challenging topics. These conversations, in turn, lead to personal and collective growth. We turn to this issue in the next section.

Correlations and Pathways: The Importance of I-House Immersion

To better understand how I-House shapes residents' development and identify potential causal pathways, we analyzed developmental trajectories among those who completed both surveys. Looking at how the same individuals change over time while living at I-House gives us a clearer picture of how I-House affected them.

We suspected that residents might only benefit from I-House if they immerse themselves within the culture and events of I-House. Identification and engagement with I-House's culture—a culture that reinforces norms of inclusivity, respect, empathy, and open-mindedness—are important factors of immersion because people who feel that being part of a group is an important part of who they are align the way they think, feel, and act with "how things are done" in the group.

Our findings show a clear pattern: the more deeply residents immersed themselves in the I-House experience—through attending events, engaging with their peers, and identifying strongly with I-House—the greater their growth in empathy, intellectual humility, and global citizenship (see Figure 13). What is special about this analysis is that we can look at how immersion is associated with changes from "pre" to "post" within the same individuals over time. This targets individuals' growth in a very direct way. This is consistent with findings in the alumni study and the hypothesis that I-House is exerting a positive influence on traits and skills that align with their mission. The figure below depicts the overall pattern.

I-House Immersion

Identifying with I-House
Attending I-House events
Engaging with other residents

Positive Traits and Attributes

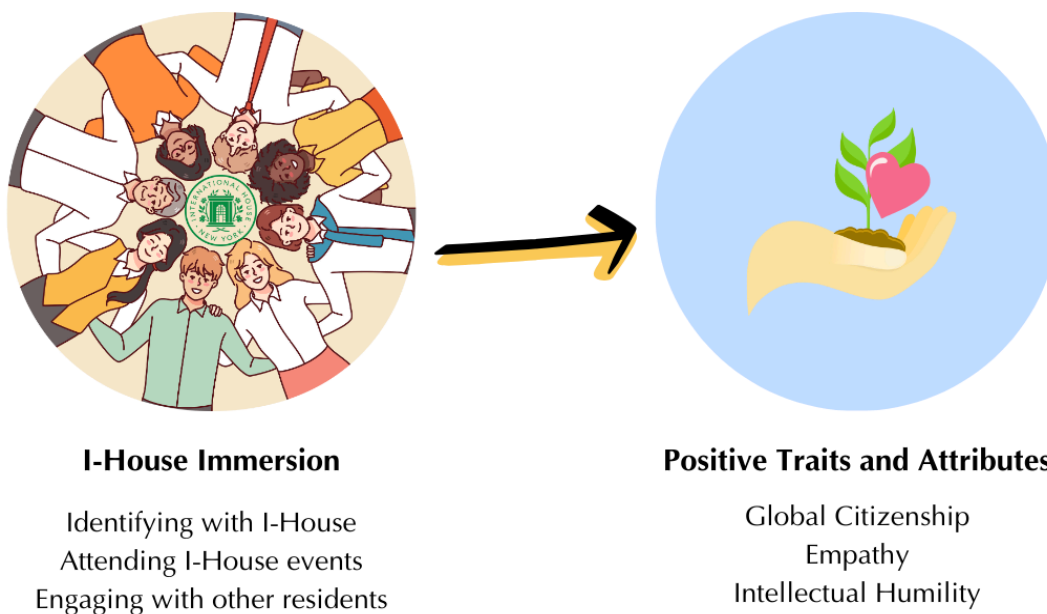Global Citizenship
Empathy
Intellectual Humility

Figure 13. *Visual depicting the key ingredients of I-House's success. Deepening immersion with I-House –through increasing event attendance, intergroup contact, and identification with I-House–was associated with increases in empathy, intellectual humility, and global citizenship over time.*

Correlations and Pathways: Benefits for Individuals with the Most Room to Grow

The vibrant I-House environment appears to be particularly beneficial for residents with the most "room to grow".[3] Across all measured outcomes, residents who scored relatively low during wave 1 showed substantial improvement in these qualities by wave 2. This consistent pattern across positive traits is seen in Figure 14 below: individuals with high initial scores exhibited no change over time (sustaining their high levels), but individuals with lower initial scores showed significant growth over the course of the academic year spent at I-House. It's worth noting, however, that even residents who were categorized as "low scorers" still demonstrated these characteristics and skills quite well—their scores were often above the midpoint, just lower compared to the exceptionally high-scoring group.

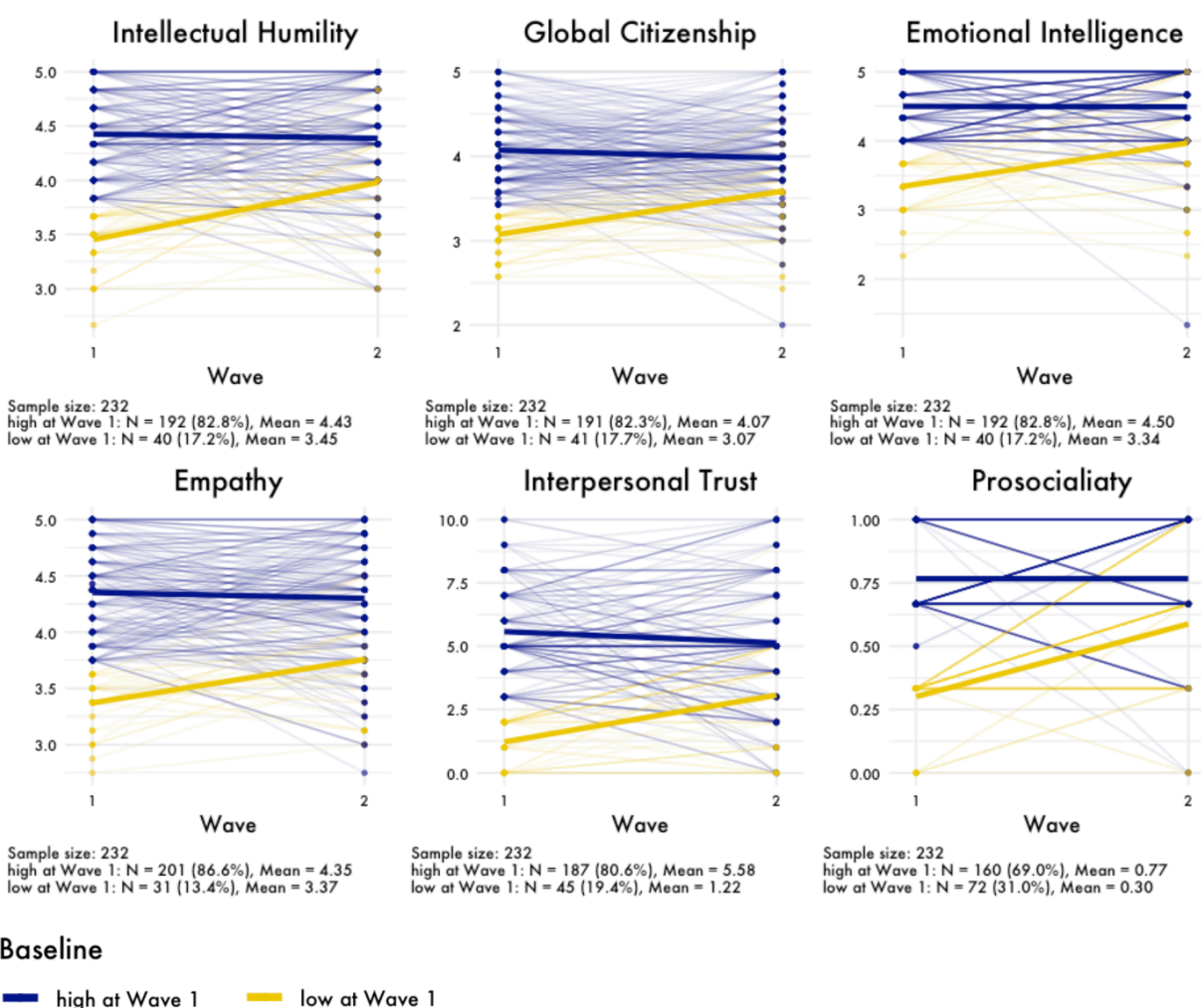*Figure 14.* Residents who had "room to grow" – that is, scored "low" at baseline (yellow) – showed significant increases across all prosocial traits. Residents who scored "high" at baseline (blue) remained

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[3] Statistically, "room to grow" was defined as scoring one standard deviation below the group average at Wave 1, while scoring high at baseline was defined as scoring one standard deviation above the group average at Wave 1.

high. The thick yellow line shows the average trend over time for people who started out with low scores at the beginning of the study, while the thinner, lighter yellow lines show how each individual in that group changed over time. Conversely, the thick blue line shows the average trend over time for people who started out with relatively low scores at the beginning of the study, while the thinner, lighter blue lines show how each individual in that group changed over time. We also note that a reverse pattern was observed for affective polarization which decreased over the course of the study among residents who were highly polarized at baseline.The sample sizes (N) for each group (high vs. low) are shown below the graph, together with the respective means. The percentage of the sub-sample of the total population is specified in parentheses.

In addition, the polarization level of residents who began the year with relatively higher affective polarization at Wave 1, decreased, on average, by a staggering 18.6% over the 9-months of study conduction (see Figure 15). Such a significant drop in polarization is especially noteworthy given that many popular theoretically grounded, empirically tested interventions to reduce polarization have produced considerably smaller effects.[4] These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that I-House's inclusive and diverse environment is uniquely effective at catalyzing people's growth into responsible global citizens and disrupting deeply held divisions, delivering the most significant positive impact precisely where it is most needed.
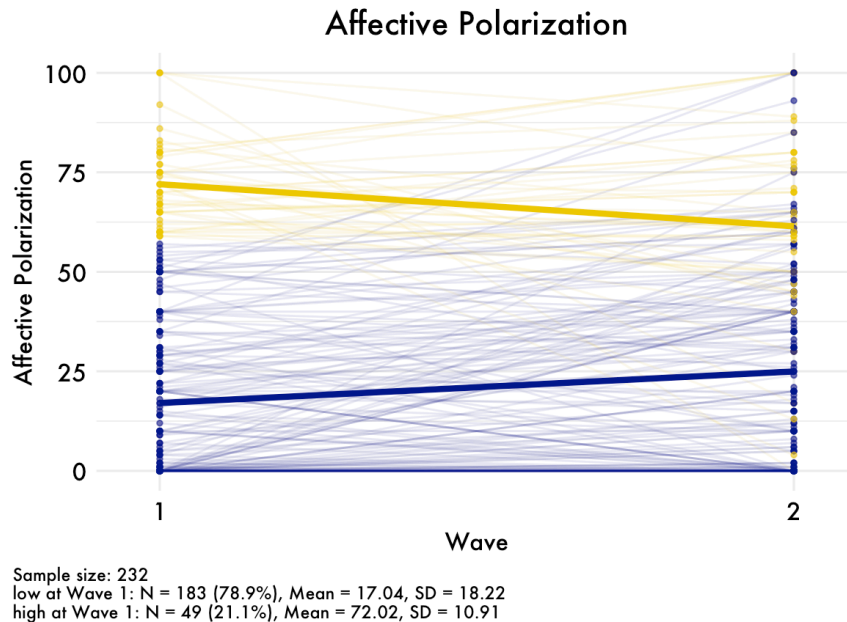

Affective Polarization

Sample size: 232
low at Wave 1: N = 183 (78.9%), Mean = 17.04, SD = 18.22
high at Wave 1: N = 49 (21.1%), Mean = 72.02, SD = 10.91

Figure 15. Residents who had "room to grow" (in this case room to de-polarize) and scored "high" at baseline (yellow) – showed notable decrease in polarization. Residents who scored "low" at baseline (blue) continued to exhibit very little polarization. The sample sizes (N) for each group (high vs. low) are shown below the graph, together with the respective means. The percentage of the sub-sample of the total population is specified in parentheses.

---

[4] For example, in a large-scale "intervention tournament" comparing 25 different approaches to decreasing affective polarization in a U.S. sample, most interventions decreased affective polarization by around 4-7 percent points (Voelkel et al., 2024). However, we stress that this comparison is not entirely equivalent. Those interventions were evaluated with a sample of Americans across the entire spectrum of affective polarization–including both participants who scored high and low on polarization at baseline–whereas the 18.6% reduction at I-House was observed specifically among residents who began the study with high polarization levels. The comparison should therefore be interpreted with caution.

In sum, residents who already scored highly on the positive traits and attributes saw limited further growth (this is commonly known as a "ceiling effect", in which scores have little room to increase because they are already close to the maximum). Importantly, we did not observe any evidence for decline among those residents (which can sometimes be expected due to another common phenomenon known as "regression to the mean"). This pattern of evidence suggests that I-House is effective both in increasing positive traits among those with developmental potential and in perpetuating them among those who already strongly embody these qualities.

Programming

I-House offers a wide range of programs, events, and activities for residents. Some are long-standing traditions (e.g., Night of Nations, Sunday Supper, Fall Fiesta), others are organized by Houses (e.g., Fireside Chats, Roundtable Discussions, Distinguished Speaker Series, Dining programs), by residents themselves (e.g., clubs, floor events, cultural nights), or as recurring social gatherings (e.g., Ice Cream Socials, Pub Nights, Ballroom Dance). Many interactions also happen informally—through spontaneous conversations in the dining hall or late at night among friends

Each event or activity may offer a different style of social interaction and education. For example, socializing during Night of Nations might feel different than during a Pub night—perhaps residents gain more formalized cross-cultural knowledge during Night of Nations, but are more vulnerable and self-disclosing during a Pub night and learn more about the personal stories of their fellow residents. These different types of activities can each contribute to resident's sense of belonging in I-House, as well as their growth as competent global citizens.

Overall, I-House's diverse programming is popular among residents and appears to play a crucial role in their personal and professional development at I-House. Figure 16 shows that most residents attend at least three to four events per month (although some residents attend more than 30 events).
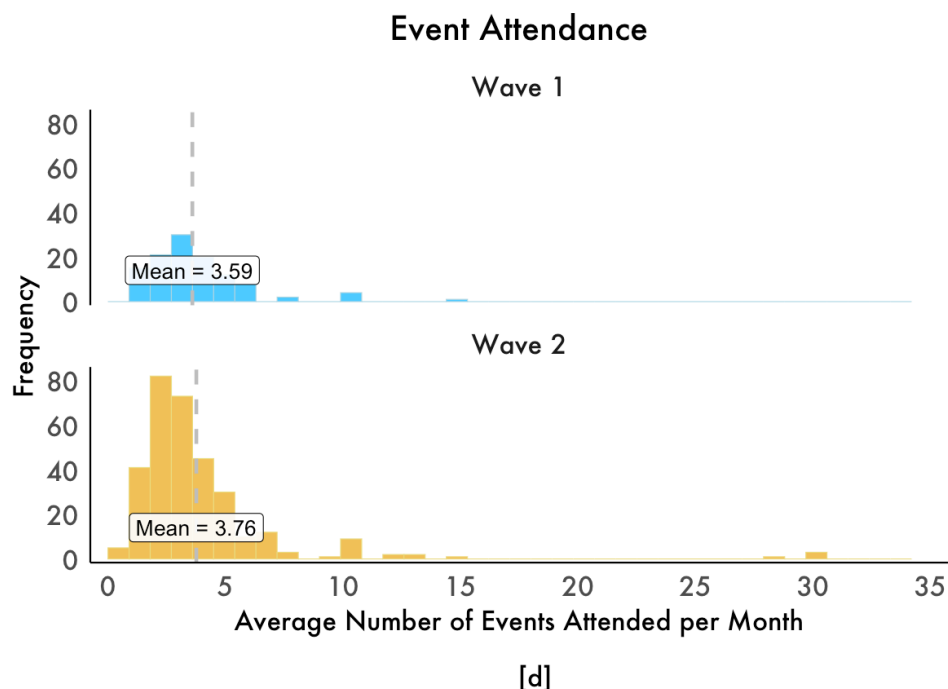
Figure 16. *Number of attended events per month by residents. Score distributions are shown for wave 1 (blue, top) and wave 2 (orange, bottom). Grey dashed lines and info boxes indicate the mean for each distribution.In wave 1, incoming residents reported how many events they anticipate to attend, while returning residents reported their average event attendance per month. The graph displaying event attendance for wave 1 therefore only includes returning residents. Since some residents only participated in wave 1 and others only in wave 2, the two samples only partially overlap rather than representing identical groups.*

In consultation with I-House leadership, we grouped events and activities into five categories for the survey: Legacy Events, House Events, Resident-Led Events, Social Events, and Informal Events. We asked residents how often they attended each category of event on a scale 5-pt scale where 1 = Never, 2 = Once, 3 = A few times, 4 = Most of the time, and 5 = All of the time. Based on wave 2 data, Legacy Events were most popular (*M* = 3.8), followed by Informal Events (*M* = 3.7), Social Events (*M* = 3.5), Resident-Led Events (*M* = 3.4), and finally House Events (*M* = 3.2). Thus, residents generally attended each type of event either a few times to most of the time. A full 64% of residents attended Legacy Events most or all of the time.

We collected data on residents' self-reported frequency of attending each type of event category in both wave 1 and wave 2, which allowed us to examine whether people attended more events over time, and whether any increases or decreases in event attendance for a given resident was associated with changes in key outcome measures. We thought this could be an important measure, as a large part of engaging with I-House is attending programming and events. Moreover, by better understanding which events are associated with key outcomes, I-House might be able to better develop future programming.

We examined whether each resident's event attendance and key outcome measures (e.g., emotional intelligence) increased or decreased over the course of the year. When increases in

event attendance for a resident are accompanied by improvements in an outcome measure, this pattern provides evidence of the potential impact of attending that type of event.

Different types of programming appear to cultivate different traits and skills suggesting that the breadth and diversity is central to its success. For instance, attending Legacy Events was associated with greater gains in emotional intelligence, while attending Social events was linked to a greater sense of global citizenship. More specifically, residents who increased their attendance of Legacy Events from wave 1 to wave 2, tended to show increases in emotional intelligence during from wave 1 to wave 2. This pattern is *consistent* with the notion that the more Legacy Events a resident attends, the more they improve their emotional intelligence. Similarly, residents who increased attendance of Social events from wave 1 to wave 2, tended to show increases in global citizenship from wave 1 to wave 2. This pattern is *consistent* with the notion that the more Social events a resident attends, the more they grow a global citizenship mindset.

Attending House events and engaging in informal activities, such as dining room chats, were less directly tied to specific traits. However, they were linked to strengthened identification with I-House which is a driver of growth across several positive traits and attributes. Specifically, increasing the frequency of attending House events from wave 1 to wave 2 was associated with increases in identification with I-House during the same period. A similar pattern emerged for increasing the engagement in informal activities.

A recurring theme in the open-ended comments was the value of meaningful exchanges, learning about others' culture, and fostering deep connections. Although we did not measure it explicitly, we speculate that certain types of events such as Ballroom Dances and Night of Nations may be particularly effective in creating these opportunities. These events explicitly celebrate cultural diversity while also providing space for informal, personal interaction among residents. As we discussed earlier, opportunities for frequent, meaningful, and positive intergroup contact can benefit the development of positive traits and skills.

Although we did not find an association between Resident-led initiatives and our key outcome variables, this does not suggest that Resident-led initiatives are not beneficial. Instead, Resident-led initiatives may cultivate traits and skills that we did not include in our survey. As we will see in the qualitative data, residents find initiatives in which they can learn from their peers, as well as cultural events very meaningful.

Overall, these findings highlight that I-House's programming does not simply provide 'things to do'. It creates opportunities for growth and development; by offering a wide range of experiences, I-House ensures that residents can find opportunities that resonate with them personally, while facilitating personal growth. Figure 17 below illustrates how individual events are linked to different aspects of personal development.
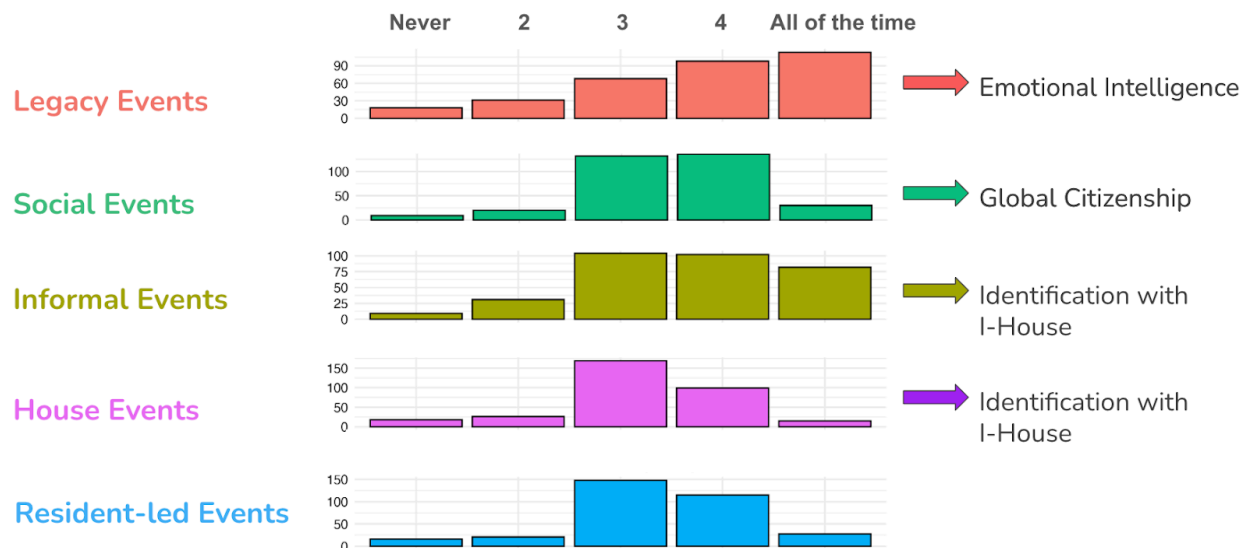
Figure 17. *Frequency of attendance for each event category, ranging from never to all of the time, and its relationship to unique outcomes. For instance, attending legacy events was linked to growth in emotional intelligence.*

Qualitative Data

In written responses, residents overwhelmingly characterized their I-House experience as enriching and transformative. Across hundreds of comments, they described I-House as an environment that was supportive, inspiring, and eye-opening (see Figure 18 for some representative examples). Many saw I-House as a bedrock during moments of personal or political uncertainty. Others emphasized how daily interactions with peers from different backgrounds broadened their perspectives and fostered lifelong friendships. These testimonies align with the quantitative findings. Notably, the residents' reflections closely aligned with what alumni shared in our alumni survey, suggesting that I-House's benefits have been cultivated and sustained over decades. Together, it suggests that I-House is not only a residence, but also a powerful context for personal and professional growth.

> Living at I-House has been an incredibly enriching experience in itself. The opportunity to engage daily with a truly global community has deepened my understanding of diverse cultures, values, and worldviews.
>
> I think I-House is a beacon of light in NYC. It challenges preconceived notions.
>
> The skills I've gained at I-House have had a deeply positive impact on both my work and personal life.
>
> I-House, in some ways, has been a shining light in this storm [of US political climate]; a place where I can relax and express my views and opinions freely.

Figure 18. Illustrative quotes from residents' answers to the open-ended questions. Residents overwhelmingly characterized their I-House experience as enriching and transformative, and describe a supportive culture that cultivates psychological safety and cross-cultural understanding.

Question 1: What are the activities or experiences, if any, that you found particularly meaningful or that you feel open your mind?

Residents at I-House appreciate the enriching experience of engaging with a diverse global community, with many highlighting the importance of cultural events like the Night of Nations and Sunday Supper. These events, along with dining hall conversations, provide opportunities for meaningful exchanges about different cultures and perspectives. Residents report several positive aspects, including the sense of community and the chance to learn from others' experiences. Concerns were minimal, but some residents suggested a broader range of topics for speaker events and increased opportunities for informal interactions might improve the experience (see the word cloud to the right for the most common words used in responses).

In open-ended comments about meaningful experiences at I-House, residents mentioned Legacy events (Night of Nations and Sunday Supper are well loved), House events, and many

different informal events including, ice cream social, late night conversations, dining hall chats, movie nights. The breadth of events and opportunities to socialize were key for residents.

Question #2: What knowledge or skills, if any, have you gained from living at I-House?

The key themes from the resident comments highlight the development of intercultural communication skills, empathy, and open-mindedness as significant positives of living at I-House. Many residents noted improvements in their social skills, including the ability to engage in meaningful conversations and debates with people from diverse backgrounds. Concerns were not explicitly mentioned, but there was an emphasis on the challenges of adapting to a communal living environment. Suggestions for improvement were not directly provided, but the comments suggest a desire for continued opportunities for cultural exchange and community engagement. Overall, the experience at I-House appears to foster personal growth, cultural awareness, and a sense of global citizenship.

Question #3: How has that knowledge, or how have those skills, affected your work and your life?

The key themes across the resident comments highlight the positive impact of living at I-House, particularly in fostering personal growth, cultural understanding, and networking skills. Many residents express increased confidence, open-mindedness, and improved communication abilities, which have enhanced their academic, professional, and social lives. The diverse community at I-House has broadened residents' worldviews, encouraging empathy and collaboration across different cultures. Common suggestions include continuing to provide opportunities for cultural exchange and personal development. Concerns are minimal, with a few residents noting the need for better balance between social and work commitments (

Question #4: What is your hope for the future direction of I-House?

The key themes from the resident comments highlight a strong appreciation for I-House's inclusive and diverse community, with many hoping it continues to foster global engagement and cultural exchange. One recurring theme was affordability and the desire to further increase inclusivity through offering more financial aid. Common concerns include the need for more affordable living costs, such as rent and laundry, and better management of resources. Residents suggest enhancing dialogue and mentorship opportunities and improving communication and transparency in decision-making. There is also a desire for more diverse representation in leadership and programming that supports professional development and addresses global issues.

Additionally, residents express a need for stricter enforcement of community standards and better infrastructure.

While the overwhelming majority of open-ended responses were positive, a few remarks were more critical. We have summarized them for your consideration:

- Several residents were concerned about the generally left-leaning mentality at I-House and a desire to encourage residents to show respect for diversity in all its forms, including on religious and political beliefs.
- A handful of residents hoped that I-House residents would become more diverse and inclusive in general (e.g., admitted fewer US citizens, more residents from Africa, more residents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, a wider range of gender identities).
- Three residents wanted more diversity among I-House leadership and the Board, to better match the diversity present among residents.
- Three residents wished I-House would improve their handling of sexual harassment, as well as cases of racism, theft, or homophobic actions.
- Two residents wished there could be more attention paid to offering food options that are vegetarian/vegan friendly or accommodate special diets (e.g, gluten free).
- One resident felt that staff should be paid more.
- One resident wished the community kitchen rules could be better communicated and enforced to avoid disorder, and that there should be rules against leaving personal belongings in common areas for extended periods of time.
- One resident wished the rooms could be larger; that displaying all of the country flags or a global flag instead of just 4-5 flags would be nicer; that during Night of Nations taking

down the US flag if/when other flags are taken down would be polite; and that giving facilities a standing ovation during Night of Nations should be tradition.

- One resident hoped that I-House would not invite external speakers who are heavily involved in the military industrial complex or who have served in militaries that are complicit in human rights violations.
- One resident wished the walls were more soundproof as they can hear other residents late at night.
- One resident wished residents could have more control over their laundry machines, room temperatures, and have input on spending decisions made by I-House (e.g., a resident representative seat on the Board of Trustees).

Recent U.S. Political Climate. We also asked residents in wave 2 whether the recent US political climate had affected them, and if so, how. 43% of residents in wave 2 responded to this optional open-ended question, suggesting that many in the I-House community were worried about the broader US political climate (particularly international students). Many expressed concerns about their visa status, safety, and freedom of speech, leading to self-censorship and a reluctance to engage in political discussions. There is a general feeling of hopelessness and frustration, with some considering leaving the country due to uncertainty and perceived threats. The political environment is also impacting career prospects and funding opportunities, contributing to a sense of instability and insecurity.

Despite these challenges, some residents find solace and support within their community, such as I-House, which is seen as a place where they can express themselves more freely. Many residents described I-House as a safe haven in tumultuous times (illustrated by the quotes in Figure 18).
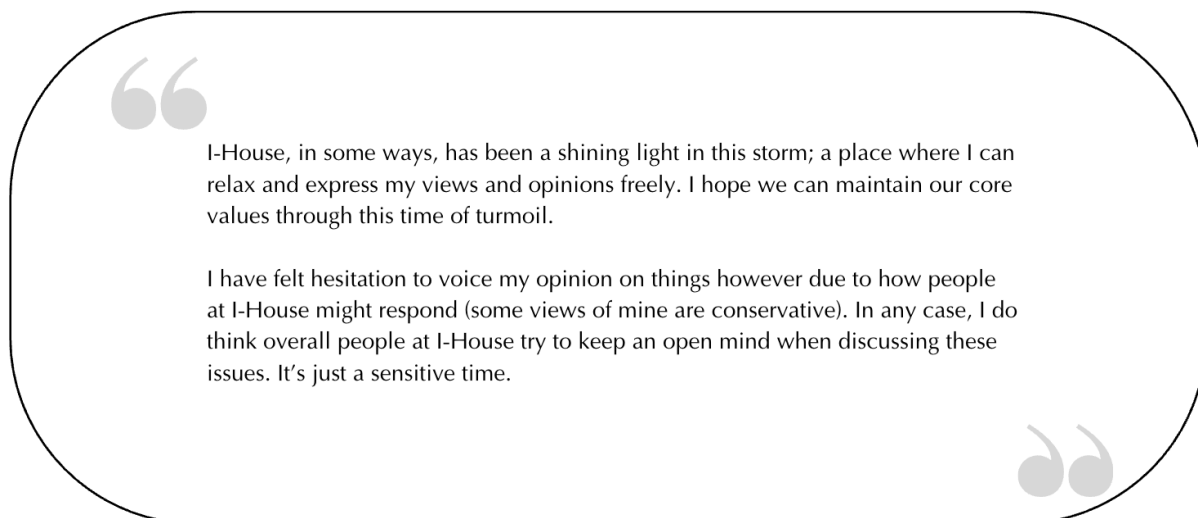
> "
>
> I-House, in some ways, has been a shining light in this storm; a place where I can relax and express my views and opinions freely. I hope we can maintain our core values through this time of turmoil.
>
> I have felt hesitation to voice my opinion on things however due to how people at I-House might respond (some views of mine are conservative). In any case, I do think overall people at I-House try to keep an open mind when discussing these issues. It's just a sensitive time.
>
> "

Figure 18. Illustrative quotes from residents' describing their experience of I-House during the new U.S. political climate.

We also asked residents in wave 2 whether the recent political climate has impacted their view of I-House on a 7pt scale (1 = very much worsened their view of I-House to 7 = very much improved their view of I-House). About half of residents (50%) said it had not changed their view of I-House, about 39% said it had improved their view of I-House, and only 11% said it had worsened their view of I-House. Overall, it appears that even in the face of external political turmoil, I-House has offered a supportive and safe community.

Admission Process

Each year, I-House receives a substantial number of applications, reflecting its strong reputation and appeal. Selection is based on diversity considerations and applicants' essays. Figure 19 below shows the admission scores of residents who took the survey and had available admission data data.
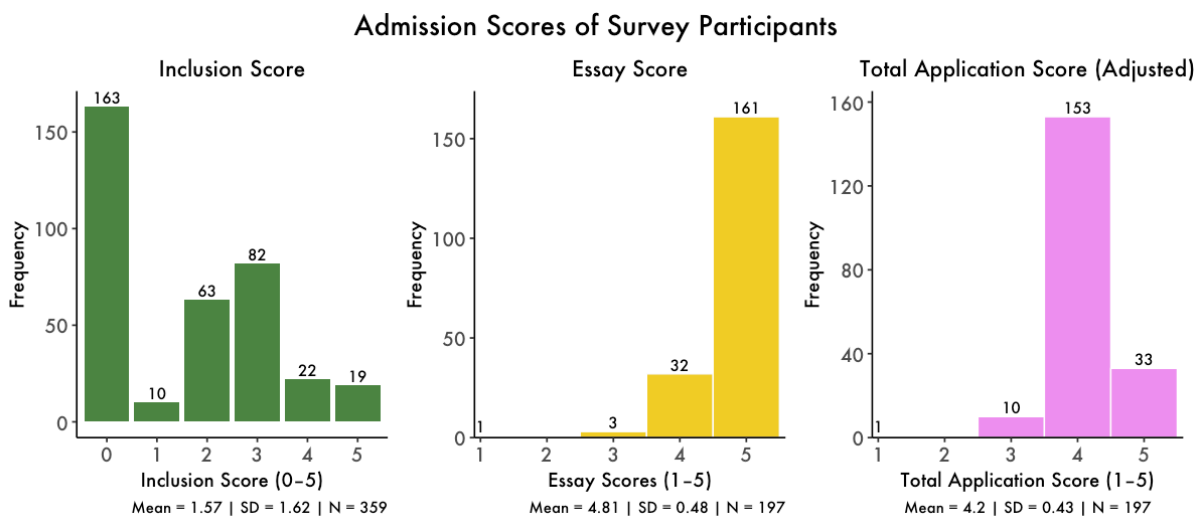

Figure 19. Admission scores of residents who participated in the survey and had available application data. Total numbers of each score are indicated above the respective bars. Means, standard deviations, and sample size are indicated below each bar. Since inclusion and essays were measured on different scales, we created an adjusted overall admission score that accounts for this problem.

While I-House's admission approach is well aligned with its mission to build a diverse and open-minded community, closer examination revealed some limitations. For example, when we studied the entire applicant pool, approximately 68% of all applicants who submitted an essay (1,390) received the highest possible score (see Figure 20).
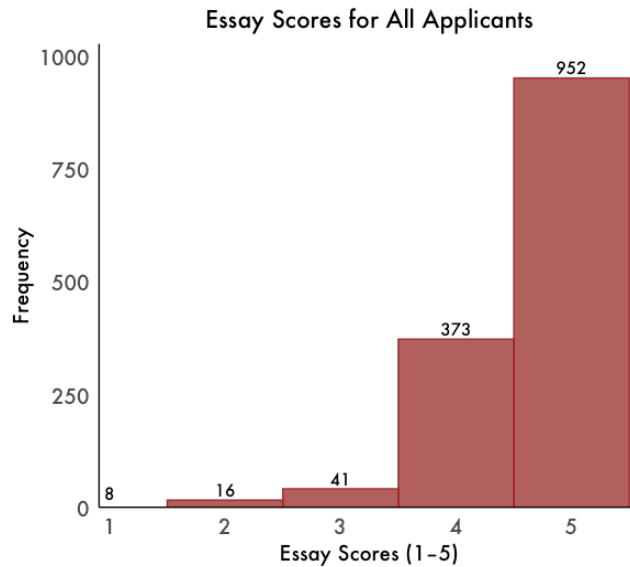
Essay Scores for All Applicants

Figure 20. *Essay scores of all applicants who submitted essays, including applicants who were not submitted. Total numbers of each score are indicated above the bars. The vast majority of essays received the highest possible score.*

We believe that this pattern reflects two aspects of the admission process. First, there is likely a self-selection bias in which the unique environment of I-House appeals particularly to those individuals who already embody I-House's core values, creating a strong applicant pool. Second, the current application process appears to lack sufficient sensitivity to distinguish meaningfully among candidates.[5]

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this longitudinal study provide evidence that I-House is not just a residence, but a catalyst for personal and professional transformation. Residents consistently outperformed benchmark groups across measures of positive traits and attributes, reflecting the organization's efficacy in creating an environment conducive to developing caring and engaged global citizens. This environment appears to be particularly beneficial for I-House residents who are still developing these qualities and as such have "room to grow". However, people who score high on these measures of prosociality tend to stay high (rather than regress to the mean).

Although I-House often attracts (and admits) individuals who already embody the values of I-House, it also transforms residents who have "room to grow" and are still developing certain traits and skills. Specifically, these residents who had "room to grow" on key traits and skills exhibited the greatest change, scoring higher on positive outcomes (global citizenship, empathy, emotional intelligence, intellectual humility, prosocial behavior, and interpersonal trust) and lower on affective polarization after 9 months at I-House. This provides the clearest evidence to date

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[5] If essay scores were effectively capturing applicants' prosocial traits and skills, we would also expect those scores to predict residents' prosocial traits and skills at wave 1. However, we did not find such a relationship.

that I-House fosters personal growth in pro-social traits among people who stand to benefit the most.

The findings from our new longitudinal study align with those of the alumni survey: residents reported benefits to their personal and professional development and scored very high on all positive traits and skills of interest. Indeed, the alumni reported in overwhelming numbers that their experiences at I-House have a transformative effect on their lives. Yet, the current residents scored even higher than I-House alumni. Taken together, these two studies provide evidence that I-House is associated with a strong set of prosocial traits and their programming and culture contribute to the growth of these traits.

Residents who immersed themselves most fully in the I-House experience by frequently attending programming events, engaging with peers, and identifying strongly with the community showed the greatest growth in empathy, intellectual humility, and global citizenship. Importantly, we also found that different types of programming were linked to the development of distinct traits and skills. This suggests that the breadth and diversity of I-House's offerings are central to this success. These findings combined with open-ended survey responses point to I-House's success of creating a safe space where residents can meaningfully engage, openly share their opinions, and deepen their understanding of one another and the world.

Our analysis suggests that I-House admits individuals who already embody many of the values, skills, and positive traits I-House seeks to promote. I-House successfully recruits open-minded global citizens, which likely helps create a welcoming community that creates a psychologically safe space characterized by openness, respect, and empathy, that in turn helps to foster growth, particularly among individuals who arrive at I-House with lower levels of key positive traits (although they are, objectively, already quite strong relative to the general population).

This also means that many residents have less "room to grow" because they already score very highly on various positive traits and skills. These high scores may make it challenging to measure I-House's impact to its full extent since many residents already score near the ceiling on these key traits and skills. However, admitting a community with shared core values may itself foster a culture of pro-sociality among residents and spillover to residents who do have room to grow. As such, it could be risky to change the admission process to recruit more residents with "room to grow" if it fundamentally reduces the mix of people who sustain the vibrant and inclusive culture.

Taken together, these findings suggest that I-House helps residents become socially and culturally intelligent global citizens. And the impact seems to be greatest for those who are still developing these qualities. Moreover, our results suggest that I-House's success is partly driven by its unique combination of self-selection, a psychologically safe environment, intentional and diversified programming, and strong social identities.

Taken together, our data suggests that I-House's success rests on three key pillars:
1. **Diversified, intentional programming** that cultivates a range of traits and skills.

2. **A vibrant, inclusive community** that cultivates psychological safety and reinforces norms of inclusivity and open-mindedness.
3. **Strong resident identification with I-House**, which motivates alignment with its mission and norms.

A key to fostering positive development among residents appears to be promoting residents' immersion in the I-House experience by fostering a strong sense of identification while simultaneously encouraging engagement with important aspects of the I-House culture, particularly attending events and interactions with residents from different backgrounds. Residents who immersed themselves the most demonstrated the most significant growth in empathy, intellectual humility, and global citizenship. Importantly, different types of programming appear to contribute to different positive outcomes. This suggests that the variety of programs is itself a critical ingredient in I-House's success. Qualitative data from residents' open responses suggest a desire for more intimate events.

Recommendation #1: Continue to foster identification with I-House. Identification with a group can be increased by, building social connection within the group, building pride with being part of the group, and having distinctive positive attributes of being associated with the group. For example, increased identification with I-House could be achieved through residents wearing matching t-shirts at certain events, having I-House "swag" that is visible to others (e.g., tote bags, mugs, hats, reusable water bottles, laptop stickers, etc), keeping in touch with alumni and hosting alumni events, connecting current residents to the institution's strong alumni network. Residents already know about and attend many I-House events—continuing to promote these events and encourage more informal interactions (e.g., game nights, watch parties, etc) would further immerse residents in the I-House experience.

Recommendation #2: Continue to build psychological safety with I-House. Our findings suggest that I-House is exceptionally effective in cultivating an environment of psychological safety. This culture empowers residents to explore and share different perspectives and engage in discussions about complex issues. Such spaces for open dialogue are becoming increasingly rare–especially in higher education. Against the backdrop of a polarized world, I-House stands out as a rare and vital space where deeper understanding of one another and the world can flourish. To sustain and strengthen its climate of psychological safety, some promising strategies include: Communicating and role-modeling trust and creating trust-building activities; Welcoming the discussion of complex issues (e.g., debates, round-tables, small discussion forums); Publicly affirming the varied skills, perspectives, and contributions that residents and staff bring to I-House; Making values and social norms of inclusivity, diversity, and openness visible; Role-modeling and creating spaces that invite authentic sharing and safe self-disclosure (e.g., through low-stake icebreaker questions at dinners).

Recommendation #3: Further expand programming and events. When reflecting on their I-House experience, many residents highlighted the value of meaningful conversations and exchange. We therefore recommend continuing to offer and even expanding opportunities for this type of exchange. In addition, in the open-ended comments about the future for I-House (as

it relates to events and programming) many residents expressed the desire for more informal events and exchanges (lightning talks, peer education sessions, learning from each other, etc.). Further, some residents suggested more political programming (thinking about what we can do to improve the world), better dialogues about difficult issues, wanting to hear from I-House about current political events, more cultural events, higher profile speakers (especially speakers who are able to speak to both sides of an issue), facilitating connections between new and old residents, expanding mentorship and leadership programs, along with more board games and hikes.

A critical piece of I-House's programming success seems to be the diversity of programming and ensuring that residents can find opportunities that resonate with them personally. It appears that some residents would appreciate more opportunities for resident-led events and learning directly from each. At the same time, attendance at these resident-initiated events was not associated with growth in the key outcomes measured (although participation may relate to other positive traits and skills not captured in this study). These events were less frequently attended than some of the other events. One plausible explanation is that residents may require clearer guidance, support, or coordination from I-House staff to help plan and execute such programs effectively, which could enhance both their reach and impact. I-House should also be sure to communicate effectively with residents if they are cancelling an event.

Recommendation #4: Survey residents each semester to ask for their general weekly availability to help schedule events. The main reason people don't attend events is due to scheduling conflicts with personal obligations (50% of the time) or the time of the event (35% of the time). It may be helpful if I-House surveys its residents at the start of each semester to ask about when the best blocks of time generally are to participate in certain types of events to better align with residents' schedules. Residents don't attend out of interest only 11% of the time so the good news is most of the programming I-House is offering seems to be of interest. The cost of an event is rarely if ever an issue (only 2% of the time), which bodes well for residents being able to afford attending events. WhatsApp and email are the most popular ways to find out about events, though flyers, newsletters, word-of-mouth and digital boards help too.

Recommendation #5: Consider whether I-House wants to recruit/admit people who already embody the values of I-House, or who have "room to grow". While I-House is highly successful in attracting individuals who align with its mission, the admissions process could be refined. Nearly all applicants receive top evaluation scores, suggesting that the current system does not adequately differentiate among most applicants. Adjustments to the process could help ensure that I-House continues to admit residents who best fit its goals and, if desired, broaden the range of traits and experiences represented in the community. Notably, residents with the most "room to grow" benefited the most from the I-House experience. At the same time, much of I-House's strength stems from the inclusive and open-minded environment. This culture is likely shaped by residents who already embody its mission upon arrival and removing too many of these residents might have negative consequences. Finding the perfect balance between those who exemplify I-House values with those who stand to gain the most will be essential moving forward.

Recommendation #6: Consider adjusting the admission process. I-House may want to adjust their prompts to elicit a wider range of responses that more readily highlight whether some individuals have a lot of experience living with a global community vs. not, and the degree to which prospective applicants genuinely embody I-House values. I-House could also consider requesting longer or more complex essays. The essays we saw were typically 500 words long but perhaps a longer essay would give residents more room to distinguish themselves. I-House should also note that AI favors AI-generated content (Laurito et al., 2025), and as AI becomes more widely used, residents may be relying on AI to write their essays. Thus, I-House's system of using AI to read and rate residents' essays may need to change. One possibility is that I-House could ask prospective applicants to conduct brief interviews where they answer this question in real time. We also recommend monitoring legislation on admission criteria as the inclusion component of the admission process may have to be removed to be in compliance with recent legislation.

Recommendation #7: Conduct experimental research. The longitudinal design of this study provides suggestive causal evidence that immersion in I-House fosters a variety of positive traits and attributes, particularly among residents still developing these qualities. To build stronger causal claims, future research could incorporate experimental or quasi-experimental designs. For instance, randomly admitting residents would provide the strongest possible causal test of the impact of I-House. It might also provide enough variance in admissions/essay scores to determine which aspects of the application process predict success. Finally, it would likely lead to the admission of more residents with "room to grow" and provide a glimpse at the implications of a different mix of residents.

Conclusion

By every measure, I-House appears to provide an inclusive and transformative environment for residents from around the world. Our perspective as social psychologists is that I-House built an effective model to nurture contentious global citizens and responsible leaders creating a community that may be adopted by other organizations pursuing a similar mission.

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APPENDIX

To view the full PDF of the survey, please see the links below:

- [Wave 1 survey for incoming residents](#)
- [Wave 1 survey for returning residents](#)
- [Wave 2 survey for all residents](#)

To view additional data from each survey:

- [Wave 1 event attendance](#)
- [Wave 2 event attendance and programming info](#)

Essay Prompts

Essay Prompt 1 = Provide an instance from your personal life that embodies one or more of I-House's values: respect, empathy, and moral courage. Explain what makes this value (or combination of values) significant to you and how this experience has impacted your perspective on life.

Essay Prompt 2 = Living in a diverse and intellectually stimulating environment like I-House offers unique opportunities for personal growth. Describe a situation where you sought out an experience that challenged your existing beliefs or capabilities and share how you anticipate your stay at I-House will further your journey of personal development.

Essay Prompt 3 = I-House thrives on the active participation and contributions of its residents. Describe any unique skills, perspectives, or experiences you can bring to the I-House community and how you plan to use these to enrich the lives of your fellow residents.