Introduction and Background
One of Yale’s signature differentiating traits is its residential college system. The residential colleges play a dominant role in students’ social and overall college experience. Historically, Yale has been proud of the residential college system, but there has been increasing concern on campus that the system is not functioning optimally. More students move off-campus each year, and transfer rates between residential colleges are at an all-time high. Meanwhile, many students express concern that social life and other aspects of residential college life vary from college to college in significant and sometimes detrimental ways. Determining ways to strengthen the residential college system and to improve the experience provided to Yale’s students is clearly in everyone’s best interest.

Project Overview, Progress, and Challenges
This project has taken the form of two distinct phases: a data-gathering phase and a policy action phase. As of now, we have completed the data-gathering phase and are moving towards the second phase.

During the data-gathering phase, we have sought to learn as much as possible about residential college life and the challenges of improving the system from a variety of stakeholders’ points of view. This process has included a significant set of questions on the 2018 YCC fall survey, a student focus group, and conversations with Heads of College and Dean Chun. An overview of our findings is presented in the following section.

In the next phase, we will work towards the goals listed later in this document.

The main challenge we have faced is the nebulous nature of this task; there are of course many ways to improve a system, and it is not always readily apparent which options are the best and most actionable.

Data Overview
Survey Findings
In the 2018 YCC fall survey, which received over 3200 responses, we included a comprehensive set of questions about student experience with residential college life. The main finding was that most students are relatively satisfied with their residential college experiences, with 84% of students reporting being “somewhat” or “very satisfied.” For students who live off campus, the top three most frequently cited reasons for their moves were all related to food: “The ability to cook for yourself,” “Food options/Food quality,” and “Cost of food plan.” However, these responses were closely followed by “Cost of housing” and “The ability to live with room/suite/house/apartment-mates of my choice.” The responses of on-campus students giving reasons for why they would consider moving off campus mirrored these results. One caveat is that
the vast majority of respondents were first-years, which may skew the results. Below are visual representations of some of the key data points.

**Interview Findings**

In an effort to better understand the faults and positive aspects of the residential college system, we first spoke to a focus group of students. The main problems they identified centered around inequalities in the facilities, the cost and quality of dining, and a lack of a sense of belonging in the college. These worries were echoed in meetings we had with Heads of College, who further went on to express concern with the decentralization of the social scene from colleges to other social groups and spaces.

In identifying social culture as one possible avenue to rebuild residential college pride and community, we considered several possible solutions. First, we discussed working closely with residential college councils to create more student-driven change that could be adapted and modified to each unique residential college culture. In addition to residential college-driven social events, we hope to implement standard YCC-sponsored events in each of the residential colleges, once again with the goal of creating a greater sense of community. Additionally, we considered the
possibility of creating an intercollege competition (similar to the Tyng Cup) with points awarded for spirit and pride.

Recommendations and Next Steps
Having completed the data-gathering phase of the project, we have four concrete goals for this project moving forward.

1. Write a full report on the state of the residential college system, to be submitted to Dean Chun and the Yale administration with recommendations on how to best strengthen the system, before mid-term.
2. Establish lines of communication between the YCC and residential colleges. Specifically, we will be convening the presidents of all college councils and developing a presentation with specific recommendations on residential college social life to be delivered to Heads of College. The first meeting of residential college council presidents will be on January 18th, and will include Dean Chun and members of the YCC working on this project. We plan to make such meetings regular, perhaps monthly or semesterly, with the goal of facilitating the sharing of ideas for college-specific programing, discussion of common problems and disparities between colleges, constructive thought about solutions to bolster the college system on micro and macro levels, and provision of an avenue for college council presidents to directly make policy recommendations to the YCC.
3. Plan specific YCC-sponsored social events designed to foster community in individual residential colleges, with the goal of implementing at least one event before mid-term, and at least one in the second half of the semester, funding permitting.
4. Further explore the possibility of inter-college competitions related to college spirit and social life and make a recommendation before the end of the semester.

Conclusion
It is clear that there are several avenues for us to explore further. While some of the necessary changes to the college system are no doubt beyond the reach of the YCC, we hope to be able to make clear and precise recommendations to Dean Chun and the Yale administration. It is eminently clear that something will need to be done about facilities issues and the steep cost of meal plans. However, while these longer-term goals will require a great deal of investment, we can begin working immediately to strengthen the sense of community in individual residential colleges. The challenge is certainly large, but with the guidance of the YCC, and with enough effort and investment from Yale, progress can be made.