

Fall 2011

Office of Residence Life
Gettysburg College

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Class of 2013

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Gender-Neutral Housing Proposal



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During the Spring 2011 semester a group of students, faculty, and staff involved with Allies¹ shared a series of recommendations with Provost Chris Zappe and Vice President of College Life and Dean of Students Julie Ramsey. These proposals were compiled from discussions with students, faculty and staff and are intended to help support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and many other groups/people. One of the recommendations discussed, focuses on the College shifting to gender-neutral housing.

Vincent Casmirri '13 served as the College Life Summer Intern during this past summer and he worked closely with Victor Arcelus, Assistant Dean and Director of Residence Life, to develop this gender-neutral housing proposal for Gettysburg College. Over the course of the summer, Vincent and Victor collected and reviewed many college/university gender-neutral housing proposals, policies, and practices. This information and the specific dynamics and characteristics of Gettysburg College were used to develop the proposal.

Rationale

The Office of Residence Life proposes that Gettysburg College offer gender-neutral housing, which is defined as a housing option in which two or more students mutually agree to share a multiple-occupancy bedroom, suite, or apartment regardless of students' sex or gender. Gender-neutral housing provides students increased choice in selecting roommates, regardless of gender, in order to respect and support the various needs of our students. In addition, gender-neutral housing provides more options for students who do not wish to live in more traditional room arrangements. This further demonstrates support for the college's non-discrimination policy with respect to gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Gender-neutral housing provides students maximal choice in determining and taking responsibility for their own living arrangements. This opportunity is consistent with Gettysburg's approach to education, where the College supports students' development as self-directed young adults, able to take personal responsibility over all dimensions of their lives. This learning occurs through students' active decision-making and engagement in the learning environment, both in and out of the classroom.

Gender-neutral housing intends to help create a campus climate that is welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of all students. This approach lessens the impact of heteronormative assumptions regarding housing assignments. It provides options for a variety of students: those who feel uncomfortable rooming with members of the same sex, transgender students in the process of discovering their gender identity, students who feel they would be more compatible with a roommate of a different sex or gender, and students who do not want sex or gender to be a primary factor in choosing a roommate. This policy helps create an environment that acknowledges, appreciates, and respects the diverse nature of the Gettysburg College student body, while giving students more options in finding a roommate who is truly compatible.

¹ Allies aims to promote the rights, safety, and comfort of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer, and Questioning persons on the Gettysburg College campus and to spread awareness of LGBTQQ issues.

Policy Description

Gender-neutral housing will be available in all halls for sophomores, juniors, and seniors through the spring housing selection process. The option is available to first-year and transfer students through special requests coordinated with the Office of Residence Life. The following guiding principles apply:

- Students may choose to request a roommate of any sex or gender.
- As with all roommate requests, the Office of Residence Life will only honor those requests made by all parties living within the same living space (i.e. room, apartment, suite).
- Upperclass students must apply with their prospective roommate(s) following the same processes and deadlines of all students entering the housing selection process.
- Upperclass students will not be required to reveal their reasons for opting to live in gender-neutral housing. First-year and transfer students will have a conversation with a Residence Life professional so that the College can provide housing that best meets the needs of the student.
- Students will not be assigned to gender-neutral housing unless they have elected to do so.
- This program is intended for students who wish to share a room, suite, or apartment with friends of a different sex or gender. It is not intended for romantic couples.
- There is no specific number or limit of gender-neutral spaces on campus.
- We encourage students to maintain an open dialogue with their families. Students over 18 are legally able to make decisions about their housing placements.
- Living space designation for a given academic year:
 - Any space on campus can be gender-neutral. This avoids segregation and offers students gender-neutral housing within all housing styles and at the various housing price points.
 - The default designation for a room, apartment, or suite will be single-sex unless the students selecting into the space opt to create a gender-neutral pair/group.
 - Once a room, apartment, suite is gender-neutral that space will continue to be gender-neutral as long as the residents can maintain the occupancy of the living space.

When there is a vacancy:

- In a stand-alone gender-neutral double, a roommate who is left behind may elect to pull in any new roommate—including a roommate of the same sex. If the resident cannot identify a new roommate, the room will default back to single-sex status. In this case, the Office of Residence Life may place a student of the same sex in the room.
- In a gender-neutral triple, apartment or suite, the residents may elect to pull in any roommate(s). All students in the space have to approve new resident(s) moving into the triple, apartment, or suite.

If the residents in a triple, apartment or suite, cannot fill the vacancies, the Office of Residence Life will first attempt to place students in the apartment or suite who are interested in living in a gender-neutral space. Current residents will be asked to approve the students interested in moving into the space.

If the Office of Residence Life needs to maximize use of all available spaces on campus and the above is not possible, then Residence Life staff will work closely with the student group to determine next steps. Two options include:

- Relocating the gender-neutral group to another location that accommodates the group's new size.
- Split the group in order to create two single-sex groups and fill vacancies with students of the same sex.

Gender-Neutral Housing FAQ

Why should Gettysburg College offer gender-neutral housing?

There are some students for whom traditional, same-sex room assignments are not ideal or appropriate, and we believe it is important that housing policies evolve to meet the needs of students to create an inclusive, welcoming environment. Gender-neutral housing provides options for a variety of students: those who feel uncomfortable rooming with members of the same sex, transgender students in the process of discovering their gender identity, students who feel they would be more compatible with a roommate of a different sex or gender, and students who do not want sex or gender to be a primary factor in choosing a roommate. This policy helps create an environment that acknowledges, appreciates, and respects the diverse nature of the Gettysburg College student body, while giving students more options in finding a roommate who is truly compatible.

Is this a permanent change in policy?

The intent is for the proposal to be reviewed and discussed during the Fall 2011 semester and, if approved, implemented during the Spring 2012 housing selection process for the 2012-2013 academic year. A formal review of the policy, practice, and student experience will be conducted in January 2013. Information gathered during this review will be used to make changes to the housing selection process and implementation of the program for the 2013-2014 academic year. As with all Residence Life policies, gender-neutral housing will be continuously reviewed and improved to most effectively meet students' needs.

Who will be able to apply for gender-neutral housing?

This option will be available to sophomores, juniors, and seniors through the housing selection process. First-year and transfer students will be able to indicate that they are interested in gender-neutral housing on the housing form within the myFirstYear Dashboard. Residence Life will work individually with these students to either pair them or offer singles. First-year and transfer students can live with any other student if they choose to participate in the college's room change process, which begins two weeks into each semester.

How many gender-neutral rooms are available and where will they be?

There is no specific number, or limit, of gender-neutral rooms on campus. Gender-neutral housing will exist across all Gettysburg College properties except in halls that are designed as single-sex.

Can students be randomly assigned to a roommate of the opposite sex?

No. Students who wish to take advantage of the new policy must enter into any roommate arrangement as willing partners.

Can couples live together under this policy?

The Office of Residence Life strongly discourages couples of any sexual orientation from living with each other. We respect and honor the privacy of our students, so we do not require students to disclose the reason for their roommate request.

What if a student chooses to live with someone in a gender-neutral arrangement and becomes uncomfortable with the situation?

The College's established room change process allows for reassignment in any living situation where there is a problem that cannot be resolved.

Are bathrooms gender-neutral too?

There are two types of bathrooms on campus in the residence halls: single person and group bathrooms.

- All single person bathrooms (one toilet and one shower) are gender-neutral (men or women can use the bathroom). Single person bathrooms are located in most apartments, suites, motel rooms, and some small houses.
- Group bathrooms are ones where there are multiple toilets and showers. These bathrooms are single gender (male or female). Group bathrooms are located in traditional style halls (e.g. Stine, Musselman, Stevens) and in some small houses.

For students living in a gender-neutral room, access to a gender-neutral bathroom will depend on the building in which they live. Information about the types of bathrooms offered in each building will be included on the Residence Life website so that students can use this information to help them in selecting an appropriate place to live.

What if parents don't want their child to live in a gender-neutral housing space? Will parents be notified if their child opts for gender-neutral housing?

We encourage students to maintain an open dialogue with their families so that they can be supportive of a student's housing decision. Students over the age of 18 are legally able to make decisions about their housing assignment. It is the student's choice whether or not to tell their parents or guardians. Students under 18 should discuss housing plans with their families, as they must provide parental consent.

Can you estimate how many students will choose to take advantage of this policy?

A number of institutions that have implemented a gender-neutral housing policy report that around 1-3% of student rooms are selected as gender-neutral rooms. For Gettysburg, this estimate would translate to roughly 4 to 11 upperclass double/triple rooms or apartments (7 to 22 double/triple rooms or apartments if including first-year student spaces yet there would likely be a small percentage of first-year students who choose gender-neutral housing).

Currently, Gettysburg typically offers roughly 70 beds within 10 apartments to be selected as mixed-gender housing (students of different sexes or genders sharing an apartment but not rooms). Most of these spaces house students engaged in the Theme House Program. In addition, during the 2011-2012 academic year we have three pairs of students piloting gender-neutral housing by sharing doubles.

What other institutions offer a gender-neutral housing option?

More than fifty colleges and universities offer some form of gender-neutral housing, including Brown University, Carnegie Mellon University, Clark University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Haverford College, Ithaca College, New York University, Sarah Lawrence College, Skidmore College, Stanford University, Swarthmore College, Susquehanna University, Wesleyan University, and University of Pennsylvania.