

Dealing with the Pros and Cons of Millennials' Desire for Single Rooms

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Many of today's traditional-age students have grown up with private bedrooms and bathrooms and have little desire to share space once they get to college. Consider the student comment written on a housing survey at Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio: "I truly do not want a roommate. At all. No, I really don't. I, somehow, doubt I can make this much clearer."

Jonathan Lucia, director of residence life at Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama, has experienced this trend first-hand. He notes that although some schools are handling this demand by changing the way they construct residence halls, the real challenge is managing the pros and cons that come from allowing students to live alone.

Leaving the traditional corridor

Colleges and universities are quite often characterized by the corridor-style residence halls built during the 1940s and 1950s (and after). However, more recent residence buildings have moved away from this trend toward more private living spaces.

"A lot of colleges are now in competition [for students], and residence living is one" such arena of competition, says Lucia. "You would probably struggle to find colleges constructing corridor-style halls."

Depending on the population an institution serves, students might view private bedrooms, private bathrooms, enhanced food preparation space, and up-to-date power and data capabilities as basic needs. Some colleges are even adding features such as administrative offices and classroom space to residence halls, so that students may rarely have to leave their living space.

But what of the chance to grow, to discuss, and to learn from others in the

residences? Student development theory suggests that students do a substantial amount of learning in nonacademic settings, and Lucia agrees.

He explains that students who have a roommate often learn important skills they will use later in life, and they benefit by being "pushed out of their comfort zone." However, it is difficult to give this push effectively when students are insisting on private living spaces and their parents are backing them up.

But in spite of student and parental requests, a college or university can offer only as many singles as it has available, and economic constraints make it unlikely that many colleges will completely revamp existing residences to turn them into single rooms with private baths. This means that students are likely to get at least a taste of more communal living. At BSC, for example, first-year students are still required to live in corridor-style residences with a shared bathroom.

This kind of living arrangement brings some clear benefits. Lucia notes that it is "better for building community," and that a college loses some of its community-building ability when students can retreat to a private space. He also notes that students who share living space receive more support from residence advisors, who are "more likely to know if they are struggling."

However, this is not to say that single living does not have its advantages as well. Lucia notes that this arrangement "may help the university administratively," as there is less roommate conflict, potentially fewer room switches, and less angst.

Even more important, students who request to and are able to live alone may be more comfortable in their living spaces. This will not only decrease the stress of college life, but may also increase the chance for academic success.

Ultimately, most colleges and univer-

sities may be in a period of transition. However, Lucia explains that there are compromise options available, such as building plans that require students to walk through common areas as they leave their room, allowing for privacy but still encouraging interaction and community building. Perhaps, with building innovations like these, the double-occupancy corridor room will join the telephone in the common room as aspects of college unknown to current students.

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti writes frequently for Student Affairs Leader. ●

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insights to a committee studying a complex question involving organizational change.

Finally, your committee should have clear expectations regarding the confidentiality of the information you receive and your interactions with each other. We would hope that you have clarified those expectations before this time, but it is always prudent to revisit the obligations of committee members to each other, to those who share their perspectives with you, to students, and to the institution. Your committee will serve the institution, the division, and the students well if you do a thorough examination of these and other issues and understand that your role is not to make the decision but to inform decision makers of the intended and unintended consequences of any final decision they might make.

Arthur Sandeen, PhD, and Margaret J. Barr, PhD, together have more than 45 years' experience as vice presidents of student affairs. They are both contributing editors for Student Affairs Leader. Send your questions for them to tkattner@magnapubs.com. ●