



UCLA Ponders Co-ed Dorm Rooms for “Transgenders”

In an effort to “better accommodate transgender students,” the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) is flirting with a new campus experiment to accept co-ed dorm room assignments from students who would prefer to live with members of the opposite sex. If approved, the “gender-inclusive housing” policy could go into effect as early as next year, allowing students to request co-ed roommates for the 2012 academic year.



Last year, the Undergraduate Students Association Council [proposed](#) the policy change to the school’s On Campus Housing Council, and the OCHC happily advised Housing Services to research the idea. Housing Services answered willingly and approved one request this year as a pilot for the student council’s request.

Patrick Malkoun, a homosexual student at UCLA, has been a vigilant supporter of the policy change, suggesting that it would alleviate stress for gay students by allowing them to room with female students — which, he claims, would avoid the impending potential for “homophobia.” “Living with someone that isn’t gay can be like living with a hot pink elephant in the room,” he said. Malkoun’s roommate was evicted last year, so he had to find someone else to live with. He asked a close friend, a female Design/Media Arts major, also gay, to move in with him. Malkoun and his friend submitted their appeal to Housing Services but their request was denied a few days later, as Housing Services notified them that UCLA’s policy allows only single-sex housing.

Although many universities around the country have permitted heterosexual students to live in co-ed rooms with their boyfriends, girlfriends, or friends of the opposite sex, UCLA emphasizes that they want to avoid simulating MTV’s “The Real World” experience of various fierce conflicts among roommates. Office of Residential Life director Suzanne Seplow [argues](#) that co-ed dorm rooms would relieve stress on transgender students, and that “UCLA is just following suit of this national trend,” as schools such as UC Berkeley and Stanford University have implemented similar policies. “Given that most of our housing systems are structured under the concept of a binary gender — that there’s male or female — for folks that don’t fit into those categories, finding housing is challenging,” Seplow [maintained](#).

Ohio University is one school that is diving in to the campus housing mix, as the school instituted a one-year experiment for this year’s fall semester. Like UCLA, student councils and the school’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Center have hyped the program as a profound benefit for students who identify as “transgender.”

In addition to Ohio, Berkeley, and Stanford, Rutgers University will also be instituting a policy this year that will allow students to bunk up with members of the opposite sex in “gender-neutral” rooms — with



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the cardinal motive being to help gay and transgender students feel more “welcome.” School officials said they have been juggling the idea of gender-neutral housing for nearly three years, but the decision was expedited after a first-year student, Tyler Clementi, committed suicide after his straight roommate secretly [filmed](#) and webcasted his “sexual encounter” with another male student.

Seplow stressed that the policy is not designed to entertain romantic relationships between heterosexual couples, but rather to help transgender students who would benefit emotionally from residing with a student of the gender they’re transitioning to. Seplow said most of the housing requests received by the Office of Residential Life have been related to this concern, but critics note that the university receives only a handful of transgender students every year, so Seplow’s assertion is likely exaggerated.

Although many UCLA students support the move, many have also expressed opposition, or are skeptical about participating in the new housing policy. “I don’t think I would do it[.] I think there would be living issues,” [said](#) Kathleen DelRosio, a sophomore at the university. A freshman observed, “I think it would be a little awkward at first. As a first-year [student], I don’t think I would want to.”

Some observers suggest that the policy change could be lucrative for the university, as the move would brand the school as a “tolerant” educational establishment that caters to transgender, gay, and lesbian students, which, they advise, would rally LGBT students to relinquish higher tuition costs for a learning environment where they feel “accepted.”

Although some universities have had gender-neutral housing policies in force for some time, the “national trend” which Seplow touts is still relatively new. Substantial backlash from the policy has yet to emerge, or at least has failed to be brought to public attention. The opportunity for college lovers to room together could cause problems for neighboring residents, especially considering the mangled lifespan of most college relationships. “When opposite sex attracts, if anything happens, like breakups, it’s going to ruin the whole floor community,” suggested Billy Sahachartsiri, a history/ political science major, and messy relationships could lead to distractions for students trying to study or sleep.

Opponents of the proposal — including students’ parents — assert that chartering such housing conditions is morally and societally destructive, as it encourages behavior and lifestyles they disapprove of. As student Cristal Alba [suggested](#), “I’m pretty sure parents don’t want their children rooming with cross-gender or trans-genders, maybe, or boys and girls rooming together.”

Photo: Desk and bed area of a room in UCLA’s Hedrick Summit residential building.



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