Proposal to Allow Gender-Neutral Rooming at Wheaton College

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On April 14, 2009, the Wheaton College Student Government Association (SGA) voted unanimously to support the original version of this proposal, which was submitted by:

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The Wheaton Administration approved this version of the proposal on November 2, 2009, and the Wheaton SGA voted to endorse the approved version on November 3, 2009. This revised version of the proposal includes modifications to the Proposed Gender-Neutral Housing Policy for First-Year and Transfer Students, and to our comments about the prospects of gender-neutral housing in Keefe Hall.
## Contents

**INTRODUCTION**  
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------  3

**CURRENT HOUSING POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACTS**  
Existing Housing Practices  3
Impacts of Existing Housing Practices on LGBTIQ Students  4
Impacts of Existing Housing Practices on All Students  5

**PROPOSED GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING POLICY**  
Proposed Gender-Neutral Rooming Policy for Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors  5
Proposed Gender-Neutral Rooming Policy for First-Year and Transfer Students  5

**WHY GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING SHOULD BE A CAMPUS-WIDE OPTION (EXCLUDING SAME-SEX DORMS/HALLS)**  
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------  7

**SAME-SEX DORMS/HALLS**  
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------  7

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**  
What Do Other Schools Do? How Common is Gender-Neutral Rooming?  8
Do Any of the Schools in the Northeast 9 Have Gender-Neutral Rooming Policies?  9
What About Couples?  10
Are There Any Monetary Impacts of Allowing Gender-Neutral Housing?  11
How Do Existing Co-Ed Floors, Gender-Neutral Bathrooms, and Connected Singles Relate to Proposed Gender-Neutral Rooming?  11

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**  
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------  12

**CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION ON GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING**  
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------  12

**APPENDICES:**

- **APPENDIX A: MODEL GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING POLICY (BRANDEIS)**  
- **APPENDIX B: CLARK UNIVERSITY’S STATEMENT ON GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING**  
- **APPENDIX C: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WITH GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING**  
- **APPENDIX D: CONNECTICUT COLLEGE’S GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING POLICY**  
- **APPENDIX E: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
INTRODUCTION

A year ago, a group of students at Wheaton College began meeting to discuss how to make Wheaton’s housing policy better reflect the college’s commitment to being an inclusive living and learning environment. We place great value on these ideals and feel that in order to align with them, Wheaton must revise its housing policy.

CURRENT HOUSING PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACTS

Existing Housing Practices

In practice, the Office of Residential Life does not allow students to have roommates of the “opposite” gender or sex. However, the Wheaton Student Handbook does not state that students must room with others of the same gender or sex.

In cases where a person’s sex and/or gender identity is not simply “male” or “female,” students may contact the Office of Residential Life to figure out how to handle their housing. The Office of Residential Life works with the student to determine a rooming situation that is acceptable to both the student and the Office. The result in these circumstances has typically been that the student is given a single room. There is no official policy that explains that special arrangements can be made.

The only students who must fill out forms for the Office of Residential Life on which they must state their sex are incoming freshmen and transfer students. All other students either apply for special interest housing or participate in the regular housing lottery. Basic information that is written on the Wheaton College Roommate Questionnaire is typically cross-checked with information that the college has on file for students. According to the Office of Residential Life, if the sex written on the form is different from the sex on file for a student, the Office of Residential Life contacts the Admissions Office to determine if a typographical error explains the discrepancy; normally, this resolves the issue. Because the housing office makes rooming assignments partly on the basis of gender, if it appears that a student’s self-identified sex does not match what the college has in its records, the student will likely need to be consulted about zir\(^1\) identity. The Office of Residential Life tries to avoid this outcome.

\(^1\)“Zir” is a gender-neutral pronoun (used where some people might otherwise write “his or her”).
Impacts of Existing Housing Practices on LGBTIQ² Students

In light of the current practices of the Office of Residential Life, students who identify as transgender,³ intersex,⁴ or otherwise do not identify within the binary gender system⁵ (“male” or “female”) have two options when seeking housing on campus: (1) They may hide their gender identity and/or gender expression from the housing office because they are not comfortable sharing it or fear that being honest about how they identify with the housing office would negatively affect their ability to room with whomever they feel most comfortable. (2) They may feel that in order to have a rooming situation that they like and with which they feel comfortable, they must “out” themselves to the housing office, even if they do not wish to. We believe that students should not have to decide between concealing their identity or “out-ing” themselves.⁶

Additionally, the practices followed by the Office of Residential Life are based on heterocentrist assumptions that are inaccurate, as well as unfair and frustrating for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. Assumptions that men are more comfortable living with other men, and women are more comfortable living with women, are erroneous, for this is not the case for all students, straight and LGBTIQ. Further, the implicit assumption that placing people of the same sex/gender together will mean less sex among students does not take into account the range of sexual orientations of Wheaton students. The idea that our current housing practices discourages couples from living together only holds true for straight students. Mandatory same-sex rooming does not prevent students from having sex. In fact, Wheaton’s realistic approach toward promoting safer sex⁷ shows that the college recognizes that students engage in sexual activity. A housing policy that allows for gender-neutral housing and is not based on assumptions of heterosexuality would be more equitable to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Such a policy embodies Wheaton’s Core Values of inclusiveness and “embracing diversity in all its forms.”

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² “LGBTIQ” stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer/questioning.

³ “Transgender” is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

⁴ “Intersex” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t appear to fit the typical conceptions of what is male and what is female. Intersex people may or may not identify as transgender.

⁵ Some people identify as both male and female, or as neither of these genders; others do not identify with any gender. Such people may or may not identify as “gender-queer.”

⁶ In their list of “Ways that U.S. Colleges and Universities Meet the Day-to-Day Needs of Transgender Students,” the Transgender Law and Policy Institute emphasizes that allowing gender-neutral housing is very important. (Source: http://www.transgenderlaw.org/college/guidelines.htm.)

⁷ This approach includes the Office of Student Life making condoms available to students, and the college allowing sexuality education groups and workshops on campus.
Impacts of Existing Housing Practices on All Students

There are many potential factors that students consider when choosing a roommate: work and sleep habits, music preferences, neatness, compatibility of personalities, and so on. Although gender can be a factor as well, it is not a deciding factor for all students. Current housing practices limit students’ rooming options on the basis of gender. Allowing gender-neutral housing would give students of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions the ability to determine how gender does or does not factor into their rooming preferences.

**PROPOSED GENDER-NEUTRAL ROOMING POLICY**

Proposed Gender-Neutral Rooming Policy for Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors

We feel that Wheaton should adopt a policy allowing sophomores, juniors, and seniors to choose the person with whom they wish to room, regardless of gender. Whether it be in a traditional dorm, a suite, or a house, the only requirement for allowing students who wish to room together should be their mutually requesting to do so. It is our position that gender-neutral housing should be a campus-wide option at Wheaton, excluding the same-sex dorms and floors.

There are cases when it is necessary for the Office of Residential Life to assign upperclassmen roommates. This could occur in order to fill a partial vacancy because the student in the room is unable to find someone to take the open spot, or for students who otherwise do not have a roommate but need one. When this happens, we would like the housing office to be sensitive to the preferences of the students involved.

Proposed Gender-Neutral Rooming Policy for First-Year and Transfer Students

We recognize that implementing a gender-neutral housing policy for freshmen is more complex than for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However, we do not feel that this should dissuade Wheaton from implementing a gender-neutral housing policy that includes all Wheaton students.

We propose that the Roommate Questionnaire should be changed to read “Gender” instead of “Sex.” This way, students would not feel restricted to responding solely on the basis of their biological/physical sex, as they currently are. Rather, they would be allowed to state their own identity and not be constrained by expectations that they identify within the constructs of the binary gender system (“male” or “female”).

We understand that some students and parents may have questions about gender-neutral rooming. Our group and the Wheaton College Administration have a mutual desire for members of the Wheaton community to be informed about what gender-neutral rooming is and why we
allow it here. We have agreed with Lee Williams, Wheaton’s Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students, that information on gender-neutral rooming will be included in the mailings sent out to students during the room selection process. We have also agreed that parents will receive information on gender-neutral rooming comparable to what students receive. Representatives of our group will work with Nancy Just and the Office of Residential Life to write up these informational materials. We also encourage the Office of Residential Life to include this information on the Wheaton College web site.

The information that would accompany housing materials would make reference to a part of the Roommate Questionnaire where students may check off one of three statements:

___ I prefer a roommate of the same gender
___ I prefer a roommate of a different gender
___ The gender of my roommate is not important to me.

Students would not be required to “justify” or explain their roommate preference. We have agreed with Dean Williams that incoming students who express such a preference, along with those who express a preference for living in a Substance-Free Hall or Single Sex Building/Floor, will receive follow-up correspondence intending to confirm their choice. Representatives of our group will work with Nancy Just and the Office of Residential Life to design correspondence which confirms that students understand what they have requested and which does not pressure them to change or explain their decision.

Following initial housing placement, we think that Wheaton should implement a policy stating that freshmen are free to choose to room with people of any gender, dependent only on mutual desire of students to room together.

Variation in how people state their gender identity is inevitable both on the current and proposed housing forms. Notably, some students may identify as a different gender from the sex that appears in their official records. We encourage the Office of Residential Life to view what may appear as potential “discrepancies,” between students’ stated gender identity and their biological sex on file, as a non-issue that warrants neither investigation nor correction. We believe that people should be treated in terms of how they identify, rather than how others think they should identify.
WHY GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING SHOULD BE A CAMPUS-WIDE OPTION (EXCLUDING SAME-SEX HALLS/DORMS)

We feel that an inclusive housing policy should be the norm on campus, hence our proposal for gender-neutral housing as a campus-wide option. Wheaton has many interesting housing options, including Wellness dorms, the living and learning community in Beard, suites in Gebbie and Keefe, various themed houses, and many general-interest/regular dorms. We do not believe that students should have to decide between living in the type of housing that they would like and being in the rooming situation with which they are most comfortable or prefer. To relegate gender-neutral housing -- a policy that strives for inclusiveness -- to a single dorm or hall would be contrary to the ideals of this institution and foster the societal assumptions of heterosexuality and binary sexes/genders.

Some people might ask, if we can have specific same-sex dorms/floors, why not have gender-neutral dorms/floors? The idea behind same-sex dorms/floors is that people who wish to live in an environment with only people of the same sex/gender as them can do so. The idea behind gender-neutral housing is not about the gender/sex of others on the floor or in the dorm, but is rather about the genders/sexes of those who are living in the room.

SAME-SEX DORMS/HALLS

Implementing a policy that allows gender neutral-housing campus-wide will not affect the same-sex dorms/floors. We fully support the continued existence of the option of same-sex dorms and halls. Additionally, we encourage the Office of Residential Life to work with transgender students who wish to live in same-sex dorms so as to find a solution that is acceptable and fair to everyone involved.

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8 Currently, at the request of the donor, Mr. Keefe, each suite in Keefe Hall is required to be all men or all women. Given Mr. Keefe’s recent passing and the sensitivity of the situation, we do not feel that the topic needs to be brought up with Mr. Keefe’s family in the next year or two. Several years down the road, we would like for this issue to be revisited. In the meantime, students who desire suites that allow gender-neutral rooming would have other options on campus, including Gebbie Hall.
Frequently Asked Questions

What Do Other Schools Do? How Common is Gender-Neutral Rooming?

We feel that Wheaton should take a strong stand on the issue of gender-neutral housing, and we recognize that Wheaton has a history of being on the forefront on a range of issues, including connections, sustainability, and the transition to co-education. It is our view that the campus community and administration’s discussions on this gender-neutral housing proposal should focus on the issue of gender-neutral housing at Wheaton and not on comparison to other institutions. That said, it can be helpful to know how other institutions have implemented their housing policies with regard to gender-neutral housing.

A gender-neutral housing policy that we consider to be a model is that of Brandeis University in Waltham, MA. We consider the policy of Brandeis University to be the best overall gender-neutral housing policy because of its inclusive, campus-wide approach to the issue and its clear explanation of the school’s policy rationale. The university’s policy can be found in Appendix A.

The Housing Office’s statement on gender-neutral housing at Clark University in Worcester, MA, explains their rationale for adopting a policy that allows gender-neutral housing. This statement is in Appendix B.

The National Student Genderblind Campaign, a student-run organization whose mission is “educating, advocating, and organizing for gender-neutral policy,” maintains a list of colleges and universities in the United States that allow gender-neutral housing of some sort.9 As of summer, 2008, the Campaign reports that there are at least 36 known college universities that have gender-neutral rooming.10 Below is our analysis of the policies of these institutions, in addition to Connecticut College, which adopted a gender-neutral housing policy in March, 2009.

- Of the 37 American colleges and universities that allow gender-neutral rooming, 28, or 76%, do not require that students fill out an application explaining or justifying why they want placement in gender-neutral housing, while 9, or 24%, do require such an application. We did not count schools that require a student to check off a box stating a preference for gender-neutral rooming, as requiring an application.

- Of the 37 American colleges and universities that allow gender-neutral rooming, 10, or 27%, of them allow gender-neutral housing campus-wide (or campus-wide, excluding same-sex dorms/halls), while 27, or 73%, allow gender-neutral housing only on specific floors or in specific dorms or houses. There is a great degree of variation among institutions that only allow

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9 This document can be found online at http://www.genderblind.org/research.pdf. The colleges and universities on this list are found in Appendix C.

10 Much information was drawn from the Genderblind Campaign’s list discussed above, with further data drawn from web sites of schools’ housing offices, LGBTIQ resource centers, and school newspapers.
gender-neutral housing in specific places; at some institutions, there are just one or two areas on campus that allow gender-neutral rooming, while others allow it in many locations.

- Of the 37 American colleges and universities that allow gender-neutral rooming, 20, or 54%, allow gender-neutral housing for all students, while 17, or 46%, only allow gender-neutral housing for upper-class students (sophomores, juniors, and seniors). At some of the schools that allow gender-neutral rooming for all students, freshmen simply check off a box stating their desire to be in gender-neutral rooming. A few schools have multiple boxes for students to mark their preferences for a roommate who is male, female, or of any gender. Still other schools require that freshmen contact the housing office to express their preference for gender-neutral housing.

Do Any of the Schools in the Northeast 9 Have Gender-Neutral Rooming Policies?

The Northeast 9 is a comparison group of similar peer colleges that Wheaton often uses in institutional research on policies, tuition, endowments, and the like. The other colleges in the group are Bates College in Lewiston, ME; Colby College in Waterville, ME; Connecticut College in New London, CT; Hamilton College in Clinton, NY; Haverford College in Haverford, PA; Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY; Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA; and Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

In February, 2009, Connecticut College adopted a gender-neutral housing policy for upperclassmen (sophomores, juniors, and seniors). The college’s Office of Residential Life explains: “There is no specific floor or ‘themed’ house for students who choose the gender-neutral housing option. The option is available to students who wish to reside in any of the college’s traditional or themed residence halls or on-campus apartments. It is important that gender-neutral housing be another option for students and not one that isolates individuals or severely limits their housing preferences.”\(^\text{11}\) According to the college’s web site: “The policy, originally requested by students, has been endorsed by the Student Government Association, the Campaign for Gender Identity Awareness, the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Office of Residential Education and Living, the Office of Student Life, and the college’s senior administration.”\(^\text{12}\) Please see Appendix C for the full article and more information on the specific policies at the College.

Haverford, which implemented its gender-neutral housing policy in 2000, allows campus-wide gender-neutral housing for upper-class students and does not allow gender-neutral housing for freshmen. According to the Housing Office, “First-year students are housed in single-sex

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\(^{11}\) Source: http://www.conncoll.edu/campuslife/8687.htm.

rooms, suites, or apartments that are coed by floor. Upper class students have the option of gender-neutral housing in all their housing – rooms, suites, apartments."

At Muhlenberg College, a policy to allow gender-neutral housing for upperclassmen is currently in the works. In March, 2007, the Student Council unanimously voted in favor of a proposal for gender-neutral housing. The Board of Trustees has not yet taken action on the issue.

Bates, Colby, Hamilton, and Trinity Colleges do not have gender-neutral housing. Hobart and William Smith Colleges are two separate colleges, one for men and one for women, and neither has addressed the issue of gender-neutral housing.

What About Couples?

In discussions about gender-neutral housing, some people express concern about how many straight couples may “take advantage” of gender-neutral housing in order to share a room. Some people ask: Is there some way to prevent this from happening?

Firstly, it is crucial to note that same-sex couples can already room together under current housing practices. There is no reason to assume that opposite-sex couples would be any less or more likely than same-sex couples to want to room together. We firmly believe that policies should be considered in light of the entire student population’s diverse identities and needs, and should not be restricted to what might make sense for a “majority” in any respect.

This view is consistent with Wheaton’s 2014 Milestones, which “represent the objectives that have been identified as necessary to realizing the college community’s vision for how it will grow” in coming years. One of these institutional goals is that “Wheaton’s residential environment fosters students’ purposeful consideration of how their actions, values, and beliefs affect the people with whom they interact, and the communities of which they are a part.”

Trusting students to give due consideration to their housing decisions and improving the equitability and range of options of who we can room with are excellent steps to take toward realizing this goal.

The Residential Life and Housing Office at Clark University in Worcester writes that under its housing policy, “male and female couples would be able to live together. It is important to note that in colleges that we have researched, straight couples electing to live in gender neutral housing were rare; the fact is that couples (gay or straight) know the difficulties of living together and seldom elect to do so.”

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13 Source: http://www.haverford.edu/housing/about/index.php.

14 Source: http://www.clarku.edu/offices/housing/genderblind.cfm.
Are There Any Monetary Impacts of Allowing Gender-Neutral Housing?

Enacting a policy to allow gender-neutral housing campus-wide (except in same-sex halls and residences) would not result in any direct costs to Wheaton, as allowing gender-neutral housing does not necessitate any sort of changes to buildings or rooms nor does it impose any costly changes to the modus operandi of the Office of Residential Life.

Some may wonder whether allowing gender-neutral housing at Wheaton would affect contributions to the Wheaton Annual Fund. We feel that in the vast majority of cases, the commitment of alumni and their families to continue to financially support Wheaton runs deeper than any single policy of the college. (Moreover, if we grant that a number of donors may take a gender-neutral housing policy into consideration, it is reasonable to expect that some may give more and some may give less depending on their views on such a policy.)

How Do Existing Co-Ed Dorms, Gender-Neutral Bathrooms, and Connecting Singles Relate to Proposed Gender-Neutral Rooming?

Most dorms at Wheaton are co-ed, with people of all genders living on each floor. Furthermore, current housing practices give students who have connecting singles the option of having a single-mate of a different gender. All co-ed dorms have gender-neutral bathrooms, which are bathrooms with single stalls and showers that are open to all people to use regardless of gender. Although bathrooms are communal spaces with less privacy than dorm rooms, they have been successfully in-place since Wheaton became a co-educational institution in 1988. This shows Wheaton’s willingness to embrace progressive, gender-neutral policies.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All students should be comfortable in their rooming situations. Implementing a policy allowing gender-neutral rooming as a campus-wide option (excluding same-sex dorms/floors) would allow students to make decisions on the basis of what they prefer and are most comfortable with. Allowing gender-neutral rooming will not impact the placement of students who prefer roommates of the same gender/sex.

We feel that in the “innovative spirit” articulated in the college’s Core Values, the campus community should be excited for the opportunity to implement this important and progressive policy. Having a policy that allows gender-neutral rooming would embrace the ideals of being “rooted in tradition, growing into the future” and “welcoming challenge.”

Adopting policies that allow gender-neutral housing as a campus-wide option (excluding same-sex dorms/floors) aligns with many of Wheaton’s Core Values, and allows students to make decisions on the basis of preference and comfort. This includes having a community which is “committed to gender equality,” “inclusive” and “embrac[es] diversity in all its forms.” In addition to providing more housing options for all students, we are proposing a housing policy that brings greater equality and inclusiveness for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION ON GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING

If you have comments or questions about gender-neutral housing at Wheaton, we invite you to please email Eric Eid-Reiner ’11 at Reiner_Eric@wheatonma.edu. Eric has been Vice President of the LGBTIQSA Alliance at Wheaton and headed up the group of students that wrote this proposal.
APPENDIX A: MODEL GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING POLICY

Though we are advocating for a policy that is more inclusive of freshmen, the Brandeis Gender-Neutral Housing Policy is the best existing policy. That policy, with which Brandeis includes a glossary of terms, is below.\textsuperscript{15}

Glossary of Terms
The following terms are essential to understanding the gender neutral housing policy:

\textit{Single-Gender} – A floor or community in a residence hall that is designated as male or female. Single-gender floors exist in the Castle, East, the Village, and North.

\textit{Mixed-Gender} – A floor or community in a residence hall for students of any gender. Mixed-gender floors are found in Massell, North, East, and the Village. All suites and apartments in the Castle, Rosenthal, Ziv, Ridgewood, Charles River, 567 South St, and the Foster Mods are considered mixed-gender.

Gender neutral – A housing option in which two or more students may share a multiple-occupancy bedroom, in mutual agreement, regardless of the students’ sex or gender. Any room in a mixed-gender area may be considered gender neutral.

\textit{Gender}– Social understandings of sex categories which may or may not align with biological sex.

\textit{Gender expression}– Presentations of masculinity or femininity through how one looks, acts, and dresses.

\textit{Gender identity} – The inner sense of being male or female.

\textit{Sex}– A determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males.

\textit{Sexual orientation} – The romantic or physical attraction to another person. It can be considered as ranging along a continuum from same-sex attraction only at one end of the continuum to opposite-sex attraction only at the other end.

\textit{Transgender}– Umbrella term that describes many people who transcend “normative” embodiments of masculine and feminine, including transsexuals, genderqueers, and other gender variant people.

Gender Neutral Housing Policy
Gender neutral housing is defined as a housing option in which two or more students may share a multiple-occupancy bedroom, in mutual agreement, regardless of the students’ sex or gender. Gender neutral housing supports the University’s non-discrimination policy and fully commits to the principles of social justice with respect to sexual orientation, sex, gender, and gender identity. Gender neutral housing provides housing options for students who may identify as transgender or are questioning their gender identity or do not wish to prescribe to gender classifications. Gender neutral housing also decreases heteronormative assumptions regarding housing assignments. Students who are uncomfortable with a same-sex roommate or do not wish to have a same-sex roommate also have more housing options to choose from.

Gender neutral housing applies to all multiple-occupancy rooms on mixed-gender floors in East and the Village, double rooms in suites in the Castle and Rosenthal, and efficiency apartments in 567 South St and the Charles River Apartments. These options will not impact the option of selecting single-gender housing. Gender neutral options cover multiple floors, buildings, and quads such that occupants of gender

\textsuperscript{15} Source: http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/reslife/roomselection/genderneutral.html.
neutral spaces are not segregated to only one or two halls. Gender neutral bathrooms are designated on mixed-gender floors when possible.

Rooms on mixed-gender floors are considered gender neutral rooms only when two or more students agree to live together. Students agree to live together when they select a room together during Room Selection in the spring semester. Students must self-select the gender neutral housing option. Gender neutral housing will never be forced upon a student. If a vacancy occurs in a room on a mixed-gender floor, the room is not treated as a gender neutral space. The remaining occupants may pull in a student to maintain the gender neutrality of the room or the Department of Residence Life will assign a student to the room. The sex of the students will be considered when a vacancy exists in a multiple occupancy space. Vacancies in suites and apartments will be treated as gender neutral if the occupants of the suite originally filled the space as a gender neutral space. If the suite or apartment is housed as a single-gender space, the gender of the space will be maintained and the unit will not be treated as a gender neutral space.

Gender neutral housing is not available for first-year students. Rooms are only gender neutral when students agree to live together, and the housing process for first-year students does not allow for the appropriate agreement. First-year students who want a gender neutral space should contact the Department of Residence Life, and an appropriate housing assignment will be made.

Critics of gender neutral housing believe that the option promotes promiscuity and encourages students in heterosexual relationships to live together. At Brandeis, students in relationships already have the option to live together in suites and apartments, and most students in relationships do not choose to live together. The Department of Residence Life discourages all students in romantic relationships from living together. This criticism also assumes that students who select gender neutral housing are heterosexual, and it does not take into account that students in same-sex relationships have always had the opportunity to live together.
APPENDIX B: CLARK UNIVERSITY’S STATEMENT ON GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING

The Residential Life and Housing Office at Clark University in Worcester, MA, provides the below explanation of the development of their gender-neutral housing policy and reasons for adopting it. We feel that Clark University, like Brandeis, is exemplary among institutions that allow gender-neutral housing in its articulation of why it has the policy that it does. The aforementioned explanation is below.16

About gender blind/neutral housing

The proposal for gender blind/neutral housing was submitted in Spring 2006 by two undergraduate students. It has been discussed in a campus-wide Town Meeting, at Senior Leadership, and by the Board of Trustees at the April 2006 Board meeting. The Board's Student Affairs Committee also held an open session for all Trustees on November 30; that discussion was supportive of this decision and was taken into account by Senior Leadership in making the final decision.

More and more schools are embracing gender blind/neutral housing policies. Clark is not the first. Schools that currently allow gender blind/neutral living arrangements include: Bennington, Brown, Colorado College, University of California/Riverside, Guilford, Hampshire, Haverford, Humboldt State University, Lewis and Clark, Lawrence University, Oberlin, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, Sarah Lawrence, Swarthmore, University of Southern Maine and Wesleyan.

Gender blind/neutral housing is a housing option that has no restrictions about the gender of roommates. This means that a male student and a female student can jointly choose to live together in a double room. Under this plan, different sexed roommates are never randomly assigned. Now, like any roommate request, Clark's Residential Life and Housing Office will only honor requests made by both parties mutually. Gender blind/neutral housing will be offered side by side to traditional housing in mixed class halls. This option is not available to first-year students.

This housing choice provides options for transgender students in the process of discovering their gender identity, gay or bisexual students, students who feel uncomfortable rooming with members of the same sex, intersexed students who do not wish to be identified by any sex, and students who feel they would be more compatible with a roommate of a different gender. This policy helps create an environment that acknowledges, appreciates and respects the diverse nature of the Clark student body, while giving students more options in finding a roommate who is truly compatible.

Technically, under this policy, male and female couples would be able to live together. It is important to note that in colleges that were researched, straight couples electing to live in gender neutral housing were rare; the fact is that couples (gay or straight) know the difficulties of living together and seldom elect to do so.

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16 Source: http://www.clarku.edu/offices/housing/genderblind.cfm
APPENDIX C: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WITH GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING

The following colleges and universities have some form of gender-neutral housing.\(^\text{17}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/University</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Introduced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American University</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennington College</td>
<td>Bennington, VT</td>
<td>Within the last 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandeis University</td>
<td>Waltham, MA</td>
<td>2008</td>
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\(^{17}\) Source: http://www.genderblind.org/research.pdf. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

\(^{18}\) Colleges and universities which have had policies that allow gender-neutral room, whether or not they specifically articulate the option, are marked “N/A” in the “Year Introduced” column.

\(^{19}\) Humboldt State University is a California State University.
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APPENDIX D: CONNECTICUT COLLEGE’S GENDER-NEUTRAL HOUSING POLICY

Connecticut College, which is part of the Northeast 9, recently adopted a gender-neutral housing policy. The college’s press release on this, and their frequently asked questions on gender-neutral housing, are below.

Current News: Connecticut College adds gender-neutral housing option
March 06, 2009

Connecticut College has adopted a gender-neutral housing policy that allows students to elect to live with a roommate of any gender identity or biological sex. With this policy, the college can continue to ensure that all students have access to safe and comfortable living environments regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.

The new housing option will be available to rising sophomores, juniors and seniors who self-select roommates of a different gender or biological sex.

"A significant part of the mission of the Office of Residential Education and Living is to provide safe, comfortable and inclusive living arrangements for all students," Armando Bengochea, dean of the College Community, said. "This policy acknowledges the diversity of the student population at Connecticut College and is a necessary step toward providing fair and inclusive housing options."

The policy, originally requested by students, has been endorsed by the Student Government Association, the Campaign for Gender Identity Awareness, the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Office of Residential Education and Living, the Office of Student Life and the college’s senior administration.

Connecticut College joins more than two dozen U.S. colleges and universities with a gender-neutral housing option, including Wesleyan University, Swarthmore College, Clark University, Brown University, Sarah Lawrence College, Ithaca College, Hampshire College, Stanford University, Dartmouth College, Cornell University and Columbia University.

Gender-Neutral Housing FAQ

Q: How does gender-neutral housing work?
A: Members of the rising sophomore, junior and senior classes have the opportunity to choose their own room assignments through the spring housing lottery process. Through this process, students find a roommate and together the students select a specific residence hall, then room assignment. Students who wish to take advantage of the gender-neutral housing policy have the option of choosing a roommate of any biological sex or gender identity.

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**Q:** Is gender-neutral housing all on one floor or in one residence hall?
**A:** No. There is no specific floor or “themed” house for students who choose the gender-neutral housing option. The option is available to students who wish to reside in any of the college’s traditional or themed residence halls or on-campus apartments. It is important that gender-neutral housing be another option for students and not one that isolates individuals or severely limits their housing preferences.

**Q:** What about bathrooms? Are they gender-neutral too?
**A:** Many bathrooms at Connecticut College have been coed for a number of years. This practice has contributed to a student culture which is very accepting of inclusive residential environments.

**Q:** How many people does this impact?
**A:** The policy applies to rising sophomores, juniors and seniors – the majority of whom qualify for single rooms within the College’s residence halls. There are only about 55 double rooms available to upperclassmen, so the policy will really affect only a small number of students who choose to take advantage of the option. However, we felt strongly the option should be available to current and future students, because for a very small number of students, this policy is very important to feeling fully comfortable and accepted in the Connecticut College community.

**Q:** Under this policy, can couples live together?
**A:** The Office of Residential Education and Living strongly recommends against couples of any orientation living with one another. Under the policy, however, couples are not banned from rooming together. Two women or two men who choose to live together are not questioned about the nature of their relationship, and we believe that requiring students who apply for gender-neutral housing to explain their relationship is intrusive and unfair.

**Q:** Can students be randomly assigned to a roommate of the opposite sex?
**A:** No. Freshman and transfer students are assigned roommates of the same biological sex. Rising sophomores, juniors and seniors who wish to take advantage of the new policy must enter into any roommate arrangement as willing partners. Freshman and transfer students can live with someone of a different biological sex only by going through the college’s room change process, which takes place a few weeks into the fall semester.

**Q:** What if a student chooses to live with someone of the opposite biological sex or gender identity and becomes uncomfortable with the situation?
**A:** The College’s established room change process allows for reassignment in any living situation where there is a problem that cannot be resolved.

**Q:** Why can’t freshman or transfer students participate?
**A:** The Office of Residential Education and Living maintains that the gender-neutral housing option should be part of a process in which two people who know one another enter willingly into a roommate situation. Adapting to roommates who are different from themselves (in many possible ways) is part of all students’ learning experience, and we encourage students to try to work out their differences before resorting to a change process. If they are not successful, the College’s room change process is available to them beginning in the third week of the semester. At that time, the Office of Residential Education and Living reviews and considers any mutual requests from freshmen and transfer students for gender-neutral housing.
Q: What if a freshman or transfer student is assigned to live with a member of the same biological sex and feels unsafe or threatened in this situation?
A: If a student feels threatened or unsafe in a roommate situation for any reason, he or she should contact the Office of Residential Education and Living immediately, and alternate housing will be provided.

Q: Do any other colleges have this?
A: Yes. More than two dozen U.S. colleges and universities offer some form of gender-neutral housing, including Wesleyan University, Swarthmore College, Clark University, Brown University, Sarah Lawrence College, Ithaca College, Hampshire College, Stanford University, Dartmouth College, Cornell University and Columbia University. While no two policies are exactly the same, Connecticut College’s policy most-closely resembles the policies at Clark University, Sarah Lawrence College, Wesleyan University and Hampshire College.
Back to Top »

Q: Why is this important?
A: Connecticut College is committed to providing safe, comfortable and inclusive living environments for all students. This new policy acknowledges the diversity of the student population at Connecticut College, including LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning) students, and extends the range of fair and inclusive housing options. The policy, originally requested by students, has been endorsed by the Student Government Association, the Campaign for Gender Identity Awareness, the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Office of Residential Education and Living, the Office of Student Life and the college’s senior administration.
APPENDIX E: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this proposal would like to acknowledge and express our gratitude for the following individuals, who have been supportive of our efforts:

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