

# Questions on Anchor Housing

Anchors Away\*

April 5, 2005

## Abstract

The recent College Council elections featured a question on the anchor housing plan proposed by the Committee on Undergraduate Life (CUL). Fewer than 20% of the polled students were in favor. More than 3 times as many were opposed. Why? Why are students at Williams overwhelmingly against a policy change whose purpose is to improve their lives? We believe that the opposition arises from misgivings about the process. CUL, despite the best of intentions, has failed to provide a thorough summary of the important issues surrounding anchor housing. In particular, it failed to provide any discussion of housing policy at peer institutions, ignored the special role of the Berkshire Quad at Williams, and declined to provide any metrics by which to measure the success or failure of anchor housing five years from now.

We respectfully ask the Trustees, acting on behalf of the entire Williams community, to seek answers to these questions. Please request that President Schapiro and Dean Roseman task CUL with spending another few months on anchor housing. We do not seek to prejudge what CUL will find, but we are certain that Williams will be better off if a search is done. Anchor housing is too important a change to rush into. There are many reasons why students are overwhelmingly against it. CUL has no hope of convincing them unless and until it provides a thorough discussion of their concerns. Moreover, anchor housing itself, should it be implemented, is much more likely to be successful if the students are behind it. Help us to allay their concerns. Students deserve to have their questions answered.

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\* Anchors Away is a group of students and alumni concerned about the imposition, without due consideration, of anchor housing at Williams. Many people contributed to this report. Special thanks to Andrew Goldston '08, David Kane '88, Jonathan Landsman '05, Daniel Rosensweig '08 and Joseph Shoer '06.

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# 1 Executive Summary

“This will probably be the biggest change in student residential life at Williams since the abolition of fraternities.” Professor Charles Dew ’58, member of the Committee on Undergraduate Life.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Dew is right. Anchor housing will have a larger effect on student life at Williams than any policy change in the last 40 years. The College must, therefore, take more care in making this decision than it has on any other decision since the 1960s. We feel that care has not been taken. There has been an unfortunate rush to judgment with regard to anchor housing, a rush that threatens to throw out much of what is good about Williams in the midst of a praise-worthy attempt at improvement.

The CUL Report is, at best, a first draft of the sort of report that should be written. We do not question the CUL’s goals. Its goals are our goals. We question the evidence, or rather the lack of evidence, as to whether the policy changes it recommends will achieve the goals that it so eloquently describes. In particular:

- The CUL ignores the experiences of every other college besides Williams. Middlebury and Bowdoin, for example, both moved toward anchor-like housing plans in the 1990s. What happened there is relevant to what will happen here.
- The CUL provides no discussion of the role of the Berkshire Quad at Williams, either historically or today. Whatever else may be said for anchor housing, it will destroy the “Odd Quad.”
- The CUL leaves us with no metrics to evaluate the success or failure of anchor housing five years from now. Without metrics, how can we know whether or not the policy has succeeded?

CUL has failed to convince the student body that anchor housing will improve student life at Williams. Last month’s College Council election featured this question: “Do you support the ‘Williams House Proposal’ in its current form, as outlined above?” Only 17% of the students said “Yes,” while 57% said “No.” There is, perhaps, a strong case to be made for anchor housing, but the CUL has so far declined to make it and has avoided taking on the most difficult and controversial aspects of the issue.

We implore the Trustees to ask the Administration to provide the entire Williams community with a more thorough analysis of anchor housing. The biggest change in student life in 40 years deserves no less.

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<sup>1</sup>“Cluster Housing Rankles Some at Williams,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, February 23, 2005.

## 2 Introduction

Section 3 provides an overview of housing policy at Williams. Our goal is not to replace the CUL’s own summary, but to highlight some aspects of Williams today that may be unclear to those not living on campus. We include a set of assumptions about housing at Williams that, we think, serves as a useful starting point. We also provide an overview of student opinion on anchor — also known as “cluster” — housing.

The next three Sections cover the three primary shortcomings of the CUL Report. Section 4 describes the CUL’s failure to provide any meaningful information on the experiences of peer institutions. CUL acts as if Williams has nothing to learn from what has happened at places like Bowdoin and Middlebury over the last ten years. We disagree. Section 5 reviews the special status of the Berkshire Quad — the “Odd Quad” in common parlance. Section 6 outlines the failures of the CUL in 2002 to provide any metrics by which we might judge the success or failure of its last set of reforms. We believe that the same mistake should not be repeated with anchor housing. How will we know, in five years, if anchor housing has failed if CUL provides no benchmarks against which to measure it? As supplementary material, we provide an appendix with two *Record* articles that chronicle the experiences of Middlebury and Bowdoin with anchor-type housing systems.<sup>2</sup>

## 3 Williams Today

Any informed discussion of Williams housing policy requires a thorough understanding of how housing works at Williams today. The CUL Report provides few details. We hope to fill that gap.

Begin by considering a set of assumptions about housing and student life at Williams. None of these are self-evidently true. Other schools have success with other policies. But, to the extent that there is an agreement, among both CUL and its detractors, students and alumni, the following statements would

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<sup>2</sup>Much of the material in this document is reproduced verbatim from articles and arguments on the Anchors Away web site and on EphBlog. See <http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/anchors-away/> and <http://www.ephblog.com>. Special mention goes to Joe Shoer’s ’06 voluminous writings on anchor housing. See <http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/anchors-away/objections.htm>, [http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/anchors-away/first\\_forum.html](http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/anchors-away/first_forum.html) and <http://wso.williams.edu/blog/main?wso=jshoer>. Amarnath Santhanam ’07 deserves extra credit for taking the time to transcribe the WCDU debate on anchor housing. See <http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/anchors-away/debate.html>. Small stylistic changes have been made throughout (e.g., “I” to “We”, “my” to “our”) so material is rarely reproduced exactly as first presented. Our goal has been to create a unified report covering the major disputes over anchor housing in a stylistically pleasing fashion. If any writer feels that her work has not been given due credit, our apologies. The CUL Report itself is available at <http://www.williamsrecord.com/wr/?section=news&view=article&id=6480> and <http://www.williams.edu/resources/committees/cul/reports/CulHousingProposal.pdf>. Those interested in an especially acerbic dissection of the CUL Report should see <http://www.ephblog.com/archives/001756.html>.

probably be included in that consensus. At the very least, they provide a starting point for the conversation.

### 3.1 Assumptions

- There shall be no theme or special interest housing.
- The first year entry system with Junior Advisers works well and should be left alone. First years should be engineered into entries that are as diverse as the admissions office can make them.
- Co-op housing for seniors works well and should be expanded. There is something magical about the opportunity to live communally with close friends during senior year. It is a good thing that Williams has exposed its students to a wide diversity of Ephs in their first three years. Senior year is the time to enhance and solidify the very special bonds that, if students are lucky, will last a lifetime. Co-ops do that.
- Senior-only housing is special and should be encouraged and facilitated, even for those who do not want to live as co-ops. All the good aspects of co-ops apply here as well, but there is no reason to prevent those who want to eat in the dining hall from enjoying an intimate housing experience with close friends during senior year. Moreover, the size of most of the houses with premium senior rooms — West (40+), Brooks (15+), Wood (25+), Perry (25+), Garfield (30+) — make them hard to fill with just one “type” of student. Senior-only housing outside of co-ops is unlikely to lead to theme housing, much less houses whose character carries over from year to year.
- During sophomore and junior year, it is good to live with both close friends in your suite and Ephs different from and/or unknown to you in your house. The time for the extreme social engineering of first year is over, but the importance of being exposed to a diverse group of students remains. It is best that the serendipitous relationships that will arise from these interactions have as many years as possible to develop and deepen.
- It is hard to know ahead of time who your friends will be or where your most meaningful Eph connections will occur. Your closest relationships may well be with people who came to Williams from very different backgrounds. In fact, the more different you are from your fellow Eph, the more likely you both are to get something out of the relationship. But those relationships take time to develop and flower.
- The flexibility and possibilities of junior year should be retained. It is a good thing that more than 50% of juniors do something different — from being a JA to Williams-in-Oxford — that takes them away from upperclass housing.

- In the short term, the physical infrastructure of Williams must be taken as a given. No major student construction projects are on the horizon. None are needed. To the extent that there is money for housing, it should be spent on increasing the number of senior co-ops and decreasing the number of doubles.
- The spaces on campus — Dodd, Spencer, Currier and so on — capable of supporting large parties are held in common for all students. The College plans on holding a certain number of parties in those spaces each year, even if the residents of those houses are not a part of the party. Students who do not like living in such houses should not pick into them.
- No housing system is perfect. There will always be students who are dissatisfied. But misery should be decreased whenever possible. A housing system in which 30% are very happy and 3% are miserable is much better than a system in which the breakdown is 50% to 10%.
- Student choice in housing is a good thing. It may not be the most important thing but, as long as the other goals of housing policy are met, it is best to let students choose where to live.

If one takes these assumptions as given, then the current free agent system works quite nicely. In fact, one of the reasons that students are so enamored with the status quo is that they are broadly in agreement with the assumptions above and are smart enough to realize that, within the universe of possible housing systems, the College's current policy of a campus-wide lottery system works remarkably well.

### **3.1.1 Election Results**

Consider some highlights from the questions asked during last month's College Council elections.

- More than 3 times as many people oppose the current incarnation of the system overall compared to those who support it.
- More than 80% of students surveyed said they were either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the current housing system, compared to less than 20% dissatisfied or even somewhat dissatisfied. Nearly 7 times as many students said they were "satisfied" as "dissatisfied."
- More than twice as many students thought the proposed system would not increase class-year mixing as thought that it would.
- Aspects of the proposed housing system that the plurality of students (over 40%) thought were particularly strong were: 6 person pick size, general housing renovation, and construction/purchase of additional co-op housing. It is notable that none of these aspects require any sort of restriction on where people can live. All of them could be implemented in a free agent system as easily as they could be in a cluster system.

- Aspects of the proposed system that the plurality of students (over 40%) thought were particularly weak were: room draw exclusive to each cluster, size of each cluster, and having an anchor house as the social center of each cluster. The first was chosen by more than 60% of respondents. What is most notable here is that the aspects that students thought were weakest are those that are the most fundamental parts of the system.
- More than 2 1/2 times as many students thought that a “well-planned restructuring/modification of the HC system and ACE” is a better option than the anchor housing system, compared to the number who said such an option wouldn’t do enough to fix social and residential life.

The vast majority of students dislike the proposed system and think a well-planned restructuring of certain aspects of the current system would be better. The majority of students either don’t think the system would accomplish the lofty goals it has set for itself, don’t think the problems exist in the first place, or both. The greatest numbers of students chose the most fundamental aspects of anchor housing as the weakest, and the aspects that could easily be implemented within a free agent system as the strongest. In other words, students prefer the current system to the cluster system, no matter how much the CUL fixes up the details, because the largest objections students have with the system are the fundamental aspects that the CUL refuses to change.

## 4 Omission I: Peer Schools

### 4.1 Burden of Proof

“In God we trust; all others must bring data.”

— W. Edwards Deming.

Excessive skepticism becomes annoying at some point but the burden of proof is on the CUL to demonstrate its evidence and reasoning. CUL has talked to plenty of people. But it is not good enough to talk to many people, decide on a policy and then say, “Trust us.” CUL has an obligation to present its evidence and reasoning along with its conclusion.

The members of the CUL need to describe exactly what they did, who they talked to, what those people said and why all that adds up to anchor housing. One CUL member claimed that CUL has “a pretty good idea of what works and what doesn’t work. There are numerous other schools, many of them similar to Williams which have well-working systems resembling the cluster system.”

- Which schools, precisely?
- What are their systems, precisely?
- How do the outcomes — various measures of student interaction and satisfaction — at those schools differ from Williams?

- What evidence is there that these different outcomes are connected to the housing system at these schools?
- What reasoning allows us to conclude that switching housing systems at Williams would cause outcomes to change?

Even in the absence of hard data, the CUL still has an obligation to describe in writing the case study approach that it used, the interviews it did and the reasoning it followed. This is not hard to do! Indeed, it is clear from comments made by CUL members that they have already done this, but they still need to let the skeptics see the work, not just the result.

If CUL specifically describes how, say, Middlebury and Bowdoin have anchor housing (more or less) and students at both schools are much more satisfied with social life than students are at Williams — and if individual students/administrators from Middlebury and Bowdoin claim that a reason for this satisfaction is the housing system — then the opponents of anchor housing need to come up with a reason (other than just generic skepticism) for why the same won't hold at Williams. But, as the *Record* articles on Middlebury and Bowdoin make clear, there is no evidence that the students there are any better off than the students at Williams. In fact, we suspect that the reverse is true, that the students there are worse off and that one of the reasons for this is that the current housing system at Williams, while not perfect, is better than any anchor-type arrangement. Alas, although the College has access to all sorts of data that would address precisely this question, the CUL Report fails to include any of it.<sup>3</sup> Many students believe that the *reason* CUL failed to include this data is because doing so would weaken the case for anchor housing.

## 4.2 Show Them The Data

Different housing policies have different effects on student life. It would be irresponsible to implement anchor housing without taking a data-driven look at the experiences of other colleges. Consider a specific example. The CUL's argument asserts that anchor housing would benefit sophomores because it would allow for “deeper connections” to other classes. This is an empirical claim. Why not gather some data and examine the issue?

First, we would need to operationalize the notion of “deeper connections.” What does this mean and how can we measure it? We could ask each sophomore:

- How many seniors he knows.
- How many seniors are among his five closest friends.
- How many seniors he has shared a meal with in the last two days.

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<sup>3</sup>For example, Williams is a member of the Consortium of Financing Higher Education, a group of elite schools that gathers and distributes data on many aspects of undergraduate life. See <http://www.danieldrezner.com/archives/001972.html> for a discussion.

Much of survey research is devoted to figuring out the best way of eliciting correct information. There are several Williams professors (Marcus, De Veaux, Klingenberg, Sheppard, Zimmerman, et al.) with the requisite expertise as well as statistician alumni more than willing to help out.

Second, we need to see how these measures of “deeper connections” vary across time and space. It is a shame that the CUL, or some other body, does not design a thorough survey of undergraduate life at Williams and administer it every year. If participation in room draw were contingent upon completing the form, response rates would be close to 100 percent. If the CUL had been doing this for the last 20 years, it would be much easier to examine how life at Williams has changed and to speculate on the causes of those changes as well as the likely effects of alternate policies. Although this hasn’t been done, there is no reason not to start now.

But, since we don’t have access to historical data — and since doing surveys of alumni is problematic on several levels — there is nothing to be done but look at other schools. Luckily, other schools are also interested in these questions. They want better information on student life and would likely be willing to administer an identical survey to their students, assuming that there would be data sharing all around. The quality and quantity of sophomore-senior interaction probably varies across schools, but we need to know where and how much it varies in order to develop policies for improving it.

Third, we need to analyze the data to see if there is a connection between different housing arrangements — either at Williams in the past or at other colleges in the present — and the various results that the CUL seeks to achieve. We need to see some statistics. Do colleges with anchor-like housing policies have “deeper connections” between sophomores and seniors than colleges with policies more like the current all-campus lottery? How much deeper are those connections, and what aspects of the housing policies seem most important in creating them?

The CUL has made a series of empirical claims (about house unity, party quality, cross-class connections and so on) concerning how different student life would be under anchor housing. Are those empirical claims correct? The CUL has provided no data to back up its forecasts. If the necessary data were impossible to obtain, that would be fine. We would have to make do with intuition. But we can get the data. There is no excuse for not doing so. What is the rush?

Policy forecasts are, of course, only one half of the puzzle. Even if we could all agree that the average sophomore would go from eating meals with two seniors to four seniors over a typical two day period, we might still disagree about the desirability of the anchor proposal. Even when we agree on what the costs and benefits will be, we may weigh them differently. Yet first we need to analyze those costs and benefits. As Deming’s quote reminds us, we cannot take these claims and generalizations as given until we have numbers. Data first, analysis second, policy last.

### 4.3 CUL Methodology

Beyond the CUL's failure to provide *any* information about the experiences at other schools, we have more specific concerns about the manner in which they gathered and presented data about Williams. Despite CUL chair Will Dudley's insistence that he's not a believer in 'spirit from the top' in the case of house coordinators or party planning, the anchor house proposal itself looks like an imposition of 'spirit from the top.' The CUL asserts that establishing anchor housing would result in some sort of spontaneous well-spring of cluster pride, cluster spirit, and everything good that anchor housing could possibly bring. However, this carries more of an appearance of a top-down executive decision on students' residential — and social — structure without consultation of those most affected.

- Time scale. The proposal has been in the works for four years. However, it has not occupied the campus as an issue for any longer than a few months. Current seniors vaguely remember the idea of anchor housing failing in 2002, and only now does the issue appear again. The 'version 1' proposal burst onto the scene in mid-January, students were (1) informed that the proposal would be finalized and presented by late February and (2) given the impression that the administration supports the proposal and would essentially rubber-stamp whatever crossed the President's desk. The mostly negative immediate student reaction induced the CUL to make alterations to some major details of the proposal, but they stick to their initial self-imposed deadline despite changing the proposal within the space of a day or two. This willingness to alter the plan is at odds with the insistence that four years of work lie behind it and that it should be trusted for its four years of continuous effort.
- Student information and input. Student input was not visibly sought before the proposal appeared in the campus consciousness in mid January. Since then, CUL strategy has focused more on selling the proposal to students and convincing them that they would not lose anything rather than seeking additional student input and advice on both the details and the fundamentals of the plan. Now that the implementation has been delayed, the CUL ought to carry out student opinion-gathering with as much transparency as it possibly can. Until now, CUL operation and data-gathering has been an extremely opaque process. The CUL also needs to remain open to fundamental objections to the plan rather than accepting anchor housing as an indisputable premise and recognizing only student input on details.
- Non-representative student committee members. As a corollary to insufficient student input gathered, the student members of the CUL are not representative of the student body as a whole. They were appointed from a self-selecting group: only those students who saw a problem to be solved applied. Only those students who believe that a change of housing system

will spontaneously result in improved social and academic life are advocating this proposal. Furthermore, comments from some student CUL members suggest that they see very little suite identity across campus. These are not majority opinions among the student body.

Again, the point is not *primarily* that the CUL Report is faulty in what it chooses to cover. It is not. The problem is in what it leaves out. It is impossible to fairly consider a change in the housing system at Williams without grappling with the experiences of other schools and reporting on those experiences to the Williams community. As the *Record* noted<sup>4</sup> 4 years ago:

Further elaborating on the College’s position in comparison to other schools, Schapiro said “this is not the kind of place where you just import what happens elsewhere, but we’re far from an optimal situation now.” Schapiro, along with Charles Dew, professor of history and chair of the CUL, and Tom McEvoy, director of housing, stressed the importance of studying models at peer institutions. Most comparable to the reform ideas presented seemed to be the cluster system at Middlebury.

The word “Middlebury” appears no where in the CUL’s report. Indeed, there is *no* discussion of any of the lessons learned by any other school in considering the issue of housing policy. Why did the CUL leave this out? We do not know. But we do know that many students interpret this omission unfavorably. They believe that the administration decided that anchor housing was the best solution 4 years ago and that the current process is a charade. They think that the CUL failed to include any discussion of peer schools because such a discussion would have weakened the case for anchor housing.

We are not so cynical. Yet we think the students have a point. The reason that the CUL has failed to win over the students to its vision is that it has failed, so far, to take student concerns seriously. Providing a thorough analysis and discussion of the experiences of other schools with anchor-type housing systems would be a good place to start.

## 5 Omission II: The Berkshire Quad

For students and alumni who identify with the Odd Quad, the experience of watching the debate over the anchor housing system unfold has been one of disappointed expectation, turning to fear for the upcoming years. In rhetoric and writing by members of the CUL that preceded their current report, the Odd Quad culture was neither attacked nor praised, but typically left entirely unmentioned. Reading the current report, one familiar with its culture expects a mention of the Odd Quad at many places where the lessons of its long existence are pertinent, yet while a detailed discussion of the Odd Quad’s past, present,

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<sup>4</sup>See <http://www.williamsrecord.com/wr/?view=article&section=news&id=1597>.

and future are surely needed, the current report contains not even a mention. Throughout the anchor housing debate, the Odd Quad has been the elephant in the room that the CUL seems to have tried to ignore.

The culture of the Odd Quad is and has been an achievement of many of the goals of the CUL's current plan, and an exception to the states of campus life that have motivated their recommendations. The Odd Quad is a corner of campus that plays a prominent role in the life of hundreds of students today, and thousands over the years of its evolving existence; yet the CUL proposal would mean its certain death. To be sure that this cost to the community is outweighed by the benefits, to reach the kind of understanding of Williams residential life that is necessary to craft good policy, it is imperative to understand this culture, unique to Williams, that so many students have built and tended to for decades.

This section of our report is not an attempt at this understanding, which cannot be properly achieved in this space, but it is a survey of the aspects of the Odd Quad that seem to most offer guidance to the project of restructuring residential life at Williams, and questions for the CUL's current report.

The Odd Quad is an exception to nearly all of the CUL's "findings" regarding residential life at Williams today: prevalence of fragmentation, lack of common investment, lack of benign traditions. While one may debate the extent to which the free agency system has led to these problems, it is indisputable that the residents of the Odd Quad have not felt these problems, or felt them much less, under free agency. They have solved or avoided the problems on their own, in their own way. Laurie Brink '05 eloquently describes how the Odd Quad has helped students who are not like "most" of their peers.

That's it, in a nutshell. Entries are successful for "most students." This plan, if it is successful for anyone, would at best only be successful for "most students."

So what about the rest of us?

I never felt even slightly supported by my entry. I didn't drink or dress in my undies for Queer Bash or care about the World Series, and they did, and so our paths diverged. After a while I stopped showing up for entry snacks at all, because I preferred to hang out with the many friends I had made outside of my entry . . . who almost all, oddly enough, seemed to live in one quad. Yep, you know which one. I doubt I would have made a third of the friends I did freshman year if Currier, Fitch, and Prospect had been more "diverse," which in your terminology seems to mean "more totally unrelated (and superficially different)." That's not to say that I didn't make ethnically, religiously, sexually, culturally, politically, economically diverse friends. I certainly did. But I didn't make very geographically diverse friends, because all the people with interests like mine congregated in the buildings they knew were their safe spaces, where it was okay to say, "Let's play a board game!" and okay to put on spontaneous musical productions, and okay to go home at 3 AM Sunday morning without a drop of alcohol in you. The Odd Quad

is a refuge for a lot of people who find ACE parties irritating and don't make friends in their entries — not because their entries were bad, but simply because they didn't fit there. This plan takes that refuge away.

A year and a half ago I had the pleasure of meeting a pair of freshman girls who showed up to an Odd Quad gathering advertised on a listserver. Both of them seemed shy at first, but became more talkative and cheerful as the evening progressed. Both said they didn't hang out with their entries, and both said that they were immensely glad they had come. I believe they both live in the Odd Quad now. Where would they have found a place without it?

You must know they never would have found their places. You must have encountered enough freaks, geeks, nerds, oddballs, and misfits to know that we won't come to the keg parties, whether ACE throws them or anchor houses do. And without the Odd Quad, we won't have any alternative place to meet. That's awfully hard on those of us who aren't "most."

Does the CUL worry that students depend too much on centralized social planning under free agency? Is there a fear that free agency makes it hard for traditions to arise and persist? On the contrary, the Odd Quad is a culture in which social tradition and interaction among the diverse many has thrived under free agency, a culture in which the needs for tradition and good social interaction have been successfully united and solved. The Odd Quad generates and maintains traditions that both define and stabilize its culture, and facilitate interaction among its hundreds of members.

Students of the Quad understand that they share a commonality, even if they cannot easily describe what that commonality consists in. Bop-swording (mock fencing with padded weapons) and LARPs (live action role-plays) were once a major Odd Quad activity, but many never partook and still considered themselves, and were in turn considered, to be members of the Odd Quad. Over the years, new and ingenious events take their places as cherished traditions of the Quad, such as the Driscoll Deviations, in which members of the Odd Quad dress according to a certain theme and eat (and perform) in Driscoll, or silly movie nights, in which students advertise their suite to the Odd Quad as a place to come and watch a movie each week. Often different suites rival each other with selections, or establish themselves on different nights, and always the invitation goes to hundreds of people, most of whom the suite residents have never met. This is the sort of social event style and tradition that the CUL wants to create using random affiliation and clusters, but which the Odd Quad has achieved for decades through self-chosen association. A sophomore commented:

I am concerned that anchor housing will be very detrimental for small groups of people with similar interests (i.e. not mainstream ones). Currently many people like this can congregate in the Odd

Quad, but this group would be fragmented under the anchor system, making it more difficult for non-mainstream people to find people with whom they are comfortable. I believe this problem is aggravated by the idea that clusters would throw lots of parties, but what about people who don't like to party? It'll be much more difficult to avoid it. For a plan that is nominally about encouraging diversity and a better social scene, it is distressing that anchor housing will make social interactions for people with unusual interests much more difficult or wipe them out.

Perhaps the greatest triumph of the Odd Quad has been its breadth across campus and graduation classes. Many student members of the Odd Quad do not actually live in the quad, but take the walk there for visits and events, and treat it as a home away from home. Odd Quad alums who return to visit often return as guests of the Quad, socializing with and staying with students whom they may never have met, but whom they know through listservers or participation in traditions. Old traditions die and evolve and new arise over time, yet the Odd Quad remains a recognizable and stable enough entity that it has been able to serve as a dependable home across distance and time – and it is entirely maintained by students who choose to affiliate. Ebonie Little '07 wrote:

I'm not here to knock the entry system — I met a bunch of very fun and friendly people in my entry last year. I chose to live here because while I really love you guys over in Dennett, I knew I had a group of friends with interests and attitudes that I can really identify with. I'm socially awkward, but not as traumatized as most, and I don't feel the need to crawl into a lair of social isolation as other Odd Quadders confess they often do. But I took the option of living here in a great place of interesting people who aren't going to call something "sketchy" at the first sign of non-conformity. On both ends of the spectrum, we have a Gladden and we have an Odd Quad who are happy with where they are, and no social engineering on the part of the CUL will benefit either side. At worst, the minority culture will just be completely wiped out.

Though the particulars certainly cannot be applied to all students, the richness of social interaction and tradition in the Odd Quad is something that the CUL, and all of us, dream of achieving for all of campus, but the Odd Quad poses strong questions to the conclusions and assumptions of the CUL's proposed method of doing this. We may dismiss the Odd Quad an exception to the rule of campus life, but if we do, we dismiss an exception thousands of students in size, and decades old.

If we cherish what the Odd Quad has achieved, as the CUL does, its existence is an opportunity for our goal of improving life at Williams. Its culture should be studied and discussed extensively in the CUL report, not ignored. Specifically, we need to know:

- Students who consider themselves members of the Odd Quad and students who do not all perceive a bond among Odd quad members, yet what form does this take? Traditions of the Quad have changed greatly over the years, yet a common name and perception of bond have endured. How has this happened?
- To what extent has free agency been a necessary component of the Odd Quad’s success? What desirable features of the Odd Quad could be achieved under anchor housing, and how?
- Many students and alumni, Odd Quadders or not, have felt that the Odd Quad has served as a necessary refuge for some, or at least an important place where some students can fit better than they can with a “majority culture.” What would happen to students who used to join the Odd Quad for this reason in the new housing system?
- Most important, and underlying all other questions: if free agency led to the decline of tradition and union in most parts of campus, why has the Odd Quad been an exception?

Again, our goal is not to prejudge what the CUL might discover. We just want them to look.

## 6 Omission III: Standards for Judgment

The third major omission of the CUL Report is that it provides no discussion of how we are to evaluate the success or failure of anchor housing in the years to come. Even those who are strongly in favor of anchor housing — who do not feel it is necessary to closely consider the experiences of other schools or the special status of the Odd Quad — should be in favor of listing the standards by which we should judge anchor housing five or ten years from now. Unfortunately, a failure to specify such standards is quite consistent with CUL’s behavior 3 years ago.

### 6.1 The 2002 Report

One of the more sideline shames of the campus life tinkering this time around is the concurrent acknowledgment that the restrictions put in force in 2002 have not achieved anything of meaningful merit.<sup>5</sup> What we refer to is:

- Gender capping of houses at 60%.
- Reduction of pick sizes from 7 to 4.
- Creation of blind room draw, where names are no longer allowed to be posted on WSO or on the physical posters in the pick room.

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<sup>5</sup>Material drawn from <http://wso.williams.edu/blog/view?id=1449>.

Back in 2002, the CUL published a report<sup>6</sup> that gave their recommendations in great detail, and was scant in two other departments: 1) presenting the evidence they believed supported their recommendations, and 2) presenting a set of goals whose attainment would measure the success or failure of their recommendations.

Without these “features,” which would have been standard in any serious study of any kind in any academic field, a review of the CUL’s data by anyone outside of the CUL was impossible, and judgment of whether their recommendations would serve their goals equally impossible, as there could be no common understanding of what those goals were. Some thought it was to achieve racial house diversity, some gender, some diversity by extracurricular affiliation (especially sports teams), some all of the above. The CUL, at the time, was clearer about what it was trying to avoid than what it was trying to promote: “We don’t like theme housing.” “It is ridiculous that this house is overwhelmingly male.” “Some houses have taken on a cross-year character; this is bad.”

They also made an appeal to authority: “We have studied this extensively for 3 years . . .” hence, and we won’t say it in so many words, but we really do know better than you. The next draft of the CUL Report should include:

- As extensively as they can, a presentation of all their data and reasoning from it, whether that data be anecdotal or numerical, from Williams or from other schools.
- An unambiguous statement of what aspects of life are intended to be improved on this campus.
- A statement of when the CUL will be ready and willing to hold their new system to these standards. If they have been found to have failed, they must be met with the same recommendation for abandonment that the CUL gives to our current system of housing.

To which a CUL member replied:

To begin with, your suggestions and criticisms are fantastic. This CUL will definitely be careful not to make the same mistakes the 2002 CUL made in their proposal. You’re correct in noting the importance of defining clear criteria for success and failure which can be used in judging and forming any residential system in the years to come.<sup>7</sup>

But the CUL Report included none of these suggestions! Our point is not that the CUL’s goals are bad goals. We are concerned that the CUL Report does not produce any evidence that the proposed changes will accomplish these goals, and we are concerned that the CUL has missed data of critical importance.

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<sup>6</sup>See <http://www.williams.edu/go/strategicplanning/studentlife/explore2.html>.

<sup>7</sup>See <http://wso.williams.edu/blog/view?id=1449>.

Assume that anchor housing is implemented. Five years pass. Should Williams declare victory or should we return to free agency? The CUL needs to tell us *now* what the standards for judgment should be *then*. Without this guidance, it will be impossible to know whether or not anchor housing has been successful, whether or not the trade-offs involved have been worth it.

## 7 Conclusion

Alex Bal '06, one of the new Co-Presidents of College Council, wrote during last month's campaign that:

Jessica [Howard '06] and I are committed to ensuring that if any changes are made to the housing system, they are only those that reflect strong student support. In light of the *Record* survey, we would thus oppose implementation of anchor housing in its current form. . . . It is also true that most students strongly dislike the idea of having their housing and suitemate choices limited to 1/5 of the campus; for this reason, Jess and I will fight to ensure that this type of housing change is not made as long as students continue to feel this way, which we fully expect they will.<sup>8</sup>

Bal and Howard went on to win almost 80% of the vote. The other slate was also against anchor housing, so we can hardly ascribe their victory to their stand on this issue. But the fact remains that CUL has almost completely failed to convince the student body that anchor housing — a policy change whose sole purpose is to improve the lives of Williams students — is a good idea.

The main point of this report is not to argue against anchor housing. Obviously, we do not think that anchor housing is good policy. But even proponents of anchor housing must agree that the CUL Report is fatally flawed to the extent that it has failed to convince students that anchor housing is in their own best interest. Williams students are not stupid. They are reasonable in their skepticism. The CUL might still win them over, and thereby greatly increase the likelihood of success for anchor housing once implemented, if it took their concerns seriously.

The next version of the CUL Report should address

- The experiences of peer schools with anchor-like housing systems.
- The role and status of the Berkshire Quad.
- The standards by which anchor housing will be judged five years from now.

President Schapiro once noted that

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<sup>8</sup>See <http://wso.williams.edu/blog/view?id=1595>.

My experience in my fourth year here as president and my 15th on the faculty is that when the students really have something to say in a powerful way, they're right, because they're closer to it and they have the well-being of our institution at heart.<sup>9</sup>

President Schapiro is exactly correct. No campus controversy in the last decade has engaged the students to the same extent as the fight against anchor housing. The students are "closer to it and they do have the well-being of our institution at heart." Now, it could be that the students are wrong, that anchor housing is what is best for them and for Williams. But, at the very least, CUL and the Administration should take their concerns seriously.

We respectfully ask the Trustees to insist upon further investigation into the Williams House System — its potential effects on the communities already in existence here at Williams, and the results of similar systems at other colleges — before implementing such a scheme here at Williams College.

We arrive, again, at Professor Dew's statement that anchor housing would probably be "the biggest change in student residential life at Williams since the abolition of fraternities." We agree. And it is because of their magnitude that the proposed changes deserve the most careful, thorough thought we can give them. Therefore, we ask the Trustees of the College to request that President Schapiro and Dean Roseman instruct the CUL to further investigate this issue before approving the anchor housing.

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<sup>9</sup>See <http://www.williamsrecord.com/wr/?view=article&section=news&id=4970>.

## A *Record* Articles

The *Record's* coverage of housing related issues has been superb, both in the last few months and over the last few years. By all accounts, the two colleges that a) are most like Williams and b) have instituted policies similar to anchor housing are Middlebury<sup>10</sup> and Bowdoin.<sup>11</sup>

Any reader of the CUL Report needs to closely consider what has happened at these colleges. The CUL, unfortunately, provides no discussion of the topic. It is not clear why Williams will be more successful in implementing anchor housing than Middlebury or Bowdoin has been. In fact, it seems clear to us that the typical Williams student is better off under free agency today than the typical Middlebury or Bowdoin student is under anchor housing even a decade after its implementation.

### A.1 Middlebury

Residential changes at Middlebury have not come easy. The liberal arts college, Williams' Vermont peer, implemented what it calls a "commons" system of residential life in 1992, years before current students arrived on campus.

Despite an ambitious construction program and reorganization of residential life along academic lines, some students still see the commons years later "as an administrative attempt at social engineering," Tim Spears, dean of the college, said last month. "For students," Spears said, "'commons' is a loaded word."

While most at Middlebury tend to agree with the premises of the system, frustration remains with the fashion in which the commons have progressed. Spears said, "Some students ask, why do we have this?"

"There's not a great sense of commons pride," said Amanda Goodwin, a sophomore and member of the Student Government Association's finance committee.

There is consensus among all students and staff members that the commons continue to evolve. Goodwin said, "There is a sense at Middlebury that the commons are still in a development stage."

The initial decision to adopt the system came out of a decade-long effort to enhance the relationship between intellectual and academic life, which began with the recommendation by a campus committee in 1989 to abolish the fraternity system and replace it with commons and social houses.

Middlebury implemented the Enhanced Commons System, a model that decentralized the campus into five clusters in 1999. The system, controversial since its conception, called for the decentralization of the dean's office, the creation of five dining halls and the construction of several residence halls in order to create smaller communities within the college.

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<sup>10</sup>From "Spotlight on Middlebury Commons," by Rob Streicker. *Williams Record*, February 15, 2005. See <http://www.williamsrecord.com/wr/?view=article&section=news&id=6393>.

<sup>11</sup>From "Bowdoin Bids Farewell to Frats," by Ainsley O'Connell, *Williams Record*, February 22, 2005. See <http://www.williamsrecord.com/wr/?view=article&section=news&id=6420>.

One of the first strategies for making the college feel smaller was to shrink the size of the student body to under 2000. “[Middlebury] had outgrown its status as a small college,” Spears said. “We needed a new structure to have small communities.”

Middlebury ultimately decided that making several smaller communities would allow the college to expand its size to 2400.

Middlebury established the first generation of the commons system in 1992. Spears said that some believed at the time that the commons were a conspiracy to kill social houses, the last vestiges of the fraternity system. Spears called the first implementation “a loose confederation of would-be communities of various dorms on campus.”

By 1997, after administrative review, it was clear that the commons needed more energy. “They were not doing what we wanted them to do,” Spears said.

The committee developed a recommendation for a more “fully-Enhanced Commons system.” Middlebury’s president at the time, John McCardell, gave a taped speech in 1997 to the board of trustees at their summer retreat.

At that retreat, the board voted to begin a new commons system based on the three pillars of proximate faculty housing, decentralized dining and continuing membership (that students would stay in the same commons for four years.) McCardell’s speech circulated around campus following the meeting on what became known as the “Secret Tape.”

The tape incensed students who viewed the board’s decision to implement a commons system as a top-down regulation of their social lives. The entire 1997-98 school year became a community-wide discussion of the commons, with forums held and an online survey that resulted in considerable response. The final report of the Residential Life planning group was accepted by the board of trustees in May 1998. The college spent the following year ironing out the logistics of full-scale decentralization.

Objections at the time were plentiful. Some professors objected to the use of so much money going to “student amenities” instead of academic use. Others argued that Middlebury was too small to need smaller communities. Others said the commons system was better suited to urban environments and that the building spree would make Middlebury’s rural campus ugly.

The text of the Enhanced Residential Plan recognized the polarized environment into which it was released. “Students in particular have been upset by the prospect of changing the school they know and love,” the plan said. “Despite the many good things that happen on this campus, the Middlebury experience is not uniformly excellent.” It urged the community to use its imagination to meet the challenge of closing the gaps between various campus constituencies.

### **A.1.1 Academic Advising**

One of the primary focuses of the commons system was to improve the advising experience at Middlebury. Most students, faculty and staff agree that this has been the most successful aspect of the system.

Today, incoming students select a first-year seminar. Most often this selection determines the commons they enter, though the students do not know beforehand which seminar corresponds with which commons. The commons are balanced by academic interest, meaning that science seminars and humanities seminars are evenly distributed among commons.

The faculty member who teaches the first-year seminar is the academic advisor to the students in his class until they pick a major advisor at the end of their sophomore year.

In addition to the faculty advisor, students have a close relationship with the dean of their commons. As a result of the report, the residential life office and the dean's office ceased to exist, as their functions are now wrapped into the administration of each of the five commons.

Spears said, "Students have come to appreciate [the advising]; it's the most popular part of the commons system." Goodwin said that first-year seminars bring the conversation from classrooms back to the dorms.

Students who spoke with the Record were unanimously supportive of the decentralized dean's office. Goodwin agreed that the commons work well for advising, saying that students feel comfortable talking informally with their dean in addition to going to him or her for academic reasons.

Spears, who is also a professor of American literature, said the faculty sees a clear benefit to being part of the commons. The symbolic faculty heads of each commons live in college housing near their commons. They often invite students to come to their homes for dinner and conversation following lectures, sometimes several times each week.

"The commons help integrate faculty with students in a non-evaluative way," said Nick Campofranco, a junior and co-chair of Wonnacott Commons. While faculty members are present at commons events, Spears said that professors "are not woven into students' everyday lives — that hasn't happened."

White also said that other commons employees have developed closer relationships with students, including custodians, who now have a much better rapport with students. When first-years arrive on campus, deans, residential staff, advisors and custodians for their commons greet them and help them move in.

### **A.1.2 Housing and Dining**

Along with the establishment of the commons, the Enhanced Residential Plan called for the construction of new residence halls and associated dining halls. The original plan was to build the commons one by one. Ross Commons was completed first; Atwater came online this year, with its dining component opening just two weeks ago.

The residential requirements of the commons system have been among its most divisive components. When the Enhanced Commons idea surfaced in 1997, students were "very much against it," said David Edleson, dean of Cook Commons. There are still "very mixed feelings" about the commons, Edleson said, though "each year it gets better."

“One strength of the commons system is to live with some people for a long time,” he said. “Not necessarily with friends; that’s not the point. The point is [students become] more respectful and get to know each other well.”

“Students resent limitations on where they can live,” Edleson said. “Some students feel [the college is] small enough already.”

Eli Berman, a sophomore member of the Task Force for Commons and Student Life and a senator from Wonnacott Commons, said that “right now people see [the commons] as a separator, as the inability to live with friends.”

Berman disagreed with the assertion of some students that the commons over-compartmentalize the campus: “There’s no chain or boundary separating each commons,” he said.

The inequality of upperclass housing among the commons has been a source of frustration for students since the implementation of the system. “With students, the principle concern is housing,” Spears said.

Students in the unfinished commons have little desirable housing. “Right now, there’s nothing to look forwards to,” Spears said. In the past, students have changed commons on a yearly basis to get better housing.

Campofranco said the experience of students living in completed commons is not different from the experience of those living in uncompleted commons. “Facilities is only a piece of it,” he said. According to Campofranco, the oldest completed commons, Ross, has the highest percentage of people leaving it each year.

When the commons were not part of the room draw system, students switched commons annually for the best housing. That meant that some commons did not have enough beds after to accommodate first-years who wished to continue in the same commons. In Cook Commons, there were 170 first-years and only 12 spaces for rising sophomores.

The college has revised room draw several times to enable continuing membership in the commons. “The [old] room draw was defeating the purpose of continuity,” Campofranco said.

Goodwin said, “This is the first year where room draw has supported the commons.”

As it stands now, Middlebury has a multi-tiered room draw. First, students are assigned random numbers within their commons to choose single or double rooms. If students wish to leave their commons, they must wait for the all-campus room draw, which takes place after all the commons draws occur. The system is based on seniority. Students who switch commons pick at the end of their class.

Some rooms at Middlebury are reserved in groups as pseudo-suites for another round called Block Draw. In this round, each participant is assigned points. A student receives a point for every semester he has spent at Middlebury and a point for every semester he has spent in his current commons. This system rewards students based on seniority and continuing membership of a commons.

Within each commons system are academic interest and substance-free housing. When a student moves into a language house, he changes his commons

affiliation.

According to Kelly Bevere, residential systems coordinator, “More times than not, [juniors returning from abroad] do have to live in a different commons.” These students are not penalized and receive the points they would have received in their own commons.

Spears said there is “de facto segregation” by class year, even within the commons. He said that study abroad and separate first-year housing account for students living primarily with their classes in the commons.

Some students “dislike [fewer] residential choices,” Spears said. On the flip side, there has been an increase in student demand to stay within the same commons from year to year. Edleson also said there are 50 percent fewer students who want to live off-campus for 2005-06. Only 65 students applied.

Spears said the college is reassessing its plan to proceed with building and may consider completing the housing across campus before building additional dining halls. This will save the college money, as well, as dining is the most “economically challenging” part of the commons system. The continuing costs of operating multiple facilities is greater than the cost of operating the existing three, Spears said.

Students may greet that development favorably, as the decentralization of the dining facility has been the most contentious issue for them as of late. “People don’t want to be separated that much,” Goodwin said. “It’s our one time together.”

Edleson agreed that communal spaces were important but questioned whether dining halls were ultimately worth the cost. As an alternative, he suggested that the commons build open spaces to hold catered dinners once a week for commons residents.

Berman strongly supported the dining component of the commons system. “If you’re alone for dinner one night, you should be able to go to your commons dining hall and it’s not weird to sit down with anyone there.” He envisioned the dining hall as a community-building facility.

There is also a perception among the students that the commons have detracted from the faculty resources of the college. “If you really want to push something, do you want new buildings or do you want to increase salaries and hire more faculty?” asked Goodwin, who serves on the student committee charged with advising the board of trustees on tuition. The Special Initiatives Fund is a proposed system by which representatives from the commons and major student organizations like MCAB would meet to decide co-sponsorship. They would pool the commons’ current resources to give out money.

The problem now is that students can go to every commons to get co-sponsorship money. In addition to the communication gap, “[the commons] are not aware of how much they’ve given out. They’re not finance people,” Goodwin said.

Berman disagreed with the centralized funding pool. “Ideally, you would just go to your commons [for sponsorship],” he said.

Unlike MCAB, which brings in campus-wide events, “The commons’ focus is smaller,” Campofranco said.

The purpose of each commons council, which co-chairs like him run, is to allocate money to other students.

In his commons, Wonnacott, the commons distributes Wonnagrants to help pay students for community-based internships.

Campofranco said the atmosphere of the commons differed from the social houses, “[The commons have] more wholesome events.”

Berman hoped that the college would give more than 10,000to12,000 per year to each commons in the future, a level of funding that he believed was unacceptably low.

Most commons events are under-attended, Goodwin said.

According to Berman, Junior Counselors (JCs) take freshmen to events. But as students get older, they become “more concerned about housing,” he said.

Campofranco agreed: “The commons is more geared towards freshmen and sophomores. Older students are busy with work.” He said that because “upper-classmen are less involved,” they are critical of the commons “from an outside perspective.”

### **A.1.3 Looking Forward**

Though the current residential system has been in place for six years, it has been two years that the campus has been free of classes exposed to the previous residential system.

“Six years isn’t as much time as it would seem,” Edleson said.

The answer remains largely the same as when the system was introduced: Middlebury must continue to build upon its academic reputation and provide a comprehensive, seamless education.

Looking back, Spears said that the key to successful residential reform is to “get students involved early on.”

He stressed that reforms must be a “collaborative enterprise.”

“Often [student] reaction is against the process itself,” he said. “Change can seem revolutionary; issue the challenge in optimistic terms.”

## **A.2 Bowdoin**

The founding of Bowdoin College in 1794, one year after Williams, marked the beginning of a history similar to Williams’ own. Both liberal arts colleges were founded as Massachusetts schools, as Bowdoin’s home of Brunswick, Maine, was a part of the Commonwealth until 1820. Both adopted one-of-a-kind mascots: at Williams, the Purple Cow; at Bowdoin, the Polar Bear. And both continue to draw some of the best students in the country to their rural campuses while keeping enrollment at or below 2000.

But in terms of residential life, the colleges diverged decades ago. While Williams moved to ban fraternities in 1962, fraternities at Bowdoin were campus staples until 1997, when the trustees voted to ease them out and adopt a college house system in their place.

By that point in the late 1990s, less than a third of the student body pledged to join a fraternity, the number and size of which had decreased steadily over the years due to dwindling student interest and the financial burden of keeping the houses alive and well.

“People were beginning to wonder whether the institution of fraternities had outlasted their time at Bowdoin,” said Kim Pacelli, director of residential life and a member of the commission that recommended ending the frat system. “For the 70 percent of students who were left behind, we were finding that there wasn’t a very good sense of community.”

“They were dying a slow death,” said Williams Campus Life Coordinator (CLC) Matthew Boyd, Bowdoin ’01, who was part of the first class of students barred from pledging. “When I arrived the campus was divided,” he said.

According to the Commission on Residential Life’s February 1997 interim report, presented to the Bowdoin Board of Trustees that spring, just 29 percent of students said in exit surveys that they were “satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the sense of community on campus.”

A separate student-run survey revealed that 19 percent felt “connected to Bowdoin traditions.” Satisfaction with academics was significantly higher.

Commission reports dating back to 1983 noted the fragmentation prevalent across the Bowdoin campus. “Many students experience the campus as sets of small groups of people within which there are bonds of shared interest or friendship but with little connection across the boundaries of these small groups,” the interim report stated.

For more than a century, commission members said, Bowdoin had deferred social and residential responsibility to fraternities without in return offering resources or support, resulting in a system that teetered on its last legs.

In an attempt to recreate the social vibrancy of fraternities’ halcyon days, members of the commission advocated the launch of a system that would tie the college’s six first-year dormitories to affiliated social houses, offering upperclassman members of the houses the opportunity to live in the refurbished equivalent of the Williams row house and take on leadership positions as planners of social life. Affiliations last all four years, but stem directly from geographic arrangements only during students’ first year on campus.

“The great thing about the system is that you can either take it or leave it,” Pacelli said. “But everyone has the option to participate.”

Not all students gravitate toward their affiliate house. Nicole Melas, a sophomore from Los Angeles, said her perception of the houses was one of “sweat fest” all-campus parties crowded with first-years, not centers of community as envisioned by the commission and trustees. “It’s a random association,” Melas said. “The affiliation doesn’t have any strong tie; there’s not a common interest.”

Asked to describe student perception of the houses, Melas said, “On the whole, I don’t think that people view them favorably. Everyone has their own point of view on what they’re lacking.”

“The system is still very new,” said Pacelli, who added that she would like to “spark more upperclassman involvement.”

Dwindling interest in the houses as students leave freshman year behind has been an obstacle since the system's inception. House leadership often falls to sophomores, as half of Bowdoin's juniors spend time abroad and seniors prefer to live in co-op-like housing on the outskirts of campus. Each of the six houses is home to between 20 and 30 students, who are expected to take responsibility for planning and hosting social events that range from dinners with professors to all-campus Halloween bashes.

MacMillan House, of which Melas is an affiliate, is one of only two houses with senior presidents.

Bowdoin still has "issues with students getting disengaged," said Boyd, who was president of his house in 1998-99 as a sophomore and contributed to the writing of the College House System Constitution.

His subsequent progression through the housing system was a typical one: junior year in Coles Tower, a 16-story high-rise that bears resemblance to Greylock, and senior year in a smaller house that he compared to Poker Flats.

"Living in the house is key to involvement," said Kalyn Bickerman, a sophomore resident of MacMillan. "I think that's why the upperclassmen fall out of favor with it."

House character varies somewhat from year to year, depending on the students who apply to live there, though signature theme parties hosted by the houses tend to carry over from year to year.

Members of the lacrosse team dominate one house this year, Bickerman said, and were placed on probation early in the fall, making the house unavailable for campus-wide parties until just recently.

Social events within the houses may be open to all of campus or designed for affiliates alone. To better coordinate between the houses, an Inter-House Council consisting of the house presidents and programming chairs meets regularly to discuss ideas and plan for big weekends, such as homecoming.

The council's president, senior Seth Guiterman, is currently leading an effort to re-evaluate the house system with the help of a student survey.

"I lived in Baxter House for two years, and I want to make an everlasting effect on the system," Guiterman said earlier this month in *The Bowdoin Orient*.

"It's a matter of re-evaluating the current system and making it better," he said. "We're looking at the system as a whole, not on an individual house basis."

The system continues to evolve in more concrete ways as well. The residential life staff hopes to increase the number of houses to eight — less than the 12 originally envisioned in 1997, but a slight increase from the six now in place.

By the end of the summer there will be two new first-year dormitories on campus, part of an effort to place incoming students in doubles rather than triples, which have been the standard for decades.

Apart from house officers — each house selects a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, house historian and programming chairs — three additional structures of student governance and social planning exist. There is Bowdoin Student Government, the equivalent of College Council; the Campus Activities Board, which brings concerts and comedians to campus; and a system of proctors

and residential advisors selected by the college's residential life staff and paid a salary.

Social house residents also go through an application process, which includes a written application and group and individual interviews. Students apply in groups as large as eight and are expected to arrive on campus a week before classes start for an orientation that emphasizes teamwork.

"I'm not going to live here next year," said Bickerman, who applied as an individual. "But I think it was great for my sophomore year. You get really close to the people you're living with. What makes a great house is people who are willing to give up their time."

Pacelli had a word of advice for colleges looking to make changes to residential life: "Make sure you've got buy-in from lots of different people before you make the decision," she said, and "be flexible as the system evolves. We've stuck to the model and the ideals, but let students shape it."