

Report of the Committee on Undergraduate Life
28 February 2005

The Committee on Undergraduate Life (CUL) recommends that the College adopt and implement a new system of residential life, to be referred to in this report as The Williams House System. This recommendation is the result of a thorough examination of the current system of residential life at Williams, which was undertaken by the CUL in response to President Schapiro's challenge, issued in 2001, to "make this excellent place even better."

The Williams House System is designed to enhance the undergraduate experience by building upon the strengths, while overcoming many of the weaknesses, of the current system of residential life. An assessment of those strengths and weaknesses is thus a prerequisite to understanding the specific features of the proposed House System, and the ways in which those features can be expected to contribute to the quality of student life. The first section of this report prepares the ground for such an assessment by providing a very brief history of residential life at Williams, which highlights the defining features of the current system in contrast to those of its predecessors. The second section assesses the current system, the third describes the residential life goals and expectations identified by the CUL, and the fourth presents the proposed Williams House System. The final section explains the process by which the CUL has developed this recommendation since first beginning its examination of residential life more than four years ago.

I. Residential Life at Williams: A Brief History

The current residential system, which has been in place for approximately 12 years, is the product of more than 200 years of evolution characterized by what Stephen Jay Gould described as "punctuated equilibrium": long periods of gradual and relatively insignificant change have been interrupted occasionally by moments of more dramatic transformation. These moments define the most important eras in the history of undergraduate life at Williams, of which there have been four in the last century.

1) The Fraternity Era (1800s-1960s)

Most students belonged to fraternities, where they lived, ate, and socialized with their fellow members.

Reason for Transition: In the early 1960s, fraternities were deemed incompatible with the mission of Williams College and, in the face of significant student opposition, abolished.

2) The Strong House Era (1960s-1980)

The exclusive fraternity system was replaced by an all-inclusive residential system. At the end of freshman year, every student (together with a small group of friends) was assigned to a house, where he or she (now there were women) lived and ate with fellow members from sophomore year through graduation.

Reason for Transition: In the early 1980s, operating so many kitchens was deemed incompatible with the financial health of Williams College.

3) The Weak House Era (1981-1992)

The system of house affiliation remained the same (at the end of freshman year small groups were assigned to houses in which they lived until graduation), but students now ate in large dining halls, which fed people from many different houses.

Reason for Transition: In the early 1990s, increasing numbers of students grew dissatisfied with living for 3 years in the houses that have less desirable physical space. In 1992-93 this was addressed by instituting, for the first time in the history of the college, an all-campus room draw. Intended as a modification to the house system, the all-campus room draw accidentally put an end to the long history of residential affiliation at Williams.

4) The Free Agent Era (1993-present)

With the exception of first-years (who continue to be assigned to entries), all other students form small groups, and then pick blocks of rooms anywhere on campus, based on a lottery system that gives priority to seniors, then juniors, and finally sophomores. Students repeat this process each year until they graduate.

It is worth noting that of these three major transitions in the last 45 years, only the first, which resulted in the abolition of the fraternities, was driven by a deliberate attempt to think through and implement the form of residential life most appropriate for a liberal arts college. The other two transitions were precipitated by the need to solve genuine problems (one financial, and one administrative), but had the unintended consequence of killing off residential affiliation. It was never decided that residential affiliation was no longer appropriate for Williams, or that there was a form of residential life better suited to the College and its students, but the introduction of the all-campus room draw made affiliation instantaneously meaningless, because students no longer lived in the same building, with the same collection of people, for more than a single year. The death of the old house system was thus thoroughly incidental, and the free agent era of today is the result of blind evolution rather than careful and deliberate design.

II. The Free Agent System: Strengths and Weaknesses

The all-campus room draw has successfully solved a genuine problem with the house system that preceded it: too many students were unhappy about living for 3 consecutive years in spaces they considered undesirable. Under the free agent system, no student has to suffer this experience. Sophomores have the fewest options when it is their turn to choose rooms, and are therefore the most likely to live in the areas deemed least desirable by the seniors and juniors who pick ahead of them. But all students are assured that after sophomore year their lottery position will improve, and that as seniors they will enjoy the most desirable housing Williams has to offer.

Students understandably place a great value on having more choices available to them than they did under the house system, and they also seem to consider it fundamentally fair that desirable living space is a perk associated with seniority. The proposed Williams House System is careful to preserve these improvements.

The most regrettable (and ironic) consequence of the free agent system is that increased choice has diminished student autonomy, which has traditionally been one of the most cherished values at Williams. Social life is now significantly less likely to be generated locally, or from the ground up, than was the case under the house system. This is not because current Williams students are inherently less enterprising or friendly than their predecessors, but rather because the free agent system gives them a smaller stake in their local communities (which have become dormitory buildings filled with individuals and small groups, rather than houses filled with

members), and a weaker incentive to get to know their neighbors (who are redistributed across campus every 9 months, rather than affiliated with each other for 3 years). Indeed, students frequently complain that they barely know the residents of their dorms outside of their own suites.

Partly in response to this situation, the CUL recommended in 2002 the creation of the Office of Campus Life, and with it the new positions of Director of Campus Life, Campus Life Coordinator (CLC), and Housing Coordinator (HC), all with the intention of providing additional resources to stimulate and facilitate the social life of the students. The HCs (current students) and CLCs (recent college graduates) began their work in the fall of 2002, and have embraced their roles enthusiastically and creatively, but they must struggle against the atomizing tendency of the free agent system, which makes it a challenge simply to get the collection of small groups sharing a building interested in doing things with each other. Consequently, social life at Williams has become increasingly dependent upon the central planning of All Campus Entertainment (ACE), an organization created by students in 2002 in response to persistent dissatisfaction with the available social options. ACE is well-funded, and works hard to plan quality events, but in virtue of the group's mission the events it sponsors tend to be larger, more homogenous, and less frequent than was the case under the house system. Dissatisfaction with ACE is widespread, especially among juniors and seniors, who tend to avoid its events in favor of socializing with their small groups of friends or teammates, either in their suites or off-campus. But students have difficulty imagining an alternative to ACE (despite the fact that it is only 3 years old), since it is currently responsible for organizing so much of the social life on campus.

A second common student complaint is that the sophomore experience leaves something to be desired. No longer first-years (who have a ready-made entry affiliation) and not yet juniors (who have chosen a major, and may be serving as JAs or spending time abroad) or seniors (who are seniors), sophomores often feel a bit at sea, lacking a significant source of attachment and interaction outside of those provided by their small groups of friends or their extracurricular activities. For many, the defining experience of sophomore year is the fact that they have lived in Mission Park with 300 other sophomores.

Third and finally, the all-campus room draw is highly stressful (even painful) for many students, and in its initial form quickly led to various kinds of residential segregation on campus (by class-year, by gender, by ethnicity, and by athletic participation). In response, the CUL recommended in 2002 the introduction of certain constraints on the room-draw process (most notably, limiting groups to a maximum of 4 students, and "gender capping" dorms, so that no more than 60% of the students in any residence may be of the same gender). These constraints are widely unpopular, sometimes on insufficient grounds ("Why should I have to live near people I

don't know?"), but sometimes for the quite justifiable reason that they often lead to breaking up groups of friends that have already been whittled down to 4 (for example, it is fairly common for a group of 4 people to pick into a 6- or 7-room suite, leaving 2 or 3 free rooms, which means that later in the lottery another group of 4 will have to split up to fill these spaces). Such constraints have achieved their intended goal of greater diversity in many dorms, although they have not been able to affect the distribution of students according to class-year.¹ It might be possible to achieve further diversification by designing more constraints (e.g., class-year caps on individual houses that would function like the existing gender caps), but these would be highly unpopular: students often disparage such techniques as "social engineering," which they consider both undesirable and ineffective. This critique is correct in at least one important respect: increased residential diversity (which is essential to the College's mission of giving all of its students the opportunity to encounter and learn from the incredible peer-group available to them at Williams), is not by itself an effective response to the fundamental problem of giving the well-mixed people any greater incentive than they currently have to get to know and interact with their neighbors in meaningful ways (and thus to take full advantage of the opportunity that Williams is committed to providing).

The impact of the transition from the old house system to the free agent era might be summarized by drawing an analogy to Franklin Roosevelt's characterization of social security as the "third leg" of a three-legged stool, designed to work in conjunction with private savings and a private pension to support people adequately in old age. The accidental dismantling of the house system pulled one important leg out from under student life at Williams, which not surprisingly has put undue strain on the other two (entries and extracurricular groups). In particular, extracurricular groups have had to fill the void, which has produced a more fragmented social life (one in which events not hosted by ACE are more likely to be thrown exclusively by and for members of particular teams or clubs of various kinds), and in turn has furthered the need for some of the unpopular room draw constraints (to keep these tightly knit groups from "taking over" houses). This transition, as noted above, has given students more choices with respect to where they live, and guarantees that no one lives in the least desirable housing for three years, but these benefits have come at a significant cost.

III. Residential Life: Goals and Expectations

¹ Appendix 1 contains four graphs that show the degree of residential diversity in recent years according to class-year, gender, ethnicity, and athletic participation.

The primary goal of the Williams House System is the creation of an environment in which upperclass houses are not merely places to live, but are genuine and lively communities to which students feel a real attachment. The intention is not to replace other forms of attachment that are, and should remain, extremely important at Williams (including those based on class-year, entries, and extracurricular groups). Rather, the goal is to supplement these attachments in a way that achieves what they are having difficulty achieving on their own in the absence of a house system. The creation of a residential affiliation that enables the emergence of house spirit — by encouraging students to think of themselves as members of a community, and so to participate with each other in a wide variety of activities and events — is thus intended to overcome three of the weaknesses of the free agent system, by fostering increased student autonomy, true residential integration, and an improved sophomore year experience. It is also important to achieve all of this while maintaining students' ability to live with their closest friends, make choices within the system, and look forward to living in the highest quality housing during their senior year.

The development of meaningful residential communities is anticipated to be especially beneficial for students whose extracurricular ties are not overly strong, but long experience with the old house system at Williams supports the belief that such communities will also provide an important form of affiliation even for those whose extracurricular attachments run deep. The expectation is that affiliation with a meaningful residential community will enable the flourishing of many social activities, generated at the local level, but with campus-wide impacts: a greater number and wider variety of small- and medium-sized parties (hosted by houses, but open to all students); greater enthusiasm for intramural sports (with teams representing houses rather than, as is typical under the free agent system, representing varsity sports teams that are “out of season”); reinvigorated and newly developed traditions at Homecoming, Winter Carnival, and Spring Fling; increased student-faculty interaction; enhanced support for cultural events and community service projects; and whatever else the current and future students of Williams College might imagine.

House affiliation and spirit can also be expected to foster true residential integration. When students are members of a house, instead of merely occupants of a building, they know that their fellow residents will be a part of their lives for several years. This knowledge gives students additional incentive to meet and interact with the people who live around them, and thus increases the chances that they will discover surprising commonalities, cultivate new interests, and form serendipitous friendships.

Genuine residential integration would create important opportunities for all students, but would be especially beneficial for rising sophomores. Under the old house system, sophomores actually had a desirable status, in virtue of contributing new energy and personalities to the social

mix of their houses. When groups were formed and assigned to houses (in the second semester of the first year), rising sophomores were welcomed as new members with Spring Fling parties and other activities, and often enjoyed more or less formal “big brother/big sister” programs that matched them with upperclassmen in the house. The timing of this was quite effective, for just at the moment when many first years were growing ready to stretch their wings beyond their entries they were welcomed into an existing social community and immediately treated as members. This made it an exciting and rewarding time for first years and upperclassmen alike, and ensured that sophomores knew and could develop important relationships with the juniors and seniors in their houses.

The goal of the Williams House System might be characterized as seeking to combine the best aspects of the old house era with the best aspects of the current free agent era. The rekindling of genuine and spirited upperclass houses is essential not only to the enhancement of the undergraduate experience, but also to the educational mission of this residential college. At the same time, students understandably value their ability to live with close friends, to have choices within the residential system, and to anticipate living in high quality housing as seniors. The Williams House System recognizes and aims to secure all of these virtues.

IV. The Williams House System

The features of the proposed Williams House System have been developed as carefully as possible in an attempt to achieve the best possible balance between the many goals and considerations that are important to residential life and the total undergraduate experience at the College. The experience of the CUL suggests that the modification of any single aspect of the system has important ramifications for the whole, and we therefore strongly recommend the adoption of the Williams House System in its entirety, as described below. If particular changes are deemed necessary, we urge that these be made in consultation with the CUL, in order to ensure that the effects on the whole are fully considered, and that corresponding adjustments to other aspects of the system may be made if necessary.

1. The Houses

The Williams House System groups the residential buildings on campus (excepting entries and co-ops) into five clusters, each of which has a House as its physical and social center. The five Houses, which have been selected for their excellent social spaces, character, and rooms for

seniors, are: Currier, Dodd, Tyler, Spencer, and Wood. Each House has an average of 275 members.²

The number and composition of the clusters have been chosen so that the House communities are: large enough to provide a critical mass of people and energy to support a wide variety of activities, and to give members meaningful choice of suitemates and rooms; small enough to enable students to develop relationships with significant numbers of their fellow members; geographically unified; situated in close proximity to a common dining hall; a mix of sophomores, juniors, and seniors, many of whom will be living in residential buildings that integrate the class years; reasonably equitable in terms of the physical quality of their housing stock.

Given the geography of the Williams campus, and the tremendous variety of the available housing, the five proposed Houses achieve all of these goals to a remarkable degree. Several specific changes and improvements to existing residential buildings, however, would enhance both the equity and unity of the Houses, and are therefore strongly recommended. Tyler House needs additional quality housing for seniors, which could be achieved by some combination of converting existing doubles to singles (in either Tyler itself, or in Thompson), renovating Tyler Annex, or adding portions of Poker Flats to this House. Spencer House needs approximately 10 additional senior singles, which could be created from existing doubles in Spencer, Brooks, or West. Finally, Dodd House needs the addition of Goodrich, Parsons, and Sewall (which are currently co-ops) in order to offer enough quality senior housing in its geographic area. In order to avoid the loss of co-op beds, we recommend that Chadbourne and Woodbridge be converted from regular housing. Additional renovation priorities may be identified by the student survey currently being conducted by College Council, and the CUL recommends that careful attention and adequate funding be devoted to these needs, since House equity will be extremely important to the short- and long-term success of the Williams House System.

Co-ops are deliberately not incorporated as physical components of the Houses. Co-op living is extremely popular, and it is important that every senior have the same probability of success in the co-op lottery. It is also important, however, that seniors living in co-ops have natural incentives to continue participating in House life and events. It is therefore recommended that groups wishing to enter the co-op lottery be formed of students who share the same House membership, but that these groups have the opportunity to choose from among any of the available co-ops.

² Appendix 2 contains a spreadsheet that shows which residential buildings belong to each House, and how many beds they contain.

2. House Membership and Social Affiliation

All sophomores, juniors, and seniors will be members of a House. First-year students will, through their entries, have a social affiliation with a House.³ These affiliations will connect entries to each other (four or five distinct entries will share the same House affiliation) and will offer first-year students who have the need or desire to meet more upperclass students the opportunity to do so. The CUL gave serious consideration to making first-year students full members of Houses, which works extremely well at several peer schools, but ultimately concluded that the entry tradition is so important and successful at Williams that it should be left largely as it is. At the same time, it must be recognized that the entry system does not work equally well for all students, and that the students for whom it does not work, and their JAs, would benefit greatly from there being easily available resources for peer support and mentoring, which the House affiliation will provide. This affiliation will also provide a variety of social opportunities for all first-year students, which they may participate in to whatever degree they choose.

In the spring semester of the first year, students will form groups of friends, up to a maximum size of 6. Groups of any size in which all the students share the same social affiliation may choose to become members of that House. Groups of 4 or 5 students who share a social affiliation may choose to become members of that House with one additional first-year who has a different affiliation. All other groups will be randomly assigned a House membership.

The opportunity to convert the first-year social affiliation into House membership and, in some cases, to “pull in” a friend who has a different affiliation, ensures that students can build upon meaningful relationships that they have begun to establish. It also ensures that individuals who have yet to find a close group of friends in the first year can choose to enter a House with which they already have some degree of familiarity and connection. The random assignment of all other House memberships, and the restrictions on the “pull in” provision, are important to prevent the reemergence of excessive residential stratification along predictable lines. It is expected that Houses will develop distinct personalities over time, which is to be welcomed, but it is important that these personalities not devolve into “theme housing,” and the random assignment of House memberships will mitigate this tendency.

³ Appendix 3 contains a spreadsheet that shows which entries are affiliated with each House, and how many beds each entry contains. The variation in the numbers of first-years affiliated with each House corresponds to the variation in the number of upperclass members.

The moment at which students receive their House memberships is an important one, and should be recognized as such. Houses will be encouraged to welcome their new members, and it is hoped that they will each develop their own distinctive traditions to mark and celebrate the inclusion of the rising sophomores.

After the House memberships of rising sophomores have been determined, each House will have its own room draw. These room draws will be conducted on the basis of seniority, ensuring that seniors continue to live in the best housing on campus. The construction of the clusters will also ensure, however, that significant numbers of sophomores and juniors will live in the same buildings together. Inter-class mixing will be further encouraged by attempting to design these room draws so that there is no penalty, and perhaps even an incentive, for forming suites that include members of more than one class year.

3. Transfer Provision

Students may form groups of friends (from any class year) up to a maximum size of 3, and apply to receive a House membership together.

This provision recognizes the importance of students being able to live with their closest friends, and the fact that not all students find those friends in their first year at Williams. The provision is limited to groups of 3 to encourage students to remain members in their original Houses, while also giving them the opportunity to transfer if it is truly important to them to do so. The new House membership will be randomly assigned to prevent the emergence of “theme housing.”

4. Dining, Intramural Competitions, and Big Weekends

The Williams House System is an opportunity for students to participate in and contribute to communities of their own making. The CUL does not wish to prescribe either the particular forms that such communities may take, or the particular events and activities in which the members of those communities may choose to take part. Experience suggests, however, that certain forms of interaction may be especially important to building and sustaining House spirit, and the CUL encourages the student body, future House leaders, and the Office of Campus Life to pay particular attention to the significance of dining, intramural competitions, and the three traditional “big weekends” at Williams (Homecoming, Winter Carnival, and Spring Fling).

The clusters of individual buildings that comprise each House have been carefully constructed with dining in mind. All members of each House will live in close proximity to the same dining hall, and will therefore be likely to eat with fellow House members on a regular basis as a matter of course. Such ordinary dining should be supplemented, however, by “special occasions” that bring House members together for meals that are distinctive in virtue of the food, the venue, the attire, or the invited company. Houses are encouraged to imagine their own special dining traditions, and to work with the Office of Campus Life and Dining Services to make these successful.

The House System also offers the opportunity to reinvigorate the intramural competition that once thrived at Williams, and which can serve both to celebrate and reinforce students’ attachment to their residential communities. Such competition can include athletics (from basketball to innertube water polo), but it could also include bridge, chess, debate, public speaking, and many of the other activities that Williams students enjoy. Consideration might even be given to the awarding of an annual House Cup, in the interest of stimulating friendly House rivalry. Houses are encouraged to work creatively with the Office of Campus Life and the Athletic Department to develop intramural traditions that have broad appeal.

Finally, the Williams House System is well suited to enhancing the existing traditions at Homecoming, Winter Carnival, and Spring Fling. Houses could host special meals and parties on any or all of these occasions. Houses could also sponsor tailgating at Homecoming (and perhaps at Amherst, when the football game is away), snow sculpture contests at Winter Carnival, and Welcome-to-the-House events for rising sophomores at Spring Fling. These suggestions represent only a few of the many possible ways in which the House System and the Big Weekends could complement each other, and again the CUL encourages the founding members of the Houses to initiate events and traditions that students will enjoy for many years to come.

5. Faculty Affiliation

The Williams House System offers an exciting opportunity for enhancing student-faculty interaction outside the classroom. Under the old house system at Williams, faculty regularly dined as guests of the students, and the three-year membership of students in their houses enabled the development of long-term and meaningful relationships with the houses’ faculty associates.

The CUL recommends that all faculty be given a House affiliation. This is intended as an opportunity, not a burden. Faculty are not to incur any additional obligations, but rather the chance, should they choose to take it, to enjoy more meaningful interaction with students outside

the classroom. Such interaction could take many forms, including but not limited to sharing meals, playing bridge, chess, or intramural sports, attending concerts, lectures, or films, and participating in community service projects.

The CUL also recommends investigating the possibility of linking first-year advising to House affiliation. Again, this would impose no additional burden on the faculty, but would simply ensure that all faculty currently serving as first-year advisors would have a more substantial connection to their advisees, which might make the relationship more meaningful and the advising more successful. Some first-year advisors are not faculty, and the CUL recommends that these staff members also be given a House affiliation. House affiliation might also be considered for Deans, coaches, custodial staff, security, and any other staff who would like to participate in the Williams House System.

6. House Governance

The actualization of the full range of benefits that the Williams House System is capable of providing will depend upon good House governance. Such governance should be not only efficient and principled, but also actively supportive of all House members.

The ideal governing structure for each House should be thought through carefully by next year's CUL, with substantial student input. At this time the CUL believes that each House Council should have officers elected by the members of the House, as well as House Coordinators (who are also House members) appointed by the Office of Campus Life. These officers should include House members from each class-year, to encourage continuity of leadership and the development of institutional memory regarding what needs to be done and how to do it. House Councils might also include a faculty representative chosen from among the affiliated faculty. The CUL recommends recognizing such a faculty position as the equivalent of committee service, to enable interested faculty to devote genuine time and energy to the job.

7. Transition

The ideal transition would be as smooth as possible for the students of the free agent era, while also laying the groundwork for a successful launch of the Williams House System. These goals should both be given due consideration, but it should also be recognized that there may be some tension between them. Current students are accustomed to choosing rooms anywhere on campus, whereas the House System is predicated upon each House having roughly the same

distribution of seniors, juniors, and sophomores, and upon no House being dominated by a particular group or theme.

The smoothest possible transition for current students would allow them to participate in one final all-campus room draw, in which they would select not only a room but membership in the House to which that room belongs. This form of transition would give students the choices to which they are accustomed, and would also ensure that the areas of campus that presently have distinctive personalities would largely retain them at the outset of the new House System. Current residents of those areas would likely welcome the opportunity to preserve and pass on to future generations the existing traditions that they hold most dear. But this form of transition might be an impediment to the creation of five new Houses in which all incoming first-years and future students can have a reasonable expectation of feeling at home. It would also be likely to result in an uneven distribution of the class-years across the Houses, which would necessitate future shuffling of students from one House to another to ensure that all seniors in subsequent years are able to live in the highest quality housing. This latter problem might be prevented by means of a class-year cap on the final all-campus room draw, but such a mechanism would not address the issue of creating new Houses that have initial personalities bequeathed to them by the prevailing distribution of student groups at the end of the free agent era.

An alternative possibility for launching the Willams House System would allow current students to form groups of friends that would then be assigned a House membership at random. This procedure would have the advantage of ensuring that every House would be created with the appropriate class-year mix, and without a dominant group or theme. But it would likely be resented by many current students, and especially rising seniors, who expect to be able to decide where they will live. To the extent that such resentment diminished student enthusiasm for the new House System, it would impede a successful launch. This problem might be mitigated, if not eliminated, by allowing students to indicate the House in which they would *least* like to live, and then attempting to ensure that as few students as possible are assigned to their least favorite House. Although accounting for such preferences is not advisable in future years, since it would tend to encourage the development of “theme housing,” it might be a reasonable way to launch the House System properly while also giving consideration to the desires and expectations of current students.

The CUL recommends that the precise transition process be decided upon in the coming year, in consultation with College Council, the Office of Campus Life, and the Dean of the College. Whichever process is selected, it should be emphasized that the rising upperclassmen at the time of the transition will become the founding members of their new Houses, giving them an

opportunity about which they can rightfully be proud and excited. These students will have the chance to imagine and organize the events and traditions that will become important to the future identity of their Houses.

8. Timing

The Williams House System is expected to enhance the undergraduate experience at the College significantly, and therefore should be implemented as soon as is reasonably feasible. It is also important, however, that the implementation of a change of this magnitude be done carefully and well, and that students, faculty, and staff have time to prepare properly for the transition. The CUL therefore recommends that the Williams House System be adopted and announced in the spring of 2005, and implemented in the fall of 2006.

This schedule allows necessary modifications and renovations to existing housing stock to be identified in the coming academic year, and performed in the summer of 2006. It also allows the CUL and the students to spend next year working out the many practical details that must be decided upon before implementation, including the transition process, the House governance structure, the physical set-up of House common spaces, and the slate of kick-off events.

According to this schedule, the founding House members will be determined in the spring of 2006. It would therefore be possible, and advisable, to take the first steps toward implementation immediately following this determination. This could include inaugural social events (such as cook-outs, for example) at which all new members of the Houses could gather together for the first time. But it could also include election and selection of the first House Councils, so that these officers arrive in the fall of 2006 fully prepared to begin their work. Indeed, it would be valuable to have at least one officer from each House spend a significant part of the summer of 2006 in Williamstown, participating in the preparation and planning for the fall kick-off. To make this possible, this role should be treated as a paid summer position.

9. Future Considerations

The one certainty regarding the future is its unpredictability. The CUL has, over the past 4 years, drawn on all of the information and experience available to it, and on the wisdom of many current and former Williams students, faculty, and administrators, in an attempt to develop a residential system that will enhance the undergraduate experience at the College to the greatest possible degree. We are confident that the proposed Williams House System will deliver

significant benefits to the coming generations of students, but it will also produce consequences we have not anticipated. The CUL, the student body, and the College administration will thus need to continue, as they always have, evaluating and reevaluating residential life at Williams, in order to identify both the successes and the opportunities for further improvement.

At this point, the CUL recommends that after a full generation of students has passed through the Williams House System particular attention be paid to the following considerations:

- a) the percentage of students choosing to convert their first-year affiliation to House membership, the percentage of students choosing to transfer their House membership, and any discernable variation in these percentages across Houses (if significant variations in chosen memberships and transfers are discernable, this would suggest that steps need to be taken to improve the equity of the Houses; if a high percentage of students choose to convert their first-year affiliation to membership, and a low percentage of students transfer, then constraints on the transfer process might be loosened; conversely, if excessive movement between Houses threatens to undermine the sense of community that is at the heart of the system, then the transfer provision might be further restricted or eliminated)
- b) the impact of the provision allowing groups of 4 or 5 first-year students who share a social affiliation to “pull in” a friend who has a different affiliation to their House (if this provision increases the percentage of students choosing to convert their first-year affiliation to House membership, it might contribute positively to the sense of community the system is intended to foster; but if the provision catalyzes the development of “theme housing” it might need to be restricted or eliminated)
- c) the form of connection between first-year entries and upperclass Houses (this could be strengthened by ensuring that JAs are members of the House with which their first-years are affiliated, or even by making all first-years, through their entries, full House members; conversely, it could be weakened or even eliminated if future experience suggests the desirability of such steps)
- d) the role of dining in House life (which could be enhanced in a number of ways, including setting aside designated areas for House dining in the common dining halls, increasing the frequency of special House meals, some of which might be catered in the Houses themselves, and providing kitchen spaces and equipment in the Houses for students’ own use)

V. Process

The CUL began its examination of residential life in 2001. President Schapiro encouraged the CUL to “think big,” and to imagine and consider alternatives to the current system without excessive regard for potential financial, conceptual, or practical obstacles. The CUL responded by conducting a careful assessment of the existing state of affairs, and engaging in constructive brainstorming regarding what needed improving, and how those improvements might be achieved. This assessment was conducted over three semesters, and resulted in the CUL report issued in April 2002.⁴ The College enthusiastically adopted the CUL’s recommendation that it make significant practical changes (by creating and staffing the Office of Campus Life, and making a number of modifications to the room draw process), and undertake significant new financial commitments (not only to the Office of Campus Life, but also to the renovation of dorms, and to ACE and other student groups). The most significant conceptual aspect of the CUL proposal, however, was the recommendation that the College give serious consideration to the implementation of a house system, after the impacts of the other changes had begun to be understood. The house concept was the answer that the CUL proposed in 2002 to the question: how can we create residential communities with the self-sustaining energy necessary to reinvigorate a more thoroughly satisfying undergraduate life experience, without sacrificing the things that students prize most about the current system?

The CUL of 2002-03 continued to gather information and conducted a campus-wide Survey of Student Satisfaction with Residential Life. In 2003-04, the CUL examined the use of alcohol on campus, and the College’s policies regarding such use, and issued a Report on Alcohol Policy at Williams College. The consideration of residential life continued without interruption, however, under the aegis of the Residential Life Advisory Group, which was formed and led by Doug Bazuin, the newly appointed Director of Campus Life.

The CUL of 2004-05 thus inherited from its predecessors both a mandate to reconsider the implementation of a house system, and a wealth of information regarding the experience of students under the current system. We have spent the year gathering additional information, considering and evaluating a range of possible residential life alternatives, and attempting to educate the community about our work. Toward these ends, the CUL and its members have met with many individuals and groups, including:

⁴ Please see that Report for a more detailed account of the CUL’s procedures, goals, and recommendations in 2001 and 2002.

The Trustees of Williams College
 President of the College, Morton Owen Schapiro
 Dean of the College, Nancy Roseman
 former Director of Housing, Tom McEvoy
 College Council
 JA Advisory Board
 Minority Coalition
 House Coordinators
 Campus Life Coordinators
 Coordinating Committee for Campus Diversity Initiatives

We have also organized or participated in a number of events designed to enable all interested members of the community to share their thoughts and experiences with the CUL. These include:

- 2 large public forums hosted by the CUL
- CDU debate on the CUL proposal
- WCFM radio appearances
- House snacks hosted and paid for by the CUL
- Visits to first-year entries
- Electronic communication via the CUL website and email

The Williams Record has also been invited and encouraged to attend our meetings throughout the year (as it was in 2001-02), and has provided extensive, accurate, and fair coverage.

In closing, we would like to echo the words with which Morton Schapiro ended his address upon the occasion of his inauguration as the 16th President of Williams College: “This is a time for Williams to set a new standard of excellence in undergraduate education . . . Let history one day note that our community had the courage to seize the moment.”

Respectfully submitted,

Will Dudley, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chair
 Nirmal Deshpande '07, student
 Megan O'Malley '06, student
 Noah Smith-Drelich '07, student
 Karen Untereker '05, student
 Sandra Burton, Assistant Professor of Physical Education

Charles Dew, Ephraim Williams Professor of History

Eiko Maruko, Assistant Professor of History

Thomas Murtagh, Professor of Computer Science

Marcela Villada Peacock, Program Coordinator, Multicultural Center

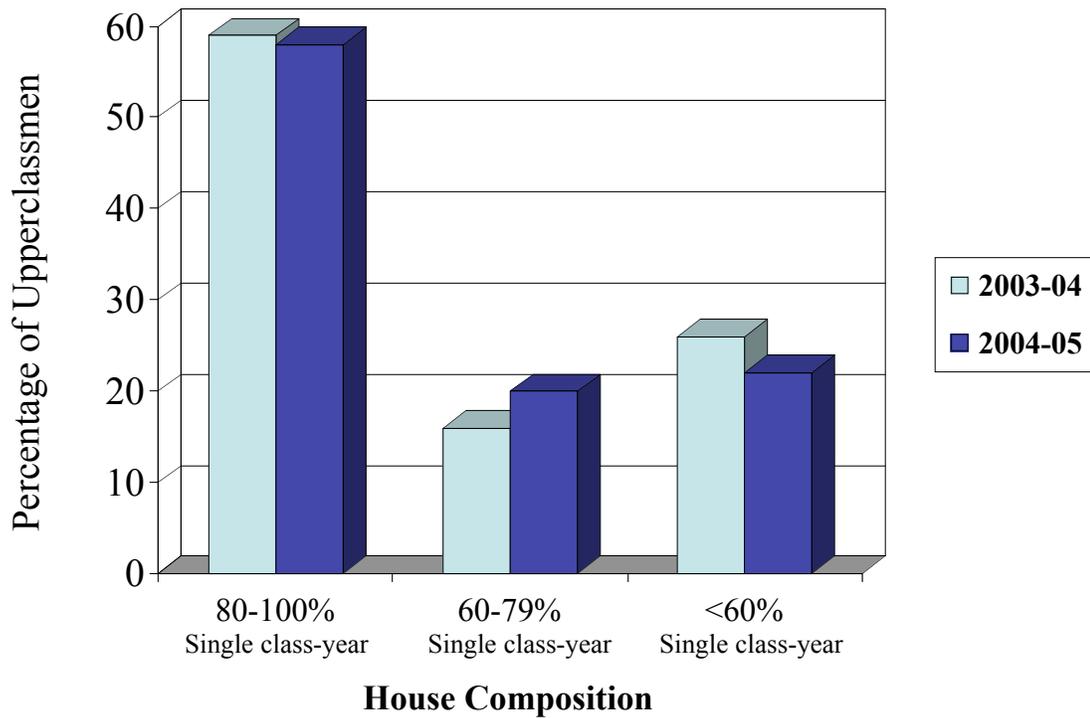
Doug Bazuin, Director of Campus Life, *ex officio*

Matthew Boyd, Campus Life Coordinator, *ex officio*

Appendix 1
Residential Diversity at Williams

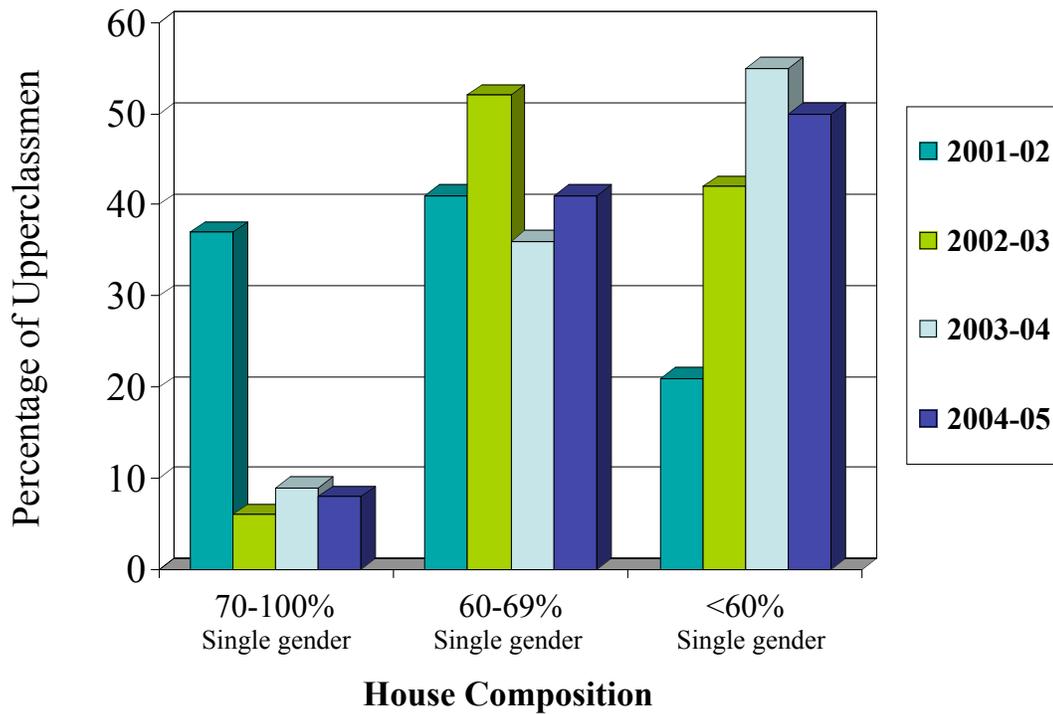
Housing Diversity by Class-Year

60% of upperclassmen currently live in houses in which more than 80% of the residents come from a single class-year. In fact, 45% of upperclassmen live in houses in which more than 90% of the residents come from a single class-year.



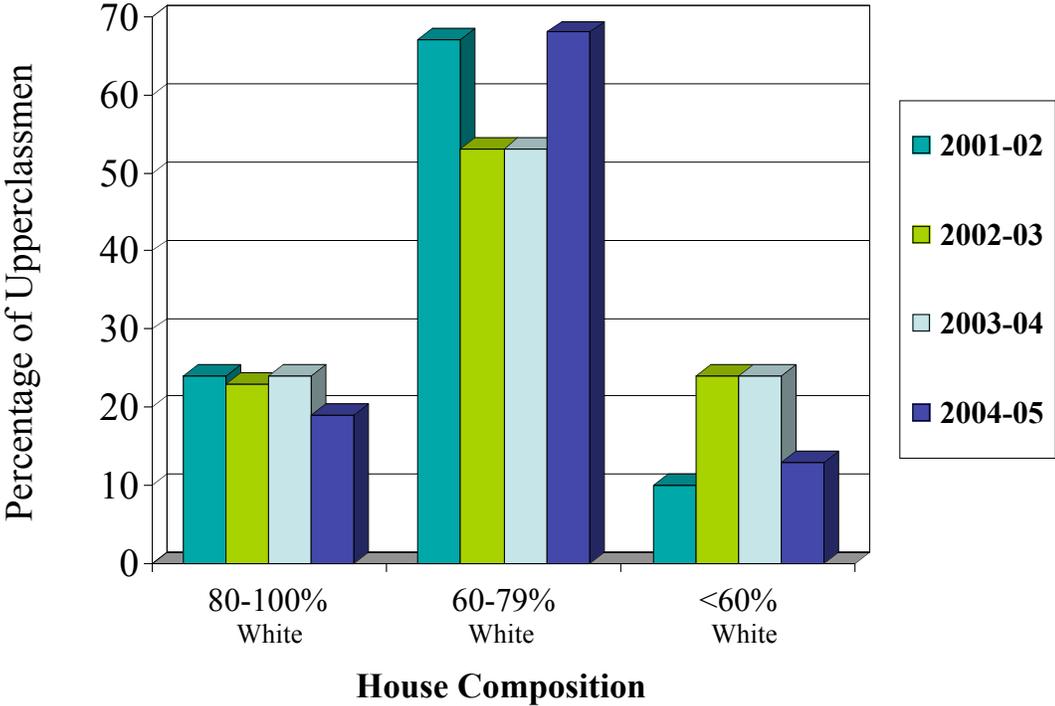
Housing Diversity by Gender

In 2001-02, 37% of upperclassmen lived in houses in which at least 70% of the residents were of a single gender. Since the introduction of the gender cap in 2002-03, fewer than 10% of upperclassmen live in houses with such a dramatic gender imbalance (and these are almost all co-ops).



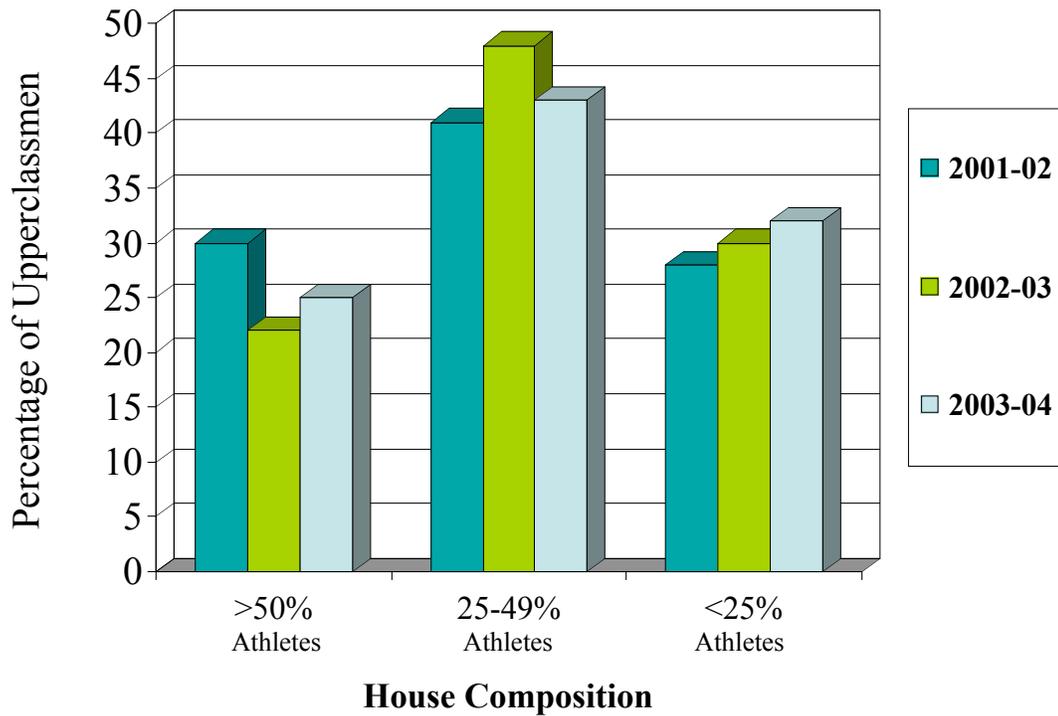
Housing Diversity by Ethnicity

If a house were a microcosm of the student body, approximately 70% of its residents would be white. In recent years roughly 60% of upperclassmen have lived in houses with such an ethnic composition. 20% of upperclassmen live in houses with significantly higher percentages of white residents, and 15% live in houses with significantly lower percentages of white residents.



Housing Diversity by Athletics

If a house were a microcosm of the student body, approximately 35% of its residents would be varsity athletes. Slightly more than 40% of upperclassmen live in houses with such an athletic composition. 25% of upperclassmen live in houses with significantly higher percentages of athletes, and 30% live in houses with significantly lower percentages of athletes.



Appendix 2
House Composition

Members Per Cluster	275
in Houses	240
in Co-Ops	22
off Campus	13

CLUSTER	BEDS	SINGLES	DOUBLES	"Senior Singles"
Currier	62	60	1	60
Fitch	44	28	8	28
Prospect	108	60	24	0
Total	214	148	33	88
Dodd	58	34	12	34
Hubbell	27	11	8	11
Dodd Annex	12	12	0	6
Goodrich	9	9	0	9
Parsons	8	6	1	6
Sewall	10	8	1	8
Dennett	90	90	0	0
Mills	66	66	0	0
Total	280	236	22	74
Tyler	39	19	10	19
Tyler Annex	40	40	0	40
Thompson	31	21	5	17
Armstrong	78	78	0	0
Pratt	72	72	0	0
Total	260	230	15	76
Spencer	21	17	2	17
West	47	43	2	43
Brooks	18	14	2	14
Gladden	89	83	3	0
Carter	70	70	0	0
Total	245	227	9	74
Wood	28	24	2	24
Perry	28	24	2	24
Garfield	37	31	3	31
Aqard	31	7	12	7
Bryant	62	62	0	0
Mark Hopkins	76	72	2	0
Total	262	220	21	86
HOUSE TOTAL	1261	1061	100	398
COOPs				
Chadbourne	13	11	1	11
Doughty	11	11	0	11
Lambert	8	8	0	8
Milham	9	9	0	9
Poker Flats	36	36	0	36
Rectory	8	8	0	8
Susie Hopkins	9	9	0	9
Woodbridge	16	10	3	10
Total	110	102	4	102
GRAND TOTAL	1371	1163	104	500

Note: This plan adds 10 new high-quality singles, and 2 new co-op beds.

These additions not only improve senior housing, but also serve the goals of cluster equity and geographic unity.

The singles are added by converting 10 doubles in Spencer-Brooks-West (this model assumes 4 in Brooks, and 3 in each of Spencer and West).

The net gain of co-op beds is achieved by making Chadbourne and Woodbridge into co-ops, while making Goodrich, Parsons, and Sewall regular senior housing in the Dodd cluster.

Note 2: Student feedback suggests that the Tyler cluster is not as attractive to seniors as the other clusters.

Possible remedies include: converting doubles to singles in Tyler and Thompson; renovating Tyler Annex; adding part of Poker Flats to the Tyler cluster.

Appendix 3
Entry Social Affiliations

Members Per Cluster	275
in Houses	240
in Co-Ops	22
off Campus	13

Entry Social Affiliations	BEDS
----------------------------------	-------------

Currier	
Fay 2	23
Morgan West	27
Sage B	22
Williams F	21
Total	93

Dodd	
Fay 1	29
Lehman East	20
Lehman West	20
Sage E	25
Williams D	27
Total	121

Spencer	
East 1	20
Morgan Mid-East	20
Morgan Mid-West	21
Sage F	21
Williams C	24
Total	106

Tyler	
East 3	19
Morgan East	33
Sage A	19
Sage D	23
Williams A	19
Total	113

Wood	
East 2	18
Fay 3	23
Sage C	20
Williams B	27
Williams E	25
Total	113

546

Note: The variation in the numbers of first-years affiliated with each House corresponds to the variation in the number of upperclass members.

This plan incorporates 3 important suggestions made by the JA Advisory Board:

- 1) No attempt is made to ensure that JAs are members of the House with which their first-years are affiliated. The JA selection process is entirely unaffected.
- 2) The affiliation of a each entry with a given House persists from year to year.
- 3) The two pairs of entries that currently function almost as single units (Lehman West and East; Morgan Mid-West and Mid-East) are affiliated with the same House.