

A Plan for Williams Housing: Diverse Fellowship via Large, Fixed-Size, Same-Year Groups¹

by David Kane '88

February, 2018

dave.kane@gmail.com

Executive Summary

There is a strong consensus within the Williams community about the main assumptions underlying housing policy: the importance of the freshmen entry/JA system, the success of co-op housing for seniors, the lack of funds for major new construction, and the desirability of both house *community* and *diversity*. Given those assumptions, the best housing policy would involve three major structures. First, a Student Housing Committee --- modeled on the Junior Advisor Selection Committee --- should run most aspects of the housing process. The more that students have responsibility for managing their own lives, the more they will learn from the process and the better the outcomes will be. Second, students should, as much as possible, live in houses with other members of their Williams class: sophomores in the Berkshire Quad; juniors in Greylock; seniors in row houses and co-ops. Third, non-senior rooming groups should be as large as possible and of fixed size, but subject to diversity constraints. For example, sophomore rooming groups would be any number less than 5 or exactly equal to 15, with restrictions on both gender balance and organization membership. Allowing students to group themselves has two main advantages: it creates genuine house community and it provides major incentives for large groups to “pick up” less popular students. The more that students sort themselves into houses and the more incentives they have for being both diverse and inclusive, the better the housing experience for everyone. The best first step would be to change the co-op process so that groups have to be large enough to fill a house.

¹Thanks to Director of Campus Life Doug Schiazza for providing the housing data. Many of these ideas first arose in conjunction with the 2005 opposition to Neighborhood Housing led by the student group Anchors Away. See their letter to the Williams Trustees for background: <http://goo.gl/Ig40PE>.

Assumptions

After two decades of turmoil, the outlines of a better housing system for Williams are fairly obvious. Begin with these assumptions, widely held in the College community:

1. The ideal Williams house, whether a small building like Milham or a large dorm like Carter, will feature a diverse group of students who know and like each other. Any house in which the students, without any interference from the Administration, spontaneously decide to create house t-shirts, compete in intramural soccer or field a Trivia team is a good house. Those activities, although fairly unimportant in and of themselves, indicate a cohesion and fellowship which will unavoidably generate numerous opportunities for learning and growth outside of the classroom.
2. The First Year entry system with Junior Advisers in the Freshmen Quad and Mission Park works well.
3. Co-op housing for seniors works well and should be expanded. There is something magical about the opportunity to live communally with your closest friends senior year. It is a good thing that Williams has exposed you to a wide diversity of Ephs in your first three years. Senior year is the time to enhance and solidify the very special bonds that, if you are lucky, will last a lifetime. Co-ops, and other senior-only housing, do that.
4. 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 freshman year is over, but the importance of being exposed to a diverse group of Ephs remains.
5. There shall be no theme or special interest housing. The College will not allow significant student self-segregation, especially segregation that crosses class lines and continues for more than one year in the same location.
6. It is hard to know ahead of time who your friends will be or where your most meaningful Eph connections will occur. It is just as likely as not that your relationships will be with people who came to Williams from very different backgrounds. But those relationships take time to develop and flower.
7. The physical infrastructure of Williams is a given. To the extent that there is money for housing, it should be spent on increasing the number of small senior houses and decreasing the number of doubles.
8. The spaces on campus — Dodd, Spencer, Tyler, Wood, 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 attending the party.
9. 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% and 10%.
10. Student choice in housing is a good thing. This is especially true when it comes to different rooming groups living near each other. It is better to allow the natural clustering of rooming groups with similar preferences about noise and parties than to force groups with conflicting tastes into close proximity.

Any of these assumptions might be challenged. For example, Smith integrates first years into upper class housing. Stanford has theme housing. Yale has a radically different housing infrastructure. Perhaps such systems would make Williams better. Yet the vast majority of Ephs, including current and past members of the Committee on Undergraduate Life, concur with almost all of our assumptions. The optimal housing arrangement for Williams follows quite naturally: *We should organize housing by class year and encourage the largest, most diverse pick groups possible.*

Student Housing Committee (SHC)

The Junior Advisor Selection Committee (JASC) is one of the most successful institutions at Williams precisely because it has significant responsibilities and because it is student-run --- no other elite school allows students full control over such an important selection process. Having student oversight of, and involvement in, room allocation would be a good thing, assuming that the same high standards of objectivity and thoroughness were met. Students on the committee would face difficult decisions with no clearly correct answers. The Administration would play a role, just as it does with the JASC, but, except in exceptional circumstances, the students would make the final call.

The exact structure of the SHC should be modeled, as closely as possible on the JASC. Membership would be open to all and involve self-nominations. The size would be large enough to represent all views but small enough to have productive meetings. The incoming co-presidents would be members of the SHC the previous year. Over time, procedures and traditions would develop, but nothing would prevent the SHC from changing the rules for the next year as conditions warranted. Student members would recuse themselves from any decisions directly affecting their own housing. For example, juniors on the SHC would not participate in (or, at least, vote on) any of the decisions about senior housing for the following year. Those decisions would, instead, be handled by the freshmen, sophomore and senior members of the SHC.

The Davis Conjecture

The Davis Conjecture²: The fundamental unit of social life at Williams should be the academic class-year, not the physical house.

Students from the same class who want to live together should be allowed and encouraged to do so. The more that students interact with a wide variety of their fellow Ephs, and the more years that this interaction is allowed to occur, the better off everyone will be.

Note that the Davis Conjecture asserts nothing negative about, say, the interaction between seniors and sophomores. Plenty of such cross-class interaction will continue to occur, especially

²Originated by former professor Diana Davis '07, an Anchors Away organizer.

within the student organizations that transcend academic class: sports teams, singing groups, literary publications, student government and so on. But the reality is that a given Eph will only have the opportunity to make X number of friends, have Y number of meaningful conversations, share Z meals in the dining hall during her four years at Williams.

Consider a sophomore sitting down to lunch in April with a senior that she has never met before, someone from a very different background. Such lunches are, potentially, a big part of the learning that goes on outside the classroom. The problem with this lunch is not so much the event itself, but the fact that this relationship will probably not develop since, in two months, the senior graduates. These two Ephs, from different backgrounds, don't have enough opportunity to interact. The real problem, then, is with *the lunch that did not happen*, the lunch between this sophomore and her fellow sophomore from that very different background. If the sophomore had lunch with a senior, she did not have lunch with her classmate, she did not start a relationship which could then develop over the next two years instead of being still-born over the next two months.

One of the goals of Williams housing policy is that these friendships and conversations represent a fair cross-section of Williams students. The more time that a student spends with others in her class, the more likely the most (stereotypically) unlikely of relationships are to develop. Senior/sophomore interaction is not a bad thing in itself. It is a bad thing because it takes the place of greater sophomore/sophomore interaction. There is more than enough diversity *within each Williams class* to expose every student to the full panoply of backgrounds and outlooks that the College brings together for the benefit of her education. Know your class and you will know Williams.

The Uible Lament

The Dudley Report³ provides an excellent description of the goal of housing policy at Williams.

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 . . .

The clearest, perhaps only, example in the history of Williams housing of "genuine and lively communities to which students feel a real attachment" were the fraternities of the 1950s.

³<http://goo.gl/aUUnDJ>

The Uible Lament⁴: The only way to create genuine and lively communities to which students feel a real attachment is to allow large groups of students to sort themselves into houses.

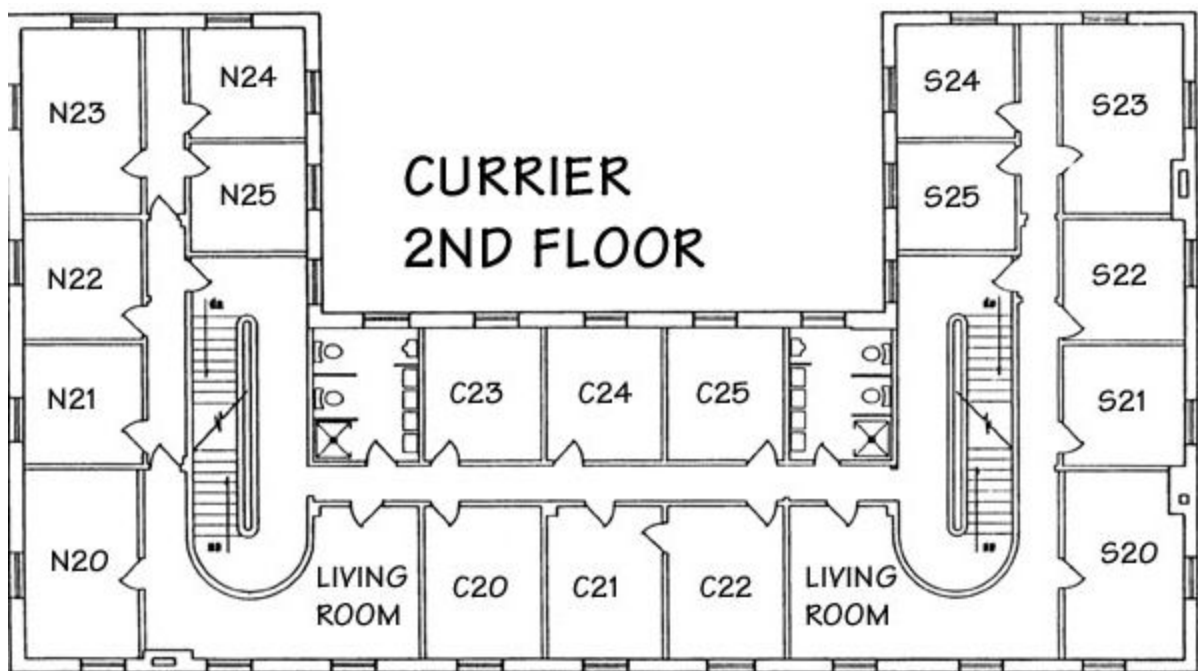
The easiest way to ensure that houses contain students who feel a real “attachment” to each other and, therefore, to the house which they share is to allow very large, but diverse, pick groups.

Consider a scenario in which rising sophomores are allowed to form pick groups of size 15 but with certain restrictions. First, the groups must be gender-balanced, either 8/7 or 7/8. Second, no more than 1/3 of the students in the group can participate in any single extra-curricular activity. It is fine to have five football players or BSU members or *Record* reporters or Springstreeters, but you can't have 6 or more from any category. Third, the groups must be exactly 15. Not 14 or 16. Students can still form groups of 4 or fewer, but, if they want to select with a larger group, they must create a group of 15.

The mechanism would probably involve (for each class year separately) a first round in which large groups were formed. Assume that 20 large groups apply for inclusion in the lottery. The Student Housing Committee (SHC) first confirms that each of the groups meet the criteria for inclusion in terms of gender balance, no more than 5 individuals from the same student organization and so on. The SHC would then “block off” 20 picks of 15 beds each for the use of these groups. All of the beds in a given pick would be in the same building, thereby guaranteeing that the students in the group would be living near to one another. Each pick would feature a collection of rooms that were, on average, slightly better than the average quality of sophomore rooms overall. (We want to encourage and reward students for creating large groups.)

⁴Named in honor of Frank Uible '57, former president of the DKE House. Frank is famous (on EphBlog) for reciting “Bring back . . .” whenever someone mentions the various ills of Williams social life. The ellipsis take the place of “fraternities.”

Consider the second floor of Currier:



The SHC could, for example, block off rooms C20 -- C25 and S20 -- S25 as being reserved for one of the 20 pick groups. (Nine of these rooms would be singles and three would be doubles, thereby providing 15 beds.) The SHC would be making these judgments anew each year, based on previous years' experiences with various choices and the number of large pick groups this year.

The second step would be a lottery for the 20 groups. The group with the highest pick would go first and so on. Since all 20 picks are of similar quality, groups will be somewhat indifferent about which pick they get. But, after the first few groups select, there will be every incentive for groups to *sort themselves into houses* on the basis of their affinity to the other large groups that have already selected into those houses. If most of the students in my group know and like (at least most of) the 15 students in the group that has already picked in to the second floor of Currier, then we will probably pick into Currier as well. The more people who you know and like in your house, the more fun that house will be.

The third step, after all the large groups have been assigned to houses, is a second stage lottery for students in groups of 4 or fewer, including large groups that have broken up. They would select rooms according to the lottery, with whatever gender caps or other restrictions were needed. They would have full information about the large (and small) groups that had picked before them and would, therefore, be able to minimize the conflicts between partiers and non-partiers, at least for those with lottery picks above the very bottom of the class.

The sorting of students by natural affinity occurs on three levels: Students have sorted

themselves into large groups, those large groups have sorted themselves into houses, and the small groups have sorted themselves based on the large and small groups that have picked before them. Even before September, the students scheduled to move into Currier will already know and like many of their future housemates. Moreover, because each housing group is diverse --- in terms of both gender and group memberships --- Currier itself will be as diverse as any first year dorm. If a large group with a low lottery number does not like any of the remaining picks, it would be permitted to “break up” into small groups, as if it had never created a large group in the first place.

The first advantage of large pick groups is that they increase the chances that a dorm will become a home, that students will feel a meaningful attachment to Currier, not because they care about those particular bricks, but because they care about the 14 other students in their pick group who live there. Not only would 2 or 3 large groups be able to, on their own, create a community, but those groups (and the smaller groups who picked after them) would have selected that particular house with knowledge of the other students who would be living there. Given that students move from house to house each year, *there is no way to create a house community unless you start with a large group of students who already know and like one another*. If the failure of Neighborhood Housing has taught us anything, it is that community among strangers does not come in a single year, no matter how many resources are devoted to the cause.

The second advantage of large pick groups (of fixed size) is that they increase the chances that students who have, for whatever reason, not developed a circle of close friends in the class to live with are *sought out by larger groups*. If your preferred group is 13, then you need to find 2 more students if you want to live together. (Otherwise, you have no choice but to split up into 4 groups, each with 4 or fewer students and no guarantee of ending up anywhere near each other.) The two students you find are *precisely those who most need to be found by someone*. Who will you pick? The short answer is: Whoever you can find. You need to seek out fellow students who are not already in a larger group, who are not close friends with three other students and, therefore, unwilling to split up their group of 4. You need to find students who have not, yet, found a home at Williams. How about the quiet kid in your entry? How about the loner in your physics class? How about the student who was cut from your sports team? You need to find someone, ideally someone that you know is nice and hope will fit in.

The students recruited for large groups will, finally, have found a place at Williams. Knowing how friendly Williams students are (especially the sorts of students who will want to live with a large group), we can be sure that these recruited students will be welcome at the lunch table and in the common room. They will become a part of the group because the group invited them in, because the group needed them. Of course, there will still be quiet kids in every dorm, loner students in every science class and athletes cut from every team. Those students are among those most likely to be dissatisfied with their Williams experience. But by providing incentives for other students to include them in a broader social circle, Williams does everything possible to end their isolation.

The third advantage of large pick groups is that it guarantees diversity in the least disruptive

fashion possible. Currier and Carter will be as diverse as Sage and Williams. And, better yet, the College will still be allowing students so much freedom in deciding who joins their rooming groups that the diversity requirement for large groups will chafe as little as any such requirement could.

Consider these observations⁵ from the Second Interim Report from the Neighborhood Review Committee:

Students underscored what the Committee found in its surveying: they want to live with their closest friends and want more freedom of choice. Many students also embrace the value of having demographic diversity within residences and hope that a system could be developed that would allow students full choice in whom they live with while also making sure that separate, homogeneous enclaves of students don't take over houses and dorms. However, if students had to choose between these two goals – choice and diversity within their residential settings – most would prefer to live with their closest friends.

The NRC hopes that we can develop a set of recommendations that will allow the College to get past having to choose between these two goals in upper-class residential housing.

The NRC is exactly correct that students care more about choice than they do about diversity but they are completely wrong to argue that Williams can't have both. The key is to allow students to create their own large, diverse housing groups. Diversity is guaranteed by construction but no student is prevented from living with any specific friend in his own class, assuming that that friend wants to live with him. The only “constraint” in this new world is the prohibition against large non-diverse groups. Yet the College has never allowed such groups!

Forcing large groups to have *exactly the same number* makes the process easier for the Student Housing Committee and maximizes the likelihood that isolated students with an interest in joining larger groups will be invited to do so. Yet the key insight of the Uible Lament is not dependent on identical sizes. The most important point is that the groups themselves are *large*. The SHC will, over time, experiment with different approaches and determine how best to strike a balance. As long as the groups are large enough, the resulting outcomes will be far superior --- in terms of enhancing housing community --- than what Williams has experienced over the last 50 years.

Intimidation and Disrespect

The NRC also notes that:

Students' residences need to be places free of intimidation and disrespect, and students should not have to shoulder the burden of justifying their right to feel safe in their houses and dorms. The NRC also recognizes that there is a difference between this right to feeling safe and the

⁵goo.gl/48EIqX

discomfort that, typically, is going to rise from time to time among students as they grapple with the challenges of living together

Many individuals also spoke of their frustrations in not even knowing their immediate neighbors. Students are not getting the full benefit of widening their friendship circles and, moreover, are living in environments that are not conducive to resolving low-level disputes in an informal manner.

The trick to minimizing these conflicts is to provide students with the tools and incentives to better sort themselves. The opponents of Neighborhood Housing sometimes forgot that “discomfort” was a common problem because the lottery process lent itself too easily to fractured housing. For example, a group of three juniors would pick three rooms in a four person Greylock suite. They were happy since they were all living together, but they may also have been somewhat concerned about who would be joining them. Then, later in the lottery, a single student would take that room, a student who was probably split up from his friends. What happens when his preferences for noise, music and parties conflicts with those of the other three?

Note that no one is at fault. The system has “worked.” Students have been allowed to live “wherever they want.” But, even with all that freedom, conflicts are (too) common precisely because there are too few incentives for students to sort themselves more efficiently. The more that students end up living with others who they are comfortable with --- Ephs with whom they have enough in common that they are able to work out whatever problems may arise --- the better off everyone will be. Consider an e-mail that was sent to a student after the 2010 senior co-op draw was complete.

Hello! So you guys have picked into Chadbourne: I just wanted to let you know about some of our ideas/intentions for the house, time and space wise. ...

What to expect next year on a regular basis, and some events: 1) Music, movies/TV, video games on weekdays and Sundays : I definitely envision after practice if people do not have work to do, that will may invite a few guys from the crew team to hang out with us for a few hours, in addition to just the house members doing these things. Expect visitors during the week. Of course not lasting long into the night. Minimal drinking. 2) Friday Nights: Light Drinking (We have practice in Sat. morning), Loud Music, More crew visitors than on weekday/Sunday 3) Saturday Nights: We party really hard on these nights. ...

The loudness, duration and scale of these parties may be EVEN MORE INTENSE than what I’ve experienced the last few years because of the fact that it is in a Co-Op. These social activities are very important to us and the Crew Team as it will establish good camaraderie amongst ourselves and the women’s team. Basically it is VERY IMPORTANT to us to make Chadbourne a terrific SOCIAL VENUE. This is intention of each of the 10 of us, and many of us will be quite uncompromising.

In spite of all this, we are very responsible and considerate people. I know that most of you do not party like we do and we really didn’t want a situation where the people filling the last spots

had different intentions. ... I just wanted to let you know what you are getting into and if you are very nervous at the prospect of living with us, then if is at all possible try to switch with similarly intentioned people.

Although this e-mail is somewhat direct, it is, more importantly, *honest*. These students intend to have a lot of parties. And that is OK! We want students at Williams to have a good time, to throw parties, to enjoy their college years. But we also want students who prefer to live quietly, to, at least, avoid close proximity to “INTENSE” parties, to have that option as well. The only means of achieving the optimal placement of students along the party/quiet dimension --- *by far the biggest source of student housing conflict* --- is to provide the incentive and the means for students to sort themselves.

Recommendations

The exact details should be left to the Student House Committee, but the broad outlines of an optimal housing policy are fairly obvious, given our initial assumptions, the Davis Conjecture and the Uible Lament. Create a Student Housing Committee. Organize the students by classes: sophomores in the Berkshire Quad, juniors in Greylock and seniors in the row houses and co-ops. Provide incentives for large, diverse pick groups of fixed size.

Sophomores

We want the sophomore class to live together, just as they sought to live together in Mission during the era of Free Agency. We are happy to let them have large pick groups and for those pick groups to congregate to some extent, especially if that congregation is along the party/quiet dimension. The Berkshire Quad, with 355 beds, is the natural (and historical) home for the sophomore class. We might try grouping the rest of the class together as well, perhaps in Morgan (102), West (54), Spencer (25) and Brooks (27) or perhaps in Dodd and its associated houses (153). The key is that sophomores live with other sophomores. The nice thing about having most of the class in 5 largish buildings is that it still leads to extensive student mixing. Students have already met scores of their classmates in Mission and the Freshmen Quad. Now they will meet scores more. In an ideal world, you would want every sophomore to know the name of every student in her house. They might not be best buddies, but if they had shared a meal at least once during the year, that would go some distance toward providing exposure to a wide cross-section of the Williams community.

My recommendation would be the Berkshire Quad (355), Morgan (102) and Tyler/Tyler Annex (78). But the exact houses chosen outside of the Berkshire Quad are not important. The key is that we have 8 or so houses, each with a critical mass of students. It is almost impossible for any individual house to be dominated by one group. Tyler/Tyler Annex might even naturally develop into an off-beat Odd Quad-type arrangement, providing a natural location for students less interested in the mainstream party scene that will almost certainly dominate the Berkshire Quad.

Juniors

We want the junior class to live together, just as they sought to live together in Greylock during the era of Free Agency. The same reasoning for sophomores applies here. Greylock, with 296 beds, is the solution. Given patterns in study abroad, there are approximately 400 juniors in residence at any point in time, but 52 of those are JAs. This means that 50 or so juniors will need to live elsewhere. The best options would be to turn one or two of the nearby row houses with decent party space into a juniors-only house, with students living there with the knowledge that it would be a center of class socializing. Wood (29) and Perry (25) are the obvious candidates.

The marvelous convenience of the Berkshire Quad and Greylock is that all the houses are large enough that — if classes are segregated and gender balance is kept roughly equal in each house — *diversity is inevitable, regardless of pick group size*. That is, it is highly unlikely that any Berkshire or Greylock house, under this regime, could develop into anything that looked like theme housing. Because most sorts of theme housing involve, by definition, gathering a specific subset of Ephs together, any successful attempt at theme housing requires cross-class housing. Prevent/discourage that and theme housing largely disappears even if Williams does not ban it *per se*.

Because rooms are of mostly uniform quality, housing in Greylock also minimizes the disruption caused by junior year abroad. Students can come and go without worrying too much about the quality of their rooms or the distance from their friends. The large pick group size might be different for juniors than for sophomores to account for the standard arrangement of Greylock suites. It might also make sense to have a pre-round of room selection that would allow a single very large group to pick into Wood. Imagine a group of 30 friends, men and women, members in all sorts of different groups in campus, choosing to live together in Wood with full knowledge that Wood was to become the center for socializing for the junior class. Nothing could be more conducive to the party scene at Williams than placing students who want to throw parties into a house suited to the task.

It would also be useful to allow students to form pick groups that took account of study abroad plans. (For this reason, junior room draw should occur as late in the spring as possible while senior and sophomore draw can happen much earlier.) A group of 5 students might pick a 4 room Greylock suite, having committed to having one student away in the fall and a different one in the spring. It might also be useful to favor groups of size 4 over groups of size 3 since we want Greylock suites to, as much as possible, contain students who want to live together. For example, all groups of size 4 should be allowed to pick before all smaller groups. Further details left as an exercise for the Student Housing Committee.

Seniors

Seniors want to live together, especially in small groups with their closest friends. Moreover, after three years of social engineering by Williams, it is time to let them make their own choices. If all the senior women on the soccer team want to live together in Susie Hopkins, then let them. If all the seniors in the Black Student Union want to live in Brooks for their last year at Williams,

then give them this freedom. Williams has done everything it can possibly do to convince these students that they should be close friends with Ephs from a variety of backgrounds and that their living arrangements should reflect that cross-section. If, for whatever reason, these students disagree, then let them be. Williams, as an institution, should not try to force seniors into being something that they are not. Instead, *we should focus on binding those seniors to each other, and to Williams, for the rest of their lives. Allow seniors to sort themselves into senior houses so as to minimize conflict and maximize bonding.*

Such freedom does not violate the restrictions (at least in spirit) against theme housing for two reasons. First, these are senior-only houses: no underclassmen allowed. Even if group X is living together in an unhelpful fashion (from the point of view of the College), their decision does not necessarily leak down to other classes. Almost all the sophomores and juniors in group X are still living in thoroughly integrated dorms in either the Berkshire Quad or Greylock. Second, even if Susie Hopkins is the soccer house one year, it will not be the soccer house next year. If every single year there is a house dominated by group X, then this is not so much a *problem* as a *signal* that Williams is doing something else wrong. If so, we are better off facing the problem squarely than averting our eyes via housing randomization.

One aspect of senior housing involves the social scene. Williams should do a better job of matching Ephs who like to throw parties with housing that makes throwing parties easy. Several houses (e.g., Dodd, Wood, Spencer, and others) make for great parties. Right now, we make no effort to ensure that the students living in those houses want to throw parties. We should reserve specific houses as “party houses,” places where the residents are expected and encouraged to throw parties.

Imagine a Williams in which 64 senior friends and acquaintances who both want to live together and enjoy throwing parties take over Dodd. Wouldn't that make for a dramatic improvement in the social life? Imagine the same for 60 friends in Spencer Court or 32 in Agard. The secret to a successful social scene is to empower those students who want to throw parties with the means of doing so. The senior housing process should go something like:

1. Treat all senior houses the same. There is no point in distinguishing between co-ops and non co-ops. Some senior houses have kitchens. Some do not. As long as seniors know the rules and regulations associated with each house, there is no problem, and no added expense to the school.
2. The Student Housing Committee would determine the best mechanism for assigning seniors to houses. Note that the process will be much more complex than that for sophomores and juniors because the senior housing stock is so much more diverse in terms of the number of beds grouped together. Carving out 15 beds from the second floor of Currier is easy. Arranging a process that fills everything from Dodd to Lambert is hard.
3. The process would probably aim to solicit “bids” from large groups in the first round. Groups of 50 or so might make a bid for most of Dodd or West. (It is unlikely, but not impossible that there would be more than one bid.) If there were no bids for Dodd or West as a whole, then these houses would be split into two or more parts, with each part accepting bids in the next round.

4. Garfield and Poker Flats might be handled in this round as well, depending on how things go with Dodd.
5. Once Dodd had been filled, there would be a second round in which groups of 25-30 would bid for mid-sized houses like Hubell, Spencer, Brooks, Thompson, Garfield and so on. Any houses that were not filled would be, like Dodd, split into parts and passed on to the next round. The hardest part of the process is organizing things so that groups of the same size have multiple choices. Over time, some doubles would become singles to make this easier.
6. Once all the mid-sized houses were filled. The third round would take care of all the small houses.
7. Throughout, houses would be filled with a group of students who had decided, among themselves, that they wanted to live together.
8. Once large groups had all been placed, the remaining spots would be filled by seniors who, for whatever reason, wanted to participate in the process either solo or with just a friend or two. Small groups are disadvantaged precisely because we want to provide incentives for the creation of large groups.

There will be a fair amount of turmoil associated with this process. It would not be easy to get a group of 50 students together. Dealing with friends abroad is time consuming. Feelings would be hurt as groups came together and split apart. But such is life. *Williams would, at a stoke, become the only college in the world at which almost all the seniors lived together in groups of their own choosing spread among a housing stock that, in its quality and variety, is second to none.*

Over time, the College could continue to convert other small buildings to senior housing, thereby moving to a situation in which every senior is guaranteed a single. If the College ever decided that the small amount of theme-lite housing were unacceptable, it would have a simple solution to the problem: Require senior housing groups to be “diverse enough,” just as with the sophomore/junior large pick groups. That is, the College would just not allow all the women soccer players to live together and with no one else. There would be no need to define this phrase ahead of time. Conversations between the Administration and the Student Housing Committee would make the standards fairly clear and, over the course of a few years, a common law-like understanding would naturally emerge.

First Steps

Moving from the current campus-wide lottery to this new system might be too much to attempt all at once. Better, probably, would be to take some simple steps in Years 1 and 2 before making the full leap. First, change the co-op process so that groups can only apply for houses which they fill precisely. Since Lambert has 8 beds, only groups of 8 are allowed to apply to Lambert. Make this process rolling and public: a group of 8 juniors can decide to apply to Lambert in October, 11 months before they might move in. Their application is public, meaning that other students now know that there is at least one group interested in Lambert. Other groups are, of course, free to apply as well, but the knowledge of previous applications may guide group formation to target other co-ops with fewer applicants. All applications are made public

once submitted. The drawing occurs in February for any co-op to which more than one group applied. Second, reserve the Berkshire Quad for sophomores. This is somewhat against the spirit of the campus wide lottery, but no worse in effect than the restriction on Mission being for first years. Moreover, it is an especially easy change to enforce. Third, prevent seniors from selecting Greylock. This would naturally make Greylock mostly juniors. Fourth, create the Student Housing Committee. During its first year, it would not have much to do, other than planning out the details of the larger changes scheduled for the following years.

Summary

The Davis Conjecture --- *The fundamental unit of social life at Williams should be the academic class-year, not the physical house* --- and the Uible Lament --- *The only way to create genuine and lively communities to which students feel a real attachment is to allow large groups of students to sort themselves into houses* --- lead to a system not-dissimilar from what Free Agency naturally evolved into, but it grounds that outcome in a coherent theory of why class-based interaction is better than house-based interaction and how to achieve community/diversity in a single house. If Eph A and Eph B, from very different backgrounds, meet and become friendly, we want to provide that friendship with years to flourish. If both are in the same class, this happens naturally. If they are in different classes, it may still happen, but not as often and not as thoroughly. Moreover, the more that students are bound to their classmates, the more likely they are to continue their connection to Williams for the rest of their lives. Post-Williams, almost everything works via the class. Stronger intra-class bonds lead to more alumni giving, greater reunion attendance and more volunteer efforts. Connecting seniors to each other connects them all to Williams. Require Williams students to live with their classmates in certain parts of campus and allow large but diverse pick groups and, without much further interference from the College, the resulting patterns will encourage the mixing of Williams students from all backgrounds while simultaneously minimizing the amount and intensity of student conflict.