



First Year Housing Report

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Summary:

Residence life is an essential part of the college experience for students at Bluffton University, especially because of the four year on campus housing requirement. As research shows, the first two years of a student's experience on campus is critical in the ability to influence student growth and retention. In the academic year of 2011-2012, the department of Residence Life at Bluffton University piloted a first-year floor for men and one for women. Bren-Dell Hall housed the floor of men and Ropp Addition housed the women. The students on these floors were placed randomly during room draw and housing assignments. Many other institutions of higher education have programs or residence halls with all first year students and Residence Life at Bluffton University sought to see how this would work for our campus.

Students on the Floor:

Students on the first year floors came from a variety of backgrounds and hometowns, and are studying a variety of majors, including education, music, accounting, youth ministry, biology, nutrition, social work, psychology, criminal justice, and environmental studies.

What services students were provided:

- First Year Seminars with other students on the floor
- Extra RA for support- 2 RAs for each of the two floors
- First year specific programming and community development activities

Results:

Students living on the two all first year floors on campus were asked a series of questions about their experiences on their floor. These questions were designed to gauge the benefits and also disadvantages of having an all first-year floor in our residence halls. 20 students total from both floors completed this survey in March of 2012.

Retention Rates from Fall 2011- Spring 2012

First-year floor of males in Bren-Dell	%
First-year floor of females in Ropp	%
Overall Bluffton University First-year cohort	%

As shown in the table above, the first-year floor retention rate was similar, but slightly lower than the overall retention rate for first-year students at Bluffton University.

GPA's for First- Year Students

First-year floor of males in Bren-Dell	%
First-year floor of females in Ropp	%
Overall Bluffton University First-year cohort	%

Enjoy attending Bluffton University

Overall, students on the first-year floors were very pleased with their overall experience at Bluffton, with 95% of the students who took the survey stating that they enjoyed attending Bluffton.

Effect of living on first year floor on Bluffton experience

Enhanced experience	57.9%
Hindered experience	5.3%
Neutral	36.8%

For the most part, living on a first year floor either enhanced or didn't affect students' experience at Bluffton.

Selecting a first-year floor

65% of students, if given a choice, would have selected to live on a first-year floor. 35% of students would not choose that option. If these students were given a chance to redo their first year, 84.2% would choose to live on a first year floor and 15.8% would choose to live on a mixed floor with upperclassman.

Retention for Fall 2012

Out of the 20 students who completed the survey, 85% will be returning to Bluffton in the fall.

Community

40% of the students believe that living on a first-year floor helped to strengthen their floor community. 35% are neutral on this, and 25% either disagree or strongly disagree that living on the floor helped strengthened the community.

Resident Advisors

57.8% agree or strongly agree that the RAs placed on those floors were great at helping them adjust to college life, 26.3% is neutral, and 15.8% disagree that the RAs were helpful to them as a first-year student.

Advantage over other students

Only 30% agree or strongly agree that living on a first-year floor gave them an advantage over other first-year students on campus. 30% disagree or strongly disagree, and 40% are neutral.

Recommendations for the future:

- All first year building
- 2 floors in one building with collaboration- 1 male, 1 female
- Allowing residents to choose to be on the all first year floor or if they would prefer a mixed floor
- Adding a faculty member as support
- Adding a learning in-hall component. Perhaps holding FYS in the residence hall.

Appendix:

Experiences so far at Bluffton:

- Positive one for sure!
- Great faculty, awesome students.
- Good community, but when living on all freshman floor some students are not treated equally when it comes to quiet hours.
- I love the environment and community feel.
- Trust friends and groups to be a part of is good for me, but there is some drama that goes with it on the floor some that I hate going through. I love the nature right by Ropp. I love having close relationships with the professors I have. I like the support I have academically and emotionally (Rae).
- I absolutely love Bluffton It was a bit challenging to get used to , not only living away from home but also the Mennonite perspective, but my RAs played a large role in helping me adjust and so have many other people here on campus!
- Dorm life is helping me become more independent and teaches me how to live with others.
- Bluffton is great. Everyone is very friendly and welcoming.
- Bluffton's community and university life is a very positive experience
- I love the community and have always liked Bluffton people. The science courses seem to be lacking proper instruction.
- I am completely in love with this school. I was going to transfer because the major I wanted isn't here, but I couldn't leave, so I just changed my major.
- Really there has been nothing negative about my experience so far. I love the community and all the professors

How has living on an all first year floor affected your experience at Bluffton?

- There were good things and bad ones. I'm glad I got to meet other people my age, but I relate a lot better with older people so I was kinda bummed when I found there was not possibility that my upper classman friends would be on my floor
- Some people were very loud all the time and it made it hard to study and do homework and sleep even with my door closed.
- It helps me get to know a lot of the girls in my class that can allow me to have lifelong relationships...potential good times for the future and after (class reunions and get togethers.)
- I think it is important to live by people that you have many classes with.
- Without proper examples set by upperclassman, my hall mates were, unfortunately, quite disrespectful to the hall, bathroom, and kitchen. Very few people on my floor treat the building and property with the respect that is necessary when living in a college dormitory.
- I wish I would have had more upperclassman to talk with about things, such as classes and just to get a better feel of diversity

- Everyone was in the same position and we all got along very well. But it is always VERY loud and it seems like there are more problems on this floor than any other floor.

Would you have selected to live in a first-year community?

- I like the experience for the most part, some of the new people I got to meet
- I think it gives everyone a sense of togetherness because everyone is new to college
- I prefer to be with older students that have already “figured out” college and know how to be responsible and respect each other.
- I would probably be afraid of drama, but it’s actually a lot more fun.
- I would have chosen to live amongst different grade levels, so I could talk to them about their experiences.
- It was a neat experience. It’s only for a year so I wouldn’t mind trying it out.
- I would think that it would be an easier switch to college for all first years to be together.
- Just knowing that we all were starting on the same page helped a lot.

If I had a chance to redo my first year, I would choose to live on:

- I think it would be good to experience people of all ages like real life would be. I didn’t mind a first year floor, but I think more is offered from a mixed floor.
- I can live my first year on an all first year floor- sure, but I want to move on to a mixed floor next year to broaden my horizons with the whole school.
- I have far more upperclassman friends than first-year friends due to their higher levels of respect and general manners
- I would not redo my first year. I have lived on a first-year floor. I would repeat this process (redoing my first year living conditions) again because I believe that there is value in this type of community living.
- It’s perfect how it is. I love my floor.
- Freshmen who are going through the same feelings, experiences, etc. as I am gave me a lot in common with them and resulted in a lot of bonding and friendships.
- You are only a first-year student once, why not go for it?