

## **Proposal for Genderblind Rooming Options**

### **Rationale:**

We propose the inclusion of genderblind housing options in Guilford's co-ed halls. The term "genderblind housing" refers to rooms where people of any sex or gender can room together, including people of the opposite sex. This would provide options for transgender students, students in the process of discovering their gender identity, gay or bisexual students who feel uncomfortable with rooming with members of the same sex, intersex students who do not wish to be identified by any sex, and students who feel that they would cooperate better with a roommate of the opposite sex. The current policy reflects a time of heteronormativity and heterosexism that is not relevant to Guilford's student body today. In order to promote diversity in our campus, we must have dorms that are open and accepting of all students. The proposed policy would help create an environment that acknowledges and appreciates the diverse nature of our student body.

### **Policy Description**

The "Room Assignments and Changes" subsection under the "Residence Hall Information and Regulations" section of the Student Handbook will be amended to say the following: "Students in their second year or above may choose to request a roommate of any sex or gender. Such requests will only be considered in the currently co-ed halls of Binford and Milner. Like any roommate request, Residence Life will only honor those requests made by both parties mutually."

Note that, according to this policy, opposite-sex roommates would never be randomly assigned. Making this policy request-only reduces the chance of students rooming with people they do not feel comfortable with. Also, this policy would not affect any halls other than those that are already co-ed.

We believe that this is necessary for the following reasons:

- Genderblind housing will provide options for LGBTQI students that are made to feel uncomfortable by the current system. As illustrated in our rationale above, the current policy neglects to recognize the experiences of people in this community. By allowing people to room with friends of any sex or gender, Guilford would be fostering greater respect and acceptance of our LGBTQI community.
- At the moment, there are no feasible alternatives to accepting a same-sex roommate in the dorms. While the new apartments allow people of any sex to share an apartment, the increased expense makes this option unattainable for many students. The same applies for the option of buying a single room in the dorms. Genderblind housing needs to be available in a way that makes it affordable for all students.
- In order to live up to its Quaker-based goal of equality, Guilford must implement housing policies that are equal for all students. By keeping in place a policy that encourages heteronormative thought, Guilford allows for the marginalization of LGBTQI students. We must strive towards a campus where all students are treated and viewed as equals; this policy would help Guilford progress towards

such a goal. We would like to note that the historically Quaker colleges of Haverford and Swarthmore both have implemented some similar forms of genderblind housing; Guilford should be willing to follow their lead on the path to equality.

- Guilford College's Strategic Long-Range Plan expresses the need for more diverse housing options on page 96. The SLRP has been approved by the Board of Trustees and created with the help of many of Guilford's faculty and staff members. Genderblind housing as presented here would be a vital step towards the implementation of this goal. By including this goal in the SLRP, Guilford College has acknowledged that the current housing policies are not acceptable for all students. We propose a simple and cost-free remedy for at least a good portion of this problem.

In discussions with students and administration at Guilford, we have encountered some objections to our proposal. We would like to address those objections below:

- Some are worried that this would encourage many heterosexual couples to room together. While this is a possibility, we doubt that it would be as commonplace as people seem to think. While gay and lesbian couples are currently allowed to room together, there are not many cases of them doing so – the proportion of gay couples on campus to those gay couples who choose to be roommates is so small it is negligible. There is no reason to assume that heterosexual couples would be more likely to room together than homosexual couples. Furthermore, in the colleges we have surveyed, none reported any more problems with heterosexual couples choosing to be roommates than with homosexual couples.
- Some have expressed concern that women would be at more risk for sexual assault if sharing a room with a man. We believe that this view fails to take into account the reality of both the current situation and our proposed solution. First of all, this view is based on the assumption that the only sexual violence that occurs is towards women from men. This does not recognize the fact that men can take advantage of other men and that women can take advantage of other women, as well as that women can take advantage of men; our current housing policies brush this fact away and do little to prevent it. Our proposal only allows for opposite-sex roommates who have mutually requested to be such; we believe that this would actually help to decrease chances of sexual abuse by allowing students to specify a roommate that they trust and feel safe with.
- Some dislike the exclusion of freshmen from this policy. In our discussions with other Guilford students, faculty and staff, we encountered a strong opposition to the concept of freshmen being allowed to participate in genderblind housing. This opposition is based not on their age or perceived lack of maturity but rather on their lack of understanding of campus life. Most freshmen come to Guilford with little to no experience of living in a dorm. The unique dorm environment and challenges it creates is something that they might not understand. We do not wish to have students placed in situations that they feel uncomfortable with, and we would be worried that the lack of understanding might lead freshmen to place themselves in situations that they later regret. Also, parents would be likely

object to such a situation, and we do not want to negatively affect enrollment at Guilford.

**Outline of the Proposal**

Little action would be required to implement this policy. We have already spoken to Aaron Fetrow and Kent Chabotar, and an open forum will be held to address this issue. We encourage members of senate to attend before voting on this important policy. If Senate approves this proposal, it will be presented to Kent Chabotar for consideration. Any further student action that is deemed necessary will be organized by the Community Concerns Committee, which the SLRP explicitly states to be the student committee in charge of implementing more inclusive housing policies. All those who wish to participate may join the Committee to do so, unless Student Senate finds a need to create a new committee or delegate this issue to a different preexisting one.

**Budget Implications**

This proposal has no budget implications and does not need to go through Budget Committee.

*Submitted by Anya Benson and David Norton to Steering Committee on 10/11/05*