

HEAD TO HEAD

Gender-neutral housing proposal misses mark



Adam Rollins

Last week, I attended two informational meetings to discuss the proposed introduction of a gender-neutral housing policy to Truman State campus residences. The GNH policy would allow male and female students in campus housing to live in the same room or suite. However, I oppose this policy change because it would not solve any of the problems it seeks to address.

The GNH meetings were led by Director of Residence Life John Gardner and Student Association President junior Aaron Malin. Malin primarily was responsible for driving the proposal through the student government, while Gardner seems to support the initiative based on information from other schools that have instituted GNH policies, including Ivy League universities and several schools throughout Missouri.

While the student government's GNH resolution claims several benefits to this proposal, Gardner and Malin stated this plan primarily was focused on making campus housing more inclusive for members of the LGBT community and students who do not conform to assigned gender roles. Such students might feel uncomfortable being forced to live with roommates of a certain sex, be harassed by roommates or otherwise feel unsafe in their current housing environment, Gardner said. These students then move off campus to live with students of the opposite sex, with whom they feel safer or more comfortable, Malin said.

I agree with the underlying sentiments of Malin and Gardner — we should, as much as possible, make our school a safe environment for all students and promote compassion and understanding toward those who are different. Unfortunately, the GNH policy wouldn't be a step in this direction.

Gardner wants to introduce this plan first in the on campus apartments so LGBT students can have a safe environment to live in. However, a student at one of the meetings pointed out that students who are

uncomfortable with their living arrangement can solve this problem by moving off campus. I agree with this point and, in fact, I argue that moving off campus is the superior solution.

The University's primary responsibility is to produce mature adults who fully are capable of living unassisted, not to keep students living in campus housing so Residence Life can make a little more money — which is a benefit of this plan as stated in the student government's GNH resolution. The only group of students who cannot move off campus is incoming freshmen, a group who would be ineligible to participate in the GNH program, Gardner said.

In addition, the most commonly noted disadvantage of this proposal is this option likely will be used by romantic couples to live together. Call me old-fashioned, but there exists a moral standard of separate living arrangements for unwed couples and it should be the University's role to encourage high moral standards. Gardner argues there already are romantic couples living together on campus, so this plan makes no difference. That's like saying people already exceed driving speed limits, so we might as well stop issuing traffic tickets.

But the real shame of this proposal is creating a new housing program for LGBT students implies being different is the problem, rather than not being able to accept the differences of others. There are better ways to prevent bullying and harassment on campus. Removing students from unsafe environments does not solve the true problem, only hides it. If we really want Truman's campus to be a safe, inclusive environment, we should be sponsoring programs to educate the bullies and harassers, to encourage students to treat all others with compassion and respect.

Adam Rollins is a sophomore communication major from St. Charles, Mo.

Housing option would benefit LGBT students



Sarah Muir

Having coed residence halls just a few decades ago would have been crazy, but now they are the norm. All of Truman State's residence halls are coed. Student Senate believes it is time to make another change and implement a gender-neutral housing option on campus. Even though it might not yet be the norm, implementing a gender-neutral housing option is the correct decision for Truman State.

There are economic reasons for why the option should be available. Students at Truman's gender-neutral housing forum suggested more housing options could persuade more students to live on campus. Fifty-one percent of Truman student lived off campus during the 2011-2012 academic year, according to the U.S. News and World Report profile about Truman. More students on campus means more money for the University.

A second reason to make the switch is for student comfort and safety. The status quo doesn't offer a good option for students who are transgender. Current housing is assigned by biological sex, which can force these students into an uncomfortable situation.

Gender-neutral housing also has great stereotype-breaking benefits. The current system reinforces outdated ideas of heterosexuality. The assumption is romantic or sexual relationships won't occur between roommates of the same biological sex. This ignores the

possibility of gay or lesbian roommates living together. Gender-neutral housing abolishes old beliefs about sexual orientation implied by the status quo. Breaking these old misconceptions is key to reducing bullying and discrimination against LGBT individuals.

Gender-neutral housing makes Truman more open and accepting. This housing option would ensure that Truman doesn't get left behind on an issue that could one day be as typical as coed residence halls.

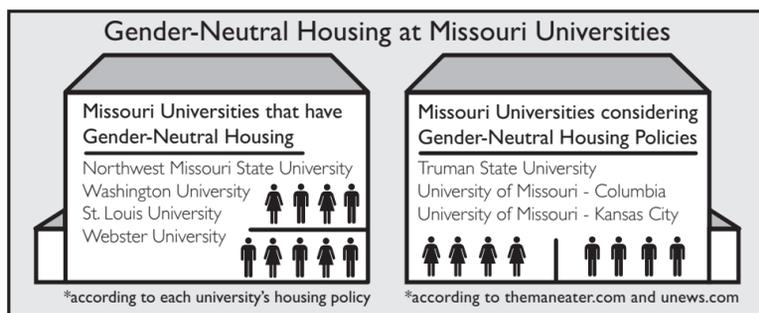
Furthermore, the potential harms of implementing this change are minimal and don't outweigh the benefits. A major concern brought up is couples will move in together, which could cause more roommate conflict and actively promote premarital sex. Other schools have implemented gender-neutral housing and haven't reported any problems of increased conflict. Northwest Missouri State University said gender-neutral housing actually decreased conflict among roommates, according to an Oct. 2012 News Press Now article. The premarital sex argument also ignores lesbian and gay couples who already are living together in the residence halls without problems. When it comes to premarital sex, I think we all know — especially those of us who have been forced to the couch for a roommate's sexual activities — the current system doesn't stop anyone.

Some are worried that prospective students' parents, who often pay for room and board, wouldn't approve of gender-neutral housing and would not send their children here because of it. It's only an option if students choose to participate, though. Students wouldn't be randomly paired off with members of the opposite sex. The decision to live in gender-neutral housing facilities is therefore a personal one and not a decision the University would be responsible for. It wouldn't be a mark against Truman for families who disagree with it. It actually improves the reputation of Truman by creating more options for potential students.

Lastly, some worry it actually would isolate LGBT students by singling them out. The option would be open to everyone, though, and at multiple places on campus, most likely starting with the apartment buildings. There wouldn't be one place on campus where only LGBT students lived.

Schools like Northwest Missouri State have implemented this program and seen success, but the only real way to know if the program will work for Truman is to give it a try — the real harm is not giving it a chance.

Sarah Muir is a freshman political science major from Lee's Summit, Mo.



AROUND THE QUAD: Would gender-neutral housing help prevent discrimination at Truman State?



"Yes, it because it will give Truman State a greater aura of importance."

Benjamin Batzer
senior



"No, because people already have their views in place. I don't think this will make much of a difference."

Erin Schnurbusch
senior



"There are several things that could help prevent discrimination. This is just one piece of the puzzle in solving that problem."

Michael Baharaeen
senior



"Yes, because it will allow people to live with others who are understanding of their circumstances."

Erin Nyquist
sophomore

DQP program will undermine University mission



Connor Stangler

Why are we at this university? Two weeks ago, I claimed Truman State was ill-prepared to implement its new upcoming assessment program, the Degree Qualifications Profile. Change will happen, but inevitability has never been sufficient reason to silence criticism. The DQP raises two issues students must address — whether this system is beneficial to students and what the purpose of a Truman education is.

First, a brief recap — Truman will gradually transition to a competency-based assessment program — the

DQP — which measures knowledge and skills the school determines its students should know. According to the Lumina Foundation's Executive Summary of the DQP program, The system will use "specified learning outcomes" shifting the focus of curriculum from how a student learns to things he or she learns — the "stuff learned" model. Truman will modify the DQP slightly to match specific campus expectations. The program might be implemented on a class-by-class basis rather than solely with a senior portfolio at graduation.

A competency-based assessment system, however, jeopardizes Truman's liberal arts mission. It would make it easier to prove to employers and funders that Truman students are meeting certain qualifications. It would more concretely define and measure learning benchmarks. But these systems, especially ones that determine funding, prioritize results rather than processes. Truman must keep in mind that, especially at a liberal arts school, the "stuff learned" isn't as important as the "stuff experi-

enced." Truman must recognize three potential threats.

First, part of what separates Truman from any other public four-year university throughout Missouri is its emphasis on education beyond the vocational and technical. We think there's more to a student than his or her market price. We value synthesis of ideas and intellectual expansion more than narrow skills. By explicitly setting standards that correspond to marketplace expectations, we risk a destructive and ill-fit marriage between economic performance and the liberal arts.

Second, it's dangerous to mix education and money. As soon as Truman's funding depends on proving students learned certain things throughout a certain amount of time, we will have every financial incentive to make these qualifications easier to attain. As soon as the product is tied to profit, we risk turning the school into a factory and classes into mechanized assembly lines. We will want to produce graduates that meet standardized and easily measurable benchmarks. These qualifications

should look good to our financial suitors, but digestible progress reports usually sacrifice complexity for brevity. We should avoid incentivizing our entire Truman education.

The third threat is at once the weakest argument — it is also ultimately the most important. The liberal arts education was created to express the inexpressible and accomplish the ineffable. The DQP — created by the private Lumina Foundation — seeks to combine the abstract elements of the liberal arts and the measurable qualities of assessment. According to the DQP executive summary, the DQP program does away with concepts such as "awareness" and "critical thinking" and replaces them with active verbs like "identify" and "prioritize" with the belief that the latter are "key elements of assignments." The former "do not lead directly to assessments of competence." The DQP, then, takes the abstract intellectual virtues of liberal arts and boxes them in qualitative benchmarks.

However, the value of the liberal arts lies not in its direction but in its indirection. For four brief years, col-

lege students excuse themselves from the ends-driven traffic of adulthood and indulge in the means to those ends. In large part, the liberal arts are a leap of faith. They often are a conscious investment in the impractical, based on the incalculable, yet self-evident dogma that certain moral and intellectual aspects of education don't conform to a test. The careerist in each of us realizes we need to one day prove we can "identify" and "prioritize" in the work place, but the humanist in us declares "awareness" is just as, if not more, vital.

Truman must ask itself how the DQP preserves the liberal arts mission and what components of that mission it threatens. We know there are benefits of the education not prized by the employer or state legislator that are better expressed in the crucibles of classes, papers, discussions, lectures, arguments, challenges, activities and seminars than a test or benchmark. They are better felt than defined.

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