

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AND
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

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2 GARDEN STREET

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 617-495-4955

June 27, 1983

Dear Councillor:

President Bok is out of the country and has asked me to write in response to your recent council order regarding changes in Harvard College policy for off-campus residency. There has been a great amount of concern and confusion about whether the College has modified its housing policy in a way which would encourage large numbers of resident students to move off-campus thereby competing with Cambridge residents for scarce rental housing. By providing some background I hope to assure you that an exodus of undergraduates from the resident Houses into the community is not the intent nor will it be the result of the College's recent deliberations on this matter.

The number of undergraduates living off-campus has always been a very small percentage of the total Harvard College population. In recent years, the number of students living off-campus has declined to an historic low. (Our records show that thirty years ago, approximately 600 students lived off-campus; ten years ago, 450 students lived off-campus; five years ago, 500 students lived off-campus). Currently, Harvard College houses 94% of its undergraduate population of 6500 on-campus. (By comparison, Northeastern houses approximately 23%; Boston College, 55%; Tufts, 80%; BU, 50%; and MIT, 88%.)

Of the 387 Harvard undergraduates living off-campus, 160 live outside of Cambridge. The 227 undergraduates living in Cambridge are a diverse population which includes local students living at home with parents or relatives, older students including married students and veterans, and a small number of transfers and visiting undergraduate scholars.

Last year, with the encouragement of my office and others within the University, the College agreed to an experiment designed to increase the number of local students enrolled at Harvard. In addition to the regular complement of local students accepted as residents, a small number of graduates from high schools in Cambridge and greater Boston were accepted as mandatory commuters, that is with the understanding that they would have to commute from home because the Houses were already full. I should underscore that the purpose of the mandatory commuter

experiment was not to increase the enrollment of the College which for the past decade has been held to 6500 and is expected to continue at the same level. Rather, the program was undertaken as a way to provide access to a Harvard education for more local students.

Unfortunately, the experiment was not successful. Most Harvard College students, including those accepted as mandatory commuters, want to live on-campus, not off-campus. The resident House system at Harvard has been structured in such a way as to be the focal point of an undergraduate's academic and social life. Most of the students who were forced to live off-campus felt alienated and disenfranchised. Most requested on-campus housing and were put on waiting lists.

The plight of these students was in part the reason John Fox, Dean of Harvard College, chose to write about Harvard College's policy for all non-resident students. As a result, many proposals for improving the status of non-residents were discussed by the Faculty Council including a proposal to abolish Dudley House, the traditional non-resident gathering place for commuters. The theory was to separate and re-assign commuting students from Dudley House, where they were isolated from resident students, to the resident Houses where they could associate with resident students and participate more actively in College activities. The abolition of Dudley House, a proposal which ultimately was not adopted, was widely reported in the Crimson which I suspect added to the confusion. Many people in the community assumed Dudley House was a dormitory in which students lived rather than a meeting place for commuters and that its abolition would force hundreds of displaced students to seek rental housing in Cambridge.

The Faculty Council did recommend that residence be available at some time to all students wishing to live on-campus and that non-residence should be entirely voluntary. Freshmen will no longer be admitted as mandatory commuters.

To make room for those who want to live on-campus, the College has made two modifications in its policy which were reported to you in Dean Fox's letter of May 23. They are: 1) allowing students who might wish to live off-campus to retain affiliation with a residential House if they lived in that House for two or more terms and, 2) providing those students who may choose to try off-campus living a guarantee for on-campus housing if their plans should change. With these changes comes the hope that a few students may decide to live off-campus thereby creating space for those who wish to live on-campus. It is unlikely that there will be a significant net change in the size of the off-campus population as a result of these changes. Only three students have applied for off-campus housing under the new policy. August 5th is the deadline for students to indicate their housing preference for the fall semester.

Because of the concern expressed by the Council, the College has agreed to monitor requests for off-campus housing very carefully and would be happy to answer any further questions about this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jackie O'Neill". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Jackie O'Neill
Director of
Community Affairs

cc: Kathy Spiegelman
✓ Paul Healy

22.

9-381

Comm. from Paul E. Healy, City Clerk, transmitting a comm. from Jacqueline O'Neill, Director of Community Affairs, Harvard University Re: Harvard's policy regarding undergraduate housing.

In City Council,

June 27, 1983

*Placed
on
-File*