

Living in the DU house at Indiana University

Living arrangements in the DU house have evolved over time and are probably much different today than most alumni will remember or can even imagine.

Some memories of the way it was.

Most alumni probably recall their living arrangements at the DU house as including one or two roommates in a room that had a desk, study chairs, and a closet for personal possessions. The desk may have had a built-in bookcase at one end as it did when I was an undergraduate or may have been a more creative arrangement such as a slab door on some boxes or crates that also held books or personal items. The closet may have had a door. In my day, the door was on hinges and some closet doors could be locked. When the south wing was built, the closets had sliding doors that took up less space in the room. Chests of drawers, larger bookcases or shelf units, additional clothes-hanging facilities, and small refrigerators may have rounded out the assembly of clutter shared by the roommates.

The house was designed with a suite of two rooms with private bath on the east end of the main floor that could have been used by a house mother but never was. These rooms were used as private rooms for the president and treasurer at one time. More recently, one has been devoted to the bike team. Two toilet enclosures replaced the tub and other bathroom facilities, and this toilet room is joined to the corner private room as a very nice powder room/unisex guest toilet space.

Originally, there was a cook's apartment at the east end of the ground level. The only residential "house mother" the chapter ever had, Frances Veller, lived with her member spouse, Don, in this cook's facility; the Vellers were very proud of this distinction and remembered the chapter generously in their will. This space was converted into the kitchen when the south wing was built, and the dining room was expanded into what was originally the kitchen.

At one time, long ago, everyone, or almost everyone, slept in bunk beds in the large unheated space called the cold dorm in the east end of the top floor. For many years, these were double-deck metal army cots. Before the south wing was added to the house, the dining room seated 48, the customary number of men living in the

house. After the south wing was built, the dining room was expanded to include the area once occupied by the kitchen with seating for 64, the then customary house capacity.

Members have been creative over the years in adapting their living arrangements to their preferences, and DU has been quite flexible in allowing these alternative arrangements. To gain more sleeping space in the '80s, decks were built in many rooms. Men could sleep under the deck with sofas and leisure type furniture with a television and other amenities on the upper level. Men living in these rooms had to remember not to stand up! Sometimes, a group of members would sleep in one room and gather all their study and lounging facilities in a separate room. Personal-item hanging/storage space could be in either or both rooms. The cold dorm became little used over time as members preferred to sleep in their rooms under the deck, on a sofa, in bunk beds in the room or in small clusters of bunks in a few residential rooms. The cold dorm was used so little that much of the space was converted to other uses. At one time, the cold dorm space was used as a ping pong room with an easily concealed secret bar area (the statute of limitations has run on that infraction). Some of the space was converted to new study rooms and some was used by the bike team.



Insight into today's living arrangements.

Today's students have very different housing needs than the house was designed to accommodate, and the members of DU have been very creative in adapting the house to match current preferences. Most important, a student no longer possesses a lot of books; his reference material is accessed through his computer. Today's students have probably never seen a typewriter or carbon paper. And, today's student does not need a desk on which to put the computer since it can be anywhere, even on his lap. When it seemed essential, every room in the chapter house was wired with two computer outlets and an outlet for TV. The era of plugging the computer into a wall outlet was short lived, and after a difficult transition, the house is now fully wireless so a member can use his computer to reach his lesson plans, assignments, and reference material from anywhere. The main floor room adjacent to the vestibule by the main stairway is now the "scholarship" room with eight well-lighted work stations where members can do their work and where all members can send their projects electronically and wirelessly to a pair of high-tech printers. The dining room is also regularly used as a study center. The conference room, now located in the northeast room on the main floor, has been adapted into a space that can be used for group study, complete with a dry-erase board for work on group projects that are an increasingly popular form of teaching. Over the history of the house, the academic building across Third Street has also had a convenient library room where members can migrate to study.

Beds are also in transition. College students today likely have had their own room at home, often with their own bath, and generally with a larger bed than a twin. When the sleeping area is under a deck, there is generally more space for sleeping than the width of a twin bed, and many members now expect wider sleeping accommodations. In some cases, a room with a deck evolved from a place for two members to sleep below with leisure facilities above to a space where two pairs of members would sleep with the guys on the upper level enjoying the sleeping width enjoyed by their lower-level roommates.

For the 2010-11 year, the chapter expects occupancy by more men than has been experienced in many years. Housing

(continued on page 7)

Living

(continued from page 6)

will be provided for 68 members in the chapter house, and 12 additional men had to be excused from their four-semester live-in expectation because there was "no room at the inn." Occupancy will include seven seniors living in beyond their four-semester live-in expectation, and there will be a total of 10 live-in seniors, which will provide desirable mature, experienced leadership. Seven percent of live-in members will be seniors, compared to 8 percent among other mid-size fraternities, according to the 2009–10 Inter-Fraternity Council survey. Also, 69 percent of DU members will live in the chapter house, compared to an average of 59 percent among other mid-size IU chapters.

With the lack of need for a personal study space and a desire for wider places to sleep, members have created a "dynamic" model to maximize occupancy and satisfy the demand for housing at DU. A few rooms on the top floor are now the only rooms occupied on the "traditional" model: the room's two or three occupants sleep, have their leisure space, and have their personal hanging/storage space all in one room. A large majority of members now have their leisure space on the middle floor of the original house. Clusters of four to six members are now assigned to rooms that in olden days were designed for two or three members. These rooms are now furnished with a couple of sofas, some lounge chairs, a TV, a refrigerator, and the vast array of electronic gear that is part of the life of a young man. All the rooms on both floors of the south wing are now used exclusively for sleeping, usually four to a room with larger sleeping areas for each member. Since computers can be used in these bedrooms, members can cram for their exams while in the comfort of their bed. In 2010–11 DU will use a few full-over-full bunk beds to assure their safety and acceptability before acquiring more in the future as appropriate. Most members' personal hanging/storage space is also in their sleeping room. In 2010–11, 14 members will use twin-width bunk beds in the portion of the cold dorm that is still used for sleeping. These members will use locker-room type space for their personal hanging/storage in an area next to the cold dorm and an area on the middle floor

DU summer 2010 improvements

The ongoing program to renovate student rooms is continuing this summer. Four rooms are being done this summer, bringing the total of renovated student rooms to seven, about 25 percent of the student rooms. When a room is renovated, all modifications are removed, returning the room to its original shape and finishes. Electrical service is upgraded as necessary to provide sufficient and conveniently located outlets for the variety of equipment and electronics that are an integral part of current student life. Exposed conduit that must remain is installed within the walls. A smooth, finished ceiling is installed with recessed can lights, usually on two circuits. Every room has a cable television connection and two Internet connections (since the house is now wireless, the Internet connections are a helpful backup in case of overloads). Window finishes are restored to the original oak. A durable floor and base are installed. Door frames and hardware are cleaned and restored; in some cases six-panel oak doors are installed now, and in other cases, the door replacements will be made when a section of rooms is complete.

Two of the rooms being renovated this summer will become a new president's suite. The northwest room on the top floor will be the president's office with a small conference table and leisure seating area for small, private meetings for as many people as are on the chapter's executive council. The adjoining bedroom will be shared by the president and his roommate. The president's office space will keep the conference room, dining room, and other areas available for study much of the time. A dry-erase board has been installed in the conference room to accommodate group class projects.

The rear stairway is also being renovated with a new oak-topped metal rail. This will eliminate the replacement of spindles, avoid the housekeeping nightmare of cleaning the tread edge between spindles, and allow carpet to be installed to the edge of the stairs in the future. The nicks and scrapes that are inevitable in this heavily used area will hopefully be less apparent with the new material. The section of the main stairway with wood treads will be sanded and refinished. Deteriorated sections of the kitchen floor will also be replaced.

Readying the house with beds, clothing lockers, and other facilities for the expected capacity occupancy is also necessary. There is the usual process of deep cleaning of the bathrooms and the recreation room and dining room floors, repairing and replacing deteriorated equipment, and repairing interior and exterior damage and wear. The chapter is blessed to have the services of Brent Stanton, who keeps on top of ongoing maintenance throughout the year and who performs, coordinates, and oversees the summer projects.

south wing adjacent to the bathroom.

In many ways, this "dynamic" model is much more conducive to brotherhood than the traditional model most alumni remember. A member does not have just

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one or two room mates for a year at a time but rather has two clusters of members with whom they share space

and have close personal interaction. This fraternal model is almost the opposite of the dorm housing being created by the university. The university is converting dorm rooms that were previously shared into single rooms and eliminating the group bathrooms in favor of more private facilities, sometimes attached to the sleep-

ing/study room. The huge development of new university-owned student housing at 10th and Dunn that will be available for occupancy for the first time in the fall of 2010 is exclusively apartment-type accommodations for two to four students, often with each person having a private bedroom and shared leisure and bathroom space.

Whereas the classrooms are stressing group dynamics, the university housing model is stressing privacy and limited personal interaction. The demand for living at DU at this time seems to be good evidence that the college-age student recognizes that this is one of the few times in their life that they can develop their interpersonal skills, and the DU living model is consistent with that objective. We'll also trust that future generations of DU members will continue to adapt the treasured space to the needs and preferences of the day.

— Ronald Koverner