

Emily Miller

Special to The Hawk – Published February 2013

Residence Life Implements Changes to Increase Upperclassmen On-Campus Housing

Word count: 725

Ask any rising junior or senior where they are living next year and you will get a variety of answers. Whether it's in an off-campus apartment or house, or in Merion Gardens or the Townhouses, upperclassmen have a plethora of living options for the upcoming academic year.

The Office of Residence Life has changed upperclassmen housing options and benefits for the 2013-14 academic year in an effort to increase the junior and senior presence on-campus. With more living space for freshman and sophomores, there is now more room for upperclassmen that want to live on campus.

"With the addition of Villiger Hall, we can now focus more attention on upperclassmen," said Director of Residence Life, John Jeffery. "Historically in the past, we did not have a substantial amount of space for juniors and seniors. There is now space that we can dedicate solely for juniors and seniors."

SJU currently houses about 425 juniors and seniors, and not all are in the exclusive upperclassmen community, Jeffery stated.

But with a more space comes more interest, and a hope from residence life that more upperclassmen will choose to live on campus.

"We are seeing an increase in demand and interest from housing info sessions," Jeffery said. "We've heard positive responses from juniors and seniors."

Merion Gardens apartments and the Townhouses now house this exclusive upperclassmen community that boasts additional benefits not available in other on-campus housing options.

These modified privileges include free residential parking passes (students still have to pay for a pass if you want to park on-campus), a modified guest policy, and yearlong leasing options. But do they really outweigh the option of living off-campus?

Many students who have already signed their housing contracts seem to think so.

Ally Thomson, '15, is one of these students. She chose to continue living on campus next year due to the flexibility the housing agreement offers her as a student who is planning to study abroad in the spring of 2014.

"The housing agreement is flexible with study abroad... I didn't want to deal with subletting and having that fall through," Thomson said.

The housing agreement releases any student from the housing contract upon acceptance to study abroad programs, another added benefit of living on campus.

"I guess there're a lot of perks, like traditional security, and it can be cheaper with free parking and not having to pay for utilities," said Thomson.

Taylor Heil, '15, said, "A lot of people don't want to deal with the responsibility of renting a house or apartment." Heil also plans on living on campus when she is not studying abroad.

One of the many reasons why the university is promoting on-campus housing for upperclassmen is because of Zoning Compliance §9-2805 in Philadelphia County.

It states that "no student may live in an Educational Housing District in [...] any dwelling in which more than three unrelated persons are living as a single household unit without a valid use registration permit."

Violation of the zoning code can mean eviction for tenants of that residence.

"[The zoning compliance] affects the landlords much more than the students. The landlords must not be leasing to more than three unrelated individuals," Jeffery said. "It would affect cost. It may present itself to be more expensive than living on campus. The cost of living off and living on are about the same."

Despite this zoning code, many students still take the risk, and live off-campus, including Jess Nevins, '15, who plans on renting a house next year.

"I would say the main reason [for renting] is for the freedom off campus housing provides. There is no hassle with signing friends in and restrictions of what you have to clean and do before breaks," said Nevins.

Nevins also cites cost and responsibility as reasons to live off campus.

"It is much more affordable, the housing we found. Compared to on campus housing which is overpriced in my opinion," Nevins said. "...also the sense of responsibility gained. It almost feels like the next step in life."

By now, students have decided whether or not they are going to live off campus, as the deadline to sign the housing contract passed on February 10th. With looser restrictions, it does seem as though more students may choose to live on campus next year, but no solid evidence has been presented yet.