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Final Research Paper

Marquette: A Housing Problem

It's interesting to note the rise in admitted undergraduate students with each passing year here at Marquette University. Year in and year out, there are more and more undergraduates that live on or near campus grounds. If this is a common trend here at Marquette, what makes this year so different from previous years? Well, the university has admitted more than 2,000 freshmen over the summer months leading into the fall 2011 semester. This contrasts heavily with the 1,900 admissions quota in place by the university. While it may not look like a staggering difference as a number, the difference can be felt throughout the initial months on campus. Many students came into the school year with a permanent housing arrangement, which is a first for the university in several years. With 2,084 freshmen on campus halfway through the first week of school, available housing for both upper and lower class Marquette students has become a greater issue.

Narrative

As a student here at Marquette, the prospect of university housing has become more and more intriguing. This process has affected all students here at

Marquette, including me. It's interesting because Marquette's housing hasn't sparked my attention until this year. With an influx of record setting students, the issue has surfaced in my mind. Not only am I curious to understand the meaning of these new undergraduate acceptances, but I am also interested in Marquette's future plans for its students' living situations.

In fact, I do have a personal stake in this issue of university housing. Not only do I have ties with the process, but also the simple necessity to have a place to live, either on or off campus grounds. The real need to address Marquette's housing issues and the subsequent reactions from students and others here at the university stemmed from the inevitable need to find a place to live myself. I will admit that I did not jump to house hunt during the early months of my sophomore year, but I never thought it would be an issue. After all, campus apartments and houses were largely reserved fro the upperclassmen anyway, so I figured that it wouldn't be an issue. When I began my search in later months, I began to find that many housing locations had been booked far in advance from when I had initially thought. This idea was expanded upon when I was forced to scramble for housing during the summer months as well. I wondered why it was so difficult, as it had not been a prominent issue in my earlier years at Marquette. With school less than a week away, I knew I would have to get the job done on campus.

I confronted the housing department in Carpenter Hall, inquiring about the possibility of helping me search for any available apartments on the

university grounds. The answers I received were shocking, as I had been told that not only had all the dorm rooms been booked, but also they didn't have a definitive answer for me about the apartments. I was placed on a waiting list for any available dorm rooms, as I 'm sure that many other students were. I was also given a sheet with various numbers to call for housing lenders on it. It was clear to me that I was not the only upperclassman to have similar issues, as many of the firms that I contacted gave me answers similar to those of Carpenter Hall. I had walked into the on-campus housing department on 15th and Wells, nervous about being able to find a place. I approached a contact that told me that they did not have a single place available, not even a studio apartment. I remember asking him, "Well where am I supposed to go?" He just looked at me and gave a blank look, shrugging his shoulders in contempt for my asking. It seemed by his reaction that he had received this question many a time the same day by other desperate students, but nonetheless I thought it was a legitimate concern at the time and demanded a firm answer. Little did I know that this slight shrug of the shoulders and the absence of a true answer were becoming more and more common with each scratched off contact on the list. After settling down in a studio apartment I managed to scrounge for, with scarce options otherwise, I had commuted to and from school for an entire week from the Chicago land area; a full 90-minute trip there and back daily. It had been unbelievable, I remember telling myself during the car rides. It definitely would have been a trying effort to

put up with doing that for another week. Looking back, even that first week was hectic enough.

Marquette Coverage

While this story may not hit home with many students that were not affected by the housing troubles that arose during this semester, I was assured that I was not the only who was when I picked up the Marquette Tribune during the first week of school. The Office of Undergraduate Admissions received more than 22,000 applications, admitting nearly 13,000 in total. (1) Of that 13,000, roughly 16% were incoming freshmen. In addition, this increase in admissions mentioned earlier is an 8 percent increase over the class of 2014. Indeed, the class of 2015 has arrived. With a class size of that number, the fact that 8 percent of those freshman (1) found themselves with a permanent place to live in the beginning months of the 2011 fall semester isn't that unbelievable. Nearly 44 percent of all transfer students that were admitted and arrived at Marquette's doors in August found themselves in the same position. A note of clarification is needed. There is a rather large difference between having a place to stay on campus and having a temporary place to stay on campus. Besides the obvious, many students feel that uprooting their current arrangement after a couple of weeks on campus brings a social disadvantage upon them. Students that are taken out of the temporary housing and are placed into more permanent arrangements lament having to change atmospheres so quickly. (3) This is not hard to agree with. From a social standpoint, taking a student who is not only

new to the school surrounding but who also doesn't know many others is likely to have a similar reaction to such an action. Whether this is a fair move or not is irrelevant when attempting to give underclassmen permanent dormitory housing, but if there were enough space for all students, issues like these would have no place in the housing complexes.

Temporary Housing

So where were all of these undergraduates placed during these initial few weeks of school? Since freshman and sophomore are specifically mandated to remain in one of the nine university-owned dormitories, many of these buildings were revamped to accommodate the 8 percent without permanent housing. Study lounges that were designated for student use were converted into temporary housing. Many of these beds were stacked to accommodate the larger influx of undergraduates at Marquette. Specifically, dorms like McCormick and O'Donnell underwent a similar process to accommodate 23 and 34 students, respectively. However, due to the lack of new space available to put these new students in, some of these recently converted study lounges were meant to stay as permanent housing. So, while not all students were uprooted in the first few weeks, nearly 34 students were given a permanent setting in one of O'Donnell's recently revamped lounges. In addition, the layout of O'Donnell's study lounge areas was reconfigured into triples and quads, allowing space for more without a permanent residence. However, the 'man-cave,' the basement area that is arguably the staple of the dormitory itself, would not be affected by those

without a place to live. (3) McCormick, a dorm common to freshman and sophomores recently underwent similar changes to accommodate the increased numbers as well. Lounges and other study areas were converted into triples and quads, able to house three to four students for the first couple weeks. Many of these students located in such lounges were primarily freshman men and transfer women. As practical of a solution this is, some students, those permanently living in such dorms, were not as welcoming of such revamping ideas. Many felt that turning lounges and other study-designated areas in such dorms was unwanted, explaining that such changes cut down on study time. (3) In addition, many students also felt that these lounge conversions served only to eliminate social interaction between new floor mates, bringing into play a whole new issue. It's possible that there's a level of social disconnection and entitlement by those who were previously settled in.

2015's High Numbers: Why?

If it's safe to say that a larger class demands larger living accommodations, why then is that Marquette could not provide for a class number that was expected to be on the rise? While this is certainly not the first year that Marquette has undergone strenuous housing situations, as I will elaborate on later, it is troubling to note that this housing situation that surfaced this semester can be, to a certain degree, be summed up as a mere 'coincidence.' Dr. James McMahon, assistant vice president and dean of Residence Life, sheds light on the matter:

"From our usual 1,950 expected freshmen, we expect a 15% yield; however, the yield was much higher this year, bringing in more than 2,000 students" (4). One of my initial assumptions, later to be disproved, was regarding the newly constructed engineering hall on the corner of 16th and Wisconsin Street. After a rather long and tedious journey of attempting one of the last few remaining apartment complexes n campus, I started to question whether the large amount of new students was to be expected, an idea that contrasted the existence of the newly built facility. However, as it turns out, the newly built engineering complex was actually paid for by donors supporting the school. This further evidenced the predicament of 'coincidence' that stifled Marquette's housing options for the first couple months. A dramatic increase in the number of underclassmen in the fall of 2011 has something of a snowball effect for the next two semesters, according to McMahon. "Something like this will have a two year hit for us. This means were going to have a large sophomore class" (4). Even if the situation is a bit of a coincidence, it is alleviating to know that management in the Office of Residence Life in Carpenter Tower understands the situation's depth.

University Apartments

In addition to the nine university-owned dormitories that house nearly 4,400 underclassmen, Marquette's campus is also home to an area more commonly known as Campus Town. Encompassing nearly six stretched blocks of the campus grounds itself, Campus Town is commonly associated with upperclassmen, including juniors and seniors. This location is convenient for

many students, as it is placed in the heart of campus, near 16th and Wells. In fact, the area is so convenient that it is constantly seen as a hot commodity and fills up quite fast. Sign up times for the following year are booked as early as November; this year nearly 300 students were on the waiting list since mid-July. (4) While Campus Town is within a short walking distance from many of the campus's commodities, Humphrey Hall is located on 17th and Wisconsin Street. another university-owned apartment complex. With numerous amenities, Humphrey is a promising potential home to many upperclassmen; however, it too fills up, usually as early as November as well.

The big takeaway here is the shortage of housing options for upperclassmen as well. With five private contractors supplying upperclassmen with on campus apartments, there simply needs to be more housing for those who wish to live fairly close to campus. In addition, existing apartment complexes are being rented out by a single person, rather than the intended two or three tenants. "Every apartment is filled right now, but only 70% of the bed space within these apartments is being used up" (4). In combination with simply not having enough space for upperclassmen, the limited space is being bought out by students willing to pay a premium price to have his or her own room. Dr. McMahon stated if housing got so tight, does it not make sense for us to require that every bed is filled?" (3) While it is a thought to consider, it is hard to imagine many students willing to sacrifice that kind of freedom, especially so soon after being freed from the mandatory dorm settings their first two years. Coupled

with the fact that it would be nearly impossible for administration to enforce this kind of referendum, this seemingly good idea from an administrative standpoint would not sit well with upperclassmen. With no clear solution for upperclassmen housing, I began brainstorming about what could be done.

The Current State

With Campus Town at 70% capacity, what does the rest of the campus-housing look like? Well, as of right now, Marquette's housing facilities are "operating at 99% capacity," according to Dr. McMahon. While no underclassman was turned away at the beginning of the semester, this staggering capacity was taken into account after October 1st, 2011, the day in which all temporarily housed students were given a permanent housing arrangement. Indeed, no one could have expected for the university to be operating at such a high level. McMahon, speaking on behalf of many in Residence Life, believes that housing is limited because of the number of students who paid their deposits and actually enrolled at Marquette was "surprisingly" high this year (3). The university generally ballparks that nearly 100 students who are accepted to Marquette and pay for guaranteed housing, a process that is in effect during the spring term working towards the next fall, will drop the idea and go to another school. While this number may seem insignificant, it, like the 1,950 freshman acceptances expectancy number, gives administration a good forecast for the upcoming school year; sharp increased or decreases can affect the state of housing

dramatically. While no concrete solution has been finalized during this fall semester, meetings in the spring are expected to offer more findings.

Looking Back

Of course, looking at the housing situation from the viewpoint of a single year would have little on which to compare itself to, so it's important to understand some key decisions made years ago. Back in 1993, Marquette laid the foundation for a new dormitory that would line the corner of West Wells and 13th Street. A significant investment, the \$15 million hall would have accommodated nearly 400 beds, but the plan was tossed that same year because, according to Gerald J. Meyer, Marguette director of public relations, "the university had enough space for its students" (5). The problem, in comparison to the situation at Marquette today, is that such a quick disposal of ideas that benefitted students would not fly today. This kind of plan would be up for extensive review, and, given the current situation, most likely would have passed, granting additional beds and housing options. Furthermore, in years prior to Marquette's 2011 housing situation, the use of off-campus hotels was used extensively. Rooms were rented out nor nearly two months as a result of larger than expected class sizes. The rooms were part of larger company chains such as the Hilton and the Ambassador Hotel, located just a few blocks down from the Mashuda Residence Hall on 19th and Wisconsin Street. Interestingly

enough, many of the students put up in such lavish commodities did not have the great times you might expect. I know, and even in the face of all that freedom!

Social Repercussions

Despite having an unseemly amount of freedom in comparison to your fellow classmates at the time, you weren't having that much fun in the end. A large social disconnection is associated with students that live further away from campus, according to Dr. McMahon. Involvement levels tend to plummet and a large social gap reveals itself to students who are located off campus. The correlation this has with students nowadays sheds some light on the housing situation as well. In fact, this anecdote helps to fortify the university's reasoning behind mandatory residence for the first two years. If the university were to allow sophomores to obtain their own apartments instead of being confined to a mandatory dormitory, that same social disconnection and acuminated repercussions would skyrocket as a result. "Juniors have a hard time adapting to the new independence," stated Dr. McMahon. He explained that an increase in alcohol abuse is present among these new upperclassmen (4). Imagine what would happen to sophomores if they were allowed to go out on their own!

Student perspectives

In an effort to shares my tales of woe in attempting to find a place to stay while traveling 70 miles to and from Milwaukee, I made attempts to find others

with similar situations regarding housing. Surely I was not the only one to have housing issues at the time, right? Indeed, many other students did have such issues, including one that I was able to interview. Sobon, his pseudonym, and I met for this interview on a Hiawatha train that was headed to Union Station in Chicago. It was actually the first time I had met him and it was by the off chance that we were headed to the same stop, Glenview. I was walking toward the station on 5th street when I had noticed that he was carrying a rather large amount of baggage. After asking if he was headed to the train, we began what would eventually lead into a rather semi-structured interview about academics, the college social scene, and spent some time talking extensively about housing experience. When I asked him about any difficulties regarding obtaining housing he responded,

Sobon: "Not really. I mean...I have some friends who have had difficulty in the past with tryin' to get a place in the dorms. Like, I had a friend who was put on a waiting list..and he didn't know until mid-June that he'd be able to get a room."

In a way, it was reassuring to know that I was not the only one having trouble getting a place to live, even if the reassurance came from someone who was in an entirely different grade than I.

Proposal:

With university housing operating at 99% capacity, there is no doubt that change is needed. I suggest change comes in the form of more housing. While a seemingly simple solution, I realize its implications yet offer other ways to foster the growth and development of new housing in the Marquette community. For example, there is a private upperclassmen apartment complex being constructed in the 2012 spring semester. With a capacity of nearly 400 beds, this complex is a great start to the addition of more housing. In addition, I suggest reaching out to landlords in the surrounding campus area to see if Marquette can rent out these facilities. Although not a long-term feasible solution, this temporary fix will help alleviate a campus that is operating at 99% capacity.

Conclusion:

Indeed, Marquette has a lot to discuss in the early months of the next semester regarding the housing shortage here at Marquette. I was fortunate enough to hear back from Dr. McMahon, a very important man for information regarding this topic. Looking extensively through online databases and the Marquette Tribune, as well as interviewing lowerclassmen on similar issues helped me to research this important and relevant topic to a greater extent. With support from affected Marquette students and with the support and attention of the administration and Residence Life, it is very possible that new housing plans will surface in the spring.

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