

In first for Davidson, freshmen settle in to mixed-gender halls

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This fall, Davidson began a pilot program for freshmen: “gender-neutral” halls, an initiative that began approximately three years ago with an idea by Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) members.

Before 2012, only Martin Court apartments and Tomlinson suites would allow a group of 4 or 5 students to live together regardless of gender.

When GSA approached Jason Shaffer, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence

Life, it advocated for the creation of “more options for men and women to live interspersed with each other,” according to Shaffer.

The first step to bring this concept to fruition was a 2013 survey which asked students two essential questions: “How would you feel about Davidson allowing students of different genders to live in a mixed gender community?” and “How likely would you be to choose to live in a mixed gender community?” According to Shaffer, 75% of students supported the creation of a mixed gender community, and just over 50% of students

responded that they would likely choose to participate in the program depending on the dorms it affected.

The second step of the process was implementing the program for upperclassmen in the 2014-2015 school year. 4th Belk, Irwin, Akers, Knox, and Chidsey Hall were all mixed-gender communities.

“[Upperclassmen] have a better way to differentiate between, ‘is this going to be a good fit for me,’ than an incoming student who is basing her

ideas off a tour, conversations with friends and what they think Davidson is going to be like,” Shaffer explained. However, the abundance of positive feedback from upperclassmen who were currently living in these communities caused the Residence Life Office (RLO) to reconsider this assumption.

RLO distributed the typical housing preference form to incoming freshmen, but this year included the statement, “Davidson College offers residential communities where students who identify as male live on half of the floor and students who identify as female live on the other half of the floor. The communities have single-gendered designated community bathrooms. Would you be excited to live on a floor as described, yes or no?” 78% of the incoming students answered, “Yes, I would be excited to live in a community described like that.”

With this information in mind, RLO followed typical protocol of looking at interests, personal-

ity types, and other attributes before assigning the floors. It decided to implement the program on three floors in Richardson (base, first and third), feeling that this is not dramatically different from the mixed-gender housing of 4th Belk, except in a smaller setting.

Summer Abiad '17, hall counselor on First Rich, however, believes that the difference in floor plan between Belk and Richardson makes a big difference. “Since there are no wings [in Richardson], it's very different,” she said.

“You get a lot of different perspectives and personalities that I don't think you would necessarily get on a single-gendered hall.”

-Nick Kennedy '19

Nick Kennedy '19, who lives in Richardson, notes that the mixed-gender halls in his dorm make for greater cohesiveness among its residents. “I don't think [Belk residents] have gotten to know each other as well, just because there are so many different people and they're not as close

together. We've definitely gotten to be closer with each other than people in Belk have,” he said.

Although RLO is waiting until freshmen have adjusted to Davidson life to send out a survey to gather responses to the mixed-gender halls, many students on the hall seem to have positive reactions so far.

“You get a lot of different perspectives and personalities that I don't think you would necessarily get on a single-gendered hall,” Kennedy said.

Andrew Fe '19, another Richardson resident, agrees. “Amongst the 24 kids that we have [on the hall], I feel like I know every single one of them. Within in the first week, I knew names and I knew fun facts.”



Freshmen lounge on gender-neutral first Rich. Photo by Willie MacDade.

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