

By Dr. Bobby Fong
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When I went to Harvard, I lived on campus all four years. That was the university's requirement, for living on campus was an essential part of its conception of academic community. Sharing insights with fellow students over pizza at two a.m.; learning to live with those whose backgrounds and beliefs have little in common with one's own; impulsively attending a lecture, performance, or sports event because it's just next door; encountering a professor and some classmates for talk about issues raised in classes: these are things that create academic community.

Required on-campus occupancy is part of the fabric at many of the nation's elite universities. The same has been true at Butler, where freshmen and sophomores have been required to live in University housing. But we didn't have the space to offer housing to all juniors.

We do now. And that enables Butler to institute the requirement that students live on campus through their junior year.

Given one of Butler's core commitments – that we be a residential campus –the Commission on Undergraduate Residential Life, which included students, faculty, administrators, and trustees, recommended in 2002 that we build additional facilities so that we could take our on-campus residency rate to about 70 percent. This is where we want to be as an educational institution.

It's clear from studies that campus occupancy increases the quality of the educational experience. Students who live on-campus are more likely to be involved in campus activities, perform better academically, and report a higher degree of satisfaction with their college experience. They are safer: on-campus housing, unlike rentals, must undergo regular inspection to ensure they meet all safety requirements; on-campus security, with pass-keys, alarms, and campus police patrols, is better.

Our anticipation was always that juniors would be the primary occupants of the village. They are still deeply involved in on-campus study and activities. Living on-campus gives them an opportunity to mentor younger classmates and to develop leadership skills within the academic community. By the same token, given Butler's educational mission, with our emphasis on capstone internships, rotations and student teaching, there are good reasons why living on campus for seniors ought to be a prerogative but never a requirement.

Marketing studies conducted in 2003 indicated that there would be a high demand for spots in the village, so we decided to leave the choice of residence up to the students in this first year. However, between 1999 and 2005, Butler's undergraduate full-time enrollment grew from 3300 to 3800 students. Three years ago, we had to ask students to move off campus because of the extra-large freshmen class. We currently have a culture where students almost expect that they will have to live off campus beginning in their junior year. That expectation meant not enough students opted in to meet our 70 percent on-campus residency goal. Consequently, we enacted the junior residency requirement to begin in the fall of 2007.

We wanted upperclassmen to be better represented on campus. If we were able to do this by allowing juniors and seniors to choose, we would have. But we are trying to

change the culture of the university. It used to be that if you were a junior or senior, you expected to live off campus. We are changing that expectation.

We are committed to being an undergraduate residential campus. On-campus residency is an important part of that commitment. It will enhance our education and the quality of a Butler degree.