

# Gender Inclusive Housing



Roosevelt University  
Office of Residence Life  
Task Force Report  
January 2013

*“The trouble is that not enough people have come together with the firm determination to live the things which they say they believe.”*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

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## **I. Introduction**

The Office of Residence Life formed a 19 member Task Force in the fall of 2012 in response to a Student Government Association resolution that called for a gender neutral housing option at Roosevelt.

The Task Force met throughout the fall semester and included students, staff, faculty, and members of the University Center leadership team (membership list attached). The Task Force developed working subgroups that completed the following aspects of this proposal:

- Researching institutional models for best practices
- Conducting assessment of student support for gender neutral housing
- Developing a definition of gender neutral housing for Roosevelt
- Developing a housing assignment process
- Researching risks and liability
- Researching impact on facilities
- Creating academic partnerships
- Developing a community education plan

The committee reviewed the ACUHO-I list of colleges and universities that currently have Gender Neutral Housing options and held a discussion of identifying current and best practice with gender neutral housing. This discussion was used as the framework for consideration of the development of an option for Roosevelt University students.

Considerations include:

- University Readiness for a Gender Neutral option

- Facilities Impact
- Need
- Opportunities for connection to Academic Success of students
- Mission and Vision of the Institution
- Impact of a Gender Neutral option on the community at large

## II. Definition of Gender Inclusive Housing

The first decision of the Task Force was the determination that the term “gender neutral” did not accurately describe the intent of the housing option. The Task Force unanimously voted to change the term to “gender inclusive”. The following definition was crafted to describe the intent of the housing option:

“Gender Inclusive Housing reflects Roosevelt University’s social justice mission through support of our diverse student body. This community promotes ethical awareness by providing a safe and supportive environment for students of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations.

Students interested in this housing option may include, but are not limited to, those who identify as transgender\*, gender non-conforming\*, intersex, genderqueer, and allies.

Students in this community agree that:

- Individuals have the right to identify themselves as any gender or sexual orientation and have the right to not identify.
- Individuals may change the way they identify their gender or sexual orientation

All residents are expected to be active members of this community by providing support and encouragement to each other both in and outside of the residence hall environment, and by participating in continuing education surrounding gender and sexual identity.”

## III. Assessment

The Task Force identified ways in which to collect data regarding a Gender Neutral option. It was determined that a question on the Quality of Life survey and focus groups would be the best way to gauge student support and interest. Statements from community members were collected, and parents were asked to provide input. The results are detailed below.

The Educational Benchmarking survey was conducting in December, 2012. Students were asked to respond to the following question:

*“The Office of Residence Life is currently exploring a Gender Inclusive Housing*

*option. This would mean that students in this community could choose to live with other students regardless of gender identity. Would you support a Gender Inclusive housing option?"*

**83% of respondents indicated that they support a Gender Inclusive Housing option at Roosevelt.**

In December, 2012 a communication was sent through the parents newsletter asking for feedback or additional questions or concerns related to a Gender Inclusive Housing option. The Office of Residence Life received one response from a parent, who indicated full support for the initiative.

Statements of Support:

The following statements were provided to support the initiative through focus groups and communication with the Office of Residence Life:

*"As an out and proud gay man who believes that individuals should not be punished or discriminated against for their choice in who they love and how they express their love, it gives me great pleasure to write this email in support of the Gender Inclusive Housing option on campus. The human rights campaign for the GLBTIQ community has come so far but right now I believe that this issue is of such great importance in our community. Gender Inclusive options may help to break down the boundaries and fears that cause this type of defacement and inconsiderate attack upon others in the community.*

*I believe that supporting minority groups to fully achieve their academic goals is exactly the type of foundation that Roosevelt University was built upon. This housing option would allow students who do not define or limit themselves within the traditional binary terms of gender to feel comfortable and welcome in our housing community. As an education institute and now a residence, it is essential that we provide these students with support and access to resources as they discover their own path towards the people that they want to be. Such a program will also help the rest of the residence community to develop acceptance and build more understanding for this often overlooked and misunderstood issue as well as work towards providing a safe environment for all, no matter their sexuality or gender identity."*

*"I believe GIH is a way for Roosevelt to really showcase their dedication to modernity and diversity. A lot of colleges talk about how they respect the the queer community, but GIH is a real, concrete, and lasting way to demonstrate RU's progressive mindset."*

**IV. Housing Assignment Process**

The housing assignment workgroup determined that best practice and a good model for RU is to house students interested in a Gender and Diversity Inclusive community on the same floor in the Wabash Building. This will allow the staff to be trained to work with

the community and offer tailored support. This will also allow partnership with the Women and Gender Studies and Social Justice programs to support programmatic efforts and assist in supporting a learning community.

The following questions and answers describe the housing assignment process for the Gender Inclusive community.

**Q: Who can live in the Gender & Diversity Inclusive community?**

A: This housing option is open to all students. It provides options for transgender students, students in the process of discovering their gender identity, gay or bisexual students, students who feel uncomfortable with rooming with members of the same sex, intersex students who do not wish to be identified by any sex, and students who feel that they would be more comfortable with a roommate of a different gender.

**Q: Why is it important to offer gender-inclusive housing option?**

A: Residence Life is committed to providing safe and welcoming residence hall environments for all students. The addition of a gender-inclusive housing option acknowledges the diverse needs of the student body and helps further develop a residence hall climate that is positive, respectful, and inclusive for all residents.

**Q: How are roommates chosen?**

A: Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to self-select their roommate. If students are unable to identify a roommate and would like to live in the Gender Inclusive Community, Residence Life will make a roommate selection during the assignment process.

**Q: What if I am under 18?**

A: Students under the age of 18 must provide parent consent to live in the Gender Inclusive community.

**Q: How many spaces are available?**

A: The Gender Inclusive community will house as many students as are interested in residing in the community.

**Q: What is gender identity?**

A: Gender identity is one's sense of one's own gender. It is the inner sense of being a man, a woman, both, neither, two-spirit, multi-gender, bi-gender, or another configuration of gender.

**Q:** What if I want to support the Gender Inclusive students but I do not want to live in a Gender Inclusive housing space?

**A:** Students who wish to participate in the community can elect to live in gendered spaces as allies. The Diversity Inclusion component of the floor will examine topics of Diversity that are broader than gender, such as race and ethnicity.

## **V. Risks and Liability**

A review of literature and information on Gender Neutral/Gender Inclusive housing did not reveal any determined risks or liability for institutions. Students that elect to participate in the community are bound to the same contract as all other on campus communities, and must be over 18 or have parental permission to reside in the community.

## **VI. Impact on Facilities**

The Gender & Diversity Inclusive Community would be housed in the Wabash Building. The WB is a suite style community that has shared bathrooms within a 4-5 person suite. This style of community does not require any additional changes to the facility. Further facility considerations would include the Gender Inclusive bathrooms located throughout the university and determining a symbol or language that would appropriately describe the bathroom.

## **VII. Academic Partnerships and Community Education**

The Women and Gender Studies Program has agreed to partner with Residence Life to provide ongoing community education for students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and any constituents of RU. This community would be considered a Living Learning Community and students would participate in a cohort that would enroll in WGS 212: Feminism in Action which is a linked ACP 250 course. Programmatic initiatives within the community would focus on gender justice, relationships, and social change. Residence Life would partner with student groups and campus resources, such as Feminists United, the Counseling Center, and the Center for Student Involvement to provide support for the GI community. Additional partnerships can include the Mansfield Institute and Social Justice courses offered at Roosevelt.

## VIII. Task Force Membership

Jessica Thieson	Roosevelt University student
Brenden Carlson	Roosevelt University student
Brett Stechler	Roosevelt University student
Kaitlin Vens	Roosevelt University student
David Muirhead	Roosevelt University student
Lucas Barnhill	Roosevelt University student
Bridget Collier, Ed.D.	Residence Life
Matthew Smith, Ph.D.	Residence Life
Katie Denny	Residence Life
Bob Brophy	Director, University Center
Marlene Levine	Executive Director, University Center
Laura Kehoe	Office of Registrar
Pete Lahie	Office of Admissions
Jennifer Tani	Office of Government Relations and Outreach
Sarah Manzeske	Office of Student Services
Jude Hansen	Graduate Hall Director
Ellen O'Brien	Women and Gender Studies-Director