

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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GENERAL STUDIES STUDENT COUNCIL



HOUSING E-MAILS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Emails: 18 emails were received by University Senator Matan Ariel

Dates: Occurred from October 2004 to February 2005

Themes: There were 5 major themes of the emails, which included:

- i. positive feedback
- ii. GS/JTS separation
- iii. Lack of housing
- iv. IRE costumer service
- v. General feedback (maintenance, costs, wait-list situations etc)

Content: For GSSC records, the following document includes the content of the emails received and sent.

Recommendation:

This report is not a full representation of how GS students feel about housing--the response pool was small. Nonetheless, the students who replied express their applause and concerns in a way that might not otherwise be expressed. This report should be submitted to the GS Dean of Students Office, the Office of Institutional Real Estate (IRE), the office of Vice President for Student Services, and the List College Dean of Students Office. It should also be posted on the GSSC website.

The actions needed to remedy the concerns expressed in these e-mails, such as lack of housing, separation from an undergraduate community, high living-costs in NY, long wait-lists, and costumer service, are beyond the authority of the GSSC. By making this report public, however, the GSSC can publicly thank the Columbia administrators and maintenance personal who contribute to the wellbeing of our students. Similarly, we can point out incidents and themes that should be addressed by the University.

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REQUESTING INFORMATION FROM THE STUDENT BODY:

The following e-mail was sent to the GS student body on several occasions throughout the 2004-5 academic year:

Dear GS student,
Housing is one of the top concerns for GS students. We at the GSSC want to help!

Lack of housing is just one of the many difficulties we face at Columbia. In order for us to help you we need to hear your stories. We are not looking just for what you find bad about housing, but also what you like about the housing system, the services you receive, and your housing unit as a whole.

We hope that with your help we might be able to find reoccurring themes of both strong and weak aspects in the CU housing system. Our goal is to constantly push for improving housing services and to encourage the development of a cohesive housing community for our students

If you have had a great housing experience, if the employees at IRE were particularly helpful, if your superintendent fixes your heat even before you notice it is broken, or if your room and roommates assignment was a psychological masterpiece, LET US KNOW.

If you have encountered bad service, if your calls to UAH were not answered, if your e-mails were ignored, if you were denied housing despite being eligible, if your room was infested with cockroaches, if the door had no lock, or if your super was AWOL for months, LET US KNOW!

E-mail Matan at ma2157@columbia.edu. Please include the incident\’s that encouraged\’troubled you, the people involved, the dates, and your housing location. Also, please let us know if you are willing to have your name submitted to the administration, or if you prefer to remain anonymous.

The General Studies Student Council
<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gssc/>

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POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Date: Sun, 13 Feb 2005

Subject: Housing

I have nothing good to say about housing as far as placement or keeping their word. However, the maintenance part of my housing is wonderful. From Peter Hoff to Dolores Butler to her staff of a different Peter, Linda and one who's name I have forgotten, they just don't come any more helpful. The three porters under Dolores are so good it is as if there was a competition for the best team. They were here on the weekend while it was still snowing and their buildings were the only ones with clean sidewalks right away. I commented that they were really great and Peter said "We have a lot of senior citizens. It wouldn't do for one of them to fall."

I live in a very clean building. [name of tenant]
536 W. 113th Street [apartment number]
[phone number]

Date: Sun, 13 Feb 2005

Subject: Housing

I neglected to say that whatever needs fixing, gets fixed. Once I fill out a maintenance request, I know a contractor is going to knock at my door at 9o'clock the next day or soon thereafter. However, some things are beyond the Super and for those I go to her boss, Peter Hoff, who is available, tactful, and helpful. I could not ask for better maintenance.

[name of tenant]

Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004

Subject: Housing

Hi Matan,

[...]

I'm writing to say my housing experience has been great. The supers are nice, the room is nice, and when I had a problem, UAH helped me to sort it out.

Sincerely,

Chloe Carmichael
cjc2115@columbia.edu
[phone number of student]

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Hi Chloe,

I am happy to hear that! Can I include your information in what will eventually be a report to the administration?

Matan

Yes, please do. I want them to know how much I appreciate their help, especially a woman named Italia Mancinelli, who is Assistant Manager of UAH. Her number is 212-854-9318, email im1@columbia.edu.

Thanks!

Date: Sun, 9 Jan 2005
Subject: Re: Housing

Just a quick word on housing... I've actually had a really good experience living in the International House (which is offered through university housing). The rooms are moderately priced shoeboxes, but the social aspect of living at IHouse is incomparable. You might pass this on to anyone in GS who has international or multi-cultural interests, and who is older than 21. Or, if anyone is interested and has questions, feel free to forward my contact info (I've weathered one semester at IHouse New York, and 3 years at IHouse Berkeley).

Cheers,
[name of tenant]

Date: Sun, 9 Jan 2005
Subject: Re: GS: Housing!!!!

I'm from Kansas city. [I] came in from out of town went straight to the housing office signed my lease and was on my way. I've only been for a few days but my room is perfect, exactly what i asked for! thank you for your help and your reliability.

[name of tenant]
600 w. 113th st. [apartment number]

Date: Tue, 11 Jan 2005
Subject: Gs housing

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Hi Matan,

I was assigned a room at 600w 113 st. and it's been great. It has absolutely been above my expectations. The staff at the housing office were really helpful and just about everyone involved was very willing to help.

My room is great and I love the facilities, the internet and the TV cables provided are great and I just love the close proximity to school.

Cheers and keep up the good work :)

[name of tenant]

GS/JTS SEPARATION

Date: Fri, 26 Nov 2004

Subject: Re: GS: Housing Concerns?

To Whom it may concern,

We are in the joint program with JTS/GS. While we are happy with the program academically, we are concerned with our housing. We currently live in Mathilda Schecter residence halls where we feel extremely isolated from the rest of the college community. We are interested in finding out possible ulterior housing options. While we are aware that JTS students typically use the housing provided by JTS, and that housing is limited for GS students, we would appreciate any information that could help us in our search for other housing options. Thank you for your time and consideration,
[name of tenant] [e-mail address of tenant]

LACK OF HOUSING

Date: Thu, 28 Oct 2004

Subject: FW: Housing Concerns?

housing? what housing? :) I am a New York city resident and commute 2 hours each way. Columbia housing has two problems for me. Because I already lived in the city, I wouldn't qualify, and could you add the word "affordable" to the needs list? affordable housing is a concern.

Thanks for working to address the problem!

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[name of tenant]
[email of tenant]

Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004
Subject: GS housing concern

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for your time and consideration in these housing matters, I think this is a big issue. Here is my statement: There is absolutely no excuse for having 1400 people on the UAH wait list this semester. You would think, after 250 years Columbia would be able to provide housing to anyone who needs it. I am # 423 in the new male category. Just as the roster got close to my number, the open signups have ceased, so that "internal transfers" can take place, supposedly more spots will be available after this internal transfer is complete. But what spots will be available? Probably the less desirable rooms! (if any) I am also unhappy that GS is excluded from ON CAMPUS housing, cannot swipe into dorms when visiting friends, and we are excluded from applying for an RA position in the dormitories. We pay relatively the same (if not more) to attend Columbia, but I keep noticing that we get significantly less in return.

Regards,

[name of student]
[e-mail of student]

Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004
Subject: Re: GS Housing Issues.

Hi-

I'd like to say I have even HAD any housing experiences thru GS housing, but the sad fact of the matter is that I NEVER WAS HOOKED UP WITH A PLACE TO LIVE THRU YOUR SERVICES at all. I HAVE been on your waiting lists, etc., but to no avail. The last time, recently, I requested a login/ pass to access the housing database thru the correct e-mail procedure (almost a month ago), and nobody got back to me. Thus, for the 3 years I have been here at GS, have always had to find my own places to live without any thanks to your department. I have had to find my places either from flyers, or craigslist.org. I think a little more effort on your part is in order. We pay a ton of money to go to this school, and it only detracts from our learning experience (and taxes our mental health) to be always frantically scrambling for a place to live.

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>Arielle JS Abrams

PS- I FINALLY JUST found a place to live NEAR to Columbia and in an acceptable neighborhood after all this time (Starting Nov.1, on W109 betw. Bwy/ Amst.). For the 3 years I have been at Columbia, I have lived in 4 apartments, 2 of which I had a lease for, up in the 130's-140's. The time and energy I have spent fighting with the horrible f-ing slumlords and subleters has been a living hell. My grades and my emotional state have suffered because of this. I wish I could be attending a Columbia 250 event this Friday, but I have to be IN COURT for the last place I was living at, to take care of residual issues. The place was on W 133rd St./ Amsterdam and it was a real hellhole, with huge mice infestations, garbage piled up in the downstairs hallway, and even RATS and DRUGDEALERS in the halls daily. **Put a note in your records that this place was owned/managed by Mr. Hamid Khan of Collegiate Realty. If you have any Columbia housing associated with this scumbag, I suggest you scratch him off your list (he owns various properties in the Upper West Side). His precious daughter goes to Columbia, but there is no way in hell he'd ever let her live in this place that he owned/operated.**

Why don't you guys clean up your system a bit and reach out a little more to your students, who are your bread and butter? Nobody should have to suffer with living situations like the way I have, while also trying to achieve their best at such a renowned institution of learning.

Dear Arielle JS Abrams,

I am so sorry to hear about your housing situation in the past few years. The GS Student Council will do everything it can to improve the wellbeing of you and other students. Can I assume that you have no problem with us including your information in what will eventually be a report to the administration? We can also include an actual copy of your e-mail as well.

*Sincerely,
Matan Ariel*

Hey- yes, I guess that's alright. Thanks.
>Arielle

Date: Mon, 10 Jan 2005
Subject: RE: Housing!!!!

housing? what housing? I came to Columbia as married NYC resident with extremely limited financial resources. I have two impediments to Columbia housing--eligibility and money.
what housing?

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IRE COSTUMER SERVICE

Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004

Subject: GS: Housing Concerns?

So I applied for the housing transfer and got lottery number 19. I went in on the first day to pick out three single dorm rooms to look at, I had to take off work (work-study gig) to go. I get my three rooms and I tell her (Anissa Timothy) than I can't go that afternoon because of work. She says check them out in the morning, they start showing at 8am. so I go around 8:30 to see the room and the supper has stepped out to get breakfast I finally get in and see the room, I also went around the corner to see another room and then i rush off to class. As soon as I get out of class I head over to housing to let them know what room I want. Mrs. Timothy informs be that because i did not "send someone over" or call or send an email by 9:15am to let her know of my selections I would now be out of the lottery. Had she simply checked her books to see if someone else had expressed interest in the room then i would have been happy to take my second choice but she refused and informed me that all of my room selections would be offered to the rest of lottery and I could come back after 4 days and see if ANYTHING was "left over"

I explained the super was not there and that I had to go to class. She said other people "sent people" or "made exceptions and went to class late" I explained it was a once a week seminar where attendance and punctually it count. She basically told be tough luck, that some how doing back flips for her department and not going to classes is what i came here to do.

[name of tenant]

Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004

Subject: housing response

My name is [name of student] and I am a new transfer student here at GS. Simply put, I have been incredibly displeased with the housing here at Columbia. The entire experience was distressing and totally discouraging. I moved out here from California, and figured that since I was coming 3500 miles across country and paying 43,000 dollars a year to make this educational opportunity possible that I would be given some sort of preference or at least adequate treatment. This was not the case, I turned in my housing application early yet heard no response. I followed up, and either wasn't called back or was given the run-around when I actually did speak with representatives from UAH. It got to the point where I was set to move in two days and still didn't have a place to live. As a result, when I got out here I had to spend and entire week, viewing between 5-12 places a day just to find someplace to live. I went to the UAH office and was completely disrespected. I was either blown off, or told by people that "there was nothing they could do, it was out of

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their hands". I was told to monitor the wait list, which I did, and which was completely futile. I was number 434 and [since] the wait list was moving like molasses it appeared that I wouldn't get a place to live until November or December if I even got a place at all. And after all, what good does getting a place three months into the school year do for me, what was I supposed to do, sleep on campus holding on to the vague hope that something "might" become available. So I had to get myself a place off campus. This makes sense for many GS students who are older and returning to school, but being that I am a 21 year old broke student, affording a New York apartment was next to impossible. As it is, I got tied into a one year lease (as is customary here in NY) in which I am paying 1350\$ per month of money that I don't have to spend as opposed to the 2500\$ PER SEMESTER that I was planning on paying for University housing. So I am now effectively paying thousands of dollars more per year than I was anticipating, oh and by the way, its not like tuition or other living expenses are cheap here in New York. Basically, the housing at Columbia was a complete disappointment, I have no idea who runs this division of the University, but they need to be replaced. I have no idea where you find the geniuses that work in UAH who can't utter a phrase other than, "sorry, I don't know what to tell you" but the hiring process needs to be changed. I have no idea how you can even claim that this is a functional part of the College, because from my experience it was completely and totally dysfunctional. I AM PAYING 43,000\$ PER YEAR TO GO TO SCHOOL HERE, AND THIS IS THE ABSOLUTE BEST THAT CAN BE OFFERED! What about those students who don't have the resources or support to pull things together last minute, what, are they just deprived of the Ivy League opportunity that they EARNED because the housing system is messed up and they can't afford an off campus place. I mean, it is completely ludicrous. Simply put, I cannot believe that at an Ivy League institution, one of the best schools in the country and supposedly one of the best schools in the world that this is the treatment that is given to students who are investing a small fortune to come here. Its the worst division of any institution that I have ever witnessed in my limited experience and I believe that everyone involved with GS housing should be completely embarrassed by the dysfunctional nature of its operations. Serious changes need to be made, and it needs to happen now rather than later.

Sincerely,
[name of student] (GS)

P.S. Please feel free to share this story with any and every advisor/administrator that will listen to it, it is important that this message be heard. Thank you for your time.

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GENERAL FEEDBACK

Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004
Subject: Re: GS: Housing Concerns?

I am currently a Junior at GS and I have had two different housing situations at Columbia. The first was a share with three roommates. We had one bathroom, two of the roommates were really messy - to the point that we got rodents and insects in our apartment. I had never seen people live in such disgust as I did during that housing experience.

When one of the roommates left - the clean one - I was left alone with the two dirty roommates. I did not have the energy to clean up the entire apt. by myself and I eventually became so stressed that I got an ulcer and migraines. I finally went to speak to the housing supervisor at GS - Dominic Stellini. He advised me to get on a lottery to change living situation. I did, and I had my own apt. within a month of beginning the process - recently renovated apt. that is well lit and has hardwood floors. I suffered but at the end everything came through for me and now I am living in an ideal housing situation.

I hope this helps,
[name of tenant]

Date: Sun, 9 Jan 2005
Subject: Housing Response to Matan

Dear Matan,

This is in response to Ariel Beery's e-mail concerning housing.

The last time I was in Columbia housing was about 14 years ago. I was visiting a GS student then. The place was infested with roaches, and was not well decorated. I have neither roaches nor mice, but my building has them, and in New York I have been fortunate to have been well advised with the best methods to keep these things out of one's apartment. You may want to have this information handy, or maybe the housing people should. We have an exterminator visit our building monthly, but I don't use him generally because I don't like the smell or chemical residue. Some people can find themselves developing allergic reactions to these, also. The sure way to keep them away is to use COMBAT GOLD. It comes in a gold box, and there is now a yearly version, but you want to get the stuff that needs replacing every six months. You can get roach "motels" (of different sizes) that, cleverly hidden and placed, will eliminate roaches. If you have them, I am told it takes a little while for a complete effect. I replace them every few months in my apartment. Even though I have none, my neighbor does, so I have to be on the defensive. Also, the best mouse detractor I have found is a sound machine that

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you plug in around the house that emits sounds inaudible to the human ear but which mice apparently can't stand. I also keep all my grains and edibles in jars or cabinets inaccessible to a mouse. And I ensure that my walls and joints are sealed off, with steel wool around pipes and putty. If a mouse gets bold, you can get a humane trap and then release them outside. The exterminators have poison or glue traps, which are traumatic to have to use, and not good for anyone. All of this stuff is available at a good hardware store.

I live in my own apartment in the Bronx. I like it because it is large, the view is very nice, the air is much fresher, and the area has a lot of parks. It is north Bronx, so relatively safe, and used by students of Fordham University. You might want to ask Columbia to keep a list of landlords in other areas of New York for students, but I realize this is way off your main concern.

Hope this helps,

Best wishes,

[name of student]

Date: Sun, 09 Jan 2005
Subject: GS Housing

I wish GS offered housing for students with pets. The 0-pet policy is understandable for the average 18-yr old undergrad but for those of us who are adults and have had animals integrated into our lives for a while, it would be nice to have at least a pet-deposit policy as is standard with most "real world" housing. (cats & small dogs?)

I'm glad you're addressing the general housing issue--any suggestions for where I can go for more help in my own search?

Thanks,

[name of student]
[e-mail of student]
[phone number of student]

Date: Sun, 9 Jan 2005
Subject: Housing notes

Hi, Matan!

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Here are a few quick notes about my Columbia housing experience.

GOOD:

I love my apartment! The building (419 West 119th Street) is old but charming, the staff is superb, and it's literally half a block from Mudd, where I have most of my classes. The \$25/month access to the Columbia internet backbone is also fantastic. I am very lucky to have this apartment.

GOOD/BAD:

The rent of \$958/month is "great" for Manhattan, but, of course, it's still a bit steep when you're borrowing it all to go to GS. The heat is good most of the time, but, of course, it's simply either on or off -- there's no temperature control as such. So, when it's on, it's too hot, and, when it's off, it gets cold.

NOT SO GOOD:

I was thrilled and grateful to get my housing assignment, but I felt that I got it at the very last minute. I was moving up to NYC from Columbia, South Carolina, and I had to line friends and family up to help me with the truck, loading, unloading, etc. -- and it was very hard to set all that up while enduring the uncertainty of no housing assignment until some 2 weeks before my move-in date. The stress was pretty awful.

When I arrived, my superintendent (the excellent Mr. Corbin) looked nonplussed and told me that my apartment was "not ready." My moving crew and I had to wait for a couple of hours for the staff to clean it up just enough for us to move in -- and they didn't have time to finish and had to come back later. It was the central housing office that dropped the ball in this case -- its team did not inform Mr. Corbin's staff of my move-in date and time in a timely fashion, even though they had that information available.

Columbia Housing doesn't give you a copy of your lease, just the first page of it. There are occasions when it is useful to have the whole lease, but you have to request it and wait for the copy to come in, by which time you're likely to forget to pick it up.

Perhaps partly because I didn't have my full lease around, I forgot that you had to be enrolled full time at all times in order to keep your apartment. When I started, I had 12 hours of Computer Science classes, but the particular combination proved to be too much, so I had to drop one course at the last possible moment, continuing with only 9 credits. Several weeks later, out of the blue, I got an eviction notice from Housing. No warning, no questions, nothing -- just when and where to drop the keys off. I had to

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invoke the gracious and angelic assistance of our own Assistant Dean Dominic Stellini to help me out of this bind, and, thank heavens, that worked out.

Things like the last-minute housing assignment and the summary eviction notice contribute to a general impression of Columbia being great on faculty but lousy on the little things that could make living here a more pleasant experience. Too many unanswered e-mails, cold-sounding and uninformative people answering the phones, etc.

DESIDERATA

Everybody knows that NY housing is scarce, but I believe a lot of Columbia GS students have the intention of remaining in New York City, if possible, after completing their programs. It would be great if Columbia organized some sort of part-volunteer, part-sponsored effort to ease the transition for students from Columbia housing to the cold and hostile open market, just as the Center for Career Education is supposed to help -- or should be supposed to help -- ease students' transition from classes to jobs.

Thanks!

Best wishes,
Amittai

afa13@columbia.edu
[web address]

Date: Mon, 10 Jan 2005
Subject: Fwd: GS: Housing!!!!

Hi Matan,

I'm abroad, in Germany, right now... but, I lived in Apartment 9D4 of 600 W. 113th Street last Spring Semester.

I thought that the staff at 600 W. 113th were absolutely great. They were, all, very friendly, and problems were addressed as soon as they were reported. The laundry facilities in the basement weren't bad, either.

The rest of the conditions at 600 W. 113th, however, are pretty bad. There were cockroaches EVERYWHERE, despite the fact that an exterminator would come quite regularly to spray. The bathrooms were pretty disgusting, too... they were definitely NOT cleaned as often or as thoroughly as they should have been. In fact, they would only ever be cleaned after the students complained about standing cess-pools of water, etc.. Lastly, there are non-Columbia residents living in 600 W. 113th, and the ones living

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next to me, in 9D, were rather scary people. I was pretty uncomfortable about having complete strangers coming & going through our apartment-unit at all hours of the day/night.

That's all that I have for you... Hope it helps!

Ben Morris (bbm2103)

Date: Mon, 10 Jan 2005

Subject: Re: GS: Housing!!!!

Actually, I was left completely in the lurch by the housing system. Coming from the other side of the country, I am lucky that I knew a couple people out here who were able to assist my housing search. All I got from the Housing system was a "don't count on it". I suppose this comes down to simple over population, so I don't really hold it against any of you. I promise. I was fortunate, though, that my situation allowed me to become reasonably settled before the semester began. I wonder about others--younger and less well connected.

I don't need any response or anything, or satisfaction. But you asked for my opinion, and here it is with its tone of entitlement.

Ossian Foley
