EMPOWERING ROOMMATE SELF-SELECTION

Written and Researched by: **BRANDON BARILE**

RoomSync Housing Professionals Ambassador
Hobart and William Smith Colleges Assistant Director of Housing Operations
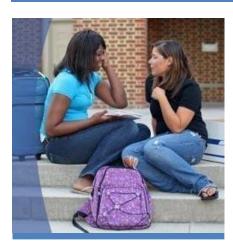
RoomSync

EMPOWERING ROOMMATE SELF-SELECTION

For decades, housing professionals have known that a successful roommate relationship could lead to a successful academic year, making roommate assignments the single most significant educational program conducted through housing[i].

When completing first-year assignments, some institutions believe that roommate matches randomly assigned are no less successful than those that are self-selected. However, research shows no supporting information to support this belief[ii]. In fact, roommate self-selection tends to empower students to make informed and independent decisions, encourages ownership of roommate problems and allows students to begin "caring" for their roommate relationship before they are placed into the situation.

Studies suggest that increasing the ability for a student to self-select a roommate will lead that student to take greater responsibility for concerns and problems, and put less blame on their roommate[iii]. One of the key dimensions of empowerment is the ability to respond to events in a productive way through responsibility-taking and ownership. This aspect of empowerment permeates the mentality of students who self-selected their own roommates. They begin to solve interpersonal conflicts on their own through their sense of ownership in the roommate selection decision.

RANDOM MATCHING VERSUS SELF-SELECTION

Students took ownership and responsibility to create a good roommate relationship when self-selecting their roommate (Coleman, 2006).

While there is no significant difference between purely random roommate assignments and roommate matches assigned by housing offices through a single dimension, such as a preference room[iv], there is a high correlation between roommate success and roommate self-selection[v].

When students had an opportunity to make a decision in their room selection process, they were empowered and invested in their roommate relationship. If some issue did arise, a roommate change was not always the first option. Conversely, students who were randomly assigned a roommate were significantly more likely to change roommates[vi].

When being empowered to self-select a roommate, students report a greater level of satisfaction with the housing selection process because they were more in control of an aspect of college life that they had traditionally felt was stressful[vii].

RoomSync

One research study[viii] compared students who had selected their own roommates to those randomly assigned by the housing office. The study found that students who had self-selected their roommates were more likely to remain with a roommate they had chosen, even when they had a low level of rapport with them, demonstrating their ownership in the decision versus blame. Students who self-select take more responsibility for the success or failure of the roommate relationship[ix].

While students generally consider housing assignments to be one of the more stressful experiences, ABC News[x] revealed that when the ability to self-select was introduced, students were not only more empowered in their decision-making ability, but were also more satisfied with the ability to self-select. In addition, students with the ability to utilize an online self-selection resource also reported higher satisfaction.
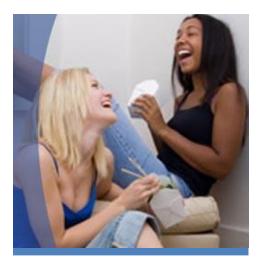
In fact, roommate peer effects are important influences in freshman year GPA and in decisions to join social organizations[xi], both of which may be contributing factors in the student's persistence at the school and future success. This continues to support that the empowerment of self-selection will pervade a student's drive and support to achieve college-related goals.

SELF-SELECTION: IMPACT ON STAFF

Another study found that students who had selected their own roommates over random matching were more likely to remain with a roommate they had chosen, reducing administrative demands on housing offices for room changes[xii]. Universities can also decrease administrative burden by providing resources to facilitate self-selection.

An online forum allowing students to search for potential roommates to fill vacancies normally filled by the housing office was used in an apartment setting at Washington State University. The addition of a self-selection component decreased the vacancy rate from 10 percent to 2 percent in the first year of use[xiii].

With additional student ownership during a roommate disagreement, students were less likely to request roommate changes. Instead, they were more likely to stick through a situation and attempt to resolve the situation. Research shows that a student's involvement and control over the roommate selection process decreases the administrative workload[xiv].

Students reported that they were pleased with the ability to self-select their roommate and that it reduced their stress…

This is one factor that may rank highly during a housing office's requisition process of roommate matching software. A high level of student ownership of the roommate matching decision not only

RoomSync

decreases the expected burden of blame on housing staff when things don't go smoothly, but also adds another level of security in the process to ensure that the students walk into to a satisfying situation.

RESOURCES TO SMOOTH THE PROCESS

Social media may have a positive impact on students' sense of themselves in the community. **Students who use social media were twice as likely as other students to feel well-liked by their peers *and* to participate in extracurricular activities.**

Students who use Facebook said they felt 20 percent more connected to their school and community, as compared to those who don't use the site. This use of social media now allows for students to connect to their community prior to their arrival.

Facebook has been anecdotally documented as a cause of the uptick in demands for roommate reassignment received by housing offices following random assignment. Oftentimes, these requests come from parents who didn't like what they found on their child's assigned roommate's profile. When students have the opportunity to make a decision about a roommate, the element of surprise is not present[xv] and won't result in a sudden backlash of reassignment phone calls.

Schools who have used self-selecting online services have reported a 65-percent reduction in roommate conflicts.

Schools that have used self-selecting online services have reported a 65-percent reduction in roommate conflicts, while 48 percent of residence hall staffers said conflicts were "less severe" after adopting the service[xvi]. Further, nearly 10 percent more students who self-selected a roommate through an online search program were still with their original roommate (91 percent compared to 82 percent) from one semester to the next[xvii].

CONCLUSION

Allowing students to self-select a roommate has become an empowerment opportunity. Instead of removing their input, the decision becomes solely theirs. Data suggests that with this opportunity, students take further responsibility when an issue does arise and are more willing to work through related issues, instead of requesting a new roommate at the first glimpse of incompatibility. Lastly, using an online search program increases the likelihood not only of a student self-selecting a roommate, but also increases the likelihood students will persist with their original roommate and achieve success in college.

RoomSync

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND INSIGHTS

RoomSync empowers students by providing a superior roommate matching experience via Facebook. The roommate matching experience happens securely within Facebook, providing students with a fun and engaging way to find roommates. At the same time, housing departments can access a full set of tools to manage the matching process every step of the way.

As of May 2013, more than 40 universities and colleges have selected RoomSync to provide them with powerful, convenient, student-driven roommate assignments through Facebook.

For more information about RoomSync, or to set up a demo, e-mail us at info@roomsync.com, give us a call at 352.327.4061, or visit us at www.roomsync.com.

Cited Resources

[i] Garb, E. (1978). Roommate compatibility: A theoretical model, Journal of College and University Student Housing, 8(1), 24-27.

[ii] Thompson, S. C. & Kelley, H. H. (1981). Judgments of responsibility for activities in close relationships. Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 41, 469-477.

[iii] (Thompson & Kelley, 1981)

[iv] (Gehring, D.D. (1970). Prediction of roommate compatibility. Journal of College Student Personnel, 11, 58-61.

[v] Coleman, J. K. & Cooper, D. L. (2005). The effect of self-selecting roommates in university housing. Unpublished manuscript, University of Georgia.

[vi] (Coleman, 2006)

[vii] Hoover, E. (2002). Self selection. Chronicle of Higher Education, 9/20/2002, 49(4), A35.

[viii] Stanley, D., Werring, C., & Carey, J.C. (1988). Level of rapport and frequency of change in self-selected and randomly assigned roommate pairs. Journal of College and University Student Housing, 18(2), 21-24.

[ix] (Coleman, 2006)

[x] Reeves, M. & Jamieson, B., (8/30/03). Cyber roommates: Colleges adopt online matching service so freshmen can pick roomie, ABC News. Retrieved 11/15/03 from ABCNews.com.

[xi] Sacerdote, B. (2000). Peer Effects with Random Assignment: Results For Dartmouth Roommates. Dartmouth College and NBER, 11-18.

[xii] (Stanley, Werring, and Carey, 1988)

[xiii] Tattershall, R. (2003, October). Using bulletin boards to match roommates for single student apartments. ACUHO-I Talking Stick, 14-15.

[xiv] (Coleman, 2006)

[xv] (Marklein, M.B. (2012, August). Colleges differ on best way of roommate selection. USA Today.

[xvi] Carter, D. (2012). Researchers: Self-selecting college roommates can improve grades. eCampus News.

[xvii] (Coleman, 2006)

RoomSync