Family Housing Needs & Issues Identified in the Literature

UC Davis Student Family Housing Redevelopment Committee
Fall 2014

Presentations

Hey, We’re Students Too! Reframing Programming Efforts in Graduate and Family Housing to Address Students’ Academic Needs, Thomas Germain & Mary C. Jordan, PowerPoint presentation at the 2011 Annual Conference & Exposition of the Association of College and University Housing Officers - International.

This PowerPoint presentation summarized issues at the University of Florida (980 apts, 1500 residents, nearly all are grad students, most are international students, and over half are single students).

Between 1999 and 2010 they saw a steady and significant decline in the number of children (from 450 to 200) and an increase in the percentage of single students (32% to 57%). They did not discuss any reasons for the decline.

They identified the students’ primary challenges and responsibilities as financial issues, language barriers, and childcare.

Their program focuses on transition issues, community integration, culture sharing, and programs geared toward families and children.

The presentation also provides data from a survey at the University of Florida, University of Georgia, Iowa State University, and University of Colorado at Boulder. They found that 50% of students spent more than 30 hours a week studying and 35% did most of their studying in their apartment. Students wanted a safe and secure community and a separate study space in the community.

Helping Graduate Students Succeed in an Undergrad-Driven World, Kelly Ignatowski, Jan Sternbach, & Alicia Kreul. 2013 Annual Conference & Exposition of the Association of College and University Housing Officers - International.

The presenters were from the University of Wisconsin - Madison - 1235 apartments, 3000 residents, 83 acres, 61% students, 22% postdocs, 14% faculty/staff, 66% are international students, 65% are families, 750 children.

2009 meeting of Big 10 Housing Officers – reported a decrease of students in family housing, more grad students in singles, more international students, and grad students struggling to balance roles (parent, student, TA).

Compared to residence hall students, students in graduate and family housing:

- are more isolated
- have less staff supervision and oversight
- have fewer opportunities to meet neighbors
- have less time to attend community events
- often don’t want or need relationships with housing staff
- are more focused on studies, research & teaching and less involved in campus groups & activities
- have less social support as extended family is often distant
- are likely to be struggling with more serious relationships
- have more financial stress from limited stipend support
- Families have to deal with family dynamics, balancing roles, work/school visa issues, childcare & school districts, and financial stress.
- In addition to the typical stress and pressures of grad school, international students must 1) adjust to a new language and culture, 2) deal with financial worries, 3) navigate a foreign education system, and 4) grapple with feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Also, they may have more stress/pressure to succeed from family and home country.
Strategies to meet challenges:

- provide exceptional customer service (greater friendliness, willingness to help, individualized communication, promptness in responding, and more sensitivity and concern)
- make a big place seem small
- build community & develop relationships
- make it easy for students to find and connect with resources
- bring resources to the community so it's easier for busy students to access the information

Articles

Housing for Graduate Students, Patricia L. Mielke and John H. Schuh, New Directions for Student Services, June 1, 2003.

Grad students housing should be reasonably priced, convenient to campus facilities, comfortable, and quiet. It should help them pursue their education without distraction. (2nd page)

Support Staff - A staff person may be provided who has some of the features found in social work and recreation administration in order to create the elements found in a neighborhood. This person might work with students, spouses and children to organize activities, recommend childcare, make referrals to campus and city services, work with the local school district, and provide general support. (2nd page)

Community Space - Central to the success of any programming or student governance effort is the need for meeting or community gathering space. (4th page)

International students – Language issues can be a special concern with spouses or children who may be less fluent in English than the grad student is. The problem is exacerbated when staff contact family members during normal business hours, when most grad students are in class. Written materials can be provided in different languages. Campus resources such as language institutes can be made available to family members. (5th page)

Definition of Family - Campus administrators need to consider the issue of domestic partners in determining policies for eligibility. (6th page)

Evaluation – Routine evaluations of facilities, programs and services will enhance the quality of the living experience.


Schuh discusses the differences between the lives of families living in community neighborhoods and those living in higher-density family housing for shorter periods of time – less community.

"Mable, Terry, and Duvall (1980) introduced a conceptual model for the development of community that incorporates three ingredients: shared goals, shared responsibilities, and shared communication. These elements parallel the elements of community suggested by Murphy and Howard (1977), which included identification, moral unity, involvement, and wholeness. When these elements of community, and the functions of neighborhoods introduced earlier, are reviewed, it becomes clear that developing a sense of neighborhood is one of the ways that those responsible for family housing can begin to create a sense of community and can ameliorate the stress and alienation that is part of high-density living." (p. 27)

"Simply doing things for residents of family housing will not solve problems, because the provision of services will not address the problems created by the absence of a neighborhood. People who live in family housing must play an essential role in the development of the environment. If they are denied that opportunity, their community will not develop." (p. 27)

"Butler (1975) suggested a five-step model that seems appropriate for family housing:
1. Start with activities that have been carried on before and that have been successful.
2. Expand the program in areas of universal or well-known interest.
3. Consider recreational programs provided by local organizations.
4. Organize new activities as special interests or needs are discovered and as new needs develop.
5. When the community, its resources, people, and needs have been studied, develop new activities that will enrich the life of the community.” (p. 28)

“Several conclusions can be developed from the preceding discussion on program development for family housing. They include the following:
1. Programming can be developed for remedial, preventive, or developmental purposes.
2. The elements of community (shared goals, responsibilities, and communication) are the basis upon which neighborhoods can be developed.
3. Clear, logical processes should be followed for the development of programs or services in family housing, based on the identification of values and beliefs of the community.
4. There will be times when the institution will have to act as an interested third party in mediating disputes between the recipients of services and those who pay for the services.
5. A prescribed process should be followed in developing programs or activities for family student housing.” (p. 28)

“By approaching the concerns of students residing in family housing from the perspective of fostering community, and of providing an array of interventions heavily focused on human development, housing officers will be able to meet the needs of a very important clientele—the residents of family student housing.” (p. 29-30)

Neighbor Interaction and Stress in Family Housing, Donald F. Whalen & Mary Winter, Journal of College and University Student Housing, 17(1), 1987. pp. 28-34

Study at Iowa State – 1460 apartments, 80% occupied by families

“Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) and Mercer (1985) found that in an apartment complex the physical setting and the proximity of apartments to each other determined the pattern of social life by influencing the number of chance meetings among residents. These passive contacts formed the basis for the development of friendships, which may have been the key to reducing stress. Taylor (1982) noted that neighborhoods can reduce stress by promoting social interaction, social control, a sense of security and ease, organizational ties, collective identity, and a sense of place for socialization.” (p. 28)

“. . . only one variable, annual income, was a significant predictor of the number of neighbors known. Those residents with lower household incomes reported knowing more neighbors than did residents with higher incomes, Possibly this relationship was a function of the positive correlation between income and the number of workers. Residents who were employed had less time to meet others in the apartment complex than those not employed. An alternative explanation is that those with lower in- comes look to neighbors for social interaction.” (p. 32)

“. . . there is some support for the notion that simply being acquainted with neighbors can lead to trust and reliance on neighbors.” (p. 32)

“. . . relationships with neighbors that are characterized by trust and reliance reduce the likelihood of stressful interactions. On the other hand, the demands of a job, especially in combination with the pressures of academics, may result in greater vulnerability to stress caused by neighbors.” (p. 33)

“The results suggest that if residents of family housing get to know their neighbors, the frequency with which neighbors are a source of stress may be reduced.” (p. 33)

Books

Most of the books referenced in the committee’s report are available through interlibrary loan. In 2013, the Association of College & University Housing Officers International published a series of books on campus housing management (edited by N. Dunkel and J. Baumann). We borrowed these books from staff in Student Housing.