



University Life Division
Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs

**TO: UNIVERSITY HOUSE CORPORATION REPRESENTATIVES,
CHAPTER PRESIDENTS AND HOUSE MANAGERS**

**FROM: BETH SCHNITMAN-MALM, ASSOC. DIR – CHAPTER HOUSE
ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE**

RE: CHAPTER HOUSE OCCUPANCY - LOOKING AHEAD

DATE: AUGUST, 2009

For the past few years, in preparation for the next year's housing, a new option was initiated to try to assist chapters to get upperclass members to live in the chapter houses. We distributed "Letters of Commitment" for current members to sign to live in the chapter houses for the next academic year. Upperclass members of your chapters were encouraged to sign this commitment letter before November 1st to indicate their intent to live in the chapter house during the next academic year. This enabled upperclass members to know that they have a space in the house for next year before they consider signing a lease to live off campus. This also helped to support the Occupancy Policy of having approximately 40% of total house residents being upperclass members as residents each year (this varies from house to house but 40% is the "target").

This program proved to be very successful for a number of chapters that utilized the "Letter of Commitment" option. Other chapters, that did not encourage members to sign the letters, continue to struggle to meet their responsibility of having "full" occupancy for their chapter house for next year. This has resulted in higher rents and higher Facilities Management Fees for out-of-house members who chose not to live in their chapter houses.

Additionally, when occupancy agreements were submitted the first week of April, some chapters were WRONG about how many residents they indicated would be living in their house next year when asked at their annual budget meeting in February. This necessitated the budgets, rent rates and facilities management fee rates all having to be reworked and increased. This in turn, caused some students and their parents to reconsider their membership status and talk about resigning from their chapter because the Facilities Mgt. Fee was so high.

EVERY CHAPTER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING SURE THEIR HOUSE IS AT FULL OCCUPANCY EACH YEAR (see attached Chapter House Occupancy Policy). If you don't, the costs go up and this is not what anyone wants to see happen. Every member needs to understand that the decision that each of them makes on where they live each year impacts the rent and Facilities Management Fee rates.

Therefore, as we prepare to begin a new academic year, you need to start thinking ahead to the 2010-2011 academic year and what needs to happen to make sure that all our houses are at full occupancy.

Effective with the 2010-2011 Academic year, every chapter will be required to do the following:

- Utilize the “Letters of Commitment” for current members to sign this fall. You should have approximately 40-50% of your spaces FILLED by November 1st by doing this.
- New Members who join during January, 2010 recruitment and are planning/expected to live in the chapter house during the 2010-2011 academic year, will be required to sign “Letters of Commitment” to live in their chapter houses no later than February 15, 2010.
 - New Member Education will not be over for most, but this is NOT an acceptable reason for not having new members sign Letters of Commitment. If they sign the letter, they are not signing a lease off campus or in the college houses. They should not be expected to wait until initiation to know if they are a full member. They need to be able to make plans for where they will live the next year!!
 - Any vacancies can also be filled by current members who did not sign letters in the fall.
- **Any chapter that does not have a full occupancy roster (including letters of commitment for each person on their chapter roster) by February 10, 2010, will be subject to further review by OFSA and their Alumni House Corporation Board regarding their status to occupy their chapter house for the next academic year.**
 - A chapter's budget meeting will not be scheduled until this is satisfactorily addressed
 - The number of occupancy agreements turn in on April 1st must match the names on your roster and letters of commitment that were submitted in November 2009 and February 2010.
- All chapters need to:
 - Begin discussing the importance of, and how they will fill their chapter house with current members as well as new members who join as a result of Formal Recruitment in January 2010 at their chapter meetings during the fall, 2009 semester.

- How will your chapter incorporate housing into your Informal (Fall 2009 Showcasing and Information Sessions), on your website, as well as Formal Recruitment Programs (January, 2010)?
- What do your By-Laws say about members living in your houses? If every member (fraternities in particular) was required to live in their house for at least one year, filling the house would not be a problem.
 - It may be appropriate for your chapter by-laws to include requiring certain officers to live in the house. General guidelines from both OFSA and most national headquarters is that at least the President, Vice President and Treasurer live in as well as the House Manager.
- How is your chapter going to keep your house full for both fall and spring semester and still try to accommodate Junior Year Semester Abroad members who want to live in the chapter house for one semester only? Each chapter MUST have at least 95% occupancy fall and spring semesters.

Presidents and House Managers will receive copies of the “Letter of Commitment” from OFSA the beginning of October for current members to sign. These need to be completed and returned to OFSA by November 1, 2009. Similarly, you will receive Letters of Commitment for New Members on February 1, 2010. These will need to be signed and returned to OFSA on February 10, 2010.

We can also discuss and consider other “incentives” to encourage current/upperclass members to live in the chapter houses. For example:

- If Letters of Commitment are submitted by November 1st there could be a 10% discount on what would be the per semester rent rate for next year. If it is submitted by December 1st, the discount could be 5%. A percentage of no more than 50% of your total occupancy number will be eligible for a discount.

We encourage you to develop a plan or, review your chapter’s existing plan, in order to meet your chapter’s obligation to keep your house at full occupancy every year. Any house that is unable to meet their full occupancy obligation could jeopardize their ability to keep their chapter house in the future as noted above.

If you have any questions or need an update on what 40% or full occupancy is for you house, please contact me at schnitma@upenn.edu or 215-898-0538.

Thank you!