

# Dorm contracts not selling

By Patrick Low  
Of the Emerald

When University freshman Jayne Hanslovan moved out of the campus dormitories and into the Delta Gamma sorority, she thought getting rid of her nine-month dorm contract would be relatively easy. All she had to do was forfeit her \$50 deposit and pay the University's Housing Department \$1 a day until she found someone to take her place.

But it's been more than a month since she advertised her contract for sale in the Oregon Daily Emerald and on various notice boards around campus, and so far she says the response has been terrible.

"I thought it would be easy to sell my contract, because I thought there were a lot of people waiting to get in. But there weren't," she says.

Hanslovan is one of about 30 students who moved out of the dorms this term and discovered in the following weeks how costly and frustrating getting rid of a dorm contract can be. An unsold contract can cost more than \$200 in daily penalties.

Potential buyers are scarce in the middle of a term, and stiff competition among the sellers accounts for the seductive promises of cash or libations that accompany dorm contracts advertised for sale in the Emerald classified ads.

Many students leave the dorms to join and move into a fraternity or sorority, and some are lucky enough to receive compensation for the contract fees from their Greek houses. However, Hanslovan's sorority does not offer such help, and she can't afford to have the \$1-a-day penalty cost hanging over her head, she says.

Hanslovan says she sought help from the Housing Department but received virtually no assistance in finding a replacement for her dorm unit.

"I was sort of surprised," she says. "They're the Housing Department and I thought they'd help me line up people. I went in there, and they said all they could do for me was tell me where to put up ads. I figured there'd be more of a way they could help me."

Dick Romm, director of residence life, admits Housing Department policies have given the department a somewhat shady reputation. But the policies must remain, given the financial realities of operating the dorms, he explains.

Romm says contracts are long-term because it's the only way the department can be guaranteed a fixed number of residents for three terms.

"If we have a term-by-term contract we would probably have to budget on the fact that we'll be less full," Romm explains. "We'll have to be more conservative because we're not allow-

ed to lose money. The only way we could take in the extra money is to raise room and board rates.

"So our stance has been for years that we advertise ourselves in the long-term housing business. And anybody who breaks that contract shouldn't be subsidized by the people who stay here all year.

If we went by, say, a term-by-term contract, we'd probably have to raise room and board rates. So in effect the people who do stay would be subsidizing those (who leave)," Romm says.

Still, the people who get stuck with the \$1-a-day penalty often feel they are the ones subsidizing the housing budget, a frustration that often translates into hostility toward the department.

"It's like they've got a racket going," said one disgruntled ex-dorm resident whose fraternity is paying 75 percent of his penalties.

Romm says he's heard the complaints about his department's year-long contract ripping students off, and he understands how they feel. But the policies exist to protect the Housing Department, since it is not a non-profit organization, Romm says.

The department must squeeze out some profit in order to make payments on the bonds that the University sold to build the dorms, he says.

"If there was some natural disaster and they have to close the University, we have to guarantee the state of Oregon that we can pay the mortgage for two years," he says. "Otherwise you will default on the bonds, and the taxpayers have to pay. So we have to make enough money over and above our expenses to make a two year reserve."

About \$230 out of each resident's room and board is allocated for the mortgage payment, Romm says. And if a person decides to leave, he or she is made to pay \$1 a day to cover the mortgage.

In addition, each empty bed constitutes a loss of \$2,200, and right now there are 40 of them, he says. Any disincentive to leave, such as not refunding the \$50 dorm deposit, helps to keep the department in the black, he says.

"I realize that people change their minds, and that's why we have ways to get out of the contract," he adds. "But they are ways in which we won't lose a great deal of money."

"But if we were completely full, and we had someone who wanted to sell their contract, then we will help them find replacements," he says.

In the meantime, Hanslovan says she will advertise her contract again at the end of the term, when a new crop of students will be moving into the dorms.

## DORM CONTRACTS

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**DORM CONTRACT FOR SALE** Call Kathy Rm 213, 485-91 or "Available NOW" 3-9

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