Couple cohabitation

Some couples take the "next step" by moving in together

By Michelle Golden • Freelance Reporter

"Webster's New World College Dictionary" defines a cohabitant as a "person living together with another or others." Often, living together is seen as the "next step" for some couples.

Sophomore Malia Bennett said living together with her longtime boyfriend was hard in the beginning.

"We were together all of the time," she said. "It was a learning experience that I value. We learned from our mistakes. It is important to have separate lives as well as one together."

Bennett and her boyfriend took some time apart from their living situation and briefly separated.

"I think one of the reasons we did break up is because we were not living together," she said. "The influence by friends is so intense, especially in these developmental years."

Bennett added that the two learned to communicate to work out problems more effectively.

"That is one of the reasons we are doing so well today," she said.

Not all have a positive experience when they live with a significant other.

Junior Emily Birkland said her live-in experience had some unpleasant effects on her relationship as well as her life.

"Living together you really get to know an individual," Birkland said. "In some ways it really made me like my boyfriend more, but adversely at times I really felt as though I did not have enough alone time because we spent all of our time together."

Many couples fault a lack of space as a main pitfall to of a live-in relationship, sometimes feeling the need to suppress their feelings to avoid an unmanageable situation, which can be unhealthy for the relationship and the individual.

"When I lived with my boyfriend, I would try to avoid a fight by bottling up my feelings, which eventually ended with an even bigger unnecessary dispute," Birkland said.

Birkland said because she and her partner are no longer living together, they have become closer and more receptive to each other's feelings.

"Because we spend less time together, we are more eager to see each other," she said.

In some cases, finances play a significant role in the decision to live with a partner.

"We both paid rent and had our own separate places, which cost a lot," Bennett said. "It just didn't seem logical financially because we were sleeping at each other's houses every night."

Despite potential difficulties, the number of unmarried couples living together is increasing. The numbers have risen steadily from 439,000 in 1960 to 5.5 million in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Michelle Golden is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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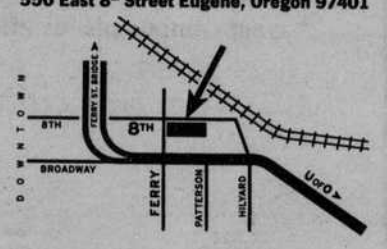

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Working from home

Resident assistants get a lot more than free food or rent for payment — they also learn leadership skills

By Joseph Robert Boyd
Freelance Reporter

On a typical Thursday, junior psychology major Mary Geisler will wake up at 7:30 a.m., attend classes from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., grab lunch, participate in staff meetings from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., and make her nightly rounds at 10 p.m., midnight and 2 a.m.

Geisler is a second-year resident assistant for Watson Hall in Hamilton Complex. As spring term comes to a close and students start making plans to move out, resident assistants are trying to move back in— this time on the University's dime.

"I had an amazing time my first year as an RA, both with the residents and the staff," Geisler said. "It gives me more of a focus, whereas now I have learned to sit down and prioritize. Staying busy keeps me on top of things, and I have learned a lot about planning and time management."

Geisler became interested in being an RA after working with her hall's government two years ago. She applied after an assistant complex director convinced her that being an RA would expand her leadership skills.

"An RA needs to work well as a group member," Geisler said. "Working with 80 residents can be challenging, and at times it is difficult getting a large staff to be all on the same page. You need to be able to work well as a group member, take initiative, yet still know how to follow."

According to Geisler, an RA has to play many roles. An RA may have to act as a "surrogate older sibling," a mediator, a shoulder to cry on, a person to vent frustrations at, and most importantly, a knowledgeable academic and safety resource.

"The other day, there was a guy here who lost his wallet for like a week," Geisler said. "He canceled all of his credit cards and everything, and it turned out that someone had found it and left a message on his room phone, but his roommate had erased it. I had to find the phone number of a woman who is one of the heads of Hamilton and sure enough, she had it. It seems like random things like that always come up."

Geisler said an RA has to be able to balance school, work and the rest of life; however, the most important quality an RA needs to have is patience.

"I feel like I have the ability to bring people together," junior resident assistant Shamim Matin said. "I can help people come together who normally wouldn't socialize with each other initially. After they got to know each other, I could kind of leave and they would stick together."

Matin, an exercise and movement science major, is one of more than 200 students who showed interest in becoming a resident assistant this spring. The applicants were whittled down to 50 after a selection process that included a series of written essays and interviews. In the next week, 30 of the 50 students will be selected as RAs for next year. The resident assistants attend a one-credit leadership class once a week in the spring.

During the leadership class, students participate in team-building exercises such as constructing something out of Legos, allowing each individual to touch only one color.

"I would recommend to any freshman who is having fun in the dorms to try and become an RA," Matin said. "With the free food and living, it is not a bad idea at all."

For students interested in free food and housing, but not the large-scale commitment of being an RA, becoming a Residential First Year Interest Group academic assistant is an alternative.

Students enrolled in a residential FIG live in the same housing complex as their classmates and FIG adviser. According to the residential FIG Web site, FIG advisers "are advanced undergraduate student mentors who live in the hall and are available to help form study groups, bring speakers into the hall, help with pre-registration advising and help direct students to campus resources. The FA helps support the RA to create a great living space."

Senior international studies and religious studies major Cameron Levin is the Cultural Patterns in the Middle East FIG adviser. As an FA, she shoulders some of the same responsibilities as a normal RA. However, she said she is around mostly for academic help, grading and proofreading papers.

"The Residential FIG program is a wonderful thing that UO has started and that other universities are beginning to adopt," Levin said. "Being an FA has given me teaching experience, a chance to work with top professors and meet many new students. I would recommend it to anyone who is thinking of teaching as a career path."

Joseph Robert Boyd is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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