

# The Cost of Campus Living

UO SAYS REQUIRING FRESHMEN TO LIVE IN DORMS IMPROVES ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, BUT SOME STUDENTS SAY THE POLICY ISN'T WORTH THE HIGH COST

By Jade Yamazaki Stewart

Lily Wheeler paid nearly \$1,500 a month for a spot in the University of Oregon's Living Learning Center dorm and a standard meal plan freshman year. She lived in the roughly 200-square-foot space with a roommate and had to share showers and bathrooms with the rest of her floor. The dorm didn't have a kitchen.

Wheeler received the Pathway Oregon scholarship, which covered tuition and fees. But she says she and her mother were forced to take out loans to pay for the dorms and the meal plan, which together cost \$13,450 for the school year minus winter break — around eight months.

Now a junior, Wheeler lives in a two-bedroom, one bath apartment with a kitchen on Mill Street, a 10-minute walk from campus. She says she now pays \$450 in rent and around \$200 for food every month, less than half of what she paid freshman year. She shares the apartment with another person, but has her own room.

Wheeler is around \$15,000 in debt. She says she worries about her finances after graduation.

"I would have half the amount of debt, and my mom wouldn't be in debt at all, if I didn't live in the dorms," she says.

UO started its first year live-in requirement in 2017, citing enrollment reports that showed that students who lived in the dorms their first year between 2006 and 2017 had higher graduation rates and GPAs. Wheeler says she

was forced to live in the dorms, even though she didn't want to. She and others say the dorms are too expensive. Housing officials say living in dorms gives students a social network and helps ease the transition into college.

The most affordable dorm options cost nearly \$9,400 per school year for a triple room and a meal plan that allows unlimited access to Carson Dining Hall, a large cafeteria. The same room with a standard meal plan, which offers other campus food options, costs nearly \$12,000. Singles or doubles with baths in some halls cost more than \$20,000.

"The live-in requirement was absolutely instituted for the purposes of student success and of students staying in school," says Michael Griffel, the university's housing director.

He says many public universities across the country have been implementing the policy for similar reasons in the last 10 years. Griffel says students who live in dorms join a diverse community and have access to academic resources like resident professors.

He also says that students who don't want to live on campus can fill out exemption forms.

"It's incredibly easy to have an exemption," Griffel says.

But Wheeler says her exemption request was denied.

She says she filed an exemption to try to live with her parents a few miles from campus in Springfield, but she was refused.

The UO housing website says that "all incoming first

year undergraduate students are required to live on campus." But the website includes a list of commonly granted exemptions. Living with your parents nearby is on the list, and Wheeler does not know why she was denied.

Sophomore and Eugene native Pilar Tosio also went into debt to pay for the dorms. She says she enjoyed her time living in Walton Hall but doesn't think it was worth taking out loans.

"I think it's a stupid policy, because a lot of people can't afford to live in the dorms," Tosio says. "They're a lot more expensive than comparable off-campus housing."

She now pays around \$600 a month in rent for a shared flat at Skybox Apartment, located next to Matthew Knight Arena.

Other students echo Griffel's views on the social value of living in residence halls freshman year.

Junior Molly Schwartz, who came to UO from Los Angeles, says she made most of her best friends by living in Hamilton Hall.

"It's really hard to make friends in college, especially at such a big school," she says. "I don't know how I would have made friends any other way."

Schwartz says she supports the live-on requirement because she has friends who benefited from the experience.

She says her father struggled to pay for her to live in the dorms, and he doesn't struggle to pay her off-campus rent now. But Schwartz says the money was worth it because she made a smooth transition to Eugene and college.

Bernice Amaya, another junior from Southern California, says she also made invaluable connections in her time in Bean Hall. Bean Hall doubles are notoriously cramped.

"The room was so small that you can hold your roommate's hand while you're both lying in bed," she says.

She says she didn't mind the tight quarters because they made it easy to make friends. Amaya says she and many of her dormmates from Bean Hall still live in apartments and houses together. Amaya says she and her "fellow Beans" are planning to rent a cabin together for MLK weekend.

Although she liked the dorms, she doesn't agree with the live-on policy.

"Considering how expensive it is to live in, I don't think that anybody should be required to live in, regardless of if the university says it promotes higher GPAs or a better social life." ■

# Not the End of the Line

THE EUGENE MISSION OFFERS STABILITY AND HOPE TO ITS GUESTS

By Dan Buckwalter

To get there you travel Blair Boulevard and take a left at West First Avenue.

The road leads to Eugene Mission, a nonprofit started in 1950 in downtown Eugene and at its current 7.5-acre location since 1967.

You pass the veterans' area and the Conestoga huts, work and storage areas, the Women's Center and a Family and Children's Center. You see the administrative offices, the Men's Center and, finally, a fenced off area beneath an overpass.

To the untrained eye it has the imposing feel of the end of the road.

Don't say that to Jessica or Sam, two residents of the of the Women's Center.

"I disagree with that," Sam says. "I try really hard to look at people with God's eyes. [Eugene Mission] opened

their doors to the homeless. They helped me feel loved. They helped me be more stable."

Sam and Jessica, both older women at the shelter, asked that *Eugene Weekly* not use their full names to protect their privacy as they rebuild their lives.

"I was so adamant about not coming to the Mission," Jessica recalls of a two-week hospital stay for anxiety and other health-related issues. She walked through the doors of the Mission almost two years ago. "I'm just so appreciative the Mission is here."

Tabitha Eck, director of Strategic Operations and Resources at the shelter, works closely with the Women's Center. She calls the homeless women at the shelter the "most fragile of our communities."

Jessica and Sam are just two examples. Jessica and her dog, Snoopy, escaped a physically and verbally abusive housing situation with nowhere else to go. She had

drained her savings in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a restraining order, was on anti-depressants that were only making her anxiety worse and was two months behind on rent.

Sam has been in and out of sobriety, at one point almost 10 years sober. She lost that and was arrested earlier this year in the St. Helens area on an old warrant.

An attorney in St. Helens and a Columbia County judge took mercy on her. Charges were dropped and Sam returned to Eugene and for the second time to Eugene Mission in August.

"I felt home," she says.

The Eugene Mission was formerly known as a faith-based emergency shelter. Men and women who stepped through the doors were required to attend chapel services.

That has not been the case for years, though Sam, in an effort to sustain her sobriety, has leaned hard on the chapel and her faith in a higher power.

Instead, the shelter aims to welcome everyone as they come, no matter how broken, and the volume of people entering the Mission is increasing, says Shannon Smyth, Supportive Services manager at the shelter.

The Women's Center at Eugene Mission has a capacity of 70 beds with an additional 30 emergency beds to handle overflow from other agencies, Smyth says. The

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