9-2013

A Case Study of Gender Neutral Policies in University Housing

Josh Chave
Lynn University

Follow this and additional works at: https://spiral.lynn.edu/etds

Part of the Gender and Sexuality Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Chave, Josh, "A Case Study of Gender Neutral Policies in University Housing" (2013). Student Theses, Dissertations, Portfolios and Projects. 167.
https://spiral.lynn.edu/etds/167

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at SPIRAL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Theses, Dissertations, Portfolios and Projects by an authorized administrator of SPIRAL. For more information, please contact liadarola@lynn.edu.
A CASE STUDY OF GENDER NEUTRAL POLICIES IN UNIVERSITY HOUSING

By
Josh Chave

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Lynn University,
College of Education

Lynn University
2013
ABSTRACT

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country. One reason to create these policies is an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. As the number of gender neutral housing policies in the United States continues to rise, research has been slow to meet the growing demand for empirical data on gender neutral housing.

The dissertation presented a case study of one institution. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with administrators, gender neutral housing committee members, residence life staff, and students. This dissertation examined the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing on the campus. The purpose was to provide a transferrable case study for other institutions, as well as to provide the university with information about how gender neutral housing functions on the campus.

This dissertation found that implementation began as a grass roots proposal from LGBT advocates in the student population. The university responded by creating a gender neutral housing committee that examined gender neutral housing policies on other campuses, sought feedback from the community, and eventually made recommendations for the creation of gender neutral housing.

The strength of the policy is rooted in its openness to the entire community. Its weaknesses stem from misinformation and confusion about the policy, and a lack of practical access for first-year students.

This dissertation also found that while the campus climate was not heavily impacted by gender neutral housing, individual students experienced a positive change as a result of participation.

The results indicated that while the policy began as an LGBT specific program, the culture of the university and the gender neutral housing committee led to gender neutral housing becoming open to all students. Similarly, while the campus climate has not changed dramatically as a result of gender neutral housing, it has opened discussion on issues of gender and sexuality.

It is recommended that the university conduct an awareness campaign to address misinformation about the policy, as well as consider alternative means for allowing first-year students to participate in gender neutral housing. Further, institutions seeking to implement gender neutral housing can consider this case as a model of practice.
A CASE STUDY OF GENDER NEUTRAL POLICIES IN UNIVERSITY HOUSING

Chave, Josh, Ed.D.
Lynn University, 2013

© 2013, by Chave, Josh. All Rights Reserved.

U.M.I.
789 E. Eisenhower Parkway
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Mertler—Your continued guidance and support throughout my entire Lynn career has allowed me to grow and learn more than I thought possible. You let me shape my focus and my learning to my professional goals. You trusted me with a great deal of responsibility and I hope that I met your high expectations. I am continuously impressed with your ability to challenge and support your students. I will always consider myself number 100.

Dr. Burlison—I cannot thank you enough for helping me to navigate this process. There is absolutely no way I would have made it without you. You never stopped believing in my work or me. Thank you so much for being my advocate and for keeping me going when I was ready to quit. You stepped up when you didn’t have to and I am so grateful.

Dr. Dunlop—Thank you for supporting me throughout this process. I appreciate your input and your encouragement to share what I have learned with others. I am thankful for all you have done for me and for the doctoral program.

Dr. Broido—Thank you so much for taking me on. I know you have many other responsibilities yet you were always incredibly patient in working with me. I am excited to have worked with you and I am sure we will again.

Robin Barletta—You are in so many book acknowledgements now—but you have been there for me more in these past three years than I ever could have anticipated. This would have been much harder without you, and I hope you realize how important you are to me.

Cohort 3—Thank you for all of your help and support over the past three years. Each of you opened my eyes to new things every day.

Joy Ruhl—Thank you for keeping me sane through this process and for being far more organized than I am.

The university—Thank you so much for all of your help and for giving me access to your institution for my research. I am especially thankful to my key informant. I promise to pay it forward to some doctoral student when I am in your position.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad. I owe the success I have to the two of you. You have always supported my decisions, without pushing me too hard. You placed such a high value on my education. I would never have dreamed of reaching this point if it were not for your love and support. I am incredibly lucky to be your son.

The past three years have not been easy for our family, but we stuck together and the best is yet to come.

I am so lucky to have you in my life. You put up with my craziness for many years, but don’t think this gives you a pass; I have plenty of crazy left.

I love you mom and dad.

I used to be crazy. But now that I’m a doctor, the proper term is “eccentric.”
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................. 1
Background ........................................................................................................................................... 1
LGBT issues ......................................................................................................................................... 1
  Bullying ........................................................................................................................................... 1
  Drop out risk ................................................................................................................................... 2
  Psychosexual development ................................................................................................................. 2
  Student achievement ......................................................................................................................... 3
Gender neutral housing policies ........................................................................................................ 4
The case study ...................................................................................................................................... 5
Rationale .............................................................................................................................................. 5
Statement of the Problem and Research Questions ........................................................................ 6
  Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed? ................................................................. 6
  Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed? ..................................................................................... 7
  Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate? ......................................................................................................................... 7
Scope .................................................................................................................................................... 7
Definitions ............................................................................................................................................ 7
  Theoretical definitions ....................................................................................................................... 7
    Transgender ................................................................................................................................... 7
    Gender neutral housing .................................................................................................................. 8
    Campus climate ............................................................................................................................. 8
  Operational definitions ..................................................................................................................... 8
    Transgender ................................................................................................................................... 8
    Gender neutral housing .................................................................................................................. 9
    Campus climate ............................................................................................................................. 9
Assumptions and Limitations ............................................................................................................ 9
Summary ................................................................................................................................................ 10

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................................................... 12
Organizational Theory ....................................................................................................................... 12
  Evolutionary change theory ............................................................................................................. 13
  Teleological change theory ............................................................................................................. 14
  Life cycle change theory .................................................................................................................. 16
  Dialectical change theory ................................................................................................................ 16
  Social cognition change theory ....................................................................................................... 19
Multicultural organization development and change ...................................................................... 19
  Multicultural organization development stages ............................................................................. 20
  Multicultural organization change process .................................................................................... 20
Bolman and Deal’s four frames ......................................................................................................... 21
  Frame one: Structural frame ........................................................................................................... 22
  Frame two: Human resource frame ................................................................................................. 23
  Frame three: Political frame ............................................................................................................ 23
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Findings Related to Research Question 2: Execution

Conclusions Related to Research Question 1: Implementation

Philosophical shift

Understanding the university using Bolman and Deal's four frames

Understanding the university using Birnbaum's four frames of higher education

Implications of the philosophical shift

Change at the university

Conclusions Related to Research Question 2: Execution

The current policy

Challenges

Heterosexual couples living together

Freshmen student access

Parental concerns

Technical concerns

Misinformation and confusion

Conclusions Related to Research Question 3: Impact

Impact on individual students

Impact on the campus climate of the university

Impact on the perception of the gender neutral housing

Recommendations

Audience 1: The university administration

Perception of the policy

Access to the policy

Audience 2: Universities seeking to implement a gender neutral policy

Areas for Future Research
Change Agents ........................................................................................................... 129
Summary ................................................................................................................... 129
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 131
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS ................................................................. 136
  Interview Protocol - Committee Member ............................................................... 136
  Interview Protocol - Administration ..................................................................... 138
  Interview Protocol – Residence Life...................................................................... 140
  Interview/Focus Group Protocol – Students.......................................................... 142
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT ...................................................................... 144
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Six Types of Gender Neutral Housing Options .................................................. 31
Table 2: Respondent Group Membership ........................................................................ 39
Table 3: Alignment of Research Questions, Data Types, and Data Sources ................. 43
Table 4: Alignment of Codes with Research Questions .................................................. 54
Table 5: Six Types of Gender Neutral Housing Options ................................................ 110
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). One reason to create these policies is an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011).

Background

In order to contextualize the phenomena of gender neutral housing, three areas of background information were examined. The first area involves issues unique to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students; the second addresses the development of gender neutral housing policies; and the third provides a brief description of the university being studied.

LGBT issues. Colleges and universities are increasingly encountering the difficult situation of how to accommodate LGBT students. Policies toward LGBT students have come under increased scrutiny. The recent suicides of several gay students have brought the issue of bullying to the forefront (Cramer & Ford, 2011; Lipka, 2011).

Bullying. Bullying issues are more prevalent among LGBT individuals. LGBT students are twice as likely to hear derogatory remarks as their heterosexual peers in college (61% and 29%, respectively). These remarks come from students and peers 92% of the time (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010).

It is evident that LGBT students are at particular risk of bullying. Rankin et al. (2010) recommend developing inclusive and welcoming policies to combat bullying.
They propose that students and faculty would benefit from more inclusive environments in colleges and universities. Colleges and universities can expect less bullying in more inclusive environments. Chapter II outlines an application of student development theory to the concept of gender neutral housing and shows the theoretical support of gender neutral housing meeting the needs of LGBT students.

**Drop out risk.** Transgender students are statistically more likely to consider dropping out of school than their gender normative peers. Heterosexual gender normative male students considered leaving their institution 27% of the time, compared to 28% of the time for heterosexual gender normative female students. Thirty-eight percent of transmasculine (born genetically female) and 33% of transfeminine (born genetically male) considered leaving their institutions. These numbers are statistically significant in the sample (Rankin et al., 2010).

These numbers should be of particular concern to college and university administrators. The transgender student population is growing, and with that comes the need for more gender neutral policies and programs designed to meet the needs of transgendered students (Schneider, 2010). Policy changes, such as the introduction of gender neutral housing, can send a clear message to the transgender student population that their university supports them. Students who feel supported are less likely to drop out of their institution and are more likely to be involved on campus. Rankin et al. (2010) also recommend specific efforts directed toward LGBT students to improve retention.

**Psychosexual development.** College is a time of tremendous growth for students, including those who are LGBT identified. Some theorists pose alternate stages of
psychosexual development for LGBT individuals because the experience is so different from heterosexual development. “While other adolescents are practicing self-disclosure and honing communication skills, which will allow them to form healthy intimate relationships, LGBT students may become adept at hiding important parts of themselves” (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007, p. 76). This is obviously detrimental to the student’s development and self-esteem. One solution to this problem is to expose students to a supportive LGBT environment. Students can then learn to cope and develop positive self-images and experience more successful identity development (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

Supportive environments are helpful to LGBT students. College and university administrators are concerned with the social and psychological development of their students and therefore have a responsibility to maintain environments where students feel supported (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011).

**Student achievement.** Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) found that an inclusive campus climate could also impact student achievement and academic success. By increasing diversity and inclusivity, students are more apt to succeed in a college or university environment (Gurin et al., 2002; Young, 2011).

The work of Gurin et al (2002) and Young (2011) suggest that LGBT students are not the only potential beneficiaries of these changes. Rankin et al. (2010) adds that inclusive and diverse campus environments combat bullying through the education of the student population. This means that the entire student body is benefitting from the creation of inclusive climates. From the perspective of a college administrator, improved
student achievement and success are major goals. Therefore, the creation of diverse and supportive campus climates could be of paramount importance.

**Gender neutral housing policies.** Colleges and universities need to create programs that are more supportive of LGBT students (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Rankin et al., 2010; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011). Gender neutral housing is one such policy that is gaining momentum in colleges and universities around the country. There are currently 460 colleges and universities that include transgender issues in their nondiscrimination policy; of these, 69 have some kind of policy in place for changing names to reflect a gender change, and 90 have some form of gender neutral housing. These policies range from apartments with single-sex rooms and bathrooms, to mixed gender rooms (TLPI: College and University, 2013).

There is no shortage of documentation explaining the need for policies that are inclusive to LGBT individuals. Programming and policies specifically designed for LGBT students are now considered best practice by student affairs professionals (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Rankin et al., 2010; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011).

While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, these are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research (Kircher & Hong, 2010). While internal evaluations are certainly excellent starting points, they present several challenges. First, internal evaluations are not spread or used to inform practice at other institutions. Second, the research is very specific and tailored to the specific evaluative needs of the university. There is little ability to apply the findings of one study to other institutions. Third, the research itself is not peer-reviewed and the
measures of success are not clearly defined. The measure of success at one institution might be “filling all the spaces,” which is hardly an adequate measure of a successful program (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

The case study. The university serving as a case for this research has had gender neutral housing for two years. The campus is located on the east coast and is in a predominantly liberal city. It is a private institution with over 10,000 undergraduate students. The campus has over 40 residence halls. Gender neutral housing exists throughout the campus, meaning that any student can sign up to be a part of the gender neutral housing policy, regardless of the hall the student wishes to live in. The only stipulation is that all roommates must agree to live in a gender neutral housing option. Currently, less than 100 students participate in the gender neutral housing opportunity. However, the number of participants has increased since the first year of the program.

Rationale

This study has two main target audiences. The first audience is the administration of the university being studied. This research seeks to examine the effectiveness of the implementation and execution of their gender neutral policy. This information is certainly of value as the institution continues to develop innovations and improve the policy. This is especially true since there is little evaluative research on gender neutral policies (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

The second target audience consists of administrators at other colleges and universities who are considering implementing a gender neutral policy at their respective institutions. As Oliver and Magura (2011) wrote, “lessons learned from established programs can be invaluable for residence life professionals seeking advice or insight on
newer programs” (p. 52). Using a case study approach, other colleges and universities may avoid similar obstacles and be more informed as they move through the process of implementing their own gender neutral policies.

**Statement of the Problem and Research Questions**

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). One reason to create these policies is an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011). While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, they are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research studies (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

This research is a qualitative case study of a university that seeks to thoroughly examine three elements of gender neutral housing: (1) the implementation, (2) the execution, and (3) the impact on the university campus. Case study was selected for its ability to provide in-depth holistic information about this phenomenon (Weiss, 1998). There are three research questions, which parallel the three foci of this dissertation in practice.

**Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?** This question was addressed through document review and interviews with gender neutral housing committee members at the university. Using inductive research techniques, themes were isolated and provide insight into the implementation process.
Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed? Interviews with residence life staff, students, and administrators at the university were used to address this question. Challenges and the management of them were of particular interest in this study.

Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate? Interviews with residence life staff, administrators, and students were used to address this question. These data sought to reveal what, if any, changes have occurred because of the implementation of the policy.

Scope. This study had a limited scope, as would be expected in a case study. Every college and university must address the specific needs of its student population. This research sought only to collect information about one university at one point in time. The results of this study may be interesting to other colleges and universities, but by no means are the results intended to be generalizable.

Definitions

Due to the innovative nature of gender neutral housing policies, it is important to define several key terms. Terms are defined both operationally and theoretically, with one notable exception. The definition of “gender neutral housing” will be purely theoretical. This is necessary, as discovering the official and practical definition of “gender neutral housing” is of paramount importance in this research.

Theoretical definitions. It is important to fully understand three key terms: transgender (as part of LGBT), gender neutral housing, and campus climate.

Transgender. Definition 1: Transgender is an umbrella term for anyone who transgresses or blurs traditional gender categories, inclusive of female-to-male
transsexuals, and male-to-female transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueers, gender blenders, two-spirit people, androgyny, and other self-defined gender-variant people (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 171).

Definition 2: “Those who experience a mismatch between their biological sex and their psychological awareness of gender, feeling more comfortable in the identity of the other gender” (Wester, McDonough, White, Vogel, & Taylor, 2010, p. 214).

**Gender neutral housing.** “Gender neutral housing policies exist in various stages across...institutions and can be categorized into three models based on the degree to which institutions require students to self-identify to participate in gender neutral housing. Some institutions require students to self-identify specifically as transgender, some institutions require students to self-identify as LGBTQ, and some institutions do not ask students to self-identify in any way to take advantage of gender neutral housing options” (Kircher & Hong, 2010, p. 4).

Gender neutral housing as defined by the university in this study is housing in which students can live with anyone regardless of sex or gender, provided the students opt-in to the program and request each other.

**Campus climate.** The behaviors, attitudes and practices of students, faculty, and staff at a college or university (Rankin et al., 2010).

**Operational definitions.** The operational definitions are noted below.

**Transgender.** In this case, both definitions offer similar descriptions of transgender; however, the definition from Beemyn and Rankin (2011) is broader, as they do not accept the idea of a binary gender. In this research, the term transgender will align more closely with Wester et al. (2010).
**Gender neutral housing.** As noted previously, the operational definition of this term represents one of the focal points of this research. In its simplest form, gender neutral housing is when individuals of different genders are able to cohabitate in the same living space. However, the data will provide an appropriate definition for this term. Particular attention is paid to the official definition and how similar or dissimilar it is from the practical definition utilized by the university.

**Campus climate.** For the purposes of this case study, the theoretical definition will serve as the operational definition as well.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

From a theoretical perspective, this research assumes that gender neutral housing is both supportive and community oriented. While it is logical that gender neutral housing could create a supportive and community oriented environment, this is currently not supported by research. The actual results of this study could support or reject these assumptions.

This research assumes that respondents are honest and that the information they present in interviews is their true opinions. It is assumed that the university values gender neutral housing, and hopes for it to be successful. However, it is assumed that individual members will be honest about their personal opinions and personal experiences with gender neutral housing.

This study is limited by time constraints. Interviews took place over the span of one week. It is further limited by the small sample size and extensive overlap among respondent groups. However, this overlap is unavoidable in the context of this study as administrators frequently serve in multiple roles on university and college campuses. As
a case study, it represents one university at one point in time. The results are not
generalizable and only represent the views expressed by the respondents. The study
assumes that the participants were honest and forthcoming with information about the
policy. This study is further limited by the small sample size of 16 individuals.

The biggest weakness of the study is the lack of transgendered student
representation. None of the participants in this study was a member of the transgender
community. Considering the initial focus of the policy as advocated by the LGBT
student organization, this is an important absence. The transgendered student voice could
have presented additional ideas and data to the study

Summary

In this chapter, background information into the topic of gender neutral housing
was provided. First, the unique needs of LGBT students were examined, followed by the
increasing prevalence of gender neutral housing options to address these needs, and
finally some specific background information about the university used as the case study.

This research was a qualitative case study of a university, which sought to
thoroughly examine three elements of gender neutral housing: (1) the implementation, (2)
the execution, and (3) the impact on the university campus.

The audience for this study was the university and other institutions that might be
considering implementing a gender neutral housing policy. It provided insight to the
university about the effectiveness of the implementation and execution of the policy, and
may serve as an example for other institutions that were considering this kind of policy.
It also examined the impact of gender neutral housing.
The following chapter is a review of the relevant literature. This review will present theory to support the creation of gender neutral housing policies, the existing research on such policies, and organizational theory. Chapter III focuses on the methodology used in this case study. Chapter IV will outline the results, and Chapter V will draw conclusions from those results.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). One reason to create these policies is an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011). While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, they are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

This literature review focuses predominantly on the theoretical underpinnings utilized in this study and how these theories support the creation of gender neutral housing policies. The first section examines organizational theory, specifically the work of Bolman and Deal (2003) and the application of the theory to policy change. The second section of the literature review examines the limited existing literature written specifically on the topic of gender neutral housing.

Organizational Theory

Organizational theory is one of the most important elements of student affairs (Kezar, 2003). It is part of the everyday activity of a student affairs professional. “We should start paying more attention to organizational processes if we really want to start improving educational products” (Berger, 2000, p. 195).

Organizational theories focus on how organizations function, and how they create and deal with change. Sometimes professionals “identify changes that they think are important for their campuses—they have a vision. Having a vision is very different from
being able to accomplish change—one of the most elusive practices on college campuses” (Kezar, 2003 p. 226). Change still occurs. Gender neutral housing represents a new innovation that affects organizations of higher education.

This area of study has existed for over 50 years. The field of organizational theory is quite expansive. The theories all work together to attempt to create an overarching theory of change. “Each theory is seen as counteracting a weakness within the other” (Kezar, 2001 p. 54). Therefore, this literature review will provide a brief overview of the large theories and models of change. They are: (1) evolutionary, (2) teleological, (3) life cycle, (4) dialectical, (5) social cognition, and (6) multicultural. Then this research will focus on the work of Bolman and Deal (2003) and Birnbaum (1988) who wrote using multiple models of change.

**Evolutionary change theory.** Evolutionary models, also known as environmental models or adaptive models of change believe that environmental and situational factors are what precipitate change in an organization. Individuals and leaders do not cause change, and instead react to changes that occur naturally because of time and changes external to the organization (Kezar, 2001).

There are five key concepts in evolutionary models. The first is the concept of systems. “The theory of adaptation is tightly linked to an open system perspective” (Sporn, 1999 p. 22). According to this theory, organizations are connected inextricably to their environment and there is not a defined line separating the organization from the environment. This approach is well suited to the realities of higher education institutions (Clark, 1983).
This also represents the second and third key concepts, interactivity of the system to the environment and openness. Academic units interact, students and community stakeholders interact, and change cannot be localized to one specific part of the system (Clark, 1983; Kezar, 2001; Sporn, 1999).

The final key concept of evolutionary theory is homeostasis. “The concept of homeostasis refers to self regulation [sic] and the ability to maintain a steady state by constantly seeking an equilibrium between the system and its environment” (Sporn, 1999 p. 38).

Evolutionary theory is the oldest of the change theories described here. It has a long history with a strong research base. However, there are several weaknesses to the theory, namely that it does not account for leader motivated change. As Kezar (2001) wrote, “these models reflect little human agency; strategic choices and creativity are mostly unimportant” (p. 32). A second concern in these models is the inability to control for all variables when the view of the system and environment is so broad. Again, most organizational change theory builds on each other, and therefore these weaknesses are less important in the overarching context of change theory (Kezar, 2001).

In evolutionary theory, organizations are forced to change and adapt due to environmental pressures. This stands in contrast to the teleological models presented in the next section.

**Teleological change theory.** Teleological change theory believes that change is intentional and purposeful. It is the most prevalent of the change theories and features extensive planning and assessment (Charnall, 2007; Kezar, 2001).
The best-known teleological change theory is organizational development. It is categorized by continuing examination of processes. There is a constant search for solutions to problems. The process is regenerative, in that there is always a search for new problems and solutions (Kezar, 2001). Golembiewski (2003) wrote, “not only do individuals prefer regenerative interaction, in general, but it also generates consequences that facilitate responsible behavior in organizations” (p. xx). The goal of the leader then becomes creating a system with high openness and trust, and low risk, allowing free exchange of ideas. In other words, leaders practicing organizational development seek to create a humanistic workplace (Golembiewski, 2003).

Leaders become the change agents for organizations in the teleological models. Teleological theory has many strengths. The most important strength is the emphasis on professional development as a part of the change process. Another strength is that the role of the leader is clearly outlined and some theories have systematic linear models of change (Kezar, 2001).

There are several weaknesses to this group of theories. The linear model of change is criticized for being idealist and Kezar (2001) pointed out that “organizations are often irrational, events happen spontaneously, environments change without predictability, control is illusory, and leaders’ ability to change is more attributed than real” (p. 36). Context can be ignored in favor of a specific change model. The theories, while humanistic in nature, can also ignore followers and overemphasize the role of leaders. There is “an assumed plasticity” in the workforce (Kezar, 2001 p. 36). It does not account for member resistance to change, and this creates a weakness in the theory.
**Life cycle change theory.** Life cycle models, also known as developmental models, share many common themes with evolutionary models. They also place a high value on the system as a whole, and adaptation to change. Life cycle theories place a much greater emphasis on the human element, and consider change to be developmental as part of growth (Kezar, 2001).

Organizations evolve and change based on time and growth. According to life cycle theories, organizations are analogous to a human being, one who grows up and matures over time. This maturation is the form of change that life cycle theories focus on (Kezar, 2001).

Life cycle theories present organizations as living things. They experience birth, sometimes called entrepreneurship, which is marked by brainstorming and new ideas. Next is youth, or collectivity. During the youth stage, new ideas are still being presented, but there is more participation in the change process. Maturation occurs when participation is formalized and rules are formed. At this point, the organization can experience death, or a new cycle can begin with change and innovation (Kezar, 2001). “It is important to note that life-cycle models postulate that the transition from one stage to the next is slow, smooth, and evolutionary. Incremental changes...are typical of the process” (Levy & Merry, 1986 p. 230).

The idea of phases and a formalized model make these theories very helpful; however, they are criticized for being very conceptual, with little empirical basis for the theory (Levy & Merry, 1986).

**Dialectical change theory.** Dialectical change theory is also known as the political metaphor of change. “The political metaphor encourages us to recognize how
and why the organizational actor is a political actor and to understand the political significance of the patterns of meaning" (Morgan, 2006 p. 205). Dialectical change theory views organizations as political structures. They can be democracies or dictatorships, but the leader must be aware of what kind of political orientation the organization has before change can occur (Morgan, 2006).

Morgan (2006) cited six different types of political organizations. They are: (1) autocracy, (2) bureaucracy, (3) technocracy, (4) codetermination, (5) representative democracy, and (6) direct democracy. Autocracies are essentially dictatorships, in which one or a few leaders have complete control and power. Bureaucracy, in this context, means that order and leadership occurs strictly through written word. These organizations typically use the written word as a method of spreading rules and laws, as well as maintaining authority. Technocracy is rule by the more knowledgeable; the individuals with the most experience and knowledge are the people who are given power in technocracies. Codetermination is when two different groups with opposing views come together, usually with mutual goals in mind. Power is particularly important here, as each group brings with it constituents and support. Representative democracy involves elected officers acting on behalf of the rest of the organization, while direct democracy gives every individual an equal opportunity to get involved in decision making. Part of the work of a dialectic change agent is to discover which type of political rule is in effect at any given moment, keeping in mind that organizations typically utilize different strategies for different situations (Morgan, 2006).

Of the six types of political rule, direct democracy is quite rare. Participation is usually quite low. Few members of the organization are invested in change themselves,
unless there is a change that negatively impacts them. This deals primarily with motivating factors of change. When attempting to create change using the dialectic theory, there are three major skills that the leader must understand. The first is setting the agenda. While this occurs in teleological models as well, the focus here is not on the leader’s vision but instead on the needs and values and beliefs of politically vocal organization members. The second skill is networking. Through networking, leaders can create powerful interest groups that will support or oppose the change. While the leader might still be encouraging the change, it is these strong groups that allow it to flourish or flounder. The final skill is negotiating. Through the negotiation process more and more members of the organization are convinced the change is good, and begin to join the interest groups (Kezar, 2001).

Every aspect of organizations is motivated in some way by politics. This acknowledgement is viewed as a strength of the theory. This can also be a weakness. Morgan (1986) warned that if individuals only view organizations through dialectic change theory then they will “begin to see politics everywhere and to look for hidden agendas even where there are none. For this reason, the metaphor must be used with caution. There is a very real danger that its use may generate cynicism and mistrust” (p. 205). This kind of thinking is not productive in an organization and can be a self-fulfilling prophecy (Morgan, 1986).

All of the theories presented so far have assumed that there is one singular view of the organization, and has ignored the fact that different individuals may, in fact, view the organization in drastically different ways. Therefore change and leadership can be
uniquely challenging. Social cognition change theories seek to address this problem. The following section briefly summarizes this school of thought (Kezar, 2001).

**Social cognition change theory.** At the core of social cognition theory is the idea that different individuals in an organization have different opinions and experiences of the organization. The theory focuses on how leaders can create change and help followers to interpret and internalize that change. Social cognition theories, unlike all the previous theories, do not accept the existence of a unique culture in an organization. Instead, each individual brings his or her own perspective, rendering one culture impossible (Kezar, 2001).

Leaders work to establish meaning and form the opinions of the members of the organization. While dialectic theories view individuals as members of powerful groups, social cognition theory, views each member of the group individually. As Morgan (1986) wrote, “Any attempt to change... can mobilize all kinds of opposition as individuals and groups defend the status quo in an attempt to defend their very selves” (p. 236). Ignoring the individual can create massive resistance to change (Morgan, 1986).

**Multicultural organization development and change.** “The pursuit of what is currently termed social justice and diversity, whether for moral reasons, legal reasons, or in the service of a system’s mission, has been a priority for both corporate and educational institutions for several decades” (Jackson, 2005 p. 3). In the increasingly global world, it is becoming more important to have an understanding of the global perspective (Brooks & Normore, 2010). This includes having an appreciation of multiculturalism. LGBT students are one group that can benefit from the multicultural
perspective (Schneider, 2010; Young 2010). In this section, the stages of multicultural organization development and the change process are described.

**Multicultural organization development stages.** Jackson (2005) described six stages on a continuum that an organization moves through as it becomes multicultural. Organizations can be exclusionary on one end of the spectrum, and multicultural on the other.

Stage one is exclusionary. These organizations actively keep out non-members. They usually are opposed to change. Stage two is called the club. Clubs might promote membership, and might even accept individuals different from the rest of the membership. Clubs are not interested in diversity and accept different individuals when their values match that of the club. The third stage is called the compliance stage. It seeks to comply with non-discrimination policies, but does so “without disturbing the structure, mission, and culture of the system” (Jackson, 2005 p. 9).

The fourth stage is the affirming stage. It is characterized by a desire to actively recruit previously excluded individuals. While this is a positive change, the organization has not yet reached full multiculturalism. The fifth stage, called redefining the system, is categorized by the desire to take advantage of the difference of its members. Finally, the multicultural system is one in which diversity is a strong element of its mission, both in word and deed. These organizations actively work to remove oppression and participate in community outreach to help influence change (Jackson, 2005).

**Multicultural organization change process.** The multicultural change process is four fold. Step one is working with the change agents. The change agents are internal, external, and campus leaders. The internal team might be the impetus for change. For
example, student input might begin a change. External change agents are usually consultants who participate in the change process. Finally, the leadership team ultimately makes the decision to move forward with the change (Jackson, 2005).

Step two is to determine how prepared the organization is for the change. Without some idea of the readiness of the organization, it is impossible to move forward. Step three is assessment and benchmarking. Benchmarking is important in order to understand the current state of affairs, and through assessment as the change begins it is possible to see growth. Finally, change can occur. The assessment continues throughout this stage in order to measure the effectiveness of the change (Jackson, 2005).

Multicultural organizations are better able to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse world. “Bringing together the values, practices, and perspectives of both organization development and diversity offers a model to help fulfill the promise of organizations and society to be both successful and socially just” (Jackson, 2005 p. 19).

In this section, the various change theories have been briefly summarized. These theories all work together to attempt to create an overarching theory of change. “Each theory is seen as counteracting a weakness within the other” (Kezar, 2001 p. 54). In the following two sections, Bolman and Deal’s (2003) and Birnbaum’s (1988) theories are discussed. These theories utilize multiple models of change.

**Bolman and Deal’s four frames.** Bolman and Deal (2003) proposed four frames used to understand organizations. Each frame looks at organizations in a slightly different way, using a different lens from the pre-existing change theories. Using frames helps to orient the researcher and provide some guidance as to navigating that organization. “Frames are windows on the world of leadership and management”
Frame one: Structural frame. This first frame presented is the structural frame. The structural frame emphasizes the importance of relationships and roles. In a structural frame, everyone has a specific role to play in the organization. These roles interact in order to create a product and form the organization. The organization is structured around these interconnected roles. “Division of labor—or allocating jobs—is the cornerstone” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 49). The question of how jobs are allocated (differentiation), and how those jobs interact (integration), is at the heart of the structural frame.

“This frame is often epitomized by the notion of the organizational chart, with which people understand how the organization functions through definitions of a variety of roles and relationships among those roles” (Kezar, 2003, p. 228). Bolman and Deal (2003) call this vertical integration because the organization and responsibilities travel vertically. Task forces and meetings can present lateral integration where the relationships among the roles can travel laterally. Organizations can use both types of integration and the relationship among roles can be relatively fluid, despite the fact that structure implies rigidity.

The first frame borrows much of its theory from the teleological and evolutionary change theories described previously. The Bolman and Deal (2003) model attempts to build on the strengths of each theoretical framework (Kezar, 2001).
This first frame focuses mainly on the need for specialization of tasks and creation of a product. It stands in stark contrast to the human resources frame described in the following section.

**Frame two: Human resource frame.** The human resource frame is common among student affairs practitioners (Kezar, 2003). It does not focus on roles and relationships, but rather on individuals. The human resource frame views people as human capital in an organization.

Bolman and Deal (2003) stated that in the human resource frame, people are analogous to seedlings. They are cultivated by a gardener (in this case, the organization) and helped to become the best that they can be. Organizations that invest in their employees are organizations utilizing the human resource frame.

The human resource frame has an emphasis on relationships, but the meaning is different than in the structural frame. In this frame, the relationships of various roles and tasks is secondary, instead the relationships among individuals are of primary importance. While the structural frame is primarily based on the evolutionary and teleological models, the human resource frame shares many similarities with life cycle theories (Kezar, 2003).

**Frame three: Political frame.** The political frame closely examines the competing interests of various parts of an organization. Organizations are coalitions of people and interest groups vying for power and influence (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

While politics are usually viewed as a negative, this is not universally true of the political frame. Charismatic leadership to motivate is one benefit of this frame (Kezar, 2003). Politics are unavoidable in organizations and failure to acknowledge their
importance can present severe challenges to leaders. As Bolman and Deal (2003) wrote, "organizations are both arenas for internal politics and political agents with their own agendas, resources, and strategies" (p. 238). Once again, this frame comes from preexisting organizational theory. It is primarily based on the dialectical theories described by Kezar (2003).

**Frame four: Symbolic frame.** The symbolic frame treats organizations as living cultural bodies. "Over time, every organization develops distinctive beliefs, values and patterns" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 244).

Borrowing heavily from social cognitive theory, culture becomes the most important element of the organization. It becomes important to understand how that culture is shaped. (Kezar, 2003).

Leaders who do not understand the various frames are unable to appropriately prepare the organization for change (Kezar, 2003). In this research, it will be important to examine the organization through the four frames in order to fully understand how change occurred in the creation of gender neutral housing policies.

**Change in the Bolman and Deal model.** When an organization begins to create change, four main issues arise. (1) Change alters the preexisting structure of an organization. Without acknowledging the structural frame, employees can become confused and resist the change. (2) Change can make employees feel undervalued or less effective. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the human resource frame. Through training and support employees can once again feel valued and part of the organization. (3) Change inevitably creates conflict that requires knowledge of the political frame to counter. Issues must be discussed and problems addressed. (4) Finally, change creates a
kind of symbolic loss of the old way of doing things. If the change agents are not aware of the symbolic frame, they cannot help members of the organization properly grieve the loss and appreciate the new changes (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Each of these four issues is directly related to one of the previously discussed change theories. As Kezar (2001) wrote, “each theory is seen as counteracting a weakness within the other” (p. 54). Leaders must address change as structural as in environmental and teleological models. They must address change as a human resource concern as in the life cycle theory. They must address change as an issue of power and politics, as in the dialectical theories. Finally they must address change as an issue of identity and values as in the social cognition models of change. The model utilizes elements of each theory to build one large encompassing strategy (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Kezar, 2001).

Change is difficult and requires forethought. “Change agents fail when they rely almost entirely on reason and structure and neglect human, political, and symbolic elements” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 383). Bolman and Deal (2003) advocated that leaders understand and meet the needs presented by the four frames when instituting a change.

Thompson (2000) studied the effectiveness of leaders, specifically focusing on gender differences. Thompson (2000) surveyed 570 individuals in leadership and subordinate positions to determine perceived effectiveness. He found that neither gender nor specific leadership style were as important as utilizing the four frames. Leaders who utilized three or more of the frames were almost universally considered to be more
effective in their roles as leader. In order to be an effective leader and to effect positive change, it is important to utilize the four frames.

**Birnbaum’s four frames of higher education.** Birnbaum’s (1988) work also contains four frames, although they are not identical to Bolman and Deal’s (2003) frames. They are: (1) bureaucratic, (2) collegial, (3) political, and (4) anarchical. Birnbaum (1988) wrote that institutions tend to be predominantly guided by one of the four frames. Therefore the way change occurs in each frame is different (Kezar, 2003).

**Frame one: Bureaucratic.** The bureaucratic frame is most closely aligned with the structural frame of Bolman and Deal (2003). Bureaucracy plays an important role in colleges and universities. This is most evident in large institutions where scale necessitates bureaucracy. These colleges or universities typical emphasize efficiency and written record. Change in bureaucratic institutions is usually mandated with little input (Kezar, 2003).

**Frame two: Collegial.** The collegial frame is most closely aligned with the human resource frame of Bolman and Deal (2003). Typical of smaller liberal arts colleges, employees and students are treated as resources that can be cultivated. The organization is usually community oriented. Change in collegial universities tends to occur through more discussion and is based on the shared values of the institution (Kezar, 2003).

**Frame three: Political.** Unsurprisingly, the political frame in Birnbaum’s (1988) work is analogous to the political frame in the work of Bolman and Deal (2003). Colleges that are unionized are more likely to be influenced by the political frame. As different unions and groups fight and negotiate, the political elements become more
apparent (Kezar, 2003). Change is particularly difficult in the political frame. “The heavy reliance of political leaders on intuition, experience, and a sense of the particular situation at hand makes it difficult to generalize about what works in specific circumstances” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 146). However, the motivation for change is usually a disagreement or competing ideas (Kezar, 2003).

**Frame four: Anarchical.** Many different goals and leaders characterize the anarchical frame. These institutions usually have many initiatives and many goals. “Anarchical institutional processes flourish when resources are abundant and in excess of the level needed to function” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 173). This is largely because the excess resources allow for divergent ideas. Change at anarchical institutions occurs everywhere, due to the abundance of leaders and ideas.

**Change in the Birnbaum model.** Birnbaum advocates understanding the culture of the institution. Change will occur differently very differently at a collegial institution than it would at an anarchical one. This knowledge can inform leaders. “Creating leadership teams with people who hold different perspectives...can help student affairs educators more quickly capitalize on complex thinking within organizations to inform decisions” (Kezar, 2003, p. 240).

In this section of the literature review, various organizational change theories have been discussed. These theories will inform the research and explain the process of change as gender neutral housing was implemented and executed at the university.

**Gender Neutral Housing**

There is limited research available on gender neutral housing policies. This is largely because the programs are so new. In part two of the literature review, this
dissertation examines the existing research and seeks to inform the methodology of this study.

University of Oklahoma residence life staff recently reported that their gender neutral housing policy had been a success. The article was written for a news outlet and was not scientific. The criteria for success appear to be having “no major incidents” (Allen, 2012, par. 6). This article is a symptom of the lack of empirical data surrounding the topic of gender neutral housing. While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, these are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research (Kircher & Hong, 2010). Internal evaluations are certainly excellent starting points, but they present several challenges. First, individual universities conduct these evaluations, and they are not disseminated widely. Therefore, unpublished findings can not inform practice at other institutions. Secondly, the research is very specific and tailored to the specific evaluative needs of the university. There is little ability to apply the findings of one study to another institution. Thirdly, the research itself is not peer reviewed and the specific measures of success remains undefined. The measure of success at one institution might be “filling all the spaces,” which is hardly an adequate measure of a successful program (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

The American College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I) is an international organization that seeks to support the efforts of residence life staff. Approximately 900 colleges and universities are members of this professional organization. Its membership collectively serves over 1.8 million students (ACUHO-I, n.d.). ACUHO-I has endorsed only one research study focusing on gender neutral housing. The study seeks to determine the status of gender neutral housing across
institutions, but is purely descriptive in nature (Taub, 2012). This supports that there is little research that seeks to examine gender neutral housing policies.

Kircher and Hong (2010) conducted a study of nine colleges and universities that have gender neutral housing policies. Upon contacting the nine colleges and universities being studied, the researchers attempted to discover patterns of implementation, execution and evaluation of the gender neutral programs. The three main areas of focus in the Kircher and Hong (2010) study are identical to the main areas of focus in this study.

**Implementation.** Kircher and Hong (2010) discovered two main types of implementation plans. The first is a grass-roots implementation, where the students are the impetus for change. The second is a top-down implementation where the university administrators are the impetus for change. The grass-roots model was far more common in the results of this study.

The researchers outline a three-step process for grass-roots implementation. Step 1 is student petition for change (impetus). Step 2 is the residence life staff reaction to the impetus, typically the creation of a committee to examine the potential options for a policy. Finally, step 3 is the creation of the policy. The top-down implementation plan looks almost identical, the only difference being the source of the impetus for change (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

This case study seeks to examine the implementation process at the university being studied and the implication of the implementation plan. It is evident that the university’s implementation model will fall into one of these two categories.
Execution. In the execution of the gender neutral policies, Kircher and Hong (2010) found that there were three main categories of student access policies across the sample. This refers to the types of students who have access to gender neutral housing at each campus. Some institutions require students to identify themselves as a transgender individual before they are eligible for gender neutral housing. Others have a less strict requirement and require students to identify as LGBT to be eligible. The largest group of schools (five out of nine) had no eligibility requirements with regard to self-identification. Therefore the three categories of student access policies in this study are (1) self-identified as transgender, (2) self-identified as LGBT, and (3) no self-identification required (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

The study also looked at specific kinds of gender neutral housing options. The majority of schools in the study implemented gender neutral policies where the spaces were gender neutral by apartment. This means the individual rooms within the apartment were single gender (either single rooms or double rooms), but the apartment could contain students of any gender. Other schools implemented gender neutral policies where the space was gender neutral by room. Therefore, there were two categories of gender neutral housing room options. Those two categories were: (1) gender neutral by apartment, and (2) gender neutral by room. These two variables create six potential combinations of access to gender neutral housing and gender neutral housing type. The six types found in the Kircher and Hong (2010) study are outlined in Table 1.
Table 1

*Six Types of Gender Neutral Housing Options*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type 1</th>
<th>Type 2</th>
<th>Type 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-identification</td>
<td>Self-identify by apartment</td>
<td>Gender neutral by apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>no self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of room option</td>
<td>Gender neutral by apartment</td>
<td>Gender neutral by apartment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type 4</th>
<th>Type 5</th>
<th>Type 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-identification</td>
<td>Self-identify by room</td>
<td>Gender neutral by room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>no self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of room option</td>
<td>Gender neutral by room</td>
<td>Gender neutral by room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kircher and Hong (2010) also addressed some obstacles to the implementation and execution of the policies, namely in the area of backlash from the university community. The study names four groups that might require additional convincing that gender neutral housing is an appropriate decision for the university. They are: (1) students, (2) parents, (3) trustees and alumni, and (4) the community at large. They also focus on two main challenges in the execution of the policy. They were, (1) replacing students who leave gender neutral housing options, and (2) bathrooms and showers.

**Impact.** Finally, Kircher and Hong (2010) also examined how institutions measured the impact of gender neutral housing policies. The most common reported method was informal internal assessments. The colleges had no data other than student participation in the program, which was universally small. While internal evaluations are
certainly excellent starting points, but they present several challenges. First, individual universities conduct these evaluations, and they are not disseminated widely. Therefore, findings do not inform practice at other institutions. Secondly, the research usually focused on participation and enrollment numbers, rather than a true impact evaluation. Thirdly, the research itself is not peer reviewed and the specific measures of success remains undefined. The university in this study defined success in terms of student comfort. Several respondents noted that if the policy helped one student feel more comfortable, then it was successful and necessary.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the relevant literature. Many theories were applied to the concept of gender neutral housing. These theories inform the methodology of this study, particularly in the areas of community involvement and identity development. The work of Bolman and Deal (2003) and organizational theory provides an understanding of organizational change. Kircher and Hong (2010) provide a base for conducting the case study. They developed a model of the two types of implementation plans (grass-roots and top-down), and the six types of gender neutral housing (based upon self-identification requirements and room options). They also provide context into the measures of success and impact of gender neutral housing policies.

Chapters I and II have established the background and theoretical foundation of this study. Chapter III presents the methodology utilized in this study. Chapter IV will explain the results, and Chapter V will interpret those results into the conclusions.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). One reason to create these policies is to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011). While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, they are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research (Kircher & Hong, 2010). This research is a qualitative case study of one university, which examines the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing on the university campus. In this chapter, the researcher presents the research methodology.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?

Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?

Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?

This study was descriptive and exploratory in nature and represents one point in time. Case study was selected for its ability to provide in-depth holistic information about this phenomenon (Weiss, 1998). Case studies are typically well suited for answering questions that seek to understand how something happened (Yin, 2003). All three research questions in this study are “how” questions.
Setting

The university serving as a case study in this research was selected purposively. The researcher contacted the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) to determine interest from ACPA member institutions. ACPA contacted all member institutions' housing officers to solicit participation. Most of those schools do not have gender neutral housing policies. Several institutions expressed interest in participating in this research. Certain institutions were removed from the selection process because the gender neutral housing policy was too new (less than a year) or not yet implemented. Other colleges and universities were not selected due to very small or extremely limited gender neutral housing options. The university that was ultimately selected was the most forthcoming with information and most eager to participate in this research. It is an urban, private university located in a large, liberal-leaning city on the east coast. Its undergraduate population is approximately 10,000 students.

Students are largely from the east coast; however, the student body has representation from across the country. Approximately 65% of students receive some form of financial aid, and population is racially and economically diverse.

Several individuals who participated in the study discussed the activist student population. When asked about the student population, one respondent remarked:

"I think we attract a slightly more activist student body—not necessarily in the 60's radical activism but in the sense that they say, 'I have a stake in my experience, and I am going to contribute to it. I am not just going to sit back and let the world come to me.'" (A)

The student population as a whole is also very supportive of LGBT students and gay causes. While there are some students who have strong opposition to the LGBT
lifestyle, every respondent in the study believed those individuals comprised a very small minority.

The following experience illustrates the activist nature and support of LGBT students. On the second day of interviews, a tall man was standing in the center of campus on top of a small box. Two men stood on either side of him. They held signs that said, “you are all sinners.” The tall man had a microphone and a set of speakers. He began to preach. He told students passing by that they were sinners. The only way to find God would be to give up their lavish lifestyle and live on the “straight and narrow.” He continued to preach about the narrow path to god.

At first, students passed him, looking down trying to avoid eye contact. Eventually, a small female student walked up to the man with a bag. She was at least a foot shorter than him before he stepped on his soap box. She kneeled at his feet and began to open the contents of her bag. Inside was a rainbow assortment of chalk. She quickly set to work drawing images around the tall man questioning his beliefs. Soon he was completely surrounded by her colorful artwork. Students gathered around, not to hear the man preach, but to watch the woman draw. Several students casually engaged the man, questioning his beliefs. They did not get angry. They did not attack him, physically or verbally. They simply questioned him as he continued to be surrounded by the rainbow of color at his feet. For the rest of the week, long after the tall man had gone, the woman’s artwork remained on the ground in the center of campus.

This is indicative of the environment at this institution, and the type of students it serves. The students are actively engaged in their community, willing to defend their beliefs, and able to do so calmly.
Campus mission. The campus certainly values academics and research as it is mentioned in the campus mission; yet out of 15 interviews, only three individuals mentioned the research focus. Instead, most stated that the university sought to create new leaders and focus on student development. One respondent talked about the mission of the university to grow and develop students:

"The mission is to educate our students and make them grow as an individual as a whole and to help engage them in their community." (R)

Many respondents echoed this sentiment. The published mission of the university also places a strong emphasis on leadership and service.

Housing on campus. The campus has over 30 residence halls that range in size from 1,100 beds to a modest 5-bedroom building. Approximately 7,500 undergraduate students live on campus each year.

The university offers a wide range of housing options, from standard doubles to apartment and single living spaces. The options are a bit different than what is commonly offered at colleges and universities as most living spaces have a private bathroom shared by all residents of the space.

The largest building, which houses first-year students, is made up of predominantly four-person spaces that provide double rooms for students. Third- and fourth-year housing options also contain a high number of four-person spaces with double rooms and a shared common areas. Gender neutral housing is applied to the entire campus. This applies to spaces where bedrooms are not shared with common living spaces, and to spaces where students share a bedroom space.
Approximately 6% of all residential students live in single spaces with communal bathrooms. Forty percent of the on campus student population is housed in quad living. Most quad living spaces are two standard doubles that share a common area and at least one bathroom. A very small percentage of quad living spaces provide each resident with individual bedrooms. Approximately 35% of residential students live in double living spaces, with 33% living in standard doubles with either attached private bathrooms, or bathrooms shared with the neighboring room. The remaining 2% live in doubles with kitchen spaces and a private bath. Five and six person housing assignments account for approximately 5% of the student housing and is used exclusively for first-year students.

Gender neutral housing has been officially integrated across all housing units for two years, in all housing options. Each year the university has anywhere from 140-150 students take advantage of the gender neutral housing policy. This represents about 2-3% of the total on campus student population. Four person living spaces are normally single gender; students who opt-in to gender neutral housing could still live with a roommate of the same gender, but share a common area with individuals of any gender.

Participants

Respondents in this study were selected with the help of a key informant. Yin (2003) wrote, “key informants are often critical to the success of a case study” (p. 90). The Associate Vice President for Student Affairs was the key informant for this study. The VP gave the researcher access to committee minutes and the contact information of administration and committee members. He also provided access to students and residence life staff. The researcher contacted the individuals and interviews were scheduled. Four individuals did not respond or declined to participate in the research.
This study utilized interviews from 15 individuals. While the intention of the researcher was to separate these individuals into four groups (committee members, administrators, residence life staff, and students), there was a high amount of overlap. This was particularly true among committee members and administrators as all committee members were also full time administrators. Of the 15 individuals interviewed, six were members of the gender neutral housing committee, eight serve as administrators at the university, three work in residence life, and eight were current students or recent graduates of the institution. Respondent group membership is presented in Table 2.
Table 2

Respondent Group Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Committee Members</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Residence Life Staff</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographics.** The administrator group contained eight individuals. These individuals ranged from second year administrators to veterans with almost 30 years of experience at the institution. All of the administrators were male. While several administrators disclosed that they had graduated from the institution, one had graduated less than five years ago and was counted as a member of the student group as well. He
was also active in student government as a student and provided insight into the student senate process.

Six of the administrators interviewed were also part of the gender neutral housing committee. While the interviews did not ask individuals to disclose sexual orientation, two of the committee members disclosed that they were gay, and one disclosed that he was heterosexual. Respondent group membership is presented in Table 2.

The residence life group was the smallest group with only three respondents. One was the director of housing and was a member of the gender neutral housing committee; the other two were students who also worked for the university in residence life. Both of these individuals were women and disclosed that they were heterosexual. One also disclosed that she had previously lived in a gender neutral living space before becoming a part of the residence life team.

The student group contained of eight individuals. One was a recent graduate who was now an administrator and two were currently working in residence life. One was a recent graduate who was frequently mentioned by other respondents as the student responsible for the initial senate resolution. All of these individuals were interviewed individually.

The remaining four students were interviewed in a focus group together. The student group was the most diverse, containing White, Asian American, and African American students. The student group contained four men and four women students. Three of the male students self identified as gay, one identified as heterosexual. All but two of the students had lived or were currently living in gender neutral housing. Respondent group membership is presented in Table 2.
**Interview process.** Each respondent group had a different interview protocol to address different research questions. Due to the overlap issue, respondents were assigned to one of the four groups for the purposes of the study. For example, certain committee members are also part of the day-to-day execution of the policy. Their expertise in the execution of the policy made their insights as administrators very valuable. When time allowed, the respondents were asked questions from all of the interview protocols that applied to their specific position and experience in order to obtain as much data as possible. Participation for all respondents was voluntary; the researcher kept all records confidential, under lock and key only accessible to the researcher.

For the purposes of this case study, respondents were identified by their main group affiliation. Main affiliation was determined during the scheduling process in order to assure that all four groups were represented. Quotes from the committee will be identified as (C), administrators will be identified as (A), residence life staff members will be identified as (R), and students will be identified as (S). This is in an attempt to maintain confidentiality as much as possible, as providing any more information (such as position titles or dual roles) about the specific individuals would easily allow identification at the institution.

**Data Collection Procedures**

This section will examine the specific data collection procedures utilized in this study. The first data type was interviews. Yin (2003) wrote that interviewing is “one of the most important sources of case study information” (p. 89). Individuals were interviewed and their responses were recorded on two digital recording devices. While the majority of interviews were conducted one-on-one, students had reservations about
meeting one-on-one and had the most challenging schedules as final exams began. Therefore, 4 students participated in the study in a focus group.

Documents were the second source of data. Yin (2003) wrote, “the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 87). The key informant provided the researcher access to the meeting minutes and executive summary of the final report compiled by the gender neutral housing committee. These data were used to corroborate the statements of the committee members (Yin, 2003).

The specific data used to address each research question is described below; this information is also presented in Table 3.

**Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?** In order to address this question, four major sources of data were used: (1) interviews with members of the gender neutral housing committee, (2) interviews with administration, (3) interview with the student who proposed the policy, and (4) documents. The multiple sources used in this study allow the researcher to triangulate data (Yin, 2003).

**Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?** Three respondent group interviews are utilized to address this question: (1) administration, (2) students, and (3) residence life staff.

**Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?** Three respondent group interviews are utilized to address this question: (1) administration, (2) students, and (3) residence life staff.
### Table 3

**Alignment of Research Questions, Data Types, and Data Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type Source</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: Implementation</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>• Gender Neutral Housing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td>• Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Key Informant/ minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: Execution</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>• Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Residence Life Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3: Impact</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>• Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Residence Life Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview protocol design and structure.** The interview design is a focused interview. Focused interview allows for conversational communication and appropriate corroboration (Yin, 2003). The specific research questions guide the question formation in the interviews. The questions are grouped based on the research question they address. Below is a sample of interview questions and their relationship to the research questions. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.
Research Question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?

1. What was the impetus for creating a gender neutral housing policy?
   a. Who pushed for the change?
   b. What was your initial reaction to the idea?

2. How was the gender neutral housing committee formed?
   a. Who made up the committee?
   b. How were these individuals selected?

3. Can you describe the work of the committee?
   a. What did the committee do when they met?
   b. What kind of work took place in these meetings?
   c. How did the committee work together?
   d. How did the committee handle disagreements?

Research Question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?

1. How closely does the proposed policy align with what actually occurs in the halls?

2. What other groups became involved? What were their concerns?

3. How has the policy changed since it was first implemented?

4. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the policy?

Research Question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?

1. How do you think the policy has changed the campus?
   a. How does this policy reflect the mission of the university?
2. How have students reacted to the policy?

3. What has been the impact on the LGBT population?
   a. How does this policy influence perception of LGBT people?

4. How do you feel about the policy?

   It is important to note that the interview design is a focused interview. Focused interview allows for conversational communication and appropriate corroboration (Yin, 2003). Individuals who participated in the interview process also completed an informed consent (Appendix B).

   **Verification of data.** In addressing each of the research questions, at least three different sources of data were utilized. This allows for appropriate triangulation of data and supports construct validity (Yin, 2003). This triangulation aids in the verification of the accuracy of the data collected. While the overlap issue does blur the lines for the different groups, the number of respondents allows for appropriate analysis of the data.

   Member checking also occurred throughout the data collection and analysis process. Most frequently this took the form of electronic communication with respondents to review themes and patterns that were developing during data analysis, such as the philosophical shift of the policy away from being solely for LGBT students.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study underwent institutional review to maintain ethical practices and procedures. While the subject of gender identity and sexual orientation is sensitive, the focus of this study is not on any individual respondent’s personal gender or sexual identity. Therefore, the danger to participants was minimal. The primary audience for this study is the university. Therefore extra consideration must be taken to assure
confidentiality of research participants. For this reason, participants are only identified based on the group they were a part of for the study: committee member (C), administrator (A), residence life staff (R), and students (S).

Data Analysis Procedures

This research utilizes the method of developing a case description. This strategy attempts to develop a framework throughout the data analysis stage using emergent design (Yin, 2003). Through examination of the respondent’s interviews and the minutes from the gender neutral housing committee, a narrative of the implementation and execution process formed. The committee minutes served as the framework, providing a clear timeline of events. The respondent interviews supplemented this framework and provided additional information to create a more complete picture of events.

All interview data were recorded and transcribed fully by the researcher. The documents and the transcriptions were then repeatedly read to develop the coding scheme. The data were coded based on common themes. The researcher began developing codes during reflection after each interview. Once the data were transcribed, repeated readings revealed additional themes and codes that needed to be created (Weiss, 1998).

Research question 1: Implementation. The data utilized in research question 1 were interviews with respondents and minutes from the gender neutral housing committee. The implementation coding scheme was developed after transcribing interviews from students, committee members, and administrators. The complete coding scheme is presented below. The codes were also applied to the gender neutral housing committee meeting minutes. This information was used to create a case description that
outlined the change process for implementing gender neutral housing. Of particular significance were reasons and barriers to change, as this information is necessary to understand the specific implementation plan of the university.

**Research question 2: Execution.** The data utilized in research question 2 were interviews of individuals affected or involved in the execution of gender neutral housing. This included administrators, residence life staff, and students. These interviews were transcribed and a coding scheme was developed with regard to the execution of the policy. The complete coding scheme is described below. The most significant themes that emerged were descriptions of the specific policy and opt-in processes as these themes provide a thorough understanding of the policy as the university executes it.

**Research question 3: Impact.** In addressing research question 3, interviews with student, administrators, and residence life staff helped to form a case description of the specific impact of the policy. These interviews were transcribed and a coding scheme was developed with regard to the execution of the policy. The complete coding scheme is described below. Common themes became apparent, such as the perception of the policy as being for all students or for specifically the LGBT population. These themes made it possible to understand that perceived and actual impact on students as a whole, and students who utilize the policy.

**Coding scheme.** Codes were divided into three overarching groups that reflected the three research questions: (1) implementation codes, (2) execution codes, and (3) impact codes. The codes will be discussed below and presented in Table 4. Examples of coded material are also presented.
For the purposes of this case study, each respondent is identified only by the main group affiliation they were assigned. Quotes from the committee will be identified as (C), administrators will be identified as (A), residence life will be identified as (R), and students will be identified as (S).

**Implementation codes.** Implementation codes are codes that most closely align with research question 1. These codes deal with the implementation process, the culture of the university, and barriers to change.

Culture (Cu): Any statement that discussed the culture of the institution and its impact on students.

“Career oriented—that’s how I would describe it.” (S)

“I think it’s a good fast paced dynamic—Independent culture—in that our students come here with pretty focused desires for getting involved and getting ahead. They learn a set of skills in the classroom and apply them to their careers.” (C)

School description (SD): Background material that described the university and is largely used to provide context and information about the specific university.

“So mostly we house undergraduate students, of that we have a large percent of students that are Greek—we also have a growing international population.” (A)

Mission (M): Any statement that addressed the specific mission or values of the university, and how those values are expressed through gender neutral housing.

“I think that as we have become a university more focused on diversity and inclusion—and have taken that on—we have made ourselves open to any student no matter who they are.” (A)
Reason for change (R4C): Any statement that gave a reason for the development of gender neutral housing at the institution.

“We obviously have a great staff of professionals who keep us abreast of changes in our field—but I think that our students also bring us issues every day with things they want us to consider.” (C)

Barriers to change (B2C): Any statement that addressed barriers to change or opposition to the change process.

“I think researching the policy in general was pretty challenging, as I’m sure you have experienced. Some schools that have gender neutral housing don’t advertise it—so it was a little challenging to research all of these schools.” (S)

“There was only one group—one student group on the entire campus—that opposed gender neutral housing.” (S)

Change process (CP): Any statement that described how change occurs at the institution.

“You know, sometimes you have to convince everybody else, which is how universities work. But did we really have to do that process?” (A)

Committee membership (CM): Any statement that described the member selection process for the gender neutral housing committee.

“If my memory serves, the VP [Vice President] felt we should get stakeholders from key groups, so we had committee members from admissions, parent services, alumni affairs, housing assignments, and residence hall programming perspectives, so I think it was just to have a cross section of individuals who could provide a perspective.” (C)
Committee conflict (CC): Any statement that described specific conflicts the gender neutral housing committee had, and how those conflicts were addressed.

“I'd say by and large there wasn't a lot of disagreement with the group, but the people who we brought in to discuss—there was certainly robust disagreement between their points of view.” (C)

Gender neutral housing perceptions (GNHP): Any statement that discussed initial reactions to the policy and perceptions about the policy.

“I thought, ‘wow this is progressive.’ Having grown up like I was talking about earlier—in a conservative family, and having attended a conservative school—these were policies that would not even have been considered, so I was impressed to see we were considering them.” (C)

External research (ER): Any statement that described the process of market comparisons of other institutions.

“Part of this is we wrote our policy and had three or four schools that had written sort of the same thing and virtually copied them and said, ‘this looks really good.’ And you know we cited them and for the most part I think we adapted what other people were doing. These people did it first, that will work.” (C)

Execution codes. Execution codes are codes that most closely align with research question 2. These codes deal with the on-ground execution of the policy and how the proposal developed into what is practiced on campus.

Definition of gender neutral housing (GNHD): Any statement that sought to define gender neutral housing. This could be either personal definition or the university’s official definition of the policy.
"If you look at what gender neutral housing actually means—Gender neutral housing is taking out the ‘M,’ the ‘F,’ whatever label is for gender or sex—whatever your school uses—and not including that in any way shape or form in how you make housing assignments. I don’t know any school in the country that is throwing that out the window completely.” (A)

Opt-in process (OIP): Any statement that described the process by which students participate in the program.

“One of the things you have to do is you have to preference someone of the opposite gender, and two you have to answer a lifestyle question that said you wanted gender neutral housing.” (A)

Room descriptions (RD): Any statement that described the type of living situation students who participate in the program would receive.

“We made it very clear that being gender neutral does not mean you are getting your own bedroom. You are going in a double just like everyone else is going in a double.” (A)

Practical challenges (PC): Any statement that described execution challenges to the policy.

“One issue was the computer programs. The code needed to allow people to choose. That’s like a step for someone in the office that deals with our computer programming thought about.” (C)

Strengths (St): Any statement that described a strength or positive attribute of the policy.

“I think the strengths are having students have the option to use it and be able to choose who they want to live with. Students having that choice can decide who they would feel most comfortable with.” (R)
Weaknesses (W): Any statement that described a weakness or area of improvement in the policy.

“I could see it not going good just from a personal standpoint, living with friends is not always the best option. You may not remain friends.” (R)

Impact codes. Impact codes are codes that most closely align with research question 3. These codes deal with the impact of the policy on the campus community and the individual students who choose to utilize it.

Impact (I): A general code used to mark any statement on the impact the policy has had on the campus community.

“There are students who, in the past, did not apply here because we did not have gender neutral housing. I think there are students who apply here now as undergraduates because we do have gender neutral housing. I don’t know numbers but you couldn’t convince me any other way.” (C)

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues (GI): Any statement that addressed the impact of the policy on the LGB student population.

“My roommate my freshmen year was gay and his boyfriend—basically moved in because his roommate was not very open minded, and he was uncomfortable in the room. That could have been just him living with me as opposed to another male, or living with any of the girls who live next door.” (S)

Transgender issues (TI): Any statement that addressed the impact of the policy on the transgender student population.
"For them to be able to come in and sit down in front of a group of people they don’t know and say, ‘I am transgendered and I need a space to live where I feel safe,’ for me took a lot of courage.” (C)

Who is this for? (W?): This code developed over time as different respondents had differing views on the intended benefactors of the policy. This is addressed more fully in Chapters IV and V.

“The way it was introduced—in that it was presented as a gay rights issue. At least that was the perception. And I think that was really a mistake because frankly gay rights is a polarizing issue, not so much here, but there are people...the policy is not about gay rights, it’s really not. It’s about students living with who they are most comfortable, cut and dry that’s it.” (A)

“I would say the highest priorities—maybe one being transgendered students, two being those who identify with the LGB community and three being straight allies. I would say that in order of importance—maybe importance isn’t the right word. But one, two, three like that is who is helped.” (S)

Student comfort (SC): This code also developed over time as the phrase “student comfort,” and the word “comfortable” was used repeatedly and by many respondents. This phenomenon is more fully addressed in Chapters IV and V.

“It’s got nothing to do with, ‘I want to live with somebody of the opposite sex because I am in a relationship with them, and I want to play house.’ It’s, ‘I feel more comfortable living with this person because I get along with them and they happen to be of the opposite gender. We just get along better.’” (A)
Table 4

Alignment of Codes with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: Implementation</th>
<th>RQ2: Execution</th>
<th>RQ3: Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cu-Culture</td>
<td>• GNHD-Definition of gender neutral housing</td>
<td>• I-Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SD-School description</td>
<td></td>
<td>• GI-LGB issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• M-Mission</td>
<td>• OIP-Opt-in process</td>
<td>• TI-Transgender issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• R4C-Reason for change</td>
<td>• RD-Room descriptions</td>
<td>• W?-Who is this for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• B2C-Barriers to change</td>
<td>• PS-Practical challenges</td>
<td>• SC-Student comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CP-Change process</td>
<td>• St-Strengths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CM-Committee membership</td>
<td></td>
<td>W-Weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CC-Committee conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• GNHP-Gender neutral housing perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ER-External Research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the data. The research questions guiding this study seek to explore the topic of gender neutral housing and understand its development, implementation, and execution. After coding, the analytic techniques used on these data are searching for commonalities and telling the story. Searching for commonalities is the search for trends and themes. Telling the story involves fully explaining the data that have been collected in a clear and concise way (Weiss, 1998). In addressing research questions 1 and 2, this
case study will tell the story of the implementation and execution of the policy. These stories are presented in Chapter IV.

Research question 3, unlike the other research questions, is evaluative in nature. It seeks to understand the impact of the policy on the campus climate. Therefore, the analytic techniques are slightly different. While the commonalities and the story are also important, comparison also plays a role in the evaluating the program. Therefore it is necessary to examine the respondents' perceptions of the campus before and after the policy was implemented in order to understand its impact (Weiss, 1998).

Measures of Data Quality

The key informant of this study provided access to the respondents and much of the data in this study. The respondents are individuals who work at the university or are students who participate in the program. These individuals have first hand experience with the policy and therefore are credible sources.

In order to assure quality data and quality data analysis, this research utilized three main validity measures: triangulation, member checking and external audit. Each research question was answered with at least three sources of data that addressed it. This supports the validity of the data and findings because the information is coming from various sources and is known as triangulation. Triangulation is important as it increases the credibility of findings (Creswell, 2005).

The second validity and quality measure is member checking. Member checking is a process where the researcher returns to the participants to verify the accuracy of findings (Creswell, 2005). It is not just presenting collected data or transcripts. Instead, member checking is when the researcher provides respondents with themes and specific
descriptions to verify accuracy. Throughout the process, the researcher worked closely with the respondents to verify that the data were representative of the gender neutral housing policy, and that they were a fair portrayal of the implementation and execution at the university. After the data collection phase, the respondents were contacted for clarification and to determine accuracy of findings. Five respondents were contacted to determine accuracy, four of the individuals responded. For example, the respondents were asked to verify the theme concerning the philosophical shift away from LGBT individuals to an approach that was open to all students (Creswell, 2005).

Glesne (1999) took this idea further. Member checking is not just about assuring fair and accurate reflection. It also gives respondents the opportunity to share their response to the findings. “Both researcher and researched may grow in their interpretations of the phenomena around them” (p. 152). In this way, member checking can increase the quality of the data collected.

Lastly, external audit allows individuals external to the study to examine the research methodology, the data, and the analysis. The researcher utilized other doctoral candidates as external auditors throughout the data analysis process, while maintaining the confidentiality of the institution (Creswell, 2005).

Given the nature of this study, examining one institution at one point in time, the generalizability and transferability is limited. However, this is not a concern as the results are designed to be relevant only to the institution. While the results could certainly be interesting to institutions considering a policy change, the findings are not applicable to every college or university.
Researcher Values

Researcher bias in qualitative analysis is an unavoidable and important part of the research process (Feldman, 1995). Researcher values can be considered an additional point of data in qualitative research studies. Therefore, it is important to address the values of the researcher and provide context. This researcher became interested in gender neutral housing options as a student in college. This interest has continued in work as a residence director and the completion of this research project.

This researcher believes that gender neutral housing is a legitimate option for LGBT individuals living on college and university campuses, and for any student who is more comfortable in that environment. At the very least gender neutral housing does not harm the campus climate, but this researcher believes it can help the climate and develop more open and supportive environments. The researcher understands these biases entering the study, and is prepared to either support or reject these opinions.

Summary

This chapter described the participant selection, setting, data collection and data analysis techniques and the role of the key informant. The key informant served a vital role in connecting the researcher to appropriate respondents in order to answer the research questions (Yin, 2003). The respondents were divided into four groups: (1) gender neutral housing committee members, (2) administrators, (3) residence life staff, and (4) students. The criteria used to select respondents were described. Several of the respondents were part of multiple groups. Those individuals were assigned a group, and then were asked questions regarding any other respondent group they belonged to at the
end of the interview session. Interview protocols and procedures were explained and provided.

Originally, the research was designed to contain only one-on-one interviews, but in order to encourage student participation, one four-person focus group was conducted. The techniques for data analysis and the coding scheme were described. Through comparison, description, and the search for common themes, a holistic picture of the case was developed (Weiss, 1998). Lastly, researcher values and measures of data quality were described. Chapter IV describes the results of the study. These results inform the conclusions presented in Chapter V.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). One reason behind the creation of policies is in an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011). While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, they are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research (Kircher & Hong, 2010). This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative case study conducted at a university that has recently implemented a gender neutral housing policy.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?

Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?

Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?

There are two main audiences for this research. The first audience is the administrators at the university being studied. Part of this research is to examine the change model and obtain a better understanding of how change occurs at the institution. This is potentially valuable information as new programs and policies are implemented.
This research also seeks to evaluate the gender neutral housing policy. This is also of interest to the institution as the policy continues.

The second audience for this research is other institutions that might be considering gender neutral housing policies. While this is a case study of one university and its results are not generalizable, the results could still prove beneficial, and could perhaps inform a process for other institutions. As Oliver and Magura (2011) wrote, “lessons learned from established programs can be invaluable for residence life professionals seeking advice or insight on newer programs” (p. 52).

For the purposes of this case study, respondents were identified by their main group affiliation. Quotes from the committee will be identified as (C), administrators will be identified as (A), residence life staff members will be identified as (R), and students will be identified as (S).

Findings Related to Research Question 1: Implementation

Research question 1 asked, “How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?” In order to address this question, data were collected in the form of interviews from gender neutral housing committee members and administrators. As will become evident in the following pages, students were the impetus for this change. Some student participants who were interviewed were part of the student group that advocated for change; therefore, their contributions are also provided. Additional data were collected in the form of minutes from the gender neutral housing committee provided by the key informant.

The gender neutral housing policy began as a student senate resolution led by a campus-based LGBT advocacy group in 2010. The original resolution was presented as a
way to be more inclusive to the transgender student population; however, many of the respondents report it as a program for all students, not simply transgendered or LGBT students as a whole. Once the senate resolution passed, the university created a gender neutral housing committee to look into the policy. Their work included examining the policies of peer institutions, seeking input from the community, and creating recommendations for the implementation of the policy. Individuals were selected for the committee by the leadership team and the president. The goal was to have a representative from as many on student services area as possible.

The committee work revealed several concerns about gender neutral housing. The biggest issues for the committee and the various stakeholders were (1) heterosexual couples living together, (2) opening the policy up for all students including freshmen, and (3) determining what buildings would be considered gender neutral.

The following sections break down the specific implementation process. It examines the four main steps in the implementation process: (1) student advocacy, (2) committee formation, (3) committee work, and (4) committee recommendations.

**Student advocacy.** Gender neutral housing began as a student initiative out of the university’s LGBT student organization. This group had actively advocated for several LGBT causes. In 2008, students successfully advocated for the creation of an LGBT resource center. One respondent discussed how quickly change has occurred since the creation of the LGBT resource center.

"Ever since the resource center, we have had progress really fast—we had a non-discrimination policy in 2009, an LGBT studies minor in 2010, gender neutral housing in 2011, and the list goes on." (S)
These changes all began through student advocacy. The LGBT student organization began advocating for gender neutral housing in response to concerns from the transgender student population.

"It [gender neutral housing] had always been on my mind, but it was even more so at the forefront of my agenda as an activist on campus when I saw how unhappy my transgendered friends were. How they couldn’t be themselves because if their birth certificate says ‘male,’ and they transitioned to become a female—depending on the state they live in—that might not be recognized." (S)

In order to present the university with a proposal about gender neutral housing, the LGBT student group began to gather data about the policies at other institutions. A segment of students in this LGBT student organization broke away and became "University Students for Gender Neutral Housing," a separate advocacy group focusing specifically on gender neutral housing on campus. At the time, few schools had such a policy and finding information was challenging. One respondent reported that he eventually began calling colleges and universities and talking directly to housing staff.

**The senate resolution.** The research eventually led to a senate resolution in the university’s student government. At its core, the argument focused on the needs of transgendered students. The resolution provided three main points: (1) it claimed that to not have gender neutral housing was a violation of the university’s non-discrimination policy, (2) it provided information about other colleges and universities that had implemented gender neutral housing, and (3) it outlined a proposal for gender neutral housing at the university.

The university had changed its non-discrimination policy in 2009 to include transgendered students, a change that the LGBT student population had pushed for. As a
result, the senate resolution claimed that not having gender neutral housing was a violation of the revised policy.

The resolution contained an appendix with a list of every college in the country that was currently offering gender neutral housing, as well as what the scope of the policy. This included the type of housing assignment and how students were assigned to the gender neutral spaces. The vast majority of schools had double rooms as the primary housing option for gender neutral students, and most opened the program to second, third and fourth year students. Particular attention was paid to institutions of similar size and student population to the university.

Finally, the senate resolution provided a proposal on how the university could proceed. First, it asked the university administration to spend the next academic year researching gender neutral housing and developing an implementation plan. It requested that all students (freshmen through seniors) be permitted access to this policy. It advocated against a program in which all students were assigned randomly regardless of gender, and instead suggested an opt-in program in which students had choice to live in a gender neutral space. Lastly, it requested that the policy be formally piloted in the following academic year. One student led the effort by the student senate. The research participants frequently named this individual as the driving force of the policy. This individual also participated in an interview and was frequently used for member checking.

This proposal was put to a vote in the student senate the same day as the senate resolution to create an LGBT studies minor.
"It was also presented—by the way—the same senate meeting as the LGBT minor, by the same group. So it was very closely tied with an LGBT issue as opposed to a campus housing issue." (A)

As will become more evident throughout this chapter, the policy has changed over time from a purely LGBT issue to one that is a university-wide student comfort issue. The respondents in this study were not in agreement about whom the policy was designed to benefit.

The senate allowed students to come in and explain why gender neutral housing was important to them before the votes were cast. This was referred to as student testimony. One respondent stated that student testimony probably got the resolution passed.

"We had all these really beautiful people testify at the senate hearing—a transgendered person, a gay individual, a straight ally. People from every walk of life testified why this was important to them—and you could see the votes changing in the eyes of the senators as stories were told. That was really a turning point." (S)

There was some fear that the resolution might not pass, as a conservative student organization had opposed the resolution and was active in the student senate. This conservative student organization was the only one to take a stance against gender neutral housing. The College Republicans had taken no position on the issue.

"So for us [the student advocacy group] that was actually a win because in previous years they [College Republicans] had opposed LGBT initiatives on campus. So it was, “oh you are not opposing us, that’s not great but we can deal with it.”" (S)
The senate had passed the gender neutral housing resolution with a two-thirds majority. One respondent reported that the event was emotional. Transgendered students cried after votes were cast.

“One of my transgendered friends who had been discriminated in housing—this was a monumental vote for her. She felt like she was finally being recognized by the university, and just started crying in the audience. For me, that was one of the most moving moments in my university career. It's not an intangible thing where you can't see who this is benefitting. It's benefitting her, it's benefitting me, it's benefitting everyone.” (S)

Once the senate resolution was passed, the document was given to the administration of the university. Then change process from an administrative level could begin. The committee members reported that their work was not to determine if gender neutral housing was going to be implemented, but instead how it would be implemented.

“I don’t think there was anybody on the committee—I’ll be honest with you—that didn’t understand and accept that this was something that had to be done.” (C)

**Committee formation.** Committee members and administrators were asked how change occurs at the university. The most common response was that change occurs slowly. The student voice is important.

“Change occurs here, like most institutions, fairly slowly. I remember hearing a quote that running a university was like steering an ocean liner. You try not to rock the boat too much and too quickly. But I think the case study we are talking about is emblematic of the kinds of changes we see here. I’ve been here for 15 years. Student agency is really important and thus the gender neutral housing policy is no different.” (C)

Student agency was consistently named by administrators and gender neutral housing committee members as being an important element of change at the university.
Currently there is a movement at the university to become smoke-free. This is due in large part to the student population at this point in time.

"I think if it [gender neutral housing] had happened a year earlier and students weren’t pushing for it, the university wouldn’t have changed the policy. The students were saying, ‘it was an important issue for us.’ Every year it’s a different issue; two years ago it was access to mental health, this year it’s smoke-free and next year it will be something else.” (C)

While the impetus for change can be student driven, the committee respondents were also quick to point out the need to maintain communication with the university’s stakeholders.

"The university was going to do this the best way we can and we are also going to do this the best for us. The student voice is probably the loudest, but it is not the only voice we wanted to hear. Part of it was sort of balancing that. We can’t only please one population.” (C)

The university leadership, including the Dean of Students and university president, wanted to hear what other stakeholders had to say. The solution to this problem was to form a gender neutral housing committee. The members of the committee were selected to provide representation from stakeholder groups throughout the university. Committee members were director level or higher administrators who were brought together by the university’s leadership team to represent the different stakeholders. The committee included representatives from parent services, alumni services, the president’s office, admissions, media relations, housing and residence life, student affairs, and general counsel.

The representatives from parent services and alumni services presented the thoughts of the parents and alumni respectively. The alumni representative was
particularly concerned with the opinions of recent alumni, as the older alumni population was unlikely to have lived on campus during their experience at the university. These representatives facilitated conversations and focus groups with alumni and parents. The President’s representative on the committee served as liaison to the President, and also to the Board of Trustees. Admissions and media relations considered the marketing elements of such a policy. Housing and residence life represented the practical and facilities concerns of implementing gender neutral housing. Student affairs representatives served to inform the committee of developmental concerns. Lastly, general counsel’s role was to examine the legal concerns with implementation of gender neutral housing.

Committee work. The committee had several items on its agenda: (1) to gauge reaction from the committee members themselves, (2) to research the policy and procedures at other institutions, and (3) to collect data from key stakeholders in the university community. Once these three tasks were completed, the committee created their recommendations for the leadership of the university.

Committee member reactions. The committee’s first job was to get an idea of everyone’s opinion on the issue. It appears that there were only minor reservations among members of the committee.

“I don’t think there was anybody on the committee—I’ll be honest with you—that didn’t understand and accept that this was something that had to be done. I just think everybody on the committee wanted to do it the right way, and make sure there were no ramifications that could come back and hurt us.” (C)

“I think for the most part, it was widely received as a positive step.” (C)
The residence life representatives of the committee pointed out that gender neutral housing already existed on a very small scale at the university.

"We have offered gender neutral housing at the university for almost 10 years through our townhouses—which sort of are no longer in existence. We used to allow in those small townhouses, men and women to live together—through the living learning communities. At its height we had about eight with six of them being gender neutral." (R)

To the residence life staff representatives, the townhouses served as a kind of pilot. These options were very small, only housing four to six students in one townhouse.

That is not to say that there were no reservations. The biggest reservation was the possibility of heterosexual couples living together. This concern continued to repeat among many of the respondents, regardless of whether or not they served as committee members or not.

"I was concerned you were going to have a lot of 19 years olds who were going to say, 'I want to live with my boyfriend,' or "I want to live with my girlfriend," and have lots of couples living together... Well I hope this isn't going to be an issue because that's going to be an added burden for the housing office." (A)

"I think people kind of joked that it would be a really bad idea if couples decided to live together—just because if that blows up it would be an awful situation." (R)

"Were you going to have lots of fights, were you going to have lots of boyfriend girlfriends and everything and not get along and those types of things?" (A)

"Some of the opponents cited things like, 'romantic couples will live together.'" (S)
This was, and still is, a common concern at the university. As will be evident when examining research question 2, there have been very few cases of heterosexual couples living together.

Due to the makeup of the committee, many of the other concerns were quickly and easily addressed. For example, there was some concern about the housing computer software used to sort students being reprogrammed to override gender as a sorting method. The presence of residence life staff on the committee allowed for that issue to be resolved quickly.

Similarly, having general counsel on the committee answered any legal concerns about the policy. The Human Rights Act that governs this university made implementing gender neutral housing easy due to its very broad and inclusive language.

While most of the committee members were either in support of gender neutral housing, or had only minor reservations, many wanted to gather more information.

"My initial reaction was that I wanted to get some more information. I saw that institutions that had it were top institutions in the country, so I was surprised we hadn’t done this before. Also knowing our culture and the student population we have, I didn’t think it would be a real big deal to institute this policy. But I wanted to educate myself a little bit more about this policy and the ins and outs of it.” (C)

Therefore the committee began working on its next step in the process, that of researching policies at other institutions.

**Market basket research.** The committee set out to gather information about how the policy has worked at market basket institutions, or institutions that are similar to the university. The university has about 35 institutions that it considers to be market basket
schools. According to the final proposal by the committee, 10 of these market basket institutions currently had some form of gender neutral housing.

“They [the committee meetings] were driven by comp analysis. We did a lot of benchmarking... We look at a lot of our market basket and peer institutions—we looked at really close schools to see what they were doing. A lot of the conversations were just kind of reporting back: ‘Go look at the school, their policy, the language they use, and how they market it to students. What was their media reaction? What was the student newspaper saying? The local paper?’ A lot of it was conversation back and forth.” (C)

Committee meeting minutes reflect that members of the committee were tasked with reaching out to other institutions and reporting back the findings. One university the committee contacted had gender neutral housing in place for over 10 years. This was largely due to the prevalence of single person rooms with common living areas at the institution. The representative from the market basket institution even went so far as to call gender neutral housing “the norm” at her institution.

The committee learned from this research and was able to make some predictions about the policy.

“We said it would be 1-2% of the population, we are at about that. We didn’t think we would have a lot of freshmen; we haven’t had a lot of freshmen. We didn’t think we would have a lot of roommate conflicts...For the most part we haven’t seen a ton of roommate conflicts...We are seeing what we thought we would see.” (R)

This research conducted by the university allowed for the evaluation of the policy to determine if implementation was right for them. Some of the respondents were keenly aware of how innovative the policy was. Others felt that the university was not breaking new ground and was simply following the example of other institutions.
“And there was the normal amount of university sort of trepidation, ‘do we really want to go down this road,’ and it hadn’t really been done a lot in a lot of places. When we did some research on it, we didn’t see a lot of other places that had done it.” (A)

“I remember thinking, ‘Yea, this isn’t new ground... We aren’t doing anything different than most of the Ivies and much of the Big 10.‘ We weren’t so unique.” (C)

At this point, the committee had a firm understanding of what the gender neutral housing looked like at peer institutions and market basket universities. The committee then turned their attention to the university community at large.

**Community member reactions.** The committee—and the university as a whole—was concerned with hearing from stakeholders at the institution, regardless of the issue at hand. The committee held focus groups and conducted outreach to the various stakeholders to be sure their voices were heard.

“We built in a feature where people could submit testimony, either in person or anonymously to bring their ideas.” (C)

“So we had a meeting with parents on teleconference getting opinions, same with alumni, same with the media.” (A)

The following sections will look at the different groups and the concerns they brought up about gender neutral housing. The groups the committee sought out were: (1) parents, (2) alumni, (3) faculty and staff, and (4) students. These reports are compiled from interviews with committee members and from meeting minutes, not from actual conversations with the respective groups. These focus groups were very small. The committee justified the relative size of the focus groups by having representation from the groups on the committee. Representatives from the office of alumni affairs, parent
services, and other stakeholder groups allowed the committee to look to those representatives as spokespeople.

**Parent reactions.** Much of the conversation with parents of current students focused on explaining what the policy would look like. This information was compiled from meeting minutes of the gender neutral housing committee. The committee conducted a focus group by phone with a small group of four parents. Parents had four main concerns: (1) random assignment for their child, (2) parental notification of gender neutral housing, (3) heterosexual couples living together, and (4) freshmen students living in gender neutral housing.

According to the committee minutes, the telephone conference with parents were positive, once parents understood that their son or daughter would not be randomly placed with a student of the opposite gender. Instead, he or she would need to request a specific individual with whom to live. Other issues dealt with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Some parents were concerned that their child would select gender neutral and not inform the parents. FERPA prevents the university from revealing personal information about students to anyone but the student, and therefore parents would need to verify housing with the student. Another concern that came up frequently was the issue of heterosexual couples living together.

"I think there was the concern of the boyfriend/girlfriend situation and they would break up and turn ugly. Parents have the biggest hang-ups about that." (C)

Several of the respondents stated that fathers were more likely to have these concerns about their daughters. The fact that the policy was opt-in alleviated some of
these issues. Lastly, the parents also worried about freshmen students living in gender neutral housing. They did not believe that freshmen would be ready for such responsibility.

The parents were asked to provide guidance on the implementation of the policy. Parents did not appear to like the term “gender neutral housing” and wanted a less “off-putting” name for the program, such as “open housing.” They also suggested implementing it discretely, rather than having a large awareness campaign about the program.

"Without too much fanfare, if possible.” (Committee minutes-Parent focus group)

Alumni reactions. Alumni reactions, as recorded in the committee meeting minutes, were gathered during a 45-minute focus group with four alumni of the university. These individuals were purposively selected by the gender neutral housing committee to be representative of active recent and older alumni. Half of the individuals had graduated very recently, while the other half were individuals who had graduated at least 15 years ago. The alumni were somewhat divided in their opinions. While one alumnus believed gender neutral housing would support the mission of the university and present it as a “gay friendly” institution, another stated that it was very radical and needed more justification for the mixing of genders. The minutes note that the alumnus who was opposed to the policy was willing to support the policy if implemented as discussed in the meeting.
One of the major concerns was offering the option to freshmen students. There was a belief by some of the alumni that freshmen were not ready for the responsibility of gender neutral housing.

Much like the parents, alumni were asked to provide feedback about how to implement the policy. They suggested framing the policy around anti-discrimination policies toward the LGBT community.

**Faculty and staff reactions.** The focus group with the faculty and staff was conducted electronically. A summary of the comments is presented in the minutes from the gender neutral housing committee. A professor of sociology and two admissions representatives were presented with an early draft of the policy.

The first admissions representative cited a desire to include the policy on a diversity section of the admissions website. This individual wanted to expand their selling points for students who are part of the LGBT community.

"I think gender neutral housing is not only a good thing to have, but perhaps the 'right' thing to do. As we seek to expand our definition of diversity and inclusion, gender neutral housing provides us with the opportunity to provide an option for those students (even though my hunch is that it will be a small number relative to the entire college residential community) for whom gender identity is an important issue." (Committee minutes-Faculty and Staff Focus Group)

The other admissions representative expressed a desire to keep the policy "low key," and to not "oversell" it. This meant implementing the policy discretely and not having a large awareness campaign for the university community.

In this early draft, there had been some language in the policy about requiring students to come forward and identifying as LGBT in order to live in gender neutral
housing. The key informant was not able to locate this early draft. One admissions representative expressed reservations about requiring this type of self-disclosure. She considered it “irrelevant and invasive.” This could be important as it illustrates how some individuals’ perceptions of the policy has shifted away from a purely LGBT issue.

Like the focus group with the parents, this group also preferred re-naming gender neutral housing. The sociology faculty member preferred the term “open” housing.” She stated that no one is 100% gender neutral and therefore the term is misleading. It is unknown if she found the term gender neutral housing “off-putting” as some of the parents did in their focus group.

The perception of gender neutral housing from these individuals was largely positive, although there appears to be some desire from the one admissions representative to implement the policy as quietly as possible. The reasons for this are unclear in the notes from this meeting.

Student reactions. By far the largest response to the proposal was from the student population. The student group had the most vocal minority in opposition to the policy. Students were able to come to the gender neutral housing committee directly and express their opinions, or they could electronically submit their testimony (by name or anonymously). While 24 students requested to meet with the gender neutral housing committee, 17 attended the focus group. 15 students elected to provide written testimony.

The majority opinion was in favor of the policy. Similar to the alumni group, there was disagreement about allowing freshmen students to participate and which buildings would be considered gender neutral. Some of the testimonies were
presentations of negative experiences that various LGBT students had experienced as a result of a poor roommate situation.

“What really stands out in my mind is the conversation with the student about how difficult it was for that student in his freshmen year. His homophobic roommate, and how important that policy would be for him.” (C)

“I understand the concerns of those whom are opposed to this project, yet I must respectfully reject their views. Every student deserves a living space that enables them to enjoy a healthier and more productive collegiate encounter. Not just those who fit into a certain box.” (Committee minutes-Student testimony)

Just as with the alumni and the parent focus group, some of the students wished for the policy to be revealed as discretely as possible.

“I noticed that [at other institutions] due to the limited participation in the program, the option is not flaunted...Subtly allowing this option—I believe—is the best way to ensure its success and not discourage some of the university’s more conservative applicants.” (Committee minutes-Student testimony)

The vocal minority of students who did not support the creation of the policy also presented testimony to the gender neutral housing committee. The main concern was heterosexual couples living together.

“I am opposed to gender neutral housing for a number of reasons. Firstly, I believe it will undermine the fabric of social life at the university for students, whether they are enrolled in a gender neutral housing program or not. Instituting a gender natural housing regime will put pressure on students, notably couples, to live together.” (Committee minutes-Student testimony)

“I’m opposed to gender neutral housing, I just think it will lead to trouble, i.e. if a couple breaks up or something, and could put further stress on the housing system. Also, the inherent differences between men and women’s
"lifestyle etc. seems like it would make comfortable living impossible."
(Committee minutes-Student testimony)

The student voice was predominantly positive. The opposition typically centered on the recurring issue of heterosexual couples dating, and concerns that males and females are too different to live together.

Summary of reactions. All of the focus groups and outreach to the community were predominantly positive. Most of the concerns centered on heterosexual couples dating, keeping the implementation as discrete as possible, limiting the policy to prevent freshmen participation, and which halls would be considered gender neutral.

The committee had now gathered information from peer institutions and from members of its own community. It was now time to create a final set of recommendations for the Provost.

Committee recommendations. No member of the committee was against gender neutral housing; the question was more about the best way to go about executing the policy. The student senate resolution was received in January, and seven months later the committee was ready to put forward recommendations. This section will outline the specific gender neutral policy proposed. It will then examine two elements of the policy that created minor conflict in the committee: allowing freshmen to participate, and allowing gender neutral housing to be 100% integrated with the community.

The policy. The policy as recommended by the gender neutral housing committee is straightforward. Gender neutral housing is spread throughout the entire campus in all of its residence halls. There is no designated area for gender neutral residents. Students who wish to participate in gender neutral housing must select a roommate or roommates
of opposite gender, and then must check a box on the housing application in which they opt-in to gender neutral housing.

Gender neutral housing students are assigned as they would be if they were selecting same sex roommates, meaning there is no difference between gender neutral spaces and single sex spaces. Any room on campus can be gender neutral if a gender neutral set of roommates selects the space.

Students must have a roommate in mind. The university will not randomly assign gender neutral spaces, even if the student has checked the box to opt-in to gender neutral housing. In the event of a student leaving a gender neutral space, the remaining roommates have the opportunity to obtain a new roommate. If the students cannot do this, the university may be forced to move students in order to fill all available housing.

While the original student senate proposal was heavily influenced by a desire to meet the needs of the LGBT population, particularly transgendered students, the recommendations cite the needs of LGBT students only once. Instead the recommendations desire an open housing system for all students. The rationale being that students who are more comfortable living in a gender neutral space, are not necessarily all members of the LGBT community. Similarly, the committee did not determine any student development concerns for students living in gender neutral spaces, and sought to prevent the policy from ghettoizing LGBT individuals. The policy is focused more on giving all students the freedom to live with whomever they are most comfortable. Similarly, the final policy as published on the university website does not mention LGBT students in any way, except to present the LGBT center as a resource for
students. This represents a philosophical shift to create a policy that is open to all students and not just for the LGBT student population.

**Conflict in the committee.** The gender neutral housing committee made the decision to allow freshmen to participate. They also recommended opening the entire campus to gender neutral housing. As is evident in many of the focus groups, these two decisions were mildly controversial. This section will address the conflict within the committee and why these decisions were ultimately made.

First, the committee recommended that freshmen be allowed to participate in gender neutral housing. This recommendation is based on a desire to provide flexibility to all students.

"The gender neutral housing committee believes that all classes of students would benefit from having these flexible housing options to choose the individual(s) they want to room with in campus residence halls. The committee also believes that students, above all else, should have a comfortable living environment to support their academic and co-curricular endeavors." (Committee final recommendations)

*For us that was one of the best parts, because why would we give equality to three-fourths of students or half of students? It just doesn’t make sense. (S)*

This issue was one of the few conflicts that the committee faced. It led to conversations with the developmental experts on the committee. However, utilizing student development theory and development theory as a whole, the committee could find no developmental reason that first-year students would be any less able to live in gender neutral housing.
"That's where I stood for a while, is that it shouldn't be for freshmen, but we came to the conclusion that developmentally, and socially there was no reason not to." (C)

While this was one of the few areas of disagreement within the committee, the committee felt free to talk out their differences.

"The nice thing about the committee was that we didn't all come from the same office, yet we all knew each other pretty well. But there was no reason to hold back for politics or whatever. It was a safe environment where we felt like we could raise concerns and we had the right expertise in the room." (C)

Respondents mentioned the conflict; however, some of them barely remembered the issue at all.

"This is one thing I can't remember—If we wound up allowing for incoming freshmen or if it was just for upperclassmen." (C)

It is clear, at least for this individual committee member, that the conflict was not big enough to be memorable.

The second mildly controversial recommendation of the committee was to open the entire campus to gender neutral housing. It appears that members of the committee never had conflict about this issue, and that it was solely an issue brought up by the focus groups and individuals external to the committee.

The committee felt that placing gender neutral housing in specific locations could be detrimental to the students taking advantage of it. These individuals would be unnecessarily segregated.
"One of the things that we learned from other schools is we didn’t want to define a community as gender neutral. Partially because we didn’t want to ghettoize the community and put a target on it and say ‘this is where we stick the gender neutral students.’" (R)

The committee also felt that if a specific building was chosen, it could discourage student participation if the housing was less desirable. Conversely, placing gender neutral housing in a very desirable housing location might encourage participation by students who would normally not have availed themselves of the policy.

"You don’t necessarily want to make it a benefit, but you don’t want to make it a deterrent. You want to make it even, and fair and that’s what we tried to do." (R)

The committee drafted their final recommendations to the Provost and the policy was ready for execution the following academic year.

**Findings Related to Research Question 2: Execution**

Research question 2 asked, “How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?” In order to address this question, data were collected in the form of interviews from administrators, residence life staff, and students. This section will focus on how the community was informed about the gender neutral housing policy, the day-to-day operation of the policy, a review of the initial fears compared to the reality, and the respondent’s thoughts on strengths and weaknesses of the policy.

While there was an effort to inform the community at large about the policy, many of the respondents had questions or misinformation about how the policy operated. Day-to-day, the policy has had very few issues or challenges. The only issues of note were roommate conflicts and one case of a parent having a negative reaction to her
child’s living arrangement. This section will also look at the reality of the policy on ground. For example, despite consistent concern that heterosexual couples would choose to live together, this has largely been a non-issue at the university. Lastly, respondents were asked what they believed to be the strengths and weaknesses of the policy. These statements will be summarized and presented at the conclusion of this section.

**Informing the community about the policy.** The committee had delivered the recommendations to the university seven months from when the students had passed the senate resolution. The report came out in August and therefore implementation would be impossible for September. The policy was slated to take effect the following academic year.

The work of the committee was newsworthy on campus. The student newspaper had been following the work of the committee throughout the process.

"You know, the student newspaper wanted regular updates, and it's not that it was closed, but we weren't giving regular updates because there weren't updates to give. There was a perception that there was a secret bunch of meetings. But it wasn't a secret; it was just hashing things out. You don't necessarily want to do that publicly." (R)

"We sort of agreed—we are not going to take out a big advertising campaign. So if people ask about it, it's on the website. If people really are coming to the university, and will make a decision on it, they can find it. But we weren't also saying, 'On the front of the website, we are going to put a button that says, if you want to live with a member of the opposite sex, you can do that.'" (C)

The student newspaper reported on final approval of the policy, but there was not a large-scale advertising campaign directed toward students. One committee member was a little disappointed that the campaign was not larger:
"I would use it [the advertising for the policy] as a means to generate dialog around the discussion of sexuality and what it means. And maybe try to get people to bring forward some of their biases and assumptions to create more understanding about the LGBT community. I think there were reasons why they chose not to beat the drum. Because they wanted to implement the policy, they didn’t want to create riff in the community...I think they were trying to do it in a discrete way for strategic purposes, but I still wish we could have had more dialog around what the policy means for the community that it’s intended for.” (C)

Based on the interviews with the respondents, it seems that the student newspaper coverage was the only real promotion of the policy. Some respondents questioned if students knew about the policy at all.

“I think the university comes from a standpoint—and talking to an administrator who told me this—that they are very concerned that they are going to scare potential students off. I think through their parents. Because parents hear it and they start freaking out.” (S)

“I mean, I haven’t heard of that many people taking advantage of it. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing—or if people know about it and choose just not to do it.” (R)

“I am sure they are people on campus who don’t know about gender neutral housing.” (S1)
“Absolutely.” (S2)
“I bet there are a ton of people who don’t know it exists.”(S1)
“That could account for why the numbers are so low.” (S3) (Focus Group)

“They didn’t really advertise the GNH. A lot of people just don’t do it, and I would be curious to know why. Like do people just not know about it?” (R)

In interviewing respondents, it appears that there are still many questions about gender neutral housing. Respondents who were not members of the gender neutral housing committee had some confusion about how the policy worked; some even had a misunderstanding about the policy in general.
“I think some people had wanted it to be for all students including freshmen. I think that was probably a compromise at some level. I think—I know that there was a hope that it could be anywhere, that it wouldn’t be restricted to certain buildings and certain types of rooms.” (A)

“So for us, we applied with someone else who is our third roommate. We just assumed we would get a fourth roommate.” (S1)
“We totally assumed we would get a fourth roommate.” (S2)
“And then we were placed in like a different room, we were shocked.” (S1) (Student Focus Group)

“But I would be curious to find out the room swapping thing. Because I really want to know.” (R)

It seems as if there are still questions about the specifics of the policy. Some administrators seem to not know whom the policy is open to, or that the policy is spread throughout campus. Similarly, students seem confused about the opt-in process and residence life staff still has questions about room swap processes. (It should be noted that room switches are quite rare, but when they do occur another student must opt-in to gender neutral housing or the room reverts to single gender.) In fact, every individual respondent who was not a member of the committee had at least one unanswered question about the policy. This will be explored more fully in Chapter V.

The following section examines the day-to-day functioning of the policy.

**Day-to-day operation.** Once the policy was in place, the gender neutral housing committee was largely disbanded. The housing office became the primary source of information about the policy.

“We didn’t formalize the assessment as much as we should have, that probably in hindsight was the one piece that—it was sort of left to the housing office to tell us, 'Is it working, have you had complaints?' So it went from a committee process to really an implementation group. By and large, the implementation group was the media relations people and the housing staff.” (C)
The housing staff became primarily responsible for execution of the policy. They state that they have had almost no issues with gender neutral housing. There was one notable incident in which the parent of a student in gender neutral housing demanded that her child move to a different space when she discovered her child was in gender neutral housing. The issue was apparently largely based around the parent’s conservative religious background. The student’s assignment was changed before the end of move-in day to a standard room. While it was the student’s choice to live in gender neutral housing, the mother convinced her child to switch rooms. However, the residence life staff reported that there have been few roommate conflicts or issues.

“For the most part, we haven’t seen a ton of roommate conflicts—one or two—which is on par with what you typically see with people who pick their roommates. We are seeing what we thought we would see.” (R)

The students who participate in gender neutral housing do not see it as unique or unusual.

“This is just like every other housing; I don’t know why anyone thinks of it as being different.” (S)

“I think I would like to reiterate the fact that it really only comes up once a year to check that stupid box, and if you accidentally checked no and still put a girl. I think you would still get it.” (S)

“Friends are friends.” (S1)
“I don’t look at someone’s genitalia and say, ‘oh we are going to be great friends now.’ No it’s just like, we’re friends, it [living together] would work well, I don’t care.” (S2)
“I don’t understand how anyone’s gender has any impact on your living relationship, none. I mean, we are not sharing a room, and even if we were, you are sleeping in a bed. I am not asking anybody to sleep in the
same bed with me every night, that’s just not an issue.” (SI)(Student focus group)

“I don’t think anything of it, I just think of my roommates... I like one of my roommates, and the other one bothers me, it’s the same thing as last year. It just so happens they are a different gender.” (S)

The day-to-day implementation of the policy has been smooth and there have been very few issues. To the students who participate and to the residence life staff, gender neutral housing is just like any other roommate situation.

Fears compared to realities. There were several fears and concerns to implementing gender neutral housing. The two biggest fears were that heterosexual couples would live together, and that this would lead to break-ups and an increase in room switches.

By all accounts the number of heterosexual couples that participate in the policy has been small.

“I can think of four—five—six that I can think of over the time we have had the process in place.” (A)

Even so, some of the respondents did not see a problem with heterosexual couples living together. For example, the students interviewed point out that adults can make the decision to live together. The students appeared to understand the consequences of what could happen if a relationship ended, and believed the consequences were their own to bear. One committee member pointed out that such a situation could be a great learning opportunity for students:

“And let’s say this student made the mistake of gaming the program and wanting to participate because they wanted to live for example with their
girlfriend. The repercussions of that are entirely on the student. And the student—you know—I hate to say that experience is the best teacher—but if that experience has gone a trifle bit awry, then the student only has themselves to blame. They would probably think twice about doing something like that again.” (C)

“I think we had some concerns from a student life standpoint. 'so if couples do live together, and they break up how do you deal with that? Because that could be extremely awkward. To the students, 'you are making a choice.' If you choose to do this and you break up, you are going to deal with the repercussions. And that may take you some time to get through the room swapping. But we were worried about it, but we didn't see any issues.” (C)

In terms of room switching processes, the university has seen very few in gender neutral spaces.

“We do room swaps with an online system. You go in, you say you want to room swap; someone emails you, and says they want to swap. We have had probably one or two, but for the most part—because people are picking their roommates—they're not swapping out of where their roommates are. It's just the nature of when you pick your roommate you know that ahead of time that you want to live with them.” (C)

It would appear that many of the events that opponents feared would come to pass, simply have not. The policy appears to have been implemented with no noticeable concerns or issues.

**Strengths and weaknesses.** Respondents were asked to present what they perceived as strengths and weaknesses of the policy. This information was enlightening as it highlighted a few issues that have already been addressed, such as some confusion about certain elements of the policy, as well as highlighting an issue in terms of access for freshmen students. The respondents, in particular committee member respondents, point to openness and access for students as the primary strength of the policy.
**Strengths.** Many respondents believed that the primary strength of the policy was the access given to students and the increase in flexibility afforded to students.

“*I think the strengths of the policy is that it's one more option. We try to give students as many options as possible, and try to be as open as possible to accommodate how a student wants to live so they can be as successful as possible.*” (A)

“*Maximum flexibility and choice at every level.*” (C)

“*It responded to what our students wanted—they wanted it and we couldn’t find a reason not to—so why not do it?*” (A)

“*I think it puts more onus on the student, and allows the student to trust the system, and probably makes them feel empowered for being trusted.*” (C)

This is also where the theme of student comfort presented itself in the transcripts. Many of the respondents were quick to point out that this policy was about student comfort and creating a pleasant housing option.

“*It’s about students living with who they are most comfortable, cut and dry that’s it.*” (A)

“*It doesn’t matter—their sexual orientation—they can simply be comfortable in their housing environment.*” (S)

There was almost universal agreement among respondents about the strengths of the policy. The only other strength that came up in the interview process was the idea of following the trend of innovation in the market, but even the committee member who cited this as a strength went on to talk about student comfort and an increase in flexibility.

**Weaknesses.** The respondents were more divided on the weaknesses of the policy. One commonly cited weakness was the perception students and the community
as a whole have on the program. Respondents discussed the perception that gender neutral housing was considered purely LGBT housing.

“I think a lot of people stereotype around LGBT issues, when it’s not. I think the students look at it and don’t necessarily look at it as, ‘what can I learn from someone of the opposite gender, and how can that help me to grow as a person in my future life?’ (A)

“The way it was introduced—in that it was presented as a gay rights issue. At least that was the perception. And I think that was really a mistake, because frankly gay rights is a polarizing issue...the policy is not about gay rights.” (A)

One respondent was a student who lived in gender neutral housing with a male friend. No one in the room was a member of the LGBT community. Yet, she found that others assumed her male roommate was gay due to his housing choice.

“But I remember when I did tell [that she was living in gender neutral housing] them I was doing this, they were like, ‘oh is the guy gay?’ That was almost always the question that came up. And he is not and doesn’t mind getting that question, but it’s like, ‘why is that your first assumption?’ It was literally always the first or second question out of people’s mouth ‘was he gay?’ No. It didn’t annoy me or anything, but I definitely noticed that. He was never asked like, ‘oh are they lesbians?” That was never a question.” (S)

The policy began as a way to make transgendered students feel more comfortable, and was advocated for by the LGBT student organization. Yet, just two years later, many respondents argue that gender neutral housing should not be considered an LGBT policy.

The second most common weakness mentioned is a theme that has recurred throughout the research: heterosexual couples living together, despite reports that it is uncommon.
"The weakness of the policy is always—could always be—where a straight couple decides they want to live together and then they decide to break up." (C)

"I’ll just one more time mention the boyfriend/girlfriend thing. That doesn’t really address that." (A)

One student respondent talked about the change in perception over time. According to her, the original perception of the policy was that heterosexual couples would all live together, but now it is stereotyped as LGBT housing.

"I remember when it started out first seeing an article in the newspaper that was like, ‘the university is going to be the dating central,’ and... mothers were freaking out that their sons were now going to live with girls—premarital sex was going to happen! Which is interesting because they looked at it so different when it first came out—to now, I think we are 2 years in and it’s started to turn more into, ‘oh that’s the gay housing.’” (S)

The university appears to be shifting perception to make gender neutral housing a policy designed for all students, yet it appears students still perceive it is a purely for LGBT students.

Another weakness mentioned by the respondents is the access for the freshmen student population. Some believe that while the letter of the policy allows freshmen to participate, in practice it is quite difficult for freshmen to select gender neutral housing.

"I think the weakness is that it is difficult for freshmen—I think—because they have to have a roommate in mind in order to qualify for gender neutral housing. So I think that becomes difficult for freshmen who come in without a big network of friends or potential roommates." (C)

"I think if there are any weaknesses, I think it’s the whole mutual request type thing in that not only do you have to opt-in, but I wonder if in hindsight we could have set up a market for students to consider and
Lastly, there was one unspoken weakness of the policy that has been mentioned earlier: informing the community. As previously stated, every respondent who was not a part of the committee had questions about the policy, or presented misinformation about it.

In the first year, 150 individuals opted-in the program and selected a roommate. Over 300 students checked the gender neutral housing box without listing an opposite-gender roommate. The residence life respondents suggested that students were showing support for gender neutral housing. It is impossible to know for certain. One student mentioned that she had expected to be assigned an additional gender neutral roommate. It is clear that there is some weakness in the policy with regard to informing the community about it.

**Findings Related to Research Question 3: Impact**

Research question 3 asked, “How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?” In order to address this question, data were collected in the form of interviews from administrators, residence life staff, and students. The study found that most individuals believe the policy has had little, if any, impact on the community as a whole. Some respondents believed the policy reaffirmed the university as a progressive institution. The overall impact was small. This is due largely the small number of students who participate, and the perception that some students are unaware of the policy. Respondents did point out that while the overall impact might be small, the impact for participating students has been great.
Impact on the community. When asked if the campus has changed or been impacted by the creation of gender neutral housing, most respondents did not see a marked difference.

“I think it’s such a small part of the housing experience in general, and housing is such a small part of your university experience in general.” (S)

“Not really—the reason I say ‘not really,’ is that the numbers who are participating are like a hundred students a year.” (A)

“I think of it as a non-issue.” (A)

“I think that we were already a progressive campus and we were already offering an option.” (A)

Some respondents believed that the creation of a gender neutral policy might attract students.

“There are students who, in the past, did not apply here because we did not have gender neutral housing. I think there are students who apply here now as undergraduates because we do have gender neutral housing. I don’t know numbers but you couldn’t convince me any other way.” (C)

“I don’t think it has changed perceptions any—I think it may have changed people’s perceptions of the university and whether to choose us and attend—certainly in that regard—but having changed campus and changing people’s perceptions within the community, I don’t think so. I think it is more or less business as usual.” (C)

Some respondents reported that they believed the policy has reaffirmed the university’s position on LGBT issues and solidified its stance as a progressive institution. This is particularly important in light of comments by a committee member who wished the policy had been used to create more dialog about the unique needs of LGBT people. This represents the minority opinion among the respondents.
“I think people are more aware of LGBT issues. The fact that we have had so much progress within the last few years is astounding and has really opened people’s eyes... It’s great” (S)

“I think our students see it as continuing to demonstrate our support of the student experience. And acknowledge that we value student input.” (C)

Respondents report that the policy no longer attracts attention, and has become part of the overall campus community. A group of students have produced a situation comedy for the university television network. This program features men and women students who are unknowingly assigned to room together. The story centers on a miscommunication in which the male student must pretend to be homosexual in order to prevent the female student from moving out of the room, further supporting the perception that gender neutral housing is widely considered to be for LGBT students.

“And they are both like, ‘Oh my god, how can this possibly work.’”
“And then I don’t know where it’s going—they are probably going to date by the end.”
“Yea probably.”
“I follow the show, I am the only person that watches it.”
“That’s so not true, so many people watch it.” (S)

It is important to note that the show reinforces that the common perception at the university is that only LGBT students utilize the policy. It also appears that the two main characters might fall in love over the course of the show. As has been mentioned previously, the fear of heterosexual couples living together was one of the largest barriers to the change. It appears that the student population has fewer problems with heterosexual couples living together than the administration at the university.
Impact on individuals. While the impact on the community at large is far from tangible, many respondents discussed the value for the individual students who participate.

"Only 135-150 take advantage [of the policy]. But I think even if one person is more comfortable, and doesn’t have to deal with homophobia—you know, I think having and being comfortable in your room when you come home from class or activities—being comfortable in your living environment—is so key. When you think of Maslow and his hierarchy and having a home that is a safe place—a place of solace and peace, a place where you can recharge and study—is so important." (C)

"I think some people really really benefit a lot, and are affected a lot [by gender neutral housing]." (S)

"For the general student body, no [there is no impact]. But for those that needed it—wanted it—it’s a huge difference in their life here, which to me was the point." (A)

Summary

Chapter IV addressed the three research questions utilizing document analysis of gender neutral housing committee meeting minutes and interviews with committee members, administrators, residence life staff, and students. The research questions were:

Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?

Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?

Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?

This chapter outlined the change process for developing gender neutral housing. Students were the impetus for change, and the university responded by creating a gender
neutral housing committee. This committee researched the policies of other institutions, and met with community stakeholders. After reviewing the opinions of the community and seeing the way gender neutral housing had worked at other institutions, the committee made recommendations to create gender neutral housing. The biggest obstacle to change was the belief that heterosexual couples would make the decision to live together. While many stakeholder groups expressed reservations, a small, but vocal, student minority was the loudest objectors to the policy.

In addressing research question 2, the policy itself allows students of any class level to live with a roommate or roommates of the opposite gender. The students must opt-in to gender neutral housing and select an opposite gendered roommate in order to be eligible for gender neutral housing. The biggest barrier to change appears to be that students, and even administrators, seem to have confusion about the policy. Of the non-committee members interviewed, every respondent has a question or presented misinformation about the policy. The policy itself is considered a success by the residence life staff. The initial fear of heterosexual couples living together has happened rarely, and gender neutral housing has continued without major incident for two years.

Lastly, in addressing research question 3, the respondents do not consider the policy to have had much impact on the community. While some argue that the policy affirms the university’s progressive nature, and that it might help some students make admissions decisions, overall the respondents do not see a marked impact. However, this is not to say that there is no impact. The respondents agree that for the individuals who select gender neutral housing, this option has had tremendous positive impact on their housing experience and, by extension, their college experience.
In Chapter V, conclusions are drawn from these findings with regard to each research question. For research question 1, the chapter seeks to draw conclusions about the change process and culture of the university using the Bolman and Deal (2003) change model and Birnbaum’s (1998) work on college culture.

For research question 2, it will examine the perception about heterosexual couples living together, as well as the difficulty in messaging the final policy to the community.

In addressing research question 3, Chapter V will examine the competing perceptions about the policy: as a policy for the university as a whole, and as a policy specifically designed for the LGBT population. The final section will conclude with some recommendations moving forward for the university, and institutions that might be considering gender neutral housing.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Statement of Problem

The following research questions guided the study:

Research question 1: (Implementation) How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?

Research question 2: (Execution) How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?

Research question 3: (Impact) How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?

In order to address these research questions, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis were conducted. The data were then transcribed and coded based on emergent themes. The findings of the study were presented in Chapter IV. This chapter will draw conclusions for each research question, and will support these conclusions with theories presented in the literature review.

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). One reason for the creation of these policies is an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Beemyn et al., 2005; Cramer & Ford, 2011; Schneider, 2010; Schnetzler & Conant, 2009; Young, 2011). While some efforts have been taken to evaluate gender neutral housing policies, they are usually internal evaluations rather than empirical research (Kircher & Hong, 2010). This chapter draws conclusions based on the findings presented in Chapter IV.
There were two main audiences for this research. The first audience was the administrators at the university being studied. Part of this research was to examine the change model and obtain a better understanding of how change occurs at the institution. This was potentially valuable information as new programs and policies are implemented. This research also sought to examine the gender neutral housing policy. This was also of interest to the institution as the policy continues.

The second audience for this research is other institutions that might be considering gender neutral housing policies. While this is a case study of one university and its results are certainly not generalizable, the results may still prove beneficial, and could perhaps inform a process for other institutions. As Oliver and Magura (2011) wrote, “lessons learned from established programs can be invaluable for residence life professionals seeking advice or insight on newer programs” (p. 52).

Conclusions Related to Research Question 1: Implementation

Research question 1 asked, “How was gender neutral housing implemented and how were obstacles addressed?” Kircher and Hong (2010) discovered two main types of implementation plans for gender neutral housing policies. The first is a grass-roots implementation, where the students are the impetus for change. The second is a top-down implementation where the university administrators are the impetus for change. The grass-roots model was far more common in the results of Kircher and Hong’s (2010) work.

Kircher and Hong (2010) outlined a three-step process for grass-roots implementation. Step 1 is student petition for change (impetus). Step 2 is the residence life staff reaction to the impetus, typically the creation of a committee to examine the
potential options for a policy. Finally, step 3 is the creation of the policy (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

The implementation plan at the university is closely aligned with the grass-roots implementation that Kircher and Hong (2010) describe. It began with a student advocacy group. This group passed a resolution with the student government and called the university to action. The university formed a gender neutral housing committee to examine the potential impact of the policy and make recommendations moving forward. The committee’s function was mainly to examine the potential options for a policy at the university. This included seeking feedback from community stakeholders. Finally the committee made recommendations that eventually became the gender neutral housing policy as it has been implemented.

Research question 1 sought to understand the implementation process at the university. Based on interviews conducted with respondents and review of the gender neutral housing committee meeting minutes, the university implemented gender neutral housing from a grass roots approach.

Research question 1 also sought a deeper understanding of the kinds of obstacles to implementation that existed. While there were reservations and opposition to the policy, the biggest obstacle was the formidable task of gauging the opinions of the various stakeholders in the university. Through focus groups, the committee heard from alumni, parents, students, faculty, and staff. While relatively few focus groups occurred, the committee was designed by the university to be representative of the community. These individuals expressed minor reservations. The primary reservation was that heterosexual couples would be living together. Other reservations included allowing
freshmen to participate, where the gender neutral students would live, the name “gender neutral housing,” and the desire to reveal the policy discretely. Much of the reaction from the committee and the community at large was positive. Most people considered the policy to be a move in the right direction.

**Philosophical shift.** There has been a shift in language as the policy developed. The original grass-roots student advocacy group pushed for the change as a way to better meet the needs of the LGBT student population, particularly the transgendered students. The gender neutral housing committee shifted the policy to be more inclusive of the entire university community.

The final policy recommendation of the committee opened the entire campus to gender neutral housing. This is an important philosophical shift in the focus of the policy, from a policy to protect LGBT students to one that allows any student to live in the housing environment he or she finds most comfortable. In order to understand why this shift occurred, it is important to gain a better understanding of the culture of the university and how change occurs there. The following section will utilize organizational theory to gain a better understanding of the change process at the university. More specifically, it will illustrate how and why this philosophical shift occurred.

**Understanding the university using Bolman and Deal’s four frames.** Bolman and Deal (2003) proposed four frames used to understand organizations. Each frame looks at organizations in a slightly different way. Using frames helps to orient the researcher and provide some guidance as to navigating that organization. “Frames are windows on the world of leadership and management” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 12). The four frames are: (1) structural, (2) human resources, (3) political, and (4) symbolic.
Frame one: Structural frame. This frame emphasizes the importance of relationships and roles. In a structural frame, everyone has a specific role to play in the organization. The question of how jobs are allocated (differentiation), and how those jobs interact (integration), is at the heart of the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The relationship among roles in the organization can be relatively fluid, despite the fact that structure implies rigidity. The university utilized a gender neutral housing committee that served as a kind of task force. Power and responsibility in the committee moved laterally. While there was a chair of the committee, responsibility and roles were integrated in a non-hierarchical way. Findings indicate that the committee was primarily concerned with providing a voice to as many stakeholder groups as possible. This meant having representation of as many groups as possible on the committee, as well as attempting to reach out to group members. One respondent discussed the importance of the student voice, and added that the students were certainly not the only voice. At no point in the data collection process did any respondent give the impression that any one voice was more important than another. The university valued the voice and the opinion of community members, even those who were in opposition to the policy.

This value placed on opinions and voices supports the idea of a lateral power structure in the committee. Given the value placed on hearing all voices, it is logical that the university is community oriented. Several respondents stated that gender neutral housing needed to be fully integrated in the community to avoid “ghettoizing” certain individuals. Given the structure of the gender neutral housing committee, representing the community as a whole, it is logical that the final policy would move away from being
solely for LGBT students. The university community is valued and there was a strong
desire not to single out any one community.

Frame two: Human resource frame. The human resource frame has an emphasis
on relationships, but the meaning is different than in the structural frame. In this frame,
the relationships of various roles and tasks are secondary, but instead the relationships
among individuals are of primary importance. The human resource frame views people
as human capital in an organization (Kezar, 2003).

The university is certainly active in the human resource frame. The initial
impetus for the change was for LGBT students and was put forward as a way to assure
the comfort and safety of students in their learning environment. While the initial focus
on LGBT students might have waned, the respondents were universal in the belief that
the policy was created in an attempt to assure a safe living environment. Bolman and
Deal (2003) stated that in the human resource frame, people are analogous to seedlings.
They are cultivated by a gardener (in this case, the organization) and helped to become
the best that they can be.

Several respondents mentioned the work of Maslow (1943) as a major reason for
the implementation of the policy. Maslow (1943) wrote that individuals move through a
hierarchy of needs. If basic needs are not being met, then the individual will not actively
seek higher order needs until change occurs. Self-actualization is the highest order of
needs in the hierarchy. Achieving self-actualization can be considered a goal of the
human resource frame.

The university had a strong desire to cultivate all of its students. It is logical that
the policy would be opened up to the entire community in an effort to increase student
comfort and therefore help students move up Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. As one respondent stated:

"For us that was one of the best parts, because why would we give equality to three-fourths of students or half of students? It just doesn't make sense." (S)

That respondent was the student who pushed for change in the senate and led the student advocacy group. He describes why it is important for first-year students to have access to the policy. In doing so, he also implies that the policy should be open to all students. Even in its earliest stages, the individuals seeking change sought it for everyone, despite being part of an LGBT cause.

Frame three: Political frame. Bolman and Deal (2003) wrote, "organizations are both arenas for internal politics and political agents with their own agendas, resources, and strategies" (p. 238). The political frame closely examines the competing interests of various parts of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The creation of gender neutral housing engaged the political frame as outlined by Bolman and Deal (2003). The student population utilized their political power as a major voice on campus. While the committee and the community as a whole appear to have viewed the change as a positive step, there were some individuals and groups that attempted to use political influence to delay or stop the change.

This was most evident in the focus groups with administrators and parents. The administration focus group put pressure on the committee to deliver the program as discretely as possible. Many respondents expressed a perceived fear of "scaring off" potential students and their families. The administrative and parent focus groups attempted to have control over the change by using potential new students and revenue as
political items of power. While the change still occurred, “scaring off” potential students is still a continuing fear among certain members of the administration. The student respondents brought this fear up during the focus group.

Understanding the political frame of the university does not necessarily explain how the change in language occurred from an LGBT focused program to a community wide one; however, it would appear that the political influences of these individuals did impact the implementation of the policy. The push from these individuals was to announce and implement the policy very discretely. As is evident from the results described in Chapter IV, this political maneuvering was successful. Many respondents stated that they did not believe the student community at large was aware of the policy, and any respondent who was not a member of the committee had questions, confusion, or provided incorrect information with regard to the policy.

Frame four: Symbolic frame. The symbolic frame treats organizations as living cultural bodies. “Over time, every organization develops distinctive beliefs, values and patterns” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 244).

The university values diversity. When asked about the university mission and values, the respondents almost always emphasized diversity and equality. It appears that the university is supportive of the LGBT students and their needs. Many of the respondents discussed the importance of helping the LGBT student population feel comfortable. The culture of the university is supportive of different ideas and different views. This is further supported by the desire to hear all voices before implementing the change. They committee carefully listened to opinions about the policy, including negative opinions. The culture of the university allows for the free exchange of ideas.
Had the university not valued the free exchange of ideas, the student senate might never have been able to get the attention of the administration. Therefore, the senate resolution might not have had the same impact, nor led to the creation of a gender neutral housing policy.

Using the lens of the symbolic frame, it is also clear that residence halls have a symbolic meaning to respondents. As mentioned, several respondents expressed the importance of meeting the safety and comfort needs of students. Respondents also referred to the residence halls as “home” for the students. This is an important symbolic meaning. The residence halls are the students’ homes when they are at the university; therefore, the gender neutral housing committee felt it was important for students to be comfortable in their living spaces. Had the university held a different symbolic definition of the residence halls, perhaps one of utility rather than comfort, the change might have been more difficult to implement. The symbol of residence halls as home also seems to support the expansion of the policy from an LGBT initiative to a campus-wide policy, despite the fear of heterosexual couples living together.

Bolman and Deal’s (2003) work helps to create an understanding of the specific policy elements. In particular, this is true of the expansion of the policy to all students and not simply the LGBT population. Due to a system of values and the organization of the university and gender neutral housing committee, the policy was able to expand to all students.

The following section will utilize the work of Birnbaum (1988) to examine the culture of the university, which allowed for this policy, and its expansion. This will
further expand on why this important philosophical shift occurred from a purely LGBT policy, to one open to the entire campus.

Understanding the university using Birnbaum’s four frames of higher education. Birnbaum’s (1988) work also contains four frames, although they are not identical to Bolman and Deal’s (2003) frames. They are: (1) bureaucratic, (2) collegial, (3) political, and (4) anarchical. Birnbaum (1988) wrote that institutions tend to be predominantly guided by one of the four frames. Therefore the way change occurs in each frame is different (Kezar, 2003).

The university culture as defined Birnbaum’s four frames of higher education. Based upon the data collected from respondents and the path utilized to create the policy at the institution, it appears the university is a collegial institution. These types of organizations are community oriented. Change in collegial universities tends to occur through more discussion and is based on the shared values of the institution (Kezar, 2003). This is the path to change at the university. The desire to hear opinions and views from many stakeholders imply an emphasis on discussion as an element of change. The university opened a dialog about gender neutral housing and the change came from a cultural value of diversity and a symbolic view of the residence hall as a home. While collegial universities are typically small, it is apparent that for this particular change at this particular time, the culture of the university leaned toward a collegial model. The culture of the university operates within the collegial frame. It allowed the policy to move from implementation to execution; it also allowed the policy to grow in scope and provide access to all students.
**Implications of the philosophical shift.** Opening the policy up to the entire campus allowed a more diverse student population to take advantage of the policy, but it also meant shifting the original goals of the policy. The philosophical shift did not fully reveal itself until after the data collection process was complete. During the member checking process, respondents were presented with the theme of the philosophical shift. It was necessary to seek additional information about the transgender student population and their experience as a result of this shift, especially as this population faces unique hardships in colleges and universities (Schneider, 2010).

During the member checking process, one committee member stated:

> "Obviously, the underpinnings of the policy are related to the needs of transgender students, but we felt the most expeditious means of constructing the policy and implementing it, based on our research, was to create a more universal policy open to all students. One of our selling points was that the policy expanded housing options for all students." (C)

The committee made the decision to open the policy up due to a desire to support all students. They believed that opening the policy to the entire community allowed it to happen more quickly. The university is community oriented and has a preference for programs and policies that support all students. Respondents consistently named a fear of “ghettoizing” students if it was specifically targeted. A policy that expands housing for all students is more likely to move forward than one that is specifically targeted, in a university that operates in a collegial manner.

**Change at the university.** Through an understanding of the culture and organizational structure of the university, it is possible to speak more broadly about change at the university. Change is difficult and requires forethought. “Change agents
fail when they rely almost entirely on reason and structure and neglect human, political, and symbolic elements” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 383).

While none of the respondents or members of the gender neutral housing committee specifically sought out the four frames of the organization, it appears that the change process acknowledges the frames effectively.

The creation of the gender neutral housing committee acknowledged the importance of the structural frame, as well as emphasized the cultural norm of the university to be open to new ideas. By opening the committee to various stakeholders, the committee allowed for an expression of the political frame. Lastly, the university values a human resource model of concerted cultivation of student success, as evidenced by the application of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy and the consistent desire for student comfort in their living spaces.

Kircher and Hong (2010) propose that gender neutral housing can occur from a grass-roots campaign from students. The university values this grass-roots approach. In fact, several respondents recalled other changes that had occurred as a result of grass-roots campaigns, such as increasing access to mental health services and becoming a smoke free campus. Change at the university engages the four frames of the organization as outlined by Bolman and Deal (2003) and is cognizant of the culture of the institution (Birnbaum, 1988).

**Conclusions Related to Research Question 2: Execution**

Research question 2 asked, “How was gender neutral housing executed and how were challenges addressed?” In order to address this question, data were collected in the form of interviews from administrators, residence life staff, and students. This section
will focus on how the community was informed about the gender neutral housing policy, the day-to-day operation of the policy, a review of the initial fears compared to the reality, and the respondents’ thoughts on strengths and weaknesses of the policy.

**The current policy.** The policy itself was implemented exactly as the committee had recommended. It opened gender neutral housing to any student at the university, from freshmen to seniors. The students are placed in the same housing they would have been placed if they were with a same gendered roommate or roommates.

This matches one of the types of gender neutral housing as established by Kircher and Hong (2010). In the execution of the gender neutral policies, Kircher and Hong (2010) found that there were three main categories of student access policies across the sample. This refers to the types of students who have access to gender neutral housing at each campus. Some institutions require students to identify themselves as a transgender individual before they are eligible for gender neutral housing. Others have a less strict requirement and require students to identify as LGBT to be eligible. The largest group of schools (five out of nine) had no eligibility requirements with regard to self-identification. Therefore the three categories of student access policies are: (1) self-identified as transgender, (2) self-identified as LGBT, and (3) no self-identification required (Kircher & Hong, 2010).

The study also looked at specific kinds of gender neutral housing options. The majority of schools in the study implemented gender neutral policies where the spaces were gender neutral by apartment. This means the individual rooms (either single rooms or double rooms) within the apartment were single gender but the apartment could contain students of any gender. Other schools implemented gender neutral policies
where the space was gender neutral by room. Therefore, there were two categories of
gender neutral housing room options. Those two categories were: (1) gender neutral by
apartment, and (2) gender neutral by room. These two variables create six potential
combinations of access to gender neutral housing and gender neutral housing type. The
six types found in the Kircher and Hong (2010) study are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

*Six Types of Gender Neutral Housing Options*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type 1</th>
<th>Type 2</th>
<th>Type 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-identification</td>
<td>Self-identify</td>
<td>Self-identify LGBT</td>
<td>No self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>transgender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of room option</td>
<td>Gender neutral by</td>
<td>Gender neutral by</td>
<td>Gender neutral by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>apartment</td>
<td>apartment</td>
<td>apartment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type 4</th>
<th>Type 5</th>
<th>Type 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-identification</td>
<td>Self-identify</td>
<td>Self-identify LGBT</td>
<td>No self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>transgender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of room option</td>
<td>Gender neutral by</td>
<td>Gender neutral by</td>
<td>Gender neutral by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>room</td>
<td>room</td>
<td>room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the university, students are not required to self identify and are able to live in
individual rooms with students of any gender. Of the six types of options Kircher and
Hong (2010) describe, this is the most open gender neutral policy, providing the
maximum number of options to the student population.
Students are required to opt-in to the policy by selecting a roommate of the any gender, and checking a box on their housing form that indicates a preference for gender neutral housing.

**Challenges.** This section will describe several challenges that have occurred in the implementation of the policy. While most of the challenges are items that the respondents brought up during the interview process, it was also clear that there was a larger challenge that was not being addressed. All of the administrators and students interviewed who were not intimately involved in the implementation process had major areas of confusion about the policy. Some individuals stated misinformation that they believed to be fact. This section will address all of the challenges, starting with the challenges the respondents named, and concluding with the challenge of misinformation and confusion.

**Heterosexual couples living together.** Certainly the most common concern expressed by individuals during the implementation process was that of heterosexual couples living together. This was seen as a negative scenario. The respondents cited a lack of maturity in undergraduate students as a main reason why heterosexual couples living together was not an ideal living situation.

First, it is important to note that only three respondents discussed current students that were living with their significant other. While there is no measure to determine how many couples are living together at the university, the largest estimation was 5 bedrooms. This means that at a campus of over 10,000 undergraduate students, only 10 made the decision to live together while in a relationship. Of course, same-sex couples have the ability to live together in gendered housing. Despite the rise in LGBT students (Rankin
et al., 2010), LGBT couples living together have not become a topic of research, nor of conversation. Respondents were quick to point out that many heterosexual couples saw the dangers and potential negative side-effects of living with their significant other, and opted to live in gendered spaces. The fear that heterosexual couples would live together has not come to fruition in the way some of the opposition believed it would. The residence life staff stated that the number of heterosexual couples living together was minimal, and that overall the gender neutral housing residents had very few roommate conflicts.

Secondly, several respondents pointed out the potential developmental gains that could occur as a result of this kind of situation. While not ideal, “experience is the best teacher,” as one respondent put it. He went on to say that if a situation like that went badly, the students would be forced to take responsibility for their decision to live in this environment. One respondent added, “If you choose to do this and you break up, you are going to deal with the repercussions. And that may take you some time to get through the room swapping.” These students are over 18 years of age. If they were not in college they could make the decision to live together. The consequences for a break up in that situation could be far more serious than a room switch in college. Many respondents chose to view this challenge as an opportunity for learning.

Lastly, many students actively did not see the problem in couples living together. They challenge the notion that it is universally a negative thing. They posit that many couples may be living together with no problem, and therefore the university would have no reason to look into those spaces. The students see it as a privacy issue, and believe the university should trust the students’ judgment.
**Freshmen student access.** Another major concern was freshmen student access. Freshmen students are first year college students. While there was considerable discussion about access for freshmen, and there is still a misconception among some respondents that freshmen are ineligible. Freshmen students were given access to gender neutral housing. Many committee members stated that the policy was opened to freshmen because they could determine no developmental or safety reason not to do so.

The policy as it is written allows for freshmen participation. Many respondents discussed the fact that few freshmen participate, and that participation as a freshman is quite difficult. The policy requires that both individuals select each other as roommates, and opt-in to gender neutral housing. Freshmen students, who are less likely to have a network of friends at the university, might not be excluded in theory, but are excluded in practice. One respondent wished that more could be done to provide freshmen students who sought gender neutral housing with gender neutral roommate options. He suggested the creation of a type of matching program similar to what is done with freshmen that do not elect to live in gender neutral housing. One respondent shared a story of a freshman student who wanted to live in gender neutral housing during his first year. Due to the constraints of the policy, this individual met a woman student on the internet he did not know. The pair was a very poor match. Essentially these two students randomly selected each other rather than live in a gendered space.

Some respondents, particularly the student population, do not understand the requirement to select a specific roommate. To them, a random assignment to a gendered room is the same as a random assignment to a gender neutral room.
Parental concerns. Parental concerns are another challenge to execution of the policy. Only one respondent could recall an issue with regard to a parent concern. A man student had not informed his very religious mother that he would be living in a gender neutral space. When she discovered this, she insisted that he be moved. Similar to the heterosexual couple concern, this issue has been negligible. This was the only story of a parent forcing a move. If there were other cases, no respondent brought them up.

Technical concerns. Another minor challenge to implementation was the concern over the software that sorts students during housing selection. Respondents pointed out that the challenge existed; however, the program was easily altered to meet the needs of the new policy. Further information on this issue was not provided by respondents, except to say that the office that manages computer software for the university was easily able to adapt the programs.

Misinformation and confusion. Lastly, the largest challenge facing the execution of gender neutral housing is the misinformation and confusion that many respondents shared. Every respondent who was not directly involved in the implementation of the policy had questions, expressed confusion, or provided false information. For some, this could have very real consequences.

For example, one administrator, who works closely with residential students, was unaware that freshmen students had access to gender neutral housing. He was quick to state that freshmen students were not eligible to participate.

Several students reported that they chose the university, at least in part, because of gender neutral housing. This was not necessarily a living option they wanted to
participate in, but it sent a message of acceptance that drew them to the institution. One respondent stated that he chose the university over another institution because of the way gender neutral housing was integrated into the campus as opposed to one location.

"About the housing thing [at the other institution] it was just such a turnoff to me I didn't want to be singled out. 'Oh you're gay, you must want to be in the gay house.' I think that's what is so attractive about this program is it's not the gay house, I'm living in with other people." (S)

Therefore, administrators who attend open houses and work with prospective students should have a very clear understanding of the policy. Yet, at least for one administrator at the university, that was not the case.

Another negative consequence about the confusion is that certain students wind up in housing situations they were not expecting. One group of three students opted to live in a four person apartment. They believed that they would be randomly assigned to live with someone else who opted-in to the program. These students are active student leaders and yet still struggle to fully understand the policy.

Many of the challenges that were anticipated turned out to be minor, if they presented at all. The challenge of lack of information continues to present issues at the university. Similarly, the difficulty in access for freshmen sometimes leads to unpleasant roommate situations.

Conclusions Related to Research Question 3: Impact

Research question 3 asked, "How has gender neutral housing impacted the campus climate?" In order to address this question, data were collected in the form of interviews from administrators, residence life staff, and students.
Kircher and Hong (2010) examined how institutions measured the impact of gender neutral housing policies. The most common reported method was informal internal assessments. The colleges had no data other than the extent of student participation in the program, which was universally small. While internal evaluations are certainly excellent starting points, they present several challenges. First, individual universities conduct these evaluations, and they are not disseminated widely. Therefore, findings do not inform practice at other institutions. Secondly, the research usually focused on participation and enrollment numbers, rather than a true impact evaluation. Thirdly, the research itself is not peer reviewed and the specific measures of success remains undefined.

At the university, a similar level of assessment existed. The gender neutral housing committee left the assessment responsibilities to the residential life office.

_We didn’t formalize the assessment as much as we should have, that probably in hindsight was the one piece that—it was sort of left to the housing office to tell us, ‘Is it working, have you had complaints?’ So it went from a committee process to really an implementation group. By and large, the implementation group was the media relations people and the housing staff." (C)_

This study found that most individuals believed the policy has had little, if any, impact on the community as a whole. Some respondents believed the policy reaffirmed the university as a progressive institution. Other respondents discussed prospective students’ admissions decisions. The overall impact was small. This is due largely the small number of students who participate, and the perception that some students are unaware of the policy. Respondents did point out that while the overall impact might be small, the impact for participating students has been great. The administration has stated
throughout the course of this study that the impact of the policy, in terms of resources and time, is minimal. They do not believe the policy hurts the community, and also recognized a student desire for gender neutral housing.

While many respondents do not see the policy impacting the campus community as a whole, the campus was impacted in three ways: individual students, the culture of the university, and perception of the program.

**Impact on individual students.** Gender neutral housing committee members point out that while the policy has not had a massive impact on the campus in general, improving the life and comfort of one student makes the policy worthwhile. The student respondents who participate in the gender neutral housing policy frequently expressed that they were more comfortable living with the individuals they selected, regardless of gender. Maslow (1943) writes that basic needs must be met before higher order needs can be addressed. These students’ basic need for a safe and comfortable home environment was met by the gender neutral housing policy. Again, while the overall impact might be small, the individual participants are impacted every day when they return to their residence hall rooms. These individuals feel more safe and comfortable in their space.

**Impact on the campus climate of the university.** The respondents did not feel that the campus had changed much as a result of the creation of gender neutral housing. However, there have been changes as a result of the policy. Gender neutral housing is now a part of the culture of the university. The student population at large might not be familiar with the policy or what is required to opt-in, but things like the creation of the gender neutral housing situation comedy written by students show that the policy is
impacting the culture of the university. The show features a straight man and woman who inadvertently select a gender neutral living space together. In order to retain the very desirable room, the man student pretends to be gay so that his woman roommate will be comfortable living with him.

The show’s main themes revolve around assumptions that individuals make, and how those assumptions may not always be accurate. For example, in the first episode, the female student assumes her roommate is gay. Similarly, another female student assumes he enjoys fashion and other elements of popular culture because of his perceived sexual orientation. The show’s message is that individuals should not make judgments or assumptions.

One gender neutral housing committee member felt that the policy would have been an excellent opportunity to open a dialog to the university community about this exact set of issues.

“I would use it [the advertising for the policy] as a means to generate dialog around the discussion of sexuality and what it means. And maybe try to get people to bring forward some of their biases and assumptions to create more understanding about the LGBT community.” (C)

Despite the fact that this did not occur as the policy was being implemented and the community was informed of the policy, the group of students producing this television show appears to be facilitating that exact conversation in a way that the student population might find relatable. Several student respondents brought up the show, and implied that it was relatively popular at the university.

**Impact on the perception of the gender neutral housing.** The initial goal of the policy was to provide additional housing options for the LGBT community. The
common perception of the policy was that heterosexual couples would make the decision to live together.

Two years later, the perception of the policy has changed. Now, the primary goal of the policy is to provide additional housing options for everyone. Yet the common perception is that it is a housing option only for gay people. For example, one student respondent who was a heterosexual woman talked about her heterosexual man roommate. She states that most people assumed that her roommate was gay.

“It was literally always the first or second question out of people’s mouth ‘was he gay?’” (S)

“I remember when it started out first seeing an article in the newspaper that was like, ‘the university is going to be the dating central,’ and... mothers were freaking out that their sons were now going to live with girls—premarital sex was going to happen! Which is interesting because they looked at it so different when it first came out—to now, I think we are 2 years in and it’s started to turn more into, ‘oh that’s the gay housing.’” (S)

This represents a complete reversal of original goals and perceptions of the program. What began as an LGBT initiative is now open to everyone. While the initial fears were that heterosexual couples would live together, the current assumption of students is that anyone in gender neutral housing must be gay. Perhaps this misalignment comes from a lack of awareness about the program as described in the conclusions to research question 2. Additional research would need to be conducted to examine this shift.
Recommendations

This study has two main target audiences. The first audience is the administration of the university being studied. The second target audience consists of administrators at other colleges and universities who are considering implementing a gender neutral policy at their respective institutions. Therefore the recommendations are divided into two sections, one for each audience.

Audience 1: The university administration. The recommendations for ways to improve gender neutral housing come from the respondent interviews. One of the questions asked about strengths and weakness of the policy.

There were two main weaknesses that were reported the perception that the policy was LGBT housing, and access to the policy, particularly for freshmen. The other weakness commonly cited was heterosexual couples participating in gender neutral housing; however, data showed that this is a perceived weakness, rather than an actual weakness. Despite concerns of heterosexual couples living together, it is very uncommon at the university. These recommendations are organized around the two reported weaknesses.

Perception of the policy. The most common weakness respondents discussed was the perception of the policy. The respondents felt that the community viewed the policy as designed for the LGBT community, while the policy is designed to be open to all students.

This was not the only misconception about the policy. Again, the second most commonly reported weakness of the policy was that heterosexual couples could live together, yet the respondents estimate that only 5 rooms have contained heterosexual
couples in two years. With the exception of gender neutral housing committee members, every respondent had questions, confusion, or incorrect information about the policy.

Residence life respondents stated that in the first year over 300 students tried to opt-in to the program, but only 150 had selected roommates. Of course, the policy requires that individuals opt-in and select a roommate in order to be placed in gender neutral housing. The residence life team believed that the 150 students who opted-in without a roommate were showing their support for the policy, yet it is possible that they were attempting to be randomly assigned a roommate. One student reported that she believed she would be randomly assigned a roommate when selecting a four-person space with only three roommates total. Instead, she and her roommates were placed in a much less desirable housing option.

Several respondents worked in the Office of Admissions and the Office of Residence Life, yet still did not know the policy. It is particularly important that residence life staff be familiar with the policy so they may adequately advise students. Similarly, if potential new students are looking for gender neutral housing options, it is imperative that the admissions team has an understanding of the policy. One administrator reported that freshmen were not permitted to participate in the program, and that only certain buildings allowed for gender neutral housing. Both of these statements are inaccurate.

Gender neutral housing committee members discussed the pressure to implement the policy in a subdued way, and this was supported by the document analysis of the committee meeting minutes. It appears that the community’s misconceptions about the
policy could stem from a lack of a proper and accurate awareness campaign about the policy.

There seems to be a fear that open discussion of the policy could deter potential applicants who are more conservative. Several respondents believe the opposite, that students are actively seeking these options at colleges and universities.

An awareness campaign about the policy could serve two purposes. First, it could shift the community’s belief that the policy is only for LGBT students. Second, it could ensure that the student affairs team, residence life, and admissions are able to describe the option to students and applicants who might be interested in the policy.

**Access to the policy.** One element of the policy that met some resistance was opening the option to freshmen students. The committee recommended that freshmen be able to participate; however, the opt-in process makes it almost impossible for freshmen to live in gender neutral housing. The policy requires students opt-in to gender neutral housing with a roommate in mind. Freshmen students are less likely to have a network of friends in the university and therefore it is very difficult for freshmen to opt-in. Only 25% of freshmen students select a roommate. Nearly all sophomores, juniors, and seniors choose roommates. Similarly, some rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors might not have enough potential roommates to live in the options they want. Several committee members, students, and administrators expressed dissatisfaction with the current opt-in process and how it excludes freshmen students.

There are several potential ways to address this problem, some will be offered in this study and are noted below.
The first is to allow for random matching when students select gender neutral housing. The second is to allow for random matching when students select gender neutral housing, but to sort the students by gender. The third is to create some kind of program that allows students to meet and seek potential gender neutral roommates. Each option is described below, addressing relative strengths and weaknesses.

Random matching. The university was hesitant to allow for random room assignment for gender neutral housing. However, now the residence life staff now has a better understanding of the number of students who are likely to participate, and they have more experience working with gender neutral living spaces. Students could opt-in to the policy, and then are sorted in exactly the same way that students who did not opt-in are sorted. This is still not a university-wide genderless selection, as it is only for individuals who opt-in. Students could, of course, continue to select a preferred roommate or roommates, but if the individual would prefer living with someone of the any gender, then this option is available.

The strengths of this option are that it is the most open, and allows for freshmen and upper class students to seek gender neutral housing without a roommate in mind. However, this option is not desirable for a number of reasons. It would require an overhaul of the existing system and would essentially require two sorting processes; gendered and gender neutral. It would also create difficulty with regard to larger living spaces and determining how many male and female students should be placed in them.

Random matching by gender. Random matching by gender is not a gender neutral housing option, as gender is still considered. Instead of allowing students to opt-in and be sorted randomly with someone of any gender, this proposal would allow students to be
sorted into gendered spaces with other individuals who opted in to gender neutral housing of the same gender. Man students would still be placed with man students, and gender neutral housing becomes another way to sort potential roommates. It is assumed that individuals who opt-in to gender neutral housing would do so for the same reasons. A freshmen student could opt-in to a space knowing they were going to live with someone who also had a similar set of views about gender. Of course, the university would need to have a clear explanation of what opting-in to gender neutral housing means, to assure that students were in fact selecting based on similar values.

The strength of this option is that it allows for freshmen students to have a gender neutral option, but it does not address other students who might seek a gender neutral roommate. It also assumes that all students select gender neutral housing for the same reasons. This is not a guarantee and would require a constant awareness campaign on the part of the university.

Assisted roommate search. This final option presented here is to create a program, either as an event on campus or using computer software that allows students to meet other students seeking gender neutral housing. It could be structured very similarly to existing events that residence life programs put together to allow all the students who are currently seeking roommates to meet for the following year. The university would facilitate meetings and students could make the decision to room together. One administrator made this recommendation during the interview process.

"I think if there are any weaknesses, I think it's the whole mutual request type thing in that not only do you have to opt-in, but I wonder if in hindsight we could have set up a market for students to consider and meet—or even a better, matching system like we already do with our freshmen housing agreements." (A)
The strength of this proposal is that it allows any student to participate and seek gender neutral living arrangements, while requiring the least additional administrative work from the residence life staff. This is an option that could easily be put in place to assist students in finding roommates.

The two major recommendations made to the administration at the university were presented above. The first was to create an awareness campaign to fight misinformation about the policy, and the second was to institute a matching system for individuals who might seek gender neutral housing but do not have a roommate in mind. The following section addresses recommendations to other universities.

**Audience 2: Universities seeking to implement a gender neutral policy.** While this is a case study of one university and its results are certainly not generalizable, the results could still prove beneficial, and could perhaps inform a process for other institutions. As Oliver and Magura (2011) wrote, “lessons learned from established programs can be invaluable for residence life professionals seeking advice or insight on newer programs” (p. 52).

The main recommendation of this study to university administrators who might seek to create gender neutral housing policies on their campus is to examine the existing campus culture. What worked at one university will not necessarily work at another. The policy created at the university has been largely successful and effective. It is possible to implement similar policies at other institutions. Those policies and the path of implementation must be congruent with the culture and values of the institution.

There are several general lessons to be learned from the university. The first is the importance of listening to the community stakeholders. No matter the institution, the
voice of the community stakeholders is important. Every institution might not choose the path of the university, but community involvement is likely an important step.

Secondly, the university’s main challenge since implementing the policy has been awareness about what the policy is, and whom it serves. Other universities seeking to implement such a policy should consider this throughout the process.

Lastly, it is important to be prepared to face resistance. There were many concerned individuals throughout the process of implementing and executing gender neutral housing. They primarily came from the student population during the open forums. The university combatted resistance with facts and information gathered from other institutions. The committee knew that gender neutral housing would represent about 2-3% of the community. They were prepared with informal data from other schools showing that few heterosexual couples participated in the policy. They anticipated and heard concerns, and attempted to address those concerns with information gathered from similar institutions.

Gender neutral housing does not have the potential to cause much impact to the overall community. Yet for the individuals who participate, it can change their college or university experience.

**Areas for Future Research**

There are several major areas of future research that could further inform the body of research about gender neutral housing policies. The first is to replicate this study at another institutions of a different size and student population. Not only would this provide institutions with an additional model to work from, but it would further expand the knowledge about the types of gender neutral housing that exist.
This is particularly necessary given the unique housing options at this university. Many of the rooms on campus are apartment style with shared bathrooms. It is possible that the unique housing options at the university allowed for an easier transition to gender neutral housing. Conversely, it is possible that traditional housing options with communal bathrooms might make for an easier transition because men and women would still be segregated by gender in bathrooms. It is noteworthy that committee members, administrators, and residence life staff never brought up sharing bathrooms as a concern in this study, even though all gender neutral spaces on campus share bathrooms regardless of gender.

Replication studies would also allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences of transgendered individuals in gender neutral housing. A weakness of this study is the lack of transgendered student representation in the interview process. This is important as the policy was originally drafted to serve the LGBT population, particularly transgendered students. Similarly, students who do not identify on the gender binary were not part of this study. During the member checking process, respondents were asked about these individuals:

"I don't think that the committees had that particular group of individuals (non-gender binary students) in mind, nor did the original LGBT student association proposal. So, the needs of this student group were not on our radar screen." (C)

In seeking additional institutions for replication, this would be an appropriate student group to interview, particularly at institutions where gender neutral housing is more targeted to the LGBT population.
Another area of further study would be to focus on the shift in philosophy about gender neutral housing at the university. The initial goal of the policy was to provide additional housing options for the LGBT community. The common perception of the policy was that heterosexual couples would make the decision to live together. Two years later, the perception of the policy has changed. Now, the primary goal of the policy is to provide additional housing options for everyone. Yet the common perception is that it is a housing option only for gay people. Future research could probe more deeply into that transition and how inaccurate perceptions about the policy could be combatted.

Lastly, one of the primary concerns about the policy was the potential for heterosexual couples to live together. Several individuals pointed out that homosexual couples already have the ability to do this under gendered housing policies. While many respondents expressed serious concerns about the dangers of heterosexual couples living together, in general students did not choose that living situation.

Some of the respondents were less concerned about couples living together. They saw it as a developmental opportunity. These individuals believed that the university environment was a safer place than an apartment or home for students to learn a lesson about living with a partner. There are more options for students if the relationship ends and the university has more support options for students. Future research could examine the issue of couples living together to take a closer look at these concerns. For example, future research could examine the developmental challenges of living on a college campus with a significant other. The results could be utilized when discussing the issue of couples living together as one of the primary concerns of gender neutral housing.
Change Agents

While this study has not shown a marked improvement of campus climate, it does show that individual students experience a more positive housing experience as a result of gender neutral housing. This researcher seeks to encourage administrators to become change agents. The data in this study is transferrable to other institutions and can serve as a model of practice. Through this study, other institutions might consider creating and implementing gender neutral housing options to better meet the needs of their students.

Summary

Gender neutral housing is an innovative new policy being developed in colleges around the country (Oliver & Magura, 2011). At this university, the impetus for change was student driven, and the campus responded with the creation of a gender neutral housing committee. The biggest challenge to implementing the policy was informing and getting opinions from the community as a whole.

The policy that was implemented allows students to request a specific roommate or roommates of the opposite sex and opt-in to gender neutral housing. Other than gender, the housing is identical to every other housing situation on campus.

According to the research, the policy has not had a drastic affect on the campus overall. However, it has influenced conversation about misconceptions regarding the LGBT population. The students who take advantage of the policy are affected by it every day, and it has become the norm for them. Executing a gender neutral housing policy does not hurt anyone, yet can positively impact the college experience of those who participate.
"I think it was important to make students feel most comfortable in their home, which when they are on campus is their dorm room. And no one likes walking into a bad environment with a male roommate or a female roommate. No one likes living in a bad roommate situation. I think the ability to make some of our students feel more comfortable that didn’t really impact anyone else, was the right decision. 100% through and through. There are simple things we do all the time that no one even notices.” (A)
REFERENCES


doi:10.1080/15538605.2011.578506
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol - Committee Member

Opening:

, Thank you for your participation in this case study on gender neutral housing. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing policies. This study will be important to other colleges and universities who might consider implementing similar policies.

I am here to learn more about your participation in the committee and your perceptions on the implementation, execution, and impact of the policy at your institution. This interview should not take longer than an hour and will consist of open-ended questions regarding your participation on the committee. With your consent, I would like to record this conversation for my records. However, your responses are confidential and only I will have access to the recordings. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and it is not anticipated that there are any risks for participating. You are free to end this interview at any time.

Before we begin, I would like to get your signature on a consent form that outlines everything I have just said.

Transition:

I am going to begin with some general questions about your institution:

Initial questions:

1. Tell me about your university.
   a. What student population do you serve?
   b. What is the mission?
2. How would you describe the culture of your university?
   a. What does your university value?
   b. How would you describe the environment here?
   c. How does change occur?
3. How do you define gender neutral housing?

Transition to Research Question 1 (Implementation):

Now I want to learn more about the implementation of the gender neutral housing policy:

4. What was the impetus for creating a gender neutral housing policy?
   a. Who pushed for the change?
   b. What was your initial reaction to the idea?
5. How was the gender neutral housing committee formed?
   a. Who made up the committee?
b. How were these individuals selected?

6. Can you describe the work of the committee?
   a. What did the committee do when they met?
   b. What kind of work took place in these meetings?
   c. How did the committee work together?
   d. How did the committee handle disagreements?

7. What obstacles did you face while beginning this change?
   a. How did the committee address these obstacles?
   b. What kind of opposition did you face?
   c. How did you address the opposition?

8. What did the committee ultimately propose?
   a. How was the proposal received?

9. What is the current gender neutral housing policy?
   a. How closely does this match what the committee proposed?

10. If you could repeat the process of designing the policy, what would you do differently?
Interview Protocol - Administration

Opening:

Thank you for your participation in this case study on gender neutral housing. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing policies. This study will be important to other colleges and universities who might consider implementing similar policies.

I am here to learn more about your perceptions on the implementation, execution and impact of the policy at your institution. This interview should not take longer than an hour and will consist of open-ended questions. With your consent, I would like to record this conversation for my records. However, your responses are confidential and only I will have access to the recordings. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and it is not anticipated that there are any risks for participating. You are free to end this interview at any time.

Before we begin, I would like to get your signature on a consent form that outlines everything I have just said.

Transition:

I am going to begin with some general questions about your institution:

Initial questions:
1. Tell me about your university.
   a. What student population do you serve?
   b. What is the mission?
2. How would you describe the culture of your university?
   a. What does your university value?
   b. How would you describe the environment here?
3. How do you define gender neutral housing?

Transition to Research Question 1 (Implementation):

Now I want to learn more about the implementation of the gender neutral housing policy:

4. What was the impetus for creating a gender neutral housing policy?
   a. Who pushed for the change?
   b. What was your initial reaction to the idea?
5. What did the committee ultimately propose?
   a. How was the proposal received?

Transition to Research Question 2 (Execution):

Now I want to learn more about the execution of the gender neutral housing policy:

6. How closely does the proposed policy align with what actually occurs in the
halls?
7. What other groups became involved? What were their concerns?
8. How has the policy changed since it was first implemented?
9. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the policy?
10. What were some challenges to the execution of the policy?
   a. Facilities concerns?
   b. Training concerns?
   c. How have they been addressed?
11. If you could start again, how would you handle the execution of the policy differently?

**Transition to Research Question 3 (Impact):**

Finally, I have a few questions about the impact of the policy:

12. How do you think the policy has changed the campus?
   a. How does this policy reflect the mission of the university?
13. How have students reacted to the policy?
14. What has been the impact on the LGBT population?
   a. How does this policy influence perception of LGBT people?
15. How do you feel about the policy?
Interview Protocol – Residence Life

Opening:

__________, Thank you for your participation in this case study on gender neutral housing. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing policies. This study will be important to other colleges and universities who might consider implementing similar policies.

I am here to learn more about your perceptions on the execution and impact of the policy at your institution. This interview should not take longer than an hour and will consist of open-ended questions. With your consent, I would like to record this conversation for my records. However, your responses are confidential and only I will have access to the recordings. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and it is not anticipated that there are any risks for participating. You are free to end this interview at any time.

Before we begin, I would like to get your signature on a consent form that outlines everything I have just said.

Transition:

I am going to begin with some general questions about your institution:

Initial questions:

1. Tell me about your university.
   a. What student population do you serve?
   b. What is the mission?

2. How would you describe the culture of your university?
   a. What does your university value?
   b. How would you describe the environment here?

3. How do you define gender neutral housing?

Transition to Research Question 2 (Execution):

Now I want to learn more about the execution of the gender neutral housing policy:

4. How closely does the proposed policy align with what actually occurs in the halls?

5. What other groups became involved? What were their concerns?

6. How has the policy changed since it was first implemented?

7. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the policy?

8. What were some challenges to the execution of the policy?
   d. Facilities concerns?
   e. Training concerns?
   f. How have they been addressed?

9. If you could start again, how would you handle the execution of the policy differently?
Transition to Research Question 3 (Impact):

Finally, I have a few questions about the impact of the policy:

10. How do you think the policy has changed the campus?
   a. How does this policy reflect the mission of the university?
11. How have students reacted to the policy?
12. What has been the impact on the LGBT population?
   a. How does this policy influence perception of LGBT people?
13. How do you feel about the policy?
Interview/Focus Group Protocol – Students

Opening:

Thank you for your participation in this case study on gender neutral housing. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing policies. This study will be important to other colleges and universities who might consider implementing similar policies.

I am here to learn more about your perceptions on the execution and impact of the policy at your institution. This interview should not take longer than an hour and will consist of open-ended questions. With your consent, I would like to record this conversation for my records. However, your responses are confidential and only I will have access to the recordings. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and it is not anticipated that there are any risks for participating. You are free to end this interview at any time.

Before we begin, I would like to get your signature on a consent form that outlines everything I have just said.

Transition:

I am going to begin with some general questions about your institution:

Initial questions:

1. Tell me about your university.
   a. What is the mission?
2. How would you describe the culture of your university?
   a. What does your university value?
   b. How would you describe the environment here?
3. How do you define gender neutral housing?

Transition to Research Question 2 (Execution):

Now I want to learn more about the execution of the gender neutral housing policy:

4. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the policy (program)?
5. What were some challenges to the execution of the policy (program)?
   g. How have they been addressed?

Transition to Research Question 3 (Impact):

Finally, I have a few questions about the impact of the policy:

6. How do you think the policy has changed the campus?
7. How have students reacted to the policy (program)?
8. What has been the impact on the LGBT population?
9. What is your experience with LGBT students at this university?
a. What has been the impact of the policy on the LGBT population?
b. How does this policy influence perception of LGBT people?
10. How does this policy reflect the mission of the university?
11. How do you feel about the policy?
INFORMED CONSENT

A Case Study of Gender Neutral Policies in University Housing
Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study about gender neutral housing. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the implementation, execution, and impact of gender neutral housing policies. This study will be important to other colleges and universities who might consider implementing similar policies.

This research is being conducted by Josh Chave in partial fulfillment of a Doctorate of Education from Lynn University. The researcher is conducting this study in order to learn more about your perceptions of the implementation, execution, and impact of the policy.

Your participation in this research study is limited to an interview. This interview should not take longer than an hour and will consist entirely of open-ended questions. This interview will be recorded; however, the researcher is the only person with access to the recordings. Given the circumstances of this study, it may be possible for someone to learn the identity of those being interviewed (due to a limited sample size); however, all efforts will be taken by the researcher to maintain confidentiality. It is not anticipated that there are any risks for participating in this research. Participation in this study will not benefit you directly, but will help expand the knowledge about gender neutral housing policies. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to end this interview at any time.

If you have further questions about this research, please contact Joshua Chave at [contact information] or via email at [contact information] or the advisor of this doctoral research study, Dr. Craig A. Mertler, at [contact information].

By signing below, you agree to the terms outlined above. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                      Date

Josh Chave, MA  ___________________________  ______________________
Primary Researcher                            Date