

IWU policy to keep students on campus

Feb 09, 2019

BY HEATHER COX - hcox@chronicle-tribune.com

Starting this fall, undergraduate students at Indiana Wesleyan University will be required to live on the residential campus.

An update to an IWU policy was made in 2016, stating that undergraduate students aged 16-22 are to live in university undergraduate housing. Though this policy was updated in 2016, current students had been grandfathered into the old policy, meaning this will not begin to affect on-campus students until next semester.

If undergraduate students are married, are the legal guardian of a minor, are taking less than nine onsite credit hours or live with a legal guardian within 60 miles of the Marion campus, they are not required to live in university housing and can complete an off-campus housing application.

Brandon Hill, vice president of Life Calling and Integrative Learning at IWU, said students who are currently on-campus, as well as future students, are aware of this policy just as undergraduate students in 2016 were also made aware of the coming policy change.

Hill said the reasoning behind the change is rooted in the fact that the university is a four-year liberal arts residential campus and those types of universities traditionally house students on-campus.

"Part of what we believe enhances the residential and learning experience is living on-campus and that is certainly backed on the research of student success and thriving," he said. " ... We believe strongly in our residential program and its ability to help students be successful."

Hill said the research they've looked at shows that students living on-campus have better social and GPA success and are more likely to graduate.

The reason for allowing students to live off-campus in the past was due to student population growth that Hill said the university couldn't keep up with.

"We grew so fast for so long we couldn't keep up with the housing demand so we needed students to live off-campus," he said.

Since then, Hill said the university has invested dollars to provide that on-campus experience to all students. Now, they have enough housing to support students with a traditional residential model for all four years.

While some criticize this decision, stating the university wants more money from students, Hill said he doesn't believe that is the case. He said they built housing for students to live on-campus because of a rising demand.

"Some comments are that it's a money grab, and I don't know that's it at all. We want to use our resources to the fullest extent," he said.

For the 2018-19 school year, Hill said tuition for the Marion campus is at \$26,630 and room and board is \$8,480.

Sarah Kirk, a senior at IWU has lived off-campus for her last year as an undergraduate and said for her, it has been a significantly cheaper choice - one she had been looking forward to.

"I had issues with IWU housing for a long time. I also have issues with mental health, and I felt like IWU housing was very inconsiderate of that," she said.

As a vegan, Kirk said it's been a lot easier - and cheaper - for her to shop for her own food. She said the prices for meal plans on campus are "highway robbery" and the options available on campus for those with dietary needs are not adequate.

Hill also noted that the housing policy states "A Housing Exemption Appeal process is available to students desiring to live off-campus for financial reasons, mental/physical/emotional health needs, or other extenuating personal circumstances," so some students could appeal the policy and potentially be approved to live off-campus.

According to Matt Thompson, dean for residential learning at IWU, this appeal process includes working with the IWU Ron Blue Institute for Financial Planning "to develop a practical and realistic financial plan to encourage a successful transition to independent living." This appeal process is not new to the housing policy.

Hill said at times, students don't realize how expensive it is to live off-campus and they want to help bring realistic expectations.

While living in and taking care of a home was a stressful adjustment at first, Kirk said she has learned a lot in the process, including how to be a part of downtown Marion, how to take care of issues like losing electricity, how to find a good renter and how to pay for things like rent and utilities.

Even though she's not living on the residential campus, Kirk said she only feels a little bit removed, but for the most part has the same friends. The main difference is that she doesn't spend as much time on campus late at night, knowing she has to walk home.

Overall, Kirk is not a fan of the updated housing policy change which will begin affecting students in the fall. She said it enforces an issue that keeps students removed from the community and causes students to spend thousands of dollars they could be saving.

"I have huge issues with this policy, as does everyone I know. It is a ploy by IWU that has been manufactured and presented in a way that says 'we are trying to help' or 'we care,' but it's not," she said. " ... There are also many renters that make much of their earnings from renting to students that will now be losing a majority of their renters and income."

Allen Seldon, a local landlord, has been renting out properties to the community for 30 years and said he has enjoyed working with IWU students in the past. He said in his experience, the students have been well-behaved, mature and a great group of tenants.

"We have thoroughly enjoyed renting to the students and seeing them live in the community, getting to know their neighbors, spreading good will of the campus to their neighbors," he said.

Seldon said he's heard good things from neighbors who have lived by the students and has even kept in contact with some past tenants.

He and his wife have been sure to purchase homes near the college and to keep them as affordable as they could to help the students save money. Numbers of IWU students have dwindled over the years as the college policies change, he added.

As of now, Seldon is unsure how much this updated policy will financially affect them, but they are concerned.

"Some of our properties are adjoining other rentals, and we have already seen people from the community come in instead of students, and the quality of the environment has drastically reduced," he said. "We've had problems in the area like we've never had before."

Seldon said he will miss interacting with student renters and seeing them live in the community.