University restricts availability of winter break housing

BY CORINNE SEGAL
Daily Editorial Board

Tufts administrators have this year decided that only international students who are either freshmen or on financial aid will be able to live in university housing during winter break, according to International Center Director Jane Eths-Andrews.

The International House and the Commuter (Hillside) House will house any eligible students, with 26 spaces available, according to Dean of Student Affairs Bruce Reitman.

This marks the first time the university has restricted winter break housing to these two groups, Eths-Andrews said.

Before 2009, any student could opt to remain on campus during winter break and move into another student's room in Metcalf, Stratton and Richardson Halls, according to Reitman. The system has since been abandoned due to a number of problems and concerns that arose.

Eths-Andrews explained that since there was now limited space available, it was essential to prioritize the students, especially those who do not have the option of returning home due to financial reasons.

"We first need to take care of the kids who don't have the money to go home," Eths-Andrews said.

Freshmen should also receive priority because they may not understand their options for winter housing, Office of Residential Life and Learning (ResLife) Director Yolanda King said.

"They're still beginning to learn the area, they're developing new friendships," she said.

"They don't have the connections, they don't have the friends," Eths-Andrews added. "They don't know as many people here. They're very new to campus."

As of now, no upperclassmen have approached ResLife to request housing for this year's winter break, according to King.

The International Center notified students of the new policy twice by email. Eths-Andrews said. She noted that students who wish to stay during winter break but are ineligible for university housing have the option of subletting an upperclassman's off-campus apartment.

The center will serve as a resource for such students, including helping subletters locate an apartment on TuftsLife, according to Eths-Andrews, who added that it has also placed announcements in the Tufts alumni newsletter asking for local volunteer host families.

"We're asking local host families to give us a response by early December," she said.

Reitman explained that the previous system of having students move into other students' rooms in designated halls over winter break was problematic and led to

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complaints.

"No one was comfortable leaving their stuff for someone else to have access to," he said.

Furthermore, parents as well as university administrators in 2009 were concerned that the system of moving students into other students' rooms would help spread the H1N1 flu virus, Reitman said.

That same year, the university allowed students to remain in their own rooms during winter break, but there were concerns that some students would be alone in their dorms, he added.

This system was also inconvenient for students because the heat in the dorms would often be turned down during the break, Reitman said.

"The problems were different," he said. "There wasn't the issue of people abusing or not taking good care of other people's property ... but it was an issue of energy usage.

The university decided last year to offer winter break housing in the International and Commuter Houses, limiting the amount of space available for students to stay but addressing concerns about student isolation and safety.

Eths-Andrews noted that usually there is not a great demand for housing, and approximately 20 students stayed on campus last winter break.

"Typically we don't use all the beds," she said. "Even when we left it open for everyone, all those beds were never used.

Last year also marked the first time students were charged a $100 fee to stay on campus. The university expects this year's fee to be higher but does not know the exact figure yet, Eths-Andrews said.

The International Center will pay the fee for students on "significant" financial aid, Eths-Andrews said.

The fee reflects the weekly cost of university housing, according to Reitman.

Sophie Savelkoul, a sophomore from the Netherlands, plans to return home for winter break. "I'm staying home for a longer time than I wanted to because I can't stay on campus," she said.

Tufts is not obligated to offer any winter break housing but wants to accommodate the needs of some students in need, Reitman said.

"There's no easy or good answer to this. It's a compromise no matter how you look at it," he said.

"What we're trying to do is still make it possible for people who have no choice," Eths-Andrews said.

Eths-Andrews emphasized the administration's commitment to providing students with assistance.

"It's a hard issue, and it requires everyone to work together on it," Eths-Andrews said. "My message to students is to let us know what they're thinking and we'll work with them on it."