

## **Simmons Hall Action Plan First-Year Housing Assignments**

### **Simmons Hall Room-Assignment Action Plan**

#### **Simmons Values Statement**

Simmons takes a roommate-first approach towards first-year housing, whereby matching students with compatible partners is considered the single most important objective throughout the process. A roommate should be someone with whom a student feels comfortable, from whom they can learn, and with whom they can share experiences. Roommate matching is incredibly deliberate and is the most time-intensive part of the Simmons process.

In pursuit of the Simmons community's collective happiness, Simmons's Room Assignment Chairs place students in rooms using a holistic consideration of their stated room preferences. This process is done manually by a small committee of house team members, including the RACs.

No input from other upper-level students is considered or allowed. The goal of this process is first, to ensure that no student is unhappy or disappointed with their assignment and second, to ensure that as many student preferences are granted as possible, without severely compromising the happiness of any single student. That is, everyone gets a little of what they want, but no one gets everything.

Due to the incredibly varied size, shape, and physical features of Simmons rooms, we believe an algorithmic approach to room assignments is inappropriate for Simmons Hall. No two rooms are identical and Simmons benefits from a human approach to room placement, catered to each student's individual requests. That said, we are exploring algorithmic means of pre-filtering/grouping to handle particular scenarios that arise almost every year such as female-only bathroom allocations, proximity to friends, etc. In our experience, due to the short timeframe, some students can get unintentionally overlooked due to a human-only approach and as a result, we are seeking ways to make the process as fair as possible.

#### **First Year Rooming Process Outline (2022)**

In Simmons, first-year students are matched with appropriate roommates and placed in rooms based on a holistic overview of their responses to a thorough room preference form. This matching process occurs in two phases: once over the summer and once at the end of orientation week.

1. Over the summer, the Room Assignment Chairs (RACs) review student responses to the general housing questionnaire and carefully match students with compatible roommates. This matching is done manually by the RACs, without an algorithm, and is based on a combination of student interests, living habits, and qualities that students have listed as desirable in a roommate. Once grouped into singles, doubles, and triples, students are assigned to rooms in the building. Because the social atmosphere of Simmons is very fluid and halls are not unified by a single identity or culture, the room assignment process over the summer is fairly random\*\*\*.

\*\*\*Assignments given over the summer are intended to be temporary. Most students in the building will relocate during phase 2 of the assignment process (after orientation week). Consequently, students will be advised to pack a small bag with a week's worth of living supplies and will be encouraged not to unpack the rest of their belongings until after phase 2 permanent assignments are given. This will be explained in the welcome letter and on a flyer given to students at check in. Students who wish to remain in their summer assignment should refer to the section titled "*Opting Out of the Simmons Relocation Process*".

2. After arriving on campus and beginning orientation, students choosing to stay in Simmons will be invited to a roommate-finding "mixer" over dinner, where they can mingle and meet potential permanent roommates they may not yet have met. The entire first-year Simmons class will then gather in the Multi-purpose Room (MPR) for an overview presentation of the inhouse exploration process. As is explained during this presentation, students will first explore the building, where they will meet upper-level students, GRAs, and discover the weird variety of physical features available in Simmons rooms. Students will then report to the dining hall, where they will fill out a thorough room preference form listing all of their room-related preferences. These preferences include requested roommates, living habits, desired room features (i.e. curvy walls, internal/external bathrooms, windows, etc.), desired room location, and proximity to friends.

On this form, students will also have the option to indicate a preference to NOT relocate (i.e. to remain in their temporary assignment). The RACs will explain to students how best to convey their desires through the form and how form responses will be interpreted, so that students are well-equipped to express their needs.

Students will assign "points" to each of these preference categories, weighting them in order of importance. Students will have a finite number of points to distribute and are encouraged to distribute points in a way that indicates which rooming factors are truly a priority and which are less important to them.

Once all forms have been submitted, the RACs will meet with the Assistant Director/Area Director and select other members of student house government (usually including the President or House Chair and a designated "ethics chair" for the evening). This small committee will first match students with roommates, taking into account students' requested roommates and their living habits. Once all roommate sets have been grouped, the committee will begin placing students in the building. Room assignments in this phase are very deliberate. Students are assigned to a room manually by the RAC committee, without an algorithm, based on a

holistic consideration of students' point-weighted form preferences. Only student form responses are considered; no input from other upper-level students is solicited or allowed.

All student concerns and complaints should be taken directly to the RACs and the Assistant Director/Area Director. The RACs, in consultation with the House Team, is ultimately responsible for the final decisions of the rooming committee. Other Simmons students serving on the committee are not responsible for fielding questions or concerns about housing assignments.

### **Opting Out of the Simmons Relocation Process**

Students who would like to opt out of the relocation process (ie: stay in their summer assigned room) need to complete one or both of the below:

- Indicate on their rooming survey\* completed on in-house rooming night that they do not want to relocate, and allocate the appropriate number of points to stay in their current room. Any person who does not allocate the maximum amount of points to their desire to stay in their summer assigned room is thus indicating to the RAC committee that they are alright with a move. (\*The rooming survey is required no matter if you want to relocate or stay in your room.)
- Contact the RACs or Assistant Director/Area Director stating that you do not want to move. The RACs/AD will be able to answer any questions and calm any concerns you have about the process. Please note that if you contact the RACs/AD and do not indicate you want to stay in your summer assigned room on your rooming survey, the RAC committee will assume you have decided to opt in to relocate.

Students should be aware of potential issues in which a student cannot maintain their summer assignment room. In the event that a student must be relocated, the RACs will document why that decision was made. Students may approach the RACs and Assistant Director/Area Director if they feel they were unfairly moved and their request was ignored.

- Students whose summer assignment meet ADA qualifications must recognize that by law, you will need to move should a student with an ADA accommodation need it. If you request opting out of the relocation process, but your room is required to meet an ADA accommodation, please know that per your housing contract, you will be and are required to move to a new assignment.
- Students should also be aware that if multiple students in a double or triple wish to remain in their assigned room, but do not wish to room together, at least one student will have to relocate to a different assignment. Simmons will grant the request of the student who allocated the most points towards a desire not to relocate, or, in the case of ties, will choose the student(s) who must move randomly. When a student's request is not granted in these cases, RACs will place students in other rooms based on the other preferences they indicated on their in-house preference form. Students can facilitate the process by discussing their desire to relocate/not relocate with their roommates as early as possible.

To summarize:

- Students may opt out of the relocation process up until completion of the rooming survey completed on in-house rooming night.

- Students who are given an assignment in an ADA accommodating room are not guaranteed to keep their room (per ADA law).
- Roommates who do not want to live together but do not want to move are not guaranteed to keep their room, and the roommate chosen to keep the room will be who allocated the most points or chosen at random.

Any questions about the opt out process can be directed to the RACs or Assistant Director/Area Director.

## **The First Year Rooming Committee**

The First Year Rooming Committee, responsible for final assignments at the end of in-house exploration, consists of the RACs, the Assistant Director/Area Director, the Simmons President or House Chair, and an Ethics Chair (appointed by the RACs during REX). This committee is responsible for the execution of the assignment process outlined above. All committee members participate in roommate pairing and room placement. The special roles of each committee member are defined below (but may vary slightly year to year, as the committee deems appropriate).

### **RACs**

- Give an overview presentation to first-year students and serve as the point of contact for all questions and concerns leading up to in-house exploration.
- Administer the room preference form and explain to students how best to express their desires through the room preference form to maximize their return.
- Ensure that the committee is adhering to Simmons rooming values.
- Oversee the assignment process. Be the final authority on all assignment decisions.
- Maintain a schedule, ensure everyone is on track with the assignment deadline, and define a group workflow.
- Delegate tasks and oversee their completion.
- Be the point of contact for all student questions, concerns, and complaints. Students should take their concerns directly to the RACs and Assistant Director/Area Director, NOT to other members of the rooming committee.

### **President / House Chair**

- Attest to the general characteristics of specific locations in the building. Help determine which sections are likely to be loud or quiet, lively or low-key, etc. Since all upper-level students shuffle around the building, the general atmosphere of a section can vary year to year.

- Document decisions as they are made (paperclip roommate groups together, keep track of how many wishes a given student has been granted, take note of which students are relocating and those whose requests not to relocate have been granted, etc.).

### **Area Director**

- During in-house exploration, help the RACs to address student questions and to enforce the house rooming policy.
- Ensure that the committee is adhering to Institute and DSL values and rules.
- Remind the RACs of special arrangements made with individual students prior to inhouse exploration. Ensure that those students receive what they were promised.
- Help guide the group through tough decision-making.
- Once assignments are released, help RACs communicate with students who are initially upset/frustrated with their assignment.

### **Ethics Chair**

- Work with the Assistant Director/Area Director to guide the group through tough decision-making.
- Work with the President to keep track of how many of a student's wishes have been granted.
- Notify the group if a decision would seem to greatly upset any student.
- Ensure that all discussion of student responses is appropriate and remains confidential.
- Ensure that decisions are based only on students' stated preferences and NOT on upper level student input.

### **Other House Team Members**

The Heads of House are not involved in the minutiae of the rooming process but are available to handle complaints and concerns that arise before, during, and after the rooming process.

The GRAs of Simmons take point in explaining their section of Simmons to the first-year students during the exploration period. GRAs explain the section, provide light snacks, and answer questions about living in Simmons.

### **Upper-Level Student Rooming Process**

The processes described above are specific to first semester students.

Once permanent assignments are completed, a small number of students (across all class years) will email the RACs throughout the academic year requesting a rooming switch.

Switches are made at the discretion of the RACs, provided the student has a compelling reason and there is available space in the building to accommodate the request. RACs often consult the Heads of House, GRAs, and/or Assistant Director/Area Director if circumstances are difficult.

Between fall and spring semesters, RACs ask incoming students from other dorms to list their preferences and manually assign students to rooms that meet these requests, if possible. The number of students transferring in/out is usually less than 10, so this individualized process works well. In the event that turnover between semesters is very large, the RACs have the ability under Simmons house policy to hold a small in-house lottery, at their discretion, for all students moving in/switching rooms between semesters. This has not occurred in the past 7 years.

In April, all rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors returning to Simmons self-select rooms in an order determined by a lottery process. Picking order is determined by class year and randomly generated within each class year as follows\*\*\*:

1. Rising Seniors, 9th, and 10th term students
2. Rising Juniors
3. Rising Sophomores

Students simply select any available room with their desired roommate (if any) during their assigned selection turn. The RACs administer the lottery and enforce all bylaws surrounding the process but do not match roommates or assign returning students to specific rooms. Students who wish to keep their current room through the next academic year may do so and must notify RACs of this intention before room selection day.

## **Process Feedback, Evaluation, and Documentation**

During the rooming process, RACs will document their decision-making process so that they have written responses prepared for inquiries about room/roommate assignments. RACs will also document how closely the permanent rooms matched with student room preferences, including keeping track of how many students' wishes to keep their temporary assignments were fulfilled.

For the future, surveys will be created that ask students to reflect on the rooming process a week after, a month after, and at the end of the school year to gauge how well the room assignment process worked. It is important to survey at different points in the year to tackle honeymoon bias or stress during the first month of classes. It will also be helpful to monitor overall roommate longevity.