

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

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Summary

I thank all the members of the Caltech community who have contributed to the process of reflecting on the future of residential life and the introduction of the Bechtel Residence. In particular, I commend our students for their significant contributions in forming the Committee on Undergraduate Caltech Housing (COUCH) and conducting the committee meetings, presentations, and discussions that led to a thoughtful and useful report. Consultation with our trustees, alumni, faculty, Student Affairs staff, and administrators has been equally essential in developing this plan. President Thomas F. Rosenbaum and Provost David Tirrell have offered valuable guidance and leadership, as well as feedback on earlier draft recommendations, and have endorsed this plan as a framework for opening the Bechtel Residence and for the future of residential life at Caltech.

In advancing this plan, the core values of our campus and the residential life community have been the guiding principles. The key elements of the plan are:

1. Bechtel will be a multi-use, multi-generational residence open to all undergraduates. Bechtel will provide a new model of residential living that will be distinct from the House system.
2. The residents of Bechtel will be full members of the residential life system, and will be represented in all student activities and in the shared governance of residential life.
3. A new Advisory Committee on Residential Life will be established to help implement the initial changes, provide ongoing assessment of Bechtel and the Houses, and make recommendations to the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) for further steps or improvements. The committee will include faculty, staff, and students.
4. The process for residence assignments for freshmen as well as upperclass picks will be reformed to maximize student choice and reflect our core values.
5. Current off-campus undergraduate housing will be converted to graduate housing beginning in the fall of 2018.
6. A new Residential Experience office will be established within Student Affairs to coordinate residential life activities and serve undergraduate students, residential associates, residence life staff, and Faculty-in-Residence.
7. The Faculty-in-Residence program will be expanded to promote engagement between students and faculty in the residences.

The steps connected with elements 1-5 will be implemented in stages over the next three terms (Winter 2018, Spring 2018, and Fall 2018), starting immediately with preparation for Bechtel occupation by continuing students and for House room picks, and continuing with Prefrosh Weekend, fall welcoming activities, and room assignments. The Advisory Committee is in the process of being constituted now; students, faculty, and staff have already been invited to nominate participants and form subgroups to provide input. We are arranging for tours of Bechtel throughout the coming months for students, faculty, and staff. The establishment of the Residential Experience office will take place in 2019 and this office will begin planning for additional Faculty-in-Residence apartments at that time.

Introduction

In the fall of 2018, Caltech will be opening the Bechtel Residence, which will house an additional 212 undergraduate students on campus. The introduction of the Bechtel Residence is a major event in our small community, and will change the makeup of our residences substantially for the first time in over 20 years. The introduction of a new residence will enable essentially all of our undergraduate students to live on campus and will significantly impact off-campus housing opportunities for all students. This posed the immediate question of considering who will live in Bechtel in the fall of 2018. More importantly, it has provided an opportunity to reflect upon and reshape the future of our residential life experience.

The current residential life system at Caltech has a long tradition with distinctive features that set Caltech apart from other universities. These include social activities and residential structures that are distinctive to each residence, and significant student participation in shared governance. At the same time, the needs and experiences of our undergraduate students reflect those of undergraduates everywhere in the world, as they grapple with issues of maturation and personal growth in this new and exciting but at times challenging world of residential life, independent of their families. Given this, it is important for Caltech to examine critically and dispassionately our residential life program at regular intervals. Residential life has been examined at various times in Caltech's history, and substantial changes have been made over the years, even as traditions have been extended and revised. We should carefully consider the lessons of previous reforms even as we take a fresh look in the context of the Bechtel Residence. This plan concludes with a reference list of the reports of earlier studies of residential life at Caltech as well a link to the recent report of the COUCH.

From the early stages of the Bechtel planning process in 2012 on until today, students, faculty, staff, and administrators have voiced strong views and potential concerns about the role of the new residence, and about potential changes to our current House system. This is appropriate because, as a residential campus, we all have a stake in the process and we share responsibility for the residential experience. Given the array of very committed and sometimes conflicting views about Bechtel and the future of residential life, over the past year I invited and encouraged students, faculty, and staff to reflect and engage with one another in discussions.

Many formal and informal small group discussions have taken place. There have been a series of town hall meetings on campus, outreach to alumni, and presentations and discussions with trustees, faculty, and administrators. Undergraduates formed the COUCH to discuss and develop clear proposals about the utilization of Bechtel and the future of residential life, culminating in an extensive report on their findings and suggestions. Faculty and staff have likewise been very engaged, providing essential perspective on the impact of residential life on undergraduate academic and personal growth, on the interaction between the student residences and the larger campus community, and on the critical importance of creating welcoming and inclusive residential living situations. Housing and residential life staff have offered invaluable input on best practices and the practical aspects of opening a new residence.

I particularly appreciate the students involved in organizing the town hall meetings, numerous small group discussions, and surveys and analyses that culminated in the COUCH report. They have crucially shaped the recommendations that follow regarding the immediate occupancy of the Bechtel Residence in the fall of 2018 and on a path forward for undergraduate residential life.

Goals for Residential Life

Many ideas have been put forth both for utilizing the Bechtel Residence and for potential changes in our residential life program. Thoughtful evaluation of these ideas requires having a set of goals or principles

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

for residential life that reflect our shared values at the Institute. The COUCH considered this issue and articulated the following set of core values in their report:

1. Intellectual growth – supporting learning and intellectual development
2. Mentorship – learning and receiving guidance from other students, both academically and non-academically
3. Diversity – exposing students to peers from different backgrounds and experiences
4. Identity – developing an independent identity and sense of self
5. Support – fostering a community that cares for students and where students care for each other
6. Honor Code – upholding the spirit of the Caltech Honor Code
7. Choice – having options for where to live in order to suit different wants and needs

Another value that emerged is that of fostering an environment within the residences that promotes informal interactions between faculty and students, opportunities for learning, and a sense of community that extends beyond the classroom and laboratory.

This is a thoughtful set of principles for evaluating residential life, consistent with the values of our community as expressed in our campus Code of Conduct. Most importantly, the implementation of a residential life program based on these core values should create and sustain residences where all students feel comfortable living and socializing. Caltech's ability to attract and retain the very best students depends on providing a healthy, safe, and respectful environment that promotes personal as well as intellectual growth.

Plan

This plan outlines a set of initial steps and a process for evaluating their effectiveness in achieving the goals of our residential life program. It is not rigid nor completely specified at every stage. A guiding principle behind the plan is that we should be open to carrying out trials of new ideas; giving them a chance to succeed while evaluating them critically and objectively. Caltech takes pride in being a bastion of discovery and inquiry into new ideas, using empirical evidence, critical thinking, and logical reasoning to test those ideas against the canon of scientific knowledge. We should bring the same experimental and self-critical spirit to our exploration of new ideas in residential life.

Initial Occupation of Bechtel Residence

Living in the Bechtel Residence will be an option open to all undergraduate students. Students living in Bechtel will be fully included and represented in student associations and governance activities. At the same time, Bechtel will not be a mere extension of the House system, but will instead offer the choice of a different experience.

The Polaris Plan issued by the COUCH proposed to blend multiple housing models into one single residential community, including freshmen and upperclassmen in a mix of either themed suites, suites chosen as a block, or individual rooms. The Polaris Plan acknowledged the limited choices available to students in the current residential model (whether to live on or off campus and whether to be affiliated with a House), and considered Bechtel an opportunity to expand the choices available to students at every stage of their undergraduate experience. The plan described here endorses this emphasis on choice, and draws directly from the Polaris Plan in providing a mix of students at all levels of enrollment, freshmen through seniors, to support mentorship and community and to enable the development of an independent identity in a diverse living environment that complements the current House system. Themed housing is an exciting element of the Polaris Plan, and administration and staff are committed to working with students to make it a reality in the years to come.

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

The COUCH also recognized that there were issues in residential life associated with the House system, and proposed that:

“By restructuring the housing system through Bechtel, we hope to make new students feel more comfortable with where they live and ensure an adequate number of options.”

The COUCH Subcommittee on Unaffiliated Housing put it this way:

“Ultimately, we found that using an unaffiliated housing format for Bechtel would offer students the opportunity to form a community in Bechtel, without creating a sense of obligation or commitment to “The House.” Rather, the community would be centered around connections between students who chose for themselves the living situation that best suited them.”

The COUCH Subcommittee on New Houses went further, rejecting explicitly the idea of creating new Houses within Bechtel:

“...it is the recommendation of this subcommittee that the Bechtel Residence not be allocated for the creation of a new House or Houses.”

Implementation - To effectively implement the model for Bechtel and address the limitations of the present system, we must make several key changes to all aspects of our residential life program. Thus, in conjunction with opening of Bechtel, the following additional steps will be taken:

1. Reform the current system of Rotation used to place incoming students in residences.
2. Adjust the current system of room picks to account for the addition of the Bechtel Residence.
3. Reform the existing student governance and representation system to make sure all students are represented.
4. Provide greater flexibility in the board plans.
5. Provide greater support to our students, residential associates, and Faculty-in-Residence.
6. Provide increased opportunity for engagement between students and faculty in the residences.

Practical Considerations – Elements of the COUCH proposals for the Polaris Plan and Unaffiliated Housing are useful starting points for the fall 2018 occupation of Bechtel. The process will begin with a survey of all continuing students by the Housing Office and a request for expression of interest to live in Bechtel. The Advisory Committee on Residential Life will be immediately appointed by me, and will include student representatives (including some current members of the COUCH) along with faculty and stakeholders from Student Affairs. The first task of the committee is the evaluation of the continuing-student survey and applications by individuals and groups to live in Bechtel. The additional roles of the committee are discussed in detail in a separate section at the end of this document. As discussed in the proposals below for reforming Rotation and room picks, the Housing Office will allocate a certain number of rooms in Bechtel for incoming freshmen; the balance will be available to all students either singly or in groups by application and a lottery.

Continuing students who are currently living off campus will all have the opportunity to consider returning to a campus residence in the fall of 2018. The Advisory Committee and the Housing Office will consider student preferences and ranking of housing choices in assigning rooms in Bechtel to current students. The COUCH report surveys indicate that while there is significant interest in having suites with specific themes, there is even greater interest in being able to choose a group of suite-mates based on friendship or common interests. While offering specific situations such as substance-free or quiet suites or hallways is sensible and appropriate, if these factors are significant barriers to students living in our

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

current residences, then we should address these issues directly rather than making Bechtel the only solution to these concerns.

Off-Campus Housing – In the fall of 2018, off-campus properties currently used as undergraduate residences will be converted to graduate-student housing. The use of these as residences for undergraduates has been an artifact of on-campus capacity not keeping pace with the growth of the undergraduate population. With the stabilization of the student body's size and the addition of the Bechtel Residence, we will be able to allocate off-campus residences to create housing for graduate students. We are currently able to house less than 50 percent of our graduate students in Caltech housing and it is increasingly challenging for them to find appropriate rental housing in the Pasadena area. While we are planning to address this situation in a more comprehensive fashion with additional graduate-student housing, the near-immediate use of these off-campus properties will be a significant interim step.

The shortage of undergraduate beds on campus has resulted in a number of undergraduates currently living “off-off” campus in community rental properties. With the addition of the Bechtel Residence, there will be 940 undergraduate beds on campus; we project that enrollment in the fall of 2018 will be between 940 and 960. Considering the year-to-year fluctuations in enrollment and a less than 100 percent occupancy rate, in the future only a very modest number of students will need to live “off-off” due to a lack of suitable on-campus rooms. There may be valid reasons why students may not wish to live in a dormitory situation, particularly as they mature and desire to live independent lives, and we will respect the desires of those students, valuing their development of an independent identity and sense of self.

At the same time, most families and students want the Institute to provide an affordable on-campus residential experience in a supportive environment. For Caltech to continue to provide that experience, we need to maintain a reasonable level of occupancy in our residences. The solution, we believe, is to increase flexibility within our residential model and to make the on-campus residential experience as attractive as possible.

Currently, we require all freshmen to live on campus for their first year; the duration of one year was in large part due to the limited number of beds on campus. With the opening of Bechtel, this limitation is gone and we can now extend the residential experience to a full four years for all of our students, consistent with our four-year academic experience, beginning with the class of 2022: i.e., freshmen matriculating in 2018. The Advisory Committee and Student Affairs will create a set of guidelines and a clear process for evaluating requests for exceptions for students in this and subsequent classes. Currently enrolled students who are living in Caltech or non-Caltech off-campus housing are strongly encouraged but not required to apply for on-campus housing; Caltech off-campus housing will not be available to undergraduates starting in the fall of 2018.

Campus-Wide Student-Led Activities and Governance - Students living in the Bechtel Residence and all other residences will be full members of the residential community. Currently, the community makes substantial distinctions based on House membership and residence location (on, “off” and “off-off” campus), with the peculiar distinction that locations like Marks and Braun are “off campus.” A value-laden structure that relegates students who choose to live in a particular location to a lesser status conflicts starkly with core Caltech values of inclusiveness and choice, which have been affirmed by the COUCH.

Student-led organizations like ASCIT, ARC, the IHC, and related House committees provide valuable leadership opportunities and play a significant role in student development. The initiative shown by students in the creation of the COUCH and the thoughtful approach to Bechtel are wonderful examples of student engagement. The IHC and ASCIT have the immediate task of working with the Advisory Committee on Residential Life and a broad cross-section of our students to examine the current student leadership structure and to establish Bechtel student representation in campus-wide student-led

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

organizations. A lesson learned from opening Avery House is that it is essential from the outset to have Bechtel residents represented in campus student governance and provided with a supportive social organization within the residence. In order to accomplish this goal, our students should work together to bring a proposal forward of how to modify or create new structures that reflect the changed nature of residential life on campus.

Stewardship and Governance of Bechtel - The residents of Bechtel will share the responsibility for the stewardship of the building with the Housing Office. The Housing Office will initially set the policies for the building, distinct from but informed by the experiences with our other residences. The residents will work with the Housing Office to address policy issues and practical building management concerns. To accomplish this, it is not necessary or desirable to create an extensive bureaucracy, but it will be important to establish student leadership teams that represent various living units such as suites, floors, or buildings within the residence. These teams will also have the responsibility to represent Bechtel residents on various campus committees, engage in the stewardship of the building, and organize social activities. The Bechtel resident associates, peer advocates, and Faculty-in-Residence, as well as Student Affairs staff will support the initiation and development of these teams.

Contingency Plans – The COUCH students have expressed a concern that so many students will opt out of the residential life system that we will have difficulty filling beds in Bechtel. This is based in part on the perception that students currently living off campus prefer to do so because of factors such as noise in the Houses, the cost of the board plan, or lack of sufficient or appropriate menu choices. However, it is difficult to untangle the motivations for voluntary off-campus living from the reality that we simply have never had sufficient space to accommodate all undergraduate students on campus. The experience with Avery House was that the occupancy rose over the first few years of use as new generations of students found this to be an attractive living environment. We anticipate that we may have a similar experience with Bechtel, but we will have a better sense of this in May, following the assignment process for upperclass students. Recognizing that we may need some additional flexibility, Housing has considered various contingency plans. These include placing some or all undergraduate students currently in Marks and Braun into Bechtel and housing graduate students in those two residences.

Board Plan – The board plan is being re-examined with the goal of providing a dining experience that will enable greater choice in both the number and variety of meals. Some of our students, on and off campus, have identified the dining experience as an important element for all residences, not just Bechtel. The COUCH Subcommittee on Unaffiliated Housing focused extensively on this issue and made a number of suggestions. These include phasing out waited dinners in selected residences (dinner in Bechtel will be cafeteria style with no waiters) to reduce cost and provide more choice, eliminating the declining balance in favor of “The Anytime” dining plan described below, using Chandler as a dining option in the evening, and providing more flexibility in dining times, particularly for athletes.

Students who live in campus residences, including Bechtel, will continue to be required to be on the board plan. We acknowledge that there have been a number of concerns about this requirement, and introducing greater flexibility into the board plan is a priority for the coming year. During the winter and spring terms of 2018, Caltech Dining Services (CDS) is testing “The Anytime” dining plan, enabling students to make selections from all food items at Broad Cafe, Chandler Cafe, Red Door Marketplace, Student Coffee House, and South Kitchen, all without additional charges. Dean Kevin Gilmartin and AVP Dimitris Sakellariou are working with CDS Director Jon Webster to evaluate the outcome of this trial, solicit input from our students, and consider further innovations for the fall of 2018, including the possibility of using the recently renovated Teaching Kitchen in Avery for students who would like to prepare their own meals.

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

Wellness, Safety, and Support Networks - Having a strong support network for student mental and physical health is essential in any undergraduate residence. The peer advocate (PA) program will be in place in Bechtel from the outset, with particular attention to the PAs who serve the freshman community within the residence. Health and Counseling services is keenly aware of the importance of support networks and will be responsible for working with residents and residential life staff to establish a supportive environment.

Rotation

Caltech has long valued its multi-generational House system, and many of the core values articulated by the COUCH can be aligned with the experience of our students in these communities at their best: mentorship, identity, support, and commitment to the Honor Code. By introducing Bechtel as a multi-generational residence, we have taken seriously the student perspective as offered through the COUCH. At the same time, we are committed to providing new choices to present and future students, and to making thoughtful and deliberate reforms to improve the quality of the residential experience. These begin with Rotation.

At the heart of the current residential life is the notion that incoming students should be assigned to residences according to how their personality and interests match those of the current members of that residence. Through the Rotation process, incoming students participate in dinners and social events held on a rotating basis at each of the residences during the first week of the fall term, and rank their preferences at the conclusion of the week. In turn, the upperclass members of each residence rank each of the incoming students. The behavior of students during this period is subject to a set of special rules, including the “Rotation Code” and “The Four Laws of Rotation.” The ranking mechanics are secret and there are proscriptions on what students tell the freshmen about each others' residences. At the conclusion of the week, the rankings are considered by the Rotation Committee (composed of the leadership of each House), which endeavors to create an optimal match between students and Houses.

A recent innovation has been to use ideas from social science, such as the concept of stable matching, to carry out a portion of the process using an algorithm to analyze the ranking data. Although using software to implement the algorithm has decreased the time spent on the matching process, there is always a significant effort required on the part of the committee to deal with the many special situations that arise and the “deals” and “trades” that have been ingrained in the system over the years.

This system is unique to Caltech and, in the assessment of some of our students, one of the key problems with our current House system.

“The current House System and Rotation has a plethora of challenges and weaknesses that must be addressed. Regardless of how Bechtel is filled, **Rotation in particular should be thoroughly examined and decisively revised.**” - The COUCH subcommittee report on All-Freshman Housing

This is not a new observation; these issues were considered at length by the 2001 *Task Force on Undergraduate Residential Life Initiatives*, and making substantial changes to Rotation was one of the key recommendations of the report:

“The task force unanimously recommends that Rotation be seriously reconsidered, and agrees that there is sufficient evidence to call for relatively swift, substantial changes to the existing system. The task force supports alternatives to the current rotation process that still ensure the distinctiveness of House personalities. One option is to assign

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

students to Houses prior to their arrival on campus, with Rotation being replaced with an Orientation week. The Orientation week would include introductions to all the Houses as well as welcoming activities in each House.”

Over the past three years, the student leaders involved with Rotation have worked with the administration and faculty to make Rotation more welcoming and favorable to incoming students. Their efforts have been valuable, but it is clear that Rotation still involves expectations and activities that are fundamentally inconsistent with our core values. Despite reforms, Rotation remains an essentially compulsory rather than voluntary process. There is a mechanism for incoming freshmen to opt out of Rotation, but this has a high social cost, and in any case suggests an expectation of participation. Further, Rotation forms communities by exclusion as well as inclusion. Its mechanisms for assigning individuals to residential communities are often misleading to incoming students. For some of those involved, Rotation turns out to involve an initial experience of marginalization and rejection at precisely the time when they should feel most welcome as new members of the Caltech community. The 2001 task force observations on this topic remain valid and relevant today:

“Many freshmen and upperclass students detailed numerous problems with the rotation and selection process, including dissatisfaction with the secrecy, feelings of being judged or being in a "meat market", the sense of anxiety the process produced, and some of the house and dinner rituals they did not want to participate in. Caltech offices echoed these concerns and also noted the problems associated with students living in temporary housing arrangements in the first weeks of school.”

Allowing Houses to judge and rank incoming students is problematic in other ways. It risks creating a fraternity-like atmosphere in which students may feel compelled to conform to the expectations of a group. Rotation has at times involved troubling initiation rituals and patterns of behavior that are inconsistent with Institute policies and values. This is disruptive to the community and can impede individual development and academic success. Processes of self-selection can also lead to insular and exclusive communities. A symptom of this is that incoming students regularly find some Houses unattractive, and those Houses struggle to attract a sufficient number of new members, or wind up with unbalanced populations that do not reflect the diversity of the student body as a whole.

In the past, even students who acknowledged problems with Rotation have been reluctant to propose reforms. On the other hand, faculty, resident associates, and Student Affairs staff with experience of room assignments at Caltech and other universities have been forthright with their criticisms. The following plan for changes to the way students are assigned to residences is meant to uphold essential values of choice, inclusion, transparency, and respect for shared values, while maintaining the Caltech tradition of multi-generational residential communities with distinct identities and traditions.

1. The current system of Rotation will be replaced with a transparent and open system that allows incoming students to express their own preferences without being judged, tracked, or ranked by others.
2. Freshmen will be provided with opportunities to learn about the Houses and the Bechtel Residence and eventually make choices on where to live through welcoming activities that will be truly voluntary. The Advisory Committee on Residential Life will evaluate proposals and oversee the process of acquainting incoming students with the residences and assigning students to rooms.
3. The principles that guide the room assignments will seek to create a diverse, supportive learning environment within each residence that prioritizes student preferences while still allowing the different residences to maintain individual personalities that reflect distinct approaches to

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

undergraduate residential life.

4. The process for assigning freshmen to the various residences in the fall will have the goal of creating a balanced and diverse population overall in each residence. Since there will be a number of freshmen living in Bechtel, the number of freshmen living in the other residences will be reduced proportionately.
5. The process of room assignment will be clearly described and transparent, without any element of secrecy or misrepresentation. The Advisory Committee on Residential Life will review the process annually and make the results available to the campus community.
6. For the coming fall, the least disruptive solution will be to continue the practice of interim room assignments, so that the freshmen can participate in the voluntary welcoming activities in each residence before providing a ranking of their preferences. The practice of Houses ranking students will be discontinued. As in the past, the resident associates, residential life staff, and student leadership will work together with the Deans Office to resolve situations of incompatibility or needs for special accommodations.

However, the preferred long-term solution is to allow incoming students to know where they will be living before they arrive on campus. To facilitate that, the current students can prepare online introductions in the form of video presentations and other materials that will enable incoming students to rank their preferences. These rankings and the students' personal statements can be used by the committee to make residence and room assignments.

The expectation is that Houses will be welcoming and potentially appealing to all incoming students. Houses that have persistent problems obtaining sufficient interest from incoming students will need to carry out a self-assessment exercise to identify underlying problems and propose solutions. One important role of the Advisory Committee on Residential Life will be to develop mechanisms by which our residential communities can be supported in self-assessment and, where appropriate, in meeting reasonable expectations for change and reform.

Observations about these persistent issues with Rotation and proposals for remedies are of long standing; they were addressed most recently in 2010 by an ad hoc *Rotation Review Committee* of the Faculty Board. The committee considered a number of options for reforming Rotation and made recommendations about the rules for Rotation. The final recommendation for dealing with persistent problems was the system of "Eco-rotation" that involved houses progressively losing privileges to host students with the ultimate measure of disbanding the House altogether. This proposal, although discussed at length in the Faculty Board and slated for implementation in the fall of 2010, has never been used.

The process of accountability should extend beyond rotation. While the Honor Code and its related mechanisms (the BoC and the CRC) provide effective mechanisms for holding individuals responsible for their conduct (and will continue to do so), Caltech has struggled to hold the Houses as communities responsible for collective conduct. As a result, significant group incidents that violate community standards have been handled in an ad hoc and inconsistent fashion. This is not fair to the rest of the Institute, nor is it fair to the Houses themselves, since expectations about accountability are not clearly defined. The Advisory Committee on Residential Life will develop consistent and transparent processes for the regular assessment and review of our residential communities.

Distribution of Students to Residences - Considering the total capacity of each residence, assuming equal numbers of students in each cohort, and neglecting gains or losses due to transfers or retention, the table below gives an idealized distribution of students to residences using a class size of 235. The actual

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

historical data vary from year to year and location to location. The total capacity of all residences is equal to 942, which, if completely filled, will hold the entire enrolled population of 940 students in this model. However, the residences do not operate at 100 percent occupancy (students change rooms, move off campus, take leaves of absence, etc.) and the total enrollment fluctuates from year to year due to variability in the incoming class, transfer students, and “super-seniors.”

The numbers in this table provide an example of one possible model for the distribution of students throughout the residences. These numbers are not rigid targets, and the actual distribution within each residence will vary from year to year. In particular, the values for this coming year may require significant adjustment based on the responses to the residence survey. The Advisory Committee will review proposals from the Housing Office to set guidelines for this spring. These will be subject to further consideration and potential modification in the fall of 2018 and in subsequent years as student preferences change. The numbers in the table also clearly indicate that, as of the fall of 2018, there will be almost precisely enough rooms for our nominal total class size of 940-960. In these circumstances, in order to provide students choices in the location of their rooms, it will be necessary for all residences to be flexible regarding who can live in the residence, as well as enabling students to move between residences.

Location	Capacity	FR	SO	JR	SR
Avery	135	36	33	33	33
Blacker	64	17	15	16	16
Dabney	64	17	15	16	16
Fleming	80	21	19	20	20
Lloyd	80	22	19	20	19
Page	88	24	22	21	21
Ricketts	70	18	18	17	17
Ruddock	90	24	22	22	22
Marks	30	-	10	10	10
Braun	29	-	10	9	10
Bechtel	212	56	52	52	52
Total	942	235	235	236	236

Room Picks

Under the current system, individual residences are responsible for selecting which continuing students can remain living in the House. A combination of a system of preferences and a lottery process are used to determine who will remain in residence in the House or its affiliated off-campus housing. Each House has a different procedure for “room picks,” which are done according to rules the House membership has established. At the completion of the internal room pick process, students without a room assignment enter the lottery run by the Housing Office for unaffiliated rooms in the off-campus residences.

This system must change for the coming year or Bechtel will simply become a substitute for unaffiliated off-campus housing. The following framework is proposed for this year:

1. Inform all continuing students about the changes in the availability of residences and the possibilities for living in Bechtel. In order to maximize student choice, all continuing students will be surveyed to obtain their preferences for a residence next year and, in the case of Bechtel, express their preferred situation for suitemates, quiet areas, and so forth. The Advisory

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

Committee will work with the Housing Office to select a set of initial occupants for the Bechtel Residence. Additional occupants may be selected after the room pick and incoming room assignment processes.

2. At the conclusion of the Bechtel room survey and initial allocation process, the Housing Office and Advisory Committee will work with the Houses to set aside the remaining number of rooms for freshmen. The table on the previous page is a starting point, but the committee should be flexible and take into account the results of the survey as well as the experimental nature of this first year.
3. For this year, the room picks process for upperclass students will be similar to previous years, with Houses assigning their remaining rooms to continuing students who have expressed an interest in remaining in the House. Over- or under-subscription issues will be addressed by the Advisory Committee, which will consider the ranking provided by the students in the initial survey.

This process is intentionally flexible and will evolve during the next few months as the Housing Office and Advisory Committee learn more about student preferences for the fall of 2018. Over the next year, the Houses will work with the Advisory Committee and the Housing Office to evaluate and refine this process.

Finally, students should have the opportunity to explore different living styles and choose the one that works best for them. In this spirit, we should consider the possibility of students selecting a new residence at the end of the first year and provide mechanisms for transfer within residences in subsequent years. The Advisory Committee on Residential Life should consider this possibility along with other mechanisms to maximize the residential experiences available to our students.

Advisory Committee on Residential Life

As recommended by both students and faculty, and as outlined above, an advisory committee to the VPSA will provide ongoing assessment and recommendations on residential life. One of the important lessons we have learned from the process of soliciting input on Bechtel and residential life is the key role of community engagement in developing and vetting ideas. This committee will be composed of students, staff, and faculty appointed by the VPSA. I have already invited the COUCH to suggest mechanisms by which students would nominate student committee members.

Immediate committee tasks in preparation for the fall of 2018:

1. Working with the Housing Office and Student Affairs to evaluate the survey responses and applications for living in the Bechtel Residence in the fall of 2018.
2. Working with the Housing Office to develop a process this spring for finalizing Bechtel room assignments for continuing students.
3. Proposing a process for acquainting incoming students with residential life and the residences that is consistent with the framework set out in this plan.
4. Developing a process for assigning rooms to incoming students in a manner that is consistent with the framework set out in this plan. In doing this, the committee should include input from each of the Houses and the Student Affairs units that are involved in residential life.
5. Evaluating the current student governance model and implementing a revised model for all students, including the residents of Bechtel.

Tasks for the 2018-2019 academic year and beyond include:

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

6. Providing ongoing assessments and recommendations to the VPSA for further changes or adjustments based on lessons learned from 2018.
7. Proposing a framework for regular assessment of all residences, including our Houses, and implementing and overseeing the assessment process.

The deliberations of the committee will be guided by the Goals for Residential Life and principles that are set out in this plan. The committee should seek input and work collaboratively with all stakeholders while working closely with the VPSA to achieve these goals.

The changes set out in this plan are a starting point for the committee's work: a full delineation of the processes is neither possible nor desirable at this time. Instead, many decisions have been left open to enable the Advisory Committee to be flexible and to adapt to the evolving situation in the coming year. Given the very substantial changes necessitated by opening Bechtel and repurposing the off-campus residences, the choices we make this year may evolve significantly over the following years. The experience of the past year and the history of residential life at Caltech demonstrates the importance of community engagement in evaluating the outcome of our experiment and considering the next steps. The Advisory Committee will play an essential role in these processes.

Support of the Residential Experience

The process of anticipating the opening of Bechtel and reflecting on the changes it will bring has called attention to the need for additional Institute focus on and investment in undergraduate residential life. To support and facilitate this, Caltech will develop an Office of Residential Experience within Student Affairs. This will serve as a focal point for supporting all the activities connected to life in the residences. The Director of Residential Experience will work closely with other Student Affairs staff and offices, including the Deans, Counseling Services, the Caltech Center for Diversity, Housing, the faculty, and especially the students, to create an environment that supports a quality academic, social, and emotional experience for the entire Caltech undergraduate population.

This office will support our distinctive living communities by building relationships with the residents, particularly with the student leaders, in the undergraduate Houses and other residences. The office will work with the students and the residential life staff in each area to create a comfortable and supportive living environment for all members of the Caltech community. The goal is to create a meaningful and inclusive residential experience that supports students as they confront challenges, connect with resources, and build supportive social networks.

This office will be responsible for coordinating and sponsoring events and social activities as well as serving as a liaison for student governance and supporting and guiding students in working with each other and the administration. This office will also have responsibility for working with the students to manage major social events. It will include the existing Student Activities and Programs office, and will provide support for Resident Associates, Residence Life Coordinators, and Faculty-in-Residence.

Student-Faculty Engagement in the Residences

As mentioned above, another goal of this plan is to foster an environment within the residences that promotes informal interactions between faculty and students, opportunities for learning, and a sense of community that extends beyond the classroom and laboratory. One of the most successful means of engagement between students and faculty is the Faculty-in-Residence (FIR) program, which was part of the initial concept of Avery House 20 years ago, and over time has developed into a positive experience for both students and faculty.

Plan for the Future of Residential Life and Opening the Bechtel Residence

In the short term, the FIR program will be expanded to four positions in the fall of 2018: the two faculty positions already existing in Avery House plus two new faculty positions in the Bechtel Residence.

But our vision goes further: to promote greater student-faculty engagement in the residences, the FIR program will be extended to the South and North Houses. This is not a new idea: the 2001 task force on residential life initiatives proposed exploring this:

“The task force recommends that the Institute explore the institution of faculty apartments for the north and south Houses in order to create increased opportunities for faculty-student interaction and multi-house socializing within the context of residential education. Faculty in residence in the north or south Houses could contribute to cross-house activities and events.”

The Institute is committed to providing the financial resources for creating the new faculty apartments needed in order to make this expansion possible. Once the Bechtel Residence is completed, planning for these necessary renovations will commence. In addition, we will improve the Resident Associate apartments in the older Houses in order to provide both a private living area for the Associates as well as more public space for holding resident gatherings and social activities.

Another improvement to the program entails the creation of a new Head Faculty-in-Residence position. The Head FIR will work with the Office of Residential Experience in the implementation and evaluation of the FIR program, will work with Student Affairs, Housing, and students in the recruitment of new FIR families, will mentor new FIRs, and will help coordinate activities designed to facilitate student-faculty interaction in the residences, such as the Faculty Associates program.

Background Material

Selected Reviews of Residential Life:

Task Force Report on Undergraduate Residential Life Initiatives, 2001 (M. Feldblum, Coordinator)
Report of Committee on the Caltech Student Experience and Student Affairs, 2007 (M. Hunt)
Student Experience Trip Report, 2009 (A. Cheong)
Campus and Residential Life Committee, 2009 (R. Kiewiet)

Reports to the Faculty Board:

Aims and Needs Committee Report, 2009 (P. Dervan)
A Short History of Student Housing at Caltech, 2012 (P. Asimow)
Rotation Committee and Eco-Rotation Proposal 2010

Bechtel Residence:

Program Committee for the Bechtel Residence, July 2012 (A. Sargent)
[COUCH Polaris Plan and Group Reports, Dec 2017 \(COUCH\)](#)