

To: Caltech Community

From: Joseph E. Shepherd, Vice President for Student Affairs

Date: June 13, 2018

Subject: VPSA Acceptance and Response to ACRL Report #3

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I thank all members of the Advisory Committee on Residential Life (ACRL) for their work this year, and their persistence and engagement in reaching consensus on recommendations for a rotation revamp. This was a challenging task.

In their June 4, 2018 report (<http://studaff.caltech.edu/acrl>) to me on revamping the rotation process, the ACRL recommends preserving key aspects of our distinctive system of welcoming and assigning incoming students to residences, while also proposing significant changes to improve the experience for incoming students. Importantly, the rotation process maintains a role for house communities and continuing students. The committee has also appropriately pointed out that what we do this fall is a trial, and should be given a fair chance, then subjected to re-evaluation as part of the ongoing work of the ACRL. I support this expectation.

I accept the broad terms of the report, particularly the Guiding Principles, which affirm shared values around our undergraduate residential experience. I also accept the recommendations for revising the rotation process, with the following refinements and changes, as a basis for the rotation process this coming fall. Referring to the ACRL report on rotation revamp, the specific changes and refinements to the process used this fall are as follows:

- 1) In Recommendation 2 and later in the report, the term “house list” will be used instead of “best-fit” list. “Best-fit” suggests a ranking of incoming students that should be avoided. “House list” indicates instead the role that current students can play in identifying incoming students that are likely to contribute to the intellectual and social mission of the house communities.
- 2) In Recommendation 2, the maximum list size shall be adjusted to  $0.5 * M + 2$ , where M is the total number of freshmen beds in each house. This will avoid excessive asymmetries across houses while largely leaving intact the distribution proposed in the recommendation.
- 3) In Recommendation 2, the optimization processes may have multiple solutions. The director of the Office of Residential Experience will work with the IHC to guide the selection of the one solution used to make room assignments and house affiliations.
- 4) In Recommendation 6, around best practices with respect to data privacy: rotation data shall be collected, accessed and stored through Institute provided software systems. The Office of Residential Experience will be the sole custodian of the data and software that implements the rotation algorithm. The Director of Residential Experience will have the responsibility for coordinating the work of the IHC during the actual house assignment process and will consult with the Chair of the ACRL as needed.
- 5) In Recommendation 7, the implementation of the rotation process by the IHC will be carried out in consultation with the Dean of Undergraduate Students Office and Housing Office. Again, the new Office of Residential Experience will have an important role here. The IHC and house members will work with the Office of Residential Experience, who will facilitate the scheduling and approval of rotation events, including promotional material such as videos.

- 6) In Recommendation 9, transfer students shall participate in the rotation process on an equal basis with incoming first year students, including the assignment of a bed for the first-year during the rotation process.

Following on issues raised by students and staff as part of the COUCH process, my February 1 memo to the community announced the creation of an undergraduate Office of Residential Experience. This office will take on many of the responsibilities for event planning and registration that were previously managed through Student Activities and Programs and the undergraduate Deans' office. My expectation is that the Office of Residential Experience and the IHC will share the responsibility for implementing the rotation process. I ask students planning rotation activities for fall 2018 to work with the current residential life team as well as Felicia Hunt and Tom Mannion while the Office of Residential Experience is being set-up during this coming summer. This group will work with the IHC in consolidating the ACRL's recommendations and the refinements listed above to summarize the guidance for rotation in a single document.

The process of assigning incoming students to housing is part of the shared governance between the administration and our students. The Institute's administration has a special role and responsibility to ensure that our shared governance processes like rotation follow the policies of the Institute, as well as state and federal laws. Moreover, the students and administration together must strive to create a residential experience that is safe, healthy and welcoming for all students.