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The Official Newsletter of the Ashdown Community



Ashdown House Executive Board Committee Mid-Year Update

By: *Amanda Zangari*

Last year, AHEC's main goal was to transition Ashdown successfully to its new home in NW35. This year, AHEC set improving internal Ashdown events to be its main priority.

By and large, we have been very successful. Between orientation, Coffee Hour, The Cherry Pie Society, outings, and yoga classes (to name just a few things this fall), a lot of great new events have occurred. At the same time, campus wide events such as the cultural dinner series, our large dance parties and brunch have continued to occur. Nevertheless, attendance at events such as coffee hour has dropped dramatically since the move from W1.

Why do fewer people attend events now than two years ago if there are 200 more students in the new building? It certainly isn't for lack of opportunity to do things.

We've come up with several reasons. Firstly, W1's central location made going home for dinner or coffee hour a lot easier. You could stop in for a study break and return to lab as quickly as you could have gone to LaVerde's for a sandwich. Secondly, events like coffee hour work best when you come to hang out with the people you know. When you know no one, it's awkward. The social courage to make new friends and sit with new people also ends around the same time orientation does, so if you don't see someone you know, why go to coffee hour? Or rather, why stay after you've grabbed your plate of free food?

Therein lies the problem. On a day to day basis, you see fewer people in new Ashdown. In the old Ashdown, most people shared bedrooms and everyone shared a kitchen. The rent was cheaper, but there was no A/C and a sartorially acknowledged rodent problem. The living situation was designed so that people saw each other

all the time, knew each other, and went to coffee hour to see each other. Now we are in a building of single apartments that are attractive for the room condition and the privacy, not for the community.

The common spaces in the building are behind closed doors and out of the walking path for many residents. You don't meet people unless you are looking for them, which make for a less than ideal situation. You may not know this, but past AHECs fought many very difficult battles with the administration when the NW35 move was proposed. Originally, the new building was to contain no common space besides the laundry room. We're lucky to have what we do, and it's because the students who came before us cared deeply.

Now, like most residents of this building, I never lived in old Ashdown. I'm glad I don't share a bedroom with anyone (or anything). I loathed having to haul my pots and pans to a common kitchen to find I forgot one vital thing after I started cooking, so I'm glad to have a kitchen in my apartment. However, I know how common facilities bring people together, something especially important as technology makes it easier to be anti-social.

Last spring, as I came home, my roommate was leaving. She was upset because the person next door was playing a musical instrument and she could not concentrate on her work. I banged on her bedroom wall. The music stopped and our neighbor came over to apologize. As it turned out, the neighbor was not only from my department, but in the five person class I was taking that semester. I had no clue that he lived in Ashdown, let alone next door to me. He was

mortified that he was bothering my roommate, but I was mortified I didn't know it was him. That made him the first neighbor of mine I knew.

I see this issue not as an issue with the residents themselves, the amount of work students do, or the quality of programming we've put on along with a spectacular team of officers, but an engineering problem: apartment-style housing does not lend itself to casual interaction. Aside from putting on great events, how can we work around it? How can residents who live in apartments to not only meet their neighbors, but know them? To me, the success of coffee hour (and our community) is not the number of people who go, but the number of people who are still there a half hour after the food has been taken away.

We don't have an easy answer to this problem yet. AHEC is looking for one though, and we'd love to hear from you.

Amanda Zangari
AHEC Secretary

The Ashdown House Executive Committee holds meetings every Thursday in the Crafts Lounge at 7:30. AHEC meetings are open to the entire Ashdown community, and deal with programming as well as dorm wide issues.

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Website

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