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Franklin House

New IWU Residence to Stress Independent Living, Life Skills Themes

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Up to 36 Illinois Wesleyan University students will have the chance to live in a new theme house next semester, offering programming focusing on independent living and life skills.

The residence, known as Franklin House, is located at 1609 N. Franklin Ave., across the street from IWU's new Jack Horenberger baseball field.

Franklin House became available for theme programming, when IWU withdrew institutional recognition from the Alpha Chapter of Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE), a social fraternity, after repeated violations of the university's alcohol policy and fraternity rules and regulations.

Julie Thornton, IWU's assistant dean of students/residential life, said: "Last year more than 500 students responded to a survey of all students living on campus and 112 respondents wanted more theme housing.

"With the time frame we're working under to prepare Franklin House for next semester," Thornton added, "we can't do a full-fledged theme house, but, I think, Franklin House will give students a taste of theme house living."

Matt Damschroder, small halls director, said: "Franklin House will place an emphasis on development of life skills, including resume writing, how to conduct a job search, job search etiquette, how to buy a car, and how to rent an apartment. Life skills also include development of appropriate communications techniques, conflict mediation, and an appreciation of ethnic, racial, and other differences among people.

"Small residence halls," Damschroder added, "are ideal for theme houses since smaller groups of students are usually interested in a specific theme."

Franklin House, a coed residence by room and a smoke-free facility, will contain a dozen single rooms, 10 doubles, and one quad. It will have one or two resident assistants, depending on the number of occupants.

There is a Dec. 4 deadline for applications to live in Franklin House.

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The Franklin House application contains an essay question, asking prospective residents to explain why they want to live in the facility and how their participation in Franklin House will benefit them and others.

Thornton and Damschroder will review the applications and begin notifying students about whether they have been selected for Franklin House, beginning Dec. 7.

Franklin House residents will meet to discuss house expectations, contracts, room assignments, and move-in procedures on Sunday, Dec. 13 at 9 p.m. in the Henning Room, Memorial Student Center.

Students will be able to move into Franklin House on Jan. 3-4, 1999. Thornton and Damschroder will evaluate Franklin House applications, based on students' grade-point averages, contributions to the residence hall community (such as involvement in residence hall programs and hall councils), and adherence to courtesy issues.

Among Franklin House features will be:

- 24-hour quiet hours (other residence halls have 12-hour quiet hours, 10 p.m.-10 a.m.)
- 24-hour courtesy hours, which means blaring stereos and other activities that generate excessive noise are not permitted at any time to enhance study conditions
- Open visitation

Thornton pointed out that theme housing on campuses is a positive trend nationally, pointing to successful programs at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., and Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill.

"Theme housing," Thornton said, "gives students the opportunity to identify areas of interest. It also is a good way for students to exercise responsibility about where they live and to become excited about where they live.

"Theme housing," Thornton explained, "makes their residence much more than just a place to sleep. After all, 80 percent of a college student's career is spent out of the classroom."

The IWU residential life survey also revealed strong student interest in
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more single rooms, quiet hours, smoke-free buildings, and the ability of upper-class students to live together in more of an independent living situation.

In the future, Thornton said, IWU may consider other residential themes, for example, wellness, English, math, and art."

Since the late 1980s, IWU has had one theme house, Kemp Hall, which focuses on international programs, cultures, and issues.

Just over 1,200 students live in IWU's residence halls, 350 students live off campus, and the balance of Illinois Wesleyan's 2,000 students live in fraternities and sororities. IWU operates eight "traditional" residence halls and a half dozen small halls, with more limited occupancy.

Thornton has been part of IWU's residential life staff for four years, previously serving as assistant director of residential life. She is a graduate of St. Olaf College, where she majored in speech communication with an emphasis in public relations. Thornton, who is from Minneapolis, earned a master's degree in college student personnel from Illinois State University.

Damschroder, a native of Montezuma, Iowa, joined the IWU staff last July. He is responsible for six residences: Adams, Park Place, Blackstock, Kemp, Wallis, and Wilder. Damschroder is a graduate of Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, where he earned bachelor's degrees in philosophy and English, concentrating on Women's and Cultural Studies. Previously, he was an area coordinator at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio.