



INCLUSIVE CHANGES IN THE HOUSING APPLICATION PROCESS

For many years CU Boulder student housing assignments were based on date priority, meaning students were at an advantage if they submitted their housing application earlier than others. Students who were accepted early to the university would rush to confirm their acceptance by paying a \$200 confirmation fee and submit a \$300 non-refundable deposit with their housing application, which was required for first-year students. This gave financially privileged students an early date/time stamp and priority for receiving their first or second choice

in residence hall assignment, even if they weren't fully committed to CU Boulder. Additionally, if a contract was terminated at any time and the student was taking classes at CU, they were charged a 15 percent cancellation charge of room and board from date of cancellation to May. This often resulted in thousands of dollars assessed to the student, a risk that financially privileged students were willing and able to take.

Around 2015, University Housing began reviewing our contract and policies for ways to be more equitable in the

student housing experience. The first change was made in 2015-16 when we changed the termination charges from a full academic year contract to semester charges, reducing the cancellation charge from thousands to hundreds and possibly even zero. In 2020, unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic, we changed our non-refundable deposit (if someone canceled) to a \$250 refundable deposit and \$50 application fee. Students were still paying \$300, but the \$250 was returned when the contract ended, less any damages.

We also reflected on how we could make the process of paying the deposit more equitable for students who needed to wait for financial aid or who experienced financial challenges in getting the totality of \$500 paid to confirm acceptance to CU Boulder and apply for housing. We explored ways to do so and still have their housing preferences considered, since we were date/time priority for preferences. At this time, we worked with Admissions to identify Pell Grant eligible students who could defer their \$500 to the fall tuition and fees bill, and these students were then able to apply within the first round of assignments, in early April.

In an effort for all students to have equitable access to our Residential Academic Programs (RAP), Living Learning Communities and traditional housing options, a historic change was implemented for the 2021-22 academic year in which we eliminated the date priority process. Beginning that year, we set a priority deadline for early May and all applications received were granted housing assignments by random selection, giving all students the same opportunity to be assigned to one of their hall experience preferences.

There have been many positive impacts to students, families and our operations with this change.

- **Fewer cancellations:** With this change, we have experienced 57.6 percent less cancellations prior to move in.
- **Fewer phone calls and emails:** With this process in place, communication with families about student housing has improved. Our call and email volume during the first year decreased by 1,998 from April-August. Families better understand that their student could be assigned to any of our 24 halls rather than having their hearts set on the central campus halls they visited during their campus tour.
- **Positively impacts the university community:** Students don't feel pressured to decide or feel left out that they don't have a housing assignment if they are a later confirmed applicant or came off the waitlist. Previously, families shared concerns with us that they felt punished for "following the rules" and waiting until May 1 to confirm if they were deciding between schools. Additionally, with the early housing commitment, many would cancel and leave ideal vacancies that we could then only fill with students who applied late or were waitlisted. This was very upsetting to those who applied in the middle tiers as they felt they were not able to secure those spaces. We have received many positive comments and appreciation from families regarding our new process and decision to eliminate the date priority process. This new deadline has positively impacted our families





and their experience when deciding to choose CU. Anecdotally, we are encountering much happier students and families in their interactions with us.

So far in 2022, we are experiencing these positive impacts:

- **Admitted Students Day (ASD):** Previously, when we used the date priority process, more than 3,000 students would have their housing assignments prior to visiting campus for ASD. Families would visit our offices with concerns about their student assignments and lack of opportunity for placement in a RAP, rather than explore other halls. For the 2021 ASD virtual event, we worked with Admissions to send out the halls each student was eligible to select in their housing preferences. This encouraged them to virtually visit the halls they were eligible to consider. For the 2022 ASD, we sent the same eligibility email prior to ASD so families could plan visits to halls that their students could select for their eligible housing preferences. We had the most families in ASD history visit the Williams Village community. Our office saw significantly fewer families with housing concerns than the historically 300+ visiting our office.
- **Timeline:** This year we are able to release assignments two weeks earlier than previous years, due to this new process. This allowed us to be better campus partners to support RAPs and course registration. This change also allows us to offer two housing change processes. Our office annually manages more than 500 housing assignment changes.
- **Enrollment management:** Anticipated census numbers were higher this year than previous academic years. This estimation

guides our housing capacity decisions for the year. Due to the first-year live on requirement, we are obligated to house all first-year students. When that number trends lower than first predicted, it allows us to increase housing options for transfer students as well as continuing students. This new process allows us the time and flexibility to be more accommodating to more students as well as university needs.

Overall, the change from confirmed date priority to one date for all students to complete their application was one that was long overdue. It has created a more positive experience for students and families in their housing selection, a more equitable selection process particularly for low-income and working class students and greater efficiencies within University Housing.

Learn more about University Housing: colorado.edu/living/housing

