

# Graduates Students' Needs in Housing Must be Priority

*Mike Sage*

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As a master's student and member of the Graduate Student Assembly, I care a great deal about the maintenance of a thriving graduate community at Virginia Tech.

One of the most important things that can be done to continue the great work that has made the graduate student population so vital for this institution is to provide more appropriate housing opportunities.

Much has been done in recent years to create a truly special graduate community at Tech. Under the leadership of Dean Karen DePauw, the uniquely beneficial Graduate Life Center has been implemented, as well as programs like Transformative Graduate Education, which has introduced a host of interdisciplinary educational opportunities that were not previously available. However, in order to accommodate the large student body within this graduate community, both Tech and the town of Blacksburg have to work together to provide more realistic housing opportunities.

"Most of the recent increase in enrollment, proportionally, has been with graduate students," DePauw said. At the very base of the issue we have more grad students entering school each year, which alone would justify a serious look at new housing. Yet, merely addressing the sheer amount of housing is not the solution. What grad students at Tech need are more options for a type of living environment that is conducive to the lifestyle that most of us live. With many grad students having spouses and children, and virtually all of us needing a relatively quiet atmosphere to accommodate our studies and a generally more standard day schedule, the more undergraduate-oriented housing options throughout Blacksburg are less than ideal. The massive apartment communities around town - such as Foxridge - are great for those in the midst of their undergraduate years, but they don't provide a great environment for family life or for those on a business-like schedule.

On-campus housing is, understandably, not an ideal family environment either. With dorm and suite living arrangements, the logistical problems for families, or even couples (no kitchen, often no private restrooms, etc.), are difficult to overcome. With the combination of our need to accommodate the massive undergraduate population at Tech and the geographically compact nature of the campus, it isn't easy to just build more living space strictly for graduate students.

Additionally, according to Rebecca French, graduate representative to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, since the New River Valley lacks many of the firms and industries that could employ many young professionals, it is even more difficult for graduate students with spouses and family members to find work opportunities. French also said, "You can live inexpensively in Blacksburg, but it usually requires roommates to be affordable. And renting an entire house on a graduate student's stipend is not at all affordable." So for a student, or couple, or an entire family, where do they go to find quiet, affordable living space?

Fortunately, the university administration is considering some innovative proposals to address the housing issue, such as with the notion of public/private housing partnerships. DePauw said this type of arrangement "doesn't necessarily need to be on-campus, but has to be connected to the

university." Therefore, new off-campus housing (where there is more space and flexibility of planning than on-campus) could be planned with the input of university decision-makers, which could pay big dividends for graduate students looking for new housing options.

In the end, we want to be able to recruit the best possible master's and doctorate candidates. To do this, we must provide greater opportunities to secure housing arrangements conducive to how most graduate students live. And if both Tech and Blacksburg can work together to accomplish this, we might just create a full niche of students whose careers and family lives prompt them to stay in Blacksburg for the long term, which would benefit both the institution and town tremendously.