

# ROOMMATE

— *how to prepare to be paired* —

# RELATIONS

A year in a College House goes fast, but there is plenty of time to build a strong relationship with your roommate(s), whether to lay the foundations of a lasting friendship or simply develop the stable partnership necessary for a harmonious living arrangement.

**F**inding out where they are coming from, both literally and figuratively, is an excellent place to start. Where is home? How did they spend their summer? What do they intend to study, and what extracurriculars might they participate in this year? What are their hobbies or passions, their favorite music, films, books, food, games or sports teams? Where have they travelled, or where would they love to go? With some comfort level, you might discuss family, religion, or past or current relationships. In the process, you might discover that you have much in common; but do not be surprised—or alarmed!—if there is a great difference as well. Penn students are from all over the world, from very different backgrounds; your roommate might be of different ethnicity or faith, and their lifestyle, dietary habits and working hours might be markedly distinct from yours. One of the best aspects of University life is that you are exposed to a wide range of people, and one of the most important learning experiences you can have at Penn is learning to co-exist with those who seem different from you—a key life skill you will need after graduation! After covering some big picture items, be sure to discuss matters that will impact your day-to-day life: comfort level with guests (particularly overnight); sleeping schedules; interest in sharing food items, supplies, and technology; plans for keeping the room clean.

# Roommates = best friends? **NOT NECESSARILY**

It is important to keep your expectations in line with reality. Successful relationships of any kind do not require nor do they hinge on individuals within those relationships to become best friends. The same is true with roommates. It is highly likely that a majority of students would not identify their roommate as a best friend and yet still consider their relationship as a very positive experience. This is often because roommates have invested time learning about each other's background and interests and build upon this foundation by exhibiting respect for each others needs. Keep in mind that you and your roommate(s) have the freedom to decide who your best friends will be and if it is not each other that is perfectly fine!



**IT'S IMPORTANT**  
to negotiate expectations  
**EARLY**  
in the roommate relationship

### *Adopt a “win-win” strategy*

It is important and even imperative to start early to think about negotiating an accommodating and comfortable living space for you and your roommate(s). One has to keep in mind that a win-win strategy for sharing a space with others is the best insurance for successful living. Here are a few pointers on how to proceed:

- Contact your roommate(s) before moving in and get to know each other
- Make your own list of all the factors that would make your living arrangement with others harmonious. Arrange the items on the list by order of importance to you.
- Suggest to your roommate (s) the same idea and ask them to make up their own list
- One has to be thoughtful, respectful, and sensitive to others' living arrangement needs in order to establish a trusting relationship with roommates

### *Don't adopt a “first come, first served” strategy*

The day you arrive to your College House and enter your room, don't settle immediately in the 'best corner' of the room. First, consult with your roommate(s) and then work together in making decisions on how to occupy the space most efficiently. This could be your first 'homework': to find the best arrangement possible of the furniture in the room and to create the most agreeable living environment in the space.

# CLEAR AND OPEN COMMUNICATION

is of key importance to a good and lasting roommate relationship

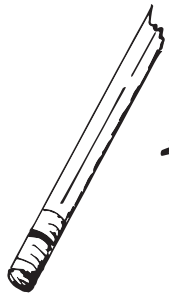
**A**fter you have met, exchanged and discussed ideas about the living arrangement in your room, the next step is to consolidate the outcome of the negotiations and interactions you had in a form of a roommate agreement. The purpose of a roommate agreement is to keep open your lines of communication about issues and concerns as they arise in your living space. It is a tool that allows you to make use of the university policies to work out compromises for comfortable living and for preserving a lasting relationship with your roommate(s). A few tips to keep in mind:

- Ask your RA for a roommate agreement form to start the process
- Your RA should keep a copy of the agreement and could serve as a coordinator of the process and when needed as a mediator to find the best compromise
- Don't discuss your roommate 'problems' with others when you have not discussed them with your roommate first
- Don't direct accusations towards your roommate based on an assumption or hearsay before inquiring about it directly with your roommate
- Remember that you have a lot of support in your college house. Use the RA, the House Director, the Faculty Director and the numerous resources on campus.

# APPRECIATING DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCES

Living together involves blending lives and lifestyles. You may be living with a roommate who has very different traits, values, and habits. Your roommate most likely grew up in a different family, was educated in a different school, formed a different set of friends, and developed a set of values, beliefs, opinions, and habits that are different from your own. You are a very different person from your roommate, but living together gives you the opportunity to learn from someone very different from yourself. Just like you'll be learning in the classroom, you should look at your living experience as another chance to learn about negotiation and compromise. It's likely that you'll learn a great deal about yourself while learning about someone new. Be open to the background and life experiences of your roommate, and be willing to share who you are in return. Living with someone new is not always easy, but who says it has to be hard?

AND BEING  
OPEN  
TO THE EXPERIENCE



# ANTICIPATING STRESS

throughout the academic year

The college academic year will expose you to a whole new set of challenges. From the intensity of meeting hundreds of new people during move-in and orientation, to the possibility of spending major holidays away from your family for the first time, to ending the academic year and saying goodbye to friends who have become your family, the year will bring many different stressors that you've ever experienced before. At Penn, you will feel that you will be in a constant state of mid-terms - that will be your reality! You should recognize that during your most challenging week in the semester, your roommate may have an easy week, and vice versa. The most important reminder is to continue being respectful to your roommate during this time. If you think about the academic year chronologically, you can recognize some of the stressors that might be most impactful:

- Move-in and Orientation (it's stressful to meet hundreds of people!)
- Classes begin (it's likely you'll be a bit more busy than you've ever been before)
- MID-TERMS!
- Finding new friend groups and clubs (as you find who you are at Penn, you and your roommate could grow apart, or you could grow closer)
- Thanksgiving (for many students, this might be the first major holiday away from family)
- FINAL EXAMS!
- Winter Holidays (many students will visit family for the first time in the year...this may cause added stress)
- Spring semester begins (it can be difficult to readjust to life back at Penn)
- Fraternity/sorority recruitment (maybe you join the same organization, or not... or neither of you join one. Regardless, it can be a stressful time)
- Making housing decisions for next year
- MID-TERMS!
- Winter in Philly (it can feel like it lasts forever...)
- Spring Break (finally)
- More MID-TERMS!
- Spring Fling, Hey Day, and the end of school (it's a great social time, but you still need to be thinking about your academics)
- FINAL EXAMS!
- Move out (it can be stressful too... and it's hard to say goodbye, but you made it through your year at Penn!)

An academic year for a college student seems like it might be long, but it goes by quickly. Continue respecting your roommate and keep the lines of communication open. If you do this, you're sure to have a great year!

The best—and most conveniently located!—resource for roommates in residence is their Resident Advisor (RA) or House Director. Not only are the House staff and RA team skilled listeners and problem-solvers, but they are knowledgeable about the wealth of additional resources available on campus. Other key resources on campus—whether for mediation, assistance in coordinating life schedules or understanding and embracing diversity—include the following:

**UNIVERSITY MEDIATION PROGRAM  
(OFFICE OF STUDENT CONDUCT)**

[mediate@exchange.upenn.edu](mailto:mediate@exchange.upenn.edu)

**STUDENT HEALTH & COUNSELING (SHAC)**

<https://caps.wellness.upenn.edu/>

**OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN**

<http://www.upenn.edu/chaplain/>

**LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER CENTER**

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lgbtc/>

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES**

<https://global.upenn.edu/iiss>

**THE WOMEN'S CENTER**

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/pwc/>

**THE GREENFIELD INTERCULTURAL CENTER**

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/gic/>

**THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN RESOURCE CENTER**

<http://www.upenn.edu/aarc/>

**WEINGARTEN LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER**

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/>

**LA CASA LATINA**

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lacasa/>

**MAKUU: THE BLACK CULTURAL RESOURCE CENTER**

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/makuu/>

**PAACH: THE PAN-ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY HOUSE**

<https://secure.www.upenn.edu/vpul/paach/>