

Bard Residence Life Podcast

00:00 Josh: Welcome everybody, to the latest edition of our podcast. I'm Josh Tyler, and as always, I'm here with the Director of Admission, Mackie Siebens. Hi Mackie!

00:08 Mackie: Hello Josh! Hello everyone. As Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens, Director of Admission. I'm an alumna, I graduated from Bard in 2012. We're joined today by Bard community members who are linked in some way to Residence Life, which is what we're going to be talking about, and hopefully answering some questions about what it's like to live here at Bard College, so we'll start here. Want to introduce yourself?

00:32 Justin: Sure! How're you doing? My name is Justin, I'm currently a junior at Bard. I am the Peer Counselor of the Brown residence building, on the second floor. I study economics, I'm part of the baseball team, and I'm also a SAAC officer.

00:47 Mackie: Do you want to just explain what SAAC is?

00:48 Justin: Yes, SAAC is the Student Athlete Advisory Committee. So, we work on improving welfare for student athletes, and engaging with the greater Bard community.

01:00 Mackie: Great, thanks!

01:01 Harmony: Wow, that's pretty cool. Hi, my name is Harmony, I am a current sophomore. I intend to moderate into Anthropology and Written Arts as a joint major. I am the PC, or Peer Counselor, of Leonard Hall. I'm involved in STEP club, in Afropulse, and the Caribbean Student Association.

01:24 Josh: Great!

01:25 Patrick: Hi, I'm Patrick Clarkson, I'm the Assistant Director of Housing here at the College. This is my third year working here. I'm also the Area Coordinator of South Campus, which is a predominantly first year area.

01:36 Josh: Great!

01:36 Mackie: Fabulous.

01:38 Josh: Thanks everybody. And can you tell us a bit about the role of the Residence Life Office here at Bard, and what it is that you all do?

01:46 Patrick: Yeah! So, Residence Life starts their process with students incoming, and makes sure they have the housing they need, hopefully the housing they want, through their time here at Bard. We work really hard to make sure that the residence halls are an engaging and well-rounded community, which is why we have a team of 48 Peer Counselors, who are student leaders, Justin and Harmony can speak to that experience, that build up the life of the residence halls.

02:15 Josh: Great. And I'm sure probably the question that's kind of first and foremost on most prospective students' minds is, how do they choose their room, and how is this process reviewed by the Residence Life Office?

02:33 Patrick: Yeah! So, first year students will complete a housing profile. From there, we actually read every single profile, and find the best match within the first-year class from commonalities between individual students. We sort down all of the files, we read the little bio you write about yourself, and we pair you up. From there, we build up the residential communities by pairing up folks who have similar preferences for different communities on campus. And then also, it's a little random, because we find that that's the most successful way to have a little bit of the Bard student population in every area of campus.

03:08 Mackie: And can you talk a little bit about the types of rooms, too? If you guys want to talk a little bit about your experience of being placed as a first year, and then the room draw process also, which I'm sure some students are interested in hearing about.

03:22 Harmony: Yeah! For me, in my first year, I was placed in Tewksbury, which is on South Campus. It's a dorm of a mix of singles and doubles and triples, and it's one of the largest dorms on campus, which was super cool, because you got to have a diverse array of students surrounding you, so you might have some conservatory students, or athletes like Justin, or just "Bard students", quote-unquote, whatever that even means. But it was super exciting! My room was nice, it was kind of, it's a bit of a shock always, to meet your roommate and be like, "Who are you, I don't know you, we might have texted but oh my god, I'm meeting you in person," but it was really a sweet encounter at the end of the day, which was super relieving.

04:09 Mackie: Nice. Yeah, Justin, you want to talk a little bit about your experience?

04:14 Justin: Sure, yeah! I actually came in having previously connected with my roommate, because he was also on the baseball team. So, it was one of those instances where the roommate selection wasn't random, because we both put our names down. I was placed in Keene North, which is toward the north end of campus, and it was a great experience. My room was next to the common room, so if I heard people in there, I was always able to go out, hang out, do homework together in groups. It was a great time, you know, it was fun to meet other first-years and the building was also mixed, like Tewksbury, for Harmony, it was mainly freshmen on the first floor, but on the second floor, it was sophomores and juniors. It was a great mix of the community.

04:59 Mackie: How did you choose, once you sort of are here, and have spent a year here and have sort of found maybe your people that you want to live with, can you talk a little bit about how you figured out where you wanted to live, and maybe, if neither of you lived in a suite-style, we could actually ask Patrick to go into that a little bit more too.

05:22 Justin: Yeah, I actually became a Peer Counselor my sophomore year, so I never had to go through room draw.

05:27 Mackie: Ah, okay.

05:27 Justin: So, it was kind of a unique situation.

05:31 Harmony: That is the same for me!

laughter

05:34 Harmony: However, I can talk about my friends' experience a little bit.

05:39 Mackie: Sure!

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05:39 Harmony: So, it's a bit of a scary moment, because you're like, okay I've made all these friends, who am I going to live with next year? I need to find someone who I know well enough where we're not going to go at each other's throats in the room or something like that. So, it was really about finding a friend that you really trusted, and going through the room selection process, which included getting a randomized number, and then using that number to prioritize where you would be in the room selection process. So, I happened to get number 45 in a range of lots of numbers.

06:16 Mackie: That's a good room draw number!

06:16 Harmony: Yeah, a lot of people were angry with me, for getting that. And so, it was super cool to see it on the other side, being a Peer Counselor, seeing the room selection process.

06:27 Patrick: Right now, I'm actually setting up to run the room selection process this year. About a third of the students at Bard will go into a special application for housing, which is for our suites, and for our themed communities. All of our themed communities are upper college spaces where students propose a theme. Then they gather up students and whatever building they best fit into, is where their theme gets to fit. So, if they need a space with a big kitchen, they'll end up in that space. If they don't, they'll end up in a different space. In our suites, we have a ton of sophomore, junior, and senior students, who will apply together in groups of 4 or 5, and fill out a suite, which is great! Those are kind of, they're really apartment spaces, because you have a private bathroom, a kitchen and a common space with 3 bedrooms, either doubles or single rooms, based on the configuration.

07:20 Mackie: And as someone who lived in a suite, and applied this way back as a student, does it still work this way where if you find your group of people, to find your theme or find your suite, you can use the best room draw number amongst people?

07:32 Patrick: That's exactly how it works.

07:33 Mackie: Nice, it still works. I love that there's a lot of consistency to this process, it works and it's been going on like this for a long time, so that's awesome.

07:40 Patrick: It has been! We're calling it room selection instead of room draw, but it's still the same exact process as it was when you did it.

07:46 Mackie: Right, room selection. Noted. Will use that moving forward.

07:49 Josh: Great, so you've talked a bit about the variety of options for students, like the different types of dorms, the different kinds of rooms. What options do first year students have when they come? Would they be in singles? Doubles? Are there triples? What would that look like for the students, and how would that look moving forward?

08:12 Patrick: Yeah, so in your first year, most students are in double rooms, where we pair you up with a roommate. About 15-20% based on the year, and very little to none of the first years are single rooms, just because they all get picked at room selection by the upperclassmen. So then going into your sophomore year, you're likely to be in a double room again, but that time it's with a roommate you pick, or with roommates that you want to go into a suite with. Then in your junior and senior years, that's when you're hitting your single rooms.

08:46 Josh: And approximately how many residence halls are there on campus?

08:49 Patrick: We actually have 48 different residence halls, about. The number changes from year to year, there's a ton of different options. So, first years live in twelve spaces on South Campus, two spaces in Resnick Commons, and then five different spaces over in Cruger Village.

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09:07 Josh: And stylistically, are they similar, or are there differences, are they small, large, what kind of styles do we have?

09:14 Patrick: Our residence halls range from 5 to 284 students. Really, the bulk of our residences are in that 20-30 student range, so it's a little odd, when you look at other colleges, you're going to be seeing 200, 300 person buildings. Here at Bard, we focus on these small buildings. All of our residence halls, except for Sands House, were constructed to be residence halls, so they are built and designed with the amenities that you need as a college student.

09:42 Mackie: And can you talk a little bit too about the bathrooms across campus? I know that's a question we get a lot, what does the bathroom situation look like across these various different types of living spaces.

09:53 Patrick: Yeah, I would say the vast majority of our spaces have single-user restrooms, and there's a few exceptions to that, there's about three exceptions to that, but most students are going to be in spaces where you have access to a single user restroom, or all of your restrooms are single user style.

10:10 Josh: Great. When someone's kind of taken this all in, and they kind of know where their dorm is going to be, and it's time for them to actually move on to campus, what can they expect once they get there? What are the dorms equipped with, and what also should they expect to bring with them?

10:27 Patrick: Yeah, so the spaces are equipped with a twin extra-long bed. Most of our beds at this point are height adjustable, so you can change how you use storage underneath, they come with a dresser, a desk that has drawers, and a chair. They either have a closet or a wardrobe. But you two as students, do you want to talk about what you brought with you and what you found useful?

10:47 Justin: Sure, yeah. When I came, I brought a TV and my Xbox, I brought a ton of clothes for all the seasons, because I didn't want to go back and forth between Bard every time I needed warmer clothes. Some snacks for the room, I actually brought my own mini fridge from home, which fit the standard, and worked with the policy. Harmony?

11:16 Harmony: Yeah, similar stuff. Obviously, clothes, obviously got a mini fridge. I don't know, I feel like I brought my whole room on my back, because my mom was like, "we need to pack everything, you don't know what's going to happen," because I'm from California, so it was pretty scary coming from so far from home, where you're like, "I don't know the bug life, I don't know the weather, I don't know anything, everybody says I need a scarf and a good jacket, what is a good jacket?"

11:47 Josh: Did you find that what you brought in your second year differed from what you brought in your first year?

11:51 Harmony: Yeah, luckily, I was able to get a storage unit over here, so there was not a need to bring everything under the sun from my room. I definitely got a better jacket, if you're from anywhere that's not somewhere with a lot of winter moments, it's an interesting experience. Yeah, I think what I brought in my second year was really just soap, a toothbrush, another blanket that I like, just really simple stuff. But nothing too troublesome.

12:24 Mackie: And can you guys speak to, and thinking about sort of like, sort of making your house a home, what other ways do you as Peer Counselors and ResLife make these spaces comfortable for students in terms of dorm activities, and trying to make sure that students are able to voice their opinion about their living space and all that kind of stuff?

12:46 Justin: Yeah, I think a lot of that starts right at the beginning with L&T, when all the students arrive to campus, well first years arrive to campus, but just kind of laying down rules, but also opening up a connection between the student and you, giving them your phone number, just being present within the common room. And in terms of dorm events, me personally, I like to have more passive dorm events, just pretty lowkey, you know, bake some cookies or play some board games with the residents. Just shooting a text like “hey, I’m going to be in the common room tomorrow night, come grab some cookies, you know, we could watch some TV, or play a video game, whatever it is. But just making sure that they see your face so that they know you’re a friendly figure and willing to help them if they ever need anything.

13:33 Harmony: Yeah, totally ditto. I think, as a new PC, it was really nerve-wracking because I didn’t know how many dorm events to do, or what kind of dorm events, but I think I found a nice balance where I have things like where I make pancakes on Sunday, and I randomly make brownies, and we have an ever ongoing puzzle in our common room. I accidentally got them one that was too hard this time, so none of them are wanting to do it, which is kind of sad. But it’s super cool because when you’re coming in as a PC, you think you have to put on all these events, make sure everybody’s happy and healthy, but if you create a community that is really symbiotic, and relies on each other, they’re coming up with their own events as well. So, like, one resident texted me and said, I have hecka board games, and I really want to do a board game night, can you tell everybody? I was like “yeah, I’ll make you guys some mac and cheese and all this stuff, and I’ll even play with you guys.” So, it was a really nice event where you see your residents having agency, because they’re so comfortable in the space and it feels so much their own.

14:33 Patrick: Yeah I found with our small residence halls that we have across campus, it’s really easy for students, Harmony you’re in one of the ravines, which is 20 students in there, and so it really can feel like a living room, so students are really encouraged to make the space feel homey.

14:48 Mackie: Nice. One other thing that we do get questions about, and maybe this is directed at you, Patrick, for students who want to bring animals or pets to campus, what does that situation look like?

15:01 Patrick: Yeah, so if you’re bringing a small animal like a fish or a hamster, you are allowed to do that. We just have you get clearance from your roommate first, we would hate for you to bring a pet and your roommate be allergic to it. But other than that, we approve anything that’s small and, in a tank, or a cage.

15:21 Josh: Now how about service animals? What is the policy in that instance?

15:26 Patrick: Yeah, so for those students, you’ll register with Disability Services, and we’ll reach out with just a brief registration form to meet any local standards for that. And then we’ll do our best, you’ll see on the housing profile you’ll be able to note if you want to live with a student who has a service animal, because we want all students to live in a double room and have that unique college experience of sharing a space.

15:51 Mackie and Josh: Great.

15:52 Josh: Well thanks everybody, we really appreciate having you.

15:56 Mackie: Yeah! And as always, if you have questions please send them our way at admission@bard.edu and we’ll be happy to send you those answers and track down the experts who can answer them in detail. So, thanks everyone!

16:08 Josh: We look forward to next time!