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Lab 2

Story 5

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Students who make the transition to living off-campus are finding out great power is not the only thing leading to great responsibility—independence also is.

When faced with new situations and businesses that are trying to turn a profit, students need a place to go for advice. This is where the Oklahoma State Off-Campus Student Association comes in.

Hanna Kelley, the president of the Off-Campus Student Association, is one of the people who is in contact with Stillwater property managers and landlords to make sure students are not being exploited because of their youth and renting inexperience. She said they hear complaints and advise students what to do in certain situations.

“We help students from everything to landlords who won’t give them their deposit back to something as simple as helping a new student decide where they should live based on their personality and all of that,” Kelley said. “A lot of people don’t know the rules, so that’s what I’m here for.”

Marie Basler, the faculty adviser for the association, estimates 64 percent of students live in housing the university does not provide. On top of that, Basler said 17 percent of students live in sorority or fraternity houses, which means only 16 percent live in dorms.

The transition is not always an easy one, she said. Students have a hard time adjusting to having to take care of bills and upkeep by themselves.

“When you live on campus, all of your payments are rolled into one big payment,” Kelley said. “So I think budgeting becomes a big issue when kids live on their own because you can have three or four bills and you have to remember to pay them all and be able to afford them.”

Despite the challenges, the desire to gain a greater feeling of independence and maturity is what attracts people to live away from the dorms, senior architecture major Jordan Gill said.

“There are just so many distractions and watchdogs on campus it seems like,” Gill said. “Off campus you have your landlord, but you’re basically on your own outside of that. There is something that’s really refreshing about that.”

Even when students have heard stories of the problems in apartments, they are still surprised to witness such events personally, junior education major Andrew Shelton said.

“I think everyone, or at least I did, goes into living off-campus thinking that they will have everything go well and be the exception,” he said. “Nobody really expects to have cockroaches living in their kitchen counter or anything along those lines. But those stories are real, and they happen to just about everyone I know.”

Instances like that are what the Off-Campus Student Association is there for. When there is a problem an apartment complex is not responding to, it contacts the property managers to try to solve the problem and, when necessary, collaborate with the Student Government Association and threaten to take legal action.

Basler said more times than not, the landlords are willing to do what they can to keep their tenants pleased. Sometimes the student is the reason a conflict takes place.

“A lot of it depends on how you approach them,” she said. “If you go in mad, screaming and yelling, the odds of a work order being put through are slim. Sometimes students struggle with that just because they are new to renting.

“So when students come in, the No. 1 thing I tell them is to remain calm and remain polite, even if they feel taken advantage of. Of anyone, landlords probably protect students more than anyone else. Without students, those people wouldn’t make money or be able to pay their taxes.”

Gill said being able to deal with not getting their way is one of the biggest struggle he has seen other students go through.

“Most, but not all, students at a major university probably came from a background where they were pretty indulged in that they got a lot of what they wanted,” he said. “Especially coming from the Dallas area, many people aren’t used to being told no.”

Through it all, Basler said moving off-campus is an opportunity every student should take advantage of before graduating.

“Getting out of the dorms is the next step on the way to the real world,” she said. “The experiences teach you so much and help out in the future when you’re maybe living in a new city with a new job. It is an invaluable experience in terms of growth as an adult.”

Source Sheet

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