

What are Community Agreements?

Definition and Philosophy: Community agreements are made by the individual unit and are facilitated by the RA. It attempts to assess how incoming residents feel about a number of "gray area" issues like noise levels, upkeep of the facility, how to monitor visitors on the unit, etc. This process is an attempt to start positive discussion about group issues that affect all residents rather than leaving community development to chance. Our objective is to have our residence hall unit communities form through communication, compromise, and commitment, rather than as a reaction to problems that occur in the future. Throughout the year, the agreement will transform and evolve to compensate for natural changes that take place in the residents. The residents should view the agreement as a method of developing a community on the floor, as well as initiating relations with other members of this community. With the creation of the agreement, the concept of authority shifts from the RA to the residents. This agreement will empower residents to take full responsibility for their community by developing an atmosphere of respect.

Purpose and Procedures: These forms serve as a structuring device for facilitating and negotiating discussion about the unit standards. If students are to live together in reasonable harmony, they must have the opportunity to express their expectations of how they want to be affected by others. From an awareness of each other's expectations, the residents can discuss differences and come to agreement on ways that they can incorporate these differences into successful compromise where cooperation yields contentment.

Often residents believe that everyone thinks alike, has the same needs and values, and will act the same in a residence hall environment. Thus they don't understand or appreciate why a unit agreement is vital. The RA must help the residents to see the implication of a community with no standards or no assumed standards. The RA must also help the residents to understand their role and the role that the residents will assume as members of the community. Residents need to be held accountable for their experiences and actions that involve others around them. It is also important to stress that each resident needs to accept responsibility for participating and contributing to the standards s/he will be expected to observe. The discussion with residents concerning the purpose and need for a unit agreement is an important avenue to open conversation about the reality of community living. This discussion begins the process of residents engaging other residents in relationship-building conversation. **PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO DISCUSS THE AGREEMENT—ONLY GOING THROUGH IT AS A CHECKLIST COMPROMISES THE RESIDENTS UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY AND OF EACH OTHER.**

Benefits to RA's: The community survey provides initial information to the RA about the needs and expectations of each resident. The RA should see the floor/unit agreement as a resource to help address possible conflicts before they arise, as well as a foundation for future discussions should conflicts develop. **This process is also an important way to convey to the residents that the role of the RA is not to "control" the floor/unit, or to be everyone's "go to" person.**