

## A House System for Messiah College—Summary of Rationale

Houses are decentralized, diverse, long-lasting, educator-led, residence-based societies. While a dormitory is organized to provide for basic physical necessities (i.e., food and shelter), a House is organized to provide for each student's intellectual, social, and spiritual development throughout four years of study. Houses provide a stable point of contact for relating the curriculum to the co-curriculum and serve as a quality control mechanism on both fronts. Throughout lifetimes and across generations these stable points of contact encourage personal investments on the part of *all* current students, educators, alumni, and friends of the College.

### Concerns Addressed by a House System

#### 1. *Delay in affiliation with a School*

Many students do not declare a major until their junior year. We need established communities that welcome students their first day on campus. Houses ensure that every student has a home and colleagues—peers and superiors—who recognize a shared responsibility for intellectual and spiritual growth throughout their tenure at Messiah.

#### 2. *Lack of interaction between older students (juniors & seniors) and younger students (freshmen & sophomores)*

Interaction across age-groups is important for continuity: It allows a true *culture of learning*. Sometimes older students are the best teachers for younger students (Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development"). Older students deserve the opportunity to give to another generation. Our culture reflects a problem in society that we simply must overcome. To serve a liberal arts education, Houses provide structured, intimate communities that encompass the full range of diversity at our school in terms of ages, academic interests, backgrounds, ambitions, etc.

#### 3. *Division between curriculum and co-curriculum*

Houses are educational societies and, as such, educator-led societies. House administrators and faculty fellows bridge the curriculum and co-curriculum, bringing quality education into the Houses and relating student needs to the faculty and administration. Houses provide bottom up pressure for quality rather than expediency.

#### 4. *Rootlessness*

Our campus-wide housing lottery "stirs things up" every year, thwarting social stability and continuity. This lack of stability is evident in the lack of traditions at Messiah. Stability supports learning and encourages investments in community.

#### 5. *Anonymity*

The greatest catalyst for apathy, violence, and vandalism on campus is anonymity. Decentralization promotes responsibility, consideration of others, and accountability: in sum, the development of moral character. More individuals can initiate improvements in relationships, social programs, and facilities, promoting the educational mission of Messiah and making daily life more enjoyable. At 250-500 students each, Houses allow for diversity while encouraging constructive participation by *all* current students, educators, alumni, and friends of the College.

### Houses Improve on Living-Learning Floors

1. *By embracing diversity*—students live in cross-sectional rather than self-segregated communities.
2. *By providing continuity*—communities last more than one year and across generations.
3. *By including all students*—no student on campus is left out.
4. *By following a proven model*—over 700 years of unparalleled success at Oxbridge and around the world.

In the U.S., Yale, Harvard, & Rice have the strongest systems, all initiated within the past 50-75 years. Yale had c. 3,000 undergraduates at the time of transition. Harvard had c. 3,500. Rice has 2,750 today. Murray State and Middlebury (2,000 students) recently adopted the model. Vanderbilt and Willamette (2,200 undergraduates) have just announced plans to establish campus-wide systems. Messiah would be the first religiously affiliated institution in the U.S. with such a system. A House system can be established crudely and cheaply in one year's time and improved over centuries.

To learn more and join the conversation, visit [www.messiahhouses.org](http://www.messiahhouses.org).