



Finding the Ideal Roommate

The Student Pairing Survey

Abstract

Many universities use roommate-matching surveys as a way to establish roommate pairs, before and after freshman year. We examined this process by investigating what criteria universities use to match roommates, then compared this to what students identified as their ideal roommate. Our findings demonstrate that the student and university perspective are fairly consistent and that students, overall, are satisfied with the matches made for them.

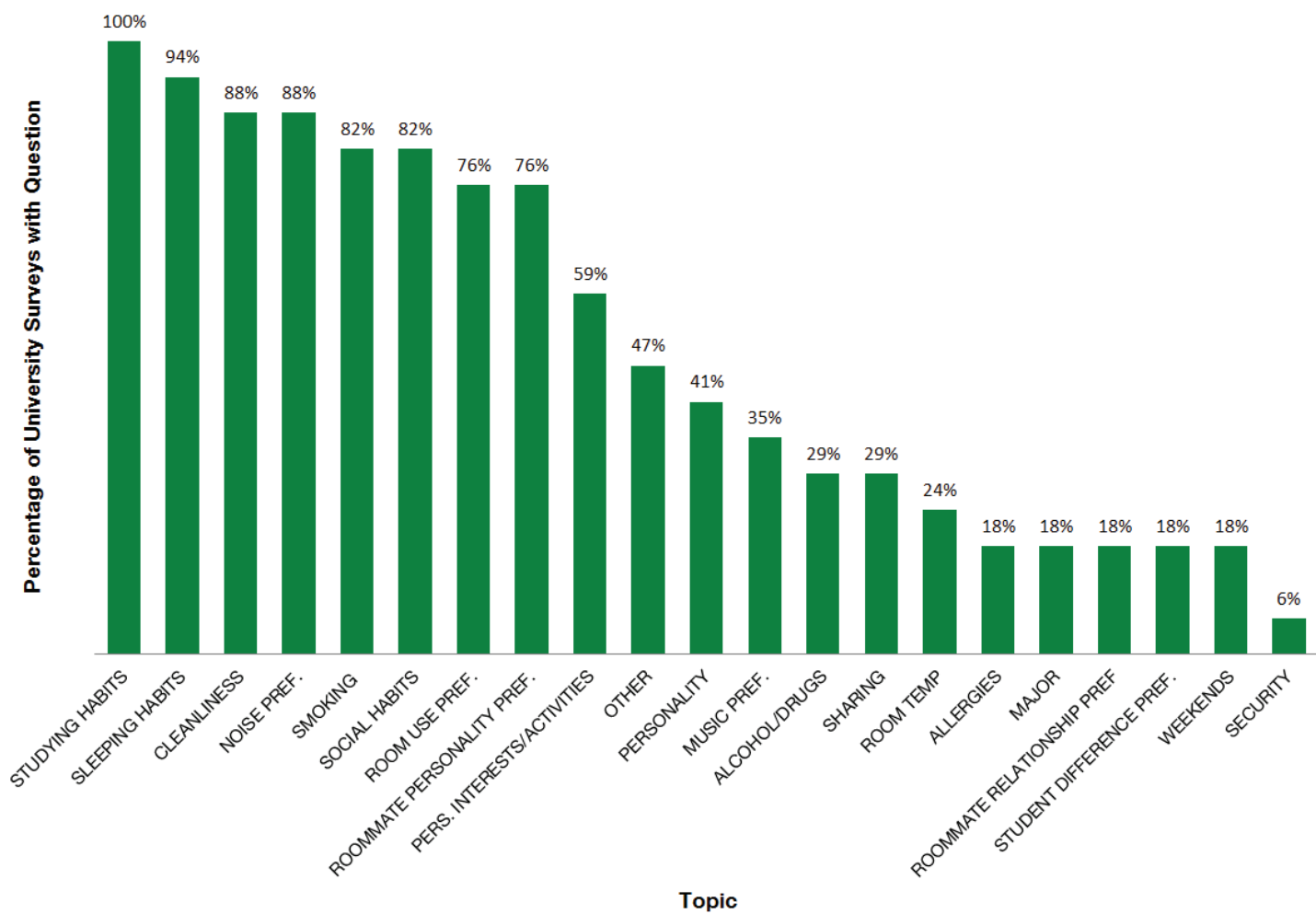


The Administrator Perspective

There are several factors universities consider when making roommate matches, including identifying student lifestyles and preferences. They are under significant pressure to make successful matches because residence halls will serve as a place for students to live, to work, and to discover their own independence. According to Lori Ryan, Housing Operations Specialist at Fordham University, “this process is starting off students who are attending college for the first time, and this will be their first real college experience.” Therefore, it is essential that universities exercise discretion when making roommate matches.

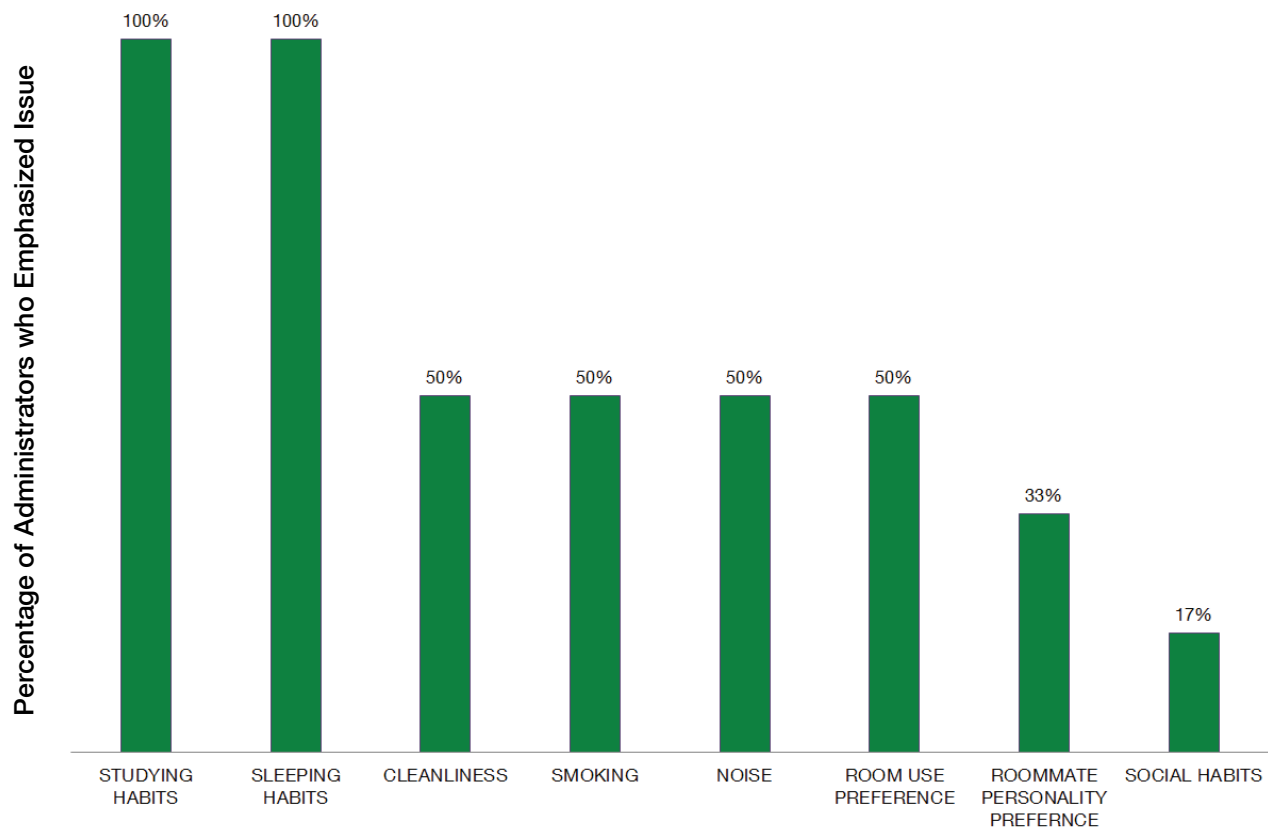
In order to effectively account for and measure this, many universities utilize a survey that will determine the relative compatibility of potential roommates. While each questionnaire differs, we identified several common themes within the questions that each of these surveys asked. We examined over a dozen roommate-matching surveys from universities across the country, and identified 21 different categories of questions. These categories include items such as music preference, study habits, and weekend activities.

Most Popular Roommate Matching Survey Questions



As demonstrated by the graph, every university asked questions related to study habits. Further, over 75% of universities asked questions related to sleeping habits, cleanliness and noise preference, smoking habits, social habits, room usage, and roommate personality preferences. As expected, these trends also directly reflect the responses we gathered from university housing administrators when asked about the most important factors for roommate pairing. All of the universities we interviewed identified that studying and sleeping habits were two of the most important factors to consider when it comes to roommate matching. Approximately 50% of those interviewed said that noise preferences, smoking, and cleanliness were a major factor in the process, too. Approximately 33% said that personality, and 17% said that social habits were other major considerations in the matching process.

Most Important Factors for Administrators



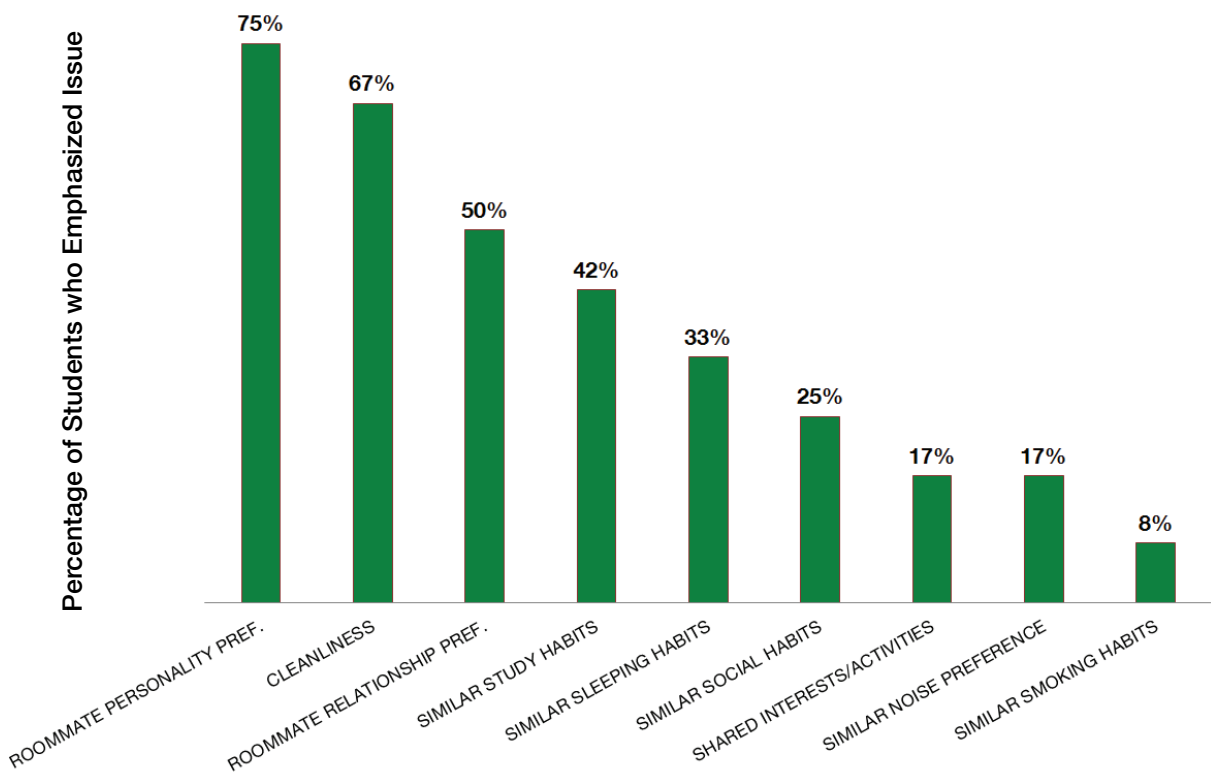
Many universities also ask extremely specific questions, including those related to music taste and even hometown population. While this may help to make more suitable roommate matches, according to Stacy Weiss, Staff Assistant of Housing Assignments and Community Housing at Duke University, it's really about finding "the core stuff that is more relevant" when it comes to matching up roommates. As Erin Iverson, Manager of Assignments and Public Inquiry in the Department of Resident Life at the University of Maryland, explains, "For students who do not make a mutual roommate request, this process ensures that they are matched with a roommate who shares compatible living behaviors which have a positive impact on their overall residence hall experience."

The Student Perspective

To understand how these surveys work to pair roommates, we also wanted to consider the student perspective. With this portion of our analysis, we hoped to identify what qualities students look for in a roommate, so that we may compare this to the university perspective, and identify the level of satisfaction students had with their matches. To achieve this we surveyed current students and recent graduates regarding their roommate preferences.

The single most important criterion for students we surveyed was personality, in which 75% identified specific personality traits that their potential roommate possesses as being most desirable. Students we surveyed described their ideal roommate as being someone fun, honest, outgoing, and responsible. The second most important criterion for students identified was cleanliness; this was then followed by roommate relationship preferences. This category of responses included student preferences for what type of relationship they would have (best friends, friends, friendly, etc.), as well as open communication and respect for one another. Students also identified that similar study habits (42%), as well as similar sleeping habits (33%) and social habits (25%) were important to them.

Most Important Factors for Students



While fewer students identified shared interests/activities, noise preferences, and smoking habits as important roommate qualities, we did not want to discount these responses. These qualities will still hold significance, as they are characteristics students identified as being most desirable.

How Do They Compare?

Upon comparison of the data we collected, we can identify a significant correlation between the university and student perspective. We found that both students and universities identified that roommate relationship preferences, roommate personality preference, cleanliness, interests/activities, study habits, social habits, noise preference, and sleeping habits were factors in determining a successful roommate match.

While there were many similarities between the responses, there were some noteworthy differences. Students, for example, said that personality was the most important consideration for new roommates, while administrators identified studying and sleeping habits as the most important. This occurred in much of our findings, in that universities place more significance on certain criteria than students, and vice versa. This could have occurred because universities may link living experience with academic success, while students link living experience with a favorable social environment.

Another major difference we found between the two perspectives was that universities identified that room use preferences as a major factor in making successful matches, while students did not. Instead, students included relationship-related issues (such as open communication, respectfulness, and friendly interaction), and shared interests and activities. This may directly reflect student preference for roommates to possess certain personality traits, or their preference for shared social habits, study habits, and sleeping habits.

We can conclude that, while there were some differences between the qualities identified by students and universities, university-made matches were successful. In our findings, 43% identified high satisfaction with the matches made for them by university roommate pairing processes. None of the students we surveyed identified dissatisfaction with their match.

While these matches were successful, students still experience some obstacles when it comes to the process of roommate pairing. According to Rob Castellucci, President and CEO of RoomSync (a service that has helped over 50,000 students connect with roommates over Facebook at 37 different colleges and universities), the biggest problem that students encounter with the roommate selection process is that they want direct control over whom they'll be living with. They are fearful of whom they might be paired with because, for many, this is the first time they will be away from home and sharing a room.

Another major problem Castellucci identifies is that parents often become involved in the process, helping their child fill out the housing survey. While this may seem helpful in clarifying students' questions, it ultimately leads to students misrepresenting themselves. With a parent over their shoulder, students will not mention that they smoke or consume alcohol. This skews the process and can create unsatisfactory matches.

To help alleviate these problems, many universities support their survey with added resources and tools. At Georgetown University, Patrick Killilee, the Executive Director of Student Housing, says they allow students to answer a questionnaire and view other student responses to match themselves with a roommate who answered similarly. "Students report a high level of satisfaction with this program," says Killilee. "Upper class students consistently tell other students to use this to get a roommate." Services like this help to "bridge the gap" for students while searching by offering a survey, but also giving students more control. This type of system, in many ways, can alleviate the problems and anxieties students have when it comes finding a roommate.

The Ultimate Roommate Survey

From the research we have conducted, we developed a roommate-matching survey that will merge student preferences and the university perspective. This survey incorporates those criteria that students identified, such as personality, cleanliness, and shared interests/activities, along with the existing criteria that universities use to match roommates. We hope that this survey will help to make more successful and satisfactory matches for universities.

1. I go to bed around _____
2. I wake up around _____
3. I sleep best when the room is (silent / a bit noisy / no pref)
4. I study in (the room / a common area / the library)
5. I prefer to study in the (morning / afternoon / evening / late night)
6. When I study, I prefer (silence / some noise / no pref)
7. I prefer that shared space be (always clean / clean some of the time / disorderly / no pref)
8. Concerning shared space, we should (take turns cleaning / each clean our own mess / clean together)
9. I would prefer that visitors, guests, and significant others
 - Are welcome anytime
 - Are welcome once or twice a week and on weekends
 - Are welcome on weekends only
10. I prefer to be notified that visitors are staying (one week in advance / 24 hours in advance / no pref)
11. Should issues or problems between us arise, I would prefer that my roommate(s) and I
 - Discuss issues openly and honestly as they arise
 - Arrange a time to discuss issues
 - No preference
12. I go out (not often / once or twice a week / three to four times a week / more than four times a week)
13. I would prefer a roommate who (is outgoing / keeps to oneself)
14. I would prefer my roommate(s) and I were
 - Best friends and spent significant time together
 - Friends and spent some time together
 - Friendly and cordial when we see one another
 - Kept to ourselves
15. I would prefer that our space be used primarily for (studying and sleeping / socializing and relaxing)
16. Other information / interests

At JumpOffCampus, we have utilized the survey we created to generate a resource that helps students to not only find off-campus housing, but to also find roommates. By offering students a comprehensive apartment and roommate search tool, they can more easily and efficiently find safe and suitable off-campus housing.

Our roommate finder is a recent addition to our site, and is very similar to the aforementioned system used by Georgetown University. To find a roommate, students are asked to fill out our survey to create their own roommate profile. We also ask students to provide their desired range for rent and when they are looking to move in. We then enable students to connect their Facebook profile to their JumpOffCampus roommate profile as a final step in offering as much data as possible.

Once the student completes their own profile, they can begin to search through other student profiles within the same university community. Each profile they view receives a compatibility score, which allows students view how similar their survey responses were. Additionally, students can also narrow their search by adding specific filtering criteria. Once they have determined a suitable match, they can then contact the other student.

By giving students more options and the freedom to choose whom they live with, they will be in control over their living arrangements. With this system, we hope to reduce some of the inevitable stress that students experience during the process, and we hope to empower them to make more informed decisions when it comes to moving off-campus.

At JumpOffCampus, we also provide resources to educate students about the apartment search process. In most cases, this will be the first time a student is on their own to find a place to live. We want to make sure they are equipped with the knowledge they need to go through this process. When students are inspecting apartments, for example, they can use our apartment checklist to keep track of details about each place. We also encourage our partner universities to upload their own guides and resources, as well. JumpOffCampus is truly a student's "one-stop-shop" for off-campus housing.

The JumpOffCampus Team

While attending Tufts University as undergraduates, we were frustrated by the inefficient process of finding off-campus housing. There was no transparency and an abundance of misinformation that ultimately led to a myriad of problems. Unresponsive landlords (quickly termed “slumlords”) were a common theme for us and our friends. In doing more research, we were shocked that this was the case at the vast majority of institutions across the country. We then set out to solve these off-campus housing issues, first at Tufts and now at 15 schools in the Northeast.

JumpOffCampus partners with universities, offering a free and online resource for their students to find safe and affordable housing. Aside from providing a valuable resource to students, JumpOffCampus also delivers value to the other elements of the off-campus housing ecosystem: universities, and landlords. We give universities an effective way to oversee the process of their students moving off-campus and provide them with the necessary data to address safety, as well as to coordinate across departments (e.g. Housing and Admissions). For landlords, we provide a simple and cost-effective property management tool with direct access to student tenants.



Mark Abramowicz
CEO & Co-Founder

Mark is an avid New York sports fan and loves to travel the world. While he was born in New York, Polish was his first language. He has also played soccer his entire life, including at Tufts University, where he graduated in 2010. While at Tufts, he studied Quantitative Economics and Entrepreneurial Leadership. Contact: mark@jumpoffcampus.com.



Kyle Nichols-Schmolze
CTO & Co-Founder

Kyle grew up in Newton, a suburb of Boston, and graduated from Tufts with a degree in Computer Science Engineering. He is passionate about bikes, ultimate frisbee, the web, climbing, and skiing. He also spends a lot of time with the three Bs of music: Beethoven, Bach and Brahms. Contact: kyle@jumpoffcampus.com.

Steve Brown
Director of University Outreach

Steve is a dynamic sales executive and team leader offering over twelve years of success in sales and marketing. He is a Boston sports fan, and loves the outdoors. Contact: steve@jumpoffcampus.com.



Appendix

We collected online university roommate surveys and utilized these resources to inform our study. We then contacted those universities to which those surveys belonged. We also randomized selected universities across the United States to obtain interviews. Similarly, to find student participants, we contacted students who were either current students or those who had recently graduated. We did allow for individuals who had graduated in 2011 to participate in the survey.

Information was either collected through face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, or by email contact. We then evaluated each of the responses by coding them, and placing them into the pre-determined categories.

Schools whose surveys were utilized in this study:

Bluffton University
Dallas Baptist University
Duke University
Fordham University
Franklin Pierce University
High Point University
Holy Cross College
Queens University of Charlotte
San Diego State University
Southern Oregon University
Sullivan University
Thomas College
University of Delaware
University of Louisiana – Lafayette
University of Mary
University of Oregon
Westminster College

University housing administrators with whom we spoke:

Erica Lewis, Coordinator of Residence Life, High Point University
Lori Ryan, Housing Operations Specialist, Fordham University
Stacy Weiss, Staff Assistant for Housing Assignments and Community Housing, Duke University
Jim Kramka, Senior Director of Housing Operations, Vanderbilt University
Patrick Killilee, Executive Director of Student Housing, Georgetown University
Erin Iverson, Manager of Assignments and Public Inquiry in the Department of Resident Life, University of Maryland