

Coed decision up to residents, official says

By CATHERINE THRIFT
Gamecock Staff Writer

Approval for Columbia Hall's conversion to coed housing status was given by the USC Board of Trustees at their September meeting, but how and when it will be implemented remains to be decided by the dorm residents.

Richard D. Wertz, dean of resident life and University housing, met with Columbia Hall residents Tuesday night to present various alternatives for the implementation.

"THE ISSUE of coed living has been stirring around the campus for a long time," said Wertz. "But there is some confusion as to what coed living is. The trustees think it's Bates West. I think it's men and women living in the same residence hall."

Wertz added that Bates West could not technically be called a dormitory, because the floor plan is an apartment complex.

The trustees stipulated that coed living at Columbia Hall would be in the form of layered floors, with men and women not on the same hall. But, Wertz said, if the residents decided to go more extreme, the plan would be presented to the Board in January.

He also presented the idea of having special-interest floors, centering around academic or social interests of the residents. Such floors, he said, would help the residents decide which men could move into the dorm if coed living is approved by the women.

"COED LIVING can be an enjoyable experience

educationally," Wertz said. "From my own experience I can say that it does not lead to the promiscuity which the press would have us believe."

Attendance at the Tuesday meeting was light, but the majority tended to favor the coed plan. Undecided residents were given the opportunity to question Wertz about possible undesirable consequences.

"We'll start small, only replacing the 120 or so seniors who won't be back next year," he said. "No one will be displaced or forced to move after the plan is implemented."

WERTZ ALSO added that the trustees' approval did not obligate the residence hall to accept the plan.

"No one will be forced to accept it. We'll just go back to the trustees and say, 'No,'" he said.

Concerning the possibility of going to a 24-hour open house plan, Wertz said that the issue would also be decided by the residents. It would not automatically go into effect if the coed plan is approved.

"If residents want to keep men off the floors from midnight to 8 a.m., they will have that privilege," he said.

The open house issue grew out of concern about the coed dorm's security. Wertz said Bates West has the least amount of incidents of any dorm and said that a coed plan would probably make the residents more security conscious.

Dorm government representatives said that the next step would be a dorm wide poll to determine if the residents want to accept the proposal or not.

Dean of Residence Life Richard D. Wertz (right) said, "Coed living can be an enjoyable experience educationally."



"WE NEED a poll to document how the decision was arrived at," Wertz said.

After the poll is taken, a decision will be made to pursue the matter further, or drop the issue entirely, depending on the percentage of participation by residents.

If the poll shows the coed plan is received favorably, committees will be set up and meetings held to decide how it will be implemented.

Wertz told the residents that coed living has already been tried successfully in various parts of the country. In northern and western universities, 50 per cent of the campus residence halls are coed.

Duke University has begun to use the coed plan and clusters the dormitories to afford students more choice in living style.

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY came close to a coed situation last year, when lack of dormitory space required the use of Clemson House for housing women students.

The multi-purpose facility was being used as a hotel, but some of the transient rooms were converted to house women students, although the move was only temporary.

Lander College, in Greenwood, is surveying its student body about the possibility of converting a dorm to coed housing.

A spokesman said that Lander officials are studying the possibility of using Coleman Hall, an off-campus dorm, for coed living.

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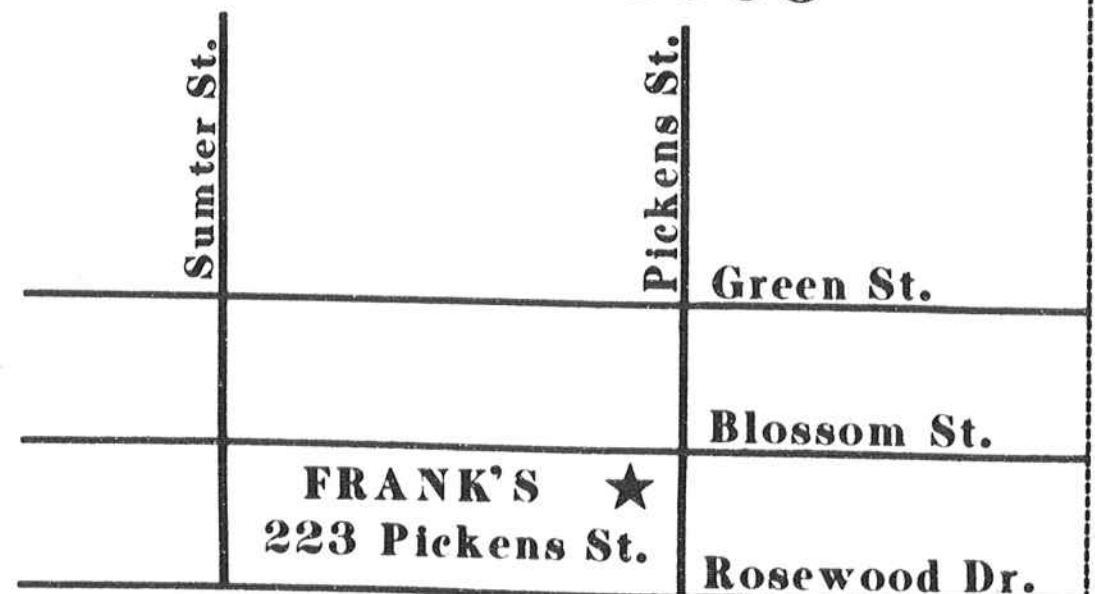
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