

Student housing faces its worst nightmares on 79th Street

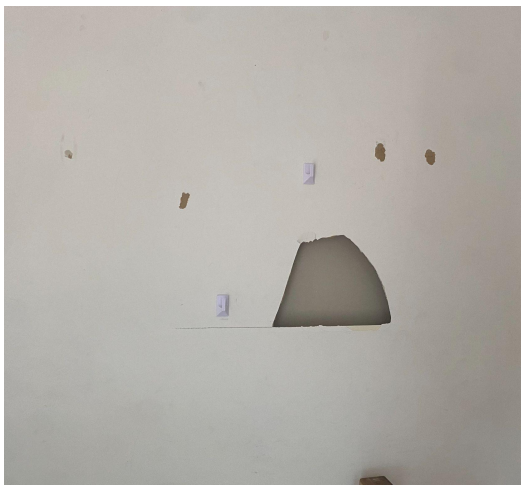
By Nikole Rajgor

When Zoe Vanrabenswaay woke up with hot, blistering bite marks all over their right arm in October 2022, they assumed it was eczema. However, an urgent care trip confirmed that was not the case: they were bed bug bites. Vanrabenswaay, 26, returned to their Upper East Side dormitory, where they not only face an infestation, but have rodents roaming alongside their four roommates.

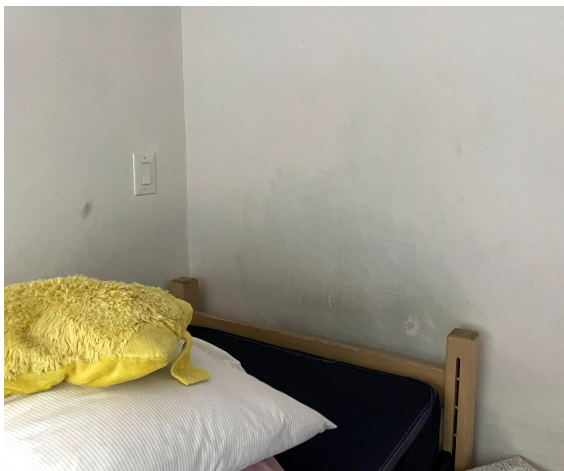
From the 2022-2023 academic year, Vanrabenswaay, a student at Hunter College, resided at 334 East 79th Street, an apartment complex managed by student housing organization [The FOUND Study](#).

“FOUND Study works in partnership with Hunter to manage 79th Street,” said Joshua Stanavage, the resident director of FOUND Study Midtown East. “Hunter College formally owns it and FOUND Study assists in managing different elements of different terms with a heavy concentration on Summer organizing. During the academic year, Hunter College controls the beds.”

Last year, the building resumed housing Hunter students, who have since made various complaints for its onslaught of rodent and bug infestations, infrastructure issues, and other violations.



Zoe Vanrabenswaay's former apartment, where three of their roommates still reside. Photos courtesy of Nikole Rajgor.



The bed bugs ravaged the lower floor of Vanrabenswaays' duplex. "After a series of back and forth," exterminators were sent to fumigate the space. But when Vanrabenswaay asked for another fumigation round to ensure its eradication, their requests were ignored. The bugs returned two months later. For Vanrabenswaays' out-of-state roommates, they resorted to couch-crashing in friends' apartments, as they were not offered alternative housing.

Residents paid [between \\$14,574-16,485](#) for this academic year, depending on the apartment size. Sabrina Rosado, a former resident, said her parents had to take out a loan to afford her residency. Rosado, who has scoliosis, put in a request for maintenance to help raise her bed to fit her dresser underneath. However, she received no response in the matter until her father had the building's security contact maintenance.

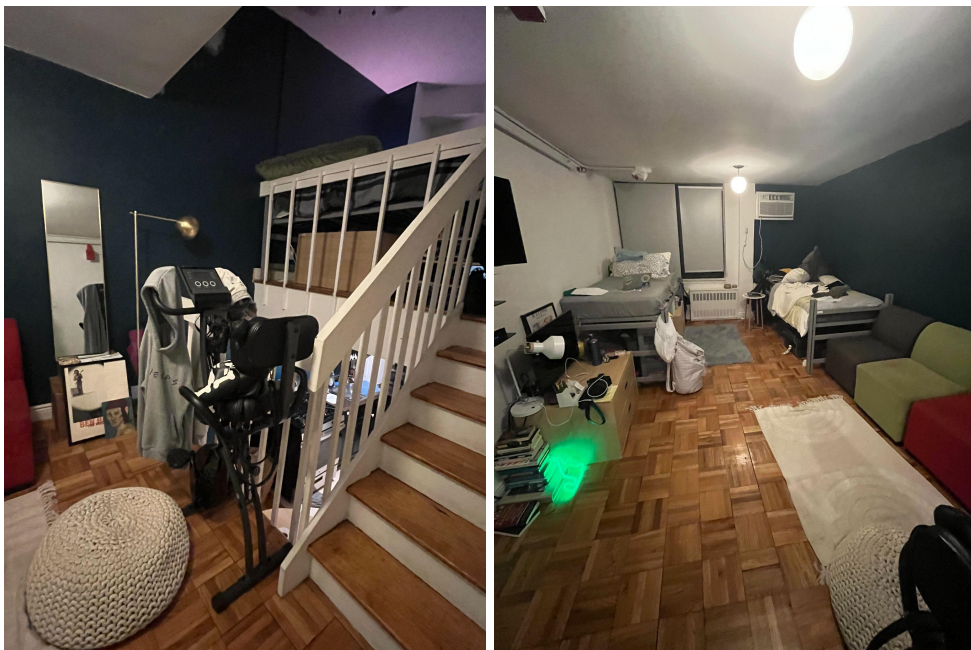
Rosado did not blame the staff. Rather, she believed them to be "stretched thin between housing locations," and feels that Hunter could rectify this by hiring on-site maintenance for each dormitory, and being more responsive to students.

Victoria Panchoosingh, a current resident, affirmed that infrastructure issues have not been resolved. When Panchoosingh moved in, she opened the bathroom sink cabinet to reveal an overflowing bowl of water catching leaking droplets.

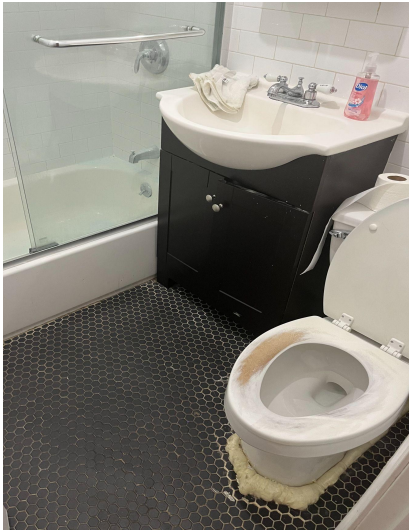
“While it was addressed by maintenance, I don’t get why it wasn’t resolved beforehand,” said Panchoosingh.

Panchoosingh also said the limited online resources about the dorms mislead residents, who may not fully understand the open-floor layout.

StreetEasy listings and [photos provided by The FOUND Study](#) show a few pictures of apartments (some with private bedrooms). Unlike the other [locations of The FOUND Study](#), tours are not offered for this building.



Panchoosingsh’s triple room layout. Two students share one floor and bathroom while one student has their own floor and bathroom. Beds are assigned by staff, so you do not have control over whether you are charged a higher cost for having your own floor and bathroom. PC: Nikole Rajgor.



Conditions of a resident's apartment who declined to be interviewed but granted photo permission. PC: Nikole Rajgor.



Many students who report housing frustrations often do so to collegiate administrations, and are not aware they have tenant rights. For times that work orders are not properly addressed, are the times they can contact resources such as the New York City Housing of Preservation and Development (HPD).

Dormitories are included in [NYC's Housing Maintenance Code](#). If students contact 311 for issues related to their housing, “their conditions will be overseen by the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB),” said Tanisha B., an official from HPD’s Office of Neighborhood Strategies.

KNOW YOUR HOUSING RIGHTS

IN NEW YORK CITY, TENANTS ARE **LEGALLY** ENTITLED TO THESE HOUSING CONDITIONS AND LANDLORDS HAVE TO FUFILL THE FOLLOWING:

TENANTS

Live free from pests, leaks, & mold (plus any other hazardous conditions such as lead paint)

Have basic utilities such as functioning heat (required between October-May), hot & cold water (required every day), and electricity.

Any peeling paint should be attended to in a safe manner (i.e no dust particles being spread)

Have no key-locked or double cylinder locked window gates



LANDLORDS

Provide heat, water, electricity and adequate fire safety measures (smoke detectors, fire escapes, etc.)

Address leaks, mold, and pest issues *immediately* after being notified and conduct annual inspections for these conditions

Investigate the cause of leak or mold conditions affecting multiple apartments in a building, and address it within four months.

Pest control specialists locate bed bug presence and eliminate the source, treat the apartment with cleanings or fumigation and make follow-up visits to ensure that the bedbugs are gone.

Sources:

NYC HPD ABC's of Housing
NYC Housing Maintenance Code

When the frost of December brought on a mice infestation in Vanrabenswaay's apartment, maintenance provided glue traps, but made no attempts to cover up the rat holes that they pointed out. Vanrabenswaay said they would hear the screams of dying baby mice stuck on the traps.

So they called 311. Once the case opened, an inspector arrived at the apartment. Since the building's maintenance technically addressed the issue by providing the apartment with glue traps, HPD deemed the case "resolved."

"We felt trapped in saying they didn't address it properly, because they kind of did in giving us traps," said Vanrabenswaay. "It felt like we didn't get any support." However, Vanrabenswaay there was "behind-the-scenes pressure" in receiving quicker responses.

"That was the main problem with this entire situation," said Vanrabenswaay. "It would take a week to get a response for a work order or an email. I had a hole in my wall for almost three weeks in the semester."

With little disposable income, students often have no choice but to be subjected to on-campus [housing](#), even if it produces less-than-ideal situations. These violating conditions reflect NYC's [crisis](#), where low-income, [migrants](#), and homeless populations are also left with few options.

Vanrabenswaay moved to another FOUND Study location, but reports a better living situation. They still visit their old building to see their former roommates, but do not understand why they returned.

"It was the most horrible place I've ever lived in," said Vanrabenswaay.