
BU Freshmen Say South and Fenway Housing Leaves Them Disconnected

By Hannah Portman

When freshman Juliana Holmes pictures her first year at BU, she anticipated the classic freshman experience: living in a dorm, eating in a dining hall downstairs and being immersed in a built-in freshman community.

But when she opened her housing assignment, the words “five-person suite in South Campus” were far from what she expected.

“My immediate reaction was just, ‘Where the hell is this? What the heck?’” Holmes said.

Still, she tried to stay optimistic. She would live with four other freshmen and hoped to connect with others in her building, she thought.

But South Campus hasn’t turned out that way, and her first few weeks have been harder because of it.

This year, BU placed freshmen in South and BU’s Fenway campus due to a shortage caused by the Warren Towers Renovation, a three-year project that closes one tower at a time through 2028. The shift has left many first-years missing out on the community and experiences that typically define freshman year.

Each Warren tower holds roughly 600 beds. Without that availability and particularly high housing demand, BU turned to non-traditional housing placements, said Colin Riley, BU’s executive director of media relations.

South Campus, across the Brookline line, is a quieter area of brownstones and small apartment-style buildings. Typically, South Campus is home to sophomores, upperclassmen and graduate students.

BU’s Fenway housing presents similar challenges. While close to Newbury Street and Fenway Park, it’s almost a mile from central campus. Students there rely on the Terrier Transit shuttle, which is “really unreliable,” Heidi Monke, a freshman living in Fenway, said.

Holmes and Monke both expressed feeling isolated in their housing. “Socially, it’s a major disconnect,” Holmes said. Her friends in West and Warren spent the first week knocking on doors to find a community within their building. Holmes doesn’t feel comfortable doing that in South where she’s not part of a “freshman community.” Monke agreed. “It doesn’t feel like that big community thing where you see your friends everywhere and go sit with a ton of people at the dining hall.”

Both Holmes and Monke described the sense of disconnection as structural, not just personal. Holmes added that the people in her building are all very different and rarely connect. She suggested that if BU keeps placing freshmen in South, they should group people with shared interests. “If you’re already going to be putting people in a location that’s not ideal, it should be with people that can connect with one another,” she said.



Warren Tower A is currently under construction, with scaffolding and wrapping covering its entirety.

Riley suggested frustrated and isolated freshmen should raise concerns with RAs and administrators. “The most important thing is for students to communicate,” he said.

Holmes also said that early on, it might have helped if BU had created a system to bring South Campus freshmen together. But now, after meeting everyone in her building, she said it feels too late. Instead, she suggested BU organize larger events to connect South and Fenway freshmen so both groups could build a community together.

In West Campus, freshman Olivia DuPont feels grateful. She said it’s already hard to meet people as a new student, but being in West surrounded by other freshmen has made it easier.

She added that having a dining hall steps from her dorm has been invaluable. Holmes, by contrast, said the George Sherman Union is her closest option, and she has already spent over \$250 of her \$500 dining points for the semester.

BU doesn’t release how many freshmen live in West or Warren, but Riley said that both house a “significant portion of incoming freshmen.” Holmes estimated that freshmen make up only about 15 percent of South Campus.

The problem reflects a broader housing shortage across Boston, where rising enrollment at universities has outpaced dorm construction. According to Boston’s 2024 Student Housing Report, from 2013 to 2024, total student enrollment at Boston-area universities rose 12.2 percent, while BU’s grew 10.4 percent. The report found that as schools add beds, demand still outpaces supply, leaving a citywide gap of 24,255 dorm beds for full-time undergraduates

“Housing demand fluctuates, enrollment fluctuates, it’s just the nature of business,” Riley said on why BU has had to accommodate in these ways.

When Warren Towers renovations finish in 2028, traditional freshman housing is expected to return. But for Holmes, Monke, and the next three freshman classes, the classic BU experience won’t.

“I’ve been putting 110 percent into making sure I’m always doing stuff,” Holmes said. “I don’t want to have FOMO due to my location.”