Dear UMass Lowell Families,

Recently, we have received numerous questions from students and families about Edge Merrimack River, a privately owned and operated apartment building in downtown Lowell. The University does not endorse or have a relationship with Edge Merrimack River. On the contrary, we are significantly concerned by its aggressive and irresponsible marketing of an “anything goes” atmosphere boasting the lack of rules, regulations and supervision exemplified in their tag line “Find Your Freedom, Live on the Edge”. These concerns were deepened when we learned that Edge Merrimack River hosted an event where free beer was provided to students as a recruitment tool.

We pride ourselves that all University Residence Halls provide a comprehensive living learning environment, that supports and enhances the personal growth and academic success of our students. We are highly concerned that the 400 bed Edge Merrimack River property, marketed as private student housing, will not provide the same standards of safety and security, supervision, or community that we know is essential to students success. In addition, we are concerned that Edge Merrimack River’s marketing misleads students about the actual costs of living in what will be among the most expensive off-campus housing in the city of Lowell.

Safety and Security

Edge Merrimack River has marketed that they will not monitor guest access, nor have trained Residence Life staff. In contrast, we believe that these elements are critical safety components for buildings housing large numbers of students. In fact, all university owned residence halls are locked 24 hours a day with security personnel present at the entry of each building from 7pm to 7am to ensure that no unauthorized or restricted individuals gain access to private student spaces. Twenty four hour patrolling and video monitoring by UMLPD, Blue emergency phones, safety lighting, 24 hour campus EMTs, and trained residence life staff are all elements of the University’s comprehensive security plan.

The Private Student Housing Myth

Edge Merrimack River is not student only housing. Fair Housing laws and city ordinances prevent Edge Merrimack River from denying housing to non-students. Unlike other off campus properties that lease apartments as whole units, Edge Merrimack River leases individual bed spaces within an apartment. As a result, by law, Edge Merrimack River may not be able to prevent non-students of any age from being placed in apartments/bedrooms with students or in other apartments throughout the facility.

Student Support Matters

Easy access to student services such as university transportation, on-site tutoring and academic support, convenient dining options, and access to the university network are essential to student success. Edge Merrimack River residents will have limited or no access to these services in their living environment.

Cost Matters

We understand that financial aid and the impact of college debt is on everyone’s mind. Edge Merrimack River will be among the most expensive off campus housing in the Lowell market, and is more expensive than the vast majority of on campus housing options. As a result, living in Edge Merrimack River may result in significant unanticipated financial distress for students, particularly for students on financial aid.
Financial aid packages for residents are based on on-campus room and board costs. Financial aid for students living off-campus is based on off-campus rental averages. Because Edge Merrimack River’s prices are well above the rental market, students on financial aid who live there will take on greater financial liability than if they lived on campus or in other less expensive off-campus housing. Because we have received reports that Edge Merrimack River is encouraging students to sign leases prior to understanding the impact on their financial aid, we are concerned that many students won’t discover this issue until it’s too late. We encourage all students to speak with their financial aid counselor prior to considering signing a lease with Edge Merrimack River.

We hope that this letter helps clarify any questions or concerns you may have regarding the Edge Merrimack River property. We are committed to supporting our students and families. Should you have any further questions, please be in touch with the Office of Residence Life.

Sincerely,

Larry Siegel
Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and University Events