

**ANNUAL SURVEY:** BUDGETS, MAINTENANCE, AND MORE CHALLENGE HOUSING OFFICERS ➔

# LIVING ON CAMPUS

A special report from College Planning & Management magazine

May 2010

## 2010 COLLEGE HOUSING REPORT

MORE THAN JUST BEDS,  
NEW RESIDENCE HALLS OFFER  
AMENITIES AND SUSTAINABILITY

EAST HALL

COLLEGE  
Planning & Management

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# Green & Growing

Sustainability and amenities are increasing in new residence hall projects. [By Paul Abramson](#)

**R**esidence hall construction underway within the last year appears to have been very brisk. School Construction Alert, a service of the Market Data Retrieval Division of Dun & Bradstreet, identified more than 120 individual residence hall construction projects at some stage of construction during 2009. In a separate survey, we were able to identify an additional 30 projects, meaning that during the last year at least 150 colleges had completed or were involved in construction of new residence halls. For this 15th annual compilation of residence hall construction for *College Planning & Management*, we were able to compile detailed information on 51 residence hall projects opened in 2009 or under construction now and expected to be completed this year.

Two interesting trends jump out from that sample:

1. Many of the new residence halls are being constructed with green and energy-conserving goals. Several mentioned that they qualified for LEED Platinum and Silver consideration.
2. Residence halls are no longer just places where students sleep and study. Foodservice (usually vending) and preparation areas, along with laundry services, have become standard. But this year there is a notable increase in the mention of added amenities such as parking garages, grocery stores, assembly areas, backyard patios and game rooms, conference centers, planned faculty offices and campus maintenance shops, and in one case, “working fireplaces and music practice rooms.”

There was a time when residence halls were constructed as inexpensively as possible — often by outside firms that leased the buildings back to the college. While this may still be a pattern on some campuses, both the effort to meet LEED standards in construction and design and the addition of new amenities suggest that residence hall projects are being looked at as permanent additions to the college scene and should be designed and constructed for a long life.

## The National Picture

**Table 1** shows that the median residence hall being built today will cost about \$21.8M, a further drop from the \$23.8M reported a year ago and \$26M the year before that. The lower cost is likely due to the fact that these residence halls are being constructed in time to take advantage of

**Table 1** Cost and Size of Residence Halls

	All Reporting (Sample Size: 51)	Less than 200 beds (Sample size: 15)	201 to 500 beds (Sample size: 21)	500+ beds (Sample size: 21)	Public (Sample size: 38)	Private (Sample size: 13)
Total Cost	\$21,800,000	\$11,250,000	\$21,800,000	\$68,500,000	\$23,550,000	\$19,000,000
Construction Cost	\$19,000,000	\$9,000,000	\$18,430,000	\$61,000,000	\$19,993,000	\$17,180,000
Furniture and Furnishings	\$896,000	\$475,000	\$900,000	\$2,000,000	\$925,000	\$655,000
Fees	\$2,750,000	\$556,000	\$2,651,000	\$4,973,000	\$3,023,000	\$2,279,000
Other	\$1,000,000	\$200,000	\$120,000	\$1,000,000	\$771,000	\$1,150,000
Size of Project (sq. ft.)	91,000	51,404	92,246	256,367	144,328	62,000
Number of Beds	293	132	330	802	383	151
Sq. Ft. per Bed	351.2	400	331	346	347	368
Cost per Student	\$69,502	\$92,857	\$61,783	\$71,880	\$59,321	\$90,909
Cost of Furnishings per Student	\$1,656	\$1,531	\$1,800	\$1,640	\$1,531	\$2,269
Cost per Sq. Ft.	\$194	\$225	\$188	\$194	\$185	\$240

Note: The median for each variable was calculated separately; thus, component costs may not add up to total cost.

the national economic slowdown that has brought many construction projects in under budget as construction firms vie for relatively scarce jobs.

Not all respondents were able to break out the components that went into total cost, but among those who could, the median cost of construction alone was \$19M. Furniture and furnishings accounted for \$896,000 in the median residence, and fees totaled \$2,750,000. (Note: A separate median was found for each variable, so the components will not add up to the total.)

The size of that median project is 91,000 sq. ft. and it is designed to house 293 students. The median provides 351 sq. ft. per bed. One quarter of the projects provided 300 sq. ft. per bed or less. On the other end, one out of four projects provided more than 405 sq. ft. per bed, and one in 10 reported more than 500 sq. ft. per student. It should be noted, however, that these figures were found by dividing total project size by number of beds provided so that space for other than bedrooms was included. Some

projects include more non-residence space (i.e. classrooms, dining halls, and even parking garages) than others, so there is not necessarily a direct correlation between size of the project and available space per student in a resident room.

Median cost per student among these projects was \$69,502, slightly higher than a year previous. Cost per student was derived by dividing the total cost of the project by the number of student beds. Cost per square foot fell to \$193.96, and is derived by dividing total cost by gross square feet reported.

The size of the residence halls varied significantly from several small buildings (housing fewer than 100 students) to projects that housed more than 1,000. In **Table 1**, residence halls have been broken into three size groups (fewer than 200 students, 200 to 500 students, and more than 500 students); essentially, small, medium, and large projects, to see how they might differ. **Table 1** also shows

median costs and space for public colleges versus private ones.

#### Does Size Make a Difference?

The median residence hall provides 351 sq. ft. per student. Residences with fewer than 200 students tend to provide more space per bed (400 sq. ft.) while the median larger houses provide somewhat less. While in past years the larger residences appeared to cost more than smaller ones, that fact has reversed in this sample. The smaller residence halls had a median cost per bed of almost \$93,000, while the largest ones had a

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## Table 2 | What's in a Residence Hall?

	All Reporting	Less than 200 beds	201 to 500 beds	500+ beds	Public	Private
Card Access to Building	90.2%	73.3%	95.2%	100.0%	92.1%	84.6%
Card Access to Rooms	35.3%	33.3%	38.1%	35.7%	42.1%	15.4%
External Video Surveillance	84.3%	73.3%	90.5%	85.7%	84.2%	84.6%
Internal Video Surveillance	60.8%	53.3%	61.9%	64.3%	63.2%	53.8%
Rooms Air Conditioned	84.3%	86.7%	85.7%	78.6%	84.2%	84.6%
Rooms Carpeted	66.7%	53.3%	61.9%	92.9%	73.7%	46.2%
ATM	19.6%	20.0%	14.3%	28.6%	18.4%	23.1%
Vending	80.4%	60.0%	85.7%	100.0%	92.1%	46.2%
Computer Center	27.5%	20.0%	33.3%	35.7%	31.6%	23.1%
Fitness Center	15.7%	20.0%	4.8%	28.6%	13.2%	23.1%
Kitchen	72.5%	80.0%	61.9%	78.6%	65.8%	92.3%
Laundry	98.0%	93.3%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	92.3%
Study Room	78.4%	60.0%	85.7%	92.9%	84.2%	61.5%
TV Room	78.4%	53.3%	85.7%	92.9%	84.2%	61.5%
Classrooms	47.1%	26.7%	61.9%	50.0%	52.6%	30.8%
Dining Hall	17.6%	26.7%	14.3%	7.1%	21.1%	7.7%

median cost of \$71,880... almost \$21,000 per bed less. The medium-size projects with 200 to 500 beds fared even better, with a median cost of less than \$62,000 per bed.

In terms of cost per square foot, the pattern was the same. The median among the smaller houses was more expensive (\$225 per square foot) than either the large ones (\$194.13) or those that fell in the middle (\$188 per sq. ft). While these numbers may be instructive, they should also be used with care. We use medians, rather than averages, to avoid being unduly influenced by any single unusual project. On the other hand, the median among a relatively small sample can also give a false reading.

### Public Vs. Private

In looking at private institutions separately from public ones, it becomes

evident that private colleges tend to build smaller residence halls (median size is 151 students) but provide somewhat more space per bed. The median cost among 13 private college residence halls was \$19,000,000, compared to \$23,550,000 for residences on public campuses.

In terms of cost per student and cost per square foot, the private colleges are higher. This is a reversal from the findings of last year's survey. The explanation may lie in geography. In this year's sample, more than 60 percent of the reporting public institutions are located in what would traditionally be recognized as "lower construction cost" states (ranging from West Virginia and North Carolina to Texas) while more than 70 percent of the private colleges reported upon are located in what would be recognized as higher-cost states.

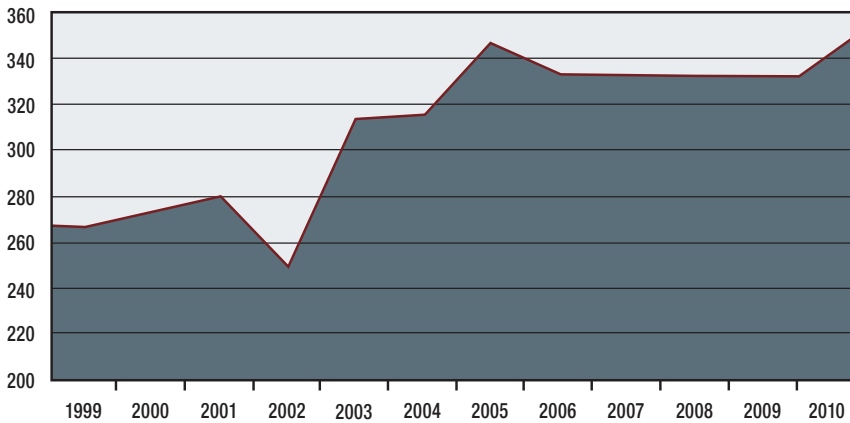


Photo courtesy of F&GAL

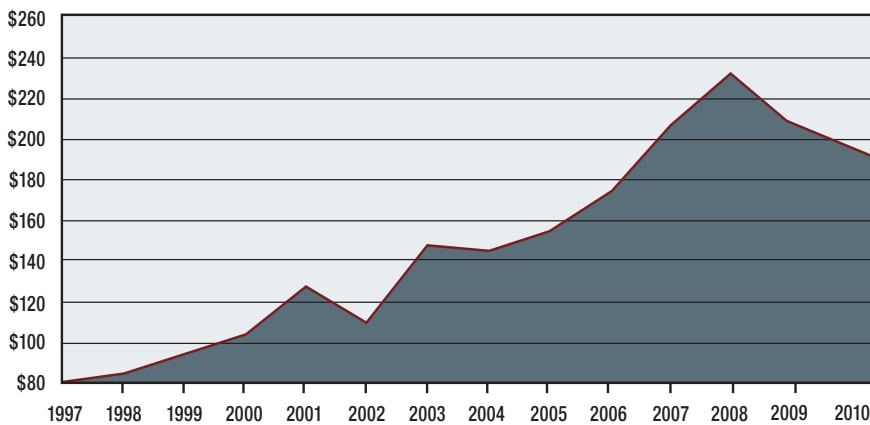
Green and sustainable features are integrated into current residence hall building design. This includes operable windows, emphasis on natural light through daylighting, built-in blinds/shutters, energy efficient windows and appliances, low-VOC paints and finishes, bike storage, and more.

Also noticeable this year is the number of projects that are seeking LEED recognition, suggesting that colleges are willing to spend a little more to make their buildings more environmentally friendly and, hopefully, longer lived.

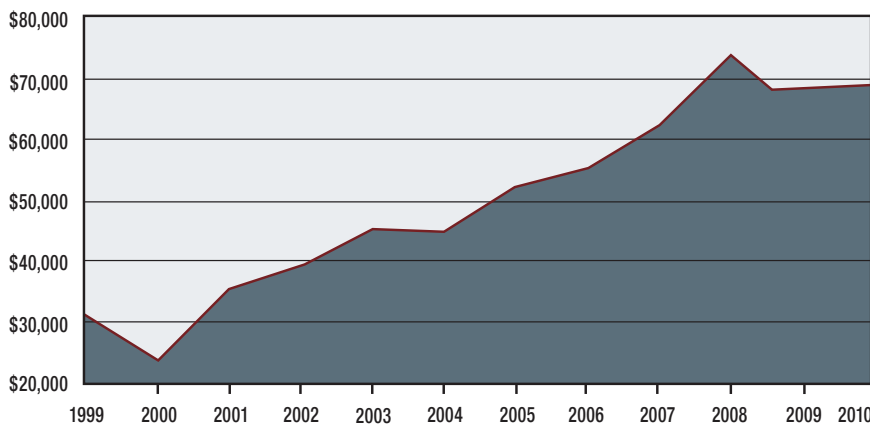
**Graph C Median Sq. Ft. per Bed**



**Graph A Median Cost per Sq. Ft.**



**Graph B Median Cost per Bed**



**Amenities Provided**

Table 2 on page 4 looks at what is provided in a residence hall — other than sleeping and living quarters — and at amenities that are available for residents. It shows, for example, that virtually every residence hall provides laundry facilities for the residents. That is expected.

Vending (80.4 percent of residence halls reporting), study rooms and TV rooms (78.4 percent), and kitchens (72.5 percent) are regularly included in residence hall projects. Smaller projects are somewhat less likely to include them. Computer centers are not so popular, probably because students are expected to log on in their rooms.

ATMs are in fewer than one in five buildings, but are in almost 30 percent of residences with 500 or more students. Fitness Centers are in just 15.7 percent of all projects but are in almost 30 percent of the larger projects and in 23 percent of those at private colleges. Almost half the residence halls include one or more classrooms.

Air conditioning is seldom an issue anymore — sleeping rooms are air-conditioned in almost 85 percent of the reporting projects — and carpeting is provided in two-thirds of the rooms. Where these amenities are not provided in the construction, students are allowed or encouraged to bring or rent them.

There is a growing concern about security, as shown by the almost 85 percent that report using external

video surveillance and the 61 percent that include more controversial indoor surveillance systems. Both are increases over past years. Card access to buildings is now used in 90 percent of the projects but the use of card access to individual rooms is down to 35 percent. It is not clear why: perhaps because of cost, perhaps because students tend to lose the cards. Only 15 percent of private colleges include them.

Judging by reports we have seen, construction of residence halls is continuing throughout the nation as colleges prepare to attract and house more students. But

they are no longer just sleeping houses (dormitories, if you will). The great majority of projects include living spaces with food (vending and kitchens), study and socializing spaces, as well as fitness rooms and more. There is an increasing use of space in residences for classrooms and for offices and other college support space. And the inclusion of retail space and parking garages attached to residence halls is a trend to be watched.

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# ...And the Survey Says

Not enough space and not enough money are two challenges campus housing officers are managing, according to our annual Living on Campus survey. **BY DEB MOORE**

**E**nrollment on college campuses is growing, but according to our 2010 Living on Campus Survey, only 58 percent of the respondents have enough residence hall space to handle even the current student population. The lack of adequate space is only one topic of concern for today's colleges and universities. To find out more about this and other issues facing colleges today, *College Planning & Management* surveyed planners, administrators, and chief housing officers from two-year and four-year colleges and universities nationwide. We had 195 of your colleagues from 44 states respond to this survey. The respondents are responsible for more 2,000 residence hall buildings — new and old, large and small. Here is what they had to say.

## How Much Space Is Enough?

When asked "How much residence hall space does your campus currently have?"

42 percent of the respondents said they were short on space. Less than five percent reported surplus space. Nearly 30 percent of those surveyed are in the process of increasing their stock in beds, with another 25 percent planning to do so within the next five years. A majority of the new residence halls being planned (78.9 percent) will be college-owned and operated. The others will be owned and operated by private developers, college foundations, 501(c)(3) housing corps, auxiliary services, or a combination of the above. This planned construction should handle the immediate shortage of space — providing a slow but steady growth in enrollment.

## Maintenance Matters

In addition to adding new space, maintaining existing residence hall facilities was of great importance to those surveyed. Many were concerned about accumulated deferred maintenance. When asked "What are your plans for upgrades/



renovations to the residence halls on your campus?” about 45 percent stated that renovation projects are currently underway. Eighteen percent reported that renovations have been put on hold due to budget constraints. Topping their to-do lists were general maintenance, painting, and repair; the replacement of carpet, furniture, and furnishings; and improvements in security and energy efficiency.

Many are noticing a growing gap between “want” and “need.” Student and parental expectations keep pushing for the conversion of rooms to suites, adding more group spaces, and adding amenities (a top priority). Unfortunately, in the current economy this is not always a possibility. For some, doing a good job on past renovation projects has come back to bite them. “In the last five years, we have had a good run of renovations, and while it is not stopping for next year, the degree of renovations we can afford is not as great. When some of our halls are 70 to 80 years old, it makes the contrast between those buildings and are newest halls or recently renovated ones that much greater, and

student perceptions are quickly turning against the non-renovated places.”

### The Students Themselves

On the topic of student expectations and behavior, concerns were expressed about alcohol use, psychological issues among students, and an “increasing lack of sense of personal responsibility or consideration of the consequences of their behaviors,” a problem exacerbated by reduced residence life staff and furloughs. “My staff and operating budget have been literally cut in half, but the same if not more needs and expectations continue.”

### How Green Is My Residence Hall?

Three out of four institutions now report that in addition to high-class amenities, students are interested in “green.” There are innovative green residence hall programs and features on many campuses, including: solar panels for domestic hot water; waterless urinals; sensors on sinks; low-water washing machines; hydration stations to provide filtered water and eliminate the need to use bottled water;

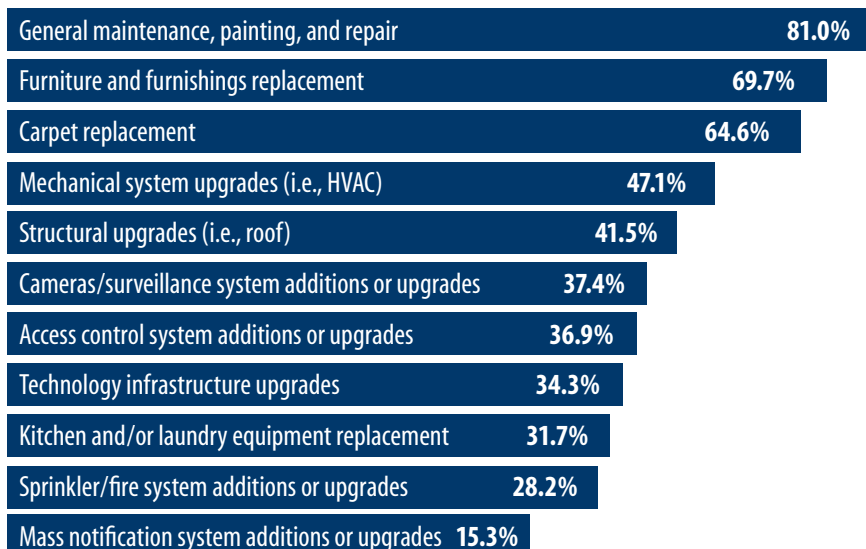
vegetable gardens; energy-saving competitions; recycling campaigns; the promotion of water-saving practices; energy stickers on light switches; and the use of recycled materials for posters and passives. Some of the more interesting programs included midnight trash runs with dumpster diving to identify items that could be recycled, and developing a “swap day” for students to donate unwanted items to local service agencies. Another innovative program included partnering with an architectural engineering class — their class project, to develop a “green room” in a residence hall. This pilot will help the institution learn how they can expand it to other rooms.

### Balancing Costs and Quality

In addition to meeting student expectations, the cost of a higher education and of living on campus was also a top concern. Parents are feeling the effects of the recession; and in turn, so do the students. Add to that the rise in the unemployment rate in the 18-30 age group and we are gearing up for the perfect storm. For some institutions this has led to problems in

## BY THE NUMBERS

### What types of renovations/upgrades are being considered in the next 3-5 years?



### Top 3 issues facing chief housing officers over the next 3-5 years:

1. Cost to students
2. Changing student expectations
3. Lack of adequate funding

filling beds. “Students are struggling financially and housing is the one thing that they do not need to finish college.” For others this has led to an inability to compete with nearby off-campus rentals. It has become a difficult balancing act for institutions to provide modern facilities that students desire while keeping room rates low. The job is made even more difficult when overhead charges are increased and housing revenues are seen as a way to help balance the checkbook.

The one thing that was not surprising to hear is that 90 percent of those surveyed felt that the quality of their on-campus residence halls played an important role in determining whether a student would attend their institution. The job of those answering this survey is not an easy one — student and parent expectations are rising, staff is being cut, funding is limited at best. But despite the odds, they are navigating the current economic crisis and staying committed to providing the best experience possible for students living on campus.


*A special thanks to all of you who have contributed to the information presented in this report.* 



Photo © Chuck Choi

Common student spaces and study rooms with open floor plans furnished with easily reconfigured furnishings help foster interaction, socialization, and collaboration within today's residence halls.

## BY THE NUMBERS

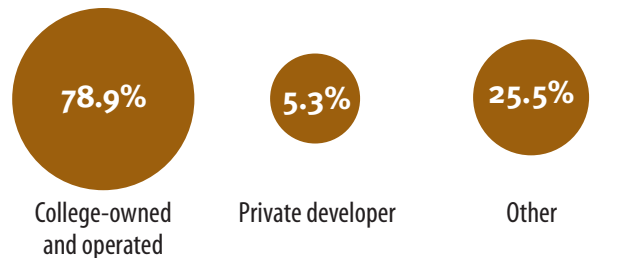
### How much residence hall space does your campus currently have?



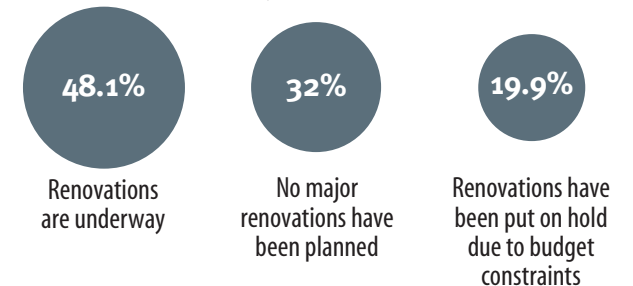
### Is your institution planning to increase the number of residence hall beds on campus?



### Who will own and operate the residence halls being planned?



### What are your plans for upgrades/renovations to the residence halls on your campus?



### How important is the quality of on-campus housing in determining whether a student will attend your institution?

