



LIVING ON CAMPUS

Downsizing Residence Halls: Space and Costs

PAUL ABRAMSON

A funny thing appears to have happened on the way to the development of college residence halls this year: The cost has fallen. While the median residence hall reported on a year ago cost almost \$74,000 per student, an equal number of halls surveyed this year cost \$69,135 per student. This interrupts a 10-year trend that had almost tripled the median cost per student from just under \$25,000 in 2000.

Are the new residence halls skimping to get costs down? Possibly, but not in ways this survey shows. Space per student remains the same (at 333 sq. ft. per bed), and such amenities as the use of card access to buildings and rooms, installation of ATMs and fitness

centers, and inclusion of classrooms and dining halls has increased.

One possible explanation: The median size of residence halls declined from 302 beds to 278. As was noted a year ago, and confirmed this year, smaller residence halls tend to cost less per square foot and per student.

These are among the findings of this 14th annual compilation of residence hall construction prepared for *College Planning & Management* magazine. For this survey, we were able to identify and collect information from 50 residence hall projects opened in 2008 or under construction now and expected to be completed this year. The data presented is from that sample.

Table 1 Cost and Size of Residence Halls

All figures shown are medians

	All Reporting (Sample Size: 50)	Less than 200 beds (Sample size: 18)	201 to 500 beds (Sample size: 19)	500+ beds (Sample size: 13)	Public (Sample size: 31)	Private (Sample size: 19)
Total Cost	\$23,759,000	\$8,000,000	\$26,000,000	\$61,850,000	\$31,950,000	\$8,407,000
Construction Cost	\$18,500,000	\$5,525,000	\$22,496,000	\$50,218,000	\$26,100,000	\$6,458,000
Furniture and Furnishings	\$900,000	\$375,000	\$1,000,000	\$2,150,000	\$1,000,000	\$600,000
Fees	\$2,459,000	\$635,000	\$2,400,000	\$5,000,000	\$3,023,000	\$814,000
Other	\$988,000	\$1,400,000	\$683,000	\$2,650,000	\$988,000	\$600,000
Size of Project (sq. ft.)	92,246	38,000	134,828	237,000	157,200	38,950
Number of Beds	278	112	358	706	416	132
Sq. Ft. per Bed	333	343	353	306	342	325
Cost per Student	\$69,135	\$57,730	\$75,605	\$78,760	\$76,168	\$61,829
Cost of Furnishings per Student	\$3,162	\$2,710	\$3,112	\$3,167	\$3,162	\$3,146
Cost per Sq. Ft.	\$207.92	\$195.39	\$212.90	\$232.19	\$217.88	\$204.77

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

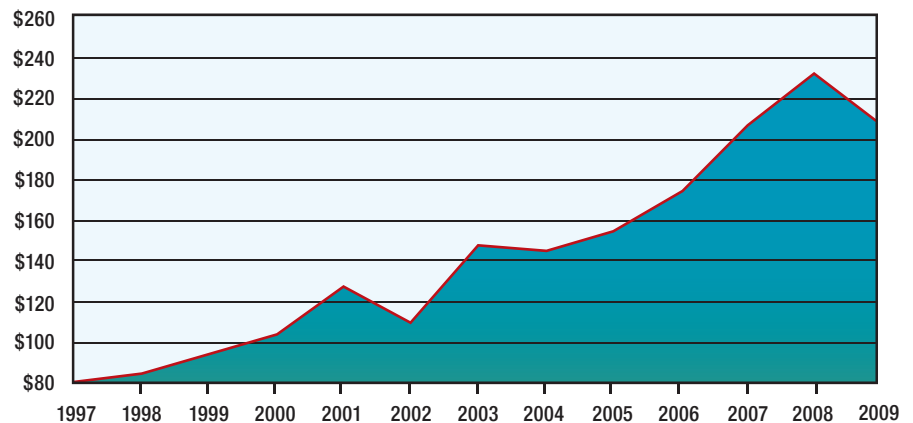
The National Picture

Table 1 shows that the median residence hall being built today will cost about \$23.8M, a considerable drop (8 percent) from the median \$26M reported a year ago. Actual construction is responsible for just under 78 percent of total cost, with the balance going to furniture and furnishings (accounting for \$900,000 in the median residence), fees (\$2,459,000) and other costs, including site work. (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 92,246 sq. ft. and it is designed to house 278 students. The median provides 333 sq. ft. per bed. (While the median is instructive, it's also interesting to note that there is a wide range, with 20 percent providing fewer than 250 sq. ft. per bed, while on the other end, 20 percent report they provide more than 400 sq. ft. per bed.)

Cost per student has fallen 6 percent from what was reported a year ago, to \$69,135. Cost per student was derived by dividing the total cost of the project by the

Graph A Median Cost per Sq. Ft.



number of student beds. Cost per sq. ft. is \$207.92, and is derived by dividing total cost by gross sq. ft. reported (**Graph A**). Some projects include more non-residence space (i.e. classrooms, dining halls) than others, so there is not necessarily a direct correlation between size of the project and available space per student in a resident room.

The size of the residence halls varied significantly, from several small buildings

(housing as few as 44 students) to one project that provided space for 2,700. In Table 1, residence halls have been broken into three size groups (fewer than 200 students, 201 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.

Table 2 What's in a Residence Hall?

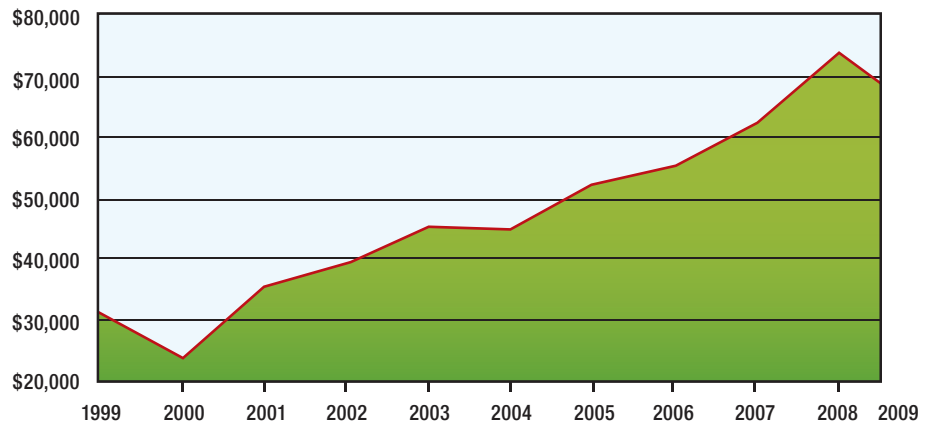
(Percent of respondents including facility/amenity)

	All Reporting	Less than 200 beds	201 to 500 beds	500+ beds	Public	Private
Card Access to Building	96.0%	88.9%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	89.5%
Card Access to Rooms	52.0%	44.4%	52.6%	61.5%	64.5%	31.6%
External Video Surveillance	60.0%	61.1%	73.7%	38.5%	58.1%	63.2%
Internal Video Surveillance	50.0%	44.4%	52.6%	53.8%	51.6%	47.4%
Rooms Air Conditioned	86.0%	88.9%	84.2%	84.6%	83.9%	89.5%
Rooms Carpeted	66.0%	66.7%	57.9%	76.9%	71.0%	57.9%
ATM	18.0%	5.6%	26.3%	23.1%	25.8%	5.3%
Vending	82.0%	72.2%	84.2%	92.3%	90.3%	68.4%
Computer Center	20.0%	11.1%	21.1%	30.8%	22.6%	15.8%
Fitness Center	32.0%	16.7%	31.6%	53.8%	32.3%	31.6%
Kitchen	82.0%	94.4%	57.9%	100.0%	77.4%	89.5%
Laundry	98.0%	94.4%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	94.7%
Study Room	76.0%	72.2%	73.7%	84.6%	77.4%	73.7%
TV Room	78.0%	61.1%	78.9%	100.0%	87.1%	63.2%
Classrooms	38.0%	27.8%	42.1%	42.6%	45.2%	26.3%
Dining Hall	20.0%	11.1%	21.1%	30.8%	22.6%	15.8%

Does Size Make a Difference?

The median residence hall provides 333 sq. ft. per student. Residences with fewer than 200 students tend to provide more space per bed, while the larger houses provide less (306). The larger ones also appear to pay more than the smaller houses, whether measured in cost per student (\$78,760 per student in residences with more than 500 beds vs. \$57,730 in smaller residence, **Graph B**) or in cost per sq. ft. (\$232.19 vs. \$195.39). Some of the difference may relate to amenities provided (larger houses more often include fitness centers and classrooms, for example) but a more significant difference may lie in the fact that all but one of the larger houses are on public campuses. Public colleges may be required to deal with factors (for example bidding laws) that private institutions can ignore.

Graph B Median Cost per Bed



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 132 students) and to provide somewhat less space per bed. The median cost among 19 private college residence halls was \$8,407,000,

compared to \$31,950,000 for residences on public campuses. In terms of cost per student and cost per sq. ft., the public colleges are higher.

What is not truly clear is whether the higher costs are associated with larger residence halls (most of which are on public campuses) or whether they are associated with public institutions (which also tend to build larger buildings). Is it the chicken or the egg?

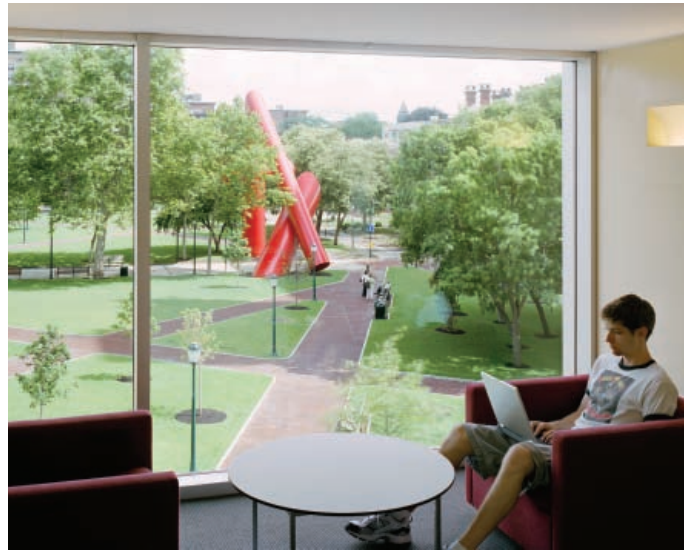
Amenities Provided

Table 2 on pg. 3 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. But there appear to be some changes in residence hall planning that may be significant for the future.

As an example, as recently as four years ago, half of residences were providing computer centers for the use of students. Today that is down to 20 percent. In smaller halls, only 11 percent provide computer centers. Presumably, with individual students bringing their computers and connecting to the Internet on their own, fewer colleges consider it necessary to provide a centralized facility. Likewise, the incidence of study rooms and TV rooms has declined, though not nearly as much. They were still available in three of four projects.

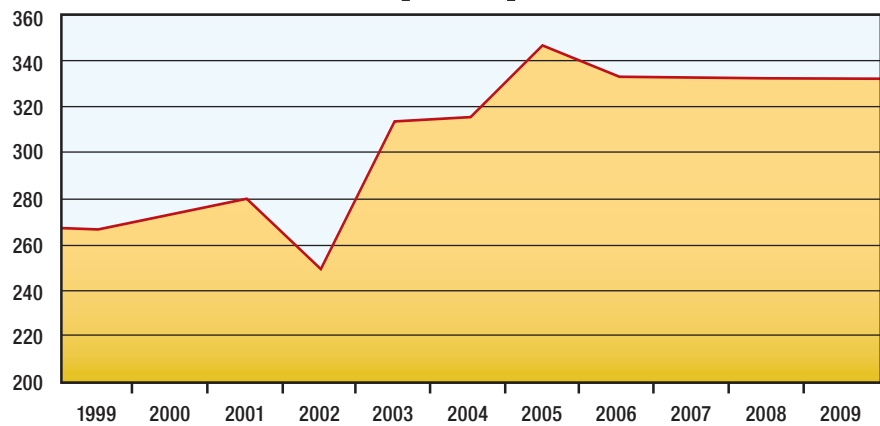
On the other hand, fitness centers once were available in fewer than 15 percent of new residence halls; this year that has doubled to 32 percent. More than half the larger residences provide fitness centers. ATMs are growing more common, but mainly in larger halls and those at public colleges.

Security is a major concern for colleges, their students, and the students' families. To increase security, 96 percent of residence halls use card access systems rather than keys to get into the buildings, and 52 percent provide key access to individual rooms. Card-access room keys were in use



More than 75 percent of schools reporting are including gathering spaces such as study rooms or TV rooms in their new residence halls.

Graph C Median Sq. Ft. per Bed



in just 11 percent of the halls as recently as four years ago.

External video surveillance has been installed around 60 percent of the buildings and internal video surveillance is inside 50 percent of the residences, both representing increases over past years. Other facilities appearing in residence halls more frequently now include classrooms (38 percent) and dining halls (one in five). Air conditioning and carpeting of student rooms appears to be on the decline.

One amenity about which we did not ask popped up on several reports: retail space. It was not stated whether the retail space was for clothing stores, food stores, fast food or restaurants, book stores or computer stores, or for stores selling sta-

tionery and sundries, but residence halls house an obvious market for all of these items and at least some colleges are making a place for them within their housing complexes. Presumably the retailers pay a rental that helps to support the housing operation. Given the rising costs of college, we may see more of this in the future. **CPM**

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Survey Says: Housing Officers Are Juggling Student Expectations With an Uncertain Economy

DEB MOORE

The events of the past year have made predicting what will happen on college campuses an interesting task. The numbers are riddled with contradictions, making it near impossible to see clear-cut trends. Take, for example, enrollment. If asked a year ago the prediction would have been for continued growth. With ongoing anxiety about the economy, many colleges are now anxiously awaiting May 1st, the National Candidate Reply Date.

What we do know is that many college-bound seniors and their families have been adversely affected by the current economic downturn, experiencing a decline in family income, a fall in the value of their investments, job losses, and a change in college plans. According to the *Student Poll* study published by the College Board: one in six indicated that the recession had forced a change in their college plans; 41 percent indicated that they are giving much more consideration to attending a public university or college close to home; 15 percent are giving much more consideration to community college; and one in five are giving much more consideration to living at home and commuting to college.

In contrast to that report, a number of colleges have reported back to us that the floundering economy has had a positive effect at their institutions, with more people heading back to school to get more education. And despite fluctuating enrollments and the rising costs for room and board, living on campus is gaining in popularity at many institutions. In the past, it was common for upperclassmen to live off campus. With the rising costs of utilities, the expense of commuting, and other expenses associated with off-campus living, many of these students are turning to the fixed costs of on-campus housing to help make ends meet.

Doing Whatever It Takes

In past surveys, “changing student expectations” were identified as a top concern of housing officers. It appears that colleges have been doing a good job upgrading their housing. This year we are hearing that the redesigned spaces and amenities being offered are one of the reasons that many students want to move back on campus. Success is creating another dilemma on some campuses: more requests for housing than available space. This shortage of space is being compounded at institutions that are aggressively recruiting additional students to help shore up their finances. It has been reported that some institutions are converting residence hall rooms into double- or triple-occupancy to handle the situation,




but it appears that the more common scenario is assigning students to supplemental spaces like lounges, guest rooms, etc.

While overcrowding is the problem on some campuses, others are seeing decreases in their housing numbers despite increases in their enrollment. Students are choosing to go to school, but can't afford to live on campus; many of them choose to live at home.

When asked the question “Do you feel the downsizing of homes will be mirrored on campus: i.e., downsizing of residence hall rooms, returning to an old-style dormitory design, or cutting back on amenities?” the answer was an overwhelming yes and no. No one saw a trend toward old-style double-loaded corridor dormitory design with gang lavatories. However, some institutions are revisiting the need for fully loaded apartment-style facilities and over-the-top amenities. The University of Georgia is now in the planning process of adding more beds on campus, and their focus has shifted back to a more traditional design. However, one significant difference relates to bathroom privacy. The majority of rooms in their new building will be doubles, and there will be one bathroom per room. This is a 2:1 ratio, and supports feedback from students regarding a strong preference for bathroom privacy.

Going for the Green

The “green” movement is still alive and well on campuses across the country. For some it is about stewardship. For others it is about recycling, water conservation, and energy-reducing challenges. On the facility side, many new projects include installing of water-saving fixtures, building to LEED standards, and making changes in operations (e.g., green cleaning). At Northwest University, double room placements are consolidated twice a year to cut down on the number of rooms using utilities. When asked the question about replacing, upgrading, and maintaining residence halls, it seems all colleges are in the same boat — not enough manpower, not enough money, and enrollment numbers still an unknown.

As for expectations — students still want new facilities, sophisticated spaces, the latest technologies, and a full complement of amenities. Parents want whatever makes their children happy. And of course they want it at a low, low price. 

A special thanks to the housing officers who contributed to the information presented in this report.