

# Special Report: College Housing 2004



Photo © Anne Gunnerson

The South Campus Commons residence facilities at the University of Maryland, College Park. Architect: Design Collective, Inc.

by Paul Abramson

In *College Planning & Management's* first annual survey of Chief Housing Officers (published in *CP&M*, June '03), the concentration was on how housing officers would plan the ideal residence hall, if they had the opportunity to do so. Most indicated they preferred co-ed residence halls of no more

than 250 students, housed in carpeted, air-conditioned double rooms or four-person apartments.

In this second annual survey, the thrust of the questions dealt more with existing residence halls, their maintenance and security, and the planning process.

Chief Housing Officers of 577 four-year colleges and universities were asked to respond to an e-mail questionnaire. Full responses were received from 83 institutions including 50 public colleges with 630,000 students and 33 private institutions with almost 103,000 students (see Table I).

The responding colleges operate 1,178 residence halls an average of more than 14 residences per campus. Altogether these colleges have 224,826 beds meaning that the average residence hall accommodates about 190 students. Residence halls at reporting private colleges average about 130 students. At the public institutions, the average number of beds in a residence hall is close to 225.

While public colleges build larger residences, they do not house as large a

**Table I: Base Numbers**

	Public	Private	Total
<b>Responses:</b>	50	33	83
Total Students	629,835	102,625	732,460
Average Number of Students	12,597	3,110	8,932
Median Number of Students	8,500	2,550	5,000
<b>Residence Halls:</b>	774	404	1,178
Beds	172,273	52,553	224,826
Add 15 percent for beds off campus (fraternity/sorority and other college-related housing units). Public colleges average 18 percent in related housing; private colleges report an additional 5 percent.			
Average No. of Beds per Campus	3,445	1,593	2,810
Median No. of Beds per Campus	2,315	1,450	1,875
<b>Number of Beds per Residence Hall:</b>			
Average	223	128	190
Median	222	121	169
<b>Percentage of Students Accommodated:</b>			
Average	28.2%	58.3%	35.1%
Median	18.6%	61.8%	31.1%



percentage of students. Overall, the responding colleges provide housing for an average of 35.1 percent of their students. The median institution provides housing for just under one-third of its students. Public colleges, on average, report that they can house 28.2 percent of their students but

the median among those reporting is just 18.6 percent. Apparently some smaller public colleges provide housing for a large portion of their students. The average private college provides beds for 58.3 percent of its students. The median private college has housing for more than six of every 10 students.

Fraternities, sororities and other college-related off-campus housing adds about 15 percent to the median college's housing stock. Public colleges report that these off-campus, college-related residences account for an additional 18 percent of their students. Private colleges have only five percent of their students in these facilities.

### Are There Enough Beds?

A surprising 53.3 percent of respondents (see Table II) said their campuses currently have "sufficient" residence hall space, with an additional 2.5 percent saying they have too much. Slightly more than 43 percent of the campus representatives said they need additional space, with almost half the private college administrators falling into that category.

Interestingly, while more than half the residence hall directors report they have sufficient space, 65 percent are on campuses that are planning to provide additional beds. Among public colleges, almost three of four report that they are planning to increase their already "sufficient" number of beds, with almost 30 percent reporting that such construction is underway now and another 45 percent expecting to build within five years. With the median public college housing just 19 percent of its students, it's interesting to speculate on what housing directors mean when they say they have sufficient residence hall space at the present time.

Among private colleges, better than 50 percent expect to increase their stock of residence halls, with 15 percent reporting that construction is now underway. Almost half of private colleges, however, report that they have no plans to build at all, pretty closely matching the 51 percent

**Table II: Construction Planned and Underway**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: How much residence hall space does your campus currently have?</b>			
Sufficient Space	55.3%	51.5%	53.8%
Too Much Space	4.3%	0.0%	2.5%
Too Little Space	40.4%	48.5%	43.7%
<b>Q: Is your college planning to increase its stock of residence hall beds?</b>			
Yes	74.5%	51.5%	65.0%
Underway Now	29.8%	15.2%	23.7%
Within Five Years	44.8%	36.3%	41.3%
No Plans	25.4%	48.5%	35.0%
<b>Q: If you do have plans to add more beds, how many would be added?</b>			
<b>Total Number of Beds Planned:</b>			
Underway Now	19,585	905	20,490
Within Five Years	7,322	3,519	10,841
Total Beds Planned	26,907	4,424	31,331
<b>Median Beds Planned</b>			
Underway Now	640	200	475
Within Five Years	300	250	300
<b>Q: If you do have plans to add more beds, will they be in:</b>			
Apartments	54.5%	41.2%	50.0%
Suites (Shared)	39.4%	41.2%	40.0%
Single Rooms/Dormitories	6.1%	17.6%	10.0%

**Table III: Who Will Build and Operate New Residence Halls?**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>They will be built by:</b>			
The College	23.5%	31.3%	26.0%
A Developer/Contractor	76.5%	68.7%	74.0%
<b>They will be operated by:</b>			
The College	91.2%	100.0%	94.0%
A Developer/Contractor	8.8%	0.0%	6.0%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

**Table IV: How Often Are Residence Halls Upgraded?**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: How often do you upgrade or otherwise make changes to existing residence halls?</b>			
<b>Median Years</b>			
Replacement of Beds	10	9	10
Replacement of Loose Furniture	10	10	10
Replacement of Lounge Furniture	10	8	9
Replacement of Kitchen Equipment	10	10	10
Replacement of Laundry Equipment	7	5	5
Replacement of Carpeting	7	6	7
Facilities Repaired and Repainted	4	1	2



who say the space they currently have available is sufficient.

How much is being built? The reporting colleges say they are presently involved in building residence halls with 20,490 beds, 19,585 (96 percent) of which will be at public colleges. Their estimate is that they will be

building an additional 10,841 beds through the next five years, more evenly split among public (67.5 percent) and private (32.5 percent) colleges.

The median public college currently constructing is providing 640 new beds in its ongoing projects. Looking ahead five years, the median public college expects to add an additional 300 beds. The median private college with construction now underway is planning to add 200 new beds. The median among those with five-year plans is 250 beds per campus.

Who will build new residence halls? Almost three-quarters of the responding colleges (Table III) say they will have a developer or contractor undertake the project, while 26 percent will build their own residence halls. Once the facility is built, 94 percent of all colleges expect to operate the new residence halls themselves; while six percent will leave that

**Table V: Do Students Participate in Planning Decisions?**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: Do you have a mechanism for soliciting input from students when planning a new residence hall or remodeling an existing one?</b>			
No Mechanism for Student Input	6.5%	9.4%	7.7%
<b>Student opinions are solicited concerning:</b>			
	Percent of colleges indicating participation		
Building Amenities	83.7%	100.0%	90.3%
Room Amenities	95.4%	96.6%	95.8%
Personal Amenities	55.8%	72.4%	62.5%
Type of Furniture	86.1%	82.8%	84.7%
Communications	39.5%	37.9%	38.9%
Security	27.9%	24.1%	26.4%
Technology	37.2%	34.5%	36.1%



to the developer. All of the private colleges will manage their own residence halls, no matter who builds them.

### ***Replacement and Upgrading Policies***

Residence halls deteriorate for a number of

reasons — including age, how they were built in the first place (quality of construction and furnishings), change in style (creating apartments in what were once traditional dormitories) and, of course, the wear and tear caused by residents.

Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that despite the certainty of deterioration, they have no policy on upgrading or replacing equipment in their existing facilities. Among colleges that have a policy on upgrading and replacement of equipment (see Table IV), beds are replaced every ten years, loose furniture every ten years and lounge furniture slightly more often. Kitchen equipment is also replaced every ten years but laundry equipment lasts an average of only five years. Carpeting is pulled up and replaced on a seven-year cycle. Facilities are scheduled for repair and repainting every two years.

### ***What Do Students Want?***

Student input is regularly solicited when colleges plan new residence facilities or the remodeling of existing space. Just 7.7 percent (Table V) of respondents indicated they had no mechanism for student input; the balance do.

Ninety percent of colleges seek student input on building amenities and 96 percent ask students about room amenities, including air conditioning, refrigerators and microwave ovens. Eighty-five percent consult students concerning furniture.

When it comes to communications, security and technology, student input is more limited. Less than 40 percent of colleges seek student comment on communications and technology. Students participate in security planning at more than one-quarter of the reporting campuses.

### ***Major Issues Facing Chief Housing Officers***

What are the major issues Chief Housing Officers will have to deal with over the next five years? Respondents were asked to select three from a list of 13 offered by the survey instrument. As Table VI shows, the major concern on most campuses revolves



around the existing stock of housing, the need to upgrade existing space (chosen by 58.2 percent of respondents) and the cost of getting the job done (cited by 46.8 percent).

While overall costs and maintenance were the chief concerns of chief housing officers, with close to 50 percent or more selecting them, staffing in general was a major concern of almost 30 percent and security of more than a quarter of the respondents.

While the percentages among these five major concerns varied slightly between public and private institutions, the level of concern was relatively close. Private colleges seem to worry less about upgrading existing space (it may have been built better in the first place) and more about student costs and budget cuts, but the differences are not huge. Staffing and security get about the same amount of concern among all colleges.

Major differences occur, however, after that. Private colleges rank drug and alcohol use as one of their major concerns

**Table VI:  
What Major Problems Are Expected in the Next Five Years?**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: What do you see as the major issues facing chief housing officers over the next five years? (Select three.)</b>			
Upgrading Existing Space	67.4%	45.5%	58.2%
Costs to Students	50.5%	57.6%	53.2%
Budget Cuts Affecting Maintenance & Operations	41.3%	54.5%	46.8%
Staffing	26.1%	33.3%	29.1%
Security	23.9%	27.3%	25.3%
Drug/Alcohol Use	10.9%	45.5%	25.3%
Keeping Beds Filled	26.1%	15.2%	21.5%
Adding Technology	15.2%	24.2%	19.0%
Providing Add'l Amenities	13.0%	15.2%	13.9%
Lack of Space	10.9%	12.1%	11.4%
Competition from Private Housing Complexes	13.0%	9.1%	11.4%
Vandalism	4.3%	6.1%	5.1%
Banning Smoking	4.3%	0.0%	2.5%
Other	8.7%	3.0%	6.3%



(45.5 percent of housing officers picked that as a major problem), while just 11 percent of public housing officers considered that a significant problem.

On the other hand, better than one-quarter of public college administrators worry about keeping their existing beds filled, while that was

of concern to just 15 percent of their private college colleagues. Private colleges are more concerned with the need to add technology (24 percent), compared to public (15 percent).

Vandalism and banning smoking in residence halls rank very low on the list of concerns. Is that because they are lesser problems or because they are simply accepted as a problem that must be faced but not considered a significant concern?

### ***The Importance of Housing***

Does availability and quality of on-campus housing play a significant role in the college recruitment process? Chief housing officers believe they do. More than 60 percent (Table VII) said the availability of on-campus housing is very important when students choose where they will go to college; another 28 percent said it was “important.” Just two percent thought it plays no role at all.

As to the quality of that housing, better than 91 percent said it was important or very important while less than three percent felt it played no role at all. Assuming that these sentiments are accurate, and reflect the opinion of admissions officers, it would seem that the dollar crunch chief housing officers see affecting their ability to upgrade, maintain and staff existing residence halls should be considered a major concern to the entire college community.

### ***Do You Have a Master Plan?***

How well do colleges master plan their residence hall needs? Almost 39 percent of respondents said their college has a master plan for residence hall construction, maintenance and financing, and presumably, follows it (Table VIII). Twice as many public colleges (48.8 percent) as private ones (24.2 percent) have such plans.

Interestingly, another 37 percent said their college has a plan but that it is not always followed. Almost 46 percent of private colleges fall into that category. Almost one-quarter of all colleges (and 30 percent of private ones) admit to having no plan at all for residence hall construction, maintenance and financing.



However, master plan or no, colleges are undertaking major projects in their residence halls over the next three to five years. Four out of five report that they will be painting residence halls during that period, while almost as many expect to be replacing carpeting and furniture before the end of the decade.

More than 50 percent of all colleges have major projects scheduled to upgrade fire safety systems, upgrade their HVAC and to improve security. (Security upgrades will be undertaken in better than 60 percent of public colleges, but at only 42 percent of private ones). More than half the colleges reporting will also be adding a keying or card system or upgrading the ones they have.

About one of three colleges will be undertaking a major upgrade to their electrical systems. One in five will be remodeling existing rooms

to create suites and other improved living quarters.

### Sprinklers

Sprinkler systems were reported in place in all residence halls by more than than 20 percent of the respondents (see Table IX), with more than one-quarter of the private colleges saying all their residences are sprinklered. Almost 40 percent of the campuses report that many — but not all — residences they control have sprinkler systems. Another 40 percent reported that few or none of their residences include them.

Asked whether they were planning to add sprinkler systems, better than 25 percent of the respondents said they were in the process of doing that right now. Another 31 percent will be adding sprinkler systems in the next three to five

years, but almost 44 percent of colleges that do not have sprinkler systems in all their residence halls have no plans to add them at the present time.

Most of the colleges that will not add sprinkler systems report that the fire marshals in their area do not require them (55 percent). Another 32 percent indicate that such systems are simply too expensive (with almost 43 percent of the private colleges citing that as a factor). The problem of potential vandalism, which has been used in the past as a reason not to install sprinkler systems, is not a factor.

### Security Systems

When it comes to security systems, colleges are significantly more active (see Table X). Just slightly more than 10 percent of the respondents indicated that their existing security systems are “complete,” which I took to mean have been upgraded to the point that the college is satisfied with them at the present time. Another 31 percent reported that security systems are being upgraded now, while one-third said such upgrades will take place within the next three to five years. However, 25 percent of all colleges reported that they have no plans for increasing security systems in the foreseeable future.

**Table VII: Availability and Quality of On-Campus Housing**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: In your opinion, how important is the availability of on-campus housing in determining whether a student will attend your college?</b>			
Very Important	55.6%	66.7%	60.3%
Important	33.3%	21.2%	28.2%
Not Very Important	11.1%	6.1%	8.9%
Plays Little Roll	0.0%	6.0%	2.6%
<b>Q: In your opinion, how important is the quality of on-campus housing in determining whether a student will attend your college?</b>			
Very Important	41.3%	54.6%	46.9%
Important	52.2%	33.3%	44.3%
Not Very Important	6.5%	6.1%	6.3%
Plays Little Roll	0.0%	6.0%	2.5%

**Table VIII: Master Planning**

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: Does your college have a master plan for residence hall construction, maintenance and financing?</b>			
Yes, we have a plan	48.8%	24.2%	38.5%
Have plan, but it is not always followed	31.2%	45.5%	37.1%
No, we handle issues as they come up	20.0%	30.3%	24.4%
<b>Q: What major projects are you considering for existing residence hall over the next three to five years? (check all that apply)</b>			
Painting	78.3%	84.8%	81.0%
Replacement of Furniture and Furnishings	82.6%	72.7%	78.5%
Replacement of Carpeting/Flooring	82.6%	72.7%	78.5%
Upgrade Fire Safety Systems	58.7%	57.6%	58.2%
Upgrade HVAC	56.5%	48.5%	53.2%
Upgrade Security	60.9%	42.4%	53.2%
Add/Upgrade Keying or Card System	52.2%	54.5%	53.2%
Major Electrical Upgrade	34.8%	30.3%	32.9%
Remodeling Rooms to Create Suites	26.1%	18.2%	22.8%
Other	17.4%	3.0%	11.4%

### Table IX: Sprinkler Systems

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: Are your residence halls sprinklered?</b>			
Yes, all have sprinklers	15.6%	27.3%	20.5%
Many have sprinklers	35.5%	45.4%	39.8%
No, few or none have sprinklers	48.9%	27.3%	39.7%
<b>Q: If you do not have sprinklers in residence halls, are you planning to add them?</b>			
In the process of doing that now	20.0%	35.0%	25.5%
Will add sprinklers over next three to five years	37.1%	20.0%	30.9%
Not planning to add sprinklers	42.9%	45.0%	43.6%
<b>Q: If not planning to, why?</b>			
Fire marshal does not require	60.0%	42.8%	54.6%
Too expensive	20.0%	42.9%	31.8%
Vandalism	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	20.0%	14.3%	13.6%

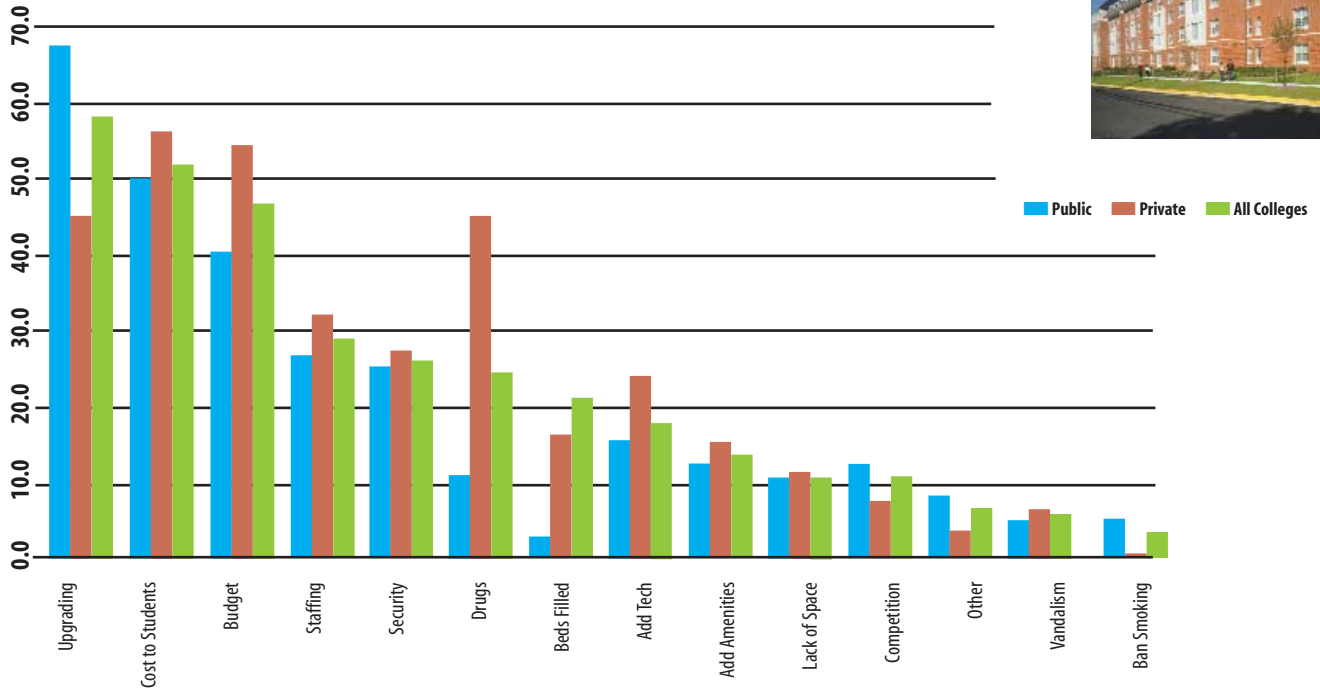
### Table X: Security Systems

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: Are you planning to upgrade security systems in residence halls?</b>			
Have completed security systems	4.4%	21.2%	11.5%
Yes, in process now	37.8%	21.2%	30.8%
Yes, over next three to five years	33.4%	33.4%	33.3%
No plans at this time	24.4%	24.2%	24.4%
<b>Q: What steps are you taking to upgrade residence hall security systems?</b>			
Increased lighting in area	62.5%	63.2%	62.7%
Installing security cameras around residence halls	68.8%	47.4%	60.8%
Installing keycard system for buildings	62.5%	57.9%	60.8%
Installing security cameras in residence halls	59.3%	31.6%	49.0%
Installing emergence communication kiosks, call boxes, panic alarms	31.2%	42.1%	35.3%
More security patrols	31.2%	26.3%	29.4%
Installing keycard system for rooms	31.3%	26.3%	29.4%
Adding security/reception posts at entrance	15.6%	26.3%	19.6%
Other	3.1%	5.3%	3.9%
<b>Q: If installing or currently using a keycard system, what are the cards used for?</b>			
To enter residence halls	62.9%	80.0%	70.0%
To enter residence hall rooms	42.9%	32.0%	38.3%
To enter other buildings/rooms	40.0%	32.0%	36.7%
Use one-card system for many campus functions	60.0%	56.0%	58.3%
<b>Q: If you use a keycard system, does it record data on who uses facilities and when?</b>			
Yes	87.4%	100.0%	93.4%
No	6.3%	0.0%	3.3%
Not sure	6.3%	0.0%	3.3%

### Table XI: What Is in a Typical Residence Hall?

	Public	Private	All Colleges
<b>Q: Do your residence halls include any of the following?</b>			
Laundry Rooms	97.8%	89.5%	94.0%
Study Rooms	57.0%	73.7%	81.0%
Group Kitchens	73.9%	68.4%	71.4%
Game rooms/Rec rooms	71.7%	60.5%	66.7%
Computer Labs	23.9%	42.1%	59.4%
Classrooms	54.3%	39.5%	47.6%
Fitness Centers	34.8%	18.4%	27.4%
Faculty Offices	30.4%	7.9%	20.2%
Cafeterias	26.1%	5.3%	16.7%
Coffee Shops/Snack Bars	21.7%	7.9%	15.5%
Libraries	2.2%	2.6%	2.4%

## What Major Problems Are Expected in Next Five Years





Interestingly, when describing the steps they are taking to increase security, increased lighting was the major upgrade reported by the largest number of respondents. Installing security cameras around residence halls and installing keycard systems for buildings are the other steps being

taken by more than 60 percent of the colleges.

Almost half the colleges say they are installing security cameras in their residence halls, a process that is more popular in public colleges (almost 60 percent) than private (32 percent).

Thirty-five percent report the installation of emergency communication kiosks, call boxes and panic alarms so that help can be called as a security measure, but almost 30 percent will also increase their security patrols, so that more help is in the area.

The area around residence halls will be made more secure with lighting, alarms and patrols, but inside the halls, improvements are being made, too, with almost 30 percent installing keycard systems for room entrance and 20 percent adding security/reception posts at residence hall entrances.

Most colleges (70 percent) that are moving to keycard systems as a security measure will use them to allow people to enter the residence halls themselves. Almost 40 percent also will use them as room keys. Card keys issued to students will also allow admission to other buildings and rooms on 37 percent of the campuses. Almost 60 percent of respondents simply said that their keycard systems are already in use for many campus functions.

### ***What Is a Residence Hall?***

Everybody knows what a residence hall is. Ask any parent or high school student. A residence hall is a place where students live, study and sleep. But is that all there is? Not so, according to chief housing officers. They report that in addition to residents' rooms, 94 percent of their halls also include laundry rooms and 81 percent include study rooms.

Okay, that's not surprising and would not surprise parents or high school students who would expect that a quiet space and a place to wash clothing would be available. That 71 percent of residence halls have group kitchens, 66 percent include game rooms and almost 60 percent include computer labs seems to fit nicely with the life styles of most college students.



It was more surprising (Table XI) to find that classrooms will be found in almost half the residence halls. On the negative side, only slightly more than one of four residences includes a fitness center.

Faculty offices are in 20 percent of the residence halls, cafeterias in 17 percent and coffee shops or snack bars in 15 percent. Less than three percent have libraries, but considering the availability of computer labs and study halls, the lack of an actual library seems inconsequential.

In any case, the simple answer is that there's more to a typical residence hall than simply a

place to sleep. Today's residence hall provides space to study, for communications and for preparing food. And in a growing number, there are places to take classes, meet faculty, exercise and be fed. One wonders why a student would ever have to leave. Perhaps they don't. **CPM**

*Paul Abramson is the education industry analyst for College Planning & Management magazine and the president of Stanton Leggett & Associates, an education consulting firm located in Larchmont, N.Y. He can be reached at <intelled@aol.com>.*

## RESIDENCE HALL CONSTRUCTION IN 2004

Fifty-seven residence hall projects currently underway were identified in *College Planning & Management's* annual study of college construction (see *CP&M*, February 2004). As reported then, the median among that group contained 93,550 sq. ft. and cost \$133.33 per square foot to build. The cost of the median project among that 57 was \$12 million.

A follow-up survey to those institutions resulted in detailed information from 24 projects. Additional data was sought on their costs and size along with new information on their amenities. The results are shown below.

The median residence hall among the 24 responding will house 385 students (see Table 1) and cost \$18,293,000 to complete. Of that \$18.3 million, almost 89 percent (\$16,196,500) represented the actual cost of construction. Another 5.5 percent (\$1,000,000) went to furniture and furnishings. Fees consumed \$1,727,046 (9.4 percent). The balance went to miscellaneous items, usually site preparation.

In terms of cost per student, the median residence hall under construction right now will spend a little less than \$45,000 per student for its facilities, with costs ranging from a low of \$25,862 per student to a high of \$114,641. The median cost per square foot is \$145.47. In terms of space, the median allocation is 316 square feet per student.

While the amount spent on furniture and furnishings is a relatively small part of the cost, it is interesting to note that the median cost per student for these items was \$2,495.

Most of the residence halls reported will be coeducational but three colleges noted that they will have planned space for families. Three out of four colleges reported that they are doing the building; the other 25 percent are having their residence hall built for them by an outside developer.

Table 2 looks at the percentage of residence halls that contain each of the mentioned facilities or amenities. For example, 75 percent will have kitchens, but only 25 percent report that they will have any type of fitness center. That, however, is significantly more than the 14 percent reported last year. A dining hall will be found in eight percent and laundry facilities of some sort in all of them.

Vending is available in 96 percent of the residences but ATMs are relatively rare, found in just three of the 24 reporting. Card access to buildings will be available in 79 percent of the residence halls. Card access to individual rooms will be in 38 percent and 52 percent will have video surveillance, both increases from a year ago, indicating that security is a growing concern. Eighty-three percent of the new residence halls will be air-conditioned, and 71 percent will put carpeting in the rooms.

**Table 1**  
**Cost and Size of Residence Halls**  
(Results from a survey of 24 residence halls currently underway)

All figures shown are medians

Total Cost	\$18,293,000
Construction Cost	\$16,196,500
Furniture and Furnishings	\$1,000,000
Fees	\$1,727,046
Size of Project (square feet)	125,850
Number of Students	385
Square Feet per Student	316
Cost per Student	\$44,996
Cost of Furnishings per Student	\$2,495
Cost per Square Foot	\$145.47

**Table 2**  
**What's in a New Residence Hall?**  
(Percent of respondents including facility/amenity)

Laundry	100%
Vending	96%
Study Room	96%
TV Room	83%
Rooms Air Conditioned	83%
Card Access to Building	79%
Kitchen	75%
Rooms Carpeted	71%
Computer Center	54%
Video Surveillance	52%
Classrooms	42%
Card Access to Rooms	38%
Fitness Center	25%
ATM	13%
Dining Hall	8%