

Special Report: College Housing

Better than 67 percent of all respondents to our first survey and special report on college housing say their colleges are planning to build more residence hall space.

by Paul Abramson

What kinds of residence halls are administrators planning to build, and how many students will they accommodate? Are students involved in decision making and, if so, how? Are there plans in place to ensure regular maintenance and improvement of existing residence halls? These are among the key questions asked and answered for COLLEGE PLANNING & MANAGEMENT's first special report on college housing.

Chief housing officers of 794 four-year colleges and universities were asked to respond to an e-mail questionnaire. Representatives of 118 institutions (14.1 percent) responded to the survey, including 67

public colleges with 788,000 students and 51 private institutions with 147,400 students (see Table 1). The total (935,400 students) represents slightly more than 10 percent of all students in four-year colleges in the United States. (Chief housing officers of two-year colleges were also asked to respond, but the rate of response was too low to be useful.)

The responding colleges operate 1,323 residence halls ranging in size from just seven students to more than 7,300 students. The median campus, both public and private, has 11 residence halls. Altogether, these colleges have 221,207 beds, meaning that the average residence hall accommodates about 167 students. Residence halls at private colleges average about 100 students per building. At the public institutions, the average number of beds in a residence hall is greater than 200.

While public colleges build larger residences, they do not house as large a percentage of students. Overall, the responding colleges provide housing for an average of 23.5 percent of their students. The median institution provides housing for one-third of its students. Public colleges, on average, report that they can house 20.6 percent of their students. The average private college provides beds for 38.6 percent of its students. The median private college has housing for half its students.

Fraternities, sororities and other college-related, off-campus housing adds about 15 percent to the median college's housing stock.

TABLE 1: Base Numbers

	Public	Private	Total
Institutions	67	51	118
Total Students	788,004	147,366	935,370
Average Number of Students	11,761	2,890	7,927
Median Number of Students	9,600	1,667	4,246
Residence Halls	758	565	1,323
<i>Both public and private colleges average just more than 11 residence halls per campus.</i>			
Beds	163,804	57,403	221,207
Average No. of Beds per Campus	2,500	1,155	1,929
Median No. of Beds per Campus	2,385	950	1,435
<i>Add 15 percent for Beds Off Campus (fraternity/sorority and other college-related housing units).</i>			
Number of Beds per Residence Hall:			
Average	216	102	167
Median	235	108	158
Percentage of Students Accommodated:			
Average	20.6%	38.6%	23.5%
Median	20.7%	50.0%	33.1%

Are There Enough Beds?

Asked whether their college has enough residence hall space, too much or too little, it was interesting (see Table 2) to see an almost equal split between those colleges that have enough beds now and those that need more housing (47.1 percent). The balance of respondents (5.7 percent) say their colleges now have an overabundance of residence hall space.

Although they already have housing for a larger percentage of their students, private colleges are less satisfied with their current stock, with 50 percent

saying they do not have enough. At public colleges, 51.8 percent of respondents say that they have sufficient space.

Better than 67 percent of all respondents say they are planning to build more residence hall space, including many colleges with sufficient space. Presumably, they are either planning for a growing campus or are planning to replace existing residence halls that are not up to modern standards.

Actually, 28.8 percent of respondents have projects underway right now, including 22.7 percent of the private institutions and 34.5 percent of the public colleges. Another 38.5 percent expect to build within five years; fully 45.5 percent of the private colleges indicate that construction of residence halls is on their agenda. Just under one-third of all colleges indicate that they expect no residence construction at all during the next five years.

How much is being built? The reporting colleges say they are presently building residence halls with 12,821 beds, 10,390 of which will be at public colleges. Their estimate is that they will build an additional 16,061 beds through the next five years, with almost 10,000 of those at public institutions.

While it is risky to read too much into this sample, it can be postulated that, if colleges representing just more than 10 percent of all students in four-year colleges currently are building or planning residence halls with 28,882 beds, then all four-year colleges in the United States may well be building and/or planning as many as 280,000 new beds within the next five years.

The median public college currently building is providing 483 new beds in its ongoing projects. Looking ahead five years, the median public college expects to add an additional 350 beds. The median private college with construction now underway is planning to add 136 new beds. The median among those with five-year plans is 175 beds per campus.

It is not surprising to see that the traditional residence hall with its gang toilets is losing favor. Only 16 percent of colleges building now or planning to

TABLE 2: Construction Planned and Underway

	Public	Private	All Colleges
Q: How much residence hall space does your campus currently have?			
Sufficient Space	51.8%	40.9%	47.2%
Too Much Space	3.4%	9.1%	5.7%
Too Little Space	44.8%	50.0%	47.1%
Q: Is your college planning to increase its stack of residence hall beds?			
Yes	67.3%	68.2%	67.3%
Underway Now	34.5%	22.7%	28.8%
Within Five Years	32.8%	45.5%	38.5%
No Plans	32.7%	31.8%	32.7%
Q: If you do have plans to add more beds, how many would be added?			
Total Number of Beds Planned:			
Underway Now	10,390	2,431	12,821
Within Five Years	9,846	6,215	16,061
Total Beds Planned	20,236	8,646	28,882
Median Beds Planned			
Underway Now	483	136	219
Within Five Years	350	175	200
Q: What kinds of accommodations will be provided?			
Apartments	48.9%	45.5%	48.2%
Shared Facilities	34.1%	39.4%	35.8%
Traditional Residence Halls	17.0%	15.1%	16.0%

TABLE 3: Who Will Build and Operate New Residence Halls?

	Public	Private	All Colleges
They Will Be Built By:			
The College	48.8%	48.5%	48.7%
A Developer/Contractor	51.2%	51.5%	51.3%
They Will Be Run By:			
The College	80.9%	100.0%	87.5%
A Developer/Contractor	10.6%	0.0%	7.5%
Other	8.5%	0.0%	5.0%

TABLE 4: How Often Are Residence Halls Upgraded?

	Public	Private	All Colleges
Q: How often do you upgrade or otherwise make change to existing residences?			
There is no policy for upgrading or replacing equipment.	44.8%	85.3%	52.0%
Q: If there is a policy, how often are the following scheduled to take place?			
	Median Years		
Replacement of Beds	9	10	10
Replacement of Furniture	15	11	15
Replacement of Kitchen Equipment	11	7	10
Replacement of Carpeting	10	5	8
Facilities Repaired and Repainted	3	3	3

TABLE 5: Do Students Participate in Planning Decisions?

	Public	Private	All Colleges
Q: What input do you solicit from students when planning a new residence hall or remodeling an existing one?			
No Mechanism for Student Input	6.9%	14.3%	11.8%
Student Opinions Are Solicited Concerning:			
	Percent of Colleges Indicating Participation		
Building Amenities	94.3%	88.9%	92.1%
Room Amenities	83.0%	75.0%	79.8%
Type of Furniture	73.6%	83.3%	77.5%
Communications	77.4%	63.9%	71.9%
Personal Amenities	69.8%	58.3%	65.2%
Security	41.5%	38.9%	40.4%

build within five years will provide more of that type of accommodation. There is little difference in preference between public and private colleges.

Who will build new residence halls? Almost 52 percent of the responding colleges (see Table 3) say they will have a developer or contractor undertake the project, while 48 percent will build their own residence halls. Once the facility is built, 87.5 percent of all colleges expect to operate the new residence halls themselves; another 7.5 percent will leave that to the developer. Some five percent of the respondents are looking for some joint operational process, perhaps with the developer maintaining the buildings and the colleges taking responsibility for assigning students and maintaining order.

Replacement and Upgrading Policies

Building new space to meet demand is obviously important. But equally important is the upkeep and improvement of existing facilities. 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 residence halls) and, of course, normal wear and tear.

More than half the respondents indicate that, despite the certainty of deterioration, they have no policy on upgrading or replacing equipment in their existing facilities (see Table 4). More than 85 percent of private colleges indicate they have no such policy. Apparently, once a residence hall is open, it is expected to last.

Among colleges that have a policy on upgrading and replacement of equipment, beds are replaced every 10 years, furniture every 15 years, kitchen equipment every 10 years and carpeting every eight years. Facilities are scheduled for repair and repainting every three years. It is noteworthy that, while most private colleges do not have a policy on upgrading or replacing equipment, those that do tend to do it more often than their public counterparts.

What Do Students Want?

Student input is regularly solicited when colleges plan new residence facilities or the remodeling of existing space. Just 11.8 percent (see Table 5) of respondents indicate that they have no mechanism for student input; the balance do.

Ninety-two percent of administrators seek student input on such building amenities as laundry and exercise rooms. Eighty percent ask students about room amenities, including air conditioning, refrigerators and microwave ovens, and three out of four give students an opportunity to chime in on the type of furniture to be used. (Some administrators mention asking furniture manufacturers to bring samples to campus so students can view and test them.)

Student input on communications availability, including television and Internet connectivity, is sought at 72 percent of the campuses. Students on 65 percent of the campuses are asked for their opinions on such personal amenities as whether residence halls will be coed or single sex and whether smoking

will be permitted.

When it comes to security, student opinions are sought less often. Just 40.4 percent of the colleges responding say that students are asked for input concerning security systems.

Major Issues Facing Chief Housing Officers

What are the major issues chief housing officers have to deal with through the next five years? Respondents were asked to select three from a list of 11. As Table 6 shows, the major concerns on most

Residence Hall Construction in 2003

by Paul Abramson

Sixty-eight residence hall projects currently underway were identified in COLLEGE PLANNING & MANAGEMENT'S annual study of college construction (see COLLEGE PLANNING & MANAGEMENT, February 2003, page 16). As reported

then, the median among that group contained 52,250 sq. ft. and cost \$130.04 per sq. ft. to build. The cost of the median project among that 68 is \$10 million.

TABLE 1: Cost and Size of Residence Halls
(Results from a survey of 28 residence halls currently underway.)

All figures shown are medians

Total Cost	\$14,502,000
Construction Cost	\$12,472,000
Furniture and Furnishings	\$827,000
Fees	\$1,146,000
Size of Project (square feet)	110,000
Number of Students	388
Square Feet per Student	313
Cost per Student	\$45,271
Cost of Furnishings per Student	\$2,155
Cost per Square Foot	\$148.03

A follow-up survey to those institutions resulted in detailed information from 28 projects. Additional data was sought on their cost and size, along with new information on their amenities. Here are the results.

The median residence hall among the 28 responding will house 388 students (see Table 1) and cost \$14,502,000 to complete. Of that \$14.5 million, about 86 percent (\$12,472,000) represents the cost of actual construction. Another 5.7 percent (\$827,000) is going to furniture and furnishings. Fees consume \$1,146,000 (7.9 percent). The balance goes to miscellaneous items, usually site preparation.

In terms of cost per student, the median residence hall under construction right now will spend a little more than \$45,000 per student for its facilities, with costs ranging from a low of \$27,500 per student to a high of \$82,400. The median cost per sq. ft. is \$148.03. In terms of space, the median allocation is 313 sq. ft. 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 is \$2,155.

All of the residence halls reported will be coeducational, and one college noted that it will have planned space for families. Three out of four colleges reported that they are doing the building; the other 25 percent are having the 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, 86 percent will have kitchens, but only 14 percent report that they will have any type of fitness center. A dining hall will be found in 11 percent and a library of some sort in all of them.

Vending is available in all of the residences, but ATMs are relatively rare, found in just three of the 28 reporting. Card access to buildings will be found in 86 percent of the residence halls but card access to individual rooms will be in only 25 percent. Almost all of the new residence halls will be air-conditioned, and 68 percent will put carpeting in the rooms. Thirty-nine percent are installing video surveillance systems.

TABLE 2: What's in a New Residence Hall?
(Percent of respondents who are including each facility/amenity)

Kitchen	86%
Fitness Center	14%
Dining Hall	11%
Library	100%
Vending	100%
ATM	11%
TV Room	75%
Study Room	86%
Computer Center	46%
Classrooms	39%
Card Access to Building	86%
Card Access to Rooms	25%
Video Surveillance	39%
Rooms Carpeted	68%
Rooms Air Conditioned	96%

TABLE 6: What Major Problems Are Expected Through the Next Five Years?

	Public	Private	All Colleges
Q: What do you see as the major issues facing you through the next five years? Select Three.			
Lack of Space	14.3%	18.6%	16.7%
Overbuilding	2.9%	0.0%	1.3%
Costs	45.7%	39.5%	42.3%
Upgrading Existing Space	54.3%	58.1%	56.4%
Banning Smoking	2.9%	4.7%	3.8%
Security	37.1%	48.8%	43.6%
Adding Technology	20.0%	28.6%	24.4%
Providing Add'l Amenities	25.7%	27.9%	26.9%
Staffing	11.4%	37.2%	25.6%
Budget Cuts Affecting Maintenance & Operations	65.7%	44.2%	53.8%
Competition From Private Housing Complexes	25.7%	2.3%	12.8%
Other	11.4%	7.0%	9.0%

TABLE 7: Availability and Quality of On-Campus Housing

	Public	Private	All Colleges
Q: In your opinion, how important is the availability of on-campus housing in determining whether a student will attend your college?			
Very Important	55.1%	45.5%	51.0%
Important	39.7%	40.9%	40.2%
Not Very Important	5.2%	9.1%	6.9%
Plays Little Roll	0.0%	4.5%	1.9%
Q: In your opinion, how important is the quality of on-campus housing in determining whether a student will attend your college?			
Very Important	55.2%	56.8%	56.3%
Important	39.7%	34.2%	36.9%
Not Very Important	3.4%	4.5%	3.9%
Plays Little Roll	1.7%	4.5%	2.9%

campuses revolve around the existing stock of housing, the need to upgrade existing space and the cost of getting the job done. Fifty-six percent of colleges chose upgrading existing space as one of their three most pressing issues. More than half are concerned about budget cuts and particularly how they will affect maintenance and operations. Overall costs are a major concern at 42.3 percent of the campuses responding.

Security is a major concern at 43.6 percent of the colleges, with private colleges (48.8 percent) more likely to list it among their three major concerns. Providing additional amenities (26.9 percent), staffing (25.5 percent) and adding technology (24.4 percent) are seen as major problems on about one quarter of the campuses. All of these, of course, have

costs associated with them, confirming that cost factors of one sort or another are seen by most chief housing officers as the major issue with which they will be tussling through the next five years.

Competition from privately owned or operated housing complexes is an issue of concern at 25.7 percent of public institutions. It is not of concern to many private institutions. Lack of space ranks as a major concern at 18.6 percent of the private colleges, while public colleges put this somewhat lower.

There was an opportunity for respondents to add their own concerns, issues that were not listed. Most additions were variations of those proposed, but a number of respondents identified the behavior of a new breed of entering student (and of their parents) as a troublesome issue with which they are going to have to deal.

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 half (see Table 7) say the availability of on-campus housing is very important when students choose where they will go to college; another 40 percent say it is important. Less than two percent think it plays no role at all.

As to the quality of that housing, better than 93 percent say it is important or very important while less than three percent feel it plays no role at all. Assuming that these sentiments are accurate and reflect the opinion of admissions officers, it seems 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.

Designing the Ideal Residence Hall

Suppose the chief housing officer was given a free hand to design his college's next residence hall? How big would it be? What amenities would be included in individual rooms and in the building? How would security be provided?

Given the opportunity to use their expertise to

design the best residence hall, 52.4 percent of all respondents think in terms of buildings that housed anywhere between 101 and 250 students (see Table 8). Almost 25 percent think that is too large, opting rather for residences for 51 to 100. More than one-third of all private college representatives prefer

these smaller units, but very few (6.8 percent of private college respondents) would build residence halls for less than 50 students.

Public colleges tend to think bigger than their private counterparts but, while one-quarter are comfortable with residence halls of 251 to 500, only 3.4 percent would have more than 500 students in their ideal setup.

There is near unanimity about providing coed buildings. Less than 10 percent of respondents would choose single sex residence halls. At private institutions, however, the percentage rises to 18.2 percent. That could reflect some single-sex colleges.

Trying to define the type of accommodations proved difficult because terminology was not always clear. Double rooms seem to be preferred (50 percent) to single rooms (25 percent) or four-person apartments (30 percent), but several respondents suggest suites that combined two-person rooms. Apartments with two, six or eight students were also mentioned. No one opted for traditional residence halls.

The ideal residence hall would have carpeting in all rooms (56.3 percent) but a strong contingent (35 percent) would have none at all. A few (8.7 percent) would leave it up to the students.

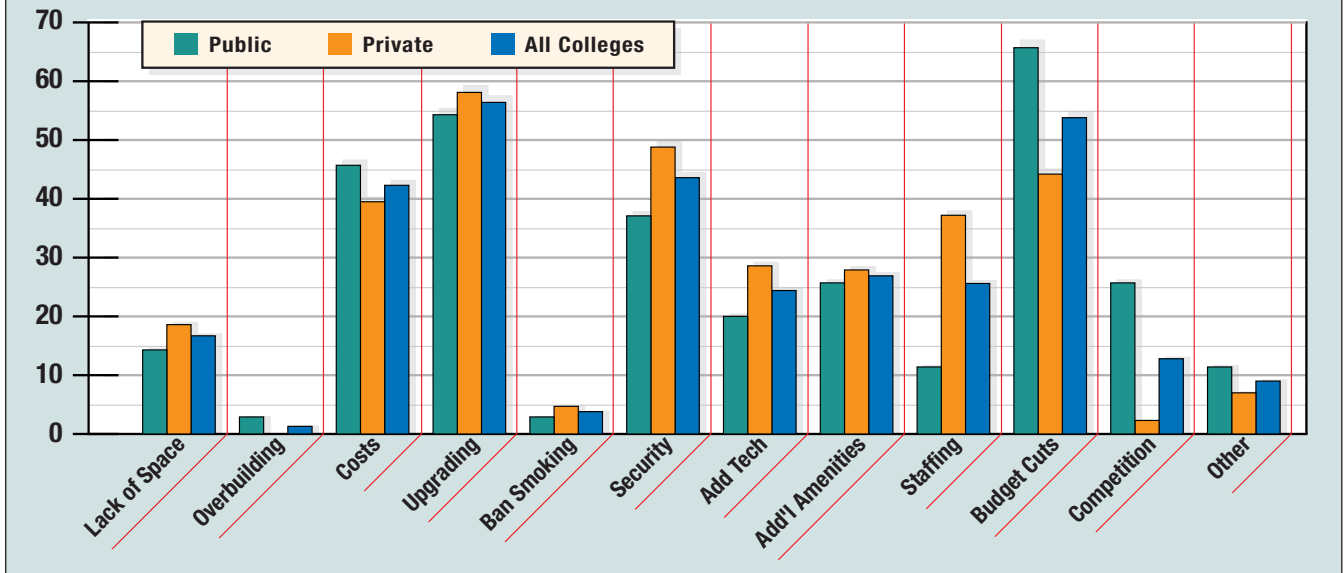
Air conditioning is hardly an issue anymore. Central air conditioning would be available in 92 percent of the residence halls. Almost 80 percent of respondents would have central air conditioning with individual room controls. Another 12 percent would provide central air conditioning with system control. Seven percent overall, but almost 11 percent of public institutions, would provide individual room units.

The days of the hall telephone that rings until someone picks it up are numbered. Cell phones have made that obsolete. The real question is whether residence halls will provide telephone hook-ups at all or will simply make it possible for students to use their cell phones. Right now, 55 percent would provide telephones while the other 45 percent would leave it up to the stu-

TABLE 8: Design the Ideal Residence Hall

	Public	Private	All Colleges
Q: If you were asked to design an ideal undergraduate residence hall today, how many students would it accommodate?			
Less than 50	0.0%	6.8%	2.9%
51-100	15.5%	36.4%	24.3%
101-250	55.2%	47.8%	52.4%
251-500	25.9%	4.5%	16.5%
More than 500	3.4%	4.5%	3.9%
Q: Would it be coed?			
Yes	96.6%	81.8%	90.3%
No	3.4%	18.2%	9.7%
Q: What kind of accommodations would you provide (percent of each)?			
Single Rooms	25.0%	30.0%	25.9%
Double Rooms	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Four-Person Apartments	50.0%	30.0%	32.0%
Q: How would you deal with carpeting?			
Provide In All Rooms	56.9%	56.8%	56.3%
Provide In No Rooms	36.2%	31.8%	35.0%
Student's Choice	6.9%	11.4%	8.7%
Q: How would you deal with air conditioning?			
Central, Individual Room Control	78.6%	81.6%	79.8%
Central, System Control	10.7%	13.6%	12.1%
Individual Room Units Provided	10.7%	2.3%	7.1%
Room Units Available for Rental	0.0%	2.3%	1.0%
Q: Telephone?			
College Provides	54.5%	56.8%	55.0%
Students Provide (Cell)	45.5%	43.2%	45.0%
Q: Computer Hookup?			
High-Speed Connection	98.3%	100.0%	99.0%
Not Available	1.7%	0.0%	1.0%
Q: Security/Surveillance?			
Cameras Throughout	53.4%	29.5%	42.7%
Cameras Exterior Only	34.5%	50.0%	41.7%
None	12.1%	20.5%	15.6%
Q: Security/Access Control?			
Key Card System	88.0%	75.0%	82.5%
Room Keys	10.3%	20.5%	14.6%
Room Codes	1.7%	4.5%	2.9%

What Major Problems Are Expected in the Next Five Years



dents to bring their cell phones.

While there may be some question about providing telephones, high-speed computer hookups will be provided in virtually all future residence halls.

How would security be provided in those ideal living quarters? Three choices were given concerning the use of surveillance cameras: use them throughout the residence hall, use them on the exterior of the residence hall or do not use them at all.

Better than 84 percent of chief housing officers would use surveillance cameras, with 42.7 percent putting them inside and outside, and 41.7 percent want them outside but not inside. Private college administrators tend to want to make less use of cameras, with just 30 percent allowing them inside buildings and more than 20 percent opting to have no camera surveillance at all.

There is more agreement on the use of access control. Better than eight out of 10 institutions would go to key card systems, which would be used both to allow entry into the building and into a particular room. Of the balance, almost 15 percent prefer to stick with room keys while a little less than three percent favor providing room codes that students could keep to themselves or share with others.

What would individual rooms in the ideal residence hall include? Given an open-ended question, most mentioned standard furniture (bed, desk, chairs, dressers) and kitchen equipment, including microwave ovens, refrigerators and microfridges. Cable hookups, semiprivate baths and Internet access were almost always mentioned. Some of the

more unusual comments include ceiling fans, garbage disposal, multiposition chairs and good lighting. One respondent (presumably from a college with a strong music program) mentioned space for practice on a piano while another suggested “face sinks” in individual rooms, coupled with semiprivate baths. One respondent said the room amenities “would depend upon student input.”

How about common areas? Laundry, fitness center, lounge and study rooms were mentioned frequently, as were food service and vending, computer labs, kitchens and large-screen TVs. Bike storage racks, game rooms, front desk operation and meeting rooms/classrooms were also on a majority of lists. Some items mentioned less often included public meeting rooms, free laundry machines, newspaper delivery, garbage chutes and recycling centers, a wellness area and night lights in hallways. One respondent called for a luxurious main lounge while another topped that with: An appearance that says “Wow, I want to live here.”

Costs, security, policies and preferences were the focus of this first annual survey of residence halls throughout the United States. If you would like to participate in next year’s survey, please provide an e-mail address. And, if you would like to suggest changes or new questions, we look forward to receiving and reviewing your ideas. [CPM](#)

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