



# LIVING ON CAMPUS

## COLLEGE HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT 2008

### Large or Small, at Public or Private Schools, Residence Hall Costs Continue to Rise

PAUL ABRAMSON

**S**lice it any way you want — by size of project, by public or private college, even by geographic region — when it comes to constructing student housing on campus, the median size (space per student) is about the same. But the cost per student and per square foot is significantly less in smaller residence halls than in larger ones.

The cost of residence hall construction is rising and rising rapidly. The median residence hall reported on this year cost \$231.49 per square foot, up more than 11 percent from one year ago, when the median stood at \$207.29 (**Graph A**, page 2). It costs almost three times as much to build a residence hall today compared to what it did in 1997.

Cost per bed has also increased (**Graph B**, page 3) from a reported \$62,756 a year ago to the current \$73,942. If building

smaller residence halls can keep the price down, colleges may want to rethink their big projects and cut them down to more livable (and less expensive) size.

These are among the findings of this 13th annual compilation of residence hall construction prepared for *College Planning & Management* magazine. For this survey, we were able to identify and collect information from 47 residence hall projects completed or to be completed this year. The data presented is from that sample.

#### ***The National Picture***

**Table 1** on page 2 shows that the median residence hall being built today will cost almost \$26M. Construction is responsible for almost 82 percent of total cost, with the balance going to furniture and furnishings (accounting for \$862,720 in the median residence), fees, and other costs, including site work.

The size of that median project is 90,743 sq. ft., and it is designed to house 302 students. The median provides 333 sq. ft. per bed. Cost per student has risen to \$73,942, based on dividing total

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

All figures shown are medians

	All Reporting (Sample Size: 47)	Less than 200 beds (Sample size: 15)	201 to 500 beds (Sample size: 18)	500+ beds (Sample size: 14)	Public (Sample size: 27)	Private (Sample size: 20)
Total Cost	\$25,907,500	\$6,450,000	\$28,500,000	\$43,775,000	\$34,000,000	\$12,400,000
Construction Cost	\$21,197,517	\$5,499,915	\$23,384,250	\$34,989,358	\$27,823,500	\$9,920,500
Furniture and Furnishings	\$862,720	\$282,510	\$897,750	\$1,540,880	\$923,000	\$575,000
Fees	\$2,222,864	\$396,675	\$2,168,850	\$5,309,908	\$3,315,000	\$1,307,000
Other	\$1,624,400	\$270,900	\$2,049,150	\$1,934,855	\$1,938,500	\$597,500
Size of Project (sq. ft.)	90,743	35,000	96,123	193,281	157,200	50,908
Number of Students	302	120	316	602	416	151
Sq. Ft. per Student	333	317	340	329	336	331
Cost per Student	\$73,942	\$60,170	\$74,960	\$67,987	\$76,437	\$69,135
Cost of Furnishings per Student	\$2,582	\$2,267	\$2,502	\$2,660	\$2,572	\$2,655
Cost per Sq. Ft.	\$231.49	\$200.00	\$242.96	\$227.56	\$237.56	\$226.54

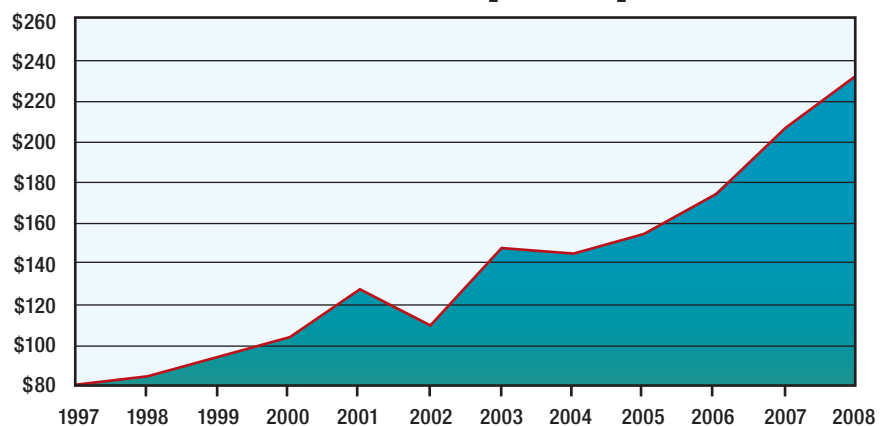
cost by number of students accommodated. Cost per square foot is \$231.49.

Yours is probably not the median residence hall in terms of size or funding. The balance of Table 1 breaks residence halls into three size groups (fewer than 200 students, 201 to 500 students, and more than 500 students) — essentially small, medium, and large projects — and also shows median costs and space for public colleges versus private ones.

**Does Size Make a Difference?**

Most residence halls provide between 300 and 360 sq. ft. per bed. As shown in Table 1, the median is 333 sq. ft. per student. Residences with fewer than 200 students tend to provide less space per bed, but the difference is relatively small. For example, 317 sq. ft. per bed in smaller halls, compared to 329 sq. ft. in the larger ones. (All of these figures are medians and are obtained by dividing total reported square feet by number of reported beds.)

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



Since colleges include different auxiliary facilities within their residence halls (see **Table 2** on page 3) the space provided per bed will in some cases include classrooms, dining halls, fitness centers, and the like, while others may have little more than sleeping rooms and laundry space. It is safe to say that the average resident room space

is about the same in virtually all recently constructed residence halls whether they are large or small, public or private. (Of the 47 residence halls surveyed, three of four clustered close to the median space per student.)

But while space is relatively the same, there appears to be a significant difference

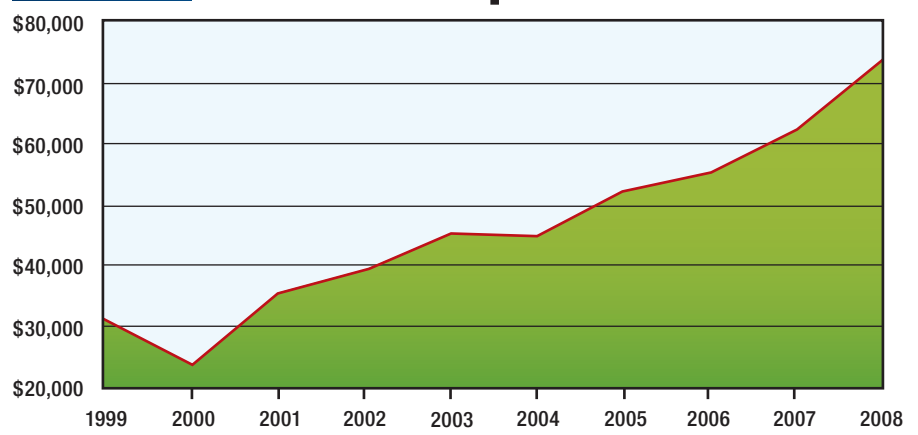
## Table 2 What's in a Residence Hall?

(Percent of respondents including facility/amenity)

	All Reporting	Less than 200 beds	201 to 500 beds	500+ beds	Public	Private
Card Access to Building	89.4%	86.7%	88.9%	92.9%	85.2%	95.0%
Card Access to Rooms	44.7%	40.0%	55.6%	35.7%	48.1%	40.0%
External Video Surveillance	57.4%	66.7%	61.1%	42.9%	51.9%	65.0%
Internal Video Surveillance	42.6%	46.7%	33.3%	50.0%	40.7%	45.0%
Rooms Air Conditioned	89.4%	93.3%	83.3%	92.9%	88.9%	90.0%
Rooms Carpeted	61.7%	53.3%	61.1%	71.4%	70.4%	50.0%
ATM	10.6%	0.0%	11.1%	21.4%	18.5%	0.0%
Vending	91.5%	86.7%	94.4%	92.9%	96.3%	85.0%
Computer Center	25.5%	13.3%	22.2%	42.9%	29.6%	20.0%
Fitness Center	25.5%	6.7%	27.8%	42.9%	25.9%	25.0%
Kitchen	89.4%	93.3%	77.8%	100.0%	88.9%	90.0%
Laundry	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Study Room	93.6%	100.0%	83.3%	100.0%	96.3%	90.0%
TV Room	80.9%	80.0%	83.3%	78.6%	88.9%	70.0%
Classrooms	31.9%	20.0%	44.4%	28.6%	33.3%	30.0%
Dining Hall	12.8%	0.0%	16.7%	21.4%	14.8%	10.0%

in cost per bed between small residence halls and larger ones. The median cost of those with fewer than 200 beds is \$200 per square foot and a little over \$60,000 per student (bed). The largest halls, with more than 500 students, cost \$227.56 per square foot and almost \$70,000 per student. Those in the middle — with between 201 and 500 students — are the most expensive, at almost \$243 per square foot and \$75,000 per student. The likelihood is that these middle-sized residence halls cost more because they provide similar amenities as do the larger ones but have fewer students over which to spread the costs.

### Graph B Median Cost per Bed



**Public Vs. Private**

This year, for the first time, we looked at private institutions separately from public ones. The expectation was that private colleges would spend more on their residence halls and provide more space. That does not appear to be the case. Actually, in terms of cost per student and cost per square foot, the public institutions were more expensive.

The explanation appears to lie in project size. The median public

**Smaller residence halls are easier to manage, safer, and provide better living conditions for students.**

college residence hall accommodates 416 students. The median private college residence hall is being constructed for 151. Once again, size appears to make a significant difference. Apparently there are no economies of scale; at least not among residence halls reported this year. Chief Housing Officers consistently report that smaller residence halls are easier to manage, safer, and provide better living conditions for students. Perhaps the confluence of lower costs and better conditions will lead colleges to build more smaller residences in the future.

**Amenities Provided**

Table 2 looks at what is provided in a residence hall other than sleeping and living quarters and amenities that are available for residents. It shows, for example, that every residence hall provides laundry facilities for the residents and that four out of five provide a television room and nine of ten a study room. Kitchens are also available for student use in almost 90 percent of the buildings. Computer centers and fitness centers are found in about one out of every four projects, and classrooms are placed into three of every ten.

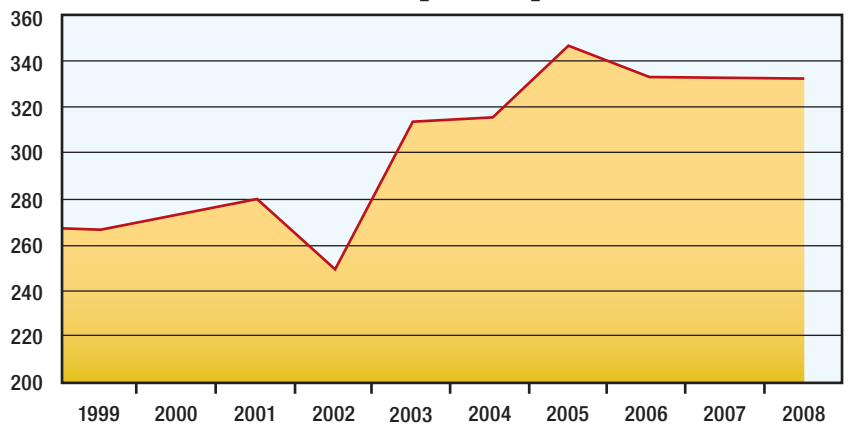
As for conveniences, almost 90 percent reported that they provide air conditioning



Photo courtesy of David Lamb Photography, Fairport, New York

A sample open lounge area in a new residence hall at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY, where students can meet spontaneously, stimulating intellectual and social interaction.

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




and six of ten install carpeting in resident rooms. Vending machines are available in 90 percent of the buildings, but ATMs in only one of ten.

Security has become a major concern of colleges, their students, and the students' families. To increase security, almost 90 percent use card access systems rather than keys to get into the buildings, but fewer than half provide key access to individual rooms. External video surveillance has been installed around 57 percent of the buildings and internal video surveillance is inside almost 43 percent.

The differences between larger residence halls and smaller ones do not appear to be great in so far as security is concerned. Private colleges appear to make somewhat more use of video surveillance than do public ones.

In terms of conveniences, ATMs are not available in smaller halls or (a little surprising) at private colleges. Since many of the smaller halls are on private campuses, that may be the explanation, but some of the largest ones reported are also at private institutions.

As for support facilities, the larger residence halls provide much more. Almost half have computer centers and fitness centers. If you live in a small residence hall and want to use a fitness center, you'll probably need to go somewhere else on campus. There is no difference between the facilities provided at public and private colleges.

Dining halls are designed into relatively few residence halls: essentially, only at large ones. But do not worry; if a student gets hungry, vending is available just about everywhere, large or small, public or private. No junk food, of course! 

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**Paul Abramson** is education industry analyst for College Planning & Management and president of Stanton Leggett & Associates, an educational facility consulting firm based in Mamaroneck, NY. He is co-author of *Space Planning for Institutions of Higher Education*. He can be reached at [Intelled@aol.com](mailto:Intelled@aol.com).

## Case Study

# University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Universal Design for Residence Halls



With close to 50 million Americans characterized as disabled, the concept of “universal design” is expanding into many aspects of life, including residences, technology, and even elementary education.

With 30 percent of the current student body at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater acknowledged as disabled, the University is working with Cannon Design to further the concept of “universal design” by developing a residence hall that will accommodate all levels of disabilities. The University’s approach will not only heighten awareness, but also encourage peer institutions to more aggressively embrace this segment of the student population.

The new \$30M U-WI-Whitewater residence hall, scheduled for completion in 2010, will accommodate 450 beds in fully accessible four-person suites. The design allows students to share a residence with a disabled roommate, an experience not offered to many at present. To accommodate extreme disabilities, optional four-person suites provide caregivers and service animals the space required to assist students with their daily needs. All rooms are designed with clear floor space so wheelchairs can maneuver easily and wheelchair-bound students can freely socialize. Wall and floor finishes were specifically designed and selected to enhance wayfinding without distraction or limitations for the visually impaired.

Cannon Design was commissioned for the planning and design of the project because of its expertise in higher education, with past successes at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and University of Illinois-Chicago.

The residence hall is on track to be the first LEED Silver-certified residence hall in Wisconsin.



Photo courtesy of David Lamb Photography, Fairport, New York

# Sixth Annual Survey on College Housing

DEB MOORE

**E**nrollment on college and university campuses is booming, and so is the need for student housing. Institutions across the country are responding to this growing need by constructing new residence hall facilities.

More than just a dorm room, they are living/learning centers with state-of-the-art technology and a wide array of amenities. To find out more about residence halls, *College Planning & Management* surveyed Planners, Administrators, and Chief Housing Officers from 46 two- and four-year colleges and universities nationwide. Here is what they had to say.

## Space

When asked, “How much residence hall space does your campus currently have?” the answer was a pretty even split. Forty-eight percent said they have “too little” space on campus, while 41 percent indicated the space they have is “sufficient.” The remaining 11 percent felt that they had too many available beds, but even those with sufficient space are preparing for growth. Sixty-seven percent of the survey respondents are planning to

expand the number of beds they have available on campus. More than one-third indicated they have residence hall construction projects already under way; another 35 percent have projects planned within the next five years.

## Design and Amenities

The cost of a college education is on the rise, and so are student expectations. Nearly all of the new residence halls being built are apartment-style (kitchen, bath, living, and sleeping areas) or cluster-style (multiple sleeping rooms surrounding a core living area). Very few are opting for traditional double-loaded corridors with sleeping rooms, although one institution is building houses for small groups of students. The new residence halls being designed will include a variety of programs and spaces. More than half (52 percent) will include game/recreation rooms. Forty-one percent will include classroom space. Coffee shops, snack bars, and cyber lounges can be found in one-third of the residence halls being built. When it comes to including kitchens, 24 percent will have individual kitchens while 41 percent will have group kitchen spaces. Laundry rooms follow this same trend. Fifty-seven percent of residence halls will have group laundry facilities, while only 13 percent will have in-room laundries.

## Green

When asked, “Will making the residence hall green (i.e., energy-efficient and environmentally friendly) be a part of your future plans and designs?” the answer was a resounding “yes.” For 54 percent of the respondents there was no question and no strings attached. Another 43 percent would go green if it did not add to the initial cost. Nearly half stated that their new residence halls would be LEED-certified buildings.

## Recruitment and Retention

It was not surprising to hear that 100 percent felt that the quality of their residence halls had an influence on student recruitment and retention. In fact, 87 percent of the institutions polled have a mechanism for soliciting student input when planning a new residence hall or remodeling an existing one. When it came to measuring building condition, 78 percent felt that their residence halls were in excellent or good condition, and only slightly more than half felt that tighter budgets had forced them to defer maintenance.

## Replacements and Upgrades

A majority of institutions have a regular schedule for upgrades to existing facilities, but few actually kept to that schedule. When it came to the replacement of items like beds, timing ranged from annually to every 20 years — nine years on average. Loose furnishings like desks and chairs were replaced every 10 years. Carpeting was replaced every seven years, and the rooms painted every three years.

When asked what major projects were being considered during the next three to five years, safety and security initiatives topped the list. Forty-three percent of the institutions responding to this survey are planning to upgrade their fire safety systems; 61 percent are planning upgrades to their access control/card access systems; and 67 percent are planning upgrades to

### Designs for the Future

## Net+Work+Camp+Us Wins Jury Prize at 21st Century Project Design Showcase

Powered by the belief that, when considering the future of collegiate housing, every space is a potential learning space and that open structures promote interaction and connections, the net+work+camp+us team was the winner of this year’s 21st Century Project Design Showcase competition, presented by the Association of College & University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I).

Yang Tian, Suping Li, Yuzhu Zheng, and Nathan Herold comprised the award-winning team. The young professionals were advised by Rob Reis, AIA, LEED-AP, a design principal with Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas + Company in Norfolk, VA. The four team members are also employees of Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas + Company, as well as recent graduates from institutions such as the National University of Singapore, Southeast University in China, University of Virginia, SUNY Buffalo, Guilin Institute of Technology in China, and Clemson University in South Carolina.

The 21st Century Project is a multi-phased initiative leading to the construction of a new, state-of-the-art residential facility for colleges and universities. In addition to creating one or more prototype residential facilities on several campuses, the project will assist colleges and universities in designing new residential facilities that reflect the ever-changing roles that residences play in the collegiate experience.

The winning team explained that their proposal “conveys an essential message about what can be, about students’ new way of living and learning, about the impact of new technologies, about new methods of exchange, and new social relationships in an ever-changing information age.”

Other showcase competitors included MGA Partners of Philadelphia, Ayers/Saint/Gross of Baltimore, Little Diversified Architectural Consulting of Charlotte, NC, and the team of Mackey Mitchell Architects of St. Louis and the Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

Results from this competition will be available online at [www.21stCenturyProject.com](http://www.21stCenturyProject.com).




Image courtesy of ACUHO-I

other security systems including surveillance, security lighting, and alarms. Other items that made this year’s list of major upgrades include roof repairs, HVAC systems, lighting, electrical upgrades, replacing elevators, bathroom renovations, and seismic provisions.

## Other Concerns

Housing officials will face a number of issues during the next five years, the most troubling being changing student expectations. Seventy-four percent stated this as being a “major” concern. The rising cost to the students came is a close second at


67 percent. Try to combine cost and expectations, and then add in parental interference, and it spells trouble. One respondent said, “Student expectations are changing. The traditional double-occupancy dorm room is out. Private sleeping spaces with semi-private bathrooms and kitchens are the new expectation. If students cannot get this on campus, they will look elsewhere.” On the other side of the coin, we heard, “Cost containment is increasingly difficult with rising utility costs and students’ desire for additional amenities and personal space.” “Amenities cost money!!! It is hard to keep up with the Joneses.”

Other top issues faced by housing officials include upgrading existing spaces (50 percent); providing additional amenities (43 percent); budget cuts affecting maintenance and operations (39 percent); safety and security issues (39 percent); keeping beds filled (37 percent); and adding/upgrading technology (35 percent). This focus on student expectations represents a major change from past reports where items like maintenance and operations budget cuts topped the list.

**Top Of the List**

When asked, “What is the one biggest issue that concerns you right now, and why?” the answers were varied. For many, the fluctuation of student enrollment is the biggest concern at this point in time. For some, that meant declining enrollment; for others, increasing enrollment. Respondent’s other concerns included:

- skyrocketing utility costs cannibalizing operating funds that could otherwise be used for residence hall facility improvements and student programming;
- meeting the needs of current and future students and their parents;
- campus security;
- converting traditional rooms to suites;
- adequate staffing to meet the increasingly different population coming to the halls that either are medicated, in counseling, and/or are not equipped at the maturity level they should be; and
- inappropriate expectations from administration for percent of beds filled given the lack of investment in maintenance, renovation, etc.

A special thanks is given to all of those who have contributed to the information presented in this report. It is clear that those who participated in this survey have made positive contributions to their institutions and their students — and their task is not an easy one. 

**Looking Ahead**

**Major issues facing chief housing officers through the next five years**

Category	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Adding Technology	24.4%	19.0%	25.2%	44.1%	41.3%	34.8%
Budget Cuts to Maintenance and Operations	53.8%	46.8%	32.5%	52.9%	51.7%	39.1%
Changing Student Expectations	N/A	N/A	31.7%	32.4%	48.2%	73.9%
Competition from Private Housing Complexes	12.8%	11.4%	10.6%	17.6%	20.6%	19.5%
Cost to Students	42.3%	53.2%	47.2%	82.4%	51.7%	67.4%
Keeping Beds Filled	N/A	21.5%	18.7%	44.4%	31.0%	36.9%
Parent Interference	N/A	N/A	15.4%	50.0%	41.3%	39.1%
Providing Additional Amenities	26.9%	13.9%	12.2%	35.3%	37.9%	43.4%
Security and Fire Safety	43.6%	25.3%	18.7%	32.4%	48.2%	39.1%
Staffing	25.6%	29.1%	23.6%	32.4%	44.8%	23.9%
Upgrading Existing Space	56.4%	58.2%	43.1%	61.8%	48.2%	50.0%

**Safety & Security**



istockphoto.com / Skankster

**Top Security Upgrades (in order of importance)**

- Installing security cameras around residence halls (46%)
- Installing keycard systems for buildings (43%)
- Installing mass notification systems (43%)
- Increased lighting in area (35%)
- Installing security cameras in residence halls (30%)
- Installing keycard systems for rooms (24%)
- More security patrols (22%)
- Installing emergency communication kiosks, call boxes, panic alarms (20%)
- Adding security/reception posts at building entrances (11%)