WHAT STUDENTS WANT

Campus Living:
A Student Perspective
Over the past ten years we have seen a rather dynamic change in how students of all ages engage with the world around them. Social interaction and opportunities for learning and mentoring occur in a much different way and in more diverse environments than perhaps ever before in our history. The college and university campus environment bears witness to this fact. Although it may be easy to point to evolving technologies as a catalyst for change, the truth is that the way in which the design community thinks about spaces that foster interaction, support individualism, create privacy, and aligns with the overall academic mission of the university, is often disconnected.

Designers and knowledge leaders within Little believe that perhaps the greatest opportunity to successfully merge these vital elements of campus life lies in the creation of innovative on-campus student housing. As the one place on campus where live, sleep, learn, study, play and socialization potentially overlap on a daily basis, the “residence hall” affords us the opportunity to define “what students want and need” simply by going to the source and listening to the student. Thus, the creation of the 2013 Student Housing Symposium. The purpose of the Symposium was to identify those factors that drive successful campus housing from the student’s perspective, through the exploration of ideas that will lead us to the creation of truly innovative student housing design for the future.

Our “next step” is to create a booklet each year as we continue to develop, define, and test the theories developed by the students. The next version will focus on what we hear as we share “what students want” with Housing Officers and University administrators from across the nation, and how we put the theories into practice at the project design level. We have already begun to take a deeper dive into three key topics that emerged, but were not fully vetted during the creation of 2013 workbook.

1) How changing dynamics and demographics of the student population effects residence-life communities
2) How location of campus housing affects student choice and aligns with off-campus alternatives
3) Opportunities to infuse key concepts into our current array of renovation and adaptive re-use design

Stay tuned…
With changing expectations of a new generation, we begin our exploration with the most fundamental building block of the student housing experience. During the symposium we asked the students a variety of questions pertaining to their dorm room experiences. There was a broad consensus that traditional dorm furniture frequently impedes their optimal use of the space. Their responses generated ideas ranging from a multi-purpose wall where a bed, desk and storage can be easily reconfigured to moveable partitions that could help define living and sleeping spaces and provide privacy between roommates. What we learned is that the efficiency of the room can be greatly improved without increasing floor area.

**PRIVACY**
Movable divider walls can create semi-private zones

**INDIVIDUALITY**
The ability to personalize the room is important
The desire for color was a recurrent theme

**FLEXIBILITY**
- The ability to reconfigure the room layout is important
- The furniture should be moveable and adaptable to various tasks
- A multi-purpose and shared work surface can replace a traditional desk
- A ‘study wall’ could be reconfigured for specific technology needs

**CONVENIENCE**
A sink should be placed inside the room specific needs

**STORAGE**
- A ‘storage wall’ could be reconfigured to meet the student’s specific needs
- A ‘moveable closet’ could be used to further define the space
If you had the choice, would you choose to live in a neighborhood where every street and every house is identical? Or would you prefer a diverse and vibrant neighborhood?

The students see no reason why their dorms cannot be the latter. They overwhelmingly preferred diversity over monotony. They suggested offering different unit types, mixing age and class levels, promoting cultural diversity, and introducing complementary non-residential uses.

**DIVERSITY IN STUDENT POPULATION**
- Students of different ages and class levels could benefit the neighborhood
- Faculty members could be part of that mix (as in Residential Colleges)
- The character of the neighborhood should be shaped by cultural diversity

**DIVERSITY OF SPACES**
Multiple students could occupy the same building, program, types, and amenities
As we spoke with students, we began to realize that the corridor is so much more than an architectural element for circulation, organization and efficiency. For underclassmen, the corridor becomes a conduit for social interaction and a place where new friendships are forged. Students shared numerous memories about a space less about linear movement and more about stitching two sides of a long hall together. Was there an opportunity for this potentially sterile element to be celebrated? Could the corridor actually provide the genesis for new architectural ideas?
Over the course of a day, students find opportunities to study in various locations throughout campus. We wanted to understand the characteristics of what makes a good study spot. We learned it should be bright and comfortable. It should be fairly quiet, yet visually connected to the more active spaces. Larger group study areas should be complemented by cozier individual study nooks. A student that chooses to study outside of his or her room doesn’t want to feel isolated.

GROUP STUDY
Is becoming more prevalent throughout the campus

VISUALLY CONNECTED
Students like to be engaged with their surroundings, even when studying alone

INDIVIDUAL
Small individual study nooks located off circulation paths can be useful as an alternative to studying in the room

FORMAL /INFORMAL
A mix of settings is necessary to accommodate different study objectives and/or student preferences

EVERYWHERE
Wireless technology and mobile communication enables students to study anywhere at any time
Casual seating to rest, relax and create in

Mobile furniture for flexible seating arrangements

Whiteboards and pin-up space - some mobile, some stationary

Glass wall provides privacy, light and a writable surface

Images of a modern interior space with a focus on collaboration and flexibility.
A sense of community is what students seek when they arrive on campus and it is what will keep them there for the course of their studies. We defined the community as a relatively small group (16-32 students) that can take ownership of common areas, such as kitchens or lounges.

In order to be activated, gathering areas should be located along the horizontal and vertical circulation paths, have access to light and views, and connect various communities to each other.

**VERTICAL CONNECTIONS**
Community lounges could be located near vertical circulation elements, and connect floors to each other.
CRACK OPEN THE CORRIDOR
Provide views and light to transform the circulation areas into community spaces

LEVELS OF INTIMACY AND TRANSPARENCY
As in a home, the various activities envisioned in the community areas require differing amounts of transparency

Chill Space links multiple floors

overall view of suite

1. SLEEP/CHANGE
2. GROOM
3. PRIVATE STUDY
4. LIVE, EAT, PLAY, COLLABORATE

outaway view of suite
A SENSE OF PLACE
CREATING FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENTS

When is a building too big? What makes a space feel cold? How do we make communal bathrooms less impersonal? We showed the students photographs of various academic and residential environments. Their reactions to the images consistently revealed their preferences for well-proportioned, light-filled spaces full of warm materials.

MATERIALS
Materials, color and lighting contribute to creating spaces that fuel creativity

SCALE
Taller buildings create challenges in relating to the human scale

OPENNESS
Students are drawn to open, transparent and inviting spaces

COMMON AREAS
Community bathrooms should feel less institutional
The interaction between the indoors and the outdoors is inherent to the concept of a campus, and should be fully developed. Within student housing projects, increased daylight, ventilation and views can greatly enhance the quality of a student’s residential life experience.

Students expressed that public green areas on college campuses, although plentiful, are often underutilized. For many, exterior rooms, patios and roof terraces have the potential to be their most valued ‘community’ space.

**ACTIVE USES**
Campus outdoor spaces are highly valued yet often underutilized as they often lack purpose.

**WELL DEFINED SPACES**
Exterior rooms with specific uses in mind (outdoor eating for example).

**LAYERED APPROACH**
Allow indoor spaces to spill into outdoor areas, creating many layers between indoor and outdoor.

**VISUALLY CONNECTED**
Creating indoor/outdoor visual connections enhances the sense of community and makes for good architecture.
QUALITY OF SPACE
Natural light is of utmost importance when deciding where to go for daily activities

LIGHT DISTRIBUTION
Find ways to equally share daylight while preserving privacy
In focusing on the key topics that emerged from our 2013 Student Housing Symposium, we noted some important themes that emerged again and again in our discussions with the students. Here is a more comprehensive list of “what students want and need”.

FLEXIBILITY WITHIN MY ROOM

1. Ability to reconfigure the room layout is important.
2. Half of students study in their rooms, half would rather study elsewhere. Perhaps desks are not necessary in some of the bedrooms to allow for greater flexibility.
3. Most students use their laptops or ipads more than TVs, but would ideally prefer a “study” wall that can be re-configured for technology.
4. In general, rooms should embrace the growing use of technology and provide students with faster connectivity.
5. In general, rooms should embrace the growing use of technology and provide students with better collaboration spaces in conjunction with the collegiate environment, as do library and workplace environments.
6. Students like the idea of a divider wall (translucent) along the bed. This could be done volumetrically without increasing cost, i.e., trade off in square footage vs. volume.

VARIETY WITHIN MY DORM

1. Just as “one size may not fit all”, there is no one design that fits every situation.
2. Students prefer built-in furniture that defines the space (ex: along a wall), but with the ability to reconfigure. Students like the idea of a mobile bed with a cushion seat that could rest below the desk.
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HOW I STUDY

Today’s students, as natives of the digital information age are: 1) technology learners, 2) more collaborative 3) very intuitive problem solvers. Here’s a good multi-tasking environment, as do library and workplace environments, needs to be designed for better collaboration spaces in conjunction with individual “search and study” spaces. In attempting to define the type, number and location of such spaces on the campus, we discovered the following:

1. Small individual study “nooks” should be scattered throughout. Students love the idea of having a room where they can be alone.
2. This community lounge should be located in primary vertical circulation zones, so that students can see people coming and going and perhaps enhance connectivity to multiple floors. Instead of one large, open space, though, students are attracted to a layering of space with differing levels of intimacy and transparency.
3. Double height spaces enable “room to breathe” that is not felt in dorm rooms, but divisions in the types of space encourage multiple types of activities to thrive at the same time.
4. Laundry should not be an afterthought, but rather a place for social interaction. A place for a group of say 8 students to eat (table) as well as a place to socialize (soft seating) is preferred.
5. Flexible space for games, TV, social room, “zones” should be part of the neighborhood commons. Several upperclassmen expressed a desire for a mix used building, as might be experience in an urban center.
6. Larger dining areas should be housed elsewhere as students like getting away from “home” (escaping as some students call it) to be close by.
7. Gaming areas traditionally include pool tables, ping pong, t.v.’s but not the Internet (and in some cases expanded) as to how often they are used and by whom. The general consensus is that freshmen and sophomores use such spaces the most to meet people and hang out with friends.
1. When asked about sustainability students seemed to migrate (unprompted) to natural day-lighting, views, and ventilation.

2. In every space we discussed with the students, from their room to study areas, natural light came up as extremely important.

3. Quality of light is as important as quantity.

4. Glare and heat gain were often cited as being problematic.

5. Views out of the room onto nice outdoor space gives a sense of place and tranquility.

6. Students expressed a strong desire for programmed outdoor space in close proximity to their dorm room because of the connection to nature and the inherent ambient noise. “Working green spaces” include easy accessibility from dorm rooms, strong internet connectivity, courtyard/canopy/screened porch options to reduce glare. Porches off of a dorm building also provide the possibility of power sources.

7. Students are more interested in imagining activities and experiences over architectural style and facades.

8. Students are less interested in the “style” of the dorm and more interested in how they can imagine living in interesting and exciting ways. They are open to new form and arrangements, particularly as they include outside space and green areas.

9. The students are drawn to buildings that were more open, transparent and inviting.

10. Neighborhood space could also include “community” wall for writing/posting and mailbox areas. Cross ventilation is desired: ceiling fans were also mentioned as desirable.

11. Trees are a must, especially the old growth oaks that “speak of community areas.”

12. Views into the residence hall community spaces from the exterior is nice.

13. Views out of the room onto nice outdoor space gives a sense of place and tranquility.

14. Although students understand the logistics of providing balconies, they would love to have a “common” balcony adjacent to community areas.

15. Students love the idea of rooftop gardens or green roofs. They are going to access the roofs anyway, so we may as well design them safe and secure.

16. An outdoor place to eat is desired. Also, students love the idea of grilling and picnic tables.

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