

Student Housing Today...

Are Greeks Staying Competitive?

By, Andrew Pitts, Treanor Architects, P.A.

Talk to anyone about student housing and they will conjure up images of loud music, burnt popcorn, pizza delivery and late night studies. However, it still is a business – one with demanding buyers, heavy competition and constant change.

Just as in every other business in America, Greek Housing cannot afford to ignore the market which surrounds it. The student housing market is seeing significant trend changes due to demographics and technological advances. With these changes in front of us, it is imperative to stay current, fiscally savvy and on top of the game.

Facing the Facts...

For the fifth year in a row, a record number of students have enrolled in colleges and universities. With the influx of students comes the spending of money on housing. Take a look at the facts:

- The U.S. Department of Education reports that an anticipated 15.6 million students will be enrolled this year.
- Over \$1.5 billion will be spent in 2002 on new construction or renovations of on-campus housing.
- Universities and colleges are spending, on average, \$6 million on new facilities.¹
- In order for Greek organizations to spend comparable dollars, they would need to spend over \$35,000 per member on the facilities.

Your Competition...

With the influx of students and the desire for more on-campus housing, universities and colleges have undertaken major construction projects on their residence halls. Schools have begun to realize that their current facilities do not meet the needs of today's students.

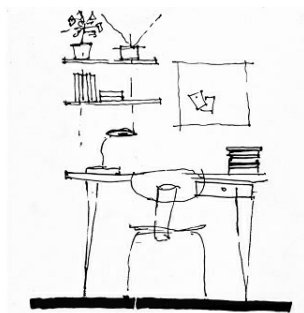
Additionally, many off campus apartment complexes are taking advantage of this opportunity and providing living arrangements that address the new student needs. These facilities target the student population with full service complexes which provide a variety of living arrangements.

What do students want?...

The most popular living layout to provide a sense of privacy is the suite layout- a separate study/living and sleeping area. These suite layouts can vary from 2 students up to 6 students.

"The top two requests from students are more privacy and a "home like" environment."

The study/living areas provide a "home like" living room for the students. This area is used for studying, recreation, and socializing. These areas should be designed to meet the needs of today's students- large enough to accommodate



The Student of Yesterday



The Student of Today

the furniture needs, storage needs, and technology needs and flexible enough so the students can make it their own.

The sleeping room does not need to be a generous sized room. Again, it is the sense of privacy that is the issue, not the size of the room.

Along with the desire for privacy in living and sleeping also comes the desire for private bath facilities. Layouts vary from private (within the suite) to shared (share with another suite.)

A facility need not have only one arrangement of layouts. Many times a facility will provide a multitude of living unit types to meet the many needs of the members. Other unit types include sleeping dorms, sleeping/study room (not separate spaces,) community bathrooms, and apartment style living.

Current State of Greek Houses...

How does your house stack up to the competition? Even though we may have great curb appeal and the interior of our house looks well kept, we are not meeting the growing needs of today's students and lack the amenities students desire.

Additionally, a large section of the Greek community is fighting growing deferred maintenance, building code violations, and fire and life safety deficiencies. Plumbing pipes are worn, electrical service is old and does not meet needs, and the mechanical system struggles through another year.

"While we can cover up many imperfections with a new coat of paint or new carpet, our aging facilities obviously need significant work."

What else is a necessity?...

Security:

Too many times we will return from Spring Break and hear that XYZ house was broken into and thousands of dollars of items have been stolen. *How do we prevent this?*

Again, it is the sense of security. If a facility looks secure then it is perceived as secure. Facilities need to control the landscape against the house (trim the bushes around the windows,) and improve / replace the lighting around the facility (replace those broken light bulbs.)

Other issues can be addressed when building or renovating a facility. Allow for direct supervision of the main entry points into a facility- know who is coming in and out. Provide hardware that will allow for control and monitoring. A card access system on the main entry doors can control and monitor who is entering the facility, block entry during specific time (spring break, summer, etc,) and allows for easy removal of a member should that be necessary. These systems can also be installed at entry to living floors, entry to special rooms and entry into the student's suite.

Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing Systems:

Comfort of the space is equally important as control of the space. Too many of our current facilities are hot on one side and cold on the other. Providing mechanical systems that allow

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the students some level of control should be incorporated into a facility

Electrical requirements are of critical concern as well. On average a student brings over 15 items to plug-in. Facilities should be provided with an abundance of receptacles, adequate primary service, and room for expansion.

Life Safety Improvements:

Another trend is the installation of fire sprinkler systems. On average there are over a 140 "reported" fires in Greek houses. The National Fire Protection Association estimates that two-thirds of fires go unreported. Sprinklers typically reduce the risk of a fire fatality and reduce the average property loss by one-half to two-thirds.² In addition many municipalities are requiring the installation of sprinkler systems in community residential facilities.

Greek houses also are typically of older construction (many date from the 1920s), and most have wide, open staircases. Housekeeping practices and general building upkeep are generally not up to par with commercial facilities. Like other houses, these usually are lacking in fire-rated construction, self-closing corridor doors, and have sleeping areas that are not separated from public rooms.³

Technology

This area is one of the fastest growing and ever changing trends in housing. Organizations are providing data connections throughout the facilities: individual living area, small and large group study rooms, library, and computer / technology rooms. They are providing a central network, internet service, and access to the University computer system. On average, an individual living suite should be provided with one data connection per occupant (i.e. 4 person suite equals four data connections.)

Remodel, Renovate or Build?

With all of these issues and concerns, we may be asking ourselves, "Does it make more sense to remodel or renovate an existing facility, or rather, should we simply raze the current facility and build new?" In order to make the best decision for our organizations, begin to ask these questions:

1. What is the relative condition of our current facility? What is the significance of our deferred maintenance or deficiencies? What no longer works? What no longer performs its function? What is unsafe? What does not conform to current building codes? What requires more dollars to maintain then to replace?
2. Should we renovate our current facility or

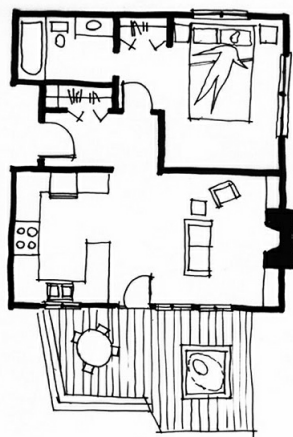
build new? Are the improvements planned primarily cosmetic improvements and enhancements? In other words, are these minor changes in structure, minor upgrades in mechanical systems, and simply remodeling some rooms and spaces?

3. Should we tear it down and build a new building? Will the cost of renovating the building exceed the cost of building a new facility? Will the improvements require major structural and/or mechanical changes? Will it require renovation of all rooms and space?⁴

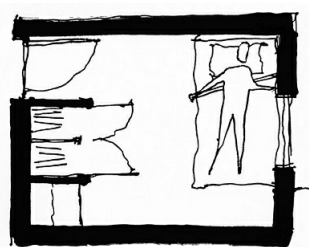
"With these answers and the assistance of a design professional, an organization can begin to evaluate its options and costs."

Where Do We Go From Here?

When taking stock of the state of our facilities, it may feel a little overwhelming to make these changes. We might ask ourselves, "Are our facilities really that lacking? Do we really need all of these amenities?" However,



What students want...



What students get.

keep in mind that your competition is providing these amenities...or soon will.

While some houses may be hesitating to make these changes, other houses across the nation have begun to address some of these issues: over \$70 million has been spent in the last ten years on new facilities or renovations.⁵

How does your facility compare? Do you stack up to the competition? Are you losing upper classmen to apartments?

Organizations need to address these issues and many more as they look towards the future of housing in the Greek community.



Formal Community Space



Traditional Greek House Design

Andrew Pitts is an Architect with Treanor Architects, P.A. Treanor Architects, P.A. has worked with numerous Greek Organizations, presented at national conferences, and specializes in Greek and Student Housing.

¹ College Planning and Management, 2002 Construction Report, February 2002

² NFPA Fact Sheet, November 2001

³ The Dormitory and Fraternity House Fire Problem, Mark Bromann, Flex Fire Protection Design, April 2000

⁴ ACHUHO-I, Campus and Housing Construction and Renovation- An Analysis of Cost and Design

⁵ Patrick Alderdice, President, Pennington and Company, Lawrence, Kansas