

Community College Housing

An Update on Survey Results
Regarding Current Trends in
Community College Housing

by

Linda Anderson

&

Ellen Ulf

In the August 2004 issue of this publication, Anderson Strickler, LLC (ASL) authored an article entitled “A Philosophical Change, Community Colleges Getting into the Student Housing Business” This article provides an update on the activities of community colleges and housing and summarizes the results of a survey ASL conducted of two-year schools with student housing.

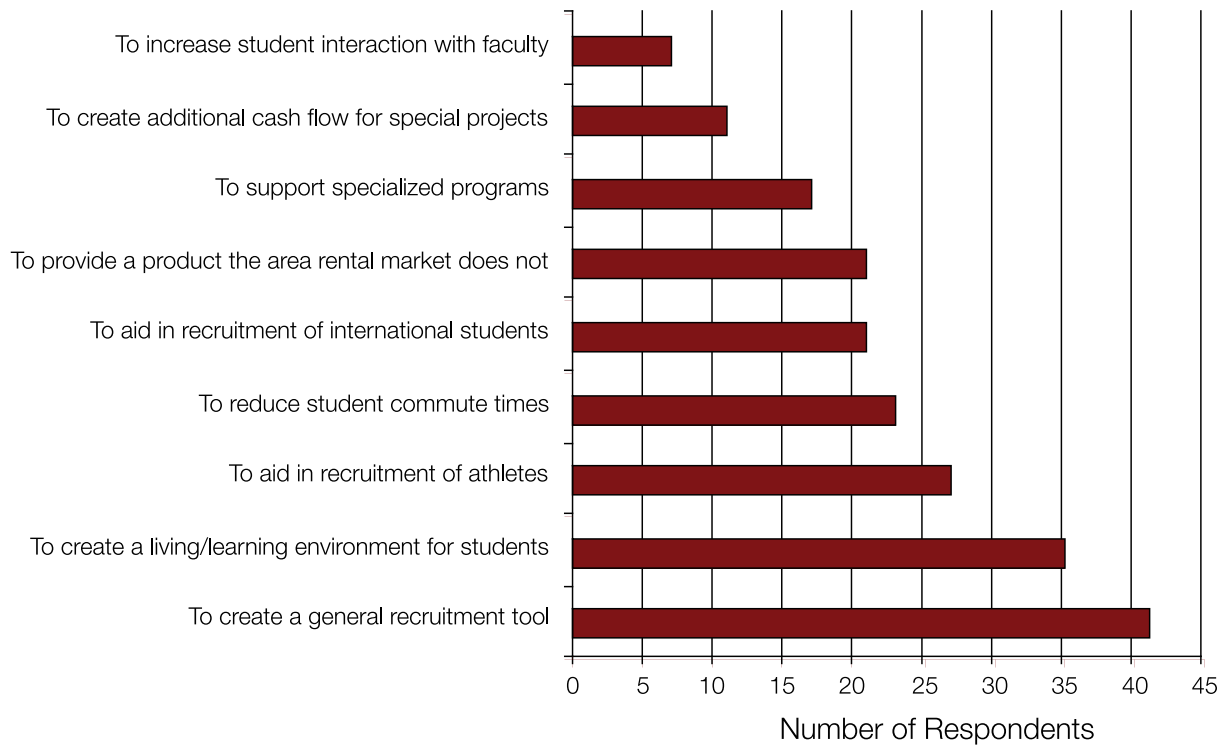
General Trends

According to Norma Kent, vice president of communications for the American Association of Community Colleges, 233 public community colleges in the United States have housing facilities and most were built within the past nine years.¹ Our experience also shows that interest in student housing at community colleges is rising.

In the six years between 1998 and mid-2004, ASL conducted student housing feasibility studies for nine community colleges. In the two years between mid-2004 and now, the number of such studies has more than doubled.

There is other evidence the number of community colleges studying the feasibility of student housing is increasing. In fact, state-wide community college systems such as Maine and New York provide housing, or are considering housing, at all or most of their institutions. The State of Maine changed from a technical to a community college system in 2003. In three years, its enrollment of first-time freshmen increased by 50 percent.² The size of the state requires students to drive long

Figure 1: Reasons for Developing Student Housing



distances to their community college of choice. Therefore, the need for student housing has increased.³ ASL completed a student housing study for five out of seven Maine community colleges in 2005. Since then, the System has contracted with a student housing developer and has broken ground at three of the campuses.

ASL has also seen an increased interest in student housing at community colleges in New York. As SUNY community colleges are not allowed to own student housing, facilities are developed and managed by non-profit corporations or affiliated foundations. Out of 30 community colleges nine provide on-campus housing and four provide off-campus housing. Of the 17 that do not currently have housing, at least six are actively considering the development of housing.

Community College Housing Survey

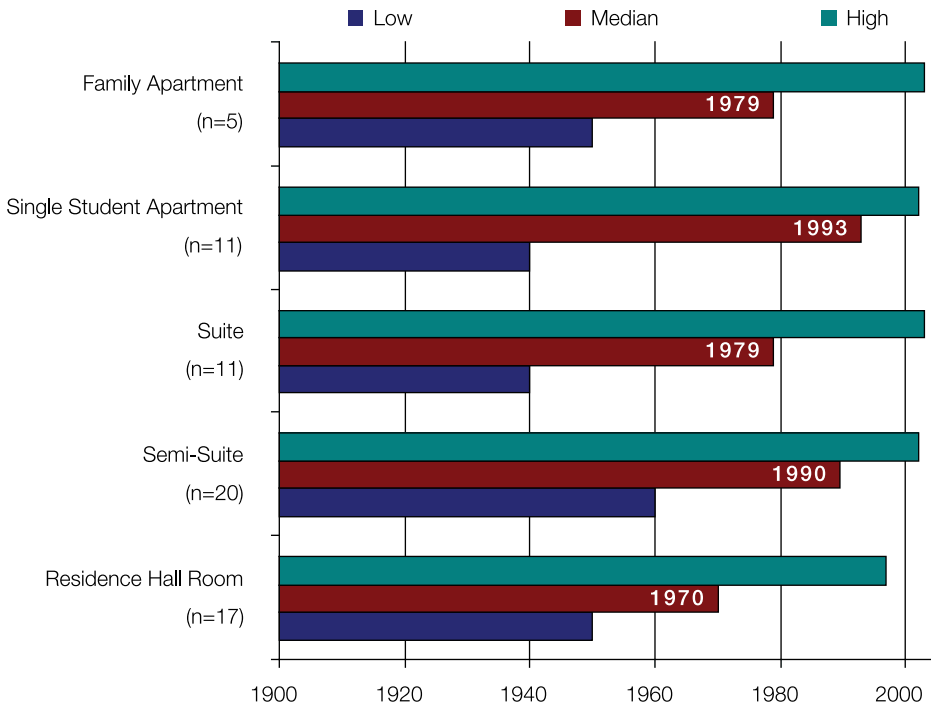
ASL developed a housing survey for residential community colleges. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into the reasons for building student housing, the type of units and amenities offered, occupancy trends and whether or not student housing has met expectations. An email message was sent to nearly 300 housing officials from public and private two-year institutions ASL identified as having housing and invited them to participate in the online survey. The survey yielded 55 responses for a response rate of 18 percent.

- When asked to share the reasons for building student housing, survey participants indicated that their main

goals were to create a general recruitment tool, to create a living and learning environment for students, to aid in the recruitment of athletes, and to reduce student commute times. The reasons for providing student housing are shown in Figure 1.

- The most common type of unit built is a semi-suite – typically two or more bedrooms sharing a bathroom – at 28 campuses. Second most common are traditional residence halls with shared community bathrooms – at 23 campuses. The shift over time, however, has been towards more private accommodations as shown by the average age of housing. As can be seen in Figure 2, the median date of construction of traditional-style housing is the oldest at 1970 while the median date of construction of single student apartments is 1993. In our experience, the majority of projects currently under construction or in the planning stage are apartment-style, both in reaction to student preferences and to avoid the expansion of the campus' dining program. Although many of the responding campuses indicated that they offered a meal plan, this is not the current direction of new projects.
- The most popular common area amenities include social/TV lounges, laundry rooms, vending machines, and adjacent parking. The popularity of amenities depends on the housing type offered. For example, 96 percent of residence halls offered a common laundry room vs. only 80 percent of single student apartments; however, one-

Figure 2: Student Housing Construction Dates



third of single student apartments offered a washer/dryer within the unit compared to only a handful of traditional or semi-suite units.

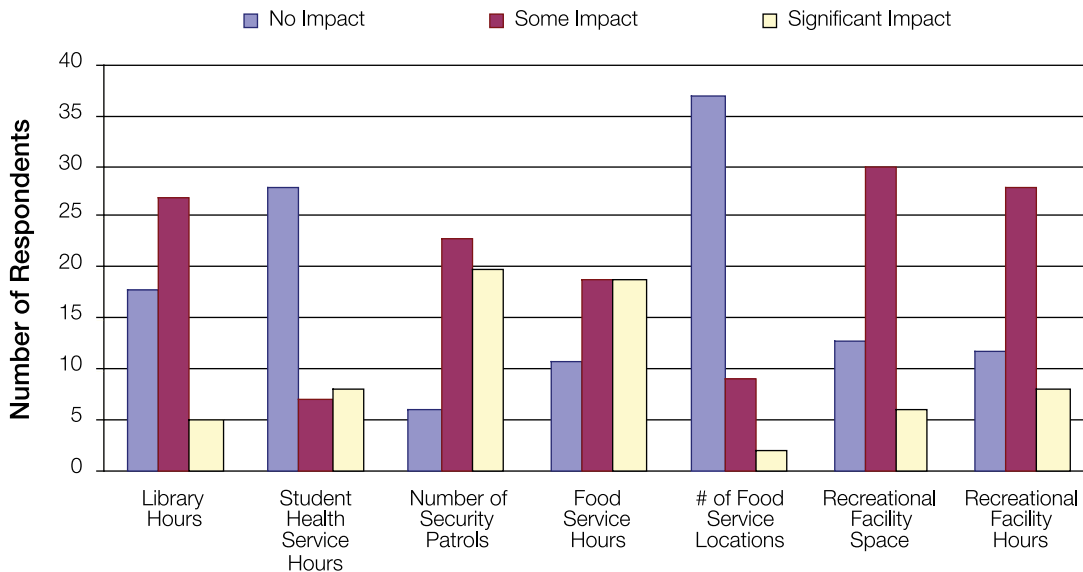
- Game rooms and basketball courts are the most common recreational facilities. Once again, there were differences depending on the style, and perhaps age, of the housing. Just under half of the single student apartments offered a fitness center vs. 30 percent of traditional residence halls. Almost two-thirds of single-student apartments offered volleyball vs. 50 percent or fewer of the other housing styles.

- Occupancy over the past several years has mainly been steady or increasing. Occupancy of all unit types follows the same general pattern: occupancy is highest in the fall and slightly lower in the spring before declining steeply in the summer. The units with the steepest decline are the least private – the residence halls and semi-suites. Suites and single student housing fared better. A likely reason is that a number of single student apartment communities require a 12-month lease owing to student demand and/or to the need for 12 months of revenue to make a project pencil. Another likely reason is that suites and apartments are more attractive to summer conference attendees.

- The advent of housing impacts the campus beyond just the four walls of the housing. As can be seen in Figure 3, in terms of “significant impact,” housing affects the number of security patrols and food service hours the most. In terms of “some impact”, recreational facilities space and hours and library hours were the most noted. The least impact is on the number of food service locations.

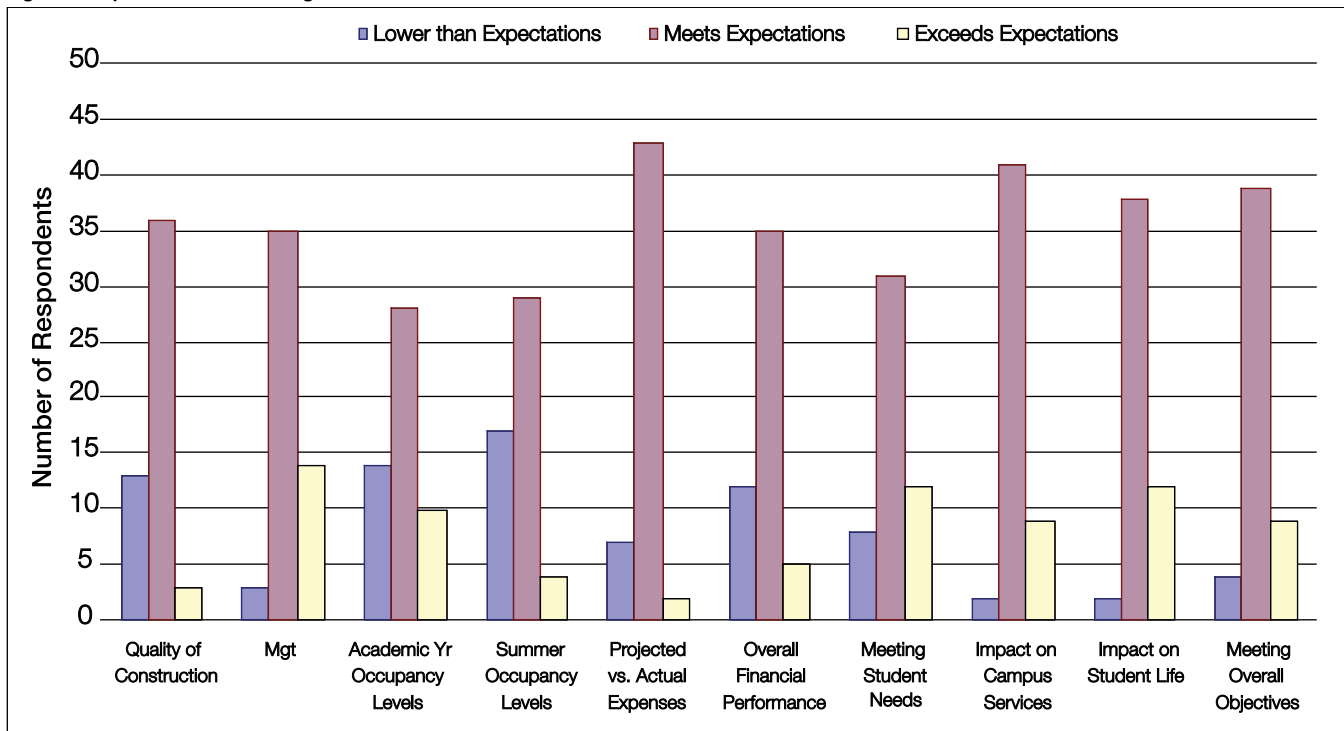
- Though many of the campuses do not offer academic support functions in housing, for those that do offer such services, educational workshops and tutoring were the most popular. As the interest in living/learning communities grows on residential campuses, perhaps more community colleges will adopt a similar philosophy and create more physical spaces to accommodate such programs.

Figure 3: Impact on College Services



- For most campuses, on campus housing has met expectations (Figure 4). The three most common reasons for not meeting expectations are summary occupancy levels not being high enough, academic year occupancy levels not being high enough, and lower quality of construction than anticipated. The three most common reasons for exceeding expectations are management, meeting student needs, and impact on student life.

Figure 4: Expectations of Housing



Conclusion

Based on the results of this particular survey, the pace of student housing development on community college campuses appears to be increasing. This is a positive factor for colleges considering the addition of housing to their campuses as they can now draw from the recent experiences of their colleagues. In addition, the industry in general has become more familiar with community college transactions making the implementation process smoother. Will the pace continue? It appears likely. Having housing is no longer considered an oddity for a community college. Many community colleges are trying to manage increasing enrollments as well as a higher demand from traditional-aged applicants who are looking for the “full” college experience, but in a community college setting. Applicants are also considering particular programs that may not be offered at their own county’s community college. These changing needs of the college can be met by providing a comprehensive educational experience in and out of the classroom, the ability to recruit students from outside of the immediate area, and in some cases, provide a product that the area rental market cannot provide. ♦



Linda Anderson is a principal with Anderson Strickler, LLC, a consulting firm located in Gaithersburg, MD. Anderson Strickler, LLC (ASL) conducts market and financial feasibility studies for colleges and universities and has completed over 230 such assignments. ASL has conducted over 35 housing studies for community colleges and other higher education institutions without housing that are interested in starting a housing program. Linda speaks frequently at industry

conferences on the subjects of student housing planning, implementation, and procurement of services. ASL principals have made presentations at NACAS, CCBO, ACUHO-I, SEAHO, NASPA, APPA, NACUBO, and AUREO. ASL also contributed to the NACAS monograph entitled Higher Education Housing Facilities: Options for Construction, Renovation, Privatization & Financing.

Contact Linda at: linda@andersonstrickler.com



Ellen Ulf has been associated with the ASL principals since the mid-80’s when she was responsible for the start-up operations and management of new student apartments at Tulane University. Since 1993, she has worked in various capacities with the firm’s principals. Currently, as a Senior Associate, she takes on assignments that involve both market analysis and financial feasibility. She has been the project manager for most of ASL’s studies for community colleges. She has also presented a session at the 2004

CCBO conference on community college housing. Ellen attended Tulane University and the University of Maryland in College Park.

Contact her at: ellen@andersonstrickler.com

1. *Baltimore Sun*, Housing Trend Hits Two-Year Colleges, July 12, 2004.
2. Maine Community College System press release, September 28, 2005.
3. *Morning Sentinel*, Enrollment at Community Colleges Up, June 3, 2005