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Campus Housing Design in the Digital Age

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Overview

The explosion of information technology resources over the past two decades has significantly impacted the role and scope of student housing on the nation's campuses. Transformational shifts in teaching and learning are creating new opportunities and challenges for residential staff, programs and facilities. Technological advances are presenting alternative – and sometimes preferred – means for students to fulfill their educational and social goals.

Flipped classrooms, hybrid courses, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), digital libraries, social networks and digital badges have great potential for revolutionizing higher education worldwide. While these advances are being viewed by some as a threat to the traditional campus, they in fact offer new opportunities for high quality on-campus instruction at reduced costs. On many campuses, the ideal environment for deploying these new pedagogical models will be in the student housing environment, and residential learning communities (RLCs) can assume a prominent niche by providing the integration of academic course work with high-quality interactions between students, faculty and mentors.

Although difficult to predict, the future use of technology will inevitably bring both great opportunities and significant challenges to traditional higher education structures. While there is wide-spread disagreement, some futurists such as Peter Drucker (Lenzer & Johnson, 1997) forecast that large universities will not exist in the future. There is general agreement, however, that the survival of our campuses will rely on ensuring that human face-to-face interaction remains the foundation of the on-campus teaching and learning environment. If it does, the future role of student housing programs, services and facilities will become even more important.

On-campus students are increasingly using technology for academic, social and entertainment purposes. The 2013 Sloan Consortium recently reported that 32% of today's college students take at least one course online. The 2012 Educause study of *Undergraduate Students and Information*

Technology suggests that "institutions and educators need to balance strategic innovations with solid delivery of basic institutional services and pedagogical practices and to know students well enough to understand which innovations they value the most." Their findings and recommendations reflect four general themes:

1. Blending modalities and using technology to engage learners is a winning combination.

2. Students continue to bring their own devices to college, and the technology is both prolific and diverse.

3. Students have strong and positive perceptions about how technology is being used and how it benefits them in the academic environment.

4. Students are selective about the communications modes they use to connect with instructors, institutions and other students.

To accommodate these trends, campuses have created wireless environments that provide access to seamless teaching, learning and social resources anywhere on campus. From their laptops, tablets or cell phones, students can view lectures, interact with fellow students and faculty, access library resources, and utilize free off-campus resources such as the Kahn Academy, UDACITY, Coursera and EdX.

The assimilation of technology into all facets of student life will continue the transformation of traditional higher education. At the same time, this creates new challenges for maintaining the integrity of the teaching and learning environment.

Future Trends

Online course and degree offerings in higher education will undoubtedly continue to increase. Coursera is just beginning to obtain accreditation for their MOOC courses, and over the next several years, students on traditional college campuses will be able to obtain transferrable academic credit by enrolling in online courses offered from universities worldwide.

In addition, the traditional lecture-style classroom instruction model will be utilized less and less by faculty who are realizing the value of hybrid courses (a mix of online and in-class lectures, generally reducing the number of in-class lectures) and flipped classrooms (online lectures with face-to-face classroom project work). By providing their lectures online, faculty have the opportunity to engage students in new types of active on-campus learning collaborations. This approach appears to be achieving higher levels of student learning outcomes and skill development; and when they can be integrated into campus living facilities, the opportunities for engagement are significantly improved. These new models call for new types of learning spaces that are very different than the traditional classroom – particularly the large lecture hall, which many believe (and hope) face extinction.

This rapidly shifting teaching and learning paradigm will require campus administrators to begin strategic discussions about how and where students will learn on their campuses over the next several decades. EdX president Anant Agarwal predicts that in ten years, most of the classes taught on campus will be performed by "blended learning." The 2013 Sloan Consortium reports that the proportion of chief academic leaders who say online learning is critical to their long-term strategy is at a new high, exceeding 69%.

The call for a new examination of on-campus learning was reported in the 2013 New Medium Consortium Horizon Project: "MOOCs have put the spotlight on residential campus education and its unique value. The challenge is to identify and articulate that value in the context of MOOCs and financial issues. Much of the current discussion about MOOCs focuses on comparisons between learning at brick and mortar institutions. Early MOOC innovators and developers have expressed that they are not trying to replace face-to-face education, but apply lessons from distance learning that can also help improve on-campus learning. There is an important opportunity in the next several years to identify and articulate what successful physical campuses do best and what they can do that cannot be accomplished online. The challenge ahead is to identify the unique strengths and weaknesses of each for different types of teaching and learning activities, including a reexamination of the importance of the physical learning environment and how it can most effectively be integrated with virtual environments."

As institutional leaders initiate these discussions, the value of personal interactions between students, faculty, mentors and peers will emerge as the essential element of the campus experience of the 21st Century. Finding the right balance between the use of virtual environments and face-to-face human interaction will be the challenge. In order to maximize the benefits of these interactions, many new instructional models will emerge which will intentionally blend online learning with personal interactions. Although the classroom and laboratory will continue to be a focus of on-campus learning, the residential setting will become increasingly more important for both shaping these interactions, and for supporting formal academic work. With accredited online course offerings, residential learning communities (RLC's) have the potential to become self-contained academic enterprises within the larger campus environment.

Residential learning communities have been embraced by hundreds of campuses over the past thirty years as an effective approach to improve student learning and skill development by bridging students' curricular and co-curricular experiences. Primarily, this has been achieved by structuring positive faculty-student and student-student interactions around a common academic or educational theme. The ideal model provides academic courses within the residential community, with structured interactions inside and outside of the classroom. In actuality, only 48% of these programs currently provide formal coursework, and 23% had no faculty involvement at all, (NSLLP, 2010).

The integration of new technologies into the residential learning community environment may emerge as the ideal on-campus teaching and learning environment for the 21st century. By intentionally integrating personal interactions, experiential learning and high-quality courses, the potential of these communities can be fully realized. Campus design will thus increasingly factor higher levels of student learning and skill development outcomes by maximizing the benefits of blending instructional technologies with face-to-face teaching and mentoring. It seems apparent that the residential learning community could be at the center of these campus design discussions.

Designed correctly, the value of residential programs will be recognized by future students and their families as an essential part of higher education into the foreseeable future. Although future students may not spend all four years on campus, being part of an educational community in the early stages will be desirable to many traditional aged students. Many advanced students will seek other opportunities such as internships or studying abroad, where they will enroll in courses but live off-campus while completing their degrees. The Materials Science program at MIT, for example, has developed the "Semester from Anywhere" program to send students off-campus while still taking MIT courses online. Certainly, the RLC has great potential for being the right place to prepare many students for these types of opportunities.

The function and design of campus residential facilities will thus be an important institutional issue as these strategic discussions occur. New housing facilities will require spaces for (in no particular order):

1. Flipped classroom collaborative projects and group work

2. Groups to view online lectures

3. Study groups

4. Educational support services (advising, tutoring, library assistance, etc.)

5. Group collaboration and project work

6. Informal interactions between students, faculty, mentors and peers

7. Socializing and recreation

8. Individual studying, reflection and privacy

Outcomes-Based Facility Design

Strategic discussions about the future campus will focus on the added value of attending a residential campus. Ultimately, new outcomes for learning and skill development will emerge, and it will be essential that the residential facilities of the future be designed to support the attainment of these outcomes. These new outcomes will most likely include:

1. The *application* of knowledge rather than the *acquisition* of knowledge

2. The development of human interaction skills and competencies

3. The development of global skills and the ability to work effectively in multinational work teams

4. Entrepreneurialism and the need to adapt individual skills to rapidly changing work environments

These and other outcomes will have implications on campus design in general and in the design of residential communities in particular. It will be important for future design to incorporate specific campus outcomes to help shape the residential facilities. The spaces that will be impacted will include student sleeping areas, dining facilities, residential academic spaces, academic support spaces, public gathering spaces and more.

Although the above trends, taken together, will pose significant challenges for higher education decision-makers, the intentional blending of modern technology resources with the traditional benefits of face-to-face interactions between students, faculty and mentors – including thoughtfully planned housing facilities as a cornerstone of the on-campus learning environment – will ultimately preserve the campus experience and provide richer learning opportunities for the next generation of students.

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About Scion

The Scion Group LLC is a real estate services partner to higher education institutions, foundations and private-sector providers of student housing. Scion supplies facility and strategic planning, market studies, operations assessments, development consulting and complete property management. Its team of experts offers the first-hand perspective of educators, operators and owners, enabling clients to create high-quality, financially sustainable learning communities.

Founded in 1999 by seasoned professionals from the fields of higher education administration, market and corporate real estate, and property management, Scion is a recognized leader in the analysis, planning and operations of educational housing and auxiliary facilities. The firm combines extensive practical experience, sophisticated methods for financial and operational modeling, and an understanding of the unique nature, mission and specialized considerations of colleges and universities. Scion specializes in residential learning communities, mixed-use facilities, commuter-to-residential transitions and urban environments.

A member of ACUHO-I, NACUBO, CAUBO and the NMHC Student Housing Council, Scion has often presented case studies to professional audiences and has authored several articles. Scion has been cited by the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times*, CNN, ABC News, MSNBC and *Time*, *Forbes* and *Inc.* magazines. Prior engagements for consulting services have included work on or adjacent to over 110 campuses in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the U.K.

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