



Residential Planning Group Final Report May 2022

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INTRODUCTION

a. Are the existing residence halls past their useful life and economically not worth keeping?

Without a complete facility assessment, this question cannot be completely answered. However, it is noted that some of the oldest residence halls were determined to be worth renovating this summer. The question of “useful life” seems to be more about whether the configuration of the building (quads, doubles, singles, air conditioning) makes the buildings undesirable by students in the long run. The buildings will require renewal, and that cost will increase as it is delayed, but the existing buildings are filling a market demand for housing that is not currently available elsewhere.

Recommendation: As above, the College should do a complete Facilities Assessment of the residence halls to determine what the deferred maintenance issues are.

b. Does a future strategy for housing indicate an increase or decrease in demand compared to the existing capacity?

the residential community around the College; a limited number of apartments and rental houses may be available but they require a car to commute to campus and the rentals that are closest to campus are not as affordable as those farther away.

If enrollment should drop as the demographic cliff puts pressure on yield, we could see the need to shutter a residence hall. If enrollment should increase, we could evaluate the possibility of contracting with apartment complexes in North Chicago or Highwood. Increasing the density within the existing halls is not a good option given the pressure for more communal spaces and more private space (see below).

Recommendation: For now, develop flexible contingency plans for a decrease or increase in enrollment that does not involve tearing down or building a new residence hall.

3. Do the existing buildings meet the needs of current students and provide the type of accommodation that competitors provide?

We approached this in two ways. We spoke with students and with the Residence Life staff to understand the needs within the buildings, and we spoke with Admissions staff to get their feedback about what families have said regarding competitor offerings.

Students are asking for singles. This is sometimes expressed through a disability accommodation request. It is also clear through the room selection process that singles are in high demand. The room configuration most in demand is the single in Nollen, which shares a washroom with only two other students. The four-person "quad" rooms in McClure, Roberts and Gregory are the least popular; these are two rooms (that require the "back" room's residents to walk through the "front" room) with a private bathroom for four people. Community washrooms used by more than six people are not desired.

Community kitchens are very popular. Students will travel to the halls that have kitchen access: Moore, McClure and Cleveland-Young. Middle campus has no kitchen at all. The type and availability of communal gathering spaces varies. While the Mohr Student Center is popular for early evening gatherings, students prefer to congregate in spaces within the halls to continue socializing. The temporary tent on South Campus, set up for outside classes during the pandemic, was also mentioned as a popular gathering space.

Admissions staff spoke about the impact of our housing stock on their work. Although it is not the most important consideration, the quality of the housing sometimes becomes the tipping factor at the end in getting student to commit to a deposit. Admissions indicated that a “sense of community” and evidence of customer service are more important considerations. However, they also thought it not unreasonable to conclude that fewer overnight visits during the pandemic might have had a favorable impact on enrollment. Parents are more likely than students to comment on the quality of the spaces, including being surprised about community washrooms. Admissions is careful about which housing spaces are shown to applicants, but overnight visits are dependent upon the students who offer to host.

We understand that this is not an amenity race and we are not desperately far behind our competitors, but some upgrading would be an advantage so that furniture, furnishings, and communal spaces would look (and be) inviting. Admissions concluded that money put into the existing halls, as opposed to constructing brand new facilities, would be preferred.

Recommendation: In a master planning exercise, develop plans to upgrade the existing residence halls to provide more singles, fewer students per washroom, more communal kitchen space, and more community space that meets the specific interests of students.

4. How should we address parking problems?

With the increase in enrollment and, proportionately, the larger increase in commuters, the demand for parking has become a significant problem. Spaces are often not available on Middle Campus in the middle of the day, leaving commuter students and faculty circling for spots. Faculty and staff who arrive early are assured of spots but dare not leave for lunch. There are frequently spots open at Glen Rowan, but these spots are either not top of mind or are considered too far for walking purposes.

On South Campus, events in the Sports and Recreation Center or the Ice Rink will often necessitate Parking Restriction emails from Public Safety. This February, parking restrictions were in effect for three weekends. Students were required to move their cars so that spaces could be made available for guests, which unintentionally sends a message to students about how the College is prioritizing space. (See attached illustration email.)

Several times in the past few years, an attempt has been made via working groups to locate spaces for additional parking. Each TD₂ (in₈nd)-5 (t)₁₉ ((ha)₃ rar a(d)-5 smrin₈(ing)₃ (d)-5 (u)-2 en tob(in₈(u)-2 (d)-5 ng)₃ elin₈(r)₁ esusurs. Tohesm r arr eurt.-5 lo--2 (t-.43 sd)-5 .

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At this writing, the College is seeking our next Director of Residence Life, who will be charged with leading efforts to invest in the staff's professional development, create a programmatic curriculum for the residence halls, refresh the Resident Assistant (RA) program, join campus efforts to reinvigorate campus community, and move the needle on student impressions of the community in the residence halls. Both returning and new RD staff will experience an optimistic reset of the department this summer.

Resident Assistants (RAs) are critically important in setting the stage for healthy communities. At this writing, the College is also responding to student requests to increase wages – including from the RA population – and a task force convened to address these concerns. More discussion of the RA program can be found below.

Recommendation: Analyze the fiscal resources that are necessary to secure the right people – and give them the resources that they need – to build community.

2. What will it take to build community in our residential program?

It's clear that collective attention from staff in Residence Life, Student Affairs, and campus partners must be focused on how to increase the student sense of community and belonging for both our residential and commuting students. We discussed several ideas – all of which require time and financial resources – but are worth exploring further by the relevant staff in coming months and years.

As examples only:

- x The College could consider repurposing a centrally-located house (7 Campus Circle?) as a middle-campus kitchen and gathering space for commuters. Committee members noted other liberal arts colleges have student kitchens or themed houses (cookie house!) that are institutional points of pride.
- x We could offer meditation and prayer space in the residence halls or in the student center. These practices are sometimes individual, but are often communal activities too.
- x We noted the need for a creative program to 're-socialize' students this fall, with a focus on fun, energetic connections with others that enhance the student experience.

Committee members were concerned that these efforts might be complicated by a generation of students who – due to the COVID-19 pandemic – have been socialized differently than their forebears. In Fall

2022 and beyond, our students may need more thorough information about campus programs and traditions, and how to plan events and engage with peers.

We also noted the need for better gathering space for commuters. The existing commuter lounge in the lower level of Deerpath is large, with comfortable seating and modest appointments, but it is not centrally located. Perhaps commuting students could be assigned to join certain residential communities to broaden their social connections and access to spaces on campus.

Both the Residence Directors (RDs) and the Resident Assistants (RAs) are asked to spend a notable amount of their time and energy on building community on the floor and across the residence hall. This can feel at odds, on occasion, with the accountability measures that the RDs and RAs must take to ensure the community's standards are upheld. Some committee members felt that confronting policy violations makes it difficult for RAs to be seen as builders of community; other committee members felt that holding the community accountable is good for the overall health of the community itself.

Currently the operational budget for programming in the residence halls is too low at approximately \$10,000 annually. This amounts to \$2,500 per RD, or \$250 per RA, or \$8 per resident each year. Of course, other campus entities like the Gates Center, Intercultural Relations, Student Government, and student clubs contribute to campus community through their own programming budgets.

Recommendation: Empower Residence Life and other campus departments to experiment with low -budget projects that may develop into community -building traditions.

Recommendation: Assess the space in Mohr Student Center for a commuter lounge and prayer/meditation space.

3. What kind of spaces create community?

Over time, small residential lounges originally planned for TVs or studying were reclaimed for bedroom space. This leaves only the larger, public "entryway lounges" for communal space in most buildings. Some of these are in good to excellent shape (Moore, Nollen, Deerpath) but others are unattractive with mismatched and uncomfortable furniture. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, few buildings have kitchens, which further limits student interaction and connection. We found it noteworthy that students

mentioned the outdoor tents and picnic tables as gathering places that are addressing that need, at least partially.

Recommendation: Include residence hall furniture replacement in residence hall master planning. Capitalize on any donor interest or surplus

The College contracts out for the dining plan and pays Parkhurst for the meals. Financial Aid packages about \$4,000 of additional College grant aid for students living on campus who have unmet need. The average across all residential students in FY19 (pre-pandemic) was \$2,846 in additional aid per resident. Starting with \$14 million billed for room and board, subtracting Parkhurst fees, and subtracting the additional grants, the remaining revenue was \$4.3 million or about \$3,900 per residential student. Against that revenue is allocated direct repairs, custodial, facilities management, utilities, interest paid on debt for past renovations, and the residence life staff and programming. The net revenue remaining was only \$507,000, which is not enough to pay for needed annual refurbishment, let alone major capital repairs tn (en)-10 (u)-onliuer c-3 (a(o)5 (n d)-2 (s)

5. What is the financial role of summer programs that utilize the residence halls?

The College has a strong summer rental program, which brings in week-long camps and conferences to live in the residence halls. These renters will also usually purchase meals from the College's meal plan provider, Parkhurst. The summer meal plan revenue helps offset the cost of the academic year meal plan.

In the summer of 2019 (the last full pre-pandemic summer), the College netted \$270,000 from these rentals. The College also contracted for \$45,000 of additional custodial help to get the halls ready before and after rentals, making net revenue \$225,000. In the summer of 2021, with students present on campus in the spring but few rentals in the summer, the College incurred no additional summer custodial charges. We are not able to identify or analyze specific costs for repairs due to summer wear and tear since the College work-order system does not collect this information.

The College also rents residence hall space to students in the summer.

Some of these students are attending summer sct\$2iu0 (c)-31 (c)-9 (ep)2.9 (ep)2 (e)-9 s tc38 (m)-20 (c)-(end)(s)-2()JJs(o)5 (m)-12 (e o)5 (r)1 (e a)-7 (o)5 (r)1 (k)Jng n campus

alone, make a prediction about whether the students of our near-term future will want to live on campus at greater or lesser rates, just as we could not, alone, identify how to prioritize the millions of dollars of deferred maintenance in the residence halls.

As you have read, this report outlines three priority recommendations for the coming years:

1) Develop a Facility Master Plan that will outline the needed renovations to the residence halls and address the parking situation.

- x In the near-term, a facilities assessment could be requested by an external party that would help ready us for campus master planning process. Furthermore, the campus parking shortage may need a remedy before the master planning process can be completed, and flexible solutions for additional residential beds may be needed if enrollment continues to grow.

2) Rally the relevant campus departments around building community in the coming year(s), especially as we seek to revivify the campus after a pandemic kept us apart.

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