

Report of the Master Plan Task Force on Enhancing Campus Life and Residential Communities



Figure 1 - Panther Village

Introduction

According to a report published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “students who live on campus are more likely to graduate, and particularly when the on-campus experience is purposefully structured toward student learning and engagement” (Barriers to Success: Housing Insecurity for U.S. College Students, February 2015).

Our task force focused on questions regarding the needs of non-classroom spaces that support student learning and the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) campus experience. Specifically, we were asked to:

- Consider the types of living learning environments will be needed to support students in the next 5, 10 and 20 years.
- Consider the spaces needed outside the classroom that foster informal learning experiences.
- Consider the types of passive spaces, both interior and exterior, that are needed to deliver high quality living learning programs.
- Consider the types of partnerships that can be forged to better serve the students, faculty and staff, as well as the community of Cedar Falls and the citizens of Iowa.

The campus faces a wide range of facilities needs and choices that depend, in part, on academic goals as well as student recruitment and retention goals, and engaging the broader community in campus-based activities. An expansion of summer programs including academic, community-focused (including summer camps), and conference activities is desired and additional facilities support required. Moreover, with regard to Learning Communities the campus as a whole is working toward facilitating students making the transition to the university, fostering students successfully pursuing their major programs, and finally making a smooth transition to the next phase of their careers after UNI. This “moving in/moving through/moving on” perspective can be applied more broadly with respect to planning for facilities that support our students as they enter and exit these key stages.

Student housing on the UNI campus currently includes eight traditional residence halls for first year students (4,164 beds), three apartment-style residence halls for upper-level students (774 beds), and 323 traditional apartment units for nontraditional students and families (or a total design capacity of 5,261).

According to Sightlines Facilities Asset Advisors, UNI’s housing inventory is lacking residence hall suites.

UNI Housing Inventory			
Housing Type	Description	Percentage of beds	
		Peers	UNI
Traditional Hall	Sleep/study area	58%	81%
	Community bath		
Suite-Style Hall	Sleep/study area	25%	0%
	Private bath		
Apartments	Private bedroom/bath	17%	19%
	Kitchen/living room		
Total		100%	100%

Figure 2 - UNI Housing Inventory

Following the “moving in/moving through/moving on” model of support for student success, adding suite-style housing provides a natural housing transition for students. First-year students reside in traditional residence halls to facilitate their adjustment to college and relationship building. Second-year students could transition into modernized suite-style accommodations offering more privacy and independence. Finally, upper-level students may elect to transition into apartment-style accommodations to achieve even greater autonomy and self-reliance.

UNI currently provides housing for approximately 37% of all students enrolled at UNI, including 93% of new freshmen (83% of all freshmen), 55% of sophomores, 28% of juniors and 17% of seniors.

The absence of suite-style housing may be contributing to a decline in the retention of second-year students residing on campus due to their inability to secure apartment-style accommodations after having lived in a traditional residence hall for their first-year. This lack of retention in residing on campus may hamper efforts to continuously improve enrollment retention at UNI on the whole.

It should also be noted that some second-year students elect to live in Residence Hall on the Hill (ROTH), but express dissatisfaction with living further from the core of campus and having to share a bedroom.

Total Housing Occupancy Compared to Capacity, Enrollment, Classification						
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Projected	Projected	Projected
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
University Enrollment	12,273	12,159	11,928	11,987	12,079	12,203
Residence Students	4,413	4,355	4,386	4,413	4,445	4,523
Occupancy as a % of Enrollment	36.0%	35.8%	36.8%	36.8%	36.8%	37.1%
Total Housing Design Capacity	5,015	5,261	5,261	4,829	4,829	5,203
Occupancy as a % of Capacity	88.0%	82.8%	83.4%	91.4%	92.0%	86.9%
Occupancy by Classification						
New Freshmen	94.2%	92.4%	92.7%			
All Freshmen	84.5%	83.1%	83.0%			
Sophomore	58.3%	58.5%	55.1%			
Junior	23.3%	26.7%	28.0%			
Senior	14.7%	15.1%	17.1%			

Figure 3 - Total Housing Occupancy

Given these realities, it is important to provide housing options that grow with our students as they progress from their first year to their final year at UNI. One means of accomplishing this connection with our students is through the growth and development of Learning Communities that are tailored to student interests across their time at the university. Facilities has a role in supporting Learning Communities as well as other structures to make living and working on campus a well-rounded, exciting, and full experience for students, faculty, and staff.

Learning Communities

Learning Communities (LCs) are student-centered, faculty-driven, administratively-supported educational experiences that help students succeed in their intellectual and personal development while promoting community engagement. They can be sorted into two types of LCs: Classroom-based communities and living-learning communities.

Classroom-based Communities are course-focused communities. Academic courses that include an embedded peer mentor consist of Cornerstone, first year and transfer only sections of liberal arts core courses.

Living learning Communities (LLCs) are residential based communities. Students live together based on academic majors (biology, business, education, exploring, honors, music and women & gender studies) or classification (Springboard = first year; STEP = second and third year experience program; Transfer).

UNI continues to develop and expand its Living Learning Communities. All first and second year students at UNI have the opportunity to participate in learning communities, including Living Learning Communities. These learning communities provide:

- **Integration:** Common classes based on major; interest; classification

- **Intentionality:** Experiences that promote student success through focused communication with a community of faculty, staff and peers
- **Resources:** Exposure to campus and communities resources
- **Unique Experiences:** Students engage in opportunities to shape their own learning and create community while exploring their own personal values, interests and identity
- **Ownership of Learning:** Students will actively engage in their learning and development

Beginning fall 2015, UNI will purposely structure its on-campus experience with Living Learning Communities that are specifically designed for each stage of a student's college career, first year students through seniors. All learning communities center on academic topics, academic classifications and/or shared interest of the students.

New areas to develop include strengthening the Honors student experience through Living Learning Communities.

Residential Living

The Task Force determined Residential Living contains four broad areas that require attention: Living Learning Communities, retention of sophomore students, Fraternity Sorority Life, and international students/families/visitors and faculty/staff housing.

Most students in traditional residence halls are freshmen and sophomores. There is an 81% capacity in the freshmen and sophomore residence halls, and the overall total occupancy is 83.4% for all of the residence halls.

UNI has suite-style residence halls for sophomores and juniors on in ROTH. Our university competitors have greater capacity, however, making this residence hall style something to consider for the campus Master Plan. The junior and senior residence halls are currently at 93% capacity indicating a shortage of space that is likely to be exacerbated by recent changes in the city code for off-campus housing.

Campbell Hall, Lawther Hall, and Hillside Courts need attention. Lawther Hall will close at the end of spring semester 2015 for a two-year renovation. When it reopens in the fall of 2017, it will offer suite-style housing for sophomore and junior students. With these updates, Lawther will enhance UNI's capacity to provide summer academic offerings as it is located close to several academic buildings. In addition, it would make an ideal conference center for summer academics as early as 2018. The renovation of Lawther Hall will reduce bed capacity. As UNI approaches its enrollment goal of 14,000 students, bed capacity could become a concern.

Campbell can also be modernized to provide space for upper-level students with modern residence space. As with Lawther, modernizing Campbell also improves the opportunity for the campus to support adult summer conference groups.

Hillside Court Apartments was constructed 45 years ago (1970). These wood-frame structures are nearing the end of their life expectancy and it may not be cost-effective to modernize them. Eliminating Hillside Court Apartments altogether would be the most efficient solution. ROTH can then be converted to housing for nontraditional students, families, UNI employees and guests of the university. We believe that many students currently in Hillside Courts would consider modernized Lawther and Campbell Halls to be superior locations due to improved facilities and proximity to academic buildings. ROTH, then, can serve nontraditional students, families, and others who have different need than do traditional students.

Considering the need to enhance campus opportunities for summer students and conference groups, it would be beneficial to update Bender and Dancer Halls through installing air-conditioning. For these two facilities to be fully effective year-round, an addition would be needed for the Towers Dining Center. Bender and Dancer Halls have a design capacity of 1,190 beds; however, the Towers Dining Center currently has only 700 seats.

The above suggestions improve student housing for sophomore students and above, as well as non-traditional student housing. In the event of additional pressure for high quality housing for graduate students and upper-level

students, the next phase of Panther Village could be constructed. This would add beds into the system and provide more options for students at these levels.

Off-campus Residence

The City of Cedar Falls has recently enacted changes to rental housing to maintain the character of single family neighborhoods and to avoid over-crowding houses that cannot handle more people living in them safely. Cedar Falls is becoming more proactive regarding enforcement of building codes, especially with regard to maintenance issues. Ordinance changes have recently been implemented that will limit the number of non-family residents who can live in a house.

These changes should improve quality of life for citizens and students alike who live near the UNI campus. The ordinance changes may also result in more students choosing to live on campus, if appropriate housing options are available. However, Cedar Falls is also looking at the potential for density bonuses in a ring of around campus. Density bonuses provide a tool to incentivize removal of deteriorated structures and combine small or sub-standards lots to create redevelopment of apartments. Ultimately, this policy could allow more safe and affordable housing near campus.

Some Greek houses are owned by UNI, an unusual arrangement and unique to UNI. Even more unusual is that the Physical Plant manages these houses. The Task Force feels it will be more consistent and efficient for the Department of Residence to manage these houses along with other university-owned housing both on- and off-campus.

Campus Life

Complementing the Living Learning experience at UNI, our dining services are being further integrated into academic facilities on campus. This includes the recently opened Book Bistro café located in the learning commons of the Rod Library, and our plans for a new café to be located in the soon-to-be remodeled Schindler Education Center.

To further meet students' dietary needs, allergen-free venues have been added to our dining centers – providing entrees, side dishes and desserts that do not contain any of the top eight allergens (milk, egg, wheat, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, fish and shellfish). The Task Force encourages a conversation regarding a possible Hospitality Major that would further engage Dining Services with the academic enterprise of the campus.



Figure 4 - The Book Bistro in Rod Library

Creating a Vibrant Central Campus

The Task Force has two important questions regarding specific issues in how to best integrate a strong and vibrant campus life experience with scholarship and learning activeness that will create a seamless experience for students.

1. How can UNI best integrate outdoor spaces and activities with the Department of Residence and our Living Learning programs?

The Task Force believes a conversation is needed among campus stakeholders that will focus on campus

aesthetics, the location of recreational spaces near residence halls and other key locations, and offering well-structured meeting “nodes” for casual conversation or as gathering places prior to attending campus events.

Along with this conversation, we should consider whether UNI would benefit by designation as a Tree Campus. Some other universities in the state have this designation. Seeking this designation would be consistent with other sustainability goals, such as LEED certification on new structures.

2. How can the Rod Library and the Maucker Union work synergistically to provide the UNI community a strong sense of the campus center that meets multiple needs (academic, social, fitness, and others)?

We are a community of active scholars—active in uncovering new knowledge and in using knowledge to address important issues in our city, state and the nation. The center of campus needs to have facilities and spaces that support these activities.

Maucker Union provides spaces for meetings, dining, and retail. In addition, it also includes dedicated spaces for the student newspaper, student radio station, a computer lab, a workout facility, student government/organizations, departmental offices for the Center for Multicultural Education, Military and Veteran Services Center, and the LGBT Center and International Programs.

Although recent university enrollment figures have been projected to maintain or experience slight declines, the usage of the facility has not mirrored those trends. The chart on the right shows the trend of reservations across the previous six years. Campus departments are the largest group of event reservations followed by student organizations. Less than 3% of events (but 20% of revenue) come from off-campus groups. Traffic in Maucker Union is also high with over 6,000 people, on average, entering the building every week day.

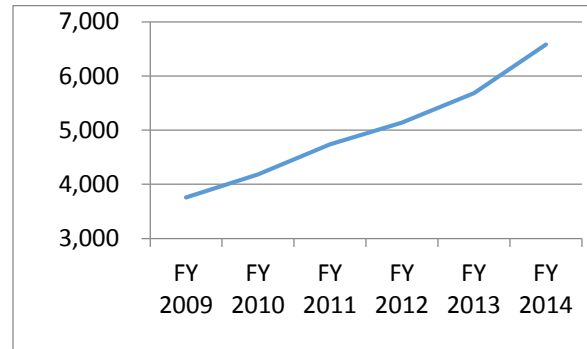


Figure 5 - Trends of Facility Reservations

The Rod Library has been an evolving library under the dynamic leadership of Dean Cox, who has a goal of creating a 21st century space for academic study. Maucker Union, adjacent to the Rod Library, has been seeing increasing usage, but is aging. The bond for Maucker is set to expire in 2022, so the timing is excellent to consider how best to improve both spaces as part of a vibrant modern campus center. Together, the Library and the Union, represent—and indeed, define—UNI as a social and academic institution. Currently, they are co-located in the center of campus, but are not functioning optimally in their traditional 20th century roles and certainly not functioning in the way many imagine a 21st century campus should look and feel.

The Task Force strongly encourages discussion about how to make best use of these two critical structures in the heart of campus. A solution will involve considering how best to engage technology, food services, and social needs. How can these spaces be improved to work synergistically to become a clear and strong statement of the heart of UNI?

Summary of Recommendations

Consider the Rod Library and Maucker Union as representing the heart of UNI and her campus. How can these two key structures be integrated to provide a vibrant academic and social experience for students, faculty and visitors to our community?

ROTH housing should be converted to be appropriate for nontraditional students, families and new employees. At the same time, we recommend razing Hillside Court Apartments. Modernizing Lawther and Campbell Halls is also

recommended, along with providing air-conditioning in Bender and Dancer Halls. The latter also requires that the campus consider an addition to the Tower Dining Center.

A discussion regarding the Commons Building and new spaces required for the Visitor's Center (with Admissions personnel) and Alumni Relations is required. New space, truly new or renovated existing space, is required to address UNI's pressing need to provide an outstanding experience for guests to our campus, enhancing both enrollment and advancement goals. The discussion should consider how best to use the Commons Building, Campbell Hall, and possible new construction to best serve several stakeholders.

The summer programs, including summer camps, conferences, and courses for traditional students and the community, need to be improved and developed. Expanding and deepening summer activities on campus benefits the institution, her students, and the community in a wide variety of ways. In support of this goal, improvements to several residence halls have been recommended (Lawther, Campbell, Bender, and Dancer). Dining options throughout the summer need to be examined and may need to run at breakeven or a slight loss until the summer program development meets target goals for participation.

The Task Force recommends a discussion about increasing non-traditional student enrollment. One option for the Academic Program Task Force to consider would be creating new programs on campus (i.e., a hospitality major to support the growth of transfer students from Kirkwood). A hospitality major would also allow the UNI Dining Services to provide service-learning and internship opportunities that will better connect them with the academic enterprise of the university.

Interest in supporting Living Learning Communities should be continued and expanded to include Honors, Fraternity and Sorority Houses within the residence halls, interdisciplinary learning communities and so on. An example would be an international house where our international students could be partnered with American students in the summer to help acclimate our international students to American university life.

We recommend that all housing managed across campus be managed by the Residence Life unit for consistency and improved accountability.

This Task Force report is respectfully submitted by its members:

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