THE EVOLUTION OF THE COLLEGE DORMITORY

SCOPE:

This bibliography provides a general overview of American college dormitories; their physical and philosophical changes from the late nineteen hundreds to the present day.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Although universities originally focused on the pursuit of the liberal arts and religious training, higher education left the straight and narrow, taking the road most traveled. Shifting educational, social, political, moral, and economic paradigms found physical expression on college campuses. Libraries, originally the centerpiece of a university, gave way to elaborate student centers. Boarding houses and chaperones yielded to dormitories and resident advisors. Social conformity melted into social acceptance, and the college dorm room has evolved from a monastic cell to a calling card announcing the occupant’s individuality.

STUDENT SECLUSION

Entering the twentieth century, most colleges had no extracurricular activities, no intramural sports, and no organized athletics. What existed was an emphasis on research and the academic way of life. Traditionally, residence halls were occupied by male students who were forced to adhere to strict dress codes, compulsory chapel services, and curfews. Until the 1830s, Harvard students were required to chop and haul their own firewood back to the dorms. As women assumed a place in higher education, concern for their moral protection dominated residence policies. College administrators believed it was their in loco parentis responsibility to ensure that morality and integrity was maintained by young women students. Dorm mothers enforced the rules, and a strict "lights-out" policy.
EDUCATING THE “WHOLE PERSON”

Before 1930, dormitories in America were only living spaces that provided little more than shelter and varying degrees of social interaction. They were not recognized as an integral part of the extracurricular life of students at most colleges. Student expression was limited as dorm rooms reflected the school and not the student. Eventually, restrictions loosened and posters and pin-ups became standard dorm décor.

IT’S ALL IN THE FAMILY

In the 1940s, with most of the country’s college-age men serving in World War II, more women applied and were accepted to universities. Female-only dorms and harsh university guidelines were constructed. Women were never allowed in male dorm rooms, and campus curfews existed into the 1960s. The end of World War II brought with it the dawn of the golden years for higher education. These were years of amazing growth for American colleges and universities. Thanks to the G.I. bill, 360,000 World War II veterans and their wives flocked to campuses across the country in the 1950s, where they lived in trailer parks and temporary bungalows that often lacked plumbing — accommodations that were still luxurious compared to the military barracks. School officials did little to mask the ultimate purpose of these communities (i.e. making babies). At Michigan State University, for example, GIs and their wives lived at "Fertile Valley."4

COLOR, GENDER, AND COLLEGES

The 1950s and 60s saw a surge in political and civil rights debates in America, with the college campus taking center stage in the debate over equality. The federal government came to the aid of colleges and universities with an estimated billion dollars in funds. By 1958, the federal government had assumed nearly 25 percent of the cost of all construction and by 1960 provided almost 20 percent of the actual operating income of most colleges and universities.5 Massive state and federal spending sparked a boom in dorm
construction, as minorities and disadvantaged students began flocking to campuses nationwide. In the late 1960s, female students began protesting gender segregation — not only in the dorms, but also at schools in general. No longer weighed down with strict rules that gave women’s residence halls a semi-convent feeling, dorms played an active role in the women’s movement. Women at Barnard College in Manhattan staged several protests called "bed-ins" to demand equal access to education.

In roughly a ten-year span, policies regulating student behavior in the residence halls moved away from strictly enforced curfews, dress codes, and alcohol policies. In the 1970s, many U.S. colleges moved from having only single-sex dormitories to providing coed residence halls, with male and female students typically housed on alternating floors or wings. Then came coed hallways and bathrooms, further shocking traditionalists. Now, some colleges allow undergraduates of opposite sexes to share a room. 

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The cinder-block dorms of the 1950s met the computer revolution of the 1980s. Re-wiring buildings became an expensive and drawn-out task. In 1985, Drexel University issued each incoming student a new Microsoft computer. In 2004, Duke University greeted its freshmen with iPods. Many schools require students to purchase computers before the school year begins. Writer Nicholas Carr says, "Facebook is the dorm; Wikipedia is the library; and Craigslist is the mall." 7

"VALUE-ADDED EDUCATION"

State and federal funding dwindles but demand for college degrees continues to rise. Tuition rates soar as have the need for better amenities to justify the expense. With colleges competing for students and their tuition dollars, billions are spent each year to support the student life and housing industry. High-end housing can be a tremendous draw for prospective freshmen. From 1995 to 2004, just 17% of the 113 residence halls constructed were traditional dorms; the vast majorities were apartment-style suites. American Campus Communities, one of the nation's largest student-housing developers design with luxury in mind. Tanning salons, pool waterfalls, Mongolian grills, and hot tubs are some of the amenities offered at colleges across the country, like Boston University's 35-foot climbing wall. Sandy Baum, a senior analyst for the College Board, says: "It's not so much colleges wanting to be country clubs, it's students who want to live in country clubs." 8

American Campus Communities surveys students each year to find out what they like. Since 1996, ACC has developed more than $1.5 billion in properties for university clients, and has acquired in excess of $2 billion in student-housing assets. Rutgers University's $55 million Rockoff Dorm features a Coldstone Creamery, a 7/11, grocery delivery, room cleaning and laundry services. La Vista del Campo Norte seems at first glance more like a hotel than a dorm. Bill Bayless, CEO of American Campus Communities states: "Nowadays, students demand privacy, technology and the same amenities they grew up with, he says. It's what the student expects when they leave Mom and Dad's." Some critics argue such grand accommodations distract students from college's
real purpose.⁹

Not everyone agrees with the luxury-dorm fad. Berea College in Kentucky has adopted a unique approach to strangled budgets and coddled kids: Dorms are furnished by the college crafts workshops, cafeteria food is provided by the school's farm, and students are required to work 10 hours a week in various campus jobs. "It's about identity and the culture you want to develop," says Gus Gerassimides, Asst VP for student life. "Ultimately every community has choices to make. It's who you choose to be."

RESEARCH TERMS

LC Subject Headings

Dormitories (May Subd Geog)
  UF Dorms
  Halls of residence
  Residence halls
Dormitory life (May Subd Geog)
  UF Dorm life
  Life, Dormitory
Resident assistants (Dormitories) (May Subd Geog)
  UF Advisors, Resident (Dormitories)
  Assistants, Resident (Dormitories)
  Dormitories--Staff [Former Heading]
  RAs (Resident assistants)
  Residence hall assistants
  Resident advisors (Dormitories)
Student housing (May Subd Geog)
  UF College housing
  Students--Housing
  BT Temporary housing
  SA subdivision Student housing under names of individual educational institutions, e.g. Harvard University--
  Student housing
  NT Dormitories
Student life and customs
  USE Students

Library of Congress Classifications

LB2331 Theory and practice of education--Higher education--Special aspects of higher education
LB2342 Theory and practice of education--Higher education--Finance. Income and expenditure. Accounting--By region or country
LB 2343 Theory and practice of education--Higher education--Student affairs services. Student personnel administration--Student guidance and counseling
Dewey Decimal Classifications

College students

Main Classes
200     Religion
230-280 Christianity
230-270 Specific elements of Christianity
240     Christian practice & observance
248     Christian experience, practice, life
248.8   Guides to Christian life for specific classes of persons
248.82-248.85 Guides to Christian life for specific age groups
248.83   Adolescents and college students
248.834 College students

Student housing

Main Classes
300     Social sciences
370     Education
378     Higher education
378.1   Organization and activities in higher education
378.19  Guidance, discipline, physical plant, welfare, students, curricula
378.194-378.198 Guidance, discipline, physical plant, welfare, students
378.198 College students
378.19871 Student housing--higher education

College and university buildings

Main Classes
700     Arts & recreation
720     Architecture
721-729 Specific aspects of architecture
Specific types of structures

*Buildings for educational and research purposes

Buildings for education at specific levels

*College and university buildings

Accessory structures

RESOURCES

Books


Textbook layout, accessible to nonprofessionals, useful as a ready-reference.


Covers categories from historical development and financing to programming and personnel, listing hundreds of books, periodicals, newspapers, and dissertations. Not annotated, but very useful for research.


A collection of articles published by university-affiliated authors that focus on the importance of resident assistants, educational programming, special interest housing units, and professionally trained full-time staff.


A collection of articles published by university-affiliated authors that focus on the importance of resident assistants, educational programming, special interest housing units, and professionally trained full-time staff.


Selective annotated bibliography, listing citations not included in the first edition of the bibliography.


Detailed descriptions of dormitory topics are supplied, ranging from facility planning to etiquette to laundry stain removal.

Collection of papers presented at the Conference on the Housing of College Students May 17, 1933 and supplemental material on housing plans in effect at a number of colleges and universities.


Academic study of dormitory structure and design at Berkeley.

**Dissertations**

There are a number of dissertations written about student housing, usually specific to the student’s doctoral program university. A few dissertations of note:


Frichette, S.R. (1976). *Factors associated with the social climate of single-sex and coeducational residence halls, etc.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oregon State University. (University Microfilms No. 76-14388)

Livingston, I.B. (1967). *Social, economic and political influences on the development of residence halls for women, etc.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University. (University Microfilms No. 27-2033A)

**Government Documents and Publications**


Replaced *School Life* for the duration of the war.

Sanford, B.E. (1918). *Organization of social life where there are no dormitories, and housing students under such conditions*. National Education Association, 393-395.

*School Life*. Publication suspended Mar. 1942 to July 1945. From Mar. 1942 to June 1945 *Education for Victory* was published in place of *School Life*.


**Newspaper Articles**


- Discusses the Edward S. Harkness donation of $25,000,000 to Yale and Harvard for the construction of college houses for its students.

Gordon, Larry. In college dorms, a 'post-gender world'; Dozens of schools are starting to allow coed roommates. (March 15, 2010). *The Los Angeles Times*, Main news; Metro desk; Part A; p. 1.

- Report on the trend for colleges to provide coed dorm rooms, and student/parent response.


**Periodicals, Monographs**


- Discussion from a Catholic worldview of the need for creating a school environment equivalent to the home.


- Discussion of the connection between college work and college play.


- Advocates the creation of a beautiful campus; equates the aesthetic with the cerebral.


- A recognition of the influence of student leisure time and a call for its purposeful use.


- Essay on the current trends in dorm décor; pictures.

M. C., T. "Affairs at the University of Michigan." *Nation* 11, no. 284 (December 8, 1870): 383.

- Article advocating the policy of students residing with local families in order to supply the student with an intimate home life.

No palaces on veteran’s royal road to learning. (1946, March 16). *Business Week*, p.22.


Describes in detail the three essential elements of effective living-learning centers: programs, staff, and physical facilities; “form follows function.”


A philosophical foundation of the importance of the residential environment at a college or university.

Quotes from well-known philosophers and historians support the author’s claim.

**Photo Essays**

Stephey, M.J. *The Evolution of the College Dorm*. *Time.com*

http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1838306,00.html#ixzz0lOHX1xwd

An excellent overview, with pictures from Life Magazine’s archives, quoted and paraphrased by this bibliography.

**Workbooks**


A practical workbook that enables residence education professionals to define, design, and deliver community development model appropriate to each unique institutional setting.