

# Housing struggles to compete

■ University Housing faces the challenge of creating accommodations that will make students feel at home

By Hank Hager  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The University's residence halls were the third-worst in the nation in 1998, according to a 1998 report by the scholarly journal Princeton Review.

Though the University no longer holds this dubious distinction, many on campus feel the need for an additional residence hall is necessary to keep University Housing a viable option for students.

"It's clear to me we need to build a new residence hall," said Michael Eyster, director of University Housing, adding it would have to be centrally located on campus.

According to a report by Anderson Strickler, LCC, a consultant group hired by the University to assess the future of campus housing, to remain competitive the University must build another residence hall or improve the existing ones. Doing so would maintain the "residential" status of the University by putting an emphasis on a strong campus community for students.

The University has begun construction of two new buildings slated to house graduate and law students between Moss and Villard Streets east of the Bean Complex.

The report also found that no residence hall at the University is less than 30 years old. The University Inn, built 34 years ago, is the newest while the oldest, Carson Hall, had its 52nd birthday last year.

Eyster defined a residential campus as characterized by vitality and vibrancy as well as a sense of community. He said it is not based simply on the percentage of the student

body living on campus.

Anne Leavitt, associate vice president of Student Affairs, agreed with Eyster and said a new facility or the renovation of an existing hall is something that has to be done to keep the University from becoming a "commuter campus."

The report named freshmen as the primary beneficiaries of a residential campus because of the proximity to academic facilities, such as the Knight Library.

According to the report, "having a residential component lends a certain 'aura' and makes the campus more appealing." The report also suggested on-campus students become more involved with campus activities and are more apt to use the University's academic resources.

Currently, 3,125 beds are available in campus residence halls — enough to house approximately 20 percent of enrolled students. The average room has a gross area per bed of 247 square feet, which is almost 100 square feet less than the average for newly built residence halls at other schools. Because of this, Eyster said the possibility of students leaving for more spacious living arrangements is real.

"Current residence hall rooms don't offer the kind of space students need," Eyster said.

He said the residence halls are still in good shape, but were built for students of a different era.

Other universities have begun to invest more in their student housing. In a letter to Dan Williams, vice president for administration, Eyster wrote that Oregon State University has begun to pay more attention to the interaction between its faculty and students who reside in housing. This, he wrote, has brought OSU praise in its attempt to bring more students to its residence halls.

Leavitt also said University resi-

dence halls are not competitive with other schools.

She said residence halls are the first step to creating and maintaining a residential campus. After 5 p.m., she said, the campus becomes very different. Students and faculty leave, creating a void of activity at night on campus.

"We need to have a really compelling campus at night," she said.

She said creating a campus where students feel at home and want to go to relax and enjoy their leisure time is important in having a residential campus.

Leavitt said directors from the Student Recreation Center, the EMU, and University Housing have discussed ways to involve students in programs on campus.

Dennis Munroe, director of Physical Activity and Recreation Services, said the proximity of the Rec Center to the residence halls can be a determining factor for students who choose to live in housing on campus.

"We stand prepared to try to enhance the residential experience to a desirable level," he said.

But funding has created a situation where the University may not be able to afford to add or renovate a residence hall.

"We can't fix them without some dedicated funding," Leavitt said.

In the 1998-99 fiscal year, University Housing received \$20,962,992 in funds. During the same period, \$20,502,989 was spent in operating expenses. This left a surplus of \$460,003. An additional \$604,890 was added to housing reserves, putting \$1.8 million total in reserve. According to the housing assessment, this represents 1 percent of the replacement cost of the entire housing system.

"I think Student Affairs has a job to do," Leavitt said.

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