

Report:

University of Alberta Task Force on Residential Capacity May 2000

The Task Force on Residential Capacity was formed in January of 2000 by the Vice-President (Academic) and Provost to evaluate residential capacity at the University of Alberta and to make recommendations on institutional housing strategy appropriate for the period of increasing internationalization and expanding enrollment we are now entering. To this end, the Task Force has been asked to address a range of issues:

- The proportions of our student body, graduate and undergraduate, that should be housed in the residence system
- What groups of students, if any, should be given priority in residence
- The relative importance of location versus cost
- The types of residences most needed
- The relative importance of flexibility in design and adaptability
- The value of Pembina Hall as a residence in view of the need for space for other uses in central campus
- The possibilities for partnerships with private developers
- Long-term strategy for North Garneau as it pertains to the residence system
- The appropriate role for Housing and Food Service in supporting exchange agreements and Extension's English Language Program
- The role of the residence system in recruiting international students and students offered major scholarships

This review is timely because enrollments, both graduate and undergraduate, are projected to increase steadily over the next few years while vacancy rates in the University area are expected to remain extremely low. Even at our present level of enrollment, it is very challenging for students to locate accommodations that they can afford close to campus, and the problem will become worse if enrollment expands as predicted. Moreover, the shortage of affordable housing creates exceptional difficulty for students coming to the University from outside Edmonton. This includes students the University's Key Strategic Initiatives target for recruitment: international students, the majority of graduate students, and many of the best and brightest of our scholarship winners.

In setting our goals for residence capacity, it is important to keep in mind the vital role the Residence System plays in the University's Key Strategic Initiatives. The following are particularly important from the perspective of this task force.

- **Key Strategic Initiative # 4. *Recruitment of Outstanding Students and Students With Outstanding Potential***

This can be realized only if we are able to offer places in residence to students we recruit from outside the Edmonton area.

- **Key Strategic Initiative # 6. *Internationalization***

A number of issues are related to this initiative:

- It is particularly difficult for students from other cultures with no support group in Edmonton to find accommodation.
- Parents of young international recruits look for the safety and protection a residence community affords.
- Many international students will not come to a university that does not provide accommodation.
- The difficulties international students who come without prearranged accommodation face in finding decent, affordable housing can affect their academic performance for the worse.
- Exchange programs require university residence space to function well.

- **Key Strategic Initiative # 8. *Improved Learning Environment***

The experience of residence life will contribute significantly to the “development of the whole person” and “the education of model citizens and leaders of tomorrow” which are important goals of this initiative.

Research suggests that students who live in residence have higher completion rates for degree programs, better than average GPAs, and higher levels of satisfaction with their university experience than non-residents.

In forming its conclusions, the Task Force has been able to draw on the internal review of our residence system that was completed late in 1999. While The Housing Strategic Plan Discussion Paper (attached) is as much concerned with operational issues as with capacity, it and the research that went into preparing it provide a wealth of valuable information about our residence system and about residential capacity at comparable Canadian universities.

The Discussion Paper reveals that, in housing about 11% of its total student population, the University of Alberta falls below the Canadian average of 12% to 15%. Moreover, this overall average is considerably lower than the percentage of students accommodated by the really top-notch universities with which the U. of A. would be compared academically. For example, U. B. C. houses 16.3% of its total student population, U.W.O. accommodates 17.2%, and Queens 21.4%. Each of these universities house over 20% of their full-time students as compared with our 12.8%. In addition, several of our leading competitors for the best international and Canadian students are now building additional residences.

In view of these factors, it is clear that considerable increases in residence capacity of various kinds will be needed. Priorities for residence places that reflect both relative need and the Key Strategic Initiatives have to be determined. The recommendations that follow reflect the conclusions of the Task Force on which groups of students have the most pressing needs and which types of residences will best address these needs. Clearly, international students and exchange students are priority groups, but many Canadian students from outside Edmonton, especially younger students in first and second year, also need residence accommodation. Winners of major scholarships will generally require residence accommodation, and it is common for our competitors to offer it. Waiting lists also show that married students and students with children, many of whom are graduate students relocating from outside Edmonton, need much more University housing. English Language Program students who come to study in the Faculty of Extension for relatively short periods of time represent a special problem, and the success of this important program will depend significantly on our ability to provide accommodation for its students. Extension is managing to maintain its ELP program with a home-stay program at present, but the situation is far from ideal for many students and the lack of residence accommodation for ELP students makes expanding the program challenging.

While present waiting lists and recruitment goals suggest substantial expansion, the Task Force has been mindful of the fact that our residence system operates on a cost-recovery basis and that market demands change. In estimating demand, the Task Force kept in mind that overall need will be less than the cumulative need of individual groups in that students needing housing often fit into more than one category -- international students and graduate students, for example. It was also understood that creating more residence space for prioritized groups would indirectly help other students by reducing the demand for local, non-residence housing. Therefore, the Task Force concluded that it would be best to expand gradually, addressing the most obvious needs first and revising expansion plans periodically as market demand and University priorities indicate. In expanding, it will also be important to design any new facilities for reasonable flexibility of use, so that they can be used for conferences in the summer, for example, and so that accommodation can be easily adapted to changing tastes. The Task Force recognized the central importance of location in planning new residences. Notwithstanding these considerations, however, the

Task Force concluded that, with sound planning and periodic reviews, it will be feasible to expand the residence system substantially over the next decade with little risk of failing to break even financially.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That affordability for students be central in all plans for expanding residence capacity.

Recommendation 2:

That the University expand its overall residential capacity to 13.5% of the student population as soon as this is economically feasible and that the University set a long-term target of housing 15% of its students.

Recommendation 3:

That Housing and Food Services give priority to the following groups:

- Winners of major scholarships
- International students
- First-year students from outside the Edmonton area
- Second-year students from outside the Edmonton area
- Students with families

Recommendation 4:

That Housing and Food Services and the University administration collaborate in creating a second traditional multi-floor residence with the capacity to house 400-800 students.

Recommendation 5:

That Housing and Food Services and the University administration add at least 50 townhouse units at Michener Park.

Recommendation 6:

That the University administration and Housing and Food Services explore ways of adding additional residence space for unmarried graduate students and senior undergraduate students on the underutilized land at the east end of the campus now occupied by Garneau houses and other smaller buildings.

Recommendation 7:

That the University administration seek a share of the federal government infrastructure funding for low-income housing now being administered by the Edmonton Foundation for Housing. (This could well assist with Recommendation 6.)

Recommendation 8:

That Housing and Food Services gather information on flexible design plans at other universities so that it can provide informed guidance to those planning new residence space on how best to create facilities readily adaptable for changing demand and for alternative use in the off-season.

Recommendation 9:

That Pembina Hall be preserved as a residence for the foreseeable future.

Recommendation 10:

That the University administration explore the possibility of acquiring old St. Stephen's College.

Recommendation 11:

That an international residence be built that will provide approximately 200-300 additional bed spaces for international students and Canadian students who want an international experience.

Recommendation 12:

That Housing and Food Services and the University administration collaborate with the Faculty of Extension to create residence accommodation primarily for students in Extension's English Language Program.

Recommendation 13:

That long-term plans for the South Campus include one or more residence buildings within easy walking distance of the extended LRT route.

Recommendation 14:

That the University administration ensure that it is represented on the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing.

Recommendation 15:

That in exploring the possibility of partnerships with private developers, Housing and Food Services move cautiously to ensure that any joint ventures preserve the quality of residence experience and support the University's strategic initiatives.

Recommendation 16:

That the University plan to review progress in carrying out the recommendations of this task force and the state of residential capacity relative to enrollment in three to five years.

Members:

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