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A dormitory-replacement project at Indiana U. of Pennsylvania may be the most ambitious ever in the country.

Swanky Suites, More Students?

To attract applicants, a university bets \$270-million on housing

BY BECKIE SUPIANO

INDIANA, PA.

LEADERS at Indiana University of Pennsylvania had heard the horror stories: Students would be accepted here, visit the campus, take one look at the outdated dormitories, and decide to go someplace else.

Something had to be done.

So they made the bold move to replace all student housing, bed for bed—at a cost of \$270-million.

The public university has already begun tearing down its traditional dorms—think cinder blocks, communal bathrooms, earth tones—and is replacing them with swanky, apartment-style suites.

In addition to meeting students' demands for better amenities, Indiana is using the project to reinvent its living-and-learning program. Such programs, which have become popular on campuses across the country, are designed to increase student

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To Draw Students, a University Replaces All Its Dorms With Swanky New Ones

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engagement by extending education beyond the classroom.

Indiana's effort is ambitious—one of the largest student-housing-replacement projects in the country, if not the largest. And it shows how far some colleges are willing to go—and how much they are prepared to spend—to attract and retain students who expect to be catered to.

According to several experts, big improvements in student housing can indeed help with recruitment. "It's fairly safe to say if facilities are fairly dreadful and students don't want to live there, it will make a difference," says Richard A. Hasel, a founder of the Art and Science Group, a college-marketing company.

The effort is crucial as the university tries to recruit more students at a time when western

Pennsylvania expects a steady decline in the college-age population. "It really makes IUP more of a destination for students," says Tony Atwater, the university's president.

Mr. Atwater also hopes that the project will send a message to the Indiana area, which is slowly adjusting to an economy focused more on service and technology and less on manufacturing.

"If IUP can do this—live its moniker of being 'beyond expectations'—then the community can," he says.

TIME AND MONEY

The big construction project had its naysayers, who worried about its cost and the time it would take. One early skeptic was Susanna C. Sink, interim vice president for administration and finance. She was persuaded only after see-

ing Indiana's market research indicating that students wanted upscale housing.

The construction, which began in 2006, is divided into four phases, allowing the university to keep 3,500 students on the campus even as the new housing is built. The project is on schedule, with the first two buildings open and fully occupied with 734 students. The next phase is scheduled to open in time for the fall semester, and the whole project is on track to be completed in 2010.

Indiana is paying for the \$270-million worth of construction with bonds issued through its private foundation. Financing the project that way, rather than through the state's higher-education system, has hastened construction, in part because the university does not have to go through the lengthy bidding process required for state contracts.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT GOLDSMITH FOR THE CHRONICLE

Students at Indiana U. of Pennsylvania meet in the "living and learning" program, which links their academic and social lives.

While the university owns the land, the buildings belong to the Foundation for IUP, which leases them back to the institution. The foundation plans to sell the facilities to the university for one dollar a building in 30-some years, when the debt has been retired.

Part of the cost for the new suites will be subsidized by the students who live there, who pay \$3,010 to \$3,925 per semester, about \$1,000 more than in the old dorms. Students who don't want to live in the new residences still have the option of the older dorms until the project is completed, or, of course, living off campus.

Despite the cost of the housing replacement, refurbishing the old dorms to meet the demands of today's students would have been even more expensive, says Robert O. Davies, vice president for university relations. The new buildings will be LEED-certified, meeting standards of environmentally conscious construction, which should eventually reduce operating costs like heating and cooling.

The replacement project also represents a "culture shift" at the institution, says Mr. Davies, who is also the executive director of the university's foundation. The new housing will allow Indiana to foster the "teacher-scholar model," he says, providing the kind of personalized academic setting that students want.

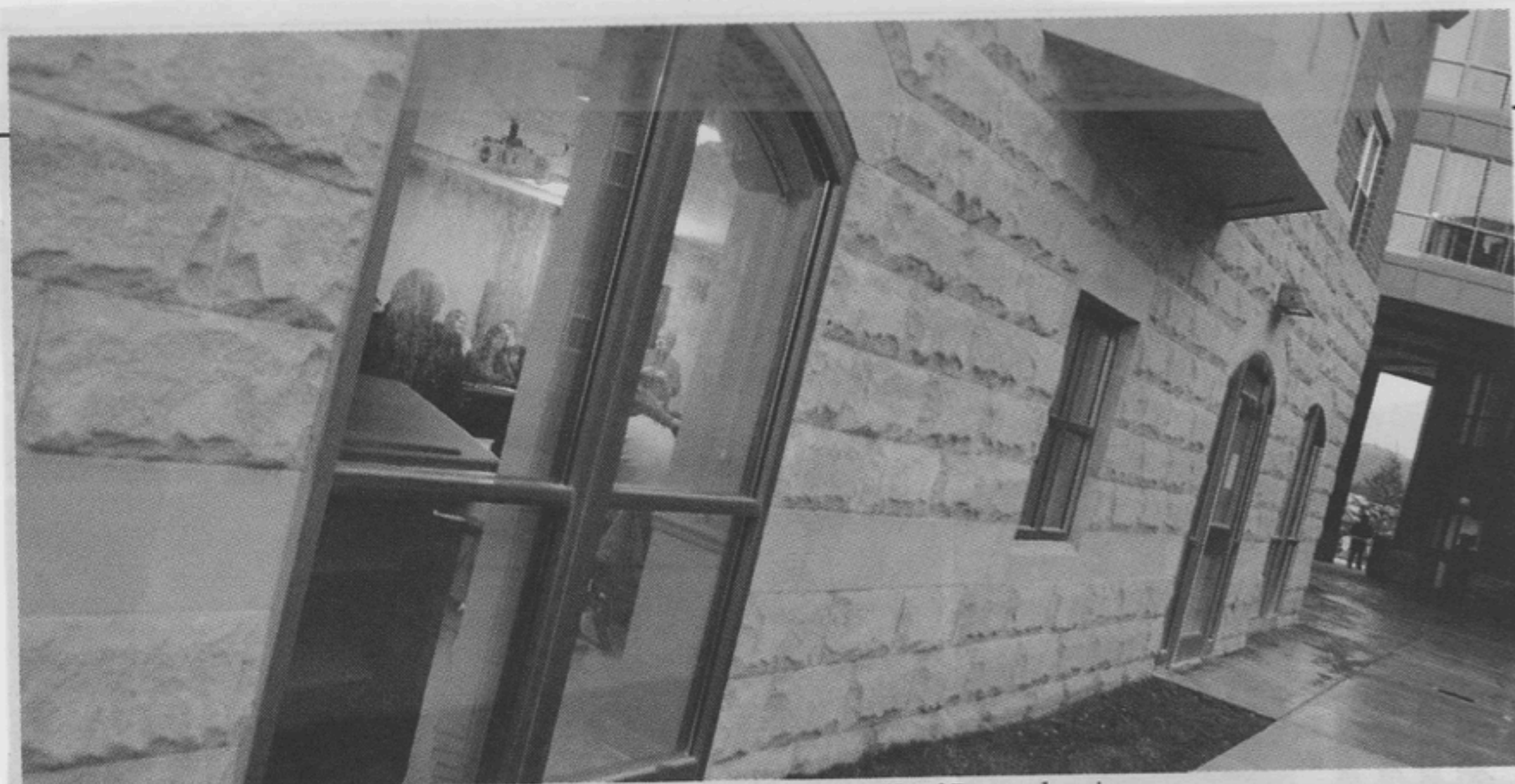
By the end of the project, the university will have torn down 13 buildings and built nine—all in the center of the campus, and all while students continue to live there. In addition to juggling accommodations for a quarter of its undergraduates, Indiana also has had to close central streets on its compact campus during the academic year.

LIVING AND LEARNING

Indiana's leaders always wanted the new housing to be in the heart of the campus—rather than on the outskirts, as at many institutions. They were motivated partly out of a desire to show that students are the top priority, and partly because they wanted the lower floors of



Construction at Indiana U. of Pennsylvania is proceeding in phases, so that the 3,500 students who live on the campus can stay there while their new suites are being built.



The Suites on Grant, the first two of the new dormitories at Indiana U. of Pennsylvania, are already occupied by more than 700 students.

the residence halls to be public spaces. The completed halls, for example, house the IT Support Center, the African American Cultural Center, and the International Affairs Office.

The combination of public and private spaces in the buildings raised concerns about security, something the architects addressed by putting doors between the two kinds of space and requiring key-card access to enter the residential portion.

The halls' location is intended to extend the feeling of the nearby grove of oak trees, a popular hang-out for students. The prime location also helps to connect the academic and social lives of students through living-and-learning programs, a major goal of the replacement project.

The residences feature "learning studios," multimedia-equipped rooms that can be used for lectures or group study. Students with particular academic and extracurricular interests will also be clustered in particular residence halls. For example, students who are nursing majors or who do not want to be around alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs will be able to choose to live in the "wellness" wing of one of the residence halls.

To encourage faculty members to create living-and-learning activities, the student-affairs office offers them one-time grants of \$500 to \$2,500.

Crimson Connections, a program for students who have not declared majors, was created with one of those grants. All incoming students at Indiana must choose a college, even if they don't quite know what they want to study. And undeclared students often get lost within their colleges and are more likely to drop out.

So Michele A. Norwood, assistant dean of fine arts, and Jacqueline Beck, director of academic planning and assessment in the College of Health and Human Services, created the program for undeclared students in their colleges.

They designed Crimson Connections to engage such students and help them build connections to one another and to the university. Freshmen in the program take two linked courses together each semester and attend at least four meetings led by Ms. Norwood and Ms. Beck. The meetings are held in one of the new halls, although not all of the students in the program live there.

Kaitlin F. Mackenzie lives in a traditional dorm, but it takes her just five minutes to walk to the meetings. There's a bit of a stigma attached to undeclared students at Indiana, she says, and it's "nice to talk to other people in the same exact position."

The program has helped Ms. Mackenzie improve her time-management skills, she says. It has also helped her decide on a major, nursing. She has found her place at Indiana and is looking forward to living in the new housing next year.

Administrators say offering such programs right where students live can make all the difference. It is also important that those activities occur in the public part of the buildings, so students from across the campus can participate, says Jack G. Makara, assistant director for assessment and academic initiatives in the Office of Housing and Residence Life.

on, which makes the thin walls both a blessing and a curse. But it has been quite an adjustment for students used to the relatively soundproof cinder blocks of the old dorms. The architects took note, and the housing in the next phases of construction will have thicker walls.

Another challenge is creating spaces that not only enhance learning but will still be useful decades from now. Hank Colker, of WTW Architects, in Pittsburgh, which designed all of the new residence halls, refers to that notion as building with "flexible bones." The idea is that residential space could be converted to study space, and back again, should the need arise.

That way, with any luck, Indiana's housing will draw potential students, and not deter them, for years to come.

Although the new suites have proved popular, the builders are still working out a few kinks. Perhaps the most frequent complaint of students living in the completed buildings is that the walls are too thin.

The community advisers say that helps them know if a party is going

PRIVACY VS. COMMUNITY

Indiana wants to help students build the sense of community they crave, but the university must balance that with their desire for privacy. The new housing was created to meet demands for increased privacy, as well as for enhanced amenities. Both of those requests came up again and again in the university's extensive marketing research. In the new residences, students will be able to choose from six styles of suites, for two or four residents. The least expensive is a two-person room with a shared kitchenette and bathroom; the priciest is a two-person suite with private bedrooms and bathrooms and a shared kitchenette and living room.

The suites have both wired and wireless Internet access, microwaves, refrigerators (full-sized in all but the smallest suites), self-controlled heat and air-conditioning and full carpeting. It's what this generation of students requires, administrators say.

"Dormitory-type living is no longer the environment students today are expecting," says Rhonda H. Luckey, vice president for student affairs. "It is essential to provide students with a living environment that meets their needs and interests."

The university is providing "comfortable quarters," says Mr. Atwater, the president, "but also bringing into it amenities that support student success."

One unintended consequence is that many students choose to hang out in the suites' living rooms rather than in more central locations, as they would in the old dorms, says Reginald B. Bolding Jr., a student who is a community adviser in one of the new buildings. (Resident advisers are now called community advisers.)

Several of the community advisers agree that residents are more comfortable in the new rooms and have a heightened sense of independence.

"It's become a lot harder to get residents to come to programs," says Donovan V. Daniel, a student who is the head community adviser for the new buildings and has also worked as a resident adviser in a traditional dorm. But some of them say that may change as the living-and-learning program becomes more incorporated into the residence halls.

"I think the clusters will help a lot," Ondirae H. Abdullah-Robinson, another of the advisers.