

CAMPUS RESIDENCE HALLS: A PLACE TO CALL HOME

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Picture a plain brick building with minimal amenities, outdated furniture, cinder block walls, grimy group bathrooms, and bedrooms the size of holding cells. It has little character and even less charm— it simply provides shelter for its inhabitants. This is imagery that school dormitories used to invoke.

Luckily, that image has now vanished along with the old furniture. Today's campus residence halls are no longer constructed as buildings with the sole purpose of providing lodging for students. The style, layout, and program of the residence halls being built now stems from strategic thought and preparation that directly reflect the mission and direction of the schools themselves. Administrators have come to realize that the appearance of all the buildings on their campuses has an impact on the message they are conveying to their prospective student bodies; the kind of dorm they build will surely affect the types of students they attract. A school's enrollment, operational objectives, optimal student/faculty ratio, balance of initial and life cycle costs, and student/parent expectations all factor into determining what is to be built.

Gone are the cookie-cutter designs of the past, replaced instead with original layouts that fit the needs of each individual institution. Recent examples of this residence hall revolution are the student cottages at Northfield Mount Hermon School in Gill, Massachusetts; the faculty/student housing at Hillside School in Marlborough, Massachusetts; and the undergraduate dormitory at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Three uniquely different styles of residence halls, each one implicitly expresses the values and mission of its respective academic institution.

Northfield Mount Hermon School is a co-educational secondary school for grades nine through twelve. It was formed through the merger of the Northfield School and the Mount Hermon School in 1971. After the merger, the school operated two campuses under one administration. Both the Northfield and the Mount Hermon campuses had several stately and substantial buildings with the exteriors predominantly of stone, brick, and slate.

In 2004, the school decided to consolidate all of its operations onto the Mount Hermon campus. Approximately 80% of the students at Northfield Mount Hermon are boarders; therefore, the lasting impression of the residence halls is of utmost importance when trying to attract an elite student body. Once the decision was made to blend the two campuses, the administration

wanted to ensure that any new buildings reinforced the existing high standards, while also inspiring a feeling of unity from being on one campus.

"We're making a huge investment in facilities because they express our goals and values," said Dean of Students, Nicole Hager. "The first new structures on our new campus are more supportive and nurturing. The fine finishes don't just look good, they're about quality, durability, and a homey feel."

The two new student cottages—built in 2005 and designed by architects at Sasaki Associates of Watertown, Massachusetts—bring all elements of the campus community together; they accommodate 56 boarding students, include residences for six faculty families, and have rooms set aside for use by local day students. The buildings are a modern interpretation of Berkshire craftsman style—wood framed with brick veneer façade, granite stone work, and slate roofing. Interior finishes, including slate flooring and accents, high-end millwork, and six gas fireplaces were included to ensure the buildings are comfortable, welcoming, and enhance the feeling of home.

The new residence halls at Hillside School are also a great example of the new trend in campus dorms. The style is very different from the cottages built at Northfield Mount Hermon because the mission and direction, as well as the student body, are



Student Cottages at Northfield Mount Hermon School

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Student Cottages at Northfield Mount Hermon School

very different at Hillside School. Here, the institution serves 120 boys in grades five through nine, some of whom have learning styles that require an especially structured and supportive environment. The existing campus consists of 22 buildings, a number of which are New England farmhouse-style structures.

Boarders represent approximately 60% of the student body and, since the age group is younger, more attention was given to creating a nurturing, disciplined atmosphere. Hillside School will be increasing enrollment over time, so the new dormitories they've built over the past few years satisfy their growing need for on-campus housing. The wood-framed residences—two newly built with near-term plans for a third—contain three 2-story faculty apartments with full basements, kitchens, and multiple bathrooms, and a student living complex with six double bedrooms, a common living room, and a bathroom facility.

The designs of the two new dorms, which were done by Ganek/Baer of Littleton, Massachusetts, encourage the boys to socialize with one another. The bedrooms are slightly smaller than average, increasing the attraction of spending time in

the common rooms under the supervision of a faculty advisor. The shared living room, kitchen, and study area are all equipped with broadband Internet connections, television, and telephones. *"Amenities matter a great deal,"* explained Assistant Head Master Art Goodearl. Also high on the list of priorities was the ambiance inside the residence halls. The color palette of soft beiges and grays, according to Goodearl, *"creates a soothing feeling for our boys."*

In contrast to the dorms on primary and secondary school campuses, greater emphasis is placed on creating an independent living environment at the college and university level. While freshmen are likely to be housed in a more congregate housing format, suites containing multiple bedrooms, a bathroom, and a common area with kitchenette are more attractive to upper class students. These residence halls are wired for Internet access and feature areas for group studying. Often there is an apartment for the Resident Advisor or Director, but no faculty would be housed there.

The new undergraduate dormitory at Babson College—a private university with a focus on business and entrepreneurial studies—exemplifies this style of residence hall. In the fall of 2005 Babson's undergraduate population was more than 1,700 students and that number continues to grow.

Expansion of the student body dictated that it was necessary for Babson to build a new dormitory. The five-story, 55,000 square foot, all brick building, which is being built into a hillside, has an elegant curved façade and was designed by Perkins + Will



Student and Faculty Residence at Hillside School

Architects of Boston to mirror the architectural style of the rest of the buildings on campus.

When completed it will accommodate 124 students in 31 apartment-style units, each containing four bedrooms as well as a bathroom, shared living room, and kitchenette. The building will also feature student lounges, a lobby, and a two-bedroom apartment for the Resident Director. Earmarked for upper class students, the new dorm is scheduled for completion by the 2006-2007 school year.

"On a college campus there are different priorities for a dormitory, especially for upper class housing," says Erland Project Manager for the Babson project, Dave Griffin. *"It's more of an independent*

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living situation and the school understands the students' desire for more freedom. That's why you see apartment-style dorms at the college or university level as opposed to student/faculty residence halls that you might see at independent schools— the students are more mature and self-sufficient, and the housing needs to reflect that."



Student Residence at Babson College

The face and image of school dormitories is very different than it used to be. Schools are rebuilding and renovating their outdated residence halls because they now realize that the buildings on their campuses need to reflect mission and values that are important to them. It may still be school, but the new modernization of dormitory designs makes it feel more like home.



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