

Annual report to: M.U. Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin
From: Jeanne Abbott, chair, Residential Life and Campus Dining Committee



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The Residential Life staff continues to face challenges related to housing the growing number of students now enrolled at MU, given limited space in the residence halls. Feeding the student population under Campus Dining Services is also challenging, with the need to balance cost, taste and environmental concerns.

These challenges are compounded by the necessity of rearranging space for students during ongoing periods of construction, as well as serving a diverse community of students with specific needs and budgetary constraints.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the Residential Life and Campus Dining Committee met twice to hear Frankie Minor, director of Residential Life, outline plans for residential facilities and Julaine Kiehn, director of Campus Dining Services, discuss changes to the dining halls.

The offices of both are to be commended for their diligence in trying to satisfy the competing interests within a demographic that approaches 35,000 students. The two directors pay close attention to requests and complaints, respond quickly and handle the daily issues of student living in strategic and compassionate ways. They seem dedicated to providing their constituency with the best experience possible.

Reports from staff at those meetings covered these points:

- During Spring Semester 2015, the Department of Residential Life initiated the complex, long-term project known as Dobbs Replacement. This project is the fifth and final installment of the Residential Life Master Plan. The current phase involves demolition of Jones Hall, a nine-story facility built in 1959. It is one of three similar facilities — the others are Lathrop and Laws halls — to be razed and rebuilt as five-story residence halls with single and double student rooms. The first of the new halls will open in August 2016; the second new hall plus an additional dining facility will open in August 2017.
- Wolpers Hall is undergoing renovation and will reopen in Fall 2015 as a co-educational dorm. It will have a mix of traditional, community-style singles and doubles, with capacity for 301 residents.
- Gateway Hall will open next fall as a new facility with a number of sustainable features including solar green roofs, water diverted to a rain garden and the use of recycled building materials. Gateway Hall will be the first on campus to include gender-neutral or unisex restroom facilities with fully lockable separate spaces for users

- A wing of gender-neutral housing will be established in the fall for students who agree to the terms. It will accommodate a total of 16 students plus student staff.
- University Village, a declining facility with safety issues, was demolished this year. Concerns remain about suitable housing for graduate students and families, and Residential Life has been exploring options, as well as the possibility of a private-market solution.
- Laundry complaints turned into a headache for all concerned this year, the result of mechanical failures and user mistreatment. As a solution, a contract will be extended to a new vendor, and residence hall staff will monitor the situation more closely.
- On the dining hall front, an expanded Plaza 900 opened in August 2014, as well as a Sabai restaurant in Johnston Hall. Both seem to be popular destinations.
- Campus Dining is revamping its price structure in conjunction with more menu engineering. The goal is to make pricing more logical, with students getting additional value for their money.
- A Culinary Discovery Series has been a success in Johnston Hall, with the executive chef preparing five-course meals for students who reserve space. The series of five meals includes partnerships with local vendors, educational components and family-style dining.
- Block meal plans will be evaluated over the summer to see if the number of meals per plan can be adjusted, and a set of new plans in varying amounts offered to students.

In sum, providing incoming freshmen with sufficient, attractive housing options that meets their needs continues to deserve the attention of the Residential Life staff. The rehabilitation of deteriorating facilities seems to be on schedule, and new facilities are being constructed as appropriate to the size of the targeted population. It is a masterful juggling act that seems to be always in play.

In the meantime, the community remains divided about the explosion of off-campus housing for the rest of the student population. Pressures on downtown Columbia continue to engage city officials, and the need for a strong city-campus relationship seems to be key to solving some of the concerns.

The UM and MU administrations would be wise to keep abreast of the community issues since they seriously impact the quality of life for students, faculty and staff.

Respectfully submitted by,
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