

Administration plans to build new dorm next spring

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The university plans to build a new residence hall due to a housing shortage leaving students without campus housing, university officials said.

"We are having a shortfall as far as students that want to go into our housing and what housing stock we have available," he said. "Our enrollment is up significantly this year."

John Bucher, assistant to the vice chancellor of budget and assessment, said housing turned away more than 100 students due to lack of rooms.

Administration requires freshmen to live on campus, and there were nearly 600 this semester. With 1,200 beds and more than 1,300 applicants, housing had to turn students away.

"There were many who called and we had to tell them we didn't have enough space. No sense in turning in an application. So, their numbers didn't make it to the fact sheet," Bucher said.

Full-time student enrollment last year numbered more than 3,000 students and increased considerably this year, while housing availability remained the same, Vice Chancellor John Pierce said.

"As we look forward, these projects take anywhere from two to three years to construct. So you're looking down the road two years at more demand," Pierce said. "And the problem with Governors Village is that in 2012 the state is requiring all dorms to be sprinkled, and it's not."

Governors Village plumbing is within the concrete floors, and it will be hard to place sprinklers inside without a full renovation, Pierce said. Administration hired an architect to conduct a feasibility study on the cost-effectiveness of renovating the dorms instead of razing and starting over.

"The new dorm would either be a high-rise or spread out a bit, about 400 beds," Pierce said. "Our architect found we could renovate the old dorms at a cost-competitive price compared to building all new ones."

According to Pierce, the feasibility study

revealed that renovation would be cheaper than creating new dorm space. This could be done without removing walls, allowing for aesthetic remodeling.

"We would replenish the 100 beds in Governors Village and, right now, we plan to build 300 new beds in a different facility," he said. "After verifying the feasibility, administration needs to make sure that there is enough demand for housing to justify the building of a new dorm."

Governors Village currently has four of its five buildings operational, and administration plans to renovate all of them within a few years, according to Bucher.

Governors Village houses almost 100 students, and all those rooms will be out of order in two years due to safety codes.

"The board of trustees approved a marketing study to see what really is the financial feasibility of this project, and if it makes sense to go through with it," he said. "Are there enough students who are willing to pay? Can we fill the beds?"

Student's housing fees will pay for dorm renovations and the construction of new dorms. This allows all housing expenses to be self-liquidating, Pierce said.

"Our market study will verify that we are experts in this," he said. "We need to be sure we will have the revenue coming in to pay back the loan debt and expenses."

According to Bucher, the only dorms not indebted are in Governors Village, which require renovation in the coming years.

Brokers require a cushion of funds from the university to keep payments current in the case of an emergency.

"What we learn from the marketing and feasibility study is how much to borrow and how much our payments will be," Bucher said. "Then, we find out how much we need to charge for the rooms. We have to have enough income to cover more than the payments and operating expenses. The loaner wants about 120 percent cushion in case something weird happens."

According to Pierce, the new dorm will cost around \$2 million dollars annually in fees. More than half of these fees would go to pay off the building debt, and 30 to 40 percent would cover operating expenses.



Taliaferro Pollock- Staff Photographer

Bridget Holliday, left, and sister Brooke walk past Governor's Village. UNCA plans to begin construction on a new dorm next semester.

Due to a lack of rooms, UNC Asheville paired resident assistants with roommates and converted several dorm lounges in Mills Hall and Founders Hall into bedrooms to accommodate the overflow, Bucher said.

"We try not to room RAs with a roommate because it causes problems or conflict," he said. "But with the overflow of students, we found one solution to be giving them roommates."

According to Bucher, living on campus provides students many opportunities to experience UNCA and increases student retention.

"We really feel the residential experience is a big component of the overall educational experience at UNCA," he said. "We're really focused on relationships, and living on campus contributes to that

aspect."

The university plans to minimize student impact by starting renovations and construction of the new dorm during the spring semester, Pierce said.

Pierce said that students will be asked for input and suggestions as the project continues to progress.

According to Bucher, there are fewer students on campus during the spring for various reasons, including graduation and students moving off campus. Housing administration will work on ways to minimize student difficulty during renovations.

"We know it is going to take around 12 weeks to complete the project. We may phase them one at a time, or, most likely, we'll take a spring semester to work on it and have it ready for the fall," Bucher said.