

On-Campus Housing: A Boon to Rural Community Colleges The Benefits of Community College Involvement in On-Campus Housing

*A policy brief by the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama
for the MidSouth Partnership for Rural Community Colleges*

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Executive Summary

To better serve their students, expand access, and respond to local needs, community colleges are expanding their involvement in on-campus housing. This issue brief presents findings from the first census of on-campus housing at community colleges:

- Many rural-serving colleges have on-campus housing. The U.S. Department of Education in 2001 reports 206 Associate Degree Colleges with on-campus housing, of which 190 or 92% are rural-serving in the 2005 Carnegie Basic Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education.
- An undercount of on-campus housing at rural community colleges exists. More institutions provide on-campus housing than USED/IPEDS reflects.
- The 206 rural-serving Associate Degree Colleges have 39,000 total beds, making on-campus housing a significant enterprise.
- On-campus housing allows the delivery of a "true college experience" for full-time community college students; rural community colleges serve larger populations of full-time students. The full-time students supported specifically include student athletes.
- On-campus housing allows for innovative programming, such as that found at Itasca Community College (MN), where Engineering Technology students live above the laboratories in which they gain skills and work.

On-campus housing is an integral part of campus life for many rural community colleges. It enhances diversity by allowing the colleges to serve international students. It allows rural colleges to address special areas of critical need, making programs such as nursing and allied health more accessible. With higher energy prices and a favorable revenue stream, more rural community colleges may be looking to on-campus housing in the future.

Introduction

This issue brief presents selected results of a national study of on-campus housing at U.S. community colleges from Pat G. Moeck's 2005 doctoral dissertation recently published by the MidSouth Partnership for Rural Community Colleges, completed under the direction of Stephen G. Katsinas.

Most community colleges with on-campus housing serve rural America. The federal Higher Education Act of 1965 requires colleges and universities that wish to submit and receive federal grants and distribute federal student financial aid to submit data on an annual basis to the U.S. Department of Education via the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Of the 206 rural-, suburban-, and urban-serving Associate Degree Colleges classified in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's 2005 Carnegie Basic Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education released in February 2006, that reported on-



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campus housing via IPEDS in 2001, 190 or 93% were rural-serving. The remaining colleges were suburban- and urban-serving community colleges. The 2005 Carnegie Basic Classifications identify 860 community college districts with 1,552 campuses across the United States, of which 553 are rural-serving, 195 suburban-serving, and 112 urban-serving community college districts, with 922, 328, and 302 identifiable campuses, respectively. Of the 9.4 million students attending U.S. community colleges, as measured by unduplicated annual headcount in 2000-2001, about 3.2 million attend rural-serving community colleges, compared to 3.0 million attending suburban-serving, and 3.2 million attending urban-serving institutions. Within the rural-serving category exist three sub-classifications; small, medium, and large, with 140 small, 303 medium, and 110 large rural-serving community college districts, that have, respectively, 206, 499, and 217 identifiable campuses.

Not surprisingly, the most common category of publicly-controlled community colleges with residence halls is that of medium rural-serving colleges. Among the 206 community colleges with residence halls, 51 or 25% were small rural-serving colleges, 107 or 52% were medium rural-serving colleges, and 32 or 15% were large rural-serving colleges. Small rural-serving colleges have an annual unduplicated headcount of under 2,500 students; medium rural-serving colleges have an enrollment of between 2,500 and 7,500 students; and large rural-serving colleges have an enrollment in excess of 7,500 students (Carnegie, 2006).

The terms defined in the IPEDS surveys related to housing are somewhat imprecise, and for this reason, in 2004, Moeck surveyed the 206 Associate Degree colleges that reported via the 2001 IPEDS Institutional Characteristics (IC) Survey they had on-campus housing (Moeck, 2005). Surveys were sent to the presidents and/or their chief housing officers. Usable responses were obtained from 126 of these 206, or 61%. Only 15 responses, or just 6%, were from suburban- and urban-serving community colleges. Of the 126 usable responses Moeck obtained, 117 or 62% were from rural-serving community colleges. By rural sub-classification, among these 117, 26 or 51% of those small rural-serving community colleges reporting to IPEDS that their campus had on-campus housing responded to the survey; for medium rural-serving colleges 73 or 68% of the colleges reporting to IPEDS that their college had on-campus housing responded to the survey; and for large rural community colleges, 18 responses or 56% of those reporting to IPEDS that their college had on-campus housing responded to the survey.

Where were the colleges that had on-campus housing located?

Practitioners have long been aware of involvement in residence hall operations by rural community colleges. In northern and midwestern states such as Minnesota, Wyoming, and Michigan, virtually every rural-serving community college maintains residence halls. The level of involvement by community colleges in the South and Southwest in residence hall operations, however, is not so clear. **Table 1** shows that most community colleges with residence halls are either members of the North Central (46%) or the Southern (32%) Associations of Colleges and Schools, which are the two largest regional accrediting agencies in the United States.

Based upon his travels to more than 300 community colleges in 35 states over the past two decades, Katsinas (*personal communication, March 12, 2004*) believes most rural-serving community colleges do operate residence halls. They are more commonly found at the many rural-serving community colleges established before the Baby Boom, especially those founded before World War II. For example, East Mississippi Community College, a community college in rural-serving Scooba, Mississippi, visited twice by both Katsinas and Moeck, has residence halls. Established in 1927, EMCC has 6 residence halls, with 452 beds, housing nearly 50% of the students on its Scooba campus. A waiting list for beds is created

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What are the future prospects for housing at rural community colleges?

The future prospects for on-campus housing at rural community colleges are bright. As seen in **Table 3**, 90% plan to build new residence halls, 80% of respondents from each type of rural-serving college indicate residence halls are filled to capacity, and 32% have wait lists. Many colleges project renovation of existing structures (Moeck, 2005).

Rising student demand and a positive impact on unrestricted revenues at a time of declining state investment together may explain why half of the rural-serving colleges surveyed indicated they were considering new housing construction (Moeck, 2005). As Robert Pura, President of Greenfield Community College, noted when asked why his college was one of three in Massachusetts (Mount Wachusett in Gardner, Cape Cod in West Barnstable, and Greenfield) building housing, "We have many students who would love to have affordable housing but don't have it, and, as a result, work way too many hours and can't attend to their studies (Schwietzer, 2006)." Another rural-serving college president, Joe Sertich, of the Northeast Minnesota Higher Education District in Minnesota's Arrowhead region, leads a district that includes five separately accredited colleges, four of which were established before and immediately after World War I. All of his district's rural colleges have on-campus residence halls, and Sertich believes on-campus housing is critically important to the college's ability to serve its students: "Rural students are finding more compelling reasons to live on campus as transportation costs soar in parallel with rising fuel costs. Rural colleges today need housing as a way to fulfill their mission to provide access and affordability to students across the regions they serve (*personal communication, June 7, 2006*)."

Table 3

Future Renovation and New Construction of Residence Halls at Public Community Colleges – Survey Question # 21: Is it likely in the next five years that major renovations to existing residence halls and/or new construction will occur at your college?

Community College Type	Projecting Residence Hall...	
	Renovations (n = 49)	New Facility Construction (n = 57)
Rural	Small	15
	Medium	29
	Large	8
Total	44	52
Non Rural Total	5	5

Notes:

1. A total of 232 colleges granting associate degrees reported to IPEDS in 2000-2001 academic year that they had residence halls.
2. Of the 232 public colleges reporting, 204 were community colleges.
3. A total 126 community colleges of the 204, or 61%, that reported having residence halls to IPEDS responded to this survey.
4. Not every college responded to every question. A total 126 usable responses were obtained for this question. A total of 19 responses to this question were deemed unusable.
5. IPEDS = Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System developed and maintained by the United States Department of Education.
6. As the number of non-rural colleges replying to the survey is disproportional to the total number of campuses reporting, the data is reported for presentational purposes only. No conclusions are drawn.

Source: Moeck 2005, Table 24.

Table 1

Two-Year Publicly Controlled Colleges Reporting in 2001 that They Offered Residence Halls to the US Department of Education Compared to the Survey Responses to the 2004 Survey of On-Campus Housing at Community Colleges By Accrediting Region

Accrediting Region	Two-year Colleges		Survey Respondents 2004		Total Percent Responding
	n	%	n	%	
Middle States	18	8%	7	5%	39%
New England	6	3%	1	1%	17%
North Central	104	45%	63	46%	61%
Northwest	15	6%	10	7%	67%
Southern	71	31%	44	32%	62%
Western	16	7%	11	8%	69%
Total	232		136		

Source: Moeck, 2005, Table 3.

every fall semester, according to President Emeritus Tommy Davis, who believes that nearly every one of Mississippi's 14 rural-serving community colleges has on-campus housing. Dr. Davis began his leadership of EMCC in 1990 at a time when the College enrolled 1,084. When he retired in 2004, the total enrollment exceeded 4,000, including two additional campus locations. Davis says, "Without residence halls, many deserving students would be unserved by higher education. EMCC continues to serve first generation students whose personal finances do not allow them to buy a car or afford gasoline to drive a long distance to get an education. On-campus housing is their only option; otherwise, they are doomed to repeat the cycle of poverty (*personal communication, June 7, 2006*)." Interviews of college officials conducted by the authors, mostly at rural-serving colleges in Oklahoma, New Mexico, and other southern and southwestern states, indicate that residence halls are common throughout these regions.

The case of Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, a region that had 5.5 million residents in 2000, provides another good example of the undercount issue. Nine community college districts serve this region; 3 of which were established during the Baby Boom era (1965-75): Dallas, Grayson, and Tarrant. One suburban district, in Collin County, was established in 1985. The 6 formerly rural districts of Grayson County College, Hill College, Navarro College, North Central Texas College, Trinity Valley Community College, and Weatherford College all operate campuses that serve suburbanized counties, and all 6 possess on-campus residence halls for their students.

What were motivating factors for offering on-campus housing?

In terms of motivation to offer on-campus housing, increasing full-time enrollment, offering a true college experience, and diversifying the student body via easing physical and economic strain on students who lived far away from the college were cited by more than 90% of survey respondents. Diversifying the student body by offering opportunities to minorities, providing cost-effective services to full-time students so that savings could be channeled to provide a broader range of student services to part-time and non-traditional students, diversifying the student body by offering opportunities to international students, and diversifying the student body by offering opportunities to student-athletes were cited by more than 80% of respondents. The positive impact on college finances was cited by more than 70% of respondents, while lowering transportation costs to commuting students, and enabling students to complete specialized academic programs that fill college service area needs were cited by more than 60%.

Moeck found a significant percentage (27%) of responding rural-serving colleges offer housing for athletes (2005). In her 2004 analysis of federal Right-To-Know data, Castaneda (2004) found a total of 73,936 student-athletes at U.S. community colleges, with the vast majority participating at rural-serving community colleges using the new Carnegie typology. Castaneda also found 38% of all U.S. community colleges had athletics, of which 54% were located at rural-serving colleges. Moeck concludes, not surprisingly, that it is likely that many athletic scholarships at community colleges include room and board for the students representing their institutions in intercollegiate athletics. As Joe Sertich, President of the Northeast Minnesota Higher Education District, said "The added full-time college experience is one becoming more attractive to students, particularly if they can also have the privacy they desire in their own dorm room (*personal communication, June 7, 2006*)." The strong ties of these motivating factors to student services explains why housing typically reports to the division of student affairs at most rural-serving colleges.

The shortage of nursing and allied health professionals in rural areas, and the severe shortage of qualified faculty to educate and train students at rural community colleges is an issue of continuing

concern (Reid, 2005). Fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated that on-campus housing made it possible for students to complete specialized academic programs such as allied health and nursing. In light of the fact that nursing vacancies take 60% longer to fill in rural areas with qualified staff (Reid, 2005), expanding pathways to successful degree completion can be seen as an economic development contribution to individual students and to the region rural community colleges serve.

What is the profile of students living in on-campus community college housing?

The typical student living in on-campus housing at community colleges is traditional aged, full-time, male, and unmarried. At the small rural-serving colleges, 60% were male, at the medium rural-serving, 56%, and at the large rural-serving colleges, 54% (Moeck, 2005). This is in contrast to the national averages for all students at small, medium, and large rural-serving colleges of 43% male, 42% male, and 45% male, respectively (see Hardy, 2005, Table IV.12, page 128). Rural-serving community colleges serve larger percentages of first-time/full-time students than do other types of community colleges. According to Hardy and Katsinas (2006) the 5.4 million U.S. community college students are spread fairly evenly in thirds across rural-, suburban- and urban community colleges. But rural-serving community colleges enroll far higher numbers of first-time full-time students: of the 511, 49 first-time/full-time students enrolled nationally, rural-serving community colleges enroll 48% or 246,370. At rural-serving small and medium colleges first-time/full-time students comprised 19% and 15%, respectively, of their total college-wide enrollments in the Fall 2000 term. Not surprisingly, by marital status virtually all of the colleges reported single students of traditional 18-24 years of age living in their residence halls. In terms of enrollment by program, more than 67% of the students at small rural-serving colleges, and 75% of those attending medium rural-serving colleges were enrolled in transfer curricula. While it is not possible from the survey data to ascertain how much athletics contributes to on-campus housing, it is clear many rural-serving community colleges use on-campus housing to address the existing gender imbalance within traditional transfer curricula, by enrolling large numbers of traditional-aged male students (Moeck, 2005).

What is the financial impact of residence halls on the colleges that have them?

Table 2 shows the financial impact of on-campus housing on the responding rural-serving community colleges. Two of three survey respondents (66%) indicate operating their residence halls on an annual total revenue basis, instead of a cost-per-bed basis. This might suggest that residence halls are well-embedded into the budgetary fabric of these colleges.

Respondents were asked how much money was generated by on-campus housing and, not surprisingly, a smaller percentage of the respondents answered this voluntary survey item. Still, the average revenue is in excess of \$1 million per year. Given the fact that, on average, the total budget (current funds revenues) for all small, medium, and large rural-serving colleges reporting to IPEDS in FY2000-2001 was approximately \$10 million, \$20 million, and \$8 million respectively, this may be highly significant (Moeck, 2005). This means that housing revenues at small and medium rural-serving colleges may comprise 10% or more of total revenues. The importance of this quasi-unrestricted revenue stream is underscored by studies documenting a lack of unrestricted funds for internal entrepreneurial activities at small colleges (Katsinas, Alexander & Opp, 2003), and declining state appropriations for rural-serving Associate's Degree colleges from 48.1% in Fiscal Year 1981 to just 37.3% in Fiscal Year 2003 (Roessler, 2005).

Table 2
Economic Basis of Administering Residence Halls at Rural Publicly-Controlled Community Colleges, using 2005 Carnegie Basic Classifications – Survey Question: # 15: From an economic perspective, how are residence halls operated on your campus? (N = 126)

Community College Type		# Resp.	Annual Cost/Bed	Annual Total Revenue	Annual Estimated Revenue (in millions of dollars)
Rural Serving	Small	29	7	22	1,955,400
	Medium	70	23	49	24,850,000
	Large	22	9	13	4,280,000
	Total	121	39	84	\$ 31,085,400
Total Non Rural		5	3	5	1,307,000
Total Annual Revenue Reported					\$ 32,392,400

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 4. Not every college responded to every question. A total 126 usable responses were obtained for this question. A total of 19 responses to this question were deemed unusable.
 5. IPEDS = Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System developed and maintained by the United States Department of Education.

Source: Moeck 2005, Table 20.