



DYNAMIC SOLUTIONS FOR DIVERSE INSTITUTIONS

Addressing the Affordable Student Housing Crisis

“Affordable student housing has become a **critical issue** in higher education, significantly impacting students’ ability to succeed academically and maintain their well-being.”

Unfortunately, these challenges disproportionately affect disadvantaged students, particularly those from minority backgrounds. In California, for instance, a recent report by University of California, Los Angeles concluded that 1 in 5 of the state’s community college students, 1 in 10 California State University students, and 1 in 20 students at the University of California campuses have experienced homelessness, which often goes hand-in-hand with food insecurity. Worse yet, the research finds that the equity gap is stark, with students of color more likely to experience these hardships.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

Universities and colleges often struggle to accommodate all their students due to limited housing capacity. Traditionally, upperclassmen preferred off-campus housing, while underclassmen were required to stay on campus. However, the rising cost of off-campus housing has driven up demand for university-owned housing, exacerbating the shortfall. Broader housing market trends continue to inflate off-campus housing costs, placing a significant financial burden on students already grappling with tuition and other expenses. For many institutions, it is not as simple as “build more housing,” the high cost of construction, coupled with the limited land availability of surrounding campuses makes developing new housing a challenge even for institutions with robust endowments. This gap in high construction cost vs already high tuition is challenging for institutions to offer affordable rates, despite the long-term benefits of expanding on-campus accommodations.



California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) South Village

WHAT’S TO BE DONE?

In the short term, to address the pressing issue of affordable student housing, institutions must implement comprehensive support services to mitigate the impact of housing scarcity. Community colleges in particular have the greatest housing gaps and should work to offer integrated support services including food assistance, family care, and health and mental wellness programs. These services are essential for students’ overall well-being and academic success, and they can foster partnerships that provide new funding opportunities and supplemental programs. Many of these programs are pre-existing in the local community, and by creating strategic partnerships with these organizations, colleges and universities stand to make the largest impact on their student bodies. In doing so, institutions can alleviate some of the immediate strain on students while developing long-term housing solutions. In addition to local partnerships, institutions are using financial aid data to make informed decisions about how student’s financial aid packages may fall short and are instituting additional education and training to assist students with funding applications, food programs, and grant programs to assist them.

In the mid-and long-term, institutions are implementing a patchwork of tactics to make new student housing developments “pencil out”. To meet this crisis, institutions are getting creative with a mix of funding and innovative construction techniques.

HOW COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES ARE RISING TO THE OCCASION

Creative Partnerships and Funding for Construction

Local Partnerships: Institutions can partner with local service organizations, clinics, food banks, and family planning services to support students.

Federal and State Grants: Seeking funding from federal and state sources can help alleviate the financial burden of constructing new housing.

Local Bond Dollars: Applying local bond dollars specifically for housing projects can provide necessary funds.

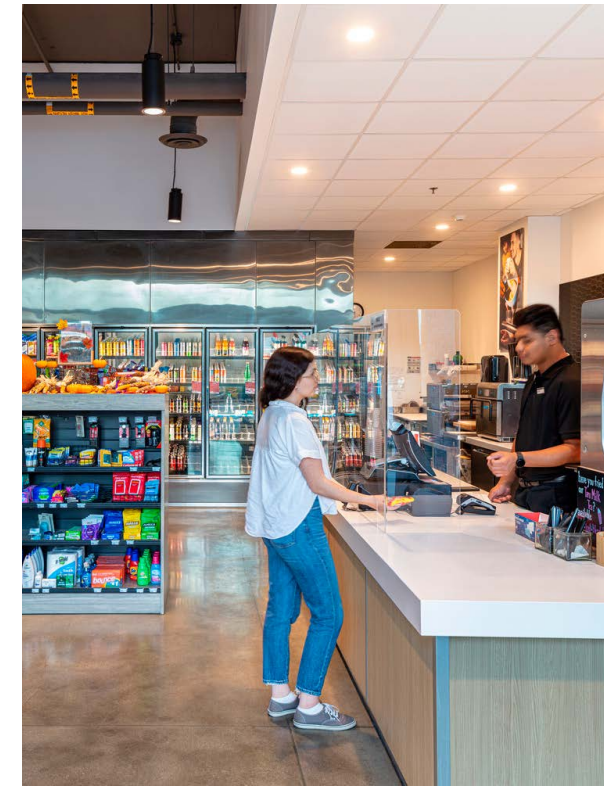
Sustainable Design: Using funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), institutions can incorporate sustainable design elements to reduce long-term operational costs. This includes strategic building orientation to optimize natural light and wind conditions, reducing energy consumption without additional costs.

Innovative Delivery Methods

Modular and Prefabricated Elements: As the rates of enrollment are on an upswing, the needs of the universities are changing. Colleges need quick and easy solutions to allow for higher occupancy rates to keep up with the rise in enrollment. Modular and prefabricated elements can make construction faster, causing less campus disruption. Though these solutions are not necessarily cheaper in themselves, modular construction costs are more certain.



California State University,
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Efficient Design and Construction: Optimizing the student housing unit, which is the building block of the development, is crucial. Planning to create the greatest flow and density of students means you can house the most students comfortably for the least investment and opens the door to design efficiencies and programmatic synergies that make the construction of new student housing more financially viable, particularly for institutions without large endowments.

Public-Private-Partnerships: Particularly helpful for developing more off-campus housing, P3 is a development/deal structure in which a public or private college or university takes on a private sector partner (or partners) to share in the resources, risks, and incentives that come with the development and operation/maintenance of new facilities. Many institutions have seen success in rapidly developing housing using this structure.

Unconventional Conversions: Many campuses are acquiring nearby properties and quickly converting them into small scale apartment complexes as an off-campus solution. Others are turning single-occupancy rooms into doubles and doubles into triples, or even study rooms into bedrooms.

EARLY SUCCESS STORIES

Design and Construction: Designed by HED, the CSULA South Village housing project in Los Angeles, California, exemplifies a successful model. At its opening, it was the most affordable housing option in the California State University system, thanks to design efficiencies that promoted dense and communal living arrangements.

Home to 1,500 student beds, the South Village creates an inclusive experience by creating community through a design to support student success. Designed to promote diversity and inclusion via small community floors, and a strong complement of shared common spaces for living and learning, the South Village utilizes a village concept of ‘neighborhoods’ to create a robust residential community that supports student success and builds community through shared amenities. These include support spaces such as dining, a convenience store, study and lounge spaces, a fitness center, administrative and student life offices, classrooms, and 4 faculty/staff apartments. The mixing of these amenities creates a sense of a vibrant community that supports student success by creating social connection and a sense of belonging in addition to making these resources readily available. Featuring double and triple bedrooms in small communities with gender-inclusive community bathrooms, the 8-story building wraps around a park, with each of the three segments possessing a separate identity with long-range views to different regional mountains and hills.

Funding: At Imperial Valley College (IVC), the city donated funds to construct a series of tiny homes for students on a city-owned lot adjacent to the campus. The city allocated \$11.6 million to San Diego State University (SDSU), SDSU Imperial Valley, and Imperial Valley College (IVC) for a new student housing project at SDSU Imperial Valley in Calexico. This initiative, a first in the region, will create 40 rooms for 80 students from both SDSU Imperial Valley and IVC, addressing a significant housing insecurity issue impacting over 11% of SDSU students, predominantly first-generation and Mexican-American. The \$17 million project, funded by California’s Higher Education Student Housing Grant Program, aims to break ground in early 2025.

Strategic Partnerships: Also at Imperial Valley College (IVC), the campus has partnered with local psychological health providers to offer robust health services, supporting students’ mental and physical well-being. IVC unveiled “Lotus Living, Rise Above, Resilient Community,” a neighborhood of 26 tiny homes dedicated to housing-insecure students. Funded by a \$2.6 million Homekey grant and additional local support, this project aims to address student homelessness exacerbated by the pandemic. The single-occupancy homes feature essential amenities and cost students \$200 monthly rent plus community service hours. This initiative, located near the IVC campus, prioritizes former foster youth, and aims to support students’ academic success and basic needs. The IVC Foundation will manage the property, offering workshops and community events to foster a supportive living environment.

Tackling the affordable student housing crisis demands a dynamic, all-encompassing strategy that encompasses smart design, robust support services, and cutting-edge funding and construction techniques. By harnessing local partnerships, tapping into federal and state resources, and embracing sustainable design, institutions can craft affordable, supportive, and eco-friendly housing that empowers students to excel both academically and personally. Each successful strategy will be as dynamic as the institutions themselves.