Community Kitchen

STUDENT HOUSING DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Building Community and Supporting Mental Health in Students

The college experience is a transformative period in a young person's life, but it can also be challenging, stressful, and overwhelming. Architectural design plays a vital role in shaping the campus environment, and must engage the whole person: the social, emotional, and physical. Thoughtful architectural design can contribute to the creation of a supportive and inclusive living-learning communities that focuses on mind, body, and spirit to promote student mental health.

Student housing plays a crucial role in shaping the college experience, as it serves as a home away from home for students. **The design of student housing facilities can significantly impact the well-being and sense of community among students.**

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Community spaces within student housing facilities are essential for building connections, encouraging social interaction, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Common Areas: Designing spacious and well-appointed common areas, such as lounges, recreation rooms, or study spaces, encourages students to socialize, connect, and engage in activities together.

Shared Kitchens & Dining Areas: Providing shared kitchen and dining facilities allows students to come together over meals, fostering a sense of community and creating opportunities for interaction and cultural exchange.

Outdoor Spaces: Designing outdoor spaces, such as courtyards, gardens, or rooftop terraces, provides students with areas for relaxation, recreation, and community events. Incorporating seating, greenery, and recreational amenities contributes to a vibrant and inviting atmosphere.

PROMOTING SHARED IDENTITY AND COMFORT

While community spaces are vital, it is equally important to provide students with privacy and comfortable living environments, where everyone thrives, respects differences, and hones their cultural competencies including:

Well-Designed Bedrooms: Ensuring well-designed bedrooms with adequate space, comfortable furniture, and sufficient storage helps create a sanctuary where students can rest, study, and recharge.

Micro-identities: Distinctive design choices across floors or for buildings can help create a neighborhood identity for groups of rooms, floors, or buildings within the campus.

Noise Control: Implementing effective noise control measures, such as soundproofing materials and thoughtful room layouts, helps create a quiet and conducive environment for study and relaxation.

INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE DESIGN

Inclusive and accessible design principles should be prioritized in student housing to accommodate the diverse needs of students, such as:

Universal Design: Incorporating universal design features, such as wheelchair-accessible ramps, elevators, wide doorways, and grab bars, ensures that housing facilities are accessible to students with disabilities.

Gender-Inclusive Spaces: Designing gender-inclusive housing options and facilities recognizes and supports the diverse gender identities and expressions of students, promoting inclusivity and respect.

Neurodiversity Considerations: Taking into account the needs of neurodiverse students by providing quiet zones, sensory-friendly spaces, and visual cues can create a more inclusive and supportive living environment.

WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Now more than ever, student housing design should prioritize the mental health and well-being of residents, providing spaces that promote relaxation, stress reduction, and self-care with amenities like:

Fitness and Recreation Facilities: Integrating fitness centers, yoga studios, athletic courts or recreational outdoor areas within student housing facilities encourages physical activity, which is known to support mental health and stress reduction.

Quiet Spaces and Meditation Rooms: Designating quiet spaces, meditation rooms, or wellness lounges allows students to engage in mindfulness practices, meditation, or seek moments of solitude and reflection.

Nutritional Educational Center: Including a communal kitchen where students can learn how to cook healthy food and good nutrition.

Access to Natural Light and Connection to Nature: Incorporating equitable access to natural light and fresh air, biophilia strategies and generous access to green space and views to the outdoors, all of which improves health and well-being.

Counseling and Support Services: Collaborating with counseling and support services to have dedicated spaces within student housing facilities can facilitate easy access to mental health resources and promote a supportive environment.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Ensuring the safety and security of student housing facilities is crucial for promoting a sense of well-being and peace of mind, including:

Adequate Lighting and Surveillance: Installing sufficient lighting and security cameras in common areas, corridors, and outdoor spaces enhances safety and reduces the risk of incidents.

Controlled Access Systems: Implementing controlled access systems, such as key cards or biometric systems, helps maintain the security of the building while providing residents with a sense of safety.

Emergency Response Preparedness: Having well-defined emergency response protocols, including clear evacuation routes, fire safety measures, and access to emergency services, fosters a sense of security and preparedness.

Thoughtful design of student housing facilities can play a significant role in building a sense of community, supporting mental health, and enhancing the overall well-being of college students. By creating inclusive and accessible spaces, promoting social interaction, prioritizing privacy, shared identity, and comfort, and incorporating wellness and safety features, student housing design can contribute to a positive and supportive living-learning environment that enhances the college experience and supports the mental health of students.

By Martha Ball, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C | Market Sector Leader, Higher Education
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