Crowded Campus: Where is the money going?

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Fifty long minutes of class have come and gone, students pack up their bags and sling them over their shoulders as they walk out of the classroom and onto the sidewalk. Joining a surplus of other students, they notice campus is more congested this year. Iowa State University’s enrollment of 31,040 students is the highest to date, beating last year’s record by 1,153. “Growth is always positive,” says Warren Madden, Vice President for Business and Finance. “We would much rather deal with the university growing than shrinking.”

Housing

However, enrollment growth can present challenges. As the amount of students increases, the demand for on-campus housing also increases. According to Madden, one-third of all Iowa State undergraduate students live on campus in either the dormitories, Frederiksen Court apartments or Schilletter and University Village (SUV), and 80 percent of the students living in Frederiksen Court and SUV also lived on campus the year before.
With the high demand to live on campus, the Department of Residence has had to deal with a housing shortage. By converting floor den spaces into dorm rooms and renovating the Wallace and Wilson halls from super-single to double rooms, everyone wishing to live on campus has been provided a place to stay.

Wallace and Wilson halls were once part of a four-building complex that included the Knapp and Storms halls, built in 1966 and 1967. Wallace and Wilson were built with sand from Wisconsin, while Knapp and Storms were built using local sand that contained a high amount of iron. Over many decades, the iron oxidized in Knapp and Storms causing damage too expensive to repair and in 2005, Knapp and Storms were demolished. To compensate, Martin and Eaton suite-style dorms and Frederiksen Court apartment-style housing were built.

“We believe we have a nice balance between traditional residence halls, suite-style residence halls, new apartments, and older apartments with a good price point, though new apartments are tremendously popular,” says Pete Englin, Director of Residence.

Although no plans have been made to build more dorm buildings, the Iowa Board of Regents approved the planning of seven more Frederiksen Court buildings, which would add 672 beds to the complex. As the demand for on-campus living increases, Frederiksen Court is the best place to expand since its rooms are the first to fill each spring during recontracting. The proposed addition is intended to reduce the amount of students living in dens and provide permanent housing.

Michaela McInerney, freshman in psychology, lives with two other girls in a Friley den. She was placed into the den when it was too late to cancel her housing contract. If she could have, McInerney would have looked into living in an apartment, but she has enjoyed her experience and believes living in the dorms is important as a freshman. Though she gets along with her roommates and enjoys the extra space a den offers, she thinks it's unfair to have to pay the same price as students living in a quad dorm, as they were able to choose their living situation while McInerney was forced to live in a den. “The acceptance rate at Iowa State should be lower” says McInerney. “Chances are, first-year students are going to live in the dorms. If it was harder to get into ISU, there might not be this problem.”

Student leaders have asked the Department of Housing to not use any dens as living spaces in the future and to have a five percent vacancy rate in permanent housing to allow for flexibility. Students now living in dens usually have two to four roommates, are provided the same amenities and pay the same rate as other students in their hall, but dens often have more square footage per person. “It’s not a requirement to live on campus,” says Englin, “but we never turn students away who want to live on campus.”

The Department of Residence looks at historical contracting rates of new and returning students to predict future occupancy rates. They also predict how large the university will be in 20 years and if enrollment projections do continue to rise, additional dorm buildings may be built. “Residence halls are terrific environments for fostering student success,” says Englin, “but given their more expensive construction costs, they typically require rate increases across the system.”

Though no one is required to live on campus, on-campus living has been increasing each year since 2006. Numbers are predicted to be about the same next year, 10,426 students living on campus. With the seven new Frederiksen Court buildings, more upperclassmen will be encouraged to live in the apartments rather than the dorms to provide more room for freshmen.

“We’re here for the students,” says Englin. “If we’re listening to the students we’ll make better decisions.”
Programs, Faculty and Finance

In addition to the housing demand, more classes and faculty are also in need. Iowa State has added more academic courses and hired 40 to 50 new faculty members this semester with a ratio of 18 students to one faculty member. Liberal Arts and Sciences is the largest college at Iowa State, with Engineering coming in second.

Twenty-five percent of each student’s tuition goes toward the classes they take in their college, while the other seventy-five percent is allocated to the other colleges their courses are in. Each college at the university has their own budget according to how many students are taking courses within that college. In other words, the colleges do not have a flat budget, which allows the university to better each student’s experience. With a budget fit to how many students are taking courses in each specific college, there is a lesser possibility of being short of instructors and classrooms.

The president and budget cabinet make the final decision on where all of the money is spent. By the time the president receives a budget proposal, a great amount of time and input has been devoted by the provost, senior vice president of student affairs and vice president for business and finance. Once the budget is taken care of at the university level, it is then taken to the Board of Regents. If the Regents approve the budget, steps are then taken to follow through with any changes.

For the year 2013, Iowa State was granted $1.213 billion by the Board of Regents. Within that, $362 million is allocated to Sales and Service which consists of residence, athletics, the Ames Laboratory, etc. Another $508 million goes towards base programs, education, research and outreach.

“The university wants to continue to have the environment students need to be successful, in and out of the classroom,” says Madden.

Future

For now, the Board of Regents’ forecast for enrollment shows the amount of students coming in will begin to steady. In the next years, graduating class sizes from Iowa high schools will begin to decline, while the amount of students coming from Illinois, Minnesota and international countries increases. This year, there are 2,065 students from Minnesota and 1,851 from Illinois, the two biggest feeder states.

“Other states’ decisions and world issues could affect us,” says Madden. China is improving their higher education system, but Madden does not think this will deter Chinese students from choosing ISU. In 2003, 72 Chinese students attended ISU, but that number has increased to 1,212 this year, accounting for nearly four percent of the entire university’s population.

“Even though we’re growing in size, we don’t want to lose commitment to the students or their ISU experience,” says Pam Cain, Associate Vice President for Business and Finance.

The agriculture and engineering programs are continuing to have a high demand. To control the growth, budget increases and building more facilities and classrooms will need to be planned. With the new lecture hall, Troxel Hall, currently under construction near the northeast side of campus, 400 more seats will be available for next year.

“Without an exception, people are excited to see enrollment growth,” says Englin. “If a university wants to have challenges, these are the challenges we want to have.”

Who lives where?

- 17.4% Residence Halls
- 29.6% Outside Ames
- 45.4% University Student Apartments
- 3.6% Fraternities & Sororities
- 3.1% Other