On-campus living accommodations have become a key factor when it comes to attracting college students.

These days as prospective college students look at where they will call home for the next four or more years, campus housing can often influence where they decide to attend college. To stay competitive with other institutions, Truman State University has embarked on a major construction project to enhance the residential living experience for students living on campus.

Campus housing has come a long way since students first moved into Blanton and Nason Halls, the first permanent housing built by the university more than half a century ago.

For one, the terminology has changed. “Years ago, the dorms were simply a place that housed students,” says Brad Chambers, director of admission communication and scholarship. “As colleges and universities began to place greater emphasis on the living environment through services, amenities, and programs, the terminology also changed.” These days many universities have shifted from using the utilitarian-sounding “dorm” and instead are referring to student housing facilities as “residence halls.”

The addition of a brand-new residence hall—West Campus Suites—marked the first phase of the campus housing improvement project, and now the university is working its way through remodeling the older residence halls, one by one. Missouri Hall was closed while it underwent extensive renovation and re-opened in time for students to move back in last fall. Now Blanton, Nason, and Brewer Halls are closed for renovation. Dobson Hall is next in line, followed by Ryle Hall, and finally Centennial Hall. The timetable for the multiyear project extends into 2011.
When West Campus Suites opened in the fall of 2006, it marked the first time Truman students had an opportunity to move into a brand-new residence hall since Centennial Hall opened in 1968. Many things have changed since Centennial opened its doors, including students’ expectations.

“I believe that students are looking for newer, more modern looks and amenities,” says Caleb Forrest, a Missouri Hall resident and president of the Missouri Hall Senate. “I feel that amenities that offer students a cooler look and easier access to things are key to students’ wants and needs – it’s all about feeling a sense of comfort and an ‘at home feel’ that attracts students.”

Many of the amenities showing up in the residence halls today reflect the changing needs of students. For instance, West Campus Suites provides an apartment-like living environment similar to what students would have in off-campus housing but with the convenience of living on campus. The new co-ed facility has single-sex suites shared by four students, and each suite has a furnished common living area, two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a food prep area with an extra sink.

One of the most popular amenities found in West Campus Suites is central air, and air conditioning has also been added to Missouri Hall, which was retrofitted with heating and cooling units similar to those found in hotels. Residents have the ability to control the heating and cooling settings in their rooms in both West Campus Suites and Missouri Hall. According to Andrea O’Brien, director of Residence Life, they hope to add air conditioning throughout all or most of the university’s residence halls, except for Grim Hall, however the plans for each building are being finalized as they work through the renovation process.

The proliferation of technology and instant connectivity has had a major impact on campus housing as students who have grown up being heavily influenced by information technology arrive on campus with a new set of expectations. “Students used to come with a desk lamp, a fan and radio, and that was the extent of it,” says Mark Schultz, the university’s campus planner. “Now they come with a lamp, a television, a computer, video games, DVD players, and a whole host of other electronic gadgets.” To keep up with the times, residence halls have been equipped with wireless and wired Internet, and electrical systems in the older buildings are being upgraded.

While responding to the changing needs of the students means moving forward in most cases, there is at least one instance where it appears to be taking a step back in time. “In the past, we had a phone in the hallway – now we’re dealing with data jacks in every room so the students have the ability to hook up to a land line although only about one in 10 are using it,” says Schultz. With the growing use of cell phones and wireless Internet, Schultz says he is seeing a renewed interest in having access to a community hall phone for the few times a student might need a land line.

The expanded lobby (shown above), as well as a number of new study areas scattered throughout the newly redesigned Missouri Hall, clearly shows how the university is enhancing and increasing the community study areas located within the residence halls.
Student housing has always represented a community of strong social networks, and the overall housing improvement plan has been designed to increase public areas within the residence halls and make them even more accessible to residents, especially for academic purposes.

“We needed to find more spaces for students to study as groups or to hold meetings within their area,” says O’Brien. “And we needed more useable spaces for educational programs to be held within the residence halls.”

This was easy to accomplish in a new facility like West Campus Suites where community learning spaces were simply factored into the design. In addition to the living areas found in each of the suites, the 416 residents in West Campus Suites have access to a large lobby, complete with a working fireplace, as well as a large multipurpose room with a capacity to seat 42. The new housing facility also has eight group study rooms, six computer work stations, and a lounge on each floor that features a 32-inch LCD television.

The newly renovated Missouri Hall, which reopened this past fall and houses just over 500 men and women, provides a shining example of how the university has been able to incorporate more community learning spaces into an existing residence hall. “Through the renovations, we were able to expand the size of the house lounges and provide dedicated study locations,” says Zac Burden, the director of Missouri Hall.

Burden says the students like having access to the 20 decentralized computer stations that are scattered throughout the building better than the previous set-up where eight computers were all placed in one room. Additional space was also gained through the expansion of the front lobby which wraps around the old lobby area in Missouri Hall.

“Missouri Hall has been at Truman State since the early 1960s and has been home to thousands of students since then giving them safety, a social area to live, and help with academic success,” says Forrest. “Truman State University’s Residence Life works hard to give each student a good living experience on campus through academic programs, community building programs, healthy living programs, and other programs that can mold the student into a well-rounded individual.”

Like Missouri Hall, the plans for Blanton-Nason-Brewer, Dobson, Ryle, and Centennial call for an increase in community learning and study areas within the residence halls. “With everything we do to remodel the existing residence halls, we are slowly losing extra capacity in favor of more amenities,” says Schultz. Therefore, even though the university added a whole new residence hall when it built West Campus Suites, the overall housing capacity offered by the university will not be increasing. Instead, the university will be housing approximately the same number of students, but residents will have access to more study areas and more amenities.
Missou Hall, which was also referred to as Mizzou Hall by some, was one of the units that made up Grandview Heights, the temporary veterans' housing that was erected on campus in the 1940s. Truman alumnus Bill Sanders ('63) describes his experience living in Missou Hall from 1959 to 1963.

When I arrived on campus as a student in August of 1959, I was told all the dorms were filled, and I’d better find housing off campus, but the college would keep my name just in case somebody didn’t show up.

Well, as luck would have it, somebody did not show up. The room that was vacant was in an old Army barracks. It was a wooden, one-story structure shaped like a “T” that was called Missou Hall.

Life in Missou Hall

Missou Hall was once part of some temporary veterans’ housing erected on campus to accommodate the influx of students taking advantage of the GI Bill after World War II ended.

Making the Old New Again

Like many of the buildings on campus, all the residence halls except for West Campus Suites date back 40 or more years ago. And while updates have been made over the years, generations of students have taken their toll.

The addition of the new residence hall provided a way for the university to do a massive overhaul of the older buildings without reducing the amount of housing offered on campus.
In addition to replacing obsolete mechanical, electrical, and heating systems in the older residence halls, the renovations include some major health and safety enhancements, such as sprinkler and alarm systems, as well as improved access for the disabled. Bringing the older buildings up to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act means adding elevators to residence halls that did not have any previously, adding or improving roll-in access ramps to the buildings, modifying entryways, and providing clear space in designated rooms and bathrooms.

When construction crews began work on Blanton-Nason-Brewer, they discovered that the original plumbing had never been upgraded, which necessitated a major redesign of all the bathrooms in the complex. “Since all the bathrooms in Blanton-Nason-Brewer are being remodeled, they are being made ADA adaptable,” says Schultz. “And the first floor in Nason Hall will be fully ADA compliant.”

Laundry and kitchen facilities in the older residence halls are also being upgraded, and Schultz says additional improvements are under consideration to possibly redesign the residence hall cafeterias to accommodate changes that have occurred in the method of food delivery. “Our dining halls are designed for the traditional cafeteria where diners come in one end with a tray and go down the line,” says Schultz. However, the trend is moving toward food-court style dining halls similar to the one currently found in Main Street Market in the Student Union Building.

“The students are excited about the new options and are eager to learn about how they can live in the newly renovated facilities,” says O’Brien. “The added amenities are extra nice from the students’ perspectives and have been very good additions in meeting students’ needs both socially and educationally.”

The approximate $90 million housing project, which is funded by bond issues financed through revenue generated by the facilities, calls for the removal of Fair Apartments to make way for yet another major campus improvement project for the Pershing Building, which houses the Health and Exercise Sciences Department Office and Truman Athletics.

Originally erected as housing for married students, Schultz says Fair Apartments was built as temporary, wood-frame light construction. As part of long-term plans that were made some time ago, he says they hope to build a south Quadrangle in the area where Fair Apartments and the parking lot east of the Pershing Building are currently located. The parking will be moved to the outer perimeter of campus.

The Randolph and Campbell apartment complexes will continue to house students, but Schultz says the fate of Grim Hall is still undetermined pending the redesign and additions that will be required for the Pershing Building project.

If my memory is correct, it housed around 60 or 65 boys, two to a room, a small room. There was no air-conditioning, and the winter heat was steam. Each room had one register, but many registers did not work well. Sometimes in the winter, you froze or just as bad, you suffocated.

I lived there for four years until I graduated in 1963. Missou was the cheapest housing I’m sure. I think it cost $30 a month to live there.

For my meals, I found work at a café called the Huddle. It was located where Missouri Hall is now. It was a very small cafe, would only seat 12 or 14 customers at a time. I worked there for three years with only a verbal agreement and a handshake to wash dishes and make hamburgers. I was to work an hour for every meal. So I usually worked two hours a day and ate two meals. The owner was a lady by the name of Faye Moore.

My sophomore, junior, and senior year, I was given a partial football scholarship which included my room at Missou Hall and tuition. With that and the free meals, I can honestly say my folks were very grateful.

— BILL SANDERS
Class of 1963

This aerial view shows Grandview Heights, the temporary veterans’ housing erected on campus after the end of World War II.