

SPOTLIGHT

Saint Martin's University (Lacey, Washington)

Name: Parsons Hall
Opened: August 2008
Cost: \$14 million
Architect: Mithun
Number of Beds: 262

The new 67,000-square-foot residence hall has allowed students at Saint Martin's University to experience residence life the traditional way, as opposed to what they've been used to in the past: living in hotels. For the past two academic years, the university has rented space at the Quality Inn and Suites and the Dakota Apartments, converting them into a residence-hall atmosphere. They have also resorted to tripling up students in rooms meant for two. This fall marked the first time that there was enough space for all students who wanted to live on campus.

The university assembled student focus groups to plan the community spaces, and as a result the 262 freshmen, sophomores, and juniors who live in Parsons Hall now enjoy a communal kitchen and family-style table, a fitness room, a 24-hour computer lab, a conference room, and a late-night espresso stand. Also, in response to student suggestions, the sophomore wing offers single- and double-room suites with shared baths, while the freshman wing offers two-bed suites that share common down-the-hall baths. "We actually moved from the current mode of building suites for freshmen," says Melanie Richardson, dean of students. "The focus group thought part of the freshman bonding experience was shared bathrooms."

Enrollment has grown at least 3 percent a year since 2002, and this project allows the university to make space for their upperclass students. "We have a population of juniors and seniors who want to stay on campus, which does not happen at other schools," says Richardson. "We're very excited to retain upperclassmen."

The university hopes to be able to keep up with the housing demand in the future, keeping hotel stays for vacations only. Andy Aslaksen, director of housing, is optimistic: "We built this hall with room to grow."

