WHY FRESH EYES?

If you build it they will come…
Ray Kinsella, Field of Dreams

This was the wide-spread philosophy early in the trend of universities using private developers to deliver new on-campus student housing. Build a new, modern facility and students will stand in line to sign up for it. It was a risky approach. While there were many successes, there were housing communities which struggled soon after opening.

COCM was selected to take over the management of a number of these struggling on-campus housing communities. The experience provided us with valuable insights about the mistakes to avoid and the right steps for success. We believed these insights would be beneficial to any institution planning a new housing facility or re-positioning an existing housing program. Thus began the Fresh Eyes consulting program.

THE FRESH EYES PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH

More traditional approaches to housing planning focus on unit type preferences, rent tolerances, and the relative demand for off-campus housing options. In contrast, Fresh Eyes focuses on organic growth. How full-time student enrollment – both historical and projections for future growth – informs the planning process for an on-campus housing program. And conversely, how a housing program - when carefully planned and positioned to recruit and retain a student - can serve as a tool in enrollment growth. Also foundational to the Fresh Eyes approach are the following:

• **On-Campus Student Housing Matters:** Our research, and that of others, indicates a strong correlation between living on-campus and student success. A carefully planned campus housing program positively affects recruitment, retention, and overall student satisfaction.

• **First Things First:** One of the key principles in Stephen Covey's well known book, *7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, is the concept of, “first things first.” In on-campus housing, the most successful programs focus first on meeting the housing needs of first and second year (full-time) students. Like investing in a retirement account, these students are critical to growing a strong overall housing program.

• **What Students Value:** Each year, COCM conducts satisfaction surveys from the majority of our student residents. The responses generally fall into three categories, all of which are critical to a strong on-campus housing program:
  
  • **Convenience:** Students place a premium on convenience. “Can I walk to class?” “Is my furniture in place?” “Can I make one payment for rent and utilities?” “Is it easy to sign up for housing?”

  • **Community:** The number one reason given by students for leaving on-campus housing is, “I didn’t know anyone.” On-campus housing must build strong community among the residents.

  • **Value:** When on-campus housing is both convenient and builds strong community, residents generally perceive they are receiving value for their money. This perception is critical in establishing rental rates.

• **Housing is a Living Organism:** A student perceives all the various university-provided student services as seamless. On-campus housing is truly a living organism, either strengthened or weakened by other student services: from dining to financial aid, parking, and safety.

• **COCM’s Proprietary Housing Calculator:** Based upon our assumption that on-campus housing growth is organic, we built a proprietary tool we call a “Housing Calculator.” It combines historical and projected enrollment and other data to provide recommendations for sizing any new housing and/or for considering optimal bed capacities for renovated residential facilities.
HOW DOES FRESH EYES WORK?
The Fresh Eyes process is about first understanding the campus culture, philosophy, and approach to the on-campus housing program. We then review programs, policies, and the actual physical housing product. *Fresh Eyes is not about critiquing people or positions.* The process is focused on analysis and recommendations to help position a housing program to grow the institution. But in the process, many campus stakeholders gain a new perspective (and enthusiasm) regarding their role in making campus housing successful.

The entire process is designed to be affordable and efficient, completed over the course of three to four consecutive days on a campus. On the final day, findings and recommendations are presented in a two to three hour PowerPoint format. The analysis process involves interviews with key university officials, along with student focus groups. The typical university officials involved are:

- President
- Provost and Academic Deans
- Vice President for Business and Financial Affairs
- Director of Admissions
- Director of Financial Aid
- Director of Enrollment Management
- Dean / Director of Student Affairs
- Director of Housing and Residence Life / Staff
- Director of Dining Services
- Director of Public Safety
- Director of Facilities Planning and Management

We conduct student focus groups with the following:

- Currently living on-campus
- Currently living off-campus
- RA’s and Hall Director staff
- Student leaders

We also tour all existing housing and dining facilities, but only after the student focus groups. We want to first see them through the eyes of your students.

WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL OUTCOMES?
The analysis and recommendations made on the final day focus on providing or promoting:

- Practical, workable solutions for positioning a housing program – both existing and any proposed new housing. Many of the solutions can be implemented immediately.

- Greater understanding and appreciation among campus stakeholders concerning the value of on-campus housing in recruitment, retention, and overall student satisfaction.

- Recommendations for repositioning other student services (dining, financial aid, etc.) to maximally support the on-campus housing program.

- Recommendations for the sizing / phasing of any proposed new housing and/or renovations, including taking older housing communities off-line, using our proprietary Housing Calculator. The inputs to this tool are:
  
  - Current bed capacity (design).
  - Historical enrollment data.
  - Projections for future growth in first-time / full-time students, as well as overall full-time student growth.
  - Capture rates for housing all classes of students.
  - Recommendations for unit/building concepts for the various student target markets.
SUMMARY
We offer Fresh Eyes consulting to help your institution make sound decisions when planning existing and/or proposed new on-campus housing. Decisions that will help you grow, recruit new students and retain existing ones.

We also provide the same services to architects, master planners, and developers to provide insight and recommendations for the programing of new and renovated student housing – both during the proposal stage and in the project work after selection.

For more information, please contact:

Alton C. Irwin, MAI
Chief Marketing Officer
205.414.6417 | airwin@cocm.com
FRESH EYES REFERENCES

University of Hartford
Arosha Jayawickrema
Vice President of Finance & Administration
860.768.4276 / www.hartford.edu

University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)
Harlan M. Sands, J.D., M.B.A.
Former Assoc. Provost for Administration & Finance; Currently Vice Dean and CAO for Finance and Administration / CFO, University of Pennsylvania
215.898.2741 / hsands@wharton.upenn.edu

John Carroll University
Rev. Robert L. Niehoff, S.J.
President
216.397.4281 / president@jcu.edu

New Jersey City University
Dr. Sue Henderson
President
201.200.3111 / shenderson@njcu.edu

Lock Haven University
Dr. Michael Fiorentino
President
570.484.2000 / mfiorentino@lhup.edu

Auburn University
Robert Ritenbaugh
Associate VP Auxiliary Services
334.844.4190 / ritenrc@auburn.edu

Johns Hopkins University
David McDonough
Director, Facilities and Real Estate
410.491.3746 / dmcdonough@jhu.edu

Anthony Nero
President
Armada Hoffler Properties (Project Developer)
757.366.4000 / tnero@armadahoffler.com

Montclair State University
Kathleen E. Ragan
Assoc. VP Ragan
Student Development & Campus Life
973.655.3450 / ragank@mail.montclair.edu

Florida Atlantic University
Dorothy Russell
VP Finance / Chief Fiscal Officer
561.297.3266 / druss@fau.edu

Dr. Corey King
VP Student Affairs
561.297.3988 / cking14@fau.edu

Indiana State University
Diann McKee
VP for Business Affairs, Finance, and University Treasurer
812.237.2372 / diann.mckee@indstate.edu

University of New Mexico
Walter Miller
Associate VP for Student Life
505.277.2331 / wcmiller@unm.edu

University of North Alabama
David P. Shields, Jr.
VP Student Affairs
256.765.4223 / dpshields@una.edu

St. John Fisher College
Dr. Ronald Ambrosetti
Currently President
Our Lady of Holy Cross College
504.398.2109 / rambrosetti@olhcc.edu