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Consulting Report Adds to University's Decision Toward Housing

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In March, Brailsford & Dunlavey, the consulting firm that was called in to survey University of Michigan-Dearborn's student population about the perspective popularity of student housing, delivered their final report to UM-D. The consulting firm has been developing the report since December.

"We began the project with the intention of definitively find how housing at UM-D would become a strategic asset," said Brailsford & Dunlavey associate Kim Martin.

UM-D administration still have not made a final decisions regarding student housing, but the report's findings are a firm step in the direction to a decision.

"No matter what, this is going to be transformational for our campus," said UM-D Chancellor Daniel Little.

The report, which is broken up into several sections including numbers, exhibits and analysis, began with a preface that detailed the reasons why the consulting firm was hired and why it is believed that student housing can positively affect UM-D. Brailsford & Dunlavey had previously conducted a similar report regarding student housing in 2002. This most recent report emphasizes UM-D's intentions to work with GVD Detroit to discover the demand for phase one of student housing: an off-campus apartment within two miles of the university.

Martin described phase one as focusing on how housing would benefit enrollment, improve the campus' competitive amenity, and foster the creation of a distinctive college community within Dearborn.

Student respondents were broken into current, admitted and prospective categories.

In the part of the report that contained the numerical summary of the online survey that was conducted, it is shown that 74 percent of current UM-D students are interested in on-campus housing and that 65 percent are interested in off-campus within two miles of the university.

According to the university, 62 percent of UM-D students are under 25 and 65 percent of them live at home.

An online survey was sent to prospective students within the university's seven-county "catch area."

In it, 84 percent of the students who have chosen not to attend said that the lack of student housing influenced that choice.

In the end, only 42 to 43 percent of admitted students chose to come to UM-D, according to Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management and Student Life Stanley E. Henderson.

An educational advantage of having student housing as indicated in the report is that "studies have shown that students who live in student housing have higher GPAs, develop stronger ties with the university and form better connection with their peers."

UM-D administrators discussed the possibility that housing would benefit "students who are engaged in a rigorous major" like engineering because it would allow them to be closer to resources on campus and in the area.

Current UM-D students completed a total of 2,127 online surveys, and of those who completed the survey, 93 percent believe that student housing will improve the quality of life at UM-D.

The next section of the report was a collection of findings from UM-D's peer universities (which all have student housing) and from other schools throughout the country who have recently developed student housing for the first time.

The report also contained quotes from students who participated in the surveys.

"Although I personally would not be interested in student housing due to my full-time work schedule and near completion of my graduate degree, I think it is an excellent option. I wish this was available when I was an undergraduate full-time student, working on campus," commented one student.

Another student said, "adding student housing on, or near campus, would greatly increase the amount of potential students interested in the university, and would create an even tighter-knit community of current students."

Prospective students echoed the feelings. "I feel that on-campus housing for UM-Dearborn will attract more students to the university and possibly attract some students away from the school in Ann Arbor, because UM-Dearborn is so much more open and nicer to prospective students during decision time; housing is a very big factor that draws students away from Dearborn," said another prospective student.

At the presentation meeting, several administrators discussed the additional requirements that need be set in place in addition to the tangible housing building. There would need to be an expansion of university services to include housing staff, support staff for repairs and technology, laundry configurations, administration documents like roommate agreements and even initial interior designers and consultants to effectively cater to both genders' housing requests.

"There is much more to be done, but we are excited to work with the university in any way," said Dearborn Mayor John "Jack" O'Reilly.

But, concern was still voiced from some university administration. "There is a tradeoff," said Vice Chancellor for Governmental Relations Edward Bagale. "Where are we going to put our money? Should we improve academic facilities like the science building, or this new venture?"