

Dorms go extreme to lure students

Ann Arbor, Michigan (CNN) -- When most people envision a dorm room, they think of a cave-like space barely big enough to fit a TV, a closet and maybe a mini-refrigerator.

But that's changing as universities are catering to students who want movie theaters, tanning beds, fitness centers and, most importantly, private bathrooms.

Over the past few years, schools and private developers across the nation have poured millions into state-of-the-art dorms after recognizing that today's generation of students will pass up 8-by-10-foot rooms and apartments without washing machines.

For example, one private company -- [Landmark Properties](#) -- has units serving college students from the Southeast to Texas. They include the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa; numerous properties at the University of Georgia in Athens and North Carolina State University in Raleigh, among others.

And universities are also offering improved living quarters on-campus.

Last September, the University of Michigan opened the North Quadrangle Residential and Academic Complex, called North Quad by students and faculty. The \$175 million state-of-the-art building includes 450 residential rooms, classrooms with video teleconferencing capabilities, study lounges with smart boards and flat-screen TVs in nearly every hallway that show upcoming events.

In July, the National Association of College and University Food Services awarded the dining hall its gold status for the facility's food presentation and menu, which includes salmon fillet, tortellini with a walnut pesto sauce, lamb and even shark. For students who want a typical college meal, there's a pizza station and soft-serve ice cream.

Turns out college students liked the premier dining. The cafeteria was built to cater to 500 residents and staff, but more than 1,000 students from all corners of campus showed up for lunch daily throughout the last academic year, said Housing Director Linda Newman.

Freshmen aren't allowed to apply to live in the dorm, which is the first new residence hall to open in 40 years and one of the few on campus with wi-fi access and central air conditioning.

The dorm also has suite-style living arrangements intended to mimic apartment layouts.

Dan Dueweke, a University of Michigan junior studying psychology, recently moved into his two-room suite with a bathroom and wood floors. It's his second year living in North Quad, which Dueweke says is far superior from Baits II - the dorm he lived in his freshman year. Built in the late '60s, the building is now "breaking down" and has a lingering "musty smell," Dueweke says

"Here, there's still the new smell," Deuweke said, gesturing to his suite's freshly painted mustard yellow walls. "Everything is new and big and different from living in a normal stereotypical dorm."

The university doesn't keep track of the number of students applying to live in North Quad. However, the dorm attracts many upperclassmen-- 32% of students who live in the building are juniors and 22% are seniors and graduate students, according to housing spokesman Peter Logan. The dorm is also one of the first to fill up during the housing sign-up process.

The university designed the living quarters for more privacy and personal space. With about 10,000 undergraduate students applying for campus housing the past two years, Logan insists nearby luxury apartments and lofts in Ann Arbor, Michigan, aren't drawing students away from campus housing.

"North Quad wasn't built to compete," he said. "Although we recognize that if we don't have good contemporary facilities for student living, that might factor somewhat into a student's ultimate decision on whether they want to go to Michigan or somewhere else."

A lot of the campus residence halls in the U.S. were built in the mid-20th century when it was common for kids to share bedrooms and bathrooms at home. Today, students arrive at college not used to sharing a room or the communal experience of the older dorms, Newman said. Students are also bringing more gadgets, including refrigerators, microwaves, flat-screen TVs and computers.

"Just the stuff that people bring with them, the type of housing has to change ... we are changing the types of amenities we're offering to remain current and relevant to the student of today and of the future," she said.

The challenge is making sure the buildings last the next 100 years since universities can't afford to renovate them year after year, she added.

On the other side of the University of Michigan campus, a privately owned 10-story apartment complex called [Zaragon Place](#) has a wait list full of students hoping to live in the building that opened in 2009. The fully furnished apartments -- complete with black leather couches, 42-inch flat-screen TVs, granite kitchen countertops, washing machines and dryers -- cost about \$1,189 a month. (North Quad costs about \$1,412 a month for a two-room suite with a private bathroom). Students have access to a 24/7 gym, underground parking and a convenience store next to the building.

While the modern decor attracts some students, others such as senior Breanna Taylor find

security in its location only a few minutes away from most campus buildings.

"My mom liked the close proximity to the library, so when I walk home at 2 in the morning it's not far," she said.

The demand to live in Zaragon Place is so high that the building's owners decided to build a 14-story complex with similar amenities in another location a few blocks from North Quad.

Zaragon President Richard Perlman said his building appeals to students who don't want to live in old dorms with no air conditioning or share a bathroom with a dozen other people.

"Kids today want more privacy, they want better amenities, and in a lot of cases, they don't want to have three or four roommates," he added.

He says North Quad is an "exception" in terms of quality, but even then, the dorm isn't on the same level as Zaragon housing.

"We're offering an entirely different product based on the quality, closeness, the adult nature of it and its sophistication," he said. "We believe that's what kids want, and that's how they want to live."

Newman emphasized that premium apartments aren't competitors because they only draw from the off-campus market.

"Students who choose to live on-campus beyond their first year do so for much more than a shiny apartment," she said, explaining that students enjoy the resources such as computer labs, security and sense of community that University Housing offers.

The main motivation of private developers is to make a profit, Newman said. That's not the case with the university, which strives to provide affordable living and learning environments where students can succeed, she said.

"The residential experience is not just about the facilities, it's about the life that takes place in the building," she said.

The Retreat at Denton in Texas opened in July to 492 residents. Serving two nearby schools, it offers "cottage-style living" in which students lease their own room and bedroom -- similar to university housing -- but share a kitchen, dining and living room and patio with two to four students.

While it may sound like a typical apartment floor plan, The Retreat offers amenities you can't find in a dorm, including a clubhouse with two tanning beds, movie theater, sound-proof music rooms, salt-water pool and volleyball and basketball court.

Besides catering to students' recreational interests, The Retreat provides tutors from University of North Texas and Texas Woman's University and sponsors resume-building workshops to help students in their academic and career paths.

The Retreat, run by Landmark Properties, is the "stepping stone" between dorm life and the

conventional apartment-style living students experience after graduation, says Retreat Community Manager Bryan Curley.

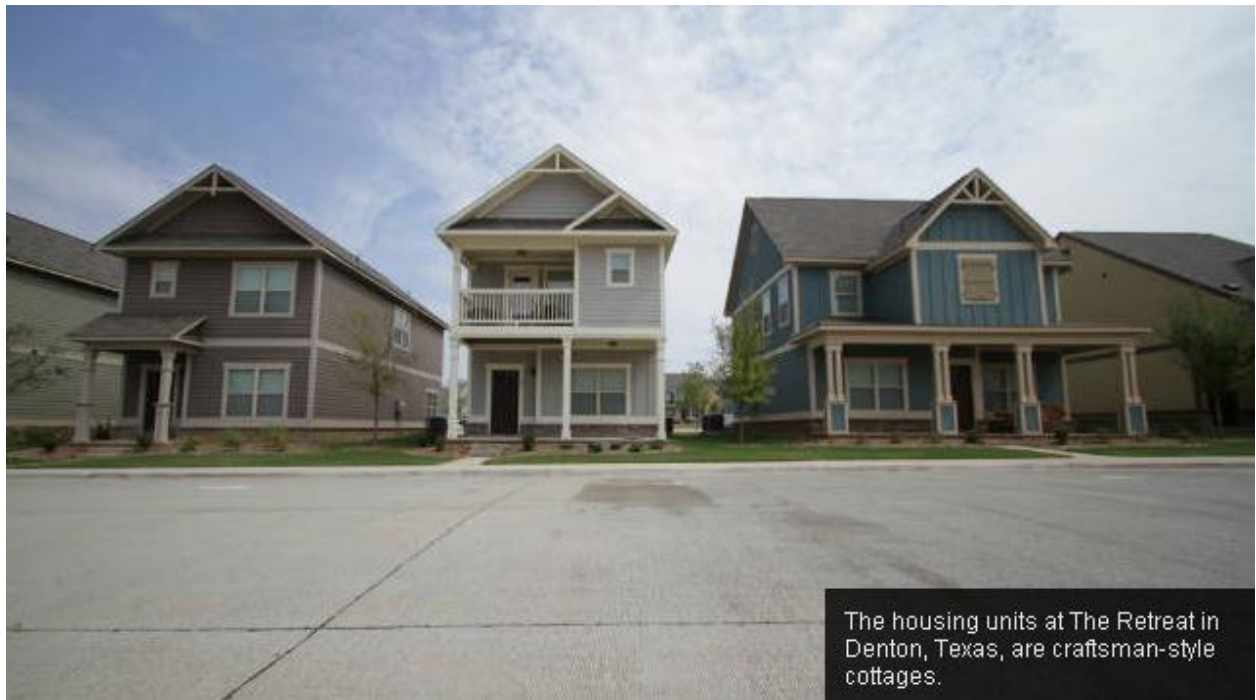
"This is taking both worlds and putting them together," he said.

And it won't cost an arm and a leg to lease a room. While it is on the pricier side of off-campus housing, The Retreat is cheaper than some of the UNT and TWU dorms, Curley says.

The Retreat is just another example of how student housing has evolved over the years.

Parents touring the grounds especially notice the difference. As mothers and fathers see the state-of-the-art fitness center and poker room, Curley says their reactions are all the same:

"Wow, I didn't have this when I was in college."



The housing units at The Retreat in Denton, Texas, are craftsman-style cottages.