Creating Dormitories with a Sense of Home

Johnathon A. Brousseau
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CREATING DORMITORIES WITH A SENSE OF HOME

A Thesis Presented

by

JOHNATHON A. BROUSSEAU

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

May 2023

Department of Architecture
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to everyone who supported me on my journey through architecture. To my family who have offered endless love and encouragement throughout my life. To my classmates who extended help as we worked together through this program. To my friends who provided relaxation and respite in this stressful time. And to my partner who gave me unwavering support and guidance through everything.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of so many members of the UMass Department of Architecture. Foremost, I would like to thank Professor Erika Zekos for serving as my committee chair, and for her encouragement and constant support throughout this process. I would also like to thank Professor Ann Marshall for taking over primary advising duties and offering her insightful guidance and feedback. Finally, I’d like to thank Professor Stephen Schreiber for his generous feedback and tough questions throughout this process.
ABSTRACT

CREATING DORMITORIES WITH A SENSE OF HOME

MAY 2023

JOHNATHON BROUSSEAU, BS ARCH., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

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With more people in the United States renting now than at any point since 1965, there is an amorphous temporality in the dwellings of many Americans (Cilluffo, Fry, 2022). This provides flexibility and thus, more freedom for upward mobility, an enticing attribute for younger people living on their own for the first time. However, this lack of permanence can create challenges in establishing a “sense of place”. When residents don’t feel a strong connection to their spaces, they can feel as if they don’t belong. This issue is especially prevalent in dormitories, where a feeling of belonging is vital to student success (Strayhorn, 2019, p.217). These obstacles present a formidable design opportunity for architects to alter their existing planning and design of dormitories.

This thesis explores the inherent power struggles dormitories present, as well as the shifting definition of “home” as both a space of belonging and a set of qualities imbued into a space. The goal of this project is to establish an understanding of the role of placemaking in temporary dwellings and discuss the difficulty one can face with creating a sense of “permanence”. and ultimately, to create a framework for designing student housing with a particularly strong “sense of place”.

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With a focus on housing solutions for university students who are currently experiencing both a shortage of on-campus housing, this thesis offers a set of guidelines for effectively designing student housing with a strong sense of place, with an emphasis on creating a sense of permanence in temporary dwellings.

*Keywords: dormitories, student housing, sense of home, placemaking, belonging*
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Student Living

Students across the United States are currently experiencing a shortage of housing within their campus and school communities (Smithson, 2022). University pupils are clamoring to find places to live that are comfortable, affordable, and accommodating of an ever-evolving lifestyle. They may be considering spaces that require them to share roommates, people may be subletting their spaces, and cohabitational partners may come and go. This kind of living situation is useful for affording flexibility and a degree of freedom to move and pursue other opportunities if they arise. However, it can be hard to curate spaces that feature that flexibility while also fostering a sense of place. Through thoughtful placemaking and design, architects can design spaces that better make students feel like they belong and imbue a ”sense of home” in temporary dwellings.

Project Relevance

The United States has long suffered from inequity in access to home ownership and upward mobility. Additionally, affordable housing projects have their own troubled history, and it can be difficult to get affordable housing projects off the ground. With the COVID-19 pandemic confining so many people to their homes, it allowed everyone to reflect on their dwellings and evaluate what is and is not working in our spaces. The “dining room turned office” or “living room turned classroom” really exposed how spaces we occupy every day can quickly go from comfortable to awkward. A survey from The American Institute of Architects revealed that there was a marked increase of requests from clients for home offices and mud rooms, indoor/outdoor spaces such as
sunrooms, as well as increased requests for “flexible” rooms within the house (Baker, 2020). The confinement we all found ourselves under also exposed the compounding effect that inequitable access to space can have. As described in a New York Times article from March of 2020:

“In New York, well-off city dwellers have abandoned cramped apartments for spacious second homes. In Texas, the rich are shelling out hundreds of thousands of dollars to build safe rooms and bunkers. And across the country, there is a creeping consciousness that despite talk of national unity, not everyone is equal in times of emergency.” ((Scheiber et al., 2020)

In a time where everyone was clamoring for safety, those without the luxury of a suburban or rural place of respite were stuck. As the world eases back towards some level of normalcy, it’s important to remember the lessons we learned from our experiences confined to our dwellings and allow them to inform our future design decisions.

**Outline**

This project presents a set of guidelines for effectively designing student housing that is both affordable and feasible to apply to different dorm typologies. These guidelines are presented alongside a student housing project sited in an area that is currently facing a student housing shortage. This project will serve as a precedent project that will define and integrate guidelines for student housing that has a sense of home. This thesis begins by charting the history of rentals and home ownership in the United States, and then tracks how perceptions of these concepts have shifted in contemporary culture. Next, it explores the role of placemaking in rentals and affordable housing projects, and the difficulty one can face with creating a sense of “home” or “permanence.” Finally, this thesis looks at student housing, with an emphasis on how dormitories can be designed at a planning level to better adapt to student’s lives.
Housing Shortage

The pandemic also bore some responsibility in the current housing shortage being experienced in college communities. As some students took gap years through the pandemic, they have created a larger incoming class of students who need to be housed. This can be observed on the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass) campus, as Selene Bonafini (2022) reports on comments by UMass News Director Ed Blaguszewski: “in our recent memory, we can’t remember a tighter [housing] market,’ Blaguszewski said. UMass is offering an incentive for students to commute for the Fall 2022 in exchange for a $900 rebate on Spring 2023 housing under certain conditions.”

Additionally, increased interest in living on-campus from sophomores and juniors who missed the campus experience when colleges closed, and education was moved to an online experience has strained on-campus housing resources (Burke, 2021). Within the UMass community, Bonafini reports “’We are occupied this spring higher than we’ve ever been occupied in my twenty years,’ …In 2016, 59% of admitted students decided to enroll and 65.5% in 2019, making predicting how many admitted students will enroll difficult. ‘It’s not an exact science. It’s an art,’ Blaguszewski said.” (Bonafini, 2022).

With universities struggling to predict and accommodate incoming classes, the student body will need to adapt to more difficult living conditions. Dorm rooms meant to accommodate two people will now be expected to house three in the same space, and lounges and other common areas may need to be converted to dorm rooms (Bonafini, 2022). These arrangements reveal a need for more thoughtful design in how we house our student body, and to rethink how we can create spaces that are both adaptable and affordable.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND

History

Affordable Housing in the United States

America’s long and tenuous history with affordable housing continues even today. Katherine Flynn highlights this issue in her *Architecture DC* article, “The Housing Problem” (2020). Although the affordable housing movement has its roots in the push for municipal housing in the early 1920s, the movement did not gain mainstream traction until the Great Depression and the rise of tent communities. With so many Americans struggling to find a place to live, it was clear that another solution would be necessary.

President Roosevelt’s creation of the New Deal in 1933, as well as the Housing Act of 1937, provided new access to federally funded housing. This support was discriminatory however, as “the first public housing community built under the Roosevelt administration, Techwood Homes in Atlanta, permitted only white residents” (Flynn, 2020). From the advent of the program, they stated that their goals were to provide all citizens with safe and stable housing, and to reinforce the belief that Americans facing hardship deserve a right to shelter. In reality, these programs served as another form of segregation by which Native American, Black, and Hispanic citizens had a more difficult journey to find their own affordable dwelling.

This issue was later compounded by urban renewal policies following both world wars that focused on rebuilding and bolstering our urban landscapes. Flynn writes:

“They did not prioritize the construction of new housing to replace what had been intentionally destroyed—leaving many African-American residents displaced. Policies of redlining, or the use of color-coded maps by the Home Owners’ Loan
Corp. (and later the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration) to indicate where it was safe to insure mortgages, further limited the ability of African Americans and other racial minorities to become homeowners—one of the surest paths to the middle class in America.” (Flynn, 2020).

This combination of factors has created some harrowing contemporary statistics. As of 2020, there is a “30% gap between the homeownership rates of white and Black households and a 10-to-one disparity between the net worth of white families and Black families” (Flynn, 2020). Additionally, there has been a lack of federal funding for affordable housing, despite the pandemic likely placing additional strain on renters (Flynn, 2020). For example, The Housing Association of Nonprofit Developer’s (HAND's) Housing Indicator Tool, a platform that tracks housing being built in the Washington D.C. and Baltimore area, reported that “All of the jurisdictions still have a considerable amount of work to do to reach the housing targets, particularly for housing affordable to low-and lowest-income households. This is not something they can do individually; rather it will be critical to have private-sector and philanthropic partners at the table… No jurisdiction is meeting all of the targets for the middle-income and below categories” (“Housing Indicator Tool”). There is a reliance that is fostered between nonprofit or low-income housing developers and private investors or lenders, and this reliance and the subsequent tight constraints it places on the project can present a compelling challenge to architects.

**Renting in the United States**

The renting of property might appear as a diametrically opposed concept for a country whose identity was founded on the ideals of “life, liberty, and property.” The ideals of property ownership and liberty have long been linked together, as private
ownership of land granted a certain level of freedom for citizens to do what they pleased, as well as increased financial freedom (Ely Jr., 2016, p.1-2). Additionally, in the earliest stages of our country, it was only white men who owned property who were routinely allowed to vote (“The Founders and The Vote”). In short, ownership has long been attached to personal empowerment and participation in government.

Unfortunately, these beliefs have created an unforeseen side effect. As an alternative to home ownership, renting is often perceived in a more negative light. In his writing The Grapes of Rent: A History of Renting in a Country of Owners (1999), Donald A. Krueckeberg details:

“They found that community organizations were dominated by people who espoused an ‘ideology of property,’ a key point of which is that too much rental housing leads to neighborhood decline...This ideology—that owners are better citizens than renters—is a modern manifestation of a bias hardened in stereotypes that has misguided American public policy from colonial times to the present” (Krueckeberg, 1999, p. 9-10).

Although there can be a wide array of factors that make renting a more feasible option for numerous different lifestyles, there is a general perception that rental housing is less desirable. There is a commonly held belief that those who own property in a place are inherently more prideful, active, and respectful within their communities. By virtue of there being an Other, those who don’t own property, it is presumed that they must have less pride or investment within their communities. In fact, it appears that the opposite is true. According to a study done by Michael Greenberg in two New Jersey Cities:

“He found that ownership made no statistically significant difference in discriminating between those who were very active in community affairs and those who were moderately active. However, it did play a role in discriminating between those who were very active and those who were inactive: The inactive people tended to be owners” (Krueckeberg, 1999, p.10).
There is clearly an indication that renters are invested in their communities and feel a sense of pride for that space. The real reason behind why they may not be acquiring property or “putting down roots” in these places could come from a wide variety of reasons. One of the more widely recognized situations is that of students. Nahyang Byun and Donghwa Shon discuss this in their article “Living Place Matters: The Duplicity of Shared Housing in the Young Adults of South Korea” (2022). Students are an economically vulnerable group who are often faced with limited housing choices. They are still developing and often trying to establish a home away from their families, and it is widely accepted that students find a temporary dwelling of some kind instead of establishing a permanent home. (Byun, Shon, 2022, p.1). Due to the unique combination of factors that many students face, rental properties tend to make more sense for their lifestyles. However, with a current strain on off-campus rental markets, students are struggling to find rental spaces that are both affordable and comfortable. Is there a way that on-campus housing solutions could provide an answer to students?

**Dormitories**

Before exploring how student housing can be better designed, it’s important to establish an understanding of the history of dormitories. In the United States, the first colleges were sponsored by Protestants, and were mostly in isolated locations. Therefore, it became a necessity for these institutions to provide housing for the students when these small towns didn’t have enough space to accommodate them. This maintained an insular, almost monastic quality to early student cohorts. As Elyse Martyn (2019) discusses in her article “The Evolution of the College Dorm Chronicles How Colleges Became Less
White and Male”, these spaces were almost always segregated and shunned anyone who wasn’t a part of the white Protestant elite.

Following World War II, veteran enrollment necessitated the expansion of dormitories. This was continued into the 1960s with a large generation of baby boomers setting off for college (Blimling, 2020). This ballooning student population made it necessary for many colleges to adopt a denser housing typology for students. Enter the modernist high-rise. The simple design of these structures made them relatively cheap and easy to construct, but their regularity also made it difficult for residents to resonate with them. Martyn writes “These residence halls made students feel anonymous, more products than people” (Martyn, 2019). These densely-occupied domiciles didn’t exactly foster a communal, family-like atmosphere between peers. In response, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw more radical campus plans that intended to bring campus design back to a more human scale. In spite of these radical design movements and an increasingly diverse student base, Martyn writes that “the dorms of today still mimic many of the same core features of dorms of the past…The college dorm still acts as a space to transition into adulthood” (Martyn, 2019). Although the general layout and purpose of dormitories have been slow to evolve, there is a more contemporary trend emerging in their design. An abundance of amenities. Dormitories are not just spaces to house students when they are not in class. They are the homes for many adults living on their own for the first time. As a result, we have seen increasingly elaborate dormitories outfitted with more apartment-like amenities (Martyn, 2019).
Placemaking and a Sense of Home

What defines a space as “home” undoubtedly varies from person to person. Therefore, this thesis will seek to explore definitions of homes through a phenomenological framework. Phenomenology is defined by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object” (Smith, 2018). It is concerned with the phenomena that one is personally perceiving. In evaluating dwellings, it is this perception toward the built environment that allows us to evaluate what factors make a place feel like “home”.

**Literature Reviews**

**Building, Dwelling, Thinking**

When exploring what it means to occupy space, Martin Heidegger’s *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, originally given as a lecture in 1951, is a pioneering work in how we discuss architecture. However, his earlier work *Being and Time* from 1927 is an important starting point that details a series of his phenomenological concepts. He argues that the qualities of “being” and existing are inextricably linked to time. He argues that “Being is time. That is, what it means for a human being to be is to exist temporally in the stretch between birth and death. Being is time and time is finite, it comes to an end with our death” (Critchley, 2009). Heidegger then explores this quality of being through a phenomenological framework, investigating people in their day-to-day lives. Subsequently, his *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* lecture expounds upon these ideas as they
pertain to dwelling. He begins by establishing that not all buildings are dwellings. Although we build and occupy workspaces and bridges for example, we wouldn’t consider any of those “dwellings” (Heidegger, Hofstadter, 1971, p.1). He then explores the etymology of “build”, identifying that it originates from the “Old English and High German word for building, buan, to dwell” (Heidegger, Hofstadter, p.2). To build a space is to enable dwelling in space, and dwelling “is the manner in which mortals are on the earth” (Heidegger, Hofstadter, p. 2). He emphasizes that our dwelling on this earth as mortal beings is linked to the nature that surrounds us, as well as the “fourfold” components that make up our world. These components are the earth, the sky, the divinities, and the mortals (Heidegger, Hofstadter, p.3). Heidegger’s example of a Black Forest farm indicates his beliefs as they pertain to the role of building in dwelling. He writes:

“Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities, and mortals enter in simple oneness into things, ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbirth and the "tree of the dead"-for that is what they call a coffin there: the Totenbaum-and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time” (Heidegger, Hofstadter, p. 8).

He finishes with idea that building belongs to dwelling, and to how we can receive nature through dwelling within these built spaces (Heidegger, Hofstadter, p.3). Designing with the environment, in a way that accommodates it and is subservient to it, results in a more holistic space. Even though Heidegger emphasizes that we do not need to go back to
building Black Forest farms, we should consider the ideals of a dwelling that works so purely in conjunction with its place on earth.

Although this book is an important work in establishing how we perceive space, it is important to observe it through a contemporary lens. In their thesis *RE*)Developing Place: The Power of Narrative* (2019), Kinsey Diomedi points out “This defining of dwelling, which can also be an interpretation of place is limited in scope and an overly romantic way of viewing the world. People today are migrating into the city, which currently has less of a connection to nature as Heidegger describes it. There is also a growing trend of blending home and work through moves such as tele-working from home, designing sleeping pods and recreational areas into offices, and increased need for traveling/time away for work” (Diomedi, 2019, p.4). With a major increase in the Work From Home movement since 2019, as well as continued increases in urban living, Heidegger’s arguments may seem increasingly outdated. However, his development of ideas surrounding dwelling, the built environment, and a connection to nature revealed themselves to be increasingly relevant. Although there is a larger-scale trend of migration into urban environments, the pandemic highlighted a vital, innate desire for green space and a connection to nature, even within urban and temporary dwellings.

**A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter**

In his book *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter* (1979), David Seamon outlines the numerous qualities that provide a space with a sense of home. He describes them as “The components of at-homeness, as group reports reveal them, are rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness and warmth” (Seamon, 1979, p.71). *Rootedness* is the power of the home as a space that we organize our lives
around. We organize our departures from and our arrivals to this location and know where everything in that space belongs. It becomes almost an extension of ourselves (Seamon, p.79). Appropriation is the ability to exhibit control over one’s space, the ability to control who comes and goes, and ultimately, to have a sense of possession over one’s space (Seamon, p.80). This is an area where renting or cohousing can feel lacking, as maintenance workers and other resident’s guests can create a sense of unease or infringement. Regeneration is the comfort and relaxation that the home can provide. It houses the space that we sleep in, and the space that we feel enough appropriation towards to feel comfortable and rejuvenated in that space (Seamon, p.82). At-Easeness is the freedom to feel fully oneself and uninhibited by the expectations of anyone else. Seamon writes, “Within limits, the person at home can manifest all sides of himself and fear no repercussions; he can be as foolish, negative, or loving as he wishes” (Seamon, p.83). This is another quality that can be hindered by student housing, as there may still be pressures to prescribe to certain societal norms around housemates or roommates. And finally, Warmth, the general feeling of cheerfulness and comfort that generates from a home that is being actively enjoyed. When we put care into the places that we occupy, they have a sense of radiating that care and joyfulness that we can feel (Seamon, p.84-85).

**A Pattern Language**

One of the seminal works in the art of placemaking, Christopher Alexander’s *A Pattern Language*, provides a database of solutions for addressing problems in our buildings. It is aimed at creating a “language” of “patterns” that can interact with one another and be utilized at different scales. Alexander addresses problems at the regional
level, before evaluating individual towns and streets, followed by sharing solutions for individual buildings and spaces. Having established a multi-scalar language, he argues that it is then possible to combine several patterns in a single project in order to create functional spaces that also have a connected and almost poetic quality. Alexander asks us to consider the combination of patterns Bathing Room (144) and Still Water (71). One space is traditionally a relaxing and serene space for cleaning, while the other may evoke images of calm ponds or lakes and an engagement with the public. If we use these patterns in tandem:

“Where the bathing room merges with this common place; where there is no sharp distinction between the individual and family processes of the bathing room, and the common pleasure of the common pool. In this place, these two patterns exist in the same space; they are identified; there is a compression of the two, which requires less space, and which is more profound than in a place where they are merely side by side. The compression illuminates each of the patterns, sheds light on its meaning; and also illuminates our lives, as we understand a little more about the connections of our inner needs” (Alexander et al., 1977, p. xlii-xliii).

Much of Alexander’s work focuses on this gradient of public to private space and offering a number of different privacy levels that interact with one another in unique ways (Shafai, 2019). This consideration for occupants mental and physical health with an emphasis for addressing unhealthy environments is an extremely valuable tool for creative placemaking.

We are also seeing integration of these tenets on a planning level in order to encourage equality in our towns and cities. Charles Rosenbaum explored this by chronicling Toni Griffin, a Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) professor, and her design studio titled “Patterned Justice: Design Language for a Just Pittsburgh”. He notes that A Pattern Language is a core piece of literature for the course, “it is more effective as a reference than a narrative, but the language, says Laura Greenberg, a Masters’
student in the Pittsburgh studio, ‘is easily accessible to people. It’s not in any kind of design jargon’” (Rosenblum, 2019). The pared down language and objective breakdown of design decisions is a part of what makes A Pattern Language special. It is an accessible tool that can be used by the people, not just designers, as Alexander writes “that towns and buildings will not be able to become alive, unless they are made by all the people in society, and unless these people share a common pattern language, within which to make these buildings”(Alexander et al., 1977, p. x).

**Student Sense of Belonging**

Fostering a sense of home and community connection is especially important for students, as outlined by Terrell Strayhorn (2019) in his book Student’s Sense of Belonging. “Sense of belonging is correlated with college student success. Some students don’t succeed because they never feel like they belong in college in the first place” (p.217). If students lack a space that makes them feel like they belong, they aren’t as likely to find success. Strayhorn outlines several strategies for fostering a sense of belonging, such as clubs and groups that share common interests or live within the same dormitory. Providing them with spaces that allow for more interaction with different groups can also help students gain a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019, p.219).

Additionally, a student’s feeling of belonging has been revealed to be correlated with many other markers of academic success, such as dropout rates and motivation. Students’ own reported levels of belonging in high school were also shown to have a positive correlation with academic performance in college (Laldin, 2011). Creating an environment where students feel like they belong is essential to their growth and allowing them to succeed. Implementing placemaking strategies like those outlined in A Pattern
Language is a way to go about accomplishing this. By utilizing the strategies described in A Pattern Language through the framework of Seamon’s “components of at-homeness”, we can create dwellings that are more deeply imbued with a sense of home.
Completed in 2018, Great River Landing is an excellent example of an affordable housing project that manages to create a sense of home. The project, located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was designed to house 72 formerly incarcerated men. 4RM+ULA notes “More than a housing development in the North Loop, it is a place of stability for people committed to positive change after recovering from the traumas of unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration” (4RM+ULA). The project integrates several different communal spaces with varying degrees of privacy. There are intimate meditation spaces meant for a single person, meeting rooms for groups to meet, classrooms for hosting events or lessons, as well as public lounge spaces for open
engagement with the community. This variation in public and private spaces encourages interaction and fosters a more positive living environment. This was a particularly important quality to imbue into this project, where there is such a focus on personal growth and “reintegration into society” for the residents (4RM+ULA).

This thoughtful placemaking continues on the exterior of the building. Landform Landscape Architects partnered with 4RM+ULA to provide site design and planning services. They worked with a small outdoor space and programmed it with a vegetable garden and outdoor cooking and patio space. Residents were also asked for their feedback and expressed interest in having a small playground for potential visiting families, resulting in the addition of a play area (Landform Professional Services LLC). Again, we see that there is a thoughtfulness for enriching the lives of residents in a variety of ways. A small play area provides ambient noise and the buzz of activity while there is a more contemplative activity in a shared vegetable garden. Additional details give a sense of place as well, such as each floor having a different colored mural that then dictates the color for the entire floor. Using these in lieu of traditional floor numbers helps to incorporate a personality and a quality of thoughtful design that is also cost-effective.

**Project Row Houses**

Project Row Houses is an organization based out of Houston, Texas whose mission is to serve as “a community platform that enriches lives through art with an emphasis on cultural identity and its impact on the urban landscape. We engage neighbors, artists, and enterprises in collective creative action to help materialize sustainable opportunities in marginalized communities” (projectrowhouses.org). They operate in Houston’s Third Ward, a historically African American neighborhood, and
serve via a wide spectrum of community-engagement initiatives and art and development programs. Janae Ladet and Kimberly Burrowes evaluate this project in their article “No One Left Behind: How Placemaking Can Promote Equitable Development”, writing:

“Project Row Houses saw a need to support single mothers through the Young Mothers Residential Program, which provides housing and other social services to single mothers. Tamika Evans, director of strategic partnerships at Project Row Houses, noted the following: 'We learned that there were single mothers in our neighborhood who needed not only housing but a safe space for them and their children to grow—as individuals and as a family…. Through YMRP, we help to foster both independence and interdependence because being part of a community means that you have someone to lean on and that you’re there for others’” (Ladet & Burrowes, 2018).

An essential piece to the Project Row Houses puzzle was the creation of Row House community development corporation (PRH). This program came about to provide low-income rental units. The executive director of PRH, Eureka Gilkey, states “Our affordable housing program grew out of YMRP when graduates wanted to stay in the Third Ward but were unable to find sustainable options” (Ladet & Burrowes, 2018).

Because the organization provided these amenities and raised the values of this neighborhood, it naturally creates the conditions for gentrification. Project Row Houses was able to stave this off by integrating an affordable housing plan into their practice. They also fostered goodwill with the permanent residents of the area, bringing together institutions as well as nonprofits and small business owners to help stave off gentrification that was facing Third Ward in 2015. Both Great River Landing and Project Row Houses highlight an inconvenient truth regarding affordable and thoughtful placemaking development. The creation of projects like these are often contingent on taking advantage of several different revenue streams and require more careful financial strategies in order to maneuver.
Kresge College

Figure 2: Residences of Kresge College, UC Santa Cruz. (Ponderosapine210, 2016)

Kresge College utilizes a planning strategy at a campus level designed to make students feel a sense of home on campus. Located in Santa Cruz, California, and designed by Charles Moore and William Turnbull in the early 1970’s, the college is organized into clusters of small semi-autonomous groups. These groups all have housing that sits closely into the landscape, and they all have their own facilities and staff. (Dixon, 1987). The creation of smaller colleges helped to foster a greater sense of
individuality and belonging amongst student groups, as well as an additional level of privacy and community within each college. Kresge College was also designed to be “a self-contained and self-sustaining community that combined academic, residential, and recreational facilities. Since the original curriculum of the college emphasized the relationship between community development and protection of the natural environment, an effort also was made to provide students with extensive opportunities for participating in the design and maintenance of their own living environments” (Dixon, John Morris, 1987). This sense of authority and actionable changes over their spaces helps students feel a greater sense of ownership and command over their temporary homes. Evaluating the campus layout, there are more strategies for encouraging social interaction to help stave off student loneliness. The campus takes inspiration from a Mediterranean village, featuring a large central street lined by two-story buildings constructed at a variety of angles as if the campus were built over time. This angled building also allowed for the creation of various plazas and mezzanines. Meeting areas and larger services were distributed along the central street in order to facilitate more spontaneous meeting throughout the day (Dixon, John Morris, 1987). The dormitory rules themselves were also less restrictive than typical dorms, allowing students more agency over their dwellings. The living units featured modular furniture that came in a variety of colors and could be arranged into different configurations. Students “would not only be able to paint and decorate their rooms, but could also construct lofts, staircases, and interior walls or otherwise alter the space in order to meet their needs for privacy and/or personal expression” (Dixon, 1987). In allowing students to freely customize their spaces to better suit their needs, whether that be constructing additional partitions or reconfiguring
furniture to suit a different purpose, Kresge College allowed their students to have a greater sense of agency over their space.

**Granite Pass Dormitory Project**

![Granite Pass Dormitory Aerial Rendering](image)

**Figure 3: Granite Pass Dormitory Aerial Rendering (University of California, Merced, n.d.)**

The Granite Pass Dormitory at the University of California Merced is a contemporary project that combines an on-campus residence with academic facilities. Located on Little Lake in Merced, California, this housing project was designed by Page Southerland Page and fully opened in 2020. The residence hall is four stories tall and features a pedestrian boardwalk on the ground floor that overlooks the lake. Connected to this pedestrian circulation are classrooms and student gathering spaces, making the dormitory more of a general hub for campus and encouraging different communities to engage with the space. The student gathering spaces include meeting spaces as well as offices for student clubs and organizations, making involvement easier and bringing events to the residents. The upper three floors house the residences, organized into two
wings coming off a central “hub” that houses game rooms, lounges, and multipurpose rooms (University of California, Merced). This organization helps to centralize the recreation spaces and create crossover potential between them.

Zura Hall

Figure 4: Zura Hall, Exterior Patio and Fire Pit (H.M.C. Architects, 2020)

Zura Hall at San Diego State University is another contemporary example of a dormitory deeply imbued with a sense of home. H.M.C. Architects completed the project in 2015 and laid out their design mentality in their article “How Architects Are Improving Housing Design Standards”. They write about the challenges and diametrically opposed problems that architects can often face when designing dormitories, “These spaces need to feel like a home away from home. They also have to strike the perfect balance between privacy and community” (H.M.C. Architects, 2020). They go on to break down the design standards that they implemented in this project.
Zura Hall features an abundance of interior community rooms to serve different needs. There is a large lounge on the first floor with a kitchen and family-style table, but the hall also features nooks and smaller study rooms to provide a perfect space for every student’s needs. The outdoor spaces and connection to nature are another important aspect to making the residence hall feel like a home. The area surrounding the building is programmed with walking paths, outdoor socialization spaces such as fire pits, and a community garden. These spaces make the site feel alive and give the impression of a laid-back, familiar atmosphere (H.M.C. Architects, 2020). Finally, they highlight a few of the details that can ease the discomfort of dorm living. Filling the space with murals and other art that allow the space to feel lived-in, utilizing warm lighting in conjunction with daylighting strategies to make rooms feel more welcoming, and managing acoustics through soft furnishings and other barriers help students feel more secure in their spaces (H.M.C. Architects, 2020).
For an example of a housing project that set out to create a sense of community in all of the wrong ways, look no further than Ohio State Universities Morrill and Lincoln Towers. Designed by Schooley, Cornelius, and Schooley in 1965, the rooms in both Lincoln and Morrill are set up very different from other dormitories on campus (“Knowlton School Digital Library”). Each floor consists of six suites, one laundry room, one resident advisor (RA) room, and three supply closets. Within each of the suites is a common room, a bathroom (that includes three to four sinks, two showers and three restroom stalls), four rooms (each of which includes a study connected to a bedroom). Each suite usually has eight-twelve students in each. Rooms are quads, triples or doubles (apart from the suite directly next to the RA room, which has a single room in it). A typical floor is home to 60-70 students. (DGRESS95, 2014).
Students have also reported being dissatisfied with the layout and how it can hinder spontaneous interaction or meeting new people. One student stated “I enjoyed the fact that the desk/study area was separate from the sleeping area allowing me to study late into the night without having to physically leave my living quarters, however, I disliked that the physical layout made it easy to not interact with people unintentionally like living in a more hallway-based dorm and leaving the door open might” (“Morrill and Lincoln Tower?”, 2013).
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Framework

After collecting numerous precedent projects and key research sources, I was able to compile an overall framework or lens through which I can make design decisions (Figure 6).

![Framework Diagram]

**Figure 6: Project Framework**

At the highest level of this framework is Heidegger’s *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, which essentially establishes a way of thinking about space and dwelling through a phenomenological ideal. This is then utilized by David Seamon to outline the
phenomenological qualities and general design ideals that give a space a sense of “at-homeness” (Figure 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Experiential Stratum</th>
<th>Manifestation in Space/Place</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rootedness</td>
<td>bodily, centers the person spatially</td>
<td>concentrated in places, paths, points of use; undeveloped in unused portions</td>
<td>intelligent body-subject; spatial order and temporal continuity; minimal chance of being or becoming lost; taken-for-grantedness in terms of orientation, routines and places for things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation</td>
<td>largely emotional, attachment to place (positive), sense of threat (negative), sentiment</td>
<td>concentric and generally strongest in center; intensely in proportion to use and attachment; applies to centers, paths, places for things and things themselves.</td>
<td>provides person a place of owness and order in a wider world that is public, often chaotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regeneration</td>
<td>bodily, emotional, cognitive, renewal, and repair</td>
<td>generally happening within the home, but also associated with other places that have restorative powers - e.g. a path where one takes his daily constitutional.</td>
<td>restores both body and spirit; repose and sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-easeness</td>
<td>bodily, emotional, cognitive</td>
<td>usually strongest at home but possible in other places where the person feels comfortable and relaxed.</td>
<td>relaxation, looseness, contemplation, freedom 'to be'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>pre-cognitive; felt most by the person’s bodily, emotional parts</td>
<td>most common in interior spaces - e.g. rooms and houses; related to tidiness, decoration, interpersonal harmony</td>
<td>cheerfulness, contentment, sense of camaraderie and nurturing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7: David Seamon’s Aspects of At-Homeness**

With this collection of distilled phenomenological qualities, an approach similar to Christopher Alexander’s A Pattern Language can be used to break these qualities down further into individual, actionable strategies. Finally, this framework hopes to encapsulate Strayhorn’s views regarding Students’ Sense of Belonging, creating a space that is imbued with a sense of warmth and comfort, making students feel like they belong and producing more positive outcomes. After establishing this overall way of analyzing projects for their sense of home, I began to document my precedent projects and the design strategies that they utilize (Figure 8).
**Figure 8: Precedent Analysis**

Design strategies that appeared across multiple precedent studies were correlated to one of Seamon’s Aspects of At-Homeness, and then precedents would be checked for those design strategies.
CHAPTER 4
CLIENT AND SITE

Site/Exploration Possibilities
Amherst, MA

Amherst is a compelling case study as a through-and-through college town. The influence of students cannot be understated on the Pioneer Valley area. It is home to the Five Colleges Consortium: A collection of universities that work with one another to provide their roughly 40,000 undergraduate students a more varied experience. The largest of these, The University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass), will be the focus of this project. UMass is a flagship public university of approximately 24,000 undergraduate students, that occupies a 1,463-acre site in the north half of the town (USNews). UMass has a project under construction along Massachusetts Avenue that will provide undergraduate apartment-style housing, but the university is still anticipating a shortage of space in these next few years (Bonafini, 2022). Additionally, there are several private housing developments in downtown Amherst that would appear able to provide more housing, but they are out of the price ranges of many students. Currently, the University states that their yearly on-campus housing cost is $8,612 ("Undergraduate Expense Estimate") while comparable off-campus housing in the surrounding area would be $14,300 ("Graduate Expense Estimate"). The addition of expensive housing and subtraction of small businesses on what serves as the main street of Amherst creates a street sorely lacking in Alexander’s Pattern Language ideals. This thesis proposes a project that would be feasible due to its proximity, and it could be beneficial to explore
an area that is so accessible to my audience. Additionally, Amherst students are facing circumstances of housing shortages both on and off-campus, allowing for flexibility as to what solutions can be explored.

**UMass Housing Profile**

Ultimately, I decided to choose a site on the UMass Amherst campus. The need for new housing at UMass is only going to become more prevalent over time. The 2018 Master Plan for the University lays out a profile of the existing residential buildings, stating that “The majority of campus dormitories were built in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s and almost 70% of them are over 40 years old. The newest and most popular residential buildings on campus in 40 years were the North Area dorms, completed in 2006... However, demand for housing, particularly singles, still persists” (UMass Amherst Campus Planning Division, 2012, p. 158). The plan goes on to say that although there are projects in the works to create enough beds to address the rising student body, it doesn’t address the larger underlying problem of a largely aging building stock” (UMass Amherst Campus Planning Division, 2012, p. 158).

**The Southwest Portal**

The UMass campus master plan identifies a few prospective sites for future residential projects. After analyzing several options, I decided to go with a site on the southwest corner of campus (Figure 9).
There were various qualities that made this site an ideal candidate. Having a variety of spaces with different usage types is important to creating a sense of home, and this site is projected to have a mixed residential-academic complex. The master plan also states that this project has an emphasis on landscape and use of pathways in order to activate the space, stating “this site offers phased development opportunities that can create a carefully planned academic courtyard with a more formal gateway mass at a major campus entry point. This area’s adjacency to recreational facilities and Graber field… will draw students north from the Southwest Residential Area through the existing tunnel and will provide a well-defined pathway to the rest of the campus core” (UMass Amherst Campus Planning Division, 2012, p. 164-65). Another helpful feature of this site is that
there is room for multiple buildings to be a part of a complex, allowing me to show strategies that explore the adjacencies between buildings.

Figure 10: Site Analysis Boards

To begin the analysis of the site, I began by overlaying the proposed building layout as outlined in the UMass Master Plan, identifying a roughly 150,000 square foot footprint for the buildings on a site that is roughly 450,000 square feet. It was also important to look at the adjacencies as mentioned earlier, as this site is at a critical intersection of campus. There is the primary administrative building and formal entrance to the campus to the east of the site. The southern edge of the site creates a bridge between the Southwest residences, the campus’ largest housing complex, and the rest of the campus to the north. The west side of the site faces out onto open fields and sets an edge of the campus. This site also has a few key conflict points between pedestrians and automobiles as outlined in the campus master plan. There is already a plan to shrink Massachusetts Avenue, and make it more responsive to the pedestrian scale, and a
residential development bridging Southwest and the rest of campus would make that a higher priority.
The design process for my project began with an exploration of different dorm typologies in order to find an overall strategy for the form of my building. I began by looking at Maja Baldea’s (2013) article, “Social and architectural implications of high density” regarding ideal dorm typologies. They diagram the typical loaded-corridor design (Figure 5, left) with a clustered suite typology (Figure 11, right).

They discuss the research of Andrew Baum and Stuart Valins, which revealed that “The results of the study showed that students that lived in the corridor-design dormitories,
being exposed to large groups and intense and uncontrollable social interactions have developed a greater sensitivity to group size and a lower tolerance towards crowding. Their way of adapting to the frequent and unregulated social interactions is generally withdrawal and avoidance of social interaction” (Baldea, 2013). When students don’t feel like they have agency over a space, many students tend to withdraw and retreat to their rooms, the only place of solace from a hallway full of students. The suite design allows for a fuller privacy gradient. There is the student’s room, a space of complete refuge, as well as a suite common area that allows for limited interaction. This provides a buffer space between limited social interaction and the larger gathering of students in the dormitory halls. This ultimately informed my decision to provide suite-style housing with single dorm rooms. Students should have a space that is completely their own, while also having a common space for their suite to feel more like a collective.

**Early Design**

My initial design featured a collection of clustered buildings with living spaces that were placed on “plinths” in order to respond to the stepping of the site. The intention was that these “plinths” could house the more public mixed-use spaces while the upper floors would house the dormitories. The lower floors offer adjacencies to more public-facing, outdoor, and mixed-use spaces, while the dormitories above would be organized into smaller social groupings. Suites are arranged into clusters that share a large common area. The intention behind this design was to provide inhabitants with a full gradient of privacy levels, from public spaces that engage with the rest of campus to their own private dorm room.
Figure 12: First Axonometric

Figure 13: Early Axonometric

Figure 14: Early Site Plan
I initially wanted to set several hard edges to the key adjacencies on the site, namely the lawn to the West and the Southwest residential complex (Figure 12). This was done in order to create an insular feel to the space and create opportunities for murals or other backdrops to those more important adjacencies.

However, I decided to pivot in order to avoid setting a harsh corner to campus and make better use of the adjacencies offered by the site. In my second design scheme (Figure 13), there are now a select number of suites overlooking the lacrosse field, as well as wall partitions that enclose green spaces on the edges of the site. These walls break down and invite visitors in while also establishing more private outdoor spaces. This pivot was also done in order to work with the extreme topography of the site and weave the project into the fabric of campus. The project now engages with Southwest through various paths connecting the two, as well as responding to the site as an entrance point to campus and the recreational areas of UMass.

**Final Design**

![Final Axonometric Rendering](image_url)

*Figure 15: Final Axonometric Rendering*
Moving onto my design, this is the new UMass West Residential Complex. It features 368 beds across 5 buildings that step down the steep grade of the site. The overall size of the complex is approximately 220,000 square feet on a roughly 9-acre or 450,000 square foot site. There was an emphasis on maintaining existing pathways on all four sides of the site, including the tunnel connecting Southwest to the rest of campus. The overall form of the project is a series of Mass Timber forms connected by glass bridges. These bridges serve to frame various courtyard and outdoor spaces, connect each building to the other, and provide more private roof gardens for the dorm inhabitants.

![Figure 16: Final Ground Floor Plan](image)

### Figure 16: Final Ground Floor Plan

Moving up the ground floor plan (Figure 16) beginning from the West, you begin at a generous front lawn to campus facing the playing fields and the view of the mountains to the west, with a café space that frames the front of the complex. From there you move up to a courtyard with outdoor dining, as well as an amphitheater space under Building A. From there you can access the tunnel path to the neighboring Southwest
residential complex as the courtyard for Building B. I wanted to offer as many students a view as possible, as you can see in the “Approach from Mass. Ave. Rendering”. With Building B’s ground floor units however, I decided to at least give them a large patio space to compensate for lack of views, as well as a direct adjacency to this courtyard garden space. Building C is more residential on its ground floor, and it also features a walk-out “basement” floor that is adjacent to Building B and provides both buildings with a shared kitchen and common spaces.

Building’s D and E both feature different public function spaces that are intended to engage different groups. Building D has a large lounge and shared kitchen connected to it, creating a large living-dining space for the complex. It also has a small recreation room and breakout spaces for the residents of the complex, creating more opportunity for spontaneous interaction amongst residents.

Building E features a few new lecture rooms and small classrooms, as well as more academically focused breakout spaces that would be available to the UMass student body. This would have multiple benefits. The first and most obvious would be more classrooms which the campus also needs. But this has the added benefit of bringing the community to this space and weaving it into the overall fabric of campus.
Looking at the upper floor plan (Figure 17), you can see the clusters of suites that make up each floor. There are vertical circulation cores at either end to engage with both the residences and the bridges. In instances where the bridge intersects a floor, the suite is replaced by a student lounge.

Figure 18: Final Suite Layout
For the layout of my suite, I really grappled with what felt like the “right” amount of privacy to provide. Tying back to the aspects of At-Easeness and Appropriation, it felt important to provide each student with a completely private space for studying and sleeping. I decided on suites of four students, with each student getting a room of their own. It needed to be large enough for comfort but small enough to encourage community, giving students a reason to leave their rooms.

There are two bathrooms per suite, and then a shared living area that features a small alcove for a living space and bar-style seating for eating or studying as a group. Each suite also has a balcony to give all residents a direct connection to the outdoors from their living spaces.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

The presentation and subsequent discussion regarding my project raised some key concerns. Although I tried to take a holistic approach in my precedent research, many of my inspiration points were dormitories or apartments. There is a wider breadth of co-living styles to explore, but the intention of this project was to home in specifically on dormitory living.

It was also pointed out that there is a difficulty in creating guidelines for design that are both widely applicable and suited to their place. There is a tension between wanting to create a project that has a character of its location and wanting to make a project that could be more easily widely applicable. As a result, from my early iterations to my final iteration, there was also a loss of randomness and spontaneity in the design as I tried to create a project that could be more widely learned from. However, that wide applicability can result in a loss of character in the project.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

In terms of moving forward, the next steps for this project would be to begin adding in some components that Strayhorn brings up regarding student belonging by designing the dormitory common areas to better serve certain communities on campus. UMass already has a robust Defined Residential Community program for certain groups to live together, but with these groups considered from a planning level, we can integrate decisions at an architectural level to cater to those groups' living situations. Prospective student surveys are a valuable tool for revealing what spaces students value and would get use out of. The creation of a space that is adaptable, malleable, warm, and thoughtful can make students feel like they belong and drive actionable change.
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