

**America's Priciest Dorms****AUGUST 9, 2006 B-School News**

**Think paying for college is already too expensive? At these schools, dorm rooms alone can cost more than \$10,000 a year.**

Back-to-school shopping for dorm rooms goes into high gear this month, and the cost of these rooms is going higher and higher. Tuition rates continue to soar at both public and private universities, and room and board expenses have followed suit.

An annual College Board report on pricing trends in higher education estimated that students will pay nearly \$400 more for this year's room and board than they did last year. It also stated that on-campus housing expenses now average \$6,636 and \$7,791 at four-year public and private universities, respectively.

The crown for most expensive housing belongs to the University of California-Berkeley. Its tuition may not be as high as at the priciest private schools, but room and board will ring up at \$13,074 for the 2006-2007 academic year. To compile our list of the top 10 priciest dorms, we looked at the College Board's annual survey of room and board costs. Administrators report an average of housing and meal plans for residents and an estimate for commuters that exclude transportation and personal expenses.

Our top 10 are all located in urban areas or expensive suburbs where room to expand housing options is severely limited and therefore expensive. The percentage of students who live on campus ranges from 18% at No. 2 Suffolk to 84% at No. 4 Sarah Lawrence. Three of the schools are in the University of California system, but the others are all located in or near cities on the East Coast.

**DISAPPOINTING DORMS.** While some colleges charge the same amount to live in every residence hall, others offer housing that varies in price according to the age of the dorm, room size, and amenities such as private baths. "Low-cost" housing offerings at No. 7 New York University start at \$5,970 for a one-room triple in an older hall. But the price can soar to over \$15,000 for a private-bedroom suite in a renovated dorm with air-conditioning, for two to four students. And that doesn't include a meal plan, which begins at a required minimum of \$3,250 for traditional-style dining halls.

NYU sophomore Annie Cross picked her dorm last year for its proximity to campus, but says its run-down status and lack of air conditioning—"especially brutal during those hot months" at the beginning and end of the school year—led her to apply for more expensive housing this fall.

But she notes that it is feasible to find an apartment that is cheaper and closer to campus, even in the notoriously expensive New York City housing market. "It seems like it gets to the point where it's no longer worth it," she says of dorm life. Because she hopes to go abroad for the spring semester and didn't want to go through the hassle of subletting, she opted for the dorms again.

**TRANSPORT TRADE-OFF.** Students at NYU and its pricey peers say the majority of undergraduates move off campus by their junior year. However, that's not the case at Sarah Lawrence and Manhattanville, which are liberal arts colleges that emphasize community living.

Sarah Cardwell, assistant director of student life at Sarah Lawrence, says bargains can be found for students willing to look in less expensive neighborhoods around the college, but some who move off campus want the excitement of living in or closer to New York City. "Where the trade-off comes is in the transportation cost," she says. "I've certainly seen some students that have decided to get an apartment in Brooklyn, and then moved back on campus the next year just because of the long commute."

Upperclassmen can often save on room and board because they can choose more flexible meal plans or live in dorms with kitchens. Cross says she has yet to meet a person who has used up their NYU meal plan, and she had about 70 meals left over from the 175-meal option she was required to purchase this year.

**OFF-CAMPUS COSTS.** Still, while living off campus may be cheaper even in expensive cities, it is sometimes just as costly to live in neighborhoods that are close to campus. Students at the University of California in Los Angeles, which came in No. 6 in our rankings, cluster in the wealthy neighborhood of Westwood in apartments that are within walking distance. Apartments in other areas are often a better bargain, but UCLA junior Emily Proud points out that convenience often triumphs because "a mile can be an hour's worth of traffic in Los Angeles."

Students who chose to move off campus say they didn't anticipate startup costs such as furniture and cooking and cleaning supplies, which can make an apartment or shared house more expensive than dormitory life. Proud is paying \$600 a month to share a two-bedroom place with three roommates, but she says living off-campus will be end up being more expensive. However, UCLA estimates students can save nearly \$2,000 by commuting.

Despite astronomical room and board costs, the schools on our list have no shortage of students willing to fill university-owned dorms and apartments. Sarah Lawrence gave students a \$3,000 tuition credit to live off campus a few years ago when pressed for space, and continues to fill each bed before the beginning of the school year. And although UCLA has raised room and board costs by as much as 8% in a year to fund new dorms, the number of undergraduates living on campus is rising as the university now guarantees housing for two years and will soon guarantee it for all four years.

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