

TRENDS IN COLLEGE BOUND STUDENT CULTURE

The young adults arriving on college campuses today are very different from those of ten and twenty years ago. With colleges in fierce competition to draw these students, they have had to consider these differences in the renovating and design of their facilities.

Students today have fully integrated the laptop computer into their academic and personal life. It is a research tool, writing implement and social life organizer all in one. One of the major renovations taking place in most educational facilities, at all levels, is the provision for computer technology in everything from the required wiring to the size of the desktops. There is often a need to move desks and chairs and rearrange furniture to accommodate new uses. Increasingly colleges are seeking out furniture that is equipped with casters for ready mobility and is comfortable and sturdy.

The students have also come from an educational program that often encouraged them to participate in collaborative projects and form study groups. There is still a need for the quiet library atmosphere for times of personal study and research, but there is a growing need for areas with comfortable lounge type furniture that allows students a place to hold discussions and study together.

Another noticeable difference entails the personal life style of these students. They are generally coming from much smaller families where they have not had to share a bedroom with anyone. In the design of dorms, colleges are trying to make the communal living experience less intrusive by selecting dorm furniture that provides a visually personal space. The loft beds with desk and wardrobe underneath are a good selection for this purpose, when actual individual rooms are not possible.

In these typical families both parents have been working full time to help make the college opportunity possible. The old fashioned family meals was long ago replaced with a quick fix, on the run, eating pattern. For the average college freshman food is eaten purely to prevent starvation and the less effort it takes to prepare the better. The other element shaping their eating preferences has to do with the subconscious effect of "comfort foods". When people are placed in high stress situations they will often seek out foods that they associate with their earlier carefree years. Such choices include cereal, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and pizza. Many colleges are starting to provide dining areas that are well adapted to this culture. Such areas include a sandwich/pizza eatery with Internet capability and comfortable seating that serve as a study/social area and popular food fare. Buffet style specialty areas are also gaining in popularity. Consider a cereal bar with an assortment of fresh fruit toppings and dairy products. This provides a nutritionally responsible choice that also feels very comfortable to most young adults.

The key design factor behind the growing trends on today's college campuses is to try to make the environment better suited to needs of the students while creating a sense of the comforts of home.