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TOP STORY

## WKU prepares to open new residence hall

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) 23 hrs ago



New dorm rooms with private baths, a 24-hour dining facility and lots of common space to study or socialize are just a few of the features in the new Hilltopper Hall opening this month at Western Kentucky University.

After about 18 months of construction, the roughly \$40 million residence hall along College Heights Boulevard is nearly ready for students to move in. At about \$2,800 per semester, Hilltopper Hall is the most expensive residence hall for students.

When designing the hall, which features 408 beds, campus officials hoped to strike a balance by offering students more privacy in their bedrooms and common space for interaction and collaboration. The new residence hall does eliminate some of the green space surrounded by Gilbert Hall, McCormack Hall and Rodes Harlin Hall, an area known as “The Valley.”

But Katie Corbin, marketing coordinator for housing and residence life, sees the addition as a positive.

“I really feel like it’s done a lot to make it more usable for students,” she said, referring to the outdoor patio just outside the 24-hour dining hall on the ground floor.

The dining hall is available for all students, not just those living in the residence hall. Located in the west wing of the building, it uses large windows to bring in natural light. It’s expected to accommodate 100 to 150 students, feature a “grab-and-go” concept and be usable for special events, according to WKU’s website.

On Wednesday, the WKU athletics staff toured the facility to get a better idea of the facilities available for student-athletes. Lana Kunkel, associate director of housing operations, said 164 beds are currently reserved for student-athletes. The remaining 244

beds are for general student use, with the dorm catering to freshmen through seniors, she said. About 40 freshmen are expected to live there this fall.

Students enter the residence hall through a secured vestibule that opens into a common space that also features a gaming lounge and a “makerspace.” The room will allow students to work on creative projects at standing tables and use storage space. “That is for any student who wants to go in there and be creative,” Kunkel said while giving a tour to the WKU athletics group.

Each floor has its own common space complete with study rooms, lounges and a kitchen. There are also more private nooks at the end of hallways for students to gather in.

Each room features a one- or two-bedroom suite, a bathroom and a closet for each student. Beds can be lowered to the ground, dressers are on casters and hovering desks are hung on rungs of the bed unit. American with Disabilities Act-compliant rooms are also available on each floor next to the common areas and elevators.



WKU's move to upgrade its student housing is laid out in its 10-year master plan and represents a move to become more competitive with other state universities offering newer residence halls, according to a previous Daily News article.

Brian Kuster, WKU's vice president for enrollment and student experience, previously said Hilltopper Hall is a way for the university to cater to students' changing expectations on campus.

"They want their privacy in their bedroom, but they also want to have a space that they can interact with other students outside of their bedroom," he said. "This will provide a lot of opportunities for that."

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