

# Gaining Housing

*The University of Florida's innovative history runs the gamut from the school's inception in the 1800s to the present. T.J. Logan heads up the university's ambitious housing plans.*

Interview by Randall Shearin

With housing stock that spans three centuries, the University of Florida (UF) has an eclectic mix of choices for students. The university has always considered its housing as one of its top amenities, and has touted its residences to prospective students. Despite a robust off-campus market in Gainesville, the university has never had an issue filling its beds because of its excellent facilities. While it has no requirement to live on-campus, most freshmen and many upper classmen choose to live in university housing at UF, which has an enrollment of 54,000.

Leading housing at the University of Florida is Dr. T.J. Logan, director of housing for administrative services in the university's department of housing and residence education. UF opened two new residence halls in 2015: one a traditional hall built with state bonds and the other a public-private partnership that affords students interested in entrepreneurial careers a live-in laboratory. *SHB* recently caught up with Logan as the 2016-2017 academic year began.

**SHB:** Can you tell our readers a bit about the University of Florida's housing program?

**Logan:** We are a unique housing operation in that we are the largest single site housing provider in the Southeastern United States. If you include our graduate and family housing along with our undergraduate beds, we have north of 10,000 beds on our campus. Those are university owned beds. We don't have an on-campus housing requirement, which is also out of the ordinary when you look at other universities. We house between 82 and 86 percent of our freshman class each year, which is right on par with those institutions that do have an on-campus living requirement, once you factor in the exemption criteria at those universities. We also do well in a market that has a competitive off-campus housing market. We have positioned ourselves to provide an offering that students want to live in so that we have demand that exceeds our capacity. Overall, we only house about 20 percent of our



Cypress Hall is what Logan calls "the most accessible residence hall in America today," because of features that allow mobility-challenged residents to live independently. The 255-bed hall opened in fall 2015 and was built using traditional bond financing.

student population. That may be lower than what you see at some institutions, but we are an extremely large institution with record-breaking enrollment in 2016-2017 of about 54,000 students. Our housing department has its own maintenance and facilities operation, and our own building services department. We do everything in-house.

**SHB:** The University of Florida has always been known for having great housing stock. That was a selling point for students 25 years ago, just as it is now.

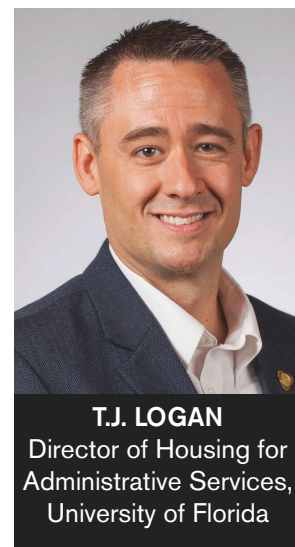
**Logan:** It has been for a long time. We also have one of the most diverse inventories of housing in the country. The original two buildings that made up the institution in the late 1800s are now residence halls here. We have everything from those two buildings dating to the late 1800s all the way through new stock that we added in the fall of 2015. Within that, we have a diverse inventory of apartments, suites and rooms. We have buildings where every unit is completely different. We think our housing fits well for any student.

**SHB:** What are some of your challenges with housing?

**Logan:** Gainesville is a highly competitive market for student housing. The off-campus apartment market is well built; some might say it is overbuilt. We are always competing with off-campus. We're not competing for demand, but competing to ensure our students are receiving a level of service that aligns well with what they are trying to study at the institution. We want to make sure that if our students choose not to live with us that they are living in an accommodation that meets their needs and has the proximity to campus they need and lease terms that fit their needs. Internally, there are challenges in maintaining 100-year old buildings and keeping up with the facilities race. Florida has a climate that offers some challenges, including heat, moisture and hurricanes. We allocate a fair amount of time, effort and resources on an annual basis to keep up with that, performing a large amount of maintenance over the summer periods. We've done a good job with keeping up with a 20-year plan we have in place for capital improvements.

**SHB:** What types of amenities do you find students asking for with on-campus housing today? How have you risen to the challenge to update your buildings?

**Logan:** It is interesting. Ten years ago, it truly was about amenities: who has the suite-style living, updated bathrooms, granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. That is when the off-campus market really got some footing with the ability to compete; those are the things that don't really cost a lot in terms of construction. You can build a short-



**T.J. LOGAN**

Director of Housing for  
Administrative Services,  
University of Florida

term building with those amenities without a whole lot of additional cost. Now, we see a shift. Part of that is that we have a lot fewer first-generation college students on college campuses. The first generation student is unique. Now, parents are influencing how students are going to live and where they are going to live, and what those parents are used to — and what worked for them — are those traditional residence hall experiences. Students today are not necessarily seeking amenities, but really a safe environment. They want to make sure, whether from an access control perspective or a staffing perspective, that we have done the right things to keep the on-campus environment as safe and secure as possible. They also want the technology upgrades; they want wireless and wired access throughout the building, and they want that supported. That's not an amenity; it's a prerequisite for taking classes at the university that you will be connected all the time. Students are clamoring for the more traditional, on-campus experience more than they have been at any point in the past decade.

**SHB:** You mentioned a capital improvement plan. What projects does that involve?

**Logan:** We have a lot going. We just started the fall semester, so we are over 100 percent occupied and we don't have anything active going on right now. Over the past few summers we have done a lot, though. We rebuilt one of our commons buildings about a year ago due to a fire that occurred, which was a large project. We built a brand new commons facility in one of our graduate and family housing villages. We are always working on a roof and on plumbing somewhere. We have redone a lot of finishes in our older buildings. It wouldn't be uncommon for you to go into one of our more traditional halls and find it updated with VCT wood flooring, crown moulding, contemporary paint colors and updated furniture. We have also worked with our athletic association on some updates to their housing complexes to better fit their needs. That includes larger beds, different furnishings, enclosed

breezeways and more branded fixtures. They need to have that to stay competitive within the SEC in terms of recruitment.

**SHB:** What is the long range plan for development at UF?

**Logan:** We are always examining our demand for housing — not just what we can accommodate but what our excess demand is. As we entered the fall of 2015, we had spent several years planning for the opening of two new facilities, which we opened. Those were Infinity Hall — built under a public-private partnership — and Cypress Hall, which was a traditional bond funded facility. Cypress Hall is the most accessible residence hall in America today, so it was an exciting project. If you look at those two buildings, they are distinct because one was built under a public-private partnership and the other was done with bonds. We thought ahead to the outcomes of those projects and undertook the methods we needed to deliver those outcomes. For Infinity Hall, a public-private partnership made the most sense to get to those outcomes. For Cypress Hall, a traditional bonded facility made the most sense. For the future, the University of Florida may increase enrollment so we will need to make some decisions as we watch those trendlines over the next few years. We don't have aggressive growth plans at this moment; we like working under a system where we don't have an on-campus live-on requirement so we don't outgrow our demand to the point where we have to have a live-on requirement. We want to house students who want to be here, rather than those who have to be here. We are also looking at other opportunities, like faculty housing. We are always looking at our graduate market and how we accommodate them.

**SHB:** Tell us about Cypress Hall, which you said was the most accessible residence hall in America. What does that entail?

**Logan:** Cypress Hall has some great features that make it accessible to everyone. The building allows many students to attend the university who otherwise could

not. It provides a living accommodation that is far beyond the bar set by the Americans with Disabilities Act. It allows students with severe mobility issues to live comfort-

ably on our campus and attend our institution. If you walk down the hallway on the ground level of Cypress Hall, you will notice that it is wide enough not just for two

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## VIEW FROM THE ACADEME

people to pass, but for two wheelchairs to pass each other side-by-side. There are automatic door openers on everything. All of the suites on the ground floor are ultra accessible. There is a SureHands lift system built into the ceiling so that students with severe mobility issues can call the lift to the bed; it will take them to the shower, toilet, or to their desk. They have Bluetooth controls they can control from their phones that will operate the window blinds. There is a Bluetooth camera on each door so that those with severe mobility impairments can see who is there and press a button to let them in. The bathrooms have a system that allow the sinks, toilets and grab bars to be adjusted based on the students' needed position or their hand strength. They may need more space between the sink and the wall; you can slide the sink on a rail to the preferred position. All of the furniture was built in-house by our carpentry shop. The

wardrobes have exchangeable interiors. We send our carpentry staff over to meet with these students as they are moving in to set the bar heights and to make sure the kick plate height on the dresser and wardrobes are set to the correct levels. The handles are also extra wide. Our Disability Resource Center works in that building as well. We've worked with a number of students and staff with mobility issues to do everything we can so they are accommodated as best as can be so they can focus on their academics. Cypress Hall has 255 beds. It has been one of our most popular buildings because it has suite-style accommodations. And while the entire building is accessible, not every student who lives in there has additional mobility needs. It is popular because the location is fantastic and, of course, it is a new building.

**SHB:** Infinity Hall is the other new hall on the UF campus, and was



The University of Florida developed Infinity Hall in a public-private partnership with Signet Development. The 312-bed project was designed for students who are interested in entrepreneurship; the P3 structure allows businesses to operate from the building.

built to foster entrepreneurial students. Can you tell us about that and why it was built in a public-private partnership?

**Logan:** Infinity is a great public-private partnership case study. We partnered with Signet Development on Infinity. It is a building that was created for the sole purpose of supporting students who were interested in entrepreneurship and innovation. The financial model for the building was built to support that, as were the rooms and the common spaces. We have students who want to live here that have the slightest notion that they want to be entrepreneurs. We also have students who come straight out of high school who already have operating businesses. I just met with four students who were running a 3D printing lab from one of their parents' garages. They were prototyping products and had an operating business. They were at the point in life where they had to make the decision of whether to put all of their energy into the business or go to college. College was important to them, but it was tearing at their heartstrings to make that choice. On a tour of Infinity Hall, they saw that they could do both. It allows them to put all of their energy into college, yet not abandon the business they started. And hopefully they come

out of college being better at both. That type of story is very exciting, because that is who we built this residence hall for. Now, if you look at a traditional residence hall and you have a student who goes to the housing department and says he wants to run a business out of his or her room, the answer is almost always going to be 'no.' It will be 'no' for a variety of reasons, including how the bond funding is put together and whether such activity is allowed to happen in that space or not. Some of it might be institutional policy; there are a number of reasons. For us, building a facility in a public-private partnership, the answer could always be 'yes.' We eliminated the fact that we would own the building, which was the biggest stumbling block. That also removes other barriers. Say one of these companies wants to have a product review and they want to cater it from a local company they are in partnership with. In a typical residence hall, they can't do that because the dining contract governs that they must cater in the residence halls. At Infinity, they can do anything they want regarding food or other vendors to do what they need to do to make their businesses successful.

**SHB:** How has Infinity Hall worked in practice?

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**Logan:** As proof of the concept, we have 16 companies running out of the ground floor of Infinity Hall right now. Many have UF students involved in them, but some have no students involved. Another interesting thing about Infinity is that the pro-forma is all based on the revenue generating space upstairs — the beds — not the businesses. That freed up a lot of space below for us to partner with companies; we have partnered with a number of companies where we have given them space in exchange for providing value back to the UF community. An example of that is that we have a fabrication lab at Infinity Hall. It was launched in our college of fine arts and architecture. They needed new space, which we gave them, but we told them they had to provide access to the fabrication space and equipment to residents of the building. They agreed, so now we have 3D printers, laser cutters and other fabrication equipment that is available to our residents. We also have a mobile application development space and a student-run graphic design firm operating in Infinity Hall. We do three- to five-year letters of agreement with the businesses; we will measure the outcomes of how they are working with the Infinity community, and that will determine whether they stay or go at the end of the term. The on-campus housing environment really does provide a unique ecosystem for supporting entrepreneurship. A part of that is that you already have the built-in capital because you have a lot of non-revenue generating space. You also have a market; you have a building full of 18- to 24-year olds. They are a great test market, but also a strong permanent market.

**SHB:** Are halls like Infinity, which expands the definition of residence hall, also expanding the role of housing director?

**Logan:** Yes. First and foremost, it is important for us as housing officers to realize what we are not experts in. We have a longstanding tradition of saying 'we can run a living-learning community about anything.' We can do engineering, foreign languages, etc. All we do is

build a building and partner with the academic group and it works. With Infinity, we said that we were not the experts in entrepreneurship. We had to engage interested students and others in the UF community to figure out what this building would look like, what would be in it, and how it work on a day-to-day basis. When we did that, we figured out what we didn't know and we came up with a better product at the end of the day. I do think projects like this are changing the role of housing. We have to be less involved in saying that we are the end-all be-all of the education of our residents. We need to be the conduit to connect our student-residents with the experts. In some ways, that is about leveraging our resources to do that. We have 3 million square feet of housing; we are a massive organization. There is a lot of value to that, and we have to leverage that to give our residents the highest return on investment in their time with us.

**SHB:** What advice would you give to other housing directors who may be feeling the pressure to look at PPPs, or are having a difficult time figuring out how to replace housing stock or build new?

**Logan:** Housing officers around the world have often looked at public-private partnerships as these evil, bad things that will ultimately result in leveraging students' dollars to make someone else rich. At the end of the day, if you look at it from the perspective that it is a delivery method that is different than the traditional one, it has a lot of advantages to it. If you look at how those advantages align with the outcomes you are trying to achieve, you may find that public-private partnership projects make a whole lot of sense. When you look at how our deal for Infinity Hall is structured with Signet, everyone wins. The University of Florida is very well positioned, Signet is very well positioned, and students — the

ones who should be front and center of every equation — come out on top every single time. I would urge housing directors to challenge themselves to think about the way they perceive public-private partnerships and maybe to shift your business when it makes sense to do so.

**SHB:** What is your background?

**Logan:** I've been at the University of Florida for just over seven years. I received my doctoral degree at UF. I planned to stay here a short period of time, but I ended up liking it quite a bit. Prior to coming here, I was at Kent State University for about a decade. I worked in the university housing operation there while receiving my MBA. My background is non-traditional in that I don't have a student affairs degree and I have never been a live-in hall staff member. I have always been on the business operations side of the housing operation. **SHB**

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