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“ The Indiana Institute of Technology in Fort Wayne, Ind., is planning to build its second modular dormitory --- a four-story building for about 64 students --- during its vacation next summer.
(Both constructed by **Whitley Mfg. Co.**) ”

Building Dorm Rooms Cheaper, Quicker and Quieter By Alison Gregor • Published: March 26, 2008

NEW HAVEN — Modular construction may have an image associated with prisons and barracks, but it is also increasingly being used in a more refined setting, to create quick and convenient dormitories and classrooms for colleges and universities.

Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pa., has added five modular dormitories with a total of 145 beds.

These are not the flimsy wooden buildings that were the hallmark of the first generation of modular building, but hardier steel and concrete structures. For instance, Yale, on a campus distinguished by sturdy neo-Gothic and Georgian Revival architecture, built a modular dormitory in 2004, covering about 7,800 square feet.

The \$3 million building is part of Pierson College, one of Yale's 12 residential colleges. It bears touches of the surrounding architecture, completed in 1933, with custom antiqued brickwork, a pitched slate roof, Yorkshire glass windows with concrete lintels, and stone copings at the parapets.

“They tried to blend in the appearance of the building with what's here already,” said Martin Dominguez, a first-year medical student who was also an undergraduate at Yale and has lived in the modular building for 18 months. “They did a reasonably good job, though the building obviously looks pretty modern relative to the other architecture.”

Mr. Dominguez said he was not happy with the quality of the dormitory's construction — some of the walls do not quite fit together and the floor is uneven in the bathroom, he said. Yale officials did not respond to requests for interviews about the dormitory.

But housing administrators at Muhlenberg College, a liberal arts institution with 2,150 students in Allentown, Pa., toured the dormitory to review the work of the construction contractor and said they were impressed. They decided to build five similar residence halls.

Modular manufacturers say that a growing number of colleges are incorporating prefabricated structures, in which the buildings are manufactured as modules at a factory and then assembled at the site.

The Modular Building Institute, an industry group, says an average of 29 percent of the commercial modular building market in 2002 to 2006 was for educational uses, but it does not break out college-level uses. The group notes, however, that primary and secondary school enrollment has been rising rapidly.

In permanent modular construction, a module may encompass parts of more than one dormitory room or may be as small as a single bathroom. The building is typically designed by an architect, and then a modular manufacturer translates the design into components, which are fabricated in a factory and assembled on site.

While this method of manufacturing saves colleges some money — perhaps 5 percent to 10 percent on construction costs — a more important reason for its growing popularity may be that it speeds up construction, which minimizes disruption on campus.

Instead of taking a year to build a dormitory, it can take only a matter of days, meaning colleges can respond quickly to an unexpected jump in enrollment and capture the revenue from rents sooner.

The three-story dormitory at Yale's Pierson College, which houses about 18 students, was assembled during spring break.

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Muhlenberg assembled five dormitories with a total of 145 beds over the course of last summer to replace older, smaller dormitories.

A Muhlenberg junior said that he and his roommates were thrilled the building was completed on schedule.

“We all knew it was modular, and that was important,” said Adam Hirsh, who applied during his sophomore year to live in one of the new dormitories. With conventional construction, he said, “we’d be worried that it wouldn’t be finished on time.”

Muhlenberg has had more experience with modular construction than most other colleges. The new dormitory buildings were the fourth prefabricated housing project at the college, said Michael H. Brewer, director of plant operations.

“We’re probably one of the biggest users of modular construction,” he said. “A lot of colleges have not used it, and part of that is because of the reputation in the past of modular being more of a trailer. We’ve had to work to overcome that aversion and the sense that modular buildings are temporary and less-than-good construction.”

Mr. Brewer said Muhlenberg has been pleased with the quality of its modular buildings. Solid buildings are important, but equally essential for students and their parents is a peaceful living experience on campus, he added.

“I h□ next four years?” he said. “She didn’t want her son to be disrupted in any way.”

The \$13.2 million project at Muhlenberg, which was designed by Spillman Farmer Architects of Bethlehem, Pa., and manufactured by the Kullman Buildings Corporation at its plant in Lebanon, N.J., consists of 20 modules for each three-story building. All were trucked to the site and assembled by Kullman.

A 600-ton hydraulic crane, one of two that large in the United States, lifted all the modules into place. Modules for the roofs of the five buildings were built on Muhlenberg’s nearby tennis courts.

“Because of the short scope of time we had, it was a feat,” said Aaron Bova, Muhlenberg’s associate director for housing services. “There were naysayers, so we ended up with crowds of people up here every night watching as they set the boxes. It was pretty impressive.”

Besides being quick, modular construction also allows colleges to build more efficiently and with fewer change orders, said Rich Sm□ at Rice University in Houston as well as dormitories at Bloomfield College in Bloomfield, N.J.

Though Muhlenberg’s new dormitories are not certified as “green” buildings, Mr. Brewer said modular construction has that potential. “The process leads to very little waste, and it’s all controlled, and waste goes into bins for recycling,” he said.

Y□ second thoughts about living in modular dormitories.

“The first thing I think of when I think of modular housing is cheap,” said Martina Guzman, a graduate student at Columbia who has not lived in a modular dormitory, but has some experience in construction.

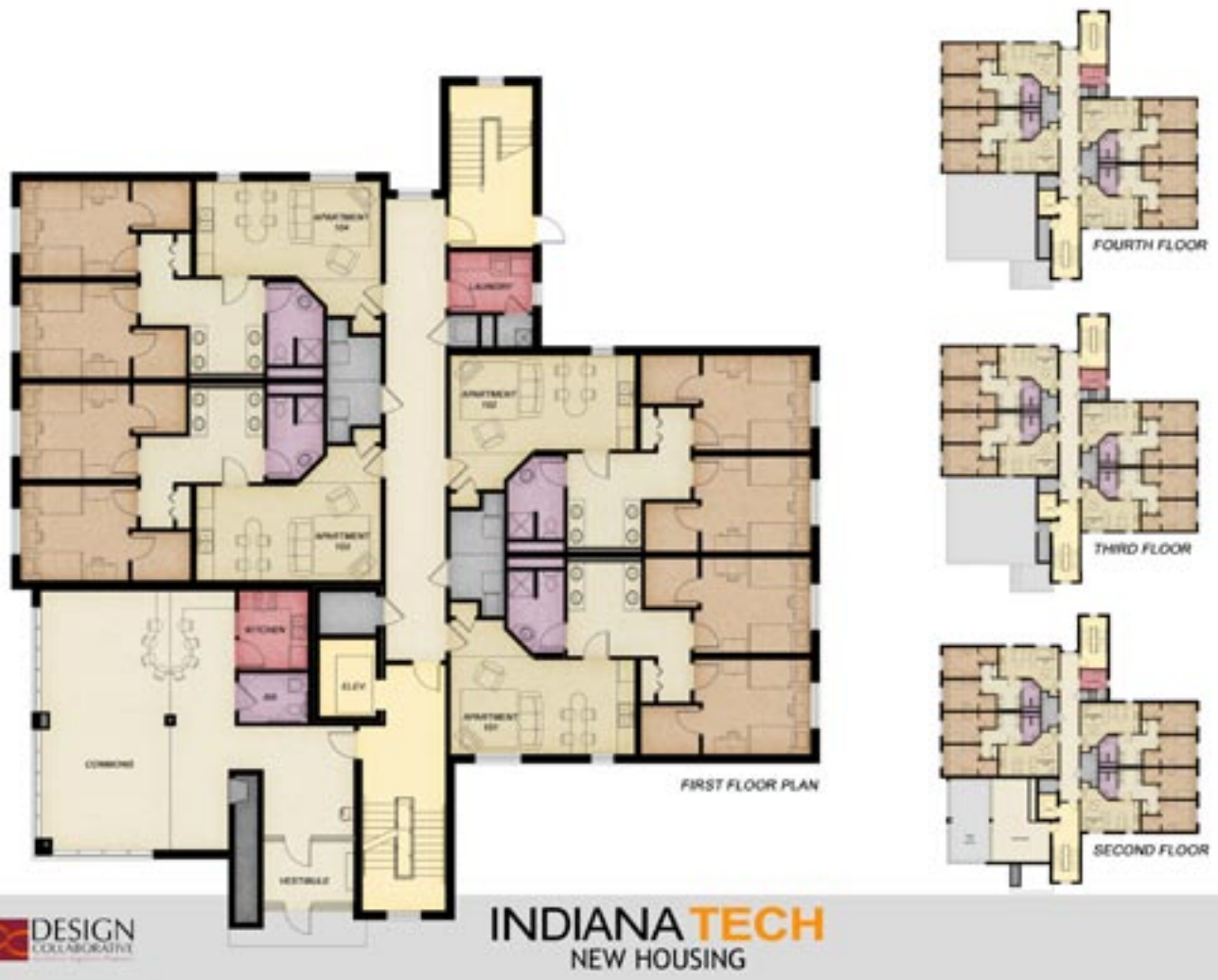
“Indiana Tech obviously really liked the first dormitory that we built for them, as they’re doing another one,” said John Morrison, the Marketing Director for the **Whitley Manufacturing Company** of South Whitley, Ind.

“Probably, initially, people have a little bit of prejudice against modular construction, because they think it will look like a barracks building, or it’s going to be strictly rectangular, but once we show them the design of some of our buildings that have been built, usually people’s attitudes change,” he said.

“It often shocks people. They say, ‘That’s modular? That came in pieces to the site?’”

Indiana Tech Building Design

By Design Collaborative • Fort Wayne, Ind.



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