

Balch Lawn



On-Campus Housing Management Made Easy

**Cornell University Partners with
StarRez to Develop New Online
Student Housing Management
System**

by

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When Cornell University's Department of Campus Life reviewed its management information systems and business processes several years ago, one of the key areas of investigation was student housing and conference services. In housing, for example, the management system had been developed in-house, but was never fully automated. This required some ongoing manual work, and certain data simply was not available within the system. Campus Life staff did not have all the information necessary to manage the student housing system most effectively.

So, in 2004, Campus Life initiated the first phase in a major systems improvement project: upgrade its student housing system. Realizing outside help was needed to update the system that had been developed years before, Campus Life ultimately chose to partner with StarRez. Working with StarRez, Campus Life would be taking full advantage of the firm's specialized expertise in housing and conference services software for institutions of higher education.

All photos courtesy of Cornell University



Today, Campus Life has a state-of-the-art system for managing student housing, with features such as online housing applications and automated housing assignments, room selection, residence hall room key inventory, and address forwarding. Perhaps more importantly, Cornell students now have a much more simple, user-friendly process for choosing to live on campus in University housing.

Making such a major transition wasn't easy, but as a result of the talent and dedication of the joint Campus Life-StarRez project team, the new system was developed and implemented in less than a year. Building on the strong foundation established with the successful housing system, Campus Life and StarRez are continuing to collaborate in developing an equally advanced system for managing conference services.

"Using the new system we've developed in conjunction with StarRez has enabled us to manage our student housing information system more efficiently, while making it easier for students to benefit from Cornell's vibrant on-campus housing program," explained LeNorman J. Strong, Assistant Vice President for Student and Academic Services at Cornell.

"The benefit of students living on campus is that it creates strong residential communities that contribute to an intellectually-engaged and socially-responsible environment," he continued. "That, in turn, gives our students the widest possible exposure to the full range of intellectual, cultural, and social opportunities available at Cornell."

David Meale, President of StarRez, added, "We are proud to be working so closely with the Campus Life team at Cornell University. The outstanding relationship we have developed has enabled our joint team to dramatically increase service to students, improve staff efficiencies, and provide Campus Life management with the reporting capabilities to make better informed decisions."

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Managing a Complex Housing System

Campus Life is Cornell's student services department responsible for providing residential student programming, and on-campus housing and dining services, as well as managing community center operations and conference services, among other responsibilities. About 5,500 undergraduate students, and an additional 1,300 graduate and professional students

and their families, live in Campus Life housing each year. Fraternity and sorority members living in Greek housing are not part of the Campus Life housing system.

Providing accommodations for nearly 7,000 residents is challenging in itself, and as part of Cornell's commitment to providing an engaging living-learning experience, all first-year and sopho-

more students are guaranteed on-campus housing if they so choose. Further, Campus Life manages its student housing responsibility within the context of the University's Residential Initiative, designed to provide a range of on-campus living options that help students flourish by involving faculty in meaningful ways in the lives of students; engaging students in the governance and leadership of their living communities;

and preparing students for leadership, service, and community building.

As part of the Residential Initiative, first-year undergraduate students are assigned exclusively to housing in one of Campus Life's nineteen buildings on Cornell's north campus (traditional residence halls, Program Houses, and townhouse apartments). Sophomore and upper-level undergraduate and transfer students are generally placed in one of Campus Life's seventeen buildings on west campus or in the Collegetown section of Ithaca (traditional residence halls and new House System residences).

The exceptions are the eight Program Houses, specifically themed living and learning communities (located on north campus), which allow a specified number of students from all undergraduate class levels to live together.

Graduate and professional students and their families have traditionally been placed in one of five buildings for post-graduate residents (residence halls and apartments). Although four of them are geographically situated off campus, they are all considered part of the Campus Life housing system.

Also affecting the Campus Life housing system this year and next – and the information system needed to manage it – is

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the impact of construction from the final phase of the Residential Initiative. In 2006-2007, a small number of undergraduate students (about 30 or so) will be placed in one of the graduate apartment complexes as a pilot program to learn about mixing undergraduates and graduates in the same community.

Further, two traditional residence halls on west campus are being demolished at the end of the Fall 2006 semester, to make way for construction of the final two Houses in the new House System. The majority of students displaced from those halls will move into one of the already-completed Houses for the Spring 2007 semester, with the remainder moving into vacancies in other Campus Life housing facilities on campus.

In 2007-2008, a third traditional residence hall on west campus is being removed as part of the Residential Initiative. While construction of the final two Houses is being completed during the year, there will be a total of approximately 270-300 undergraduate students displaced from that hall, as well as the other two halls taken down the previous year. This group of undergraduates will need to be placed in other Campus Life housing facilities.

Consequently, the new Campus Life housing management system had to be able to function effectively in this complex environment, and communicate these issues clearly and effectively to students. That's where StarRez came in.

Taking the Time to Select the Right Partner

The effort started in earnest with the formation of the Campus Life systems improvement project team in August 2004, which included hiring a project manager, assigning staff to the team, and establishing a steering committee of Campus Life directors. Once the members were in place, the team prepared a detailed request for proposal (RFP), outlining the key elements of the housing management information system that had to be developed. The team issued this RFP to all major players in the housing and conference services software field, including Campus Life's own internal software development team.

After evaluating the responses, the team was able to narrow the field to three candidates. The screening was based primarily on the contending firms' ability to provide the required functionality and technical expertise, address customer satisfaction, and assemble all of their services in a comprehensive package. Two-day demonstrations were held with each firm, after which the project team conducted final reviews and reference checks. At the end of the process, the team selected StarRez, and a contract was signed in September 2005.

The critical factors in the selection decision were StarRez's solid existing housing software package (to be used as a base element of the new system), strong technical capabilities, and willingness and desire to develop a customized conference services software component.

"We were very pleased to be partnering with StarRez to improve and expand our system capabilities within Campus Life," said Strong. "It was quickly evident that the StarRez team cared about our students as much as we do, and they worked very closely with us to ensure an unparalleled level of service. We were particularly excited about the prospect of providing our services online so our students could gain access to their account information at any time."

Implementing a Three-Pronged Solution

The overall goals of the software development project were three-fold:

- Develop and implement a new housing management system for the 2006-2007 academic year.
- Develop and implement an incident reporting/judicial administration module for the 2006-2007 academic year.
- Develop and implement a conference services system by December 2006 for the Summer 2007 conference season.

In the first phase of the project, started in September 2005, the goal was to provide online access to continuing undergraduate students for the 2006-2007 academic year room selection process. Since room selection takes place the preceding spring that meant the system had to be up and running by early 2006.

Working diligently throughout the Fall 2005 semester and continuing through the winter holiday break, the joint Campus Life-StarRez project team completed the system development and testing at the beginning of 2006. The system to allow continuing undergraduates to apply for Campus Life housing online went live when students returned to Cornell in late January 2006. The student room selection process began in March 2006, enabling students to sign their contracts online. The degree to which students actively embraced the online process, and the smoothness of the entire operation, indicated that the new system was a great success.

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As part of this phase, also implemented in Spring 2006, continuing graduate students were also able to access an online tool to select rooms and apartments for the 2006-2007 academic year. This "continued occupancy" process enabled them to keep the same apartment or residence hall room if they wished.

In May 2006, incoming residents – first-year and undergraduate transfer students, and new graduate students – were also

Risley Hall



able to apply online for on-campus housing for the 2006-2007 academic year. The new system was able to automate room assignments for these new students, based on the information in their online applications.

By June 2006, the next phase of the systems project had been implemented. The incident reporting/judicial administration module now enables the system to enter and track issues related to student conduct, with follow-up for multiple action items. By automatically tying data about student conduct into housing information, the system enables Campus Life administrators to flag situations where there may be restrictions on access to housing for a student with an open issue, or to impose charges for room damages or other costs, if necessary.

StarRez is now working closely with Campus Life on the final phase of the project, to make improvements to Cornell's conference services systems. Specifically, the joint project team is expanding the current StarRez conference module to meet the detailed needs of Cornell's conference services operation. The timeline for completion of this package is December 2006.

Better Information Means Better Service

The key advantage to Campus Life of the new system is the combination of benefits that come from automating a complex process: greater speed and accuracy, and savings in time and labor. The fully integrated housing management information system now in place provides a number of efficiencies:

- Students can apply for housing online, and their information goes directly into the system.
- Students may sign their housing contracts electronically, and staff can review/approve those contracts online.
- Determining room assignments is now automated ("auto allocation"), making this part of the process much faster.
- Completing all the critical tasks earlier - applications, room assignments, contract completions - allows more time for staff to make manual changes, if needed, to address individual student needs or special circumstances.
- Faster access to housing system information, based on a range of criteria, and being able to then report on this data more quickly, enables staff to make better decisions and manage the business more effectively.

For students, the new system means less time waiting to request rooms or sign contracts, as well as the flexibility of applying for Campus Life housing at their convenience by doing it online. In addition, the faster, smoother process benefits students by giving staff more time to provide support for their individual needs or to address their special circumstances, if necessary.

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The Campus Life-StarRez partnership has been highly successful due, in large part, to the skill and dedication of the team members on both sides.

But more than that, the close level of virtually daily contact between Campus Life and StarRez was critical to the smooth working relationship and timely production of deliverables throughout the project. The joint project team performed extremely well by putting the needs of the project first - and that was the ultimate key to success. ♦

About StarRez

StarRez, Inc. is a subsidiary of parent company StarNet Systems, based in Melbourne, Australia. StarNet Systems was formed in 1992 and has experienced considerable growth and expansion. StarRez now has more than 14 years' experience and more than 240 clients worldwide using the system. StarRez integrates with other campus systems for student data and financial transactions, dining point-of-sale, security key cards, and more. The system is also available via mobile devices. StarRez is passionate in partnering with institutions of higher education to develop successful residential communities and provide onsite installation, training, data conversion, and superior support.

For more information, visit www.starrez.com or email sales@starrez.com.

About Campus Life & Cornell University

The Department of Campus Life serves Cornell students and the greater University community through student housing, community center, and dining operations that provide rich learning opportunities, foster an engaged community, and promote a sense of personal connection to Cornell. Through its exceptional programs, services, and facilities, Campus Life enhances the learning and growth of students to reach their full potential.

Housing & Meal Plan Participation 2005-06

Undergrads in Campus Life housing	5,624
Residents in Campus Life graduate & professional student housing	1,290
Students on Campus Life meal plans	9,470

Cornell University, founded in 1865 by Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White, is the federal land-grant institution of New York State, a private endowed university, a member of the Ivy League, and a partner of the State University of New York. The University is comprised of seven undergraduate units and four graduate and professional units at the main campus in Ithaca, NY; two medical graduate and professional units in New York City; and one medical unit in Doha, Qatar.

Enrollment, Fall 2005*

Undergraduate & graduate/professional enrollment (Ithaca campus) 19,447

* Figures include on-campus/off-campus registrants. Does not include 195 temporarily enrolled Gulf Coast-area students displaced by hurricanes in 2005.

For more information, visit the Campus Life website at www.campuslife.cornell.edu and the Cornell University website at www.cornell.edu.



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