

By [SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL](#) |  
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By the East Meadow Action Committee

The UC Santa Cruz administration recently attempted to defend its record on providing student housing by touting how many additional beds of student housing it has provided in recent years. Let's take a closer look.

UCSC's record on providing student housing can be divided into two very distinct eras. The first was an era in which new residence halls were constructed every few years. That era lasted until September 2004, when the last new residential building for students was completed. In the following era, from October 2004 to today, no new residential buildings have been built for students. Zero. In that 18-year period student enrollment has increased by a third.

There have been a few false starts and wrong turns. In 2008-09 the administration had a new on-campus housing project ready to go, approximately 600 beds, fully approved and funded. The first bids came in under budget, and then the administration inexplicably canceled the project. In 2016 they began planning and preparation for the largest housing project they had ever attempted, more than 3,000 beds, entirely on the west side of campus, and widely supported. But in September 2017 they abruptly changed direction and mismanaged that project into a ditch, where it has been mired ever since. If they had stayed with the original version of that project, half of those beds would already be serving students, and the other half would be completed late this year. (They still could return to that original version, but refuse to do so.)

As a result, a campus that for most of its history regularly saw new buildings for student housing has seen none for nearly 18 years, despite rising enrollment. That has had a major negative impact on campus life, on students, and on the community.

The administration likes to claim that during those 18 years UCSC actually added a lot of beds (roughly 2,400) without building any new buildings for housing. (It is hard to be precise because the administration is very selective about which housing data it makes public.) Since no new buildings for student housing were built in that period, how was the number of beds increased by that amount? By putting an additional floor on an existing building or by otherwise expanding the volume of an existing building, 297 beds were added. That still leaves roughly 2,100 beds unaccounted for: where did they come from?

They came from (in the words of the administration) "increasing the density" of existing buildings. That means cramming three beds into spaces designed for two, four beds into spaces designed for three, and lots of beds into spaces not designed for any. "Increasing the density" is a dolled-up way to say "overcrowding."

In short, roughly 87% of all the additional student housing the administration claims credit for adding over the past 18 years is merely the result of overcrowding.

The Kresge Renewal project is now underway. It will demolish some existing buildings (including student residences) and it will build some new buildings (including student residences). The project environmental documents claim a net increase in beds in the range of 175 to 225, but the administration more recently predicts a net increase of 580 or maybe even 605. Whatever the increase may actually be, any additional beds will be welcome. Currently estimated completion of the project is 2025. However, nothing that happens at Kresge is expected to reduce the existing overcrowding campus-wide.

Overcrowding is not a solution to a housing shortage. Overcrowding is the failure to solve a housing shortage. It does real harm to students, particularly to their ability to study. And the administration knows that. In a report to the Regents regarding increasing the “density” of UCSC’s student housing, they said, “... the diminished availability of communal study space across the campus has begun to impact the student experience.” That statement was made in July 2016; the situation has only gotten worse in the six years since.

That the UCSC administration thinks overcrowding is a solution to its housing shortage, something to be claimed as an accomplishment rather than recognized as a failure that needs to be corrected, is deeply disturbing.

The administration could restart the ready-to-go housing project they abruptly and inexplicably stopped in early 2009. They could return to the large project they were preparing to build in 2016 and early 2017, a project with no opposition. They could guarantee the city and county that they would add no students above 19,500 until there was additional housing to accommodate those students. All it takes is competent management of growth and genuine caring for the needs of students.

*The authors of this Guest Commentary are Chris Connery, Jim Clifford, Gail Hershatter, Karen Bassi, and Paul Schoellhamer. For more on The East Meadow Action Committee, visit [eastmeadowaction.org](http://eastmeadowaction.org).*