While there is evidence to show that the ubiquity of wireless devices and social media may lead to greater isolation and dissatisfaction, there are also many opportunities for technology to be incorporated into residences in a way that promotes social interaction, happiness, and personal growth. Ultimately, helping students achieve a deeper sense of self and a mental preparation for the next steps after graduation should be an end goal that PBSA providers strive for.

Accommodation should be more than a place to live: it should be a place to develop and engage with one’s values. This can include meeting and facilitating ideals like environmental sustainability through the design and operation of a residence. New uses of technology can transform spaces into places that inspire and help students ‘walk the talk’ outside the classroom.

For the most part, this means improving the efficiency and ease of residential services. This can include things like online house searching, bookings and payments, laundry service, smart locking technologies, onsite management, etc. These services are conveniences, reducing many of the stresses associated with housing.

At the end of the day, what most students need is a bed in a safe environment and a steady Wi-Fi connection. That being said, most students have certain expectations for location and access to some social amenities (even if that is simply proximity to other students). For some students, meeting ‘the basics’ means commuting from home.
Unsurprisingly, students tend to be more tech-savvy and environmentally conscientious members of our society as well as a gregarious bunch with greater social needs. As such, Purposefully Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) needs to provide living situations which simultaneously promote community development and interaction, education, and environmental sustainability. Simply offering quality spaces to live within is not enough; PBSA providers must also become leaders of integrating technologies into residences to cater to the characteristics of the younger cohorts of students they serve.

"Technology plays an essential role in the lives of young people and PBSA developers must provide services that enable the choices and behaviours of their tenants in order to ensure they have happy customers"

- Jonathan Burrows, Founder & CEO of Ask4

In many ways, PBSA providers are already adjusting to their dynamic and forward-thinking clientele. Some of the technologies recently introduced to student residences include improvements like smart rental payments and service requests via mobile apps, online laundry status updates, digital locking, charging stations within communal areas, and improved Wi-Fi speed and connection stability. Each of these examples are focused on improved convenience as a means to improve the residential experience, and these conveniences are quickly being normalized into expectations. The next step is to introduce technologies which go beyond, transforming the residential experience altogether: to fulfill.

Some of the most tangible technologies catering to the ideals of many students have been focused on environmental sustainability. This is in large part due to a mutual interest from developers, continuously trying to minimize construction and operation costs, and due to the greater variety of preexisting technologies for tackling environmental issues. Consequently, we have seen movements towards modular and 3D printed construction, smart heating systems, furniture made of renewable materials, new forms of insulation, water-storing roofs, the gamification of reduced energy usage, etc.

Naturally, PBSA providers also strive to fulfill a positive student experience. In the past, this was primarily done by simply bringing students together, but with new communication technology, we need to rethink how residences can encourage personal interaction. Numerous studies find that increased internet usage and the pressures of social media have deep impacts on teens and university students who suffer increasingly from unrealistic expectations and decreased social skills. Consequently, there is the growing threat of increased feelings of isolation among younger student populations as they leave home for the first time. Thus, there is a greater need to facilitate personal interactions and community, which begs an almost paradoxical question: How can new technologies be incorporated into our residences to drive students away from their phones and out of their rooms?

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