Gina Tempel can still remember her residence hall as an undergraduate student at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., in the 1970s.

The building was new. It was considered state-of-the-art. The students loved living in it.

Yet, in hindsight, it was nothing like The Nevada Living Learning Community, the University’s newest residence hall, which will open its doors to new students in August.

The Nevada Living Learning Community, as the name implies, will bring together, under one roof, students, living space, classrooms, faculty offices, counseling and advising capabilities, as well social and community engagement opportunities.

Tempel, associate dean in the College of Science and director of the University’s Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) program, whose first-year students will comprise one of nine academic “learning communities” housed in the new building, said the University is redefining the notion of “new” and what it will mean to students.

“I remember what I had in college, and it was nothing like the Living Learning Community,” Tempel said with a gentle chuckle. “I was living in a brand new, state-of-the-art dorm, and it wouldn’t even begin to compare to what we have now.

New students arriving on campus in August will live upstairs and learn downstairs in a building created for a new generation of learners.

The $35 million Nevada Living Learning Community, at approximately 124,000 square feet, has 320 dorm rooms, four classrooms and 12 faculty offices. The nine living learning communities in the building include journalism, business, education, pre-nursing, engineering, first-year, art, honors and WISE. Living group sizes will range from 18 to 64 students, and each floor of the building will have up to four living groups. Faculty offices and classroom space on the first floor will give students frequent contact with faculty, advising and the University’s academic offerings.

“They’ve put a lot of thought into how students will interact in the building,” said Tempel, who toured the Living Learning Community in late May.
“I like the classrooms, and the fact that there will be faculty offices,” she added. “It looks like a really positive way to interact with students.”

For a program like WISE, which brings together female students majoring in the sciences, mathematics and engineering, the Nevada Living Learning Community has become a prominent selling point for prospective students, Tempel said. WISE began in 2007 and will include 38 students for the 2012-2013 academic year. A record 91 applicants were received for the fall 2012 WISE class, Tempel added.

Tempel envisions The Nevada Living Learning Center becoming a “hub” for WISE’s offerings.

“Students love new things, and this is a nice, brand spanking new building,” Tempel said. “The students have reacted very positively … it’s a selling point for us.”

University President Marc Johnson agreed, noting that The Nevada Living Learning Community’s opening, coupled with completion of the Joe Crowley Student Union and the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center in recent years, gives the University an “all bases covered” approach to the student experience.

“We’ve taken a great deal of pride in making this a student-friendly, student-centered campus,” Johnson said. “With the opening of The Nevada Living Learning Community, every aspect of a meaningful and memorable student experience has been covered in some way.

“It’s a truly remarkable building,” Johnson added. “It’s going to change how our students interact, and it will certainly enhance their overall experience, both academically and socially.”

Tempel said she is already planning ways to make further use of the building for future recruiting efforts.

She has reserved one of the larger classrooms for the spring semester, when every Friday at 4 p.m., WISE invites a successful female professional from the community to share her experiences in the working world with the program’s participants. Tempel plans on inviting high school students to attend some of the seminars.

“It will be large enough to not only fit our WISE students, but additionally any high school students who are interested in the program,” she said. “Again, it’s a way of using the building to help make our prospective students aware of all the great things our University has to offer. Students have sisters and brothers, and the good word always spreads.”

—Gina Tempel, director of WISE