

APPA's Thought Leaders Summit

by E. Lander Medlin

It is clear that the environment in which America's colleges and universities do their work has undergone significant changes. These are certainly social and demographic, but above all, the fiscal environment has changed dramatically. The federal deficit is ballooning exponentially, healthcare costs have skyrocketed, state support of higher education has declined steadily, student enrollments are burgeoning, and tuition costs have risen, sometimes disproportionately. These pressing issues will keep us fiscally challenged for many years to come.

Within this environment of scarce resources, it is becoming just as clear that the challenges of constructing, operating, and maintaining our educational facilities have been further compromised, if not exacerbated. Managing campus facilities is similar to managing a small municipality. To effectively manage the entire campus' physical assets, the educational facilities professional must understand all aspects of their facilities as well as their impact on the complex mission of the institution. The educational facilities professional must also connect the goals of the operation with the educational outcomes of the institution. Hence, linking programming, design and construction, and facilities operations in an integrated way is essential to achieve educational outcomes.

Educational facilities professionals need to engage in informed and meaningful dialogue to address these critical concerns. This is key for

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America's colleges and universities to remain strong and vital, our myriad research programs to prosper, and our great contributions to the nation's economic development to continue.

What better way to approach this call to action than to engage both higher education community of leaders and facilities professionals in a dialogue about the future of higher education, the trends, issues, and concerns. The resulting report is interconnected with a list of the top ten issues educational facilities professionals face today to positively impact the future state of the facilities at their individual institutions. Clearly, the report should also document the critical role of facilities in enhancing higher education leaders' ability to shape their institution's future.

APPA, through the gracious sponsorship of Carter & Burgess, Inc., has created an annual "Thought Leaders Summit." The purpose of this summit is to engage in an annual discussion and distillation of the major issues impacting college and university facilities and to better inform educational facilities professionals on alternative

ways to approach these vexing problems and concerns.

The first Thought Leaders Summit was held last May, consisting of senior institutional officers and facilities professionals to consider the future of higher education with particular attention to its built environment. The group identified the major trends impacting the future of higher education as: financial constraints, competition, changing demographics, a demand for innovation and tradition, changing student and other stakeholders' expectations, accountability, and resistance to change.

Truly the landscape of higher education is changing more rapidly than we might have expected just a few years ago. We are undergoing a dramatic transformation—one we will either choose to shape or allow to be shaped by it. Therefore, it is critically important for us to take heed of these trends and ensure alignment of our facilities mission with that of the institution we serve. Understanding what our senior institutional officers are concerned about will help us frame facilities issues more effectively.

Our work did just that. The Thought Leaders report also highlights the top ten facilities issues we face and their relationship to these major higher education trends, which are:

- resource scarcity/affordability;
- performance measurement/accountability;
- sustainability;
- energy and environmental resource management;
- laboratory and classroom spaces of the future;
- information technology;
- customer service;
- facilities reinvestment/total cost of ownership;

- safety and security/business continuity; and
- workforce management/demographics.

The report documents the critical role of facilities in enhancing higher education leaders' ability to shape their institution's future. However, the greatest value to the facilities professionals will be to actively engage their senior institutional officers in a thoughtful dialogue to consider these trends and issues in greater depth and develop strategic approaches to addressing them at their specific institutions. Recognize that quality improvement is hard work, yet essential as it provides a framework for asking and answering difficult questions. It is time to engage, but with a very real sense of urgency. Remember,



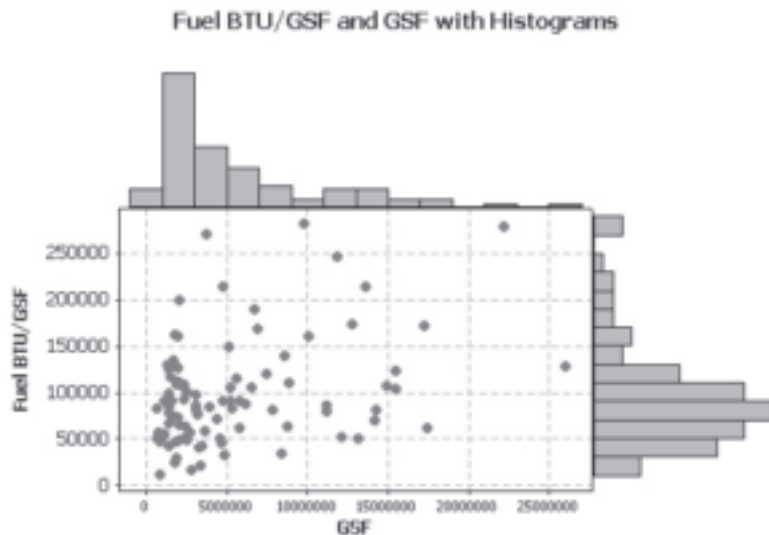
“all change is local, if the change you implement is to be sustained.”

Whether the change is driven by external influences and forces or by an internal choice to do so, the tricky part is to decide whether the change is directional (doing more, better) or transformational (doing something

else). Archibald McLeish once said, “The rock on which the greatest universities are founded is the rock of change and recognition of the fact of change. The future is won by those creating the future and not the ones trying to maintain the status quo.” I reiterate, will we choose to shape our future or be shaped by the future? The choice is ours. 🏛️

Editor's Note: The Thought Leaders report will be available this January 2007 in both print and electronic versions.

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