

Thought Leaders Examine Facilities Management Concerns

by E. Lander Medlin

Clearly, with budget deficits as they are, there is an ‘elephant’ in the room. This situation leaves a slim margin for increased investments in education by federal, state, or provincial agencies. Therefore, the opportunity to make the kinds of adjustments and investments in education that are essential for the public welfare is unlikely to present itself anytime soon.

Last year, APPA established the annual Thought Leaders Series to spark progressive discussion and distillation of major issues impacting college and university facilities and create a forum to disseminate information on alternative ways to approach these vexing problems and concerns. In April 2007, APPA’s second Thought Leaders Series took the next step and directly mapped out effective solutions and best practices to handle these challenges.

These types of discussions are critical to our industry because the challenges of change remain and the myriad pressures of accessibility, affordability, and accountability are ever-present. This makes effective constructing, operating, and maintaining educational facilities difficult at best. However, to effectively manage the entire campus physical assets in an environment of scarce resources, the educational facilities professional must understand all aspects of their facilities as well as their impact on the complex mission of the institution. They must also connect the goals of their operation with the educational outcomes of the institution. Consequently, linking programming, design



and construction, and facilities operations in an integrated way is essential to achieve educational outcomes.

At the first Thought Leaders Series—held in May 2006—a group of 20 educational leaders identified seven trends affecting higher education’s future and related these trends to the top 10 issues affecting facilities professionals. Their work resulted in the distribution of the white paper, *University Facilities Respond to the Changing Landscape of Higher Education*.

This year—through the gracious sponsorship of Carter & Burgess, Inc. (second-year contributor), and IBM—we were able to meet to hone in on these trends and issues in our field. The focus of this second meeting was to consider, in greater depth, three major challenges confronting higher education as a whole: **evolving technology, changing stakeholder expectations, and the impact of competition** on both these drivers of change.

Facilities professionals at this year’s Thought Leaders meeting identified the top ten critical facilities issues and formulated specific questions to engage senior institutional officers and facilities professionals in further dialogue at their individual institution. By taking an in-depth look at these drivers of change, they were able to

identify major patterns and themes, significant challenges, relevant strategies, strengths, and potential obstacles to success. In addition, by taking a broader perspective to develop the top ten critical facilities issues, they were able to provide a comprehensive list of questions following each issue. This approach will enhance a facilities professional’s discussion with senior institutional officers concerning these trends and issues to help improve performance and better prepare for the future.

So, what did we learn? We found the following six challenges of particular importance or significance:

- aging infrastructure and workforce
- increasing regulation
- lack of transparency
- strained public perception
- stressed financial model
- measurable “accountability” (i.e., better performance at a cheaper price—it’s about *value*)

It is essential that we seek to improve our understanding of our role, purpose, and processes if we are going to *add* value to our institutions and the higher education delivery system. The essence of our **strengths** is our ability to build relationships and partnerships and, at the same time, ensure that we keep higher education’s values at the forefront. Certainly, a key message is that broad collaboration is the neon sign for success. Also, we were reminded that technology is just a tool to create and develop community. When it comes to the **impact on facilities**, the group recognized the need for:

- for shared use/multi-use facilities
- for blended “bricks and clicks” to follow the “pedagogy”/ curriculum needs

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- for increased accountability and meaningful metrics and measures
- to increase our own transparency
- to involve students (early) in the planning process
- for more effective communication

Our facilities experts considered these issues and others to develop a list of the top 10 critical facilities issues for 2007:

1. improve communications
2. address sustainability
3. balance and articulate expectations
4. integrate with IT
5. focus on the customer
6. manage maintenance and adaptive reuse
7. make master planning effective
8. focus on total cost of ownership
9. align facilities planning with institution goals
10. institute metrics for performance measurement

The summary report, available free through our bookstore, provides the

detailed background and explanation for each of these issues along with a series of discussion questions you should use to begin a meaningful dialogue and search for solutions at your respective institution.

Finally, we highlighted the **critical skills or qualities** each educational facility professional should possess for future success. You will find these qualities detailed at the end of the monograph.

The issue and goal is ultimately about leadership—creating connections; enhancing the channels of communication; and ensuring broad collaboration. Remember, it's the human networks that really count. [We hope you find these reports useful as you consider the challenges you face at your institution. We believe the Thought Leaders report gives you the information you need to address these vexing problems, and to do so collaboratively at the highest levels in the institution.]



The second Thought Leaders report—*Educational Facilities and the Impact of Technology, Expectations, and Competition*—is available free at www.appa.org. The report stems from APPA's 2007 Thought Leaders Series on the changing landscape of higher education.

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