



Are You Shaping the Future, or is the Future Shaping You?

By E. Lander Medlin

With gas at \$4+ per gallon, food prices skyrocketing, and electricity rates out of control, we are experiencing tough times. It will take strong, steady, broad-based leadership across academe to manage our educational institutions in and through these uncertain economic times.

APPA and other education leaders are discussing the factors and conditions that have created these turbulent times. Positives such as burgeoning enrollments and public recognition of the value of a college degree skunk the negatives of declining government funding support, increased congressional/legislative scrutiny, and changing demographics.

The *three As*—*accessibility, affordability, and accountability*—remain critically important factors for measuring our success as educational institutions. Regents/trustees are concerned about accountability; presidents are concerned about accessibility; vice presidents are concerned about affordability; and educational facilities professionals are concerned about the viability of the physical infrastructure to efficiently and effectively support all this growth and change. We too must fervently reshape ourselves, our organization, and our approach to doing business.

One key issue is the alignment of the facilities mission with the institution's vision, mission, and strategy. To ensure alignment, the educational facilities professional must:

- Understand the institution's economics, processes, mission, and purpose.
- Understand facilities decisions in both today's and tomorrow's context.
- Treat facilities as a portfolio of investments.

- Develop facilities strategies to prepare the institution for changing paradigms and economic conditions.

As we focus how the societal concerns of today and tomorrow affect emerging trends that influence education, we should also identify perspectives of our governing boards and presidents. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB), American Council on Education (ACE), National Association of State Universities & Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and other associations have all been rich resources in this area. Although the concerns of society/public opinion mirror the *three As* previously described, it still feels like we are standing on shifting sand as we witness:

- Recognition of the importance of higher education, with little or no corresponding resources or support.
- Increasing call for accountability, transparency, and greater efficiencies with more governmental regulation and oversight.
- More consumer-driven choices, the newest facilities and technology with little understanding of their corresponding cost.
- Being viewed as the panacea for economic development and job creation with little clarity around a degree's broader value.

This is definitely shaky ground with many mixed messages and certainly difficult to meet such rapidly changing expectations.

Further, the megatrends Bill Daigneau described in his award-winning article titled "Megatrends & Myths" (*Facilities*

Manager, November/December 2006) remain a powerful influence on higher education now and well into the future. The megatrends he outlined are: changing student demographics, access and efficiency, technology, accountability, and green and lean. The *three As* are clearly embedded in these megatrends.

Beyond public opinion and the impact of these megatrends, it is even more enlightening to recognize and understand the perspective of senior institutional officers. If taken fully as part of an organization's strategic planning process, their perspectives provide excellent guidance for future focus and direction of the facilities organization.

AGB produces a document annually highlighting the Top 10 Public Policy issues. Taken from the 2007-2008 report they are:

- Price of tuition
- Student aid policy
- Access and success
- Accountability for student learning—hence, performance outcomes
- Consumer information
- Board accountability
- Federal tax policy
- Scientific research
- Global competitiveness
- Aligning the P-20 educational system

Each issue is noticeably outcomes-driven, externally focused, and reflective of public perception. Of the *three As*, accountability is clearly their main focus of concern.

Other associations identify with recent other education reports with many of the same perspective on the challenges they face, such as:

- Funding shortfalls and financial strain
- Growing competition
- Changing demographics
- Aging academic workforce
- Rapidly advancing technology
- Innovation to remain relevant and increase performance

- Demands for accountability
- Educational pipeline (K-12 education, the college experience, etc.)
- Being green

While their issues are reflective of the *three As*, they are more internally focused on the institutions response to the external challenges of change.

Presidents have also expressed their concerns with respect to external and internal pressures. This information can be particularly useful and instructive. The president views his or her external pressures in the following ways:

- Demographics shifts (faculty, in particular)
- Competition (for faculty, students, financial resources, research support, and image)
- Shifts in public expectations
- General lack of patience
- Little credit or recognition for progress that is made

Alternatively, the president views internal pressures as follows:

- Faculty-administration tensions
- Poor communication and collaboration
- Transparency without responsibility
- Wrong people on the bus
- Inadequate data (to make strategic decisions)
- Limiting organizational designs/structures (tradition over innovation)
- Inability to STOP doing something or some program

Knowing these pressures, consider:

- Are you working to solve these problems for your institution?
- Do you adequately review the continued value of existing programs, their purpose, cost, and benefit?


Clearly, the landscape of higher education has changed from a cottage monopoly to a competitive industry. And, higher education's objectives and focus are shifting to a more interactive engagement with all the communities they serve. Archibald MacLeish said, "The rock on which the greatest universities are founded is the rock of change

and recognition of the fact of change."


In another interesting view, Edwards Deming said, "It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory."

So what is your view of change? Remember, if you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.

To this end we can no longer be content as just stewards of facilities doing our

work behind the scenes. We must become more fully engaged with the entire community, internally and externally. We must be broadly collaborative and build solid and extensive partnerships to best benefit our institutions. 

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