

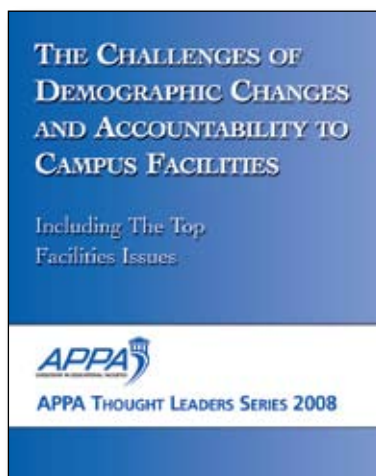
APPA's 2008 Thought Leaders Report: The Challenges of Demographic Changes and Accountability to Campus Facilities

By E. Lander Medlin

At this writing the global economic situation looks grim. Although education will be a critical driver of success for our economy, I doubt any of us will escape this economic downturn's broad-sweeping impact. Budget reductions are imminent. Only time will tell how wide and how deep they will be. Nonetheless, we must endeavor to maintain a stable, safe, and stimulating environment so students can learn, teachers can teach, and researchers can innovate. No matter what, we will always need a skilled, creative, and innovative workforce. Education is in a pivotal position to help solve our most vexing problems. Education needs your best efforts, your best thinking, and your entrepreneurial spirit! This is where the work stemming from APPA's Thought Leaders series is critical as we lead our institutions through and out of this monumental crisis.

A HISTORY OF THE SYMPOSIUMS

In the spring of 2006, APPA established the annual Thought Leaders Symposium to spark the 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 pressing problems and



concerns. 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. However, to effectively manage an entire campus's physical assets in an environment of scarce resources, the educational facilities professional

must understand all aspects of their facility as well as their impact on the complex mission of the institution. They must connect the goals of their operation with the educational outcomes of the institution.

The work of the 2006 Thought Leaders Symposium resulted in the distribution of the white paper titled *University Facilities Respond to the Changing Landscape of Higher Education*, which focused on the trends affecting higher education's future, and related these trends to the top 10 issues affecting facilities professionals. The 2007 Thought Leaders Symposium considered, 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. They also developed a list of the top 10 critical facilities issues. The central message they found is that broad collaboration is the

neon sign for success. They also reminded us that technology is just a tool to create and develop community. Ultimately, it is about leadership – creating connections, enhancing the channels of communication, and ensuring broad collaboration. Yes, it's the human networks that really count.

2008 THOUGHT LEADERS SYMPOSIUM

The focus of this year's 2008 Thought Leaders Symposium was on the challenges of changing demographics, accountability, and the impact of institutional resistance to change on both these drivers. By taking an in-depth look at these drivers of change, the participants were able to identify major patterns and themes, significant challenges, relevant strategies, strengths, and potential obstacles to success for the educational facilities professional and their institution. As in the past two years, the facilities professionals in attendance identified the top critical facilities issues and formulated specific questions to engage senior institutional officers and facilities professionals in further dialogue at their individual institutions, thereby helping to improve performance, and better prepare for the future.

Clearly, demographic shifts are occurring rapidly in both the student population and the workforce. We must respond with flexibility and by carefully fostering diversity. It will be critical for facilities professionals to work with their human resource professionals to ensure outdated hiring practices and salary scales are changed as quickly as possible to enhance staff recruitment and retention efforts in the near term. The challenges of accountability are as varied as institutional size and type. However, our collective response will need to include effective strategic planning, setting institutional priorities, and establishing corresponding performance measures to demonstrate a culture of evidence and fact-based decision making. Facilities professionals have much to offer given their

stewardship focus, ability to create a sense of place, and to effectively support the learning environment for the institution. Unfortunately, both trends are burdened with heavy and competing demands amidst enormous financial constraints.

On the second day, our facilities experts considered these trends and issues, yet expanded their focus to encompass the following critical facilities issues for 2008-2009:

- Improving accountability
- Planning for workforce changes
- Becoming the workforce of choice
- Integrating sustainability into total operations
- Implementing Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) practices
- Making facilities a strategic partner with university leadership
- Leading change

As well as discussing each of these critical facilities issues, the paper delves further by proposing several questions that facilities professionals can use to help understand how their organization is positioned for the future and to develop strategies for improvement.

2008 SUMMARY REPORT

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. We believe the Thought Leaders Symposium report gives you the information you need to address these vexing problems, and to do so collaboratively at the highest levels in the institution.

As the Thought Leaders Symposium rounds its third year, it remains clear that the need expressed at the first symposium for dialogue between educational facilities professionals and the rest of the academy has not diminished. If anything, its importance has grown. Interestingly enough, Thomas Hesburgh said, "To have a leader in any organization, you have to have a person with vision that can clearly articulate that vision; but you must

also have a team that can achieve that vision through effective implementation."

As education facilities professionals you have a unique role, one that ensures the vision and direction of your department is in alignment with the vision, mission, and strategy of your institution. Equally important, you must lead your department in the effective execution and implemen-

tation of that direction on behalf of the institution. In the difficult times that lie ahead, your leadership will be even more critical. Knowing many of you as I do, I know you are up to the task. ☺

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