



Facilities – The One Constant Amidst a Sea of Change

By E. Lander Medlin

The worsening economy, the unraveling financial system, and the increasing concern about jobs, all paint a troubling picture for the future. The free-fall of the stock market has weakened institutional investment portfolios and the lack of consumer spending has dramatically impacted state sales tax revenues. Skyrocketing prices for goods and services have combined with already high tuition costs to limit the number of options for higher education institutions' budgets. Clearly, the educational system is no more immune to this growing global economic crisis than any other industry sector. Add global competitiveness and global warming and it looks as though CHANGE is the only CONSTANT . . . or is it?

Arguably, your facilities – the grounds and buildings; the sense of place, identity, and personality they create and the image they project – represent one real constant amidst this sea of change! Actually, your facilities can be considered a stabilizing force by maintaining a stable, safe, and stimulating environment so students can learn, teachers can teach, and researchers can innovate. Frankly, given the crises at hand (and they will be long-term), your institutions represent one of the major ways out. Why? The young people that set foot on your campuses and walk through your doors are the key to getting us out of this mess long term. They are our hope for the future!

Thomas Friedman, author of the book *The World is Flat* and most recently *Flat*,

Hot, and Crowded, Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the *New York Times* and keynote speaker at our 2006 joint conference with NACUBO and SCUP, stressed that education and green energy is the path to global leadership and being globally competitive. Recently on CNN, Friedman said more specifically, "Our thinking must move from drill baby drill to invent baby invent!" Our institutions represent a clear pathway to invention and innovation, just as they did during the years following Sputnik. However, the same old thinking is not going to work. It's like the definition of insanity: "Keep doing what you're doing and expect different results."

Given this global economic crisis, education is critical, requiring a rich, stimulating environment so our best and brightest can focus on creative and innovative ways to solve our most vexing problems. Archibald MacLeish said: "The future is won by those creating the future, not by

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those trying to maintain the status quo." And, Hamel and Valikangas said: "Institutions falter when they invest too much in 'what is' and too little in 'what could be'."

With certainty this won't be easy as the picture isn't pretty right now. But con-

sider the facts at hand...if you ask anyone about the U.S. trade deficit, you will hear words of concern. Ask anyone about the budget deficit and you will hear words of outright alarm. Ask anyone about our current financial deficit and you will hear words of outrage. Ironically, there is a deficit potentially more damaging to our nation's long term well-being that people either do not recognize or choose to ignore – an "EDUCATION DEFICIT!" Consider these supporting statistics:

- If you randomly select 100 eighth graders of today, only 18 will graduate college. What will the other 82 do in a world of knowledge workers requiring a degree to achieve middle class status?
- The United States ranks 5th amongst industrialized nations in high school completion rates.
- The United States ranks 7th amongst industrialized nations in college graduation rates.

And, far more compelling and telling. . .

- The United States produces one-quarter (with the number years ago closer to 90%) of science, engineering, mathematics graduates (the tech-driven fields) in the world.

Yet, we need a skilled, creative, innovative workforce. This situation threatens our global competitiveness. The "education deficit" is real. For sure, higher education is in a pivotal position to impact our nation and our future as an economic power. This has been demonstrated throughout our long history.

- The Morrill Land-Grant Acts of the 19th century were established to educate the general populous.
- The G.I. Bill of the 20th century was established to educate more individuals to effectively enter the workforce.
- Yet, in the 21st century, this knowledge-based, global, competitive economy

requires record numbers of college-educated workers.

Indeed, we are the fuel for the world's economic engine. And, let's face it, the world's growth industries will follow this labor pool. Will we be ready?

The daunting challenge for higher education is that we must draw from the presently underprepared, underserved, minority, and low-income sectors of the population to create this labor pool. Yet, higher education's fundamental task is to get more people educated! An equally daunting challenge for educational facilities professionals is that we must deliver this labor pool amidst a competitive, high-tech, economically stressed, environmentally taxed climate. Educational facilities professionals' fundamental task is not only to get more skilled labor hired and trained (if we have the budgets to do so), but most importantly, we must maintain a stable, safe, and stimulating environment so students can learn, teachers can teach, and researchers can innovate. We must step up to this challenge. We cannot shrink from it – for the sake of our children and grandchildren, our nation and its democracy, our entire way of life.

It is critically important for educational facilities professionals to understand this situation more fully and these facts more clearly to ensure there is an increased awareness of what is on the minds of your senior institutional officers during these tough times. This knowledge puts you in the catbird seat given the actions you need to take and the decisions you need to make. You're not as invisible as you think you are. This is not as impossible a task as it may appear. Higher education needs your best thinking. Higher education needs your best efforts. Higher education needs your entrepreneurial spirit. I know you are up to the task.

APPA can assist during these tough times with its rich network of colleagues, organizational evaluation services, comparative institutional benchmarking and performance indicators, core services staffing guidelines, and professional development/ training programs all targeted to improve organizational and individual efficiency and effectiveness.


What has been so great about this association, our educational system, and the country overall is our collaborative nature. It is one that allows the free flow of ideas and information that, in turn, stimulates innovation, invention, and creativity. Although . . .

- The challenges are many;
- The stakes are high;

- The call for leadership is clear;
- We must do our part.


As a 17th century Spanish philosopher once said: "If not us, then who? If not now, then when?" §

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