

Five Key Issues for APPA's Facility Professionals

By E. Lander Medlin and William M. Elvey

APPAs took advantage of the opportunity this past April to continue its collaboration with its international strategic alliance partners – AUDE (the U.K.'s Association of University Directors of Estates), TEFMA (Australasia's Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association), and HEFMA (Higher Education Facilities Management Association of Southern Africa) – and engaged in a dialogue concerning our perspective of the five key issues educational facilities professionals face. APPA's perspective of the five key issues is reflected in this column. We found it important and useful to frame our discussion relative to both the ongoing *megatrends* and the *context* influencing higher education and the facilities profession.

Using Bill Daigneau's award-winning article *Megatrends and Myths: Facilities Management Practices in Higher Education* (*Facilities Manager*, November/December 2006) as the basis, we found the *megatrends* that drive the future are important for us to understand since they will fundamentally influence the functions and processes of higher education now and well into the future. These megatrends he described remain as:

- *Changing student demographics* – Diversity amongst those seeking postsecondary education has changed significantly from the previous student pool. The ramifications of these shifts are still being explored.
- *Access and efficiency* – Given a choice between putting higher education out of the financial reach of large portions of the population and finding more efficient ways to deliver that education,

achieving greater cost efficiencies is likely to prevail.

- *Technology* – IT has made possible the shift from the traditional instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm. And, technology in general has become ubiquitous in its use and need by all stakeholders. However, the cost of technology is outpacing our ability to pay for it.
- *Accountability* – The federal government has increasingly inserted itself into the management and delivery of higher education and education in general. Performance outcomes must be identified, substantiated, and justified by all stakeholder groups in order to receive even minimal funding for programs and services.
- *Green and lean* – Reduce, reuse, recycle. Environmental degradation and protection concerns have heightened and gained traction. In turn, long-term sustainability practices are increasingly on the rise.

Today's *context* is equally important and is a reflection of the financial constraints presently felt from the global economic downturn. Although the education sector is currently considered one of the U.S. growth industry sectors, resource scarcity has heightened at many education institutions causing near-term delays in building construction, operational budget reductions, and some corresponding reductions in the workforce. The financial strain from a myriad of funding shortfalls is significantly impacting the kinds of decisions we need to make in a contracted economic climate. Indeed, we are not immune from the effects of an uncertain global financial market.

The *critical facilities issues* we face in educational facilities have been documented in detail in the three issues of APPA's *Thought Leaders Series* monographs (*University Facilities Respond to the Changing Landscape of Higher Education*, 2006; *Educational Facilities and the Impact of Technology, Expectations, and Competition*, 2007; and *The Challenges of Demographic Changes and Accountability to Campus Facilities*, 2008). However, given the dramatic changes being felt from the global economy's free fall, we offer the following *five key issues* that we believe are the most critical for educational facilities professionals at this time:

- **Integration of Sustainability Throughout Operations** – Being "green" has taken on new meaning and import. Even the federal economic stimulus package incorporated green rating systems for modernization, renovation, and repair projects and green industry worker preparation into their requirements, along with massive funding for alternative energy/renewables. For the facilities professional, the key is "integration," from green design to recycling construction debris, and incorporating green principles and practices into the trades, custodial, and grounds landscape daily operations. And, all of this must be done in a financially viable and environmentally sound and friendly way.
- **Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy** – Reliability of system infrastructure and delivery is critical to the institutional mission. Given the energy intensity and use at our educational institutes, demand-side management is critical, especially since price volatility exists on the supply side. Complex network systems, ever-increasing technologies (building automation, digital controls, security, etc.), and expanding computing power are requirements of North American education energy systems in

particular. In addition, year-round operations are affecting efficiency and effectiveness. Most capital decisions are made on a short-term basis with little regard or understanding for the long-term impact on operations and maintenance budgets. It is a difficult task to control costs in this environment. In addition, alternative fuels and renewables have become increasingly important and gaining attention, focus, and momentum.

- **Accountability & Performance Measurement** – The focus on accountability of performance extends beyond the teaching/instructional side of the academy. Establishing and utilizing metrics for performance measurement, benchmarking other organizations, and identifying best practices for the industry are becoming a critical part of everyday operations. The gloomy economic picture for most campuses has only increased the need for operational efficiency and effectiveness in order to successfully streamline costs. It has been said many times, “We measure what we value. We manage what we measure!” This is essential in today’s environment and we suspect will be the case well into the future.
- **Aging Workforce** – Workforce demographics are changing, and the “graying of America” has increased the number of boomer generation workers looking at retirement. It has become increasingly important for organizations to assess these demographics shifts in their geographic area, determine their service needs and requirements, and use this information as the criteria for decision-making to ensure they have the proper workforce plans in place to address their future staffing needs and requirements (both managerial and technical staff). In addition, there needs to be a greater focus on creating the “workplace of choice.” This will require organizations to institute organizational climate surveys, assess systems and procedures that are impeding recruitment and retention of key and critical staff, and establish formal accession and succession planning programs. The issue is clearly the “800 pound gorilla” in the room.

- **Campus Safety & Security** – Since the Virginia Tech tragedy in April 2007, focused attention has renewed how colleges and universities deal with campus safety and security issues. In the past two years a number of states have conducted comprehensive reviews of campus safety and security. However, despite this activity, very little is known about the specific plans and procedures that colleges and universities have implemented to address today’s all-hazards state of campus safety and security. Hence, a National Campus Safety and Security Project is currently underway to document the current state of college and university emergency preparedness plans as a measure to inform the higher education community about the scope of campus safety and security today. The higher education sector and its counterparts in the K-12 sector as well are

clearly going through a period of unprecedented change. The choices we make today will affect education for years to come. Indeed, these are tough times. However, the investment decisions we make in the short term will have a major impact in the future. Therefore, it has become increasingly clear that *leadership and change management* skills are a necessary part of the educational facilities professional’s skill set as we seek a long-term resolution for each of these issues.

The educational facilities professional must be able to *balance and articulate stakeholder expectations*, provide an intense *focus on the customer needs*, employ exceptional *communication skills*, and recognize that *collaboration is key* – the neon sign for success! ☺

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