



# Another Look at the Impact of Facilities on the Recruitment and Retention of Students

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Over the past 42 years considerable research has been done to understand the issues that impact the decision of a student's choice of a higher education institution. This research has focused on understanding the phases of the decision process, the timing of the phases in the decision process and the personal, financial, and environmental factors that influence institutional choice. While many of these studies include some aspect of the institution's physical environment, these physical aspects are usually secondary to the main thrust of the research.

In 2006, through the support of APPA's Center for Facilities Research (CFaR), APPA attempted to determine the level of importance of facilities relative to other institutional characteristics and then to explore various facilities influences. The relationship and linkages between physical assets and outcomes were explored and examined in this study, published as *Impact of Facilities on the Recruitment and Retention of Students: Final Report*.

This report sought to answer questions such as:

- What factors influence a student's choice of higher education institution? When and how do students obtain their information about an institution? What institutional factors influence a

student to stay at their original institution of choice? What are the differences between demographic groups in this decision process?

- What can the physical assets (buildings, grounds, landscape, and other tangible resources) do to help recruit students?
- What is the benefit of facilities in the recruitment process?
- What, if any, impact does facilities have on retaining students?
- Are there demographic differences in the impact of facilities on recruitment and retention?

Though it has been six years since the study was conducted and results published, the facts continue to resonate and hold true today.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analyses of the study showed a positive association between the built environment and student recruitment and retention, suggesting that

institutional characteristics and facilities have a direct correlation with a student's decision to attend a particular school, both initially and after enrollment.

While academic issues were at the top of their list when it came to choosing an institution (that is, the institution had to have a strong program in their field of interest, have excellent teachers, and so on) an attractive campus and quality facilities did play a role in the decision


process, but they were not necessarily a deciding factor.

That said, the survey results suggested a significant number of respondents *rejected* an institution because important facilities were missing, inadequate, or poorly maintained. Therefore, it may be safe to say that having a quality built environment is a necessary but not sufficient condition to recruit and retain students.

## CONCLUSION

The research indicated that the built environment is fundamentally related to recruitment and retention of students. This relationship suggests that campus planning and operations of the built environment should be an integral part of the recruitment and retention strategy.

Long-range planning for new construction and the repair and replacement of existing facilities and infrastructure should be an integral part of the institution's strategic plans in support of the academic mission. This relationship suggests that collaboration is needed between the units of facilities management, executive leadership, admissions, and housing authorities.

The complete report is available at the APPA bookstore, [www.appa.org/bookstore](http://www.appa.org/bookstore); the cost is \$22 for APPA member institutions, and \$45 for nonmembers. 

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