

Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., CEFP, AIA

**It could be argued that this column is a personal soapbox** to present materials to APPA readership. It may also be due to a lack of awareness that as editor, I will accept submissions from others. I learned this following receipt of a suggestion to review a book one member had recently read; he was pleasantly surprised that I offered to publish his own review. As a reminder, I function primarily as an editor and not an authority on what APPA members should be reading. I encourage everyone to read books and write a review if so inclined. Don't be afraid of your writing skills; I'm a gentle critic and willing to help if you're unsure. So, don't be shy! The door is open for voluntary submissions.

Now, back to the soapbox; this issue covers just one book. It's not because there aren't plenty of books to read and review; it's just more important and timely. Happy reading!

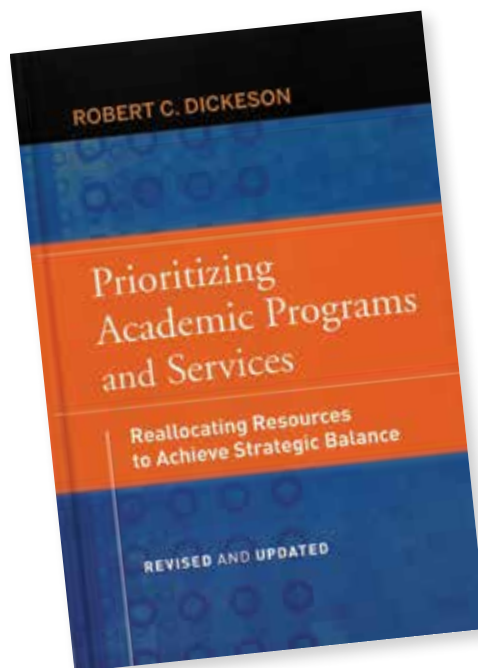
**PRIORITIZING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES: REALLOCATING RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE STRATEGIC BALANCE, 2ND ED.**

by Robert C. Dickeson, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2010, 256 pp., \$38.13 hardcover (Amazon), \$36.22 Kindle.

At first glance, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* is for academics and institutional leaders. However, it provides an important perspective and tools for non-academics and is worth the effort. The issue is, why and how does something like this fit in with APPA member concerns?

Two years ago, as a panelist for a general session at the APPA conference, I presented some issues facing facility officers in the coming years. Although those issues were important from an operational perspective, including the ongoing diminution of budgets, I didn't place as much emphasis on an issue my colleague, Don Guckert of the University of Iowa, presented during the Q&A.

Don's question centered on the concerns of increasing costs of higher education for students and their families and increasing attacks in the press and elsewhere. I was somewhat dismissive in my response, and that in hindsight was a mistake. Though they were an issue



for many years before, higher education costs have grown to be nearly an outsized issue now.

Student debt has grown to exceed consumer debt. Financial wonks are blaming student debt on slowing the economy, because graduates can't buy homes or even spend enough to support the U.S. consumer economy. Legislators in both state and federal governments are calling on more accountability for higher education. They're looking for outcomes, i.e., clear ROI data! How much do graduates

earn, how quickly is their education dollar paid off in terms of annual salary, and how quickly can they get out of debt and start "real" spending? No more discussion about average time to graduation; they stopped hearing faculty talk about the tangible benefits and personal fulfillment through love of learning a long time ago.

All of these issues are hitting higher education hard and deep. As facility officers, we have lots of experience with budget cutting. In my 30 years of facilities management, I can count on one hand the number of years when I wasn't involved in cutting budgets. Facilities are a cost and always looked at first to squeeze out budget dollars. But things are starting to change, if they haven't changed for many of us already.

Faculty have begun to realize that cuts to the facilities organization always trickle down to be cuts to the things affecting the faculty (and students). Things like emptying the trash or office cleaning on a daily basis have long disappeared; classrooms may not be cleaned daily either. Faculty notice the effects of these cuts and are starting to push back. But against what?

I experienced some tension at a recent consulting assignment when interviewing the academic representatives. One professor started the conversation by asking if we were there to outsource the facilities operation because it was done in the custodial area 30 years ago and it didn't work; they didn't want it to happen again! When we got past that issue we learned that faculty opinions about the facilities organization were high, and they alluded to taking some cuts elsewhere in order to avoid further cuts in the facilities organization. Wow! What a change from several years ago! This was a campus with beautiful grounds and immaculate interiors. The trades group was under significant strain, but overall the facilities

were in great shape. Compared to other institutions, this campus left a very positive impression.

What does all this mean and what does it have to do with *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*? If your campus hasn't started prioritizing programs, there's a good chance it will. As a facility officer, there will be some expectations to provide data and justification for continued operation. Sure, there's the make/buy process many campuses experienced years ago, but this is a much more significant exercise. Every academic program needs facilities. This description from the Williams College website is poetic but not practical: "The ideal college is Mark Hopkins at one end of a log and a student on the other." Have you been to Williamstown, Massachusetts during the academic year? A log just doesn't cut it.

As a result, it is necessary for the facility officer to be prepared to address the cost of program delivery from a facility perspective and support details about academic program costs when asked. While institution-wide costs may be acceptable in some cases, achieving savings on a per-square-foot basis for a non-laboratory academic program likely does not equate to a laboratory program. The facility officer must know costs down to programs (custodial, maintenance, landscape, etc.) but should also know those costs by building; it's even more preferable to know costs down to the academic program.

*Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* addresses many subjects: why prioritization is more important than across-the-board cuts, resistance to change, communication, data organization, outsourcing, evaluation criteria, and case studies. These are addressed in chapters and an extensive appendix (resources). Despite the title and the introductory notes, this is an excellent resource for the facilities organization predominately because academic programs are delivered in facilities; very few need no facilities.

APPA has not been ignorant of the need to address program prioritization. There are numerous tools available to help the

facility officer understand and respond to such a campus-wide initiative. These include APPA's Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI), *Custodial Staffing Guidelines*, total cost of ownership, and numerous publications. Maybe the reason more members are not using these resources consistently is because they haven't had to trim their budget, or because the institution keeps trying to do "more with less" when prioritization is really needed.

That's not a surprise; I once had a university provost refuse to tell me which college buildings needed major capital renewals more than others, claiming I was asking her to choose her favorite child. As a result, capital renewal was focused on the buildings rather than the programs they supported—a bad use of resources in my opinion. I don't think I'd get the same response at that institution now.

*Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* is an excellent resource. It takes

an institutional excellence focus, which is what we all prefer to do. It provides key concepts to steer through the process and suggests use of resources that APPA has available to members. Although it's impossible to predict the future, I have to believe more institutions are going to be looking at this approach in the coming years.

As your institution does look at prioritization, I recommend this book. I also recommend getting prepared by using tools like the FPI so you're prepared when asked some of the many questions posed in the process. ☎

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