

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

The job of a facility officer requires

attention to many details. These details may be strategic and future-driven or they may be mundane, operational functions.

Enjoy reading whatever catches your eye this summer. Here are two books that caught mine.

COLLEGE: WHAT IT WAS, IS, AND SHOULD BE

Andrew Delbanco, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2012, 177 pp., softcover \$13.46, Kindle, \$9.99.

In order to be at the table and make meaningful contributions, the senior facilities officer (SFO) needs to know where the institution is headed. It is not enough to know the goals and aspirations of the institution and the current administration; one must also know the forces affecting the institution and higher education in general. So although *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* is not a book about facilities, it is a valuable book for an SFO and others interested in higher education trends.

As facility officers, we are maintaining, renewing, and renovating an inventory of facilities that were created based on “historic” decisions. With an average renovated age of over 40 years, these facilities reflect the strategic decisions of our youth, our parents’ youth, or those of older generations. For good or bad, change comes slowly in higher education.

In *College*, Delbanco charts the birth, development, and growth of higher education, predominantly in the Western world. He concentrates mostly on U.S. higher education and on well-endowed Eastern universities: Harvard,

Yale, and Princeton. The early focus of those institutions was theological and meant to produce a well-rounded citizen who understood different perspectives, literature, and basic sciences. The physical organization of two of these campuses (Harvard and Yale) changed to a college/house organization echoing Oxford’s college system. Some other U.S. institutions followed this approach; Rice and UC-Santa Cruz are notable examples that I’ve visited.

Significant legislation influenced higher education: the Morrill Act in 1862 and the G.I. Bill in 1945. As Delbanco points out, these acts have changed the focus of higher education: Students no longer attend college to become better citizens and prepare for a career; they come to campus to learn a career. This focus on financial outcomes has distorted higher education. Concerns about student behavior haven’t changed much. Students still engage in inappropriate ways. Remember, they’re in college to learn—and to learn about life.

Delbanco’s *College* is about reminiscences and hopes, predictions and warnings. But if you are a facility officer, it is one more perspective that can open your eyes to potential outcomes for your

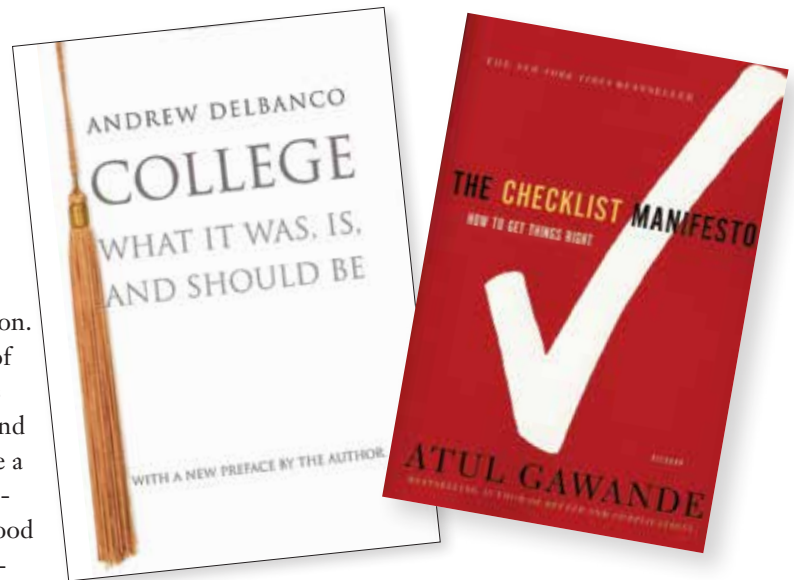
institution. Obviously, Delbanco cannot predict where higher education will be in 20 years, but he does provide an interesting narrative of how we got here and where we may go. If you have a seat at the table, *College* may prepare you for the discussion.

THE CHECKLIST MANIFESTO: HOW TO GET THINGS RIGHT

Atul Gawande, Picador, New York, 193 pp., softcover \$16.

A number of readers may not understand why a book written by a physician about how he used a checklist system to improve healthcare is relevant to facilities. To some extent, I was initially skeptical of *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*, but as I read further, it started to make sense.

A checklist—the thing used to make sure you don’t forget something—is typically used when you’re packing for a long trip, chaperoning a school



group, or shopping for an important dinner. Why do you have a checklist? So you don't forget an important piece of clothing or travel item, lose a child under your charge, or omit a key ingredient. *The Checklist Manifesto* was written for many of the same reasons—to demonstrate how even the most sophisticated professions can improve the effectiveness (and the safety of patients and the public) by making sure simple steps have been taken.


Atul Gawande has documented the challenges and successes of the medical profession in other publications. Although medical challenges are better controlled by following checklists, *The Checklist Manifesto* demonstrates that we use these tools in many other ways to ensure a successful conclusion to a complex task. Think about the tasks handled by facility managers (for example, the

construction of a building, which is complex and referenced, using critical path scheduling and communication procedures to complete). In facilities, we use checklists for many things. However, we don't seem to use checklists often enough. Maybe we're just overconfident, like some surgeons who resisted using checklists in a hospital surgery suite.

Checklists should be used in almost every complex task we do: cleaning buildings, restarting a boiler, making repairs on a roof, policing campus grounds for trash, and so on. Yet many of us think that a checklist is beneath us, or that the task is not important enough. Gawande does a reasonably good job explaining that checklists are important for many reasons and provides some examples in the appendix. I argue we should be using them simply to demonstrate we can plan our work-

day well, and get the job done right the first time.

The Checklist Manifesto is an easy read, and is interesting and lighthearted. It should open your eyes to the importance of being organized and taking care of business, even when your business might seem to be mundane or have a minor issues.

Facility officers affect the lives of hundreds or thousands of people every day. We may not do open heart surgery, but lives depend on what we do and how well we do it. 

Ted Weidner is an associate professor at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, and consults on facilities management issues primarily for educational organizations. He can be reached at tjweidne@purdue.edu. If you would like to write a book review, please contact Ted directly.



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