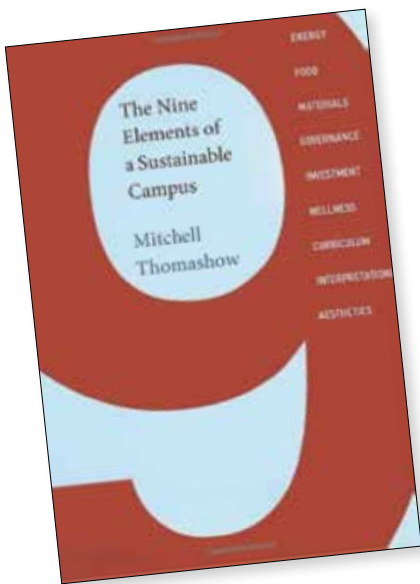


Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., CEFP, AIA

**T**he start of the New Year means a new beginning to many. However, the topic for this column is about more than a new beginning: It is about retaining the beginning, i.e., sustaining for the future after a movement started a little over 10 years ago. The approach to this column is a little different than in most columns, because I'm comparing and critiquing two books about sustainability against what I view as APPA's approach to sustainability over my 35 years of facilities experience and association with APPA. As this column reveals my personal bias, it may offend some. Nevertheless, I have strong feelings about sustainability and its focus in higher education. And it won't be the first time I have taken a contrary position.



**THE NINE ELEMENTS OF A SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS**

Mitchell Thomashow, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2014, 248 pp. Available in hardcover, softcover, and Kindle.

**ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY CAMPUSWIDE: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENT SERVICES, NUMBER 137**

Bruce A. Jacobs and Jillian Kinzie, editors, Wiley Periodicals, Spring 2012, 88 pp. Available in hardcover, softcover, and Kindle.



Let's first look at a quote I often reference. It is attributed to James A. Garfield, the 20th President of the United States, and suggested by some to be among the most educated leaders of the country. At a Williams College alumni gathering, referring to the president of the college, he said, "The ideal college is Mark Hopkins at one end of a log and a student at the other."

Those are powerful words about the professor-student relationship, but also about how it relates to facilities. Think about it: Williams College is located in the extreme northwest corner of Massachusetts, about as far away from Boston as one can get. It is also in a mountain valley and receives its fair share of snow and cold temperatures in the middle of the academic year. Education delivered on a log in January or February would be rare in most locations but an endurance test at Williams.

But think about the metaphor and then about how

education is delivered at your campus. Which is more sustainable? Is it environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable? Education on a log is very sustainable because the log is economical and free of societal bias and access restrictions. So why have our campuses become so developed with special facilities for a wide range of nonacademic purposes? Is a climbing wall a sustainable feature? What about a hot tub or "lazy river"? Granted, some basic research (and instruction) must be accomplished in specialized, relatively new, sophisticated facilities, but do we really need the latest and greatest facility to attract students? Apparently so.

I conducted a brief study of the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) charter signatories. The study showed 44 percent had an indoor climbing wall even though 77 percent of those campuses had similar rocky terrain

within an hour of campus (some on campus). Is it sustainable to provide an indoor venue when part of the concept of sustainability is to get people to recognize the value and beauty of the natural world so it will be conserved? Maybe it is more conservative to create an artificial venue so rock climbers don't destroy nature. But then is it necessary to have it indoors, heated in the winter, and cooled in the summer?

So why are our students demanding sustainable programs and climate commitments from the administration? Are they aware of their surroundings or simply engrossed in the latest app on their smartphone or tablet? Have they selected the institution for its sustainability programs or because it is really sustainable? Are our institutions recruiting students based on their demonstrated sustainability? Or is it really just a lot of talk? Remember, the most sustainable building is the one that is not yet constructed.

Students seem to have several attitudes about sustainability. They can be described generally by a scale that ranges from:

- committed to sustainability
- involved in sustainability, and
- ignorant or unconcerned about sustainability

The *committed* students have changed their lifestyle and pay close attention to their carbon footprint. They are a minority of the students but are vocal and active both within and outside their college. The *involved* students, for the most part, are supportive of sustainability, but only as long as their lifestyle preferences are not severely affected—they want to drive to the gym, fly to spring break, and eat fresh tomatoes in the winter. The *ignorant* students are a minority at the opposite end of the scale. As is often the case, there is a virtual bell curve of attitudes about sustainability among students in higher education.

These two books address students at the involved and committed portions of this bell curve. *Enhancing Sustainability Campuswide* feels like more of a greenwashing effort. It identifies projects for students to do when not in class that make them more aware of sustainability, but really doesn't help them understand sustainability nor how to implement it in a way that will last. It takes the approach of making students comfortable with sustainability and making it fun. These techniques are important but don't address the deep thinking that I believe is needed to implement sustainability in meaningful ways.

On the other hand, *The Nine Elements of a Sustainable Campus* is written for a principled leader who is committed to sustainability and educating others. It looks at the fundamentals needed to make sustainability long-lasting and compatible with modern systems. It identifies principles of sustainability and its implementation in the physical, economic, and social world of higher education. The author does an excellent job describing strategic approaches to sustainability that will result in real outcomes rather than an activity to keep students out of the bars on the weekend. That's a tall order and may only be applicable at a small number of institutions, but is much closer to the "log" example than what we have today.

I have advocated the sustainability approach that APPA has advanced for decades: identify organizational needs, identify what resources can be adjusted or must be supplemented, and obtain support for the plan. That's the same thing described in *Nine Elements*. It's not easy and it's not trendy. But then many things that make our institutions great are not easy but they all require a seat at the table either physically or virtually. Instead of implementing nice to do things as described in books like *Enhancing Sustainability Campuswide*, facility officers should be involved in meaningful actions such as those described in *The Nine Elements of a Sustainable Campus*. There's a place for both, but if pressed to select one or the other, my money is on the *Nine Elements*. ☺

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