

Making a Difference...The cost of space and why it matters

168 hours.

That's how many hours there are in a week. How many hours do you spend at home? Let's assume you spend 12 hours per day, 7 days per week; that's 84 hours. Where do you spend the other 84 hours?

If you work at a college or university, how many hours per week are you at work? 40 hours? 50 hours? Perhaps 60 hours, maybe more? Of those hours, how much time do you spend in your office, classroom or laboratory?

Assuming "normal" business hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00am – 5:00pm, with no formal teaching or learning on Saturday or Sunday (that's 48 hours of dormant facilities), there seems to be ample time to maximize resources.

Typically, there are little or no services such as the Registrar, Bursar, Enrollment Services, Health Center, and Financial Services. And what about the Provost's office, Academic Affairs and other administrative functions? Perhaps on your campus there are skeleton crews in Housing, Dining Services, Facilities Management, Parking, Transportation, Library, Student Union and Campus Police. Where is everyone?

Although most universities aspire to be a 24/7 live-learn-work-play environment, for the most part, the hours of operation and facility use on most campuses is more closely aligned to having Monday-Friday Banker's hours than they do a hotel or 24-hour restaurant where the customer receives the same level of services and quality, regardless of the time of day.

If you spend 15 hours per week in your office, classroom or laboratory, that equals 3 hours per day over a 5 day work week. If you spend 20 hours per week in your office, classroom or laboratory, that equals 4 hours per day. Or perhaps you're a really hard worker and you spend 25 hours per week in your office, classroom or laboratory; that equals 5 hours per day. Perhaps the classrooms and laboratories are used by other members of the campus community.

In higher education, people think that if a classroom is used 30-35 hours per week, then they are making very good use of their facilities. Perhaps some campuses use their instructional space 40 or 50 hours per week. So what is happening in these classrooms the other 118 hours of the week? Maybe a few student organizations will use some of these spaces for meetings, or maybe there are some evening lectures and seminars. We can be generous and add another 10 hours per week of classroom utilization. So, what about the remaining 108 hours that the space is vacant, but we are paying to have it heated and cooled? Perhaps we are also paying debt service on the borrowed money it took to build that facility.

For the university administrators, faculty and staff who work really long hours and spend 5 hours per day in their office? What is happening in these vacant and underutilized spaces the other 19 hours per day?

Herein lies one of the many challenges universities have in sorting through their priorities and investment strategies to develop new campus buildings; space utilization. How might this impact the future of teaching and learning?

If your new 100,000 square foot academic building cost \$50M to construct, it could cost you another \$30M or more to own and operate over the next 30 years. On a good week, if every space in this beautiful new academic building is being used 60 hours per week, there's another 108 hours that it sits vacant. That's a 65% vacancy rate. If this were a hotel or restaurant, you would be out of business.

So how can university business officers and other campus administrators address this problem? How can we create facilities that have a "long life, loose fit" mindset to meet the competing space typology demands while significantly improving space utilization?

Collaborative spaces

Architectural design studios

Maker spaces

Investment triggers and strategies

Evolution and impact of technology

Leverage limited resources

Impacts on the learner

Is space really free?