

IV. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Moving from idea to physical reality in the process of planning learning spaces in the undergraduate setting is a long, complicated, complex undertaking, one that involves the collaborative involvement and leadership of many members of your community.

Major new facilities, as well as major renovations and repurposing of existing spaces—within and beyond those used now for learning and research—have to be planned within the context of overall campus and programmatic needs. They must be tied to an institutional vision that incorporates the long-term goals and strengths of the college or university and must be balanced against other needs of the institution.

The process of reaching a campus consensus on the shape, scope, and intent of new or repurposed spaces can in itself create a broad-ranging campus conversation about how spaces matter. It is this process that makes the planning of new/renewed spaces a defining moment in the life of an institution.

The challenge to those with leadership roles in the planning process—administrators, trustees, faculty and a wide range of stakeholders—is to create a climate in which such as committee can flourish. Your building will reflect the community that brought it to life; it will then nurture and sustain the community that it serves.

There are different leadership and management roles that come into play in your planning. Each of these involves responsibilities that must be fulfilled if the project is to proceed as planned. How they are assumed and assigned, however, will differ from campus to campus based on local culture and policies, and the scope of your project.

Presidents and other senior administrators will have a significant role in the discussions about mission, academic plan, and campus that brought you to this point in considering new spaces and structures for learning. At some institutions, the president will be actively involved in early stages, as the vision is shaped, the program is developed, design professionals selected, and other milestones reached. On other campuses, a designated senior administrator or a faculty member who becomes project shepherd will move into the primary leadership role as the planning proceeds.

Regardless of how institutional culture shapes the leadership structure for your project, it is essential that the president or a designed senior administrator have a strong presence throughout. The president, together with the chief officers for academic and financial affairs, is accountable for the long-term welfare of the institution. Working with trustees and faculty, these senior officers are responsible for anticipating an institutional future, and for securing the internal and external resources to achieve that future. These campus leaders will make the final decisions about the scope and character of your project, as well as about the timing of construction and fundraising.



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As important as it is to be advocates for the program internally and externally, the president and other senior administrators have the even more critical responsibility to keep your planning focused on a vision of the institutional mission and to ensure that all planners have an “enlarged sense of the possible.”

This will happen as faculty and staff make benchmarking visits to other campuses and facilities. It should also happen as the campus community comes together to think about ‘what if’ and ‘why not’ in regard to the future of learning on your campus. In the process of thinking about transforming programs and space, your campus leaders should see that the right questions are asked at each phase of the planning. The president and senior officers should:

- Bring the best people to the task from all appropriate divisions of the campus and empower them with the requisite responsibility and resources.
- See that avenues of communication are kept open and that the discussions are wide-ranging throughout the process.
- See that decisions are made fairly and firmly.
- Nurture an institutional climate in which ideas flourish.
- Keep the project in harmony with the institutional mission and goals.

The characteristics of community—a predisposition to share ideas, to challenge precepts, and to revel in exploring unfamiliar territory—relate directly to the endeavor of collaborative planning.

How can this be?

Think about how a true community exhibits the willingness, even the drive, to discuss matters of the moment informally with colleagues in the lounge, or to explore issues in formal, regular sessions with peer. Community is the spirited enactment of the conviction that ideas are important, and that they gain life when people bring different perspectives to their consideration. Communities embrace a common vision yet allow—even promote—difficult dialogues. This is the challenge to leaders, within the entire community, as your planning proceeds.

