

V. FOCUSING ON THE CAMPUS

What is a campus? Significantly, the campus is the stage setting for the life of your community; the campus is the common ground that unifies the diversity of activities in which students and faculty are engaged, and the diversity of buildings in which those activities take place. On a campus built over the years, this common ground brings order and stability to the diversity that has accompanied such growth and change. The common ground that is your campus should make sense from the symbolic, educational, aesthetic, and functional perspective. It should have such strength and clarity that each building proclaims its own individuality, yet at the same time contributes to the greater good.

All individual buildings on a campus have a physical as well as a curricular context, yet (unlike regularly recurring discussions about curricular issues) rarely do campuses come together to consider how the campus as a whole (built over generations) works for them now.

As you consider any major facilities project—major from the perspective of its impact on student learning and the institutional community and culture—it is essential to consider both campus and program from the perspective of mission, strategic goals, and priorities, and to reflect on the social nature of architecture. In fact, programmatic planning and campus planning must be woven together over the many months until your community comes to final decisions about what the spaces will be, become.

Walk around and through the buildings and open spaces on your campus. Observe how buildings planned and built in earlier eras, which reflect the ideas and values of different times, come together in a coherent pattern and serve as an appropriate stage setting for the life of your community today.

Ask:

- How does the campus reflect our particular academic traditions?
- Does the campus reflect the values of our community today and our vision for our future?
- What are the best, the strongest characteristics of our campus that should be preserved and extended?
- What are the buildings that alumni return to again and again?
- Is there a sense of place that brings life and meaning to our community?

Your campus as well as your program can be a clear expression of how your community asks and answers questions about the purpose of the enterprise: how you understand the relationship between the how and what and where of learning. We believe that planning of new spaces for learning can be a defining moment for an institution. It is an opportunity to step back as a community and reflect on the physical setting into which new spaces must fit.



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Ask:

- Do our buildings, individually or collectively, serve as centers of intellectual and social activity?
- Is there an inherent unity, integrity, and coherence to our campus, or does the placement and character of the buildings, walks, and roads suggest that decisions over the years have been in a piecemeal, ad hoc fashion, building by building?
- Can a new facility reinforce what works now in campus patterns and anticipate new patterns that will accompany future growth and change?
- Should a new structure be an opportunity for redefining “centers” on our campus?
- In what ways might the new facility or renovated structure remedy past mistakes in campus planning?
- How can we be certain that a new building enhances the unity, the common ground that we already have?
- In what ways might the structure we are now planning become a physical expression of our vision for the future of our institution?
- Can the landscape design be used as an educational tool, as celebration of our culture and context?

Answering such questions helps to determine what must be done and what must not be done, as well as what it might be nice to do.

In the process of planning either new programs or new spaces, connections should be recognized and created—among departments and disciplines, between campus buildings old and new. Considerations should be given to the architectural and intellectual connections that foster community. The programs, the spaces, and the structures themselves will not create community. Communities are based on a sense of shared purpose and bound together by a common vision.

The end result of all your planning will be new spaces and structures for learning. Whether they will actually work will depend on the degree to which they reflect the ideas of the many and diverse communities on your campus, as well as the identity and mission of the institution.

It is important also to recognize the communities that surround and shape the external environment for the institution. Representatives should be informed, and involved if appropriate, as your planning proceeds.

Never lose sight of the physical expression of community that is your campus at its best, strongest, and most “characteristic” characteristics. These are what make you what you are; they are what should be preserved and extended in your current planning.

