

LOOKING AT AN INSTITUTION'S PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

A Trustee's Perspective

The primary role of college trustees is to provide stewardship for the college. Stewardship means taking responsibility for a college's or a university's reputation, vision and aspirations, as well as its physical, human, or monetary assets. Besides their obligations to their colleges, trustees also owe some loyalty to the best interests of the community at large, either local, regional, or national. Trustees implement or exercise their hopes, visions, or aspirations for the institution by appointing and working with a president. Together the trustees and the president work to implement an agreed upon philosophy and set goals for the institution; it is the president's responsibility to lead the academic community toward the attainment of those goals. This exercise in combined leadership is never more important or demanding than in the planning of curricular revisions, especially those that require changes or additions to the building inventory of the college or university.

As always, trustees must challenge the institution's leadership to think creatively and courageously. Through an aggressive approach it is possible for a college to make greater rather than smaller strides, but at the same time, the trustees must also expect a sense of reality as future oriented projects are conceptualized and proposed. When trustees encourage faculty to "think big," it should not be interpreted to mean that every one of their wishes

can now be achieved. Trustees expect a team of faculty and administrators to probe and question every request and proposal for space in the new facility, and then, when appropriate, to refuse or scale back proposals which exceed the institution's means. On the other hand, trustees can sometimes anticipate, by virtue of their experience, needs that have not been discovered by faculty or administrators. Through the cooperation of trustees, administrators, and faculty, therefore, it is possible to develop a better and more comprehensive plan for the institution.

One does not have to be an expert to recognize the advances unfolding in modern science. The importance for our nation of a citizenry educated with an understanding of science and mathematics is well known. Trustees have an "oversight" duty to ensure that their institution is contributing to the national need for a better educated society in which there is an understanding of the scientific approach and the use of quantitative methods. Trustees should look first to the college community's academic plan to meet these needs and, if the academic community's approach appears to be inadequate, trustees should ask the administration for a more complete approach.

The construction of buildings or the renovation of spaces should never be planned for their own sake, that is, just to have something new, but rather they should be linked with the advancement of academic goals. Buildings should be constructed only when a programmatic plan demonstrates that the new ideas

can be implemented only with newly constructed or renovated facilities. Trustees have an important set of responsibilities when presented with proposals for construction, renovation, or additions to buildings on campus. All colleges have limited land resources and a limited capacity to raise capital funds; therefore, trustees must ensure that buildings are not constructed unnecessarily. Once the need for a new science facility has been justified to the board, it is the responsibility of the trustees to support the administration and, in turn, to become advocates for the project so that the required financial resources can be uncovered. (It is convenient that the same logical justification for convincing a governing board can become the statement of purpose and the rationale for selling the project to a philanthropic organization.)

High-quality academic communities yearn for distinctions that will endure. Innovative approaches to the education of tomorrow's youth, permitting them to thrive in a world strongly influenced by science and mathematics, will be joined with pride by trustees as they view the historical role of their college in the community of colleges and universities in this nation.