



# Critical Issues in the New Normal

By E. Lander Medlin

The megatrends identified in Bill Daigneau’s seminal *Facilities Manager* article “Megatrends & Myths” [November/December 2006] puts today’s critical facilities issues for educational facilities professionals in perspective. These five important megatrends continue to drive the future and fundamentally influence the functions and processes of higher education.

- **Changing student demographics**—Diversity amongst those seeking post-secondary education has changed significantly from the previous generation’s student pool. The ramifications of these shifts are many and varied, and include an increasing mix of adult learners.
- **Access and efficiency**—Given a choice between putting higher education out of the financial reach of large portions of the population and finding more efficient ways to deliver higher education, the latter (achieving greater cost efficiencies) will continue to prevail.” An emphasis on operational efficiencies remains important; however, a focus on “effectiveness” is likely to become even more critical in the years ahead.
- **Technology**—IT has made possible the shift from the traditional teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm. However, the appetite for technology upgrades and replacements is rapidly outpacing our ability to pay for them. In addition, MOOCs (massive open online courses) is impacting the very nature of teaching and learning, as well as our entire educational delivery system.
- **Accountability**—Federal governments have increasingly inserted themselves

into the management and delivery of higher education and education in general. Performance outcomes must be identified, substantiated, and justified by all stakeholder groups in order to receive even minimal funding for programs and services and ensure compliance with neverending rules and regulations. Furthermore, public opinion is waning given the rapid rise in the cost of a degree along with the perception of its value in getting a job shortly thereafter. A focus on the value proposition by colleges and universities will be a critical component of how we market ourselves, make change happen, and move forward into this new reality.

- **Green and lean**—Sustainability remains the watchword for colleges and universities. Environmental degradation and protection concerns across the globe have heightened engagement and continue to gain traction. Long-term sustainability practices are the new delivery paradigm.

The global recession capped off a period of continued financial constraints and other issues:

- declines in state support
- a plummet in the value of endowments
- technology expansion
- dramatic student demographic shifts
- demands of workplace demographic shifts to ensure qualified staff to deliver facilities services
- a renewed focus on educational performance standards
- interference from regulatory bodies/agencies

- competition from for-profit institutions/organizations
- a rise in student enrollments in targeted geographic areas

Certainly, the context of today’s environment is critically important and reflective of the fact that education is not immune to the effects of an uncertain and rapidly changing global marketplace.

The critical facilities issues we face have been documented in detail in the last eight issues of our Thought Leaders Series monographs. They are fully accessible via APPA’s website ([www.appa.org/research/cfar/tls.cfm](http://www.appa.org/research/cfar/tls.cfm)). However, given the dramatic changes of today’s global marketplace and corresponding climate, the following critical issues represent the top shelf for educational facilities professionals at this time.

## ADDRESSING ENERGY MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Higher education institutions must find new and innovative ways to adapt to rising energy costs and develop strategies that reduce the risk of energy price volatility. Facilities can’t fix energy challenges alone—the entire campus must be mobilized to conserve electricity and embrace green solutions and green technologies. We must work with federal and state agencies to reduce the burden of regulations that hamper or impede utilization of some fossil fuels and allow for greater incentives to the application of renewable energy sources.

## ENGAGING IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY/STEWARDSHIP

Higher education in particular must adjust to the reality of sustainability as a permanent way of doing business. In doing so, colleges and universities can and should make measurable progress toward environmental sustainability and energy efficiency. Colleges and universities must develop a vision of sustainability that drives decision making, and facilities professionals must seek a prominent leadership role in their institutions' sustainability efforts.

## DEALING WITH DECLINING RESOURCES

Colleges and universities need creative and effective strategies to do better with less. We can only expect flat or reduced funding for years to come. Managing with less will mean identifying organizational structure changes that improve services and confront shifting expectations. Facilities departments must develop long-term strategies incorporating total cost of ownership principles to help their organization become more efficient and financially viable.

## MANAGING THE EXISTING BUILT ENVIRONMENT DESPITE THE INCREASED NEED FOR RENEWAL, RENOVATIONS, AND REPAIRS

Senior facilities officers must take steps to ensure existing campus buildings and infrastructure are aligned with the mission of the institution. As the college or university changes, the campus needs to change as well—a daunting task, since dormitories and classroom buildings cannot be transformed overnight. Yet, the costs of neglected buildings, programs, and systems can snowball. Institutions should seek out areas where investment is not being made, understand what is happening and why, and seek to reprioritize when investment is needed. Educational administrators and national, state, and local leaders need to consider the backlog of renewal and renovation projects, and upgrade costly and inefficient structures.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES POSED BY INCREASINGLY COMPLEX BUILDINGS

Building systems continue to be even

more sophisticated. Institutions should assess the costs and benefits of “smart” buildings and develop strategies for managing them going forward.

## MANAGING THE IMPACT OF CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES ON EDUCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Colleges and universities must continue to address the shifting impacts of technology on campuses, as well as plan for disaster management and facilities integration. Colleges and universities need to do a better job gathering and analyzing their data to make solid and consistent business decisions.

## MANAGING RISING LABOR COSTS AND WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHIC REALITIES

The largest portion of the facilities annual operating budget is labor costs. Colleges and universities need strategies to negotiate with unions, find qualified workers, and remain flexible in a challenging labor market. Additionally, educational institutions must fully appreciate the demographics of their workforce and how they are likely to change, and take active steps to prepare for an increasingly diverse workforce. Higher education human resource policies and procedures need to become more flexible in order to adjust to a changing workforce.

## LIMITING THE RISING COSTS OF CODE COMPLIANCE AND UNFUNDED MANDATES

Numerous standards and codes impact higher education, and institutions should ensure they understand the costs and take steps to keep these expenses from skyrocketing. Different types of campuses face different types of federal, state, and local mandates, but these directives all create rising expenses.

## ADDRESSING CAMPUS SAFETY, SECURITY, AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Colleges and universities must take ongoing steps to prepare educational institutions for a growing list of threats. The role of campus facilities departments is critical in managing emergencies when they oc-

cur, and to prevent security threats before they happen. This requires an established campus emergency operations plan and a defined role for every administrator and staff member within the institution.

## BUILDING CAMPUS-WIDE UNDERSTANDING OF THE RATINGS “ARMS RACE”

Take a rigorous approach to this issue so the institution can make an informed choice about how important rankings and recruitment should or should not be in its decision-making and recruitment strategy.

## BETTER UTILIZE AND MANAGE SPACE

Empty classrooms, offices, and labs cost money. An effective space management system not only increases efficiency, it also helps the institution make better decisions going forward. Smart strategic plans give individual departments and institutions a framework for decision making, even in tough, unpredictable times. Colleges and universities need to better manage their space to make more responsible and energy-conscious use of their built environment. On many campuses, there is a disconnect between faculty, facilities, and space planning and management that causes friction and reduces efficiency.

The education sector will continue to experience unprecedented change. Recovery remains slow across the globe. These remain tough times. However, the choices we take and the investment decisions we make in the short term will have a major impact in the future.

It remains abundantly clear that leadership and change management skills are a necessary part of the educational facilities professional's skill set as we seek a long-term resolution for these issues. Collaboration will be key at all levels with all stakeholders.

APPA remains committed to assist its members in addressing these issues and more over the NEXT 100 years! 

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