



Q & A from *The State of Facilities in Higher Ed – The Context, the Reality, the Future* Webinar

How will the pandemic being totally contained alter the assessment of risks and challenges?

Realistically the challenges at the beginning of the pandemic remain. The risks associated with space that is not sufficiently funded to maintain it, and already in a state of significant need backlog, have been compounded by the expectations for how teaching/learning/work might happen in communities turned upside down by the pandemic. We encourage people to use the pandemic experience as both leverage and a learning experience to identify how we realign our schools for the future.

As space, investment in healthy and smart buildings, and organizations change, do you see also see a change in demand-driven services, and if so, how can IHEs prepare?

We agree that service delivery will indeed need to adjust going forward. How and in which ways will depend significantly on how the curricular and cultural changes shake out. One additional way that service will change going forward is the elevated service expectations around wellness and healthy buildings that we suspect will not diminish quickly, if ever, after the pandemic is under control. How schools manage these expanded service desires will require us to reimagine how to deliver service based on a demand driven basis. The question that remains is whether those service expectations can be aligned with budgets that simply don't appear to be expanding any time soon.

Many of us are not invited to the table until it's too late (if at all.) How have others forced collaborative work with other areas – Presidents, CIOs, CFOs, CAOs, and others?

First, we must recognize that many SFOs and others in facilities leadership found themselves recognized, highly valued, and certainly at the table during this past year during the pandemic. Those who were most successful in this endeavor report that the planning, procedures, and relationships they had previously developed contributed to their success with their campus administration peers.

Key to that effort is finding colleagues who have not only experienced such opportunities but also found a way that utilized less force and more collaboration, with the expectation that it will yield a sustained partnership and produce ongoing benefits.

Generally, avoiding the temptation to simply approach decision makers with an ask. The more time spent understanding the needs of the whole institution, the greater the opportunity to connect facilities decisions to the ultimate success of that institution. This makes it clear the facilities organization is being led by people who understand the key needs of the institution, with the added benefit of a critical skill set for solving problems.

What will be the impact for educational facilities from large numbers of office buildings emptying as companies realize the savings of staff working from home?

The reduction of commercial office space may represent an opportunity for colleges and universities to avoid new construction or accelerate campus modernization efforts. For those institutions in close proximity to such resources, and with needs that align with the available space, it could be a useful opportunity.

However, for the many institutions who are already a dominant element within their community, or who are in need of a specific space type that is not readily available or easily modified from existing commercial space (arts performance, museum, athletic, specialty science research, for example) this opportunity is dramatically reduced.

How does the pandemic affect plans to align facility operations with organizational carbon reduction / sustainability plans?

There is a natural synergy between optimizing the size of the physical portfolio used by the school and the opportunity to address sustainability concerns and plans. Any effort to reduce total space in use will assist in maximizing the value of investments made to reduce carbon usage. Still, schools shouldn't be naive about carbon footprint that has been offloaded to the homes of employees who no longer work on campus. In those cases, or if reductions in travel are made possible by expanded virtual meetings, an assessment of these associated Tier 3 elements should be made. Similarly, there is a tremendous link between the Healthy/Smart buildings initiative, with its goals for a better indoor environment via more thoughtful operation and sustainability plans for campuses of all types.

Where will outsourcing fit into the campus of the future?

Outsourcing and other forms of partnerships were and remain viable approaches to address needs in the right circumstances. If the campus of the future evolves differently from the campus of today, then the financial or political equations that determine the viability of outside partnerships will change and such solutions should be reevaluated.

As always, the focus should remain on creating the best possible environment to empower the learning and research aspirations of the individual school or system. In addition to outsourcing, consideration should be given to collaborations and the sharing of resources with neighboring peers or even unrelated business with whom skills and talents can be shared. These kinds of partnerships may benefit in not only bringing needed talent, but also by adding variety into the culture at a time when fresh ideas will be much needed and valued.

With the need for space drastically decreasing, do you see those capital dollars being redirected to reducing the backlog of deferred maintenance or modernization of campus buildings?

Space represents an opportunity to better align existing money with a portfolio currently needing more than can be afforded. If schools determine that less space is needed, it allows for the opportunity to reduce maintained space in the portfolio. Doing so reduces pressure on existing capital and reduces the gap between what is available and what is required to keep up with the needs of the campus. The dollars available should, but may not, already be under scrutiny as to their deployment in addressing the

backlog of capital needs. This could be through wholesale modernization, targeted systems projects, or in the replacement of buildings that have outlived their useful life.

A shift from liberal arts to STEM has been alluded to. Are there resources to illustrate how that changes the demands on facilities?

A great source for this is in the “Great Contraction” article by Lee Gardner in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 15, 2021. Paul Frigga (in February 5th in the *Chronicle*) also speaks to the shift away from humanities. Nathan Grawe's latest book *The Agile College* includes elements of how the higher education landscape is shifting and focuses on issues and strategies to consider.

What is clear is that the liberal arts have value, but there will be a shift in the types of programs being offered, and that will necessitate the refocus of the physical elements of the campus.

Will the predicted impact of third-party building, owning, and operating of campus physical assets in the future come about? How will that impact facilities?

This is anyone's guess. We suspect that the challenge of space will drive not more or new space but may have an impact on rethinking existing space. Schools will have the opportunity to leverage partner capital to solve longstanding existing space needs at a time when school resources have been tapped to respond to the pandemic.

The question remains on which schools will be willing to relinquish control for the creation of anything beyond auxiliary buildings, particularly the storied campuses. Schools with the capacity to borrow at low rates and optimistic that they can secure future resources to pay for debt may continue to be reluctant to transfer control. But publicly funded institutions with diminished legislative support and limited alumni fundraising history are sure to lean in even more. Both options hinge on the confidence a school has on its future.

As noted in the quote from Rhonda Gibler: *Now is not the time to be conservative.* With the added caveat: *If there is confidence that there WILL be a future for a given institution.*

As someone who works in facilities and operations in student life, some of what I'm hearing concerns the future of student affairs and student life. Rethinking space sounds like a way to eliminate and "mission out" student life functions. How does this "abundance of space and needs" conversation play out for student affairs work?

Rethinking space isn't about any component of the academy, but a call to challenge what the intent is for any and all given space on campus. Auxiliary space has been extremely hard-hit by the pandemic and has been criticized before as being an amenity more than student experience. Still, auxiliaries remain the primary net positive revenue stream for any campus that intends to retain significant in-person student experiences. Student life space is essential to the quintessential collegiate experience that many anticipate retaining, and it starts with residential strategies that are key to creating the student community. Student life extends to other offerings (food, fitness/wellness, spiritual life, clubs/organizations), which are staples of not only the student experience, but the development of the whole person. A school that intends to retain an in-person student experience cannot work financially without those other elements.

That said, if there are reductions in space by having fewer offices, or a larger percentage of students are remote, then it is fair to assume that auxiliary activity will need to apply the same nimble flexibility in reevaluating its approaches as well. Some school missions will change, and that could mean a shift away from residential living, but surely, many student services will remain.

Are you seeing any repurposing of college facilities when the college no longer has use for them?

Repurposing of facilities varies widely depending on the type of building the surrounding community. In general, highly desirable and flexible buildings in densely populated areas have the greatest potential for reuse, though they may compete with other commercial space that is coming on the market if working from home becomes permanent.

Buildings of a highly specialized nature (libraries or performance spaces for example) in less dense and even rural areas are particularly problematic as they were purposely built for the school and have historically been amenities to the surrounding community. The location on campus may also be problematic if the building(s) will continue to be surrounded by parts of campus that would be inconvenient for an external/public party to navigate. There are numerous examples of such spaces being repurposed, but they are harder to do and take longer to materialize.

To what extent does the freeing-up of space exhibited by the pandemic allow for adjustment of programmatic offerings that will utilize that space? For example, will colleges and universities offer more vocational and other courses that require in-person instruction?

The idea of establishing clarity about what the institution sees as its future, and then creating that link with what is possible, is essential to understanding what to do with existing facilities. It is not unreasonable to imagine expanded programs for an institution that has been able to identify unmet demand for as-yet undeveloped programs. However, the demographic forces are arrayed against schools right now. If those programs just tap into a different set of students, but don't alter the overall revenue stream because the net student count stays flat, the problems will continue.

The first question needs to be directed at whether the space being used today is necessary for existing programs, because the cost to care for what exists today strips institutional resources. If new programs CAN be found that DO bring in more net revenue at minimal capital cost, then this COULD be a positive.

However, it might be just as effective to simply remove an operating burden and use a percentage of existing space more sustainably, or even reopening space on campus for naturalized uses. Or, selling it off to others for different uses altogether.

So much space has been dedicated to offices for faculty and administrative staff. Do you predict any change to permanent work from home plans?

There is much talk about this, but we have yet to see anything formalized, and few schools have revealed formal plans to decrease owned square footage. We are aware of schools where capital projects or collaborations with developers have been stopped for reevaluation. And in urban environments (where there is anticipated to be larger amounts of existing commercial space that becomes available) plans are afoot to explore hybrid spaces—collaborative work environments that could be used by people who come into work only part of the time, and would ultimately require less total space for schools.

Modernizing research space is often more effectively build new rather than remodeled. What suggestions do you have for making the case for facility modernization where research is growing, but enrollment is in decline?

Revisiting space utilization often leads to an understanding that modernization is the ideal response, particularly for technical facilities that are routinely becoming outdated for the work. The modernization can take the form of updates or wholesale replacement, and the driver of that decision is based in the alignment of available resources with institutional programmatic priorities. While it is not unusual for replacement to be cheaper, and even simpler logistically if there is space, there are sometimes a host of programmatic and sustainability reasons to stay with an existing structure.

The extent to which modernization involves a no net new space ethos will continue to grow as the real cost of operating these campuses comes into focus. It is widely understood that we have a long way to go in creating the healthiest (in all senses of the word) buildings for occupants, and often it takes radical rethinking and modernization to achieve it.

What are the thoughts on the need for individual faculty offices going forward?

The individual office as a concept is unlikely to go away anytime soon (arguments ranging from the need for contemplative space to arguments about private consultative time with colleagues or students come to mind), but there will be opportunities to explore (with the more adventurous faculty) an office structure that could be more flexible and dynamic.

Critical to making decisions will be a shared acknowledgment of the cost to maintain what can be in practice well-appointed storage rooms, while the institution is struggling to put dollars into the best possible learning and research environment (including faculty compensation.)

Faculty reluctant to leave last March, and who are now reluctant to return a year later, provide many points of entry for such a conversation.

Where are we on producing strategies where facilities management and buildings can contribute to student mental health?

After working from home for the last 12 months, wellness has taken on a whole new meaning. There will be a significant shift going forward as we all return to some form of 3-dimensional community. But it is fair to note that we will surely be building on the notions of healthy buildings going forward which focused on materials, access to light, and proper ventilation. Ventilation will be crucial in coming out of the pandemic, and the very notion of clean will likely experience some pressure for the continuation of practices that were normalized during the past year—even if the jury is out on whether it all helped.

Students who struggled with triggers of various kinds over the past several decades may come out of the pandemic with new concerns that will need to be managed and addressed by schools seeking to create the healthiest possible learning environment. APPA is working on the Healthy/Smart buildings initiative and we expect much more to come from that soon.

I have not seen any good plans for how we transition our workforce to handle more complicated technologies. Smart buildings are only stay smart with a specialty workforce. Working from Home (WFH) technology will only drive many maintenance skills towards IT skills.

There is no doubt that there is a long way to go in making this transition in both our existing workforce and the development for the workforce of the future collaboration. Absolutely, we are moving from mechanics to technicians, and even engineers. It is a world using big, predictive data analytics and the use of artificial intelligence. Our smart buildings will be smarter than ever before but require thoughtful owner/operators.

Some of our employees will be ready to learn new skills. Others will transition out, due to age or their own volition. But the world of today has opened the possibility of bringing talent in from all over the nation and the world. As educational institutions, our first instinct can and should be to create opportunities for our existing talent, but we should welcome these new skills and players into an ever more dynamic organization. These are uncomfortable issues for some, but the first step is to be candid and honest with the people who will be experiencing the transitions firsthand.

There is a lot of anxiety in various shops and offices associated with higher education administration. Who holds the key to moving to true engagement and building to a constructive sense of urgency? How can service delivery professionals close enough of these gaps to make a difference in this process?

It is not unreasonable to observe that academic communities caught up in the search for consensus can often make it seem like there is no one group assigned to address almost any issue. But we believe strongly that this moment in time represents the best opportunity yet for facilities leaders to continue demonstrating their competence and capability in leading schools through a transition for optimizing the use of space, and to address needs and match them to institutional carrying capacity.

The urgency is upon us as finance leaders struggle to map a path forward. Connecting the pandemic financial pressure with the inordinate demands being placed on schools by their space will release a tremendous set of opportunities that are currently unburdened by tradition and practice, after a year adopting alternative learning/work practices which should be incorporated into the community.

NO member of the community knows that whole range of implications better than the facilities leadership and they can/should lead. Joe Bilotta, in the Feb 19, 2021 APPA Town Hall, noted that "Facilities professionals can help create new tools and planning metrics or templates along with space and financial impacts as we change the way we do business. We can play a big role by showing options, possibilities and opening minds to the space ramifications based on operational plans and models. Silos are down and people are looking for advice and guidance, so we need to be both assertive and collaborative."

What would be some best practice suggestions for communicating 'the state of facilities' to all facilities staff in larger organizations and keep them updated on these themes.

In the more literal realm, the video and webinar slides are available already on APPA's site [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kemWDkhaxYs&feature=youtu.be>], and the full report is available at <https://www.gordian.com/resources/state-of-facilities-8th-edition/>. But more broadly, it is about making information available and including as much staff as possible at each institution. It means keeping staff engaged in the processes you use to track, collect, and report on your own performance so that they have a mindset that is focused on measurement of performance. This includes making any reporting you do on a regular basis available to them, passively and through episodic reporting.

You should expect all who work with you in the department (as well as outside partners you engage to speak the language you promote) to assure that a consistent message is being conveyed to those who don't spend their days thinking about this abstractly. And if you are a school affiliated with a system, you should endeavor to link these efforts up with system colleagues to leverage the power and insights that come from that network. Ultimately you will measure the success in the buy-in from the staff when you query them afterward. As they embrace and adopt the ideas you are promulgating about the reality of the state of facilities, you will know how successful you have been.

Will institutions looking at smart building technology add another layer of complexity to M&O? Where will the money come from to adequately train staff that is already lacking in basic skills?

There is no doubt that there is a long way to go in making this transition in both our existing work force and the development for the workforce of the future. The resources must be found within the simple necessity to address staff transitions over time.

As to the places where existing skills are lacking, a deep review will be essential to assess the potential for development, as well as a fundamental understanding of each job task. Roles will need to be reimagined and reconfigured. As we evolve there will be time for those who are change averse to work their way out of your organization, while strong leaders assemble the new team that will carry them into the future, comprised of existing team members, new faces, and in some cases even third-party partners.