

2007/2008 SERIES: ENABLING CAMPUS GROWTH AND OPTIMIZATION

Campus Amenities: The Importance of the Nonacademic Environment

**PRESIDENTIAL
PERSPECTIVES**

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CAMPUS AMENITIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NONACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

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Cell phones, wireless devices, private rooms, upscale food, lavish recreational and social facilities. Are today's students spoiled? Have administrations gone "soft" in catering to their wishes? Why spend such exorbitant amounts when the mission is education?

These are the comments heard on a college campus. Whether from within an institution's ranks or beyond the ivy halls to parents, community, and public officials, how do college and university administrators justify the investment in the nonacademic environment? What messaging is appropriate to engender support among the naysayers and allow the nonacademic environment to flourish?

College and university leadership understand the importance of competitiveness and staying even with or ahead of the competition. So do alumni. Ensuring that the campus has curb appeal and is filled with first-class technology, faculty, and facilities help to guarantee the necessary enrollment to keep the enterprise operational and growing.

Keeping Competitive

Hampden-Sydney College opened its doors and taught its first class on November 10, 1775. It is one of this nation's oldest colleges and one of its few remaining all men's colleges. The college is traditional—from its federal-style architecture to its curriculum of pure liberal arts. Its students come mostly from the southeast and the Republicans outnumber the Democrats by a margin of ten to one. The school's mission "to form good men and good citizens" has remained unchanged, although "in an atmosphere of sound learning" was a later addition.

Hampden-Sydney College is proud that most of its core buildings date to the early nineteenth century. The fact that one of them is the oldest four-story residence hall in continuous operation is a source of pride, though some of the elderly alumni feel that the College went farther than necessary when it put bathrooms and showers on every floor and every wing in one of its more recent renovations.

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The College has not ignored what has been happening on college and university campuses. This Fall, it celebrated the new school year with the opening of a long-awaited 85,000-square-foot library. This library has all the bells and whistles. There is enough seating to accommodate one-half of the student body at anytime. Technology is everywhere, with wireless access throughout the building. A coffee center featuring Starbucks opens each day at 5:00 PM, shortly after the coffee corner in the post office closes. A speech and oratory center is part of the complex where students and faculty use up-to-date equipment to help prepare and present classroom material. From the cherry wood throughout to the marble foyers, from the overstuffed chairs to the roll-around, swivel book tables, and from the rocking chairs on the back porch to the private, quiet seminar rooms on each floor, the new library is a lovely, useable and, for Hampden-Sydney, an over-the-top building.

How did a small, private, conservative, traditional liberal arts college for men—one of our nation’s oldest residence halls—end up with what in another age might have been considered to be an opulent structure? And while this facility was being dedicated on one side of the campus, what inspired the leadership and alumni to conceive of and construct on the other side a state-of-the-art athletic stadium for this Division III school rivaling some Division I structures? And don’t forget the new first-class fitness center along with the redone athletic facilities, “turf field,” and renovated dining hall. The competition for students, donor dollars, faculty, and bragging rights is reaching new heights and the one-upmanship grows as young people and their involved parents demonstrate their approval and interest in bigger, better, and more advanced facilities and technology.

The Tales from Other Sites

I must add, however, that what I have described as “bigger and better” for Hampden-Sydney is similar to what you will find in colleges and universities across the country. But it pales in comparison to the amenities found at larger institutions described in a *New York Times* article from several years ago. Take, for instance, the University of Houston, which enjoys hot tubs (though they give ground to the Jacuzzi at Washington State University which claims to hold 53 persons), waterfalls, and pool slides, or Ohio State University, which advertises a 657,000-square-foot structure in which kayaks, canoes, climbing walls, ropes courses, and other “outdoor” activities reign supreme. The ad for nearby college apartments at a southwestern university reads, “We want to provide you with college living at its best. Enjoy luxurious, fully furnished spacious apartment(s)—complete with private bathrooms, a washer and dryer, and a private entrance. Take advantage of our on-site sand volleyball court or fitness center when you want to hang out with friends, or just relax in our heated, outdoor pool.”

Forty years ago, when I began my career in higher education administration, housing was one of the many responsibilities that I found in my job description. We worried about students bringing too many electrical devices to school, and we had limitations for the women with their hair dryers and the men with their radios and record players. A phone could be found down the hallway, probably on the way to the showers, and heat on chilly days or freezing nights was a hit or miss accommodation. Air conditioning for residence halls simply did not exist, but windows were easily opened by manual labor. The concept of one communication connection per room and later one connection per pillow did not yet play a role in room selection.

Today, of course, we worry about campus coverage for radio and phone signals and building penetration for wireless devices whether delivered from nearby towers or satellite. XM and Sirius owners seek rooms with appropriate exposure to source satellites, while “dead zones” become well known to those students with telecommunication carriers that fail them on their travels within and between buildings. In fact, a leading use of electricity on campuses is from charger devices that recharge the batteries of the cell phones, iPods, DVDs, CD players, computers, printers, and handheld GPS devices. Hair dryers and heating coils are still among the devices drawing on the electricity, but they have been joined by enormous plasma TVs, refrigerators, microwaves, and exercise bikes. And if we are finding it challenging to keep up with student needs, either electrically or with building amenities, consider the institutions that are now subscribing to iTunes, cable systems and other sources to provide music and videos while also giving students and faculty new platforms with which to exchange classroom information including lectures, labs, exams, papers, etc. The greatest fear we live with in our computer and telecommunication centers is an Internet connection that fails.

Our classrooms are expected to be first-rate. In fact, students assume that the faculty has ensured this to be the case. Blackboard, or its equivalent, expands the classroom beyond the confines of brick and mortar. Such assumptions permit students and parents to focus on other campus amenities.

The Millennials Come of Age

How has this “movement” evolved? How do colleges answer criticism from alumni, faculty, and trustees that we are using far too many resources to accommodate student demands for posh surroundings and expensive support for technologies that go beyond

the needs of the classroom? Why do our new dorms rival the accommodations found in luxury resorts? Why do our fitness centers look like local health clubs, and why has the old mess hall been transfigured into a facility with islands of food and services? New York University’s Professor Jonathan Zimmerman, in a recent newspaper article, worries about the luxury of some students’ surroundings and whether, “Luxury housing spoils rich kids, divides students by class and encourages conspicuous consumption, none of which colleges are supposed to do.”

The answer to these questions may be found in the generational group known as the Boomers and in their offspring, the Millennials. The Millennials, first named by authors Neil Howe and William Strauss, are individuals born after 1982. Their parents, the Boomers (born 1943-1960), are the helicopter parents, the name we have given to parents who appear to “hover” over and around their children. They are members of the 75 million-strong Boomer Generation. The Boomer Generation is part of a succession of generational groups that include the G.I. Generation (born 1901-1924); the Silent Generation (born 1925-1942); the Boomer Generation (born 1943-1960); Generation X (or Gen-X’ers), between 1961 and 1981; and the Millennial Generation, also known as Gen-Net (for the generation that grew up on the Internet) or Generation Y (why?), or the Echo Boomers. The Millennials began their identity with those born in 1982 and thereafter and is only slightly less, at 60 million, than its parent generation, the Boomers.

Alexis de Tocqueville noted that “in America each generation is a new people.” I would add that not only is it a new people, but as distinct groups they have characteristics that are a direct result of the former generation from which they evolved and often in reaction to them. We’ve known about Boomers and their Millennial Generation, Echo Boomer

children, for some time. As they have come of age through the cycle of baby to pre-schooler to elementary school child, high school and teenager to college-age young adult, we have watched generations redefine the child-parent relationship and rewrite rules, traditions, laws and family relationships. After all, the Boomer Generation helped to write FERPA legislation (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974), which gave parents certain rights but transferred those rights to their Echo Boomer children when they became 18-year-old adults. (This is a rather frustrating development for Boomers who now expect to have colleges, universities, clinics, and hospitals provide information to them about their adult children upon request—information that they did not want to be shared with their parents.) This is the generation to create the “Baby-on-Board” signage, soccer moms, cell phones as electronic umbilical chords, home schooling as a substantial business, and designer genes (the biological kind!). Oh, and did I mention that they expect measurable success from any and all expenditures of money, including taxes, investments and, yes, tuition payments? This is reflected in expectations and demands made upon residence hall directors, financial aid offices, food services, and faculty advisors. Interestingly, this is one of the underlying reasons for some of the demand emanating from Congress and the White House as accountability and assessment have become major issues in the political arena.

Colleges Must Remain Competitive With Each Other and With the Real World As Well

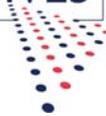
This is much more than keeping up with the Joneses. As fast as colleges and universities are changing their landscapes and improving their technology, so too are workplaces, the home, and recreational settings. Not only do colleges and universities need to worry about and address deferred maintenance, competitive faculty

and staff salaries, endowment growth and investments, but they must provide new and renovated facilities and technology access that mirror not just one another, but the world outside of the classroom and beyond the gates of the college. Those, like Professor Zimmerman, who claim that by providing students luxurious surroundings, “We’re teaching them to expect such goodies as their due” are not being observant about the lifestyles our young graduates seek and are enjoying. What they expect in college is a reflection of what they have been enjoying at home and in their high schools during the first 18 years of their lives. Colleges and universities need to deliver, and those who do not will find themselves sinking lower and lower on the food chain.

Dr. Walter M. Bortz III became the 23rd president of Hampden-Sydney College in July 2000. Dr. Bortz has guided the College to record levels of enrollment and fundraising during his tenure, and he has spearheaded the effort to draft a new long-range plan incorporating a master plan for a new library and a fine arts center, among other renovations and improvements to the campus. President Bortz is widely involved in the leadership of higher education organizations in the Commonwealth and beyond. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia, a trustee of the Virginia Foundation of Independent Colleges, served as head of the President’s Council for the Old Dominion Athletic Conference, and serves on the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities. He also is active in the Council of Independent Colleges and a member of the NCAA Presidents Council.



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