



the LAB of the FUTURE:

Building Facilities that Attract Premier Faculty and Students

By Tim R. Haley

Does the physical environment improve an institution's recruitment efforts? More specifically, could a facility such as a laboratory of the future attract the best and the brightest students and faculty? This issue has been the subject of at least two studies—first, "How Do Students Choose a College?" in 1986 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and more recently in 2006, "The Impact of Facilities on the Recruitment and Retention of Students" by David Cain, Ph.D., and Gary Reynolds, P.E., for APPA's Center for Facilities Research (CFaR).

Both studies reveal significant implications on the importance facilities have in attracting top students to our educational institutions. The CFaR report included responses from over 16,000 students, from 46 institutions, across the United States and Canada. Forty-five percent of the respondents reported a grade point within the 3.5 to 4.0 range. Various questions on the decision process were directed to the relative importance of the physical environment of an institution. At the top of the “essential” or “most important” characteristics list are academic-oriented facilities, with the top of the list being “facilities for their major.” Although the study does state that “there is not a correlation of grade point with the satisfaction of campus facilities,” it does clearly report that facilities do have an impact on the choice of an institution.

In looking at all of the university and college recruitment data that is available on the Internet, or that a prospective family receives in the mail, it seems that undergraduate student recruitment is primarily focused on favorable student life, extracurricular activities, overall rankings of the institution in the national polls, and maybe the attractiveness of the grounds, or at least the ability to circulate on campus without getting lost the first couple of years. Student recreation areas, physical education facilities, social areas, and most importantly, student housing, are typically emphasized in undergraduate recruiting pamphlets and catalogs. Most information seems to focus on all but the academic facilities, especially for the first-year or transfer student.

However, graduate student recruitment seems to focus on the program, including the “facility,” the program’s qualifications/ rank, and the backgrounds of faculty. If the graduate student is in the sciences, engineering, or a related field, having the “lab of the future” would definitely be an attraction and perhaps a strong recruitment amenity. However, most importantly, the graduate student is looking for a strong institutional reputation, and faculty members that have noteworthy credentials. Attracting the best and the brightest faculty may be strengthened by the level of investment and commitment the institution makes to its research and teaching laboratories.

Marget Sughrue Carlson, Ph.D., an alumnus of the University of Minnesota, wrote in November 2006,

STUDENT RECREATION
AREAS, PHYSICAL EDUCATION
FACILITIES, SOCIAL AREAS,
AND MOST IMPORTANTLY,
STUDENT HOUSING, ARE
TYPICALLY EMPHASIZED IN
UNDERGRADUATE RECRUITING
PAMPHLETS AND CATALOGS.

“What would cause a prominent stem cell researcher with a world-class reputation and an office view of the Golden Gate Bridge to move from the University of California, San Francisco to the University of Minnesota?” Two reasons: “First, the University of Minnesota had established the world’s first Stem Cell Institute,” and second, UM had developed, “first-class research space in the new McGuire Translational Research Facility.” As Dr. Carlson further states, “It takes state-of-the-art laboratories to attract top-ranked scientists.” The University of Minnesota has made a commitment to advance their positioning in science and technology and stated this in their *Strategic Positioning Report of September 2007*.

Early in 2001, a special committee of researchers at Purdue University distributed a survey to the faculty at its West Lafayette campus. The survey covered a range of topics, one being the recruitment and retention of faculty members. The survey included a few questions on the reason why faculty initially chose Purdue. The following four factors surfaced from the survey:

1. Prestige of the unit, school, or university (88% agreed that this was a positive influence)
2. University benefits (81%)
3. Balance between teaching and research responsibilities (78%)
4. Access to research facilities (72%)

Although facilities ended up as number four on the list of those choosing Purdue, a significant percentage of the respondents included it. In 2005, Purdue University built the impressive Birck Nanotechnology Center and currently have a new Structured Biology Center on the drawing board. The physical environment of a university or college campus has an effect on the recruitment of both the best and the brightest students and faculty members. Although there is no conclusive evidence at this time indicating that a specific space, such as a “lab of the future,” could attract the best and the brightest, all indicators point in that direction. §

Tim Haley is the senior project manager for education project development for Jacobs Carter Burgess, Seattle, WA. E-mail him at tim.haley@c-b.com. This is his first article for *Facilities Manager*.