

## STRATEGIC FACILITIES PLAN WHITE PAPER

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In today's academic landscape, higher education administrators are under increasing pressure to keep their institutions competitive and on the cutting edge, despite diminishing budgets and rising costs. A strategic facilities plan (SFP) can give your college or university the tools it needs to not only survive, but thrive in these increasingly competitive times.

Bruce Manger, a leader in the education design and planning field, illustrates using this case study:

"In 2004, I led the development of a holistic strategic facilities plan for Anne Arundel Community College, located near Annapolis, Maryland. After study of the college's market, enrollment, programs, and facilities, our consultant team identified programs with untapped growth potential and projected a potential enrollment increase of 31% over 10 years. This was higher than the 16% growth which was the College's working baseline assumption at the beginning of the study. While not all colleges have this same potential, many do, and a strategic facilities plan can provide the key to unlocking the door to that potential growth."



Even if you have a current strategic plan to help guide your course, you may not be doing all that you can to achieve a competitive edge. That is where a strategic facilities plan can help. In short, it's a model that higher education administrators can use to map out their strategic, marketing, and learning environment opportunities and goals.

Incorporating some of the same components of traditional strategic plans and campus master plans, a strategic facilities plan goes a step further by performing an in-depth analysis of the markets the college serves, its demographics, and its academic programs to provide a more complete picture of the institution. Matthew McManness, then Vice-President for Learning Resources Management at AACC, explains the real world significance of a strategic facilities plan: "The College realized that any plan would not be comprehensive if we did not include academic plan and environmental scan components. The previous master plan requirement strictly looked at enrollment projections and did not address market penetration, new programs, etc."

Manger elaborates, "A university creating a serious master plan today should consider that many of its core assumptions about the way it does business may not work in the future. Integrating a study of the institution's market and demographic base, as well as its academic programs, with the master plan will provide a credible foundation for its direction and a comprehensive tool to help fulfill the mission of the institution. It could even suggest re-examining some aspects of the mission and strategic plan."

## A FIVE STEP PROCESS

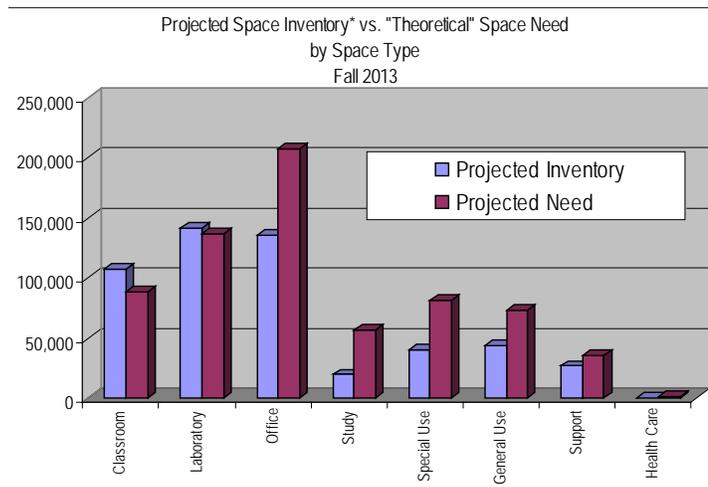
Assembling your team is the first step in developing a strategic facilities plan. The consultant team should complement the in-house resources available to the college. The SFP team includes a market and demographics expert, an academic planner, and learning environments/ enrollment/ and space needs specialists – comprising the core consultant team; engineering and planning specialists to handle the facility assessment and campus planning; and other key disciplines to address special campus needs. The entire process can be summarized in five steps:

**1) Environmental Scan.** The strategic facilities planning process begins with a market and demographics analysis, or environmental scan. This comprehensive undertaking examines local, regional, national and global issues that influence several key outcomes, including estimates of the number and profile of potential future students, as well as the types of programs that will be needed to fill projected job markets and serve learner needs in the future.



**2) Academic Assessment.** Fortified with information from the environmental scan, and after conducting interviews, workshops, focus groups, questionnaires and other investigations to understand the make-up of the college, the planning team analyzes the existing academic programs in relation to these future demands and identifies opportunities for new programs — the academic assessment and master plan. Recommendations for academic programs then influence enrollment projections and potential modifications to those projections, as well as space needs. The academic assessment can be even better informed by a detailed analysis of program effectiveness and cost.

**3) Enrollment & Space Needs Analysis.** Once completed, the academic plan serves as the basis for space the needs analysis. As the third phase of the strategic planning continuum, space needs analysis assesses the quantitative need for current and future space based on industry guidelines organized around categories of college and university spaces.



Source: Facilities Planning Associates

**4) Learning Environment Analysis.** To complement the quantitative analyses, a concurrent qualitative review assesses the quality of the learning spaces, both formal and informal. Based on trends in the environmental scan and directions identified by the academic plan review, the learning environments analysis explores space strategies that respond to these potential changes. For example, it may involve recommending less lecture space and more active learning, lab-like spaces for certain programs (which may influence the assumed square footage per student in the needs analysis). It also explores how the use of learning technologies may change what space needs to be provided. It identifies the best types of learning spaces for each institution to support potential opportunities for growth and transformation.



The physical aspects of the existing campus are also analyzed, including appropriateness of existing buildings and systems, the site, traffic and parking, the spaces within buildings, and even furnishings for those spaces.

Specialty consultants may supplement the team to address specific needs or areas of concern or opportunities, such as student housing, safety and security, food service, facility audits, and real estate, financing & development.

**5) Campus Master Planning.** Finally, the planning team will work with the institution to identify, prioritize, and budget for proposed capital projects, and then develop the actual campus master plan, or in the case of multiple campuses, plans.

## TAKING STOCK

An effective strategic facilities plan begins with an environmental scan that examines the demographic and market base of the institution, the programs that are influenced by the market, and the facilities which are needed to accommodate these programs. Jeff Middlebrooks of Threshold, the demographics expert on the team suggested that such a plan needs to ask a comprehensive array of questions:

### **Questions to Ask in Assessing Your Institution**

- *What is your market? Who are your students of this and the next decades?*
- *What programs will give them a strong foundation for personal and career growth? Is the current curriculum in sync with the programs that should be responsive to current and projected employment opportunities? Should certain programs be expanded? Changed? Eliminated?*
- *Are you truly integrating your academic and facilities planning?*
- *Facilities: Are your buildings and learning environments adequate and appropriate for the programs that the College is or should be offering? Does your infrastructure and site adequately support your buildings, both current and planned?*
- *Technology: Does your technology adequately support your programs?*
- *What could be the potential of hybrid or blended classes on improved space utilization on your campus?*
- *What implications might an environmental scan have for assessing whether your institution is operating efficiently, whether you have leveraged your resources, and increased your productivity?*
- *Is the historic direction of the institution still valid?*
- *Is there appropriate balance between traditional, core values and an innovative, entrepreneurial approach to the future of the College? What is there to learn from the successful proprietary institutions?*
- *What kind of new public/private partnerships could advance your mission?*
- *Does the mission of the College reflect how it needs to be positioned in the next five or ten years?*

The environmental scan provides the context for the **academic assessment**, which evaluates numerous factors such as program strengths, the status of academic technology and support systems, the management and administrative infrastructure and the adequacy of the institution's resource base. George Funaro, one of the team's academic planning advisors, advised, "This calls for a thorough review of all aspects of the institution's current academic structure, organization and offerings, including its niche in the postsecondary market."

During the assessment, the academic program review identifies those areas of the curriculum with the greatest and least promise. Opportunities are identified for strengthening, expanding and modifying existing programs in response to projected demand and for new programming initiatives designed to position the institution to meet future challenges more effectively and creatively. Based on these recommendations, the base enrollment projections are modified (in the case of AACC, expanded), suggesting a target enrollment potential. Finally, the process lays out additional steps to ensure the success of the planning effort, such as administrative priority setting, shoring up campus-wide support services, or establishing collaborative relationships with other institutions and organizations.

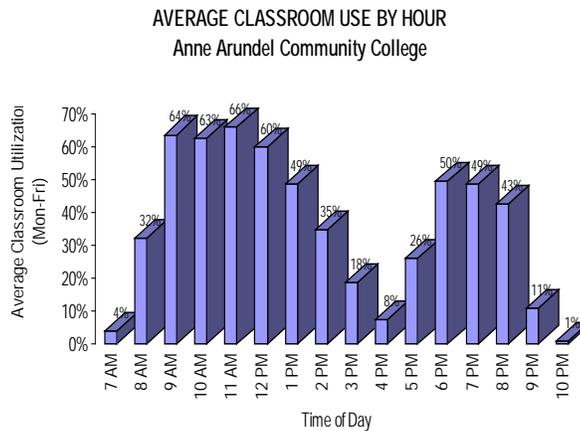
An effective tool developed by Kenneth Hoyt of The Higher Education Practice, LLC, examines in detail the potential, costs, and revenue of academic offerings. This data-driven analysis supplements and rounds out the academic assessment by reviewing the true costs of curriculum by major, enabling the institution to evaluate its offerings relative to market potential. This process, *Optimizing Academic Balance (OAB)*, would perform well as a methodology to complete our suggested academic analysis.

## **MAKING ROOM FOR GROWTH**

Once completed, the academic plan and enrollment projections serve as the basis for projecting space needs and evaluating the existing learning spaces. As the third track of the strategic planning process, the space needs analysis assesses the extent to which the current building spaces are

adequate for uses in the future. The ultimate outcome of this assessment is to determine the types and amounts of space likely to be needed to accommodate the academic programs and corresponding enrollment and staffing level increases. According to Richard Watkins, president of Facilities Planning Associates and a specialist in academic space needs analysis, “Space needs analysis begins the transition from the language of academic planning to the language of facilities and master planning.”

The space needs analysis must include both qualitative and quantitative assessments. A room-by-room facility space inventory, along with current enrollment and staffing data, is used to analyze the distribution and utilization of current space. A first step in determining the adequacy and efficiency of existing space is determined by applying accepted standards and guidelines for enrollment and staffing requirements against current inventory. Annual rates of growth as identified in the academic plan are then applied to the various affected disciplines and, along with corresponding student enrollments and staffing levels, projected into the future (typically 10 years) to calculate a projected space need that responds to demand.



Source: Facilities Planning Associates

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ANALYSIS

The strategic facilities approach also takes into account how well existing space is supporting the learning process. A qualitative assessment needs to examine how existing classrooms, study spaces and other facilities are supporting desired pedagogy, new ways of learning and the growth of learning communities.

Bruce Manger describes the approach as one that looks at the full spectrum of spaces where students are learning today, equipped with wireless mobile access to online resources. He goes on to say, “To be truly learner-centered, an institution needs to assess performance of both the formal and informal learning spaces as well as online opportunities in relation to learning outcomes.” For example, classroom layouts may need more space to allow introduction of more active learning activities, which then is reflected in the space estimates.



Vision workshops, interviews, observation studies and surveys are some of the methods the team uses to develop the strategic approach. More accurate assessments of space needs can later be developed through architectural programming on a project-by-project basis.

## EXPLORING FUTURE SCENARIOS

The planning team then explores a range of possible scenarios with the institution, generating concepts for facilities and campus development that reflect the college's strategic intent. Finally, the planning team generates budget cost estimates for each proposed project and, in conjunction with the institution, prioritize them to create a development strategy that then provides the basis for the campus and/or system master plan and implementation. The A/E group will perform site analysis for each campus, identify development opportunity locations, present several possible development schemes and ultimately hone them into a final, illustrative master plan.

From a campus planning perspective, Manger says, "All options, from acquisition to divestiture, new or renovated facilities and even the razing of certain facilities are considered before we make specific recommendations. In some cases, we will examine the need for planning new centers or campus locations."

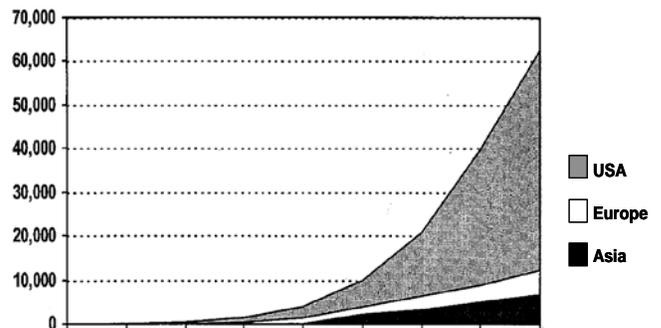
## THE RIGHT TIME

Why is a strategic facilities plan so important now? In times of tight budgets, rising costs, and the fast-changing academic landscape, administrators are challenged to invest in long term planning that will result in rewards several years hence. The changing profile of students, evolving modes of course delivery, cash-strapped institutions and state and local governments, competition from the for-profit schools, consolidation and merging of institutions, and certain change to the global and US economy are all realities that affect colleges and universities and the way they work, which, in turn, affect academic programs, the learning environment, and the master plan.

## THE PLAN FOR UMUC

Javier Miyares, current President at University of Maryland University College (UMUC), attested to the relevance of this type of plan. "UMUC is a non-traditional campus, with our main location sited on only 20 acres. We only have about 90 full-time faculty, so we rely heavily on adjuncts. For us, a typical master plan was not appropriate. Rather, we needed to reconcile growth projections — particularly online — with space to house current and future staff and classrooms. And, we needed a plan quickly. Our entire time frame was only six or seven months."

Specifically, UMUC needed to accomplish two goals: assessing space needs and expanding space for administrative support, and developing models for fourteen unique sites around the state of Maryland that would incorporate both office and classroom areas and allow UMUC to release rooms it was currently leasing from its sister institution in College Park, Maryland.



UMUC enlisted the help of Manger and his colleagues to develop an appropriate strategic facilities plan. The result: the SFP team recommended development of a new complex that would be convenient to the main campus and its staff, that would attract students, and that could accommodate face-to-face instruction in addition to expanded administrative needs. The proposed complex featured office and classroom space, with room for future expansion. In addition, the team developed four models to suit varying needs of the University for off-site facilities, including a drop-in center, a satellite classroom facility, facilities located on shared higher education center campuses, and a more comprehensive learning center.

Miyares went on to say, "The results were different from a traditional master plan, because, while there are a couple of site maps and there is certainly still a component of assessing and upgrading facilities, there is not one campus master plan. Rather, the plan validated our growth strategy and helped us create a new formula that works for UMUC's growth goals." And as for the process itself, "Even though it involved working with four different organizations or consultants, the SFP team made it look seamless to us."

## CRITICAL MATERIAL

Returning to the Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) plan referenced earlier, Manger says, "AACC represented a much more traditional institution than UMUC, with 14,000 students in one main campus and several centers throughout the county. Yet the same strategic facilities planning process was as effective for AACC as for UMUC."

McManness agreed and offered this advice, "Any college or university considering this approach should clearly communicate the scope of the project to all interested parties. They should also make sure the role of each consultant is well defined, as well as the deliverables and the process before (undertaking) the study."



McManness continued, "We have been very pleased with our SFP consultant team - they have really taken the time to learn a lot about our college, its leadership, and our mission. They have challenged our thinking in a positive manner and made the process productive."

Which goes to show, regardless of an institution's specific size or niche, the formula for planning success is the same. Grappling with the underlying issues that mold an institution, including knowing its market, makes for a more successful long-term plan, while simultaneously adding to the plan's credibility and marketability.

Since completing the strategic facilities plans for UMUC and AACC, Manger and his colleagues have continued to apply their planning skills to several other college and university master plans, including strategic facility plans for Frederick Community College and LaSalle University, the latter with Hord Coplan Macht, Inc of Baltimore.