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Fortresses To Community Spaces

Increasingly, campuses are offering different kinds of programmes on continuing education to different ‘types’ of students—part-time commuter students, who may take a course or two towards an eventual certificate, to similar students, who may be taking a course for personal enrichment or career transitions; even those seeking corporate training who take up professional seminars offered to the public in between semesters.

These programmes, and others like them, are revenue-generating ones for an institution. Simply put, these generate additional money from tuitions using the same infrastructure, already in place for traditional students. It especially works in campuses that suffer from poor utilisation of classroom facilities, and other more expensive resources. By increasing resource utilisation through such programmes, immediate return on investment is greater and long-term benefits are plenty—without incurring additional course work costs.

Partnering For Change

Those higher education institutions that are older and more evolved rely heavily on funds derived from different sources. In such campuses, in-house funding and development teams work hard to secure alumni philanthropy, corporate sponsorship, and grants, in addition to the standard government subsidies. In order to cultivate and harvest this type of “giving”, campuses form longer-term bonds with both the alumni and non-traditional students and corporations.

One of the several routes to revenue success—both short and long-term—is through corporate training. Industry academia partner-

ships leave an immediate impact on a campus, as they increase career placement opportunities and provide sources for an adjunct faculty. Such partnerships help build research collaboratives and multidisciplinary ventures of innovation, too.

Campuses devoted to research, especially dedicated to medical research, attract related industries more easily. Ideally, these campuses should be placed in areas that grant clearer access to an employment base—so that, tapping in or partnering in research innovation becomes simpler. Several institutions across the world have built public-private innovation communities or research parks to stimulate and control partnership activities.

If a university decides to build a public-private research park, or innovation community, it must look at its longer-term objectives and not short-term gains. A university research park typically

competes against private real estate entities in a real estate market.

Advantage Campus

Therefore, a research park must have a lease structure that is competitive. At the same time, the structure should be such that helps it differentiate from private landlords. Fortunately, a campus provides quite a few of amenities that a private research park does not provide. Say for instance, a campus offers physical amenities such as sports, recreation, and dining. It also provides intellectual resources—access to libraries and resource centers, access to expensive laboratory equipment. And, it also provides human capital resources—future employees, student work force, researchers, faculty and staff.

Campuses provide subsidised incubator facilities within research park initiatives and the right kinds of space and services to get new companies off the ground. This is a major reason as to why the recruitment and retention of entrepreneurial faculty can benefit not only from rent subsidies, but also from the services of an institution.

Campuses are important economic engines for communities, beyond their abilities to offer employment. Private enterprise is stimulated by being able to provide portions of the college's need—housing, food, entertainment, and others. Some colleges partner with local providers to run their internal food services and bookstores. When an institution is fully engaged with its regional context, it also plays an important role as the cultural centre for its community. Several campuses build art museums, theaters, sports arenas and public facilities that are sized beyond student enrollment needs. By allowing the community access to these facilities, there is better utilisation of assets (that are potentially revenue streams) and the building of longer-term beneficial partnerships.

Physical Construct

All this talk about different spaces—belonging to the institution and to the public—needs to get translated into the campus design and its physical construct, as well.

These new needs that a campus-of-today has, negates the traditional concept of a “walled oasis” in which only students and faculty participate. Intertwining of users and blurring of lines between college and public use will inevitably change the physical nature of a campus. So, the planning of a campus must embrace and welcome the surrounding community—as opposed to being a fortress within that community.

Opening doors to continuing education, temporary students and private industry, needs a different planning approach. Some institutions tend to keep non-traditional student spaces separated from the campus core.

For example, hotel conferencing facilities are often built on the campus perimeter. Students, through controlled access, may still take advantage of faculty and other services. However, by separating functions, often the full extent of a campus infrastructure is not used, or is wastefully replicated. Keep in mind that the long-term objective is to build a strong bond between

OFFICE TALK:

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the corporation and students with the institution. The lines are indeed blurring in few areas. In urban centers, it is sometimes difficult to discern between campus and private enterprise spaces.

Several US colleges have revitalised urban areas by making their presence felt and by intermingling with private enterprises—institutions have taken over abandoned properties, or have renovated older structures for use, alongside offices.

Security Concerns

As we saw, intertwining of users and blurring of lines between college and public spaces—changes the physical nature of a campus.

However, such changes also brings in new problems. Concerns for security tends to be the largest obstacle to opening up a campus to the public. In the past years, shooting incidents on American campuses have pointed out to the need of having stringent security plans in place.

The administrators, planners and designers must find better ways to create a secured campus without the notion of fences or walls.

When securing the campus perimeter is not possible, institutions look at other security measures such as increasing patrolling staff, increasing cameras and improving lighting. In addition, technology has simplified the ability to secure specific buildings and rooms with use of proximity sensors.

Student and faculty identification cards are easily programmed and may be changed to provide levels of access.

It is clear that improving relationships between campus and public life is important for the vitality of campuses, and their immediate surroundings. Physical facilities need to embrace as well as reinforce this concept. ◀▶▶