



## First Impressions of Campus Form *and* Function

ROBERT A. WEYGAND

**F**irst impressions are said to be among the most important. Job interviewers often make hiring decisions within the first five minutes of meeting a candidate. More than half of voters, it is said, judge political candidates by their appearance. Consumers may select a car by the way it looks before they know anything about how it runs. The same has been true of how students and their families choose a college or university.

Many of us remember that first visit to the college we thought might be right for us. We really weren't sure about that institution until we stepped onto the campus. The building facades, the interiors, the quadrangle, the landscape, the sense of space and form all made a big impression on us. It made us think, "This is where I want to be," or, "I don't think I'd like it here."

Much has changed in the way students select colleges. Today, in-depth information is available to prospective students online at the click of a mouse. Virtual tours of the campus, teleconferencing and other interactive experiences are all used to inform and entice students. But for many, that first personal visit to the college campus is

still the clincher. That first impression often seals the deal.

Today's campus architecture and landscape architecture are taking on new forms *and* functions that have a profound impact not only on that first impression (form) but also on the student's larger educational experience (function). Many campuses are now emphasizing the functional features of their buildings as an additional tool to recruit prospective students.

The function of buildings and landscape spaces on campuses is changing to reflect new academic philosophies, tighter budgets and global perspectives. New designs stress the importance of utilizing renewable resources and developing sustainable buildings and landscapes. New buildings feature interior flexibility, mixed uses and multiple academic disciplines housed together in an attempt to enhance teaching and learning.

The demand for innovative educational experiences is driving innovative design and, in turn, shaping a new vernacular on campus.

*Sustainability, flexibility, individuality, educational interfacing, interdisciplinary academic design ...* Are the

The function of buildings and landscape spaces on campuses is changing to reflect new academic philosophies, tighter budgets and global perspectives.

new ideas improving higher education? Or do they go too far—throwbacks to the era of "open classrooms," individual academic programs and degrees in General Studies? Are we losing the structure and academic purity believed so vital to the educational experience? Are we back in 1966 again?

Whatever your opinion, we hope the articles and essays herein leave you with new ideas and firmer resolve about the importance of architecture and landscape architecture in improving today's educational experience, for the campus provides not only a *first* impression, but a lasting impression as well.

---

**Robert A. Weygand** is president and CEO of the New England Board of Higher Education and publisher of CONNECTION.