

### Agents for Change

In his discussion of transformations in the physical designs and environments of college campuses, Herman Miller (2005) identifies four primary “change agents” in higher education: “competition,” “students,” “multiple learning styles,” and “creating spaces to learn” (pp. 1-3). Each agent presents “both challenges and opportunities” to three significant issues facing campuses’ futures: image, growth, and student retention (p. 1).

Miller (2005) contends competition for market share is forcing colleges to apply business-style strategic planning, continuous improvement, and marketing models, including image definition and branding, to “attract the attention of prospective students, faculty, and contributors” (p. 1). Additionally, campuses are being forced to update facilities, especially study areas and learning centers, to portray “innovation, adaptability, and forward thinking” and mirror the culture of students and society (p. 1).

Students’ multitasking capabilities and demands for mobile technology have taxed campus designers as they attempt to provide workspaces that address students’ needs for individual and collaborative learning centers, socialization, and quiet reflection. Technology changes with exceptional speed, which pushes the limits of both physical design and institutional budgets. Miller (2005) postulates that students place a high value on physical environments and availability of modern technology. My personal observations ratify Miller’s observation. Students rarely complain about the curriculum, textbooks, or instructors. However, they are extremely vocal about environmental things that have been a matter-of-course for years: extreme temperature fluctuations, broken chairs and tables, insufficient number of workspaces, dirty/outdated/ill-equipped classrooms, dead computer equipment, Internet outages, pestilence, inadequate parking, no consumables in the restrooms, no bulbs in projectors, missing or inadequate accommodations for the handicapped, poorly designed wiring and cords dangling under chairs, no copy paper, no message system for adjunct instructors, and late-arriving staff’s leaving students stranded outside locked building doors on bitterly cold mornings.

Today’s college population is a heterogeneous mix of traditional-aged and adult students with a variety of learning styles, and this mix presents considerable challenges to faculty and counselors in

student services. Miller (2005) reinforces the findings of Gardner, Kolb, and other researchers by describing the need to accommodate learners' styles and instructors' delivery methods in learning spaces whose design incorporates "creativity, problem solving, efficiency, and productivity" through facilitation and collaborative learning, rather than old-fashioned teaching and receiving (p. 2). Miller (2005) counsels that every college experience should be an opportunity for learning. Quoting Barr & Tagg, Miller writes, "[A] learning institution creates environments and experiences that 'bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves'" (p. 3).

What an extraordinary suggestion! Why hasn't every college jumped on Miller's bandwagon? Oh, right. Promoting student learning doesn't have the same level of appeal as athletic programs to the public, alumni, and – especially – big donors.

Miller (2005) details the critical importance of appropriately designed learning spaces on college campuses. While he does not directly address student services in the *White Paper*, Miller describes a number of opportunities for student affairs personnel to be involved in fostering student learning under his model. Student services personnel are the ideal staff members to promote Miller's recommendations and rally for their implementation by institutional leaders because student services departments already know the needs and wishes of current, potential, and alumni students. Simple methods – such as satisfaction surveys, open forums, quality circles, or a suggestion box – can have significant impact if they are implemented with reason and respected by all stakeholders.

#### Resources

Miller, H. (2005). The Herman Miller white paper on learning environments. *The Catalyst* 34(1).

[Note: Volume/issue numbers and pagination are estimated based on research in academic databases and on-line search engines, including the NCCET Web site's internal search feature.]

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