



WHAT WORKS - A KECK/PKAL CONSULTANT REPORT

CURRICULAR PLANNING MUST COME FIRST

Recommendations

Establish a fully developed and unified “vision for science.” It would be unwise to proceed with constructing a facility construction before constructing a vision.

A thoughtful and well-articulated vision for teaching science is the most important element of a successful building project. Planning construction is a weighty task and mistakes or oversights due to a lack of vision will impact students for decades to come. A building that inspires effective and creative pedagogy will be a treasure; a building that stifles it may have severe consequences. The science faculty must commit themselves to the difficult and time-consuming task of creating a coherent vision from the variety of opinions that naturally exist among faculty who are from different disciplines and who are at different stages in their careers. Only after a vision for how teaching and learning in the next decades has been achieved, should thoughts turn to envisioning the building that will support this program.

Engage faculty in relaxed, in-depth discussions on teaching to facilitate development of a comprehensive, departmental vision.

Ongoing conversations that occur in the normal course of events can be helpful in creating shared understandings about teaching and learning. They do not, typically, lead to the shared, carefully-articulated vision that is needed to support a successful facilities process. Early in the planning process faculty must get away from campus to a relaxed environment for extended discussions on teaching. These meetings should focus exclusively on creating a vision for the instructional program. At a later date architects can help translate this vision into a building plan.

Some people enjoy the prospects of building a community vision and others are repulsed by it. At virtually every institution there are individuals who find the idea of planning retreats repugnant and will attend only if there are utilitarian tasks on the agenda. When such voices carry the day, uninspired buildings are erected. Administrative and faculty leaders must do everything possible to ensure full participation by engaged players in extended, off-campus visioning sessions with tables, comfortable chairs, computer hookups, and perhaps even an espresso machine. ■

BACKGROUND

There are many ways to improve an undergraduate science program. Upgrading scientific equipment, changing pedagogy, engaging in faculty development, providing summer research opportunities and renovating or enlarging facilities can all play an important role in program development. The consultants that visited this midwestern college agreed that the college will need to renovate and add to its existing science facility to establish a top-notch program. But they emphasized that a full-fledged building program is not the immediate next step for this department; the institution must take several preliminary steps before moving to facility construction.