



THE BLENDED CAMPUS

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HOW WILL COLLEGES SUSTAIN EARNING AND LEARNING ON CAMPUS?

During my long career devoted to designing places for pedagogy, educators have taught me that students learn best in collaborative settings. The physical campus—a valued community place—has been home to learning within and outside the traditional classroom.

But: Covid-19 has flipped the physical campus experience to a predominantly virtual environment, pushing student hopes - as well as the higher education business model - to a cliff's edge.

Going forward, how will colleges and universities sustain a physical campus fostering community and learning in tandem with the Zoom world?

Here is one answer:

Leverage more value out of the campus you have.

This concept is not new for many campus leaders. It has driven our firm's architectural-ecological thinking and work for some time. That said, the current pandemic has alerted humanity to evaluate and prioritize what is truly valuable.

We want to work with you (on an initial pro bono basis) to define the future of the college campus as a physical place and community resource...in sickness and in health. We call this reinvented place **The Blended Campus.**

—Henry Myerberg, FAIA



A new blend of in-person and on-line is here to stay

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

The Covid-19 crisis has created an existential crisis for higher education, imperiling the best-laid plans for growth, forcing institutions to reckon with long-simmering financial challenges. University and college leaders with whom we work describe the consequences vividly: shrinking applicant pools, overreliance upon tuition and fees for revenue, potential reductions in public and private funding, and stubbornly-high fixed operating costs.

There are now more questions than answers for the design and use of physical space. In the short term, to welcome back students, faculty and staff, institutions will need to quickly, safely and economically transform their campuses from places of social density to places of social distancing.

In the longer term, a host of other issues arise: How much physical space will be “replaced” by virtual space? What should institutions do with the campus spaces they own (or are planning to build) but no longer need? And how can underutilized portions of the campus be creatively adapted for learning and earning?

In their book *The College Stress Test*, published before the pandemic, Robert Zemsky, Susan Shaman, and Susan Campbell Baldrige argued that nearly half of all American institutions of higher education were likely to struggle in the coming years. In their view, the universities that thrive will demonstrate the value of the intellectual and cross-disciplinary work that happens on campus while reinventing their business model for a new era.

That new era is now.

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

The Blended Campus proposes a comprehensive strategy to elicit more value from the campus you already have, enlivening the institution and its broader community. Our collaborative inquiry will address:

1. Learning Places (academic, research, administrative):

- **Consolidate space**—do what you do (safely & economically) with less space
- **Flex space**—do more with existing spaces by designing for more flexibility
- **Liberate space**—adapt spaces that have been superceded and supplanted because of increasingly-remote access
- **Economize space**—save energy and maintenance costs via a smaller footprint

2. Earning Places (added value for the institution as a shared resource *with* its community):

- **Revenue**—repurpose portions of existing facilities and grounds to generate revenue from outside groups such as events, co-working, conferences, start ups, residences through collaborations and partnerships with local and national businesses, real estate developers, community and cultural groups etc.

- **Renown**—share/host portions of campus buildings and grounds for neighboring community and non-profit organizations (in the arts, philanthropy, culture, libraries, education, municipal, health services, etc.)

- **Relevance**—engage students to participate in programming and managing the use of campus space with community, commercial, governmental and non-profit organizations; and students can earn income with related work-study programs

Adjustments to spatial uses through impactful design interventions allow your campus to become more flexible and vibrant without major capital spending, positioning your campus as the heart of a larger ecosystem tying together education, government, private business, entrepreneurships, and nonprofit organizations.

Inviting outside organizations onto your campus is an important way to multiply and recapture real estate revenues. These partnerships foster new exchanges of ideas, offer learning and employment opportunities for students, and make educational institutions more competitive and better differentiated, without requiring students to foot the bill.

A partnership model brings faculty into closer contact with community and business leaders, helping them find a variety of applications for their research and expertise. It raises institutions' profiles, asserting and expanding their role as cultural and economic anchors, reducing the need for new space and generating multiple new revenue streams, helping institutions to shoulder fixed costs and reduce capital spending.

The Blended Campus approach transitions the campus from an ivory tower to a community resource advancing collaborative learning alongside new modes of earning.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

We can capitalize upon the long tradition in our firm of developing strategic recommendations and campus plans and assisting client institutions through the process of implementing these solutions. Our work going forward will complement and/or replace an existing master plan.

Short-term recommendations, for example, would revolve around leveraging more value from existing facilities while instituting improved health, accessibility and environmental practices. These may include integrating a campus's physical and virtual identities as well as inventorying and studying the use of campus spaces to consolidate and put them to their best use. We can explore low-cost, high-impact material investments that include furnishings and minor building alterations for flexibility, safety and beauty. We can also assess the condition of existing facilities to guide health and environmental building system upgrades, such as improved air filtration systems and UV light modules.

We can reimagine flat and tiered lecture halls into flexible places for multiple small groups or repurpose them for outside community use. We also identify underutilized spaces and facilities for income-producing tenant and event rentals, longer term leases, and/or redevelopments that advance the institution's mission. For example, if an institution needs 25% fewer classrooms, those spaces can be converted to other kinds of group learning, research and community incubators.

Long-term projects would create strategic and spatial plans for renovating and repurposing campus facilities and launching real estate developments, inviting outside organizations and companies onto campus to find new partners and collaborate with investors while serving the financial and pedagogical interests of the institution.

Conceptualizing **The Blended Campus**, we have devised a mindful community engagement process (involving student, faculty, board, and community perspectives and participation) empowering stakeholders and users to feel ownership of their spaces and affiliation with the institution.

We develop a “buy in” vision respecting all stakeholders and accentuating the institution’s defining qualities.



THE BLENDED CAMPUS

HMA2 Architects is an interdisciplinary design firm based in New York City, working locally and globally.

To start a conversation about building strategic partnerships for transforming ideas into realities, contact:

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