

How and Why Universities Grow

BY ANDREW BLUM

It's hard to imagine a university not contemplating physical changes to its campus. On the contrary, constant building is the norm. But what factors drive development, and how does a university make building feasible economically—and smart socially? Once the decision is made to grow, how does a university respond to the surrounding community, architecturally and culturally? The university planners in our roundtable take a very different approach to growth in response to their institutions' contexts and opportunities. Each points to strategies that have broad application to any institution facing similar challenges.

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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY'S President Michael Crow brought a bold vision for a “New American University” that explicitly links its programs to the real-world issues of Greater Phoenix, like cultural diversity and rapid urbanization. As ASU's **Richard Stanley** explains, this has produced a growth strategy—including a major new downtown Phoenix campus—aimed at integrating ASU with its metropolis.

Why is ASU growing?

RS: Offering access to the widest possible range of prepared students in Arizona is one of our goals. If you look at the state's demographics and overall university infrastructure, you quickly see that ASU will continue its trajectory of increasing the student body at very fast rates. It could go from 60,000 to 90,000 students over the next 10 or 15 years—which is an eye blink when you're trying to staff up and provide facilities for that many students. So this is the right moment to look for ways that those facilities and programs can be provided.

How will ASU expand?

RS: Our strategy is to focus energies in single locations and to allow different programs of high quality to develop on every campus. We're not conceiving of ASU as having a main campus and satellite campuses. Each campus will have a number of schools and colleges, every one of which will be driven to be the best it can be within its individual market. So ASU will have strong schools that just happen to be located in different places—in Tempe, on our west campus, on our Polytechnic campus in the east valley, and on our new campus in downtown Phoenix.

Why a new campus downtown?

RS: Phoenix very much wants to revitalize its downtown, and sees the new campus as critical to activating the area and inducing more people and businesses to move in. We see the urban core's development as important for the region to be more economically diverse and competitive. Working with the city in this kind of development program feeds our desire to be actively embedded in the community. And the fact that Phoenix was willing to work with us on acquisition and construction made it a natural partner.

What will this new campus be like?

RS: It needs to take an entirely different form because of its location. To accomplish urban revitalization, the campus needs to integrate with the emerging urban fabric downtown. One way we can contribute is to create something that invites the residents of Phoenix into the campus to be a part of that vitality. We expect the designs to be very urban in style and structure, and almost entirely retail-oriented at the streets, so people other than our students will want to be there. We'll have housing interspersed with the academic spaces, so students and other folks who want to be near the campus will be down there 24 hours a day. Many of the things that might be exclusively our own space on a traditional campus need to be shared spaces downtown, so the university is part of the city. It can't be a walled-in enclosure. That wouldn't feed the other needs of the place.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S growth is initiated by academic and research needs. Harvard's historical presence and corresponding architectural heritage, part of the very fabric of Cambridge and its historic Harvard Square, make new development there a complex proposition. Now, as Harvard's **Nazneen Cooper** describes, plans for a new campus in Allston have raised larger questions about the University's strategy for long-term growth.

Why is Harvard growing?

NC: Like Cambridge, Harvard's growth has been steady, reflecting the emergence of professional schools and programs. The current growth on campus is responding to critical shortages in lab and office spaces. We have our own approvals process, in addition to Cambridge's. The President and Fellows own the campus, and each faculty or school provides a rationale for a new building or significant addition. Several of the schools with space shortages share buildings or yards, which complicates things.

Where is that growth going?

NC: The Cambridge campus is zoned as an Institutional Overlay within a Residential District. It's bounded by the Charles River at its southern edge and by the urban confines of Cambridge's residential neighborhoods and historic retail districts along the other edges. To plan intelligently for academically driven growth, we analyzed and mapped the remaining possibilities for expansion. Most of these were infill sites at the perimeter—sites that are controversial because they abut residential neighborhoods and a different scale of development.

The new Allston campus across the Charles River presents a different opportunity. Allston is comprised of large parcels of obsolete industrial and warehouse properties. It's part of metropolitan Boston, with its own zoning and regulatory process. The planning studies we've done point to the need to make reference to the Cambridge campus, with its memorable urban and natural landscape, while responding to new academic demands. There's also a need to have a more contemporary setting, and to bind the two campuses together by making the Charles River corridor they share a connecting point between them and a focus of activities on both sides.

What is the appropriate image for this new campus?

NC: Image is a difficult question at Harvard. The Cambridge campus and its physical legacy are both beautiful and limiting. Iconic buildings have formed the memory of the place and the identity of the institution. One approach would be to take delight in the modern architecture that exists on that campus—after all, it took vision to invite Le Corbusier to design a modern building next to the Fogg Museum. If the anticipated growth at Allston is in science and technology, it's inherently misleading to build “neo-neo-Georgian” shells for its enclosure. Both for these disciplines and for the Allston campus, we want the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' new lab buildings to be examples for the future.

MERCER UNIVERSITY in Macon, GA offers degree programs aimed at adult learners at off-campus regional academic centers in metropolitan Atlanta's high-growth areas. Some 1,800 working adults, drawn from a 25-mile radius of each center, are studying at the three that are now in operation. As **Dr. Thomas Kail** tells us, connecting with this community, which puts a real premium on convenience, is one of Mercer's highest priorities.

Why are adult students important to Mercer?

TK: Mercer has a long history of serving communities where access to higher education has been an impediment to people completing their degrees. Today, nontraditional college students, of which adults are a large part, make up three-quarters of the total college enrollment in the USA. Adult learners want relevant, quality academic programs, but they're also looking for convenient locations, flexible schedules, and faculty who bring a real world orientation to the classroom. This led Mercer to develop a series of regional academic centers around Atlanta and in central Georgia.

What kind of students do these centers attract?

TK: Many of them are women—seeking to increase their job skills or prepare to enter the job market once their children have grown. The average age is 33. When these students enroll, they are often returning after “stopping out” for several years. Our regional centers offer academic programs like business administration, criminal justice, information systems, and teacher education. These programs enable them to complete their education while continuing to work, often in the same field, and fulfill their other adult roles.

Is the community involved in their development?

TK: Our latest Regional Academic Center was developed as a public/private partnership with Henry County, one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation. There's a strong demand for the programs we offer, so it made sense for both of us. The County built the center and donated the land for it. Mercer's lease payments will retire the bonds the County issued to pay for it. The result is a 30,000 square-foot facility that opened in August 2003. It already serves 800 students, with a total planned enrollment of 1,200 students.

Do these students miss having a campus?

TK: In the best of all worlds, a campus with all its amenities and services would be nice, but the demand for continuous learning is so great that a range of less expensive alternatives is also needed. Mercer's Henry County regional center is right off I-75, so our working students can practically drive up to the door. They typically take eight-week courses that meet once a week for four and a half hours, and the centers are designed for that kind of intense, interactive, collaborative learning. Our students bring a lot of real-world experience, so they don't necessarily need a campus to achieve their educational goals.

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Richard Stanley is Senior Vice President and University Planner at Arizona State University.

Nazneen Cooper is Assistant Dean of Physical Resources, Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University.

Dr. Thomas Kail is Associate Provost and Dean of the College of Continuing and Professional Studies at Mercer University.

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