A Concept for the Integration of Space and Physical Planning

March 7, 2008

ECU is the fastest growing institution in the North Carolina system. As its growth continues to accelerate along with its evolution as a major university, it faces new challenges to the capacity and deployment of its physical resources. To assure and enable creative and integrated responses to these changing conditions, this paper proposes the creation of a high-level working group with a three-way charge:

1. To articulate the university’s quantitative and qualitative demands for space and land that are commensurate with the institution’s aspirations and commitments;
2. To set in motion the necessary steps to effectively deploy the university’s space and land, and to procure additional capacity in a timely manner;
3. To lead change through synthesis and analysis that engages the leaders and stakeholders across the entire campus in creative collaboration and generative dialogue.

We propose the formation of a Change Leadership Committee (CLC) around and under the auspices of the Provost to lead the integration all ongoing space efforts of the campus and the programmatic demands that they serve. This integration would include the work of the capital planning, master planning and the growth of the BSOM campus. It would assume responsibility for development and implementation of space standards, change of use or repurposing requests, building leasing or purchases, land acquisition, and interface with the leadership of Greenville and Pitt County.

Why is this important?

The Summary of Space Planning paper of September 10, 2007 identified three forms of space need. The first was a “now term” requirement where a senior-level administrator requests office space. The Campus Space Planning office moves on this request as quickly as possible and has been able to answer every request to date, albeit not without some difficulties. The second space requirement was called the “near term” requirement where the space management function has six to twelve months to find a space answer. The final space requirements (long term) are tied inextricably with long range space planning. That is the place the university has been lacking ever since the planning for the construction bond was completed.

How might it work?

The CLC’s linear reporting will be to the Executive Council through the Provost. Non-linearly, this group must create a new standard for the cross-organizational sharing of information, dialogue and collective understandings. Intensive real-time engagement through iterative processes is anticipated in the areas of academics, student affairs, research finance and other key university centers. We know of no similar example of this on the campus currently. Recommendations to the Executive Council would be complete and comprehensive in nature, fully articulating systems-oriented solutions that that unite programs, space and land consumption, finances and the resulting campus experience for our students.
The CLC should be small, represent all the affected entities, be empowered to act on suggestions and have the Provost or a Vice Chancellor as an active member. Its members are selected based on the skills they can contribute to the effort, and in that regard they must be willing to decide, commit and advocate the group’s actions. The group should not require that the Vice-Chancellor serve as chair, and instead the role could be filled by one who can manage agendas, conduct meetings, disseminate information, coordinate activities, build the effectiveness of the group as a whole and – most importantly – help it avoid a silo mentality.

If there were a CLC today, for what kinds of work would it be responsible?

- Presenting a complete plan for how the campus will continue operations as Mendenhall Student Center is being renovated. It would also be addressing the lingering doubts about the value of the project as a whole;
- Aligning space and enrollment data with the strategic planning from various levels to weigh the options of a Building A, a science building and new solutions that could now emerge thanks to a comprehensive view;
- Drafting the questions for the Enrollment Management Planning that would add physical and campus life considerations to those of program mix and access;
- Leading the planning of how the campus will continue to grow enrollment in the absence of additional state-funded capacity for at least the next five years.

The CLC must be charged and held accountable for getting in front of a moving train immediately. Initiatives to be undertaken could include or be similar to these examples:

- Create planning standards that reflect strategic goals, and the changing nature of physical and financial resources;
- A complete analysis of classroom utilization and office utilization across all campus units – and in dialogue with them and the campus leadership - with the expressed goal of finding a defined percentage improvement in space use;
- An analysis of space efficiencies that could be derived by more creative use of space. One example might be more growth in DE versus resident courses, and allowing some faculty to tele-commute and work from home. Other analysis could involve sharing office space;
- Development of a written policy that will permit delegation of day to day tasks to lower level functionaries. For instance, the Space Allocation Committee could be tasked with continuing to work to manage the now and near term issues of space needs.
History

On September 10, 2007 a space summary was prepared for the VC for Administration & Finance which detailed the recent history of university space planning. The report detailed that over the hundred year history of this institution there have always been competing demands for land, buildings, classroom space and faculty offices. Most recently there has also been a growing demand for research space.

Over the past several years there have been four university committees involved with space issues. The Space Allocation Committee is active and charged with establishing guidelines and procedures for addressing space related requests along with advising the Office of Space Planning on significant or unusual requests that cannot be addressed within current guidelines. The Brody School of Medicine Space Allocation and Reallocation Committee (SPARC) is active and advises the BSOM Dean on space issues. The Capital Planning Committee focused on longer term issues and has not been active since 2004. The Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance sponsored a small facility site selection group which has been put on hold until the campus master plan is completed.

Current Situation

ECU is the fastest growing institution in the North Carolina system. It is growing on average by slightly over one thousand students each year. The ECU Strategic Enrollment Task Force has projected ECU’s total enrollment at 36,763 by CY 2017. In essence while it took ECU ninety-four years to reach 19,412 students it will only take eighteen additional years for that number to double to approximately 38,900 students. With construction cycles that take up to ten years from concept to completion and with limited assets short of legislative appropriation, ECU is facing the same age old problems of space and quality: ECU is also actively working to improve its research posture and the bill to bring labs up to quality exceeds twenty million dollars in 2008.

While ECU continues to grow according to its five Strategic Directions, this growth creates second and third order consequences that must be realized and addressed.

Discussion

In reviewing this growing dilemma several Common Understandings were recommended. For purposes of this paper a common understanding is a point of intellectual departure from which problem solving can begin. If the understandings are contentious agreement must be achieved before fruitful discussion can proceed. The common understandings are:

- Supply and demand are both variables. For instance, the use of space and land resources must be included in the criteria used to grow some programs and to harvest others;
• When planning new programs, services or physical facilities the analysis must demonstrate coordination across all affected parties and include answers to the questions of university strategy, space availability (classroom, research areas and faculty offices), infrastructure issues and total cost.

• We must agree that all space essentially belongs to the Chancellor and no one owns space simply by virtue of using it. Space is open to an annual evaluation of use efficiency and people can and may be asked to relinquish space for more efficient use. In other words, we’ll manage and allocate these resources more in the way we do with our money;

• We must agree that competing space demands will be resolved based on what is good for the whole of the university. People requesting space under competing circumstances must be able to justify their case for use in that light;

• Exceptions to any common understanding(s) may be granted only by the Chancellor on advice from the Executive Council.

**Energies in Play**

We must have a shared understanding of our drivers, rooted in a question like “If ECU is the answer, what is the question?” For example, we might say that ECU exists to teach the students who enroll at our institution (for either a resident or DE experience). This would further suggest that we must first and foremost have sufficient faculty, sufficient faculty space, sufficient classroom space or IT infrastructure, have sufficient living quarters, policing, food services and medical facilities to support our student load. Secondary to the primary driver would be improving on our research space, extending ourselves to the community via economic outreach, improvements in medical care and growth of cultural and athletic programs.

There are several *advocacy forces* in motion at all times. Advocacy forces are entities within the university that are expected to advocate for their own growth and improvement. An advocacy force will develop arguments for program growth, budget increases, personnel additions, and new space allocation. While such advocacy forces would be expected to bring coordinated papers to the leadership for consideration this may not always be the case. Another issue the university is confronting is the sometimes unexpected addition of a legislative action as was the case for the heart center and dental school.

While no one would ever turn down a legislative addition there is no university activity to assess the impact that such additions have on the earlier cited issues of space and budget. In essence ECU’s space management picture can change with each legislative session—sometimes consistent with planning and sometimes in addition to planning. This creates a situation where our space planning is at best a “snapshot in time” which begs the question of who is taking the picture—the long range planners, the space allocation committee, the SPARC or some group yet to be named.
Conclusions

1. There is no formal or integrated entity working with these issues in a comprehensive manner;
2. University growth over the next 10-12 years will come quickly and seriously impact the university planning efforts;
3. Addressing and responding to space planning and utilization evaluation will take specialized skill sets that should be made available to the group. This means more support staff than is currently available, and the careful use of external consultants;
4. Work on this project needs to be top-driven with active, engaged support from the Chancellor and Executive Council;
5. Proposals must be strategic in nature, and must support the ECU’s strategic directions;
6. According to Peter Senge, the word leadership originates from *leith* which meant “to step across the threshold.” ECU needs a group like this to take that role.

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