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Campuses in Place

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Websites, View Books, and finally, campus visits.

Lost downtown.

No place to park.

“Mom, Dad, this is The Place. This is where I want to be.”

The best university campuses are places that have been carefully designed over decades, even centuries. They are places that speak to us of continuing care, thoughtful decision-making, reverence for tradition and ritual, and a harmony of nature, landscape, and architectural design. They are places that invite us to participate in the thoughtful creation of our communal environment. They are familiar, inviting, alluring, mysterious. Richard Brodhead has defined the university as home: “a defensive structure,” and a “world of belongingness thrown up against a larger world of exposure and strangeness” — but also, essentially and fundamentally, a “terra incognita,” a place of “disorientation, defamiliarization.”¹ Walking through the gates, we walk into the world of our future.

These qualities raise important questions for designers of new campus buildings and open spaces. Many American university campuses began on open land outside developed areas, but our cities have now grown to envelop them, complicating the distinction between “town” and “gown.” Today, many American universities are called upon to be simultaneously inward-focused learning communities and outward-oriented providers of service and amenity. Embedded in urban settings, their greens may be, in some sense, public parks; their libraries, theaters and athletic facilities invite outsiders; and students and nonstudents mingle in adjacent residential neighborhoods and commercial streets — spaces whose rhythms are defined by the campus calendar, but which are fully open to the outside world.

Many of the most difficult issues faced by universities are apparent at their perceived edges. It is here that the characteristic tension between the university’s desire to be both included and separated from the larger *polis* becomes most apparent. On campus, pressure to increase the density and scale of buildings often threatens the very qualities of space and social interaction which make campuses memorable. But when universities try to push outward, surrounding neighborhoods are likely to push back — and often with good reason, since these neighborhoods themselves have evolved into historic districts, with their own memorable and distinctive qualities of space and architecture. As a result, campus edges are frequently flashpoints of bitter controversy.

Faced with such strong opposition to external growth,

university planners have recently begun to look for new ways to coexist. One consequence is that the original design paradigm of academic life around a campus green, so carefully considered and nurtured through the last century, is everywhere giving way to new informal places which hide their academic roots. Starbucks is now at the center — and at the edge. Off-campus housing is the new solution to on-campus life. Remotely located biotechnology laboratories are the new norm.

Are these new university spaces “campuses”? Or are they something else entirely? Have we lost the clarity of the original idea of “collegial” life to a blurring of domains; or are dynamic new typologies of mixed-use places for research and learning emerging? Will the next generation of children get out of the car in the middle of this new *mélange* of university and city and announce “*Mom, Dad, this is The Place. This is where I want to be!*”

An American Ideal

In the United States, the early twentieth century was a period of intense focus on campus design. The Olmsted Brothers, Warren Powers Laird, Paul Cret, Ralph Adams Cram, Frank Day, Charles Klauder, and others provided campus plans for numerous universities. These places continue to serve as cultural paradigms. Early Olmsted plans showed individual buildings gathered around green lawns with curving boundaries and paths. Typical were the oval lawns of Smith College, shaded with (now) enormous trees, ringed with energetically Victorian buildings, and affording tantalizing glimpses of Paradise Pond. Later designs by Laird, Cret and Klauder kept the sanctity of campus greens, but interpreted them as formal rectangles, bounded by connected ranges of buildings, “where one building serve[d] to enhance, because of proximity, the value of another.”²

The shape and style of these places was not merely scenographic. Woodrow Wilson, president of Princeton from 1902 to 1910, envisioned a collegiate system of educating the whole man, in and out of the classroom. To him, the college experience required “a certain seclusion of mind preceding the struggle of life, a certain period of withdrawal and abstraction.” He described Princeton as “this little world, this little state, this little commonwealth of our own.”³

Wilson himself sketched a physical reconstruction of the Princeton campus which joined the buildings into quadrangles, or separate colleges, such as he had seen at Oxford and Cambridge. Wilson’s Quad Plan was realized in Klauder’s romantic design for dormitories that recalled



Gothic precedents. The success of such plans at Princeton later influenced Cret, Day, and James Gamble Rogers to make drawings of the Gothic quads which would become the signature elements of Yale in the 1920s.

But the idea of designing a series of quads to define an inner campus space was also not limited to Oxbridge styles. Klauder designed infill buildings at Brown University based on its colonial precedents. He also invented a Tuscan Country style to frame the quads of the rapidly growing Boulder campus of the University of Colorado. These campuses have since been admired, copied, and identified as special places.

Above: Brown University campus, c. 1891. Image courtesy of Brown University Archives.

Qualities of Space and Building

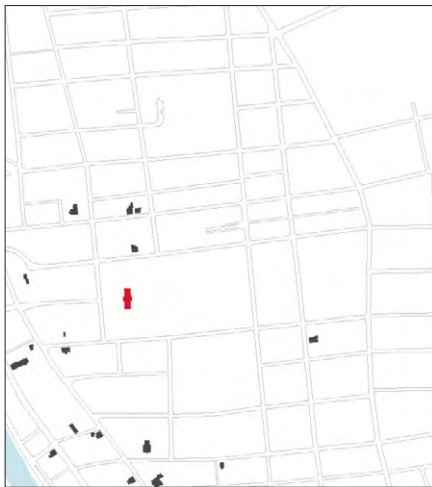
As Barbara Stanton explains in this issue, the essential ingredients of campus are greensward and trees, in a ratio favoring green over buildings. But a campus is also a place that expresses a complex mix of privacy and public purpose. The territories of many older campuses are today defined by iron fences and gates — though the gates are always open and the spaces inside welcome outside participation and use.

Campus landscapes are also furnished with signs, maps and information kiosks; artwork and commemorative plaques (free of commercial advertising) reward visitors' attention; and amenities such as benches, night lighting, and bicycle racks make them safe, convenient, and pleasant to use. Some of the great university campuses also include broad flights of steps which still invite us to sit and watch the passing scene.

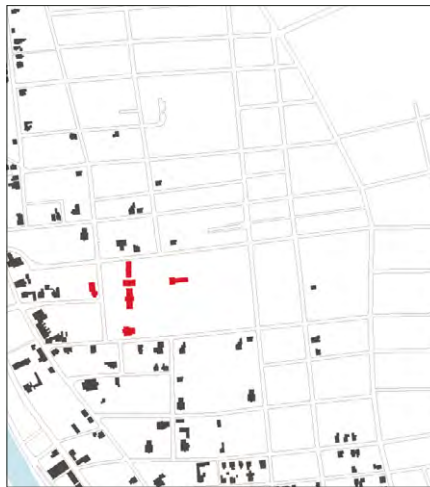
In addition, the elimination of much vehicle traffic on campuses creates an oasis of safety and quiet. With fewer cars, there is no need for wide road beds, harsh street lights, or clearly defined sidewalks. A simple lane, wide enough for a fire truck, edged with granite, speaks of a great freedom of pedestrian activities — walking, meandering, contemplating, even sitting down. It is no wonder that rituals such as “chalking the walk” have become much loved traditions in such settings.

guished by a finely woven tapestry of tiny inhabited spaces; and, as Dan Friedman explains in this issue, the bold new master plan for the University of Cincinnati creates a unified setting for a variety of contemporary buildings.

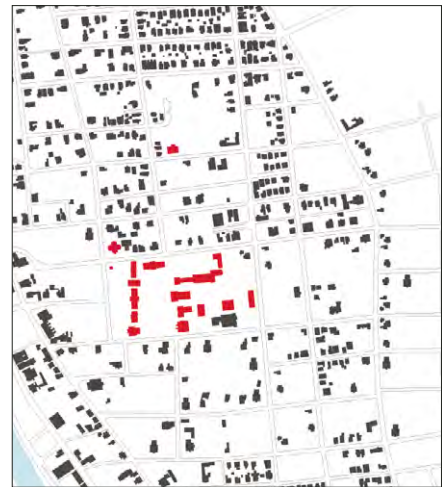
Still other campuses, such as that of Brown University, find their identity as places with deliberately contrasting styles. Brown’s buildings are diverse, quirky, often brilliant, always individualistic — all qualities that embody the character of the place. At Brown one has to ask which came



1770



1870



1904

Memorable university campuses may also be distinguished by a prevailing architectural style. However, uniformity is less an end in itself than a means to provide the sense of continuity, background and identity against which distinctive individual buildings may stand out. In design terms it is a question of establishing a “ground” against which a “figure” may become visible. An identifiable building style may also inspire a sense of belonging. Thus one may think of Princeton and Duke as Gothic, Harvard as Georgian, and University of Virginia as Classical — even when closer inspection reveals far more diversity among individual buildings.

The sense of a planned building ensemble is clearly important to the sense of a campus. Even on campuses where relatively little effort is made to arrive at a uniformity of style, a sense of appropriate scale still emerges. Often in such cases the landscape is made to do the principal work of tying the whole together. Thus, the intense green leafy canopy of Amherst College unites two hundred years of building design; the University of Oregon is distin-

first, the diversity of thought characteristic of its intellectual atmosphere, or the diversity of its buildings?

While campuses are distinctive as ensembles, their best individual buildings also proclaim a certain public orientation. Signs tell you their names and what you may expect to find inside. Grand front doors welcome entry. Public buildings are located in many other places in our cities, but rarely do we find the same quality of invitation.

Qualities of Campus Life

In this issue, Peter Salovey describes universities as places of creative encounter. He writes that they must include places of informality and interaction. Carol Christ also writes of the importance of public space in a university setting. In today’s fragmented world, people may long for the sense of community fostered by such a pattern of sociability.

In the city, informal interaction is rare, sometimes dangerous, and requires extraordinary circumstances. But on a campus a sense of containment and common purpose,

the coordination of schedules, and the existence of shared spaces for dining and living increase everyone's chances of encountering others with common interests, goals and desires. Add to this the social vitality of young adults, and one can see how a high level of informal interaction is typical of campus environments. On campuses there are people moving about at all times of the day and night; outdoor furnishings will be used.

Creativity blossoms in such free-flowing nonhierarchi-

Campuses Today

Many of the qualities described above have characterized American campuses for more than two hundred years. But the campus of the twenty-first century is also a very different place than it was fifty, or even fifteen, years ago.

As noted earlier, the most obvious change has to do with physical growth. Maps of Brown clearly illustrate this exponential increase of size. Such growth reflects the reality of increasing numbers of students, faculty and staff.



1938



1975



2003

cal environments, and college leaders have long defined their mission as going beyond mere classroom learning. The founders of Pembroke College sought to create “a new academic atmosphere with that inner quietness which only spacious and dignified surroundings permit.”⁴ Likewise, the trustees of Brown in 1925 recognized that even dormitory rooms were integral to the college experience: “A student’s room is not only an effect, but a cause of his character, and a worthy and dignified environment is felt at once in the student’s intellectual and moral life.”⁵

Well-designed outdoor spaces, and plenty of them; in-door spaces like libraries and student centers; numerous and diverse places where people feel welcome: these are all ultimately essential settings for the nurture of informed citizens.

Students need classrooms and places to live; professors need offices and laboratories; and library collections will continue to expand and require more space.

Along with growth in the number of buildings has come an increasing differentiation and specialization of building types. Yesterday’s multipurpose gym has given way to today’s indoor track, basketball and hockey arena, fitness center, swim center, and squash courts. Laboratory space has become similarly specialized. And to support the growing number of employees and students living off campus, parking garages are now needed, despite the best efforts at demand management.

The size and scale of individual buildings also continues to increase. The footprint of a research laboratory is now about 60,000 sq.ft., and a width of 130 ft. is deemed desirable. Such a behemoth will not fit easily on a carefully crafted historic campus. If located in an existing neighborhood, its associated impacts, including increased traffic congestion, will often be fiercely resisted by nearby residents.

As the old campus becomes a revered historic artifact—

Campus growth. Images from “Strategic Framework for Physical Planning, Brown University, October 2003,” R.M. Kliment & Frances Halsband Architects.

a “garden of delights” in which to enact historic rituals—it also becomes, ironically, less amenable to changes that might keep it vital in everyday use. Campus design guidelines, historic designations, tradition, nostalgia, and the force of alumni sentiment all combine to limit needed flexibility and change. Yet simultaneously, the desire to constantly reinvent and regenerate the institution requires expression in new forms, new styles, creating a parallel demand for associated places where new things are welcome.

Of course, there are very few, if any, old campuses which are so perfect that they cannot tolerate positive change. Architecture magazines and Websites show infill projects of subtlety and charm: new buildings, additions, and renovations which transform worthy old containers into exciting spaces for new programs. Indeed, the opportunity to work in a context rich with association, with a client group willing to take intellectual risks, makes campus commissions among the most highly desired by architects. Similarly, the best current campus plans manage to identify new building sites and craft design guidelines for them that reflect awareness of both contemporary and historical values.

A Question of Boundaries

Even so, the reality is that as universities face pressures for growth they have been trying to expand beyond their traditional edges. Examined collectively, such efforts seem to indicate that different types of campuses exhibit different potentials for development. In particular, some edges seem to invite incremental expansion, while others seem to demand a more radical leapfrogging to distant sites.

As the case studies in this issue indicate, campuses with

clearly defined edges are more likely to expand by taking the form of the adjacent city. These extensions are likely to be commercial in character and made up of large-scale buildings which hug the street line. In such buildings, public uses are allowed to occupy the ground floor, and little attempt is made to continue patterns of associated open space or landscaping that might tie them to older campus traditions. Their style may express an overt rejection of historical campus precedents (even if the real choice was dictated by the necessity of making peace with the neighbors).

Designing new campus buildings to look like a part of the adjacent city, and including services, commercial and office space in them, are clearly strategies of camouflage and disguise. To appeal further to residents of surrounding communities, such “stealth” expansion may even involve inviting private developers to construct the buildings. Thus commercial housing developers are increasingly being called on to build and operate university housing, and Barnes & Noble may now be the university bookstore of choice.

Following this paradigm, Columbia’s new student dormitory on Broadway includes a public library and a video store on the ground floor. Access to these spaces is from Broadway, while the students must enter their residence from a side street. In this case, the local community board indicated that its approval of the project was contingent on it being clad in Upper West Side yellow brick, not Columbia red brick.

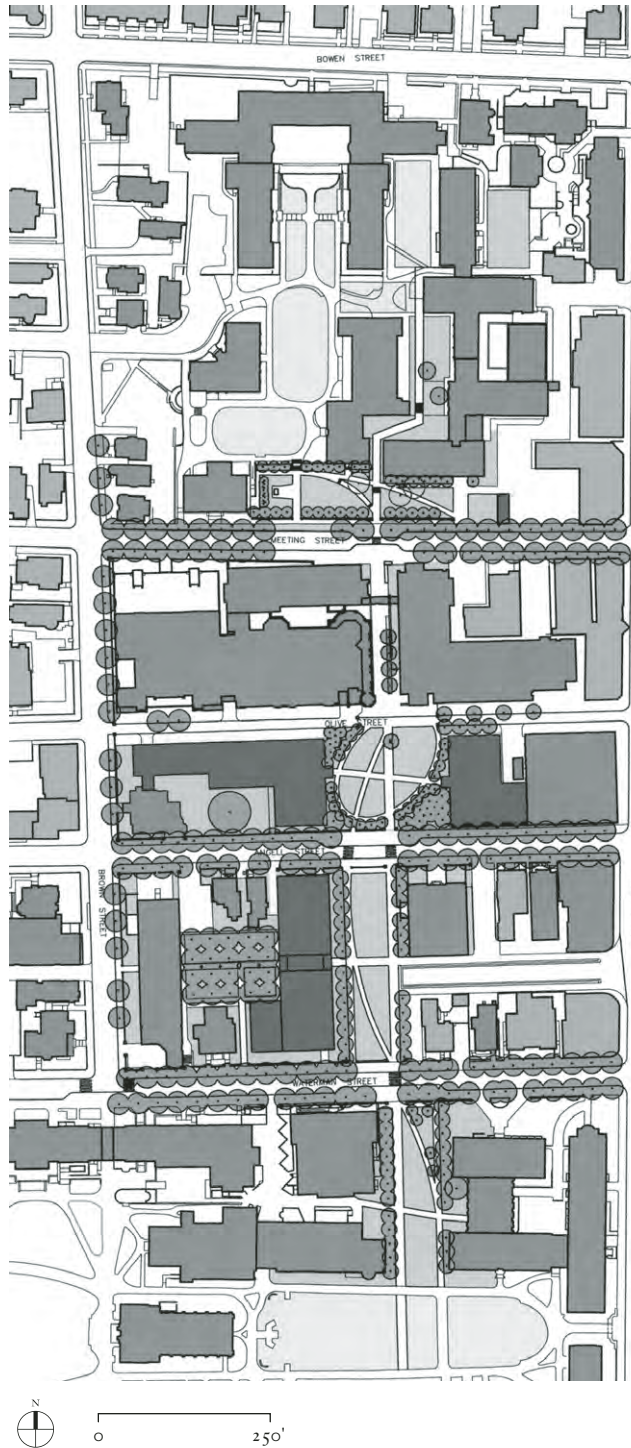
The story of Ohio State’s High Street development, described in this issue by David Dixon, shows the lengths to which campus planners have gone to address community concerns.

Here is the key to the whole matter: The object of the college, as we have known and used and loved it in America, is not scholarship (except for the few, and for them only by way of introduction and first orientation), but the intellectual and spiritual life. What we should seek to impart in our college, therefore, is not so much learning itself as the spirit of learning. This spirit, however, they cannot get from the classroom unless the spirit of the

class-room is the spirit of the place as well, and of its life, and that will never be until the teacher comes out of the class-room and makes himself a part of that life. Contact, companionship, familiar intercourse, is the law of life for the mind. The comradeships of undergraduates will never breed the spirit of learning. The circle must be widened. It must include the older men, the teachers, the men for whom life has grown more serious and to whom it

has revealed more its meanings. So long as what the undergraduates do and what they are taught occupy two separate, air tight compartments in their consciousness, so long will the college be ineffectual.

— Woodrow Wilson
1905 Phi Beta Kappa oration at
Harvard University⁹



The Walk, a proposed design for the extension of the Brown University campus joining Lincoln Field and Pembroke Green, May 2004, R.M. Klimont & Frances Halsband Architects/Todd Rader & Amy Crews Landscape Architects LLC.

Fuzzy vs. Hard Boundaries

Criteria for expansion are not as clear-cut at campuses whose edges are less well defined. Here opportunities may exist for expansion following a more gentle continuum, easing the tensions of the visible and fixed boundary, and paving the way for closer interconnection and interaction between town and gown.

Brown is one such place with fuzzier boundaries. Shared streets have provided an opportunity for limited expansion of its campus within the surrounding College Hill neighborhood. Such conditions have recently made it possible to plan for an extension of the campus walkway system to link the cores of the old Pembroke and Brown campuses across two city streets. The centerpiece of this plan is a new Walk, whose furnished green spaces are bounded by new academic buildings that open both internally to the greens and externally to neighboring streets. Among other things, the plan envisions retaining and reconfiguring significant historic buildings for new uses, while it also proposes moving one old house whose location conflicts with the new open areas to fill a gap elsewhere in the historic district.⁶

Another less obvious example of a university with fuzzy boundaries is New York University. Indeed, its edges are nearly impossible to identify. Over the years NYU has managed to expand largely by buying and renovating commercial loft buildings, transforming them into offices, classrooms, laboratories and housing, while maintaining commercial tenancies on the ground floor. While it has faced major battles in constructing new space, such gradual inhabitation of existing buildings continues without comment. In technical terms, New York zoning limits classroom uses to the area west of Broadway, but this boundary is visible only to university planners. On the street, the principal visual clue to the presence of NYU are the purple flags flown on all its buildings.

Moving Off Campus

In some cases, the edges of a university may ultimately prove immovable, and it may be essential to start anew in a distant place.

As Richard Bender and John Parman point out in their article, this has long been the policy of the University of California, which has developed new campuses around the state rather than centralize its operations in a few locations. Today this process continues with the design and construction of a tenth UC campus in the town of Merced in the fast-urbanizing Central Valley. However, even in such situations, they point out, important questions surround the location and design of campus spaces, especially as

they may be used to create new poles of growth or stabilize older patterns of development.

Smaller institutions can also employ a leapfrog strategy, especially when it comes to siting large new buildings. Brown is choosing to locate several large departments in buildings away from its existing campus on historic College Hill in areas of Providence dominated by abandoned manufacturing buildings and underutilized commercial properties. Eventually, it hopes to join the city in a broader redevelopment of one of these areas

To maintain an identification with Brown, a new campus will need to have a physical connection through a clearly defined circulation infrastructure involving such elements as bicycle lanes, shuttle routes, and signage. The new satellite campus will also need many essential elements of the old campus: inviting furnished open spaces separated from traffic and surrounding commercial life, recognizable and permeable boundaries relevant to campus functions and the life of nearby communities, and buildings of public character and related scale.

As described by Marilyn Taylor, Columbia University, long confined to an extremely hard-edged campus, is also planning a major expansion. Its new ensemble of buildings at Manhattanville will leapfrog geographic barriers and nearby neighborhoods and provide a link to their medical school campus further north. The redevelopment of Manhattanville is planned as a simultaneously urban and academic environment.

Literally and figuratively, this mixed-use precinct is being conceived as a “sandwich.” It will be built on a “factory” of below-grade infrastructure and services provided by Columbia. But the three floors closest to street level will be devoted to public use. Above that, spaces will be occupied by university laboratories and other academic spaces. Renzo Piano has described this new effort as follows:

The idea is not to make a citadel. One century ago, the only way to design a campus was monumental architecture, giving a sense of security. Today the university is in communication with life, so the story to tell today is completely different. It's more about permeability, more about participation. The model of the university today is more related to reality.⁷

Such a stratification of public urban space with academic space may well provide a new prototype for accommodating the variety of desires at the edges of the most urban university campuses. It allows local communities to maintain their identity, local governments to maintain the social fabric of the city, and deeply embedded urban universities to expand their facilities to compete with their peers.





The Walk, Building Site 1. Drawing by Frances Halsband.

The Future

There are some who would question the need for a “bricks and mortar” campus in our time. Stuart Strother recently described his experience teaching in a strip mall. Such “satellite campuses” offer the possibility for classes taught almost anywhere, books delivered by mail, and unlimited free parking. But he points out that students miss campus life, “the sidewalk culture of protest, music, art, free-love groups, and even hate groups that encourages students to think about life in new ways... the expansive common areas and green space of traditional universities [that] nurture expansive thinking and lively debate.”⁸

The models for the future, then, include campuses disguised as extensions of the adjacent city, pieces of campuses constructed by commercial builders, satellite campuses of rented space, and Starbucks everywhere. Amidst such a collision of new ideas, however, it is important to continue to ask about the obligation, and the opportunity, that only an academic institution can bring to the city.

Is this not to continue to construct and maintain those very qualities of open space, architecture, and social structure that invite free participation and dialogue, the informal mixing places that nurture creativity, and the public spaces that offer a forum for learning in a free society?

Notes

1. Richard H. Brodhead, *The Good of This Place: Values and Challenges in College Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 3-4, 53, 54.
2. Charles Z. Klauder and Herbert C. Wise, *College Architecture in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p.40.
3. August Heckscher, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), pp. 145-53.
4. From *Bulletin of Brown University, Report of the President to the Corporation*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (October 1907), p. 31.
5. From *Bulletin of Brown University, Report of the President to the Corporation*, Vol. I, No. 4 (October 1904), p. 9.
6. R.M. Klimont & Frances Halsband Architects / Todd Rader + Amy Crews Landscape Architecture LLC, “The Walk: A Proposed Design for the Extension of the Brown University Campus Joining Lincoln Field and Pembroke Green,” May 27, 2004.
7. As cited in Robin Pogrebin, “A Man About Town, In Glass and Steel,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 5, 2005 p. E1.
8. Stuart C. Strother, “The Stripped-Down College Experience,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 4, 2005, p. B5.
9. As reported by President Faunce of Brown in the *Bulletin of Brown University, Report of the President to the Corporation*, Vol. II, No. 4 (October 1905), pp. 21-23.