

An Environmental Scan: The Campus Learning Environment

For the Division of Student Affairs
University of North Carolina – Chapel Hills

By

James H. Banning, Ph.D.
Partner and Consultant
Campus Ecology Services
16 Esquila Road
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Introduction

The environmental scan of the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill's campus was focused on the impact of the physical environment on learning. In addition to a broad scan of the campus grounds, buildings, signage, and classrooms, particular attention was given to the Union, University Housing, and Greek houses. The environmental scan included two major activities: Document Review (including the campus web site) and a Scanning of Campus Buildings and Artifacts (See Appendix A for a copy of the Environmental Scanning Proposal). Both the document and campus physical environmental scans were guided in part by the following four questions: (1) Is the campus learning environment welcoming to all learners? (2) Is there a "sense of place" for learning? (3) What are the important messages communicated by campus artifacts regarding learning? And, (4) how can the learning environment be enhanced and what are the recommendations or next steps?

After the review of campus documents, an on campus scanning was performed on April 7, 8, & 9, 1999 (See Appendix B for Itinerary). This document represents the final report of this consultation/scanning project.

Structure of the Consultation/Scanning Report

This report will be structured succinctly around the two activities of the scanning process: Document Review and Scanning of Campus Buildings and Artifacts. Within each of these two activities, the comments will be organized in table form reflecting the four dimensions: (1) Name of Issue; (2) Nature of Issue; (3) Recommendations; and (4) References or support documentation (photographs, appendices, and/or source documents. The purpose of this format is to present a large amount of material in a focused and useful succinct structure enabling a quick review of the scanning activities and findings. Further elaboration of the findings on many of the issues can be found in the videotapes of the four exit reporting sessions.

Document Review

To obtain a “document” view of the UNC-CH learning environment, the UNC web site, 68 editions of The Daily Tar Heal, and the documents most likely to be in the hands of prospective and undergraduate students were reviewed. The web site was reviewed by three graduate students at another institution of higher education who have experience in working with college students and the development of web sites. The Daily Tar Heal was scanned using a structured template approach to content analysis. For each edition four sections of the paper were given a topical content code: The major article of the front page, the article of the front page that was most related to the learning environment, and the topics of the two editorial sections in each edition were coded. Finally, other “student focused” documents were reviewed for content and organization. The issues, nature of the issues, recommendations, and references from the document scan follow.

ISSUE	NATURE OF ISSUE	RECOMMENDATIONS	REFERENCES
UNC Web Site	An increasing number of students are now visiting university web sites prior to actual campus visits. Campuses must design and care for their web sites in order to present their institution in a manner they wish it to be viewed. It is for many visitors and students their first look at the campus learning environment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the amount on gray space on the pages. From a student perspective there is excessive gray space. 2. Include more information and attention to multicultural issues, groups, and programs. 3. Update pages (one notes the last revision was 1996). 4. When updating consider new technology that is attracting current high school students (Java, Flash, and Realplayer technology). 5. Include easy links to all student groups, for example, the Queer Network for Change. 6. Develop a web site for information regarding campus construction. 	Appendix C

<p><u>The Daily Tar Heel</u></p>	<p>Sixty-eight editions from November 1998 through March 1999 were reviewed for campus issues. A structured template content analysis was employed to highlight issues.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A committee within the student affairs division should take on the tasks of “media scanning” in order to stay abreast of student and campus issues and trends. 2. A committee of staff and students should be appointed to “smooth” out the student election processes. The number one issue during the period of the scan was student elections and associated problems. 	<p>Appendix D</p> <p>Appendix E</p>
<p>Campus Publications</p>	<p>Like the campus’s physical environment and web site, campus publications also communicate about campus organization and values.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>The Source</u> publication should be reviewed to improve organization. The Student Services section is particularly disorganized and the information seems randomly compiled. A thematic or conceptual framework is needed. 2. The University Housing materials need to be compiled into one booklet rather than four. 3. Greater attention should be given to the photographs used in campus publications. The same photo of the same student is used redundantly. Also attention should be given to “role stereotyping” in the photographs. For 	

		example, no photographs were found where women were associated with science.	
--	--	--	--

Campus Scanning of Physical Environment

Using the method of visual anthropology, the campus’s physical environment and artifacts were scanned. Photographs were taken of issues that were relevant to the concept of the campus as a “learning environment.” From this conceptual framework of a learning environment special attention was paid to items focusing on welcoming and giving students a sense of belonging, items relating to safety, items relating to equal treatment, and items relating to “stereotyping” of groups. Major buildings and spaces used by undergraduates were visited. Some major areas of the campus were not included in the scan, for example the athletic facilities, the Medical campus, and Business School buildings were not included. For buildings included in the scan, the following outlines the major findings and recommendations.

ISSUE	NATURE OF ISSUE	RECOMMENDATIONS	REFERENCES
General Campus Environment	Making the campus attractive to visitors and campus personnel signals the importance of the learning environment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place campus identification and welcome signs at the major entrances and destination areas of the campus. 2. Place campus You-Are-Here maps at visitor parking lots and public transportation destinations. 3. Implement a campus visitor signage program to assist in wayfinding (color codes, sign shape, etc.) 4. Increase the campus graffiti removal effort. 5. Construct a welcome sign at the entrance marked by the overhead structure between the Stores and Union. 	<p>Appendix F</p> <p>Slides 6,7,& 8</p> <p>Slide 18</p> <p>Slide 103</p>

<p>Visitor Issues: Admission Office</p>	<p>Making this important visitor destination area more welcoming</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give consideration to building a dedicated campus visitors center. 2. Review transportation congestion at the Admissions Office (bus, car, and pedestrian patterns) 3. Erect highly visible WELCOME signs. None currently exist. 4. Current signage is too small and placed too high for vehicle use. 5. Remove negative signs on rear entrance. 6. Design an outside seating space. 	<p>Slide 4</p> <p>Slide 5</p> <p>Slide 1</p>
<p>Campus Buildings (General)</p>	<p>A number of immediate actions are recommended to improve campus building in support of a more health and attractive learning environment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A more aggressive effort is needed in removing building bathroom graffiti. 2. Development and implementation of a standard external signage program for all campus buildings. 3. Immediate attention should be given to the internal signage in buildings-including all ADA issues. 4. Continue assertive efforts to make buildings more accessible regarding issues of disability. 5. Efforts should be made to find a more attractive and safe way to accommodate smoking at building entrances. 6. Major entrances to specific functions within buildings 	<p>Slide 63</p> <p>Slide 9</p> <p>Slides 42 & 46</p> <p>Slides 34, 36, & 37</p>

		<p>should be marked. For example, the new coffee shop off of the Pit is not marked.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. All restrooms for women should be re-labeled from Ladies to Women. 8. There are no physical artifacts on campus denoting the contribution of women to the University. 	Slides 58 & 59
Classroom Buildings	Many of the classroom buildings focusing on general undergraduate education are in very poor shape and distract rather than enhance the learning function.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update furniture to allow more flexibility in teaching strategies. 2. Update AV equipment. 3. Seating areas for discussion within buildings should be designed where possible. 	<p>Slides 20 & 21 Appendix G</p> <p>Slides 28 & 29 Appendix H</p>
In-between Buildings	The space between buildings (campus grounds) should be reviewed in terms of support for learning and safety.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seating areas for discussion for groups larger than 2 need to be constructed. 2. Handicapped routes across campus should be marked for the unique wayfinding that is necessary for wheelchairs. 3. Frequent monitoring of loose bricks to insure a higher degree of pedestrian safety. 	<p>Slide 32</p> <p>Appendix H</p>
Carolina Union	The building was reviewed to develop recommendations for consideration given the new addition and renovation planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Break up the long unattractive hallways with some design feature (carpet, light, seating, etc.) 2. Add texture, art forms, etc. to the large white surfaces in hallways and meeting rooms. 	<p>Slides 101, 107, 108 & 109</p> <p>Slides 99 & 108</p>

		3. Purchase new matching furniture.	Slide 81
		4. Redesign elevator entrance of top floor to be more welcoming and attractive.	Slide 94
		5. Redesign reception area- needs welcome sign and less clutter.	Slide 105
		6. A uniform and attractive mechanism for posting meeting notices at room doors is needed.	Slide 90
		7. All internal signage needs to be redesigned in a uniform manner with proper placement.	Slide 88 & 89
		8. Current recycling bins should be replaced with ones that are more functional and attractive.	Slide 91
		9. Monitor the use of the student "email stations" to determine proper number and placement in the building.	Slide 87
		10. Redesign the cashiering function at the snack bar in order not to impede traffic.	
		11. Seating for large waiting groups on the first floor level needs to be addressed.	Slide 106
		12. The lower level entrance needs to provide for seating for waiting users of the building.	Slide 102 & 104
		13. Take greater advantage of the seating areas adjacent	Slide 33

		<p>to the building for informal outdoor discussion areas.</p> <p>14. All student groups should be easily accessed by their members and other interested persons. The office for the Queer Network for Change does currently have visible access.</p> <p>15. The lower floor mural should be reviewed in regard to the depiction of African-Americans in a historical-only context.</p>	<p>Slides 24 & 25</p> <p>Slides 110, 111 & 112</p>
Greek Houses	<p>Only the exteriors of a few Greek houses were reviewed for the purpose of sharing with fraternity and sorority students the concept of values being portrayed by physical appearances.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After “function” trash removal efforts need to be increased. 2. Discarded furniture, rubble, etc. needs to be removed for fire safety issues. 3. Front yard “Bleachers” need to be reviewed in terms of the intimidation of women. 	<p>Slide 114</p> <p>Slide 116</p> <p>Slide 113 & 120</p>
University Housing	<p>A relative small number of housing units was reviewed due to the complexity of the system and time constraints. The recommendations will be presented in two sections: <u>Safety and Presentation Issues</u> and <u>Programmatic Issues</u>.</p>	<p><u>Safety and Presentation:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frequent inspections to replace missing first floor screens should be conducted. 2. Increased emphasis should be placed on not allowing strangers into the buildings. 3. Housekeeping should be more diligent in trash removal at stairwells and entrances. 	<p>Appendix I</p> <p>Slide 126</p>

		<p>4. Monitor lounge areas for housekeeping issues.</p> <p>5. Remove broken and unusable structures from the premises in order not to convey messages of vandalism.</p> <p><u>Programmatic Issues:</u></p> <p>1. Many of the housing buildings provide high density. Ongoing efforts should be maintained to reduce the scale of the buildings through programmatic and redesign efforts.</p> <p>2. Monitor the use of lounge areas to help determine the most useful function for these areas.</p> <p>3. The current programmatic structure appears to be based on “local initiatives” of residents and resident advisors. While there is merit in this approach, discussion should occur regarding the overall “housing imperatives” for the “learning life” within the buildings.</p>	<p>Slide 125</p> <p>Slide 127</p> <p>Slide 122</p> <p>Appendix J</p> <p>Slide 129, 130, 131, 134, & 144</p> <p>Slide 128</p>
<p>Campus Construction Activity</p>	<p>Many campus construction projects are underway on campus and many are scheduled to come on line in the near future.</p>	<p>1. Provide clear information at the construction site regarding the nature of the project, its purpose, its funding, and schedule of completion.</p>	<p>Slide 148</p>

	<p>Recommendations are made to increase the campus acceptance of the inconveniences of campus construction projects. These recommendations reflect the notion that the more the user is involved and is knowledgeable about the project, the more understanding they will be of the short-term hardships.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Develop a detailed “campus construction web site” to detail all the information regarding ongoing and planned projects. Advertise the web site in campus publications. 3. When possible post architectural drawings for campus personnel to mark up with suggestions. 	
--	---	---	--

Summary

The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill is by any measure a very complex and beautiful campus. The historical buildings, the modern buildings, and the connecting walkways and green spaces signal the campus environment is a place for learning. The foregoing highlighted issues and recommendations are offered in the spirit of improving the current physical environment to greater enhance the messages of welcoming, belonging, safety, equal treatment for all. Groups that appear to be less welcomed by the design of the learning environment are campus visitors, women faculty, staff, and students, and students who are differently-abled or who represent the many facets of student diversity.