

# The Campus Business

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A commentary on the continuing importance of the  
residential liberal arts college in the information age,  
from a convocation address delivered on  
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Several months ago, Arthur Levine, president of Teacher's College in New York, wrote an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* titled "The Soul of a New University." His basic point, one that I, for one, find excessively familiar if not friendly, is that "the rise of online education and other new technologies has enormous implications" for higher education, few of them encouraging. Levine spoke with what he styled the "new breed" of students and asked them what relationship they wanted with their colleges. They professed to want the relationship to be like the one they have with a utility company, supermarket, or bank; they wanted convenience, service, quality, and affordability.

Levine goes on to bolster his argument with this illustration. "It is possible right now for a professor to give a lecture in Cairo, for me to attend that lecture [in New York], and for another student to attend it in Tokyo. It is possible for all of us to feel we're sitting in the same classroom. It is possible for me to nudge (via e-mail) the student from Tokyo and say 'I missed the professor's last comment. What was it?'; have my question translated into Japanese; and have the answer back in English in seconds. It is possible for the professor to point to me and my Japanese colleague and say 'I want you to prepare a project for next week's class.' If we can do all that, why do we need the physical place called the college?"

Let's leave aside the obvious nit-picking problem of having Levine communicate in English to a student in Japan who needs the question translated into Japanese. What language do we suppose the professor in Cairo is using? The more significant question is Levine's last: "Why do we need the physical place called the college?" Later in his essay, he puts it this way: "Colleges and universities are not in the campus business but the education business."

I will confess that I bristled at that last remark. Lawrence has made major investments in our physical facilities over the past 20 years — nearly \$57 million in new construction alone — and so Levine's critique hit a nerve. Nonetheless, Levine is not alone in making such assertions. A few years ago, the futurist guru Peter Drucker made a comparable claim, writing that the ubiquity of the information revolution means that "the college won't survive as a residential institution" and that, in 30 years, "university campuses will be relics."

These arguments do grab our attention. Surely, information technologies of all sorts, the World Wide Web, CD-ROMS, online courses, distance learning, the whole kit and caboodle of digital innovations and enhancements are not things we can ignore. And we haven't. We've got fiber optics connecting the campus, e-mail accounts for everybody, connections to the Internet galore, and a campus website, and we are in the process of installing a new administrative information system, and more.

Information technology is a growing presence in the academic program; two years ago we established the position of director of instructional technology in order to provide greater coherence and impetus for this important aspect of teaching and learning at Lawrence. Last June, Dean of the Faculty Brian

Rosenberg was one of 125 academic leaders who met at Middlebury College at a Summit on Technology in Liberal Arts Colleges to deliberate on questions of future developments and collaborations in this arena. Here at home, members of the faculty have created web pages for courses in mathematics, government, English, and psychology. They have developed online exercises in French, biology, philosophy, and computer science. Nearly every department utilizes instructional technology in some way, from classics using the Perseus Project to explore the ancient world, to theatre using computer-assisted design (CAD) programs to design sets. If you log on to the Lawrence website, you can see underwater photographs from our Marine Biology Term, read historical legal cases, quiz yourself in French, improve your knowledge of logic, visualization algorithms, and listen to Freshman Studies lectures.

Students, of course, are the prime users of these many resources. They create web sites for term projects and use PowerPoint for in-class presentations. Students in the conservatory use computers for a variety of purposes, which include composing and arranging music, utilizing sequencing and notation programs, and learning the techniques of basic film scoring and multi-media production, as well as digital audio recording, editing, and mastering. Undergraduates make use of resources on the Web to conduct research — and faculty have access to a nifty service called plagiarism.com to be sure their students are respecting the Honor Code when they cite web-based sources in their papers. We have access, through the library, to more than 1,500 electronic books, more than 200 electronic journals, and over 100 online databases, many in full-text.

We certainly understand the growing significance of information technologies in advancing our educational mission and have made investments in a full array of them as a consequence. We have four computer labs in Briggs Hall — for economics, statistics, mathematics-computer science, and psychology — and the new Science Hall and the renovated Youngchild Hall will be home to a total of six computer labs, including specialized facilities dedicated to computational physics, environmental studies, and molecular modeling. As I already mentioned, we have just equipped Main Hall with a humanities computing laboratory to serve the disciplines and departments in the "old core" of the college.

While there is obviously much more to be accomplished in these areas, and while new opportunities will undoubtedly confront us and command our attention and response, it is fair to say that we have hardly been Luddites in this respect, and we certainly do not want said of Lawrence what one wag once said about historians: "Lucky fellows, their future is all behind them." But, like historians, we can and should learn from the past and seek to understand and promote for the 21st century why Lawrence — despite major and ongoing investments in technologies — should remain in the campus business.

First, let me provide a little historical context. From their inception in the 17th century through the great movement of college creation in the 19th century into the present — the



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University of Phoenix and other virtual universities notwithstanding — American colleges and universities, with few exceptions, have been situated on campuses, a mode of educational operation we derived from England, albeit giving that mode a particular American stamp. It is important to note that this fact is not accidental but deliberate. In 1671, the governing board of Harvard explicitly stated: “It is well known what advantage to Learning accrues by the multitude of persons cohabiting for scholasticall communion, whereby to actuate the minds of one another, and other waies to promote the ends of a Colledge-Society.”

In the early years of the American college, that communion was typically housed in a single building, as was the case here with Main Hall, which for many years housed students, professors, classrooms, a chapel, the library, and a dining room. The idea of having students reside on campus had its critics — in 1800 Reverend Manasseh Cutler referred to dormitories as “the secret nurseries of every vice and the cages of unclean birds” — but since the alternative was to have students take up lodgings in town, most college proponents argued for the residential model. The famous Yale Report of 1828 asserted that “the parental character of college government requires that the students should be so collected as to constitute one family,” and thus saw student residences as necessary. In the early 19th century, in fact, there was some debate about whether or not such residences should be constructed on the German system, that is, with larger rooms that could accommodate many students, or the French system, which favored more private rooms.

Whatever the choice, college dormitories were widely viewed as essential ingredients in the educational and social development of the students, to say nothing of keeping them in check. At late 19th-century Lawrence, students were scattered about town in private residences, a fact that led President Huntley to tell the trustees, “Give us a Ladies Building, and you will hear no more about lawlessness at Lawrence.” Students were evidently disregarding the rule that they were to be in their rooms from seven at night until seven the next morning, which led Huntley to say that “a system of espionage such as is necessary to enforce our study hours rule would require a force almost equal to the number of students themselves.” Better to have them all on campus, where they could be moni-

tored. The eventual result of Huntley’s plea was the construction of Ormsby Hall.

One of the great architects of the American campus was, of course, Thomas Jefferson, whose plan for the University of Virginia envisioned it as an “Academical Village.” Rather than one large building, Jefferson favored a collection of small and separate lodges for each professor, with a hall below for his class, connected by a covered walkway to a barracks (that’s his word) for student lodging. Jefferson imagined that “every professor would be the police officer of the students adjacent to his own lodge” and might also sit at the head of their table for meals. Eliphalet Nott’s program for Union College followed this model. Nott stipulated that each class was to be part of “the family of the officer who instructs them” and that they all would “lodge in college and board in commons.” The great American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted — who designed Central Park in New York — encouraged the trustees at the newly established Massachusetts College of Agriculture to embrace a campus plan that would “include arrangements designed to favorably affect the habits and inclinations of your students and to qualify them for a wise and beneficent exercise of the rights and duties of citizens and householders.”

Ideas about the college or university campus evolved and changed over the centuries. The mania for what was styled “collegiate Gothic” in the 19th century focused on architecture that was “venerable” and “substantial,” laden with “associations” and conveying the sense that the institution was “old and honored.” This attitude prevailed into the 20th century, with a dean at Princeton describing the perfect college as a place that had “quadrangles shadowing sunny lawns, towers and gateways opening into quiet retreats, ivy-grown walls looking on sheltered gardens, vistas through avenues of arching elms. These are the places where the affections linger and where memories cling like the ivies themselves, and these are the answers in architecture and scenic setting to the immemorial longings of academic generations.” Some architects, echoing these sentiments, argued for campus plans that would promote “seclusion and cloistrality,” while others resisted that image and sought instead to create something approaching a “City of Learning,” with boulevards and buildings arrayed in stately order.

Any tour of college campuses today will reveal the full spectrum of these arrangements, with some places appearing as small municipalities and others as idyllic retreats. But through it all, the ideal of the residential undergraduate college continues to have its appeal and its centrality. Even Clark Kerr, who coined the phrase “the multiversity” in the 1960s, acknowledged that “the big campus lacks the inestimable virtue which the small liberal arts college counts as its hallmark: the emphasis on the individual which small classes, a residential environment, and a strong sense of relationship to others on campus give.”

What these illustrations convey is the sense that the campus is designed to serve an educational purpose. Indeed, this was what President Henry Merritt Wriston had in mind when he wrote, “the college home is educational, or it is not” and went on to argue for buildings to house and educate students that would “contribute to their education.” Hence, he argued that “the landscaping of the campus should not be neglected and that the campus should contain “examples of fine architecture.” For him, as for us, “the ideal [of a liberal education] is a personality enriched by many kinds of harmonious experience. To that end,” he wrote, “let the college employ all its powers, residential and curricular, architectural and aesthetic, personal and professional.” In his book *The Experience of Place*, Tony Hiss reinforced Wriston’s claim: “the places where we spend our time,” he wrote, “affect the people we

— as I have often said about Lawrence in recent years — we have an edifice complex, but because we see our educational mission bound inextricably to the setting and to the places where students and faculty engage each other in common tasks. Thus, in new construction and in renovations — the atrium and study areas in Science Hall and the John G. Strange Student Commons in Main Hall being prime examples — we have created lounges and other informal spaces to help enable and encourage such engagements.

There is no gainsaying the fact that much can be gained and garnered by and from information technologies, computers, the Web, the Internet. But so too there is no gainsaying the fact that much is lost or neglected in that mode as well. To center our version of undergraduate education on these resources exclusively is to lose the special and distinctive character of how we conduct our teaching and learning mission. Some years ago, I attended a conference of college presidents and trustees at which one of the speakers looked at the presidents and said, “The problem with you guys is that you think about putting the computer in the classroom, when the fact of the matter is that the computer *is* the classroom.” I bristled at that one too.

Last June, at that Middlebury conference to which I referred, the president of Lehigh said that “if everything we do can be put on a spinning silver disc, it will be.” And in his recent book *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*,

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Further, it seems to me that the kind of teaching and learning exemplified by President Garfield’s famous statement about Mark Hopkins on one end of a bench and a student on the other — a statement that celebrates the centrality of the teacher connecting directly with the student — represents the ideal toward which our kinds of college strive. Though Garfield argued that that relationship was far more significant than buildings, apparatus, and libraries, I would argue that buildings, apparatus, and libraries enable and extend the student-faculty connection. In short, colleges create campuses and construct buildings not only for convenience, not because

James Gleick notes that the World Wide Web threatens to subsume every “purveyor of information” now doing business. These are cautions worth heeding. To assume that the computer is the classroom is to assume that education is the acquisition of information. Indeed, to the extent that we are merely purveyors of information — well, perhaps that part of our business should be put on a spinning silver disc. What’s missing in the notion that the computer is the classroom or that colleges are information providers is precisely that personal, give-and-take, challenging, and meaningful interaction between students and faculty — indeed, between students and students — that research shows to be the most significant fac-



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tors that contribute to learning among college students. As far as I know, no one has yet figured out how to teach or learn to play the violin over the Internet. And, as I've written before, the level of discourse that goes on in a computer-based chat room is far different from what goes on in a face-to-face conversation.

There's more. One increasingly popular and pervasive view of the technological age is that we've all become adept at multitasking, which I think is simply a fancy way of describing walking and chewing gum at the same time. But it is worth noting that, while students and faculty at Lawrence may multitask now and again, the nature of our brand of education is better understood as uni-tasking. Woe to the student who is multitasking when reading Plato, or practicing a sonata, or researching a paper, to say nothing of conducting a chemistry experiment. Those undertakings require singular concentration, uninterrupted time on task, and a willingness to immerse oneself in one thing deeply and persistently.

These characteristics of liberal learning — sustained and serious engagement with both texts and topics and with faculty and fellow students in a learning community, the acquisition of the critical skills of analysis and synthesis, the development of the abilities to write and speak with clarity and force, the experience of both independent and collaborative work — constitute what many argue to be the most practical form of education for the lives we will lead in the future before us. For the skills and habits of mind we seek to further and foster at Lawrence — in the academic program and in the interactions and engagements of Lawrentians in campus life — are the ones that provide the broad knowledge, mental agility, and independence of thought that translate and transfer to many settings beyond the college. They serve the individual directly and powerfully in making choices and facing changes throughout life. They are, quite straightforwardly, the best form of education an individual can obtain.

Those qualities are not about assembling information or

even necessarily about acquiring knowledge, *per se*. After all, as science writer James Burke has noted, soon “the rate of change [of knowledge] will be so high that for humans to be qualified in a single discipline — defining what they are and what they do throughout their life — will be as outdated as quill and parchment.” That being said, an education that promotes the ability to learn anew — which is surely a hallmark of liberal education — is the most sensible and safe. And that kind of education is today, as it has been since the Harvard overseers made the case in the 17th century, best conducted and captured in the context of a residential college community where students and faculty cohabit for “scholasticall communion.”

Surely, as the large public institutions demonstrate with unfailing regularity, it is more “efficient” to hold classes of hundreds of students in large lecture halls before one professor. It may be even more efficient for that approach to be conducted with thousands of students over the Internet. You can get a good deal of information conveyed in those ways. The question, of course, is whether *efficient* equates with *effective* in terms of an education that has staying power, and at Lawrence, obviously, we don't believe that it does. Michele Myers, the president of Sarah Lawrence, put it this way: A liberal arts college “offers the most contact time between teachers and students. It offers time for students to actually practice writing, speaking, arguing, evaluating, and researching in small classes with real professors who care about them as individuals and care about their work, who will critique them and hold them accountable. No computer can sharpen the mind as well as a cross-fire discussion among students with their teacher.”

The new technologies that, in Michael Sandel's words, “beckon us to a world beyond boundaries and belonging” may be best understood and confronted not in cyberspace but in a real place, a place that — as I hope is true of Lawrence — “situate[s] us in the world and give[s] our lives their moral particularity.” That's what the place of the campus can help pro-

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vide and promote. If the heart of the enterprise of a liberal arts college is, as William Adams stated, “the dynamic conversation between teacher and student about the world and things that matter,” a conversation that also occurs between and among students themselves, those conversations — if they are to be truly dynamic and hence meaningful — can only be conducted when we are in each other’s company, directly and personally.

In the last academic year, for example, 686 of our students participated in some form of individual instruction (in studios, tutorials, independent studies, and research projects). Indeed, by the time they graduate, approximately 90 percent of Lawrence students will have had such an experience. Our average class size, excluding these kinds of individual engagements with faculty members, is a little under 15. What these data suggest, obviously, is that the student-faculty relationship remains the most central and significant element in our version of liberal learning.

We extend that significant element to Björklunden, where weekend student seminars provide rich and meaningful opportunities for students to engage faculty and each other directly and powerfully. Last year, over 800 students and almost 50 faculty members did so. What we have come to call the Björklunden Experience is defined and shaped principally by the distinctiveness of the place itself. Like the campus, the physical environment of our 425 acres in Door County is not simply a site or a place for educational, intellectual, and spiritual growth but an integral element in the personal experiences that unfold there. It is not by accident that we refer to Björklunden as “the northern campus.”

At the end of the last academic year, we hosted a visit by a foundation officer who was making a site visit to learn more about Lawrence. In my conversation with him at the end of his stay, he told me that what most impressed him about the college was that, when he asked students what about Lawrence

would they least wish to see changed, they answered “our interactions with the faculty,” and when he asked the same question of faculty, they replied “our interactions with the students.” That sums it up pretty well. At the end of the day, then, that’s why we’re in the campus business. For us, liberal learning is a social experience, not the accumulation of credits and courses in the liberal arts, sciences, and music. Technology only complements that central fact; it cannot and must not replace it.

Since the construction of Main Hall in 1853, Lawrence has been in the campus business. With the recent decision by the Board of Trustees to move forward in planning for a new residence hall and a new campus center, we will be extending our commitment to celebrating and bolstering the residential aspects of the college in the years ahead. Clearly, as long as we continue to believe that liberal education is best conducted as personal experience, as long as we affirm that learning and living at Lawrence are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, we will remain in the campus business long into our future.

*Richard Warch, 14th president of Lawrence University, is a member of the Executive Committee of the Annapolis Group, an association of America’s finest liberal arts colleges. Named one of the top 100 college presidents in a national study of effective presidents, his 22-year tenure is the second longest Lawrence presidency. A graduate of Williams College, President Warch holds the B.Div. from the Yale Divinity School and the Ph.D. in American studies from Yale University. Lawrence University is a nationally ranked residential college of the liberal arts and sciences with a distinguished conservatory of music. Located in Appleton, Wisconsin, Lawrence has an undergraduate enrollment of 1,325 students.*