INTEGRATED CAMPUS DESIGN: A PROPOSAL FOR COLORADO COLLEGE
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INTRODUCTION

When presenting her personal narrative President Tiefenthaler emphasizes that growing up on a family farm provided her with a useful introduction to liberal arts thinking, prior to her exposure through formal training in college. This suggests that she is well equipped to initiate and support a process of expanding the role of liberal arts from the classroom to the varied functions of the entire college community. Given such an opportunity, this document is intended to initiate a discussion about campus design and to make a case for its inclusion in long range institutional planning. While it touches on many issues, it is not comprehensive or detailed enough to be considered a formal proposal, and although the author discussed the topic with others, as it is the work of one individual it does not reflect the thinking of those with informed views or contrasting perspectives. That is a critical factor, as any meaningful implementation of integrated design requires integrated analysis, planning, and action.

Please begin by thinking of your own experiences on a specific campus. While courses, a lecture, friendships, or mentors no doubt spring to mind, don't you also recall a particular alcove in the library, a lab, an open space, a view, season, or time of day? Didn't visual or functional details encapsulate and communicate something unique about your institution?

Definition of Integrated Design

Integrated design involves a collaborative approach to design projects in which all affected parties play an active, if not equal role. To begin the process, the problems or opportunities that prompted the desire to design something must be clearly defined. This requires conversations involving not only those programs or individuals who will directly benefit, but also such members of the College community who know the school's history, those who must raise money to realize the design, those who are charged with explaining C.C. to outsiders, those who consider design on campus to be a teaching resource, such often marginalized constituencies as students and support staff: in sum a diverse group with often contrasting but valuable perspectives. While seemingly cumbersome and disorganized at first, there is a logical process to integrated design that if followed can be efficient, cost effective, and most important result in solutions that effectively embody the educational intentions of the institution. While flexible enough to accommodate or even celebrate idiosyncrasy, the success of this process is dependent on first establishing a functional common agreement about the College's character and purpose. Integrated design is of particular value to our school as it reflects the fundamental values of the liberal arts. No project is seen in isolation, but rather as one element of a larger whole.

Campus design is never neutral. Whatever a school may communicate verbally about itself, campus design visually and functionally also conveys information about an institution's past and existing conditions; what it values, its economic status, its intellectual aspirations, and its authenticity. A basic analysis of C.C.'s campus can provide knowledge that should not be isolated from other deliberations about where the school is now and where it wants to go. Instead, every effort should be made to find connections between design and the College's mission, so that inconsistencies can be corrected and resources can be tapped.

For many years there has been a pattern of tension, or even disconnect, between the ideals of a small, residential, liberal arts college desiring to gain more prominent national prestige, and how its ideals are expressed through design. This may reflect a longstanding and unresolved institutional debate about the College's identity. Can the faculty reach a consensus? If so, would it match the views of the administration, trustees, staff, students, and alumni? Regarding campus design, and excluding some notable projects, an absence of consensus is apparent in numerous unilateral, ad hoc decisions and well-intentioned but many times uninformed initiatives that seem out of sync with our institutional values. In contrast, one has only to visit the nearby Air force Academy to see a campus design that emphatically and coherently reinforces the distinctive educational mission of the school.

To describe the situation in a cartoon format, while the faculty can't agree on anything, there is a tendency to view administrators as anti-intellectual interlopers who make poorly thought out decisions, resulting in generic projects done as quickly and cheaply as possible. Administrators have been inclined to see the faculty as elitist theoreticians who are good at criticism but don't know how to get things done: how the "real world" works. Faculty object to legitimate progress, and so must be ignored, discounted, or circumvented. Staff and students have commonly been given token roles but ultimately marginalized. The above generalizations apply to those who have been involved with campus design. A survey of the entire C.C. community might well find that the majority of its members don't really think much about design. They might believe that good function is unrelated to aesthetics, that design is inherently subjective or an esoteric subject beyond comprehension, a nice flowerbed is plenty good enough, and other miscellaneous views. None of this is unique to Colorado College; it is a common condition at schools nationwide, although many of our highest ranked institutions are noted for their distinguished campus designs.

I believe that both the faculty and administration, while meaning well, share equal responsibility along with the entire community. The institution does not yet fully understand the enormous power of design to educate, and the negative consequences of ad hoc solutions chosen by individuals. Will the College consider an approach to campus design that, while different, would utilize systems already in place combined with proven liberal arts concepts? Do we have the wisdom to

acknowledge our communal ignorance, and then to work in concert to educate ourselves? Do we have the mettle to give integrated design a fair chance?

Collaborative integration is a design system that parallels current trends in business and many other professions. It is particularly well suited to C.C. as it is a facet of contemporary liberal arts education and yet is also probably as old as Stonehenge. It features a diminished hierarchy in exchange for an emphasis on individuals with widely different skills working together to reach a community-based goal. Every decision is seen in relation to the larger whole rather than in isolation. Collaboration can take many different forms based on the nature of each project, but the more inclusive that approach the more potential there is for full community support and long term success. For example, in campus design aesthetics are not separated out from function. Students play a vital role, as they are experts on what makes a space inviting. It is not design-by-committee or a free for all, but conversations can suggest concepts that evolve into solutions through a process of iteration. In order to be focused it requires participants to be accountable, knowledgeable, and have a cooperative attitude. When practiced properly it can be remarkably efficient, cost effective, and educationally sound. Again, C.C. should be ideally suited for collaboration, which requires diverse talents, mental agility, asking the right questions, and thinking in the long rather than the short term.

Outside professionals are needed to provide guidance and continuity, but they must be balanced by internal strategies to clarify procedures and maintain institutional control. Good design is extremely challenging to realize. It is hard work, there are no short cuts, mistakes are inevitable, and the process is very dynamic. Of course, it is those conditions that make it so much fun!

OUTLINE FOR STUDY AND ACTION

Campus design needs to be seen as inseparable from other institutional concerns. Whenever a design project is proposed, it must be considered in the context of C.C.'s unique character and obligation to provide educational leadership. To do so, the College must define itself clearly, as design can support, inspire and reflect, but it cannot or should not impose. In order to ensure adherence to this goal, the campus master plan must be analyzed and updated where necessary, and then considered a document that cannot be violated without rational systematic approval. A successful master plan would shift debates from personal opinion and whomever currently holds authority to whether or not a project conforms to the plan, and hence expresses the values of the institution.

Effective analysis and stewardship of the master plan will require expertise provided by a distinguished group of professionals representing such fields as architecture, campus planning, engineering, and landscape architecture. These individuals must be chosen with great care, as beyond their disciplines they have to understand and appreciate a broad range of cultural, educational, and intellectual

concerns. Their decisions must help resolve longstanding problems rather than adding another layer of confusion. At one time the College could get by with athletic directors appointed from the faculty, but if athletics now require professional attention then design's time has probably also arrived. Professional consultants would not act in isolation from or be superior to the college community. They would work closely with it to create a master plan that translates the College's values, ambitions, and character into a coherent design system. The plan would provide guidance for both primary decisions (massing of buildings and organizing open spaces) and integrated supporting elements (lighting, signage, materials). Once a revised master plan is approved, this group would provide continuity and act as a responsible agency to implement inevitable changes to the plan by periodically meeting on campus with the Design Review Board (DRB), and perhaps in coordination with the trustees' meetings.

While the DRB should continue in some form, it would cease to be an isolated committee that is asked to make design decisions, often ignored or bypassed, or to in any way reflect personal taste. It should work in concert with the new, professional DRB, thus creating a two-tiered structure. A priority for appointing members to the "in house" DRB should be identifying individuals who can resist inappropriate pressure and believe in following rules, and eschewing those harboring unrealized creative desires. The in house DRB could act as a two-way conduit and resource, ensuring that every campus constituency understands the master plan and that the consultants (professional DRB members) are informed when aspects of the plan seem dysfunctional or outdated. It would make certain that any agency planning a design project understands what procedures must be followed, and in what sequence. As mentioned above, it would also periodically meet with the professional DRB and trustees.

Hiring or commissioning designers should be congruent with the longstanding guidelines for hiring faculty. Any large project with significant consequences for the campus demands a genuine national search, as is done for a tenure-track hire. When interviews are conducted, candidates should be questioned closely to determine their current and potential understanding of the liberal arts, their curiosity, willingness to collaborate, etc. Here again, community members who are sensible non– art types can be of substantial value, to help balance any of their art loving colleagues who can't detach themselves from their own aesthetic biases. The ability to recognize deep intelligence and sincerity is indispensible. Hiring for smaller projects, as defined by the master plan, can be approached as we do for visiting or part time faculty hires. While still trying to engage appropriate designers, the stakes are lower.

Hiring administrators and staff directly involved with campus design must also involve close attention to a candidate's experience with and interest in the liberal arts. Of course, we must remain mindful that there are examples of College employees without such experience who successfully adapt and become enthusiastic proponents. The national vs. local scope of the search should be in line

with hiring faculty. Once anyone in the above categories is employed, accountability should remain a top priority. For example, if analysis indicates that a proposed design is at odds with the master plan or looks functionally impractical, the College (DRB, in-house experts) should determine an appropriate response. Beyond saving money and insuring better quality, such oversight has the added benefits of asserting institutional expertise, boosting morale, and encouraging a sense of ownership. The College must be a responsible client when commissioning outside designers; exemplified by hiring the right people and then demanding accountability from everyone involved.

Another issue regarding integrated design concerns the Block Plan. Its calendar determines the lives of students and faculty much more than it does the administration. Many projects have been initiated and realized during times when faculty and students were not on campus, or had legitimate but conflicting obligations. In addition, if a situation became adversarial, the administration could deploy a substantial support staff, effective filtering mechanisms, and make the argument that circumstances necessitated immediate action. In contrast, if a collaborative, integrative atmosphere can be established, these same resources and energies can help ameliorate an institutional dilemma. While the basic principles of good campus design are relatively straightforward, interpretation and implementation can be challenging. No new safeguards or systems can absolutely guarantee success without a critical number of community members believing that such change is essential.

QUESTIONS, TOPICS AND ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does the institution want a master plan? If any plan is currently being followed, does it need revisions or fundamental changes?
2. If the College wants a new or revised master plan, and believes professionals should be engaged, how should they be chosen? Should a planning firm be engaged without thinking ahead about the constituency of a professional DRB? What have other liberal arts colleges done or what are they doing now?
3. If planners are hired, how do we provide them with adequate information regarding our distinctive qualities, philosophy, and approach to the liberal arts? Item #4 attempts to specify a response to this question.
    4.   When we consider campus design, what questions come to mind, what problems can we identify, and what needs or aspirations do we have? The planners would combine their analysis with what we have identified as important, taking note of our inherent diversity and eclecticism. This is traditionally defined as a program: information that the consultants can translate into a plan. The College would critique the plan and return it to the planners with recommendations for further study and response. Such a process defines collaborative, integrated iteration, resulting in a living document that joins sophisticated, imaginative thinking with common sense.