

GIVE ME



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IMAGINE you are sitting on a bench on a college campus on a summer day.

You see bikers glide by, hear a carillon in the distance and notice the cheery chatter of students talking in a nearby courtyard. The patio in front of you is clean, a big sycamore tree offers shade and you're impressed by the handsome brick walls. The fragrance of jasmine on a nearby fence is pretty sweet and the kaleidoscope of colors provided by a mass of flowers is impossible to miss. So is the vibrant turf all around. The area is free of litter, sidewalks are neatly edged and gurgling water cascades off a nearby sculpture. You're impressed because the campus landscape is just as nice as the building architecture you see at a glance. The setting is really special and it makes you feel good. You're thinking this is just what a college campus should look like. Looks simple enough. But, you're not fooled. You know that a lot of planning and hard work is needed to create a safe and beautiful campus and how difficult it is to keep it looking well maintained. Often, one of the toughest challenges is controlling where people go. We're facilities folks so we just can't allow students and everybody else to walk or bike or drive or park wherever they want to. There has to be some organization, a comprehensive plan, and features in the campus landscape that result in a theme of crowd control. Without these, there are no rules and the campus can look frayed and worn, just like the new blue jeans students wear these days.





LIBERTY

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BRICK

BY FRED GRATTO

WHAT STUDENTS WANT

Just like everybody else on this planet, students want good, dependable, timely, service. It's pretty obvious that they prefer a relationship with their campus similar to the ones they have with their supermarket, department store, favorite restaurant, insurance company, and bank. They want what they want when they want it and they want convenience. "Students increasingly are bringing to higher education exactly the same consumer expectations they have for every other commercial establishment with which they deal. Their focus is on convenience, quality, service, and cost" (Levine

& Cureton, 1998, p. 12). Think about what you want from your bank, for example. You probably want an ATM on every corner, a parking space right next to it, and no extra fees. Likewise, students want convenience. For instance, my observation is that they don't want to have to walk very far to their next class, although they might jog for miles to get some exercise. Shortcuts are a common problem. "Many colleges and universities do not define pedestrian routes clearly. When this is the case, students often create their own routes across campus grounds" (Brandon & Spruch, 2008, p. 361). When students are at liberty to take the shortest route possible, they can create paths or damage landscaping. At the University of Florida, one of our favorite and most effective ways to intercept paths and redirect people is to build brick seat walls. In addition to helping people stay on sidewalks, they make other significant contributions because they provide seating, define spaces, protect landscaping, and add to the aesthetic appeal of the brick gothic architecture on our campus. Brick curbs, even those just one brick high, also do an effective job guiding people. It's amazing what just a little elevation and a subtle hint can do to determine where people walk.

Before



After



IN ADDITION TO HELPING PEOPLE STAY ON SIDEWALKS, THEY MAKE OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS BECAUSE THEY PROVIDE SEATING, DEFINE SPACES, PROTECT LANDSCAPING, AND ADD TO THE AESTHETIC APPEAL OF THE BRICK GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE ON OUR CAMPUS.

WHAT THE UNIVERSITY WANTS

Universities want a lot of things such as high quality students, excellent faculty, supportive alumni, high quality academic programs, a great football team, a beautiful campus, and a good reputation. They also want students to learn. "Colleges and universities establish conditions to attract, satisfy, and retain students for purposes of challenging them to develop qualities of the educated person, including a capacity for complex critical reasoning, communication, leadership, a sense of identity and purpose, an appreciation for difference, and a commitment to lifelong learning" (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 2). We typically think of learning as taking place only in classrooms but research has confirmed that students establish relationships and learn from each other on campus in environments outside the classroom. Settings such as courtyards, patios, or a

Before



After



grassy knoll can contribute to the learning experience. A brick plaza, for example, can be a quaint space that provides seating, an opportunity to linger and meet with friends and, one day, memories of special days at one's alma mater.

Because college students spend more time out of class than in class, it is important to provide settings that encourage social interaction. "In fact, when asked what they learned in college, graduates frequently mention that participation in activities outside of class increased their confidence, competence, and self-assurance" (Marchese, 1990, p. 5). Bonds formed in college help students reconsider what they believe, encourage them to consider the perspectives of others, and incline them to evaluate their own priorities in life. "They amplify, dampen, or distort the force of the curriculum, instruction, codes of conduct, and institutional norms. They can trump the best teacher's ace and stalemate the most thoughtful dean. Relationships are labs for learning to communicate, empathize, argue, and reflect. Encounters

IT'S EVIDENT THAT STUDENTS NEED PLACES ON CAMPUS TO SPEND TIME WITH EACH OTHER AND SO DO FACULTY, STAFF, VISITORS, ALUMNI, AND ALL THE REST OF US.

with others who have diverse backgrounds and strongly held opinions create the context for increased tolerance and integrity" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 392).

It's evident that students need places on campus to spend time with each other and so do faculty, staff, visitors, alumni, and all the rest of us. Arranging environments is a powerful technique used to influence human behavior. This is why, at the University of Florida, we work hard to build and maintain places and spaces where people can get together without much effort. We use brick features to encourage people to slow down and sit a while, rather than just hurriedly pass from one place to another. But, there has to be a good reason for them to do this.

One reason might be an inviting brick patio or courtyard that provides seating and encloses a space to help people feel safe and comfortable. We build these magnets for people to get together. It is pretty gratifying to transform a sandy, boring space that people used to just walk across, into an invigorating place that is an attractive destination for conversation, entertainment, reading, or just relaxing. We know we have captured the potential of a setting and reclaimed another worn out space when we see people reading, talking, studying, sipping Starbucks, or just enjoying the moment in a beautiful place that they never noticed before.

WHAT YOU WANT

You want to accomplish something that matters, something that makes a difference, right? It's no fun for the grounds crew to maintain an area that looks bad when they get there and just as bad when they leave. This used to happen on our campus when we would mow and weed-eat sandy, dirty, lawns that barely hung on because they were so walked out. We don't dislike turf, in fact, we love it. Few aspects of a campus environment are prettier than lush green grass, nicely mowed and edged. But, we weren't making a difference by just mowing dirt. We woke up to reality and realized that grass just wasn't going to grow in certain areas because of relentless foot-traffic. In several areas, we built beautiful brick paver settings that control and enhance pedestrian movement. Most of the sand is gone now and the areas we renovated need little or no maintenance. We have saved time

and can go do other tasks. Another interesting fact to keep in mind is that plants and grass are pretty particular about how much sun and shade they get. The temperature, rain, and snow also impact them. Bricks don't care about any of these things. By building brick surfaces and courtyards we have turned problems into assets and reduced our maintenance load. That's what I want. You might want the same thing.

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MORE BRICKS, LESS LIBERTY

One of our goals at the University of Florida Physical Plant is to create positive environments and eliminate negative ones. Not all over campus certainly, but in several places, we have done this by not allowing people the liberty to go wherever they want to go. Bricks and more bricks have cleaned-up our large campus by eliminating paths and have created friendly places for people to spend time with each other. There are 51,000 students at the University of Florida. That's a lot of people and they create many opportunities and challenges for our facilities group. When classes change, it's an amazing sight. Fortunately, our design solutions involving brick work well and will endure for many years. They could work on smaller campuses also since we all have the same problems, in different sizes. Of course, there are plenty of other ways to manage foot-traffic and guide people. Posts and rope, stone walls, shrubs, fences, benches, railings, and bike racks work well also. But, for us at the University of Florida, brick is our solution of choice. Besides, here's what Pink Floyd said: "All in all, it's just another brick in the wall." 🎧

NOTES

1. Brandon, R. & Spruch, A. (2008) *Inspired Landscapes*. American School and University, November.
2. Chickering, A. & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
3. Levine, A. & Cureton, J. (1998). Collegiate Life: An obituary. *Change*, May/June, Vol. 30 Issue 30.
4. Marchese, T. (1990). A new conversation about undergraduate teaching: An interview with Professor Richard J. Light, Convener of the Harvard Assessment Seminars. *AAHE Bulletin*, 42 (9), 3-8.
5. *Strange, C. & Banning, J. (2001). Educating by design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Before



After

