6. Trends and Issues in Space Planning

As UAF looks ahead to the next decade, it is difficult to predict program trends. Growth at the university has traditionally responded to the boom/bust economic cycle that is so typical to Alaska. Although the Lower 48 states are bracing for an enrollment boom, Alaskan demographics appear to be declining in the elementary age cohort. Since the majority of UAF students hail from Alaska (86 percent in fall of 2000), it is likely that national growth trends will not have any significant impact on enrollments of classic first-time freshmen. However, depending upon economic trends, the university could see an increase in non-traditional students.

Quantifying and prioritizing departmental space needs is not uniformly practiced on campus. The current academic plan does not provide specific information pertaining to each department's anticipated space requirements. Although many departments cited a need for additional space in the recent accreditation study, that need was not quantified in detail in many instances. The continuing influx of research dollars also creates space shortages. Unfortunately, funded projects are difficult to predict and quantify. A comprehensive, campus-wide strategy is needed for prioritizing space needs.

The most pressing space needs for the immediate future are in biology/wildlife, art, engineering and computer science. Some administrative units, such as human resources, are overcrowded. There is also a need for surge space to accommodate units while awaiting new construction as well as during deferred maintenance projects, which will continue to take significant amounts of space off line for 12-18 months at a time through 2005.

CREATING ADJACENCIES

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to plan and assign space based upon a longer-term vision and plan. That plan focuses on creating programmatic adjacencies whenever possible. This approach was first used with the Duckering Building. A decision was made to house all of UAF's engineering programs in the Duckering Building, including the School of Mineral Engineering, which had been housed in the nearby Brooks Building.

Building upon the adjacency concept, a plan for use of the Brooks Building was then developed. As of the summer of '02, the building will house rural and Alaska Native program units, in addition to general use classrooms. Although the building is not large enough to house all units that deal with rural and Alaska Native concerns on campus, the majority of them will be housed in the building. This "center" concept will go a long way toward meeting the goals of the UAF Strategic Plan 2005.

The university is continuing long-range space planning for several other buildings on Lower Campus. A major reconfiguration of space in the Gruening, Signers' and Eielson buildings is being investigated, based upon using space that will be vacated when the Brooks Building opens. The goal would be to consolidate most of the College of Liberal Arts into the Gruening Building and utilize Signers' and Eielson for student-focused services. This reconfiguration will provide some much-needed space for both the art and music departments in the Fine Arts Building; however, it will not address all of the studio space needs for art.

Another project that the university is moving forward with is consolidation of all student dining services on Lower Campus into Wood Center. This would address facility dining, access and location deficiencies. The existing Lola Tilly Commons dining facility located on the south edge of Lower Campus could then be converted to a much-needed student mall area. Specifically, the overcrowded bookstore currently located in Constitution Hall could be relocated to the Commons. Significant storage is available, as well as large retail areas. A completed second floor would offer opportunities for other retail operations. This is particularly important on the UAF campus, given the distance from most Fairbanks shopping venues. The vacated Constitution Hall could then be used to accommodate other unmet space needs.

The vehicle for creating many of the adjacencies has been the deferred maintenance projects. From the Bunnell Building revitalization through the Fine Arts Building, these projects have been focused on creating a vastly improved educational environment in older buildings. Everything from better teaching laboratory space to the latest in smart classroom technology has been incorporated into the projects, while at the same time rectifying the building code deficiencies that were so prevalent in these older structures.

SPACE ISSUES

As stated by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges in its "Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report" of October 2001, "the first concern is that UAF has insufficient laboratory and office space to support its expanding research and graduate education base." External funding at UAF has increased from $58.7 million in 1996 to $86.7 million in 2001. As units continue to be increasingly successful in obtaining funded projects, the demand for additional space will become even greater. An anticipated growth of $11 million is expected just within the next two years, given recent successes with NIH-funded biomedical research. In 2001, a plan to reconfigure significant amounts of space on West Ridge served as the catalyst to begin planning for a new biosciences building of approximately 150,000 gross square feet. The building should be completed by 2007. Construction of additional space on West Ridge will also require significant investment in campus infrastructure. Campus utilities are currently at capacity for the west end of campus.

A new building will not address all of the existing space problems at UAF, particularly on West Ridge. Most of the existing buildings were constructed in the early to mid-70s and are no longer meeting research infrastructure needs. One of the dilemmas facing facilities planners at UAF is whether to build new or renovate. Use of the older buildings cannot continue without significant investment to bring them up to current codes and functional expectations.

Although the majority of research-related space needs are on West Ridge, it is expected that the engineering programs, which are currently located in the Duckering Building, will be at capacity in less than five years. Assuming that the biological and computational sciences building is constructed, the biology/wildlife undergraduate program will be relocated to West Ridge. That will leave approximately 11,000 assignable square feet in office and teaching lab space for possible reassignment to the engineering programs. As well, the Rasmuson Library has little room for expanding of collections and the current deferred maintenance project does not address that need.

Space challenges will continue at the university for some time. It is anticipated that through better utilization of existing space, more thorough evaluation of needs and subsequent prioritization of those needs and building revitalization efforts, the majority of space issues

will at least be addressed. Although the solutions may not be perfect, the university will continue to put its best foot forward to meet these challenges.