

A SHEPHERD'S VIEW OF *THE POLITICS AND PROCESS OF CHANGE*

I recently emerged from that professional twilight zone of science building planning and construction known as the "building shepherd." While those efforts certainly decreased my research productivity and took me out of the class more than I would have liked, the fruits of those labors will outlast my time at Wittenberg University and reach every student that comes on campus. The humbling part of the exercise comes from the realization that the building is a monument to the hard work of dozens of faculty and administrators, advancement efforts, and the services of outstanding architects, lab planners, and contractors. Nothing can bring so many together the way a building project can. Nothing will cost so much for most schools. Nothing will require the coordination of so many agendas of such a diverse lot with such competing needs.

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For us, it took a series of fits and false starts as we painfully learned the process described by Cahal Stephens et al. in *The politics and process of change: institutional building-planning teams*. Once the momentum began, however, the planning process that they describe became the greatest catalyst for change on our campus since Sputnik and consisted of an exciting five years that fundamentally improved faculty morale, student research, the way we teach, and the way our students learn. This change is the payment for the many committees and meetings described by Stephens et al.

It is hard to imagine a more powerful focusing lens than a new building (or significant renovation to an old one) when you live in outdated facilities. That need to "get it right" carried us through our reluctant initial talks about "vision statements" and "mission."

What could those abstract ideas have to do with our clear need for more bench space?

The hopes for more space brought us to the table when we had to pare down the wish list. There we discovered that discussions about vision and mission gave us the ability to make the hard choices. That incentive held our focus through months of meetings, discussions, meetings, site visits, and more meetings. We came to see how the building would be transforming in every way - not just simply giving us more breathing room. The need to get and keep others on board forced us to articulate those visions to donors, administrators, architects, board members, alumni, students, and each other.

Until we really commenced planning, which was months after we thought we had started, we had never held detailed discussions of pedagogy as a group beyond our own departments. Until then, we never believed that cooperating across traditional departmental divisions would change the way we taught or improve our curricula.



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We were departmental islands; we became a community.

In the end, we built a new structure with new labs, large windows, and attractive gathering spaces. But frankly, I think that what we really gained was:

- ◆ a new way of teaching
- ◆ a new focus on student research
- ◆ new links with colleagues
- ◆ a deliberateness about collaboration.

The building is really just the icing on the cake, but without it, we would never have found the activation energy necessary to begin the reaction. And with it, we can now offer students an education that better engages their minds.

For the building shepherd, it is more work than *The politics and process of change* seems to imply. Likewise, it is far more rewarding in reality than any essay could relate. The article clearly shows the steps necessary in building planning and design. If anything, it understates the powerful role such a process can have and the juggling necessary to succeed. ■