



PRIVATE UNIVERSITY PRODUCTS AND NEWS

APRIL 2026
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SMARTER BATHROOMS,
LOWER COSTS
**HOW COLLEGES ARE
UPGRADING A HIGH
USE SPACE**

STREAMLINING THE
CAMPUS TRANSITION
**A CONVERSATION ON
MOVE-IN AND MOVE-
OUT SERVICES**

MAXIMIZING IMPACT
**STRATEGIC PLANNING
FOR CAMPUS
AQUATIC FACILITIES**

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
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Streamlining the Campus Transition: A Conversation on Move-In and Move-Out Services

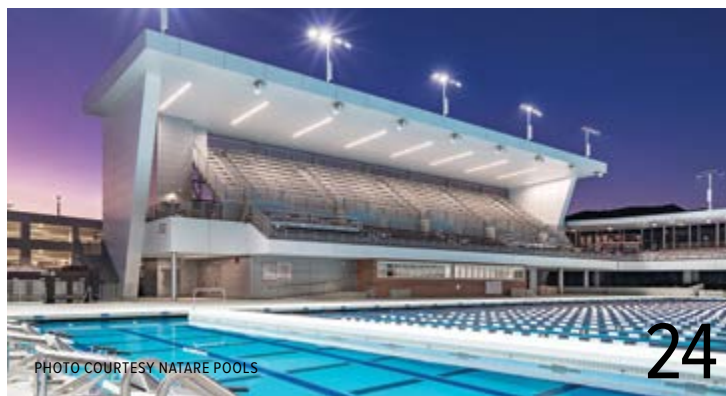
Turn move-in chaos into a campus advantage. Discover how structured move-in and move-out services boost student satisfaction, streamline operations, protect facilities, and even support recruitment—creating a first impression that lasts far beyond day one.



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What does it look like to turn climate theory into action? At Macalester College, Roopali Phadke brings that question to life through her work in energy and climate policy, student trips to the United Nations Climate Summit, and a growing battery recycling initiative.



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Campus housing expectations are shifting fast, and durability, accessibility, and efficiency have become non-negotiable. Ross Ravenhorst talks about ways to exceed those expectations, from low-maintenance surfaces to visual appeal.

Editor's Letter

APRIL 2026

There's a certain kind of energy that only spring can bring to a college campus. You can feel it in the air—right alongside a little pollen and a lot of ambition. After months of navigating winter weather, tight schedules, and the occasional “Why is this project taking longer than expected?” moment, campuses across the country are coming back to life in full color.

And with that renewal comes something facility managers know all too well: it's showtime. Spring is when campuses put their best foot forward. Admissions tours ramp up, alumni return for long-awaited reunions, and prospective students arrive with fresh eyes (and very observant parents). Every walkway, residence hall, athletic complex, and student center becomes part of the story your institution is telling. No pressure, right?

But here's the truth, this is also when all your hard work gets to shine.

Those upgraded residence halls full of visiting families imagining move-in day. The newly refinished flooring in your student union? It's hosting everything from campus tours to late-night events. And those beautifully designed outdoor spaces? They're no longer just plans on paper, they're filled with students, laughter, and the occasional impromptu frisbee game.

Spring also brings a full calendar of events that truly put facilities to the test in the best possible way. From outdoor concerts and spring festivals to athletic competitions and commencement preparations, campuses transform into vibrant hubs of activity. These events aren't just traditions; they are opportunities to showcase the functionality, flexibility, and aesthetic appeal of your spaces.

Of course, we'd be remiss not to acknowledge that behind every seamless event is a team that made it happen—often with a few last-minute adjustments, a lot of coordination, and maybe an extra cup (or three) of coffee. Whether it's ensuring an aquatic center is competition-ready, fine-tuning lighting for an evening event, or making sure every detail is just right for visiting guests, your work does not go unnoticed.

In this issue of *Private University Products and News*, we're celebrating that intersection of preparation and presentation. From innovative facility upgrades to forward-thinking design strategies, this edition highlights the ways campuses are continuing to evolve to meet the expectations of today—and tomorrow.

So as spring unfolds and your campus takes center stage, take a moment to appreciate what you've built, improved, and maintained. Because when everything comes together—when the spaces work exactly as they should and people take notice—you're not just supporting the campus experience. You're elevating it.

And if everything goes perfectly? Well, we'll all just assume it was easy.

Thank you, as always, for letting us be part of your campus story.

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Inspiring Action at Macalester College

BY CYNTHIA MWENJA, PhD

Roopali Phadke, professor in the Department of Environmental Studies at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minn., brings bold visions to reality through her strengths in leadership, collaboration, and communication. Her research focuses on energy and climate policy, citizen science, community based research methodologies, and sustainable development initiatives.

In addition to exploring these complex issues with her students in classes and summer lab experiences, Phadke also organizes an annual student observer trip to the United Nations Climate Summit, and she is the lead organizer of a remarkable battery recycling initiative which has impressive reach.

Considering Climate Complexities

Now in her 21st year at Macalester, Phadke has explored her research interests more and more through the lens of critical minerals mining over the past 10 years. According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), “Minerals that are ‘critical’ are both essential to the nation’s economy or national security and have supply chains that are vulnerable to disruption”; the USGS lists 60 of these minerals, including cobalt and nickel, for example. Phadke and her students study policies and community issues which arise around minerals mining. Phadke’s summer undergraduate research labs funded through grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF) investigate matters of water quality protection, since “mining and water use go

hand-in-hand,” as Phadke notes. They also consider questions of energy justice because that idea connects to critical minerals mining practices, as well.

Phadke points out that “Global issues touch down locally”; these connected concerns of water quality, energy justice, and their interactions with critical minerals mining are definitely at play in Minnesota—and making decisions about any one “best” course of action can quickly become challenging, due to the variety of stakeholders involved. One Minnesota example is the proposed mining of one of the largest deposits of copper, nickel and cobalt in the U.S., which is a mere five miles from the Boundary Waters Canoe area; this watershed is currently protected by a 20-year mining ban that the Trump administration would like to rescind. The mining companies proposing new drilling in the area say that they can extract the critical minerals responsibly, but environmental groups point out that clean extraction has not yet been successful, and the proposed mines threaten environmental destruction in

what is currently a protected area.

As Phadke points out, most young people today don’t need to be convinced that climate change and environmental degradation are real issues that they will have to manage; many students experience anxiety specifically relating to fears of climate catastrophe. In their search for solutions, Phadke has noticed that young people often have “knee-jerk” faith in green energy solutions like electric cars that rely on mining of critical minerals. When Phadke discusses green energy production in her classes—and the environmental impacts of extracting critical minerals—she makes the story of “green” energy much more complex for her students. Considering the nuances and tensions of real-life issues such as these is the foundation of a liberal arts education, Phadke says.

As Phadke and her students consider the more complicated picture of green energy production, they grapple with questions such as “Who bears the burden of these mines and the environmental degradation they cause?”



PHOTO COURTESY ROOPALI

“Who gets to decide on the projects, and are the decision-makers responsible to those who bear the burdens?” and even: “In the case of electric vehicles, are more cars really the solution?” Phadke states that wrestling with these thorny issues requires her students to come to terms with their own identities and really examine who pays the price for climate action.

The answers are not one-size-fits-all, either. Phadke reports that she and her students have examined mines all over the U.S. and in diverse biomes such as arid regions and wetlands. The answers about “best” practices, she notes, are very place-based; each case is unique and has different considerations, leading to different answers about the most effective and ethical course of action in each case.

Urban Mining

The newest chapter of this research in Phadke’s lab centers on urban mining, or “harvesting” metals already circulating above

ground. Such harvesting is generally done by collecting metals from e-waste, or discarded electrical or electronic devices. According to the World Health Organization, “Common items in e-waste streams include computers, mobile phones, large household appliances, and medical equipment.... E-waste is one of the fastest growing solid waste streams in the world... however, e-waste streams contain valuable and finite resources that can be reused if they are recycled appropriately.” Even though only about 20 percent of global e-waste is recycled or recovered, Phadke’s students find these ideas really exciting and empowering—and they are shocked to learn that anyone is simply burying economically valuable metals in landfills or burning them in incinerators.

CollectED Battery Recycling Initiative

As a result of this line of inquiry, Phadke secured a notable \$1.8 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop public education about the collection and recycling of e-waste, particularly batteries.

She and her partners created the CollectED Battery Recycling Initiative, which features several key components: a professional and informative website, an interactive public exhibit, and the 2025 REcharge Academy, a workshop for K-12 educators. According to the website, CollectED’s goal is to “provide tools, resources, and practical guidance for individuals, schools, and communities to take simple, informed steps to prevent battery-related hazards, protect the environment, and recover valuable materials.”

At <https://collectedproject.org/>, visitors find information about battery recycling that is easy to navigate, access, and understand. The site includes resources for people in any location to “take meaningful steps toward better battery recycling.” It also includes an interactive “Drop-Off Spot Locator” which shows site visitors where they can recycle different kinds of e-waste in their local communities. Additionally, the website provides information about the two other prongs of the CollectED project, described below.

CollectED Exhibit

There is also a \$300,000 CollectED exhibit boasting multiple enticing, interactive kiosks that fill 500-square-feet. The exhibit involved seven partner organizations in its development, design, and implementation. Taken as a whole, the exhibit tells the story of batteries and why they should be collected and recycled—why recovering their components is so important for both the economy and the environment. One of the design partners was a social marketing firm which tested logos and design features with young people. The resulting displays look like high-end science museum installations, and the array is certainly eye-catching and compelling for people of all ages. Phadke particularly appreciates the “trash panda” mascot and the cheeky messages it conveys.

Phadke worked with many people to launch the public CollectED exhibit, which debuted at the Minnesota State Fair. Covering the

event required all of her summer lab student workers as well as an additional 50 volunteers. Millions of people attend this state fair each year, and nearly 250,000 of them came through the EcoExperience where the CollectEd exhibit was housed. She says that this was a great opportunity to get her students in front of the public, and they had amazing moments interacting with so many people. Readers can view a video of the exhibit at the CollectED website above.

REcharge Academy

In the grant application to fund the CollectED project, Phadke and her team committed to making their project replicable for other states so that information about battery recycling could be spread “far and wide.” In one initiative toward this goal, CollectED partnered with the KidWind Project to host its 20th annual REcharge Academy at Macalester, focusing the 2025 workshop on battery science and recycling

education. Sixteen K-12 educators from across the country attended this weeklong institute in which they learned how to promote battery recycling; their experiences enabled them to take this knowledge back to their home communities and begin their own initiatives there.

While the CollectED project did not receive the entire amount granted due to federal budget cuts, it produced notable results in the one year that it was funded. The group met all of the milestones they had set for the initial year, and they will continue with the project in every way they are able to do so; as Phadke points out, “The need for the work has not gone away.” She hopes that they are able to access the remaining funds in the future; until then, they are seeking to partner with Minnesota state agencies, particularly in meeting the goal of returning with the CollectED exhibit to the 2026 Minnesota State Fair. They also hope to take the exhibit



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on tour throughout the state, installing it in various sites, such as institutions and museums. In a related creative initiative, Phadke and her team are building a small-scale traveling library exhibit, which will be deployed on interlibrary loan (ILL) trucks so that people throughout the state of Minnesota can interact with the information.

United Nations Climate Summit

In a different ambitious initiative, for over 10 years, Phadke has run Macalester College’s program which takes students to the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference; this event is also called a “summit” or “Conference of the Parties” (COP). Macalester faculty members and students have been given observer status for these events through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Phadke notes that it is important for the parties negotiating international treaties to have observers, and she and her students are honored to serve in that

role. With their status, they have access to the diplomatic zone, sit in on treaty negotiations, and interact with attendees from around the world.

To prepare students to take full advantage of their access and experiences at the climate summit, Phadke teaches a course focused on the issues addressed at the event; this class culminates in their travel. This fall’s group is slated to travel to Turkey for COP31 in November. Each student prepares a research question to bring to the conference; each attendee then uses their access as an opportunity to gather research pertinent to their topic. The array of topics they choose is broad; past research inquiries have included agriculture, industry, Indigenous rights, sustainable food systems, and more.

As Phadke drily states, this initiative clearly ties to her work and interests. She appreciates that attending the event can transform her

students’ lives because of their ability to learn from so many stakeholders from all over the globe. Phadke says that this experience has inspired her students to pursue careers in climate law, policy, and advocacy, among other fields.

Through the examples of projects she has spearheaded, Phadke demonstrates that leadership, collaboration, and communication can produce inspiring and admirable results—results that can change individual lives as well as the world’s collective well-being. Phadke provides a model for educators who aim to tie their research interests to the world outside the academy, and her results show that these goals can be reached in truly spectacular ways.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Cynthia Mwenja teaches Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Montevallo.

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FACILITIES &
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Smarter Bathrooms, Lower Costs: How Colleges Are Upgrading a High Use Space

BY BESTBATH

Campus housing expectations are shifting fast, and durability, accessibility, and efficiency have become non negotiable. We sat down with Ross Ravenhorst of BestBath to explore how innovative bathroom solutions are helping private colleges and universities meet rising student demands while reducing maintenance burdens and long term costs.

From ADA compliant design to installation efficiencies and customizable options, he offers a practical look at how forward thinking institutions are reimagining one of the most heavily used spaces on campus.

What are the biggest trends you're seeing in university housing bathroom design and construction today, particularly in terms of durability and student expectations?

We're seeing a strong shift toward durability paired with elevated aesthetics. Universities want spaces that feel more like modern apartments than institutional housing, while still holding up to heavy, multi-year use. There's also a growing emphasis on low-maintenance materials, and accessibility-forward design.

Students expect clean, contemporary finishes, while facilities teams prioritize longevity and ease of upkeep—so solutions need to deliver both.

How do your bath and shower solutions address the high-traffic, heavy-use demands typical in residence halls?

Our products are built using high-grade composite materials with fully reinforced walls and bases designed specifically for institutional environments. Unlike traditional tile and cultured marble type products there are no joints or grout lines to crack, stain, or harbor mold, which significantly improves durability. The surfaces are impact-resistant, easy to clean, easy to maintain, and

engineered for long-term performance, even in high-turnover, high-use settings like dorms.

Universities are increasingly focused on accessibility—how does Best Bath support ADA compliance while maintaining a modern, appealing design for student housing?

We've been manufacturing showers since 1969, so we were already at the forefront of accessible design when ADA standards were established in 1990. Today, we offer a comprehensive range of ADA-compliant solutions, including barrier-free and low-threshold showers, along with integrated safety accessories. What truly differentiates us is that accessibility isn't treated as an add-on—it's built into the design from the start. Our products combine full accessibility compliance with modern aesthetics, featuring clean lines and customizable finishes that fit seamlessly into today's student housing environments

What are the advantages of prefabricated or modular bath systems compared to traditional tile installations in dormitory settings?

Prefabricated systems offer several key advantages over traditional tile installations, particularly in dormitory settings. Because they are manufactured in a controlled environment, they provide consistent quality and performance across every unit. Installation is significantly faster, reducing on-site labor time and helping projects stay on schedule. With fewer seams and no grout, there is also a reduced risk of leaks or long-term failures. Over time, these benefits translate into lower lifecycle costs through decreased maintenance and fewer repairs. In a dorm environment, where scale and repeatability are critical, prefabricated systems help ensure every unit performs reliably and consistently.

Can you speak to installation timelines and how your products help minimize disruption during renovations, especially in tight summer turnaround windows?

Speed is critical in higher ed, especially with tight summer renovation windows. Our

systems are designed for quick, efficient installation, often reducing install time significantly compared to traditional tile. Because units arrive pre-engineered and ready to set, crews can install multiple units in a single day, which dramatically accelerates project timelines. With fewer trades involved, contractors can move faster and more predictably—helping universities stay on schedule and reopen buildings on time with minimal disruption.

Slip resistance and safety are critical in student housing—what features do your products include to help reduce accidents and liability concerns?

Safety is built into our designs. We offer textured, slip-resistant flooring that meets or exceeds industry standards along with options like integrated seating, grab bars, and low-threshold entries. These features help reduce fall risks while maintaining a clean, modern look—supporting both student safety and liability reduction for the institution.

How do your solutions contribute to long-term maintenance savings for facilities teams compared to conventional bathroom systems?

Our systems are designed to minimize ongoing maintenance and deliver long-term value. Without grout lines, facilities teams spend far less time dealing with mold, mildew, and repairs. The durable, non-porous surfaces resist staining, cracking, and damage, which reduces the need for frequent replacements. We also stand behind that durability with a 30-year warranty, giving facilities added confidence in the product’s longevity. Over time, this translates into lower labor costs, fewer work orders, and a significantly longer lifecycle compared to traditional tile systems.

Sustainability is a growing priority on campuses—what environmentally friendly materials or water-saving features are incorporated into your products?

We support sustainability by focusing on

continued....

long-lasting, high-performance materials that reduce the need for replacement and minimize waste over time. Our fiberglass composite construction is inherently durable and lightweight, which lowers transportation impact and extends product life—both key

sustainability advantages. Our systems can also be supplied with WaterSense and CALGreen compliant low-flow fixtures and water-saving technologies, helping campuses reduce water consumption. Additionally, our manufacturing processes are designed

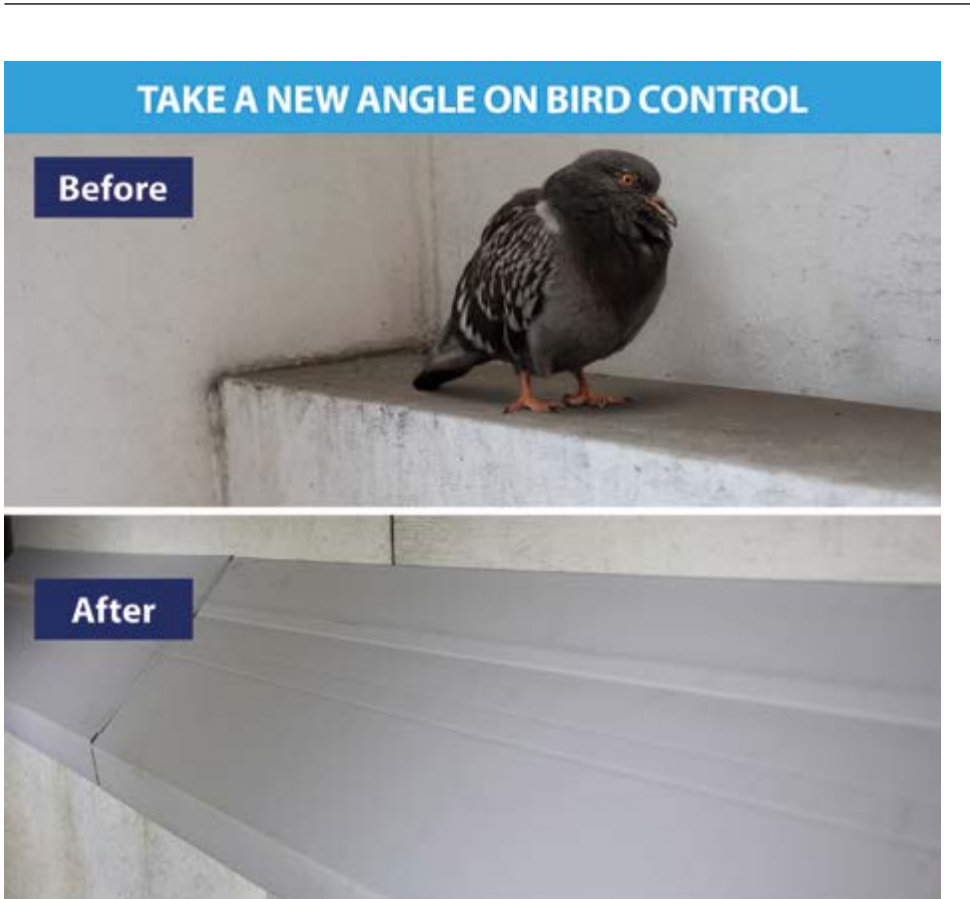
to minimize material waste, and the overall durability of our products contributes to a smaller environmental footprint across the building's lifecycle.

Customization can be important for branding and student experience—what design flexibility do you offer universities in terms of colors, configurations, and layouts?

We offer extensive customization, including a wide range of colors, finishes, sizes, and configurations. Whether a university wants a consistent standard across campus or unique designs for different residence halls, we can tailor solutions to fit their vision. This flexibility allows schools to build their brand and enhance student experience while maintaining performance standards.

Can you share a case study or example of a successful university housing project where your products significantly improved performance, efficiency, or student satisfaction?

While specifics can vary by project, we've worked with numerous universities where transitioning from tile to our prefab systems resulted in faster renovation timelines, reduced maintenance calls, and improved student satisfaction due to cleaner, more modern bathrooms. In many cases, facilities teams report significant reductions in maintenance and long-term repair costs, which validates the investment in a more durable, prefabricated solution.



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Streamlining the Campus Transition

A CONVERSATION ON MOVE-IN AND MOVE-OUT SERVICES

BY UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT SERVICES

As private colleges and universities continue to refine the student experience from first impression to final farewell, one operational area has quietly emerged as a powerful differentiator: structured move-in and move-out services. Once viewed as a logistical necessity, these programs are now being reimagined as strategic tools that enhance student satisfaction, improve operational efficiency, and even support recruitment goals.

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In this feature, Private University Products and News spoke with the University and Student Services Company to explore how institutions can elevate these critical transition periods—and why doing so matters more than ever.

Creating a First Impression That Lasts

Few moments carry as much emotional weight as move-in day. It’s a milestone filled with excitement, anxiety, and, often, a car packed to its absolute limit.

“Structured move-in services immediately reduce stress for both students and their families,” the team explained. “When there’s a clear system in place—whether that’s scheduled arrival times, designated unloading zones, or trained staff assisting with belongings—it transforms what could be a chaotic experience into a welcoming one.”

Parents notice the difference. Students feel it. And that first impression often sets the tone for the entire campus experience.

Driving Satisfaction, Retention, and Success

While move-in may seem like a single-day event, its impact can ripple across the academic year.

Institutions that invest in organized move-in programs often see measurable gains in student satisfaction scores, particularly among first-year students. A smooth, supportive arrival experience helps students settle in faster, connect with peers sooner, and begin their academic journey with confidence.

“There’s a direct link between reducing early stress and improving a student’s sense of belonging,” the company noted. “And that sense of belonging plays a significant role in retention and first-year success.”

Managing the Logistics of High-Volume Days

Anyone who has witnessed campus move-in day knows the challenges: traffic congestion, long wait times, safety concerns, and overwhelmed staff.

Structured services address these issues head-on. Pre-assigned move-in windows stagger arrivals, reducing bottlenecks. Clearly marked traffic flow patterns improve safety for both pedestrians and drivers. And trained teams ensure that unloading happens quickly and efficiently.

“The goal is to create movement, not gridlock,” they emphasized. “With the right planning, what used to take hours can be reduced to minutes.”

Unlocking Operational Efficiency

For facilities and housing teams, move-in and move-out represent some of the most demanding days of the year. Without a coordinated approach, these periods can strain resources and staff capacity.

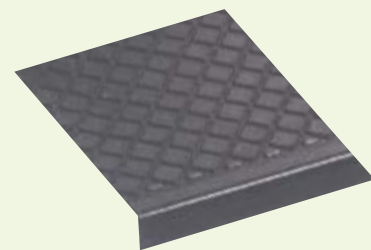
Organized programs streamline operations by clearly defining roles, timelines, and workflows. Whether it’s coordinating elevator usage, managing staging areas, or aligning housekeeping schedules, the result is a more predictable and manageable process.

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“Efficiency isn’t just about speed—it’s about control,” the team shared. “When everyone knows their role, the entire operation runs smoother.”

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High traffic inevitably leads to wear and tear—but it doesn’t have to lead to damage.

Move-in services significantly reduce the risk to residence halls, elevators, and common areas by controlling how and when items are transported. Protective materials, monitored pathways, and supervised loading zones all contribute to preserving campus infrastructure.

“It’s far less costly to prevent damage than to repair it,” they noted. “A structured approach pays for itself in avoided maintenance.”

Choosing the Right Staffing Model

One of the most common questions institutions face is how to staff these programs effectively.

The answer often lies in a hybrid approach.

In-house teams provide oversight and institutional knowledge, while student workers add energy and relatability. Third-party vendors can bring scalability and specialized expertise, particularly for larger campuses.

“There’s no one-size-fits-all model,” they explained. “The most successful programs align staffing with campus size, culture, and budget.”

Balancing Cost and Opportunity

While move-in services require investment, they can also create revenue opportunities. Some institutions offer premium services—such as early move-in, room setup packages, or storage solutions—for an additional fee.

The key is balance.

“These programs should remain accessible while offering optional enhancements,” the team advised. “When done thoughtfully, they can offset costs without creating barriers for students.”

Supporting Accessibility and Inclusivity

Move-in and move-out services also play a critical role in supporting diverse student populations.

For students with disabilities, these programs can ensure necessary accommodations are in place from the moment they arrive. International students and families traveling long distances benefit from reduced logistical burdens and added support.

“This is about equity,” they emphasized. “Every student deserves a smooth and welcoming transition, regardless of their circumstances.”

Leveraging Technology for Smarter Operations

Technology is transforming how campuses manage move-in and move-out.

Scheduling platforms allow students to select arrival times, reducing congestion. Real-time communication tools keep families informed.

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“Data and communication are game changers,” they noted. “They allow institutions to anticipate challenges and respond in real time.”

A Powerful Branding Opportunity

Perhaps most importantly, move-in is no longer just an operational task—it’s a branding moment.

From the friendliness of staff to the efficiency of the process, every detail communicates something about the institution. A seamless, welcoming experience reinforces the message that the campus is organized, student-focused, and invested in success.

“Move-in day is often the first true campus experience,” they said. “It’s your opportunity to show—not just tell—what your institution stands for.”

Looking Beyond the Checklist

While many institutions focus on logistics, the most impactful programs go a step further.

Some campuses incorporate welcome stations, student ambassadors, and even small celebratory touches to create a sense of excitement. Others extend services into move-out, offering storage, shipping, or donation programs that reduce waste and support sustainability goals.

“These are the moments that elevate the experience,” the team added. “It’s not just about moving belongings—it’s about moving people into a community.”

Final Thoughts

As expectations continue to rise in higher education, even the most routine processes are being reexamined for their potential impact. Structured move-in and move-out services represent a unique opportunity to improve efficiency, protect facilities, and, most importantly, enhance the student experience.

For institutions willing to invest in thoughtful planning and execution, the payoff is clear: smoother operations, stronger first impressions, and a campus community that feels supported from day one.

And in today’s competitive landscape, that kind of start can make all the difference.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: University and Student Services (USS) partners with over 100 universities to enhance campus living through custom programs, move-in solutions, and student-focused services—saving time, improving student success, and generating funds that directly support campus communities.

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Maximizing Impact

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CAMPUS AQUATIC FACILITIES

As private colleges and universities continue to invest in facilities that enhance student life, support recruitment, and serve broader campus communities, aquatic centers have evolved into far more than just competition pools. In this interview, Joshua Albertson of Natare Pools shares expert insight into the planning, design, and modernization of campus aquatic facilities. From balancing the needs of diverse user groups to incorporating cutting-edge technology and sustainable solutions, Albertson outlines the key considerations that can transform a traditional pool into a dynamic, multi-use destination. His perspective offers valuable guidance for decision-makers looking to maximize both the functional and financial impact of their aquatic investments.

continued...



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Planning and Design

When a private college or university begins planning a new aquatic facility or renovation, what are the most important questions administrators should ask before the design process even begins?

What is our budget? How will the facility be used (competition, training, recreation, instruction)? What types of programming will be offered? What are the local codes? How do we integrate accessibility and inclusivity? What do the community, students, and athletes want?

Many campuses are trying to serve multiple groups with one facility—athletics, recreation, swim lessons, and community programs. How can aquatic facilities be designed to successfully serve these diverse users?

The key to balancing the needs of multiple groups is a strong understanding of how the pool is currently used—or how users would like to use it. The more information we have,

the better we can assess what is possible within the available footprint.

Installing a moving bulkhead can open many possibilities for swim lessons, courses, and competition. A bulkhead allows the pool to be divided, enabling free swim or training on one side while accommodating lessons or water aerobics on the other.

What are some of the most common design mistakes you see colleges make when planning aquatic facilities, and how can they avoid them?

Understanding your audience is critically important. In other words, plan for multiple users and flexibility. The more you can offer—both to students and faculty, as well as through outside use (think revenue streams)—the better.

How have aquatic facility expectations changed on college campuses over the past decade?

In the past, college and university pools were often simple rectangular spaces used primarily by swim teams for practice and competition. Over the past decade, we've seen more elaborate designs that emphasize recreation and student engagement. Today's facilities often feature a more waterpark-like feel, with added amenities and visual appeal rather than a single-purpose design.

Renovation vs. New Construction
Many private universities have aging pools built decades ago. What signs indicate that a renovation is sufficient versus when a full replacement should be considered?

The biggest indicator is structural integrity. If the pool walls and floor are structurally sound, renovation is typically the more practical solution—especially with approaches like stainless steel gutter systems and PVC membrane systems. These upgrades can make an aging pool look and function like a brand-new facility while ensuring it is watertight.

continued...



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of students report campus recreation facilities influence their decision of which college/university to attend.



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of students report that maintaining a healthy lifestyle was important to them prior to enrolling in their chosen college/university.



What are the biggest challenges when renovating an existing campus pool while trying to keep it operational during the academic year?

The primary challenge is managing disruption. Whether the pool is indoor or outdoor, there will be a period when it cannot be used. This can be difficult for students and faculty, as aquatic facilities are often heavily utilized.

What types of upgrades deliver the biggest return on investment for older aquatic facilities?

Bulkheads, upgraded filtration systems, stainless steel gutter systems, and PVC membrane lining systems.

Technology and Efficiency

What new technologies in pool design, filtration, and water management are helping universities reduce operational costs?

There are significant advancements in pumps, variable frequency drives (VFDs), filters, and heaters. Cost efficiency is critical due to ongoing operational expenses, and reducing these costs *continued...*

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For example, vacuum sand filters provide substantial savings by requiring less water, electricity, chemicals, and maintenance than traditional pressure filters. Additionally, the sand never needs to be replaced.

How can modern aquatic systems help universities meet their campus sustainability goals or support LEED initiatives?

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Additionally, vacuum sand filters operate with exceptional efficiency in both water and energy usage. A strong example is the Oakville Trafalgar Community Centre, which features stainless steel pools, PVC membrane systems, vacuum sand filters, and stainless steel gutters. The facility was awarded LEED Gold Certification in 2025.

Safety and Operations

What are the most important safety considerations universities should address when

designing or renovating aquatic facilities?

Compliance with current local safety codes and ADA requirements is essential. Facilities must be safe, accessible, and inclusive for all users.

How can facility design help make aquatic centers easier and more efficient for staff to manage and maintain?

From Natare’s perspective, installing a vacuum sand filter is a highly effective solution. It uses significantly less water and electricity and requires backwashing only every 30–40 days (or longer in some cases). Additionally, the filter media never needs to be replaced. Because the system uses compressed air instead of traditional backwashing, it maintains exceptional cleanliness cycle after cycle.

Student Experience and Recruitment

How do well-designed aquatic facilities contribute to student recruitment, retention, and campus life?

Aquatic facilities can be a major factor. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and university officials must recognize that what works for one campus may not work for another. A

well-designed facility aligns with institutional goals and supports the priorities identified at the start of the planning process.

A strong example is the Hiwa Recreation Centre at the University of Auckland. The facility was designed to enhance campus life and foster a connected, engaged community while supporting students’ social, physical, and mental well-being.

What features are today’s students expecting in a campus aquatic facility that may not have been priorities in the past?

Cold plunge pools and hot spas are increasingly popular.

For athletes, these features support recovery and rehabilitation.

For students, they provide relaxation and social opportunities.

Additionally, pools with a resort-style atmosphere—such as lazy rivers and slides—are becoming more desirable, creating a “college waterpark” experience.

Strategic and Financial Considerations
For colleges considering a new aquatic facility or major renovation in the next five to 10 years, what strategic advice would you give them today to ensure the project delivers long-term value?

Establish clear goals, plan for flexibility, and consider multiple revenue streams. Once these elements are defined, the rest of the process becomes more straightforward. Understanding what you want to achieve will guide the decisions needed to successfully reach those goals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Natare is a global leader in stainless steel pools and aquatic systems, providing innovative, custom-engineered solutions for commercial pools, resorts, and water parks worldwide—combining decades of expertise, precision design, and unmatched construction quality.

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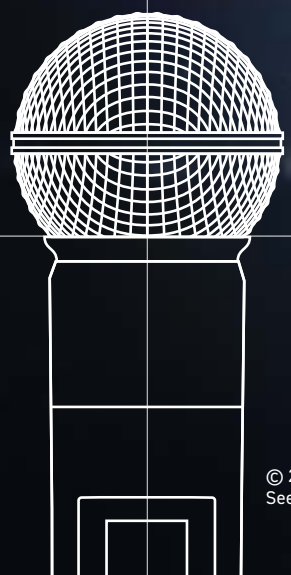
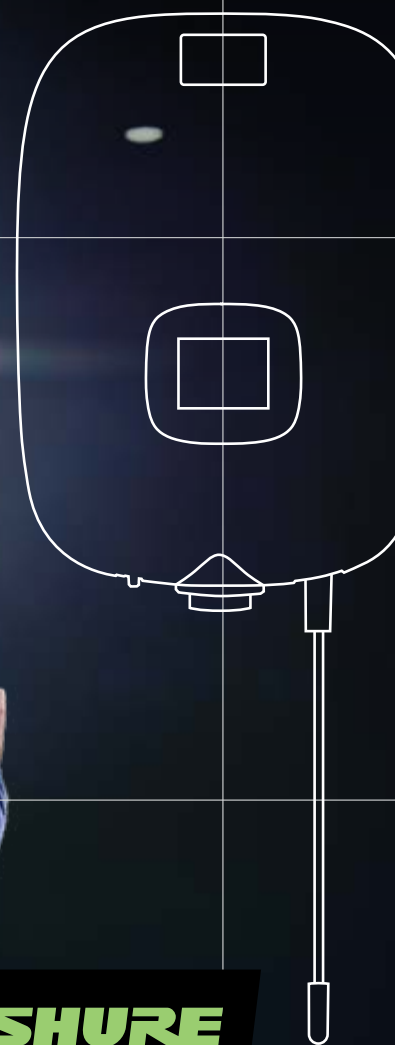
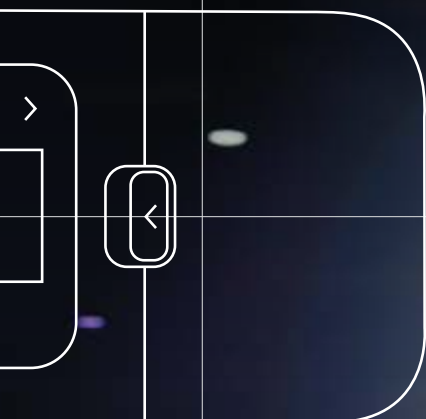
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First Impressions That Last: The Strategic Value of Exterior Landscaping on Private Campuses

BY ED BAUER

Drive onto almost any private college campus and you'll feel it before you consciously notice it. The sense of arrival. The calm. The pride. The promise. Long before a prospective student steps into a classroom or a parent meets with admissions, the exterior landscape has already begun telling a story.

For private colleges and universities— institutions that rely heavily on perception, reputation, and experience— exterior landscaping is far more than an aesthetic afterthought. It is a strategic investment that shapes first impressions, reinforces institutional identity, supports recruitment, and enhances the daily experience of students, faculty, and visitors alike.

The Campus as a Brand Experience

In today's competitive higher education environment, campuses must function as living, breathing representations of their brand. Exterior landscaping plays a critical role in that identity. Whether it's a historic quad framed by mature oaks, meticulously maintained flower beds that reflect school colors, or contemporary

green spaces that signal innovation and sustainability, landscaping communicates values without saying a word.

For private institutions in particular, where tuition costs often come with heightened expectations, the physical environment must align with the promise made in marketing materials. A well-designed landscape signals attention to detail, financial stability, and a commitment to excellence. Conversely, neglected grounds can quickly undermine even the strongest academic reputation.

First Impressions Drive Enrollment Decisions

It's no secret that campus visits are a pivotal moment in the enrollment funnel. Students and

families frequently cite the "feel" of a campus as a deciding factor. Exterior landscaping is central to that emotional response.

Tree-lined entrances, seasonal color displays, clean walkways, and inviting gathering spaces create a welcoming atmosphere that encourages prospective students to envision themselves as part of the community. These visual cues can evoke a sense of belonging, comfort, and excitement—key emotions that influence decision-making.

In many cases, the campus tour begins in a parking lot or at an admissions building surrounded by landscaping. That initial view sets the tone. Is the space vibrant and alive? Is it clean and thoughtfully maintained? Does it feel safe and cared for? These are questions visitors answer subconsciously within seconds.

Supporting Student Well-Being and Engagement

Beyond recruitment, exterior landscaping has a profound impact on the day-to-day experience of students. Research consistently shows that access to green spaces improves mental health,

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reduces stress, and enhances overall well-being. For students navigating the pressures of academic life, these benefits are invaluable.

Thoughtfully designed outdoor areas can serve multiple functions: quiet study zones, social gathering spaces, or even outdoor classrooms. Comfortable seating, shaded areas, and natural elements encourage students to spend time outside, fostering a stronger connection to campus.

For private colleges that emphasize community and student experience, these spaces become essential assets. A well-used quad or courtyard isn't just space—it's a hub of campus life, where relationships are built and memories are made.

Reinforcing Institutional Heritage and Tradition

Many private colleges pride themselves on rich histories and longstanding traditions. Exterior landscaping offers a unique opportunity to celebrate and reinforce that heritage.

Historic plantings preserved green spaces, and traditional garden designs can connect

current students with generations past. Landmarks such as signature trees, ceremonial pathways, or iconic courtyards often become symbolic elements of the institution.

At the same time, landscaping can bridge the gap between past and future. Integrating modern design elements with historic features allows campuses to evolve while maintaining their character—a balance that is especially important for private institutions seeking to honor tradition while remaining relevant.

Sustainability as a Visible Commitment

Sustainability has become a key priority across higher education, and exterior landscaping is one of the most visible ways to demonstrate that commitment. Native plantings, water-efficient irrigation systems, and environmentally responsible maintenance practices not only reduce operational costs but also align with the values of today's environmentally conscious students.

Green infrastructures such as rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pathways—can manage stormwater while enhancing

the campus aesthetic. These features turn functional necessities into educational opportunities, allowing institutions to showcase sustainability in action.

For private colleges competing for students who prioritize environmental responsibility, these visible efforts can be a differentiator. Landscaping becomes more than decoration; it becomes a statement of purpose.

Safety, Accessibility, and Functionality

While aesthetics often take center stage, the functional aspects of exterior landscaping are equally important. Clear pathways, proper lighting, and well-maintained grounds contribute to campus safety and accessibility.

Landscaping design can guide foot traffic, reduce congestion, and ensure that all individuals—including those with mobility challenges—can navigate the campus with ease. Strategic placement of trees and shrubs can enhance visibility, while lighting integrated into the landscape improves security during evening hours.

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For facility managers, balancing beauty with practicality is key. The most successful landscapes are those that seamlessly integrate form and function, creating environments that are both visually appealing and operationally efficient.

The Financial Perspective: Investment vs. Expense

It's easy to view landscaping as a line item in a facilities budget, but forward-thinking institutions recognize it as an investment with measurable returns. Enhanced curb appeal can contribute to increased enrollment, stronger alumni engagement, and improved donor perceptions.

Additionally, well-planned landscaping can reduce long-term maintenance costs. Choosing the right plant materials, investing in efficient irrigation systems, and designing with durability in mind can minimize ongoing expenses while maintaining a high-quality appearance.

For private colleges operating within tight budgets, the goal is not necessarily to spend

more, but to spend strategically. Partnering with experienced landscape architects and maintenance professionals can ensure that every dollar contributes to both immediate impact and long-term value.

Adapting to Changing Needs

Campus landscapes are not static. As institutions grow and evolve, so too must their exterior environments. New buildings, changing student demographics, and shifting priorities all influence how outdoor spaces are used.

Flexibility is essential. Landscapes should be designed with adaptability in mind, allowing spaces to be repurposed as needs change. Temporary installations, modular seating, and multi-use green areas can provide versatility without requiring major overhauls.

In recent years, many campuses have also reimagined outdoor spaces to support events, wellness initiatives, and even hybrid learning environments. These innovations highlight the growing importance of landscaping as a dynamic component of campus life.

A Lasting Impression

At its core, exterior landscaping is about more than plants and pathways—it's about perception, experience, and identity. For private colleges and universities, it represents an opportunity to make a powerful statement about who they are and what they value.

From the moment a visitor sets foot on campus to the day a graduate returns as an alumnus, the landscape serves as a constant backdrop to the institution's story. It shapes memories, influences decisions, and reinforces connections.

In a sector where differentiation is increasingly important, investing in exterior landscaping is not just a matter of appearance, it's a strategic imperative. Because in higher education, as in life, you rarely get a second chance to make a first impression.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He worked on the staff at Mount Union College.

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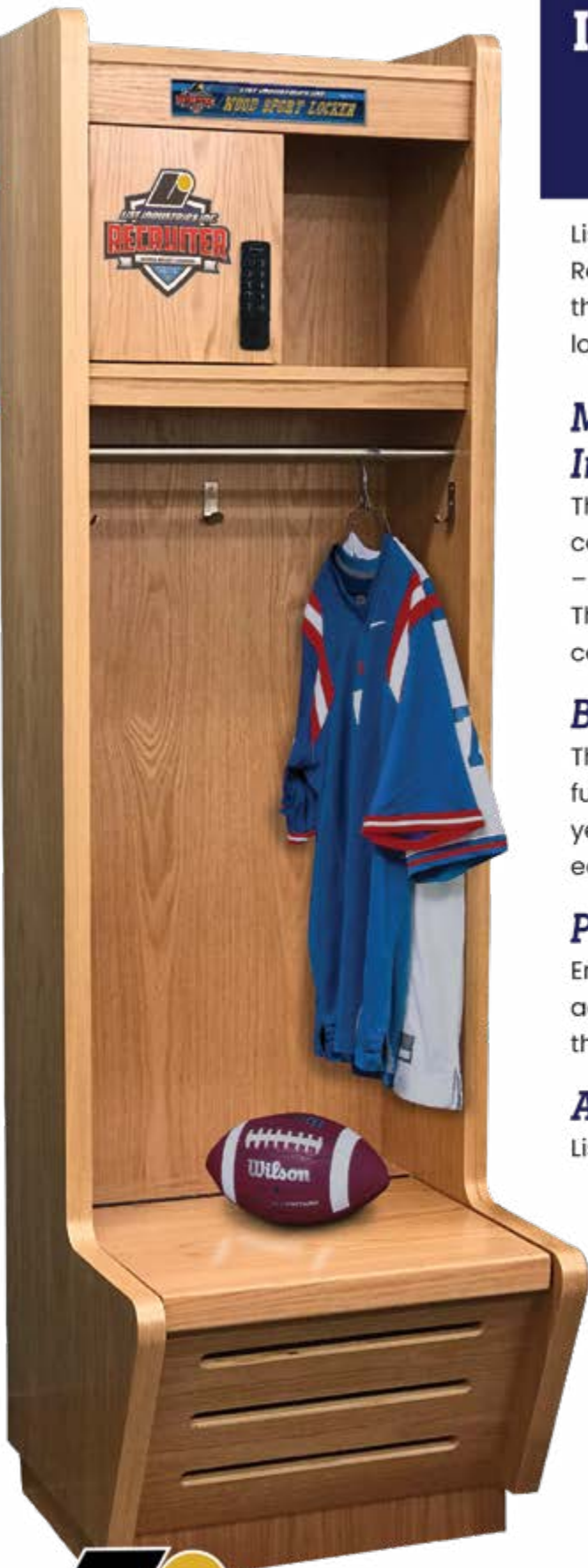
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