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Editor's Letter

NOVEMBER 2026

There's something exciting about driving onto a college campus and seeing cranes in the sky, construction crews at work, and new buildings taking shape. Sure, the noise may not be music to everyone's ears, but to those of us watching the private college and university market, it sounds a lot like opportunity!

Across the country, private institutions continue to invest in their campuses, creating modern learning environments, expanding student housing, upgrading research facilities, and improving the spaces where students live, work, and play. These investments are more than bricks and mortar. They reflect a commitment to attracting students, supporting faculty, and preparing for the next generation.

Consider a few examples. Marist University has announced a $100 million Science and Health Initiative anchored by a new 100,000-square-foot academic facility. Lenoir-Rhyne University is moving forward with a $25 million residence hall in Hickory, North Carolina, designed to house 246 students and scheduled to open in fall 2027. Both projects demonstrate how institutions are investing in facilities that support enrollment, academic growth, and the student experience. These projects also represent opportunities for the companies that serve higher education. Every new building and major renovation creates demand for doors, flooring, lighting, furniture, security systems, laboratory equipment, landscaping, and countless other products that make a campus function.

That's why this annual Construction Issue of *PUPN* is so important. We want to help you understand what colleges are building, what their facilities teams need, and where your products can make a difference. Behind every construction plan is a network of purchasing decisions—and we're here to help connect those dots.

As November brings us to Thanksgiving, I'm reminded that the greatest blessings aren't measured in square footage, construction budgets, or the number of projects on a campus. They're found in our families, friends, colleagues, customers, and the opportunities we have to work together and make a difference. We're truly thankful for the readers and advertisers who make *PUPN* possible. And if your Thanksgiving plans include hosting the family, remember: unlike a university construction project, the kitchen renovation probably won't be finished before everyone arrives!

Happy Thanksgiving from all of us at *PUPN*.

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Community-Engaged Political Science at Wabash College

BY CYNTHIA MWENJA, PhD

Shamira Gelbman, professor of Political Science at Wabash College, possesses a gift for making connections; her research focus on governance and policymaking permeates her teaching approaches and service commitments, and those ideas drive the connections that she and her students establish with the campus, their local community, and national conversations.

Gelbman remains vitally interested in how politics work on every level—as well as in exploring the ways that people actively participate in citizenship practices—and she brings a dynamic and innovative energy as she continues to explore these ideas in every part of her job.

Integrating Research and Learning with Community-engaged Projects

Gelbman pursues every avenue available to connect her students to communities outside the classroom walls; she consistently arranges opportunities for her students to take part in substantial community-engaged work. One key element in being able to establish these community-based projects is making and maintaining connections. Gelbman says Crawfordsville's small size facilitates networking; additionally, Wabash aids these efforts by having a staff member whose job includes the responsibility of assisting with community connections. Gelbman also maintains community ties as a member of the board of the local League of Women Voters chapter. All of these relationships offer potential opportunities for Gelbman to do meaningful work with her students outside of the classroom.

Lorraine McCrary, associate professor and department chair of Political Science at Wabash, admires Gelbman's emphasis on community-engaged teaching strategies, including working with her students to create local museum exhibits as well as working with students in the Wabash archives. Gelbman works closely with the campus archivist to develop projects for many of her classes, and opportunities continue to arise. McCrary notes that Gelbman will be working with a new set of documents that the Wabash archives will receive; these documents include information about activism around politics in Montgomery County, where Wabash is situated. Gelbman and her students will look at how the organization which donated the documents thinks about politics.

In all aspects of her professional life, Gelbman is drawn to examine questions of how organizations run. One way this interest plays out in the classroom is in a course entitled "Governing Wabash" which takes the college seriously as a political community. This class clearly demonstrates the convergence of Gelbman's research with her commitment to community-engaged teaching. In the class, students consider the roles of the college's administrative structure, including the board of trustees, administration, faculty, and student government association. Students in this class also gain a historical perspective by considering various governance moments in the life of the school. Additionally, students conduct case study research in the archives, and each student presents their findings in a podcast that can be accessed by the campus community.

Todd F. McDorman, professor of Rhetoric and dean of Wabash College, appreciates that Gelbman's projects put students into civic settings beyond the campus. For example, Gelbman's "Sociology and the Politics of Health" class includes a significant community partnership with the City of Crawfordsville. Gelbman developed the class



PHOTO COURTESY WABASH COLLEGE

because Wabash does not have a Sociology department, but students who were taking the MCAT needed a preparatory Sociology course. Since Gelbman's research sits at the intersection of Political Science, History, and Sociology, she developed this class to meet student needs. The class offers an introduction to basic Sociology and Political Science concepts using health as the lens. Students then gain hands-on, community-engaged experience in consulting with the staff of Crawfordsville's Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) program. After hearing from the staff about their achievements and problems they are dealing with, the students research and articulate solutions to address the identified challenges. At the end of the term, Gelbman's students submit professional memos outlining their proposed solutions to the MIH staff in a briefing presentation. Gelbman explains that such public engagement is particularly important for students who are interested in pursuing social service work. Through projects like this one, they learn that real people's lives can be affected by what they have to offer.

Connecting Classroom Learning to Wider Concerns

Some of Gelbman's classes bring national concerns into the community-engaged work. One case happens every four years, when Gelbman teaches a class looking at political science research focused on mid-term elections. Each student tracks one heated House race and reports about the race on campus. As Gelbman's students apply their learning outside of the classroom, they feel more invested in communicating their findings accurately and effectively.

Similarly, Gelbman teaches a class on election polling in Presidential election years. In this class, students not only learn about polls—how they work, their uses and limitations, their margins of error, and how seriously to take them—but they also conduct a local exit poll in Montgomery County. In 2024, Gelbman secured a grant from the Community-Engaged Alliance which enabled her students to present community programming through the League of Women

continued...

Some of Gelbman's classes bring national concerns into the community-engaged work. One case happens every four years, when Gelbman teaches a class looking at political science research focused on mid-term elections.

Voters. In these presentations, her students shared the information they had learned about polling with the wider community. The course culminates with a presentation event that covers the results of the students' exit poll and takeaways about what polls can and can't tell us.

Some of Gelbman's classes simply connect to national dialogues. In teaching the freshman tutorial—a themed course which serves as an intro to college-level work—Gelbman has focused on food-label controversies, such as whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable—as well as why the US Supreme Court felt the need to rule on this question. Students also learned about the butter versus margarine "wars," along with the similar current public debate about plant-based dairy replacements and whether they can be called "milk." Gelbman's goal is for students to absorb how politics has played a role in such national debates that may seem at first to have nothing to do with politics.

As a Political Science professor, Gelbman experiences some additional time pressures during an election semester like this one. She focuses the second half of her "Introduction to American Politics" class on the current election. Since she can't know how the election will turn out when she plans the term, she has to "roll with what happens" in real time, making preparation for the course very "dynamic." From October to early November of election years, Gelbman finds herself fielding media calls and requests to serve on panels about the election, often with little notice; she also receives emails asking her to explain ballot measures and the League of Women Voters' stances on them. Gelbman's willingness to take on these extra responsibilities demonstrates her own commitment to civic engagement.

Applied Learning and Innovative Assignments

Whether or not a class contains a community-engagement component, Gelbman makes sure to find ways for her students to actively apply their learning. McCrary highlights the fact that Gelbman develops some assignments quickly, in response to current events. McCrary recalls a time that a new bill was introduced which would enact policy relating to athletes' names, images, and likenesses. Gelbman created a classroom activity in which she assigned her students roles as lobbyists and lawmakers. In this way, the students were able to understand firsthand how lawmaking can be driven by lobbyists, without even leaving the classroom.

Gelbman has diversified the types of projects she assigns in her classes. While students in her Senior Seminar do complete a traditional research paper, she has changed the writing projects in other classes to those which reflect professional writing genres, such as a memo to a campaign manager in her course on congressional elections. As



Gelbman points out, such assignments are both more appealing and more relevant to her students' interests.

Gelbman continuously seeks ways to have students apply their learning in meaningful ways. In thinking through new assignments, she considers what end result she wants to interact with, as well as what would be interesting to her students. One innovative project Gelbman relies on is having students create podcasts based in their individual research projects. Wabash students and faculty members have the support of an education technologist who can help students with projects like these, and Gelbman has learned how to support students in developing their work. Gelbman also prepares students by discussing the podcast genre in class and listening to examples together. Students then host their podcasts on a Google website; Gelbman affirms the usefulness of this hands-on experience for students' future personal and professional lives.

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Gelbman also supports undergraduate research. One student who worked with her in this capacity is Rodolfo Solís, who is currently a Political Science lecturer at the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley. As a sophomore, Solís gained firsthand research experience in one of Gelbman's classes in which students conducted Twitter data content analysis. Solís enjoyed the experience and asked for more research collaborations. Gelbman agreed and oversaw several qualitative-oriented projects for Solís, including his writing an entry on the *Voting Rights Act amendments of 1975 for Latinos in the American Political System: An Encyclopedia of Latinos as Voters, Candidates, and Office Holders* edited by Jessica Lavariega Monforti. Solís reports that their work together motivated him and informed his later doctoral research. Gelbman also helped Solís secure opportunities to work with the National Science Foundation and the American Political Science Association Summer Institute. Solís values Gelbman's mentorship and patience, as well as how generous she is with her time. Now that he is a *lecturer* himself, he knows the challenges of finding time to work with student research on top of other demanding faculty responsibilities—so he doubly appreciates the devotion Gelbman has for her students.

Faculty Service and Research

Gelbman's commitment to innovative and engaging learning opportunities is matched by her dedication to faculty service and research. McCrary respects Gelbman's helpful organizational and administrative ideas, as well as the curiosity she brings to the faculty about how governance happens. Gelbman currently serves on the academic policy committee and the AI task force, and she is the faculty visitor to the board of trustees. She served as the Secretary to the Faculty—a five-year role—and was formerly a long-term department chair. Additionally, Gelbman's expertise informed her tenure as Faculty Development Coordinator; in that role, she mentored fellow faculty members to develop their teaching and research capacities, but she also helped them develop their vision of how they saw themselves within the governance of the school. Beyond the college, Gelbman has served as editor for a political science organization, held a variety of leadership roles in APSA, and is past President of SPSA Women, the women's caucus of the Southern Political Science Association.

In her research, Gelbman continues to focus on the ways that citizens can affect policymaking. During her recent sabbatical, she traveled to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, to gather information about the role of women lobbyists during the World War II era. The information she compiled will drive her research agenda for many years, Gelbman says.

In aligning research interests with approaches to faculty service and teaching strategies, Gelbman stands as an exemplar for faculty members across disciplines. As McDorman states, Gelbman "lives the perspectives she teaches. She takes her responsibilities seriously, engages students effectively, and is a strong participant in the Wabash college community." Ultimately, Gelbman's ability to sustain meaningful work in the context of strong community connections benefits everyone involved.





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

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FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

Beyond Wood: Using a Moisture Meter on Luxury Vinyl Tile Floors and Other Building Materials

BY LINGOMAT

Moisture content is an important consideration not only for wood, but for all hygroscopic materials used in the building envelope. When moisture levels exceed the acceptable range for wood, it will shrink, warp, or cup, causing cracks and other visible deformations. Another consideration: when moisture levels get too high, mold can develop.

Mold not only affects the durability and quality of the material itself but can also compromise indoor air quality within a building. It is important to monitor moisture levels not only in wood but also in all other hygroscopic materials used in the building envelope.

Tracking moisture is especially important after moisture infiltration. This could be a leak from a broken pipe, a malfunctioning toilet or shower, faulty roof and wall construction, and, worst yet, flooding. You can track moisture in different materials with a moisture meter, typically used for wood. Here's how wood meters can be used for wood and building materials.

Measuring moisture percentages in wood and other materials with appropriate correction settings.

Using WME moisture percentages to check moisture levels.

Comparative measurements: no correction settings are available.

Measuring moisture in wood with a professional moisture meter is easy. Pin and pinless meters must be set to account for different wood species and, if using a pin meter, wood temperature. Wood moisture content is indicated as a percentage based on the material's dry weight. In this context, dry weight means the material's weight without water (moisture), determined with an oven test.

For most wood products, the recommended moisture content for wood floors and furniture ranges from 6% to 9%. Moldings could be up to 12%. Staying within this range helps prevent shrinkage, warping, cupping, twisting, and buckling. There are regional exceptions based on climate, as illustrated in the Moisture Map of North America.

When mold growth is the primary concern, the danger zone begins as low as 55% relative humidity.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "Mold thrives when indoor relative humidity (RH) reaches 60% or higher. While it can start growing slowly at 55%, the optimal conditions for mold to spread rapidly occur between 70% and 90% relative humidity."

These humidity levels can be translated into wood moisture contents using the

Equilibrium Moisture Content (EMC) Chart, which correlates relative humidity with the moisture content that wood will eventually reach if exposed to the corresponding relative humidity.

- At 55% RH, wood stabilizes at approximately 10% MC.
- At 60% RH, wood stabilizes at approximately 11% MC.
- At 70% RH, wood stabilizes at approximately 13% MC.
- At 90% RH, wood stabilizes at approximately 20.5% MC or higher.

For example, when wood is exposed to an environment with a relative humidity (RH) of 70%, it will gradually absorb or release moisture until it reaches an equilibrium moisture content (EMC) of approximately 13%. Because relative humidity and wood moisture content are directly related, building maintenance professionals should measure both to accurately assess environmental conditions and the potential for moisture-related problems.

A versatile instrument such as the Ligno-VersaTec is well suited for this purpose. It provides both pin-type and non-invasive moisture measurements while also measuring relative humidity (RH), temperature (T), dew point (DP), and grains per pound (GPP), giving professionals a comprehensive picture of both material moisture and ambient environmental conditions.

These same principles apply to wood-based panel products such as oriented strand board (OSB), plywood, and engineered flooring. Many moisture meter manufacturers, including Lignomat, provide correction settings for these materials. The recommended moisture ranges are essentially the same as those for solid wood products.

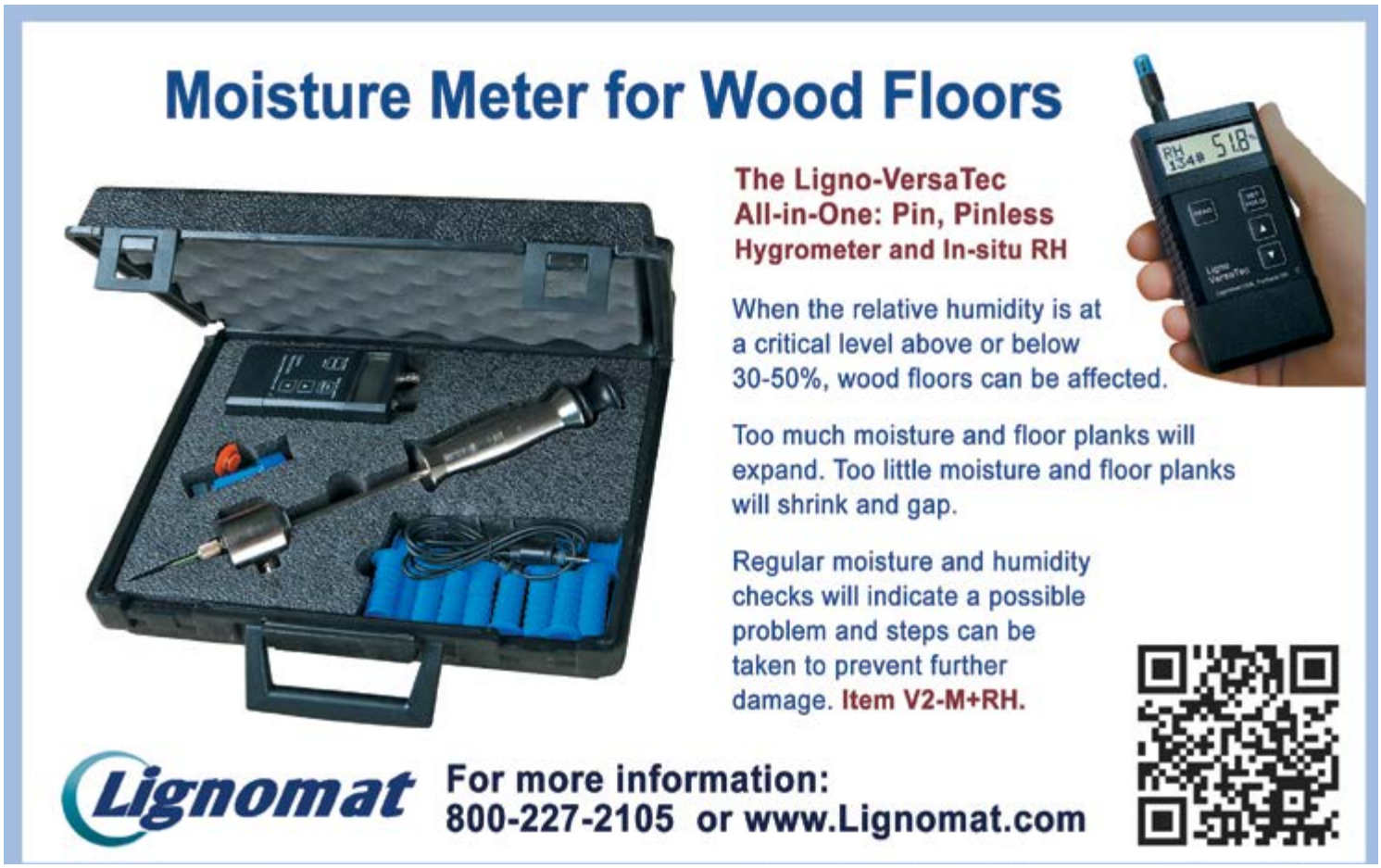
Beyond wood products, many other hygroscopic materials are commonly used in the building envelope, including concrete, drywall, insulation, and floor systems including luxury vinyl tile (LVT) installed over concrete substrates, as well as carpet. All these materials are hygroscopic and absorb moisture. When enough moisture is available, mold will grow.

Wood Moisture Equivalent (WME)

The second method is the Wood Moisture Equivalent (WME) scale.

WME values are expressed as equivalent wood moisture percentages based on the EMC relationship. They are not determined by oven-dry testing of the material itself. Instead, they represent the moisture condition of a material after it has acclimated to a given relative humidity.

continued...



For example, drywall that has reached equilibrium at 50% relative humidity has a WME value of approximately 9%. At 50% RH, wood stabilizes at approximately 9% MC.

If that same piece of drywall were tested using the oven-dry method, its actual moisture content would be only about 0.4%. This seemingly low value reflects the large mass of gypsum compared to the relatively small amount of water contained within the material.

The WME method is often used because the person taking the measurements may not be used to these low moisture values; for instance, drywall at 2% is already wet to the touch. The corresponding WME value is 18%, which clearly indicates high moisture. WME values help identify good and bad moisture contents.

Both WME and oven-dry moisture content are useful measurements, provided the meter manufacturer supplies the appropriate calibration and acceptable moisture ranges for the material being tested.

Comparative Measurements

The third method is comparative, or relative, moisture measurement.

All Lignomat pin and pinless moisture meters include a relative measurement scale. Unlike the MC and WME scales, this scale does not display moisture as a percentage. Instead, it allows users to compare moisture levels in materials for which no specific calibration setting is available.

The principle is simple: Compare measurements taken from the same materials. Higher readings indicate more moisture, while lower readings indicate less moisture. For accurate comparisons, all measurements must be taken using the same meter, the same reference scale, the same material composition and the same measuring depth, then measurements can be truly compared.

Comparative measurements become even more valuable when a known dry sample of the material is available. First take measurements of the dry area. Then measure the questionable areas and compare measured values with the dry sample readings.

Even when a calibrated measurement scale is available, comparing readings with a known dry sample is an excellent way to confirm the moisture meter's findings.

A Complete Moisture Assessment

Properly evaluating moisture conditions requires two essential instruments: a moisture meter and a thermo-hygrometer. The moisture meter measures the moisture condition of building materials, while the thermo-hygrometer measures ambient temperature and relative humidity, allowing the user to evaluate environmental conditions that influence moisture movement and mold growth. The Ligno-VersaTec moisture meter (pin, pinless, and RH/Temp) from Lignomat includes all the functions needed to measure moisture and humidity.

Using both a moisture meter and a thermo-hygrometer allows building professionals to identify moisture problems early, verify drying progress, and prevent costly damage and mold growth before they become serious issues.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Founded in 1979, Lignomat USA provides precision moisture meters, kiln controls, and monitoring systems for wood and building materials. Based in Portland, Oregon, the company serves woodworking, flooring, construction, and restoration professionals with reliable measurement tools backed by decades of engineering experience and a commitment to quality and customer service.

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Designing Campus Restrooms for Long-Term Value

BY KRIS ALDERSON

College restrooms need to withstand heavy use while staying clean, comfortable and welcoming. Choosing coordinated fixtures, accessories and finishes that are durable and easy to maintain helps campuses meet those expectations for years to come.

For private colleges and universities planning renovations or new construction, restroom design is a long-term investment. Decisions made during planning will affect both the student experience and the work of maintaining these spaces long after the project is complete.

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Maintenance starts with design

Daily upkeep includes refilling soap and paper supplies, replacing batteries and parts, and making repairs. Water and energy use also add to ongoing costs. Throughout residence halls, libraries, academic buildings and recreation facilities, products that need frequent attention can create a considerable amount of extra work.

For colleges and universities, restroom design decisions extend beyond aesthetics to long-term facility performance. A Bradley Company survey found that 85 percent of architects identified easy-to-maintain and repair products as providing strong long-term value, and 84 percent cited durable, low-maintenance materials as essential. Although the survey focused on K-12 schools, these same priorities are highly relevant for higher education facilities, where restrooms experience heavy daily use and must support long-term operational efficiency.

Maintenance staff can offer helpful insight early in the design process. They know which products need repeated repairs, which dispensers are difficult to refill and which parts are hard to find. Their experience can help the team choose products that simplify upkeep.

A coordinated look throughout the restroom

Fixtures, partitions and accessories all contribute to a cohesive aesthetic in restrooms. Matching or complementary faucets and soap dispensers help tie the handwashing area together. Mirrors, grab bars, towel dispensers, waste receptacles and hooks in similar styles and finishes can create a unifying look throughout the space.

Accessories can have a noticeable effect on the finished space, especially when they are considered early in the design process. Rounded shapes, concealed mounting and smooth surfaces give the room a consistent look. Accessories should also be easy for staff to clean, refill and repair.

Restroom styles may vary across campus, from a historic academic building to a contemporary student center. Coordinated accessories can complement each setting while using similar operating mechanisms and replacement parts. This consistency makes maintenance procedures more familiar to staff and reduces the range of spare parts they need to keep on hand.

Dispensers that simplify daily upkeep

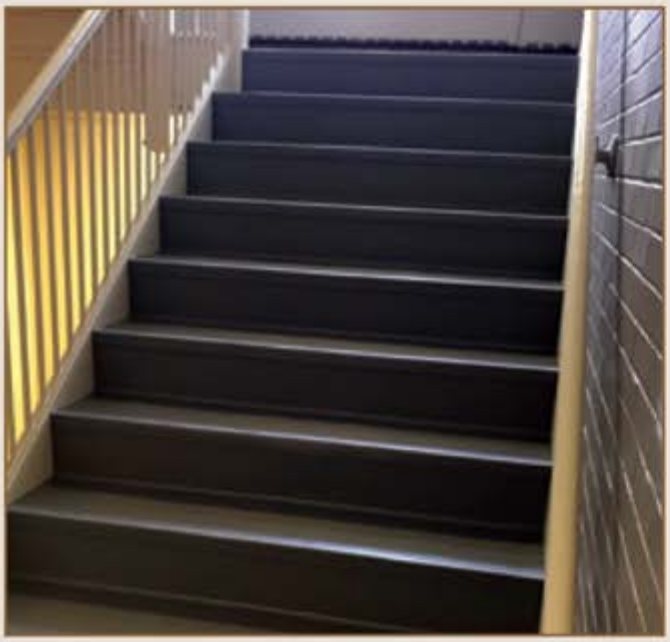
Even an attractive restroom falls short when students find empty soap or paper towel dispensers. Choosing dispensers that are easy to check and refill helps staff keep supplies available throughout the day.

Visible low-supply indicators help staff quickly spot dispensers that need refilling. Concealed magnetic locks provide access

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Paper towel dispensers designed to limit jams and torn paper help keep towels available. Dual-roll toilet tissue dispensers that automatically advance a reserve roll help prevent runouts between maintenance rounds. Dispenser capacity also makes a difference, especially in busy student centers and event venues where supplies can run out quickly between scheduled checks.

Even waste receptacles can make upkeep easier. Bag retention rings help keep liners in place, while combination towel dispenser and waste receptacle units bring the two functions together in a coordinated design.

Convenient and reliable handwashing

Bradley's 2026 Healthy Handwashing Survey™ of U.S. adults found that nearly 80 percent consider touchless fixtures important in public restrooms. Respondents also identified empty soap or paper towel dispensers and dirty or nonworking sinks among the leading reasons they skip handwashing. These findings show why reliable fixtures and consistent servicing matter to the people using the space.

Sensor-operated faucets and soap dispensers reduce contact with shared surfaces and should be easy to activate. Reliable sensors, accessible batteries or power connections, and readily available replacement parts help keep these fixtures working. Routine checks of faucet activation, soap delivery and drainage can help staff catch problems before they disrupt use.

All-in-one handwashing fixtures combine touch-free soap, water and hand drying at the basin, allowing users to complete the process in one place. This arrangement helps contain water and reduces dripping on floors as people move to separate drying stations. Integrated drying can also reduce paper towel use and the work of restocking dispensers and emptying waste receptacles.

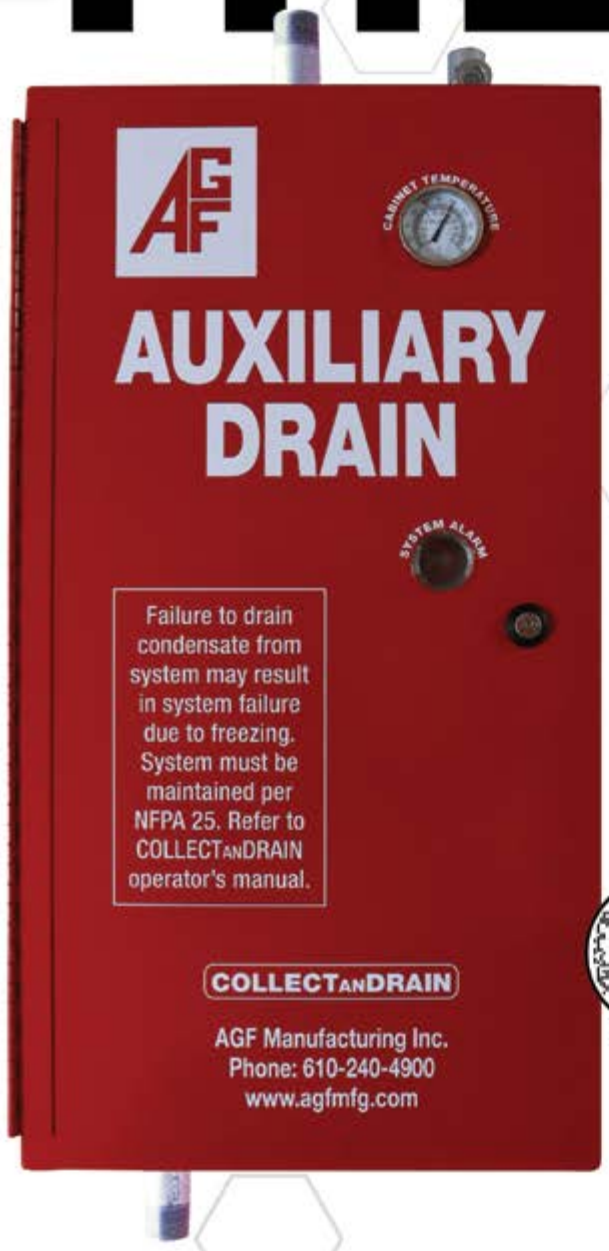
Soap refilling is another opportunity to simplify maintenance. Top-fill multi-feed soap systems, available with some all-in-one handwashing systems, supply multiple soap dispensers from one central tank. Staff can refill the tank from above the counter rather than accessing individual reservoirs beneath each sink, saving a lot of time. A larger shared tank can also reduce refill frequency, helping staff keep soap available in busy campus restrooms.

continued...





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Privacy and durability in daily use

Students also need privacy and enough room to use the restroom comfortably. The Healthy Handwashing Survey found that nearly 70 percent of U.S. adults believe restroom stalls should provide more coverage, and 52 percent would like gaps around stall doors eliminated. Taller doors, smaller panel gaps and near- or full-height partitions can help address these concerns. Planning for accessibility at the same time helps ensure fixture and accessory locations allow for needed clearances and reach requirements.

Moisture- and impact-resistant partitions with durable hinges and latches help stalls hold up to heavy use. Occupancy indicators let people see which stalls are available. Designs with fewer floor supports make it easier to clean underneath, while secure hardware and replaceable parts help with ongoing upkeep.

Lavatory materials also affect cleaning and maintenance. Smooth, nonporous solid-surface or natural quartz materials are resilient and easy to clean. Some surfaces can also be repaired after wear or damage, helping extend their life.

Lasting value across campus

Before selections are finalized, walking through everyday cleaning, refilling and repair tasks can help confirm that the design will work as intended. Dispenser doors need room to open, parts need to be accessible for service, and floors need to be easy to reach for cleaning.

These practical details help protect the investment in a campus restroom. When coordinated design, privacy and reliable handwashing are supported by durable products and easy maintenance, colleges create spaces that serve students comfortably and help facility teams keep them looking good and working well for years to come.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Kris Alderson, MBA, LEED AP is senior marketing manager for Bradley Company, the 100-year-old global manufacturer of commercial plumbing fixtures, washroom accessories, emergency safety fixtures and electric tankless water heaters, now a division of Watts Water Technologies.





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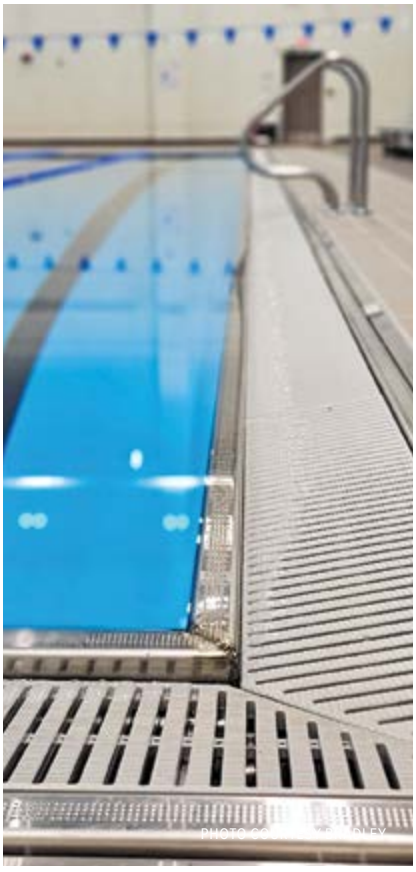
Recondition or Replace? Navigating Major Pool Decisions

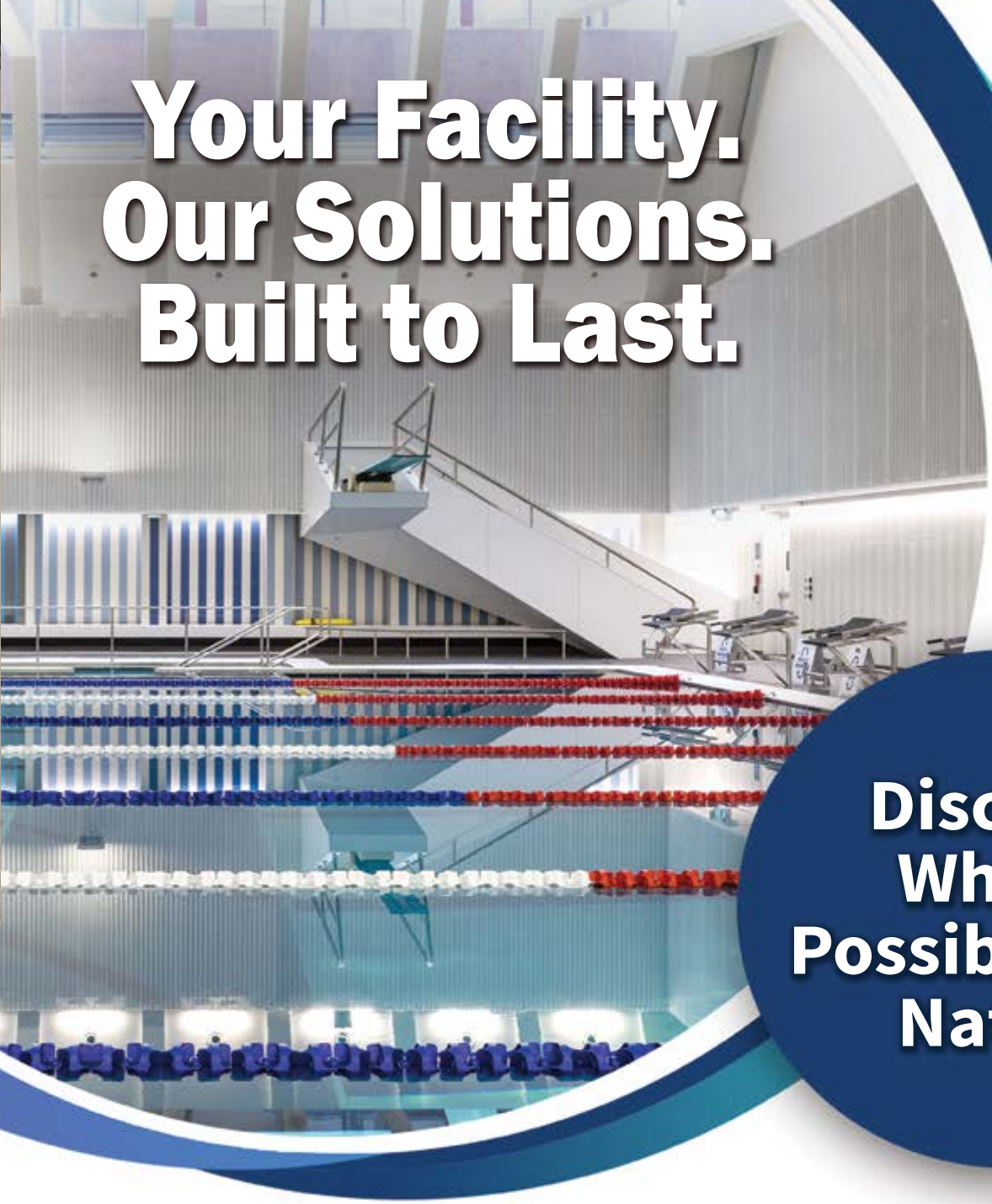
BY JOSHUA ALBERTSON

A quality aquatic facility can have a major impact on a private college or university's athletic program, but many university pools were built decades ago. Equipment and technology have come a long way since then—upgrades and reconditioning can give an existing pool new life.

But what happens when the pool seems to require constant repairs and may no longer be structurally sound? Now you're facing a difficult decision: repair or replace. Budget, safety, and a realistic assessment of an existing pool all affect what's right for your campus. Joshua Albertson of Natare Pools shares his experience to help facilities managers weigh the factors and make the best choice.

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PUPN: When should a college or university begin considering pool reconditioning? What are the most common signs that an existing pool is nearing the point where repairs or upgrades are no longer enough?

Albertson: There's some nuance to this question because every pool is different. In some cases, the decision is straightforward. When structural concerns begin to outweigh the cost of repairs, it's time to seriously consider your options. If you're facing major structural repairs or addressing the same issues for the second or third time, it may make more sense to start fresh rather than continue putting money into an aging pool.

PUPN: What are the most important factors in determining whether to recondition an existing pool or build a new one? How should facility managers weigh the pool's age, structural condition, remaining service life, and current maintenance costs?

Albertson: There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer. Budget, capital planning, and the overall condition of the pool all play a significant role. If you have a strong maintenance team and a budget that allows for ongoing repairs, it may make sense to extend the life of the existing pool. But ultimately, safety needs to come first. If the pool is no longer structurally sound or there are ongoing safety concerns, new construction may be the better long-term investment.

PUPN: How does the cost of reconditioning compare with new pool construction? Beyond the initial price tag, what long-term expenses—including energy, water, chemicals, labor, and ongoing maintenance—should campus administrators consider?

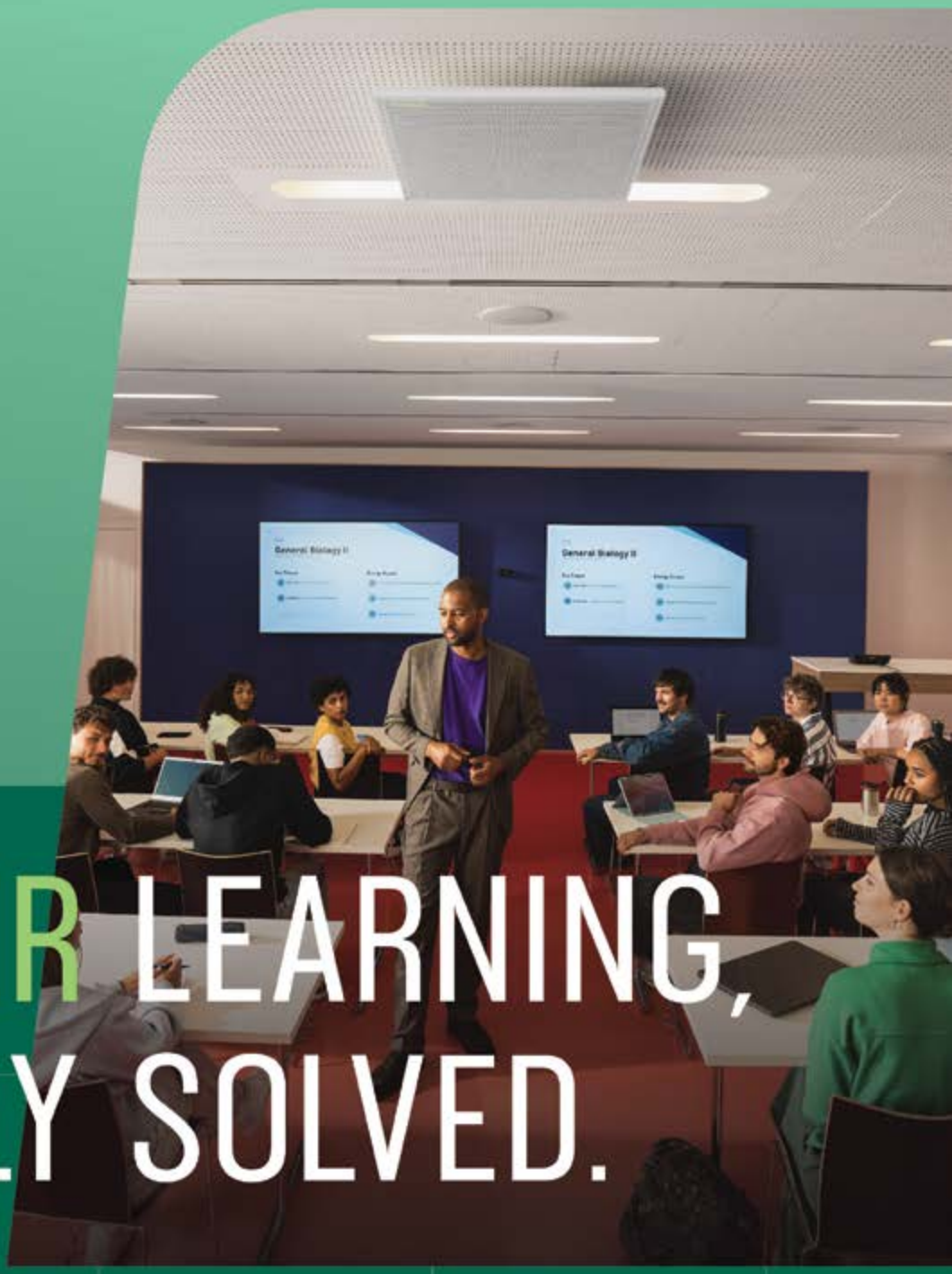
Albertson: In most cases, new construction will cost more upfront. The exception is when structural issues are so extensive that the repairs essentially become a complete rebuild. It's also important to look beyond the initial investment. Many university pools were built decades ago, and pool equipment and technology have come a long way since then. Renovating provides an opportunity to replace outdated, inefficient equipment with newer systems that can reduce water, energy, chemical, and maintenance costs. If the existing pool is leaking, addressing that alone can make a noticeable difference in water consumption and operating expenses.

PUPN: Which pool components can typically be reconditioned or upgraded successfully? For example, what options exist for resurfacing, replacing filtration systems, upgrading circulation equipment, repairing plumbing, or modernizing pool decks?

Albertson: Quite a few components can be repaired or upgraded without major demolition, especially when the pool's structure is still in good condition. Mechanical



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equipment, filtration and circulation systems, and interior finishes like plaster, tile, or PVC membrane can often be replaced or upgraded. Structural repairs involving the pool floor, walls, or deck are generally more involved. And if you're already planning to repair or replace the pool deck, that's a good opportunity to take a closer look at the perimeter plumbing. Addressing potential issues while that area is accessible can help avoid additional work down the road.

PUPN: When does an existing pool become a liability rather than an asset? What structural problems, recurring leaks, outdated systems, accessibility concerns, or safety issues might indicate that new construction is the smarter choice?

Albertson: When the pool's walls or floor begin to fail structurally, that's a major concern. Those types of repairs can be difficult and costly, and there comes a point when replacing the pool may make more sense.
But not every leak or maintenance issue means you need to start over. For example, if the pool structure is sound but the pool is leaking, installing a new PVC membrane system can provide a watertight finish while giving the pool a completely refreshed appearance.
Minor accessibility and safety issues can often be addressed with relatively little downtime. More significant concerns, however, need to be evaluated and addressed right away. The priority should always be providing a safe environment for everyone using the facility.

PUPN: How have modern pool technologies changed the reconditioning decision? Can upgrades to automation, energy-efficient pumps, filtration, water treatment, and controls significantly improve an older facility's performance and operating costs?
Albertson: Technology has certainly changed the aquatics industry, and there's no question that upgrading older equipment can improve efficiency and reduce operating costs. Newer pumps, filtration systems, automation, and controls can make a significant difference in how a facility operates.

But equipment upgrades are only part of the equation. If the pool has structural problems or is losing a significant amount of water, those issues need to be considered first. Universities need to look at the entire pool system and determine which improvements will have the greatest impact, both immediately and over the long term.

PUPN: How should colleges evaluate changing campus needs before committing to a project? What role do enrollment, competitive swimming, recreation programs, community use, accessibility, and future facility plans play in deciding whether to renovate or build new?

Albertson: All of those factors should be part of the conversation. One of the biggest challenges is balancing the needs of the general student population with those of the university's athletic programs. What works well for competitive swimming may not always be the best fit for recreation, instruction, or community use.

There's also a revenue component to consider. What programs or amenities will encourage people to use the facility? Swim meets, lessons, open swim sessions, and community events can all create additional opportunities for revenue.

And you can't overlook the impact a quality aquatic facility can have on athletics. Providing student-athletes with the right environment to train and compete can support a university's programs for years to come.

PUPN: What operational challenges should facility managers plan for during a reconditioning project or new construction? How can colleges minimize closures, manage seasonal schedules, control project costs, and reduce disruption to students, athletes, and staff?

Albertson: Communication is probably the most important part of managing any pool project. Facility managers need to understand how the pool is used, who depends on it, and when it absolutely needs to be available. For example, you wouldn't want to schedule a major renovation in the middle of swim season or right before an important meet.

No one likes having their routine interrupted, especially when it involves a facility they use regularly. Establishing a realistic project schedule, communicating closures well in advance, and keeping everyone informed throughout the process can go a long way toward minimizing frustration and disruption.

PUPN: What advice would you give a campus facility manager preparing to make this decision? What inspections, engineering assessments, life-cycle cost analyses, and contractor qualifications should be evaluated before presenting a recommendation to campus leadership?

Albertson: My biggest piece of advice is simple: talk to someone who knows pools. Start with an experienced aquatic consultant or a company that understands both renovation and new construction. Have the pool's condition evaluated, understand what repairs are needed, and look at what those improvements will cost over time compared to building new.

And don't hesitate to reach out to Natare. Our team's experience with pool renovations goes back to the 1970s, and we've encountered just about every type of challenge along the way. Whether you're looking for advice, trying to figure out where to start, or exploring your options, we're always happy to have that conversation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Joshua Albertson is the Sales Manager at Natare Pools, bringing more than 16 years of experience in the aquatics industry, including the past 14 years with Natare. A graduate of Indiana University, he studied Recreational Sports Management and Aquatics Management. His experience and industry knowledge help clients navigate aquatic facility projects, from new construction to renovation and modernization.


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Looking Beyond the Fume Hood: Why Lab Containment Decisions Shape the Future of Academic Facilities

BY KASEY FULMER

Private colleges and universities continue to invest in laboratory space as they expand research capabilities, modernize science buildings, and create environments that attract both students and faculty. Whether constructing a new facility or renovating existing labs, the goal is the same: designing spaces that will support the institution's mission for years to come.

Within those conversations, containment equipment is sometimes viewed simply as a laboratory requirement. A fume hood is specified, incorporated into the design, and installed alongside other equipment needed for the space. In reality, containment decisions influence far more than the work taking place inside the hood itself.

Laboratories operate as interconnected systems. Airflow, infrastructure, energy consumption, future flexibility, and occupant safety are linked in ways that may not be obvious in early stages of planning. Understanding those connections helps institutions meet current needs while supporting future goals.

The Starting Point Is the Science

Successful laboratory projects begin with a clear understanding of how the space will be used.

An undergraduate chemistry teaching laboratory has very different demands than a faculty research laboratory investigating new materials or pharmaceutical compounds. Procedures, materials, and anticipated research activity all influence containment requirements.

Universities rarely design facilities solely around current needs. Academic programs evolve, research priorities shift, and new opportunities emerge throughout the life of a building. A laboratory serving one area of study today may serve a completely different purpose a decade from now.

This reality encourages institutions to think beyond immediate requirements and consider how containment decisions made today may affect future possibilities.

Planning for Future Growth and Change

Higher education has always been dynamic. New faculty members bring different research interests, funding priorities evolve, and interdisciplinary collaboration creates opportunities that may have been difficult to anticipate.

Rather than trying to predict every future need, many universities focus on creating laboratories that can adapt as those needs change.

When people discuss flexibility in laboratory design, they often think about movable furniture or adaptable floor plans. Those elements are certainly important, but containment planning plays a role as well. Decisions involving ventilation strategies and supporting infrastructure can influence how easily laboratories accommodate new research programs or changing academic priorities over time.

The most successful facilities are often those that provide options. They support today's work while preserving the institution's ability to respond to tomorrow's opportunities.

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Containment Is Also an Infrastructure Decision

One of the most important aspects of containment planning is understanding its relationship to the building itself.

A fume hood does not operate independently. It becomes part of a larger mechanical system that affects airflow throughout the laboratory and, in many cases, throughout the entire facility. Because of that relationship, containment choices can have implications well beyond the laboratory bench.

This is especially relevant during renovation projects. Many colleges and universities are updating buildings that were designed decades ago, often before today's laboratory standards and research expectations emerged. Existing infrastructure may present both opportunities and constraints that influence project decisions.

Available mechanical capacity, building layout, and the realities of working within an existing structure all become part of the discussion. Recognizing these factors early helps project teams identify solutions that align with both the institution's goals and the building's capabilities.

Looking Beyond Initial Equipment Costs

Construction and renovation budgets naturally receive significant attention throughout the planning process. Initial acquisition costs are visible and immediate, making them an important part of any project evaluation.

Yet laboratories are long-term investments, and many institutions are increasingly taking a broader view of project economics.

Ventilation systems operate continuously. Conditioned air must be supplied, exhausted, and replaced every day the facility is in use. Over time, the operational impact of those systems can become just as important as the purchase price of the equipment itself.

As a result, universities often consider questions that extend beyond upfront cost. How will a particular approach affect operating expenses? How might it influence maintenance requirements throughout the life of the building? Will the solution continue supporting the institution as needs evolve?

By considering these questions during the planning phase, institutions can develop a more complete understanding of long-term value.

Sustainability and Laboratory Performance

Sustainability has become an increasingly important objective across higher education. Colleges and universities are evaluating how their facilities consume energy and looking for opportunities to reduce environmental impact without compromising performance.

Laboratories deserve particular attention in these discussions because they are among the most energy-intensive spaces on campus. Ventilation systems contribute significantly to that demand, making containment planning an important part of broader sustainability initiatives.

Advances in laboratory design have created new opportunities to improve efficiency while maintaining effective containment. At the same time, sustainability goals must be considered alongside the fundamental purpose of containment systems: providing protection for laboratory users and supporting the work being performed.

When those objectives are evaluated together rather than separately, institutions are often able to develop solutions that support both operational performance and environmental goals.

Airflow as a Strategic Consideration

Few building systems have a greater influence on laboratory performance than airflow.

The effectiveness of containment equipment is closely tied to how air moves throughout a laboratory. Airflow patterns can affect user protection, energy use, and the overall operation of the facility. For that reason, discussions about containment frequently lead to broader conversations about ventilation strategy.

Project teams may evaluate topics such as variable air volume approaches, occupancy patterns within the laboratory, and the institution's long-term operating objectives. These conversations are often most productive when facilities professionals, laboratory users, safety leaders, architects, and engineers are involved early in the process.

Each stakeholder brings a different perspective, but all are working toward the same outcome: a laboratory environment that performs reliably and supports the institution's mission.

Designing for the Long Term

Laboratory planning is ultimately an exercise in balancing present needs with future possibilities.

Containment decisions influence safety, building performance, operational costs, and flexibility in ways that extend far beyond the equipment itself. While it may be tempting to view a fume hood as a standalone component of the laboratory, its impact is often felt throughout the facility for years after installation.

Universities invest in laboratories because they invest in discovery. They invest in educating future scientists, supporting faculty research, and creating opportunities for innovation. The facilities that best support those goals are rarely the result of a single decision. Instead, they emerge from thoughtful planning and a willingness to consider how each element contributes to the larger environment.

When containment is viewed through that broader lens, the conversation becomes about more than selecting equipment. It becomes an opportunity to create laboratory spaces that remain effective, adaptable, and valuable throughout the life of the facility.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Kasey Fulmer is the Product Manager of Labconco Corporation, a privately-held company dedicated to building superior laboratory equipment.



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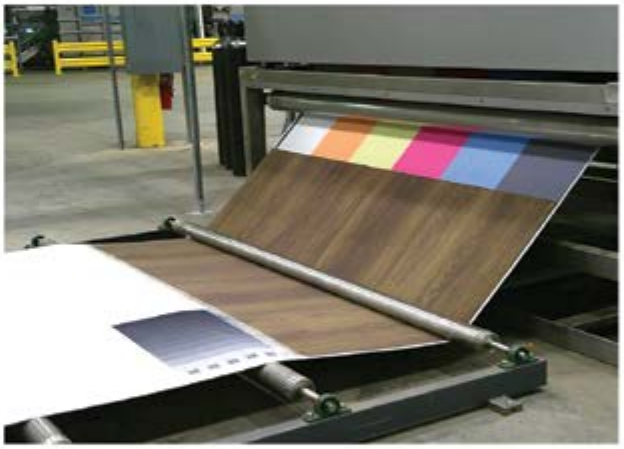
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