

# Campus and the City

## by William Rawn

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Boston's late 20<sup>th</sup> century renaissance is based on a mix of physical, cultural, and economic forces that are generated by the universities and colleges permeating the life of the city. There are special social and economic connections between the city and its universities that warrant celebration. But this suggests that there might be a special architectural connection between the city and its universities as well. Are there elements of this physical connection that can generate even more positive qualities for the city and the university in the future? Richard Freeland,

the rich and fascinating history of American college campuses nor will it explore its fundamental differences from the continental European urban model. Earliest colleges were located in the city (William & Mary, Harvard), followed by colleges founded on the frontier (Williams, Dartmouth), followed later by land grant universities located in semi-rural settings, followed still later by late 19<sup>th</sup> century universities located quite far from even a small town (Stanford, Duke, Rice). Only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has there been a rise (I hesitate to call it a resurgence) of the



*Harvard University*



*Williams College*



*Williams College*

President of Northeastern University, has outlined the defining academic and social goals for his urban university, goals which are indeed based on an intense interaction with Boston, its host city.

Our daily encounter with the benefits of a city closely integrated with its colleges and universities has inspired our campus work across the country. In most settings, we try to reinforce the positive influences that cities or towns have on their universities, and vice versa. We constantly ask the central question about the nature of this relationship: How can one translate a city's urbanity into an architecture of urbanity for its universities? At their best, campuses extend influence beyond their confines, affecting and enriching the cities and towns around them. At their worst, they can be isolated and isolating.

This lecture does not seek to review

campus located in the city: Individual campuses (e.g. Boston University, Northeastern, NYU, Temple, Georgetown, George Washington) and a set of newer state university campuses, usually secondary to the main "downstate" campus (e.g. University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, University of Massachusetts at Boston).

One can posit that urban campuses gain from economic, cultural, and social involvement with the city, and from interaction with the day-to-day life of the city. Can the campus, in fact, learn more from the complexity, confusion, drama, and subtlety of the city? And can the city gain from the presence of an increasingly worldly and sophisticated campus?

If the answer to both questions is yes, how then can city and campus create physical forms that

create and foster these mutual advantages? Are these students better prepared to cope with the complexities of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy coming from their city experience? And in the age of the multi-national economy, are these students better able to deal with the complexities of the global economy?

To understand these opportunities, specific characteristics of an urban campus warrant recognition: 1) The physical connection of campus buildings to the city buildings nearby; 2) The coherent relationship of the campus to the city street

For this model, one might ask, what would Harvard University be without Harvard Square? Harvard Square is obviously a vibrant retail center. But what fascinates me about Harvard Square is actually Harvard Yard: namely, how the citizens of Cambridge, non-students coming to and from the Square, are constantly traversing the Yard. In this very quiet green campus space, formed by individual buildings with a strong sense of edge, an interaction takes place between the citizens and the students that is intense and constant. This space is public



*Harvard University*



*Yale University*



*Yale University*

system, and the ease with which streets and pedestrian paths pass through the campus; 3) The seamlessness of that line of where the campus ends and the city begins; 4) The relative openness of the campus to the city and vice-versa; 5) The integration of residential, academic, and student life activities throughout the campus, a decidedly urban concept, as opposed to the separation of such campus functions in highly separate precincts; and 6) The relative proportion of building and open space on campus and how that relates to the density found in the surrounding city.

Let me propose that we can divide universities into three types when examining the relationship between city and the campus. The first model is the campus closely connected with its city, indeed, seamlessly connected to its city.

because a continuous wall of buildings does not bind it; it is campus because the buildings nonetheless create a sharply defined green space.

Yale University is analogous though different. Early buildings were organized to face the New Haven Green, and became part of the Green. Over three centuries, Yale started building walls around itself. Its Residential Colleges, built shortly after the River Houses at Harvard in the 1930's, walled themselves off from the city in a very assertive way. Yet other parts of the Yale campus, like the Cross Campus, are open to the life of the city. The newer parts of Yale, located at the university's edges, relate more seamlessly to the city. Louis Kahn's extraordinary design for the Yale Center for British Art locates the Museum above the stores of Chapel Street. This produces a continuing connection be-

tween campus and city, as well as a profound connection between a great building and the city.

At the University of Pennsylvania, Locust Walk, once a city street and now the central pedestrian path on campus, collects pedestrian movement to create a powerful place of university community. Walnut Street, just one block away, defines an edge of campus and had no such vitality. Now, however, the university has wisely sought to strengthen Walnut Street's urban quality with a series of four- and five- story buildings, which house retail on the

Master Plan that covers not only the campus, but also the city around it. It is a plan based on the establishment of careful yet strong connections between city and campus. Our design for the Summit Residence Halls refers to the strong linear forms of the Long Walk. And yet to establish a direct connection between city and campus, it provides a major portal to the street plus a campus-defining—and city-defining—tower as the southern entry to the campus.

The successful campus-city connection need not be limited to campuses in big cities.



*University of Pennsylvania*



*Dartmouth College*



*University of Virginia*

ground level and university facilities on the upper stories. This initiative will develop a deeper connection between campus and city, helping the University to break out of its former defensive mentality. Similar initiatives are occurring in several other precincts of this campus as the University starts to create a meaningful physical dialogue with its West Philadelphia neighborhood.

Even if a university is located in the middle of a city, it may not achieve that seamless connection. In Hartford, Connecticut, Trinity College's "Long Walk" is one of the most beautiful Collegiate Gothic buildings in the country. Yet this building forms a strong urban wall, a wall that protects the campus and its green space ambiance, which is totally different from that of the city surrounding it. Now, our office, with a team of other architects, has developed a

One of the most seamless connections between city and campus occurs at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. The Hanover Green, which is without question a public place, faces the campus buildings in a way that forces one to traverse across this public space to get from one part of campus to another. Likewise, Hopkins Center, Nelson Rockefeller's great gift to his alma mater, is located where the Green and Main Street meet. With its art, music, and theater offerings frequented by townspeople and with its all-important student mailboxes ensuring undergraduates' interaction with adjacent Main Street, Hopkins Center is literally a link to the world beyond the edge of campus.

A second model of the relationship between campus and city is the campus that is located next to a city or town but remains somewhat



*West Campus Student Apartments, Northeastern University, Boston. First buildings within West Campus Master Plan. 2001.*

separate from it. The University of Virginia, located at the edge of Charlottesville, is one example. Thomas Jefferson purposely founded the University of Virginia nearly two miles from the City of Charlottesville. It is ironic that the location of the new University had a decidedly anti-urban bias, because the architectural design of the Lawn, Jefferson's centerpiece of the University, is a decidedly urban structure.

In 1992, John Casteen, President of the University of Virginia wanted to know, "Why is the university always moving in a suburban direction when

tial colleges, we developed a set of building models that captured the essence of a Jefferson-inspired University, yet placing those buildings in decidedly urban locations. The City has implemented the Plan, and development is occurring as the Plan envisioned.

The third model of the campus is a far more common one: the campus that is totally unconnected to the city around it. Duke, Stanford, and to an extent, Rice Universities are ideal examples of this type. Physically, these campuses are extraordinarily beautiful. Yet connections to their nearby cities



*University of Virginia*



*Stanford University*



*Yale University*

it is adjacent to such a lively small city? What can be done to improve its urban sensibility?" The University and the City of Charlottesville jointly hired our firm to create an urban design plan that would improve the somewhat dilapidated and empty West Main Street Corridor that connects the University to Downtown.

The year-long project included sometimes contentious—and often quite wonderful—community meetings. Ultimately the City Council approved the plan and invited the University to move eastward towards the city for the first time in 100 years. The plan proposed three residential colleges for the University, community based middle income housing serving the nearby African-American neighborhoods, community facilities, major commercial facilities around the railroad station, and community-based commercial buildings for the neighborhood. For the residen-

are negligible. A more recent example is the new SUNY Campus at Purchase in New York State, a university dedicated to the arts (what should be more closely connected to the city than the arts?). The campus is located in the far suburbs of Westchester County, surrounded by lush green fields and isolated from any city.

Stanford University is also isolated from its host city, with the center of Stanford's campus located a mile and a half from Downtown Palo Alto. Try to walk to a neighborhood drugstore or record store when you are on the Stanford campus; there are none. There are other aspects of Stanford that are absolutely exceptional such as the quality of education, the elegance of its architecture. But the elements of city or town life, including retail and commercial choices and connections to a non-campus world, do

not exist near the day-to-day life of the campus.

The same could be said of Duke University. The Gothic campus, powerful as architecture, sits surrounded by the woods, a couple miles from the active life of Durham, North Carolina. That isolation sets a very different tone for the campus. While the center may be quite beautiful, the campus reflects an almost suburban, car-dominated pattern of organization.

In addition to the exploration of the three campus models, it is important to recognize that

work for the West Campus of Northeastern University, a new sector of this urban campus facing a major city boulevard (Huntington Avenue) and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, we sought to address two important issues. First, we undertook an urban design study of the University along Huntington Avenue, making recommendations for particular buildings that reinforce the sense of this major commercial boulevard as the most important face of the campus. This stance generated the basic design of the first three West Campus buildings.



*Northeastern University*



*Northeastern University*



*Northeastern University*

urbanity applies also to the nature of the buildings themselves and how they relate to the adjacent city pattern of buildings and streets. One building type is a “wall” that clearly defines the campus edge, like the one created by the Harvard Houses or the Yale Colleges. These usually imply a sharp demarcation between campus and city. Another is the condition where buildings frame a space, accessible from the city such as the buildings at Harvard Yard. These buildings have small or large open spaces between them, welcoming the city to enter the campus. A third building type is where buildings form a well-defined green space, opening toward the street, as found at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The best examples are those open spaces that are framed by strong edge buildings that lock the sense of campus to the street.

When our firm began master planning

Second, like many larger universities in urban or suburban settings, Northeastern has traditionally grown by simply moving its parking lots to its ever-expanding periphery. That policy runs the risk of forever separating a campus from its surrounding community. Increasingly, this growth model is becoming politically untenable, architecturally dreary, and urbanistically self-defeating. In Northeastern’s case, the University ran out of available open land.

In designing the three new Residence Halls, we created walled buildings that form a strong interior quadrangle; the walls are then punctured with two oversized portals (each 30 feet wide, and four stories and three stories high, respectively). The portals have no gates and the views through them give a sense of green respite in the city. These portals state very clearly that the public is welcome into the campus, in

support of Northeastern's long-time policy of openness to the city, a policy that emanates from its earlier days as a commuter institution. This solution, in effect, merges at least two of the campus building types cited above.

The West Campus is a highly permeable, open construct; it's not the tight-walled buildings of the Harvard houses. The largest portal aligns with Museum Road on the other side of Huntington Avenue, further accentuating that the building is open to the city and the city's street grid across the boule-

east. The six-story datum for most of the building refers to the five- and six- story buildings of the surrounding Fenway neighborhood, while the thirteen-story tower relates to the taller buildings that march along Huntington Avenue from downtown.

In the Master Plan, we asked: could Northeastern join with Wentworth Institute of Technology (an adjacent institution) to create a permanent green open space facing Huntington Avenue and the Museum of Fine Arts? It could become a major civic space, a literal Town Common, for this section of Bos-



*Northeastern University*



*Northeastern University*



*Northeastern University*

vard. Likewise, the second portal is aligned in a different direction to face Huntington Avenue. In addition, the complex has a thirteen-story tower that acts as an anchor and a beacon for the quadrangle.

We used glass selectivity to celebrate visual connections to the city. On the ground floor, we created student activity spaces with floor-to-ceiling windows; these spaces are designed to activate and enliven the street edge and the street life at the city side of these buildings. The use of floor-to-ceiling glass for the living rooms on the building's corners adds another sense of openness and transparency to an otherwise dominantly brick building. The Phase II buildings added a pair of eight-story elements, made completely of a floor-to-ceiling glass wall that acts as another welcoming threshold to the complex from the

ton, further cementing the connections of these three institutions to life and rhythm of the city.

These campus-making techniques will ensure that the Northeastern campus is simultaneously meeting its campus needs and pursuing city-making strategies that strengthen the adjacent city. It is only with strong city and strong campus that the two entities in effect become one. The urbanity and the resultant urban sensibility will bring strength to both the city and the campus, acknowledging that the campus and its students gain much from the city, just as the city gains much from the campus. That, in the end, is the goal.