

## ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE USER GROUP IN FACILITIES PLANNING

The principle of participation is a cornerstone of the facilities planning process at the University of Oregon. This process actively involves users in the design of campus facilities as opposed to limiting them merely to "review," "consultation," or "feedback." Facility design on this campus is a collaborative and interactive effort, which depends upon full use of the skills, experience, and wisdom of the users and the professional design team hired to assist in the process. It requires that the users, as those who are most familiar with the place and its potentials, think about and reason out each component of the place in terms of their own experiences and expectations.

A user group is formed for each proposed project to serve throughout the design process as the principal day-by-day representative of the University. In a very real sense, the user group is the embodiment of the institution as "client." As such, user group membership consists of faculty, staff, and students who use the facility (or will use the new facility), as well as a representative from the neighboring area, the Campus Planning Committee, and one of the relevant design departments (Architecture, Landscape Architecture, or Interior Design). This broad base of representation is intended to ensure that the resulting design meets the specific program needs as well as fits into the larger campus setting as described in the *Campus Plan*.

Working with Campus Planning & Real Estate (CP&RE) staff, the group will develop a description of the particular facilities issues at hand, ranging from campus-wide design goals to the group's own programmatic goals. Again working with CP&RE staff and members of the Campus Planning Committee, the group will then select a designer. Finally, the group will work with the selected designer to create the design for the new facilities and will forward its decisions to the Campus Planning Committee for review and subsequent recommendation to the President. Other opportunities to meet with the Campus Planning Committee in the early stages of the design process will be arranged as appropriate.

Thus the group is expected to make fundamental judgments about the project and how it should relate to the institution and the wider community. Many of these determinations will involve trade-offs, and the user group must attempt to decide which of these are the most acceptable (or the least offensive).

In addition to the services provided by the project design team, the user group is supported by staff from CP&RE. Additional assistance from other individuals may be provided to help the group resolve specific issues as they arise.

*A note about Conceptual Plans and Feasibility Studies:* User groups are not and should not be bound by feasibility studies or conceptual plans. Many projects begin with a conceptual design phase, which, as its title suggests, is conceptual in nature. This phase describes construction or program needs so that funding can be identified. Such studies usually are conducted without broad campus-wide input (although most include broad input from the expected project users) and do not address campus-wide issues such as those enumerated within the *Campus Plan*.