Customizing the future of higher education through ‘place’ and philanthropy

“If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are”—American writer Wendell Berry.

We live in the age of the hard pivot, where the unprecedented speed of our daily lives forces us to consider concepts and ideas well before they reach full maturation.

This is a shame, because too many promising ideas never have a chance to take root and become great ideas. They are discarded due to a whole host of 21st-century pressures, including the dark specter of insufficient resources and a sometimes paralyzing inability to create a long-term vision.

We are told that we live in a “volatile” time. So we live for the moment—because in today’s world, living for today seems to be the only thing we can control.

More leisurely pursuits, such as considering one’s sense of place, are often pushed to the background.

This, too, is a shame.

I have long maintained that sense of place is one of the true currencies that a university can ever possess. Place has always mattered here at the University of Nevada, Reno, and it will play a key role in our future.

Over the past few months, two major philanthropic efforts have reinforced the importance of place on our campus. They’ve also provided an intriguing roadmap as to how a University of Nevada, Reno education will be delivered in the future.

When the William N. Pennington Health Sciences Building is completed in fall 2011, this innovative building will change how we train health care professionals in our state. It is named in honor of William N. Pennington, the longtime University benefactor, whose William N. Pennington Foundation committed $10 million to the University for construction of the new building. In addition, funding of $3 million for planning was allocated by the 2007 Nevada State Legislature and $31 million in construction bonding was approved as part of the 2009 Nevada State Legislature’s Capital Improvement Project budget. Private matching funds also include a $2.5 million gift from the Nell J. Redfield Foundation and a $1 million gift from the Thelma B. and Thomas P. Hart Foundation.

The William N. Pennington Health Sciences Building will allow the University of Nevada School of Medicine to expand its class size from 62 to 100 students for a total enrollment of 400 students, while the number ofOrvis School of Nursing students will double for an eventual total enrollment of about 300 students. This expansion will help address the state’s shortage of doctors and nurses, and will ensure that our future doctors and nurses will be trained under one roof. This integrative teaching approach will help our University better meet the health care needs of the state, which will be more effectively served by multidisciplinary teams of healthcare professionals.

Training the next generation of journalists for the rapidly changing world of news, information and communications is at the forefront of a gift the University received in December, when it was announced that the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation had awarded the Reynolds School of Journalism and Center for Advanced Media Studies $7.96 million. The gift will help prepare our students for one of the most profound shifts in the presentation of news and information that the modern world has seen. It will enable our students to communicate on every platform, from print to broadcast to the Internet, social media … and whatever comes next.

The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation gift will provide funds to re-wire and re-cable the journalism building, to install a robust server system, to replace analog TV and radio facilities and to create a new multimedia newsroom in which students will learn how to write and present information on every platform. Reynolds School Dean Jerry Ceppos said it best: “In a world that constantly talks about the decline of journalism, this gift lights the way for its future.”

Both the William N. Pennington Health Sciences Building and the technologically upgraded Reynolds School of Journalism Building will provide a physical as well as a psychological architecture to our campus. They are buildings whose walls will invite rather than impede. They will remind us that a strong sense of place will always be a force of soul for our University.

Sincerely,

Milton D. Glick  
President  
www.unr.edu/president