



MANAGING FACILITIES

DURING AN ENROLLMENT CLIFF

| 4 STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLING in higher education institutions continues to lag across the country. Experts are predicting an even sharper decline of about 15% starting in 2025 due to the shrinking college-age population — the result of a drop in birth rates after the Great Recession — and changing student preferences.

This enrollment cliff is already reshaping how colleges and universities approach their operations — especially the management of their facilities and spaces.



Fewer students means the way space is used is being reconsidered, with each maintained square foot counting more than ever.



Data-driven insights and technological innovation are changing what's possible in terms of operational efficiency and optimization.



Flexible and adaptable facilities are becoming increasingly critical to remain competitive and responsive to rapidly evolving student needs.



An alternative approach, integrated facilities management, has emerged as a proven solution for streamlined, cost effective, cleaning, maintenance, grounds and energy operations.

Here are the top four strategies to reduce total cost of ownership and mitigate the financial impact on facilities from reduced enrollment.

THE ENROLLMENT CLIFF

By the Numbers

- **2.9 million fewer students** enrolled in 2023 compared to 2013 — a **14 percent decrease** over a decade
([National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#))
- Student enrollment is predicted to **fall by about 15 percent** at some institutions between 2025 and 2029
([Hechinger Report](#))



STRATEGY 1: REDUCE GROSS SQUARE FOOTAGE

This is by far the hardest, but also the most effective way to reduce the cost of facilities management. Higher education is notorious for inefficient space utilization, yet has embraced decades of expansion to attract students and accommodate programs. Absent those students and programs, underutilized facilities become a major liability. The combination of hybrid student learning and the shifts in enrolled student numbers changes how spaces on campus are being used.

Reducing the gross square footage of an institution based on space utilization data and maintenance needs can be a powerful way to reduce costs and risks.

- **Fewer buildings means a reduction in total cost of ownership**
- **Closing or removing buildings reduces the backlog and burden of deferred maintenance.**

There are a few ways institutions are reimagining their physical footprints to ensure campus resources are being optimally utilized to meet the evolving needs of a shrinking student population, including:



**Selling or leasing
buildings**



**Consolidating
space**



**Closing
buildings**

Note that buildings need not necessarily be sold or demolished to reduce space. Buildings can be also temporarily taken offline or decommissioned. Closing unnecessary or less desirable space is an effective means of cost reduction. Read below how smart technology can allow such spaces to be remotely monitored while unoccupied.



SELL & REINVEST

The University System of Georgia recently unveiled [plans to sell notable assets](#), including the institution's President's House.

The reason why? The university says the thousands of square feet and acres of grounds have become too costly and challenging to maintain. The proceeds will instead be used to support student success initiatives.

DEMOLISH, DIVEST, REINVEST

The University of Missouri is on a mission to reduce the institution's footprint by [more than one million square feet](#) — roughly 10 percent — in reaction to rising costs and declining revenue.

The reduction, a combination of demolishing or divestment, is expected to eliminate a quarter of the \$800 million in facility needs, plus free an additional \$8 million in operating funds. Those funds will be reinvested into existing facilities.



REAL-TIME DATA, REAL-TIME SOLUTIONS

At [Brenau University](#), occupancy sensors provided real-time data that showed:

- On average, **only 45% of net cleanable square footage was occupied** in a building on any given day.
- The delivery of cleaning services was adjusted, resulting in a **49% increase in efficiency** while maintaining APPA Level 2 quality standards.

Additionally, AIWX air quality sensors alerted facilities leadership to previously unknown damaging humidity levels overnight in the library, **leading to elevated energy expenses and equipment degradation.**

Subsequent analysis identified the problem, informed the solution and avoided additional expenses.

STRATEGY 2: LEVERAGE SMART TECHNOLOGY

As institutions navigate the delicate balance of downsizing and optimizing space, data-driven insights are paramount toward managing operational risk and reducing cost.

The facilities sector is now at the forefront of leveraging sensor technology for service delivery. Remote monitoring of spaces and assets extends the reach of thinly-stretched facilities departments, allowing them to deliver services more effectively and efficiently. For example, why clean space that hasn't been used? Occupancy sensors provide data-driven insights that optimize cleaning staff's efforts. Sensor technology allows institutions to monitor what they can't staff.

Aramark's [AIWX™ Connect](#) allows building owners to gather real-time data on environmental conditions, occupancy and equipment status. Poor indoor air quality, failing HVAC equipment operation, leaking or frozen pipes, even propped doors are just a few of the many campus risk areas that can be remotely monitored.

STRATEGY 3: INVEST IN FLEXIBILITY

Reliable space utilization data has the added benefit of allowing institutions to become more flexible. Real-time space utilization data, rather than simply campus schedule data, arms institutions with the information to make informed decisions about their building needs and space allocation. The move towards hybrid work and study schedules, combined with a reduction in the number of students and staff on campus, is forcing institutions to look more closely at how to efficiently use available space.

Successful approaches to flexible and hybrid-use spaces include:



Increasing occupancy levels during “off” hours like evenings, weekends and the summer months.



Modifying existing space to serve multiple purposes with easy reconfiguration of furniture or partitions.



Taking a [demand-driven approach](#) to facilities management by adapting cleaning, maintenance, heating and cooling schedules to actual usage and data intelligence.

As institutions invest in flexibility, it paves the way for more resilient and responsive facilities management capable of withstanding the challenges posed by a reduced on-campus community.



STRATEGY 4: PARTNER FOR SUCCESS

As campus administrators struggle with declining revenue, rising deferred maintenance, skilled labor shortages, and a host of other facilities challenges, higher education is embracing the value that partnership offers. Many institutions already embrace partnerships for academic purposes - such as through extension campuses, mergers, and corporate partners. The same benefits realized by partnering for academic success can also be realized in facilities management. In an environment of limited resources, collaboration with an expert partner will become more critical to success.

As an Integrated Facilities Management (IFM) provider, Aramark partners with institutions to manage campus assets, improve operating efficiencies and develop talented staff.

The **benefits of working with Aramark Facilities Management** include:



Implementation of proven processes to manage facilities, develop staff and maintain engaging environments.



Introduction of innovative, tech-enabled solutions that provide real-time, data-driven insights to improve service delivery, drive efficiencies, and enable long-term planning.



Expertise in strategic planning, capital renewal, condition assessment, energy management, and other technical disciplines.



Economies of scale in procurement and resource allocation.



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The reality of the enrollment cliff and resulting revenue reduction, combined with mounting deferred maintenance costs, present very real challenges for higher education institutions. No single strategy is enough to mitigate the risks.

Working with an experienced integrated facilities management partner, however, allows universities to embrace a multifaceted, flexible and data-driven approach that makes a difference. With a proven track record of helping higher education institutions meet the challenges of today to ensure a resilient, sustainable future, Aramark Facilities Management is that partner.

We're the facilities management partner to help you prepare for today and the future.

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