



# THE MIRROR OF THE INSTITUTION: BUILDING AN INSPIRING AND INCLUSIVE CAMPUS CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

*A campus is the mirror of a college or university's soul, reflecting its history, culture, image, management style, and aspirations for the future. This article explores how the physical and psychological environment of a campus plays a pivotal role in shaping its identity and influencing the learning outcomes and emotional well-being of students. It focuses on four core areas: (1) the symbolic and functional significance of the campus as a mirror of the institution; (2) strategies to make campus environments more inviting and student-centric; (3) the importance of nurturing a positive campus culture with real-life examples; and (4) the changing dimensions of campus culture in the 21st century. The article concludes with a call for coordinated action by students, faculty, administration, and policymakers to build a dynamic and inclusive campus ethos.*

**Keywords:** Campus Culture, Academic Environment, Inclusive Education, Skill Education, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Physical Infrastructure

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## 1. Introduction: Why Campus Culture Matters

A vibrant and healthy campus culture lies at the heart of every thriving educational institution. Campus culture is not merely a backdrop to academic life—it is the defining element that shapes the experience of all stakeholders, including students, faculty, non-teaching staff, and the larger community. As Tierney (1988) suggests, institutional culture represents a pattern of shared assumptions that have worked well enough to be considered valid and are passed on to new members.

Campus culture encompasses the values, beliefs, traditions, and habits that characterize daily interactions and institutional functioning. It affects everything—from how students engage in learning and social activities to how faculty interact with each other and with students. A healthy campus culture fosters inclusion, creativity, collaboration, academic excellence, emotional security, and a keen sense of belonging (Chowdhury, S. 2019).

## 2. The Campus as a Mirror of the Institution

A university's campus reflects its character, aspirations, and management philosophy (George, M. & Nair, L., 2021). When students, parents, or prospective faculty visit a campus, their first impressions are often shaped not by syllabi or rankings but by how the institution “feels.” The aesthetics, layout, cleanliness, inclusivity, and dynamism of the campus convey powerful messages about the institution's priorities.

A campus is the mirror of a college or university's soul, reflecting its history, its culture and image, its management style, and even its future (Banerjee, R., 2020). It tells all who visit it how it thinks about itself and the way it expects others to judge it. A healthy campus enhances well-being and enables all individuals to reach their full potential.

A campus must be beautifully planned and landscaped from utility and aesthetic point of view. It should have spacious asphalted roads with flowering trees both sides, gardens, children's parks, social and health clubs, water treatment plants, underground drainage, well illuminated street lights, moderately furnished residential quarters with intercom telephone and

internet facility and uninterrupted power and water supply for the teaching and non-teaching staff and utility complex (Reddy, K.S. & Thomas, A., 2020).

Horticulture garden with trees like Mango, Coconut, Guava, Pomegranate across the campus, will add beauty to the pollution free environment. The rich vegetation in the campus will function as a conducive habitat for variety of birds. Comprehensive health care, sports and recreational facilities, hostels, hygienic canteens, bacteria free water coolers, academic and personal counselling, fair and speedy grievances redressal are all welfare measures that should be provided to our students (Bhattacharya, M. & Kumar, R., 2021).

Mess, ATM facility, Xerox, internet, salon and beauty parlour, etc. may be provided inside the campus.

Smooth induction, stringent anti ragging measures, code of conduct, confidence building measures, orientation programs, counselling, and leisure time activities, etc. may be additional features of a well-planned campus (Saxena, N. & Das, P., 2021).

All the recommendations of National Commission for woman and minority community must be implemented inside the campus otherwise our education system fail students (Mishra, A., 2020). Instead of giving hope, our education institutions will offer a feeling fear and despair.

Gaurav Pathania, a researcher with a University College London project on discrimination in Indian higher education, told The Wire – an online new channel. “We live in a society full of oppression which is reproduced in our psychology, minds, and behaviour. Instead of giving hope, our education institutions offer a feeling of fear and despair.” Of course, there should not be any kind of discrimination inside our campus. There should not be any discrimination among teachers, staff, and students (Nair, R. & Mehta, P., 2019).

Inside campus there must be “rights of open expression.” Free speech must be allowed inside the campus. Free speech is ‘speech that is not aimed to hurt.’ Free speech that dehumanizes is not free (Sharma, L., 2021).

In a healthy campus teachers must be role models. A role model is a person who inspires and encourages us to strive for greatness, live to our fullest potential and see the best in ourselves. A role model is someone we admire and someone we aspire to be like. We learn through them, through their commitment to excellence and through their ability to make us realize our own personal growth. Students look to them for advice and guidance. A role model can be anybody: a parent, a sibling, a friend but for the students the most influential and life-changing role models are teachers (Gupta, M., 2021).

Teaching staff, non-teaching staff or students must not use foul language, disrespectful language, and obscenities inside the campus. There should be some policy in our colleges about what language is acceptable and what language is not. A healthy campus must ensure that you have clear classroom rules and consequences related to language (Das, K., 2020).

Despite compelling evidence to the contrary, many teachers still believe that fear of failure, fear of an unwanted call home, fear of the teacher, fear of ridicule, or fear of an unpleasant consequence—is a prime motivator for students to do high-quality work. The intentional creation of fear in the classroom remains one of the most widely used strategies for managing student behavior and encouraging academic achievement. But remember that fear compromises our ability to learn. In a healthy classroom let the students learn without fear. We must teach our students to respect us not to fear us. As a teacher, do remember that where there is fear, there is no love and freedom.

- **Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (India):** With its eco-conscious architecture and serene landscapes, the campus exudes harmony, discipline, and spirituality.
- **Stanford University (USA):** The open green spaces, red-roofed buildings, and tech-integrated infrastructure reflect innovation, openness, and intellectual pursuit.

Aesthetically pleasing, emotionally safe, and academically conducive environments lead to greater student satisfaction, increased engagement, and better academic and personal outcomes (Astin, 1993).

### 3. Making the Campus Environment More Inviting

Move our campus from adequate to extraordinary, students need to reclaim ownership of the built environment. In the 21st century, every student has the right to an inspiring physical learning environment. More importantly, every student has the right to contribute to making their campus a stimulating, innovative and energizing place to be (Sen, B. & Rao, S., 2021).

We should be deeply aware of the physical challenges facing higher education institutions today – crumbling infrastructure, students who feel isolated, sprawling campuses, limited parking space and a lack of funding to improve these problems. But despite these realities, colleges also contain unique tools and opportunities for confronting these issues because they have long been sites of great social transformation and action, and they continue to be powerful engines of innovation. I believe that they can also be powerful agents for change in making physical environments more people friendly.

First, let us take a moment to reflect on our experience of the built environment on our campus. Is our campus used throughout the day? Is this a place where students would choose to meet their friends? Are there choices of things to do? Do our students leave campus inspired? How many diverse types of activities are occurring in public areas – are people walking, eating, playing cricket, chess, relaxing, reading, no? Because the more activities happening on campus that people have an opportunity to participate in, the better.

These questions are critical to begin thinking differently about the ways we create, plan, and experience campuses, because campus spaces – especially library and classroom set-ups – are key to facilitating learning and social interaction.

It seems that the people who planned our colleges did not prioritize the compact, multi-use ideal. Currently there are far too many inaccessible buildings, abandoned lots and poorly maintained spaces that make campuses unattractive, unwelcoming, and unsafe for people. For instance, there have been numerous sexual assaults on several campuses nationwide; these would be better prevented through proper lighting and elimination of secluded areas. Also, the dominance of parking lots and roads that cut through campus does not contribute to the wellbeing, collectivity, or cultural richness of campuses. Indoors, poorly planned classrooms can create barriers for students and professors because they can discourage participation and encourage students to be passive observers of the lecture (Ramakrishnan, K., 2021). Making a classroom interactive and stimulating is a key to making it a successful learning environment.

Another important consideration is how accessible the campus is to the larger urban network. It is possible to evaluate this by looking at its connections to the surrounding neighbourhoods. A successful campus is easy to get to and to get through. It is visible and identifiable from a distance. The edges of a campus are especially important and should not be parking lots or large, blank walls of buildings. The campus needs to be accessible for pedestrians, bikes, and public transit. Transit stops must be conveniently located next to important campus destinations. If we make our campuses more accessible, then they will attract students and the public to come onto campus.

So where can we start? The first step is to make campuses places where people have invested meaning. A place that has a unique cultural and social identity is defined by the way it is used and the people who use it. By doing this, the physical, social, environmental, and economic states of campuses are taken into consideration. If we want to see students challenging the way that their campuses are planned on a larger scale, we need to focus on developing the social engagement and networks that are vital to innovation. Students need to

articulate what is not working for them in the campus environment and then be able to identify what they want. Gathering to discuss a vision for a better campus environment is an ideal way to build the social capital needed to change the existing structures. It is a process that strengthens existing ties, creates new ones, and invigorates communities with the knowledge of how they can make campuses better learning environments.

Make a campus more inviting, institutions must focus on four major pillars:

### 3.1 Physical Infrastructure

- ***Comfortable Seating & Study Spaces:*** Provide spaces like lawns, reading pods, bean bags, or shaded benches where students can relax, study, or engage in dialogue.
- ***Green & Clean Campus:*** Incorporate nature through trees, vertical gardens, and water features.
- ***Tech-Enabled Learning Spaces:*** Ensure Wi-Fi, smart classrooms, digital libraries, and e-learning hubs.
- ***Cafeterias and Common Rooms:*** Affordable, clean, and well-lit areas for socialization and rest.

**Example:** Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar is known for its student-centric infrastructure, blending modernity with sustainability.

### 3.2 Student-Centric Support Services

- ***Learning Resource Canfers:*** Well-equipped libraries, labs, and digital resources must be accessible.
- ***Counselling & Mentoring:*** Academic and emotional guidance through peer mentors, faculty advisors, and trained counsellors.
- ***Health & Wellness Facilities:*** Gymnasiums, yoga centres, and medical services.

**Example:** Ashoka University (India) has a dedicated Centre for Well-being offering academic, emotional, and peer mentoring.

### 3.3 Inclusive and Safe Culture

- ***Zero-Tolerance Policies:*** Strict anti-ragging and anti-bullying measures.
- ***Gender Sensitization:*** Seminars, inclusive restrooms, and support for LGBTQ+ communities.
- ***Support for Minorities:*** Language support, scholarships, and cultural clubs.

**Example:** TISS (Mumbai) has gender amity cells and hosts numerous cultural events supporting diverse identities.

### 3.4 Free Expression and Open Dialogue

- ***Freedom of Thought:*** Free speech zones for debates, open-mic sessions, and student journalism.
- ***Respectful Dialogue:*** Ensure guidelines that promote respect and prevent hate speech.

**Example:** University of Oxford's "Oxford Union" stands as a model for respectful but robust debate.

## 4. Building a Positive Campus Culture: A Few Instances

- ***University of Hyderabad:*** Promotes diversity through cultural centres and active student bodies.
- ***FLAME University, Pune:*** Encourages interdisciplinary learning, art, and theatre.
- ***Azim Premji University, Bengaluru:*** Known for ethical grounding, social engagement, and grassroots connection.
- ***Harvard University:*** Emphasizes inclusion, student governance, and intellectual diversity.
- ***University of Melbourne:*** Hosts annual Respect Week and promotes gender equity.

## 5. The Changing Dimensions of Campus Culture in the 21st Century

With globalization, digital transformation, and changing student aspirations, campus culture is evolving. Today's students seek:

- ***Eco-Consciousness:*** Campuses are adopting green policies, reducing plastic, and conserving water.
- ***Technology Integration:*** From AI-driven counselling to virtual reality labs.
- ***Globalization:*** Exchange programs, international student hubs, and cross-cultural festivals.
- ***Mental Health Prioritization:*** Institutions are now hiring psychologists, running mindfulness programs, and reducing academic stress.

## **6. Recommendations for Stakeholders**

### **6.1. For Students.**

#### **(i). Respect Diversity and Practice Empathy**

- Students come from diverse socio-economic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Respecting this diversity is key to nurturing mutual understanding.
- Empathy helps bridge communication gaps and enhances interpersonal relationships on campus.
- Example: The “Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat” program in Indian institutions encourages cultural exchange between students from different states (MHRD, 2021).

#### **(ii). Participate in Campus Governance and Clubs**

- Involvement in student unions, clubs, and committees builds leadership, collaboration, and civic responsibility.
- Active participation ensures student voices are heard in decision-making processes.
- Example: Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Delhi University (DU) have long-standing student union elections with active representation in policy discussions.

#### **(iii). Use Academic and Counselling Resources Proactively**

- Many campuses offer mentoring, academic support, and psychological counselling, but these are underutilized due to stigma or lack of awareness.
- Students should be encouraged to use mental health helplines, skill development cells, and faculty office hours.
- Example: The National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) and Manodarpan initiative by MoE India support mental well-being in educational institutions.

### **6.2. For Teachers**

#### **(i). Be Mentors, Not Just Instructors**

- Teachers must go beyond syllabus delivery to support holistic development.
- Mentorship involves guiding students on academic, personal, and career fronts.
- Example: The Guru-Shishya tradition in Indian culture aligns with this concept of personal mentorship and care.



(ii). Encourage Open Dialogue and Support Innovation

- Classrooms should be democratic spaces where students are free to question, critique, and express.
- Teachers should support creativity, experimentation, and multidisciplinary learning.
- Example: FLAME University, Pune, and Ashoka University, Haryana, follow liberal arts models encouraging open discourse and innovation in pedagogy.

(iii). Model Inclusivity, Ethics, and Professionalism

- Teachers set the tone for behaviour, values, and professionalism.
- They must avoid bias, refrain from harsh or discriminatory language, and treat every student fairly.
- UNESCO (2021) recommends teachers adopt inclusive teaching practices to support equity and social justice.

### **6.3. For Administrators & Universities**

(i). Invest in Infrastructure That Enhances Well-being

- Build safe, green, accessible, and digitally connected campuses with student-friendly facilities like quiet zones, common rooms, clean cafeterias, and inclusive hostels.
- Ensure disabled-friendly ramps, accessible toilets, and gender-neutral restrooms.
- Example: IIT Gandhinagar's campus features environment-friendly architecture, mindfulness spaces, and a wellness centre.

(ii). Ensure Transparency and Student Representation

- Transparent grievance redressal systems and inclusive student councils should be institutionalized.
- Representation must reflect gender, caste, regional, and linguistic diversity.
- Example: The University Grants Commission (Redressal of Grievances of Students) Regulations, 2020 mandates a fair mechanism for student complaints.

(iii). Promote a Vision Aligned with Academic Freedom, Sustainability, and Social Justice

- Universities should protect academic freedom, resist political interference, and ensure social inclusion in admissions and scholarships.
- Promote environmental responsibility via green campus drives and sustainable practices.

- Example: TERI School of Advanced Studies (New Delhi) integrates sustainability across all its programs and campus activities.

## 7. Conclusion

A campus is much more than its buildings and courses—it is a living, breathing reflection of a college or university's soul. Academic institutions are thus reflecting its history, its culture and image, its management style, and even its future. It tells all who visit it how it thinks about itself and the way it expects others to judge it. Campus culture is the way things are done in the college (the personality of a college), the underlying norms and values that shape patterns of behaviour, attitudes, and expectations between stakeholders in the college. It is the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up over time. The role of a university is to ensure that an atmosphere conducive to higher learning is nurtured on its campus. In a healthy campus teachers must be role models. Inside campus there must be “rights of open expression.” Free speech must be allowed inside the campus. Free speech is ‘speech that is not aimed to hurt.’ Free speech that dehumanizes is not free. In the 21st century, every student has the right to an inspiring physical learning environment. More importantly, every student has the right to contribute to making their campus a stimulating, innovative and energizing place to be. A positive campus culture can transform individual lives and uplift entire communities. Institutions must continually nurture this culture by aligning physical spaces, academic support systems, interpersonal relations, and inclusive values. Only then can they truly become spaces where every student not only learns but also feels at home.

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