

Firms team up on one-of-a-kind student center for UO campus

PORTLAND'S OFFICE 52 ARCHITECTURE HAS partnered with Eugene-based Rowell Brokaw Architects on a unique center for the University of Oregon that is the first in the nation to integrate the program elements of academic advising, career counseling and the centers for academic support and excellence with faculty, staff and senior leadership in one building.

The two firms each bring specific expertise to the project. OFFICE 52 Architecture, the design architect, brings a national portfolio of innovative higher education experience and a creative design process to the project. Rowell Brokaw Architects, the architect of record, has been working on the University of Oregon campus for many years and has deep familiarity with the institution and the city of Eugene.

The Tykeson College and Careers Building, or Tykeson Hall, will serve as a headquarters for the College of Arts and Sciences, its 800 faculty and 11,000 students majoring in 42 fields. The 65,000-square-foot Tykeson Hall represents several solutions for design and development challenges that are happening at other universities across the country.

Among them, the necessity to create new buildings that provide services for future generations to come while respecting the historic character of the existing structures and landscape that surrounds

it. Tykeson Hall will be situated at the heart of campus, on East 13th Avenue between Johnson and Chapman Halls.

Isaac Campbell, AIA, NCARB, principal with OFFICE 52 Architecture, said he and his partner, Michelle LaFoe, AIA, are working closely with the College of Arts and Sciences and its dean, Andrew Marcus, to ensure the design draws upon the historical context and the typologies of the campus while also creating a unique and powerful architectural vision for the college.

"The power of the site combined with the uniqueness of the program, those two things have been the driver for us architecturally and in thinking about the design of the building," Campbell said. "The past and the future could be diametrically opposed, but we see it as a rich architectural and landscape lineage that combine with our forward-thinking building design to create a rich milieu."

Dean Marcus emphasizes that Tykeson Hall centers around student success. By integrating academic programs, academic advising and career advising in a single place, the project can be a prototype for how colleges and universities can provide real and useful resources for students in helping them discover their path in life. The building design seeks to eliminate traditional barriers and make the connections that students need to succeed at the university and beyond.

Marcus praised OFFICE 52's design for its potential to draw some 9,000 students each year into "the living room" and other first-floor gathering places. From there, they are guided into areas on the second and third floors where academic and career counselors are readily accessible and available to have conversations that help direct students through their education and early career choices.

"This has been my first building and it's been the most exciting career experience of my life. It's like the "Field of Dreams" where if you build it they will come," he said. "It's the first time I think I've understood fully how architecture brings to life and creates a vision for doing business in a new way than you've done for more than a century."

The college's Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education, Ian McNeely, said he is impressed with the "thoughtful way in which the spaces have been arranged to draw in students who come to the building for their first time, in this case for introductory writing and math classes, and into welcoming spaces" that serve a variety of purposes in a well-lit, airy, open atmosphere.

"This represents the new landscape of higher education and the enhanced support that we went to give to this generation of students. There are more resources and greater opportunities than ever before, but also more uncertainty than ever before," McNeely said.

Mark Young, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, principal at Rowell Brokaw, said this project stands apart from other projects the firm has done on the campus because of the unique and innovative program involved.

"There isn't much precedent to rely on, so programming has been very exploratory. There have been significant discoveries about the program that have come about through the design of the building," he said. "In addition, the central location in the historic campus core brings a higher level of visibility and scrutiny to the project, much more than our previous work at the University of Oregon."

Young noted that OFFICE 52's design concept for the building has two parts that reflect history while looking forward. The three-story, east mass contains more traditional programs and draws from the massing, proportions and materials of the surrounding historic buildings. The four-story west mass holds the innovative programs and is clad in a terracotta rainscreen and glass, traditional materials used in new ways that are a departure from the character of buildings on campus.

"One of the goals of the project is to be outward-facing and transparent, which is different from how the traditional masonry buildings in the historic core of campus present themselves," he said, adding a completely glazed commons on the west side connects out into the campus landscape, a concept that OFFICE 52 brought to the project from the beginning.

One of the challenges involved in the project is planning spaces for untested uses because the program is so experimental, Young said. "It will require a change in how the occupants work, collaborate and engage with each other, so there will likely be an adjustment period. We are designing in flexibility to adapt to changing needs and innovative programs."

According to the UO, Tykeson Hall will attract students to the advising centers by not only making them highly visible, but also offering a new kind of advising that speaks directly to student interests. The building will feature:

- ▶ a large hub, the CAS Commons, on the ground floor, that helps orient students and serves as their "trailhead" for the rest of the building.
- ▶ classrooms that are deliberately located in areas that draw students farther into the building and into welcoming advising spaces.
- ▶ "theme pods" that house advising teams offering combined academic and career guidance, with each team focusing on a specific area of student interest.
- ▶ rotating exhibits positioned along sight lines to attract students to advising locations.

Campbell noted that most universities, and especially public institutions, wrestle with how to best support students who don't necessarily come to college with all of the tools they need to successfully navigate it. Universities must find ways to help these students not only stay enrolled beyond their first year, but complete their studies in four years rather than five or six. While other institutions have implemented smaller efforts at this type of integration, he knows of no others that have attempted it at this level and broad scope and scale.

"The University of Oregon has taken a proactive position on this initiative and is demonstrating real leadership," Campbell said. "My sense of it is that when they are successful in doing this, everybody is going to come see what they've done. It makes for a very interesting project and a very unique architectural challenge." ■



Images courtesy of OFFICE 52 Architecture