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DIAMOND SCHMITT ARCHITECTS

The new social sciences building at the University of Ottawa houses 19 classrooms as well as a 225-seat amphitheatre. It is connected to the renovated Vanier Hall by multi-level bridges that span a five-storey atrium. LEED Gold certification is being targeted.

New University of Ottawa building a campus hub

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For the first time in the history of the faculty of social sciences at the [University of Ottawa](#), students, professors and staff are together under one roof in the heart of the downtown campus.

Designed by [Diamond Schmitt Architects](#) in joint venture with [KWC Architects](#) and constructed by [Aecon](#), the 15-storey social sciences tower provides 275,000 square feet of learning and student space.

The building is connected to renovated Vanier Hall by multi-level bridges that span a five-storey skylit atrium, bringing together the faculty's nine academic units as well as six research centres.

Construction of the recently inaugurated building as well as renovations to Vanier Hall required an investment of \$120 million.

"This is more than just a new building; it's a veritable social science laboratory," said Allan Rock, the university's president and vice-chancellor.

"Students and researchers in our largest faculty will benefit from the synergies that come with being together."

The project was undertaken by a team that included consulting engineers [Halsall Associates](#), [Goodkey Weedmark & Associates Ltd.](#) and [Morrison Hershfield](#).

The building houses extensive classroom, student study and collaborative space on the lower five floors. The upper floors house seminar, office and research space for faculty, graduate students and staff.

The facility is intended to create a new gateway and focal point for the university campus.

“Designed to efficiently occupy a marginal site at the edge of this dense urban campus, a new academic crossroads has been created,” said Donald Schmitt, principal with Diamond Schmitt Architects.

A six-storey pavilion with a dramatic 12-metre-long cantilever houses a 225-seat lecture theatre and a double-height reception hall with a green roof. The slope of the cantilever creates tiered seating for the theatre and forms the canopy over the main entrance to the building.

The pavilion creates a terminus to the campus Grand Allée and maximizes the view corridor with extensive glazing in the reception hall. Dramatic views are afforded of the Rideau Canal and Parliament Hill from the tower.

Diamond Schmitt said the massing and materials of the building are responsive to the varied conditions around the site with podia and precast panels that emphasize the horizontal at the base of the building.

The curtainwall of the tower is designed to minimize its mass and consists of a mix of transparent, translucent and solid panels to address differing interior requirements.

For natural light, a curved glass prow on the “flatiron” form announces a new gateway to the Rideau Canal and the neighbourhood across the water.

A signature feature of the LEED Gold candidate building’s sustainable mandate is a six-storey-high biofilter living wall — the tallest in North America. This wall regulates humidity and acts as the building’s air purification system.

Diamond Schmitt Architects pioneered the commercial application of this process developed by [Nedlaw Living Walls](#) nearly a decade ago.

“The new building is far more than just an architectural jewel,” the university said.

“It also meets strict environmental guidelines, which reflect the faculty’s values and the university’s formal commitment to sustainable development.”

The university said the targeted LEED Gold certification brings the faculty’s new home close to being a net-zero energy building in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and heating load through such measures as incorporation of the living wall and installation of gardens on some roof surfaces that create insulation and allow improved stormwater management.

In addition, heat from the data centre will be recycled and used to heat not only the new building but also buildings connected to the central heating system.

Construction got underway in August 2009 on the social sciences building.



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