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Modern Makeover

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By Doug Bardwell | Photos by Scott Pease

Educational institutions don't get to remodel or renovate all that often, so when the opportunity arose, Lorain County Community College (LCCC) brought together an award-winning team to maximize their investment. A new library building had been completed in 2008 and the original library building was available. With the college's evolution and 120% enrollment growth over the past 10 years, the administration saw an opportunity to create a cutting-edge classroom building for the future.

Called iLOFT, which stands for Innovative Learning Opportunities for Tomorrow, the building is occupied primarily by the college's Social Sciences program, providing a collaborative and interactive learning environment that is as flexible as it is state-of-the-art. Designed by the firms of Sasaki Associates from Boston and Clark & Post Architects Inc. from Lorain, the facility is designed to provide learning opportunities not just in classrooms, but throughout the building.

Ronald Cocco, president of Clark & Post, recalls, "the provost wanted us to create a new learning paradigm, creating educational areas in multiple settings.

"This opened the entirety of the building to be a learning space – not just the conventional classrooms, but also the lounge, the common areas, even the corridors," he says.

The result is a facility that is truly forward thinking, according to Katia Lucic, principal at Sasaki Associates.

"[This building] puts LCCC probably ahead of every other learning institution I know of at this point," she says, in its holistic approach to academic training.

Expanding educational opportunities

Schematic design began in September 2009. Lucic notes that, early on, the project team "looked at how the learning process occurred on campus and how other institutions were using their spaces." The goal was two-fold: to opti-

OPPORTUNITIES EVERYWHERE In the iLOFT building, educating isn't confined to classrooms. Learning opportunities also present themselves along corridors with seating nooks (top) and study counters (middle), and in common areas featuring full-height, glass "writing walls" (bottom).

mize the active learning experience, both inside and outside the classroom, she says.

The project increased useable space by 22,000 square feet, adding a second floor in the previous two-story high central library area. Now able to plan 73,600 square feet of space for educational use, faculty, administrators and students began a series of meetings with the design team to determine the best way to program the space. As one idea after another was proposed, the group began to realize there was certainly more than one "best" way to deliver education.

"With all the suggestions, there was no unique winner – we wanted to do them all," says Laura Carissimi, director of purchasing and facilities planning for LCCC. "No longer do we use the concept of the 'sage' standing in front of the class. Now, we look at our faculty as coaches and mentors, interacting extensively with the students. New technologies demand new learning environments and less formal spaces.

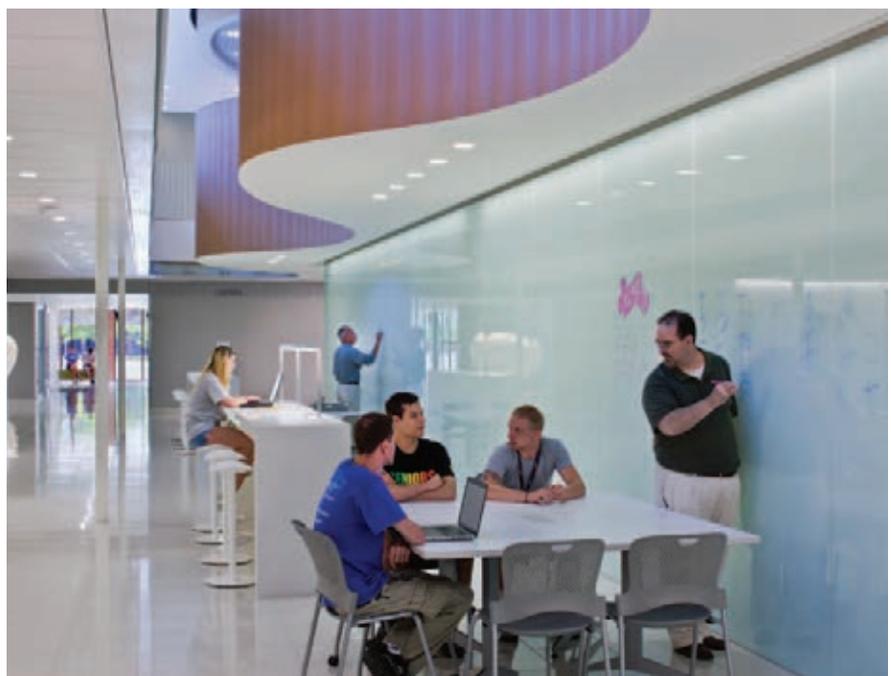
"With infinitely moveable seating, classes can be set up in traditional classroom fashion for the first 30 minutes of class and then rearranged instantly into small group discussions for the remainder of class."

Accommodating a diverse student population, ranging from age 18 through 65+, the new design provides private spaces as well as small and large areas for students to gather and collaborate. Building codes would allow 1,782 students in the building; however, with the inherent flexibility demanded of the space, current occupancy is programmed for just 1,513 students.

LCCC's student mix is roughly one-third full-time students and two-thirds part-time. The building is open six days a week, serving local and international students. Seventy percent of the students come for day classes while the other 30% attend in the evenings.

Arranging areas

Final configuration of the space resulted in 19 conventional classrooms,







HIGH MARKS The entire northern face of the building (above) is devoted to private and shared spaces for faculty and adjunct professors. This teacher's area (opposite page) benefits from two-story high, north-facing glass walls.

14 study rooms with doors and five open study rooms. Classrooms and study rooms align with the east and west walls of the building. The southern end is primarily used for open, student study areas. The entire northern face of the building is devoted to private and shared spaces for faculty and adjunct professors.

"We have so many adjunct instructors that we needed a place they could go to do their work," Carissimi says. "Taking a cue from many businesses, we utilize a 'hotel-ing' concept to provide private storage for each adjunct instructor and then they share common work surfaces. We were also able to provide them with private areas where they can counsel individual students if the need should arise."

The teacher's area benefits from two-story high, north-facing glass walls. Multiple large glass-globe pendant fixtures provide illumination at night.

The central core of the building on the first floor is occupied by the TERC – the Teacher Education Resource Center, where a wealth of tools and materials are available to teachers. The perimeter walls of the TERC are floor-to-ceiling translucent 3/8-inch-thick glass with silicone

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Katia Lucic
Sasaki Associates

butt glazing, which allows exterior light to permeate to the interior of the space.

Outside the TERC, on the public corridor side of the wall, students and teachers can utilize the full-height glass walls as oversized white boards, provided the

proper erasable markers are used. Tables and counters along these walls provide additional collaborative work surfaces.

Since the building was so wide, Lucic wanted to bring light into the core of the building. Skylights were added above the north-south corridors and natural light now brightens the first floor spaces as well. Above the plastic light diffusers, the area around the skylights was painted blue, to make even grey Ohio winter skies look more attractive.

A number of the classrooms feature moveable partitions for increased flexibility. The door wall portion of the private offices utilizes a demountable partition system with a sliding door. Using demountable walls and movable partitions ensures the most flexibility for years to come.

A floating, free-formed area was created above the first-floor core offices and has become one of the most popular areas in the building.



SUSPENDED SPACE A floating, free-formed area (opposite page) was created above the first-floor core offices (right) and has become one of the most popular areas in the building. Called the Learning Oasis, this blue, carpeted area is home to a half-dozen large LCD screens, surrounded by banquette seating for small group collaboration on a variety of projects.

Called the Learning Oasis, this blue, carpeted area is home to a half-dozen large LCD screens, surrounded by banquette seating for small group collaboration on a variety of projects. To provide for future wiring flexibility, the actual floor was lowered eight inches to allow for raised, computer access flooring.

Overhead, an open gridwork ceiling of four-inch by four-inch wide cells camouflages the ductwork, diffusers, sprinklers and other mechanical elements above. Single tube, strip fluorescent lighting floats just above the gridwork to augment the natural light coming from the linear skylights.

The perimeter of the Oasis features long, serpentine-shaped, 48-inch-high walls that have white Corian caps and more Corian wall-mounted work surfaces following the undulating design. From below, the serpentine walls appear as a long curved soffit, covered in a light-toned birch wood wallcovering.

Along the corridor walls, matching Corian study counters run the length of the corridor. Grey work chairs provide seating and abundant electrical and data outlets are easy to access at desktop height. Every so often, the continuous Corian surface dips down to seating height, enabling students to lounge or read while waiting to enter their classrooms.

Just outside the classrooms, custom seating nooks of white Corian, with their own indirect lighting, invite students to sit and lounge while waiting for class. Gray Trespa wall panels are custom cut to match the bean-shaped profile of these recessed seating nooks.

Aligning the upper and lower curved soffits was a unique challenge for the general contractor, Ozanne



Construction Company. According to Patrick Monroe, project manager for Ozanne, the tradespeople “did an amazing job” of maintaining alignment as the soffit snakes its way around the Oasis.

Building from the inside out

The soffit work wasn’t the only challenge for the builders. Another significant hurdle was devising a way to support the Oasis and the new second floor, an issue that was dealt with early on in the project.

“The existing columns weren’t originally designed to carry this addi-

tional load,” says Robert Fitzgerald, vice president of Ozanne. So the team “needed to excavate and enlarge each foundation along with shoring each of the columns.”

This process began in the fall of 2010, kicking off construction for the project.

Prime contracts totaled \$11 million and covered general trades, plumbing, HVAC, fire protection and a combined electrical and technology contract. LCCC directly contracted the audio/visual and the security system through state contracts available to the college.



SHAPING UP Just outside the classrooms, custom seating nooks of white Corian, with their own indirect lighting, invite students to sit and lounge while waiting for class. Gray Trespa wall panels are custom cut to match the bean-shaped profile of these recessed seating nooks.

were sealed off and white insulating spray foam was used above the open cell gridwork in the Oasis. By January 2012, substantial completion was achieved and classes began with the summer session.

Students and teachers will both benefit from this new movement in education, as teachers find new ways to impart knowledge and students find it easy to study however and wherever they find it most comfortable. While the building still looks the same from the outside, the teaching concepts and the building's functionality set a new standard that many others will want to emulate. **P**

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Keeping the same exterior walls, there was extensive demolition of the interior; but 90% of the construction debris was sorted and recycled. Although the college made the decision not to apply for LEED certification, the facility incorporates plenty of green features.

"While we didn't apply for certification, we followed LEED guidelines in most every respect," says Robert Flyer, director of plant operations and

construction. "High efficiency VAV systems with variable speed drives were used along with water efficient devices. A new electrical system was installed using light sensors and a building automation system."

New insulated glazing replaced all the original single-pane glazing, and thermal break frames were installed. On the roof, an additional six inches of insulation was added. Mansards



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