

News Release

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Nation's First 21st Century Public Four-year College Opens Student Center

*Architects challenged to create a fast-track building
to shape a traditional campus community and complement adjacent library*

LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga., July 5, 2011 – With the opening of an 81,400-square-foot Student Center, the nation's first public four-year college founded in the 21st century recently made a transition from a commuter school to a more traditional campus community.

[Georgia Gwinnett College](#) (GGC) opened its doors to 118 students in fall 2006 and now serves 5,800 students, of which close to 10 percent live in on-campus student housing. GGC officials turned to architecture firm [Lord, Aeck & Sargent](#) in February 2009 with a challenge to design a student center that would serve to shape a traditional campus community and build its culture. In addition, the firm was challenged to design a building that would work in concert with the adjacent Library and Learning Center, on which construction was just getting underway. A third challenge for the firm – and perhaps the biggest – was to program, design and oversee construction of the building under an aggressive, fast track schedule that called for opening of the first floor dining hall by August 2010, when the first on-campus residents moved into nearby student housing.

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The \$24.5 million, three-story Student Center is a multi-function facility that combines dining, retail, office, meeting, formal and informal event and other gathering spaces and is targeting LEED Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

A public/private venture, the building is owned by the GGC Foundation, a private entity that manages, invests and administers funds from private sources to further GGC academic excellence. The GGC Foundation sold bonds to finance the Student Center, and the College's original students approved and began paying a mandatory \$100 per semester student center fee to repay the debt service. As a result, students played an important role in providing input on planning the facility as well as its design, furniture and fixtures.

Aggressive schedule required

"Our project schedule was driven by the requirement for the dining hall to be open last August, so as a result, there was a phased opening of the facility, with building completion in January of this year," said Ken Higa, a Lord, Aeck & Sargent principal and director of the firm's Education Studio. "It was a very aggressive 18-month schedule to open dining, with our kickoff design meeting in February 2009, only six days after we were selected as the architect for the project."

Higa added that because the Board of Regents (BOR) of the University System of Georgia had already scheduled its meetings for the year, the firm had only three weeks for programming and conceptual design, and another three weeks for the schematic design presentation to the BOR.

"Decision-making had to be streamlined. There was never the luxury of changing minds. And to make things even more challenging, a mixed-use project like the Student Center meant that we had to coordinate our planning and design efforts with outside vendors such as bookstore tenant Barnes & Noble and foodservice provider Sodexo."

Despite the difficult schedule, the end result is a contextual building that on the exterior strongly complements the Library and Learning Center while the interior is fulfilling GGC's goal of creating a campus hub where students gather, hang out and collaborate.

Arc shape complements library, helps form Campus Green

"The front of the building is a curved, two-story glass lobby that completes the arc form of the adjacent library, so that together the two structures help define a main Campus Green," said Joe Greco, president of Lord, Aeck & Sargent and lead designer on the project. "We employed GGC's exterior materials palette of red brick, glass and silver metal panels in creative ways. For example, large expanses of glass allow the front entry spaces to be transparent, fostering visual connections to the student activities inside the building and serving as 'lanterns' in the evening. And the concourse that runs along one side of the L-shaped building plan is marked by an articulated brick and glass façade below a floating roof plane atop a continuous clerestory marking the main circulation concourse."

The Student Center and library share a service area to the rear as well as a landscaped plaza that connects the two buildings, overlooks the campus green and provides a campus gathering space for outdoor events.

Interior arc form also establishes the building's circulation paths

Running perpendicular to the second floor front entry arc form is a second arc form, this one carved out of the building's interior to establish the main interior circulation paths. The dynamic curve forms one side of a three-story atrium, which is the building's main wayfinding space. Topped with high-performance tubular daylighting systems that infuse the space with natural light, the atrium serves as an activity hub with a wide variety of dining options on the first floor.

While the first floor primarily comprises the 700-seat indoor/outdoor dining hall, servery and kitchen, a first-floor entry to the back of the building and located within easy walking distance from the new student housing complex allows on-campus residents a convenient entry to the dining area via a multi-purpose recreation and game room.

For those entering the second floor lobby from the campus green, the atrium arc draws them into the building and out to a rooftop terrace and event space. From there an open staircase leads them down to the outdoor dining area, which overlooks an attractive constructed water feature. The team designed the water feature as a small pond amenity with a landscaped perimeter and aerating fountain. The water feature serves the dual purpose of providing campus stormwater management.

Other key spaces on the second floor include the main floor of the two-story Barnes & Noble bookstore; an area for student services offices and meeting rooms; a concourse that spans the bookstores and offices; an interactive media wall with a 103-inch, touchscreen TV monitor that serves as a digital bulletin board of upcoming campus events and meetings; and the entry to the two-story Large Venue Interaction Space (LVIS), a flexible, multi-function 6,592-square-foot room that can seat up to 660 people and can be divided with moveable partitions into as many as four rooms. Used for student and public events such as movies, lectures, large meetings, conferences and commencement ceremonies, the LVIS is fronted by a 1,600-square-foot, two-story pre-function space and is supported by a catering kitchen in back.

“The LVIS has a unique, modern aesthetic in keeping with GGC’s slogan, ‘The campus of Tomorrow,’” Higa said. “Instead of being a traditional space with a coffered ceiling, we designed it with floating ceiling planes with slots to access lighting and projectors. And instead of traditional ballroom chandeliers, the room has spiral, cone-shaped pendant lights that accent

the entry portals and provide a memorable entrance to an almost theatrical environment complete with multimedia projection capabilities and professional sound systems.”

In addition to housing the upper story of the bookstore and open space for the LVIS, pre-function and atrium areas, the third floor of the Student Center primarily contains the quieter program spaces; group study lounges; mailboxes for on-campus residents; a copy center; student government offices and meeting rooms with a separate reception area; administrative offices; and the concourse.

“Although it may seem unusual to have programmed necessary services such as student government offices and mailboxes on the top floor of the building, this wasn’t happenstance; it was intentional,” said Adam Sterritt, GGC assistant dean of students and director of the Student Center. Sterritt, who served as the student affairs representative throughout building design and construction, said the splitting up of core student services was done to encourage students to interact with the whole building.

“We saw our intent working as soon as the remainder of the building opened in January,” Sterritt said. “First, when just the dining area was open, it became a place for hanging out. Even in the evening after the servery closed, students gathered there for evening programs such as Karaoke Night and Trivia Night. Now they’re interacting on all the floors, and with the weather warming up in the spring, the rooftop terrace is becoming a great place for student programming and gathering.

“I think the Student Center will be a key factor in GGC’s successful transition from a small commuter college to a thriving college community.”

The project team

The Georgia Gwinnett College Student Center project team included:

- GGC Foundation (Lawrenceville, Ga.) – owner
- Lord, Aeck & Sargent (Atlanta office) – architect
- Hendessi & Associates (Atlanta), program manager
- The Potts Co. (Conyers, Ga.) – construction manager at risk
- Andrews, Hammock & Powell, Inc. (Macon, Ga.) – MEP/FP engineer
- KSi/Structural Engineers (Atlanta) – structural engineer
- Long Engineering, Inc. (Atlanta) – civil engineer
- Doran & Karwoski (Decatur, Ga.), landscape architect
- Sodexo, Inc., (Bowling Green, Ky.), foodservice consultant
- Waveguide (Decatur, Ga.), AV consultant

About Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Lord, Aeck & Sargent is an award-winning architectural firm serving clients in scientific, academic, historic preservation, arts and cultural, and multi-family housing and mixed-use markets. The firm's core values are responsive design, technological expertise and exceptional service. In 2003, The Construction Specifications Institute awarded Lord, Aeck & Sargent its Environmental Sensitivity Award for showing exceptional devotion to the use of sustainable and environmentally friendly materials, and for striving to create functional, sensitive and healthy buildings for clients. In 2007, Lord, Aeck & Sargent was one of the first architecture firms to adopt [The 2030 Challenge](#), an initiative whose ultimate goal is the design of carbon-neutral buildings, or buildings that use no fossil-fuel greenhouse gas-emitting energy to operate, by the year 2030. Lord, Aeck & Sargent has offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Atlanta, Georgia; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For more information, visit the firm at www.lordaecksargent.com.

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