



Press Release

Dramatic planetarium classroom unveiled in special event as EMU's Science Complex addition nears completion

"Faraway worlds will soon be closer than ever." Campus-wide open house set for Jan. 26

by Geoff Larcom

YPSILANTI, Mich., Dec. 16, 2010 – The largest single construction project in the history of Eastern Michigan University, the new EMU Science Complex addition and adjoining building renovations, hits another milestone today, with the unveiling of the new building's planetarium classroom, viewable five floors above a distinct atrium area.

The event offered a first look at the inside of the science complex addition, which features a five-story look up to the spherical planetarium, which is supported by beams and appears suspended above the atrium. A campus-wide open house for all faculty, staff and students will be held from 4-6 p.m. on January 26, when the Science Complex addition is complete and can accommodate the larger crowd.

Eastern faculty members and administrators said the \$90 million science complex will have wide-ranging effects locally and around the state.

"This is a historic project in several respects," said Susan Martin, EMU president. "First, it is the largest single construction project in the history of the University. But, more importantly, this science complex will help EMU meet the national need for more teachers in science, technology, engineering and math. EMU is a leader in science education."

Martin noted that the complex is part of EMU's unprecedented, \$195-million, four-year capital plan, an investment that underscores Eastern's commitment to its students and to ensuring their academic success.

"We have set the pace in Michigan in terms of keeping education affordable for our students and their families, yet at the same time are dramatically improving key facilities and hiring new faculty," Martin said. "Our priorities of helping students attend Eastern and providing the new facilities they deserve are clear, and the students are noticing."

The complex is being self-funded, through the sale of bonds and a 4-percent tuition increase earmarked for capital projects that was approved in 2005.

"The new EMU Science Complex not only benefits students and faculty by providing a leading-edge learning and research laboratory, but it benefits the entire scientific community by providing an environment that stimulates discovery," said Jack Kay, provost and executive vice president at EMU. "I am proud of the collaboration between faculty, administrators, architects and builders that went into this exciting facility."

Said Tom Venner, dean of the EMU College of Arts & Sciences: "EMU has long prided itself on the high quality of science education and research we provide our students. The new and renovated facilities give EMU the means to offer even higher levels of support for science education, as well as research opportunities for faculty, undergraduate and graduate students."

"Faraway worlds will soon be closer than ever," Venner said just before a large, satin-like sheet was peeled away by EMU science students to reveal the planetarium Thursday morning.

Ross Nord, professor and head of the EMU Department of Chemistry, said the opening of the addition is an exciting step toward the completion of the science complex.

"The collaborative design process brought the science departments closer together, and the completed complex will have many interdisciplinary labs and student interaction spaces that promote collaboration and teamwork, which are essential skills in the workplace," Nord said. "Another primary focus was designing flexible spaces that will best serve our students, both now and in the future, while keeping costs reasonable given the current economic times.

"Most importantly, this modern facility will allow faculty members to focus on their true passion - training and mentoring our students to be the educated workforce and leaders of tomorrow."

Faculty and classes will begin to use the new addition during the winter semester, starting Jan. 5. Then further renovation work on the existing, adjacent Mark Jefferson Science Building will begin. It's part of one of the most active periods of construction in EMU history, with the Pray-Harold classroom building also undergoing renovations that have displaced classes and faculty there for at least a year and a half.

The board of regents, Martin, and state and community officials originally broke ground on the science complex project Nov. 18, 2008.

The project includes construction of the 80,000 square foot addition as well as renovation of the existing 180,000 square foot Mark Jefferson building. The addition will house the biology, chemistry, geography and geology, physics and astronomy, and psychology departments.

The addition's five-story section features 36 science labs and an atrium that looks up to the spherical classroom/planetarium, which is the building's most noteworthy characteristic. At night, the lit exterior of the planetarium will be seen from the west, from Oakwood Street and the adjacent parking lot. Other architectural flourishes include a suspended walking bridge leading from the Oakwood lot, and an atrium walk through.

"The department of physics and astronomy has dreamed for years about opening a planetarium to complement Sherzer Observatory," said department head Jim Carroll. "That day is almost here, and we are excited."

Carroll says the department of physics and astronomy plans to use the facility as an astronomy classroom on Monday through Thursday, open the planetarium to area K-12 students and their teachers to explore the universe on Fridays, and run planetarium shows for the Ypsilanti community on weekends.

"This new, cutting-edge facility will serve EMU students as a classroom, a science-teacher training facility, and an interdisciplinary research space," Carroll said.

"The EMU Planetarium will be so much more than a theater. Our planetarium will be a dynamic, 3D visualization experience, where we will showcase the wonders of the universe and the best of EMU. The planetarium will become an integral part of the amazing learning environment EMU offers its students."

Other building features include a new mechanical system to reduce energy consumption and costs, and a "green" roof that offers teaching opportunities in sustainable building design. The main pedestrian pathway includes a rain garden to help filter and detain storm water runoff.

The building is designed to meet LEED Silver certification. LEED stands for "Leadership in Energy and Environment Design," an internationally recognized green building certification system.

The architectural firm of [Lord, Aeck & Sargent](#), of Ann Arbor, designed the complex. Christman Company, with Michigan offices in Lansing, Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids and Traverse City, is the contractor. DMJM Management of Detroit is the program manager.

The original Mark Jefferson building was constructed in 1969 for \$8.2 million.

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