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AN AMAZING TRANSFORMATION

NO LONGER THE SOUTH OVAL'S UGLY DUCKLING,
GOULD HALL, HOME OF THE COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE,
HAS BEEN RECREATED AS A SHINING EXAMPLE
OF TECHNOLOGY MEETS 21ST-CENTURY EDUCATION.

BY DEBRA LEVY MARTINELLI
PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR

One reasonably might expect the facility that houses a university's college of architecture to be an exemplar of form meets function.

The recently renovated and expanded Gould Hall on the University of Oklahoma's Norman campus certainly satisfies and arguably exceeds that expectation.

The elegantly appointed yet environmentally conscious building cleverly melds the classic and the cutting edge into a home of which the OU College of Architecture justifiably can be proud for decades to come. Even more than that, the transformation of Gould Hall is a fitting metaphor for the evolution of the college into a 21st-century model for architecture education.

Located on Van Vleet (south) Oval just west of The Gaylord Family – Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, Gould Hall, originally built in 1951 for the School of Geology, has housed the College of Architecture since 1990. Well into the new millennium, however, the building remained very much a mid-20th-century facility that had not kept pace with the college's growth or vision for the future.

That perception changed dramatically in May 2011 when the college returned from its temporary digs in downtown Norman to the three-story, 108,000-square-foot showplace that includes 63,000 square feet of renovated space and a 45,000-square-foot addition. The "new" Gould Hall boasts design, materials and cutting-edge learning technology that set the college apart from

every other architecture program in the country.

"We have learned that how we configure space and how we design the built environment has an enormous impact on the functioning of our society," OU President David Boren commented. "Architectural and community planning decisions can be a force for strengthening or weakening our sense of community.

"The new state of the art home for our College of Architecture underlines the importance which the University places on the training of the next generation of architects who will be challenged to surround us with a nurturing and sustainable environment."

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE BUILDING INCLUDE:

A two-level vaulted gallery that doubles as flexible student work-space and a site for receptions, symposia and traveling exhibits;

The first-floor lobby or "college living room," where students and faculty can meet for informal collaboration;

"Touchdown" spaces, where students can work in small groups and display what they have on their laptops on a single shared computer. Located in hallway intersections on each floor of the S-shaped building, the touchdown spaces also serve as spots for student presentations, reviews and critiques;

Design studio classrooms on each floor, complete with technology-rich educational furniture systems;

A high-tech competition room that includes printers, plotters, tack board surfaces and high-powered computers;

"Crit" rooms for student critiques and reviews;

Areas furnished with coffee tables made of stacks of 24-inch-square sheets of paper around which students can gather to write



The Buskuhl Gallery offers a stunning new space for student work, art exhibits and symposia. The gray panels are tack surface for hanging project boards, drawings and other two-dimensional designs, while the large cubes are perfect for displaying 3-D models.



Dean Graham stands by one of the building's two glass block walls. Some of the blocks were rescued from old Gould while new ones are etched with the names of faculty, staff, alumni and donors.

and draw and then peel off the sheets;

Team rooms, including a high-tech space designated for the Division of Construction Science, that is available to the entire college;

An outdoor gathering place to facilitate year-round learning in an exterior environment;

A first-floor library that currently holds approximately 20,000 volumes;

Three first-floor classrooms, including a tier-style space that can accommodate up to 75 students;

A faculty center designed to encourage collaboration among the college's five divisions—architecture, construction science, interior design, landscape architecture and regional and city planning—while still allowing each to maintain its individual identity;

And two glass block walls that honor donors to the college, one flanking the library and another fronting the faculty lounge.

When Dean Charles Graham arrived at OU in 2008, the design and drawings for Gould Hall were substantially completed. But there was latitude in the layout of interior areas. Graham seized the opportunity to convey his big-picture objectives to the faculty.

"I shared my view that a contemporary College of Architecture should have teaching spaces that are at the cutting-edge," he recalls. "But we were still using rows of tables and chairs indicative of a very outdated teaching style. So we committed to do everything we could to advance the delivery of knowledge to our students in Gould Hall."

Part of that effort means supporting and facilitating what Graham calls the triad of teaching and learning.

"Students learn three different ways: from professors, from their own self-inquiry and from each other," Graham explains. "We recognized that furniture systems and educational technologies should be able to support that."

After researching several options, Graham and his colleagues settled on reconfigurable furniture systems to enable true interaction among students and faculty.

Two resulting innovations, the LearnLab™ and Super Studio, are believed to be the first adaptation of this type of learning technology by an American school of architecture.

The idea behind the LearnLab™ is to support multiple learning styles, increase students' retention, break down the hierarchy between professor and student, and keep students engaged as they transition among lecture, group work and individual presentations. There are five such classrooms in Gould Hall.

Instead of the traditional front-of-the-room classroom arrangement, the LearnLab™ has no front row or back row. Mobile furniture enables students to literally swivel between lecture and group work, eliminating the distractions and additional time typically required in making that transition. In short, every seat is the best seat in the house.

Technology in the LearnLab™ includes a wireless, three-in-one eno™ interactive whiteboard, complete with computer, stylus and projector, that allows students to share their work on one or all of the 50-inch plasma screens strategically placed in three corners of the room. Text written on the eno™ interactive whiteboard can be saved in a file and posted later.

The Super Studio incorporates additional multi-use technology that helps make learning architectural design a more hands-on, real-world collaborative experience. An interactive technology table called media:scape™ allows multiple students to simultaneously contribute ideas quickly and seamlessly. To foster group work, media:scape™ uses a pedestal table with embedded hardware and interactive technology. A puck-shaped handset lets users connect laptops and control the content of what is projected onto the televisions. Handsets can be stowed in the table's media well, reserving surface space for active work and related tools.

Graham and his colleagues did not wait until the move back to Gould Hall to experiment with these tools. Both a LearnLab™ and a Super Studio were created at the college's temporary quarters in the former Hobby Lobby building on Main Street, dubbed by the students "Arc on Main."

"The systems weren't designed for architecture schools, so we have learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. We brought that knowledge to Gould Hall and shared it with the company that designed them so it can improve its products for use by other architecture schools. But," he adds, "we still have a lot of work to do."

continued

Even so, the College of Architecture already has been recognized for its technological innovations by two prestigious publications, *Architect* and *Campus Technology*.

Meghan Wieters, assistant professor in the Division of Regional and City Planning, marvels at the teaching options available in Gould Hall. "Using studio space with laptops or the LearnLab™ allows me to be more creative within the classroom," she explains. "Having studio space for research related to work I do outside of the classroom should make it easier to teach and utilize graduate researchers. And having most of the faculty on the same floor allows for more interaction and exposes the students to faculty in other disciplines.

"This space will be a wonderful asset for our students and will visually show how important planning is to the college."

The college's bold interactive learning environment already is paying dividends.

Student teams now can collaborate seamlessly with students in other countries to participate in a variety of competitions. Working together through Skype and other online communication methods, OU construction science students and their counterparts at Ireland's Dublin Institute of Technology took first place in the 2011 Region V Associated Schools of Construction/TEXO [construction association in north and east Texas] Design-Build Competition. As a direct result of that success, ASC bylaws and those of other professional organizations have been changed to allow international teams to compete.

In 2011, a student group from the College of Architecture and OU's Michael F. Price College of Business was one of four finalists in a national urban design competition. The team competed against 152 others from across the United States and Canada.

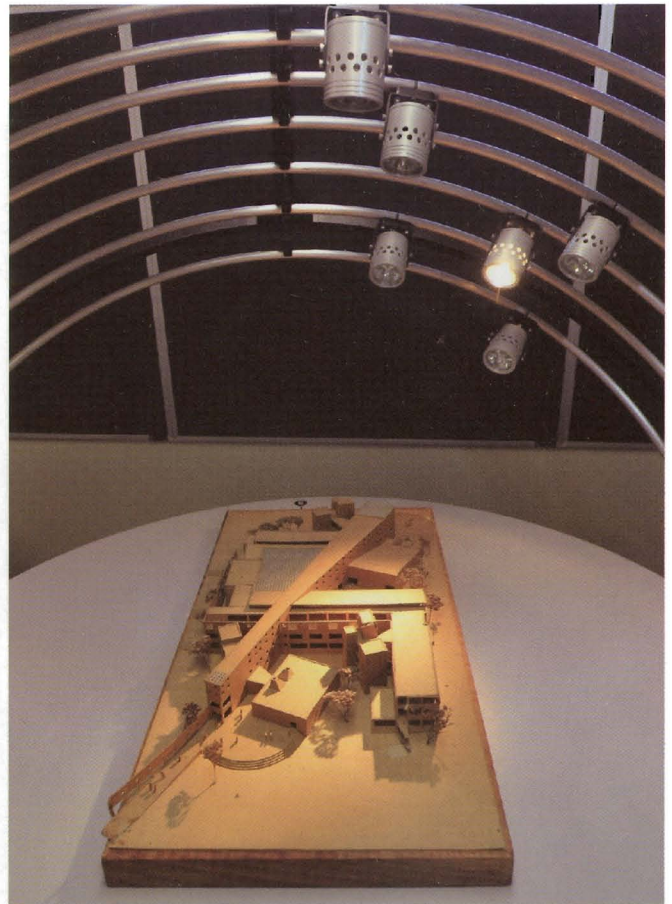
"We actually set the pace for other universities now," says Graham with visible pride. "I expect we will win the competition one of these years soon."

Another mark of the college's success integrating these advances is the fact that other leading schools of architecture—including Harvard University's—have contacted the college to find out more about what it is doing.

Even more significant to Graham is that the college's transformation is resonating with students and prospective students. Fall 2010 enrollment was 530; that number is expected to exceed 600 this fall.

Interior design senior Kelli Szatkowski is looking forward to returning to Gould Hall for a couple of reasons. "Being back on campus and being a part of the OU community again will enrich my OU academic experience," she says.

Her favorite space in the building exemplifies that sense of belonging. "I love the main entry living room area. It is both modern and 'home-like' and will give students the environment we want to have at Gould Hall."



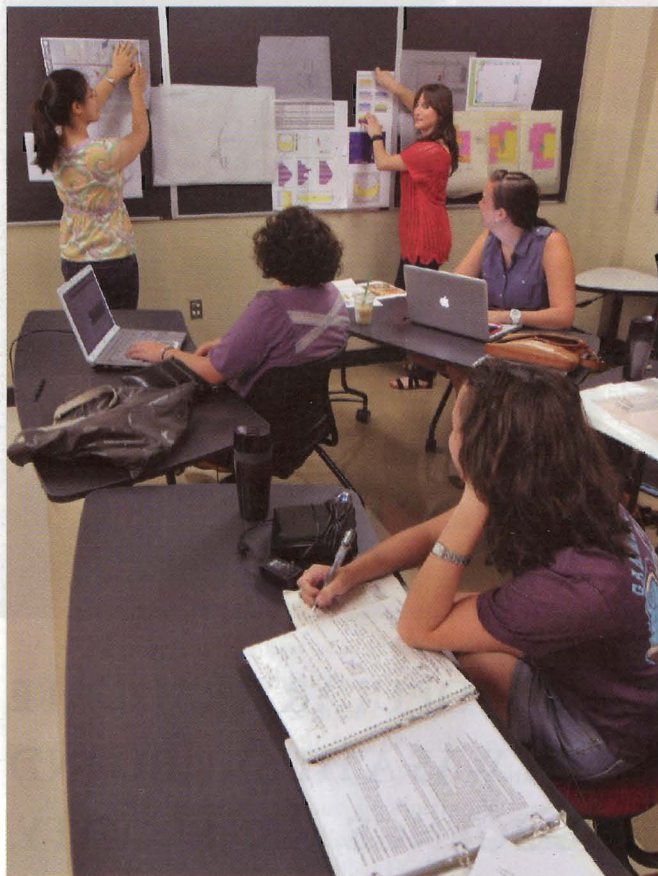
A model is displayed on a Heliodon, an interactive lighting design tool. The Heliodon shows the motion of the sun relative to a building in all seasons, at any time of day, in any direction, so students can incorporate the principles of solar energy utilization in design.



Across from the Buskuhl Gallery on the first floor is the college's "living room," a well-appointed but cozy area where students can study, brainstorm with peers and faculty, or just "hang out" and relax between classes.



Professor Thomas Cline and students Meng Hua Shih, left, and Jasmine Rikin discuss a project on one of the college's media:scape™ tables. Students connect their laptops to the table and display their work on any of the room's plasma screens.



Students in Dave Boeck's summer design studio make use of the new "crit" spaces, areas away from the main classroom where they can hang their work for presentations, reviews and critiques.

Diane Cocchiara, who expects to complete her five-year architecture degree in 2012, has witnessed the transformation of both the college and Gould Hall. "I was a freshman in the 'old' building, spent the next three years at 'Arc-on-Main' and will be in the new building for a year," she relates. "Our college is undergoing a huge change, and I believe the move into a new building will facilitate a brand new start."

That new start begins with Gould Hall. "People on campus always said it was ironic that the architecture building was the ugliest on campus," Cocchiara muses.

"Now we have taken that away and started to turn heads, not just on campus, but around the nation. Things are only going up from here for our college, and I'm excited to see these changes occur right before my eyes."

Graham is pleased with the college's progress on all fronts. "We have implemented as many ideas as our budget allows and probably as much as we can handle," he says. "Over the years, we will increase our utilization of technologies and approaches that work for our students."

The goal, he says, is for students to graduate with the confidence that they are well-educated team leaders who are capable of doing profound things in their professions.

"We are not doing all of this willy-nilly or because it seems like a good deal. We have a five-year rolling strategic plan that is updated every spring for the year ahead. We're using our resources against the plan, which has lots of vision and potential for making this college what I think it was years ago when people said, 'If you want to study creativity, there's only one college in the country to go to, and that's Oklahoma,'" Graham declares.

He notes that Frank Lloyd Wright once called the OU College of Architecture one of best in the country. "We want to get back to the point where we are proud to tell anybody we have excellent programs, and we are unique because few people are doing what we are doing here in Gould Hall. There may be some imitators and copycats in due course, but we will change again and stay out in front."

"We want our alumni to be proud of their institution, and we want the citizens of our state and the OU Board of Regents to be proud of what we're doing here," he adds. "We are not going to sit on our hands and watch the world go by. We are going to try to direct, lead and set examples where we can. That's what OU is all about."

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