

LAW SCHOOL RE-USE COMMITTEE REPORT

April 18, 2012

The eighteen member Law School Re-Use Committee met four times over the past two months to evaluate the utility of the existing law school building, to explore the current and future demands for campus-wide space, and to receive input from campus stakeholders to develop re-use options. The options are deliberately maintained at a conceptual level. Once ideal uses are established, subsequent design phases will draw out the details to generate more specifics.



As part of the evaluation, an exploration of design solutions in the marketplace was included. Advances in technology, changing demographics, and the vicissitudes of the economy all impact the way in which we work and learn. Fostering innovation and collaboration is the key to unlocking the potential of students and the workforce. Creating a built environment that promotes and encourages innovation and collaboration is achievable through creative place making. It is important, however, to realize that it is a paradigm shift that requires an “ecosystem” of connected spaces, implemented throughout a campus. Discerning how best to shape the fabric of UB’s built environment begins with discerning the best use of the existing law school building.



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LSRC GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The committee generated these principals and considered them as paramount during the discernment process. While each stakeholder has particular priorities to champion, the group found common ground in the sentiments these principles embody.

1. Exemplify the UB 21 Campus Environment characteristics
2. Re-use space with modest, yet effective, monetary expenditure
3. Consider this building as a component of a campus-wide learning ecosystem
4. Create communal spaces that become catalysts for experiential learning
5. Anticipate and meet the changing and expanding space needs of the university
8. Focus on this building but in the context of its connectivity/impact on other campus buildings
9. Prioritize the education of the students over consolidating academic silos

PREDOMINANT THEMES

The themes that developed during this process mirror the guiding principles. While the focus is on this building, it was in the context of the campus as a whole. Many of the principles and the themes are applicable to place making throughout the campus. The top themes were:



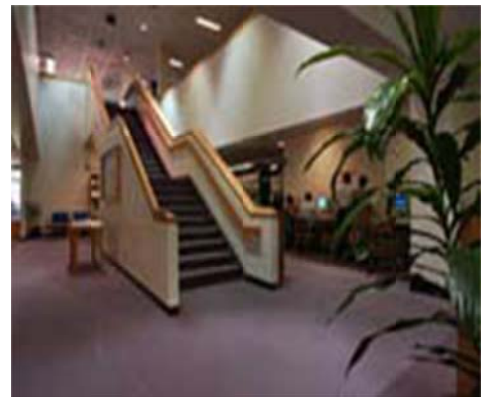
1. Setting the tone for the campus
2. Flexible and adaptable space
3. Learning spaces/commons
4. Encouraging collaboration
5. Proactive rather than reactive stewardship
6. Place making with moveable walls, furniture and finishes
7. Technological ubiquity – anytime/anywhere
8. Showcasing the campus front door, visitor reception
9. Accentuating from plaza to the new law school

THE BUILDING'S POSITIVES/NEGATIVES

This building has unique characteristics that help inform its potential “best-use”. Understanding those characteristics is critical to the decision making process.

Positives

1. Open space in the lobby offers a variety of options with respect to student gathering and general event space.
2. Open space on the third & fourth floors offers the most flexibility anywhere on campus.
3. The number of existing offices throughout the building will greatly increase campus inventory.
4. This building's adjacency and view to the largest outdoor campus space is significant.
5. The central location of this building on campus elevates its profile over other buildings.
6. The structure of the third and fourth floors was designed to house library stacks, and makes it appropriate for elements of Langsdale Library.
7. The communicating stair between the third and fourth floors provides vertical connection.
8. The quiet/windowless classrooms are considered by some to be the best on campus.
9. The lower level of the building has an appealing high ceiling space.



Negatives

1. Vertical connection between floors is lacking.
2. The lower level is isolated and unpleasant to access, no natural light.
3. The building infrastructure requires upgrades and repairs.
4. The plaza requires upgrades, including furniture and landscaping.
5. Existing office sizes vary and some are quite small.
6. Existing classroom sizes are large and will need to be right sized to maximize benefit.
7. The elevator lobbies and stairwells should be more aesthetically pleasing.
8. The first floor is compartmentalized and difficult to modify without major expense.
9. The loading dock and storage is awkwardly placed and is limited in utility.

POTENTIAL SPACE USES

The committee members provided their own thoughts and vigorously solicited input and ideas from those they represented throughout the planning discussions. Many proposals focused on providing space for not only new but also expansion of existing campus elements. The potential space uses were synthesized to a list of 24 items. The committee ranked the potential space uses in order of priority suitable for this location on campus, in this particular building. It was important for the committee to distinguish “best-use” of this building rather than simply responding to generic space needs across the campus. The proposed uses fall into four categories: general, learning, specific and communal uses. Of note is that the following ranking of importance follows the categories closely.

General Uses

1. Classroom growth
2. Welcome Center
3. Faculty Office Growth
4. Academic Center Faculty Office relocation
5. Flexible/Adaptable Space
6. “Learning nooks”
7. Student gathering space
9. Surge/Swing space



Learning Uses

8. CELT Program
10. Honor’s Program
11. Learning Commons
12. Library – all or in part

Specific Uses

13. EMSA – Front facing team
14. Faculty gathering space
15. Multi-media labs & studios
16. Auxiliary Enterprise event space
17. New Programs
20. CLA & Dean
21. CPA & Dean
23. Provost’s Offices
24. Science Labs

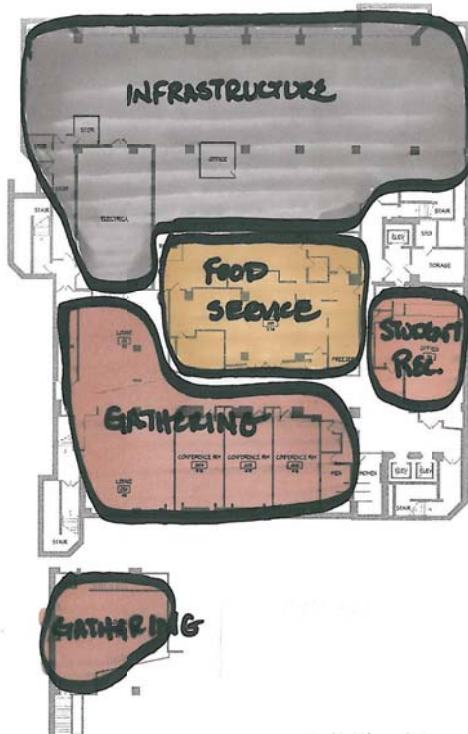


Communal Uses

18. Recreation Space
20. Gallery – Exhibit Space
22. Food/beverage Service

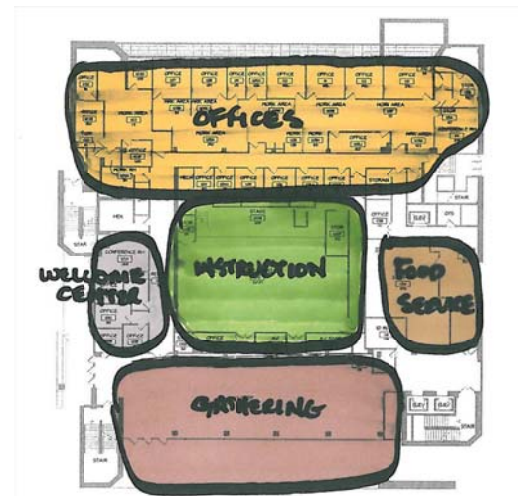
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

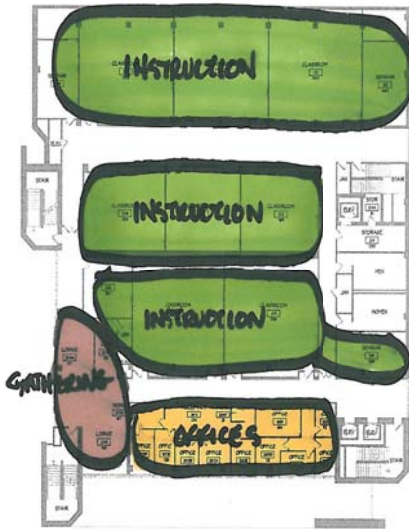
The Law Center will have to be occupied largely “as-is” given there are other capital priorities ahead of it including funding for Langsdale Library Building and the Academic Center. The most appropriate application of re-use funds for the Law Center is for essential infrastructure upgrades, and new furniture/finishes to enhance the existing spaces. Each floor of this building can be considered almost individually as to its contribution to the fabric of the campus. As such, sequenced capital funding will require this building to play a critical role in supporting the renovation sequencing by maintaining flexible/adaptable space.



Lower Level: Can be used as-is for student/faculty gathering, food/beverage service, and/or storage until later funding is available for major modifications.

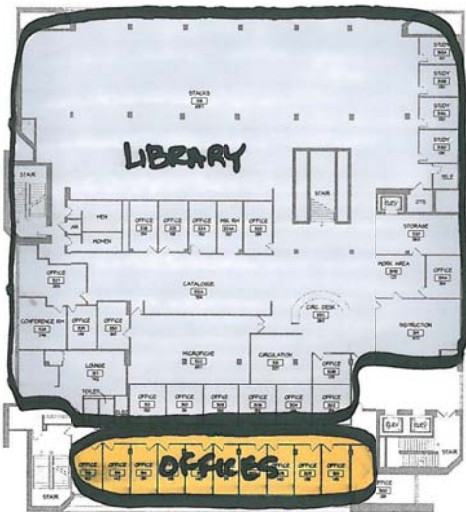
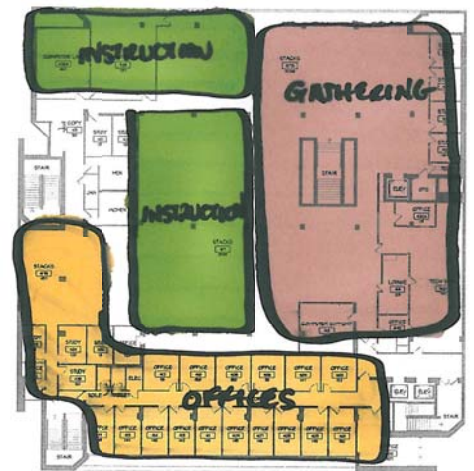
1st Floor: Determine specific occupants for the offices, such as Honors Program, incorporate Welcome Center space, and possibly food/beverage service.





2nd Floor: Use classrooms and offices as is until later funding for right-sizing.

3rd / 4th Floors: Stay flexible for future purposes. A future option involves the possibility of needing this space on a short or long-term basis to house Langsdale holdings and services. This option does not include the offices that front Mt. Royal St. Consequently, they could be used as is for faculty offices or a similar purpose(s).





LONG-TERM VISION

With future capital funding, many possibilities exist for vertically connecting the floors. This could include the addition of an atrium stair either through an external structure or an internal opening. The “best use” of these spaces could dramatically be affected by such improvements. The existing law library stacks can be adapted for use by the Langsdale library either in place or relocated to the Langsdale building.

Elevated connection of the buildings to one another is

a consideration for the future. Wayfinding for this building and for the campus as a whole continues to be important for not only visitors but to current faculty, staff and students. Critical to the success of Yale Gordon Plaza is improvements required in furniture, landscaping and hardscaping. The plaza’s important stature as the main outdoor gathering place encourages eventual integration of the west façade of the Academic Center.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

To remain nimble in a dynamic environment is challenging. Implementing strategies that maximize potential and leave options open will serve the campus well moving forward. Buildings that simplify horizontal circulation, provide vertical connections, and allow for the proactive response to change will contribute positively to the psychological, physical, and fiscal, health of the university. The committee hopes that this advice is helpful as future decisions are made about space utilization.

