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Gustavus Adolphus College Beck Academic Hall

As one of the oldest and most academically distinguished colleges in the Upper Midwest, Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota embraces a heritage of both tradition and vision. The newly-opened Beck Academic Hall reflects those values in a beautiful, high-functioning environment that promotes community and collaboration.

The three-story, 125,000 s.f. facility consolidates six academic departments under one roof, including Communication Studies, Economics and Management, History, Psychology and Sociology/Anthropology; promoting interdisciplinary learning at the heart of the campus. The building blends state-of-the-art labs with a very human touch, including a three-story atrium, open layout and abundant, flexible spaces for gathering and interaction. Since its opening in October 2011, Beck Academic Hall has quickly become a hub of scholastic life.

“More students visit this building on a daily basis than any other academic building,” said Gustavus Physical Plant Director Warren Wunderlich. “It’s definitely changing traffic patterns on campus.”

It’s also reshaping learning itself, with an abundance of dedicated, flexible-seating lecture and classroom spaces as well as informal spaces for students and faculty to meet and collaborate.

Photos: From top, Beck Academic Hall exterior; department reception area; classroom laboratory

BECK ACADEMIC HALL

Client: Gustavus Adolphus College

Architect: BWBR Architects

Project manager: Troy Stutz

Project superintendent: Riley Smith

Project assistant: Jillian Sidler

“Beck Academic Hall really raises the bar when it comes to the opportunities students will be afforded both inside and outside the classroom,” said Professor and Chair of Psychology Dr. Jennifer Ackil, who served as faculty liaison for the construction. “This will not be a 9 to 5 building.”

As the first new classroom building on campus in two decades, sights were set high from the beginning planning discussions with college stakeholders. Faculty and staff were deeply involved in the design and development of the building, which was recognized as an opportunity to bring the campus to a new level in terms of public and academic space, technology, richness of finishes, and environmental stewardship.

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Excellent communication among the owner, architect and contractor from the earliest preconstruction stages allowed KA to provide pricing exercises which guided design decisions for mechanical/electrical, daylighting issues and other factors.

“We were glad to have Kraus-Anderson’s input from day one on this project,” said Wunderlich. “KA’s design and materials analyses enabled the planners to make decisions with a solid consideration of the cost component, which was helpful to architects, engineers, owner representatives and end users.”

KA’s early collaboration in the design phase also helped the college meet high aesthetic goals through practical approaches, such as a precast exterior clad in Kasota limestone quarried just five miles from the campus.

“KA incorporated a technology of applying the stone to precast, speeding construction and increasing affordability,” said Wunderlich. “We’re delighted to express that natural resource on our campus.”

The locally-sourced stone is just one of many sustainable elements built into Beck Academic Hall. The project was built to meet or exceed LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold status from the U.S. Green Building Council’s (USGBC) Green Building Rating System™. The building exceeds State of Minnesota Sustainable Building 2030 targets and is modeled to save 44 percent more energy and 30 percent more water than typical code requires. Beck Academic Hall’s atrium helps maximize daylighting strategies, which are augmented by other energy-saving supplements such as a comprehensive solar panel system with both photovoltaic and solar thermal energy.

Extreme care was taken to uphold high-level sustainable construction goals, noted Kraus-Anderson Project Director Troy Stutz. Seventy-five percent of construction waste was recycled. A rigorous indoor air quality program was supported throughout construction, including wrapping and enclosing ductwork to prevent dust infiltration. Excellent communication and cooperation among the field team greatly aided efforts, Stutz added.

“Beck Academic Hall is a game changer in the most positive sense,” said Professor Ackil. “The activities that this building makes possible will transform lives for generations to come.”



Photos: From top, Beck Academic Hall main atrium; lecture hall; student interaction area

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