



**MACEWAN UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY SERVICE CENTRE
EDMONTON, CANADA**

DESIGNER: STANTEC ARCHITECTURE

DEALER: RGO OFFICE PRODUCTS
EDMONTON LTD.

As with any facility project, MacEwan University established rigorous cost, schedule and quality goals when it decided to create a new Service Centre for its administrative staff. That, however, was just the beginning.

This new facility was intentionally planned and designed to meet all those goals, and accomplish much more, too. Since it was founded in 1971, MacEwan has evolved from a community college to a full-fledged university serving about 19,000 students. Throughout decades of progress and change, its administrative staff worked in mostly traditional and often private offices. Moreover, they were separated and siloed on four campuses spread throughout the city.

Becoming a university in 2009 mandated a more cohesive approach, and bringing administrative staff together was the first step.

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Brent Quinton, Vice President of Finance and Administration, MacEwan University

Right from the start, the new centre was envisioned to be a space that would prompt the culture to become more collaborative, team-based and transparent. Moreover, to achieve a 40-year projected life span, the new facility needed to be what MacEwan director of facilities Stuart MacLean calls “future-proof” – a flexible, adaptive space that allows occupants to perform their work in relevant ways even as work processes continuously evolve. Finally, there were high standards for sustainability, an especially strong commitment at MacEwan due to the inspiration of its founder, Dr. J.W. Grant MacEwan, a pioneering environmental advocate.

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“The transition from college to university meant new challenges for us,” says Brent Quinton, vice president of finance and administration. “As an organization gets bigger, there are a lot of organizational development issues. We anticipated that we were going to need to adjust and grow.” Like many other organizations operating during an economic downturn era, however, MacEwan leaders knew their growth strategy must coexist with budget constraints.

It was imperative that staff members start to work more collaboratively with integrated approaches and faster decision-making to help move the organization forward. A new enterprise business system would soon be implemented, and many administrators were transitioning from transactional work to more analytical, consultative roles. At the same time, mobile technologies were being introduced to support these evolving workstyles.

A new Service Centre clearly presented an opportunity to progress to a new type of workplace to support the staff’s

transition to new ways of working. In the midst of all the change they were experiencing, however, it was essential to engage employees, minimize stress and promote overall wellbeing.

The project got an advantageous start when planners discovered that the new facility could be constructed atop an existing five-story parkade structure. This meant that MacEwan could create a 5,500 square-meter (60,000 square feet) facility for 250 staff members without consuming any campus grounds space. Because academic buildings are a top priority in the university’s long-term plans, this discovery pointed to a win/win solution.

DESIGN

Certain that gaining early engagement of future occupants could pave the way to success, MacEwan contracted with Steelcase’s Applied Research and Consulting team to launch a change management process and help solidify design criteria for the new facility.

Each of the 10 departments now housed in the new Service Centre is located in a “neighborhood” created with c:scape® collaborative workstations. Designed to optimize real estate, c:scape removes visual and social barriers, giving people better access to each other, their information and their technology.

“Bringing in Steelcase was a key decision,” says Wayne Nichol, senior manager of facilities projects. “We knew that, to get it as right as we could, change management was needed. We wanted to be very inclusive in the process. We were looking at the end game of a very accessible, collaborative, open space, but we weren’t sure what that was going to be or how to get there.”

The workshops, observations, interviews, surveys and other activities that Steelcase conducted helped soon-to-be occupants of the new Service Centre articulate how they wanted to work in the future and the fundamentals of what they wanted to achieve.

“What came out of this was that collaborating should be at the center of the space and department

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neighborhoods should be around the perimeter,” says Jacqueline McLeod, facilities planner. “Steelcase brought the expertise of being able to facilitate the conversations with staff and leaders and helped us look at our information in a different way so that we could see how to achieve our objectives.”

The activities that Steelcase conducted also got people excited about new possibilities and the future of MacEwan. “The change management process really engaged people, and there was a lot of passion,” says Quinton. “When I saw that, I thought, ‘Wow...I would really like to keep that momentum going.’”

Working with the information generated, Stantec Architecture, a prominent North American multidiscipline consulting and design firm, joined the project. Kathy Johnston-Umbach created an innovative interior design that incorporated all the key criteria and initial ideas of the team: collaboration at the center, a variety of settings to support diverse work processes, zones to connect groups, and equal access to views, natural light and fresh air.

SOLUTION

A visit to Steelcase headquarters solidified the furnishing decisions, in particular the selection of c:scape® for all workstations to promote visibility and transparency without blocking outside views and media:scape® collaboration settings to support sharing digital information effortlessly.

“Visiting Steelcase was about more than just the furniture. We saw how you could work in open and shared spaces,” says McLeod. On the way home, the team brainstormed what turned out to be a pivotal decision: prepurchase mock ups that would exactly replicate the various environments that would be in the new Service Centre.

Working cooperatively under the pressure of time, the Steelcase/RGO/Stantec/MacEwan team planned and assembled two extensive mockups. Rather than have future occupants walk through the spaces on their own, the team provided guided tours – with no more than 20 people in each group – so they could tell the story of the spaces and answer questions effectively. The first tour was of the meeting spaces and collaboration settings that would be included in the new

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centre. Then, two weeks later, a follow-up tour focused on department settings and personal workstations.

“For the individual workstations, we did groupings of six that were set up exactly how they’d be on the floor, so when we toured people they would have a sense of relationships and how far they were going to be from their neighbor,” says McLeod.

The sequence of the tours was intentionally planned as a way for the staff to understand and get excited about the shared “We” spaces before they saw the owned “I” spaces.

“We wanted to reinforce that they would be getting an entire space including all these collaboration areas and also let them know, ‘Oh yes, you’ll also have this personal workspace for when you need to concentrate and do heads-down work,’” she adds.

The new Service Centre opened in May 2011. Each of the 10 departments now housed there is located in a “neighborhood” surrounding a large “commons” space in the core. There are no closed-wall private offices in the neighborhoods. The commons offers a shared café, as well as comfortable

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soft seating with a waterfall backdrop that makes it an equally perfect place to have a conversation with a co-worker or read a lengthy report. A variety of open and closed meeting spaces are also available to increase the appeal and functionality of the space.

“It’s a congregating point, and I almost think half the business in these departments gets done there,” says Nichol.

Realizing how important it was for staff to be able to have quick “walk up and connect” experiences that leveraged technology, MacEwan invested in eight media:scape settings for the new centre, some for open areas and others in closed collaboration rooms. These settings, in use throughout the day, allow staff to share digital information and contribute their ideas and information quickly. The more they’re used, the more they’re loved.

Another progressive use of space in the centre is “active learning” classrooms. These rooms, which also function as meeting spaces, have a layout that assures all projected information can be seen from anywhere in the room. Additionally, presenters can move about freely versus

being anchored to the front of the room, and the furniture can be reconfigured easily to support different activities.

RESULTS

“The centre has met and probably exceeded our expectations,” reports Quinton. “Within weeks after we moved in, you could see people start to get together and use these spaces. Before, you had to set up a meeting room and try to find a time that would work for everybody... It could have taken a couple of weeks, whereas now people just come together.”

“The new workplace and a culture of consolidation and working together is really getting positive results,” agrees MacLean. “By giving access to different work environments and access to people, it’s building on opportunities to problem-solve.”

As more administrators exchange their desktop computers for laptops, the space will likely become even more high-performing, say McLeod. For example, workstation storage needs will lessen as workers store their files electronically to carry throughout the space.

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“Our technology hasn’t quite caught up to the space yet, but it will,” she notes.

The Service Centre has garnered media attention and attracted many visitors, a sure sign that it is positioning the university positively.

“It’s good news for the university to have people come through and look and get good impressions,” says Nichol. “We also bring internal groups up to show them what it’s like to work in this kind of space.”

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According to one occupant, everyone in the new space essentially has a 60,000-square-foot workstation because the whole floor is available for everyone to use.

Quinton notes that by positioning MacEwan as innovative, collaborative and resourceful, the centre has proven to be an advantage for recruiting new hires, especially the upcoming generation. “The younger they are, the more positive they are about it,” he notes.

Another attracting attribute: MacEwan has submitted the project for LEED Silver Certification. It demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainability with natural lighting, low VOC materials, water conservation measures, a solar-reflective roof and other design features. Energy performance was optimized to reduce consumption by 40 percent.

The facility meets MacEwan’s new standard of 19.2 net square meters per person. Employees have smaller personal workstations than they had in their former spaces, but the real estate gained has provided for a variety of shared spaces that support a wide range of collaboration, learning and socializing activities. As one occupant put it, everyone in the space essentially now has a 60,000-square-foot workstation because the whole floor is available for everyone to use. For many residents, coming to that realization after just a few weeks in the new space dispelled initial concerns about having a smaller, more open workstation.

As the project’s executive sponsor, Quinton believes this is the best thing about the new Service Centre: It’s made it possible for MacEwan to solve a space crunch, maintain reasonable space



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standards, and give each occupant more choices about where to work and more advantages than they had before.

“Because of the smaller workstation environment, we have all these other amenities – meeting spaces, spaces if you want private time, even showers and changing rooms for people who go jogging at lunch,” says Quinton. “We’re saving on space and providing so much more.”

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