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## Spotlight on Construction: Georgia Gwinnett College Prepares to Build Academic Library


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## Georgia Gwinnett College prepares to build academic library

by Joy Garmon and Gene Ruffin

A chance to build a new building from the ground up is a remote possibility for many older, land-strapped institutions, but at Georgia Gwinnett College, everything is so new that literally anything the institution does is from the ground up, and soon that will include the construction of a new library building.

The campus, home of the first four-year institution to be chartered in Georgia in more than 100 years, is located in Gwinnett County on approximately 200 acres of land. Originally, this land was home to Gwinnett University Center, a unique concept that gave University System of Georgia institutions “branch” locations at which they could conduct classes and provide typical academic services to students. The original partners in this venture were Georgia Perimeter College and the University of Georgia, with the later additions of Medical College of Georgia and Southern Polytechnic State University. By 2004, these institutions were serving more than 8,000 students in a rapidly growing county — one that had doubled its population in each of the past three decades. In order to better meet the needs of this growing population, the possibility of converting from the center to a stand-alone four-year college became a reality with the vote of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia in October 2004. In March of the following year, the Georgia General Assembly passed SR33, establishing a new college in Gwinnett County.

Currently the campus is composed of only four buildings. Three of these buildings were originally developed for the use of the center and include two classroom buildings and the Signature Building. The Signature Building

housed the administrative offices for the center and for partner institutions, an atrium, a café, classrooms and a library space. The fourth building, originally owned by someone from the private sector and adjacent to campus, was purchased after the college’s formation.

To receive SACS accreditation, the new college must meet certain standards and be able to provide for the information needs of the school’s population. Students also need appropriate gathering space — space where they can meet, study and contemplate. There are few places on the current campus that meet these needs, and what exists now will certainly not be adequate for a projected enrollment of 10,000 to 15,000 students by 2012. For example, the current library space is housed on two open floors within the Signature Building; it has a little more than 12,000 square feet of space and houses approximately 25,000 volumes. A new, stand-alone building will be needed to meet all of the needs of the new college. For Georgia Gwinnett, the ability to construct such a building arrived with the Legislature’s approval of the Board of Regents budget in May 2007. This budget included a provision of \$28.3 million for a new library building at Georgia Gwinnett.

As an initiation of our planning process, GGC established the Library Planning Group in 2006, comprised of faculty, student and administrative stakeholders. Through several meetings and site visits, this body came up with a list of program needs and recommendations, which was submitted to the College Cabinet. These included such items as design concepts, sustainability recommendations, service areas and facilities. As the college moves through

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## Hall County Library news and notes

The Friends of the Hall County Library held their annual meeting and program on Nov. 13. Antiquarian book dealer Cliff Graubart gave a brief presentation on identifying valuable books. Following Mr. Graubart's talk, he offered appraisals of books brought in by program attendees, a sort of "antique road show" for books.

The Friends of the Library were also honored during Friends of the Library Week with an appreciation reception thrown on Oct. 24 by library staff members.

The Hall County Library System will receive over \$7,500 from the AT&T Foundation to provide new computer

resources at the Blackshear Place branch. The equipment will be housed in the newly created young adult area of the library branch, which is being developed to increase library appeal to this age group.

"This grant will help us upgrade our hardware and computer seating for the Oakwood branch library," said Library Director Adrian Mixson. "This will provide teenagers with their own personal space, encouraging social networking and educational use of the library's resources for homework assignments."

The grant comes through the AT&T Exceleator program, which has provided over 2,500 technology grants since 2002. This is the first year that AT&T has expanded the program into the Southeast. ▶▶

## Georgia Gwinnett

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the design firm selection process, this group will continue to be a resource pool from which to draw valuable information pertaining to the community's desires and needs for the building.

The new library will incorporate concepts and services that have been successful in other facilities, such as a learning "commons," with services available from reference librarians, professionals from Student Support Services and the college's Center for Teaching Excellence. Our goal here is that the library will become a learning center for the entire college community. Plans call for study rooms of all sizes, from alcoves for individual study to large group study areas. A new type of planned study space is what we are calling smart study rooms, rooms that are equipped with all of the classroom technology so that the students can utilize those resources when they are working on group projects. Additionally, plans call for presentation rooms where students can practice presentations for their

classes alone or in groups. All of this will take place with the ubiquitous connectivity that is becoming the norm.

The new library building is slated to be a state-of-the-art facility, incorporating all of the latest design and technology concepts available and feasible. But to say that leaves one somewhat in a pedestrian mood these days as that expression has all but become mundane. What is state of the art when the very stasis is now dynamic? With change the norm in this Heraclitean world and obsolescence the operative concept, flexibility in design becomes paramount. While a certain minimalist approach that makes the building as adaptable as possible might be the best avenue to follow, there are certain design criteria that are still valid. These include clarity and boldness in architectural statement, symmetry with the overall campus design and master plan, an eye toward expandability, avoidance of design clichés that easily date a structure and, most importantly, flexibility.

Last but not least, though often not mentioned, is beauty. The library building is to be the intellectual heart of the campus. If it is to be successful, then aesthetics must be a living concept in its design and implementation. The design of a building communicates the meaning of that place, and in an institution of higher learning, the importance of the aesthetic dimension is paramount. All one has to do is compare an inspiring campus of Georgian or Gothic elegance to one that has been poorly planned and funded to understand the importance of structures that communicate a culture of learning. The library building at GGC will play an integral and pivotal roll in this larger picture. With the construction of a library that inspires and excites, the college will have a center that gravitates learning and intellectual activity for the entire campus. In essence, it will be a place students and faculty want to be in the action of learning. ▶▶