

Collaboration in Building – Building for Collaboration

The New Science Center at Meredith College

BJLAS Architecture

Meredith College is a women's college in Raleigh North Carolina with about 2100 undergraduate students. Our existing science facility was built in the 1950's when the college had about 800 students. It was dark, crowded, and inadequate. The disciplines of mathematics and computer science were in a building far from the lab sciences. It was a challenge, as it says in our mission, to "ready Meredith women to take their places in graduate school and/or a technologically sophisticated workforce." We wanted a place that said, "Science is important and central to a liberal education."

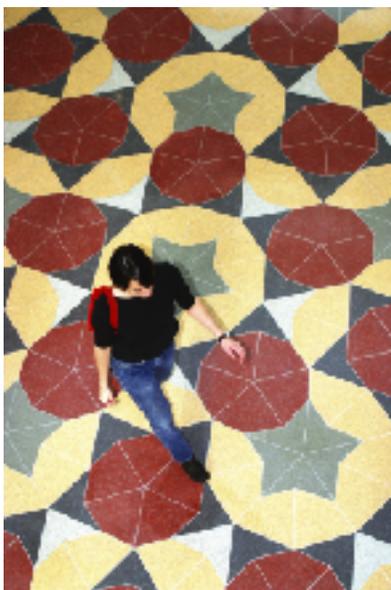
In January 2003, we moved into our new building and in one semester our lives have changed. We have grown from about two students per semester doing undergraduate research to seventeen students doing research this summer. One group studying water quality has faculty researchers from biology, chemistry, and mathematics collaborating with five students in environmental studies. We had never worked together much across disciplines before.



The New Science Center at night

How did this happen? It was a collaboration that worked. In January 2000, the architect was hired and a building shepherd appointed. The president, two vice presidents and the building shepherd were the high-level decision making team, along with all full-time faculty and two students from each department. Science faculty met with the architects as departments and individually to carefully define each teaching and research lab. The math faculty worked on classroom design. Other faculty and staff from across campus were included. Art and Interior Design faculty consulted on the gallery and our furnishings. Library and technology experts helped plan classroom technology and services throughout the building.

We wanted the planning and design to be a learning process for our students. One goal was to have our building be as "green" as it could be within our budget. The architects used the LEED™ rating system with us as a guideline for sustainable design. In addition, the architects presented a special workshop on green buildings and arranged trips to look at green features in other buildings. A general contractor was hired early and consulted on the design along with engineers for the electrical, HVAC, and plumbing systems. Although our building is not LEED™ certified, it does have many green features.



Penrose Tile Floor

Spaces for work and conversation were included wherever possible. The building is rectangular, built around an outdoor courtyard, so that offices, classrooms and labs use natural light. The courtyard itself has three outdoor classroom spaces with slate obelisks for blackboards. Six hallway corners are study alcoves, each with tables and chairs, a whiteboard, outlets and dataports. These alcoves have become a much-used study and social area for students. The Computation Commons is home base for mathematics and computer science students. This corner room contains tables and chairs, lounge furniture, a small library, lockers, and blackboards. This hang-out also hosts Thursday Tea Time when students and faculty munch cookies and solve problems together.

Student and faculty ideas are implemented throughout the building. The Penrose tiling in the atrium is a wonderful four-color terrazzo design of kites and darts suggested by two students and used with permission from Sir Roger Penrose. John Mecham, the Head of Biology and Health Science, has taught interdisciplinary courses with a member of the art department. Outstanding pieces that combine art with science have been chosen from these courses, resulting in ceramics, sculpture, and photography for our halls.