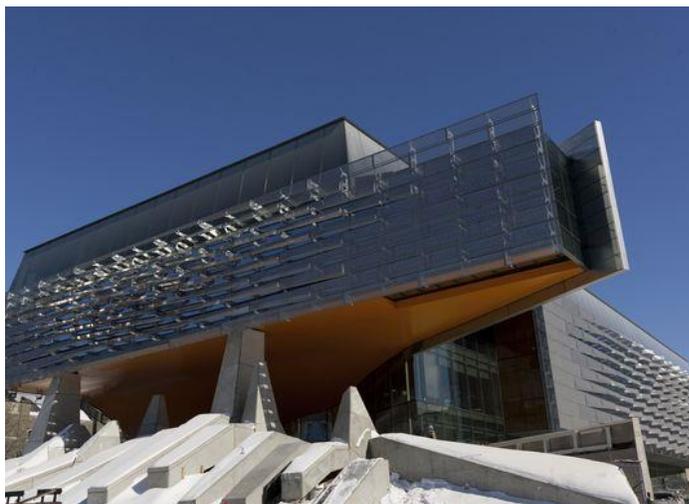


New Gates Hall at Cornell builds collaborations

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(Photo: Simon Wheeler, Gannett)

concrete floors with high, exposed ceilings, expansive atriums and plenty of open space. It's an aesthetic that Amy Gergely, director of external relations for CIS, describes as "very Silicon Valley," akin to the Google and Yahoo headquarters.

The building, with its abundant work nooks and transparent walls, is designed to encourage as much overlap between the disciplines as possible.

"One of the big factors was we wanted to have these areas where people and students and faculty could get together at will. That's a big focus for this department," Senior Project Manager John Keefe said. "Computer science and information sciences are really, really different. Computer science is the coding and stuff like that, whereas information science focuses more on the impact of the computer in society. Bringing those two together is a really interesting idea."

That conceptual aesthetic applies even to the placement of the building's two staircases, each located at opposite ends of the rectangular structure to encourage more foot traffic in the halls. The building's elevators are discreetly tucked away in contrast to the wide, monumental stairs. And the whole building community shares a single mailroom for the same reason.

"Even this is used as a collaboration tool because everybody has to come down and get their mail in one place," Gergely said. "The idea was for people to have spontaneous and beneficial interactions with each other in all kinds of places."

Silicon Valley arrived on the Cornell University campus this winter in the form of the new Bill & Melinda Gates Hall.

The \$60 million, state-of-the-art facility is designed to foster interdisciplinary research collaborations in Computing and Information Science.

Located on Campus Road across from Barton Hall and built on the former Hoy North parking lot, the Gates building brings together computer science, information science and statistical science units in a sleek yet industrial space.

The distinctive exterior is shingled with jutting stainless-steel panels. The interior of the building mixes glass walls and polished

Planning for the building began in January 2006 with a \$25 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, but the financial turmoil two years later stalled the project until additional funding could be found, according to Keefe.

CIS is its own special hybrid of sorts. Technically, it is a “college-level unit” that was formed in the late '90s as a way to give computer science room to grow on campus without tying it to a specific college. It eventually added information and statistical science, bringing the model full circle, Gergely said.

“You have the hardware side, the hardcore computing side, and then you have information sciences dealing with the intersection of people and computers. Then you have statistics that deals with understanding all the data that’s produced and computed,” she said. “It’s always been meant to foster interdisciplinary collaboration with the acknowledgment that computer science is really the thing that ties all that together.”

The collaborative spirit even extends to sanctioned graffiti that students leave via dry-erase marker on the numerous glass walls and windows: a mix of cartoon doodles, poetry and complex math theorems.

The glass walls allow anyone to see directly into conference rooms and Ph.D students’ work areas. Faculty office spaces are all the same size to create a sense of egalitarianism. While the building contains a lecture hall, a seminar room and some classrooms, it is mostly dedicated to dry labs.

Signs of corporate synergy are ubiquitous, from the Microsoft Collaborative Space to the main lounge with its futuristic “womb” chairs and a purple foosball table emblazoned with Yahoo logos.

Keefe and Gergely said the building was wired to have close collaboration with Cornell NYC Tech. Parked around the building are “tele-presence robots” with screen heads and motorized bases that allow faculty at Cornell NYC Tech to telecommute to conferences or rove around the building.

The building also takes a unique approach in conserving energy. The rooms are cooled with chilled beams full of running cold water and are heated with hot water piped along the base of the windows, eliminating the need for large air handlers, Keefe said.

The building, which overlooks Cornell’s varsity baseball field, was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Thom Mayne and his firm, Morphosis.

Source: Democrat & Chronicle

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/money/business/2014/02/19/cornell-bill-melinda-gates-hall/5606663/>