As the world laid low, campus construction projects hit high gear

University Communications
August 2021

Despite significant headwinds brought on by the pandemic, several key construction projects have been moving steadily forward.

Peter Dourlein, assistant vice president for planning, design and construction and university architect, credits University leadership and his team for clearing hurdles to keep the projects on track.

"The University didn't just lay down because of the pandemic," Dourlein said. "Once the financial viability was there, leadership decided to launch these projects. The future is counting on us, and we need to move forward with constructing these facilities that are core to our mission."

That mission — to continuously improve how we educate and innovate so we can lead the way in developing adaptive problem-solvers capable of tackling our greatest challenges — is at the heart of these projects.

The Student Success District is designed to bring unique ecosystems for research and learning together with innovative health, wellness and gathering spaces to support student success at all levels. The new Applied Research Building and Grand Challenges Research Building as well as ongoing renovations to the Chemistry building will help create a cutting-edge research environment that fosters the development of solutions to the greatest challenges facing Arizona and beyond.

The research, education and student development that will result from these projects is a key component of the Arizona Board of Regents’ New Economy Initiative, which focuses on the role Arizona's public universities will play in the state's economic future.

Mush of the progress came thanks to building inspectors, project managers, contractors and subcontractors, who stayed on campus while a majority of employees were sent to work from home, Dourlein said.

"They didn't miss a beat," he said. "All the work that needed to be completed was completed, and it was completed at the highest levels."

The work, he said, shines a spotlight on the University's value of determination, noting that University leaders and Planning, Design and Construction were committed to moving forward on the projects as soon as it was financially viable.

The University's Facilities Management team has also been busy making sure existing buildings on campus are safe. Crews have installed over 8,000 MERV 13 air filters in classrooms and office spaces throughout campus. These filters are considered very efficient at removing airborne particles of the size that usually transport SARS-CoV-2.

You can find updates on four of the University's highest-profile projects below. (To learn about the work done by Facilities Management after students and employees were sent home in March 2020, read this Lo Que Pasa article.)

Student Success District

Construction on the 9-acre Student Success District — connecting the Main Library, the Albert B. Weaver Science-Engineering Library, Bear Down Gymnasium and the Bartlett Academic Success Center — began in 2019. Work continues on Bear Down Gym, which will serve as the hub of the district and house academic, career and health and wellness services as well as meeting and dining areas. The project is set to be completed in spring 2022.

See project details, a photo gallery and the live construction webcam at Bear Down Gym.

For more information on the Student Success District, read these LQP stories:

- Renovation of Bear Down Gym brings the Student Success District closer to completion
- 5 Things to know about the Student Success District
- A look at the services and spaces offered in three Student Success District buildings

Chemistry Building Renovations

Work began in May to renovate and repurpose the historic Chemistry building on the Mall into an innovative teaching hub. Demolition and abatement work is underway on the 78,600-square-foot project. The oldest part of the building that faces the Mall will be preserved and repurposed, while the newer part of the building is being torn down and replaced with new construction. Upon completion — slated for December 2022 — the building will house collaborative learning spaces and laboratories.
The project site expanded on Aug. 17 to include the south lane of University Boulevard between Old Main and Highland Avenue, meaning bicycles, pedestrians, golf carts and service vehicles will have to detour to other routes for the remainder of the project.

See project details, a photo gallery and the live construction webcam.

Applied Research Building

Construction on the 85,000-square-foot, three-story Applied Research Building began in late June. The facility, which will house applied physical sciences and engineering research, is expected to be completed in January 2023. State-of-the-art features include an assembly area to construct stratospheric balloons and nanosatellites and a thermal vacuum chamber designed to simulate environmental conditions in space.

The Applied Research Building is located at the southeast corner of East Helen Street and the North Highland Avenue, which will be realigned as part of the project to provide safer pedestrian and bicycle crossings. Construction work is currently focused on placing dozens of caissons, or cylindrical cages inserted into deep holes and filled with concrete to form a building foundation.

More information about ARB’s research and technology capabilities is available at the Research, Innovation & Impact website.

See project details, a photo gallery and the live construction webcams.

Grand Challenges Research Building

The seven-story Grand Challenges Research Building is a key component of Pillar 2 of the University’s strategic plan, titled Grand Challenges, which focuses on tackling critical problems at the edges of human endeavor. The building will house laboratories and research space for cross-campus interdisciplinary programs, including the new Center for Quantum Networks.

The 107,877-square-foot facility, part of the James C. Wyant College of Optical Sciences complex, is being constructed on North Cherry Avenue across from the Main Library. The project, which began in July, is now in the construction phase and is expected to be complete by January 2024.

See project details, a photo gallery and the live construction webcam.

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