

Aurora University to begin construction of new Learning Commons

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A rendering shows what the Learning Commons set to be built at Aurora University may look like.
(SmithGroup)

By [R. Christian Smith](#) | rsmith@chicagotribune.com | Aurora Beacon-News

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Aurora University is gearing up to replace its existing library with a new forward-looking “Learning Commons” designed to bring people together.

Set to be located on Prairie Street in front of the university’s existing parking structure, the new three-story building will be more than just a place to check out books — it will be a multifunctional space where students can come together to collaborate and learn, according to Aurora University President Susana Rivera-Mills.

“We need to look to the future of what a library not just looks like but how it functions,” she said.

The university’s current Charles B. Phillips Library has not kept up with the university’s growth over the last several years, Rivera-Mills said. Not only is the building itself outdated and small, she said, but it was also built in a time of traditional libraries with rows of bookshelves rather than an emphasis on technology.

Senior Vice President for Student Success Jennifer Buckley said there is currently no spot on campus for students to really congregate, and walking through campus, students can often be seen just sitting in their cars.

So, the new Learning Commons was designed to be a student-centered, warm and welcoming place that feels like a home away from home, she said.

“This is a place where we see our whole campus community having the opportunity to come together to learn, grow and be innovative,” Buckley said.

It was also designed to be innovative, which she said reflects the university’s values, and to have a lot of flexible space that can be adaptable over time.

According to Rivera-Mills, this new building is “exactly what we need to enhance our student experience.”

The Learning Commons’ first floor will house books like a traditional library, but it will also have study rooms, a cafe and the university’s career services, Buckley said.

Alongside the career services office on the first floor will be an “industry lounge,” where students will be able to meet employers in a casual setting.

The second floor is set to hold a tech hub, maker space, content creation space, an academic support center and innovation space for both students and faculty along with medium and large spaces for collaboration.

Rivera-Mills said the “innovation classroom” will be a state-of-the-art place for faculty to test out new ways of teaching.

The building’s third floor will house the university’s archives, which currently is spread around the campus, alongside quiet study areas, a testing center and an outdoor terrace.

The new Learning Commons will have a “universal inclusive design” that promotes health and wellness for faculty, staff and students, according to Buckley. For example, she said the building’s design heavily considered sound: going from loudest on the bottom floor to most quiet on the top floor.

The building’s architecture will show the university’s commitment to innovation but will also connect to the traditional rest of the campus, as it “incorporates many of the characteristics that make our campus so beautiful,” Rivera-Mills said.

Students, faculty and the university’s Board of Trustees helped shape the building’s design, she said, so it feels like “this is truly going to be owned by our entire campus community.”

Construction on the building, which will likely begin this summer, is expected to be completed in 18 months, she said.

A small internal groundbreaking ceremony was held a few weeks ago, according to Rivera-Mills, and a larger announcement is expected at Homecoming in the fall.

rsmith@chicagotribune.com

