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Governors State University Architectural Response

Philip C. Williams

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Dr. William E. Engbretson, President, Governors State University, P. O. Box 316,
Park Forest, Illinois 60466

cc: Orme Evans

BILL, in talking with Orme Evans yesterday about a variety of things, your need for blurb for the ground breaking ceremony came out. Orme reported that you needed about 300 words to describe the architecture. Since we are just running through the draft resulting from our recent taping session, we felt that it should provide some material. Enclosed are two versions. The first is an edited portion from the Investigation draft, but it was about twice too long. The second is a reduced version which is shorter, but perhaps not short enough. If it requires further cutting, I have marked a section of the third paragraph which might be a candidate. If it should be shorter yet, we bow to your judgement. Perhaps an entire paragraph or subject might be omitted, such as the structural system. However, it is about as short as Susan and I could get it and still say what we felt we needed to.

I hope this will work for you. Since we got started rather late and are working from three different places, it may not all quite fit until you do your magic.

We hope to get a draft of the entire investigation to you within a week or two.

Best regards,

Philip C. Williams AIA, Senior Vice President
The architectural concepts respond directly to the program concepts of openness, humaneness and efficiency. The goals of openness and mix of people and activities evolved into the academic street concept. In a sense this concept creates a shopping center mall where students and faculty can walk along and discover the things they need. The idea of enclosing the entire academic street, instead of building a traditional campus of connected, but separate buildings, came as a response to both convenience and climate. It maximizes the opportunities for communication -- a major objective of the Open University.

The challenge, in terms of humaneness, was to put this huge complex into a form, or series of forms that would have unity but still maintain some individuality. The organization of the four colleges provided this opportunity. Each college required some highly specialized areas -- like sculpture or painting studios, music rooms, or research labs. But it was also essential to have a central street or concourse which would be everyone's domain, and where things would happen that would be relevant to everyone. Although flexibility was one of the major requirements it was not the only one. It was equally important for the spaces to be humane and varied so that each individual could find himself and feel at home. It needed little places, nooks, crannies, courtyards, where he could be alone or private with small groups.

The plan is an eloquent response to this challenge. The broad student street runs through the center of the building with the colleges and more specialized areas projecting from it in a variety of interesting configurations. The western end of the building is given over to
physical recreation and community use. The administrative and University core is roughly in the center of the plan and the Colleges of Cultural Studies and Environmental and Applied Sciences occupy the eastern end of the building. The Colleges of Business and Public Service and Human Learning and Development occupy temporary quarters in the core area. Phase 2 construction will extend the academic street and provide space for these colleges to the west. The space they now occupy will become available for the expansion of the Educational Resource Center and other core facilities.

The college is the "Place" where the individual student finds his level. Within each college, the commons is the meeting ground where faculty and students come together to talk, study, or observe. The college dean and all the student personnel people are next to the commons where they are visible to everyone. This helps to establish equilibrium in an open environment. Since the students are commuters they need quiet places to congregate in small groups and talk and study. This can be a learning carrel or a corner of the library. The whole design is open, but there is plenty of opportunity for students and professors to create their own small commons areas. They can do so by moving furniture and hanging up a sign if necessary. They can identify one of the movable seminar kiosks in the student street, and set it up for their exclusive use for whatever period of time they need it.

The relative anarchy of open spaces occurs within a very ordered, and strongly stated structural system. The basic structural unit is a precast concrete "tree" (or assembly of columns and beams) which creates a 24 foot planning module. Combined with the 6 foot spaces between trees, this produces a repetitive 30 foot square bay throughout the building. The space between trees
is the duct channel carrying heating, ventilating and air-conditioning throughout the complex. Concealed above the angle of the T-beam, the lighting system provides indirect illumination in all areas. The system allows needed flexibility, and allows the University to grow in almost any direction in response to need. The rhythm and form of the structure is such that it can be added to without changing the spirit and character of the architecture.
The goals of openness and mix of people and activities evolved into the academic street concept. The idea of enclosing the entire academic street, instead of building a traditional campus of connected, but separate buildings, came as a response to both convenience and climate. It maximizes the opportunities for communication -- a major objective of the Open University.

The challenge was to put this huge complex into a form, or series of forms that would have unity but still maintain some individuality. The organization of the four colleges provided this opportunity. Each college required some highly specialized areas -- like sculpture or painting studios, music rooms, or research labs. It was important for the spaces to be humane and varied so that each individual could find himself and feel at home.

The broad student street runs through the center of the building with the colleges and more specialized areas projecting from it in a variety of interesting configurations. The western end of the building is assigned to physical recreation and community use. The administrative and University core is roughly in the center of the plan and the Colleges of Cultural Studies and Environmental and Applied sciences occupy the eastern end. The Colleges of Business and Public Service and Human Learning and Development occupy temporary quarters in the core area. Phase 2 construction will extend the academic street and provide space for these colleges to the west. The space they now occupy will become available for the expansion of the Educational Resource Center and other core facilities.
The college is the "Place" where the individual student finds his level. Within each college, the commons is the meeting ground where faculty and students come together to talk, study, or observe. The college dean and all the student personnel people are next to the commons where they are visible to everyone. Within the open plan there is plenty of opportunity for students and professors to create their own small commons areas by moving furniture and hanging up a sign if necessary. They can identify one of the movable seminar kiosks in the student street, and set it up for their exclusive use for whatever period of time they need it.

The relative anarchy of open spaces occurs within a very ordered, and strongly stated structural system. The basic structural unit is a precast concrete "tree" (or assembly of columns and beams) which creates a 24 foot planning module. Combined with the 6 foot spaces between tree, this produces a repetitive 30 foot square bay throughout the building. The space between trees is the duct channel carrying heating, ventilating and air-conditioning throughout the complex. Concealed above the angle of the T-beam, the lighting system provides indirect illumination in all areas. The system allows needed flexibility, and allows the University to grow in almost any direction in response to need. The rhythm and form of the structure is such that it can be added to without changing the spirit and character of the architecture.
PARK FOREST SOUTH, Ill.--Goals of openness and mix of people and activities evolved into the academic street concept for new Governors State University's permanent facilities.

The idea of enclosing the entire academic street, instead of building a traditional campus of connected, but separate buildings, came as a response to both convenience and climate.

It maximizes the opportunities for communication -- a major objective of the open university.

The challenge was to put this huge complex into a form, or series of forms, that would have unity, but still maintain some individuality. The organization of the four colleges provided this opportunity. Each college required some highly specialized areas -- like sculpture or painting studios, music rooms, or research labs. It was important for the spaces to be human and varied so that each individual could find himself and feel at home.

The broad student street runs through the center of the building, with the colleges and more specialized areas projecting from it in a variety of interesting configurations.

The western end of the building is assigned to physical recreation and community use. The university core is roughly in the center of the plan and the Colleges of Cultural Studies and Environmental and Applied Sciences occupy the eastern end. The Colleges of Business and Public Service and Human Learning and Development occupy temporary quarters on the third floor of the core area. Phase II construction will extend the academic street more, please
and provide space for these colleges to the west and to the southeast. The space they now occupy will become available for the expansion of the Learning Resources Center and other core facilities.

Within each college, the commons is the meeting ground where faculty and students come together to talk, study, or observe. The college dean and college student personnel people are near to the commons where they are readily available to everyone.

Within the open plan there is plenty of opportunity for students and professors to create their own small studies areas by moving furniture and hanging up a sign if necessary. They can identify one of the movable seminar kiosks in the student street, and set it up for their use for whatever period of time it is needed.

The relative anarchy of open spaces occurs within a very ordered, and strongly stated structural system. The basic structural unit is a concrete "tree" (or assembly of column and beams) which creates a 2½-foot planning module. Combined with the 6-foot spaces between trees, a repetitive 30-foot square bay throughout the building is created. Economy is achieved by the repetition of the modular trees. The space between trees is the raceway carrying all mechanical - electrical services throughout the complex. Concealed within the tree branch beams, the lighting system provides indirect illumination to all areas. The system contributes needed flexibility, and allows the university to grow in almost any direction in response to need. Flexibility and expansibility have keynoted all of Governors State University's planning. Even the exterior steel walls are bolted on so the "skin" can be removed when the building is extended in Phase II and re-bolted on in their new locations. The rhythm and form of the structure is such that it can be added to economically without changing the spirit and character of the architecture.

Architects are Evans Associates of Bloomington, Ill. and Caudill Rowlett Scott. Contact: John Canning (312) 563-2211