

# Bridge Building Seeks To Unify Sciences

BY ELLIS DONOHUE, THE MISCELLANY NEWS  
September 23, 2015

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Vassar has been committed to science as a part of the liberal arts education since it hired its first professor in 1865, the renowned astronomer Maria Mitchell.

Recently the College has been working towards bringing its science facilities and programs up to par with its arts divisions. Although the College currently houses the Biology, Chemistry, Cognitive Science, Computer Science, Earth Science, Mathematics & Statistics and Physics & Astronomy in various buildings around campus, a new building is set to unite the programs when it opens at the beginning of next semester.

Dean of Strategic Planning and Academic Resources Marianne Begemann, who has spearheaded the project since its inception, noted that the Bridge will be installed with the latest scientific equipment and resources. She explained in an emailed statement, "[The Bridge] will have laboratory space for teaching environmental and earth science courses, shared facilities including a robotics lab, fabrication facility (electric and machine shops), a stockroom/storage facility, phytotron, herbarium, visualization lab, teaching spaces, administrative suite, offices, a cafe with seating and outdoor patio, as well as shared open common spaces for study and small group gatherings."

At 80,000 square feet, the building is also much larger than any other academic building at Vassar. According to Professor of Chemistry Joseph Tanski, who has been involved in advocating for an updated science space on campus since the 2003, in order to ensure that it would not be incongruous with the existing buildings, the Bridge was designed to serve as a link between areas of campus. Tanski confirms, "The proximity and overlap between several science departments will make it easier to work together collaboratively and will enhance the experience for students." In an article published in *The Alumnae/i Quarterly*, Beth Dunlop '69 noted, "Its structural system will allow for the use of lighter materials—glass, metal, and mesh—that will make its gently curved form seem almost to float across the landscape."

Significant efforts have been made to ensure that the Bridge is as ecologically conscious and responsible as possible, especially because it is situated directly above the Fonteyn Kill, which runs from Arlington through campus between Olmstead and Skinner Hall. Environmental initiatives for the integrated science center project include wetland restoration on the Kill and restoration of the Edith Roberts Ecological Laboratory, the wildlife area surrounding the stream.

The addition of the Bridge building is not the only alteration Vassar has made to its science facilities, however. According to Begemann, major renovations to Olmstead Hall, New England Building and Sanders Physics were completed earlier this year. The renovations are part of the larger Integrated Science Center project that includes the new construction.

All buildings involved in the project are Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certified. Tanski notes, "[The considerations] include energy considerations such as heat recovery from the Bridge air exhaust and lights on timers, wildlife friendly bird safe glass, rainwater collection for irrigation, the use of local materials such as the bluestone in the Bridge and low VOC building materials."

In addition to the College's general concern for keeping all of its facilities renovated, the renewed focus on developing space for the sciences has been one part of a campaign called Vassar 150: World Changing. The fundraising campaign concluded in June of 2013 and, with \$46 million raised for the new science center alone, enabled construction to commence.

The Bridge building nearing its opening on Jan. 4, 2016, is too many the culmination of years of hard work, and the next great step in Vassar's history. Tanski remarked, "Many of Vassar's peer college's have renovated or built new science facilities in recent years, and our science project is part of Vassar's commitment to being a leader in liberal arts education."