

Garrett College Unveils a New State-of-the-Art STEM Building

(Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)

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Some creative thinking at Garrett College has resulted in the transformation of an older building into a thoughtfully-designed new facility for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education. A \$2 million endowment gift from the Daniel E. Offutt III Trust will help the college ensure this state-of-the-art facility stays that way while providing accessible STEM education in the years to come.

The Daniel E. Offutt III STEM Center – named for the late Oakland, Maryland, native and philanthropist whose gift will equally fund STEM scholarships and STEM equipment refresh – is the result of a vision years in the making. A few years ago, leaders at the college set expansion of the STEM program as a top priority. However, the laboratory classrooms

scattered in other buildings across campus were inadequate for current educational needs. They lacked sufficient light, prep space, ventilation, and storage; student work was slowed because of the limited number of functioning sinks or pieces of equipment. Similarly, the award-winning robotics team was making do with spaces never meant for this kind of design and testing.

At the same time, it was clear that the building originally used for mine safety/technology classes and then for



One of the attractive, light-filled, state-of-the-art science labs at the new STEM building.

continuing education was in need of renovation. No air conditioning had been installed when it was built in the 1970s, and the existing heating, electrical, and sound systems were outdated.

Everyone involved agreed that STEM education would be

enhanced by re-purposing the building. Kathy Farley Meagher, director of campus facilities, called on her experience with capital project plans to oversee this huge undertaking. The project plan has been completed as originally scheduled, starting in May 2016. On September 8, 2018, Dr. Richard Midcap, president of Garrett College, served as master of ceremonies for the grand opening of the renovated and expanded educational building on the Western Maryland campus.



The original “visioning group” of 21 people, 7 of them specialists from outside the college, decided what features the building should have, and steered the process toward being sensitive to the environment. Even the colors of walls and furnishings have been chosen to harmonize with the beautiful natural surroundings the college enjoys.

Grimm & Parker Architects brought in Maryland companies Alban Engineering of Hunt Valley, SPECS Civil Engineering of Cumberland, and Columbia Structural Engineering of Columbia. After a competitive bid process, the building contract was awarded to Harbel Construction of Cumberland. These companies worked closely with County and State agencies for permits and inspections. They also communicated and coordinated with the community.

The \$8.5 million cost was split evenly between the State of Maryland and Garrett County. County, state, and national politicians worked to make available the funding needed. College and community leaders explored grants and launched a fund-raising campaign through Garrett

College Foundation for scholarships and specialized lab equipment. In addition to the Offutt endowment – called a “transformational gift to Garrett College” by Dr. Midcap – other donors participated in opportunities to name rooms within the new building.

The result is an attractive, light-filled space containing four laboratories with prep rooms, four classrooms, faculty/staff offices, conference rooms, student areas for tutoring and study, break rooms, and a large center that serves the robotics teams and others. This building’s electrical, mechanical, and plumbing infrastructure is robust and modern. As a U.S. Green Building meeting Silver qualifications for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), it has low energy costs and minimal environmental impact. Its finishes not only reflect the beauty of Garrett County, but also are easy to maintain.

Students and teachers alike are enthusiastic about the benefits this new learning space holds. Students will enjoy the convenient break, study,

The lobby at the new STEM building is an inviting, spacious area that harmonizes with the beautiful natural surroundings of the college.





Some of the anatomy training displays in the new learning space at Garrett College's new STEM building.

and meeting spaces, as well as easy access to their professors in offices near the classrooms and labs.

In addition to more functionally designed learning spaces, faculty members point out that they were able to supplement the best equipment they had with new items. For example, Linda Griffith, chemistry professor, kept a high quality cast iron device that she says could not be affordably duplicated today, but she also purchased new gas and vacuum nozzles.

One of the most notable additions to classroom resources is a virtual dissection table, a \$96,583 purchase made possible by a matching grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. This device allows students to study realistic images of four cadavers, bodies donated to science by Death Row inmates. Unlike the usual anatomy models, these individuals had various kinds of ailments and injuries, including cancer and compressed vertebrae, so students

get to see real-life anatomical problems. Using these digital images allows students to make mistakes or to repeat processes. If they accidentally sever a nerve, they can restore it. Scans and results of medical tests can be viewed on the proper part of the body. Cross sections can be viewed. Various parts of the body, such as skin or muscles, can be displayed separately. Images of animals are also available, making this dissection table valuable for veterinary science, in addition to its usefulness in human health fields, for athletic trainers, and so on. Learning to use the many features of the dissection table was so compelling, according to biology faculty members Christa Bowser and Carolyn Deniker, that they have had difficulty tearing themselves away from it.

This dissection table is the first in an institution of higher learning in the state, but it was just one of many special features of Garrett College mentioned at the dedication.



For example, Garrett College was the first community college in the country to be able to offer free tuition assistance to all qualified local students, in partnership with the Garrett County Commissioners. The athletic complex provided the first indoor public pool available in the county. The school has developed strong programs ranging from adventure sports to workforce development. The robotics team has led the way in technical competition. The college has recently expanded its library and media center, and now has completed this new STEM facility. At the STEM building ribbon-cutting, the school announced its next important project: a new performing arts center.

Since its founding in 1967, Garrett College and the community around it have formed an effective partnership to promote excellence in education and training, and this partnership promises to continue strengthening the school well into the future.



The virtual dissection table (above) allows students to study realistic images of cadavers with various diseases, injuries and ailments. Scans and results of medical tests can also be viewed, as well as skin and muscles.

Left: One of the images programmed into the virtual dissection table for training purposes.