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Facility Focus (Makerspaces)

Wentworth Institute of Technology: Center for Engineering, Innovation, and Sciences

September 1st, 2019

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The advancement of technologies for fabrication and the increased interest of educators of hands-on learning environments has prompted a proliferation of makerspaces in college and universities nationwide. The new 75,000-square-foot Center for Engineering, Innovation, and Sciences at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, designed by Leers Weinzapfel Associates, comprises a dynamic, multidisciplinary environment for such collaboration among students of biology, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, and two of the Institute's newest programs, biomedical and biological engineering.

Open to the quad on one side, a city street on another, and the campus circulation spine on a third, the building's fully glazed first floor was designed to advertise the activity inside and entice students to participate in the creativity they see from outside. The public lobby is a gathering venue that can be transformed from a collection of informal furniture to a lecture space and a building-long display that exhibits student work. Vertical bifold glass doors on the quad allow public visibility as well as an easy flow from inside to outside to allow work to be moved into and out of the building. The Center's academic makerspace is on the other side of the lobby, facing the city street.

The goal for the interior of these spaces was to be as flexible as possible in order to adapt to student needs. Tables can be flipped and nested, chairs can be stacked, whiteboards can be brought in and out, and modular, stackable wooden boxes can become stools, benches, and sitting steps. Proximity to tools for fabrication was also a design priority, and they are easily accessible in an adjacent room. Two dedicated project rooms also line one wall, and even these can be opened up to become a larger project space in this new breakthrough facility.

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