After years of dreams, planning, and hard work, the new John J. Hemmingson Center is transforming the student experience at Gonzaga University.

The light-filled, 169,000 square-foot building bustles with activity. Students fill the large cafeteria, which resembles an up-scale mall food court with its array of cuisine options. Traffic is heavy on the expansive “main street” as people stroll past Starbucks, a natural foods grocery, a Technology Center and more. Students congregate in comfortable areas that encourage socializing and interaction. Meanwhile, in secluded spaces on the periphery, people study, listen to music, or just enjoy some private time. Fortune Rodriguez, a junior majoring in Business Administration, is parked on a couch with his coffee, textbooks, and an iPad. He says the Hemmingson Center has “everything that a student needs. I love the blend of social areas with spaces where you can kick back and relax.”

HOFFMAN BUILDS:
Gonzaga’s John J. Hemmingson Center – transforming the student experience

Owner: Gonzaga University  Design Team: Opsis Architecture, Bernardo Wills Architects
Construction Cost: $58,000,000  Square Footage: 169,000  Location: Spokane, Washington  Completion Date: October 2015  Contract Type: Design-Build, Guaranteed Maximum Price  LEED: Gold

All photos by Christian Colombres
Chuck Faulkinberry, the Center’s Director, says that the building is performing exactly as intended. Standing at the top of the elegant curving staircase that rises three floors above the atrium, Faulkinberry looks like a happy man as he surveys the busy scene below. “Every corner of this building is in use, even on nights and weekends.”

“The University wanted a building designed for connectivity, to bring the campus community together around the core elements of the Gonzaga experience – academics, student development, faith, and global impact.”

Chuck Faulkinberry
Director, Hemmingson Center and Auxiliary Services
AN EXPERIENCED TEAM TACKLES AMBITIOUS GOALS

The design-build team of Hoffman, Opsis Architecture, and Bernardo Wills Architects (BWA) was no stranger to challenging higher education projects. Key members of Hoffman and Opsis were coming off a new Performing Arts Center for Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where their collaborative process delivered a multi-program building within a sensitive budget.

The Gonzaga project had some ambitious goals. Beyond a modern student center and campus gathering place, the University wanted a home for program elements ranging from the University Ministry and Center for Global Engagement, to student development programs such as Involvement & Leadership, Community Action and Service Learning, and Multicultural Education. The school set a high bar for sustainability, and established an aggressive schedule of just 22 months from groundbreaking to substantial completion.

The site, situated on a main east/west axis of the campus, challenged Hoffman to maintain safe pedestrian and vehicle flow and avoid impact to the adjacent library, residence halls, recreation center, and retail complex.
During preconstruction, Hoffman found a way to extend the partial below-grade level to cover the full footprint of the building, without impacting the overall budget. The University decided to implement this option because it provided the most cost-effective approach to future expansion. The full basement also allowed for some rearrangement of functions for better connectivity.
DEEP-DIVE DESIGN

To maximize efficiency and value, Gonzaga opted for a design-build delivery model that incorporated Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) principles to support a fully integrated decision-making process. Hoffman and Opsis used the competition’s proprietary meetings to hold highly interactive workshops with the full stakeholder committee—a deep dive into the campus culture and dreams.

Once awarded the project, the team met with over 20 different stakeholder groups to verify their detailed needs, and toured similar facilities for a firsthand look at some of the specified design elements and materials.

Opsis Principal Alec Holser says the result is a design driven by Gonzaga’s vision. One key way the design creates connection is by making everything visible. “In a 170,000 square-foot building it is easy to end up with a ‘rabbit warren’ of small spaces. We went to great lengths to avoid this. By starting with a clean slate we were able to create an open quality. In any spot in the building, you are no more than thirty feet from a natural light source.”

“We set out to design a building that would raise the bar for the student experience, at the same time it reinforced the cultural and spiritual mission of the University.”

Alec Holser
Principal, Opsis Architecture
The integrated design process encouraged inventive sustainable strategies, leading to LEED Gold certification. For example, the building includes a roof-top greenhouse yielding organic produce—one of the first of its kind in the nation—for student dining. Sustainable building system strategies included east/west axis building orientation with glazing on the north and south exposures; extensive skylights and clerestories that provide ample natural daylight; energy saving lighting controls with dimmable fixtures; and centralized geothermal heat pumps that tap into an underground aquifer.

The University’s program statement for the competition asked for a large, five-bay underground service dock for food service, trash, and recycling, and to support event deliveries for the ballroom—a community asset and source of revenue. The team saved the University over two million dollars by building an enclosed dock on grade. By placing the innovative food-growing hydroponic greenhouse and an outdoor terrace on the roof of the dock, the solution was a win-win for the project—the new, high-profile sustainable feature serves as a visual focus while reducing costs.
One of the biggest challenges of the project was providing for Gonzaga's intense food service needs: a 650-seat food court with seven service platforms, three retail dining spaces, a 900-seat ballroom, and a central kitchen for all campus dining functions. By placing the central kitchen below grade and utilizing service elevators, the team stacked the dining and ballroom functions vertically to create a very efficient food service back-of-house system.
A TIGHT SCHEDULE AND TIGHTER TOLERANCES

The team’s previous experience together and integrated preconstruction process created momentum that helped jump-start the field work, with crews pouring foundations just five months after award of the project.

Once the building came out of the ground, bringing the innovative design to life required close collaboration between Hoffman, designers, and key subcontractors. According to Hoffman Project Manager David Shourd, the project’s toughest technical challenge was the deep cantilever on the building’s north side. “We knew the overhanging truss would flex 1.25 inches once it was fully loaded with the structure and building skin above,” he says. “But we needed it to be in its flexed position prior to carrying that load, so that we could install the metal clips that would hold the skin. Precise locations of all these items were critical so that all the joints and reveals would line up exactly.”

Hoffman developed an efficient, cost-effective approach of temporarily weighing down the truss using concrete blocks. This enabled the required metal clips for the skin to be installed in exactly the right position. When the temporary weight was removed, the truss rebounded. Over the following months as the structure and skin was installed, the truss slowly flexed back down to within 1/8” inch of where the team had anticipated. The clips lined up perfectly. The result, according to Shourd, is “a level of quality that far exceeds what would have been possible without early anticipation; it shows the collaborative power of design-build.”

The large truss section that made up the North cantilever was fabricated in three large sections at the fabricator in Grangeville, ID. After the sections arrived in Spokane they were staged locally to be delivered “Just in Time” to the site, then hooked up and flown into place using two cranes. The erection sequence was developed by Hoffman and the erector to minimize picks and maximize safety.
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Over 20.5 months of construction, there were up to 130 workers on site, with more than 270,000 work-hours invested in the project. In the busy, heart-of-campus location, Hoffman kept students, staff and visitors safe and well informed throughout the project. In addition, reflecting Hoffman’s efforts to maximize local participation, a majority of the project’s 48 subcontractors were Spokane-based. The team turned the building over to the University on June 15th 2015, with move-in following a month later.

At the formal dedication ceremony in October, University president Thayne McCulloh described the new building as “a place for our students to learn, reflect, engage, play, and grow,” and an embodiment of Gonzaga’s mission to educate the whole person in mind, body, and spirit.

“...a place for our students to learn, reflect, engage, play, and grow.”

Thayne McCulloh
University President
The new context of globalization requires us to act as a universal body with a universal mission realizing at the same time the radical diversity of our situations.

It is as a worldwide community and simultaneously as a network of local communities that we seek to serve others across the world.

Superior General A. Nicolas, S.J.