

SIX REASONS YOU MIGHT NEED A NEW BUILDING

New buildings might look great, but they require excessive amounts of cash and commitment. For administrators wavering about whether or not the investment is worth it, here's a list of reasons to build a new facility.

1 It allows room for growth. The Rutgers Business School wanted to increase the size of the undergraduate population on its New Brunswick campus, going from about 800 to 3,000 students. "Previously, we'd had a very small, elite program, and we couldn't guarantee even the best students that they would be admitted when they were juniors," says Glenn Shafer. A new building allowed for significant expansion.

Similarly, the student body at UMKC's Bloch School had increased by 70 percent since 2007, and the original building couldn't accommodate the growth, says David Donnelly. "We were either going to have to freeze enrollments or get new space."

2 It improves the student experience. The new Bloch building is designed to be solely a teaching space. "We made a conscious decision to keep faculty and staff office spaces in the old building and use the new one for innovative classroom experiences," says Donnelly.

LSU's Richard White agrees that, first and foremost, a new building should be about educating students. "It's not about the faculty, the staff, the dean—it's about the students," he says. "Everything should emanate from the learning experience."

3 It shows that a school is staying competitive. "If you want financial support for your facilities, you need to be able to show donors that you're preparing your students for the work they'll do when they graduate," says Donnelly. "Donors look at their gifts as investments, and they want to see a return on investment."

3 It builds closer community ties. When school buildings include specialty spaces like incubators, members of the local business community get a chance to work with faculty and students. Rutgers' new facility in New Brunswick benefits the community by offering an enhanced venue for the school's small business development center and executive education programs—but Shafer expects even more expansion in those areas as the school moves forward with plans to construct a hotel and convention center right next to the new building. "These facilities will enable us to go beyond serving our degree students to serving the businesses in New Jersey with executive education programs, certificate programs, and other opportunities," says Shafer.

5 It engages stakeholders. The new Ourso building was the first on the LSU campus to be built with a mix of private and public funds, and the presence of private donors greatly influenced the final design. In fact, a handful of donors were deeply involved in the design process, because every month those donors, the dean, the architects, and other key players met to discuss the building's progress. "Private donors had a large say in the design elements," says Karen Deville. Without their input, "we would have ended up with a regular state building, and it wouldn't look and function the way it does."

6 It makes a statement. At Rutgers, the impressive new building on the New Brunswick campus has raised the school's profile within the university. "Despite the fact that we had almost 1,000 undergraduates and more than 500 master's degree students, we were a little under the radar because we didn't have a prominent home for our program," says Shafer. "Now the rest of the campus knows we exist. Not only that, in addition to serving our own students, we have room to offer minors in business administration and entrepreneurship, so we can serve nonbusiness students at the school."

At Ourso, the changes might be even more profound. Previously, the school shared a building with the engineering school, taking up about 56,000 square feet in a 260,000-square-foot bunkerlike building constructed in the 1970s. "It was time for the college to have its own identity and brand," says White.

Once the business school moved into the new building, it was as if the whole program was energized, says White. For instance, while the old building averaged one event every three days, the new one hosts an event almost every day, whether it's a seminar, a speaker, or a black-tie dinner. Other university departments ask to host their events at the new building; the courtyard has been the site of large tailgate parties for football games.

"Bottom line, it's changed the culture of this college," says White. "It's improved our ability to teach and learn, and it's improved the attitude of students and faculty. When I envisioned this project, I had no idea how much a new building would change the college."

And that should be the truest goal of any new building, says architect Joseph Tattoni. "Ultimately the architecture needs to be doing something more powerful than just being something pretty to look at. It needs to enhance or transform the lives of the people who occupy the building."