

SMITHGROUP

UT Arlington School of Social Work and Smart Hospital Building

Project Narrative

Coupled with a recently completed health sciences research building, the two structures join to form an iconic southern gateway along Cooper St, a major arterial. In reception of pedestrian traffic flows of thousands of students from perimeter parking lots, the southeastern corner lifts to allow free passage through a shaded breezeway, inviting traffic into a newly formed landscaped quad. Joining the research building and adjacent life sciences and nursing buildings, the structure count reaches critical mass, establishing a true health sciences neighborhood around the new central green space.

Programmatically, the building stitches together two seemingly disparate programs, becoming the all-inclusive home for the established School of Social Work and housing the Smart Hospital, an extensive skills and simulation component for the College of Nursing & Health Innovation. United around a shared mission of well-being, the two programs challenged the design team to help foster meaningful cross-disciplinary collaboration and consider how the two programs might function differently in a shared home. The building's highly fluid and porous ground floor reflects this union, with a large, shared community forum and interactive research laboratories. The new building creates an energized hub of flexible, technology-enriched learning spaces, research labs, officing, and student engagement and collaboration spaces.

AIA Framework for Design Excellence

Design for Integration – While creating a dynamic home for the building's two departments, the structure makes big placemaking moves for the broader campus.

Design for Equitable Communities – As part of the School of Social Work, the building houses a community counseling clinic on the ground level.

Design for Ecosystems and Water – The building's site placement protects surrounding groves of mature trees, engages a long-ignored creek, and converts underutilized open space and a massive surface parking lot into an amenity filled quad. The project is highly restorative in this aspect, inverting permeability percentages and capturing and filtering runoff before it enters Johnson Creek at the south end of the site. Rain gardens extend the pastoral creek landscape into the campus, providing habitat for nesting birds, ducks, amphibians, and other local flora and fauna that call the creek home. 74 percent of the plant species specified are natives and 63 percent are pollinators supporting the surrounding environment. All plants were selected for their drought tolerance.

Design for Energy – Building energy modeling informed the envelope and shading elements including fritted glazing patterns, horizontal shades and overhangs, and a west facing vertical shade structure. Thorough studies resulted in a calibrated approach that permitted daylight and exterior views while substantially reducing glare and heat gain.

Design for Well-Being – A series of landscaped pedestrian pathways acknowledge both the emerging urban fabric of the campus and connect the building to the site. The project's wellness focus bleeds outdoors via a programmable landscape that includes outdoor classrooms and informal gathering spaces. Students and faculty can find respite beneath shaded tree canopies, stroll along intimate pathways, or recreate on generous lawn areas. Interior and exterior are visually connected via ample glazing, providing natural light and views. Ground floor plazas and upper-level terraces provide further connections.

Design for Resources – A locally-sourced material, the buildings primary exterior material, limestone, and the building's primary concrete structure are designed for a 100-year lifespan. The specified concrete also includes the maximum recycled content mix allowable.

Design for Change – The building is served by a localized chiller plant integrated into a campus loop providing redundancy and efficiency for both the building and other campus structures. A generator supports 75 percent of the building with short term backup power in the event of an outage.