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Dyer Brown expanding higher-ed portfolio

July 20, 2018 - Construction Design & Engineering

Boston, MA Dyer Brown has been selected for a number of new higher-education commissions. The firm has also completed a significant interior renovation project for student orientation facilities at Northeastern University.

Currently at work reimagining campus spaces and building interiors for clients including Boston University as well as Emory University in Atlanta, Dyer Brown has established a higher profile for supporting the needs of leading educational institutions, in part thanks to its extensive success in the workplace and hospitality sectors. For Northeastern University's new Orientation Department offices and its adjacent conference center, Frost Lounge, Dyer Brown's 2,000 s/f redesign demonstrates how the firm's broad expertise helps colleges and universities reinvent campuses and student life amenities in ways that are both cost-effective and highly beneficial.

The Northeastern University project also underscores Dyer Brown's success in boosting functionality on college campuses while creating vibrant, attractive experiences through buildings and interior environments.

"Leading institutions of higher education like Northeastern compete in challenging marketplaces for applicants, for students, and for top faculty and staff," said Rachel Woodhouse, NCIDQ, LEED AP, principal and director of operations for Dyer Brown. "High-impact design focused on end-user needs provides a competitive edge. Dyer Brown's experience in a range of markets and project types contribute to more client-focused, on-brand design solutions for university campuses."

The recently completed renovation at Northeastern University has reimagined the Orientation Department facilities for initiating students into the campus experience. The redesign supports more flexible uses and creates a stronger impression for greater impact on first-year arrivals, according to Dyer Brown. The orientation meeting spaces and shared workspaces for student use were fully reinvented by Dyer Brown and the Northeastern University project team, with the architects bringing ideas from both institutional and commercial workplace strategies. The new layout situates the Student Orientation office by the entrance lobby, where it is more accessible and visible, while redesigning the meeting and conference area known as Frost Lounge to increase their square footage and improve adaptability to a wide range of expected uses.

The overall redesign also incorporates an abstracted version of Northeastern University's logo as a subtle reference in new furnishings and finishes. Interpreting the 45-degree geometry for a bolder and more contemporary look, the design subtly reinforces the school's capital-N branding and spirit

by wrapping the angled shapes across interior walls, floors and ceilings throughout. The design team also introduced inventive, cost-effective elements such as installations of wood fins integrated into the new reception desk and several walls, creating visual interest and textural dimension.

“We collaborated closely with the project’s contractor, Kaplan Construction, and several subtrades to develop creative finish materials on the floors, ceilings and walls with the striking 45-degree angle seams wrapping throughout the space,” said Karen Bala, AIA, LEED AP, senior architect with Dyer Brown. “The detailing at angles subtly evokes Northeastern’s shared identity, while the meetings of disparate materials helps reinforce that this is where communities come together and touch — part of an ongoing university initiative to recruit students from around the world.”

The influence of Dyer Brown’s success with strategic and creative workplace interiors add valuable influences on these new facilities, including the application of brand-relevant design elements. The finishes and materials palette serves a variety of purposes simultaneously: Oak wood selected for walls and the reception desk’s millwork fins are inspired by the nearby auditorium, establishing a visual relationship with the neighboring facility. A vinyl woven flooring material selected as an alternative to carpeting lends a sophisticated look while reducing maintenance requirements, and the LED lighting bars installed in ceilings offer stylish, energy-efficient illumination that blends appropriately with the plentiful natural daylight in the conference room’s feature wall and in pendant fixtures over the reception console.

“This strategic and effective renovation project serves as a useful example of how our design teams can draw from their experience in not only institutional settings but also broader workplace, hospitality, retail, and other project types to better support the needs of higher-education clients,” said Dyer Brown’s Woodhouse. She adds that Dyer Brown will reveal additional work in the higher-education sector this year and next, locally at Boston University and in the Southeast — where the firm recently opened a regional office — for Emory University.

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