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Shawmut Construction hoists final beam into place at UMass Lowell project

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UMass Lowell celebrated a milestone in the construction of its new, \$95 million student-engagement center with the raising of a 34-foot-long steel beam bearing the electronic signatures of 1,500 students, faculty and staff.

Working with the university on the design and construction of the new center are Joslin, Lesser + Associates, Perkins + Will and Shawmut Construction.

The 143,600 s/f building, under construction as part of the University Crossing complex, is scheduled to open for the fall 2014 semester and will be home to a variety of student services and other amenities open to both the campus and the public, including the university's flagship bookstore, a food court and café, an event space accommodating up to 500 people and meeting rooms. The center will also house the offices of student clubs and related programs.

"Today, we are marking an important step in the path to completion of University Crossing. When the university acquired this site in 2011, we envisioned it as a vibrant hub uniting our three campuses and the community, and as we see this student center taking shape, it is exciting to know that we are closer to reaching our goal. I look forward to being back here next year to celebrate the opening of what will be a place for student and community engagement," said UMass Lowell chancellor Marty Meehan.

Meehan and executive vice chancellor Jacqueline Moloney were joined at the event by approximately 200 people, including students, faculty and staff, UMass system representatives, city and state officials, members of the construction team and local residents, who watched as one beam symbolizing the completion of the building's frame was raised into place during what is known as a "topping-off" ceremony.

"This is a proud moment for UMass Lowell and this is a proud moment for the entire UMass system," said Henry Thomas III, chairman of the University of Massachusetts board of trustees, who called Meehan an exemplar of higher education leadership.

Because the event was held when the majority of UMass Lowell students are away from campus for the summer, the university offered a "virtual beam-signing" that allowed all to participate in the tradition of signing the final beam, even if they could not be at the event in person. To make this possible, UMass Lowell developed an application for computers and mobile devices to register the signatures, which were transferred to several large stickers that covered 17 feet of the 34-foot beam.

"This student center is designed to serve as the 'living room' of the UMass Lowell community. As the new home to our student clubs and organizations, it will be a place designed to foster student engagement, entrepreneurship and social activism, and to encourage service to others," said associate vice chancellor of student affairs Larry Siegel, adding that students have worked with the university to give input on the new building.

"They understand that the student center has an important purpose to provide both social and educational opportunities for the university community."

Located at a central point between UMass Lowell's North, South and East campuses and walking distance from the downtown business district, University Crossing is already the site of an 86,600 s/f building adjacent to the new center. That structure has undergone extensive renovations and by this fall, will be home to departments including University Police, student financial services, financial aid, parking, transportation, environmental management and the registrar's office. When the student center is completed, approximately 800 people will work at University Crossing.

"Once again, UMass Lowell has achieved another milestone," said state Sen. Eileen Donoghue, calling the university "a first-class educational institution" that is recognized around the nation. "The growth and development of our city has been enhanced because of the efforts of the university."

"This is a great project not only for the university, but for the city," said Lowell Mayor Patrick Murphy. The new center is under construction on the former site of St. Joseph's Hospital, which was largely unused in the years between the hospital's 1992 relocation and the acquisition of the property in 2011 by the UMass Building Authority on behalf of UMass Lowell.

"The UMass Building Authority is so proud to be building University Crossing," said Katherine Craven, executive director of the authority, which is overseeing the construction. "This project is going to elevate student life here by offering state-of-the-art centralized services and organization space. We are thrilled to partner with UMass Lowell and see the campus reach new heights."

"It's a facility that in so many ways will continue to transform this campus," said UMass president Robert Caret.

Located across the Merrimack River from the university's North Campus, the student center will boast a four-story glass atrium that will offer a dramatic view of the \$80 million Mark and Elisia Saab Emerging Technologies Innovation Center on North Campus and the new Richard P. Howe Bridge, also set for completion in fall 2014, which will span the river between the buildings.

"This facility will unite our campus," said UMass Student Trustee Philip Geoffroy, a UMass Lowell student from Chelmsford. "It will open new opportunities for students to be engaged with the city."