Allen Hall Expansions and Remodel: Project Quick Facts

Completed: December 2012

Size: 23,011sf addition

Allen Hall Funding: $7,500,000 G-Bonds, $7,500,000 gifts, $2,192,000 other

Architect: TBG Architects & Planners / Yost Grube Hall Architecture

Construction Manager/General Contractor: Lease Crutcher Lewis, Portland
Introduction

University of Oregon Campus Planning, Design & Construction (CPDC) conducts post-occupancy evaluations (POE) of university projects to improve our planning process and better understand the successes and shortcomings of recent projects on a case-by-case basis. This knowledge and data is applied when making influential decisions on future projects.

CPDC conducted a POE of the expansion and remodel of Allen Hall, home to the University’s School of Journalism and Communication (SOJC), which was completed in 2012. The project included a 23,011 sf addition in three stories and a basement to the existing building to accommodate the expanding SOJC and created an overall sense of building cohesiveness among the 1922, 1954, and 2012 wings. The addition includes additional office space for full-time, adjunct faculty, and graduate teaching fellows and two new classrooms. The renovation included energy and seismic upgrades to the existing 1922 north wing and 1954 west building and created a “Digital Commons” - a new teaching, learning, and collaborative digital work area centered on evolving curricular needs of digital media productions.

Now, with the building occupied for over two years, the POE gauges the successes and shortcomings of the project, especially in relation to its original project goals, which include:

- Accommodate a “Digital Commons” – a new teaching, learning, and collaborative work area centered on the evolving curricular needs of digital media technology.
- Create additional faculty offices.
- Develop a clear main entrance to the building.
- Improve internal wayfinding and create a cohesive building complex.
- Develop a building “center” for the School of Journalism and Communication.
- Promote faculty, staff, and student collaboration and community building.
- Incorporate sustainable design into the remodel of the historic buildings, as well as into the new building, to encourage another 100 years on campus.
- Continue the university’s commitment to notable campus architecture in ways that fit seamlessly into the fabric of campus.
Methodology

The goal of the POE was to collect and analyze data from the primary population groups within Allen Hall. These include:

- Current graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in an SOJC major.
- Current graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in classes that meet in Allen Hall during the time of the survey (Fall Term, 2014).
- Current faculty and staff who teach/work within the SOJC.
- Current faculty and staff who teach/work in a space or classroom within Allen Hall.

The POE was conducted via an online survey sent via email to the aforementioned population groups. The survey was made available from November 11th to November 14th, and took about 20 minutes to complete. Survey questions were grouped into a set of themes, which include:

- General use information
- Common and informal learning spaces
- Classroom spaces
- The Digital Commons
- Staff and faculty offices
- Outdoor spaces
- Thermal comfort
- Open-ended response questions
- Respondents’ profile

The survey included rating-scale based questions, multiple choice questions, point-and-click image questions, and open-ended response questions.
Summary of Results

Respondents’ Profile

64% of survey respondents were undergraduate students, 16% teaching faculty, 14% administrative staff, 9% graduate students, and 2% “other”. 76% identified as female, while 24% identified as male. 39% reported using Allen Hall for more than two years, while 27% had used the building for less than six months. 52% of respondents work for the University, 66% of whom say Allen Hall is home to their primary workspace.
General Use Information

Overall, Allen Hall had a positive rating (81/100) when compared to other buildings on campus. Respondents valued the building’s integration of technology (81/100), opportunities for collaboration (80/100), and providing a strong feeling of identity for the SOJC (81/100). Respondents gave generally low marks for visibility and wayfinding with a rating of 62/100 for “easy to find for visitors”, and 68/100 for “finding your way through Allen Hall”.

Figure 3.
How would you rate Allen Hall as a place that achieves or provides the following?

Figure 4.
How would you rate Allen Hall on the following?
Additionally, when asked to identify the main entrance (east entrance) to Allen Hall on a floor plan, only 17% of respondents chose the main entrance, making it the least popular of the building’s 4 entrances. Respondents gave a rating of 64/100 when asked, “How easy is it to find the main entrance to Allen Hall?”. This is important to note, as a primary project goal for the Allen Hall expansion and remodel was to “develop a clear main entrance to the building”.

It should be noted that prior to construction, there was the presumption that the southwest entrance would be the most heavily used, given the large number of students that enter from the Old Campus Quad to get to lecture room 221.
With 72% of respondents identifying as students, most respondents indicated that the majority of their time was spent in either formal classroom or workspaces (Digital Commons, Room 141, Room 221), or informal spaces on the building’s east side (first floor central stair area, second floor central stair area, and third floor east window). The least popular spaces were generally hallways or collaborative spaces near faculty offices.
Figure 13. Room 221, Second Floor

Figure 14. Central Stair Area, Second Floor

Figure 15. Digital Commons, Third Floor.
Though respondents generally reported feeling safe during off hours (10pm-7am) in the building with a rating of 77/100, some individual responses expressed concern over the lack of lighting around the building, specifically along the north walkway and the parking lot behind Friendly Hall:

- “I don’t like the lighting at the back of the building -- or, I should say, the lack thereof. I think that’s more of a university issue than an Allen Hall issue, but I’ve been taking the long way to 13th or to the EmX stop at Dads Gates Station because I’m uncomfortable going the shorter way. Building is OK. But I will admit that I jump anytime I hear a noise or the lights go on in the hall. It can be pretty quiet in here on the weekends or at night.”
- “The back parking lot (behind Friendly) can be very dark and isolated at night”

It is also important to note that several respondents were concerned about open access to the building during weekend hours, when there are few students and faculty/staff around:

- “I worry about weekend access to anyone who wants to come into the building when there are no staff and few faculty”
- “Often the doors are not locked on the weekends during off hours, meaning anybody can get inside even without a proper badge to unlock it”

Figure 16.
How many hours do you spend in Allen Hall during off hours (10pm-7am)?

![Pie chart showing hours spent in Allen Hall during off hours](image)

Figure 17.
How safe do you feel in Allen Hall during off hours (10pm-7am)?

![Bar chart showing safety ratings](image)
Common Spaces and Informal Learning Spaces

Common spaces and informal learning spaces within Allen Hall include entries, stairwell areas, hearths, lounges, and hallways. 75% of users report spending between 1-10 hours in these spaces during a typical week, while that rate decreases to 52% during midterms and finals. In general, more formalized common spaces near the building’s central stair area were the most popular among users, garnering 76% of the usage counts. Conversely, spaces further from the main entry and central stair area, such as those on the western side or second and third floors of the building, were less popular.

Figure 18.
Please indicate on the map below the common and informal learning spaces you most frequently use.

Figure 19.
Hearth, First Floor

Figure 20.
West Lounge, First Floor.

Figure 21.
Central Stair Area, First Floor.
Figure 18. Cont.
Central Stair Area, Second Floor

Figure 22.
Central Stair Area, Second Floor

Figure 23.
Central Stair Area/Hallway, Second Floor

Figure 24.
Central Stair Area, Third Floor
Popular uses in the common spaces and informal learning spaces include studying alone, studying/working in groups, meeting with colleagues, and just hanging out. These spaces proved less effective in fostering collaboration, with scores of 63/100 for student-teacher collaboration and 60/100 for teacher-teacher collaboration. It is important to note that the “Other” option, which accounts for 5% of the total responses, should include a write-in option for users to elaborate on their activities in future POE surveys.

Figure 25. How do you most frequently use the common and informal learning spaces? Please select your top three activities.

Figure 26. How do you most frequently use the common and informal learning spaces? Please select your top three activities.
Classroom Spaces

The classroom spaces in Allen Hall generally received positive ratings, though there were qualms with the classroom’s ability to support collaboration (64/100), respond to changing pedagogy (66/100), cool in the summer months (63/100), and minimize acoustic distractions from outside the classroom (64/100).

Figure 27. How would you rate the classrooms in supporting the following?

Figure 28. How would you rate the following qualities of the classrooms?
The Digital Commons

The Digital Commons is a series of five computer labs dedicated to Journalism and Communication located on the third floor of Allen Hall. 67% of users familiar with the Digital Commons report spending 1-10 hours in the labs during a typical week, while that number decreases to 45% during midterms and finals. Overall, ratings of the Digital Commons were generally positive. Users gave low ratings for support of collaboration with the Portland program via digital technologies and resources (50/100), as well as flexibility to account for smaller group work or break out team sessions (67/100). Similar to Allen’s classroom spaces, the Digital Commons received lower ratings for cooling in the summer months (67/100) and minimizing acoustic distractions from outside the lab spaces (65/100).
Staff and Faculty Offices

Staff and faculty offices in Allen Hall received lower ratings overall when compared to other spaces in the building. Respondents gave a rating of 55/100 when asked how their offices function for collaboration, also citing issues with flexibility (55/100), heating and cooling (50/100, 45/100), and the ability to meet/collaborate with others (52/100). Offices did receive better ratings for quality of daylight from windows, with a score of (78/100). 76% of users report using the faculty/staff lounge, but gave the space a rating of 48/100 when asked how well it provides a home for faculty and staff to gather and collaborate.
It should be noted that an office space adjacent to the second floor central stair area was mistakenly absent from the hot-spot map in the published survey, thus results are not completely representative of all office spaces in Allen Hall.
Outdoor Spaces

The outdoor spaces around Allen Hall generally received positive ratings amongst survey respondents. The east, west, and south walkways were reported as the most frequently used outdoor spaces, while the north walkway, covered bike area, and parking lot were substantially less popular. Respondents gave the outdoor spaces low marks for providing adequate seating (65/100) and acting as a venue for symposiums and conferences (58/100).

Figure 34. Please indicate on the map below the outdoor spaces around Allen Hall that you most frequently use or pass through?

Figure 35. University Street Axis

Figure 36. Parking Lot and Covered Bike Racks
Please rate the following qualities of the outdoor spaces around Allen Hall.
Thermal Comfort

56% of survey respondents report experiencing thermal discomfort in Allen Hall. Most respondents reported feeling discomfort in larger classroom and workspaces, such as the Digital Commons, Room 140, Room 141, Room 221, and the Winter Room. Users in faculty offices on the north and west sides of the building reported discomfort as well. Thermal discomfort was reported as being most prevalent between the hours of 2pm-4pm, followed closely by 10am-noon. Not surprisingly, when experiencing discomfort respondents felt “too warm” in the spring and summer terms, and “too cold” in winter. Fall term was fairly neutral, with 42% feeling “too warm” and 48% feeling “too cold”.

Figure 40. 
Which areas in Allen Hall have you been uncomfortable with the temperature?
Figure 40.
Cont.

Figure 41.
Which areas in Allen Hall have you been uncomfortable with the temperature?
Open-ended Response

When asked to “list up to three things you would change about Allen Hall”, user responses generally varied from those concerned with specific amenities (or lack thereof), quality and programming of spaces, and climatic/lighting issues. Many respondents expressed the desire for a coffee shop or café in Allen Hall, as well as more reliable vending machines. Additional power outlets and reliable cell phone reception was another popular request.

Some respondents requested more quiet study and collaborative space, while others found such spaces to be excessive and urged their conversion to faculty office space. Specifically, several respondents called attention to the small collaborative rooms between the western Digital Commons labs, calling them “silly” and “useless”.

Several users found the building’s heating and cooling to be inefficient, specifically citing “the zoning system, which affects more than one office at a time”. A few users with offices along the building’s west side found the sun shades to block natural light, causing them to required artificial lighting even on bright days.

When asked to “list up to three things in your experience of Allen Hall that HELPS your success”, increased access was a broad, pervasive theme throughout user responses. Many respondents valued the availability of computer labs and software, reliable internet access, and the plentiful charging outlets throughout the building. Users also appreciated 24-hour access to the building and lab spaces.

Access to open study and collaborative spaces was another common praise, both for providing informal work space and a venue for interacting with fellow students, staff, and faculty. More formal meeting/conference spaces were also popular, with one respondent stating, “conference rooms are so important and useful; find myself there often with groups and appreciate the TV/computer plug in capabilities for presentation practice”.

When asked to “list up to three (3) things in your experience of Allen Hall that INHIBITS your success, faculty member, or staff”, responses were similar to those in the first question regarding “things you would change about Allen Hall”, but with a greater stress on poor cell phone reception and noise. Others asked for more private meeting spaces to be available on a casual basis, as meeting spaces require reservations and collaborative spaces can be too loud and inappropriate for meetings requiring privacy.
Conclusion

Collaborative Spaces

The function and necessity of collaborative spaces in Allen Hall, one of the project goals, was an overwhelming theme throughout much of the survey. While there was a general praise for the intention and flexibility of these spaces, some respondents felt that their sheer abundance detracted from other space needs in the building, specifically faculty offices and more private meeting spaces.

Noise

Acoustic distractions were another issue throughout much of the survey, receiving an overall rating of 62.5/100 when averaged from applicable noise-related questions. Noise was a reported issue in classrooms, common and informal spaces, offices, and the Digital Commons, and could be attributed to the large amounts of open and collaborative workspaces in hallways and common areas.

Technology

The integration of technology in Allen Hall received mixed reviews from those surveyed. While access to technology (labs, software, equipment, outlets, WiFi, televisions, etc.) was generally praised, the ability of users to control and/or understand available technologies was often criticized. Complaints ranged from the “fancy new [vending machines] based off technology”, to confusion of the function of the building’s climate controls, to “teachers who are seemingly not trained on how to use the classroom technology podium”. Thus, educating users on the function of building technologies may be as important as the provision of such technologies.

Lack of Space

By and large, space allocation and/or lack of space seemed to be the largest concern among survey respondents in open-ended response questions. Based on these responses, there seems to be a general anxiety that Allen Hall was inadequately planned to meet the growing demand for large lecture halls and classrooms, and most importantly, faculty office space. Numerous responses called for the building to further expand to meet the pressures for faculty office space, while others expressed fears that the faculty would someday not be united under one roof. As previously noted, several users questioned the abundance of collaborative space, wondering if these spaces would be more valuable if converted to faculty office space instead:
• “It was not planned to provide sufficient space for a growing body of faculty, development or support staff”
• “Faculty will have to move off site”
• “The fact that we’re already out of space for faculty offices is a problem. It means we’re going to be separated as a faculty in the foreseeable future”
• “Add a fourth floor for more office space”
• “Building is too small”
• “More office space and fewer collaborative spaces”

Survey Methodology

Future surveys should ensure to give respondents the ability to “pass” on any question presented to them. While this feature was added after being called to the Office’s attention just after the surveys release, some respondents went through the survey without the ability to opt out of questions that did not apply to them.

Additionally, several open-ended responses cited confusion when answering questions that required the reading of a floor plan of Allen Hall. In future surveys, thorough labeling of floors and spaces could ensure that all respondents can better understand questions referring to floor plans, even if they are not used to doing so.

Lastly, a clear distinction between Qualtrics Survey Software’s “hot spot” and “heat map” response options should be made in future surveys. Hot spot responses, employed in this survey, only allow respondents to select polygons predefined by the surveys creator. Heat mapping allows for more customized responses, where users can point and click on the exact area in a space that they like, dislike, etc. Using heat mapping in future surveys may reveal more detailed data of user preferences, ultimately yielding more beneficial results for the CPDC team to analyze.