University Commons Programming Plan

May 16, 2014
Introduction

The University Commons will bring together the campus community by creating opportunities for meaningful engagement among students, faculty, and staff. The signature facility will complete the core campus neighborhood – that historic area bounded by the Quad, Fulford, and the Commons, connected as well to important facilities along University Avenue – and will be experienced by all visitors and members of the campus community. That experience, whether formed by first impressions, or by the thousandth return to the heart of campus, will demonstrate, in untold ways both tangible and intangible, the University’s vision of a residential community dedicated to liberal education in its broadest sense. No building at Sewanee in recent memory will more clearly express the promise of, and our confidence in, that vision.

The experience of students, faculty, staff, and University visitors will depend vitally on the activities and functions that each of them see, and can take part in, in and around the building, as well as by the interior and exterior design of the facility itself. The space must be a hub for communication. Proximity and synergy of spaces, as much as the functional spaces themselves, will enable the building to fulfill its purpose. Certain University offices and service operations, strategically designed and located within the building, will attract students throughout the day, and contribute to a dynamic, active environment. At the same time, spaces for occasional events, for casual recreation, and for

Sources for ideas and design
- Sewanee’s community (students, faculty, staff)
- Student life report (Bivens)
- Visits to other student centers
- Mobile office movement (the Hub)
- Restaurants & Eateries
- Outdoor recreation spaces
- Modern office designs (Ideo)
- Entrepreneurial incubators
planned or serendipitous conversation will draw students, faculty, and staff to engage with each other, both in small groups and as a part of a larger whole. The building will express the University’s commitment to the environment and to sustainability, incorporating these values into the design and explicitly reaching out to Abbo’s Alley on two sides. In addition to promoting interaction among faculty, staff, and students, the building will serve as a central gathering space for events of up to 500-600 people (standing); provide late night and weekend programming; offer alcohol-free opportunities for student interaction; and assist in recruiting and retaining students.

The construction of the Commons will be the first, and the most important, step in re-envisioning the heart of campus. The planning for the Commons thus also incorporates the implications for the reuse of space in Walsh-Ellett, Cleveland Annex, Carnegie, the Bookstore and Globe building, and the EQB – the buildings encompassed by the ellipse in the opening figure – as well as, of course, Bishop’s Common. The design for new and renovated spaces will need to consider how the flow of people into buildings may change, and the degree to which people will approach buildings on foot.

Process and Next Steps

The planning process began in September 2013 with the appointment of the University Commons Planning Group and its charge to complete a programmatic plan for the Commons by the end of the academic year.

After initial conversation in October, the committee prepared and mounted a website, life.sewanee.edu/uc, to disseminate information and receive input from the Sewanee community over the course of the year. In November and December the committee held three lunches and four afternoon forums, inviting faculty or staff to each, as well as a combined faculty-staff-student forum. The notes from these forums were compiled and posted on the website. During these two months committee members
also met with various student groups, such as SGA and Interfaith, during their regular meetings.

In January and February, the committee used this information to outline, in short documents, needs for event space; for food, lounge, and entertainment space; for organizational and meeting space, and for offices and parking. The committee also reviewed a number of documents, including the 2011 (rev. 2013) Campus Master Plan, the Student Commons Inquiry prepared by former acting assistant dean of students Skip Bivens, floor plans of existing campus buildings, and floor plans and images of peer college facilities. In the context of the needs identified, the committee raised the question of the location of the Commons, considering alternative sites. The committee affirmed the thinking in the Campus Master Plan that the Thompson Union site remains the most attractive for the building: a building on that site can activate the center of campus; respond to the natural environment in Abbo’s Alley; and complete the “central neighborhood,” a collection of buildings that together present the full range of intellectual, social, and spiritual activity on campus, thereby offering excellent prospects for displaying that activity to prospective students and others. In March the committee made plans for additional meetings with groups on campus and for visits to other colleges to check the group’s preliminary conclusions against the experiences of others.

After spring break, members of the committee presented its preliminary conclusions to Career and Leadership Development staff, to staff in the Bishop’s Common, to representatives from food service and mail operations, to student groups including the Student Government Association, and to faculty and staff in a forum. In April, two committee members visited three colleges with notable facilities, touring the buildings and discussing the success of those buildings with students and staff in those buildings. The committee also met with representatives of Brailsford and Dunlavey, a capital project planning and management firm, to understand aspects of the planning and management process. All of this information formed the basis for a series of refinements to the preliminary conclusions, leading finally to this document completed in May 2014.

After the planning is complete, the University will engage one or more architects to take the desired functional and programmatic activities and design the building itself, and possibly also prepare designs for renovations to sites nearby, such as the Globe/Bookstore building.During that stage the architectural firm will meet staff from relevant offices to(9,19),(995,986)
understand more closely the spatial and functional needs of those offices. Then, once funding for the building is identified, construction will begin.

Planning Recommendations

The planning recommendations are divided into several sections:

The document concludes with the membership of the committee.

Design Features and Themes

The building should certainly respond to the surrounding architectural and physical environment, close both to the Quad and to Abbo’s Alley. Beyond this basic principle, other desired features are as follows:

Art and technology. The building provides an unusual opportunity in the integration of art and technology into public spaces. The Commons will offer a venue for the display of art, perhaps on a rotating basis, and to expressing benefits of connectedness. Traveling exhibits might find the University Commons a desirable venue.

Parking. The design must be sensitive to the parking needs that support the program of the building. The number of staff in the building will be somewhat greater than the number of staff in Thompson Union, and additional parking for these additional staff will need to be created nearby, perhaps behind the Bookstore/Globe building. The building will also need to provide access for regular food, mail, and package deliveries in smaller trucks. There is not a need for a large amount of parking, since on most days visitor parking outside Fulford should be sufficient, while for very large events the University will open up parking along University Avenue.
Rooftop. Creating a rooftop accessible by the elevator and stairs with some storage will allow for receptions, terraced activities, outdoor gatherings or informal activity and would demonstrate a commitment to sustainability by adding green and water catchment features. (as much as 5,000 sf)

Stairs and atrium. An atrium will be central to creating connections and synergies between main, upper and lower floors. Banners or international flags hanging the span of a floor can communicate events or other activities. (260 sf on each floor)

Sustainability. Core campus facilities must communicate the University’s commitment to sustainability. This building provides an unusual opportunity to express leadership in terms of building and environmental sustainability. The Commons should include a runoff catchment system and a greywater system to mitigate runoff and erosion, particularly given the building’s proximity to Abbo’s Alley.

Upper floors. Openings to patios, porches, or balconies above the treeline are desirable. These would permit watching sunrise and sunset, processions from the Chapel, and other events.
Visibility to others. Most areas will require openness, like that of duPont, though which students can see each other. Spaces along the perimeter of the building should help bring the outdoors indoors, similar to features of Harris Commons and Snowden. Glass and light are essential materials. Sliding or rollup doors are an option.

Office and Service Providers in the Commons

University offices and service providers necessary for an active, dynamic environment in the Commons include

- Babson Center for Global Commerce, with visible Bloomberg Terminals

- Career and Leadership Development (CLD)

- Community-related offices, variously called “Community Engagement”, “Outreach”, and other titles not yet anticipated. Depending on the space, there is an opportunity for an office for a lay chaplain.

Note: Babson, Outreach & CLD should be clustered on the same floor or on adjacent floors. They could share an interview room, high-tech conference services, and open informal spaces for major fairs or lectures. These areas could also share hub spaces.
Total for the above: 3,800-5,000 sq ft

- **Food provider**: Pub. On a lower level, a grill that can serve food into a larger environment, which can be controlled for beer service for those over 21, should offer lunch, dinner, and snacks for late evening crowds and offer programmatic offerings like acoustic music, comedy, or dinner theatre. (The days and times of beer service will need to be determined later in concert with programmatic offerings.) Seating will range from small tables to 8-10 person booths to accommodate groups of friends, student organization leaders, advising groups, interactive programs, and study groups. Screens will provide access to major cultural, political, or sporting events.

- **Outdoor covered and uncovered seating** as well as a fire pit, garage door, or other outdoor features, adjoining Abbo’s Alley, will also increase visibility and capacity to attract individuals and groups during peak times. The Pub should have certain items that can be purchased with Tiger Dollars. (3,000 sf)

---

1 All square feet estimates are provisional and will require closer review by the architectural firm.
- **Food provider: Café.** On a middle level, a coffee shop would provide grab-and-go items, healthy foods, convenience items, and coffee and teas. This operation could support informal areas and pods of meeting rooms, as well as a larger, multi-purpose space to serve as a venue for films or lectures, and even rooftop seating. The Café should not have an institutional feel, but rather an informal feel, and patrons can gather in nearby seating, including areas near the grill service below. The Café will likely not have a grill. Students should be able to purchase some items with Tiger Dollars. (1,500 sf)

Note: The food service operations, as all food operations at the University, should provide some opportunities for student employment, integrating students into an attractive, vibrant operation.

- **Post Office/package dropoff and pickup facility.** The location may be determined by vehicular access. It should be located near a doorway to draw students, faculty and staff. This location may very well free up space in Fulford, where a separate mail facility would no longer be necessary. This facility should be near spaces for purchasing and consuming food. (3,100 sf)

- **Staff desk and office.** The building will need to be staffed with a manager during its hours of operation. This would serve as an information center. Nearby would be a touchpad screen providing additional information and possibly small, freestanding ATM’s. (600 sf)
• An office space near the Hub (see below) for one or two staff persons closely involved with student activities and particularly organizations likely to meet in the Hub-like space, described below, such as the Program Board. The choice of the staff position housed near the Hub may change over time.

Careful attention will need to be paid to provide occasional access to the Commons by smaller trucks carrying mail, individual packages, and food.

Other Spaces in the Commons

Required:

*Event spaces.* A defined area, capable of seating perhaps 200 people for a meal, would serve as a central campus event space. It could be reserved for many functions, including student organization events, banquets, parties, films, live performances, arts and crafts fairs, conferences, fashion shows, rallies, and tabling. A catering kitchen located nearby will support the space, and the space will include either a fixed stage with sound system or sufficient nearby storage to enable the movement of both as needed. This space will require built-in technology. The space should be adjacent to an atrium and outdoor terrace, viewing a natural area or Sewanee’s inspiring architecture, to maximize its effectiveness. (3,400 sf) An
example room of good size could hold 515 people standing, 368 in chairs, and 172 in tables and chairs.

Entertainment. A multipurpose lecture/film viewing space; space for group games (pool, shuffleboard, foosball, video games are some examples); space for performances, with easy access to food and beverages. Incorporating the ticket booth from Thompson Union is desirable. (2,500 sf)

Very likely the large spaces above will be one space.

Hub-like space for student organizations and others. Flexible, “Hub”-like space for student organizations and for meetings of various sizes is needed. This is temporary space for seasonal work. For instance, the Mountain Goat needs space only at certain intervals during the year. Computers, copiers, printers, creative supplies and other equipment are necessary.

Lounges and other informal space. Whether entryways, lounge/study spaces, or gathering areas designed around a piano, a TV, a pool table, or a cornhole game, these areas for conversation and collaboration are needed for meeting the often-changing needs of the campus community.

Meeting spaces. Several medium-sized meeting spaces (12-20) and a large meeting space (50). These would be flexibly designed to accommodate different meetings or classes, and would be equipped with appropriate technology. (small: 150 sf; large: 750 sf)

Storage for events. The building will require adequate space to store the furniture and other equipment (lighting, stage) to support diverse events. Storage should be available on each floor and be easily accessible to an elevator effectively located.

Storage for student organizations. Student organizations should have lockable space located near the Hub-like space for use as needed. Secondary needs, if space and design allow:
News hub. Displays of on-campus events and perhaps TVs playing national news.

Storage for the office of student organizations, to support organizations such as the Program Board.

Wellness spaces. Space for yoga, dance, and modular workout equipment for non-athletes would be desirable. This may provide an opportunity for a wellness coordinator office. (1,488 sf plus 200 sf for office)

Note: there is an additional need on campus for a space in which groups may engage in the practices of different religions. This space would require storage for various objects of the different groups, and would benefit from a kitchen. The space might be used for a variety of purposes, so long as there was a standard of respect for the space. To the extent that the meetings require quiet and peacefulness, such a space is in tension with the dynamic activity envisioned for the Commons, but might be located in a corner away from the remainder of the building. An alternative approach is to designate a house close to the center of campus that could be separated into several spaces.
Office and Service Providers in the Bookstore/Globe Building

The Bookstore/Globe building offers another significant chance to engage students along University Avenue. The building should be renovated to include the Sewanee Outing Program, the Bike Repair Shop, and a cluster of other offices, and ideally include large displays of student activity. Most of the storage for the SOP, now in seven separate spaces, could be combined in the basement. These operations have significant needs for loading and unloading vans (which could be accommodated both in front of and behind the building) and for storage, which could be accommodated in the basement. The cluster of offices should bring together a significant number of students. These offices might be selected from student life, academic services, or student services, and could change as needs change.

Renovations to the Bookstore/Globe building should incorporate several of the design components central to the vision of the Commons: the spaces should be easy to access, should feature open space or transparent walls so that others can see activity, and should streamline operations.

Parking behind the Bookstore/Globe building will require a redesign and improvement to meet the needs of loading and unloading goods and equipment, as well as of people going on day trips.
Possibilities for Offices and Service Providers in Carnegie/Cleveland Annex and the Bishop’s Common

We anticipate that Carnegie/Cleveland Annex will provide academic space, or space for clustering related offices. A natural cluster would include College academic affairs, student life administration, study abroad, and the registrar’s office. Another would be student accounts, student employment, and financial aid. In either case these clusters would respond to the expectation of the 2011 (rev. 2013) Campus Master Plan that the first floor of Walsh-Ellett will be renovated into academic space, including faculty offices and classrooms. Consistent with that plan, the Bishop’s Common would serve well as an administration building, incorporating some of the offices formerly on the first floor of Walsh-Ellett.

University Commons Planning Group

John Ford, Regent and former Senior Vice President and Dean of Campus Life at Emory University
Eric Hartman, Dean of Students at the College
Deborah Jackson, Associate Dean of Community Life at the School of Theology
Tom Macfie, University Chaplain and Dean of All Saints' Chapel
Mary Ottley, student Trustee and a junior in the College
John Swallow, Provost, chair
Will Watson, Assistant Director of the Sewanee Outing Program
Doug Williams, Frank W. Wilson Professor of Economics