KU business school releases designs of new building

By Ben Unglesbee
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While not quite reality yet, this week the hopes and dreams of Kansas University business school dean Neeli Bendapudi became the next best thing to reality: official drawings.

After raising nearly $60 million in private funds for a new facility and seeing the early phases of construction begin this spring, the KU School of Business is inching ever closer to building a new home for itself. On Tuesday the school released designs showing the interior and exterior of the future building that will replace Summerfield Hall as the school’s home in fall 2016.

"This has been an evolution," Bendapudi said of the planning process, the first one she’s ever been involved with for a building of this scale.

In designing the building, Dave Broz, the principal of Chicago-based architecture firm Gensler, which led the project, and a graduate of the KU architecture program, worked with the school and collaborators to juggle the competing needs and interests of everyone who would use and even see the building.
Architects had to conjure a building that would satisfy students, faculty, administrators, visiting business leaders, community members and campus visitors. Bendapudi and the school also wanted the building to fit in on campus, pay homage to KU's architectural history, meet the needs of today's students, and project into the future.

Out of those considerations came the designs released Monday, which show a building facade with some limestone and a swath of the red-colored roofing, reminiscent of KU's most iconic buildings, but also laden with windows, in a nod to modern corporate buildings.

The building will be composed of two wings: a north wing that will hold faculty, advising and administrative offices, and a south wing, which will house student classrooms and labs. Running between them will be an open atrium that designers and school officials hope will act as a commons area that will entice people to stay, chat and collaborate.

Designs call for 19 classrooms, 202 offices, a 350-seat auditorium and a 125-seat auditorium, plus labs, a business incubator and spaces for student collaborations, research, industry partnerships and professional development, according to the school.

Since initial design ideas were released to the public, the building has become shorter and squatter, going from six projected stories to four, and from 166,000 square feet to 155,000. Thinking about how people would move through the building changed the calculus of its configuration.

"If you want students going up and down more easily, and want faculty less dependent on using elevators and escalators, let's make it easier for people to walk up and down," Bendapudi said.

Bendapudi said she was adamant about making the building "student-centric," as well as open. She didn't want "a single space where students don't feel welcome." That even includes her office, housed in the "dean's suite" on the south side of the building. In the designs the suite looks out on an open, outdoor seating area, which in turn looks in on the dean's office. "If I'm in, people know it," Bendapudi said.

Yet Bendapudi said she was careful not to press her own vision of the building on the designs. Rather, she wanted to open the process up to input from everyone.

"We're very conscious that we're building something that should stand the test of time for multiple constituencies," she said.
KU School of Business building designs

With construction set to begin soon, a new $65.7 million dollar facility for the Kansas University School of Business is set to open fall 2016. The building is designed to encourage student and faculty collaboration, industry partnerships and high-tech education.

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This rendering shows the ground floor of the main atrium of the newly designed, soon-to-be built KU School of Business building. The building will stand across Naismith Drive from Allen Fieldhouse and will open in 2016.

This rendering of the new KU School of Business building shows the third floor from the perspective of the north wing, which will primarily house faculty, advising and administrative offices, and looks toward the south wing, which will hold student classrooms and labs.


This rendering of the proposed new KU School of Business building shows a large atrium in between the north and south wings of the building. Designed as a commons area, designers and school officials hope it will be used for collaboration and conversation. The building will also house spaces for business incubation and student research, such as the Bloomberg terminal lab, shown here with a blue exterior.

The south entrance of the new KU School of Business building, shown here in a rendering, will include landscaping meant to reflect the wild grasses of the Kansas prairie.


This rendering shows the main entrance of the soon-to-be constructed KU School of Business building. The entrance will open onto Naismith and is designed to be open and transparent so visitors can see inside.


The south side of the newly designed KU
School of Business building, shown here in a rendering, will include a dean's suite with a terrace behind it. Below the terrace is the roof to an underground auditorium that seats 350 students.


This rendering shows the proposed new Kansas University School of Business Building from the Allen Fieldhouse area. The building's exterior is meant to fit in with the limestone facade’s and red roofs of historic KU buildings.