

New library to transform Monroe Park Campus center

Renovation and expansion begins in March

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The center of the Monroe Park Campus soon will have a new focal point. [Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries](#) has received approval to begin construction to expand and renovate the James Branch Cabell Library. The project will add 93,000 square feet of new space to the facility and improve an additional 63,000 square feet of existing space.

The \$50.8 million construction project will begin on the more than 40-year-old Monroe Park Campus library next March. It is scheduled to be completed in September 2015.

The [new library](#) will feature an iconic design that embraces a student-centered learning environment, where academic study, technology, collaboration, social learning and online learning are supported and encouraged.

“VCU’s new library will have the most prominent spot on campus of any library building in Virginia, and more students will use it each day than any other library in the commonwealth,” said John Ulmschneider, university librarian. “I cannot imagine a building anywhere in Virginia that will be more visible to students, faculty, and visitors, affect more students, or have a greater impact on student success.”

On Oct. 4 at their monthly meeting, members of the Cabell Library Undergraduate Advisory Committee discussed the new library’s universal appeal, impact and its central location.

“It’s the first big campus construction project that *everyone* can use,” said Lauren McClellan, a senior mass communications student.

Michelle Taylor, a junior anthropology major, sees the new library as a lure for graduate students because of enhanced space dedicated for graduate students.

“We have a library on the MCV Campus that is for grad students but not on the Monroe Park Campus,” Taylor said. “Now, I want to consider going to graduate school here to take advantage of this great new place.”

“I think it’s really important that the library is at the center of campus,” said Luis Martinez, a senior studying French and Spanish. “It sends a message that we take our studies seriously. Other schools may have a football field or a gym at the center of campus, we have our library.”

Added senior mass communications major Caitlin Puffenberger, “it will be the physical focal point for the Monroe Park Campus.”

The new library will answer critical overcrowding and around-the-clock student needs for workspaces, computers and library resources.

Cabell Library, which opened with two stories in 1970, grew to its current size in 1975. Built to serve 17,000 students and house two million volumes, Cabell now serves a campus of 32,000 and has two million-plus volumes. In the 10 years from 2003 to 2013, visitors to Cabell doubled. Today, operating around the clock to serve diverse users – from Sunday at 10 a.m. to Friday at 10 p.m. without closing – Cabell is the busiest academic library in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It saw more than two million visitors in 2012-13; 35,000 of its visitors worked in the library between the hours of 2 a.m. and 7 a.m. Compared to other academic libraries in the state, it offers the least amount of square footage per student. The expansion will help remedy that shortfall.

Ninety percent of the new space is designed for students and faculty — not library materials or staff. A new entranceway will face Shafer Court and the trees and green space on the Cathedral side of the library will be preserved. Other additions and changes are:

- A dedicated space for faculty and graduate students will enjoy an inspirational view, looking east from the fourth floor.
- Media creation space on the lowest level will provide access to state-of-the-art and experimental audio and video content, visual and graphic design and production tools, 3D printers and other advanced media resources to support academic projects, including high-end computers for video manipulation and data visualization, along with advanced immersive technology spaces.
- An expanded Starbucks will remain integrated with the library.
- A large, flexible, media-rich presentation and event space will provide a stage for many academic programs and VCU events.

- Artwork, exhibits and event space will showcase VCU's arts programs.
- Instructional spaces will incorporate robust technology and flexible furnishings.
- Expanded space for Cabell's Special Collections and Archives will allow easier access and more use of these rare materials.
- Glass facades will reveal interior activity, creating a welcoming beacon that draws the VCU community into the library.
- Street levels will provide pedestrian-scaled facades that welcome the campus into the building and engage with adjacent outdoor space.
- Pedestrian flow into and around the new building will be flexible, open and free-flowing. The design minimizes obstacles to pedestrian traffic from the new classroom building north to Shafer Court, and from the Compass west, north and south. The east pedestrian traffic approach should not be affected.
- The building design is targeting LEED Silver certification at a minimum.

The library will remain open with full services during construction.

The new library will be a symbol of progress, said mechanical engineering student Kendall Moore. "It shows how strong VCU is and gives a sense of forward movement."