



# HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE – OKANAGAN COLLEGE

by ROBIN BRUNET



To date, Okanagan College (OC) has graduated more than 11,000 health care professionals since its original health building opened in 1963. With the College's new Health Sciences Centre opening its doors this year, students now have access to a world-class learning environment to train for health-science careers.

The 2,800 square-metre facility is a replacement space for labs and classrooms in which practical nurses, dental assistants, health-care assistants, and other health and social development students train. It is also equipped with leading-edge technology to mimic modern health-care workplace settings. The B.C. government contributed \$15.4 million of the \$18.9 million total project cost; generous support from donors throughout the College region is helping OC fund the remainder.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY GEC ARCHITECTURE

Thanks to a close collaboration between the College and GEC Architecture, the Health Sciences Centre also pushes the envelope of sustainable practice by targeting

LEED Gold, the Zero Carbon Building Standard, and Silver Certification of the WELL Educational Pilot Program. Plus, input from representatives from the College's Indigenization Committee as well as members of the Westbank First Nation ensured the design included extensive Indigenous integration.

Jim Hamilton, Okanagan College president, explains, "From the shape of the building itself to the environment around it, which includes an Indigenous garden, there are many examples of Indigenous knowledge and culture that informed the design and build."

Peter Osborne, partner at GEC Architecture, says, "The College rightfully had a deep commitment to engaging the Indigenous community as well as high standards for sustainability, and this drove the design process when we started work on the project in 2017. This is how we prefer to develop buildings, rather than going in with preconceived proposals, because all stakeholders have a meaningful role in bringing a new building to life."

From this collaborative approach emerged distinct design features. The concept of weaving is important to the Syilx people of the Okanagan Nation and was integrated into exterior and interior elements. "Inside, we achieved the crisscrossing pattern with glulam structure, and for the exterior a two-tone white fibre cement panel cladding – achieved by two different levels of sandblasting – imparted an abstract fabric appearance," says Osborne.

GEC included a light well in the design that intelligently filters natural light down to the floors and spaces below. The building incorporates faculty offices, program delivery spaces, teaching laboratories, and student gathering areas across all three floors

of the building – not segregated but purposefully integrated – with standardized space sizes. This allows for the future re-purposing of spaces as programs or research priorities change.

To keep the window-to-wall ratio down, classrooms were glazed facing the interior (which also contributed to a light, airy, interior ambiance) and punched windows were added to the exterior in a seemingly random pattern. "The main atrium contains concrete floors and hemlock and green accents to help bring outside elements inside," says Osborne. Spaces for art were designated inside the building including glazed guardrail panels and a three-storey high feature wall in the student gathering area.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY GEC ARCHITECTURE

Allmar supplied the architectural hardware, automatic operators, hollow metal doors and frames, wood doors, washroom accessories and miscellaneous building specialties, as well as supplied and installed the access control.

Equally important to the campus setting, the Health Sciences Centre was located between two buildings and deliberately stepped back to create an entry plaza connecting the three buildings.

Spencer Calhoun, senior project manager at Stuart Olson, concedes that it took extra time and planning to ensure all building materials met the numerous sustainability and wellness Gold standards. “For example, solar panels for the roof were sourced from Spain and had to be certified when they reached Canada,” he says. “When the pandemic hit, the flow of many other products were interrupted, but only temporarily.”

Calhoun says his biggest challenge was subsurface conditions: “We had to remove abandoned piping and reroute storm, sewer, and water infrastructure to make way for our building. Additionally, a narrow service corridor between buildings and an especially cold 2018-19 winter affected subsurface scope, but the team tackled each challenge as it came.”

Hamilton points out that the call for health care professionals is expected to grow over the next decade: recent labour market data predicts the need for as many as 25,000 nurses required to staff B.C.’s health care system over the next ten years.

Given these numbers, the Health Sciences Centre is a critical addition to the Okanagan College campus, as well as a great example of a facility whose design and construction promotes wellness. “By pursuing the Well Building standard and LEED Gold, every corner of the Centre has been designed with this consideration,” says Hamilton. “We’re very proud of the way this new facility will only continue to enhance the great health and social development education students have always received at the College.” **A**

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**LOCATION**

1000 K.L.O. Road, Kelowna, B.C.

**OWNER/DEVELOPER**

Okanagan College

**ARCHITECT**

GEC Architecture

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR**

Stuart Olson

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**

RJC Engineers

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**

CIMA+

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**

Falcon Engineering

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**

WSP Canada

**LEED CONSULTANT**

EcoAmmo Sustainability Consulting Inc.

**TOTAL SIZE**

2,800 square metres

**TOTAL COST**

\$18.9 million

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