

Suffolk University

Academic Building,
20 Somerset Street

Boston, Massachusetts

NBBJ PROJECT CASE STUDY

A Beacon of Education

SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY

Academic Building, 20 Somerset Street

Boston, Massachusetts

The new academic building at 20 Somerset Street brings state-of-the-art teaching environments and an enhanced sense of place to Suffolk University, one of Boston's largest higher education institutions, with more than 9,000 students.





VISION

To stand out in Boston's extremely competitive higher education sector, Suffolk University saw a need to modernize its teaching spaces and provide a more coherent student experience on its scattered urban campus.

BREAKTHROUGH

An institutional master plan guided the university to consolidate classrooms and student amenities in Boston's Government Center, allowing not only for the construction of state-of-the-art teaching spaces, but also for an improved relationship between the university and residential Beacon Hill.

VALUE

For the first time in its history, Suffolk University has a true campus center, and a once-desolate street corner left over from Boston's era of urban renewal has become a vibrant plaza filled with activity at all times of the day.

INSIGHT

Just as people value cities for the energy and vibrancy of urban life, students in big cities today seek out dynamic, interactive educational experiences, both inside the classroom and out.

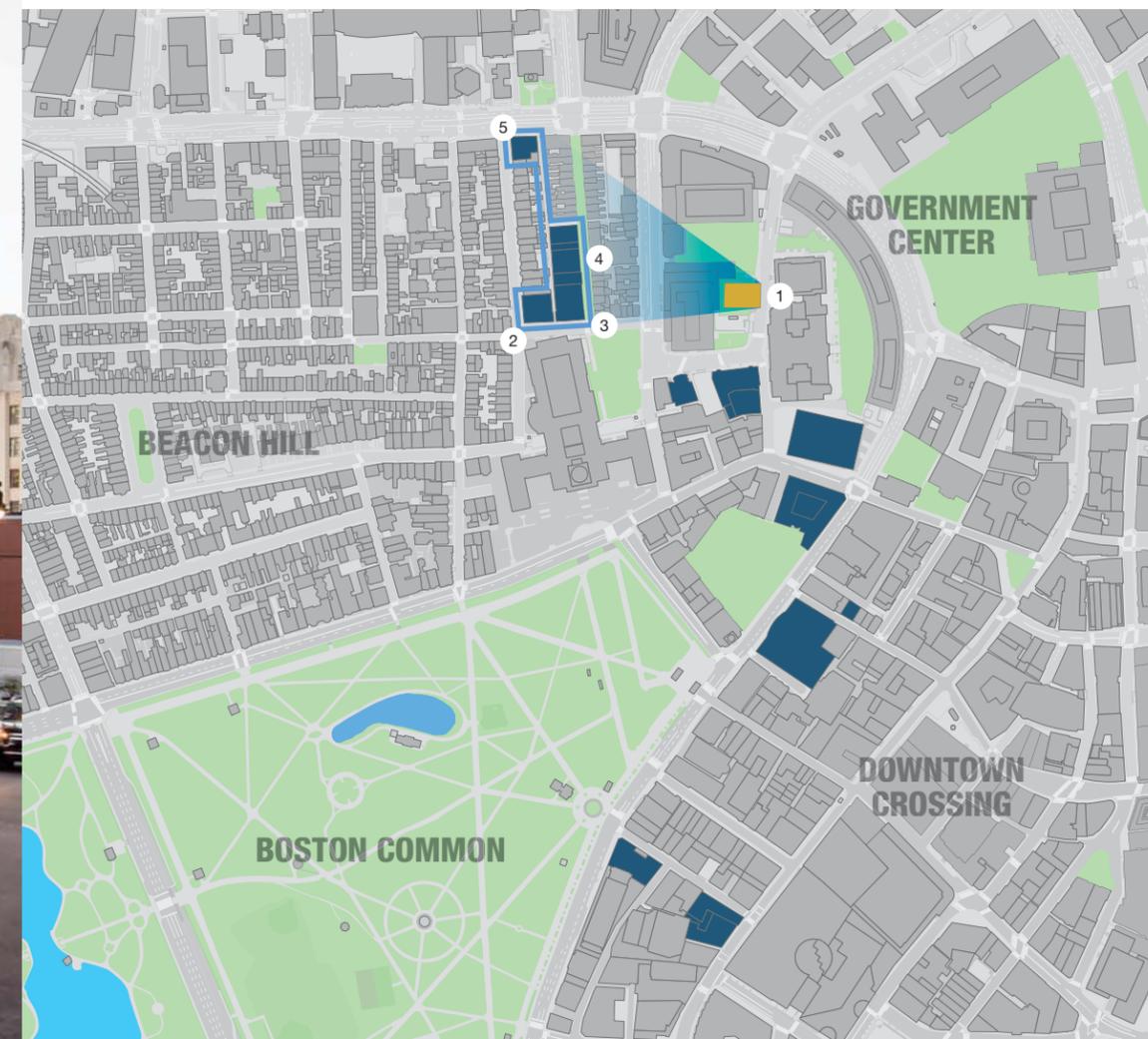


Recentering the Campus

Suffolk University's urban campus occupies more than a dozen buildings scattered throughout Beacon Hill and downtown Boston. In 2009, the university undertook an institutional master plan — led by NBBJ — that identified a top priority: consolidation within the downtown neighborhoods of Government Center and Downtown Crossing, away from residential Beacon Hill.

Both neighborhood and university benefit: Beacon Hill residents preserved the quiet, historic charm of their neighborhood, while students and faculty enjoy an invigorated campus with a newly distinct center and sense of place.

NBBJ continues to help Suffolk University fulfill the master plan, most recently with an interior fit-out for the Sawyer Business School, which will cluster the university's business and law programs within Sargent Hall.



Suffolk University Campus

The project relocates 1,200 classroom seats and a 200-seat cafeteria from the Fenton, Archer, Donahue and Ridgeway buildings in Beacon Hill, and consolidates them at 20 Somerset Street.

- 1 20 Somerset Street
- 2 John E. Fenton Building & Annex, 28 & 32 Derne Street
- 3 Gleason L. & Hiram J. Archer Building, 20 Derne Street
- 4 Frank J. Donahue Building, 41 Temple Street
- 5 Ridgeway Building, 148 Cambridge Street

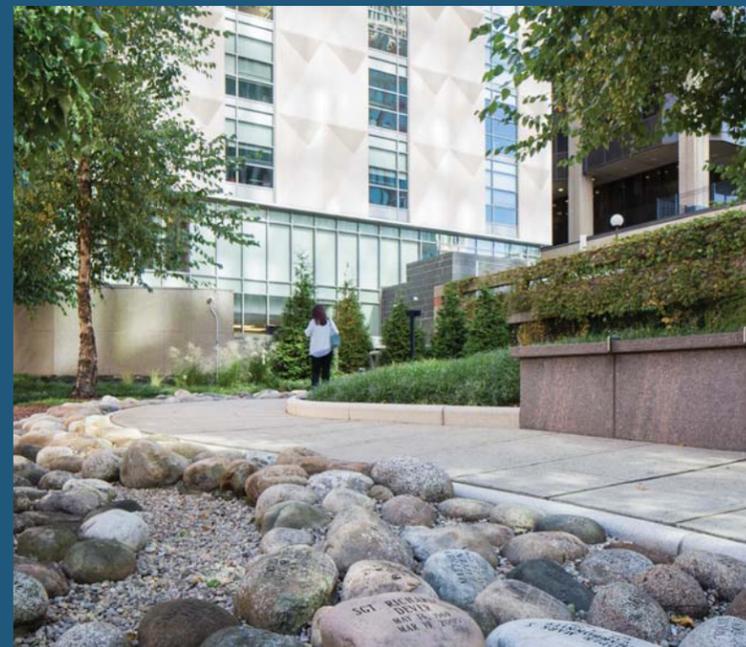
The Crossroads of Campus

Suffolk University also replaced the state-owned Roemer Plaza, a formerly dysfunctional, uninviting brick platform left over from the days of urban renewal. Today the plaza features new seating, lighting, permeable paving, trees and other plantings, and improved pedestrian circulation and accessibility. For the very first time, the university has a true campus center, filled by students, faculty, state employees and the public at all times of day.



Preserving the Garden of Peace

To the north lies the Garden of Peace, an oasis of respite amidst the bustle of downtown Boston. 20 Somerset Street was designed for minimal impact on the garden, with a more subdued façade on the north elevation, screened loading areas and a roof height that conforms to the preexisting building on site.





B A 96-seat lecture hall allows for more traditional modes of instruction.



G With 200 seats, the new dining hall provides space for socialization as well as study.



1 The lobby, with windows to the north and south that bring daylight into the heart of the building, is a hub of activity with student lounges and connections to the dining hall and adjacent classrooms.



2 In addition to the traditional classrooms, two studio-style spaces enable more group-centered learning.



3 20 Somerset Street modernizes Suffolk University with flexible learning environments, current technology, high ceilings and ample daylight.



4 Flexible classroom design allowed for easy conversion of the 4th floor into specialized media spaces for the Communications & Journalism Department.



5 New faculty offices are located adjacent to the teaching laboratories to encourage greater interaction between students and faculty.



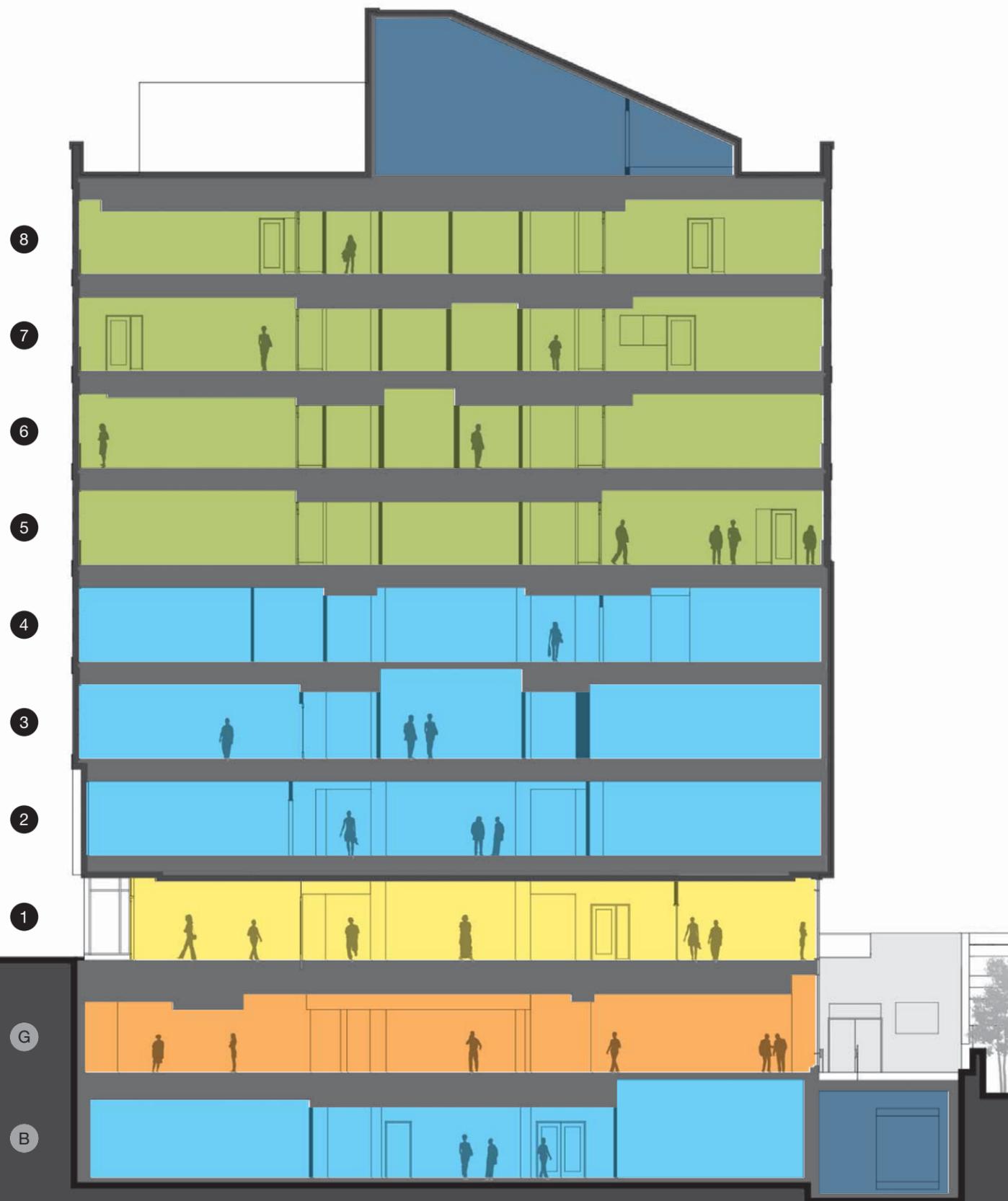
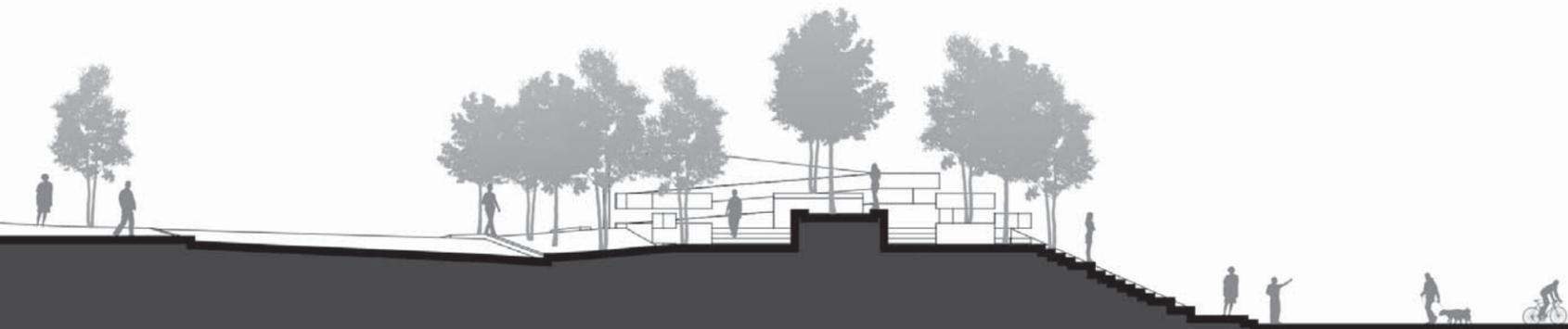
6 Seminar rooms augment the laboratory spaces for smaller classes or informal meetings.



7 Glass walls in the laboratories showcase the scientific activity within, while doubling as writable teaching surfaces.



8 New teaching laboratories on the upper levels have modernized the university's general science curriculum.



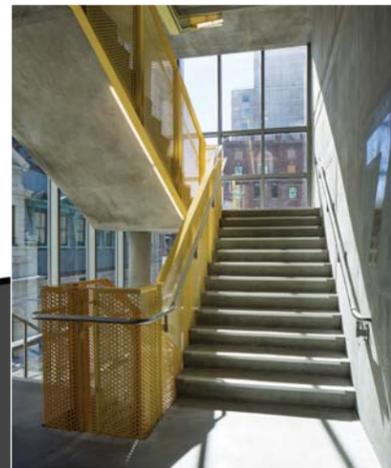
● Service / Mechanical ● Science ● Classrooms ● Lobby ● Dining

A Hub of Integrated Learning

With four floors of flexible classrooms and four floors of laboratories for the College of Arts & Sciences — as well as faculty offices, student lounges and a cafeteria — this “mixed-use” academic building fosters an interdisciplinary learning environment and promotes a special synergy between arts and sciences education.

Marking the Way

In contrast to the building's exterior, which is restrained to complement its neighbors, the interior color scheme — based on the nitrate scale, a common tool used in measuring water quality — brings visual energy to public spaces and encourages students to use the primary staircase. A simple wayfinding technique, this continuous color palette helps people locate themselves within the building while connecting back to the science curriculum.



A Flexible Teaching Platform

20 Somerset Street is designed for a new educational paradigm in which students collaborate more closely with faculty and peers. Learning spaces can scale up and down and equally support team-based work, instructional lectures and focused study.

SOCIAL SPACES FOR SOCIAL LEARNING

Because a significant portion of a student's education happens outside the classroom, informal lounges on every floor provide places to meet, study, collaborate, continue conversations after class, or even just relax.



SUPPORTING NEW PEDAGOGIES

Two studio-style, project-based spaces enable a "flipped classroom" pedagogy, which emphasizes in-class interactivity with the professor and student colleagues. In place of the traditional lectern arrangement, whiteboards and projection screens cover three sides of the room, creating an in-the-round learning environment.

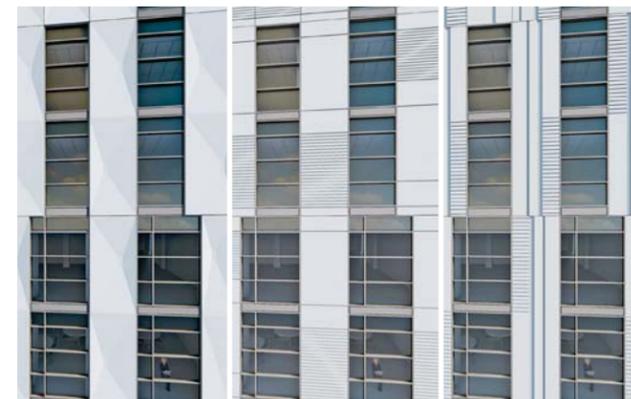


RESEARCH FOR LIFE

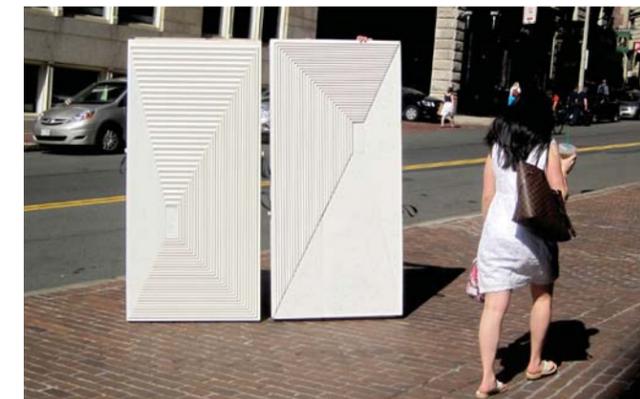
With four floors of new teaching laboratories, the university is able to greatly extend its commitment to prepare graduates for careers in Massachusetts' thriving life sciences industries.

Design That's More Than Skin-Deep

For the exterior of 20 Somerset Street, Suffolk University and the design team chose to use precast concrete for its affordability, energy efficiency, durability and its aesthetic fit with other concrete and masonry buildings nearby.



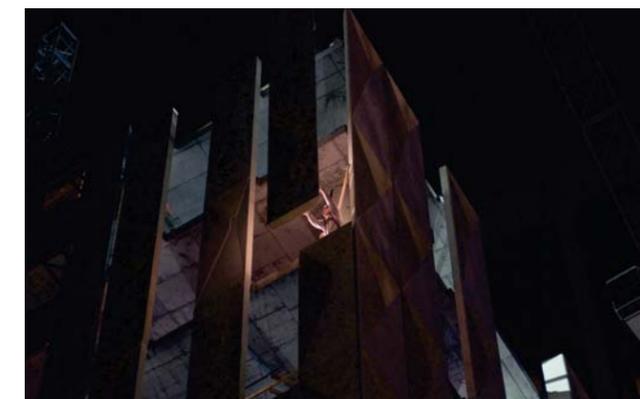
1 First, dozens of precast panel options were modeled digitally using Revit and Rhino, and a few options were chosen to develop further.



2 Mockups of the preferred panel designs were fabricated at full scale, then tested in a variety of lighting conditions.



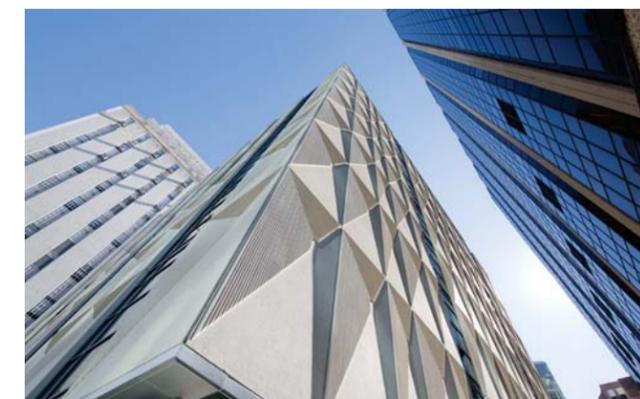
3 Once the panel designs were finalized, master cabinetmakers built the wooden formwork for the concrete. With offsite fabrication, the panels were assembled more quickly and safely, and at lower costs.



4 The panels were installed overnight, avoiding disruptions to other construction schedules.



5 Each panel is only 5 to 7 inches thick, but involves a chamfered patterning that casts ever-changing shadows.



6 The result is a forced-perspective, trompe l'oeil effect that brings depth and visual interest throughout the day.



CLIENT
Suffolk University

SIZE
110,000 SF

COMPLETION DATE
August 2015

CONSTRUCTION
\$62 Million

COMPONENTS
Flexible classrooms, teaching laboratories, TV production / editing suite, 96-seat lecture hall, faculty offices, student lounges, dining facility, public plaza

SERVICES PROVIDED
Full architectural design, interior design, permitting

SUSTAINABILITY
Tracking LEED Silver

ABOUT NBBJ

NBBJ creates innovative places and experiences for organizations worldwide, and designs environments, communities and buildings that enhance people's lives. Founded in 1943, NBBJ is an industry leader in healthcare and corporate facilities and has a strong presence in the commercial, civic, science, education and sports markets. The firm has won numerous awards and has been recognized as one of the world's "Top Ten Most Innovative Architecture Firms" by *Fast Company* magazine.

NBBJ has more than 750 employees in eleven offices worldwide, including Beijing, Boston, Columbus, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, New York, Pune, San Francisco, Seattle and Shanghai. Clients include Alibaba, Amazon, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Boeing, Cambridge University, Cleveland Clinic, GlaxoSmithKline, Google, Massachusetts General Hospital, Microsoft, Reebok, Salk Institute, Samsung, Stanford University, Starbucks, Telenor, Tencent and the Wellcome Trust.