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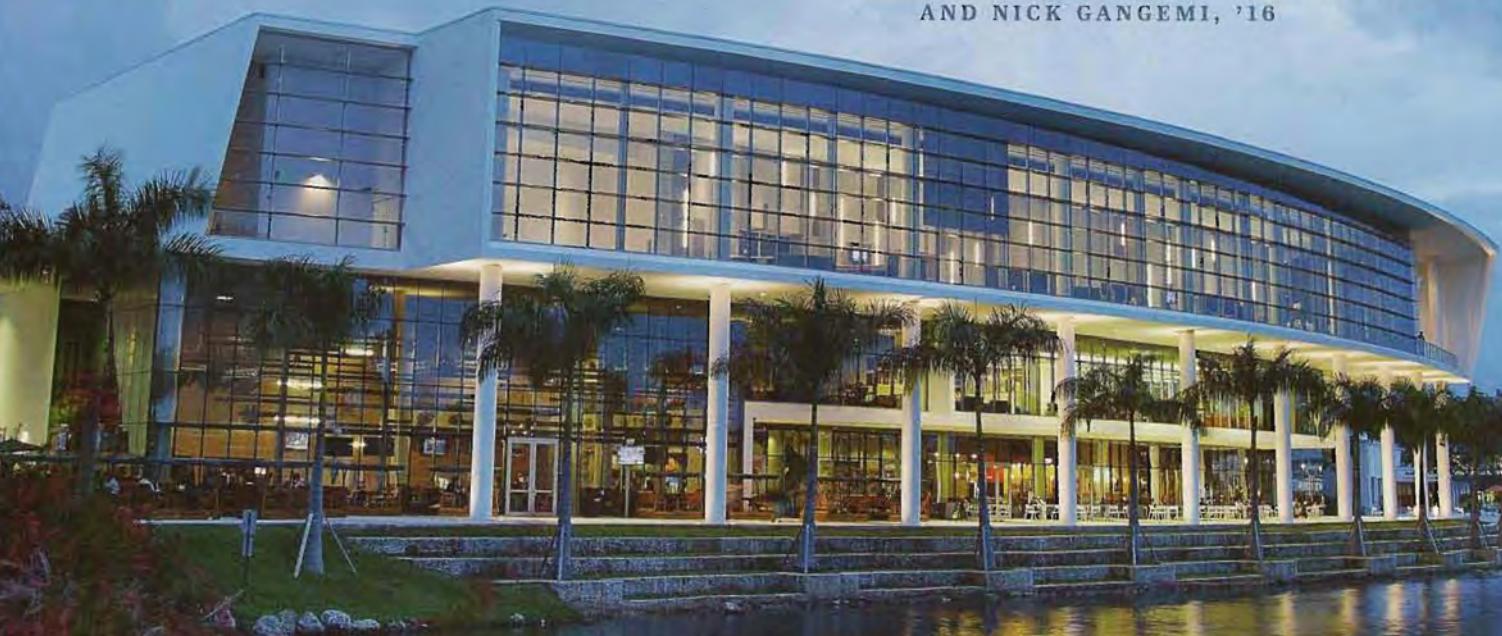
Redefining Student Life

UM's sparkling Student Center Complex, a decade in the making,
creates a world-class hub for student activities.

GRAND Opening

It is still new, but the much-anticipated Student Activities Center already feels like home to thousands of University of Miami students.

BY ROBERT C. JONES JR.
PHOTOS BY MONICA HERNDON, '14
AND NICK GANGEMI, '16



FOR ECOSYSTEM SCIENCE AND POLICY MAJOR KAMARI DURLEY, it's the 24-hour study lounge—"there's no other place like it on campus," he says. For student leader Mike Piacentino, it's the centralized student-group offices that are facilitating collaboration. And for junior Stephanie Baguidy, it's the "phenomenal ballrooms" and convenient access to organizations such as United Black Students. "This is a place I'll come to every day," she says.

The decade-in-the-making Student Activities Center, a three-story, glass-enclosed knockout on the shores of Lake Osceola, has “transformed the look and feel of our campus,” says UM President Donna E. Shalala, who proposed the project not long after she arrived at the University. “It’s more than a stunning building. It’s at the heart of student learning, living, and playing, and it sets the pulse for an exciting and rewarding college experience.”

Among the SAC’s features: a two-story Rathskeller built near the site of the original eatery and campus pub that was demolished to make room for the center; a Starbucks (the Coral Gables campus now has two of the popular coffee shops);



a media suite that houses *The Miami Hurricane*, *Ibis Yearbook*, and *Distraction* magazine; offices and cubicles for more than 70 student organizations; a grand ballroom that can seat more than 1,000 people and be divided into three sections; the Scott and Susan Fleischner Kornspan Study Lounge; and extensive meeting and activity space.

“It’s bright, lively, and fun, which is exactly what you need for a student activities center,” says Denis Hector, acting dean of UM’s School of Architecture.



The design of the Student Activities Center connects interior and exterior spaces, offering vistas of the lush, tropical campus.

Student Activities Center by the Numbers

119,368 square feet – total SAC size

15,137 square feet of terrazzo

12,727 square feet of vinyl

3,726 square feet of carpet

8,638 square feet of sealed concrete

\$46.5 million – total project cost

\$25.2 million – fundraising

\$55 million – SAC funds from student fees projected over 30 years

SOURCE: Campus Planning & Development

Level one has ample room to study and socialize; level two houses more than 70 student groups; and level three boasts a grand ballroom.



Designed by Miami-based Arquitectonica and built by Fort Lauderdale's Moss & Associates, the hurricane-themed building has beach and wave, wind, and raindrop terrazzo patterns on its first, second, and third floors, respectively. The center is designed to achieve silver LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification with spaces that maximize daylight, a rainwater management system, native landscaping, and a recycling program.

But extensive student-centered

office space is arguably its most important benefit. "To have a building that's 119,000 square feet and where the vast majority of that space is for students shows UM's commitment to the student body," says Chelsea Buffington, associate director of the Student Center Complex, which includes the SAC as well as the renovated Whitten University Center, the refurbished patio and stage area, Foote Green, and The Rock.

Bhumi Patel, president of UM Student Government, which has an

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Starbucks is one of several food and beverage purveyors located on the first floor of the center.

office at the new building, says the center was "built for students and, in a sense, by students." The Student Center Complex Advisory Council, consisting of a member from each of the student groups, met regularly to discuss everything from the building's operating policies to the furniture that would be installed, she notes.

"We wanted a space that would be conducive to facilitating great communication among students, and with this center we've achieved that," says Patel, who believes the center's inclusion of Graduate Student Association and Law School Student Organization suites can only increase camaraderie among students.

Patricia A. Whitely, vice president



"Imagine the Chinese Students and Scholars Association collaborating with members from the aeronautics club—that's the kind of interaction this place will make possible." —Mike Piacentino, Student Government chief of staff



Fabrics were tested to withstand student lifestyle staples ranging from mustard to marker, says campus planner Alicia Corral.

for student affairs, devoted a decade to helping bring the \$46.5 million project to fruition. "It will foster enhanced student engagement, programming, and a renewed sense of community for our campus," she says.

The SAC was made possible by a \$20 million lead gift from the Fairholme Foundation and a 2006 referendum in which 84 percent of UM students voted to pay an annual fee to help build the new structure and renovate the 40-plus-year-old University Center. UM parents, alumni, trustees, and faculty, among others have contributed another \$5.2 million.

Brandon Gross, B.S.C. '09, M.S.Ed. '13, was the Student Senate speaker pro tempore the year the referendum passed and served as SG president during the 2008-09 academic year. Gross is now assistant director of the Student Center Complex. "I can't think of all the adjectives in the world to describe this place," he says. "Students can be proud about bringing guests to our University and this Student Activities Center that

belongs to them. They come first in every decision we make for this complex."

At the start of the 2013-14 school year, hundreds of UM students flocked to see the building, lining up to eat at the new Rathskeller, which opened August 21, and taking in the promenade that offers open views of the lake. The SAC's official opening celebration took place on August 26, the first day of classes, followed by a formal dedication on November 7, during Alumni Weekend and Homecoming Week.

"The student involvement and enthusiasm for this project have remained true from 2003 until now, passed on from class to class," says Daniel Westbrook, executive director of the Student Center Complex. "It is a tribute to the forethought of all the students from the last decade that they were able to work toward this goal, and now it is a reality."

For students like biology major Baguidy, that reality is a dream come true. "This is going to be my new home," she says.

For a video tour of the Student Activities Center, go to www.miami.edu/miami-magazine.