

2014 Exhibition of School Planning and Architecture

Education Central

James Cook University
Townsville, Queensland
Australia

JCU Education Central





"the building is beautiful. there are certain times of the day where there's sunlight and shadow that forms beautiful patterns downstairs. So that's lovely." (staff member)

Sense of Community

Community Environment:

James Cook University identified a need to upgrade its Townsville Campus to provide improved student services and to support contemporary methods of teaching and learning. In so doing, it had the opportunity to create an environment that better reflected JCU's tropical identity, and to build a stronger sense of community among the staff and students.



Sense of Community

Community Environment:

The first step was a comprehensive research program including staff and student interviews, and area and use studies of the whole campus. The research covered all areas of the student experience. These insights became the basis of a plan to revitalise the campus with the JCU Education Central at its heart.



Sense of Community

Community Environment:

Education Central is the new front door to the university. It follows a student-led / staff-assisted model of service that was developed specifically for JCU. Based on the latest retail service models, students have a choice of service points (from self-service to fully assisted), and access to interview rooms and pods, and flexible furniture. Staff move around the space providing help as needed.





Collaborative Learning

[It's because of the space] "and because people are interested that there's a lot more conversations around pedagogies.

So you're a lot more conscious of it. So I think that's perhaps been good – that it's, there's a lot more pedagogical conversation, I would say." (staff member)

Learning Environment:

As well as the student services centre, the building contains large-scale active learning spaces, including Technology Enabled Active Learning (TEAL) room, collaborative lecture theatre, wet and dry teaching spaces, peer-to-peer learning area, outdoor learning area, coffee shop and diverse social learning areas. These larger, more flexible spaces, encourage peer-to-peer learning and extend learning beyond the traditional classroom environment.



Teacher-Led learning Spaces

Learning Environment:

The school of education plays an extremely important role in the education of primary and secondary teachers who will represent our next generation of teachers in Queensland and Australia. In terms of tertiary schools, the school of education is often the poor cousin to the schools of law and medicine. This perception of status is not lost on those who chose a degree in education.



“we started these things called Education Matters, so they’re more of a public meeting... to try to engage with the community... public forums that relate to the Education Matters... that was important...[An ideal University School of Education should] be the public face of Education in the community. Right. So, it’s trying to provide that place that we can actually function” (staff member)



“it’s just really good to be in a place where you see students working. Where you see students around, where you run into colleagues from different places and it’s just buzzy... one of the things that was really nice when we first moved over, when the students came was their sense of being a bit special because they have this new building and they, it was really nice to see how they responded to it.” (staff member)

Learning Environment:

Dedicated School of Education zones critically support students in a peer to peer learning space which is both a direct extension from the teacher-led classrooms as well as directly adjoining the academic suites. Research has indicated other benefits such as a stronger discipline learning community as well as extended time spent on campus with students supporting each other with improved access to their academics.

**Learning Environment:**

Dedicated School of Education zones also include academic and postgraduate suites and administration work area. A staff lounge/lunch area is included on the Eastern end of the building, and is accessible by all Student Services and School of Education staff. This adjoins an outdoor terrace, with views back across the creek to the Library.

Creating Connections

Physical Environment:

The design uses a double-height circulation hub at the northern edge of the building, and visual connections between all internal and external circulation routes to create a welcoming atmosphere. Continuous undercover connections link the buildings and join the student retail, student service, teaching and administrative functions in one harmonious environment. These new connections create opportunities for spontaneous interaction between students and staff, as well as prolonging the useful life of the buildings.



Comfort in the Tropics

Physical Environment

Significant external undercover areas provide opportunities for social learning, and formal and informal interaction between staff and students. Much of JCU's identity focuses on its expertise and interest in the tropics – Education Central encourages permeability between the tropical environs and the building both physically and visually where other campus buildings tend to be insular in nature.





The Veranda creates covered shaded connections from the campus ring road into the heart of the campus.



The deeply shaded outdoor learning area extends the networks of covered routes around the campus.



Site Strategy

The site strategy revolves around connectivity - linking a currently disparate set of buildings by providing continuous undercover connections (vital in the tropical climate), providing a visual and

physical connection from James Cook Drive to the library and campus heart, and connecting the student retail, student service, teaching and administrative

functions in a harmonious and collegiate environment. These connections establish a new courtyard precinct between the new building and the existing building.

Briefing workshops

Planning Process:

These workshops were conducted with the academic stakeholders in order to develop the brief for the building. It was always the understanding that this building would deliver learning and academic office spaces that would be different. Education Central was going to be designed around developing a stronger academic and student community. The architects facilitated these workshops with JCU's Estate Office Facilities Manager.

For the academic offices a strategy was developed to create suites where enclosed and open workplaces would facilitate better communication between academics. This was met with considerable resistance from staff initially. Prototype rooms considerably smaller than their existing office were constructed to help them visualize that although smaller, the inclusion of glass and appropriate furniture was comfortable and functional. (Their previous offices were large rooms off windowless corridors with their doors shut. Interviews with students revealed that although the staff were open about access to them for support, the reality was that students felt threatened and anxious about walking down long corridors and knock on their doors to ask for assistance) The new strategy located the offices in collaborative suites adjoining their informal study spaces. Extensive use of glass partitions controls noise but gives a better sense of who may be available to assist students. Staff are encouraged to work with students informally in their peer to peer space where by helping one student often ends up helping many.

For the classrooms, staff not only visited other spaces at other university campuses but the architect, using their learning modal metrics, walked them through how spaces could enable a diverse range of pedagogical practice. Interactive Three dimensional virtual models were developed so that academics could 'walk' through space and understand how they would work.

Developing 3Dimensional Virtual Tours

Planning Process:

In order to assist the stakeholder's understanding of the project, a Three dimensional fully interactive digital; model was issued as part of the design approval process. Not only could the stakeholders examine plans but they could also 'walk' through the building in their own time to fully understand what the final outcomes may look like. This not only helped in getting better feedback but it also rapidly improved timeframes for approval. Feedback at the time was that they did not feel that 'the wool was being pulled over their eyes.' And that they were approving something they did not understand.

Developing a new model for the Student Centre

Planning Process:

Most Student Centres at university campuses have been initially designed around an efficient process. ie how efficiently could students be processed. At JCU the Student Centre was designed around the student experience. Student Centres are often the very first experience at a new university. This experience is often both anxious and frustrating. JCU actively explored alternative models that would improve this situation. Wilson Architects assisted in this transition with joint visits to commercial service providers such as Apple Stores who have refined their systems around positive customer experience. JCU's new model gives students a choice of how they wish to engage with support. Staff are now more often 'on the floor' rather than only being behind the desk. Consultations now happen informally in a range of spaces. To achieve this required the University dramatically changing their processes. With the success of this new centre, JCU are now looking to modify other campus student centres.

Post Occupancy Evaluation

Planning Process:

One of the values that underpinned the development of Education Central was that the building would be a **lighthouse to the university community and beyond**, allowing staff to explore, research and demonstrate the nexus between technology, space, and new paradigms of learning informed by networks and connectivity.

Within the space of one year, Education Central, clearly acting as a lighthouse, is challenging the way that the whole of the University is thinking about how we teach students, accommodate their diverse learning styles, build a sense of community amongst learners, capitalise on technological advances in delivery modes, and ensure that students are truly at the heart of our enterprise. It is gratifying to read preliminary research results that reveal overwhelmingly positive student responses to the new spaces:

“I just want to go to uni just to be in the building! [laughs] No! I mean serious!” (student).

And it is perversely gratifying to discover that non-Education staff jockey for use of the spaces because they appreciate the affordances they offer, and that non-Education students beguilingly assume tenancy in common to the point, on occasions, of being a nuisance.

As the link between pedagogy, technology and space is brought into sharp relief through international research and trialling of educational learning environments, we understand that space matters. The School of Education has been buoyed by the opportunities that exist for innovative pedagogy in the new learning spaces that have been created in Education Central. Like our students, our staff have expressed overwhelmingly appreciative responses to their new environment. Even the early nay sayers are querying their traditional assumptions about teaching and learning, testing their repertoires of practice, and innovating in the wake of the early adopters in the new spaces

“...being in the new building just gave you the chance to rethink some of the things around teaching... [The lecture theatre] made it easier for them to do some sustained discussion in groups, whereas I think before, it tended to be shorter. I really love the lecture theatre.” (Staff member)

The new spaces encourage staff away from traditional ‘stand and deliver’ ‘master teacher’ delivery modes inviting them, instead to: harness the power of collaborative learning where students actively engage and interact in the learning process rather than listen (or not) to talking heads; explore the promise of peer-to-peer learning in technologically supported spaces; allow for individual reflective learning in quiet in-door and out-door spaces, and so on. Where previously students left the University once they had finished class, Education Central has exceeded our expectations in creating a ‘sticky campus’ where communities of students more readily cohere and augment their opportunities to learn.

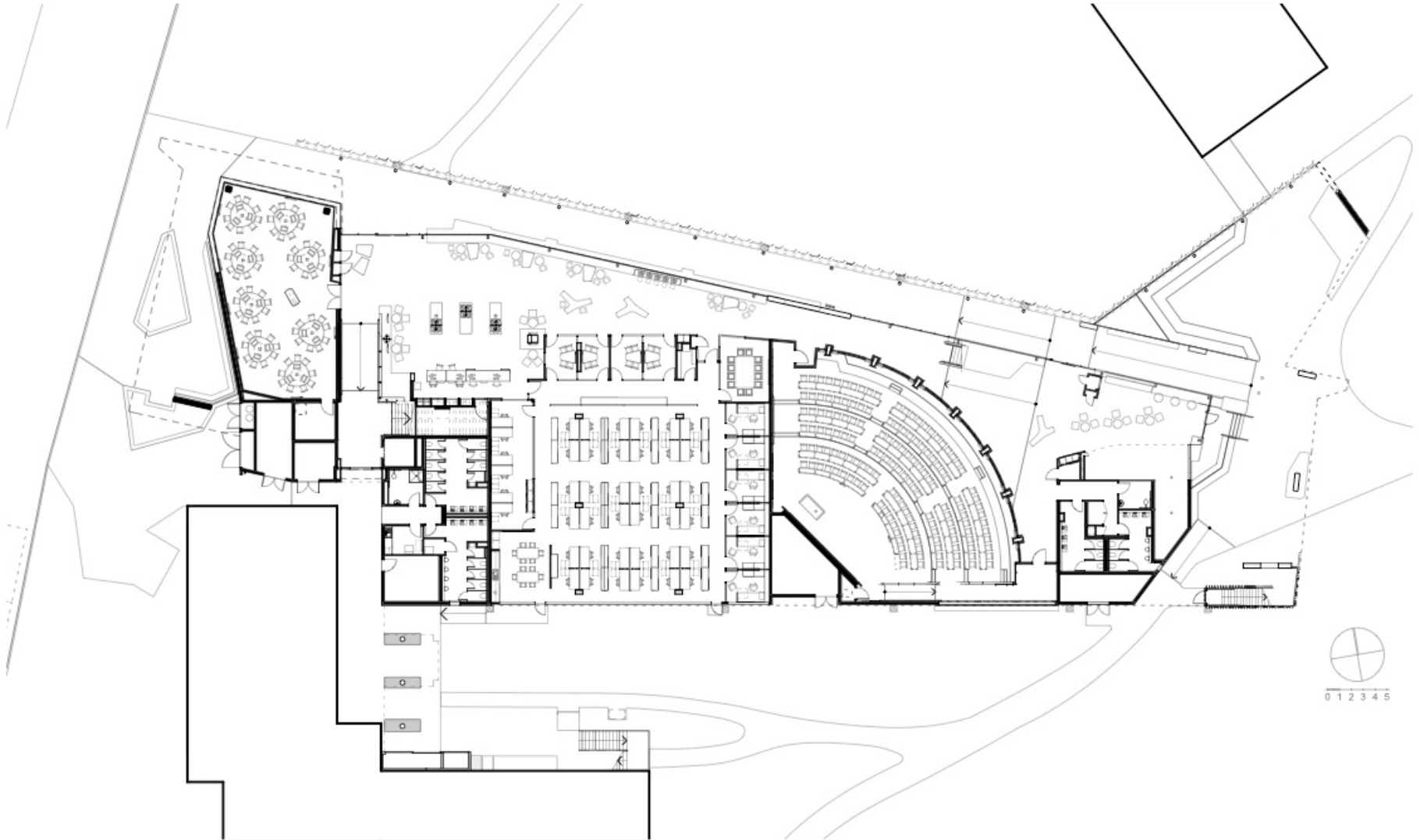
“...in the meeting rooms we sit with people we’ve never met before. And we’re like, “You can join us to study.” Next meeting, we’re all studying and it’s like random people that you’ve never met... Could be why we all passed science by the way!” (Student)

Finally, in its particular configuration of space, Education Central provides opportunities to teach more efficiently, particularly in the technology-enhance active learning spaces. Thus, networked and connected learning, hallmarks of next generation learning paradigms, have been coupled with longer-term budgetary savings.

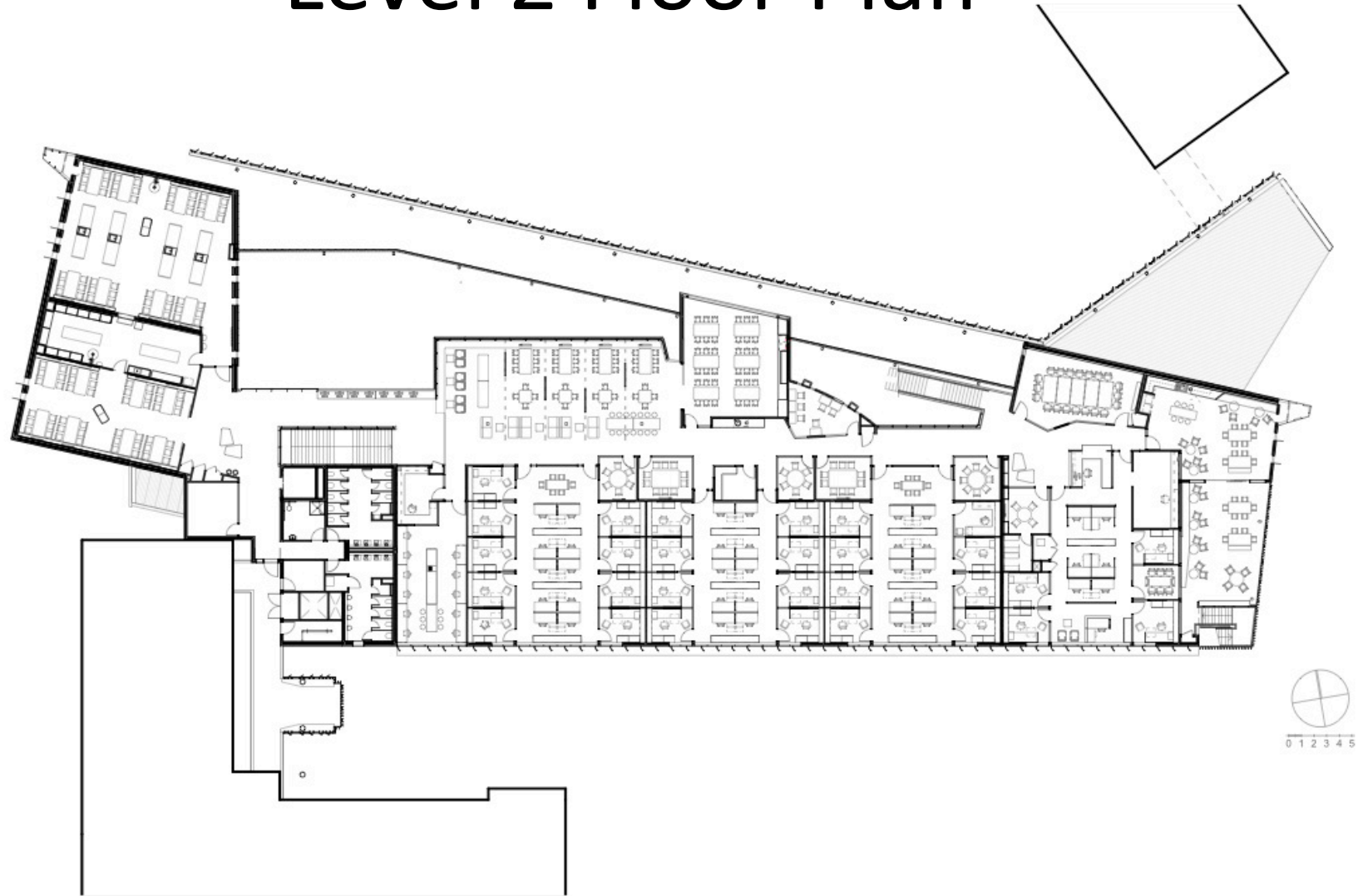
The spaces within Education Central are a force for good. The inspiration deserves to go viral.

Prof. Nola Alloway

Level 1 Floor Plan



Level 2 Floor Plan





The Lantern

A minimally glazed and well shaded western facade reduces heat-gain to the upper level classrooms.

A lantern projects toward the street as a key landmark along the heavily treed campus ring road. This glass lantern with its integrated photovoltaics powers its illumination at night.



Exhibition of School Planning and Architecture

Project Data

Submitting Firm :	Wilson Architects
Project Role	Principal Architect
Project Contact	Hamilton Wilson
Title	Managing Director, Wilson Architects
Address	564 Boundary St
City, State or Province, Country	Spring Hill Qld Australia 4000
Phone	07 3831 2755

Joint Partner Firm:	Architects North
Project Role	Local Architect
Project Contact	David Stefanovic
Title	Architect
Address	26 Bay St
City, State or Province, Country	Pallarenda, Townsville Qld Australia 4810
Phone	07 4774 1518

Construction Firm:	McNab Constructions
Project Role	Contractor
Project Contact	David Chiem
Title	Engineering Services Manager
Address	52 Merivale St
City, State or Province, Country	South Brisbane Qld Australia 4101
Phone	07 3252 6900

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Project Details

Project Name	JCU Education Central
City	Townsville
State	Queensland, Australia
Occupancy Date	2013
Grades Housed	Tertiary Education
Capacity(Students)	Student services employees: 49 School of education employees: 76 School of education students: 607
Site Size (acres)	N/A - allocated portion of greater JCU campus (no dedicated site boundary)
Gross Area (sq. ft.)	4,140sqm
Per Occupant(pupil)	
gross/net please indicate	
Design and Build?	No
If yes, Total Cost:	
Includes:	
If no,	
Site Development:	\$565,237 (External Services Site Works)
Building Construction:	\$4,302/m2
Fixed Equipment:	\$1,469,081
Other:	\$978,480 (loose furniture)
Total:	\$16,260,589