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## HCC's New South Shore Campus Is Learning Environment



Tribune photo by **KELVIN MA**

Hillsborough Community College's new Ruskin campus will feature lots of natural light. The outside is visible from 99 percent of the campus.

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By **ADAM EMERSON**

The Tampa Tribune

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**RUSKIN** - The parking lot in front of Hillsborough Community College's new South Shore campus is not flat, and that's not a construction blunder. The raised parking areas encourage water to run off into the ground nearby.

And, no, it's no mistake that half the classroom lights inside are not on. They're programmed to darken in the presence of natural light, and light shines abundantly on nearly any vantage point on campus.

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It wasn't cheap, but HCC's newest expansion is fully "green" - from the recycled steel to the collected rainwater used to flush toilets.

The construction carries a \$17 million price tag, which is about 5 percent more than a comparable building less friendly to the environment. That cost, however, doesn't yet reflect what school administrators say will be the long-term benefits: hundreds of thousands saved annually on energy and water bills.

A growing number of colleges and universities are willing to shoulder the upfront expense as well. If anyone should go green, it should be those in higher education, administrators say. That's why those in the vanguard of the environmentally friendly building movement often are found in the ivory tower.

At the University of Florida, a classroom building features no-flush, waterless urinals in the bathrooms and light sensors that keep laboratories dark when no one is present. Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton is planning a 600-bed residence hall complete with low-flow showerheads and energy-saving appliances.

"Colleges have to be thoughtful stewards of our planet's natural resources," HCC President Gwendolyn Stephenson said. "We have a role in educating the public. I think we have to be role models."

Stephenson said HCC no longer will raise new buildings, or remodel old ones, that don't meet the environmentally friendly standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council, a national coalition that advocates for environmental stewardship in construction.

For now, HCC's crown jewel in the green movement is in Ruskin.

#### Minimizing A Big Footprint

HCC officials built the new campus to meet the growing demand for a community college education in south Hillsborough County. At the time planning began in 2005, more and more colleges were incorporating environmentally sustainable and recyclable materials in their construction.

With the footprint HCC anticipated leaving at the site - as many as six buildings are planned across from Lennard High School - school administrators decided to pursue certification from the Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

LEED certification rates buildings with silver, gold and platinum designations, which score buildings on the amount of environmentally friendly materials and design features incorporated.

HCC is going for gold, a mark that costs more to meet. The college still must undergo reviews from the council, but the campus' independent architect, Everett Henderson Jr., says the South Shore building meets the criteria.

The most visible feature is the now-empty lagoon that surrounds the western edge of the campus. When ready, it will hold as much as 300,000 gallons of rainwater, collected from the roof and delivered down a giant trough.

Replacing potable water, the rainwater will be pumped into the building to flush toilets. It also will be used for irrigation.

With such a setup, Henderson estimates the college will save 80 percent of its water costs.

The less visible features are the ones designed to save energy costs. In addition to the light sensors, the building will distribute air beneath floors instead of pushing it down through ceiling vents. This lets heat naturally rise to the top of a room, where no one would feel it.

The open-aired flooring that feels like any other surface also allows for easy access to ductwork and other repair needs, which cut down on concrete and gutted woodwork that end up in landfills during remodeling.

What students will see, though, is natural light - a lot of it. The outside is visible from 99 percent of the campus.

That adds to more energy savings; the college expects to save about \$156,000 annually on lighting and utilities, Henderson said.

#### Going Green Isn't Cheap

Over time, those savings add up, but so do the upfront costs of construction.

The Ruskin campus was originally scheduled to open last fall, but building costs increased, and the college worked to find ways to keep the price tag from exceeding \$17 million.

Such expenses have deterred other colleges to go for the LEED certification HCC seeks.

New College of Florida in Sarasota, for instance, didn't want to spend thousands going through the LEED certification process for its new residence halls, but its designers referred to the Green Building Council's checklist during construction.

John Martin, New College's vice president for finance and administration, said the school spent \$22 million on the residence halls, but didn't have enough for formal LEED certification. "We had to use every dollar for bricks and mortar," Martin said.

Even though the college made the buildings environmentally friendly - Martin says they're in line with LEED silver designation - it does regard LEED certification as a stamp of credibility. When the economy rebounds, the school wants that stamp for a proposed \$11 million classroom and administration building, Martin said.

New College will have plenty of company. More college and university leaders, including University of South Florida President Judy Genshaft, have signed on to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. By signing on, the presidents pledge to neutralize their environmental and carbon footprints.

"We're creating healthier buildings," said Azita Dashtaki, assistant vice president for Florida Atlantic University's division of facilities. FAU signed the pledge last year, and plans a new engineering building designed to meet the Green Building Council's platinum LEED certification, the highest mark.

Most universities, however, are just getting started. None have approached the number of green buildings the University of Florida has raised and remodeled.

UF, Florida's largest public university, has 10 buildings certified by the Green Building Council; two have gold status. The university has registered 18 more construction projects for the council's review.

"We need to walk the talk and lead in these efforts," said Bahar Armaghani, UF's assistant director of facilities, construction and planning. "Our electric bill is \$3.5 million a month. We know that we need to do something with whatever we can to try to minimize that."

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