

Transforming a University Covid Clinic into a Flexible Space for Cross-Disciplinary Communion & Spiritual Renewal

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Introduction

This Practice/Research Project Presentation will tell the story of the Belmont University O'More College of Architecture and Design's expansion into a new flexible, studio space - an adaptive reuse project designed by one of its own faculty members. The goal of the project was to provide a space that will enrich our young, budding culture through the cross disciplinary communion of students, faculty, and staff, in a way that supported academic, community, and spiritual flourishing.



Figure 1. Cross-Disciplinary Project Reception. (Photograph by Author, 2022)

Methods

In the O'More College of Architecture and Design, we believe strongly in the idea of community as a vehicle for spiritual prosperity, reflected in our foundational belief that "nothing grows physically, intellectually, creatively, or spiritually in isolation."¹ The pandemic, of course, did just that - putting us all in some sense of isolation. As we began emerging from the shadow of the pandemic, we decided that we needed to double-down on human connections and nurture our young program's culture with great intentionality. The expansion of our space provided an opportunity for cultural and spiritual renewal of our studio, reframing how we commune with each other as a college. We wanted our new space to bring us together and generate community, not only to rebuild the broken human connections in the wake of the pandemic, but to catalyze the formation of new ones.

What we had in our existing building was a stratified layer cake, and what we needed was metaphoric gumbo - a richly diverse and hearty blend of all our students studying Architecture, Interior Design, and Fashion. Housed in a former chemistry building on campus, each department in the college was on a separate floor, and it was a rarity for a student to cross paths with someone of a different major. We felt the need to break down the mental and spiritual silos built by the pandemic as well as the physical ones that our building forced us into.



Figure 2. Conceptual Rendering of Flex Space. (Image by Author, 2022)

Ironically enough, when it came time for O'More to expand in 2022, we were offered a space that, at the time, was serving as the university's makeshift Covid Clinic. The symbolic transformation of the former Covid Clinic - that which caused our isolation - into a space designed specifically to bring people together and build relationships, seemed an incredible opportunity to illustrate how architecture can work to heal us academically as well as spiritually. In a sense, by dismantling the walls of the University's Covid Clinic, we dismantled the internal walls that Covid had built up around us, and in its place, created a space rooted in human interaction.

¹ "About O'More College." O'More College of Architecture and Design. Belmont University, Accessed April 28, 2023. <https://www.belmont.edu/omore/about/index.html>.

Results

From impetus to impact, this presentation will dive into the goals, the design, and the construction of the College of Architecture and Design's expansion into new studio spaces. It will show drawings, renderings, and images of the completed project, and describe how it is used for the cross-disciplinary communion of students today. Finally, it will share reflections of the project's influence (both intentional and surprising) on our program's culture, social interaction, and cross-departmental collaboration, and how it reinforces the college's academic, communal, and spiritual aspirations.

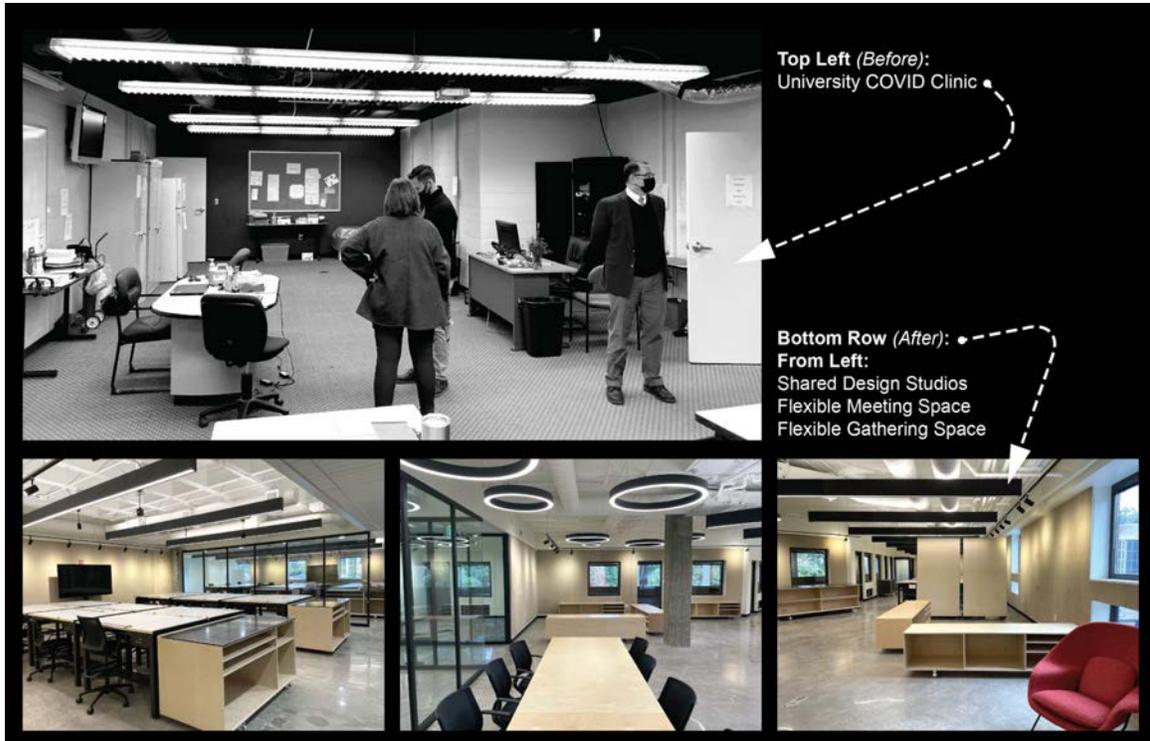


Figure 3. Before and After Renovation. (Image by Author, 2022)