The Ryerson University Student Learning Centre (SLC) is a new campus landmark housing a progressive program of collaborative learning spaces and connects to the existing library. Inspired by the historical gathering spaces of the Stoas and Agoras in ancient Greece where learning was inherently social, the lively SLC gives students eight uniquely-designed floors of generous space to meet, study, and exchange ideas.
Ryerson University Student Learning Centre

Design Architect & Landscape Architect: Snøhetta
Executive Architect: Zeidler Partnership Architects
Client: Ryerson University
Location: Toronto, Canada
Typology: University Student Centre & Library Expansion
Size: 14,200 m²
With the fall semester in full swing, Ryerson University students are making good use of the newest building on campus: the Student Learning Centre (SLC), designed by Snøhetta and Zeidler Partnership Architects. Inspired by the historical gathering spaces of the Stoas and Agoras in ancient Greece where learning was inherently social, the lively SLC gives students eight uniquely-designed floors of generous space to meet, study, and exchange ideas. Conceived as a library without books, the design develops natural conditions for groups of people to interact while also offering areas for controlled and introspective study. Most importantly, it encourages students to make the space their own. The SLC is a library built for the digital age that encourages students to interact with their physical environment. Since its opening, the new campus landmark has become a popular hub filled with student activity from 7 AM to 1 AM each day.

Ryerson University is an urban commuter campus with 38,000 students, well-known for its engineering and business programs. Previously, the campus did not have a recognizable presence within the city, with most of the academic buildings housed within the existing building fabric or set back from major streets. The new Student Learning Centre now provides a much-needed space for students to study and remain on campus between classes, creates a distinguishable identity for the University, and better connects the campus to the vibrant cityscape surrounding it.

The design begins with a south-facing raised platform that opens the street corner for a broad range of pedestrian activity, from larger gatherings to smaller individual seating areas. Part plaza, part porch, this elevated space creates a welcoming yet protected urban edge shared by students and the general public that both exhibits University life while giving students a place to view the city. Situated on the Yonge Street retail corridor, one of Canada's best-known commercial avenues, the new building prominently displays shops along Yonge Street, maintaining the retail presence locals expect in the district. Yet by directing the flow of students over and up the entry stairs it ensures the flow of students in and out of the building remains uninterrupted by commercial activity.

A new campus gateway is shaped by a large canopy clad in iridescent, hand-folded metal panels stretching from the exterior façade into the lobby. Its striking color and unusual form makes passerby stop and look up. These small and unexpected physical movements added to our daily routine shift one's relationship to and awareness of place, intensifying the connection between body and design.
The lobby is defined by a spacious atrium unimpeded by security checkpoints, and houses informal seating areas, café, and the University’s welcome desk for visitors and prospective students. It also acts as a multi-purpose forum with integrated seating and performance technology for events ranging from pep rallies to fashion shows and music performances. A broad stair leads from the lobby to a new bridge connecting the SLC to the existing University Library. Hovering above the lobby's atrium is Ryerson’s Launch Zone, a digital media lab and business incubator for emerging tech start-ups.

Each floor of the building offers a different kind of space with a unique atmosphere, inspired by themes found in nature. The sixth floor, known as 'The Beach,' is an open and informal study area that slopes down through a series of ramps and terraces, encouraging students to sit on the floor and move the casual furniture. ‘The Sky’ occupies the top floor of the building with an up-lifting ceiling that offers broad overlooks and access to natural light. ‘The Forest’ and ‘the Garden’ also provide differing learning programs with student services, traditional quiet study areas, and classrooms. Uniquely colored elevators and stair landings punctuate navigation throughout the building with surprises, without disorienting the visitor.

The facades of the building are composed of a digitally-printed fritted glass that envelops the rugged armature and pared-down aesthetic of the exposed concrete structure. While the glass is understood to be transparent and light, it also evokes a juxtaposing sense of solidity and mass. The varying façade pattern controls heat gain into the building and frames views of the city grid and nearby buildings from the interior, acting as a traditional framed window without actual frame constructions. Functioning like cloud cover, the frit modulates the light quality to range from ‘overcast’ to ‘partly cloudy’ to ‘sunny’ to further diversify the interior conditions and allow students to have a different experience every time they visit the building.

The Student Learning Centre is a building that demands to be engaged with. It breaks the routine rhythms and movements of daily student life, empowering its visitors to take full measure of their bearings and ownership of their space. From autumn to spring, midterms through final exams, students will continue to create their own experiences and memories out of this library of the future.

Please contact press@snohetta.com for high resolution images.
The design begins with the creation of a south facing, raised platform that opens the street corner to allow for a broad range of pedestrian activity, from larger gatherings to smaller individual seating areas. Part plaza, part porch, this space creates a welcoming yet protected urban edge shared by students and the general public.
Conceptual Diagram: Each floor of the Ryerson SLC has its own unique character referring to a natural landscape, which is expressed through the interior architecture and color palette. The experience of each floor is surprising and engaging, encouraging users to pause and interact with their environment.
The lobby is defined by a spacious atrium unimpeded by security checkpoints, and houses informal seating areas, a café, and the University’s welcome desk for visitors and prospective students. It also acts as a multi-purpose forum with integrated seating and performance technology for events ranging from pep rallies to fashion shows and music performances. A broad stair leads from the lobby to a new bridge connecting the SLC to the existing University Library.
Students working on the Third Floor, known as The Bluff, overlook the lobby and amphitheatre below.
The Garden

1. Entrance Hall / Events Space
2. Retail
3. Cafe
4. Casual Seating
5. Study Area
6. Study Room
7. Classroom / Seminar Room
8. Computer Station
9. Computer Instruction / Multimedia Lab
10. Technology Studio / Audio Booth
11. Office
12. Office Support
13. Meeting
14. Washroom
15. Janitor
16. Building Services / Storage
17. Green Roof
18. Digital Media Suite
19. Digital Media Zone
20. Entry Plaza
Each floor of the building is different in plan and section, to offer students a wide variety of spaces to suit their needs, both volumetrically and atmospherically. ‘The Garden’ provides a range of learning programs, with classrooms, student services, and traditional quiet study areas.
‘The Sun’ provides classroom spaces that students are free to reserve through an online system.
The Pavilion follows the Memorial’s Sustainability Design Guidelines. As a result, the Pavilion is on target to receive a LEED rating of Gold. The Pavilion features a number of sustainable features including optimized minimal energy performance, daylight and views, water efficiency, wastewater re-use, low emitting and locally sources materials and fabricators wherever possible.

The Beach
The sixth floor, known as ‘The Beach,’ is an open and informal study area that slopes down through a series of ramps and terraces, encouraging students to sit on the floor and move the casual furniture.
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14. Washroom
15. Janitor
16. Building Services / Storage
17. Green Roof
18. Digital Media Suite
19. Digital Media Zone
20. Entry Plaza
The Forest is the SLC’s designated quiet floor for individual study.
The façades of the building are composed of a digitally-printed fritted glass that envelops the rugged armature and pared-down aesthetic of the exposed concrete structure. While the glass is understood to be transparent and light, it also evokes a juxtaposing sense of solidity and mass.
The top floor is known as The Sky, an open study area with broad overlooks and access to natural light.
1. Entrance Hall / Events Space
2. Retail
3. Cafe
4. Casual Seating
5. Study Area
6. Study Room
7. Classroom / Seminar Room
8. Computer Station
9. Computer Instruction / Multimedia Lab
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12. Office Support
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15. Janitor
16. Building Services / Storage
17. Green Roof
18. Digital Media Suite
19. Digital Media Zone
20. Entry Plaza
Snøhetta understands that learning is impacted by the intellectual and physical character of who we are as human beings. We design to foster individual empowerment, providing the best platform for intellectual growth. We aspire to create places that enliven, activate and diversify.

The recently completed Ryerson Student Learning Centre sits within a trajectory of projects built for knowledge. In 1989, Snøhetta’s first commission, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt, provided several platforms for this manner of thinking. The great outdoor plaza provides a practical and symbolic connection to the building’s surroundings, facilitating public gathering and expressing that the library is more than an archive. Inside, a series of thresholds from a low, understated entry lead the visitor to a great reading hall in a range of intimate to open spaces, engaging the user’s senses and intellect.

For more than a quarter of a century, Snøhetta has continued to explore spaces dedicated to cultivating knowledge with the design of new libraries, museums and educational buildings. Recently, the James B. Hunt Jr. Library at North Carolina State University in Raleigh sparked new strategies of developing buildings for knowledge. This University Library utilizes an automated book retrieval and storage technologies to free up valuable space for collaborative and experiential learning, breaking the mold of traditional libraries as repositories for books and spaces for individual study. Stairs and terraces invigorate visitors as they move through the building, and access to natural light and fresh air further creates a natural connection between user and function.
Today, Snøhetta continues to build libraries informed by our work on the Alexandria Library, the Hunt Library, and now the Ryerson Student Learning Centre. In Canada, the new public library for the City of Calgary is designed with sensual and tactile materials, and provides an inviting space for people to engage with the building and site. In New York City, we are designing two new community libraries in Queens and the Bronx which will also act as new community centers for the neighborhood, with classes, meeting spaces and access to technology. The new Library at Temple University in Philadelphia, opening in 2018, will operate as a research facility and as new 24-hour campus center. It is both hearth and study. It is lively and also provides introspective space.

We continue to study the impact of our built work with post-occupancy research as students take ownership of these spaces. Questions that we ask include: How do people study and share knowledge in these spaces? How can we learn from their strategies for learning? How can we leverage the power of chance encounters and celebrate the role physical space plays in the intellectual stimulation of its users? As our methods of acquiring, sharing, and communicating knowledge evolve ever more rapidly, the typologies of these buildings must also change in order to accommodate, and moreover, empower our human capacity for learning. Ultimately, these buildings for knowledge are made to engender discovery.
About Snøhetta

For over 25 years, Snøhetta has designed with some of the world’s most notable public and cultural projects. Snøhetta kick-started its career in 1989 with the competition-winning entry for the new library of Alexandria, Egypt. This was later followed by the commission for the Norwegian National Opera in Oslo and the National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion at the World Trade Center in New York City, among many others. Since its inception, the practice has maintained its original trans-disciplinary approach, integrating architectural, landscape and interior design in all of its projects.

Snøhetta is currently working on a number of educational, civic and cultural projects including Calgary’s New Central Library in Alberta, Canada, the Temple University Library in Philadelphia, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Expansion in California, the Far Rockaway Public Library in Queens, New York, the Westchester Branch Library in the Bronx, and the Redesign of Times Square in New York City. The Ryerson University Student Learning Centre follows the opening of the office’s first Canadian project, The Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario.

Among its many recognitions, Snøhetta received the World Architecture Award for the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, and the Aga Kahn Prize for Architecture for Alexandria Library. In 2013, Snøhetta’s design for the James B. Hunt Jr. Library at North Carolina State University was awarded the American Institute of Architects and American Library Association’s Library Building Award, among many other recognitions. Since its completion in 2008, the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet has also garnered the Mies van der Rohe European Union Prize for Architecture and the EDRA (Environmental Design Research Association) Great Places Award, as well as the European Prize for Urban Public Space, The International Architecture Award and The Global Award for Sustainable Architecture in 2010.
About Zeidler Partnership Architects

One of the longest running architectural practices in North America, Zeidler Partnership Architects is a leading Canadian firm that offers the experience of a Toronto-based team in addition to seven other offices worldwide. Two senior partners, Tarek El-Khatib and Vaidila Banelis, and four partners lead a dedicated team that pairs architectural vision with solid technical and construction expertise. Our ability to create engaging, dynamic, and inspiring buildings that stand the test of time has been recognized by more than 140 awards, including eight Governor General's Medals, Canada's highest architectural honour, and five legacy Landmark Awards from the Ontario Association of Architects.

Quality is the foundation of our practice—quality of design, process, and service. We integrate years of experience with the input of clients and collaborators to produce an ongoing portfolio of award-winning work. We believe that unique architecture emerges from a project's physical and social relationships with its surroundings. Our goal is to fulfill each client's functional and economic requirements while seeking to evoke a positive response from the people who will use the space. The result is buildings that are a pleasure to own and to use.

Collaboration Acknowledgments

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Code: LRI Engineering Inc.
Hardware: Upper Canada Hardware Inc.
LEED: CEL Gruen
Signage & Wayfinding: Entro
FF+E: RCG | MHPM
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