JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
FULL PROJECT NARRATIVE

John Jay College of Criminal Justice’s new building provides all the functions of a traditional college campus within the confines of a single city block. The 625,000-square-foot building doubles the size of John Jay’s existing facilities by adding classrooms, laboratories, auditoriums, faculty offices, and student lounges. The new building addresses the College’s need for instructional and social spaces and creates a unified academic presence for the institution.

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, part of the City University of New York since 1964, educates 15,000 students annually in emergency response, forensic psychology, and cyber security. Before the construction of the new building, John Jay College was primarily located in Haaren Hall, an early 20th century building fronting 10th Avenue and North Hall, a former shoe factory on West 59th Street. The college had been steadily expanding for some time and, after the September 11th attacks on New York, enrollment increased dramatically to the point where the school outgrew its facilities. The new building is a critical component of John Jay’s transformation into a senior college of The City University of New York system and is an expression of the College’s continued commitment to “educating for justice.”

The new building consists of a four-story, 500-foot long podium and 14-story tower. The podium, which provides connections to Haaren Hall, contains dense social and academic programs and is topped by a 65,000-square-foot landscaped terrace that will act as a campus commons. The tower, known as “the cube,” contains faculty offices, academic quads, a conference center, and instructional laboratories. The scale of the new building is similar to its adjacent buildings along 11th Avenue and provides a strong visual presence for the College from the West Side Highway.

The building is clad with aluminum panels and low-E coated insulated glass units. Fritted and transparent glass panels are arranged in a staggered pattern along the building’s facades in which every third panel is clear. Framed glass setbacks placed at specialty spaces, including the cafeteria, research labs, the 250-seat classroom, and a lounge area off the social cascade, allow the building’s diverse programmatic functions to be visible from the exterior, demonstrating the “transparency of justice.” Vertical fins, ranging in depth from three to eleven inches, are arranged in horizontal bands around all four sides of the building. These aluminum fins are finished with silver-speckled mica-flake paint on one side and are silk-screened with a varying pattern of red dots on the other; these two treatments on the fins create a dynamic visual effect depending on the direction from which one approaches the building. Approaching from the east and moving counterclockwise around the building, the exterior appears red, creating a visual connection to Haaren Hall’s brick exterior. Walking clockwise around the building, the reflective aluminum and glass allude to the glass towers along 11th Avenue.

A 500-foot-long, four story cascade runs the length of the podium, organizing programs both horizontally and vertically. Initiating at the cafeteria level of the tower (level five), the cascade descends with a series of grand staircases, escalators, and stepped amphitheater seating, culminating at the main student entrance on 59th Street and ultimately connecting to Haaren Hall. As the social spine of the campus, the cascade is programmed with open-plan lounges, study areas, and gathering spaces to maximize interaction and student activity. Most of the new building’s classrooms flank this internal avenue, creating a vivacious hub of student activity and also allowing for efficient circulation between classes. A large skylight above the student entrance allows ample daylight to penetrate the cascade. This active social and circulation zone also negotiates the 32-foot grade change between the avenues and enhances the students’ sense of orientation. The cascade also fulfills CUNY’s wellness initiative, which encourages students to walk and use stairs in order to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.

The roof terrace atop the cascade serves as a new campus green for the college, providing an outdoor central gathering place for students and faculty. The planted green roof is landscaped with large grassy zones for recreation, decked areas for outdoor dining, and paved paths for circulation between buildings. Honey Locust, Magnolia, and Iron Wood trees offer shade along the lawn’s bench-height perimeter barrier. At either end, the commons connects to both the existing Haaren Hall building and the tower through large expanses of glass, which provide access and light for both buildings.

The presence of Amtrak train tunnels under the southwest corner of the site forced the structural engineers to propose a unique structural system for the tower. The top nine floors of the building are hung from steel outrigger trusses that are supported by the building’s structural core. As a result, these upper floors have no traditional perimeter columns; smaller hanger rods support the floors instead. The lower five floors of the building are supported by a conventional steel frame structural system. Elements of public program such as the bookstore/cafe, child care center, and a computing hub are located at the street level in order to activate the pedestrian and community activity. From a massing point of view, the cantilever of these upper floors responds to the setbacks of the Con Edison power station across the street.

The prominent location of the College in Midtown Manhattan bestows it with a strong civic presence within a section of the city that is experiencing a renaissance. John Jay College will be a significant part of this redevelopment as an institutional anchor for the neighborhood, and a landmark within the community.
Before the construction of the new building, John Jay College was primarily located in Haaren Hall, an early 20th century building fronting 10th Avenue, and North Hall, a former shoe factory on West 59th Street. The College also occupies space in an academic building on 57th Street and 11th Avenue.

The new building connects the disparate facilities and allows all functions of the institution to exist within a single unified campus.
MASSING AND PHASING STRATEGY

John Jay College initially proposed a linear phasing of Phases II and III of their expansion project (Phase I consisted of a 1988 renovation to Haaren Hall); Phase II would occupy the center of the block until additional expansion on 11th Avenue followed. This scheme offered construction efficiencies but was an inadequate urban strategy and did not provide a cohesive “campus.” Also, this scheme did not anticipate the growth of the neighborhood along 11th Avenue.

The alternative proposal extended the building directly to 11th Avenue in Phase II. A vertical mass is positioned on 11th Avenue, increasing the college’s visibility and presence within the city. A low-rise podium stretches between the existing building and the vertical mass to create an outdoor commons, thereby giving the college a proper campus green.

A significant cantilever over 11th Avenue responds to the McKim, Mead & White-designed Con Edison building across the street. Scale, rather than style, helps define the relationship of the two buildings.
UNIFICATION WITH CONTEXT

Aluminum fins on the building’s exterior are finished with silver-speckled mica-flake paint on one side and are silk-screened with a varying pattern of red dots on the other; these two treatments on the fins create a dynamic visual effect depending on the direction from which one approaches the building. Approaching from the east and moving counter-clockwise around the building, the exterior appears red, creating a visual connection to Haaren Hall’s brick exterior. Walking clockwise around the building, the reflective aluminum and glass allude to the glass towers along 11th Avenue.
THE SOCIAL CASCADE

The complexity of the program gave rise to a stepped “social cascade” that provides essential circulation and social functions for the new building. A variety of smart classrooms flank the cascade, and the use of escalators co-mingled with the stepped stairs allows students to quickly get from one class to the next without having to wait for elevators. As the social spine of the campus, the cascade initiates at cafeteria on the fifth floor and descends to the main student entrance; it contains open-plan lounges, study areas, and gathering spaces that maximize interaction and student activity. The 500-foot-long, four story cascade negotiates the 32-foot grade change between 11th Avenue and the existing academic building and also fulfills CUNY’s wellness initiative by encouraging students and faculty to use stairs in order to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.
THE CAMPUS COMMONS

A 65,000-square-foot roof terrace atop the cascade serves as a new campus green for the college, providing an outdoor central gathering place for students and faculty. The planted green roof is landscaped with large grassy zones for recreation, decked areas for outdoor dining, and paved paths for circulation between buildings.

At either end, the commons connects to both the existing Haaren Hall building and the tower through large expanses of glass, which provide access and light for both buildings.
The new building’s interdisciplinary program contains laboratories and high-tech classrooms for the departments of law, police science, criminal justice, mathematics, sciences, government, psychology, and foreign languages. Three double-height academic quads devoted to the college’s main focus areas – science, criminal justice, and humanities – are vertically stacked throughout the 14-story tower. A series of open communicating stairs adjacent to each quad enhances transparency in research and across the academic sectors. Each of these academic quads acts as a central hub for its respective field of study, eliminating traditional “department” floors, maximizing the flexibility of each 40,000-square-foot floor plate, and encouraging collaboration across disciplines.

Client Goals:
- Create a strong physical image that embodies the school’s mission and philosophy.
- Enhance the learning environment for students and provide a sense of community.
- Provide gathering spaces that facilitate student and faculty interaction and foster team and collaborative learning.
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**SITE PLAN ILLUSTRATING THE PRESENCE OF AMTRAK TUNNELS**

**DIAGRAM WITH EXPANSION JOINT BETWEEN TWO STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS**

**PARTIAL BUILDING SECTION AT 11TH AVENUE**