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## Building cooperation Behrend's new facility combines business, engineering schools



By ERICA ERWIN  
[erica.erwin@timesnews.com](mailto:erica.erwin@timesnews.com)

Ashley McFarland, a senior at Penn State Behrend, felt like a freshman all over again.

The 21-year-old business major spent much of Tuesday morning finding her way around Behrend's expansive Research and Economic Development Center, a \$30 million addition to the Behrend campus that brings the college's engineering and business schools under one roof.

Classes let out Tuesday afternoon at Penn State Behrend's Research and Economic Development Center (REDC). The structure is touted as the county's largest academic building; housing classrooms, dining areas and a state-of-the-art plastics engineering processing lab. (Ben Hager / Erie Times-News)

The 160,000-square-foot building, built on the northeast corner of campus on the hill behind the Smith Chapel, was designed to increase collaboration and interaction between students and faculty in the Sam and Irene Black School of Business and the School of Engineering and Engineering Technology.

Zoom

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Though Tuesday was the first day of classes, the building already had a few claims to fame: It's the largest building on the Behrend campus, the largest Pennsylvania State University building outside of the main University Park campus, and the largest academic building in Erie County, according to Behrend officials.

The building includes 28 engineering labs, 11 computer labs and computer classrooms, and 17 classrooms, in addition to office space, conference rooms, and a cafe that sells doughnuts, bagels, wraps, coffee and soft drinks.

"It seems like everyone has a smile on their face and a map on their hands," Behrend Chancellor Jack Burke said as he watched students and faculty mill about the cafe during a break between classes Tuesday afternoon.

Behrend is one of the first colleges in the country to house its engineering and business schools in one building, Burke said.

The center doubles the classroom space for both schools and provides the first permanent home the business school had had in the past two decades, he said.

Sharing space will help students and faculty from both schools work more closely together, Burke said.

"What's missing in the marriage between (engineering and business) is that business people know nothing about engineering, and engineers know nothing about business," Burke said.

That gap can create problems when it comes to product design or marketing, he said.

To close the divide, the college has created several courses where students of both disciplines will work together in the center's classrooms, and more courses are coming, Burke said.

Investments like the new building, along with a recently completed student housing project, should help attract and retain students, Burke said.

In the past, 80 percent of Behrend students would leave to attend the University Park campus after two years, Burke said. The remaining 20 percent would stay.

"Now it's the other way around," Burke said.

McFarland and Dave Michalowski, a senior business major, agreed that the new building is a selling point.

"It makes the campus more attractive," Michalowski said. "You're driving up and you say, 'Wow, that building is really nice.'"

McFarland, whose classes are all housed within the glass-covered building, looked ahead to winter and saw another advantage.

"When it's cold outside, I won't have to trek across campus," she said.

ERICA ERWIN can be reached at 870-1846 or by e-mail.

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