

A Strong Identity

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Schools are becoming savvy to the emotional pull a strong brand can have on alumni, as well as potential new students.

The day has finally dawned on the necessity for colleges and [universities](#) to recognize the significance of building and protecting brand initiatives for their institutions. Quality architecture and interior design are equally as important of a factor as the architectural landscape and buildings these places represent. It is very obvious that many schools are savvy to the emotional pull a strong brand can have on alumni as well as potential new students, which is why it has become tantamount.



What to do when students want more from their [campus](#) in terms of new and renovated spaces? One answer is to capitalize on the challenge and use it to transform existing spaces, develop contemporary areas and in turn, a better, stronger identity for the overall institution.

When Rutgers University, The [State University](#) of New Jersey, set its sights on strengthening their brand, two projects seemed to set the tone of the focused efforts: a renovated [student](#) center and dining commons on the Livingston campus and a new [Visitor Center](#).

The Livingston campus was in need of a stronger identity, and many administrators rose to face the challenge with the understanding that the idea of a brand for campuses is no longer a trend but instead a vital necessity.

Thanks, in part, to a gentle push from students, combined with the vision of the administrative leaders and the powers that be, the Livingston campus is well on its way to becoming the center of professional [education](#) it is striving for through the erection of new buildings and the renovations of existing ones.

Originally, the Livingston campus (Rutger's quietest one) had a 35,000-square-foot student center that needed a lot more space in addition to a new look. Other campuses throughout the country, including the others within the Rutgers family of campuses, had a clear identity and purpose. This particular building didn't have either. There weren't enough original gathering spaces for students to meet, and there were limited windows to bring in much-needed natural light to name a few of the obvious problems. The student population had grown and [student needs](#) were not being met.

As a result, students organized a grassroots effort to formally request a more contemporary, effective series of spaces and a more vibrant student center. In addition, one of the new campus' purposes was to bring together the schools of business, management and labor relations, education and social work.

The original plans called for a single building to expand the student center and a new dining commons. The project team opted for a separate, adjacent building for student and faculty dining. The student center, which remained open during construction, is now 62,000 square feet and a completely separate dining facility, which just broke ground in spring 2010, is expected to enhance and complement the student center by giving students and faculty members the venue to better communicate, work and dine in a more effective manner through strategic architecture and building engineering.

Taking the brand initiative seriously, the recently completed, award-winning Rutgers Visitor Center is a 12,512-square-foot building, which serves as the starting point for tours of the New Brunswick and Piscataway Campuses, making it purposely one of the premier attractions for the university. It features interactive multimedia exhibits that illustrate the university's rich history, as well as banquet and meeting spaces throughout.

However, the most striking balance of brand and architectural design lies within the custom stainless-steel screen and the striking red wall made from composite metals that lies perpendicular to the entrance that is emblazoned with a 6-foot-high white "R"—both reinforcing the school's colors and serving as a beacon to visitors.

The lobby boasts two-story-high windows and a scarlet multimedia exhibit wall that glows at night. The exhibit cleverly offers interactive tours of all three Rutgers campuses. To further support brand initiatives, a custom Rutgers University carpet was designed by the architect and is emblazoned with a repeating R pattern throughout the interior.

Today's universities have to have the administrative foresight combined with the "if you build it they will come" philosophy to successfully maintain an image as well as solidify the status of future brand identity. Branding through architecture and design is no longer considered a mere trend. It is clear over the years that it has migrated into an essential marketing and educational philosophy.

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