Commonwealth Honors College Residential Complex at UMass Amherst Receives LEED Silver Certification

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The Commonwealth Honors College Residential Complex at the University of Massachusetts Amherst has been awarded LEED Silver certification, a level within the green building rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The six-building complex, completed in summer of 2013, provides a living and learning environment for students enrolled in the Commonwealth Honors College. It has 1,500 beds, nine classrooms, community spaces, and rooms for faculty-in-residence.

The complex was developed in a relatively short time with a year of design followed by two years of construction. Despite the fast track of the project, LEED certification was always a part of the process according to the project manager Andy Soles. “We met [LEED Silver] because it was a steady goal at the beginning of the project. The project team worked really hard to make sure it was paramount in a lot of decisions that were made during construction,” he says.

The 515,637-gross-square-foot complex sits on a relatively small area of campus. The buildings range in height from four to six stories and all surround a series of courtyards. The layout of the site and building materials blend the natural surroundings and the rest of campus seamlessly.

“The way the buildings step up the hillside as well as the emphasis on exterior materials, the skin and the various brick colors and the limestone break up the buildings; the usable green space, the walkways from the center, a huge recharge area below, the permeable pavers, were integral to the design,” says Soles. “We did not want this to feel like an enclave, we wanted it to feel connected.”

The complex, designed by William Rawn, achieved LEED Silver for material usage, energy efficiencies, water management, site...
planning, and indoor environmental quality. Its outdoor walkways and courtyards are paved with permeable pavement and connect students to the rest of campus and public transportation. The dorm rooms and classroom space have sizable windows that provide daylight and reduce the need for artificial light. The complex has underground passageways that give easy access for maintenance, deliveries, and waste removal.

LEED Silver certification was based on a variety of sustainable design and construction features including:

- Alternative transportation access with nearby bus stops and bike racks
- Site development designed with maximize open space
- Water use reduction that includes highly efficiency low-flow plumbing fixtures
- Water efficient and drought tolerant landscaping
- Collecting areas for recyclable materials
- A flexible lighting system that can be easily adjusted to users needs
- Highly efficient chillers
- Building energy performance
- Installation of low-emitting materials including sealants, paints, coatings and carpet
- Diversion of 75 percent of construction debris from landfills

The Commonwealth Honors College Complex total project cost $193 million. It joins a growing number of buildings on the UMass Amherst campus to achieve LEED certification. In addition to the complex, the campus has six LEED Gold certified buildings and four other buildings targeted for LEED Gold certification or LEED Silver certification.

UMass Amherst continues to strive to be more sustainable. In addition to the LEED Silver requirement for all new building construction and renovations, the institution offers courses, majors, programs, co-curricular activities, and undergraduate research experiences focused on sustainability.

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