Success Lies Within
Celebrating the Opening of the William N. Pennington Student Achievement Center

by JOANNA TRIEGER  • photos by DAVE SIEGEL
The William N. Pennington Student Achievement Center opened to students Feb. 22. The building’s south entrance is easily accessed from the University Quad.

One look at the sweeping staircase in the middle of the William N. Pennington Student Achievement Center gives you an understanding of the building’s purpose. On the right side, students congregate on the oversized social steps, studying, visiting with friends and talking through ideas. On the left side, students are moving quickly, eager to take advantage of the services, collaboration rooms and study areas that the building offers. On both sides of the stairs, the focus is student success.

“There is something for each and every one of our students at the Pennington Student Achievement Center,” says President Marc Johnson. “We’ve collected our most vital and effective student services under one roof, and we’ve combined them with the study spaces and social areas that our students need to thrive. Wherever you are in your academic career, a visit to the Pennington Student Achievement Center can help you improve.”
The William N. Pennington Foundation provided leadership support for the William N. Pennington Student Achievement Center and has been a champion of student success initiatives at Nevada for more than 25 years. Foundation Trustees Fred Scarpetlo and Rick Banis ’67 (accounting) pictured and Donald Carano (not pictured).

Help when you need it
Every aspect of the 77,345-square-foot building, which was paid for through a combination of student fees, state funding and philanthropic support, has been designed with the aim of attracting students to the University, retaining them from year to year and graduating them into successful careers. Vice President for Student Services Shannon Ellis believes that a big part of that mission is letting students know that it’s normal to ask for help. “The Pennington Student Achievement Center puts programs and services that will enhance student success front and center in their daily lives. Any barriers they put up in their brains about using these services will go away quickly because they’ll see how mainstream every one of these services is for students.”

In order to accommodate busy schedules, the building has extended evening and weekend hours, allowing students to take advantage of the Pennington Student Achievement Center’s features when it’s convenient for them. On most days, the building stays open until midnight. “Fostering student achievement cannot be done through a 9 to 5 operation anymore,” says Director of Undergraduate Academic Advising and Student Achievement Derek Furukawa. “Understanding that students desired additional space on campus that is conducive to studying and collaboration was the impetus for the extended hours in the Pennington Student Achievement Center.”

The William N. Pennington Foundation has been a champion of student achievement at Nevada for more than 25 years, with major support of student scholarships and programs in the School of Medicine as well as leadership gifts.
to the Pennington Health Sciences Building, the Pennington Medical Education Building, the under-construction E. L. Wiegand Fitness Center and renovations to the Ansari Business Building, which are currently underway.

“Support of this project from community leaders like the Pennington Foundation will have a profound impact on our students and our campus now and for many years into the future,” says University of Nevada, Reno Foundation Board of Trustees Chair and Nell J. Redfield Foundation Trustee Gerald C. Smith ’03 (honorary degree). “The Pennington Student Achievement Center will foster our culture of academic excellence and lifelong success.”

Focus on career success

As you pass from the top of the social staircase through the Nell J. Redfield Foundation Atrium, the Nevada Career Studio opens to your left, accessed by the Thelma B. and Thomas P. Hart Foundation Lobby. According to the Career Studio’s Assistant Director Mary T. Calhoon, this is much more than a job center – it’s a place to lay a foundation, learn strategies for the professional world and design your post-graduation plans. Positioning this service within the Pennington Student Achievement Center encourages students to think about their career path early and often as they pursue their education.

“The clients that use the Career Studio represent the full range of students at Nevada,” says Calhoon. “We have veterans who need help fine-tuning their military resume as they transition into civilian careers, we have students navigating unique disabilities, we have freshmen who are just beginning to think about where their skills and their interests intersect and seniors who need to know which shoes to wear to an interview.”

The Studio now boasts a professional interview room, named through a generous gift from the Robert Z. Hawkins Foundation. “One of our roles is making connections between students and the many, varied employers that want to hire Nevada grads,” says Calhoon. “The Robert Z. Hawkins Foundation Interview Room provides a beautiful, welcoming space to make those connections happen.”

Mark W. Knobel ’77 (social services corrections), a trustee of the Thelma B. and Thomas P. Hart Foundation, said, “We were excited to see the level of adaptability and collaboration that the Career Studio would have in its new location. The Hart Foundation is proud to support students in their career pursuits through this project.”

Leishel Pasion, a senior in the Orvis School of Nursing, started using the Career Studio to polish her resume while applying for campus jobs. Later, she used the service to hone her writing and interview skills as she applied to the Orvis School.

“As a student, it’s a great feeling to have your peers mentor you as you develop your skills. When my nerves got the better of me, I was able to confide in them about the parts of the interview process that I struggled with the most.”

Pasion added, “I think the relocation of all the academic student services, including the Career Studio, shows how much our University focuses on the achievement of their students.”

Success is just across the hall

On the building’s third floor, The Clarence & Martha Jones Family Foundation Tutoring Center, Writing Center and Math Center, which were previously spread throughout campus, now surround an appealing atrium complete with couches and study areas. Jennifer Jorgensen, a senior mining engineering major and geology and business administration minor, finds that placement ideal.

“A lot of students use both the Math Center and the Tutoring Center for basic math classes. I first learned about the Tutoring Center because I had an awesome math tutor who worked in both places, so I saw him as many times as I could. That help was what allowed me to pass my math classes, which was essential since I’m studying engineering.”

Jorgensen now works at the Tutoring Center and thinks that grouping student services in the Pennington Student Achievement Center is a major improvement.

“Before the move, when people asked us for directions to the Writing Center, it used to

Remembering Getchell Library

The William N. Pennington Student Achievement Center occupies the site of the former Getchell Library, which opened in 1962. The library, named for the late mining magnate and Nevada State Senator Noble H. Getchell, grew to 180,000 square feet. However, increasing student enrollment and expanded library holdings eventually pushed Getchell to its limits, and the 295,000-square-foot Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center became the University’s main library in 2008.

Getchell may be gone, but it won’t be forgotten. The former library’s white granite steps now make up the seating areas on the Pennington Student Achievement Center’s south side. Portions of red granite stone from Getchell’s original construction span the length of the wall of the Pennington Student Achievement Center’s second-floor Neil J. Redfield Atrium. A large granite slab in the middle of that wall reads, “In honor of the 93,141 graduates from 1890-2014 and those to come”.

Each year, the number of new graduates will be etched into the slab, serving to remind students of the University’s long history and to inspire them to create its bright future.
be so hard to tell them. There were two locations, each location would only be open during certain hours, and it would be really hard to direct students to the right place. Now it’s so much easier to just take them across the hall.”

Tutoring Director Marsha Urban is excited to have more space available for tutoring programs. “We’re going to be able to do so many new things – small studies skills sessions, collaborative workshops with the Math and Writing Centers – that we didn’t have space for before. And the Pennington Student Achievement Center’s common study areas are great, because if students are working on something in the building and they realize they need help, they can just come right next door to us.”

The Clarence & Martha Jones Family Foundation is named for the late Clarence Jones ’31 (electrical engineering) and Martha (Hansen) Jones (attended 1929-31).

“The Joneses benefitted greatly from their time as students at the University,” says Chancellor Dan Klaich ’72 (accounting), a trustee of the Jones Family Foundation. “It’s a fitting tribute to them to support the Pennington Student Achievement Center and the University’s efforts to get modern-day students the help they need to be successful in their studies.”

Inspiration to succeed

On the fourth floor of the Pennington Student Achievement Center, the Ron Turek & Ann Carlson Alcove and Outdoor Deck offers a new view of northern Nevada: the activity-filled Quad below, Downtown Reno’s unique skyline beyond, and the iconic mountains stretching into the distance.

“This is a place for students to come to feel inspired,” says President Johnson. “We have an outstanding student body, and there are so many opportunities for them on this campus, in Reno, in Nevada and around the world. Generous supporters in our community have come together to help us create a building where barriers are broken down and the possibilities for student success are endless.”

In this lively and light-filled building, already reverberating with footsteps and voices, it is clear that the students of the University of Nevada are taking that message to heart.
A ribbon cutting ceremony celebrates the opening of the Nevada Military Support Alliance Veterans’ and Military Center on the third floor of the Pennington Student Achievement Center March 15. The new space, which was named through a generous gift from the Nevada Military Support Alliance, is designed for veterans to study, collaborate and host events. From left to right: Wolf Pack Veteran President Jeremiah Fruge, Nevada Military Support Alliance Vice Chairman Ronald Bath ’68, ’71 M.B.A., Nevada Military Support Alliance Board Member Alex Woodley ’15, Nevada Military Support Alliance President Scott Bensing, Dan Morgan, University of Nevada, Reno Foundation Trustee Ementus Keith Lee ’65, Devin Rice and Omega Delta Sigma President Sierra Leonard.

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