

Syracuse University Magazine

Manhattan Immersion



As SU's new academic campus in New York City, the Fisher Center offers students across disciplines experiential learning opportunities in one of the world's most dynamic metropolitan areas

By Amy Speech | Photos By Joseph Lawton

Inside a dance studio in the Fisher Center, the University's new academic facility in midtown Manhattan, the soundtrack to *Dreamgirls* is playing, and loudly. Actress Jennifer Hudson belts out, "I am changing, I'll be better than I am... But I need you, I need a hand." Even louder, movement teacher Darryl Quinton blasts encouragement to a roomful of SU actors-in-training. He weaves among them, getting in their faces, making them laugh, making them sweat, and calling on them to shout out lines for the rest of the class to repeat at the top of their lungs ("Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world!") while they hold painfully still in excruciating poses intended to strengthen their bodies and, more importantly, their acting skills.

Later in the day, after changing from workout gear to street clothes, students gather around comedic actor and writer Ed Herbstman, who coaches them in the virtues and intricacies of improvisation. "I'm going to repeat this constantly: Dive deeper, go deeper, invest in what you are doing instead of inventing," he says, inviting two students to serve as "guinea pigs" in a demonstration of "a different way of encountering information from somebody." Lots of laughter fills this class, too, as students collaborate in the moment to create characters and scenes, simply by playing off each other's body language and facial expressions.

Across the hall, in a different type of artists' studio, another kind of learning activity is taking place. A hushed intensity is the only soundtrack here, where architecture students sit at computers alone or in twos, surrounded by three-dimensional models crafted of white paper or pale blue foam. Professor Angela Co consults privately with a pair of students, first at the computer and then while studying their models, asking questions and offering suggestions for variations. "There are some really lovely effects in this one," Co says, gently holding an intricate paper model not much bigger than a sandwich. "I'm glad you guys took on this challenge. And it's quite well made considering how difficult it is." The three scholars rarely look up from the work they are discussing, and, in fact, no one in the room even seems to notice the lively gathering of drama students who are talking and laughing

at their lockers on the other side of the studio's glass walls.

Though dissimilar in form and content, these two academic endeavors share a common bond: Both are Syracuse University programs providing students with invaluable immersion experiences in New York City—a city that's home to more than 40,000 Syracuse alumni, and one that offers up the ultimate real-world learning environment. The Tepper Semester (<http://teppersemester.com>) is SU's rigorous conservatory-style training program for drama students, giving young artists exposure to the industry through master classes, interactions with faculty and guest artists who are at the top of their professions, and introducing them to all aspects of life in New York's cultural and theater world. "The Tepper Semester seeks to educate students not only in the specifics of their chosen fields, but also through developing them as the unique artists they are," says award-winning casting director David Caparellotis, who teaches advanced audition techniques. "No other program exposes students to so many types of theater, from downtown to Broadway, and creates a platform to help them integrate and metabolize these experiences into their own work."

The Syracuse Architecture New York City program (<http://soa.syr.edu/index.php>) blends classroom and design studio learning with guest lectures and an extensive field trip itinerary, providing students with diverse opportunities to learn from renowned Manhattan-based architects while gaining a firsthand experience in one of the world's great cities. "Design-wise, so much is happening here, and the program connects us to that," says architecture student Lara Moock '16, who hopes to work in the city after graduating. "New York is such an international hub and it's always exciting. Being here is an amazing experience. It motivates me and gets me passionate about architecture."

A Sense of Place

Now, thanks to the recent opening of the Fisher Center, the two programs also share a permanent home in the city—one that is custom-designed to serve SU students from across disciplines and allow them a wealth of opportunities to connect with and be inspired by the energy and excitement of the Big Apple. "The value of immersion experiences in the heart of New York City is they afford students the opportunity to enhance critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills while receiving a hands-on introduction to the workplace of their choice in their chosen discipline," says University Trustee Winston Fisher '96, a partner in Fisher Brothers, one of the nation's leading real estate firms, whose naming gift led the way in establishing the center. "New York is so vibrant, so dynamic, so layered with culture. It's the most interesting city in the world. Now we can offer our students an even greater chance to tap into that."

Located on the second floor of an elegant 17-story office building at Madison Avenue and 31st Street, the Fisher Center measures 20,000 square feet and features state-of-the-art classrooms, studios, and lecture and event spaces to accommodate the University's customized educational programs in New York. The new facility expands on the University's existing presence in the city, including the facilities at Lubin House, and is modeled on SU's successful metropolitan centers in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and abroad. The center opened its doors in January, the culmination of a process that began early in 2012 and enlisted the practical and financial support of Fisher and other alumni leaders in the real estate business. Among them was Hal Fetner '83, president and CEO of Durst Fetner Residential, who provided guidance on vendor selection, construction oversight, and shared his expertise throughout the project's implementation.

University Trustee James Kuhn '70, G'72, who is a founding partner of the center and lends his name to its lecture hall and to the NYC program being developed by the Whitman School of Management, scoped out the perfect location—one that is safe, allows easy access to train and subway, and is situated in one of New York's most sought-after neighborhoods. "This places us in the northern end of midtown south, which is the direction the city has taken since the influx of technology and new media tenants," says Kuhn, a Manhattan native who is principal and president of Newmark Grubb Knight Frank, one of the world's largest real estate brokerage firms. "It's an area where the young generation of New Yorkers wants to live and work."

Once the location was acquired, Jonathan Resnick '89, also a generous benefactor to the Fisher Center, helped transform the new space from an empty warehouse to an ultra-modern academic facility in just 16 weeks. "It's what I do every day, so it was easy for me to jump in and run with it and help the University," says Resnick, a Newhouse graduate and president of Jack Resnick & Sons real estate development and management company. "It was a fun project for me and a really successful one for the University." His appreciation is echoed by Michael Lefkowitz '86, who attended to legal matters associated with acquiring the Fisher Center space. "From the earliest stages, I thought it would be wonderful for the University to have a presence that connects Syracuse so directly with New York City," says Lefkowitz, a member with Rosenberg & Estis real estate law firm whose family has made a major gift commitment to the Fisher Center. "It was a pleasure to be part of the process and to help the University through the rough-and-tumble world of New York City real estate. We've created a real sense of place for the University in the city."

Founding partners Richard and William Eggers, sons of former Chancellor Melvin Eggers and his wife, Mildred, are continuing a long-standing family commitment to the University through their investment in the center, where the facility's seminar room will be named in honor of their father. "It's exciting and personally meaningful to see the University expanding its academic programs right here in the city where I've lived for 30 years," Richard Eggers says. He likens the center to SU's study abroad programs, in which students are exposed to new places with vast resources and varied learning opportunities. "Students can spend time in New York City and that fully enriches their academic program back at Syracuse," he says. "It's the best possible way to enhance their education, and the potential is phenomenal."

Anchored in the City

The Fisher Center's first residents had no trouble settling in to their new home at the start of the spring semester. Lisa Nicholas is director of the Tepper Semester and also teaches in the program, which was established in the College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) by Broadway producer and University Trustee Arielle Tepper Madover '94. Currently in its eighth year, the program has grown from 16 to 63 students a semester and from two majors to six. Nicholas reports that students and faculty alike are thrilled with the permanent space at the Fisher Center, which allows for even further expansion of the program. "We love it—its beauty, its function, and the quality and refinement of the architectural design, which supports the excellence and standards of the program," says Nicholas, a VPA alumna. She points to such features as the custom-designed sprung wood floors, mirrored walls hung with curtains, and evenly distributed sound speakers dropped from the ceiling—details that were worked out before construction began to best meet the specific needs of drama students. "The technology and design make a difference in the daily lives of the students and enhance their educational and artistic development," she says. "After seven years in three different venues, it's fantastic to have this extraordinary home for the program. We're very grateful."

Tepper faculty member Sarah Stern agrees, applauding both the new facility and the program itself. "It's a great space that lends itself to creative dialogue and focused work," says Stern, who is co-artistic director of New York's Vineyard Theatre and teaches classes in theater immersion and analysis. "This is the only program I know of that's bringing talented students here at this point in their undergraduate careers—as they are transitioning to professional lives in the theater—and creates this kind of intensive opportunity for them, both in terms of the caliber of classes they are taking and the professionals they are meeting and interacting with. They are getting a real sense of the landscape and are going to be much better positioned as a result. I wish I'd had that before I came to New York."

According to VPA Dean Ann Clarke, the Tepper Semester has provided drama students with an "unparalleled immersion experience" right from the start. "What was missing was a place the program could truly call home," she says. "The Fisher Center is more than a state-of-the-art facility—it is a home for our students, combining the spirit and support of Syracuse University with the cultural opportunities of New York."

Angela Co is coordinator of the Architecture NYC program, one of three global campuses where School of Architecture students can spend a semester or summer. She says the Fisher Center gives the program plenty of room to grow. With the capacity for up to 30 students, the program's space at the center features two studios with computer stations, pin-up walls for displaying design work, and built-in projectors and screens for faculty-led discussions. "The studio space is ample and has an amazing exposure and view out onto Madison Avenue," says Co, who teaches the program's design studio as well as the course Introduction to New York Architecture. "It is set up a bit more like an office setting than the traditional studio, which is really nice and much more flexible." Additional spaces specific to the architecture program include plotter and printing facilities and a model-making shop. "The facility is pretty incredible," Co says. "It's very glossy and bright with a lot of natural light. We're really excited about the space and happy to be working here."

The architecture program also makes use of the lecture hall, a shared space available to any academic discipline using the Fisher Center. Shared spaces also include several smart classrooms, allowing visiting faculty to teach in New York with the same capabilities and technology available to them on campus in Syracuse. "The lecture hall is a great thing because it enabled us to put together a pretty incredible event series, something we weren't able to do before," Co says. "That series is helping us move the program toward being more anchored in the city and engaging in a very active dialogue with contemporary architectural culture."

School of Architecture Dean Michael Speaks considers the NYC program essential to the school's overall mission. "The Fisher Center allows us to develop and propagate a uniquely Syracuse view of the contemporary city, planning, and architecture," he says. "We want to give our alumni, supporters, and the general public opportunities to participate in this discourse and to take part in special workshops, symposia, and short courses. Since all education today is continuing education, the center allows us to extend our educational platforms and expand our reach."

Great Things Ahead

Not only is the Fisher Center perfectly located to enhance SU's existing New York City programs, it is also fueling the University's growth in the city, enabling expanded offerings in such disciplines as business and technology, communications, the arts, fashion, and the humanities. With every day that passes more programs are being developed by SU's schools and colleges to take advantage of the Fisher Center—whether as full semester programs or for shorter offerings made available during January or spring breaks, Maymester, or the summer. Next fall, for example, the Newhouse School will launch a semester-long program for all majors, centered on student internships with NYC communication companies. "This opens up a whole new realm of possibilities for our students," says Newhouse Dean Lorraine Branham. "It also allows us to get some of our New York alumni more engaged with the school and our students. And it is an opportunity for our faculty to have a place to go and connect with alumni and others in the industry. So it's a win-win for us on a number of levels."

SU's continued growth in New York City is an idea that gets Winston Fisher fired up, and it's one he hopes other alumni will want to get on board with. "I'm competitive, and I want Syracuse to be the best," he says. "I want us to do great things and achieve greatness. And because I'm in real estate, I think facilities can help us do that. I believe the Fisher Center can be the start of something that's transformative for the University in terms of New York City offerings. It's a beautiful, modern, and really cool learning environment in a phenomenal location. And I'm proud of it." «



Professor Angela Co consults with a pair of students while studying their models, asking questions and offering

suggestions for variations. Below, she reviews work with the class on the studio's computers.



The new academic facility, located in the heart of Manhattan at Madison Avenue and 31st Street, measures 20,000 square feet and features state-of-the-art classrooms, studios, and lecture and event spaces.



The center's reception area and lecture hall both offer glimpses of the facility's bright and sleek design.





Designed to accommodate the University's customized educational programs in New York City, the Fisher Center opened its doors in January to two well established SU immersion programs: the Tepper Semester for drama students and Syracuse Architecture NYC.



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