

Project Description/Narrative:

RIT / School of Photographic Arts & Sciences (SPAS)

RIT's School of Photographic Arts & Sciences (SPAS) is recognized as one of the top programs in the nation. The third floor of Gannett Hall, long considered the heart of SPAS, had not undergone significant updates since its construction in 1965. The space was dominated by outdated darkrooms, old lab facilities, and narrow corridors that lacked natural light. The primary goal was to modernize the environment and create new spaces that better reflect the innovative curriculum.

SPAS aimed to create an open, efficient layout for lab work and instruction, featuring a large multi-functional lounge, updated darkrooms, a sound capture room, and an equipment "cage"—a central hub where students could check out photographic gear. Additionally, to better highlight the students' creative process, they sought greater transparency between corridors and educational spaces.

The redesigned floor plan maximized natural light and streamlined circulation. A new access path was added to connect the renovated space with a nearby building to the north. This strategic intervention linked the existing corridors, navigating structural challenges and minimizing disruptions to the program's spaces. The resulting geometry, subtly skewed and rectilinear, created a dynamic new axis, positioning the high-traffic equipment cage as a focal point.

The interactive cage counter, framed by wood paneling on the ceiling and walls, leads into the multi-use lounge, a new hub for students and faculty. Positioned to maximize southern exposure, the lounge allows natural light to flood the interior.

To enhance the sense of space, suspended ceilings were removed throughout the renovated areas, exposing the concrete structure and overhead utilities. Clear storefront glazing was added along the corridors to increase visibility, improve light flow, and further expand the space's perception.

A minimalist industrial aesthetic serves as the backdrop for showcasing student work, with subtle accents of color, texture, and natural wood offering warmth and balance. Ringed light fixtures, reminiscent of camera lenses, mark the primary circulation areas. The result is a revitalized learning environment that honors the tradition of photography while embracing its evolving future.

AIA's Framework for Design Excellence:

Please choose a minimum of **three** of the ten measures of the [AIA's Framework for Design Excellence](#).

1. Design for Integration: What is the big idea behind this project and how did sustainability inform the design concept?

This is a renovation project of a building constructed in 1965. Instead of building a new structure, or addition, the College decided to reconfigure an existing floor that didn't work with their current curriculum and technologies. By repurposing underutilized space, strategically opening up ceilings, and establishing new straight-forward circulation corridors, the entire floor has been transformed with a modest budget.

5. Design for Economy: How does the project efficiently meet the program and design challenges and provide "more with less"?

The new spaces are designed to be flexible and malleable for various curriculums and technologies. The open lounge space is adaptable for instruction, casual meetings, social interaction, formal gatherings, critiques, and as workspace. Adjacent to the ever-busy equipment cage, the open lounge, with ample natural light, has become a primary hub for the photography sciences students, and the entire College.

9. Design for Change: Is the building resilient, and able to easily accommodate other uses in 50-100 years?

The simplicity of its design is enduring, and the spaces are multi-functional. By tapping into the existing volume of the structure, making subtle, yet impactful design moves, and by providing transparency between the circulation and instructional spaces, this project epitomizes doing 'more with less'. It offers a new inspirational palette for photography students to advance their artform well into the future.

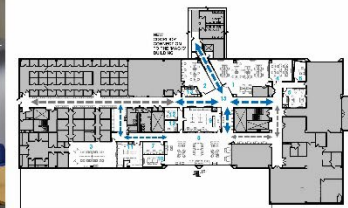
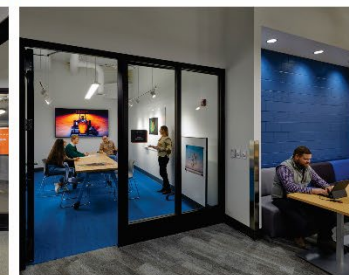
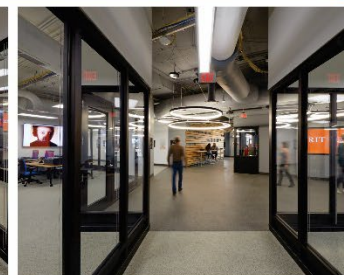
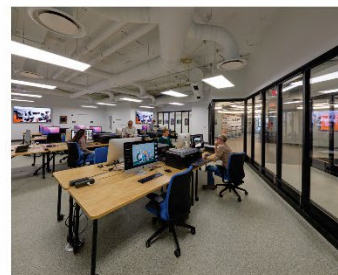
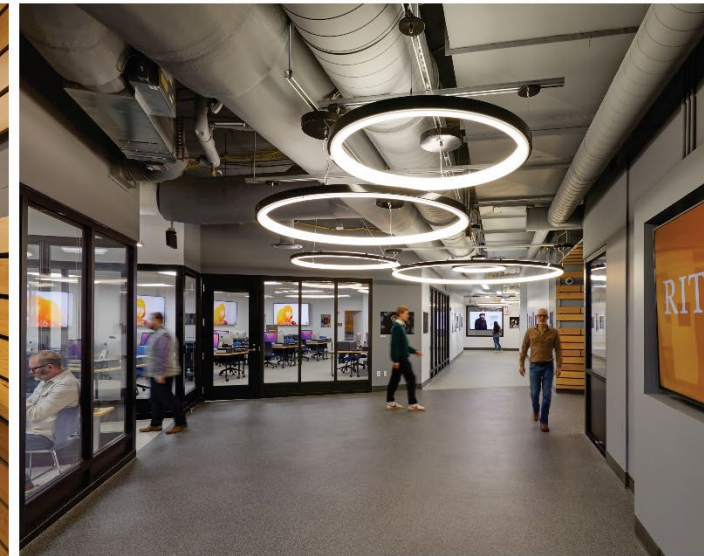
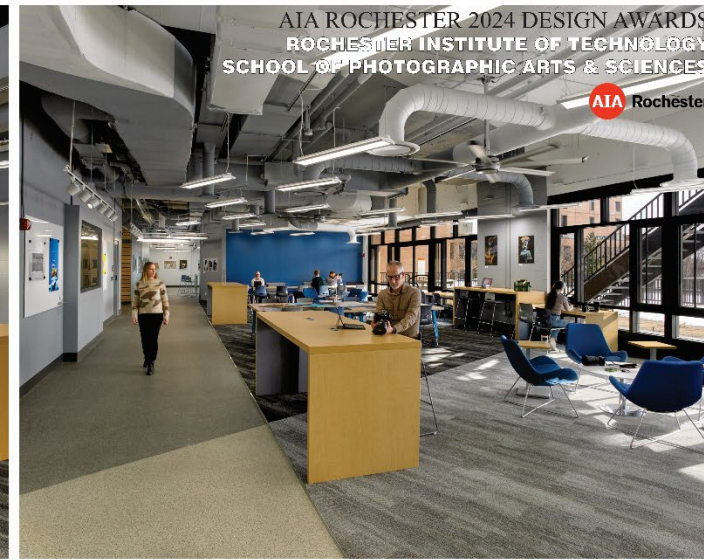
AIA Rochester Community Impact Award:

Community Impact Award Summary

Rochester, known as the 'Image City,' has deep historical ties to photography (Kodak), xerography (Xerox), and optics (Bausch & Lomb). Established in 1829, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) has long been dedicated to merging technology with the arts. The School of Photography, now the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences (SPAS), was founded in 1930 in downtown Rochester and relocated to its current building on the Henrietta campus in the mid-1960s. Initially centered on analog (film) photography, the School has since expanded to include digital imaging and other modern media technologies. This project supports the ongoing advancement of both artistic and technological innovation in photography and imaging within our community.

RIT / SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS & SCIENCES

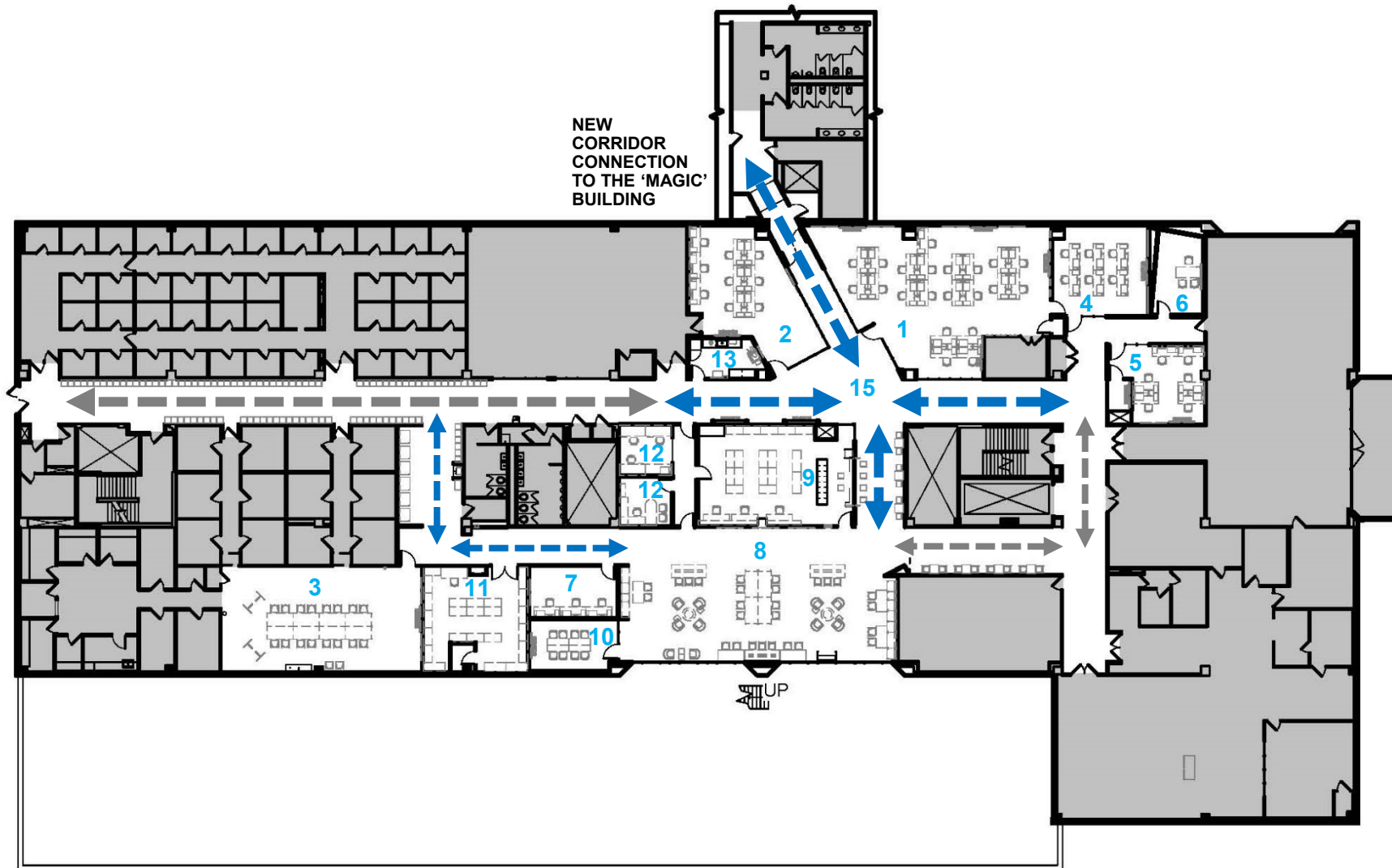
RIT's School of Photographic Arts & Sciences (SPAS) is one of the top ranked programs in the country. The 3rd floor of Gannett Hall, considered to be the heart of SPAS, had not been significantly renovated since its construction in 1965. It consisted primarily of outdated dark rooms, antiquated lab space, and narrow corridors with little access to natural light. The main goal was to enhance the environment and create new spaces that better showcase their state-of-the-art curriculum.





**MULTI-PURPOSE
'AIRPORT' LOUNGE**
(a common gathering
and work space for
students and faculty)

NEW
CORRIDOR
CONNECTION
TO THE 'MAGIC'
BUILDING



FLOOR PLAN KEY

1. ESP (Digital) Lab
2. Grad Lab
3. Analog (Film) Lab & Darkrooms
4. Motion Media Lab
5. 4D Media Lab
6. Sound Capture Studio
7. Faculty Lab
8. 'Airport' Lounge
9. Equipment 'Cage' & Counter
10. Meeting Room
11. Supplies
12. Offices
13. Copy/Print/Break
14. Vending
15. Central Circulation Hub



Existing Circulation



New Circulation

THIRD FLOOR PLAN – GANNETT HALL





NEW CENTRAL CIRCULATION HUB (above)

The new circulation hub formally links the adjacent academic building (behind), to the equipment ‘cage’ counter and ‘airport’ lounge (beyond). Clear storefront was installed along the corridors to enhance visibility, light transmittance, and further expand the perception of space.

PRE-RENOVATION PHOTOS (above)

Original corridor conditions.



CENTRAL CIRCULATION SPINE & HUB
(ringed light fixtures, emulating camera lenses,
articulate the primary circulation nodes)

RIT | College of Art and Design
School of Photographic
Arts and Sciences



PRE-RENOVATION PHOTO
(above)

Original photo equipment 'cage' counter with laboratory beyond.

NEW EQUIPMENT 'CAGE' COUNTER
(right)

The interactive equipment 'cage' counter, emphasized by striated wood ceiling and wall panels, allows students to test various photography equipment.





PRE-RENOVATION PHOTO
(above)

Original Electronic Still
Photography (ESP) Lab.

NEW ESP LAB
(left)

Transparent window walls were
introduced throughout the floor to
better showcase the student's
work process and visually
connect the circulation corridors
with educational spaces.



PRE-RENOVATION PHOTO
(above)

Original lounge area.

NEW BREAK-OUT MEETING SPACE
(right)

A small break-out space for meetings and critiques is located adjacent to the bustling 'airport' lounge.

NEW 'AIRPORT' LOUNGE
(next slide)

The 'airport' lounge serves as a multi-use commons for gathering, work, and display space. It is strategically centered upon an expansive window wall that allows natural light to permeate deep into the floor plate.





MULTI-PURPOSE 'AIRPORT' LOUNGE

(a simple, industrial aesthetic is the backdrop for this rejuvenated learning environment for an evolving artform that is steeped in tradition)