

[Engineering](#) students at Valparaiso University will gain additional opportunities to develop and practice their engineering skills in the Donald V. Fites Engineering Innovation Center, a new facility designed to advance the University's position as a leader in providing a comprehensive education for future engineering leaders

Work on the \$13 million building project began in March, with completion expected in time for students and faculty to occupy it by the beginning of fall 2011 semester

The Donald V. Fites Engineering Innovation Center will enhance the unique, innovative and creative experiences available to students in Valpo's College of Engineering (<http://www.valpo.edu/engineering>) while also being the first building on campus to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification

Kraig Olejniczak, dean of the College of Engineering, said the Donald V. Fites Engineering Innovation Center is focused on the needs of students

"This new facility will support the tradition of Valpo engineers being technically competent, possessing a sound foundational knowledge of engineering theory, while also being able to design experiments and gain hands-on experience," Olejniczak said

The Donald V. Fites Engineering Innovation Center will be attached to the south side of Gellersen Center, home to Valpo's College of Engineering and Department of Mathematics and Computer Science. The addition will cover approximately 13,500 square feet and include additional laboratory and learning spaces for Valpo's undergraduate engineering students

Olejniczak said the new Center will include significant space for Valpo's engineering students to work on multidisciplinary design projects at all class levels, including pods similar to the spaces found in high-tech business incubators. That flexible space will be especially beneficial, he said, for senior electrical, mechanical, computer and civil engineering students. All senior engineering students participate in team design projects that provide a capstone experience in which they develop creative solutions to engineering challenges

"The Center will provide a setting that simulates the environment in which our students will be working once they graduate," he said. "Our students are involved in design projects that can improve people's lives, and we look forward to having a facility that enhances the opportunities for students to be in a setting where they can practice creative problem solving and gain management expertise."

In addition to the new space in the Donald V. Fites Engineering Innovation Center, the project includes the renovation of approximately 4,300 square feet of existing facilities in Gellersen Center

"The College of Engineering has continuously advanced its programming over the years, and our students and faculty have increasingly gained national recognition for their accomplishments," Olejniczak said. "The new Engineering Innovation Center provides well-equipped labs and first-rate facilities to go along with our outstanding faculty, supporting Valpo's place as a leader in undergraduate engineering education."

The new facility is named for 1956 Valpo engineering graduate Donald V. Fites, former chairman and CEO of Caterpillar Inc. and a member of the University's Board of Directors, who provided a lead gift for the project

"My Valparaiso University engineering education was the platform from which I built a highly satisfying life and career," Fites said. "Technical excellence was, and continues to be, a given in VU's engineering college, but the real value that sets Valpo apart is the personal attention and dedication that the faculty and staff devote to each student. When one combines that with the character-building opportunities available on campus not found at larger schools, I believe you have a formula that maximizes an individual's chances for success."

Numerous Valpo engineering graduates have gone on to work for Caterpillar, and in fall 2008 the College of Engineering was the third-ranking supplier of engineers to the company. Caterpillar and Valpo alumni who are current or former employees of the company provided more than \$5 million in gifts supporting the project

"Many Valpo engineers have gone on to outstanding careers at Caterpillar, one of the world's preeminent firms for engineers," Olejniczak said. "That's an outstanding indicator of how highly-sought Valpo engineers are for both their technical skills and leadership abilities."

Funds for the Donald V. Fites Engineering Innovation Center were raised during Valpo's "Our Valpo, Our Time" comprehensive campaign, which concluded in June 2009 and raised more than \$238 million.

