It began with an alumna...

Our project began with a donor who was an alumna of our interior design program and wished to do something in benefit design at Colorado State University. Thus began a series of visioning sessions with various groups from the university and community, totaling 62 sessions between July 2013 and November 2016, when the building planning formally started.

The Strat-Op – October 2014

The first collaborative and cross-disciplinary visioning session was a Strat-Op conducted in October 2014. A StratOp is a strategic and facilitated process that helps teams clarify where they are, where they’re headed, and how they can get there. (Image from Patersoncenter.com)
Our Strat-Op brought together a team of 20 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and local design and construction professionals. During the process we realized the need for a new building to foster cross-disciplinary collaborations across campus, providing greater visibility for design on campus and inviting students from all program areas to engage in design-thinking activities through formal and informal educational experiences. The Strat-Op process was instrumental for making the case that a new building was a critical component supporting cross-disciplinary collaborations between program areas typically siloed and geographically distributed across campus.

**CSU Richardson Design Center Vision:**
- A design district
- A gallery of student’s innovations
- A modeling of the creative process from ideation to prototype to fabrication
- A visibly compelling culture
- A leader in developing new technology and processes
- A campus wide transformation

**A Place to Foster Creative Behaviors: Cross-Disciplinary Collaborative Visioning – October 2014 to November 2016**

Curriculum for a new interdisciplinary certificate program in design thinking was developed in parallel with building visioning — and by November 2016 more than 85 stakeholders representing a range of disciplines (e.g., art, education, business, psychology, construction management, landscape architecture, interior architecture, apparel design, and product development) had participated in the visioning process.
“Creative Crossroads”

Concept drawings for the building were also developed, with the core team comprised of the donor, faculty from several program areas, staff, campus facilities personnel, students, and architects. The building concept focused around making the creative process transparent. The building is located across from a newly constructed football stadium, on a new edge and entrance to campus. It is the only building “off axis” on campus intended to exploit existing pathways across the undeveloped site and maximize daylighting and views of the mountains into the learning spaces.

An Evidenced-Based Design to Promote Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Creativity

Visual connectivity between spaces with different atmospheres and affordances intend to demystify the creative process and support the different stages of creativity and design thinking. The entrances to the building are located at the center, and off the outdoor collaboration spaces, with no formal “front door” intended to invite curiosity and exploration.
It Takes a Village… Funding and Construction – August 2017 to December 2018

Construction began before all funding was secured to finish the building. The vision and branding and spaces were communicated through numerous hardhat tours to alumni and industry partners. Within a few months enough funding was obtained through philanthropic gifts, student organizations, and internal funding to complete the building and purchase new furniture and all major equipment for the makerspaces.

Building Opening – January 2019

The Nancy Richardson Design Center (RDC) opened in mid-January 2019 as an innovative hub for design and design thinking at Colorado State University. The facility provides access to a diverse array of fabrication equipment, hands-on workshops, and interdisciplinary courses in design thinking for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff. Prior to the opening of the facility in January 2019, there were no robust maker spaces on CSU’s campus open to students from all disciplines. In the spring 2019 semester, the RDC began a new 12-credit undergraduate Design Thinking Certificate program with waitlisted courses serving approximately 75 students representing 25 different majors, including many first generation, undeclared, and non-tradition students. The certificate program addresses a previously unmet demand at CSU for interdisciplinary experiential learning that enhances existing instructional programs, helping students more effectively develop those 21st century skills and mindsets that are highly desired by employers: creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary communication. We anticipate CSU undergraduates who have earned the Design Thinking Certificate will have a competitive edge to attaining better positions and higher salaries in their respective fields. Although only recently opened, the center has also hosted many interdisciplinary workshops, events, exhibits, and student and community groups. The RDC has become a popular stop for admissions tours and center staff are frequently contacted by prospective students and their parents to learn more about our curricular offerings and facility. We anticipate the RDC will play a key role in future recruitment and retention efforts at CSU.

Next Steps – Post Occupancy Evaluation

We are currently seeking funding to support our research project proposal, which focuses on understanding the complexities of how interior designs can support user creativity. This project seeks to link mood (affect), social relationships, and wellbeing to qualities of interior settings and stages of creative processes.