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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY UNVEILS VISION FOR LANDMARK ENGINEERING AND ARTS BUILDING

The facility will bring engineering and the arts together in a new campus destination for research, making, creativity, and public engagement, strengthening ODU's academic, cultural, and student experience.

Norfolk, VA, September 1, 2026 – Old Dominion University (ODU) has unveiled the design for its new Engineering and Arts Building, a major academic investment that will bring together the Frank Batten College of Engineering and Technology and the College of Arts and Letters in an integrated environment for interdisciplinary learning. With the project team of Diamond Schmitt leading the design of the arts and performance spaces, alongside Ballinger designing the engineering spaces, and VMDO serving as architect of record, the 140,000-square-foot facility gives architectural form to ODU's vision for an innovation hub that merges technical inquiry and creative practice.

A central focus of Diamond Schmitt's work is the arts and performance program, which includes an 800-seat Convening Hall at the heart of the building. Designed as a highly adaptable performance and presentation space, the hall will support academic events, lectures, conferences, dance, film, music, theatre, and interdisciplinary productions. As both an academic resource and cultural asset, it

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will extend the life of the building beyond the classroom and create new opportunities for engagement between ODU and the broader community.

Anchoring the building is a three-storey central atrium and commons that envelopes the Convening Hall, creating a shared civic and academic hub. Research environments, advanced manufacturing areas, robotics labs, immersive media spaces, visualization studios, rehearsal rooms, and design facilities are organized around this central space, encouraging movement and exchange across disciplines—allowing students and faculty to move fluidly between analysis, fabrication, testing, rehearsal, presentation, and public engagement.

Transparency, flexibility, and the strategic placement of active program spaces shape the building's internal organization. A north-south interior promenade connects workshops, studios, research environments, and shared gathering spaces, putting the energy of making, rehearsal, testing, and experimentation on display. Three double-height studios anchor prominent corners of the building: Studio A supports research-intensive engineering activity, including marine and naval research; Studio B provides a dedicated environment for rehearsal, performance, arts-based exploration, and creative practice; and Studio C serves as a combined arts and engineering makerspace that opens up the building and extends fabrication, prototyping, and performance activity towards the campus green.

Supporting these primary spaces are a costume shop, music technology control room, dressing rooms, meeting rooms, prototyping labs, motion capture suite, and AR/VR studios, for both artistic and engineering workflows. Their flexible infrastructure will allow these environments to adapt as technologies, research priorities, and teaching methods evolve.

The architectural expression of the new Engineering and Arts Building responds to the scale and materiality of the existing campus fabric, while balancing the precision of its research environments with the openness of a public academic building. Warm red brick and cast-stone details connect the project to surrounding buildings, while areas of glazing articulated by metal fins, reveal activity inside and add depth to the façade.

Located at the intersection of key campus routes, the Engineering and Arts Building is conceived as both a crossroads and a gateway. The project strengthens connections between Monarch Walk, West 45th Street, The Oval, and Gornto Pond, creating a more welcoming threshold between the University and the surrounding community. At the east entrance, the three-storey atrium frames arrival from West 45th Street and draws students, faculty, visitors, and community members through the building toward the central green to the west. Along this path, laboratories, studios, workshops, rehearsal rooms, exhibition areas, and shared commons are placed in view, making the building's creative and technical activity visible and accessible from the campus edge.

The landscape strategy responds to the site's flood-zone conditions, while

supporting a welcoming arrival experience. Elevated above the base flood elevation, the building is integrated with carefully graded approaches, engineered stormwater areas, and planted bioswales that help address the site's challenging hydrology, improve ground water quality, and moderate stormwater discharge.

Approved by the University's Board of Visitors and advancing through the Commonwealth of Virginia's capital funding process, the Engineering and Arts Building has received a $223 million investment, making it one of the most significant capital projects in ODU's history. Scheduled for completion in 2030, the facility will create a shared environment for making, testing, performing, and discovery—a place where engineering and the arts do more than coexist, actively informing and shaping one another's work.

"By bringing the performing arts into direct dialogue with research and engineering, ODU is creating a unique environment where artistic expression, technical inquiry, and experimentation can shape one another," says Gary McCluskie, Principal, Diamond Schmitt. "The new Engineering and Arts Building will do more than support interdisciplinary exploration. It will create the conditions for new ideas, methods, resources, and partnerships to emerge—advancing innovation across disciplines."

About Diamond Schmitt
Diamond Schmitt designs transformative, highly sustainable architecture that empowers people, communities, and organizations to harness change for the greater public good. Through a collaborative research process, the firm creates bold designs renowned for their exceptional performance and meticulous craftsmanship. With offices in New York, Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary, Diamond Schmitt has designed a range of acclaimed arts, culture, and academic projects recognized for their versatility of space and striking design. These include the reimagination of David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center in New York, Buddy Holly Hall of Performing Arts and Sciences in Lubbock, the Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and La Maison Symphonique de Montréal. Diamond Schmitt is also working with VMDO on the new Center for the Arts at the University of Virginia.

For more information please visit: dsai.ca.

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