

A place just for the students'

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A remodeled student lounge in Portland State University's Smith Memorial Student Union will reflect students' desires that the combined study space and event venue have an urban, gritty vibe. (Bainbridge)

Andrea Bainbridge was glad to revamp a Portland State University student lounge that her interiors firm, **Bainbridge**, designed a decade ago.

"Right now, the space is nothing but a big room filled with tables and chairs," she said. "It doesn't gather people."

PSU this past spring hired Bainbridge's firm to study the feasibility of remodeling on a limited budget the 3,842-square-foot **Parkway North** lounge in the university's **Smith Memorial Student Union**. In June, university officials gave firm staffers the go-ahead to design the project in time for it to be completed by the time students return this fall.

The project team, for a cost of approximately \$200,000, is transforming the look and feel of the space so that it can better serve its dual purpose as a study area and event venue, Bainbridge said. A small corner stage will be enlarged and moved to the center, and theater lighting and acoustical drapery will be added. To make the lounge a better performance venue, firm staffers worked with a sound engineer and a lighting consultant.

Other changes to the lounge will reflect feedback from students, Bainbridge said.

"They wanted it to be gritty," she said. "They wanted an urban, gritty music (venue)."

A new color scheme and graffiti graphic wall panels will help achieve this look, Bainbridge said. Also, the carpet will be removed, exposing the concrete floor.

"Right now, the space is really light and bright, so we're going to get a dark gray ceiling and walls to get it more urban," she said.

A new raised platform with a steel mesh railing will provide seating next to windows that face the South Park Blocks. This will enhance views from passersby into the below-grade lounge, Bainbridge said.

"You'll see people's heads," she said. "People outside can see what's happening inside."

The remodeled lounge will better serve students' needs, PSU construction project manager Kay Byrne said.

"Smith (Memorial Union) is basically the students' building," she said. "They determined there was a need to have something that was more of a comfortable gathering space for groups. There was nothing there that's really that inviting for gathering and entertaining."

PSU is a longtime client of Bainbridge's. Her firm since 1998 has designed interiors throughout the student union. She said it's been nice to go back and start refreshing those spaces.

"We have a long history in that building of remodeling different areas, and now we look at it and say, 'It's dated and tired,' " she said.

Because the lounge remodel project will be paid for with fees collected from students, their input played a crucial part in the design process, Bainbridge said. The design team met with student event and performance organizers, student government leaders and members of a student funds appropriation committee.

PSU students were clear about what they wanted, turning down initial remodel design concepts as too café-like, Byrne said.

"They said, 'No, no, no; that's more Starbucks. We want more grunge,' " she said.

Some of the students' comments, such as a request for a black light, surprised Bainbridge.

"That's still cool?" she asked them. "It was fun to find out that a grungy bar hangout has not changed in 40 years."

Also important to the students was creation of a campus space where they had complete ownership, Bainbridge senior designer Heidi Payne said.

"Their overriding thing was a place just for the students," she said. "The students voiced that they didn't have a space for them."

PSU is serving as the general contractor for the project, and crews started construction last week, Byrne said. The project is scheduled to finish by the end of September.

Smith Memorial Student Union Parkway North lounge remodel

Location:
Portland State University

Cost:
\$200,000

Construction start date:
mid-August

Anticipated construction completion date:
late September

Interior designer:
Bainbridge

General contractor:
Portland State University

Other associates:
Listen Acoustics;
Robert Dupuy, lighting designer;
System Design Consultants
and Spectrum Systems Design