The new Oppenheimer Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (OC) is waiting for Foresters when we return to campus. Located on the second floor of the Donnelley and Lee Library, the OC is the place where students can literally and figuratively “Make it!” Students need only bring their curiosity, their drive, their ideas, and their vision and we’ll show them how to make those into new ventures.

The Oppenheimer Center named in honor of a gift from brothers Jim ’65, Harry ’66, and Ted Oppenheimer offers a vibrant new space on campus for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The OC features spaces for Foresters to think, do, and share, including open lounge and work areas for collaborative design and development, a flexible classroom, and co-working areas for students and faculty working on new ventures.

“Entrepreneurship and innovation happen when people identify problems worth solving and can effectively mobilize the people, resources and networks to solve them.” Co-Director of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program (ENTP) Patricia “Trish” Thomas said. “Our ENTP program and curriculum is designed to give students the context, knowledge, skills, and discipline to make change happen, and the OC gives them a place to work together to do it.”

Last fall, students in Thomas’ Entrepreneurial and Social Ventures I: Product-Market Fit class used the ENTP curriculum to develop the programming requirements for the space which included shared workspaces, a classroom that can convert to a public presentation space, video conferencing screens, designated workspaces for students pursuing real-world ventures, and a great deal of sound-absorbing material.

Based on the student research, Mary Beth Rampolla, Founder and President of Viro Design Lab, brought the students’ vision and research to life in her design for the OC. Then, Rampolla, Thomas, and Adam Cortright, Facilities Management Associate Director, brought in Forward Space to assist with furniture selection and specification, and Valenti Builders to construct the space. “The Oppenheimer Center is a refreshing update for the College,” Cortright said. “The colors are vibrant! The furniture and space are flexible enough to accommodate many different functions of teaching and events. I thoroughly enjoyed working on this project with Trish (Thomas), Kate (Jackson) and their team of students and contractors for this much needed space on campus.”

“The OC offers students a central place on campus to collaborate and connect with each other, faculty, mentors, entrepreneurs, and community stakeholders,” Kate Jackson, the Co-Director of ENTP, said. “It allows students to imagine, get creative, build, and pitch their ideas.”

“The OC will make it possible for students and faculty to collaborate and connect with each other, experiment with new ideas in a supported and highly interactive environment. Students can come to imagine, get creative, build, and pitch their ideas,” Jackson continued.

“Entrepreneurship is for all 41,000 of us on campus,” Jackson said. “To be a student at Lake Forest is to be a part of an entrepreneurial community on campus and in the world. We want every four-year student to leave the College with a great story of having changed something, learned something, or grown something. We want every four-year student to be a leader in the community they join.”

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And what do students think of the OC?

“Holy Cow! It looks amazing! I can see how much all our work in class [ENTP 270] helped to create the space,” Hunter DePorter ’20 said.

Check out a gallery of photos. Stay tuned for more photos and updates as the OC continues its transformation this fall.

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