

Whitman College
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey
USA
(2001 - 2007)

Architect's Description

Whitman College presents a composition of dormitory buildings and communal facilities organized around three main open courts. These courts are at different levels, forming a number of terraces that negotiate the natural slope of the site. The trees along the western escarpment of the site are maintained. To achieve this, a moat-like landscape has been created along the western side of the site.

At the very center of the College are the communal facilities such as dining hall, library, auditorium, etc. Service access is from the south opposite Baker Rink.

The east/west route, on axis with the train station, and the north/south route from Dillon Gym are the main organizing routes for the new College. The three courts that are created by the residential buildings and communal facilities open towards the east, affording views of the main campus.

Whitman College can be approached and entered in many different ways. From the north-west, a new approach is created terminating with the great tower that announces entry into Whitman College. Another entrance from the north relates to Dillon Gym, while from the north-east a path marks an approach that cuts through the open lawn and leads to the terraced North Court. This court can also be accessed from the north-west by way of a covered passage.

From the direction of Forbes College, one approaches the new Whitman College along the axis of the train station. A U-shaped building accessed by a bridge across the landscaped moat announces entry and acts as porter's lodge. Study rooms, a conference room and the mail room of the new College are located here at first floor. This junction of entrances from north and west becomes a principal public meeting place.

An arcade on the north side of the South Court leads past the library and administration offices to the central dining hall and student café. Two private dining rooms are appended to the east façade of the large gabled dining hall. To the south of the dining hall are the entrances to the auditorium and exhibition hall, which are located beneath the terraced South Court. These communal facilities are well-proportioned spaces of diverse size and scale and, depending on the activity they house, feature oak panelling, limestone surrounds and large fireplaces.

The raised platform above the auditorium and exhibition hall links the upper South Court and lower East Court. It also acts as a meeting place for casual encounters between lower and upperclassmen, resident advisers, graduate students, visiting fellows and faculty.

Student accommodation is distributed around each of the three courts. The residential buildings are typically three storeys tall with attic accommodation. They all feature a mix of three-room quads, two-room doubles and singles, both for lower and upper class students; all with the required gang, single or shared bathrooms, study rooms, living rooms/lounges, laundry facilities, kitchenettes, computer print rooms, etc. Graduate students and resident advisers are interspersed as required while visiting fellows have lodgings in the great tower with views of the grounds and main campus.

The servery, preparation and kitchens with related storage, as well as loading and support facilities generally are located under the library wing in close proximity to the dining hall and café.

Construction, Materials & Character

The buildings of Whitman College are generally constructed in load bearing masonry with graduated roofing slate and concrete floor slabs and staircases. The external load bearing masonry is in traditional Princeton field stone. Indiana limestone is used for all window and door surrounds, arches and arcades and for copings, labels, hood-mouldings, crenellations and other architectural or sculptural features. Windows are timber casements with true leaded glass and built-in "energy-panels." The overall design philosophy stresses the use of passive environmental control wherever possible. Buildings are generally constructed in heavyweight materials producing well-insulated, low-response envelopes. The solid, traditional materials of the exterior fabric produce buildings that are user and maintenance friendly.

"The new Whitman College speaks of tradition in a modern voice," writes Dr. D. Porphyrios. "Its architecture reaches across culture and time to heal the estrangement which humanism constantly faces. The new Whitman College furthers a Princeton tradition that has permanent value and perpetual modernity."