

Rising cost of steel delayed completion of Zeis Hall

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Zeis Hall, the new home of the biology, chemistry and multimedia arts and sciences departments, exceeded its projected construction time due to inflated construction prices, according to Keith Krumpe, dean of natural sciences.

During the final stages of construction, inflation increased building costs, Krumpe said.

"The construction manager at risk had been estimating the prices, and when we went back for the last estimate for the project, which had been on budget six months earlier, it came back \$9 million over budget," he said.

This was due to an infrastructure building boom in China, Krumpe said. Steel was sent to China for the construction of buildings and highways.

"Normally a steel supplier would give you a price and say the price is good for 30 or 60 days," he said. "Steel suppliers would give us a price and say it was good for a week."

The project also took longer to complete due to weather delays and water line issues that ran under the building.

"We broke ground on Oct. 11, 2005," Krumpe said. "We are now fully using the completed laboratories. It was slated to be completed in the spring of 2007, but it was delayed over a year."

The 2000 Higher Education Bond Referendum provided approximately \$22.5 million for the project, Krumpe said. Higher construction costs resulted in the need for more funding, he said.

"The longer it takes to build a building, the less money you have to build because things are becoming more and more expensive," he said.

Even with rising costs, school officials agreed to continue with construction, Krumpe said.

"We had lots of meetings on campus and everybody concluded in the meetings that this was going to be the last time. Barring some extraordinary change in circumstance, this would be the last science facility we would build in our lifetimes," he said.

Additional funding came from a loan UNC Asheville took out against the funds the state distributes to schools as budget.

"Every year, universities are allowed to



Ian Shannon - Assistant Photography Editor

Chemistry student Lateef Cannon, above, exits Zeis Hall, the new science and multimedia building and home to the chemistry department. Professor of hydrology Jeff Wilcox pushes a Darcy column, which measures ground and flow rates through Zeis Hall.

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carry forward a certain percentage of their budget," Krumpe said. "We borrowed against our carry-forward money from the state. Every year, for a certain period of time, we have to pay the state back a portion of money."

Asheville couple Steve and Frosene Zeis, for whom the building is named, also donated \$3 million to the university. Some of that donation funded the completion of the building.

Krumpe applied to the National Science



Stephanie Schon - Staff Photographer

Foundation in August for a \$1.9 million grant to place a research greenhouse in Zeis. This grant will also finish some of the research labs that were not completed during the first phase of construction, he said.

"We should receive announcement of the grant in January," Krumpe said. "If it isn't funded, normally with a grant you can resubmit it at a later time. Whether we'll be able to (resubmit) this time is in question because the pot of money that was set aside

for this grant program was from stimulus money."

Due to budget difficulties, the university decided to construct the building as a shell and then add on as more funding became available, Krumpe said.

"We had two elevators designed for the building, but only put one in," he said. "We couldn't afford to put the other one in."

The multimedia department might contribute artwork to the building in the future, according to Zeis Hall department officials.

"The departments are starting to put up bulletin boards down the hallways," Krumpe said. "I've had conversations with the Chancellor and development about artwork for the space."

Krumpe said he would like to see artwork from multimedia students showcased in the building.

Lorraine Walsh, director and associate professor of the multimedia arts and sciences program, said the building helps foster creativity.

"Zeis Hall provides a cohesive learning environment for the students and faculty," she said. "Previously, multimedia arts and sciences was scattered between two buildings. Zeis Hall locates MMAS in one unified place. This facilitates creative thinking with an exchange of ideas made freer by consolidating our location."

Walsh said she believes the building was worth the time and construction that went into it.

"The building provides more than just a space to learn," she said. "It provides a significant space where one creates."

Previously housed in Rhoades Hall, the chemistry department needed more classroom space, and recently moved into Zeis.

"Zeis Hall also provides for space in classrooms," said Herman Holt, department chair of chemistry. "It allows space to do chemistry and put it in its simplest form."

Zeis Hall allows more room in labs, Holt said.

"In previous labs people were crawling over each other," he said.

According to Holt, the chemistry department is working on getting the necessary materials to enhance the classroom experience.

"Had we started on time we would've