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## UTD's first building halfway to the future

Remodeling takes Founders down to the beams for a new lease on life, adds lobby

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The nearly 50-year-old exterior walls of the Founders building may be surviving the its intensive renovation, but not much else is.

Bill Elvey, director for Facilities Management, said construction of Founders is hitting the halfway point.

The building has been gutted down to its support structure, concrete slabs and steel beams have been added to the east side for a new main entrance, and the only section unaltered is the west wing of the third floor, which is home to the biology department.

"Imagine if you stripped your house down to its four walls. That's what we are doing to Founders," said Rick Dempsey, associate vice president for Facilities Management.

The substantial completion date of Founders is slated for April 2010, giving the contractor a month to finish construction, and the university a month to move in before its operational occupancy date, currently slated for June 2, 2010, Elvey said.

The interior of Founders has been completely redesigned from its original floor plan, with only necessary supports remaining in place. While the inside is being renovated, construction workers are adding a new lobby with improved access to campus on the east side of the building, Elvey said.

Founders will house new classrooms - including laptop centered classrooms - and department offices. A computer lab will be located in the basement.

Li Zhang, head of the biology department, said she hoped more space would be given to the biology program when construction was completed.

"Founders is the only available building on campus that can house biological wet labs," she said. "Our department has more than 1,000 undergraduate students, more than half of the total students in natural sciences & mathematics. Yet our space and facilities are extremely limited."

Founders will also be the new home for the chess and debate teams, which are currently located in the McDermott Library.

The whole project will cost \$27.8 million, which will come from state funds and the UT System. Included in the cost are renovations to the Wes Tech building, which have already been completed.

"This is a really old project," Elvey said. "It was 10 years old and had been left alone. We had to do all over campus renovations before we could do this project."

Dempsey said funding for the project was appropriated 10 years ago, and it was not until he and Elvey pushed for the renovation that progress was renewed.

"It's very difficult to renovate a building compared to new construction," Elvey said. "We are trying to minimize disruption to the biology department. That is one of the challenges of this project."

Despite efforts to isolate the biology department from construction, Zhang admits it has negatively affected faculty and students.



Albert Ramirez

On the east side steel beams will become a new lobby and entrance.



Albert Ramirez

The interior of the Founders building has been stripped to the support structure in order to remodel its layout and update the facility.

"All members of our department, faculty, staff, researchers and students who remain in Founders are affected one way or the other," Zhang said. "For example, depending on different stages of the construction, we have experienced toxic air, particles out of the vent, a leaking roof, extreme cold temperatures, etc."

Dempsey said no renovations were currently planned for the third floor west wing.

