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CU Denver's new centerpiece building is only a few months from opening, and university leaders and guests celebrated by donning hard hats and touring the five-story structure before watching the final beam get lifted into place.

About 70 invited guests attended the topping out ceremony for the 156,400-square-foot [Academic Building](#) ^[2] under a crisp, bluebird sky.

Chancellor Don Elliman, Student Government Association Vice President Lubna Mazin and Saunders Construction President Greg Schmidt spoke about the building's unique features before the final beam, topped by a Colorado blue spruce, was raised skyward. Earlier in the morning, the beam was covered in signatures from students, faculty, staff and even our mascot, Milo the Lynx, who attended the ceremony.

"It's 10 months to the very day that we had the groundbreaking and I am very happy to report that the building is both on time and under budget," Elliman said.

The chancellor thanked the architects and builders for their expertise on the project, which is the first building owned, operated and used exclusively by CU Denver to be built on the Auraria campus. [CU Board of Regents](#) ^[3] Steve Bosley and Stephen Ludwig were on hand for the ceremony. "Without them this building would not have happened, so thank you," Elliman said.

The new Academic Building will house student services in a central location, provide innovative and much-needed classrooms, house departments within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and offer indoor and outdoor spaces that reinforce the relationship of our campus with our downtown Denver neighbors.

Elliman said it's fitting for CU Denver, a premier urban research university that's [celebrating its 40th anniversary](#) ^[4], to have its own building on the Auraria campus. "It's really a centerpiece for what we're trying to do for CU Denver for the future," he said. "The biggest single benefit of this building is being able to consolidate student services into one place. We are, after all, a customer-service operation and this building will allow us to actuate that."

Mazin recalled being bewildered, as a freshman three years ago, by the many different offices and buildings she had to visit to register for classes and get financial aid and other services. "I dreamed of a day when everything was in one location," she said. "When I woke up this morning and looked out my apartment window, my dream was now a reality. Students finally have a place to get all of their needs taken care of in one location."

Other features of the building include:

- Lynx Center, the central hub of student services
- 277-seat Learning Hall
- 150-seat divisible Learning Lab
- Outdoor Terrace
- Assistive Technology Lab
- Cafe (vendor to be determined)

Schmidt said the project has been unique for Saunders in terms of the excellent collaboration between CU Denver and the [Auraria Higher Education Center](#) [5]. "It has been sort of unprecedented in our experience in how smoothly that has gone," he said. "It's been a special project for us."

The Academic Building should be ready to be occupied next August.

Mazin is looking forward to seeing the large lecture halls and flexible dynamic academic spaces as well as the "one-stop-shop" student services, including student affairs, admissions, disability and financial services.

She said the new building combines with other recent developments at CU Denver -- [club sports](#) [6], activities that reinforce community and identity -- to make the university feel more unified than ever.

"This building is taking us one step closer toward that desire for a unified campus," Mazin said. "I can proudly say that the University of Colorado Denver now has the highest level of pride in the history of the university."

(Photos by Glenn Asakawa.)

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