

Design. Inspire. Succeed.

Wherever you want to go,  
St. Thomas will help you get there



Often the best way to prepare a young adult for life as a leader, thinker and global citizen is through a liberal arts education, and STU strives in making that happen. Unique to Canada, St. Thomas University (STU) focuses on a liberal arts education and 2 professional programs, giving students the ability to find solutions to problems, to make independent decisions and to be empowered to take action. With small class sizes, engaged students and passionate teachers, STU offers the freedom for students to think for themselves, the space to discover their passions and improve their skills in communication and critical thinking for today's world.

STU is proud to be forward-thinking in liberal arts education, and they are always looking for ways to improve all aspects of their performance in today's ever competitive world of attracting prospective students to study and work within its halls.



# “Functionality meets modernism”

“I was surprised by what I saw. It's completely a different building inside. It doesn't feel like an institution. The new doors, windows and colors have a soothing effect.”

Beth Arsenault  
Former student



## STU Goals

George Martin Hall (GMH), a beacon on STU's campus, is also one of its oldest buildings. Home to many student services, STU felt it was time to update and repurpose the building to provide students with the best service and amenities. Aware of the very competitive market, STU asked themselves:

- How do we serve our student-customers better?
- What is attractive to today's student?
- What are students looking for when researching prospective schools?
- How do we make our business of providing post-secondary education even better?
- How can we continue to make STU's historic space attractive, both aesthetically and functionally?
- How do we ensure a positive student experience?

STU knew they wanted to create a student-friendly facility; a one-stop shopping experience in GMH, where all of their questions, concerns, needs and wants are met. STU had a vision and wanted to work with someone that could help them achieve it by strategic design.

## St. Thomas University meets

### Optimized Planning & Interiors (OP&I) design team

OP&I follows a very strategic process from start to finish that includes collaborating with the client every step of the way. They pride themselves in a detailed process that is both visible and tangible. Active listening and creative problem-solving of their client's needs, wants and vision is at the forefront of the process.

OP&I researched the current trends on higher education before their initial meeting with STU to determine what it takes to attract student's in today's market. With that under their belt, OP&I met with administrative personnel to brainstorm how a student-centered facility at St. Thomas would look and function.

### How the OP&I process addressed STU's needs

OP&I then used the outcomes of these sessions to drive the process of breathing new life into an old facility. Termed “project-drivers”, OP&I created visuals that respected the objectives and vision STU used to describe their goal of creating a student-centered facility.

A number of these project drivers included:

- Service-focused
- One-stop shopping
- Efficient
- Calming
- Available
- Approachable
- Modern
- Flexible
- Accessible



# “has an open and inviting feel”



**Approachable**—Approachability is all about being open and visible. OP&I did a number of planning studies with different service options to discover how to best optimize how quickly and easily a student could find the services they are looking for. Do students 'feel' they are well served? Do they have a positive experience? One inhibition was readily apparent—most personnel providing students services worked behind solid, closed doors, an element inherent in the buildings historic architecture, that can inhibit a new student's ability in finding the appropriate office offering the service they require.

**One-Stop Shopping**—OP&I studied the way in which GMH is used and discovered that it serves as a main thoroughfare on campus that students pass through on their way to other places. OP&I wanted to give the building's main floor a street-scape feel so students would be comfortable passing through, all the while seeing storefronts as they pass, reaffirming that this is where you go to speak to the registrar, to register for courses or meet with academic advisors, a one stop shopping experience.

**Accessibility**—STU prides itself as being “an institution with a social conscience”, which means being approachable, accessible, flexible and friendly when it comes to meeting students' needs. They are committed to eliminating obstacles that may deter from a student's learning. Accessibility can take many shapes and forms, and OP&I determined it was important to address as many of them as possible even with the restricted space allowances. Exam rooms created on the main and 3rd floor to maximize accessibility options is one such example.

## RESULTS

The final finishing touches were completed in GMH after a collaborative process spanning two calendar years.

**The result: functionality meets modernism.** Students entering the building, looking for answers to questions, will feast their eyes on a completely transformed, student-centric facility that has an open and inviting feel. Proper signage and transparency is apparent throughout. No longer will students feel daunted entering the building. After all, this is their building; a place to address their needs.

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