



# American University, Washington College of Law

Washington, DC

Category: Institutional Architecture

Founded in 1896, American University's Washington College of Law is a supportive community and a uniquely collaborative place where students, faculty, and alumni pursue the values of diversity and equal rights for all. Its new home on the beautiful Tenley Campus at the intersection of Nebraska and Wisconsin Avenues in Washington, DC enhances the institution's rich tradition of innovation, excellence, and passion for the rule of law in the United States and beyond.

## Site

The 310,000-sf project occupies an 8-acre site designated as a National Register Historic District. The design solution creates a campus of buildings and defines a prominent identity for the College of Law, integrated within the historic and neighborhood contexts.

## Program

For its 1,700 students and 430 faculty and staff, the new and renovated buildings form a connected complex of teaching spaces, conference facilities, legal clinic resources, teaching courtrooms, law library, alumni center, faculty and staff offices, and multiple student study/meeting spaces. Outdoor spaces include a central quadrangle and an accessible front lawn that provide opportunities for interaction and promote connectivity to the environment. The campus is organized around a central courtyard space, with an underground indoor commons linking the buildings and day-lit by skylights. This underground connection provides accessibility between buildings without the need for stairs or ramps.

## Solution

Completed in 2016, the new Washington College of Law is designed as a campus of buildings, closely following the footprints of the National Historic Landmark Tenley Campus structures. Activities are interspersed throughout the three main structures, maximizing opportunities for interaction, supporting the College of Law's collaboration-based pedagogy of breaking down barriers, creating connections, and reinforcing a strong sense of community.

Functions are intentionally distributed throughout the complex to encourage connectivity. The library commons is located at the major crossroads of the entire complex, linking various law school functions and containing multiple collaborative learning settings. Formerly an outdoor loading dock, the atrium space is a hub of activity. Glass-walled training courtrooms are adjacent to the atrium/café to display learning activities. Classrooms are found in multiple locations, including in the faculty wing, to promote faculty/student interaction.

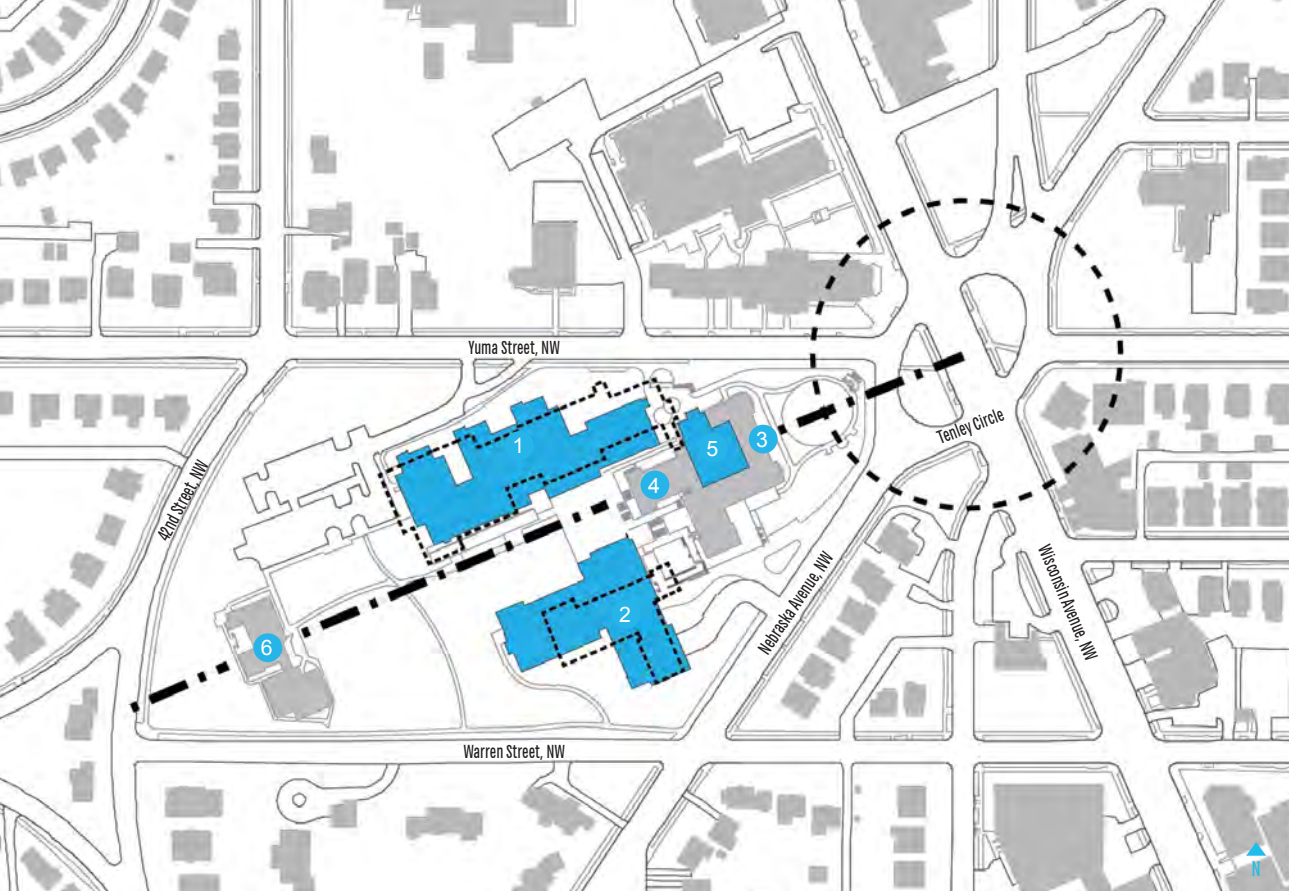
Materials create visual connections between the interior and the natural character of the spectacular site. A neutral palette, inspired by the existing limestone coloration of Capital Hall, is complemented by the warmth of wood paneling on walls and ceilings. Large glass windows providing physical and visual transparency across the campus also serve as a sustainable solution; the high levels of daylighting they provide reduces energy consumption needs. Clear distinction is made between the historic and new buildings, giving a nod to the site's historic past while incorporating the forward-looking goals that define the College of Law.



ATRIUM

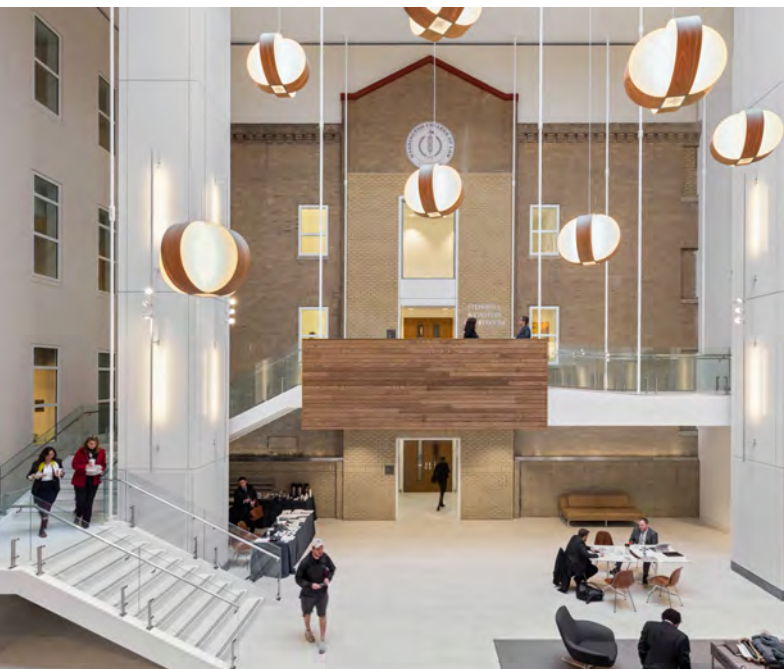
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON  
COLLEGE OF LAW  
YUMA

The new Washington College of Law is modern and forward-looking to reference the innovative focus of the school.



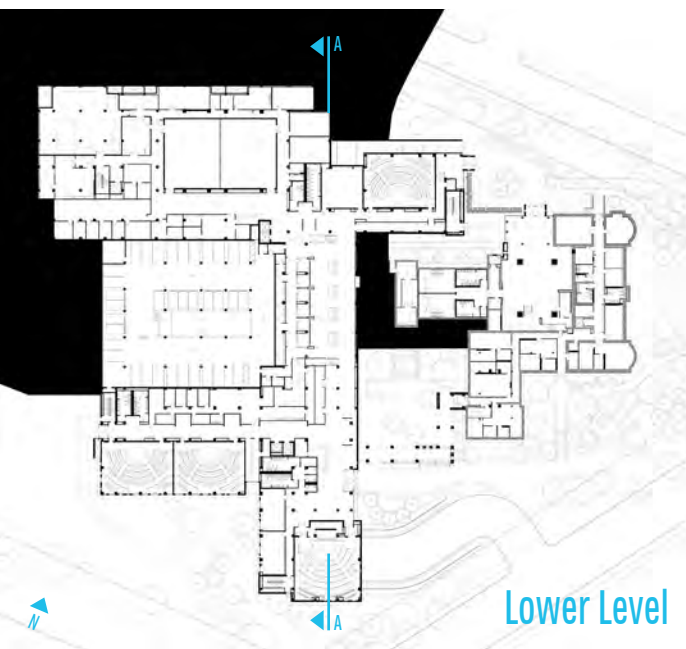
- New Construction
- Existing Buildings to be Removed
- Existing Buildings to Remain
- 1 Yuma Building  
New Construction, Washington College of Law
- 2 Warren Building  
New Construction, Washington College of Law
- 3 Capital Hall  
Circa 1904, National Register Historic District
- 4 Chapel  
Circa 1921, National Register Historic District  
Renovated as Weinstein Courtroom, Washington College of Law
- 5 Atrium  
New Construction, Washington College of Law
- 6 Dunblane House  
Circa 1893, National Register Historic District

In order to maintain the existing campus site character, new construction was limited to the Atrium, the areas previously occupied by the 1955 buildings, and a connecting Commons below grade.

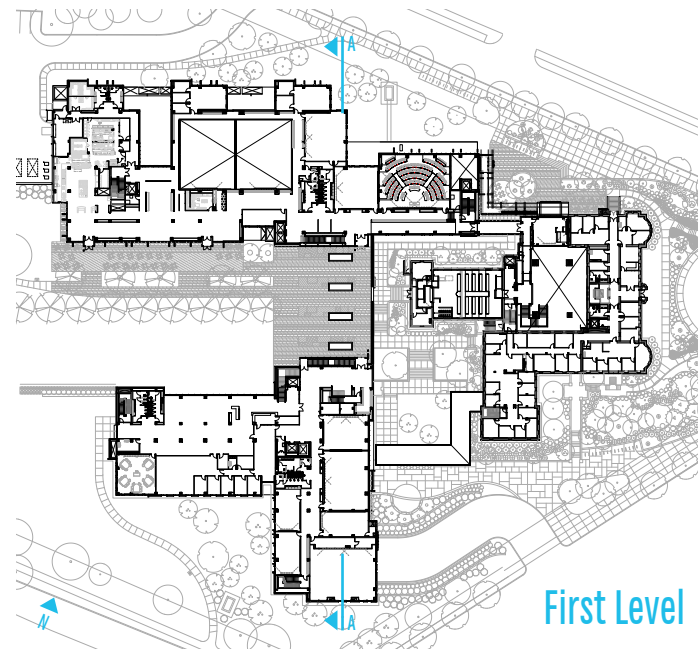




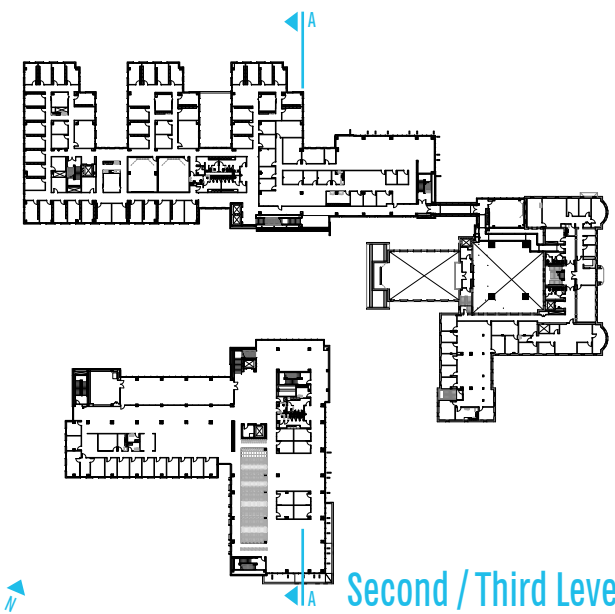
Classrooms are dispersed to promote faculty/student interaction, encouraging participation and collaboration.



Lower Level



First Level



Second / Third Levels



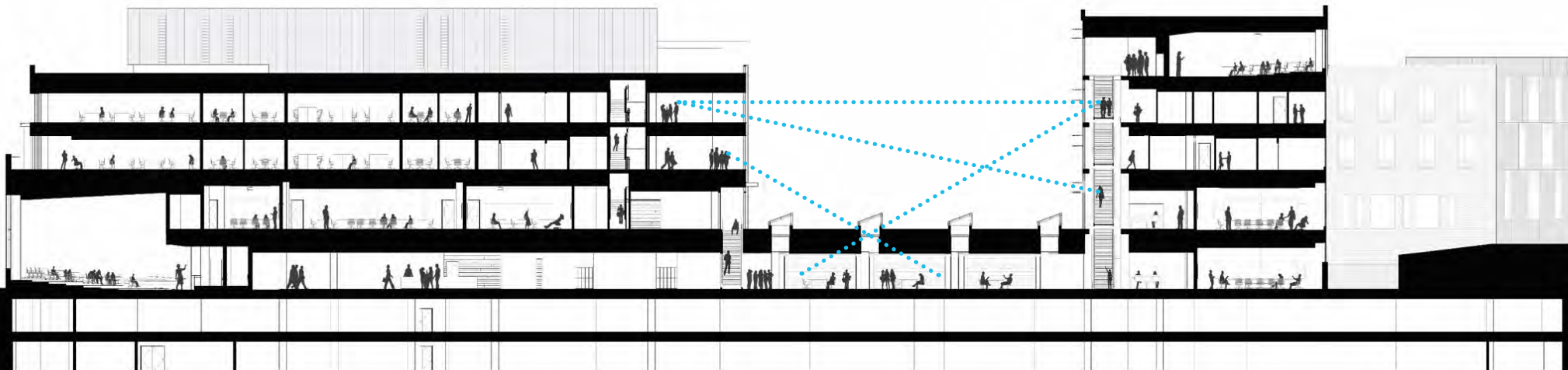
Study areas take advantage of exterior views, establishing and strengthening connections among the school community and with external communities.

The skylit library commons creates a connection between the two new wings and provides group study and work space.

Both the building wings contain large, multi-story, glass-enclosed stairs for transparency, providing visual connections to the campus and high levels of daylighting throughout the facilities.

## Transparency, Connection, and the Environment

The design solution creates physical and visual links between seemingly disparate buildings, reinforcing connectivity, transparency, community, and green spaces.





Radiant ceiling panels are integrated into the ceiling design and carefully coordinated with lighting to create seamless and open spaces for students to meet, work, and connect, and allow learning activity to visually enrich the public areas .



Facades facing the main courtyard/quadrangle are open to maximize physical and visual connection between the outdoor and interior spaces.





New buildings frame the historic Capital Hall, announcing a new face to Tenley Circle and the surrounding community, while remaining sensitive to the historic nature of the site.







AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
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Chapel (1921)

The existing chapel is revitalized as a moot courtroom to promote American University's standing in the legal community.



Sculptural skylights at the quadrangle terrace illuminate the courtyard at night and allow natural light to spill into the law school commons space below.