Designed to meet the academic needs

The Berte Humanities Center houses 12 classrooms, three seminar rooms, 34 faculty offices, a media center, a computer lab, and conference rooms, among other areas. Three of the important programs of the college’s Academic Resource Center also are located in the building—the Writing and Speech centers and the Foreign Languages Lab.

Dr. John Tatter, professor of English and chair of the Division of Humanities, has been on the Birmingham-Southern faculty for 18 years. The renovated facility has finally brought him together for the first time with the rest of his humanities colleagues, including their offices, classrooms, and teaching and learning resources.

“Most importantly, this facility has brought together the entire humanities faculty under one roof, where before we were scattered amongst various buildings on campus,” says Tatter. “This has resulted in a greater sense of conversation, communication, and sharing among us about what we teach, and it is daily benefiting not only these faculty, but also the students we teach.”

It also means greater visibility for the humanities academic programs, says Robert E. Luckie Jr. Professor of English Dr. Sandra Sprayberry. “All of the other academic divisions are in recognizable locations. This building gives the humanities more of a presence on campus. It more clearly identifies us to students.”

Tatter says that the humanities faculty played a major role in the inside design of the renovated facility, with their No. 1 priority being to meet the unique academic needs of the humanities program. From high-tech classrooms to spacious faculty offices to intimate classrooms, their design goals were purposeful.

The result is a state-of-the-art facility that is benefiting both faculty and students alike.

“Every classroom in the center—and on our campus for that matter—is what we call a ‘smart’ classroom, in that each is equipped to allow faculty and students to use the latest in technology,” explains Tatter. “Sound systems are built into each classroom of the Berte Humanities Center, which has made the playing of videos and films—those kinds of things we do so often in the teaching of the humanities—much better, much more natural, and much more professional sounding.”

The faculty offices were enlarged and the classrooms made more intimate to better fit the humanities teaching and learning, as well as the college’s new curriculum. “The humanities dictate a lot of small-group work in faculty offices with students, and the new Foundations curriculum is based on class size of about 20, so we designed the building to fit the curriculum,” Tatter notes. “They are not just big offices, but teaching and learning spaces for the faculty and students.”

“It’s a comfort level,” says Associate Professor of Philosophy Dr. Bill Myers of his new office. “Classrooms can be sterile, but these offices are anything but sterile. We use our offices much like our science colleagues use their laboratories. My senior seminar students can easily meet in my office, which is more comfortable and saves classroom space.”

Explains Sprayberry, “In science, faculty do individual work with their students in a lab. In the humanities, we do individual work with our students in our offices. I do a lot of preparation for group projects with groups in my office. That was impossible to do in my previous office.”

The offices are equipped with built-in bookshelves, which is an important resource for the humanities faculty.