

ROOM TO DISCOVER Biological Sciences Center

BY RHASHAD PITTMAN

What's going on in the new Biological Sciences Center? Professor Kirkwood Land and his students are testing possible new drugs for treating infections. Professor Mark Brunell is working with Civil Engineering Professor Gary Litton and students studying the water quality of the San Joaquin Delta. Craig Vierra, co-chair of the Biology department, is studying the biomechanics of spider silk with his students in hopes of learning how to make stronger, lighter materials for vital products like bullet-proof vests.

Before the Center opened this fall, it was not unusual to find biology students sitting on the floor, on window sills and even in the hallway during their classes due to lack of space. Sometimes rooms had to be used that were not designed for scientific research, such as the Pacific Theatre.

Professors and students in the Biological Sciences Department who remember those days have a profound sense of appreciation for the \$27-million Biological Sciences Center. The two-story, 60,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art teaching and research facility serves 1,200 students in the College of the Pacific's department of Biological Sciences, Pacific's most popular undergraduate major.

Over the years, the growing number of students put a strain on the department's facilities. Faculty members had little or no research space. "I couldn't involve students in a real way in undergraduate research," says Gregg Jongeward, co-chair of the Biology department. "Now we have space where

students can work side by side with faculty."

The additional teaching space enabled the department to reduce lab class sizes from roughly 24 students to 16. "It's a lot nicer," says 22-year-old Angela Peralta, who earned a bachelor's degree in biology and is in her second year of graduate study. "There's more research space and smaller class sizes. As a student, those are all things that you need to have a better education."

The new Center features two large lecture halls, numerous classrooms and teaching and research laboratories. The larger 178-seat auditorium is named in honor of the late alumna Barbara Bechtel Davies '79 and the smaller HEDCO Lecture Room seats 96 students. Both lecture halls have wireless Internet and feature automated projection screens, adjustable whiteboards and a sound system that allows professors to record their lectures to post online as podcasts.

Each faculty member has a private, secure research lab, which allows for close and constant interaction between professors and students as they conduct research. The spacious labs include rooms to prepare specimens for research and abundant storage space.

Craig Vierra says he expects the Biological Sciences Center to lead to faculty members receiving more research grants. Since coming to Pacific in 1994, Vierra has received nearly \$2 million in research funding, mostly from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. He says many

organizations look closely at the quality of facilities when deciding whether to award research funding.

"One of their primary concerns is the infrastructure," Vierra says. "When you can say you have a brand new building, it demonstrates that the entire University is behind you and the program."

"This facility will help attract top faculty and students to the Biological Sciences department and will serve as the academic core for our future scientists, pharmacists and dentists, and other healthcare professionals," says Provost Phil Gilbertson. The department currently has 14.5 full-time faculty members and there are plans to hire more. The additional professors will allow more undergraduates to conduct research

and gain valuable hands-on experience.

"Students want to work in an environment that is cutting edge, where the equipment is new and the technology is at the frontier of science," Vierra says. "You get that in the new Biological Sciences Center, among so many other benefits."

Major gifts supporting construction of the Center were provided by the Wayne and Gladys Valley Foundation, the late Arnold Scott, Tony and Virginia Chan, the Lakeside Foundation, the HEDCO Foundation, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Steve and Kristy Goulart, James Payne, Alice Hunter, Dr. James Stavosky, Lynwood Swanson, Dr. Amit Patel, Mr. Amish Patel and others who requested not to be named.



A PROFESSOR'S LEGACY

The new Biological Sciences Center is a symbol of Pacific's commitment to scientific research and study and a tribute to Paul Richmond, the former longtime chair of the Biology department. A professor of biology for 26 years, Richmond served as chair for 12 years. His ultimate dream was to see the new center built, and he worked tirelessly to make sure it happened.

Richmond passed away in August 2005 — only months before the center broke ground — after undergoing heart surgery. Richmond's family asked that friends and colleagues wishing to honor his memory make donations to the Biological Sciences Center.

Richmond's legacy will forever be present in the building. The center's layout is based on that of the Biology Lab building, which Richmond helped design, and a microscopy laboratory in the new center has been named in his honor.

Top: Barbara Bechtel Davies Lecture Hall.
Far Left: Main Entrance.
Below: Faculty Research Lab