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University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee breaks ground on \$1.6 million student commons project

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USF Sarasota-Manatee will debut a brand new student common at the beginning of the Fall 2016 semester. USF Sarasota Manatee

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SARASOTA -- As University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee moves toward becoming a more residential campus, officials are breaking ground on a \$1.6 million student commons area this summer to help improve the campus-life feel.

The area will feature a lounge with a gaming area, TV monitors, a coffee bar and study areas.

Preparation for the 6,900-square-foot food space started last week with a demolition. Construction is expected to take almost four months.

With plans for a Student Union years down the road, regional Chancellor Sandra Stone suggested retrofitting the first-floor space at the north end of campus to create a robust recreation and social-gathering space, according to officials. Student Government surveyed students on how best to retrofit the area and found consensus around Stone's idea, according to officials.

"This really is student-driven," Rick Lyttle, USFSM director of facilities planning and management said in a statement. "Students were involved in every aspect of the design. It's also part of our strategic plan to repurpose our building for enhanced student use."

Twice as large as the current space, the lounge will include outdoor access and spill into Jonathan's Café, extending from Jonathan's to the building's "mini rotunda." The fitness area will be expanded to allow more workout equipment and new restrooms and lockers. Student government will also gain a new conference room.

Students are funding the project on their own through capital improvement trust funds and student activity and service fees amassed over several years.

The sides worked with architectural firm Harvard Jolly Inc. of St. Petersburg to develop a final draft.

During construction, the copy center and student government offices will relocate to a trailer outside the building. The lounge and fitness area will be closed. Jonathan's will remain open, although it could experience intermittent interruptions.

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