



# Leveraging a Love of Libraries: Successful Fundraising for a New Building

SMITH  
COLLEGE

# Introductions



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# Smith College

- Private liberal arts women's college in Northampton, MA, f. 1871
- 2,500+ undergraduate students, 350+ graduate students & 53,000 living alums
- Ranked #13 among US colleges in 2023 by *US News & World Report*
- College Endowment: \$2.8 billion
- Fun Fact: In 1893, Smith was the site of the first women's basketball games





# Smith College Libraries

- 3 campus libraries:
  - Neilson Library
  - Hillyer (Fine) Arts Library
  - Josten Library for Performing Arts
- Special Collections: 3 major repositories/40,000 LF
- Off-campus storage: 700,000 volumes
- 68 FTE staff across all libraries, including 17 FTE in Special Collections
- \$4.9M general collections acquisitions budget



# Vision and Timeline

Program, Planning: Shepley-Bulfinch  
Design: Maya Lin Studio

- Flexible, collaborative spaces for learning, research and teaching
- Natural light throughout spaces
- Open up the campus east to west
- Commitment to a sustainable future
- Engagement with Smith community



Library Master Plan	Programming, Planning & Design	Construction	Opening
2010-2014	2015-2017	2017-2021	March 29, 2021



# Program Planning as Education

- Why?
  - Prepare the community for change
  - Define a narrative for Neilson's future
  - Future of the library = future of Smith
- Who?
  - Senior Staff & Board of Trustees
  - Faculty
  - Alumnae
- Partnered with Brightspot



# Educating the Campus

- Engagement sessions and workshops: 128 faculty, 505 students, 120 staff, 956 survey respondents, 20 one-to-one interviews
- Curricular partnerships: Anthropology, Sociology, and Environmental Studies coursework about the project
- Chair Fair - campus community tested furniture: 500+ visitors - mostly students



# Inform, Excite and Engage



- College publications ran feature articles, seeding institutional pride
- Guest speakers spoke about the future of academic libraries
- Librarians discussed program objectives at events and 1:1 donor meetings
- Friends of the Libraries newsletter provided updates
- Communication stations during reunions





# Programming = Cohesive Messaging Across Platforms

- Smith is a leader in developing the next-century library
- The renovation of Neilson is the college's largest capital project of the decade
- Libraries are changing and Smith must seize this opportunity
- In remaking Neilson, Smith is broadening the concept of the traditional library, responding directly to trends in education and library design and development
- The renovation has been a community effort
- Philanthropic support for the library project has been strong



March 29, 2021  
Opening Day!

**Oculus**  
All floors





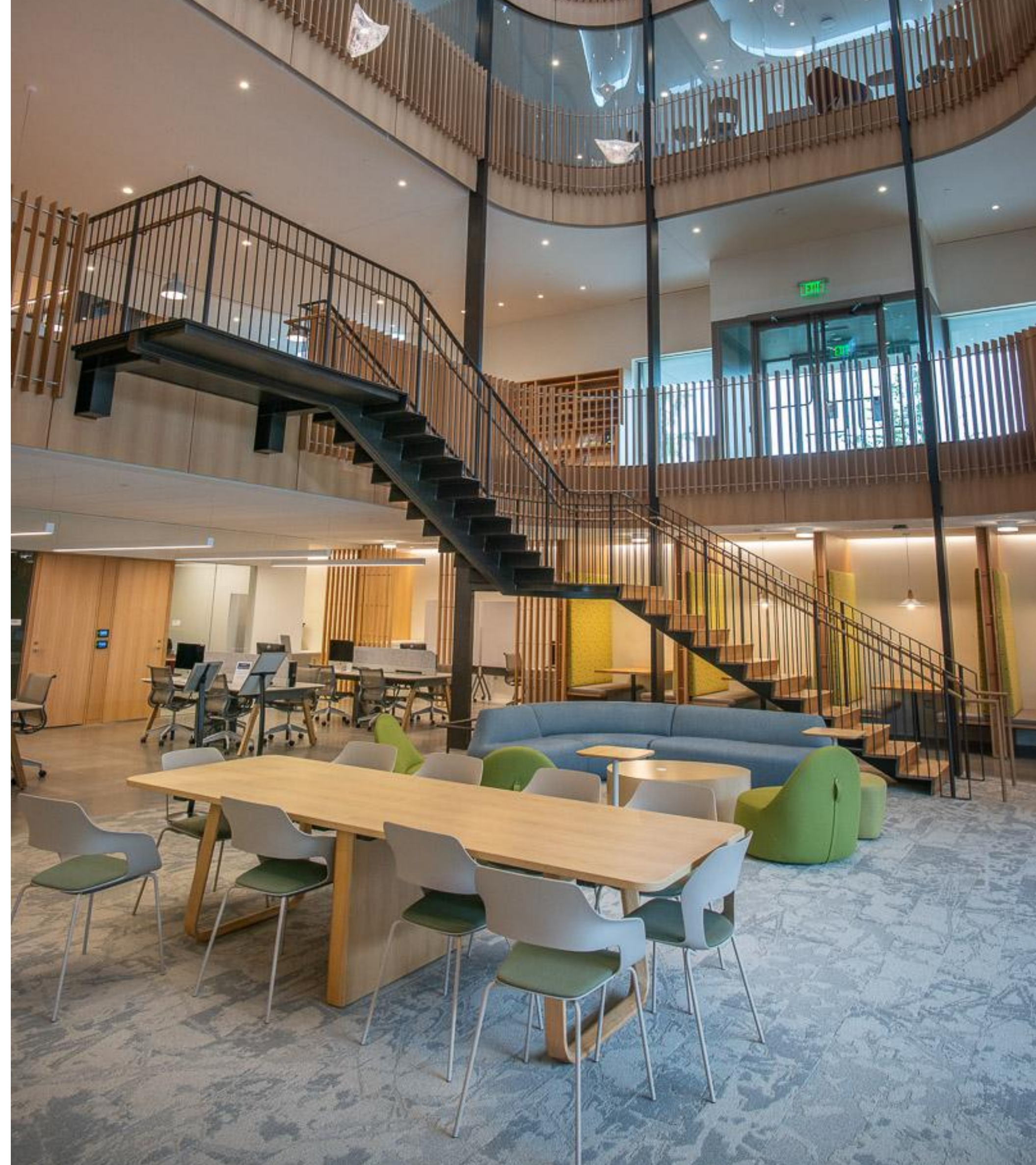
**Central Hall**  
1st Floor



**Central Service Point**  
**Ground Floor**



**Learning  
Commons  
1st Floor**



# Digital Media Hub Ground Floor



**Sunken Garden  
Ground Floor**



GF80 -  
GN451

GN451 -  
GT75

# Compact Shelving Ground Floor



The image shows a modern, bright interior space, likely a library or cafe. The floor is made of light-colored wood with a herringbone pattern. In the foreground, there are several round tables with light blue tops and white chairs. In the background, there is a long counter with a wooden top and a white base, with stools underneath. To the right, there are tall wooden bookshelves. On the left wall, there is a large circular graphic of a compass rose. The ceiling has recessed lights and several pendant lights hanging over the tables. The overall atmosphere is clean, modern, and inviting.

# The Compass Cafe

## 1st Floor



# Reading Room

## 3rd Floor



**Special Collections Reading Room**  
**3rd Floor**



**Skyline Reading Room**  
4th Floor



**Skyline Terrace**  
4th Floor



**Amphitheater**

# Fundraising: Multi Level Strategy

- **Library Development Strategy Team**

- Overall planning for fundraising

- **Central Development**

- Established a Presidential **Library Round Table** for high level donor cultivation
- Created a **library gift designation** within the college's annual fund for smaller gifts
- Established gift pyramid and naming opportunities

- Highest level **endorsement:** President McCartney promoted the project continuously



# Fundraising: Alumnae Programming

- **Road Show:** Dean Susan Fliss and Director Beth Myers met with alumnae communities for small group talks, teas, lunches, etc., to
  - showcase library staff, innovative library programming, and distinctive elements of Special Collections
  - **Goal:** to educate & fundraise for the building but also specific projects
- **Reunion Presentations and Q&A** - virtual and in-person.
- Included project updates in Smith's **alumnae magazine**. [\*29 Reasons to Love New Neilson\*](#)





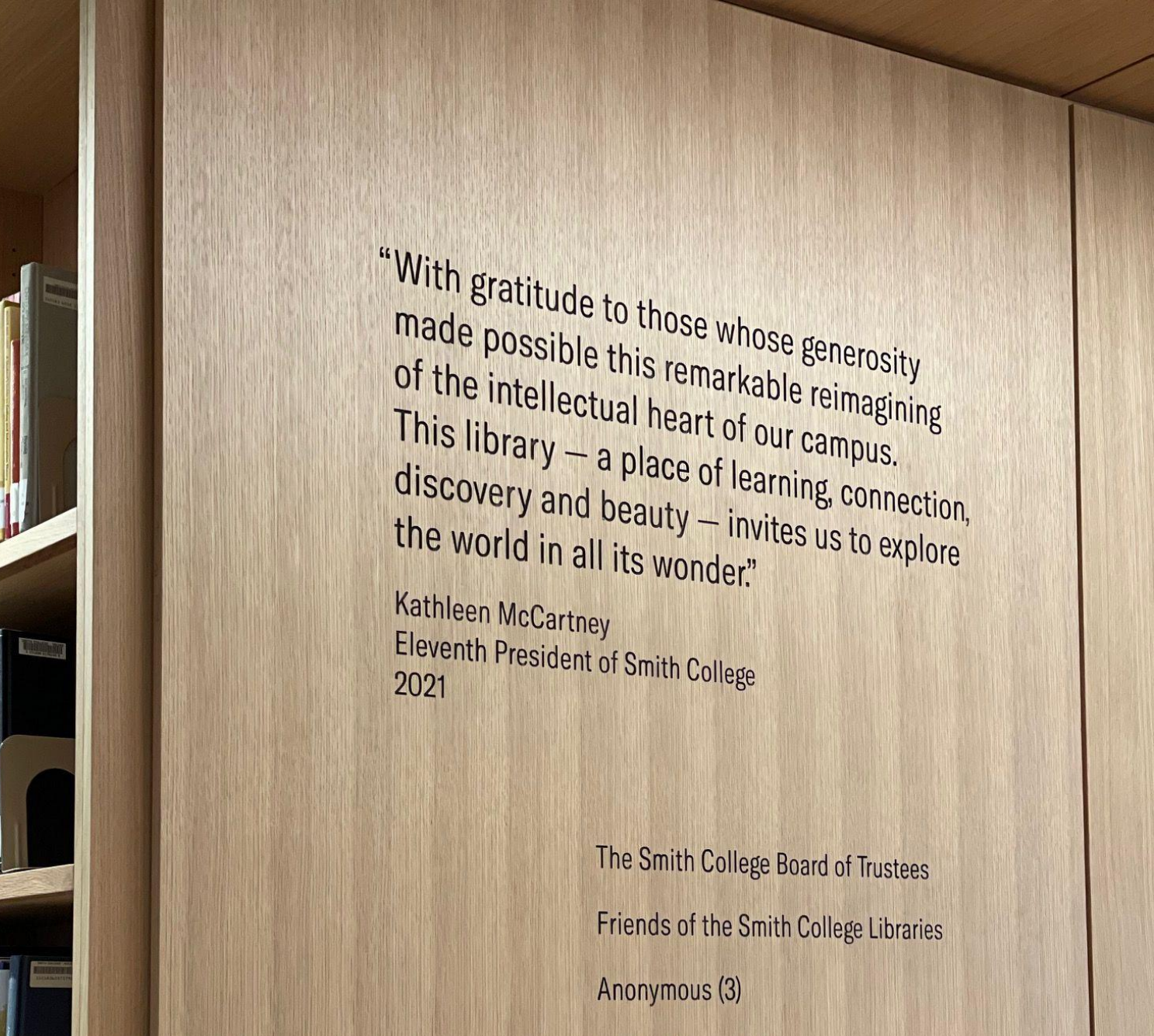
# Fundraising: Naming Spaces

Opportunities to name spaces in the building for gifts ranging from \$250,000 to \$8,000,000



# Fundraising: Donor Recognition

The community recognition wall lists names of all donors of \$100,000 + for construction & programming



# Fundraising: Friends of the Libraries

- Expected to lose members during the closure and reconstruction of the library
- Lesser role, supporting the “Life of the Libraries” - non-competitive with larger goals
- Newsletter list grew to 3,000, communicating progress with donors
- Slow opening due to pandemic made it harder to recoup former Friends members
- Created the Oculus Society to “celebrate and support the New Neilson” and help with start-up costs



# What Worked Well

- Library staff served the Planning Committee = direct impact on design
- Raised the profile of the library on campus with senior administrators, faculty, staff & students
- Raised awareness of the centrality of the library to the mission of the college
- Radically raised the profile of Special Collections to be on par with the college's art museum and botanic garden (flagship collections) - leveraging Special Collections to deepen connection to the project
- Building is now a campus focal point for classes, events, and exhibits
- Library is explicitly linked to the wellbeing of the college



# Expected & Unexpected Outcomes



- During primary fundraising phase it was more difficult to raise funds for general library services and technology
- Focus on physical building diminished attention on program needs for staffing and technology
- Pandemic meant a quiet, controlled opening with no fanfare
- No appetite for post-construction retrofits
- Seismic shift for the Smith community idea of a library
- Ongoing interest from alumnae, general public (many, many tours)
- High demand for space use by others





# What's next?

Ongoing focus on programming and services

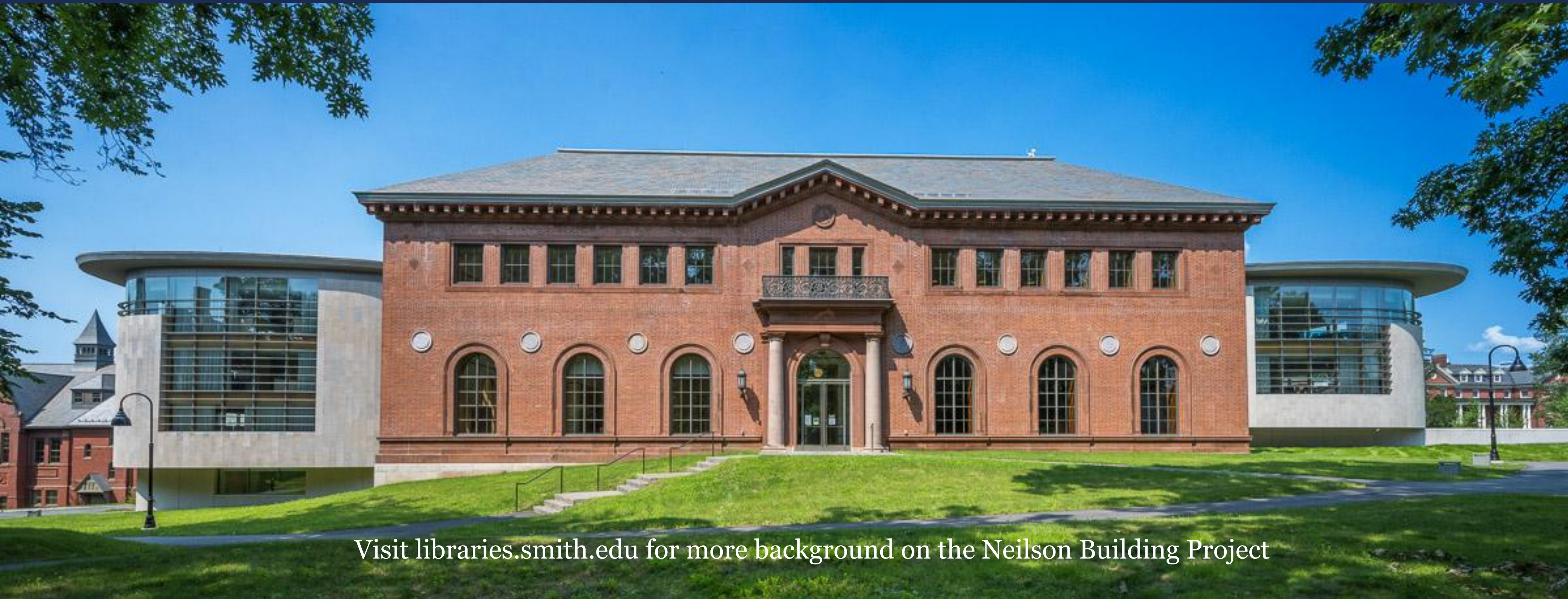
Rebuild base of support for Friends of the Libraries

Continue to promote the Oculus Society

Continued spotlight on Special Collections

Shift messaging - from changing spaces to space use

# Thank you !



Visit [libraries.smith.edu](https://libraries.smith.edu) for more background on the Neilson Building Project