

EMPOWERING STUDENT WELLNESS BY CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING



“These buildings have answered much of what’s been missing. **We are very proud of this project.** Students are using the buildings in expected and, of course, in unexpected ways.”

Dr. Megan Stang

Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

For over three-quarters of a century, HMC Architects has provided innovative, sustainable, and progressive solutions to our clients’ challenges. This dynamic thinking is central to the way we work. When you partner with HMC, you will see the difference in the HMC Experience. These examples demonstrate how Design for Good has positively impacted our clients and communities.

Goals

Promote Inclusive Campus Living Environments

Create student housing designs that foster inclusivity, ensuring all students, including LGBTQIA+ residents, feel comfortable and safe.

Enhance Student Wellness and Success

Improve student success, recruitment, retention, and engagement rates by designing for safety and inclusivity.

Champion Design for Social Change

Contribute to societal progress and advocate for inclusive and supportive student spaces.

Address Safety and Equity Concerns

Provide a tangible solution to eliminate verbal and physical abuse and create a safe environment.

Implement Student-Centric Design Solutions

Create functional, cost-effective, and privacy-enhancing bathroom facilities—based on student input—that cater to the needs of all genders.



Cal Poly Pomona Student Housing



Gender inclusivity plays a pivotal role in enhancing the well-being and comfort of students within the realm of contemporary student housing design and operation. Ensuring a comfortable living environment for all students, including those who identify as LGBTQIA+, is essential in making them feel truly at home.

This sense of safety and belonging is a prerequisite for student well-being and success. The pressing need to address this issue is evident across many campuses as they strive to plan and design facilities that meet the diverse and evolving needs of their current and future student populations in the most equitable manner possible.

As architects committed to the ethos of Design for Good, we have always sought to align ourselves with contemporary issues to drive positive change. In 2013, the topic of gender equity serendipitously entered our purview. Cal Poly Pomona was transforming from primarily a commuter campus to one that prioritized student life, aiming to boost student engagement and bolster recruitment, retention, and overall student success rates.

A significant facet of this transformation centered around designing and constructing new student housing. However, these new facilities were not envisioned at the campus periphery, where older housing stock resided, but rather as a central campus component strategically positioned near academic and student service hubs. The goal was to create a vibrant, high-density student neighborhood that would shape the

identity of Cal Poly Pomona for generations to come. The project's guiding principle was clear: prioritize the student experience and well-being.

During the design phase, we engaged in several student outreach sessions. It was during one such session that our perspective was profoundly altered. A group of non-binary students attended, and we initially embarked on our discussion with broad ideas about fostering engagement and building a sense of community. However, a pivotal moment occurred when one student raised their hand and expressed, "I don't feel safe living at Cal Poly. I didn't even want to come to this school." In that instant, with the associate vice president of student affairs, the executive director of housing, and the residential life director present, our undivided attention was seized.

We listened intently to their concerns about safety, especially in the context of the 1960s-era dormitories that were ill-equipped to accommodate their needs. Tragically, verbal and physical abuse of transgender students was far too common, with statistics revealing that one in four transgender students had experienced sexual violence in college.¹ As architects

Project Information

CLIENT:
CALIFORNIA
POLYTECHNIC STATE
UNIVERSITY, POMONA

LOCATION:
Pomona, CA

SIZE:
340,000 SF

COMPLETION:
01/2020



1.6 MILLION

people identify as transgender
in the United States.

CAL POLY POMONA

29,103

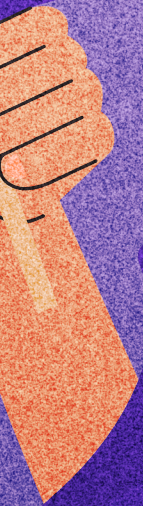
students total,
including **3,463**
first-year students

6

non-binary students
who helped inform
restroom design

156

gender-neutral
bathrooms in Secoya
and Sicamoro halls



ACROSS THE USA:

188

Gender-neutral
bathrooms
designed by HMC

60%

of transgender
students fear for their
physical safety

65%

have experienced
harrassing behavior

50%

reported poor mental
health while in higher
education programs

25%

said adverse treatment
impacted their
academic success

There are **218,000** transgender students in United States. How can we design to improve their mental health and well-being?



“These amazing new residence and dining halls are **writing the next chapter in the legacy of this great university.”**

Soraya M. Coley

President
Cal Poly Pomona

and compassionate individuals, we swiftly redirected our focus toward addressing this pressing issue through design. Yet, our own lived experiences proved insufficient for this task, and thus, we turned to the students, asking them to guide us in creating safe, inclusive bathroom facilities. Without hesitation, a student grabbed a notepad and began sketching what they considered a secure shower arrangement in a multi-person bathroom. We watched in awe as they meticulously curated the sketch with input from their peers. The courage these students displayed left an indelible impression on us, leaving us determined to answer their call for universally safe bathroom facilities.

Over the subsequent months, we transformed that initial sketch into a concrete plan, seeking approval from the university president. Collaborating closely with our contractor partner, we developed cost-neutral solutions that addressed all students' privacy and security needs, including the group that inspired us. Our subcontractor even constructed a mini mockup of these details to ensure their effectiveness before implementing them across hundreds of bathrooms.

The solution was transformative in its simplicity: we installed lockable doors leading to changing areas outside the

showers. We ensured privacy by employing continuous piano hinges to eliminate sight lines, with doors and partitions extending nearly to the floor and ceiling. The selection of doors and hardware was made with the explicit aim of eliminating any residual sight lines.

These outreach sessions marked a profound shift in our perception of the role of design. We did not create the issue or instantaneously craft a design solution. Instead, we humbly stepped aside and posed the right question at the right time to the right individuals. They, in turn, illuminated the path forward in terms of design. A few years later, what began as a sketch became a tangible safe space, replicated on numerous campuses throughout California.

This experience reshaped our understanding of the power of design. It reinforced that meaningful change can often emerge from unexpected places and voices. As architects, we are now more committed than ever to approaching design challenges with open ears, minds, and hearts, always ready to collaborate and translate innovative ideas into inclusive, real-world solutions that benefit everyone. ●

1. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/09/25/1-4-transgender-students-say-they-have-been-sexually-assaulted-survey-finds>



Why This Matters

- **More young people are identifying as transgender (.5% of adults vs. 1.4% of youth), with 18% of people identifying as transgender being between 13-17 years old.**
(<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-adults-united-states/>)
- **Ninety-one percent of transgender and nonbinary youth said they were worried about transgender people being denied access to the bathroom due to state or local laws in 2022.**
(www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf)
- **Thirty-seven percent of transgender and nonbinary youth reported being physically threatened or harmed due to their gender identity in 2022.**
(www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf)
- **Anti-trans legislation is rising: 566 bills have been proposed in 49 states in 2023, 80 anti-trans bills passed in 2023, and 26 in 2022, including one pending in California.**
(<https://translegislation.com/>)
- **In 2023, 58 bills have been introduced targeting LGBTQ rights in schools and educational settings.**
(<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/over-120-bills-restricting-lgbtq-rights-introduced-nationwide-2023-so-far>)

Los Angeles

633 W. 5th Street, Third Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90071
213.542.8300

San Diego

8910 University Center Lane
Studio 650
San Diego, CA 92122
619.744.4077

San Jose

333 W. San Carlos Street
Studio 750
San Jose, CA 95110
408.977.9160

Ontario

3546 Concourse Street
Ontario, CA 91764
909.989.9979

Sacramento

2101 Capitol Avenue, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95816
916.368.7990

San Francisco

388 Market Street, Studio 800
San Francisco, CA 94111
415.915.0759

design for **HMC** good. **ARCHITECTS**

Founded with the purpose of anticipating community needs, HMC aims to create designs that have a positive impact, now and into the future.

We focus primarily on opportunities to have the most direct contribution to communities — through healthcare, education, and civic spaces.

Learn more at
hmcarchitects.com

