PSU’s existing library is a forced marriage of two disparate styles and intentions. The original, Brutalist library faced SW 10th Ave., which is now the rear of the building and is comprised primarily of stacks. The new addition and façade, facing the South Park Blocks, gather students in a central space enframing a heritage Copper Beech tree planted about 1890. While providing study groups and individual students with an excellent gathering space, and some eye-catching visual effects, the curtain wall façade pinches the circulation desk, central stairs and computer lab, which are cramped and unappealing.

PSU Enrollment, 2009: 26,587
Projected enrollment, 2012: 35,000

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The site functions like the focus of an ellipse or a hub and spoke, centered among I-405, PSU campus, Willamette River and downtown grid.
The massing above the existing streetcar line creates a gateway between downtown and the expanding PSU campus, as well as responding to the SW Montgomery pedestrian green street proposal and the urban plaza across the street. Programmatically the massing separates the traditional media, digital media and service and social functions of the library.
Plans

1” = 20’0”

1 Lobby
2 Exhibits
3 Retail
4 Lecture hall
5 New books
6 Reading room
7 Classrooms
8 Loading
9 Computer labs
10 Reference
11 Reserves
12 Administration
13 Periodicals
14 Open stacks
15 Study rooms
16 Green roof terrace

Level 4

Level 5

Level 6

Level 7

Level 8

Level 9

Level 10
Post-tensioned concrete slabs create the library’s floors and are tied into steel columns and three circulation cores which serve as shear walls. Deep concrete beams span the 60’ opening.

Window openings punch through light gauge steel walls in the upper floors. Wall assembly has exterior rigid insulation and is clad with metal panels. The window-wall ratio of about 50% permits daylighting on a relatively narrow floor plate of 60’ while still protecting book stacks to the interior. High performance double-glazed windows with low-E ratings prevent solar gain.

Irregular vertical circulation on the east side permits visual access between floors and connects the lower building to the upper through a four-story atrium. The feature stairs allow casual browsing of stacks between floors without relying on the elevators.

Stair landings at each floor create view windows which puncture the east and west facades, breaking up the slot window pattern and providing large gathering and study areas on each floor.

The 24-hour computer labs and digital media training rooms are clad in a metal mesh which reduces glare on screens and creates an introverted space for focused computer use.
Portland State University Library

Ted Mitchner

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