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## As architecture work slows, firms heading back to schools

By Mary Ann Bourbeau

For **Ikon5 Architects**, of Princeton, about 70 percent of the company's work comes from higher education — a segment of the business that has remained fairly consistent, even during economic slowdowns.



The cyber cafe at Montclair State University, designed by Ikon5. (Courtesy Ikon 5)

"We like working with that client type," said **Joseph Tattoni**, design principal at Ikon5. "Colleges and universities are very much involved in the project. They want to be at every meeting with you. A lot of architects get frustrated by that, but we like a fully engaged client."

But getting that client in the first place isn't as easy as it used to be, Tattoni said, as the amount of firms bidding on each project had tripled, or even quadrupled, during these tough times.

"Higher education sustains us," Tattoni said. "However, I have noticed in the last year an enormous drop in expenditures for colleges and universities for renovations and new buildings, and a larger competitive pool for architects. Doing the job is a piece of cake. Getting the job was never easy — now, it's very difficult."

Architects often concentrate on higher education, because there's always a need for colleges and universities to make updates and improvements.

"Even if we're not building new buildings, there is still a need to renovate," Tattoni said. "Thousands of students use the facilities, and they get worn. These buildings often need more power and data outlets, even in a wireless environment. You must change the finishes to do that."

**DMR Architects**, of Hasbrouck Heights, recently completed the renovation of the student center at Bergen County Community College, and that 16,000-square-foot facility will accommodate the significant increase the college has seen in student enrollment, as well as faculty and staff.

In addition to its lack of a main entrance, the student center previously did not have enough space for the school's food-service company, nor was there an outdoor area seating area for students. The new design solution includes a main entrance, reconfigured interior space, additional seating areas and a new foot traffic circulation pattern. It also provides additional student leadership offices to serve the college's more than 17,000 students, and offers sustainable features such as energy-efficient lighting, water-saving fixtures in the restrooms and a roof with water-absorbing plants that limit runoff.

"We were thrilled to assist in the expansion of the student center, and are excited about the opportunities the new building will provide to the entire campus community," said **Lloyd Rosenberg**, president and CEO of DMR.

DMR recently completed new academic buildings at Middlesex County College and Ocean County College, and is working on Kean University's master plan.

"Education has been stable for the last 20 years, and I think it will continue to be stable," Rosenberg said. "Colleges are always in need of improvements and new facilities."

Rosenberg said higher education accounts for 40 percent of DMR's jobs, but the company also is active in retail and commercial and municipal project, as well as K-12 school districts.