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## Emerson College opens futuristic outpost in Hollywood

The dramatic 10-story complex offers film students a chance to learn and get internships in the industry hub while living in the gentrifying area.



The new Emerson College campus in Hollywood features a giant silver frame-like facade that connects two residential towers to a sculptural base of lecture halls, theaters and production spaces. (Christina House / For The Times / February 25, 2014)

By Larry Gordon

Although its main campus is in downtown Boston, Emerson College is staking a claim in Hollywood with a dramatic new \$110-million complex to house and instruct students who come West to sample the entertainment industry.

The new Emerson building on Sunset Boulevard — a 10-story futuristic complex of aluminum and glass — is a major upgrade for the program that trains students in writing, design, acting and producing and lands them internships in the film, television and advertising industries here. The school previously held classes in leased space in Burbank and housed students at the Oakwood complex near Universal City.

At least eight other colleges outside California also sponsor semester-in-Los Angeles programs and market them as career-oriented alternatives to studying abroad. Emerson was the pioneer 27 years ago and is now the first to have its own full Los Angeles campus, complete with dorms an elevator ride away from video editing labs and classrooms that have killer views of the Hollywood sign.

Kevin Bright, a former television executive who is founding director of Emerson College Los Angeles, said he expects passersby will be intrigued by the building's giant silver frame-like facade that connects two residential towers to a sculptural base of lecture halls, theaters and production spaces.

The structure "hopefully excites their curiosity and their imagination. I think if we can generate the question of what's inside that building, the building has done its job and the rest is up to us," said Bright, an Emerson alumnus who was an executive producer of the hit television show "Friends" and directed many episodes.

The complex was designed by [Thom Mayne](#) of the Morphosis firm, the [Pritzker Architecture Prize](#)-winning architect perhaps best known locally for the [Caltrans](#) district headquarters in downtown Los Angeles that some nicknamed the "Death Star." The goal was to create a friendly center where students can live and work, as well as a new icon in Hollywood, Shanna Yates, a project designer on the Morphosis team, said as she led a tour of the building.

The Emerson facility enrolls and houses about 130 seniors this semester, and officials say that they expect to fill the 217 beds by next year. (The fees are the same as staying at the Boston campus: about \$25,500 for the current spring semester, including space in a double room.) The Sunset Boulevard location, five blocks east of Vine Street, is more convenient to entertainment industry jobs in Hollywood and the Westside than the Burbank center was. And that section of Sunset is clearly on the rebound, with condominiums under construction across the street and restaurants opening nearby. However, strict security measures are a response to a neighborhood emerging from a darker past.

Olivia McLean, 22, an Emerson senior who is studying film and television production, said she feels safe in the Hollywood neighborhood, although she does not go out alone at

night there or in Boston. She and other refugees from Massachusetts' tough winters especially enjoy the facility's outdoor gathering spots several stories above Sunset, including one with gas cooking grills.

"It's amazing. It's like living in the Guggenheim," said McLean, who has an internship at the [Comedy Central](#) network in Santa Monica and plans to return West to look for permanent work after graduation this spring.

Emerson's new campus reflects continuing interest in entertainment industry careers from college students nationwide, according to USC film editing professor Norman Hollyn, who is president of the University Film and Video Assn.

"So long as you are going to assume Los Angeles is a mecca for the Hollywood type of filmmakers, it makes sense for students to get as much real time as possible at the hub," he said. Emerson does not pose competition to local film schools at USC, [UCLA](#), Chapman or the American Film Institute since, he said, "there are far more interested students than there are available slots."

Other colleges with Los Angeles programs include the University of Texas at Austin, Boston University, Syracuse University, Ithaca College in New York, Temple University in Philadelphia, Elon University in North Carolina and a national consortium of Christian colleges. They rent classroom space and usually house students in furnished apartments.

The new complex is a big financial step for Emerson, a communications and arts school that enrolls 4,200 students and has a relatively modest \$130-million endowment. Funding for the building mainly comes from operating revenue and borrowing, but the school will be targeting its 4,000 alumni in the Los Angeles area for more donations, officials said.

"We really went out on a limb on this," Bright said. "We believe that being first means something and are really hoping it means a lot for our alumni."

*[larry.gordon@latimes.com](mailto:larry.gordon@latimes.com)*

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