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Emerson College is building a new West Coast campus in Hollywood

The \$85-million high-rise on Sunset Boulevard, a potential Hollywood landmark, will be a striking see-through structure where students will live and study the arts.



John W. Walden, Emerson College's senior construction manager, peers over the construction site in Hollywood that will be the school's new West Coast campus. By 2014, the 10-story building is expected to provide housing, classrooms and training facilities for 200 students, double the number now studying in rented space on West Alameda Avenue in Burbank. (Anne Cusack, Los Angeles Times / February 28, 2012)

By Roger Vincent, Los Angeles Times

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Construction is underway on a potential Hollywood landmark, a high-rise college on Sunset Boulevard where students will live and study the arts.

Boston-based Emerson College, which has trained many in the entertainment field, is erecting a striking see-through building that will be its new West Coast campus.

The \$85-million tower, designed by Los Angeles architect Thom Mayne, is intended to make a statement to the community and the entertainment industry, President Lee Pelton said.

"Emerson College has a very strong brand in arts and communication, and this is an opportunity to strengthen and expand that brand in Los Angeles," Pelton said.

The school is being built at Sunset and Gordon Street on a site that had been a parking lot for

Tribune Studios. When the studios were sold in 2008, Emerson bought the parcel for \$12 million from the new owner.

By 2014, the building is expected to provide housing, classrooms and training facilities for 200 students, double the number now studying in rented space on West Alameda Avenue in Burbank. Students are housed in a nearby apartment complex.

The design of the 10-story building echoes the boxiness of a mid-century office tower, but minus significant chunks of the interior; breezes will pass through the complex via an outdoor terrace.

The shape of the new building was made possible by recent advances in computer-aided design, Mayne said.

"It allows us to design much more complicated forms, closer to the way blenders and cars are done," he said, "with softer and much more fluid language."

The terrace, open to the sky, will include a 50-foot oak or sycamore tree among other greenery, he said. "People will wonder how that tree got up there."

Among the buildings designed by Mayne and his Culver City firm Morphosis Architects are the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art building in New York, the Cahill Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics at Caltech and the Caltrans district headquarters in downtown Los Angeles.

Emerson College's Hollywood outpost will have 224 rooms in which students and staff will live. There will be three levels of underground parking and a cafe and shops at street level.

At the Hollywood campus, Emerson juniors, seniors and graduate students will study for a semester intended to include internships in entertainment, media and public relations. It will offer courses during fall and spring semesters, as well as a shortened summer session.

Pelton put the full outlay for the new building at \$110 million, which includes land acquisition, design and other costs.

Among Emerson alumni are talk show host Jay Leno, producer Norman Lear, and actors Henry Winkler and Denis Leary.

Emerson College's development is another sign of the entertainment industry's ongoing return to the neighborhood, said Victor Coleman, chief executive of studio owner Hudson Pacific Properties Inc.

In 2008, his Los Angeles company bought the former Tribune Studios for \$125 million from Tribune Co., the Chicago owner of the Los Angeles Times. The property, renamed Sunset Bronson Studios, still houses Tribune's KTLA-TV.

Hudson Pacific also owns nearby Sunset Gower Studios. Both have storied pasts as the early homes of Warner Bros. and Columbia Pictures, respectively.

"There has been a big shift among entertainment companies that want to be back in the core of Hollywood," Coleman said. One of them is Technicolor, which in 2010 rented a new office building at Sunset Gower Studios less than a block west of the Emerson College site.

Across Sunset Boulevard from the college, preliminary work has begun by Hollywood landlord and developer CIM Group on a long-planned residential and retail complex. Next door to that, another development is being planned by Hudson Pacific, but Coleman declined to reveal details.

"Clearly the amount of energy and capital going into that area is going to make it a focal point for Sunset Boulevard and Hollywood," Coleman said.