

2010

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Recommended Citation

Jordan, Mitch (2010) "Faner Hall: Faux Pas and Follower?," *Legacy*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 4.
Available at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/legacy/vol10/iss1/4>

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Mitch Jordan

Faner Hall: Faux Pas and Follower?

For many young adults in today's society, searching for an institution to continue their educational process has become a rite of passage. Every year, thousands of young adults travel to campuses across the country to find the university or college that is right for them. When prospective students visit Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, few question the aesthetics of the campus. From the natural tranquility of Thompson Woods and Campus Lake, to the antique-like appearance of Shryock Auditorium, to the contemporary Morris Library, it could be argued that the campus at Carbondale is one of the most attractive in the Midwest. However, that argument would only stand until one stumbled upon the concrete monster that stands in the center of the campus. That monstrosity, Faner Hall, has been considered an eyesore since its completion in 1975.¹ Similar complaints about the appearance of the building still can be heard today. However, they are based on modern standards of appearance. They do not take into consideration the era in which the building was constructed. Faner Hall reflects the architectural trends of the 1960s and 70s, and its construction was necessary to fulfill the needs of Southern Illinois University's growing student population.

The 1950s, 60s and 70s were a time of significant change in the United States. The culture of America was shifting, and people were beginning to see things in a different light. Politics, war, and a massive counterculture movement caused people to reevaluate their lives. One aspect people began to reconsider was the value of an education, especially higher education. Americans were beginning to realize that education was the key to long term success in society.² With this newfound emphasis on higher education came an increase in the number of students continuing on to a college or university after high school. Large increases in the student population were first seen during the early 1950s. During a five-year span, from 1951 to 1955, total enrollment in higher education increased by over half a million students.³ In 1960, there were approximately 2.2 million students enrolled, and by 1975 there were nearly 8.5 million

students roaming around America's campuses.⁴ Nearly eighty-five percent of students were attending four-year institutions, although that percentage decreased slightly as more junior colleges were constructed.⁵ At the time, schools were not prepared for the sudden influx of students flooding their campuses. Classrooms, dormitories, and other educational facilities were not large enough to accommodate all of the new students. In order to facilitate a new generation of learners, colleges and universities would be forced to expand on a larger scale. The educational landscape was changing and higher learning institutions needed to change as well.

As more students poured onto college campuses, expansion became an important issue for public and private universities alike. Many university planning experts began to question whether or not colleges would be able to handle the sudden increase in students. A report released by Educational Facilities Laboratories in 1964 concluded that universities were in fact not prepared for the new student population.⁶ Construction of new buildings and facilities was taking too much time and the amount of money that institutions were willing to spend was not going to be enough. The same report estimated that colleges would need to spend around 1.9 billion dollars on expansion. In Illinois, only 195 million dollars were set aside to construct two satellite facilities, one of which was Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.⁷ Despite spending less than what was reportedly needed, the Carbondale campus experienced immense growth during the second half of the twentieth century. That growth and expansion was led by former university president Delyte Morris, who was arguably the most influential figure in the history of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC).

When Morris took over as president of Southern Illinois University (SIU) in 1948, the school was a relatively unknown teaching college that had only a few thousand students. By the time Morris retired in 1970, the Carbondale campus was home to over 22,000 students, barely resembling the small teachers college that it once was. The most significant growth in the student population occurred during Morris's last decade as president. From 1960 to 1970, enrollment increased from 9,000 students to approximately 24,000 students.⁸ One of the main factors contributing to the university's growth was the close relationship that Morris was able to form with the citizens of Carbondale. His emphasis on making the university the town's primary industry, while keeping it a rural community, sat well with Carbondale residents.⁹

Unlike many smaller universities that were forced to place caps on enrollment due to the large influx of students, SIU simply kept expanding. In 1976, six years after Morris retired, the university was finally forced to place a limit on its enrollment because the student population was growing so rapidly that there was not enough student housing available.¹⁰ Morris's expansion was so significant that, early in his reign, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* ran a feature column entitled, "How Big Can SIU Get?"¹¹ Not only did Morris increase the student population in Carbondale, he increased the size of the campus exponentially and worked hard to reach out to the local community.

Morris's actions reflected the trend of expansion that was occurring across America, but the growth Southern Illinois experienced was unheard of at the time. In a span of only twenty years, Morris was able to transform SIU from a small teaching college into one of the nation's 100 largest universities.¹² When Morris left the university in 1970, he left a campus that was barely recognizable to anyone who had seen the school twenty years earlier. However, the expansion of SIUC did not end when Morris left. The Carbondale campus was only a few years away from being drastically altered once again, although this time only one building would revolutionize the landscape of the university's grounds.

The drastic increase in enrollment at Southern Illinois, as well as across the nation, signaled the need for more facilities to efficiently manage all of the new students. According to economist Peter F. Drucker, "To take care of all the additional students expected on the campus by 1975, colleges will have to construct new facilities equal to twice all of the campus buildings erected since Harvard opened in 1636."¹³ Drucker's estimation held true in Carbondale, as the majority of the buildings on campus today were constructed during this period of expansion. Lawson Hall, Evergreen Terrace, Morris Library, and the Communications Building were all planned and constructed between 1965 and 1975. Also, during that time, a new Humanities and Social Sciences Building was planned. It was to be placed in the center of campus, directly on top of the University President's home.¹⁴ A campus map from 1967 (Figure 1) shows the area in which the new building was to be placed.¹⁵ Point B on the map represents the temporary barracks that were used for faculty offices and research; and Point A marks the University President's house. Both of these structures would be demolished to pave the way for the new Humanities building. Eventually that new building would be named after a late English professor whose office was situated in the temporary barracks that once occupied the space.

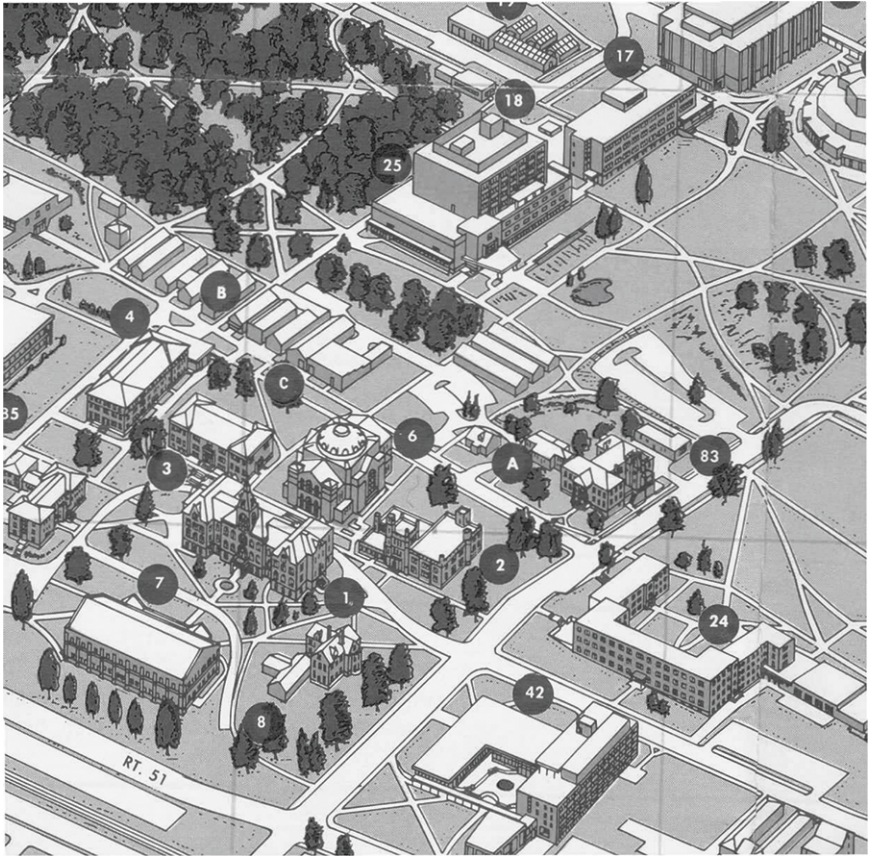


Figure 1

The decision to name the new Humanities and Social Sciences building after the late Robert D. Faner was a simple one. Faner had been a well-recognized educator at the university for thirty-seven years, and had received the Alumni Great Teacher Award in 1964.¹⁶ According to Charles D. Tenney, his students remembered him for “the warmth [and] the enthusiasm of his teaching.”¹⁷ Faner, however, was far from a simple, kind-hearted English professor. His bold and multifaceted personality was what ultimately cemented his legacy at the university. Many faculty members remembered Faner for his maverick mentality and his “intense dislike of administrative prerogative and power.”¹⁸ Although his attitude may not have been beloved by university administrators, Faner’s skepticism towards authority was admired by his fellow staff members and students. Tenney, a close friend of Faner’s, connected the professor’s intrepid

persona with the giant concrete structure that was to be named after him at the dedication ceremony for the building. Tenney said:

Bob Faner's character was the essence of humanity and... naming the building after him will be a perpetual reminder of its nature and function. What other value does it have than to reward its students with feeling and wonder, to encourage its faculty members in the discovery and transmittal of knowledge, to keep the bureaucracy on its toes, and never to let anyone reject the human norm?¹⁹

The structure's complexity has certainly left many individuals bewildered throughout the years. But its dead-end hallways, multiple entrances, and maze-like construction would have pleased Robert Faner. The ability of the building to keep its visitors guessing would undoubtedly have left a smile on the English professor's face. In an effort to capture the essence of the building's namesake, some of Faner's work, as well as other artifacts pertaining to the building, were placed inside a time capsule that was buried just inside one of the entrances.²⁰ Despite the fact that planning for the building began shortly after the professor's death, and the building that bears his name seems to reflect many of the professor's character traits, it is unlikely that designers had Robert Faner in mind when they designed the facility.

The planning for Faner Hall began in December of 1967. From the beginning, the new Humanities and Social Sciences building was considered to be a major alteration to the appearance of the campus.²¹ Towering over older campus buildings such as Shryock Auditorium, Parkinson Laboratory, and Davies Gymnasium, the new building would indeed be a significant variation from the surrounding structures. Yet, those who were doing the initial proposals for the building did not predict that its outward appearance would diverge as much as it did from surrounding structures. They did, however, have a distinct idea of what the building would look like. According to a report from the *Daily Egyptian*, "A major part of the [alteration] will be the construction of a long, open Humanities-Social Sciences building, to stretch from North of the University Center to the home of President Morris. The building's ground floor will contain classrooms and offices, and will feature a covered walkway."²² When finished, the building would measure 914 feet long, have a total square footage of 225,000 feet, and use over 28,000 cubic yards of concrete.²³ The building would no doubt be a large undertaking for the architects who were chosen for the project.

The duty of designing the new Humanities building was bestowed upon the Philadelphia based architectural firm *Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham*. The design and planning of the building would eventually earn the group a Citation of Excellence from the Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects.²⁴ To Geddes, the leader of the firm, it was the "Architects task to embody ethical and aesthetic values in a building at both the individual and social levels."²⁵ Many of Geddes's designs were similar in appearance, and Faner was no exception. Pictured in Figure 2 below is the Graduate Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania, one of Geddes's other designs.²⁶ It is obvious that he used many of the same concepts on Faner Hall that he did when constructing the Graduate Research Center. Most noticeable, he left the main construction material, reinforced concrete, exposed; making both buildings appear as if they were made of the same material that composed the sidewalks surrounding them. The two buildings also share similar structural designs. Each level of the building is clearly separated by concrete slabs and the exterior seems to be protected by an exoskeleton. The style and appearance of Geddes's work must have been aesthetically pleasing to those in the field of architecture because he is credited for designing several major buildings and he was the recipient of at least one architectural excellence award.²⁷ Geddes was not alone in his approach to the building's design, however, as many other building designers held similar views in regards to campus architecture.

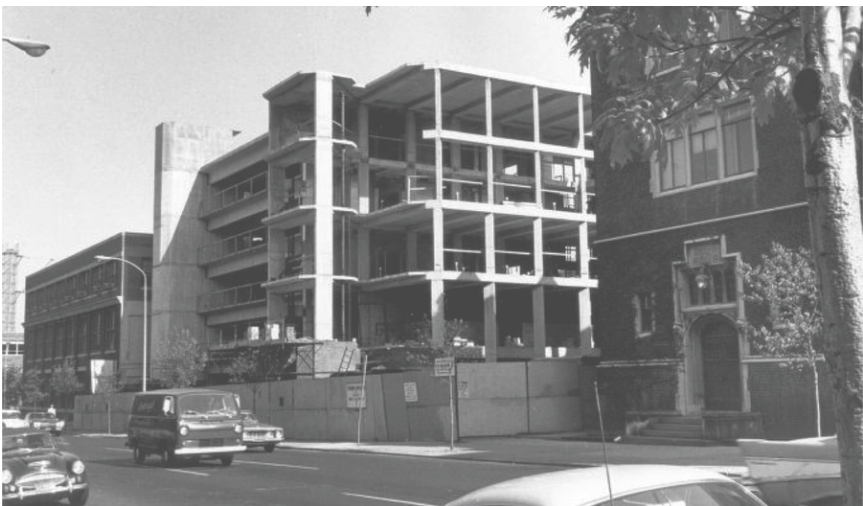


Figure 2

The style of a building plays a significant role in how people view it aesthetically as well as functionally. Campus planning and design expert Richard Dober defines style as:

The recognizable, special, and definitive way in which building parts are shaped into a vocabulary of forms; the forms assembled into distinctive and repeatable patterns; an outer fabric selected with materials that become associated with those forms and patterns; and the whole organized and sited to serve function, to appeal visually, and to signify client attitudes and values.²⁸

When Robert Geddes designed the new Humanities-Social Sciences building almost completely out of concrete, he was incorporating a mono-form style that was prevalent in campus architecture during the time period. Concrete construction became a trademark of the twentieth century, and it was used in dramatic fashion on college campuses across America. The photograph below, Figure 3, shows Yale University's Beinecke Library, which was constructed in 1963.²⁹



Figure 3

The structure clearly fits Dober's definition of style, as it has noticeable patterns and the material contributes to the repetition of those patterns. The style that is evident in Beinecke Library can also

be seen in Faner Hall. Although the interiors of the buildings are not comparable, the exteriors are quite similar. Both use exposed concrete as the façade, and both have distinguishable patterns along the exterior. The two structures also share the common rectangular prism shape. There is also a walkway underneath both buildings. The Beineke Library is not the only education facility that resembles the Carbondale structure, however. A structure that resembles Faner Hall even more closely exists at Boston College.

In 1984, O'Neill Library was opened at Boston College. Not only did it reflect the concrete architecture that dominated the middle twentieth century, it also bore a striking resemblance to Southern Illinois University's concrete structure, pictured in Figure 4 below.³⁰ When placed side by side, the two structures are difficult to tell apart. O'Neill Library, Figure 5 below, not only has the same mono-form characteristics as the structures mentioned earlier, it also incorporates the same type of split-level walkways as Faner.³¹ It is apparent that the designers of O'Neill Library drew inspiration from Faner Hall. In this instance, Geddes's Carbondale masterpiece was indeed a leader, not a follower.



Figure 4



Figure 5

The concrete design that Geddes and many others used in their buildings was part of a new architectural style that arose in the middle of the twentieth century. Architects were trying to move away from traditional styles that dominated both new and old college campuses. Designers wanted to create a style of their own, one that was not a descendant of the Oxford and Cambridge styles of the previous centuries. In order to do this, builders would need to utilize other materials besides brick and cement. Many turned to concrete, which according to Richard Dober, was believed to have "intrinsic characteristics, truths, which when discovered would yield objectively defined architecture."³² Because concrete could be formed into almost any size or shape, designers began to come up with new and revolutionary ideas for building designs. Doer explains, "The shapes and forms [of concrete] would liberate designer and client from having to imitate or interpret styles from earlier generations."³³ No longer were architects forced to create

brick structures that resembled European castles and churches. Concrete blessed designers with a flexibility that had previously been unavailable to them. Sharper angles and cylinders could now be incorporated into building designs. Concrete design also eliminated the need for timber, thus saving an important natural resource.³⁴ Large buildings also became a more feasible option with the use of concrete. Thus, the practicality of concrete helped to make it the material of choice during the era of college expansion.

Concrete buildings also became a status symbol for universities after the 1940s. By placing new concrete structures on their campuses, campus officials were able to show that they had moved away from traditional architectural styles and were ready to embrace new ideas. Concrete structures also showed that universities were prepared to take on the new student population that accompanied the postwar boom, as they tended to be larger than older campus buildings. According to Dober, "Concrete structures became the signals of institutional advancement," representing not only a change in architectural styles, but also a shift in the overall landscape of higher education.³⁵

However, as much as concrete helped change the face of college campuses nationwide, it also possessed several negative traits. The aesthetic properties of the material left much to be desired. As Dober put it, "On some campuses today, the appearance of concrete would seem to be not a material that manifests institutional advancement, but an error in aesthetic judgment."³⁶ The bland, grey color of concrete is more often than not quite unappealing to the human eye. It is hard to find beauty in a building that is the same color as the walkways that surround it. Hence, although the material withstands the elements, concrete is not always aesthetically pleasing. For example, Dober noted that on a wet day "moisture-dampened concrete is dreary and dismal," which takes away from the often times impressive architectural design.³⁷ When there is moisture in the air a concrete building looks more like a highway overpass or a parking garage than an educational facility. Concrete also tends to become non-uniform in color, making it appear dirty or stained. These negative aspects would ultimately lead to harsh judgment of Faner Hall from students and faculty on Southern Illinois's campus.

Even before the \$14 million structure had been completely finished, Faner Hall was being criticized by faculty and students.³⁸ The building had been given nicknames such as the "aircraft carrier" and the "concrete zeppelin," neither of which belongs in the middle

of a rural college campus.³⁹ The fact that the building was finished a year behind schedule led to a few complaints, as well. Faculty members who moved into the facility soon complained about the confusing layout of the building, leaking pipes, and temperature control problems. The outward appearance of the building did not help its cause, either. Faculty members complained that “the building did not fit in with the rest of campus, calling it ‘ugly’ and ‘impractical.’”⁴⁰ Their complaints were undoubtedly warranted considering the fact that nearly all of the surrounding buildings had been constructed decades earlier. The gloomy gray color of Faner Hall did not blend well with the vibrant red and brown bricks that decorated the exteriors of all of the neighboring facilities. Students and faculty also expressed their ill feelings toward the building by voting against the construction of the parking garage that is in front of Faner Hall today. Although the main argument against the building of the parking garage was not related to Faner Hall, the new building did play a factor in the opposition to the garage.⁴¹ Teachers and students alike did not want another concrete structure to be placed next to older, more visually appealing structures like Parkinson Laboratory.

Obviously the complaints about the building did not lead to its destruction, and it can be assumed that those departments that were housed in Faner were more than happy to be housed in a new, up-to-date facility. Still, many were unhappy about the appearance of the new building.

University personnel were quick to defend the design and appearance of the newly built, and newly despised, Faner Hall. Officials acknowledged that the building did not fit in with the surrounding structures, but they insisted that if it had been the same design, then the campus would be unexciting.⁴² Rino Bianchi, the Director of Facilities Planning during the construction of Faner Hall, stated the obvious: “The concrete has been used honestly. We didn’t paint or put up a brick veneer. Concrete is an honest material.”⁴³ Certainly Bianchi was not the only school official who had to defend the appearance of a new concrete building. Many other concrete structures were undoubtedly criticized by students and faculty at other universities.

Moreover, those who question Faner Hall’s design are not alone, as many a passerby has wondered about the building’s design and appearance. However, one would only need to look at other college campuses to discover that the structure is far from unique. As indicated, the building possesses qualities that exist in many other

facilities that were also constructed during this time period, and its immense size is a direct result of the large increase in student population. Unlike other structures, however, Faner has a rich history that is as intriguing and distinctive as the building itself. Although it will continue to be ridiculed about its confusing layout and bland exterior, Faner's classrooms will be utilized by young scholars for years to come. I can only hope that in the year 2075, one of those young scholars researches the building once again and discovers that there is a treasure trove of information located a few feet under the building, waiting to be exhumed.⁴⁴

Notes

- 1 Matt Feazell, "Faner nears completion-a year late," *Daily Egyptian*, 4 February 1975, 3.
- 2 *Educational Facilities Laboratories, Bricks and Mortarboards; A Report on College Planning and Building* (New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1964), 7.
- 3 *Educational Facilities Laboratories, To Build or Not to Build; A Report on the Utilization and Planning for Instructional Facilities in Small Colleges* (New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1962), 3.
- 4 *Educational Facilities Laboratories, Bricks and Mortarboards*, 7.
- 5 Richard P. Dober, *Campus Planning* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corp., 1964), 9.
- 6 *Educational Facilities Laboratories, Bricks and Mortarboards*, 8.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 8 Robbie Lieberman and David Cochran, "'We closed down the damn school': The party culture and student protest at SIU during the Vietnam Era," *Peace & Change*, 26, no. 3 (July 2001): 319.
- 9 Betty Mitchell, *Delyte Morris of SIU* (SIUC: Board of Trustees, 1988), 36.
- 10 "SIU-Carbondale to impose its first enrollment limit," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 26 March 1976, 15A.
- 11 Mitchell, *Delyte Morris*, 73.
- 12 Pete Goldman, "How Big Can SIU Get?" *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 7 July 1957, E1.
- 13 *Educational Facilities Laboratories, Bricks and Mortarboards*, 7.
- 14 Betty Mitchell, *Southern Illinois University: A Pictorial History* (Missouri: G. Bradley Publishing Inc., 1993), 83.
- 15 Southern Illinois University, "Carbondale Campus Map" (Carbondale, IL: Central Publications, 1967).
- 16 "The Dedication of Faner Hall," *Alumnus*, May 1975, 3.
- 17 Charles D. Tenney, as quoted in "The Dedication of Faner Hall," *Alumnus*, May 1975, 2.
- 18 Charles D. Tenney, as quoted in "Hall, simple plaque honor Faner," *Southern Illinoisan*, 10 April 1975, 3.

- 19 Tenney, as quoted in "The Dedication of Faner Hall," 3.
- 20 Henry de Fiebre, "Hall, simple plaque honor Faner," *Southern Illinoisan*, 10 April 1975, 3.
- 21 "Woody Hall to Become Office Building in Fall," *Daily Egyptian*, 12 December 1967, 1.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 "The Dedication of Faner Hall," *Alumnus*, 3.
- 24 Tim Hastings, "Faner dedication to top Liberal Arts Week," *Daily Egyptian*, 9 April 1975, 3.
- 25 Robert Geddes, as quoted in "Robert L. Geddes" <http://www.answers.com/topic/robert-l-geddes> (accessed 1 March 2009), 1.
- 26 "Moore School, Graduate Research Center (built 1966), exterior," photograph, by Frank Ross (http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/archives/detail.html?id=ARCHIVES_20020612002) 1967.
- 27 Geddes, "Robert L. Geddes," 1.
- 28 Richard Dober, *Campus Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1992), 39.
- 29 "Beinecke Library," http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/SOM/beinecke01.jpg
- 30 Mitch Jordan, 24 April 2009, Faner Hall, Personal photo collection.
- 31 "O'Neill Library," http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/BC/tac_oneill2.jpg
- 32 Dober, *Campus Design*, 105.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., 106.
- 35 Ibid., 105.
- 36 Ibid., 106.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Fiebre, "Hall, simple plaque," 3.
- 39 Hastings, "Faner dedication," 3.
- 40 Feazell, "Faner nears completion," 3.
- 41 Bob Springer, "F-Senate opposes parking garage," *Daily Egyptian*, 13 November 1974, 2.
- 42 "The Dedication of Faner Hall," *Alumnus*, 3.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 The time capsule placed in the building in 1975 will be opened in 2075.