

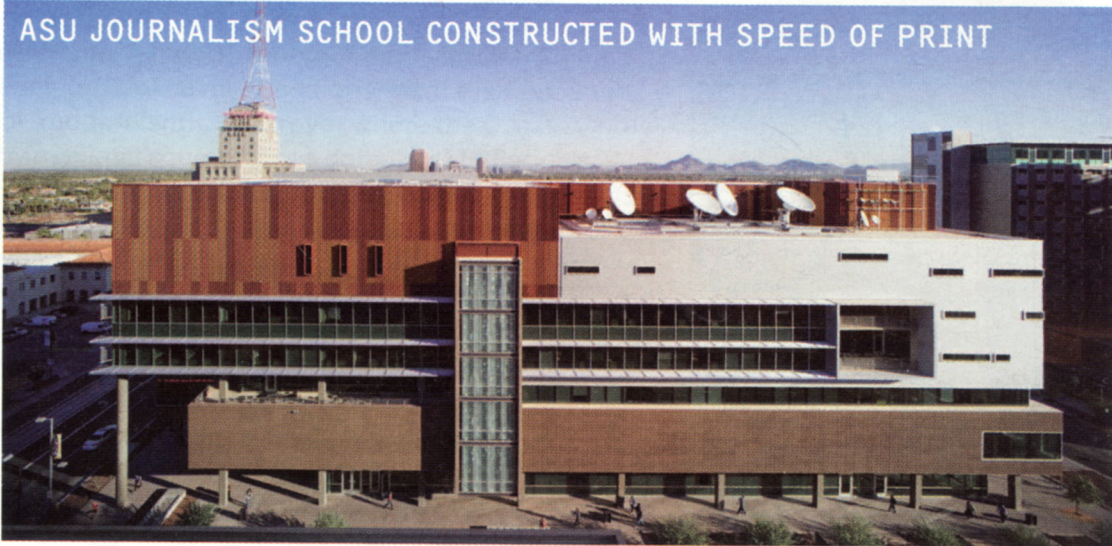
# THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

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### ASU JOURNALISM SCHOOL CONSTRUCTED WITH SPEED OF PRINT



BILL TIMMERMAN

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## Phoenix Rising

The big news in Phoenix this holiday season was the opening of the long-awaited light rail line that linked its densifying downtown to Arizona State University's (ASU) main campus in nearby Tempe. But perhaps an even bigger game-changer was the permanent arrival of the media itself. ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and local public television station KAET/Eight opened at a prime spot along the new Central Avenue's rail line. For the time being, the Cronkite School crisply delineates the north-west edge of downtown's vertical burst—a counterpoint to the vague boundary of America's sprawling, fifth-largest city. The Cronkite School's crown, a colorful array of burnt-hued corrugated steel panels inspired by the U.S. broadcast frequency spectrum, signals the building's presence from afar.

In response to the city of Phoenix's RFP to deliver the project at breakneck speed (20 months to the first day of school), LA's Ehrlich Architects teamed up in September 2006 with HDR as executive architect and local giant Sundt Construction. The proposal's success depended in part on Sundt's concrete expertise and a regular structural bay to get all but the top floor into the ground quickly. Sundt would also contribute a lineup of pre-selected subcontractors, streamlining construction sequencing. In addition, the proposal featured a thoroughly integrated team of designers and consultants that enabled groundbreaking to occur four months later, having already completed programming, blocking, stacking, and strategies to accommodate future construction. This model for design-build project delivery made for "zero value engineering, no change orders, and a much more holistic approach to design," said Elaine Solomon, vice-president of science and technology at HDR.

Once the four-story lower concrete structure containing the school's facilities was in place, a steel structure above was employed for KAET's column-free television, radio, and sound stages. The complex interlocking of different facade materials speaks to the varied functions behind, including classroom areas, lecture halls, news broadcasting facilities, and sound studios. The burnt-hued stripes indicate studios; woven metal mesh screens the glazing of the "leadership suite" and the adjacent Reynolds Center for Business Journalism. As a background, sand-colored block surfaces shield the classrooms and the Cronkite Theater.

The south facade is the most likely to be experienced by pedestrians strolling along the Taylor Mall toward ASU's downtown campus. This elevation is animated with an installation by lighting and environmental artist Paul Deeb, in which suspended aluminum shards dance between two layers of translucent glass over the entire height of the main staircase. The gap serves as a mini thermal chimney, adding real cooling to the psychological cooling of the waterfall effect of bouncing light.

Once inside the school, a multicolored palette and a repeat pattern of floor-to-ceiling inscriptions of the First Amendment give the mix of programs and spatial types some consistency from floor to floor. The building is full of new technologies and facilities in support of the school's aim to "foster a dynamic interaction among the students, faculty, and the community that they [as journalists] serve," said Ehrlich Architects project architect Matthew Chaney. The design team also made efforts to render the media literally transparent with such details as the LED news ticker marking the building entry, or the visual connection between sidewalk and the second floor

Cronkite News Service. Internally, this elimination of boundaries also occurs in the Cronkite News Watch studio, where the newsroom and the broadcast desk are contained in the same space, within eyeshot of each other.

The second floor holds the heart of the school—the First Amendment Forum. Several tiers and balconies, casually furnished with mobile elements, define the multi-level void and overlook a small stage. Next door to the forum, the Marguerite and Jack Clifford Gallery exhibits memorabilia from the career of legendary newsman and school namesake Walter Cronkite.

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