

PLANNING

FOR Higher Education

PLANNING STORY

Engaging Stakeholders Locally and Globally

A Multinational Business School Collaborates Across Disciplines, Time Zones, and Cultural Backgrounds

by Sanjeev Khagram, PhD, and Buzz Yudell, MArch, FAIA

The Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University treated its stakeholders and partners as critical sources of information and inspiration in planning for a dynamic and flexible new world headquarters.

Over the past five years, Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University (Thunderbird) has undergone a significant turnaround in higher education. Serving as a physical, technological, and symbolic manifestation of this transformation is the new F. Francis and Dionne Najafi Thunderbird Global Headquarters. The institution

3 TAKEAWAYS . . .

. . . to Engage Stakeholders Early, Often, and in Many Ways

1. **Ensure early and continuous outreach** to alumni to increase understanding of trends and needs in global business leadership. Outreach also enhances fundraising and strengthens the bonds of the alumni community.
2. **Prioritize early integration of space planning and systems** (structural, mechanical, digital, furnishings) to allow for maximum flexibility, increase options for evolving pedagogy, enhance opportunities for joint programs with community partners, increase the facilities resilience, and reduce operations and maintenance costs over future decades.
3. **Blend and balance high-tech and high-touch** by complementing user-friendly state-of-the-art technology with warm, humane spaces that welcome people of all backgrounds, which creates holistic environments that support global and local collaboration, innovation, and community.



advances social and cultural inclusivity and sustainable economic prosperity worldwide by educating and influencing leaders and managers who maximize the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for business, government, society, and the global and digital environment.

Originally known as the American Institute for Foreign Trade, Thunderbird was chartered on April 8, 1946, at a World War II air base in Glendale, Arizona, called Thunderbird Field. General Barton Kyle Yount obtained the airfield with the express purpose of developing a school for professionals that focused on international trade and global affairs. Thunderbird has often been referred to as “a mini-United Nations” because of its diverse and inclusive global student body.

The Challenges and Opportunities of a New Urban Setting

In 2015, Thunderbird became a unit of the Arizona State University (ASU) enterprise, ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as the number one most innovative US university for the last eight consecutive years. On April 8, 2018, Sanjeev Khagram, an author of this article, was announced as the director general and dean of Thunderbird, and a groundbreaking ceremony was held to celebrate the school’s future 110,000-square-foot new global headquarters on ASU’s Downtown Phoenix campus. The selected site, at the intersection of Polk and First streets, provided the opportunity for proximity with ASU’s recently completed Beus Center for Law and Society, the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation. It was

planned in accordance with the ASU president’s “One University, Many Places” initiative.

The vibrant urban location presented great opportunities for Thunderbird to become an important civic partner, and it also represented a cultural shift. For more than 75 years, students, faculty, and alumni had developed strong roots and treasured memories of the original Glendale Campus. Its remote setting and intimate scale had contributed to a cohesive community and strong brand identity. The greater alumni community had an ardent connection to Thunderbird and their time at the Glendale Campus.

Because of the dedicated community, it was clear from the beginning of the design process that deep and continuous engagement with stakeholders would be critical to a successful framing of the design process for the new Thunderbird School of Global Management—and to ensure that the rich heritage of Thunderbird was maintained. That engagement required robust outreach to Arizona State University, Thunderbird, the City of Phoenix, residents of the region, and the local and international alumni community. It would lay the foundation for support of the building and community partnerships. It would also be essential to understanding how to successfully incorporate the valued community spirit of the Glendale campus into the new urban site, while creating a technologically-advanced global headquarters. If the new headquarters were to serve emerging local and global needs, planning teams would first need to know how students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members collaborated, communicated, and innovated.



Figure 1 The global headquarters of ASU's Downtown Phoenix campus integrates technology-enhanced innovation and collaboration.



Courtesy of Inessa Binnenbaum, Moore Ruble Yudell

Aligning Planning and Design with the Evolving Mission

The demands of global leadership, management, and business education are complex. Thunderbird wanted a place for transdisciplinary learning, digitally-enabled

teaching and research, and the agility to collaborate in multiple modes of time and technology. With its rapidly expanding global education footprint, having operations in Geneva, Dubai, Tokyo, Seoul, Nairobi, Jakarta, and nearly 15 other world cities, Thunderbird's regional Centers of Excellence ensured

that the institution was now the world's first truly "global multinational business school," committed to training the next generation of leaders. Collaboration was facilitated across disciplines, time zones, and cultural backgrounds. Work was performed in-person and remote, synchronous and asynchronous, and hybrid, both in time and space.

Because of this multiplicity of modes and the rapid and unpredictable changes in how and where we work, our team developed a series of parallel tracks for stakeholder outreach and engagement. We treated our stakeholders and partners as critical sources of information and inspiration in planning for a dynamic and flexible new global headquarters.

Figure 2 **The Situation Room encourages real-time immersive global problem-solving.**



Courtesy of Inessa Binnenbaum, Moore Ruble Yudell

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Meaningful Engagement at Multiple Scales, Locally and Globally

Connecting across the spectrum of many constituents was central to our planning efforts. However, there were logistic challenges that needed to be addressed at the outset.

We wanted to solicit creative input on a local and global scale, including outreach to 50,000 alumni in 160 countries. At the same time, it was a university project that needed to meet all the standard requirements of lean budget, rapid schedule, required net/gross area efficiencies, and university standards for space, equipment, systems, and materials. To address those challenges, we established parallel tiers of outreach and engagement. Connecting with faculty, staff, and students was accomplished through participatory workshops and interviews. Those were documented by the design team through written and graphic summaries. Ideas and input from those sessions were tested through the rapid development of alternate concepts, which were iteratively presented and tested against project goals and cost models. The process was based on a low-tech version of rapid prototyping to quickly illustrate a wide array of design approaches.

Community outreach included targeted meetings with government and civic leaders and broader outreach to neighborhood groups. Those were guided by university representatives with support and coordination from the design team. That process gave way to a heightened understanding of a wide array of potential partnerships between Thunderbird/ASU and the community. The range of program opportunities led to studies of spatial and technological parameters for serving community needs. Those tiers of engagement ran concurrently so that feedback into the design process could be timely as well as integrated across different stakeholder groups.

Outreach to Phoenix, Regional Agencies, and Civic Partners

Thunderbird identified alumni and civic and institutional leaders whose partnerships would benefit both the city/region and the school/university through an expansive global network and business development outreach. From the mayor of the City of Phoenix and city planners, to local businesses and other schools within ASU, our outreach led to specific and broad areas of potential collaboration and synergy. Phoenix is the fifth-largest US city, with the fastest-growing population in the nation; it seeks to be a laboratory for innovation and resilience. During the phases of program validation (two months) and preliminary design (three months), Thunderbird leadership proposed the idea of an initiative that would focus on aligning the leading global organizations to form a consortium across public, private, and nonprofit sectors to advise the School.



The organizations were identified through alumni engagement (with many of the alumni now working at or leading those organizations).

Along with City of Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego, the Phoenix Global Rising initiative was established, creating a multi-stakeholder program committed to an inclusive and economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable future at the vanguard of local and global strategic, facilities, and campus-in-community planning. Thunderbird leadership committed to coordinating Phoenix Global Rising's six objectives: advancing urban innovation, strengthening the global entrepreneurial ecosystem, fostering international trade and investment, promoting the full inclusion of immigrants and refugees, enhancing tourism and hospitality, and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals with partners that included the Global Chamber of Commerce, the Phoenix Committee on Foreign Relations, AZ District Export Council, and a broad array of public and private stakeholders.

Planning and Design Workshops

The architectural design team (Moore Ruble Yudell Architects and Planners with Jones Studio) led a series of planning and design workshops with faculty, staff, and students, where the goal was program validation and the early integration of all disciplines (including architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, interiors, cost, sustainability) into multiple design concepts. To move the project along with dispatch, it was critical to have key Thunderbird and on-campus

stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, administration) at all workshops. Equally important was the day-one integration of all components of the design team including: architects and planners (Moore Ruble Yudell and Jones Studio), structural and mechanical engineers (Buro Happold), AV/technology (Nathaniel Holland), landscape (Trueform), cost management (The Capital Projects Group), and the contractor/CM (Okland Construction). All program and concept design decisions were required to meet evolving cost, space, program, and performance metrics before being approved by ASU's Capital Programs Management Group for further development.

Local and Global Alumni

With 50,000 global alumni, the outreach was challenging, but it was important to understand how the alumni leaders perceived the evolving nature of the workplace, technology, communication, collaboration, and innovation. Dean Khagram and Thunderbird leadership traveled to many countries during two years, meeting thousands of alumni. Regions were selected by locations with strong affinity for the School as well as where large populations of alumni resided. Individual alumni were selected by their previous engagement with the School, previous philanthropic giving to Thunderbird and to other organizations, job titles, and/or introductions from fellow alumni.

When meeting with alumni, we wanted to hear their story, what their favorite memories were, what trends they were seeing in their fields, and what their hopes



Collaboration was facilitated across disciplines, time zones, and cultural backgrounds.

were for the future of Thunderbird and the future of T-bird students. Those responses were used to help us envision and execute on the next 75 years of Thunderbird, ensuring that we are constantly at the vanguard of global leadership and management. When alumni were not available for in-person outreach, virtual forums were conducted. A series of in-person events in Phoenix invited global alumni back to the home base and allowed the design team to present evolving concepts and spend informal time with the groups. None of these parallel streams could wait for—or be contingent on—the schedules of the others.

Thunderbird leadership and the design team needed to be in constant communication in order to continuously update, test, and integrate stakeholder input as rapidly as possible. A mix of in-person, virtual, and synchronous and asynchronous communication supported the flexibility required by stakeholder schedules. To facilitate long-term planning, a timetable of regular meetings, conference calls, and workshops was projected for each calendar year. The structure of meetings, communication, and documentation was complemented by informal and as-needed conversations.

Lessons from Home and Abroad

The input from the broad range of partners and stakeholders spanned all aspects of the project. Examples of things we learned: Local civic stakeholders were interested in the new facility hosting an assortment of publicly-accessible events and forums. Some respondents, wanting the institution to be public-serving and a good neighbor, suggested that the new building be physically and visually open and accessible. The City of Phoenix was interested in Thunderbird enhancing the block on which it would be located and the adjacent streets as well as the site being responsive to the local climate through water conservation, shading, and native landscape.

Thunderbird alumni responded that they were interested in how the project could recognize Thunderbird's heritage, and how state-of-the-art technology could support communications and collaboration across the globe. They wanted the new facility to be both their home base and a spot to connect with fellow alumni and colleagues, wherever they might be.

The design team and Thunderbird leadership decided early on that the project had to provide extreme flexibility in how spaces could be programmed and how technology could be deployed and adapted over future decades of change. We also decided that the building should allow for technology-enhanced active learning throughout every space. An additional goal was to balance flexibility and technology with truly human-scaled spaces, where comfort and choice of

environment would receive everyone—so that people of all backgrounds and cultures would feel welcome and know that this was their home.

Informing the Planning and Design

We knew that new ways of study, teaching, and research would be constantly evolving, so early in concept design we found a space planning and structural module that maximized the budget and supported short- and long-term physical and programmatic flexibility. A parallel decision was to make all classrooms and event spaces flat floored. Many business schools have been moving in that direction because it allows for more flexible configuration of collaborative and team-based learning, but few if any have eliminated all tiered classrooms. Flat floors were a substantial construction cost savings, while allowing all teaching spaces to be adaptable and interchangeable.

A Hospitable Local and Global Hub

To address the requests to create a strong local presence, the building and site were designed for maximum openness at the street level. While most classrooms, offices, and administration are located on upper levels, all the spaces at the ground level are transparent, with most accessible from the adjacent plaza and streets. Landscape and arcades create welcoming shaded areas in our desert climate. The two-story Haas Digital Global Forum is the primary ground floor space and entry portal. It is a gathering

and learning space and a 365-day inviting “lantern” to the city. It can open fully to the adjacent plaza and can be used day and night for study, colloquia, and formal and informal gatherings. Close by are innovation labs, a café and shop, and flexible community meeting and study spaces. This floor flows out to usable plazas that have rain gardens and shade spaces. The building represents Thunderbird as a digital and physical hub, embodying the School’s “global is digital and digital is global” philosophy.

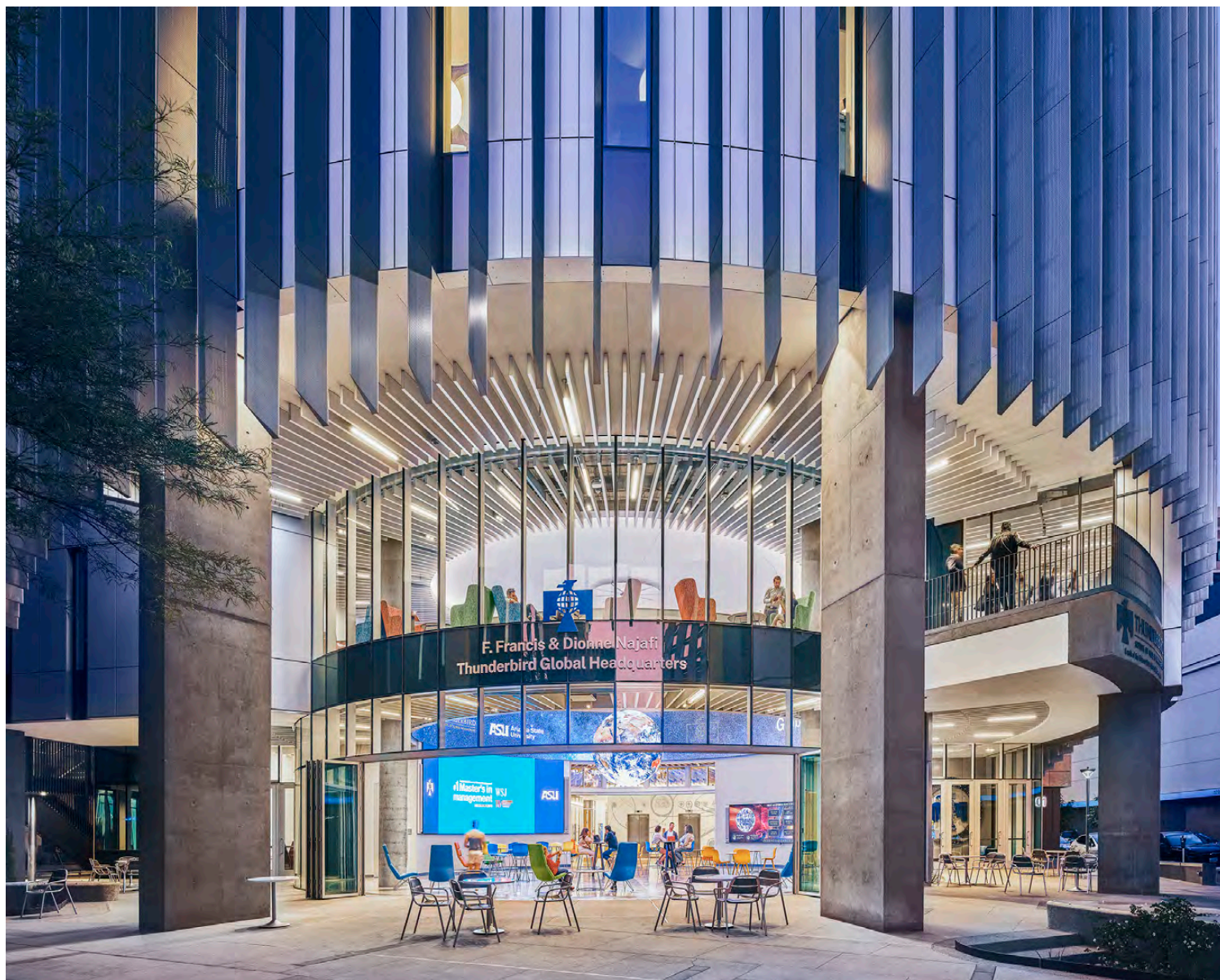
The building was equipped with the most advanced technologies that enable people across borders, cultures, time zones, and languages to gather, learn, and collaborate. The Haas Digital Global Forum is on the first floor of the building. A physical and digital synthesis of an auditorium and amphitheater open to a worldwide audience. It’s a place for training new generations of principled global leaders to maximize the benefits of rapid technological advancements for all people and our living planet.

In the center of the Haas Digital Global Forum is a digital globe that is suspended from the ceiling, a reimagined version of the iconic globe from The Continents Fountain from Thunderbird’s original campus in Glendale. By including a digital globe whose surface is rich with infographics and data, a video ribbon of custom-made displays, and wrap-around video walls, powered by state-of-the-art Planar LED technology, the Haas Digital Global Forum hosts thought-leadership events, meetings, and classes, encouraging the six-continent-spanning Thunderbird community to interact live with students, alumni,



and partners—from Arizona to Zimbabwe—in a new virtual modality that convenes global audiences, simultaneously in-person and virtually.

Figure 3 **The community is invited to ground-floor spaces, day and night, all year round.**



Courtesy of Inessa Binnenbaum, Moore Ruble Yudell

Figure 4 Flexible event and learning spaces connect to shaded native gardens.



Courtesy of Inessa Binnenbaum, Moore Ruble Yudell

Representing the Community

In keeping with its mission to promote sociocultural diversity and cross-fertilization of academic disciplines, Thunderbird encouraged local communities, professional schools, and industries to engage with the headquarters. Space planning, school programs, music, technology, and food service were selected to represent and welcome global diversity and inclusion. Similarly, the materiality, art, and wayfinding of the building were inspired by world cultures. With a strong message

coming from constituents that the building should be a global hub and home that welcomes all, we decided that the entire structure should be designed to represent the community. Transparency is carefully composed to maximize community invitation at street and rooftop levels, linked by a progression of two-story heritage spaces that move up through and around the building counterclockwise. They have been furnished with art and artifacts from Thunderbird's global collection, with expressions of Asian, African, European, and North and South American culture.

Figure 5 **Flexible-use Heritage Lounges** celebrate cultural diversity and sharing.



Courtesy of Inessa Binnenbaum, Moore Ruble Yudell

Sustainability at Multiple Scales

Another strong message we received from workshop and outreach participants was the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainability. We saw that this was an opportunity that went well beyond LEED requirements. The project was designed with local materials, native plantings, and a robust system of rainwater capture and retention. Parametric analysis informed the articulation of glazing and deep shading for thermal and visual comfort. An equally important aspect of sustainability is health and wellness. The site and building were designed to optimize shading, minimize glare, encourage movement throughout the building, and to create warm and welcoming spaces that bring character and choice to the daily experience.

Flexibility and Resilience for a Dynamic Future

So how has the input from and engagement of thousands of stakeholders manifested since the building opened to students in fall of 2021? The opening ceremony had “engagement” as its theme. The building and site became the venue for a festive Phoenix block party. During the afternoon, multicultural food trucks, musicians, and dancers animated the adjacent plazas and streets. Guests of all ages flowed inside to experiment with the immersive technology in the global forum and the innovation laboratories. At night the site became a multi-platform celebration with entertainment outside and food and drink from around the world serving social spaces on every level. Groups gathered in the heritage lounges that include art from many cultures.

Figure 6 Thunderbird welcomes people of all backgrounds and ages to interact.



CAMPUS IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE

Courtesy of Inessa Binnenbaum, Moore Ruble Yudell

This is perhaps the most technologically advanced building of any management or business school in the world. Yet it is, foremost, a place of community and connection, where individuals and groups from all backgrounds find collegiality and inspiration in serendipitous meetings. It is a committed global citizen and an engaged local partner.

Author Biographies



SANJEEV KHAGRAM, PHD, is the director general and dean of Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University and the Foundation Professor of Global Leadership and Global Futures. He holds a bachelor's degree in development studies and engineering, a master's degree and doctoral degree minor in economics, and a doctoral degree in political economy, all from Stanford University.



BUZZ YUDELL, MARCH, FAIA, is principal and co-founder of Moore Ruble Yudell Architects and Planners in Los Angeles. His passion for architecture grew out of a synthesis of artistic and social concerns. Throughout the life of the practice that he founded with Charles Moore and John Ruble, he has led design teams engaged with universities all over the United States and the world to create enduring facilities that support students, educators, and the evolving pedagogy. Yudell has also taught at the university level throughout his career.

Engage with the Authors

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