Love and Engagement

The Goal
In the design of the school’s new Ernest A. Koury Sr. Business Center, administrators wanted to make student-faculty interaction not just probable, but inevitable. But when they toured new facilities to find examples of what they had in mind, “we did not see a model that supported student engagement the way we wanted,” says Scott Buechler, interim dean. “Faculty offices were always far away from student gathering places.”

Results
The facility’s features work just as administrators had envisioned—and the engagement areas are the “pièce de résistance,” says Buechler. “This design fosters an unpredictable flow of activity—a small conversation can grow to a larger, more inclusive conversation with faculty and students,” he says. “Many faculty hold office hours in these areas rather than in their offices. This arrangement allows our faculty to be visible and present.”

Considerations
When faculty first saw the design, they were worried about their privacy, says Buechler. To allay concerns, designers included blinds in the floor-to-ceiling windows next to each office door. Faculty can close their doors and blinds when they want to work without interruption.

“This area has become the new library,” says Linda Poulson, an assistant professor of accounting. “I can help students work through a problem on the whiteboard right outside my office. All the faculty now have open-door policies—we really get to know our students outside the classroom.”

Added Features
Each student engagement area includes a collaborative computer station with a 30-inch monitor and high-volume printer, as well as meeting rooms at the periphery to allow students to gather in private. Students can work in two traditional computer labs, or a third collaborative lab with seven “pods”; each pod is equipped with five networked computer stations that can route their individual displays to a single large monitor.