When Andrew Blass founded the Pittsburgh School of Accountancy in 1921, he described a mission strikingly similar to the philosophy that guides Robert Morris University today: to “maintain a small, distinctive, professional school of advanced business practice. Appeal is made particularly to the student who prefers that personal attention, and that individual instruction, which is not always available in the larger institutions of learning.”

That accounting school became the Robert Morris School of Business, then Robert Morris College, and now Robert Morris University. Today we offer 80 degree programs in five academic schools, and programs outside the School of Business – such as actuarial science, nursing, and communications – are among the best in the nation.

Yet the School of Business remains RMU’s largest school, enrolling approximately one-third of our students. So it is fitting that as Robert Morris commences its 90th year, the School of Business finally gets a true home at our Moon Township campus. It’s astounding if you think about it. The school on which we built our reputation and which fueled so much of the institution’s growth has been an orphan on the campus that represents the fruit of that growth today.

While we’re on the subject, allow me to make a confession. I didn’t even know Robert Morris had this campus when I was first approached about becoming president. Since then RMU has been on a mission to ensure that no one holds this misconception any longer. We have updated classrooms and laboratories, and we have tackled deferred maintenance. We have renovated residence halls, athletic facilities, and recreation spaces. This fall we’re also opening a new residence hall, Peter Salem Hall, which will bring to 1,500 the number of students living on campus. We’ve created a true 24-hour, living and learning environment on campus.

And we’re just getting started. We break ground in August on a new building for our School of Communications and Information Systems, which will accommodate the Media Arts program when it moves from our former building in downtown Pittsburgh in the fall of 2012. Next up is a medical simulation center for the School of Nursing and Health Sciences. When these two facilities are completed, each academic school at RMU will have its own facility: The School of Engineering, Mathematics and Science will have John Jay Center to itself, and the School of Education and Social Sciences can plant its flag in Patrick Henry Center.

A safe, attractive campus with state-of-the-art facilities draws students to campus. What makes them want to stay is what happens inside those facilities. On the back page, Derya Jacobs, dean of the School of Business, will describe how our core values and our professionally focused curriculum have influenced the design of the building, and how it will help us prepare students to flourish in the workplace.

After all, that’s exactly what Andrew Blass set out to do when he opened his door for business in 1921. It’s good to know that some things never change.

Sincerely,

Gregory G. Dell’Omo, Ph.D.
Some elements of the building design have changed as the building is being completed. Please visit campus this fall to see the facility for yourself.
"A HIGH-TECH BUSINESS EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT."

Derya Jacobs, Ph.D., professor of operations research, was named interim dean of the RMU School of Business in 2002, and was appointed to the position full-time in 2004. Under her leadership, in 2009 the school earned accreditation by AACSB International – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Only 5 percent of business schools worldwide have achieved this prestigious designation. The following interview was compiled and condensed by Jonathan Potts M’11, senior director of public relations at Robert Morris.

When did the university start talking about this building?
When I was appointed dean, we were evaluating the current status of the business school for AACSB purposes. We had to know where we stood so we could determine our weaknesses and therefore how to improve. One of the things I noticed was that we needed a learning facility, a laboratory, analogous to engineering and science facilities. Business students must also have something that provides hands-on learning. I put together a proposal to purchase the hardware needed to create a simulated trading center, and that was approved by the previous administration. Then President Dell‘Omo came on board, and Perry Roofner [vice president for facilities] started. The university had a master plan to bring each school together [in its own building] to give them their own identity. We discussed plans to build a new business school building.

What is the vision for the new School of Business building?
From the beginning, we wanted this building to be a high-tech business education environment for our students. For that reason we did not include any faculty offices, since Massey Hall could continue to house offices for business faculty. That way you are bringing students closer to the faculty and increasing student and faculty interaction, but the building itself is truly designed to be a learning laboratory for business students. The PNC Trading Center will include the latest technology. We are going to have a Bloomberg laboratory with 10 machines in it. The Allegheny Technologies Incorporated Global Business Library will have project rooms. There will be an interactive digital wall in that library that will provide marketing and finance information. The vision of this building in the long term is to prepare students in the best way for the corporate world. From the time they enter, students should feel that it is simulating the corporate world. So even the interior design, from colors to furniture, is going to simulate the corporate world.

What was the idea behind the U.S. Steel Videoconferencing and Technology Resource Center?
As companies become increasingly global, we thought that when students graduate and start working, it is reasonable to think they will be communicating via videoconferencing – they will not be traveling all the time. Also, if we choose to offer our business degrees off-site, we can use this facility for that.

It sounds like there is going to be no aspect of corporate life that won’t be replicated somewhere in the building.
Exactly.