

Campus Evolution

WEST SIDE CAMPUS EVOLUTION

The University of Illinois at Chicago has developed in many layers, for complementary and competing interests, and for varied programmatic uses for more than a century. An understanding of the evolving patterns and relationships is essential to any attempt to add, change, or enhance the physical campus. The two “Sides” of campus, the West and the East, have evolved independently for much of their existence and must be understood both separately and together.

The West Side began its affiliation with the University of Illinois (chartered and existing at that time only in Champaign-Urbana) in 1896 and was incorporated as the “Colleges of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy” in 1913. It became the “University of Illinois at the Medical Center” in 1961. The East Side took physical shape in 1965 as the “University of Illinois Circle Campus.”

In 1982, the Medical Center and the Circle Campus joined to form UIC. While one joint institution was created, there remained two distinct physical campuses as many blocks of residential and commercial neighborhoods separated the East and West Sides. Expansion of the East Side directly to its south, to what is called the South Campus, began in the late 1980s.

UIC’s West Side campus reflects nearly a century of changing ideas about urban campus planning, hospital technology and city zoning regulations. Adding to this diversity, the West Side contains buildings that were built by the university (in its many incarnations) and several buildings acquired by the university after they were built. The West Side began as independent health care institutions built in the mid 19th century, and joined the University of Illinois, as stated, in the early 20th century. The first comprehensive master plan for the Colleges of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy in 1925 (Fig. 1) called for the construction of narrow medical buildings around the perimeter of a city block, defining a series of connected courtyards within. This master plan had a clear idea of how to create a campus that responded to the city, or an “urban campus.” The plan proposed a complex of buildings that was a seamless continuation of the city, with structures sited close to the street edge to define city blocks, while providing central courtyards within the block for students and faculty to gather. The master plan guided a building boom that lasted from 1924 to 1941. The present character of the block defined by Polk Street (north), Taylor Street (south), Wood Street (east) and Wolcott Avenue (west) still partially reflects the original campus planning concept of buildings that respect the urban street edge and define interior courtyards.



Fig. 1: West Side Campus Master Plan - 1925

In 1944 the original medical colleges' master plan was replaced by one that moved away from the idea of urban courtyards, and instead called for the construction of a series of U-shaped classical buildings on the central campus block. While this plan was not implemented in any of the subsequent master plans for the West Side, neither was the original urban courtyard concept ever continued. In 1947, another master plan was developed which called for the construction of a large open mall at the center of the campus block and a series of free-standing buildings in ill-defined open sites around the main block. This master plan set a precedent of siting isolated buildings in open sites with no relation to adjacent structures and with no definition of exterior campus courtyards or gathering spaces. This planning strategy characterizes much of the development on the West Side since 1950. While a few buildings added after 1950 continued to build a continuous street edge around the original campus block, most were stand-alone buildings built for other purposes and then acquired by the campus (Pg. 15). In the late 1950s, another master plan, authored by Richardson, Severns, Scheeler and Associates, was released for the West Side. In this plan, an anti-urban sentiment peaked, as the plan called for the demolition of the original central block of the Medical Center and its replacement with a series of buildings in a park-like setting. While, again, the main thrusts of this plan were not implemented, it ushered in the acquisition of a wave of stand alone buildings in park-like settings.



Fig. 2: College of Medicine East Tower

The acquisition of these buildings sited in vast lots furthered the disconnect from the surrounding city (Figs. 3 & 4). The urban fabric and street-wall buildings that surround the West Side campus became interrupted by vast swaths of open space and parking lots within the campus boundary. Furthermore, changes in air distribution (air conditioning) and in medical technology allowed for larger buildings with much larger floor plates. As the campus buildings became more object-like, they also grew in mass. These new massive buildings stand in contrast to their predecessors in both context and scale.

In the 1970s, yet another plan was introduced for the West Side (Pg. 17). This time, the plan was intended to address the growing requirements for parking and a scarcity of available space. The strategy became to infill any remaining land with large medical facilities and parking structures. These buildings, such as the Hospital on Taylor Street, were driven, primarily, by the functional necessity of medical facilities of their time. With a few notable exceptions, this functionalist stance towards development on the West Side has continued into the present.



Fig. 3: School of Public Health and Psychiatric Institute, View East

Significantly, none of the previous master plans for the West Side have been completely implemented. Whatever clarity any single plan may have offered is not legible today, as the West Side is composed of fragments of a series of incomplete plans. This problem has been exacerbated by the acquisition of buildings and sites in the vicinity that were built for other purposes and therefore do not belong to any era of campus development. The West Side is part of the larger Illinois Medical District that is the largest medical complex in Illinois and one of the largest urban academic medical districts in the world. The 560 acre Medical District setting includes several other large member institutions: Rush University Medical Center., Cook County Hospital, and VA Chicago.

When, in 1982, the joint institution of UIC was formed, the design challenge of integrating the West and East Sides of campus arose. This problem has many complications as the West Side, alone, lacked design cohesion and was disconnected from the city that spans between the two Sides.

Of note, in the 1990s, the Molecular Biology Research Building and the College of Medicine Research Building do stand out as revivals or continuations of the urban courtyard tradition.



Fig. 4: Applied Health Sciences Building, View South

EAST SIDE CAMPUS EVOLUTION

The University of Illinois first established a branch campus in Chicago in 1946 on Navy Pier. Increased enrollment soon made the University's Navy Pier home inadequate, and the search began for a new site for an expanded campus. After evaluating several possibilities, the current East Side site was offered to the University of Illinois by Mayor Richard J. Daley in 1961. The site was bounded to the east and north by the Dan Ryan and Eisenhower Expressways and their intersection to the northeast, which was known significantly as the Circle Interchange. The site was also located between several ethnic neighborhoods: Little Italy extended to the south-west on Taylor Street, the Greek Delta was to the north on Halsted Street over the expressway, and African American and Puerto Rican communities were also in the vicinity. The Italian community, in particular, protested the University's building plans. The community's unsuccessful battle with the University lasted until 1963, when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the community's case. This struggle set a precedent for an uneasy relationship between UIC and the community.

To design their new campus in Chicago, named the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, UICC chose Walter Netsch of Skidmore Owings and Merrill. Netsch's master plan provided a clear concept that guided the early development of the UICC Campus. Netsch's original



Fig. 5: The Great Court at Chicago Circle campus - 1965

diagram for the UICC master plan was based on a series of concentric programmatic rings (Pg. 6). In the center ring, Netsch placed a cluster of lecture halls. The next ring included the library, classrooms and the student center. In the next ring, Netsch placed the faculty offices and laboratory buildings. And, finally, the outermost ring contained athletic fields. Within each ring was a series of buildings and facilities that could be used by all UICC departments. This, Netsch argued, would promote interdisciplinary activity and help to foster a campus-wide academic community. Between 1963 and 1965, his unique plan was realized. (Fig. 5).

Netsch's plan located the primary pedestrian circulation on the second story level and connected the buildings by a series of elevated "pedestrian expressways." The elevated walkways allowed for safe entry to the campus over street traffic, served as aggrandized exterior "hallways" where students and faculty of diverse disciplines could cross paths and converse, and converged at the central ring of the campus, where a large elevated public plaza, originally called "The Great Court," was built on top of lecture halls. This plaza contained an amphitheater (the "Circle Forum") and seating, and was conceived as the social center of the campus. At the ground level, the elevated walkways were to provide shelter in inclement weather, and smaller non-elevated walkways were introduced on less primary circulation trajectories.

Like the original master plan for the West Side, Netsch's plan contained clear ideas about how to create an urban campus. However, the way these two plans conceived an urban campus could not be more different. As stated above, the West Side plan was conceived as a seamless continuation of the surrounding city. Netsch's plan made no attempt to blend in to the surrounding communities. Instead, Netsch's master plan was urban in the manner of large infrastructure such as a highway interchange; and in the scale of the skyscrapers in Chicago's Loop. Like the highway interchange, Netsch's plan sought to move large volumes of people in an efficient and concentrated trajectory. Like the skyscraper, Netsch's plan sought to concentrate a high density of people and functions within a small footprint. Netsch's plan projected a clear idea about the nature of a campus in the city that reflected attitudes towards the city that were prevalent at the time.

A second wave of construction at UICC occurred between

1965 and 1968. Among the structures added were new buildings designed by Netsch that elaborated upon the original planning goals of UIC, but championed a slightly revised aesthetic. These buildings, including the Art and Architecture Building, the Behavioral Sciences Building (Figs. 6 & 7) and Science and Engineering South (Fig. 8), were designed with an aesthetic strategy that Netsch called "Field Theory." The Field Theory buildings attempted to break with the rectilinear modernist language of most buildings on the East Side by introducing angular geometry (Figs. 6-9 & Pg. 18).

Throughout these first two phases, the development of today's UIC East Side was conceptually clear – staying true to the original Netsch plan. While many found fault with the fundamentals of Netsch's vision, it must be observed that this original master plan provided a framework for clear and ordered development. After 1968, structures were added to the East Side of campus that were inconsistent with the original master plan and did not directly connect to the original circulation spines. They included the Parking



Fig. 6: Behavioral Sciences Building - 1970, View North



Fig. 7: Behavioral Sciences Building in the foreground, View East

Structure on Harrison St., the Physical Education Building on Roosevelt Rd., and the Performing Arts Building on Harrison St. Many of these structures were separated from the central campus by vast parking lots. In the original master plan, parking was pushed to the periphery in order to keep cars off the campus core. By keeping the previously peripheral parking lots in place and building on the other side of these lots, a sense of disconnect was created between the new buildings and the existing campus core. As an unintended side-effect, the East Side resembled a ‘commuter college,’ where students and faculty drive to school and move through parking lots directly to buildings. The practice of building according to a “commuter college” model continued to 1980. New buildings of this model included the Parking Structure on Halsted St. and the UIC Pavilion on Harrison St. (Pg. 18). Over time, the patches of parking lots and wide spaces between buildings began to accentuate the disconnect between the campus and city that by virtue of the expressways, had been present on the East Side since Circle Campus’ beginnings.



Fig. 8: Science & Engineering South, View East



Fig. 9: Student Residence and Commons West, View South

UIC FORMATION

As previously stated, the 1982 merge of the Medical Center and the Circle Campus created the united UIC institution but added a new level of physical disconnection. By late 1980’s, structures that represented a new idea about the UIC campus appeared. Buildings such as the residence halls at the corner of Harrison and Halsted Streets (Fig. 9) and the Engineering Research Facility on Taylor Street were built to address the street, contrasting with the previous East Side buildings that were set back from the streets significantly. These new buildings had as their goal the establishment of a strong formal edge to the campus. While perhaps a strong design idea, it was introduced in discrete locations and it was not consistent with the original Netsch master plan nor the “commuter college” model of development.

To give new clarity to campus development, UIC commissioned a new master plan in 1990 (Fig. 10). The plan’s goals included a reassessment of open space, pedestrian circulation, development patterns, vehicular circulation and transit, and sought to make connections between the two Sides of campus and between campus and city. While the campus would have benefited from many of the suggestions in the 1990 plan, it went largely unrealized.

During the 1990s, UIC demolished the elevated walkways and the Great Court at the center of the campus (Fig. 11). The walkways had become a significant maintenance and safety issue, and users complained that they were windy and cold above, muddy and dismal below in inclement weather. While the maintenance and experiential problems with the walkways were legitimate, their demolition removed a key component of the East Side campus design. Circulation paths between and into buildings were no longer clear, as buildings that were meant to be entered on the second floor were now entered on the first. Furthermore, the strong visual connections from the walkways to the distant Chicago skyline and the immediate neighborhoods were erased.

Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing until 2008, UIC developed the “South Campus,” south of Roosevelt Road along Halsted Street (Figs. 12 - 15 & Pg. 20). This development of residence halls and mixed use facilities represents another idea about what the UIC campus should be. The South Campus is built to address the street, with a mix of residential and first floor retail establishments. Resembling the streetscapes of many areas in Chicago, South Campus might be best described as “Campus as Neighborhood.”

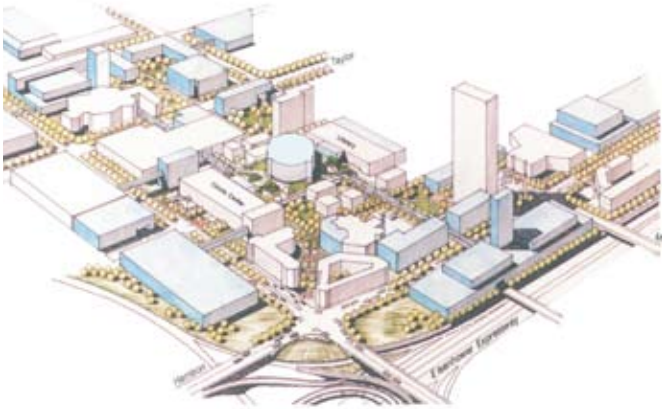


Fig. 10: East Side Campus Master Plan - 1990



Fig. 13: South Campus - Halsted Street, View North



Fig. 11: East Side - Demolition of Great Court & Circle Forum - 1990s

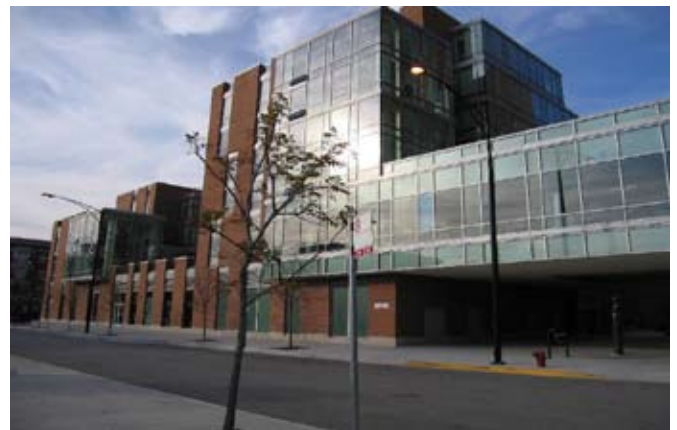


Fig. 14: South Campus - James J. Stukel Towers, View North



Fig. 12: South Campus - Halsted Street, View South



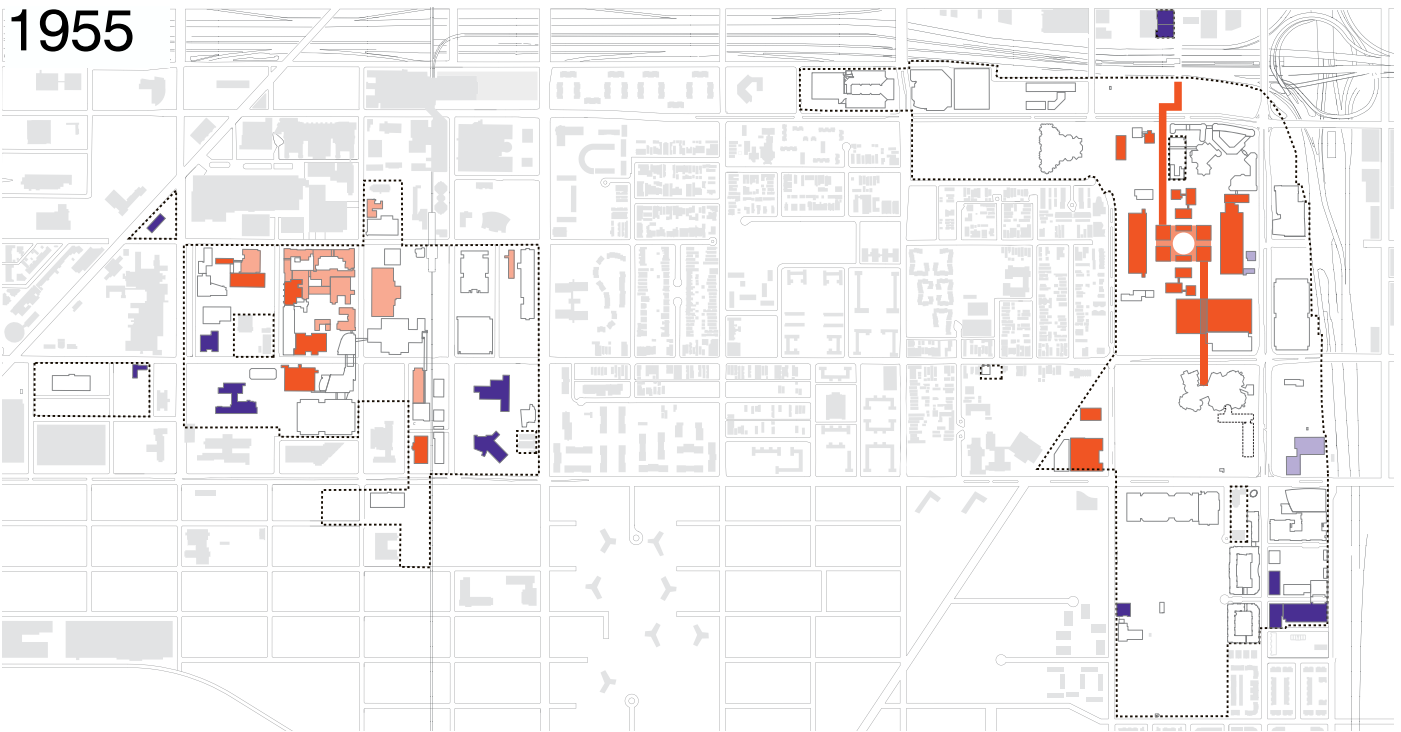
Fig. 15: South Campus - UIC Forum and Stukel Towers, View South-West

Campus Evolution

1940



1955



LEGEND:

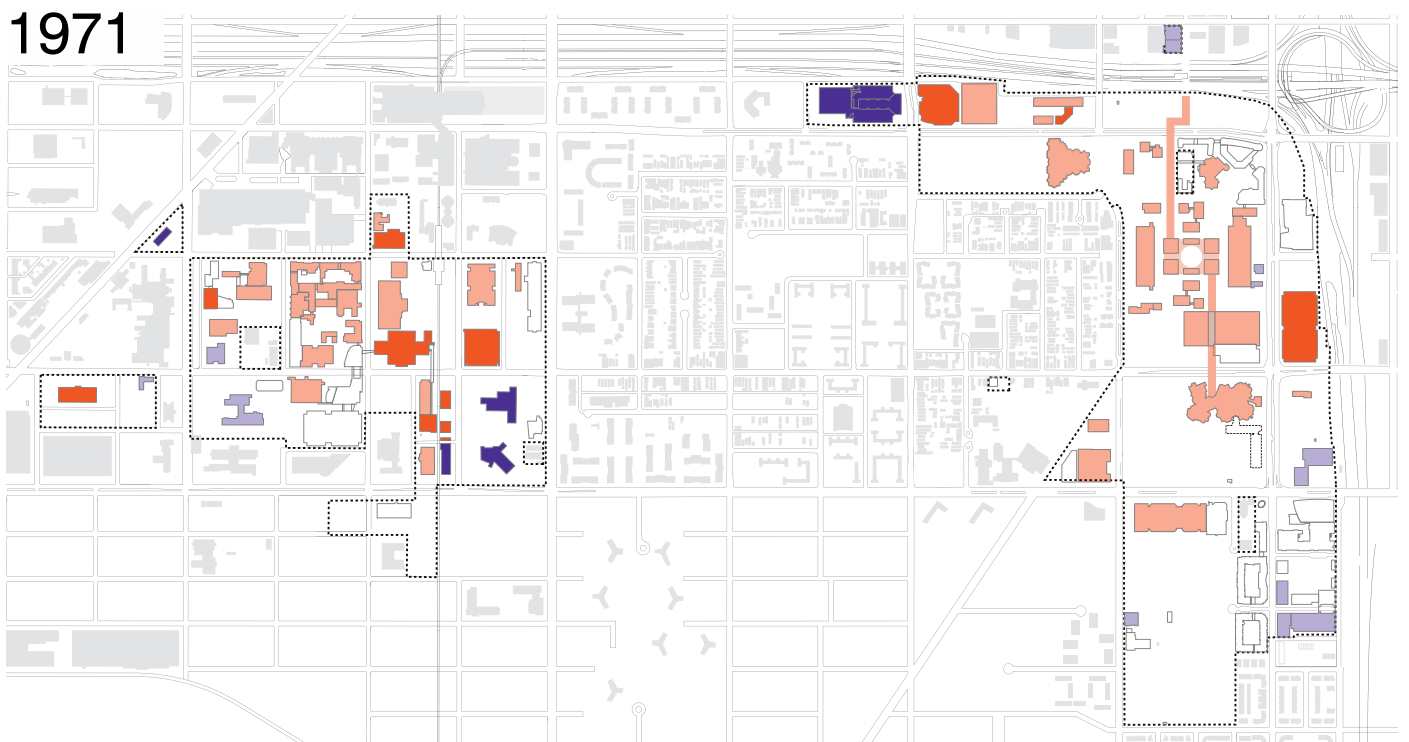
- NEW CAMPUS BUILDING BUILT
- CAMPUS BUILDING (PREVIOUSLY BUILT)
- NEW OFF-CAMPUS BUILDING
- BUILDING ACQUIRED BY CAMPUS
- 1940's STREET GRID
- ⋯ 2009 CAMPUS BOUNDARY

The following diagrams illustrate how UIC has developed and grown over time and provide an opportunity to see how the campus and city have been connected and the way the new buildings and open spaces relate to previous campus developments. In the 1940 plan, all the buildings shown in color indicate existing facilities that were either part of campus in 1940 or would be acquired in the future by the campus. These buildings were all built prior to 1940.

1965



1971



LEGEND:

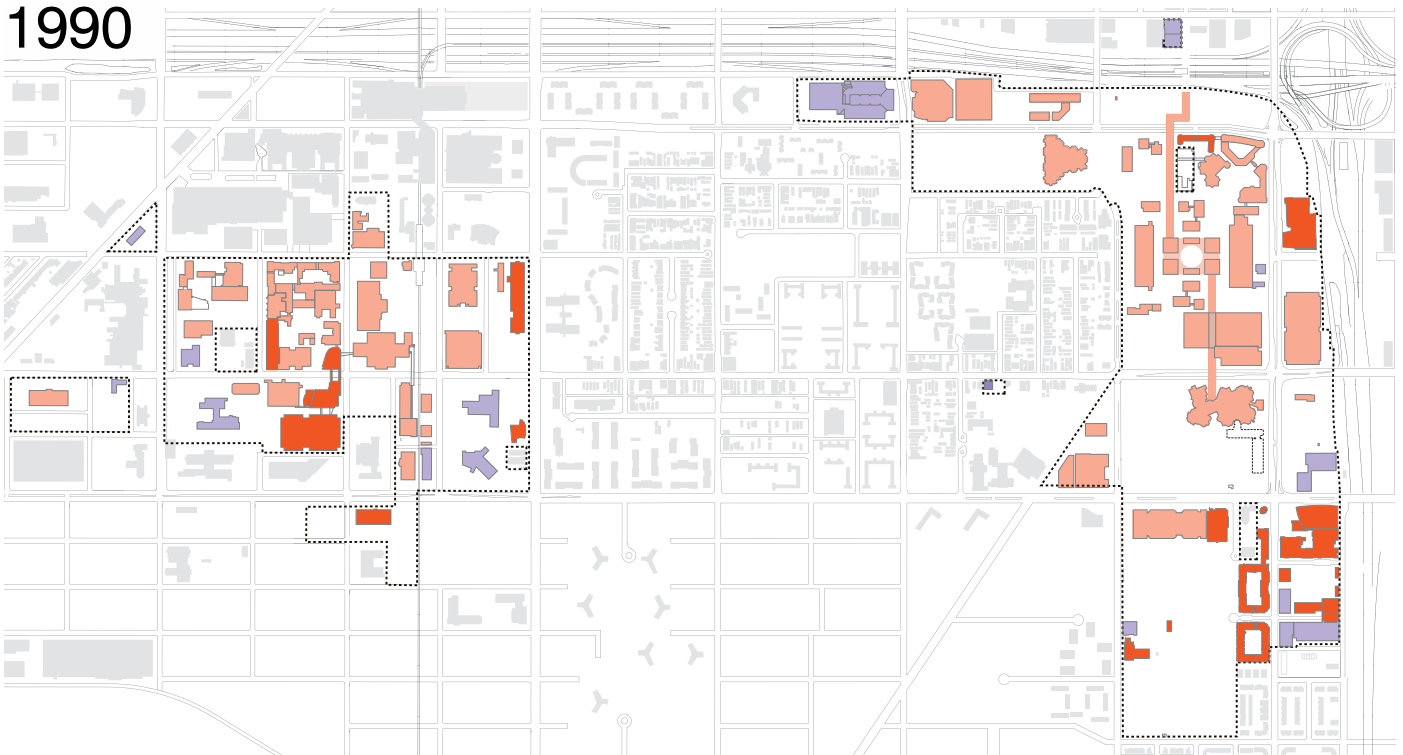
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Campus Evolution

1980



1990



2009



LEGEND:

- NEW CAMPUS BUILDING BUILT
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