A new center for university activities has been developed on the southwest slopes of Western Michigan University's campus. Designed on a plaza scheme by the architectural firm of O'Dell, Hewlett and Luckenbach, the complex includes Brown Hall, the Laura V. Shaw Theatre, Sprau Tower and the University Auditorium. The buildings through their scale and height provide a new major focal point for the campus and establish a strongly compelling visual axis toward the area.

While there are several possible approaches, vehicular and pedestrian, the most prominent is that from Sangren Hall. Suitable to the rolling site, a leisurely approach is accomplished by broad walks and stairway ramps carefully adjusted to the rise and fall of the land. These are interspersed with terraces provided with benches inviting one to linger. As one nears the area, the grand plaza unfolds around the vertical mass of the tower, and the dominant, horizontal form of the great Auditorium emerges into full view.

The organization of the buildings around the plaza is essentially grid-like and depends upon an interplay of clean-cut vertical and horizontal elements intersecting and repeating at various levels. This is congenial with the stepped terrace system, and the geometric quality of the forms reinforces a sense of clearly articulated space within the grand plaza area.

While there are striking repetitions of shape, materials, and surfaces, these have been sufficiently varied to prevent the relationships from becoming monotonous. Brick, concrete, glass and stone are used throughout; yet any element when traced will yield variety. The concrete vertical ribs of the tower, for example, are complemented by those of the Auditorium windows, while this element is contrasted with the horizontal line of a concrete connecting corridor between the tower and the classroom building.

One of the most significant utilizations of material is the glass in the lower story of Sprau Tower and in Shaw Theatre. This transparent and reflective medium tends to alleviate part of the mass of these two buildings and emphasizes the dominance of the Auditorium mass. It also reflects the light and shifting sprays of water from the pool in front of the Auditorium, thereby adding an element of movement and life to the complex. Both effects contribute to emphasize the breadth and scale of the Auditorium.