Students enjoy new STEM center at Cabrillo College

By ROSEANN HERNANDEZ
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

APTOS — It is Monday morning at Cabrillo College’s new STEM center and already there is a buzz of activity.

The 5,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art center (officially called The Monterey Peninsula Foundation STEM Center) is home to the school’s MESA (Math Engineering Science Achievement) group, physics learning center and CIS lab, an all-in-one learning hub for the school’s future builders, scientists and leaders in physics and technology.

Along the perimeter are computers for independent learning, while in private, glass-walled classrooms students participate in academic excellence workshops led by faculty or graduate students.

“There are always tutors on staff in all the STEM fields — math, science, engineering, bio, engineering technology, chemistry — and students can come in for drop in tutoring,” said Jo-Ann Panzaridi, the college’s engineering department chair and instructor.

“This place is great; an overdue upgrade,” said electrical engineering student Isabel Corpus, as she goes over an assignment with fellow student Celso Cabrales at one of the center’s new desks spread out amongst the center.

The desks have a built-in feature that Corpus especially likes — a charging station to plug in a laptop or other portable electronic device. She also likes the center’s private study rooms and kitchen. While Cabrales rated highly the center’s new fast computers.

Last year, the two electrical engineering students would go to MESA’s former computer lab, but admittedly, not very often.

“It was in the math building and it was really the size of a regular classroom — really small,” said Corpus, painting the picture.

“We’d get really hot from all the body temperature.”

Plus, it stank.

“There was a microwave in the old MESA room and if someone would heat up fish — the whole room would stink of fish,” added Cabrales.

Corpus said the old lab was really crowded, and even though the new STEM center attracts more people, she said, it is not the same.

“Here at least there is space to move — even if there is more people,” she said.

“More people started coming here because it is such a great place to study,” said Cabrales.

“We’d only spend a little bit of time at the old place now we stay the whole day.”

“And its really welcoming,” said Corpus. “You can leave your stuff here and no one will take it.”

The new STEM center is the cherry on top of a massive renovation of the 800 Building, which used to house administrative and communications staff and now is the Baskin Engineering, Physics and Computing Center.

Longtime benefactors of Cabrillo College, the Peggy and Jack Baskin Foundation, gave close to $900,000 to the Cabrillo College Foundation to complete the construction of the new facility, which features state-of-the-art classrooms for the college’s math, science and engineering students.

The funds are in addition to a $4.3 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education the college received in 2011 to “scale-up” and centralize student support services for STEM majors.

Part of that grant included the creation of a new STEM Center with increased academic support and proactive academic and transfer advising, as well as expanded engineering and computer science laboratory spaces and resources to promote a total-engagement experience for STEM students.

“Prior to the renovation, the departments in the Baskin Engineering, Physics, and Computing Center were spread over eight buildings. Now the students are located together in a spacious state-of-the-art facility,” said Panzaridi.

“With what I see is that the center is the hub for learning that creates a sense of community among the students where they work together, learn from each other, and support each other. This collaboration promotes success,” she said.

Currently, there are more than 600 students who have environment that centralizes transfer and higher education.

Jo-Ann Panzaridi, Cabrillo College engineering department chair and instructor, explains how a universal tester works during a tour of the Jack and Peggy Baskin Technology Center for Engineering, Computing and Physics Monday.

declared math, science and engineering majors for transfer and the college offers approximately 250 course sections in the STEM fields this fall semester.

“Our new Baskin Technology Center provides a state-of-the-art, collaborative work student support services for STEM majors, leading to their increased student success,” said Dr. Laurel Jones, President and Superintendent of Cabrillo College.

“STEM is of national importance for not only job market opportunities, but also for degrees. We are grateful for the generous support of Peggy and Jack Baskin, who are both pioneers in their respective industries, and for support from the Monterey Peninsula Foundation.”