A final beam is added to the Thomas W. Keating building yesterday. The building is expected to be completed in early 2006.

By Natasha Bhuyan
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The final steel beam was added to the Thomas W. Keating building yesterday, signifying one of the final steps before the UA is able to usher in an era of collaborative research with the physical completion of the BIO5 Institute.

Vicki Chandler, director of BIO5 Institute, said scientists on campus from different fields are already collaborating in their research, but BIO5 will provide them with a central way to facilitate the research.

“The UA is uniquely positioned in the country to be able to capitalize in bringing all these areas together,” Chandler said. “Our history of collaboration gives us a one-up on putting all these teams together.”

During yesterday’s ceremony, administrators, scientists and the public signed the final steel beam to be added to the building.

Labs in the Keating building, the central site of BIO5, will focus on nine areas of research: genomics, quantitative biology, high-throughput screening, regenerative medicine, medical imaging, respiratory immunology, genetic improvements of plants, medical device design and nanotechnology, according to a press release.

Brenda Jackson, a research specialist in David Gang’s plant sciences lab, said the UA already breeds an atmosphere of collaborative research and is a leading institution in recognizing the next wave of science which will combine units, not divide them.

“Other (institutions) may pull back and see how BIO5 works,” Jackson said. “The UA could be the first of many.”

Dick Powell, vice president for research, graduate studies and economic development, said BIO5 is also different from a standard research institute since there will be no ownership of the laboratories. Instead, each lab will be designated for a specific area of research, and scientists will rotate on a long-term basis.

As many fields of science across campus are already collaborating, the method of no-ownership is the most effective for BIO5, Powell said.

Lizhi Yu, assistant research scientist in the Arizona Respiratory Center whose lab will be moving to BIO5, said he is excited to work in the new facility because he will receive more space, a factor which will increase productivity and likely bring in more outside funding.

Sprawling across 177,000 gross square feet, the $65.5 million Keating building will house 300 researchers and staff and is expected to be complete in early 2006.

Roenie Keating, whose husband Thomas Keating donated $10 million to the project, said with the advent of BIO5 she expects more national attention to be placed on the UA.