



Project overview

Vertical Access was retained by the Harvard University Office of Physical Resources and Planning to investigate and document existing conditions at the exterior of William James Hall on the Harvard campus in Cambridge, MA. The scope of work for this survey included hands-on inspection and hammer-sounding of the exterior concrete and documentation of existing conditions. VA returned two years later to conduct a periodic inspection of the building's exterior.

Building description

William James Hall is a 15-story concrete-frame building, designed by Minoru Yamasaki in 1963. Pre-cast concrete spandrel panels form the structural girders between columns on the north and south façades, and have a decorative diamond pattern. At the columns, pre-cast panels were used as both formwork and cladding for the poured concrete frame. The columns are battered at ground level, slowly tapering to vertical near the top of the building. A balcony at the 15th floor is sheltered by an overhanging soffit. The balustrade at the roof of the building has cast stone concrete balusters and coping units. William James Hall is named for psychologist and philosopher

Challenges & solutions

- Used industrial rope access to allow hands-on inspection of all areas of the exterior façades.
- Scheduled inspection drops in order to minimize disruption to building users, especially at the building's main (south) entrance.
- Documented existing conditions using the Tablet PC Annotation System.

Building owner

Harvard University

In collaboration with

- Harvard University Office of Physical Resources and Planning
- Simpson Gumpertz & Heger

Photos by Vertical Access

