Three buildings create a river-facing courtyard with perimeter outdoor dining seating, rain gardens spanned by bridges with benches, and a central lawn.
Cambridge Commons is a new 700-bed freshman residence hall built to serve the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. With a site on a bluff overlooking the verdant green way of the Milwaukee River, the project also fronted on one of the areas busiest commercial arterials: North Avenue. The large program was broken down into three buildings arranged around a green courtyard that could relate to the river below, while the three buildings were pushed right up to their street edges and lined with retail and public spaces to relate to the urban setting. The courtyard becomes an outdoor space for student activities like dining, reading and sunbathing, as well as a place for active sports like soccer and ultimate frisbee out on the open green. The three volumes are clad in a unique 16” long crème-colored brick, articulating the surface into long horizontal lines. Dark metal is used to clad the upper two stories of the 6-story volume, further emphasizing the horizontal lines of the composition. In contrast to these long horizontals, deep reveals in the brickwork are used to articulate the student suites on the exterior. Certified LEED Gold in 2011, Cambridge Commons was especially sensitive to issues regarding water. A variety of sustainable features were used to prohibit erosion of the bluff and insure water quality in the river below including green roofs, storing storm water in underground tanks for use later for irrigation, extensive rain gardens, and reforestation of the bluff top with native tree plantings.
Students play a rollicking game of ultimate frisbee on the lawn of the courtyard.
The fourth floor plan, showing the three buildings connected by glass bridges.

Floors in the commons were made of polished concrete embedded with glass.