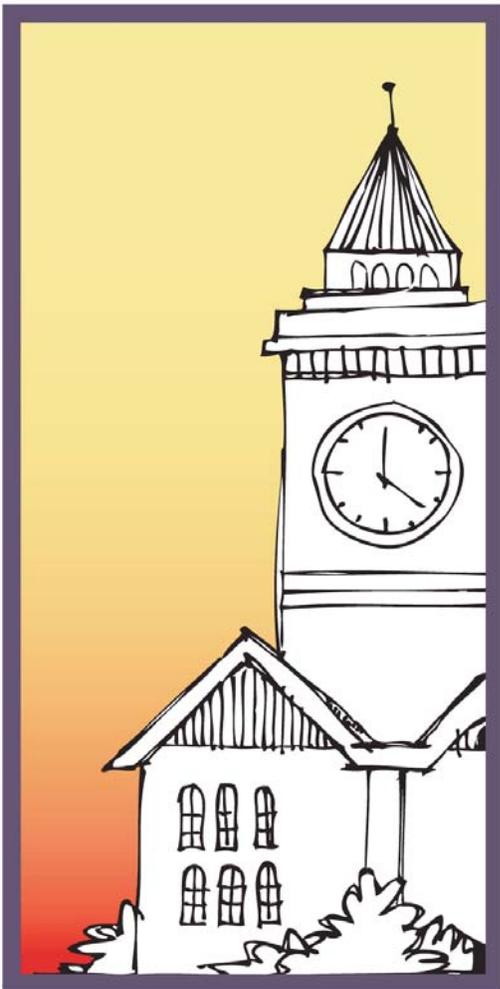


The Changing Campus

Advice and Action to Accommodate Learning



Campuses are changing. As part of a growing movement called the learning college movement, which recognizes the influence of environment on learning, many colleges and universities are shifting their pedagogical approach from a traditional instruction paradigm—which is focused on delivering instruction to students—to a learning paradigm, one in which the goal is to produce learning in students. This shift has radically altered the relationship between teacher and student and has fueled the need for new approaches to learning space design.

With the very nature of education itself changing, it is clear that new ways of thinking, new forms of collaboration, and new approaches to campus life are necessary. When presented with the opportunity to build new or renovate instructional space, campus leaders must rethink traditional approaches and accommodate a radically different educational landscape. Similarly, architecture and design firms must also undergo a paradigm shift in the way they approach the design of learning spaces, how they develop and nurture client relationships, and how they support the teaching and learning needs of faculty and students to ensure successful projects.

Supporting the Learning Paradigm

It is doubtful that the current infrastructure of higher education can support the massive influx of a multigenerational, technologically sophisticated student population seeking learning both from degree and certificate programs as well as short-term training. While colleges and universities can always defer expansion, can they afford to hang out “no vacancy”

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signs when more and more Americans want learning? The alternative is to meet the needs of their communities and constituencies by finding ways to expand facilities—and learning opportunities—either through renovation or new capital construction. Campus leadership must rise to the occasion by developing facilities that can deal with this diversity of interests, goals, and attitudes.

Those colleges that can foresee and plan for the future will be the ones best positioned to survive and thrive in challenging times. To help planners meet these challenges, Herman Miller, Inc., conducted a series of interviews, focus groups, and invitational colloquia with college leaders who had developed facilities that attempted to meet the challenges of increased enrollment and the shift to a learning-centered environment. The participants had implemented new ways of thinking, practiced new forms of collaboration, and taken new approaches to design that directly responded to the need for change. Along the way, they encountered many internal and external obstacles that made changes to their campus environment difficult. Their approach, their journey, became a learning opportunity for those interested in charting their own course to flexible, innovative facilities and deeper student learning.

Blazing the Trail

Here are the steps higher education leaders identified for charting their course to implement change on campus. Each step begins with a list of key aspects for that activity, followed by a brief explanation.

1. Define the Vision

- Begin with the end product in mind.
- Ask yourself: How does this fit into the bigger picture?
- Develop a clear set of parameters.
- Incorporate prior learnings into the process.
- Clearly articulate your vision in language that's understood by all participants.
- Fully express your intent to all involved in the process.



A facility that sustains learning and supports a variety of learning styles and pedagogical approaches is essential when dealing with a diverse student body. Designing innovative learning space is an organic process in which planning is often undertaken without complete knowledge of how the eventual space will effectively function. In a sense, the facilities that

planners are envisioning are no longer simply buildings or classrooms, but environments where learning, creativity, and discovery will occur.

To realize this learning space, a vision needs to be developed—a vision of what the facility could be, given no boundaries to the imagination. Of course, budgetary and size limitations must be taken into account, but initially, it is important to envision an ideal learning space and the capabilities it would possess. It is important to begin with the end product in mind, and to develop a clear set of parameters within which success can be assured.

The project's vision should then be clearly articulated in language and terminology understood by all participants in the process. The needs of the users—as well as potential future users of the learning space—must be fully expressed.

2. Build the Team

- Choose a leader capable of driving the project forward.
- Gather a team of both space users and non-users.
- Identify key stakeholders.
- Consult external resources for outside perspectives.
- Build the skills of team members.
- Develop a shared ownership philosophy.



First, the team needs a champion, one who will drive the project forward, building consensus both within the planning group as well as the college community. The champion must be able to create and sustain a compelling vision of the ultimate outcomes with a positive attitude and infectious energy. An understanding of how to create partnerships with campus entities advances the process and builds momentum. By asking the right questions during the planning process, the champion can separate motives from arguments and galvanize the team to focus energy on solutions, needed outcomes, and the overall vision, rather than have the group fulminate over problems and potential obstacles.

Development of a cross-functional planning team early on is essential. The demography of a campus has been unflatteringly described as a series of silos that rarely interact. This mentality must be overcome. A wide sample of input gives the team more options when hard decisions must be eventually reached.

The team should represent the eventual users, as well as non-users, of the space in order to expand

the range of opinions available to the decision makers and avoid replication of previous, comfortable ways of teaching. Early identification of the project stakeholders and inclusion of them in all aspects of planning expands the visioning potential of the team. Faculty, administrators, support staff, facilities personnel, information technology experts, maintenance staff, and—most appropriately—students should be on the planning team. Ideally, the team should be a combination of creative and pragmatic people who are willing to listen to viewpoints other than their own.

Fear of change is a human trait and can be found in any institution. Inviting critics to contribute to discussions and planning widens the range of opinions that can influence crucial decisions. In the consultation process, a willingness to hear opinions and perspectives that are negative or even unfriendly may be deflating, but it also gives the planning team a wider set of choices and a fuller understanding of the context within which they are operating.

If the facility will serve more than its core student constituency, members of the community can contribute effective external perspective. Alumni should not be ignored either. As lifelong learners, they may well reappear in continuing education programs, as employers sending staff to the college for contract training, or even as donors. Their perspective can be valuable, as their reflections on the attributes and disadvantages of the learning environments they experienced as undergraduates can be very telling.

The team must also consult many external sources of information and inspiration. Certainly, research of contemporary best practices in learning environments is essential. Attendance at appropriate conferences by team members allows them to network with experts as well as kindred souls. Visits to recently completed facilities and interviews with their users can reveal unseen obstacles and new approaches.

Other components of the team development process are essential:

- It is necessary to understand the institution's master plan and how the new project would move its agenda forward.
- A sense of dissatisfaction with current learning environments must be identified and used to build support for the project.
- A clear understanding of institutional, budgetary, and time limitations must be folded into the planning mentality.
- Developing a clear and ongoing communications plan enhances openness of the process and buy-in of various constituencies.

Throughout the entire process, an ongoing method of assessing progress toward goals must be fully implemented. Discussion should always be guided with the question, "How can this decision improve student learning?" The finished product will be a living laboratory in which faculty can continually assess outcomes and engage students in conversations that lead to continual improvement. As progress is measured and milestones are reached, it is important for the team to celebrate accomplishments and build a growing confidence that the end result will be the successful fulfillment of their hard work.

3. Do Your Homework

- Gather data and share knowledge—tap into your existing "well of wisdom."
- Review best practices.
- Visit other institutions.
- Explore potential external resources
- Create experimental spaces—test your ideas.



At some point in the planning process, it is necessary to go outside the institution and secure the services of professionals who will turn concept into reality—architects, design firms, construction companies, and various suppliers that flesh out and complete the project. Here again, the cross-functional team should be fully involved in the selection process, as it is their vision that needs to be realized and they are best qualified to communicate their needs and concepts to the professionals.

A number of criteria should be employed in the selection process of external resources:

- Visit facilities the potential firms have designed or furnished and ask questions about the effectiveness of the external resource contributions, attitudes, collaboration skills, and final product.
- Interview candidates and observe the firm's sincerity and willingness to realize the vision. Debrief the team to review the applicant's qualifications by considering these questions:
 - Did they understand that the world of higher education is changing?
 - Did they demonstrate an understanding of how this project fits into the college's master plan and vision?
 - Did their initial presentation seem "canned" or not relevant to what you were looking for?
 - Did they demonstrate their expertise effectively?

- Did they ask interesting and pertinent questions that sincerely probed your concept?
- Did they articulate a complementary design philosophy that was learning-centered?
- Did they demonstrate an understanding that all space is potential learning space?
- Did they understand the changing learning styles of today's student—and tomorrow's?
- Did they hear and understand your needs and respect your knowledge?
- How thoroughly did they research your college and your project?
- Choose firms who have experience with and, ideally, demonstrate an understanding of innovative, learning-centered designs that are in sync with the team's vision.
- Ensure that selected consultants understand and work toward contemporary standards of design and construction, including LEED certification for institutions that value sustainability. Promoting a “green” initiative may be a valuable asset in publicizing the project and well worth the effort to earn the certification.
- Filter consultants’ expertise to ensure that their recommendations are not in conflict with institutional culture. This is particularly true if the college has its own architectural and design staff.

While the design phase may have a finite period, the results of this partnership will linger long after the contractual relationship is over. Choosing the right design team is essential to the success of the project.

4. Determine Scenarios

- Ask yourself: Are you being true to your vision?
- Select and secure the services of suppliers.
- Set design and sustainability standards, including the best practices that are already in process on campus.
- Create function-based design scenarios.
- Strike a comfortable balance between creativity and order.
- Finalize the plan.
- Spearhead the next steps.



It's important to strike a comfortable balance between creativity and order, brainstorming outside of conventional paradigms. Consider the vision the team has established and how various scenarios support it.

Here are what higher education leaders consider the primary characteristics (in no particular order) of an ideal learning environment—a good starting point for tailoring your institution's vision.

- **Flexibility:** The ability to easily change the focal point of interaction between and among students and the teacher is highly desirable for a diverse student body, as well as varying learning styles and pedagogies. A well-designed, flexible space allows faculty optional choices for configuring specific learning experiences.
- **Technology:** The technology provided to support learning in the facility should be easily updated, accessible for all users, and have the capability of providing immediate learning opportunities for both students in the room as well as external participants who may be remotely logged in. It should accommodate both the virtual and physical worlds.
- **A Comfortable Context for Learning:** Design of the infrastructure of the facility should focus on optimizing the physical dimension of the learning experience. Temperature control, variable lighting, a pleasing color scheme, access to natural light and movable, ergonomic workspaces and furniture all play a part in creating an environment conducive for interaction.
- **The Potential to Evolve:** Over time, the space will house many users and stakeholders. The space should be able to evolve easily in order to house differing functions as new curricula are developed and different usages are discovered to expand its capabilities.
- **Accessibility:** The facility should be designed to facilitate learning, not just during regularly scheduled class hours, but also for study groups, independent research, open lab time, and other innovative uses of the space to maximize the return on investment.
- **Support for Multiple Fluencies:** The space must be flexible enough to support many fluencies in the learning process—written, verbal, spoken, computational, reasoning, and critical thinking.
- **Student Engagement:** Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning. Through collaboration, study teams, and thoughtfully designed exercises, teachers can use the facility to promote deeper learning.
- **Professional Development Opportunities:** An easily reconfigured space permits faculty to experiment with differing configurations and ways to interact with students, providing professional development opportunities for faculty to share new approaches and suggest how the space can be improved.

- **A Sense of Shared Ownership:** There is often tension between those who maintain facilities and those who use them. Ultimately, the mindset should move from “mine” to “ours.” Students must feel that they are challenged to succeed in the space while at the same time feel they are supported by the college.

5. Implement

- Implement your vision
- Train, orient, share, and prepare.
- Recognize project team and support teams.
- Assess and report on the progress.



This is where your hard work and efforts begin to pay off. You have had the opportunity to learn, test new ideas, and gather input from potential user groups. Now is the time to put your ideas into action by making the new spaces in your facility a reality.

Just because you make them available, doesn't mean everyone will embrace the new ideas. Just as you have throughout the process, it is critical to follow through with ongoing communication, orientation, and training. Your user group will use the new space in old ways unless they see new ways in action or are provided with opportunities to learn how to adapt their teaching methods using the capabilities of the new space.

Don't forget to maintain open communication with the user group. Address issues or concerns as soon as they arise. At the same time, it is important to recognize those who are stepping out of their comfort zones to try new things.

This step is all about making it happen—trying new things, seeing what works, making modifications as necessary, and learning from the experience.

This should also be the step when you begin the process of assessment.

6. Assess the Outcome

- What do you want to measure, and how?
- Measure effectiveness and modify as needed.
- How true were you to your vision?
- Share successes and challenges.
- What key learnings can you take into future projects?



Development of a new facility is a rare opportunity to experiment with and challenge old assumptions of instructional effectiveness. Through the process, the team needs to develop methodologies to assess the progress of the project, from concept to completion. Metrics of effectiveness should be established early on and implemented at each phase of the project. By performing formative assessment of the vision, design, and supportive elements throughout the planning process, the team has an early opportunity to make midcourse corrections before committing to a final model. Taking a page from the Total Quality Management (TQM) model, the cycle should be “Design, Experiment, Assess, Revise.”

Early adopters can become champions of change, adding to the team's strength and providing solid data for the final planning stage. As early experimentation validates the vision, the team can step back to celebrate the direction of the project and communicate their successes to the college community.

A comprehensive summative assessment should be done once the facility is operational. The findings can be valuable to future planners and users, allowing them to build on successes and avoid mistakes.

The time between initial approval to proceed with a project through the official opening of a facility is filled with hard work, give and take, research and commitment. While it can be challenging, this journey does have rewards—an opportunity to serve communities, to carry out institutional mission, and to meaningfully affect the lives of both faculty and students by providing them with a quality learning experience.

Keep in mind the 6 Cs to help chart your course through change:

A Champion: Strong leadership is essential to move the project along on time and budget. Look for a team leader with good facilitation skills, the right combination of management skills and leadership qualities, high energy, and lots of creativity.

Collegiality: Shared governance and collaboration allow for participation in decision-making, enriching solutions, programming, and campus buy-in. An inclusive, cross-functional team will ensure the broadest level of contribution to the success of the project.

Consensus: Achieve consensus through team meetings and open forums where every considered opinion is heard and weighed to move the project forward toward established goals.

Consultants: An external team of design professionals and other resources can be beneficial as the discussion moves from concept to blueprint. A mutually positive

and productive relationship between the institution and architectural and design firms is vital.

Communication: Communicate to all involved at every step of the process, from the vendors, to the designers and architects, to the community. Communication is an ongoing activity that keeps everyone informed, collaboration harmonious, and deadlines on target.

Celebration: A project's timeline can range from months to years, consuming time and energy from participants. Make sure throughout the process to assure continuity and a sense of effective progress.

Take Caution

It's also helpful to recognize some cautionary variables that must be taken into account when undergoing such a complex, collaborative venture:

- Provide a venue for individuals who challenge how change can affect learning so they can express their concerns and offer constructive suggestions.
- Cultivate an inclusive environment where different opinions can be aired.
- Choose a champion who is effective at facilitation.
- Encourage a process that's fair, inclusive, and open for participants.
- Establish a set of operating policies to assure internal and external perceptions are accurate and balanced.
- Open communication to all college constituencies throughout the entire process is essential.
- Avoid individual agendas and politics by focusing on the goal of improved student learning.

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