

LSC Webinar Snapshot— Re-imagining Spaces: Partnerships and Collaboration (June 2014)

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The Context

In 2012, we celebrated the [50th birthday of the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center](#). Renovations have created several vibrant spaces within our 'cinder block fortress' including the [Weigle Information Commons](#), the [Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts](#) and the [Collaborative Classroom](#). The same year, the [Education Commons](#) opened below the bleachers of the Franklin Field football stadium, an unusual location for an unusual library space. Around the Penn campus, new "active learning" classrooms have opened.

The Weigle Information Commons is heavily used by all of campus, with hundreds of groups reserving spaces each semester. The Education Commons is gaining popularity, especially with engineering students and athletes. An iterative, reflective approach to space planning, and a [strong Program Partners network](#) helps the two Commons to be responsive to patron needs. We share below some updates to [our 2014 webinar](#).

As part of our explorations of space planning, we brought insights from several Learning Spaces Collaboratory conferences back to campus. We visited active learning classrooms at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Minnesota and the University of Maryland – Baltimore Campus. Our field trips inspired conversations that crossed organizational lines; visiting places different from Penn catalyzed new ideas. We brought in guest speakers from MIT and North Carolina State University. A 2015 [Academic Impressions Conference](#) brought us ideas from several other universities.



Van Pelt Collaborative Classroom: 35 seats with table-controlled projectors

The Planning Process

Our conversations about campus, like our campus renovations, are inherently iterative. One question can lead to observations that generate new questions. This spring, we began with the question:

How do students experience learning spaces at Penn over the course of their day?

Recent renovation and building plans have opened up opportunities for re-envisioning traditional computer labs in dorms. What else could we do to support student learning other than providing rows of computers on tables? With colleagues in student residential services, we held undergraduate focus groups to explore how students study in dorms, libraries and classrooms. We learned that students have to continually readjust their behaviors to cope with differences in reservation processes, food policies, hardware, software, lighting, audio controls and ambient noise.



Lab Classroom: Active learning mathematics classroom in a departmental library space

Students appreciated studying in their classrooms during off-hours because their visual memory was stimulated. They remembered details such as where the professor was standing and how they drew a diagram. Students appreciated studying near their dorm rooms because they could relax, wander in and out of study groups easily and adjust eating and sleeping schedules on the fly. We were delighted to hear that they loved how productive they felt in library spaces, reserving a room or booth for a precious two hours to work on projects with their classmates.

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Our conversations deepened our understanding of each other's work. We are now exploring a common setup for displays, software and connections. If all goes as envisioned, students may have to make fewer adjustments as they move across campus spaces.

Where We Are Now

As we take on renovations and building projects, we build our own internal knowledge base. We take lessons learned in one project and apply them to the next project. For example, self-managed video recording was a hot technology when we built the Weigle Information Commons in 2006. We created four group study rooms with installed ceiling cameras and microphones that connected behind the walls to a central computer. The systems were designed to make video-recording simple. The initial implementation was very successful. Faculty and students used the one-touch system to record directly on DVD, and the rooms became integral to language classes.



Arch Building: Large room that transitions from lecture hall to active learning setup

Fast forward three years, and DVD player technology had advanced rapidly. The specially programmed DVD players we had installed were no longer available on the market. Students and faculty expected to be able to save video in digital format on hard-drives so editing could begin without recapture. By 2010, the cumbersome workarounds needed had dissuaded many students, who began showing up with personal Macintosh laptops.

Staff responded by deploying iMacs in a different set of group study rooms, replicating the functionality without installed, wall-mounted cameras. By 2014, the analog video cameras were clearly obsolete; most students could take higher quality video cameras on their mobile phones. By hard-wiring cameras into walls, we had limited our own ability to keep up with new devices. Now, we avoid wall-mounted cameras when possible, preferring instead to explore inexpensive plug-and-play devices.

Two examples come to mind in terms of how ideas have gathered momentum at Penn.

1. In 2013, Penn received a [\\$500,000 grant from the Association of American Universities \(AAU\)](#) to re-examine undergraduate STEM courses, building on the work of the [Center for Teaching and Learning \(CTL\)](#) and the [Open Learning initiative](#), and launching the [SAIL initiative \(Structured Active In-Class Learning\)](#). Collaboration with Penn Libraries and the Provost's Classroom Committee led to the creation of learning spaces to support new pedagogies – spaces with round tables, movable seats, and projection controls.

Facility administrators looked for opportunities to repurpose spaces where they could be found. In 2012, a general-purpose meeting room in the Chemistry department became a small active learning classroom, and our Math department converted several sections of introductory calculus using active learning pedagogies, increasing demand for such classrooms.

In 2013, the Penn Libraries' [Collaborative Classroom](#) opened and the campus-wide Classrooms Committee created [ARCH 208](#), a large room that can transition from a traditional lecture hall with fixed theater seating to a 90-seat round-table setup. Another 60-seat room for STEM courses opened in 2014 in a science building. Although the impetus for new classrooms came from the AAU grant, the process has required ongoing commitments, partnerships and collaboration across organizational boundaries. [This presentation](#) provides a timeline.

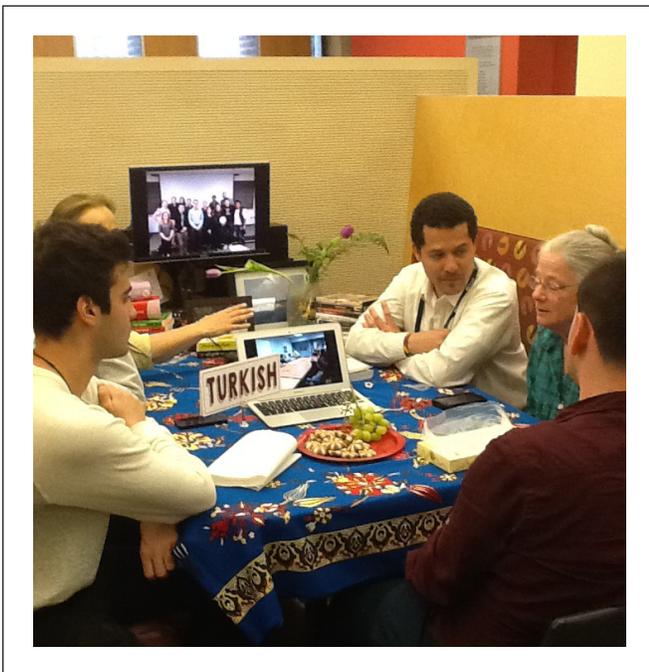
Round tables, whiteboards and technology are useful tools, but are only as good as the learning strategies they support. As faculty use our new classrooms, they and their students become more comfortable with changes in instructional practices.

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2. A casual comment at a faculty advisory group meeting in 2014 has led to a substantive programmatic decision involving the Education Commons. We learned that academic departments needed gallery spaces to display student artwork. Meetings with faculty in our Fine Arts Department led to a new student art gallery. A long, narrow hallway with arches and windows turned out to be surprisingly suitable.

We designed and created a small graduate Curatorial Fellowship, and selected our first fellow, Yue Nakayama. She is collaborating with faculty teaching three courses—Drawing II, Language of Design, and Printmaking Publications – and the first exhibition opens this fall. The initiative has created synergy with the exhibit designers at Penn Design and Penn Libraries.

In partnership with the Kislak Center, an exhibit of Angela Lorenz's athletic-related mural art will take place in October. These new connections enable the Education Commons to grow into a relevant arts destination for students and faculty. We cannot follow up on every comment we receive from faculty and students, but we find that small timely explorations can keep our spaces filled with lively programming.



Welcoming admitted students to language learning at Penn in April 2015

What Next

The Weigle Information Commons will launch its Student Showcase as part of Scholarly Commons this fall. We will include over 150 pieces of student-created new media, and each will be part of the library's repository with a unique link and archival permanence.

The Education Commons will begin outreach to academic departments for its new [3D printing service](#). We will explore discipline-specific ideas for integrating 3D printing technology into academic activities, especially course assignments. A fun activity this summer included the 3D printing of fully functional saxophone mouthpieces for a summer high school camp conducted by the Penn Band.

Several active learning classrooms will open this summer and fall. This July, a 90-seat room will open in our Engineering School. A 72-seat room for Physics will open in August 2015 and another for Biology and Psychology will open in Spring 2016. The Dental School will open a small room in Fall 2015.

This summer we have completed painting and carpeting all of the Weigle Information Commons, and we are preparing to introduce the facility to our entering class of first-year students at the end of August.

Advice about first steps

Important steps for getting started at the University of Pennsylvania have been:

- ◆ Using pilot projects and small ventures to provide proof-of-concept
- ◆ Holding outreach events across organizational silos to display what has been created
- ◆ Recognizing that the process is iterative and that there is always room for improvements
- ◆ Separating functionality into chunks so that projects can be sensitive to budget and timing constraints. ■

Resources

- The 50th birthday of the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center
http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/1112/feature5_1.html
- Weigle Information Commons
<http://commons.library.upenn.edu/>
- Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<http://www.library.upenn.edu/kislak/>
- Collaborative Classroom
<http://www.library.upenn.edu/facilities/collab.html>
- Education Commons
<http://commons.library.upenn.edu/>
- Strong Program Partners network
<http://commons.library.upenn.edu/program-partners>
- 2014 webinar
<https://pennwic.wordpress.com/2014/07/03/learning-space-design/>
- 2015 Academic Impressions Conference
<https://pennwic.wordpress.com/2015/03/26/academic-impressions-at-penn-libraries/>
- A \$4.7 million grant from the Association of American Universities (AAU)
<http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/news/penn-implement-aau-undergraduate-stem-education-initiative>
- Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)
<http://www.upenn.edu/ctl/>
- Open Learning initiative
<http://openlearning.upenn.edu/>
- The SAIL initiative (Structured Active In-Class Learning)
http://www.upenn.edu/ctl/resources/teaching_a_sail_class/
- Collaborative Classroom
<http://www.library.upenn.edu/facilities/collab.html>
- ARCH 208
<https://www.isc-cts.upenn.edu/finder/classroominfo.asp?id=ARCH-208>
- Active Learning Classrooms at Penn stand alone version
http://prezi.com/ijvpw_2sonia/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy
- SAS Pre-freshman Program Annual event
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pennwic/sets/72157645439749398>
- 3D printing service at the Education Commons
<http://commons.library.upenn.edu/3d-print>
- "The Future for Teaching and Learning" by Joan K. Lippincott, *American Libraries*, March/April 2015
<http://commons.library.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/pictures/docs/ExcerptAmericanLibrariesMarApr2015.pdf>