



Da Vinci Center for Innovation  
Virginia Commonwealth University

Firm: BCWH

Firm Representative: Charles D. Piper, AIA

Learning Spaces Collaboratory Roundtable  
*Spring 2016: Focusing on the Future of Planning Learning Spaces*  
Georgia Institute of Technology

### Driving Questions

1. A T-shaped individual is an individual who is anchored in a discipline but has the capacity and openness to span across disciplines. How can learning and the spaces for learning ensure that students become T-shaped individuals upon graduation?
2. Current trends in higher education value a culture of openness and sharing in the academic environment. What can our learning spaces do to promote strategic partnering between students from different backgrounds and disciplines to push learning beyond the boundaries of a classroom?
3. Can architectural identity help champion a program? Can a new space be a catalyst not only for new ideas, but for new programs and curriculum? If you create space, will they come?
4. Can new or renovated architectural space serve as a mechanism to spur innovative learning techniques on a campus? What does a collaboratory look like?
5. Can we grow our potential for learning without growing our campus footprints? Can today's academic needs fit neatly into yesterday's structural bones?
6. How can we structure our buildings on public universities, usually built via capital funds or private donors given to specific programs, as to not silo student thinking? What does a classroom or student environment look like in a topic-based education model?

A cross-pollination of VCU's Schools of the Arts, Business, Engineering, and the College of Humanities and Sciences, the VCU da Vinci Center for Innovation is a unique collegiate model that promotes novelty, entrepreneurship, and a venture creation mindset through interdisciplinary collaboration. When the Center wanted to create a dynamic new environment for its labs and offices, they sought out BCWH to shape an open, transparent, engaging place out of the shell of a historic, turn-of-the-century townhouse. Through a participatory design process, faculty in the Da Vinci Center and architects from BCWH worked to ensure the renovation was responsive and appropriate to students' needs—cultural, emotional, spiritual, and practical.

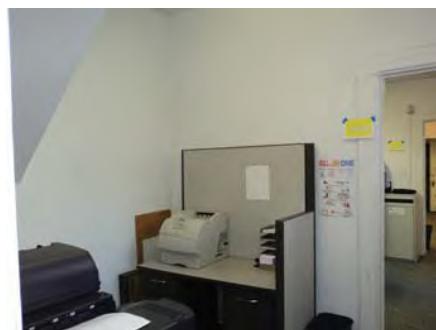
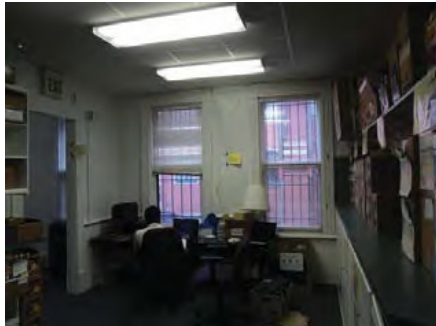
Before the opening of the da Vinci Center, affectionately known as "807" by the students in reference to its address, the Center was a small certificate program with a few classrooms and a lab in the engineering building and offices in the neighboring business school. The goal of the project was to allow the Center to have a public face and to serve as a 24-hour design incubator. The Center wanted a flexible, open think-tank where students come together in teams to discuss and create, using whiteboards, laptops, hand models, and 3-D machinery to fabricate projects for real-world clients. The designers worked closely with Center faculty to accomplish these goals and set the creative undertone for student work in the space.

In the last two years, the Center has grown into two Masters Programs, three undergraduate certificates, and a scholars program. Enrollment has more than tripled. The product is an example of a renovated space that serves as a catalyst to spur innovation on campus.

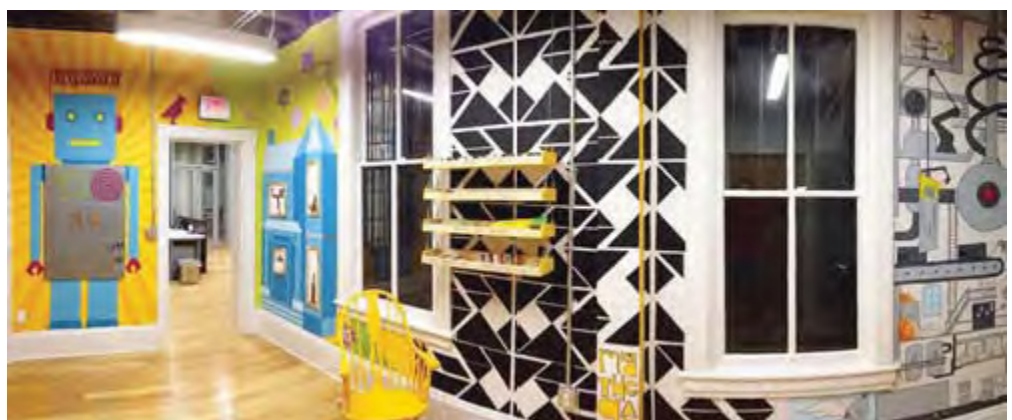
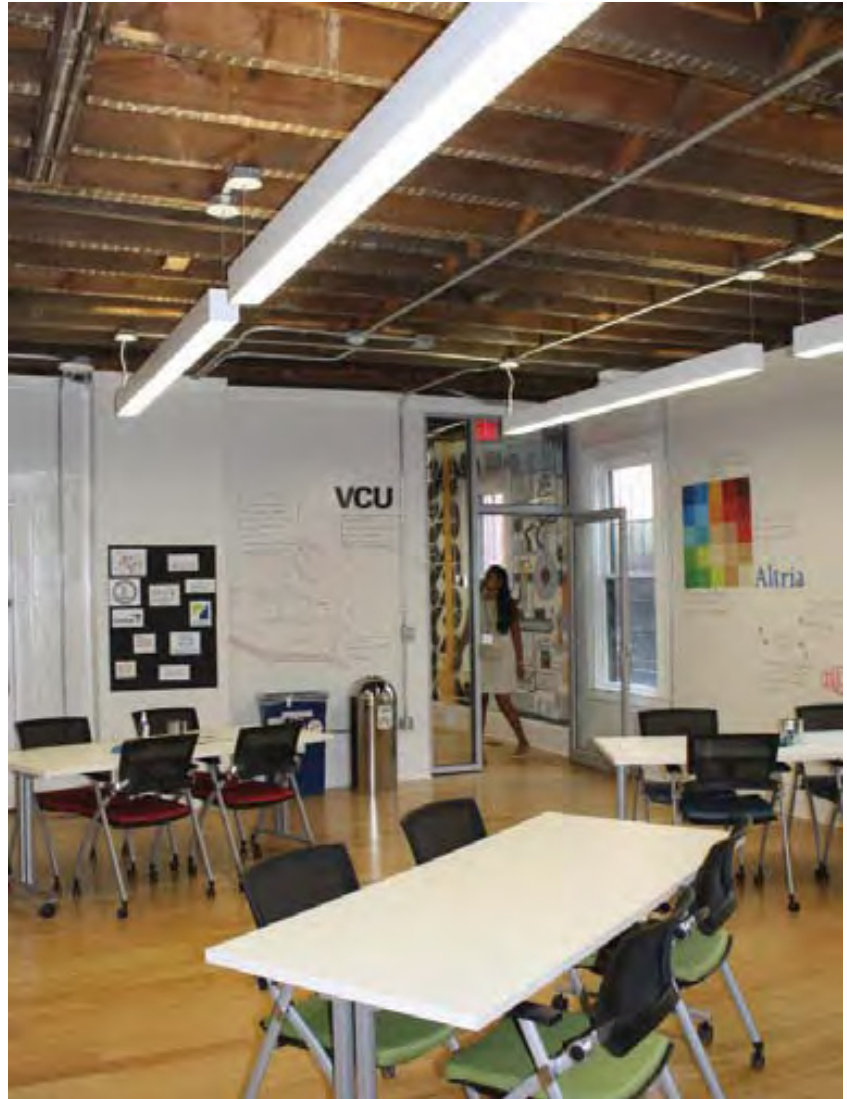
The end result was not only the addition of 3,800 square feet for the program, but a tale of process innovation: the new space has grown and influenced the curriculum of the program, allowed for strategic partnering between students from different disciplines, and grown the potential for learning on campus without actually growing the campus footprint. The building itself has become an "intrapreneur" for the students in the various programs by encouraging risk taking and innovative thinking among its occupants.



Interior Space Pre-Renovation:



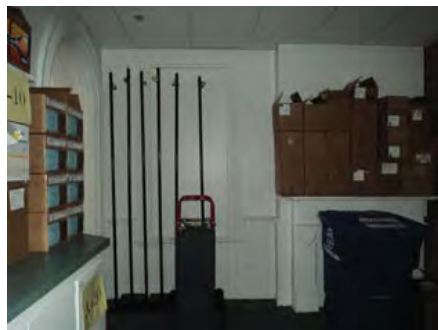
Interior Space of Collaboratory Post-Renovation:



Interior Space Pre-Renovation:



Interior Space of Collaboratory Post-Renovation:



Former Da Vinci Classroom:

