Vision, Goals & Strategies:
A Guide for Planning Learning Spaces

Introduction: This working paper introduces a template for guiding institutional teams responsible for the quality and character of student learning on their campus, to be used in the context of anticipating and/or addressing opportunities and challenges to transform the physical environment for learning. It captures the essence of experiences of planning teams on campuses across the country that have been involved since 1992 with one or more PKAL sponsored activity relating to planning learning spaces. This is a work-in-progress document that will be enriched with stories and data from the community that illustrate effective approaches to implementing specific strategies to accomplish specific goals and to realize the institutional visions for learning, spaces, and community with distinction.

Vision

People/students: A vision of what your students, as learners, should come to know, be able to do, become as a result of their experiences in these learning spaces, in relation to:

- A specific course, set of courses, learning experiences within a particular context, formal or informal

- The coherence of their career as undergraduate learners

- The understandings, skills, and capacities they translate into action in their lives beyond the campus: as life-long learner, member of the 21st century workforce, citizen in our 21st century democracy and global community.

Product: A vision of what your spaces will enable your community to be, to do, to become, now and into the future, in relation to:

- How the space/building adds distinction to the campus and signals what is central to the institutional identity and mission

- How the space/building celebrates learning, enhances the experience of learning, and inspires learners at all levels

- How the space/building is itself a laboratory for learning, modeling creative and cost-effective practices in designing, constructing, maintaining, and renewing the physical learning environment.

Process: A vision of what your institutional culture should be and come to be in regard to ensuring the physical learning environment enables the community to face its future with confidence and distinction, in relation to:

- Policies that undergird and nurture continuous and creative attention to the physical environments for learning

- Practices for planning that involve an intentional feedback loop of imagining, testing, implementing, and assessing approaches to shaping and sustaining a physical learning environment that enhances the intellectual and social environments for learning

- Policies and practices for shaping the physical learning environment that are visibly grounded in theories of organizational change.

Goals: Translating vision into benchmarks for planning

People/students: Goals for our planning are that:

- Our students see spaces as opportunities for constructing their own knowledge, for taking personal responsibility for their learning, assuming the persona of the practitioner, reflecting on and advancing their career as undergraduate learner.

- Faculty see spaces as essential tools for advancing learning of students for whom they are responsible and, as appropriate, for advancing their work as scholars.

- The larger campus community recognizes how spaces offer opportunities to enhance learning 24/7, of all students.

Product: Goals for spaces that emerge from our planning are that:

♦ The collective impact of individual spaces, buildings, and grounds enhances and inspires the learning, work, and lives of all members of our community.

♦ They signal our understanding of learning theory and research-based pedagogies; of the changing context; of best practices in "green" design and use of technologies as tools for learning, research, and managing systems.

♦ They "push the envelope" in challenging the way people think about, plan, and use learning spaces.

♦ They "work" for the users of tomorrow as well as for the users of today.

Process: Goals for our planning are that:

♦ Decisions about the physical infrastructure are always grounded in learning outcomes and learning goals for all students, in the given institutional context.

♦ Developing and maintaining a robust physical learning environment becomes a continuous rather than episodic engagement of appropriate members of the broader community and appropriate stakeholders.

♦ Best approaches for shaping and sustaining productive teams of agents of change, with responsibility for the quality and character of learning spaces—individual and/or campus-wide—are common practice.

Strategies: Translating goals into roadmaps for planning (People)

Goals: Our students see spaces as opportunities for constructing their own knowledge, for taking personal responsibility for their learning, assuming the persona of the practitioner, reflecting on and advancing their career as undergraduate learner. Develop strategies to:

♦ Understand what your current students think about their current learning spaces and about spaces in which they feel most creative and comfortable as learners.

♦ Be clear about the depth of knowledge and breadth of skills current employers/society expect of current 21st century college/university graduates.

♦ Bring students to the planning table.

Goals: Faculty see specific spaces as essential tools for advancing learning of students for whom they are responsible. Develop strategies to:

♦ Understand what your current faculty think about the capacity and potential of their current spaces in enabling robust learning of all their students.

♦ Get inside the "mental image" of what faculty imagine as the ideal learning spaces for interactions with, and the learning of, their students today and into the future; develop "use cases" for specific projects.

♦ Engage faculty, at all career stages, in imagining the future of their field and in describing the quality and character of spaces (specific and generic) that accommodate that future.

Goals: The larger campus community comes to recognize how the physical infrastructure enhances learning of all students, 24/7. Develop strategies to:

♦ Undertake a hi-profile, low-hanging fruit sand-box exercise, funded by existing resources, with careful assessments publicized and actionable.

♦ Identify resident experts whose research informs the theory and practice of shaping learning spaces; take advantage of that expertise and experience.

♦ Celebrate and tell stories, all along the way, of what works and why.

Strategies: Translating those goals into a roadmap for planning (Product)

Goal: The collective impact of individual spaces, buildings, and grounds enhances and inspires the learning, work, and lives of all members of our community. Develop strategies to:

♦ Audit the capacity and potential of current spaces to serve your institutional vision of a robust environment for learning.

♦ Audit the capacity and potential of current spaces to serve desired pedagogical approaches, accommodate desired technologies, bring about desired collaborations.

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◆ Gather data and information about each aspect of the campus culture, policies, and practices that influences (or is influenced by) the planning process, from course enrollments and class schedules, to curricular initiatives, faculty and staff demographics, etc. Make this information actionable.

◆ Develop "use cases" to explore options for how the spaces might be used; discuss with a diverse range of practitioners and revisit use cases with a feedback loop.

Goal: These spaces signal our understanding of learning theory and research-based pedagogies; the changing context; best practices in "green" design and use of technologies as tools for learning, research, and managing systems. Develop strategies to:

◆ Have facilitated discussions about theories of learning and research-based pedagogies; develop some guiding design principles.

◆ Gather and review information about learning expectations from employers, national organizations such as AAC&U, disciplinary communities.

◆ Practice due diligence in determining where the field is now (green/technologies), where it is going, and determine which emerging practices and technologies fit into your timeline for planning.

Goal: These spaces "push the envelope" in challenging the way people think about, plan, and use learning spaces. Develop strategies to:

◆ Create the elevator speech.

Goal: These spaces "work" for the users of tomorrow as well as for the users of today. Develop strategies to:

◆ Anticipate the future.

Strategies: Translating those goals into a roadmap for planning (Process)

Goal: Decisions about the physical infrastructure are always grounded in learning outcomes and learning goals for all students, in the given institutional context. Develop strategies to:

◆ Create a template of student learning goals, specifically for individual projects, and/or for the campus community more broadly, that will serve as a check against which planning decisions are made and become final.

◆ Determine, at a very early stage, the spatial implications of any potential programmatic initiative; experiment with and revisit decisions based on a feedback loop.

◆ Make a deep audit to determine current level of practice of research-based pedagogies.

Goal: Developing and maintaining a robust learning physical learning environment becomes a continuous rather than episodic engagement of appropriate members of the broader community and appropriate stakeholders. Develop strategies to:

◆ Have the planning "heartbeat" be transparent within and beyond the working committees.

◆ Have a standing learning spaces working committee that involves students, administrators, staff as well as faculty.

◆ Have evolving discussions about vision and goals for learning spaces campus-wide, in the context of undertaking particular planning initiatives.

Goal: Best approaches for shaping and sustaining productive teams of agents of change, with responsibility for the quality and character of learning spaces—individual and/or campus-wide—are common practice. Develop strategies to:

◆ Model the development, implementation, and assessment of the planning team after theories of how people learn and on pedagogical practices based on those theories.

◆ Understand the process of organizational change in the context of your institutional culture.

◆ Have a clear and compelling mantra that signals your intended "end in mind." ■

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