

PLANNING AND DESIGNING FOR INCLUSIVITY

REPORTING OUT: A ROUNDTABLE GROUP

**What would a comfortable learning space be for you?
What would a safe space for learning be for you?**

“Our group was drawn together by the similarity of our individual introductory reflections on what keeps us up at night. **Each of us said something about not being quite sure we have a clear understanding of who our learners are, about the students for whom we are planning learning spaces.** Speaking as an architect, this is particularly true for me.”

“We moved quickly to talking about conversations that needed to happen early-on between academics and architects if we are to understand whether we will be able to trust each other enough when we start planning. We think some hard questions need to be on the table. We need to be comfortable in bringing forward our questions and concerns relating to students.

We asked, how can questions about who our student population is now and what it will be in the future shape our planning? Although this might seem too broad a question to begin with, we think that questions such as these about students should frame the discussion from the very first. Perhaps in a setting like this roundtable or with focus groups, we thought this would be a good prompting question for a conversation with students.

We think a good question for the planning team to ask each other would be:

How do you describe or define yourself as a whole person?”

“We should enter these conversations without assuming we know the answer. In my recent conversations with prospective and first-year students, some say, ‘who I am is all a social construct; I refuse to be identified by race or gender.’

We have to figure out new tools and questions to understand students entering our campuses today. We cannot continue identifying populations in ways that they do not identify themselves.”

“So in the planning process, as we begin to work together, we should be recognizing that our student population is diverse, has so many facets. We hear campuses talk about first generation students, about students of color, about returning and mature students. As we begin to work with clients, we should be asking:

How do we design in a way that eliminates all biases--no matter how an individual student defines her ‘whole person/persona?’

I am posing this as a question. I am assuming that we do not have a choice to ask or not to ask this question.”

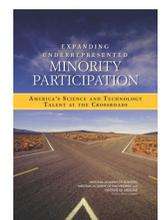
Efforts to promote inclusivity... are not enough unless they are carried out through proactive efforts to encourage the social interaction that is needed to realize inclusivity and the benefits of peer-to-peer and faculty-student interactions.

Peer-to-peer interaction can help increase cross-racial understanding, reduce barriers to integrations in educational and extra-curricular activities, and improve retention and success. Faculty-student interaction promotes the development of educational aspirations, academic persistence, and self-concept.

...[F]urther, institutions should

- 1. Involve faculty in efforts to increase diversity that are consistent with their roles as educators and researchers.*
- 2. Increase students' interaction with faculty outside class by students in research and teaching activities.*
- 3. Create a student-centered orientation among faculty and staff.*
- 4. Initiate curricular and co-curricular activities that increase dialogue and build bridges across communities of difference.*

— National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine. 2011. *Expanding Underrepresented Minority Participation: America's Science and Technology Talent at the Crossroads*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12984>.



"Questions about how spaces are comfortable, how they are safe is a good way to start conversations within the planning team. Everyone can come at these questions from a different angle. The architects can say to the client, '**I am uncomfortable in thinking about questions about diversity and inclusivity.** Can you help us understand who your students are, what is going on on your campus?' These are conversations architects have little experience with."

"For me take-away questions from this roundtable will be how to understand the campus culture for addressing questions such as these. **We should know if and how hard face-to-face discussions about diversity are being facilitated on the campus, then work with the client to determine how those discussions (or lack of them) will influence the planning and design of spaces for learning.**

It would be helpful, as a prompt to planning for inclusivity, to talk with clients about what makes a space comfortable, safe for us as individuals and for all learners, rather than for a particular sub-set of today's students. We should also understand our own biases and how they are represented in our interactions with clients and prospective clients.

For architects, perhaps the questions should be: 'What kind of conversations do we need to be cultivating on our client campuses?'

Or perhaps a different question: 'What kind of conversations should we be aware of and reinforcing?' 'What would a comfortable learning space, a safe learning space, be for me, for you, or for your students?'"

"These are hard questions. It is really essential to have such face-to-face conversations about current campus culture at the beginning of planning discussions. "Maybe the questions that architects must be asking each other are:

*What kind of conversations should we be cultivating on our client campuses?
What does our team look like when we walk into the interview?
What are the biases that we bring to the table?"*

"I think that architects today should come to work with a client with the assumption that you will be doing as much inclusive design as possible. The beauty and the challenge is that our population of students changes radically and there is an increasing diversity. **The future flies at us every year.**

The questions are not just about who is on our campuses now, but who will be coming during the lifetime of the spaces we are now planning."

AAC&U CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT: 2017 VOICES LEADING CHANGE

Affirming that people will be the drivers of the institutional and structural transformation needed to support the success of today's postsecondary students and prepare these students for unscripted challenges, conference attendees will explore strategies for leading inclusive campus dialogues and strategic visioning that value and embrace diversity of thought, identity, and beliefs.

The conference will focus on several key questions about individual and collective voice:

- *What do students' stories tell us about the work educators and community partners need to do to help create educational experiences that promote higher levels of learning and engagement?*
- *How do institutions value students' cultural capital and lived experiences when working to advance student success?*
- *How can institutions build capacity for educators to ask—and to respond to—questions about diversity, equity, and social justice?*
- *How do educators prepare students to be productive citizens in a diverse and inequitable society—and to advance the democratic ideals of our country?*
 - *How are campuses designing curricular pathways and learning experiences that encourage students to be intentional and culturally responsive learners, and that address the barriers to student success?*

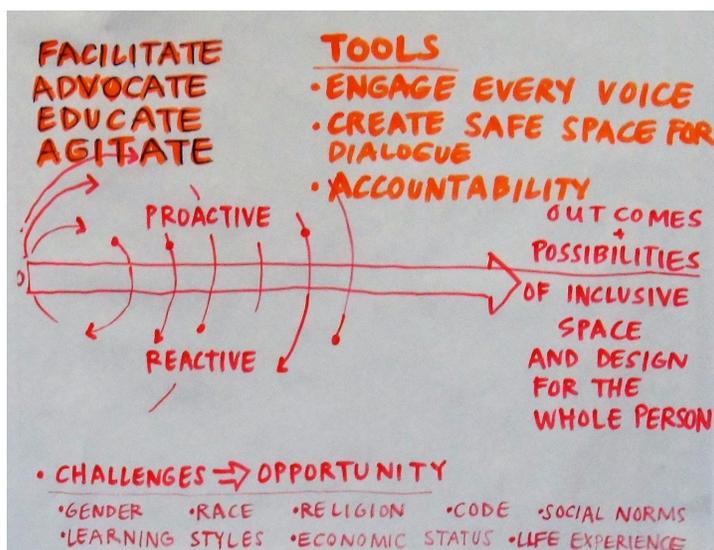
— <http://pkallsc.org/partners/association-american-colleges-and-universities-aacu>



"Are you recommending a specific question relating to inclusivity that those responsible for shaping learning spaces have in their tool box of questions to ask at the beginning stage of planning?"

"Not really. We think you walk into planning recognizing the opportunity to design for inclusivity rather than designing to address a "diversity" problem. **We receive feedback from students on planning teams when they feel they are representing the "x" minority community of students rather than all students.** It takes time to talk together without being afraid of pronouns, without people feeling anger and incriminated by language others are using. It takes time to become aware of personal biases. This takes time, especially when the campus does not have a culture of conversations about diversity."

"What we are saying is that we recognize that this is a problem. It is a new problem. It is a new, contextual problem and the response to this problem is too often 'someone else will fix it' rather than having a whole bunch of conversations about who our students are and their self-perceptions even before we start thinking about what the spaces what the spaces might be like."



I am wondering if there is a way to tie institutional goals for student learning, particularly in regard to the context of diversity, to the discussion about spaces and inclusivity and spaces?

Should we be asking our clients what they are doing to create an inclusive culture?

— Anonymous UW Colleague

2016 LSC Roundtable
University of Washington

[http://pkallsc.org/
events/2016-roundtable-
university-washington](http://pkallsc.org/events/2016-roundtable-university-washington)

