

HOW CAN WE ENSURE FACULTY BUY-IN?

How can we ensure faculty “buy-in” to the spaces we are planning? How can we ensure faculty are willing and able to use these new spaces as they have been planned, equipped? What evidence is convincing to faculty?

“We began by recounting our individual experiences with a major planning challenge—that faculty really are not prepared to be willing and able to use spaces that are different from those they now use. We spoke specifically about classrooms, reflecting on how faculty fall back into their comfort zone of past pedagogical practices and teaching tools and technologies. On my campus, the only attention to faculty development—about new pedagogies and new technologies—relates to the need to be certified for online teaching.”

“I think one dimension of this challenge is that faculty cannot visualize what they might be able to do in spaces that are quite different. Another is that faculty are not introduced systematically to the growing body of evidence showing that particular spatial configurations and affordances can transform the experience of learning. Related to these challenges is how faculty are involved in the processes of planning and designing, engaged in the months of discussions in which they become comfortable with the language of planning and become aware of might be called ‘evidence-based’ learning spaces.”

“From experience with many clients, I have seen many ways to engage faculty, recognizing that faculty need evidence. **There is much evidence available—at the national level and on campuses across the country—about spaces that serve goals set by planners, and why. The availability is not the problem.**”

“The problem is the lack of awareness of and access to existing evidence. In part this is a lack of leadership. **It takes strong leadership within the planning team and at the institutional level to incorporate attention to faculty development into the planning process.**”

“One effective planning strategy is piloting or sandboxing spaces. These are a means by which to engage faculty in ‘pop-up’ spaces where they can explore new teaching approaches and play around with new kinds of furniture, technologies, and other affordances. We have worked with some of our clients in piloting such spaces and assessing their impact on the experience of teaching as well as learning.”

“On one campus, a client put the sandbox space in the midst of the learning commons, making this experience visible as a campus-wide experimentation. Many clients now engage alumni as ‘external consultants’ to hear about how their learning experiences as undergraduates prepared them for their work. **Tours to campuses with new spaces are becoming standard practice in the early stages of planning—even before we have been engaged.** This is an optimum way for faculty to begin to visualize different spaces and how they influence learning.”

The UQ community was undertaking a series of strategic and innovative initiatives focusing on the dual role of increasing student engagement and supporting active learning. Attention to spaces and to assessment were key element in these initiatives.

Attention to assessment began with the faculty. As this initiative proceeded, we recognized there needed to be a shared language about what faculty want in a space, what works for them, and why. This is not easy to achieve.

One difficulty to understand how faculty actually use the space is finding a mechanism by which they can convey meaningful information. We considered and rejected many options before we arrived at a simple, low-tech process for getting faculty to tell us how they prefer to move about the classroom.

This simple strategy was to have a faculty member draw using pictograms how he or she moves and would prefer to move within a space. It succeeded in engaging faculty in meaningful discussions. It challenged us to thinking quite differently how we might assess spaces.

— Phillip D. Long. “Space Use for Active Learning.” https://www.pkallsc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Space_Use_for_Active_Learning_Long.pdf

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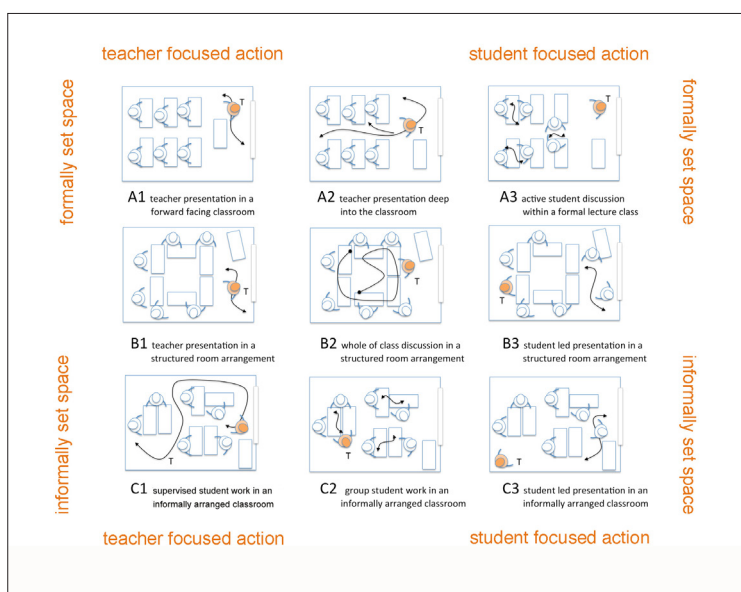
“These strategies work when there is strong institutional leadership at the campus level. Someone has to be responsible for developing and taking advantage of a feedback loop: identifying and orchestrating a specific strategic focus on ensuring faculty buy-in to the spaces that are being planned. There needs to be careful documentation from trips, stories, conversations, and sandboxing, determining how what they are learning informs next steps for advancing faculty buy-in. There needs to be a plan to aggregate and analyze real-time feedback on a regular basis.”

“Then we can begin to think about how this would actually work on a campus, how to establish a consistent body of assessment measures. We asked what kinds of metrics we would be looking for and what kinds of questions we would be asking. We also talked about the issue of who assumes responsibility for assessment agendas on a campus and wondering if they already have experience and expertise in determining the impact of spaces on the user. We even thought about the ‘nitty-gritty’ of assessment: how to craft different questions for different types of users, how many questions, etc.”

“My concerns are that faculty are not really used to thinking critically about spaces, and that students find it hard to understand the difference between assessing the space and assessing the performance of their teacher. It will be important to have both groups of users become fluent in the world of assessment in order that their feedback is of value.”

“We ended with reflecting that there is already quite a nice body of research—related to faculty development—about the effect of space on learners. But, from my perspective as a dean who has tried to figure out how to do some kid of assessment of the learning experience of students—beyond the context of thinking of spaces—I know this is really hard.”

“In some respects, those of you who are architects—who work across many campuses—may be able to do this better.”



—Phillip D. Long

