

WHY & HOW TO ENGAGE STUDENTS

“None of us wanted to be remembered as being responsible for the next generation of Sputnik buildings.”

How does engaging with today's learners give us the right input and insights into how the students of tomorrow will learn?

How can what we know about how learning happens now and how it is evolving influence the ways in which we plan today for spaces that will serve for many tomorrows?

“For me, this is an ‘aha’ moment for planners. We just do not know what is out there, but our responsibility is to look as far ahead as we can to ensure that the spaces for which we have responsibility are as relevant in the future as they are now. **The research question we should incorporate into our planning is how we anticipate how learning is evolving. There are many ways to ‘future-proof’ learning spaces, but we focused on the evolution of how learning happens. Our questions go beyond merely engaging current undergraduates in planning discussions.**”

“We began by struggling with understanding the value of engaging students. **In our collective experience as a firm, student involvement is rare or superficial.** We mention to clients the value of student input and then someone is asked to find some students and the best and brightest of the senior class join a session or two.”

“We have found it works better when the conversation with students is about a specific space—like a formal classroom. When we talk with students we most often do not talk about space but rather about their experiences in the spaces, about what makes them feel comfortable and safe, and what nurtures a sense of belonging and ownership. Such information is critical to architects.”

“There are many ways to understand student learning and how it is evolving beyond conversations with undergraduates or even younger students. Particularly in the context of planning classrooms, we have found it of value to gather and disaggregate recent data about the academic achievement of students from various demographic groups—about persistence and success. This is essential if we are to have baseline information for assessing the impact of new spaces.”

“From such information we can begin to see what is changing in our pilot classrooms and analyze why these changes are happening. We ask if students are learning better, differently than in their former classrooms, better than ten years ago. Some students may learn better by teaching themselves, others by working in groups.”

“Perhaps our earlier questions about how learning is evolving are not the right ones. Perhaps our question should be if the spaces we are planning now will be flexible enough to serve all students—in the near and far future—no matter their learning style, no matter their background. I think this could be a big picture assessment question.”

How can we make the spaces that we are planning more relevant over the long-term? How do we anticipate how learning will be evolving into the future?

- *Should we engage current students in 7th grade who will be the first entering class when this building is ready for use? Should we sit at their tables and talk with them about what their world is like, to learn about how they use SnapChat and Instagram as tools for learning?*
- *Should we be talking with teachers in the schools from which our first-year students are coming now?*
- *Should we be talking with students on our campuses now who are preparing to be K-12 teachers?*
- *Should we be talking with faculty in education and related disciplines about how learning has evolved over the past decade, about what they imagine for the next decade?*
- *Should we be talking with young alumni about their learning experiences on our campus to learn if they were ready for the world beyond our campus?*



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