PERSONAL REFLECTIONS FROM FOUR ARCHITECTS
WHAT KEEPS ME UP AT NIGHT WHEN THINKING ABOUT PLANNING LEARNING SPACES?

- What keeps me up at night are always questions about assessment.

- What keeps me up is how to convince skeptical faculty about the efficacy of "active-learning" pedagogies?

- What keeps me up at night is about how design has changed, even over my short career.

- What keeps me up at night is how we need to think about optimizing spaces so they work for all students.

A.

As an architect, my questions are always about assessment. There are so many things we think we know and understand intuitively. Some of these perhaps have been tested to a certain level in some of our projects. But too often there is no robust follow-up to questions that we ask in the planning of projects—we design and plan spaces and they are built and we move forward to the next project.

That's the life of an architect—living project-to-project.

We do not often go back and ask questions about how the objectives we established during the process were met, or questions how the spaces are evolving as they are being used—how spaces are responding to changes in the curriculum, in the pedagogies. It is important for architects to develop robust systems of assessment with our clients.

This will require keeping up with faculty involved in these spaces and perhaps with other campus administrators with responsibilities for assessment. What data would be important to them? What do we need to know? Why are these data important?

This will also require thinking about and understanding why campuses are interested in undertaking projects that did not involve a truly integrated approach to aligning curriculum and pedagogy, expecting rather that the building will solve more mundane problems.

B.

As an architect, when I do stay awake at night, I think about how design has changed, even over my short career. The more that I work on projects in higher education—of all shapes and sizes—the more I discover how important It is to be designing spaces that inspire students and to be constructing spaces that inspire.

What has been really interesting is how we are learning about how spaces can be transformative, the way that space can really affect how people are using it, how people begin to develop a sense of how a space can be used.

NOTE: All roundtables began with a prompting question, a tested LSC strategy with two goals: first, to arrive at an initial awareness of issues and concerns that each person brings to the discussion; following on that, to identify common themes for working groups to explore and to return to the metaphorical roundtable for sharing, critiquing, and advancing the discussion.

This LSC Strategy is adaptable as a prompt for the wide range of discussions on campuses focusing on learning environments—intellectual, social, physical, and virtual.

In terms of a makerspace—in the gambit of the entire learning continuum—what is new is how students are creating their own curriculum and creating their own ways of using the campus.

In our firm, we do much research about learning and spaces, and some of what we are finding important are light and windows. However, we recently did a survey of students on a campus we were working with and the most important thing they mentioned was engagement. We had certain spaces designed specifically for engagement between students; over 70% student responses to the survey noted that "spaces for engagement"were the most important aspect of a large facility. There was no question about this for the students. It was an eye-opener for me.

C.

Thinking about the non-believers, about how, in my role as an architect, to convince faculty who have no experience with active learning pedagogies and/or who do not understand the impact of such approaches on student motivation and retention, particularly in disciplines that might be difficult or unfamiliar.

What keeps me up at night is thinking through how to engage with faculty throughout the planning process in exploring new ways of teaching, to convince them that such approaches to transform the learning experience, to make them aware of the evidence—the research—documenting the evidence of approaches that are unfamiliar to them.

I am also always thinking about how to engage students in thinking about planning spaces, in helping us as architects understand how to design these spaces for making, in helping us create programming for these spaces, about how to actively engage them in educating us—faculty and architects alike--about what works for them today, particularly in challenging fields.

We are beginning to see, with some of our clients, powerful connections being made across campus through the leadership of student organizations, clubs, and all sorts of co-curricular activities. We need to figure out how to engage student leaders as a regular part of working with clients on planning, learning from students not only how to design the spaces but how to use them.

D.

What keeps me up at night is that I think that we, as faculty curricular and programmatic designers and as architectural designers, are beginning to figure out how to accommodate physical needs of students, but have not thought enough about the cognitive challenges that students have—the mostly invisible challenges like anxiety, autism, and spectrum disorder. When we think about and create these spaces, we have to think about optimizing spaces—they have to work for all students, not just the mass majority for whom we think we are getting it right, but we really do not know.