

EDITED TRANSCRIPTION TAKE-AWAY/TAKE-HOME QUESTIONS & STRATEGIES

Learning Spaces Collaboratory 2019 National Colloquium



CLOSING REPORTING OUT SESSION, NOVEMBER 3, 2019

From the Transcripts

A key component of this Colloquium is not just thinking about what is useful or good practice in general, but about some specific 'take-away' – a question or a strategy that moves your campus beyond current practice into embracing the future. What might you report to any discussion on your campus that would move beyond current practice, embrace the future? What might you insert into the discussion that would shake up the discussion? We look forward to your reports.

— Moderator: Joan Lippincott, Associate Executive Director—Coalition for Networked Information (CNI)



FROM THE TABLE GROUPS: TAKE-AWAY/TAKE-HOME QUESTIONS & STRATEGIES

1. How can our discussions, our planning move our campus forward? We would go straight for the jugular? This is about survival, about reputation, about anticipating the future. There is the student population cliffs and we will all be going after the same students (those with deep pockets and the rest of us). Think of demographics. The population is changing and we must ask: Are we ready for more diverse students? Are our spaces ready, our classrooms, the way we teach? Are we preparing for reduced/tight budgets into the future?



What we have to do is not to continue doing things the way we have been doing them in the past. We need to look in the mirror and not blame the students, or any others. We need to identify what we are doing wrong. Are we teaching the way we should? Is where and what and how we are teaching the way it should be? What kind of ecosystem should we have that would enable our students to thrive, be successful as graduates of our colleges and universities?

2. Our team discussed the importance of the planning strategy of making sure we have everyone at the table who needs to be in the room—and not just at the end of project. For example, technologists and custodians and security need to be involved at appropriate stages early on. Everyone needs to understand how the space and furniture and technologies all contribute to the desired experience of learning for our students.



We thought it important to bring these various groups together at the beginning and then—in a timely manner—bring the frontline people, the high-level people to think deeply about programming, designing, assessing. This is what we are all taking back: to be sure we are including everyone who needs to be included, at the right time, even including people you really don't think might contribute.



3. Discussions at our table zeroed in on assessment. We realize that from the beginning it is important to create and implement processes by which pre- and post-occupancy assessment of all spaces are incentivized and publicized. We thought it important to have people experienced with research at the table from the beginning. Our charge to our campus leaders is to add a line-item in the early budget from the beginning for pre- and post-occupancy assessment.
4. Our group came down to two main “take-aways.” One was how and when to engage students. It seems that most of us do a wonderful job of student engagement in the beginning of planning and we pay attention to their recommendations. But our question was how do we continue to engage them during the years of design and construction, of documenting if and how the project met our goals for student learning? The rich engagement happens at the beginning, but once the building is in use, those students are gone. Again, as our colleagues mentioned earlier, putting money in the budget is important if this is to happen.

I personally am going back with the question: why are we over-designing the aesthetic of makerspaces? You work with teams on projects and you get these images of abandoned converted warehouses and then we move into a space that maybe is new and has great carpeted floors and we are trying to figure out how to make it a makerspace. I am thinking that a makerspace really is only about having permission to do what learners want to do—and to be flexible enough to enable them to proceed.

If, as we have learned this weekend, that our buildings and spaces and campuses will be evolving for the years they will be in service to our community—and that most of us are thinking about the students who will be using these spaces in the next 5 – 15 years, maybe spaces we call makerspaces do not need to be fancy, all-fit-out. Maybe they just need to have power, some wireless infrastructure and an exposed ceiling—not because it is cool, but because things can be hung from it: overhead core wheels. This is a space that affords permission to just let go.

(Comment. Joan Lippincott: I've seen a number of makerspaces and do not think I've seen one that is over-designed. I've seen everything from one that looks like a junk-shop to someone's abandoned basement (and it was in the basement) to one that is vibrant but too small. I do believe in a well-designed makerspace but I think what you are saying is that it does not have to be populated with stuff, just see where the projects and people take it.)



5. The discussion that resonated with most in our table group as a take-away was in the category of a ‘media’ strategy. We all have a sense of the importance of goal setting and identifying audience in the early stage. The practice, from one of my table colleagues—was to have a title slide (goals, etc.) with which each planning gathering begins—so that those are prominent front and center though all discussions—rather than something decided at the beginning and then gets kind of muddled and at the end until you’ve got something other than you thought you were working toward and disagreement about something you did not expect.

So, a strategy is to have all discussions centered on goals and priorities. If priorities change or evolve, that is not necessarily a bad thing, but you will be prepared to deal with that in an intentional way—rather than trying to double back later. (We also want more student voices.)

(Comment: Joan Lippincott: I think this is one of the reasons planning (collaborative planning) often gets off track, because people lose sight of the original mission—and different components of the group go off on their own priorities. Did you notice that in the Innovation Center we visiting yesterday that in many areas they had the mission statement on the wall? I have never seen anything exactly like that in a library, but it is this idea of reinforcing: This is why we are here. This is why you are here. This is what we are about.)



6. Our big question, as with an earlier table, is about students. Our big takeaway question is how do we really empower our students to take ownership of their learning spaces? We've spoken a lot this weekend about observation. We keep saying, well, we've seen them move their chairs; they do this and that. We need to be more proactive and not make assumptions about how they experience the space. We need their voices at the table and that is diverse voices—the first years and the seniors. We need be intentional about inclusivity.

And, most important, we need to follow through with what students have voiced, bringing them through the visioning and the planning and the designing (and constructing) and post-occupancy assessment. They need to see that we value their thoughts and that they are part of the campus ecosystem. We want them to understand that the ecosystem is evolving because of them and with them.

(Comment: Joan Lippincott: Two opportunities that I've seen, one is involving students in design charrettes with the architects—which is a step further than a needs assessment or interviewing students. Saturday someone mentioned having an institutional design class take on a design project related to spaces under development.)

7. Our discussion also centered on who should be at the table. Oftentimes the same people are at the table, representing different offices or departments. We think it important to think a little more deeply into the organization (or a particular unit) to find new voices to be heard. Let them lead the discussion rather than the heads of divisions or departments.

(Comment: Joan Lippincott: This strategy could also be for engaging students.)



8. Our discussion continued in this vein. Moving away from always having the same voices at the table in order to bring new ideas into the conversation. We called them surrogates.

Our other takeaway was to change the way we speak about goals for the project—speaking of goals for the learner rather than goals for the space. Instead of talking about creating spaces for collaboration or another goal, focus more on the goals for students.

9. We talked a lot about student engagement, echoing what our colleagues here have said. But we also spoke about the academic perspective—that we can actually start to embed this into some of the ongoing research projects that may already be happening on our campus. You can then start to get student input over a longer period. But then from a practical standpoint, we struggled with how to connect input for national research projects with the short-term deadlines for a major facilities project.

As architects, we frequently invite students to come to the charrettes and different sessions we host and most often we'll likely get two students. Perhaps we need to look at going where they are and succinctly engage with them there.

Finally, we talked about starting to be more thoughtful about creating wellness in our buildings and in our campuses. Not just thinking about WELL Building Standards, but thinking about those principles will influence how to make our design decisions.

10. The question we thought important to bring back is for our campus leaders: how risk-averse are we? How do we make decisions as an institution, working with our peers around the country, potential colleagues, to be among those institutions leading the way nationally in making decisions about what we want our learners to become, about how to move forward toward creating the ecosystem to support that? It is important to go through the exercise of addressing that question. How can we work together to be prepared for what is going to happen in higher education? If we are not prepared to take risks and lead in the right direction, we are just going to be stuck with what happens. We need to be more prepared for that.

