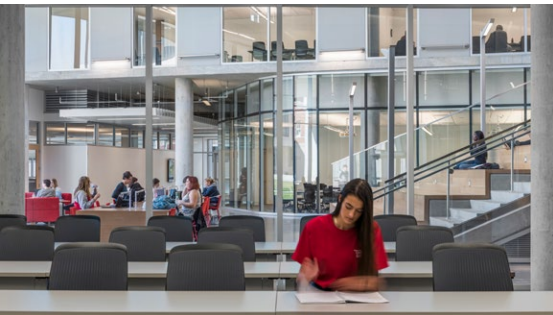# Inclusive Learning Environments in an Era of Disruptions

According to The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University, **"inclusive teaching involves cultivating awareness of the dynamics that shape classroom experiences and impact learning. It also involves being responsive to these dynamics and intentional about using strategies, or inclusive moves, that foster a productive learning environment."**

A multi-pronged approach of leveraging emerging learning technology, continual and personalized assessment, and mentoring, along with the power of design, can have a profound effect on learning. Inclusive design strategies themselves must be purposeful, meaning a focus on both physical and emotional conditions. We need to deliberately create spaces that encourage a feeling of belonging for all.

University of Cincinnati, Health Sciences Building

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Visibility

Visually connecting formal and informal learning spaces and activities can stimulate awareness and increase participation. How a classroom is configured can help set a tone for an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. It signals to students whether the environment will promote active involvement, emphasize collaboration with peers, create a sense of proximity to the instructor or emphasis to a learner to focus on heads down tasks and rely on one-directional information flow.

University of North Dakota, School of Medicine and Health Sciences

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Technology

Faculty have been inspired by technology-equipping active learning classrooms to broaden participation and build communication skills. Multiple small-group monitors and supporting technology give the option to less-assured students, including underrepresented, often first-generation college students, to initially post responses to questions on the monitors before responding verbally. This method can serve to build confidence and equalize support for students from all backgrounds to participate and succeed.

Clemson University, Watt Family Innovation Center

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Flexibility

Flexible classroom environments, where students are encouraged to sit in tables grouped together, utilize writable wall surfaces to share ideas, and engage with multiple screens, promotes team problem solving, critical thinking, and it sharpens collaboration skills. These environments teach students to make connections between ideas and evaluate information critically. As the requirements of students change, and learning patterns evolve, spaces should grow and adapt as well.

—— Looking Ahead

A significant design opportunity will be adapting learning environments for versatility so a variety of activities—collaboration, individual work, mentoring, access to resources including staff and faculty, presentations, instruction, interaction—can occur in a single space. More versatile learning environments will more effectively meet diverse student needs promoting equity and inclusion within the campus community.

Perkins&Will