

REFLECTIONS FROM THE LSC V/ROUNDTABLE ARCHITECTS¹

Responding to the Prompting Question WHAT NEXT?

* We should think of ourselves as storytellers when we begin talking about our projects—with current or future clients. Our stories should have themes—a beginning, middle, and end. They should be about lessons learned, about evidence of what worked and how we know. Perhaps all our stories together will have common themes—we should explore this with our academic colleagues.

For example, for every project there may be a common theme of how it fits into the existing campus plan, a common theme of what difference it makes to the shaping the future of the learner, shaping the future of the institution. Perhaps a story curated around the theme of taking advantage of the spaces on a campus beyond the walls of a particular building—how this might help reinforce the notion of permeability.

In these stories we should talk about the moment or the insight that pushed us to think differently about spaces prior to the pandemic.

*We should be more philosophical about the changing role of architects, incorporating into our stories some of the ways we are now working with clients to solve the problems they are facing. We should be emphasizing that we are all learning together about what the issues are now and how to deal with them.

Perhaps we should be more philosophical and personal than we have been in the past. I wonder if there was an “aha” moment in these virtual conversations that we’ve been having that pushed us to think differently. Perhaps we could all address this question: *the most important lesson that we have learned in responding to the pandemic was _____*. It will be interesting to note if there is a common question or many different ones. It will be important to think about the “aha” question that started our firms thinking differently. It will also be important to capture the lessons learned moving forward.

*We should be thinking seriously about assessment. How do we know if our spaces changed the institutional culture? How do we now use the post-occupancy assessment? Do we care to know how users and people on a campus feel about the buildings that we’ve been working on? How do we go back and make adjustments? How can we know if we addressed issues relating to inclusivity if we do not go back and ask? Can we describe what we would now do differently given the recent conversations within academe about the new types of learning, about issues relating to inclusivity, racial justice? We should all look at the projects now posted on the LSC website and ask—what might we now do differently?

*I think we’ve been bent, not broken. How do we learn from this experience about what is most meaningful for our students? How did they feel about learning in the spaces we helped shape? We should be gathering information about our students’ sense of being, belonging. We should be looking to find if questions on the experience of belonging already exist in research based on biophilia or topophilia or inclusivity. What do we know about how students feel safe in a place? Might we talk with cultural anthropologists who study behavior?

* We should be talking about learning spaces and learning experiences. We should be talking about learner-centered (customizable) spaces and parts and tools by which learners can shape their own experience for learning. How might we start this effort to learn about how students feel about the spaces we plan and design? Everyone should become a storyteller. We could create together a sandbox that we could each use to work with our different clients and then develop a protocol for gathering questions from the students—or, perhaps we should start with faculty stories and work out way ‘downstream.’

¹ The design professionals engaged in these V/Roundtables were invited to share ideas about *what next*—about if and how we should think about translating what we’ve been about into a resource for the broader communities of academics and design professionals.