

# Learning Spaces All Over Campus





Colleges are making better use of real estate by equipping in-between spaces. Add wi-fi, comfortable seating, and room to spread out your work and almost any space becomes useful work space. Some examples: an atrium at the University of Michigan (left), a corridor that connects two buildings at the University of South Dakota (above), or a hallway at Stanford University (right).



## The college campus has a way of encouraging intellectual pursuits in different places.

Discussions often migrate from the classroom to the quadrangle, cafeteria, or the nearest pub after class.

Now, places outside the classroom are more useful than ever as learning spaces, for two reasons. First, portable technology means you don't have to be near a power outlet to work and wi-fi brings online access to the remotest corner of campus. Second, college work now involves a lot of group projects. More assignments reflect and teach real-world knowledge economy skills: collaborating in pairs, small groups, and teams. Since many classrooms poorly support group work, students often decamp to places better suited to working together. Why not make suitable spaces available on campus that extend learning outside the classroom, keep the group together, and the conversation going?

### MAKING CASUAL SPACES COUNT

The first place that can better support learning is the hallway. Group conversations often migrate here because the classroom must be vacated for the next class. Yet hallways typically offer little seating and few, if any, workspaces. Places where pairs and small groups can finish a discussion help teachers leverage those elusive teachable moments. Touchdown kiosks with shared screens allow for even deeper conversations.

Sometimes a hallway just needs the right furniture. For example, at the University of South Dakota (USD) a broad corridor called The Link connects the student center and library. It's outfitted with comfortable booths with tables that seat four. Simple rectangular tables and stackable chairs that seat six are easily rearranged for larger groups. "Students can work alone or with others but still feel a part of the community," says Cathy Wagner, director of planning and construction at USD.

The Link is 150' long, 25' wide and has full-height glass on both sides. Wi-fi is supplemented by data and power outlets

in the floor. "We see both social activity and studying. It's a great breakout space for student groups because the booths are larger than typical cafe booths. Students can move the chairs and tables around, and we put things back in place at night," says Wagner. "It's the one place on campus where you'll always find people, even during semester breaks."

Planned public spaces for group work at Georgia Institute of Technology's Klaus Advanced Computing Building were placed outside computer labs like welcome mats to attract students before and after class. Wi-fi, power outlets, writing boards, lounge seating with tablet arms, small tables and stackable task chairs create intimate spaces within a larger environment. These spaces even draw students from other schools at the college.

Larger public spaces offer multiple benefits for students and the institution. At the University of California's newest campus in Merced and at Ohlone College, a community college in San Francisco's East Bay area, dramatic open spaces work like public squares. Students are attracted by the



sense of community, natural lighting, and the convenience of workspaces near classrooms. Booths fill up first: they're comfortable, and offer worksurface and privacy for individuals and groups.

College student life has changed. Students juggle coursework, jobs, internships, service work, and sometimes family commitments, so centrally located spaces with furniture and tools are student favorites.

There are institutional benefits to a large communal space, too. For UC Merced, it helps establish a sense of place for a college that opened in an undeveloped, rural area just six years ago. At Ohlone, the space helps them avoid the "commuter college" label affixed to many urban institutions. Now, instead of leaving for home or a local coffee shop, students stay at the school and engage with other students and faculty. Another bonus: these large spaces are also used for public events such as foundation and alumni meetings, seminars, etc.

#### OFFICE HOURS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

The informality of certain spaces is ideally suited to students' ongoing need for feedback. Steelcase researchers have found that Gen Y in particular seeks mentoring relationships. "I'd really like to see more guidance from teachers. They pass a lot of

knowledge to you. But if you have questions, especially after hours, when you're doing assignments at home, it's really difficult to get that guidance," one student told a Steelcase researcher.

Faculty agree. "One of the most important things with education is quick feedback. If there is a long lag between the student giving the answer and the feedback, then the student will forget. Their brain moves on. They're in a different state," noted a teacher in another research interview. Learning is enhanced when teachers can quickly provide feedback to a student in an informal space near the classroom.

Teaching and mentoring also happen in faculty offices, and so do many other kinds of work. Steelcase researchers say instructors use their offices in various ways:

- colleagues build communities of practice
- projects are managed
- materials are displayed and discussed
- teachers advise and instruct students
- different media are stored

Instructors read, relax, and conduct other business in their offices as well, so they need furnishings to support a range of activities. Yet real estate at most colleges is tight, to say the least. Recommendations for faculty

offices include using vertical space for wall-mounted worksurfaces, storage, and display, and providing flexible components that serve different purposes, such as a mobile pedestal that doubles as storage and a short-term seat, and mobile tables that one or more people can use. Multiple worksurfaces support piling, a common practice among instructors. Seating should include easily moved side chairs for visiting students and colleagues and an ergonomic chair for the instructor's long hours of focused work.

The 24/7 mentality of business has taken hold on the college campus. "Pulling an all-nighter" to meet a deadline or prep for an exam is a longstanding tradition, but today's students can work anywhere and any time, and often do. As a result, some schools offer spaces in classroom buildings where students can simply chill out. At the University of Florida (UF), design professor Jason Meneely says, "It doesn't matter what time you come, there are students putting that energy in at all hours of the day. But how do they recharge their creative batteries?" At UF the students use an atrium space to play volleyball and Frisbee, or swing on ropes hung from a balcony above. "They let off some steam from the intense creative energy they're putting into their work. I think these kinds of support spaces are just as critical as the actual studio environments."



#### MAKING MORE OF EVERY CORNER OF CAMPUS

Increasingly, students arrive on campus expecting a variety of non-classroom work environments. At the high-school level, students take on off-site internships, work in group spaces, and team with other students for everything from language practice to lab work. For example, at New Tech High in Coppell, Texas, the curriculum involves a great deal of project work, but there's no library on campus. The school provides casual areas that wouldn't be out of place in corporate or college campuses (right), so students can better collaborate on group projects.

Evolving college curricula and teaching methods, and changing student expectations mean that college spaces have to be flexible and user friendly. Just as every company needs its real estate to better support the mission of the organization, space must further the overarching goal of the college: learning. It's no longer enough to rethink the classroom and library when learning can, and should, happen everywhere on campus.



A large communal space (top) at Ohlone College in San Francisco's East Bay area helps the school avoid the "commuter college" label put on many urban institutions. Instead of leaving for home or an off-site coffee shop, students stick around, study, and meet with other students and faculty. These large spaces also double as event and meeting areas. A variety of workspaces and seating help mobile students stop, drop, and work practically anywhere on campus.