

RESEARCH SUMMARY

SPACE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVATE TEACHING AND LEARNING

California State University
LOS ANGELES, CA

Steelcase Education Active Learning Grant Recipient, Cycle 1

In Fall 2015, Cal State Los Angeles launched six new active learning classrooms they called Flexible Learning Classroom Spaces (FLeC-spaces). All made use of Steelcase Education design principles and solutions and one Verb classroom in particular was funded through the Steelcase Education Active Learning Center (ALC) Grant.

The new spaces were intended to support a variety of desired pedagogies, including interactive lectures and problem solving, inquiry, peer instruction and team- and project-based inquiry.

FACULTY TRAINING PROVES IMPORTANT

To encourage faculty to rethink how they traditionally teach and to move away from lecture-only class time, the University offered a two-day active learning workshop.

According to University staff, an important outcome of the ALC grant was an increase in faculty participating in this professional development opportunity. Over the two years of the grant period, 119 faculty members were trained, and interest and attendance have remained high since.

Based on post-occupancy survey data, Cal State Los Angeles concluded that faculty members who have attended the workshop and taught in a classroom designed for active learning were more likely to use an even mix of lecture and student-to-student work in the classroom. Conversely, faculty members who did not attend still relied more heavily on lecture-style teaching as reported by their students.

Further, students with a workshop-trained instructor were above two times more likely to rate that instructor highly for effectiveness in helping them learn course material.

“Group work is more productive, [with] better products and interactions.”

CSU Faculty Member

The ALC “made discussions seamless and easy. It also allowed students to visualize what they would have otherwise had to present verbally.”

CSU Faculty Member

BETTER SCORES AND RETENTION

In winter 2016, 300-level courses in fluid mechanics were offered in the ALC for the first time. The percentage of students who earned a D, F or withdrew from these courses dropped dramatically from the average – from 18.1 percent to 3.45 percent. According to the CSU’s year-one ALC grant report, the new rate was not only much lower than the average, but also much lower than the “DFW rate” for the same course taught in the previous quarter by the same professor.

Overall, four engineering, computer science and technology (ECST) courses were taught in the new classroom. Two showed student improvements, and those that did not were attributed to differences in teaching methodology.

ACTIVE SPACES DRAW A CROWD

The six active learning spaces at Cal State Los Angeles, including the ALC, are distributed widely across campus – a strategy campus planners pursued with attention to place them near a variety of other offices and spaces. After using the spaces over the course of two years, planners recognized that faculty and students were willing to walk across campus for an active learning experience. In the future, they said, “we would strongly consider co-locating any new active learning spaces near our existing spaces to leverage support in these rooms.”