

RESEARCH SUMMARY

CLASSIC EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY COMES TO LIFE IN NEW WAYS

Fairfield University **FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT**

Steelcase Education Active Learning Grant Recipient, Cycle 1

The ALC “really encourages free thinking and experimentation.”

Fairfield University Professor

Fairfield University embraces an educational philosophy influenced by its Jesuit Catholic heritage that includes three essential elements: experience, reflection and action. Although centuries old, this approach aligns closely with contemporary pedagogies – including active learning.

With an Active Learning Center (ALC) Grant from Steelcase Education, Fairfield University chose to remake a ground floor space in Canisius Hall, a classroom building that opened just 10 years after the University was founded in 1942.

The original space included a large projection booth and heavy table desks configured in rows. Through the ALC Grant, the projection booth, projector and screen were removed to open up more space for instruction. The updated space was outfitted with Verb whiteboards for group work and individual reflection, a Verb easel, Node chairs and tables, and Thread portable power distribution.

PROFESSORS USE A VARIETY OF TEACHING STRATEGIES

Through an ethnographic approach, the Fairfield team employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures to study the effects of the ALC on teaching and learning. Analyses supported that classroom design had positively influenced pedagogy in a number of ways. Faculty redesigned coursework

and class time, and even changed their syllabi to maximize the opportunities in the new space.

Once working in the ALC, professors were observed using a variety of teaching strategies, often within the same class period – such as whole-class instruction, partner and small group work, in-class writing and hands-on activities, presentations, and viewing of media and film clips.

PROFESSORS INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY INTO LESSONS

The second major finding was that faculty incorporated key technology upgrades into their instruction to promote active learning. Professors made use of Apple TVs, iPads and polling apps. Students also found opportunities to make use of their own devices, including laptops or smart phones, to share content or present group work via wireless projection.

The installation of Thread – a portable power distribution system that provides access to power anywhere in the room – led to a great “aha” moment for both

ACTIVE LEARNING CENTER GRANTS

students and faculty. As one professor explained, in the past, students who brought laptops were “always stuck against the wall because they needed an outlet.” Now these students can be “part of the circle.”

One professor called the ALC “the most technology friendly classroom I’ve been in.” Some have indicated that they are more likely to try newer teaching technologies because of the classroom’s design – the experience prompted one eager professor to pursue professional development on teaching through mobile apps.

SPACE LEADS TO GREATER SATISFACTION, MOTIVATION

The third major finding was that professors demonstrated increased satisfaction and motivation for teaching in the updated classroom space.

~ **35%**

CLASS TIME SPENT IN ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Professors reported enjoying the space, discussed the feeling of comfort it provided and the positive behaviors it brought out in themselves and their students.

Professors remarked on the mobility of the furnishings and how this allows them to create configurations that engage their students. In the words of one professor, “there is no front and back. Nobody can hide, every position is up front.”

One hundred percent of professors interviewed expressed interest in teaching in the classroom in a future semester.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY DEEPENS

Classroom observations revealed that almost 35 percent of class time was spent with students actively engaged in small group work, whole class discussion or presenting to classmates.

Leaders at Fairfield are pleased to report that their Jesuit Catholic pedagogical philosophy did not change over the course of the grant period. Instead, the ALC “expanded our position” on the importance of experience, reflection and action.

“I love that everything is movable. Doing group assignments, small group discussions and one-on-ones are much easier. I am not just standing up front. All [these] things help develop a stronger learning community in the classroom.”

Fairfield University Professor