

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# A SHIFT TOWARD CENTER

**LaSalle College**  
**MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC**

*Steelcase Education Active Learning Grant Recipient, Cycle 2*

Three years before applying for an Active Learning Center Grant (ALC) from Steelcase Education, LaSalle College had established an active learning committee involving eight instructors from across its programs. In addition to creating a grant-funded ALC classroom in 2016, the following year the College transformed four more traditional classrooms to better support active learning strategies.

# 66.5%

**STUDENTS REPORTING FEELING MORE ACTIVE AND AWAKE IN THE ALC**

A mix of instructors began teaching in the new ALCs. Most used the transition to reevaluate their role in the classroom and approach to the learning process and were observed to shift attention toward the students and behave more like mentors or coaches rather than lecturers.

With students situated in clusters rather than rows, the proximity and intimacy of the arrangement seemed to foster a shift in authority – with instructor as resource and expert, and students more eager to work by themselves or ask a peer before engaging the instructor.

In focus groups, students and instructors said that ALC teachers tended to stay away from the “front” of the classroom, and instead, taught amid their students, who appreciated the proximity. Instructors added that the ALCs made it easier for them to create collaborative experiences more authentic to the world of work, and they found that students tended to mix and network more than they do in a conventional classroom.

### READY TO LEARN + SHARE

While an examination of classroom performance did not show increases in student attendance or success rates, some noteworthy improvements were observed – particularly among instructors who taught in both ALCs and traditional classrooms.

Instructors reported that students seemed more motivated and that they were ready to work as soon as they arrived, attributing this to the inviting, friendly atmosphere of the ALCs. Students seemed attentive to instructions, productive during work time and more helpful rather than competitive with their peers.

Specifically, instructors believed that the new environment encouraged students to communicate more comfortably and effectively. Students indicated that the ability to face everyone in the room rather than the backs of fellow students’ heads created greater comfort in sharing, teamwork and presenting. In this respect,

**“[Students] felt more invested in what they were learning... and wanted to make the best use of their time.”**

*Instructor, LaSalle College*

instructors most noticed a difference among shy students, who became more talkative, engaged and active than before.

One student commented that the ALC made it possible to have the “chillest presentations ever,” and other students nearby quickly agreed.

The pedagogical team and ALC instructors also noticed a clear increase in the students’ “ownership” of the room. Students, especially those coached on possible ways to use the settings, explored and exploited these techniques. By year two, students in some ALC classes were more likely to determine the configuration of the room than rely on instructors to do so.

**ADOPTING NEW WAYS**

Instructor satisfaction and success in the ALCs also appeared to be a matter of taking ownership of new methods and settings.

Some features of the new classrooms were widely used and appreciated right away. Early in year one, instructors and students began using the individual Verb whiteboards for brainstorming and presentations. Students also used the boards to discretely jot down feedback during presentations and then compare notes by placing individual boards together on an easel.

In contrast, many instructors were at first unsure how to use a casual lounge area featured in the grant-funded ALC. Some saw no other purpose for it other than to support break times. As instructors experimented with this less conventional learning space, best practices began to emerge, including using the lounge to create a talk-show format for student sharing and providing the lounge as an alternative work area for students struggling with attention deficits. By year two, many instructors reported that they were more confident using the lounge setting.

In surveys about the ALC impact on their learning, students who said there was little impact tended to comment that the total experience depended on the capability and behaviors of the instructor. While many instructors were excited to use the new ALCs, it became clear that not all were ready to migrate toward active learning techniques. In response, LaSalle College organized a community of practice to help facilitate sharing challenges and opportunities, and the college plans to provide a new wave of pedagogical support in the year ahead.