

Active Learning

Healthcare Students Engage in New Classrooms



Learning happens everywhere. For [Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences](#) students, this is especially true. The school is designed exclusively for the healthcare field blending classroom and experiential learning. In the fall of 2016, PCHS opened its doors to the Center for Excellence in Practice. Research, case studies, and student surveys led to a partnership with Steelcase Education and the renovation of two campus buildings. Designers created areas to meet everyone's needs including; 26 classrooms, 18 collaboration areas or study pods, and simulation and learning labs.

Evelyn Potoka, Nursing Course Coordinator and Faculty member, and Joseph Corvino, Director of Simulation Learning and the Center for Excellence in Practice, spoke with 360 about the lasting impact these new learning environments have had on their program, their students and their college.

360: One of the goals of your new facility is to create a flexible, active learning environment. Have you changed your approach to teaching since the renovation?

Evelyn: It's been a night and day difference from the past several years! It's just so nice to be able to quickly maneuver all of our equipment to suit whatever it is we're doing at the time. We have a four-hour lecture twice a week, and we now have the opportunity to very quickly change our classroom setup. This has allowed us the chance to do more breakout sessions and more group activities. Sometimes we reconfigure the furniture in the classroom two or three times throughout that four hour session where before the renovation this was such a chore.



360: What kinds of changes have you seen in the students since the renovation?

Evelyn: One of the things that we've noticed among our students is that they're coming to class and they're staying in class. Like I said, we have a four hour lecture, which is unusual. I know it's tough to sit for four hours. However, we take attendance each class session and now they're staying the full four hours, where before class might begin with a total of 55 students present and end with only 40 students remaining for the entire class time. We don't see that anymore.

I think it's helped that we're able to get the students up and moving. We're always doing something different and we're able to keep the students engaged. They have their content outline, they know what subject matter we're going over, but they don't know what activities we have planned for the day. It's almost as if they're excited because they never know what's coming next.

Joseph: We've also seen a large increase in the number of learners who are coming to our clinical skills labs. Spring of 2016, we had about 500 students come through that space, this year we've had over 1,000. Part of that's the accessibility, part of it is changes in curriculum, and part of that is the design of the space.

360: Where else do you see learning taking place?

Joseph: We see it in the collaborative spaces.. It's rare that you see less than two students in one of those. They're writing all over the whiteboard walls, and on the glass which leads me to believe that they're having conversations, studying together, and talking about what they're writing. They're scaffolding their learning by getting it in the classroom then talking about it afterwards, maybe applying it in clinical or in our lab spaces. It's pretty much essential for learning to happen anywhere.



360: It sounds like your space meets your needs now, but can you see it adapting to future demands?

Joseph: Most, if not all, of the areas were designed to be flexible in a way that things can be changed on a day-to-day basis or a yearly basis. If we have a space designed to have a specific function, it can evolve based on changing needs of the program. One of the ways we did this was working with Steelcase to install modular furniture and cabinetry so it can be easily reconfigured.

360: Have you seen any difference in the overall dynamic on campus since the renovation?

Evelyn: The students really enjoy being here on campus, where before that was not the case. We saw the students here when class was in session. Our study pods are always full now. They come. They stay. They linger. Sometimes, we can't get rid of them. That's a good problem to have.

This week was finals week, and I had a student come up to me and say, "I can't find a study room, they're all full." I'm thinking, "What a terrible problem to have." Honestly, they love writing all over the walls in those study rooms. The rooms equipped with technology are used as well. We can see students put things up on the screen and work through different applications we've provided them with. There's so much collaboration and peer learning that you're seeing among students, where we definitely did not notice that before.

360: Like most new things, day one in your new space was probably pretty exciting. Has that feeling lasted?

Evelyn: Oh my gosh. Every day is an adventure to come to work. It's just so exciting!

Joseph: It sure is. I've been here 11 years and I've felt that throughout. Before we had this space I felt we had a great group of colleagues who share a common purpose, a mission, to educate future health care providers. I felt like we did awesome things as an institution in our previous less than inviting environment. We're now empowered to take calculated risks, to be creative, and to come up with new and different ways to do things. Now, when I come to work here, it is like what Evelyn said. You don't know what the adventure is that you're going to get into.



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Tylee Bush is a Brand Communications Intern at Steelcase. She contributes content as well as works on media coverage and brand management. Tylee is also a student at Grand Valley State University pursuing a Bachelors in Communication Studies paired with a minor in Writing. She has published work on various news, business and social platforms.