

Press Releases

Steelcase Education Grant Program Seeks Educators and Institutions Leading in Active Learning

APPLICATIONS FOR ACTIVE LEARNING CENTER GRANT NOW BEING ACCEPTED FROM SCHOOLS LOOKING TO EXPAND AND PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING INITIATIVES

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., (Dec. 4, 2017) – Steelcase Education has announced accepting applications for the fourth year of its [Active Learning Center Grant](#) program. The grant invests in visionary educators and educational institutions that promote the advancement of active learning. [Steelcase Education](#) seeks to identify leading educators and educational institutions looking to implement and expand active learning initiatives by leveraging their learning spaces.

“Students today are preparing for futures they can’t predict and jobs that have yet to be invented,” said Sean Corcoran, General Manager of Steelcase Education. “At the same time, employers complain graduates lack critical skills for real world success: collaboration, critical thinking, communication and creativity. It’s these gaps and recent research that has led many leading educators and institutions to implement active learning pedagogies. These new teaching and learning strategies involve engaging students with hands-on group work, synthesis, analysis and creativity.”

Research shows that the change from passive to active learning often happens in places that hinder the adoption of new ways of teaching and learning. In too many cases the classroom remains static: desks arranged in rows and columns facing forward with little flexibility for the varied types of learning necessary today. It's the classroom that hinders the adoption of active learning strategies.

"The lack of flexible learning spaces is often the tension schools face as they shift from a passive to active learning model," said Craig Wilson, director of the Steelcase Education Active Learning Center Grant. "At Steelcase, we are focused on helping schools, colleges and universities create the most effective, rewarding and inspiring learning environments to meet the evolving needs of students and educators. The Active Learning Center Grant helps schools advance their active learning strategies while furthering our understanding of the impact of active learning on pedagogy, technology and the physical environment."

Steelcase has invested \$3 million in classrooms in the first three years of this grant program. This year's Active Learning Center Grant will award up to 16 classroom grants for grades 6-12 or within a college or university located in the United States, U.S. Territories, Puerto Rico, Canada or Mexico. The grant provides one active learning classroom, including furniture, design review, installation, onsite training and the Steelcase Education "Learning Environment Evaluation measurement tool". Grant recipients will choose from four types of classrooms designed for up to 30 students valued at \$67,000.

Additionally, grant recipients agree to provide sufficient dedicated space, participate in Steelcase Education onsite training, and conduct and share research over a two-year period.

LEARNING FROM PAST RECIPIENTS

Forty learning institutions have been selected as Active Learning Center Grant Recipients in the past three years impacting schools and universities across the United States and Canada. At some schools, a new classroom made the difference for students as they moved from failing to passing their class. For many faculty, it meant a new way of teaching.

At the University of Arizona, faculty began to experiment with their teaching styles as they realized that students today are different from those in the past and employers are looking for different skill sets to meet the needs of today's jobs. As faculty redesigned lessons to include shorter lectures, movement, and activities to promote higher-order thinking, it became clear that old lecture halls did not support many of these moves.

"As a solution, we built a large Collaborative Learning Space (CLS). It's emphasis on high quality mobile furniture and integration of easy-to-use, highly effective tools such as tabletop whiteboards created an environment where students could more easily interact with each other," said Dr. Jane Hunter, Director of Academic Resources and Special Projects at the University of Arizona.

Reenergized, faculty across campus began seeking out opportunities to teach in the new CLS. They tried strategies they had never been able to successfully implement. They found new joy in teaching which in turn ignited students with a passion for learning. This change in culture has helped build campus-wide enthusiasm.

“Our new teaching methodologies would not have evolved without our Steelcase grant. It prompted a 5-year plan to develop five new Collaborative Learning Spaces (CLSs) each year – and we’ve surpassed that,” said Hunter.

In the first year, 80 different faculty from 40 departments and 10,000+ students benefitted from the five Collaborative Learning Spaces that were built in the summer of 2015. As planned, five more rooms were built in the summer of 2016. Because demand for these spaces increased dramatically, UA doubled the planned number and built ten more rooms during the summer of 2017, bringing the total to 20 rooms ranging in size from 24 students to 264 students. The University of Arizona has made a commitment to shift their culture from one that accepts lecture-based teaching as the norm to one that embraces evidence-based collaboration. This fall, the 20 CLSs are serving 210 faculty from 60 departments.

“I am trying new ideas in the Collaborative Learning Space that I have never tried in my 10 years of teaching. It has been fun for me. The classroom has become a ‘partner’ in the learning process,” said Richard Harper of the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Arizona.

In Dr. Julie Marshall’s classroom at Saluda Trail Middle School in Rock Hill, South Carolina, where nearly 40 percent of students are below grade level, students were previously constrained by traditional classroom furnishings: heavy metal desks that didn’t move, unstable bookshelves, and poor projection tools. Then in 2016, Saluda Trail received a Steelcase Active Learning Center Grant and converted a conventional space for 7th grade Language Arts into a more active, mobile environment.

Over the past two years, Saluda Trail conducted a mixed method study to determine whether there is a correlation between the active learning approach and student motivation and engagement, as evidenced by changes in achievement. Results include:

- During year one, the percentage of completed assignments increased dramatically from 53 percent to 96.92 percent. In year two, the average continued to increase to 99.91 percent;
- Year-end grades have increased an average of 9.6 percent per student – that is equivalent to a whole letter grade; and
- The number of students exceeding their Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) score has increased 30 percent while the number of students not meeting their MAP score has decreased by 18 percent.

“I have never seen my students so excited about learning, they are choosing to embrace their educational experience. Going into my fourth decade of teaching, it’s energizing to see the kids get excited about what we do in class every day,” said Julie Mars, a teacher at Saluda Trail Middle School. “Active learning puts students in the middle of the decision-making process, they become focused on process and not just the product.”

“This classroom has brought new life to my teaching, I’m able to be the teacher I have always wanted to be. We can move around, work on projects together, and apply learning strategies that weren’t possible before. As a result, I’m seeing kids enjoy their lessons and it’s having a remarkable impact on their academic and emotional success.”

Steelcase Education

As lifelong learners, Steelcase Education aims to make a difference in education for students, educators and designers, the organization creates the most effective, rewarding and inspiring learning spaces. As a dedicated group within Steelcase exclusively focused on education, it brings evidence-based design, technology and innovative solutions to education environments, wherever learning happens.