

# Designing for the Future: How UNSW and Steelcase Created a Human-centered Hybrid Space

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Universities around the world are embracing a new era of hybrid education, rethinking how spaces can inspire learning and connection. Traditional lecture halls, once designed for single-purpose use, are now being reconsidered for their potential to become flexible, multi-use spaces that foster connection, collaboration, and deeper engagement.

The shift toward more human-centered, adaptable learning spaces has never been more relevant.

## Reimagining the Lecture Hall

At the University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney), Dr. David Kellermann, Associate Professor and Deputy Head of School in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, saw an opportunity to redefine the lecture experience – a more engaging, equitable, and tech-integrated learning environment that adapts to evolving needs and empowers both students and lecturers.

Even before remote learning became the norm, Dr. Kellermann was exploring ways to make education more dynamic. Traditional streaming methods with one-angle setups and limited engagement were falling short for today's digitally native learners. During the pandemic, he delivered lectures from home using an interactive studio that created a more engaging and responsive experience. He wanted to bring that experience back to campus.

His vision was clear: a space where students could participate meaningfully in-person or remotely. One designed not just around technology, but around the people using it.

The new teaching studio, UNSW Sydney

## When vision meets partnership

To bring this vision to life, Dr. Kellermann partnered with leaders in technology and design. Drawn to Steelcase's research and expertise in creating high-performing spaces, he brought the team on as a key partner in shaping the physical environment. Steelcase worked closely with the professor and other collaborators to ensure the space supported the technology, teaching behaviors, participation preferences, and the flexibility users may need.

<ol> <li><a href='https://www.steelcase.com/content/uploads/sites/15/2025/11/Steelcase\_Main\_Master.mp4'></a></li> </ol>

The result was a thoughtfully customized studio that elevated the teaching and learning experience:

1. Multi-angle cameras, spatial audio, and three projection points, including one at the back of the room for remote students, ensured content could be seen and heard clearly by everyone
2. Mimicking a tiered lecture theatre but with a flat-floor layout, the space was furnished with Steelcase's low lounges, ottomans, stools and tables of various heights that allow every student to feel unique
3. Thoughtful furniture customization ensured ergonomic comfort, inclusivity and functionality – supporting everything from small group discussions to high-focus lectures

Steelcase's approach extended beyond aesthetics. It was rooted in understanding how students behave, how lecturers move, and how technology is used.

**“The design of each furniture piece encourages the purpose of the space – whether it’s attending the lecture, joining a small group discussion or being present in the room.”**

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**DR. DAVID KELLERMANN**

| Associate Professor and Deputy Head of School in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, University of New South Wales

## **A space that inspires engagement**

Since launching the new teaching studio, UNSW has seen significant improvements in both attendance and engagement. Students are choosing to sit at the front of the room, where the learning experience is most immersive and engaging, rather than retreating to the back as they might in a traditional lecture hall.

Today, this state-of-the-art studio that accommodates 45 people is one of the most sought-after rooms on campus. Beyond lectures, it has become a popular venue for faculty meetings and collaborative sessions, proving the value of designing spaces for multi-use flexibility.

## **Going beyond education: A model for hybrid workspaces**

While this project was created for next-generation lecture experience, its thinking transcends higher education. The seamless integration of technology and furniture, the support for both physical and digital presence mirrors the needs of modern offices navigating hybrid work.

Steelcase's role in enabling this space underscores a simple but powerful truth: when spaces are designed for people first, and support equality, connection and flexibility, they unlock better ways to learn, work and thrive.

**“The Steelcase team has been truly inspired by Dr. Kellermann’s vision. Our partnership with UNSW, that started seven years ago, reflects a commitment to creating innovative, human-centered spaces that help students to flourish in their educational journeys. We are excited to keep pushing the boundaries by combining blurring design and advanced technologies to prepare students for the challenges of tomorrow.”**

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**AMBROISE D’HAUTEVILLE** | Learning Director, Steelcase APAC

The new teaching studio, UNSW Sydney

## **A blueprint for the future**

The UNSW hybrid teaching studio is more than a classroom. It is a blueprint for the future — showing how purposeful design can transform not only how people learn or work, but also how they come together to collaborate, connect, and thrive.