

Transforming Library Spaces



Reimagining the Library

At Steelcase Learning, we inspire a life of learning by creating places that engage and ultimately empower people within and beyond the classroom. For many higher education institutions, libraries are the beating heart of their campus – a central, essential place for embracing more collaborative, learner-centered and project-based learning. But shifts in technology, learning styles and student expectations are reshaping how these spaces are used.

Today’s learners arrive with constant access to digital content, a desire for flexible environments and an expectation that campus spaces will meet both their academic and personal needs. At the same time, libraries are being asked to serve a broader range of purposes, from quiet study and research to group work, maker activities and community events.

Today, it’s more important than ever to design spaces that both affirm the library’s role as a trusted academic and community anchor while adapting to the changing needs of users, technology and the institution’s mission.



This research included over 50 hours of observation across 7 different locations, with a total of 37 interviews conducted.

Our Research

To better understand the evolving role of the library, Steelcase Learning conducted in-depth research with students, faculty, librarians and community members across a range of academic institutions. We explored how libraries are used today, how those uses are changing and what people value most in these spaces.

Through interviews, focus groups and observational research, our team uncovered patterns in how libraries support learning, connection and community. We also examined the impact of technology integration, the role of the librarian and the importance of flexibility.

Insights Shaping the Future-ready Library

Our research revealed that libraries thrive when they balance tradition with innovation by creating spaces that inspire connection, discovery and adaptability.

Key Insights

01 Activities vary throughout the semester, the week and even the day. Furniture settings need to adapt to these changing needs.

02 The library is often viewed as a sanctuary. Individual study areas can better support privacy and comfort, while open spaces allow for collaboration and community.

03 Many learners come to the library for collaborative work. Physical and technological affordances can be optimized further for group study and project work.

04 Ancillary settings are valued but often underutilized. Performance elements like privacy, power, laptop tables and the option for an upright posture can help students better use the space.

05 Mental health is an important consideration. Libraries can provide spaces for respite, rejuvenation and reflection.

06 Learners benefit from spaces that support diverse physical, cognitive and emotional needs. There are opportunities to create environments that are accessible and inclusive for all.

07 As individuals bring personal devices and engage with emerging technologies, spaces must be designed to support diverse devices and adapt to ongoing technological change.



Insights in Action

Spaces that balance quiet focus with opportunities for collaboration, connection and discovery can strengthen the library’s role as both an academic anchor and a community hub. The following examples highlight just a couple of the many ways Steelcase Learning can help bring these insights to life.

Products That
Make it Work

Viccarbe Season Lounge
Steelcase Elbrook Tables
Coalesse Lagunitas
Personal Tables
Viccarbe Zoco Chairs
Thread



An open, light-filled social hub invites students to gather, socialize or focus in a comfortable, welcoming environment. Flexible seating options, mobile tables and integrated power support a variety of postures, tasks and privacy preferences, allowing the space to adapt to changing needs throughout the day.

Inclusive + Inviting
Open, welcoming space for casual gathering, socializing or light focus.

Flexible
Individual tables and mobile seating allow students to adjust the space as needed.

High-performing
Lounge seating provides comfortable postures that still allow an active work position, with access to power and space to support belongings.

Functional + Varied
A variety of settings allow students to choose spaces based on task, privacy needs and preferences.



**Products That
Make it Work**

Orangebox Aspect Booth
Steelcase Think Chair
Steelcase Ology
Height-Adjustable Desk
Coalesse Lagunitas Lounge
Steelcase Shortcut Chair
Steelcase Campfire
Paper Table
Bolia Armchair
Steelcase Thread Power

This flexible study space blends enclosed rooms with open work areas to support both deep focus and quick collaboration. Accessible pathways, varied seating options and integrated technology create an inclusive environment where learners can easily shift between concentrated work, quiet reflection and hybrid teamwork.

Inclusive + Inviting

Provide circulation paths that are accessible and inclusive for learners with varying abilities.

Functional + Varied

Spaces for reflection, respite and rejuvenation are available throughout the space.

High-performing

Support hybrid collaboration with varying levels of visual and auditory privacy and access to digital displays and power.

Let's Get in Touch

To find out more about our settings, solutions and capabilities, visit SteelcaseLearning.com.

Next Steps

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