11-23-2004

"New Learning Spaces": an eye towards our new campus

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Recommended Citation

APA Citation
Ellozy, A. (2004). "New Learning Spaces": an eye towards our new campus. *New Chalk Talk, 4*(3),
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles/4936

MLA Citation
Ellozy, Aziza Dr. ""New Learning Spaces": an eye towards our new campus." *New Chalk Talk,* vol. 4,no. 3,
2004,
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles/4936

"New Learning Spaces": an eye towards our new campus

Dr Aziza Ellozy,
Director, Center for Learning and Teaching

"Spaces need to allow active learning; anything else is malpractice"
(Best Ideas, 2003 PKAL/NITLE Workshop on "Learning Spaces")

Many universities in the US and elsewhere have designed or are in the process of designing new "learning spaces" to support new types of teaching and learning on their campuses. The shift in the design of these learning spaces is driven by changes in pedagogy and technology. AUC, with the building of our new campus, has had the unique opportunity of starting from scratch, and of taking advantage of the experience of others. It is also faced with the challenge of getting it right for at least the next ten years.

A month ago, a six-person team[*] from AUC attended an intensive three-day workshop on "New Learning Spaces" held at Vassar University (NY), where an impressive group of experienced academics and architects led the formal sessions and provided individual consulting services to each of the participating teams. The workshop was organized by PKAL[†] and NITLE[‡], two organizations that have great experience in redesigning facilities in light of modern pedagogical requirements.

We approached the task with the knowledge that *pedagogy, technology and facilities need to be integrated* in a thoughtful and flexible way, and except for the two architects on board, most of us came to the workshop with little previous preparation. We learned a lot. We had many extemporaneous meetings and, among other things, we recognized the need for more communication with all stakeholders. With this spirit, I am writing this newsletter as **a preliminary attempt to engage interested faculty in the discourse.**

For the sake of clarification, "learning spaces" refer to "all spaces that accommodate the learning community", and to "all facilities that enable people to learn and to teach". In what follows, we will be focusing mostly on classrooms.

According to Brown and Lippincott (2003), the concept of the classroom is evolving and expanding. It is evolving as more emphasis on active learning and group work requires spaces that accommodate group interaction. It is expanding because technology allows the functionality of these learning spaces to expand, and to enable new learning activities and new methods of teaching and learning.

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[*] The AUC team consisted of Libraries and Learning Technologies (LLT) representatives (Dean Shahira el Sawy, Dr. Aziza Ellozy and Mr. Michael S. Allen), a teaching faculty (Dr Ali Hadi), an architect from the New Campus Development Office (Mr. Ashraf Salloum), and one of the AUC consultants (Mr. Robert Luchetti).
[†] PKAL Project Kaleidoscope
[‡] NITLE National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education

We learned that:

- In order for a teaching space to be effective it has to be either very versatile§ or very flexible∗∗. The most interesting information on classroom design that I came across is illustrated in the following drawing: in order to have students break up in groups of two, four or eight around a common table, an <u>even</u> number of rows is required.

FIG. 1. PLAN OF LECTURE / DISCUSSION
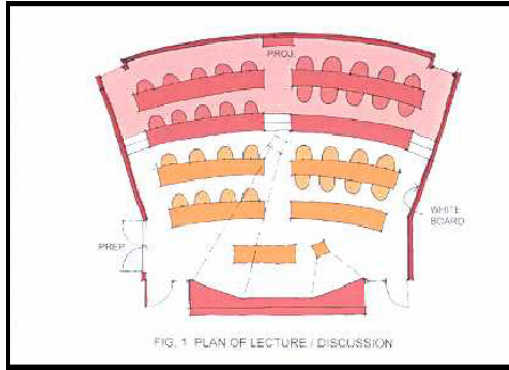
Plan of a lecture/discussion/demo versatile classroom (Baird, J. W. 2004)

Note how you can easily transition from lecture mode (left) to group work mode (right).

- Technologies will change and rooms that serve the future must be ready for those changes.

- Faculty and students are relying more on handheld units such as laptops, tablet PC's and PDAs to access and manage their educational content. The emergence of mobile (portable) wireless technologies will allow spaces to be designed around pedagogical rather than technological needs.

- Students are increasingly encouraged or required to work in small groups, creating the need for more small group study areas. These are often places that are not moderated by an instructor and require access to technology.

- **Before moving to our new campus**, prototype mockup classrooms need to be constructed and "test driven" by students and faculty.

- A '**sandbox**' environment (room) needs to be created to research emerging technologies.

- Faculty offices should be thought of as small collaborative classrooms.

<u>Sources</u>

o Baird, J.W., Holabird and Root LLC brochure. Distributed at 2004 NITLE- PKAL Workshop, "New Learning Spaces", Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY. Oct 22-24, 2004

o Malcolm B. Brown and Joan K. Lippincott.(November, 2003), *Learning Spaces: More than Meets the Eye.* Educause Quarterly. Found at http://www.educause.edu/942

Share with us your experiences by contributing to the New Chalk Talk series, or by simply sending comments/suggestions to aellozy@aucegypt.edu

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§ "The versatile classroom is the one designed to do many things without rearranging the furniture. It can also accommodate a range of technologies that can be used simultaneously" (Baird, J.W 2004).

∗∗ "The flexible classroom is designed to be able to adapt to change by rearranging furniture and equipment within a fixed space. Room must accommodate changes in technology, teaching methods and student profiles." (Baird, J.W 2004)