

CMP Classroom Working Group September 16, 2015

Common Themes

The proposals to CMP for new classroom and learning spaces have considerable common ground in what they are trying to achieve, so it was difficult to prioritize them. If you remove strategic planning proposal #80, Making MacLeish Accessible, (an idea that the Working Group recommends moving to the “Just Do” group), the remaining proposals attempt to address a shared problem – current classrooms do not support faculty efforts to experiment with and innovate pedagogy. The Classroom Working Group believes that it would make sense for elements of all the proposals to be combined and implemented as a series of prototype/pilot projects.

The Classroom Working Group developed a mission statement to guide the work:

Mission Statement

Smith’s learning spaces will be constantly evolving and pedagogically driven to inspire meaningful, dynamic, inclusive, and sustained student learning.

What is the problem that we are trying to solve?

Classroom design should be informed by how students learn and support the variety of ways that professors teach. Our current classroom spaces limit pedagogy – most classrooms are fixed structures with immovable furniture. We want every learning space to be flexible so that instructors are able to move across different mediums (from paper to screen) and hold different grouping arrangements during class (small vs. large group).

Classrooms should function as spaces that adapt to the changing needs of teaching and learning as Smith evolves. Beyond flexibility we would like to see spaces designed to continuously look forward to future unanticipated needs. We imagine beginning with the creation of prototypes that emerge from the collaborative effort of the Smith community.

If we do not solve the problems, what do we fail to gain?

Effective learning spaces/classrooms are essential to advancing the mission of the college.

Old fashioned or lecture-based classrooms reflect teaching based on one type of learning only. Failure to modify classrooms could be seen as an inability to keep up with new pedagogies, even as we maintain the possibility for instructors to choose more traditional classroom configurations.

We could lose our competitive advantage as a first class institution of higher learning if we fail to ensure that our learning spaces/classrooms support teaching and promote learning.

We also could lose an opportunity to take advantage of a significant Smith strength, namely a faculty that is very interested in and engaged with experiments and innovation in pedagogy.

What additional information do we need?

- Do a full inventory of current classroom space.
- Mine data we have about classroom/technology use.

- Identify what pedagogies we want to support.
- Gather student and faculty wishes (with Sherrerd Center and student curriculum committee).
- Gather minimum standards for learning spaces.

What are the next steps?

- Connect to other working groups such as sustainability, curriculum, and creative campus. In listening to the reports of the other working groups, we were struck by the number of ideas that cross boundaries. Some opportunity for cross-fertilization might be worthwhile.
- Connect with the library programming committee. A number of the stakeholder engagement sessions could be used to gather key data and information on learning spaces.
- Establish consistent guidelines for new learning spaces.
- Prototype different styles of classrooms (seminar, studio, lab, lecture).
- Determine how classrooms can be made available outside of class time.
- Visit campuses with cutting edge classrooms and learning spaces.
- Ultimately devise a classroom master plan.

Potential Costs

Decisions about classroom investments have been made on an ad hoc and siloed basis. There is no comprehensive approach to classroom redesign, and there is no coherent approach across disciplines. We anticipate that this work would be at a high cost with a high benefit to all.

Respectfully Submitted,

Members of the Classroom Working Group

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