

**2011-2012 Final Report on Informal Group on Learning Spaces  
Covering Period August 2011 – July 2012  
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The Informal Group on Learning Spaces began meeting in January 2011 as a means to create an open, informal place for stakeholders at any level of the university to share projects, ideas, needs, dreams, and advice about learning spaces. The resulting network of colleagues are involved in many aspects of designing, using, supporting, and thinking about formal and informal learning spaces. Each meeting has been devoted to a topic of conversation covering an aspect of teaching and learning in higher education, a learning session, visits to interesting spaces on campus, and consulting with faculty and staff.

Our 2011-2012 activities were divided into 3 meeting series. The Fall 2011 meeting series consisted of 5 meeting dates (Sept 8, Sept 22, Oct 6, Oct 20, Nov 3) and covered topics including the Student Collaboration Spaces Pilot, Basic Classroom Technology discussion, Student Computer Labs and a tour of Engineering labs and Newmark Lab, Library Spaces and research presented by Steelcase on collaboration in library spaces.

The group met 7 times for the Spring 2012 meeting series (Feb 9, Feb 23, Mar 8, Mar 22, Apr 5, Apr 19, May 3) and began to incorporate more crowdsourcing from the members. After the kick-off meeting to finalize the semester schedule, our first presentation was from Doris Reeser and Al Ochsner of Facilities & Services to provide details of the \$60M Instructional Space Improvement initiative and share their comprehensive report on general assignment classrooms from peer institutions. We then went on to discuss “Learning Spaces of the Future” and had an encore tour of Ikenberry Commons, SDRP. The group is very interested in exploring learning spaces at other Big 10 campuses and examining best practices for designing, managing and using innovative learning spaces. While we did take a meeting to share photos that we took and our impressions of spaces we saw on various trips to other big ten campuses, we could still explore this topic more fully and have more participants provide their input and perspectives.

The goal of increasing engagement and participation throughout the spring 2012 semester led us to develop a crowdsourced classroom photo gallery using Shutterfly and engaged the participants by asking them to submit photos and vote on the classroom sites that are in the most need of attention. We then planned tours to go into a selection of the classrooms to have more in-depth discussions around how we as a campus can better advocate and plan to improve classrooms that aren’t meeting the needs of the students and instructors. The tours became part of the Summer 2012 meeting series.

Since the summer months can often offer the best weather for walking around campus and less disruption to in-session classes since there are fewer classes in the timetable, we chose to use the first 2 of the 4 summer sessions for the walking tours of the “needy” classrooms we selected to visit. At each classroom site, the individual who submitted the room for the tour had a chance to point out the reasons they selected the room. The reasons stretched from lack of physical maintenance to the space, to lack of technology, to broken or dysfunctional furniture, to awkwardness in the set-up for teaching and learning. We visited

spaces in Illini Hall, Armory, Altgeld, and Davenport. Due to the wide breadth of experience and expertise in the group, we heard multiple perspectives on how spaces like these are planned and improved, and how each space might fit into the Instructional Space Improvement initiative that we heard about at the start of the Fall 2011 meeting series. The tours and the process for identifying and selecting our tour locations lent a very intimate look at how space is managed and used on our campus.

Keeping with the theme of a very hands-on, personal experience with different types of classrooms on campus this summer, we had 2 more site visits to fill out our summer schedule. Faculty from Urban & Regional Planning invited the group to Temple Buell Hall to look at a computer lab and 2 classrooms that they would like to reinvent into active learning environments more suitable for their needs. We discussed the pedagogical implications for different types of room set-ups and the kinds of things that have and have not worked for their program so far. We also discussed the process for how a department plans and manages changes to spaces like this, especially since these changes impact teaching practices, have implications on support and teacher training, and require financial investments that can be rather large. A note to me from Urban & Regional Planning two weeks following our visit indicated that they have already followed through on some suggestions we gave them and are happy with the incremental changes they have accomplished. They are continuing to plan for even bigger changes in the future.

Our final meeting for the summer was the grand tour of the newly renovated Lincoln Hall. Since this tour was conducted by the person who oversaw the project for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Matthew Tomaszewski, and several members of our group had significant roles in the project, attendees of this tour got the “inside story” on the whole building renovation. For many, this was the first chance they had to go into the building and see the classrooms and office spaces before the grand opening. Just as importantly, we got a glimpse into how important it is to develop our thinking as a campus so that we are able to anticipate the changing needs within the classrooms and guide long-range planning and implementation of spaces to realize our visions of the future.

Overall, the 2011-2012 series for the informal group on learning spaces was a very good one. We saw our membership continue to increase by word of mouth recommendations and as a result of two presentations Leslie Hammersmith made at the IT Pro Forums (“Lessons Learned” in November 2011 and “Making Space Count” in June 2012). The contact list now has 74 names on it, and each of these folks receives calendar invites and updates on the group activities. Attendance at each bi-weekly meeting is consistently good, ranging from 15-30 people, and sometimes more for some of our tours. We successfully engaged the group through our classroom tour voting, and we made our activities more personal by explicitly connecting their experiences and recommendations to campus processes and discussions. In September 2012, Leslie Hammersmith and Doris Reeser are presenting at the Regional Conference for the Society of College and University Planners (SCUP) about their experiences with the Informal Group on Learning Spaces and how collaborations like this are key to the future successes on college campuses.