FLEXSPACE: THE FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS EXCHANGE COLLABORATIVE

FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

FLEXspace – The Flexible Learning Environments eXchange is a repository of detailed learning space examples and resources that brings campus planners, learning space design teams, facilities and technology specialists, faculty members, and researchers together to connect, collaborate and create a shared body of knowledge in one central location.

A top priority for many academic institutions is to reimagine physical spaces to support evolving user needs, yet many campuses lack institutional structures that are sufficiently adaptive, flexible and team-based to remain innovative and responsive. Typically, a space planning team is more akin to a “team of rivals,” where classroom technologists, instructional designers, AV integrators, architects and designers, facilities directors, librarians, faculty, researchers, and students may struggle to understand the language and priorities coming from different team members.

Realizing the need to streamline planning, the California State University Chancellor’s Office and the California Community College’s Foothill-DeAnza Community College District partnered with the State University of New York (SUNY) system in 2013 to expand upon the SUNY Innovative Instruction Space Repository initiative to develop an open library of learning environment designs and resources called FLEXspace (Flexible Learning Environments eXchange).

FLEXspace is a free “one-stop” hub for best practices, detailed examples and a community of higher education stakeholder groups to help campuses improve communication as they plan, design, build and assess learning spaces; FLEXspace may be thought of as a B2B open educational resource that helps campuses improve quality and save time, money and effort.

The FLEXspace collection contains images, videos, floorplans, and detailed specifications describing facilities and furnishings, technologies, and learning activities supported in each space which facilitates collaboration between facilities, IT, and academic technology departments on California campuses and beyond. In addition to offering a unique pathway to share space examples, the new FLEXspace 2.0 platform introduces features that will grow both the community and the collection. The Toolkit is where members share assessment tools and protocols, planning guides, research findings, and user support resources. Idea boards allow members to collaborate within and across teams and institutions, creating shared pin boards to collectively discuss projects, examples and resources found in FLEXspace.

MILESTONES

• FLEXspace is launched as the Innovative Instruction Space Repository by the SUNY Provost Faculty Advisory Council on Teaching and Technology. SUNY presents the prototype at the CCUMC Conference.
• The FLEXspace Team is established, including representatives from SUNY, California State University System, Foothill-DeAnza Community College, Iowa State University, University of Florida, Consortium of Colleges and University Media Centers, ELI, and Society for College and University Planning.
• The first project update webinar is held to discuss division of labor for FLEXspace production migration to the Artstor platform.
• The FLEXspace website and listserv are established. Demo of the prototype and a listening tour is conducted through multiple conference presentations and meetings conferences, concluding at the Sloan C/MERLOT Emerging Technologies Conference and discussion of the creation of a provisional governance structure and tasks necessary to move the initiative into production version 1.0.
• The FLEXspace team compiles feedback and forms an advisory board and business plan. More than 50 volunteer academics, researchers and industry thought leaders from across the country and different higher education segments volunteer to shape the taxonomy (attributes fields) from the perspective of three main stakeholder groups: faculty and academic staff (pedagogy), AV and IT integrators (technology), and facilities planners/architects (space).
• FLEXspace team and EDUCAUSE discussion plans for future synergy between the Learning Spaces Rating System and FLEXspace.
FLEXspace has been a topic of the CCC, CSU, and UC intersegmental collaboration committee in academic technologies, which has been underway for a year. Others have joined this collaboration, including Penn State University, Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT), EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI), Society for Campus and University Planning, the Consortium of College and University Media Centers (CCUMC), UBTech, AVIXA, the Learning Space Collaboratory, ISTE Learning Spaces Network, the Co-Action Learning Lab, The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, and others. The FLEXspace team also continues to collaborate with the EDUCAUSE Learning Spaces Rating System (LSRS) to encourage integration of these two useful tools as part of an integrated planning process.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

The community and collection of learning space examples and resources continues to grow. FLEXspace has more than 3,600 registered members from approximately 1,200 institutions across 57 countries, a team of global experts, and an emerging research and evaluation group from industry and academia.

FLEXspace members from around the world have contributed and shared more than 400 rich examples of formal and informal learning environments, ranging from multimedia studios, makerspaces, computer labs and huddle spaces to large exhibit spaces, simulation labs and renovated lecture halls — including spaces from higher education and the K12 pipeline.

Thanks to generous involvement from the growing number of members, researchers, industry sponsors and institutional partners, the portal has gone through multiple design cycles and continues with iterative design improvements to optimize its usability and value. The portal interface, taxonomies, features and user support continue to evolve to reflect industry trends and respond to the needs of users and the research community.

FLEXspace is fast becoming the one-stop learning space hub for research, planning tools and guidance, design examples, and implementation support.

FLEXspace is more frequently highlighted in published articles (e.g., Campus Technology, EDUCAUSE Review and ECAR Data Bytes), conference presentations and webinars (e.g., The Future Trends Forum). It is recommended as a key resource in learning space design handbooks and reference lists (e.g., Learning Spaces Rating Systems Handbook, The UK Higher Ed Learning Space Toolkit).
IMPACT AND BENEFITS

- The expanded mobile-friendly platform allows users to take virtual field trips to view peer institution solutions, create a digital portfolio to document and showcase innovative designs, share best practices and lessons learned, collaborate with partners, and connect with an ever-expanding worldwide community of colleagues and experts. The ability to share sample classroom designs and develop reliable facility plans cost-effectively can produce efficient campus innovations.

- Some campuses are starting to leverage FLEXspace as a cost-effective way to create an end-user facing classroom directory to document all spaces rather than build their own, which could help support faculty using the spaces and help prioritize improvement projects.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. There are obvious benefits that campuses receive from open access to freely browse the FLEXspace collection; however, campuses are slower to contribute spaces, perhaps perceiving this as “extra work” beyond their capacity, or failing to see immediate value and return on effort. Besides sharing “for the greater community good,” many campuses would like assistance and/or a clear incentive for contributing. Newly released features address these concerns — templates for contributing spaces and toolkit resources allow users to add collaborators who can co-edit contributions and distribute the effort among a team that may include facilities and technology specialists, faculty, student workers and even industry partners. With curated galleries, the FLEXspace team can showcase campuses, highlighting them as innovators and thought leaders to acknowledge and incentivize contributions. The FLEXspace team also provides user outreach, coaching and technical assistance to campuses through webinars, demonstrations, videos and tutorials to educate campuses and assist them in leveraging the FLEXspace platform.

2. Sharing oversight and involvement by individuals who represent a breadth of roles, institutions, university segments and systems, as well as architects and industry partners has been critical in the successful design, evolution, adoption and funding of the FLEXspace initiative.

3. User-experience research and listening tours are essential to constantly refine the design and prioritize the development roadmap to ensure FLEXspace is meeting the needs and priorities of various types of institutions and stakeholder groups.
MAKERSPACES AT CAL STATE

Makerspaces are taking hold across several CSU campuses.

BUILD IT MAKERSPACE @ SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
San Diego State University

INNOVATION / MAKERSPACE CENTER
California State University Fullerton

CHICO STATE MAKERSPACE
California State University Chico

VIEW GALLERY

SPACES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Detailed examples of innovative spaces!

IDEA GARDEN
Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis

SOL MESSINGER ACTIVE LEARNING CLASSROOM
State University of New York at Buffalo

ACTIVE LEARNING HALL
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

VIEW GALLERY

FEATURED PARTNERS

See how our partners are inspiring spaces around the world.

HISTORIC RENOVATION AT FLORIDA STATE
Herman Miller

LEARNING STUDIO
Computer Comforts

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE, SCOTLAND: ACTIVE LEARNING CLASSROOM
WolfVision

VIEW GALLERY

Curated galleries showcase innovative campus spaces.

Browse or add your own examples

- Convenient Template
- Case study layout
- Captioned photos
- Details and descriptions
- Stories of design rationale and post-occupancy use
- ‘Add collaborators’ so you can co-edit details.
- Keep private and publish when ready

Tags for Facilities, AV, EdTech, Pedagogy, and Brands

Templates help to easily contribute designs and resources.

Resources might include:
- Faculty training & support
- Planning guides
- Research findings, protocols
- Presentations, videos

FLEXspace website:
flexspace.org

FURTHER REFERENCES

The California State University and California Community Colleges