



# LSC PORTFOLIOS

## BACKGROUND

The Learning Spaces Collaboratory, established in 2010, is an informal community of academics, architects, and diverse of communities of practice focusing on the experience of learners and learning in the undergraduate setting. The LSC has its roots in the work of PKAL (Project Kaleidoscope 1989/2010), an NSF-funded initiative designed to explore *what works* in undergraduate learning environments in fields supported by the Foundation. Attention to “where” learning happens reflects PKAL's kaleidoscopic approach to planning.

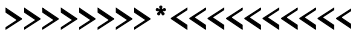
## CONTEXT

The LSC is assembling a Resource for those responsible for spaces in which undergraduates experience learning. This Resource will include a range of materials—from the archives of the LSC, PKAL, and other communities of practice—that collectively illustrate the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and expertise essential to realizing learning environments in which all learners flourish.

## PORTFOLIOS

Portfolios are the centerpiece of the LSC Resource. Each Portfolio will focus on a question or set of issues central to the process of planning and assessing spaces in which learning is experienced by all learners. The initial set of Portfolios will address questions surfacing in the series of Virtual Roundtables hosted by the LSC during the era of the pandemic. The sense of those VRs can be captured in this question:

*What do we know about what it is about a space  
that gives the learner the sense of belonging -  
a space in which each learner can feel he or she belongs?*



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## I. THE LSC VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLES /2020 - 2022

### CONTEXT

Question about belonging were treaded through the VRs in different ways, reflecting the diversity of those participating—diverse from experience, expertise and responsibility, all with a shared passion about what learners are to be, become, all aware that spaces matter.

*What do we know about spaces that give a learner—all learners—  
a sense of belonging, a sense that “this is where I belong”*

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### CONVERSATION

*(1<sup>st</sup> LSC Virtual Roundtable 5/2020)*

~ The pandemic is realizing new connections across campus, opening new lines of communication among those of us involved with planning. Building new facilities is not driving the future; the future of attention to spaces will rather be about achieving and transforming more use and value from existing campus buildings and grounds. Campuses will be scrutinizing and rethinking what already exists in spaces and resources, and building a future based on that information and data.

~ In this time of COVID, we are observing that the redesign of physical learning space is not meaning to colleges and universities what it once did. The attention to the valued elements of design is moving from innovation to necessity—from creative ambience to health-mindedness.

We care less now about creating space that is absent of authority to spaces serving social distancing. We are no longer calling places a collaborative spaces for learning and teaching, but now rather we are thinking about spaces that foster more individualism and ensure safety.

For now, what we have learned and been practicing over past decades of planning has given way to the return of the expert in front of the room—speaking to students in ‘safety-net’ rows. We have learned to adapt to reality, to our current situation

~ We are learning is that robust planning is essential if we are to survive and thrive. Another is that we must adapt and meet whatever change is inevitable, that robust planning is essential. Now that we may be seeing some light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, it is not a signal that anything will return to what some people might consider ‘normal.’

~ Expectations about spaces, and about planning spaces have changed. Some faculty like the flexibility in teaching modes, in spite of the challenges such flexibility presents. This situation is an opportunity for us—working together as colleagues—to do what we know ‘works’ in the process of planning: to engage the stakeholders; to identify the use-case and then renovate or build based on what we have learned in order to deliver a flexible learning ecosystem.

~ As always, we must seek a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive process for planning—by provoking questions and facilitating conversations about learning, gaining the perspective of others. The systemic iniquities in our society can no longer be ignored. We can never go back to business as usual.

Campuses will be weaving their current initiatives relating to inclusion and equity into their attention to physical spaces. The question that institutions seem to want the most help with now is “how”?

*How can we ensure our physical spaces are promoting equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice?*

Many campuses are asking for help connecting the dots between the digital, physical, and social spaces and the sense of belonging, of feeling including that ultimately leads to student success.

~ Colleges and universities are completely changing their mindset when it comes to space. They are beginning to look at a ‘space’ or ‘place’ through a new lens, a new filter. They are asking: *What can this facility, this space be used for, become?*





## I. B. THE LEARNING SPACES COLLABORATORY /2010 - 2015

### CONTEXT

In 2010, the Learning Spaces Collaboratory was established to focus directly on facilities, which had been an integral of PKAL to that time. This was an opportunity to focus and broaden our attention to where learning happened in the undergraduate setting—in all fields of learning, at institutions of all types.

An early group of LSC leaders assembled in a weekend retreat to identify questions to be addressed in the beginning months of the LSC. Their over-arching question was about what a space could do:

*Does the space:*

- ~ Signal that this is an intellectual neighborhood, that it is a vibrant space beckoning to all - come inside, stay inside?*
- ~ Support experimentation to inform future development of learning environments on that campus?*
- ~ Invite representation of provisional ideas and hypotheses, support change responsive change?*
- ~ Does it incorporate a seamless sequence of spaces that accommodate the collaborative process of learning, spaces enabling learners to continue beyond the time of formal learning in the informal spaces designed—with resources made available—discussions at any time, with classmates, other learners, and perhaps with faculty?*

These questions reflected what had been learned over and over again in the days of PKAL. Taking on the persona of a 'space' was a new approach for planners as they began to reach a deeper awareness of how space influences the experiences of those who enter in.





## I. C. THE LEARNING SPACES COLLABORATORY /2015 - 2019

### CONTEXT

In early 2015, scanning the academic landscape—it was clear there was deep acceptance of the many pioneering pedagogical approaches on campuses—of all kinds—across the country. Scanning the new generation of spaces, it was obvious how they were being designed to accommodate those new approaches. It seemed timely to capture both lessons learned over the past decade and questions being asked that would shape the future of attention to spaces in which undergraduates—in all fields—would flourish.

That was the impetus for the initial series of LSC Roundtables—gathering small working groups to thinking about shaping the future based on their experiences in the past. The LSC hosted 2# of Roundtables in all parts of the country during those years. What was discussed in each of these, all of these, were questions that reflect those we are still asking.

### > LSC ROUNDTABLE @ BOSTON UNIVERSITY /2016 CONVERSATION

~ We were fluid about the particular programmed learning spaces we were thinking about—a lecture hall, a lab, maker spaces, whatever. Our feeling is that the ideas we are discussing span many different kinds of learning and learning spaces, from libraries to spaces for career counseling and/or mentoring.

Several metaphors emerged that were quite useful, but we would like to share with you the idea of a stage or stage set, a learning space as a space in which engagements happen, where different kinds of engagements happen, those that make possible a certain kind of learning we desire for our students.

- These spaces are engaging. They are emotional. They have drama associated with them. They are memorable and ultimately enable meaningful experiences. Thinking about the 'stage' metaphor, we talked about how these stages are shared between faculty and students, about how in an ideal world these would be stages in which faculty are giving up control, are actually learning along with students.

This is a world in which faculty are partly responsible for setting the stage and creating the experience, a world in which the students also have some responsibilities, some autonomy, control, opportunities to shape what will be happening on the stage.

~ We talked about such spaces as being transient in nature, meaning this in a very positive way. These are spaces that are dynamic, alive, with different kind of engagements coming and going. *Groups are nesting in different parts of these spaces, then as they fledge—fly away, if you will, others will come and nest.*

There will be a transitory sense on different scales, from the café and social spaces up to the levels of nesting and homing and fledging and more. Along the way, the sense of space as stage attends to important ideas of visibility—not just the visibility of the activity itself, but also to the outcome of that activity. There is an overall sense of visibility that celebrates and values what is happening on the stage.

These are notions utterly absent in a traditional lecture hall, where if you blink you miss whatever profound moment might happen because right before was nothing and right after is nothing and for only a moment was it something. We are talking about visibility that is social in the sense of what is happening here at this roundtable, where what is happening is how learning happens.

We are thinking about the question of *why*, about creating memorable emotional and social engagements for our students, about the metaphor of the stage for learning spaces in that it signals how such a space allows for spanning differences, enabling different modes of interaction. This is what learning is about.

~ Therefore, to be effective, we thought it important to elevate students as full partners into the activity, that students understand that they have a role in their own learning, that they can become central players on the stage.

Why? Times are changing. Not only do we believe that this kind of interaction is at the heart of learning, students are now coming to expect a different kind of interaction. They are expecting something more entrepreneurial—in their learning, in their learning environment, in spaces that allow for and promote the opportunity for students to imagine their own role on the stage. That perk comes in the nature of the visibility of the space, of its dynamism.

“I can totally see myself here doing this.” They look for places in which they can imagine their own role because they can see other students in that role.

A thread in our discussion was to recognize the norms and behavior and physiology of how students learn today. They're up after noon and they're down at 3:00 a.m. They need a world—a stage for learning—that is responsive to their needs, their patterns, their transitoriness.

*Comment from a roundtable colleague:* So, if spaces reflect such basic human interactions, then the pedagogy can fill in as needed, as supported. Spaces can be transformed over the course of a day or an evening to serve many different ways of learning.

*Response from the team:* So, how does this happen? What do we think about the design process? We started thinking too small, about spaces that were more temporal, but eventually decided—like others here today—that achieving such spaces had to reflect campus-wide values, an institutional priority for spaces that are student-centered. From the perspective of planning, it seems critical to have it an institutional priority to realize spaces in which students have a primary role as stakeholder, influencer, and participant.

So, our bottom line is involving students in planning as advocates, with faculty somewhat stepping back and making room for students, peers, colleagues and all potential users and stakeholders to have a role in the planning of the stage for learning.

*Questions from a roundtable colleague:* “When I think about questions students might ask about spaces, they are: Is this a green building? Is it net zero? Is it full of daylight? Is it burning fossil fuels all the time?” These questions may not have much to do with planning spaces for learning, but they do have something to do with how the students have an overall feel of the building.

*Response from team member:* We did not talk about that explicitly, but you do emphasize the importance of understanding values students bring to the table. These are issues being discussed on campuses anyway today and attention to learning spaces in the process of planning learning spaces is an opportunity to “seize the moment,” as it were.

In thinking about the transitoriness of spaces, we thought also about the importance of different scales of permanence, about having spaces that have the kind of presence that people just want to be in. We think of this presence as having a certain timelessness, a relationship to nature, a relationship to place, but a presence that allows the building to be a living building internally.

*Comment from a roundtable colleague:* This makes me think about how today’s students are different from those for whom we planned spaces for in the past. This generation cares more about each other. So, the idea of student as a full partner, not as a client is something different. If you think back a few decades, administrators saw students as clients and the goal was to meet their needs. Now how students are using the campus is different, and they want to be involved with these kind of conversations.

*Closing comment from a roundtable colleague:* I was wondering, when your group thought about student-centered or student-driven learning spaces at the campus level, if you followed this thought to its logical conclusion: that the hard boundary between campus and community would be dissolved; that as planners we could become more relaxed about what the campus experience could be so that it could be distributed spatially in other ways.

