Fall 2013 Classroom Improvement Surveys
Findings Executive Summary

Background

University classrooms are an essential resource that support multiple learning activities and need to adapt to shifts in teaching style. In 2012, as a result of several tours and discussions about classroom needs, an effort was made to gather some faculty with classroom design interests to brainstorm ideas that would inform the design aspects of future classroom renovation projects. As this work progressed, the University was able to identify and commit funds for a select number of classroom improvements.

During the summer of 2013, three general classrooms were renovated - REN 125, 126, and TLC 023. In addition, a project was initiated for the renovation of AgSci 106, the largest auditorium classroom, with a target completion date of mid-August 2014.

In an effort to continue this strategic classroom review and improvement prioritization work, the Registrar met with the Assistant Vice President of Facilities to discuss formalizing a workgroup. During the Fall 2013 semester the Classroom Strategic Planning Workgroup (CSPW) formed with faculty and administrative representation. A charter was sanctioned by the Faculty Senate and specific goals were identified to be completed by the end of the Spring 2015 semester.

In November 2013, CSPW developed two online surveys (one for faculty and one for students) in an effort to assess the success of renovated classroom improvements. The primary goals were to 1) collect faculty and student feedback on improvements to the classrooms, 2) identify design aspects that may need improvement, and 3) determine if the renovation supported new innovative approaches to teaching.

Key Findings - Renfrew 125/126

Faculty Survey - A total of 9 (36%) of the 25 faculty members invited to participate completed the classroom survey. In general faculty felt these rooms were much improved; the tiers provided good visibility; and the node chairs allowed more space and flexibility for students.

Faculty expressed concern with the positioning of the media cart in the center of the room as this location made it difficult to walk around and engage with students. There was some difficulty with the remote clicker coordinating the advancement of material on the dual projection screens. In addition there was some difficulty with visibly being able to keep track of all students due to the width of the classroom.

Student Survey – A total of 153 (13%) of the 1158 students invited to participate completed the classroom survey. In general students liked the room set-up, felt it was open and spacious with good visibility, and had adequate access to electrical outlets for laptops. Overall students liked the flexibility of the node chairs; felt they were comfortable; and easily moved to accommodate classroom activities.

Students expressed concern with visibility of the white board due to the media cart being positioned in the center of the room; difficulty hearing from the back of the room; and the minimal storage under the node chairs for back packs.
Key Findings – TLC 023

Faculty Survey – All 8 (100%) of the faculty members invited to participate completed the classroom survey. In general faculty liked the easy navigation around the room, the flexibility of the node chairs, and the ability to quickly arrange the room for group work.

Faculty expressed some concern about the need for a second interactive white board; the hanging white boards which they felt were difficult to use; sound projection as it was sometimes challenging to hear students in the back of the room; and they did not like the windows in the back of the room.

Student Survey – A total of 34 (18%) of the 187 students invited to participate completed the classroom survey. In general students were very enthusiastic about the room set-up and felt it allowed for better focus and freedom. They liked the quick transition between classroom styles, ability to work in groups, the removable white boards, and the node chairs.

Students expressed some concern with sound projection, the window in the back of the room, the lack of use of the hanging white boards, and the minimal storage space under the node chairs for back packs.

Workgroup Observations

Overall, the node chairs were appreciated by both faculty and students. They are comfortable, flexible, and with the casters allow for quick transitions keeping students more engaged. The down side of these chairs seems to be that the storage area is too small to accommodate large backpacks and therefore tends to collect trash.

The placement of the media cart in the REN rooms was expressed as an issue by both faculty and students. The dual screens had mixed reviews with faculty, but students liked the enhanced visibility they provided.

The interactive white boards in TLC 023 were not used as much as the design committee had hoped. There was a faculty comment expressing the need to change the course design to incorporate them, and since this classroom could not be guaranteed in the future, it was not an effective use of time. There were comments by both faculty and students about the need for more than one interactive white board in this classroom.