Learning Spaces

Summary of virtual panel event held on
February 17th, 2022

The spaces where our instructors teach and our students learn have an important impact on the overall learning experience. It is critical that we support a wide array of spaces to serve the needs of instructors and learners—this includes spaces that integrate technology, allow for community engagement, and much more.

Panelists:

Ilana Bayer: Assistant Professor, Pathology & Molecular Medicine; Director, Learning Technologies Lab

Stephanie Springgay: Director and Associate Professor, School of the Arts

Dave Heidebrecht: Advisor on Special Projects, Office of the Vice Provost (Faculty); Sessional Instructor, CityLAB Hamilton

Panel Questions:

What learning spaces have you leveraged in your teaching and why?

How have students influenced and responded to your use of these spaces?

What challenges have you encountered in trying to use an array of learning spaces? How have you adapted to or overcome some of these challenges?

What role can your students, your peers, or others at the University play in contributing to the vision and future of different learning spaces at McMaster?

5 Key Takeaways from the panel

1. Learning spaces should be chosen with intent and aligned with the program's unique goals and philosophy [35:20-35:31].

2. The process of creating safe and brave spaces must take a social justice lens and involve consultation with marginalized voices [33:07-33:37].

3. Involving students as partners in course planning and development allows instructors to gain important insights all while providing student partners with valuable career growth opportunities [46:41-46:46].

4. It is important to create a culture of openness that encourages the piloting of new ideas, followed by capturing and sharing the lessons learned [47:19-47:42].

5. The future of learning is uncertain; creating a supportive environment is crucial to foster creative responses to new challenges [47:50-48:17].

Some key takeaways from each panelist

Ilana Bayer: Assistant Professor, Pathology & Molecular Medicine; Director, Learning Technologies Lab

- What do we create and enable in a certain type of space? A large lecture hall will facilitate a different type of learning than a space where chairs and desks can be moved around to enable group work or a more open space where arts and engineering projects can take place [11:12-12:33].
- Safe and brave spaces: creating a culture where students feel safe and comfortable yet willing to take risks and challenge themselves in their learning [12:40-12:53].
- Encouraging active learning, which is defined as a deep engagement with the material. This can happen in many ways, including hands-on lab work or discussion groups to solidify understanding of the content between peers [13:50-14:42].
- Extending learning spaces beyond the traditional classroom by allowing students to remotely engage in an in-person class (also known as the HyFlex model) [14:51-15:27].
- In situations where a shortage of instructors or constraints in physical space make it difficult to engage in small group collaboration, there should be an effort to integrate active learning components into other aspects of the course [16:06-16:34].

Stephanie Springgay: Director and Associate Professor, School of the Arts

- Lack of access to campus facilities during the pandemic meant McMaster's School of the Arts had to redefine their learning spaces by mailing out materials to students so they could create studios and practice rooms in their own homes [23:09-23:25].
- One of the challenges in designing the new Interdisciplinary Arts program is that the university theatre, concert hall, and foundry are located in different parts of the campus, requiring faculty to come up with flexible teaching strategies to allow students to use these facilities as a single integrated learning space [25:01-25:28].
- New "Perspectives" courses in the BFA program will have an enrollment of 250 students, but will consist of smaller "hubs" for students to collaborate. There will also be access to spaces students can use for movement activities, performaces, installations, etc. [27:00-27:30].
- As the iArts program debuts in Fall 2022, focus groups, student interviews, and ethnographic studies will be conducted to evaluate the response to new learning spaces and pedagogical methods [32:18-32:49].

Dave Heidebrecht: Advisor on Special Projects, Office of the Vice Provost (Faculty); Sessional Instructor, CityLAB Hamilton

- In 2021, the CityLAB Hamilton Semester in Residence piloted a hybrid community-engaged research tour called Cycle Towards Action, consisting of an in-person ride-along where students learned about bike infrastructure in Hamilton, followed by a virtual dialogue in which they shared their feedback about the ride and had an action-orientated conversation about what they learned [39:42-40:34].
- Art of Change course uses a podcast as a central learning resource; students attend a virtual session, then break for 45 minutes to listen to the podcast (which includes interviews with community leaders), then return for the final third of the class to discuss and reflect with the group. Students are encouraged to get away from their screens and move outdoors during the podcast portion of the class [42:22-43:57].
- Expanding the conversation beyond the classroom: podcast is shared on social networks so that knowledge can be shared and students can reflect on the opinions of individuals from outside the course [45:15-45:39].
- Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning; they are involved in planning, facilitation, and note-taking, leading to greater involvement and positive outcomes for both learners and instructors [45:52-46:10].

Referenced Resources:
The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker
CityCAST
https://blackstudentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/