

# THE FUTURE OF THE FACULTY OFFICE

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL SPACES TO  
CREATE A STUDENT-CENTERED UNIVERSITY



**Steelcase**<sup>®</sup>  
EDUCATION

**Author**

Jeffrey J. Selingo has written about higher education for two decades. He is the author of three books, the newest of which, *There Is Life After College* (HarperCollins, 2016), is a New York Times bestseller. Named one of LinkedIn's must-know influencers of 2016, Jeff is a special advisor and professor of practice at Arizona State University, a visiting scholar at Georgia Tech's Center for 21st Century Universities, and a regular contributor to the Washington Post. You can find out more about him at [jeffselingo.com](http://jeffselingo.com)

**Acknowledgements**

Author wishes to thank Peter Schmidt for his research assistance on this paper.



Even as the layout and design of the modern workplace is reshaped, with open offices, team huddle rooms, and teleworking, the basic form and function of faculty offices on most college campuses remains much as it has for decades, if not centuries. Walk into almost any academic building—whether it is fifty years old or a year old—and you’ll probably see some version of this: long, narrow hallways lined with doors (often closed) to individual faculty offices.

The evolution in the design of the faculty office has, for the most part, been an afterthought. During the growth of campuses in the 1960s, faculty offices were largely fashioned by the demands of a new generation of professors, who usually wanted two things: space and privacy. By the time the next big building boom arrived at the beginning of the last decade—180 million square feet of academic and administrative space was built between 2000 and 2010<sup>1</sup>—architects, planners, and financial officers had firmly taken over the design of new buildings. But even with efficiency and utilization at the top of the minds of college officials, faculty offices didn’t disappear, though they did become smaller on some campuses.

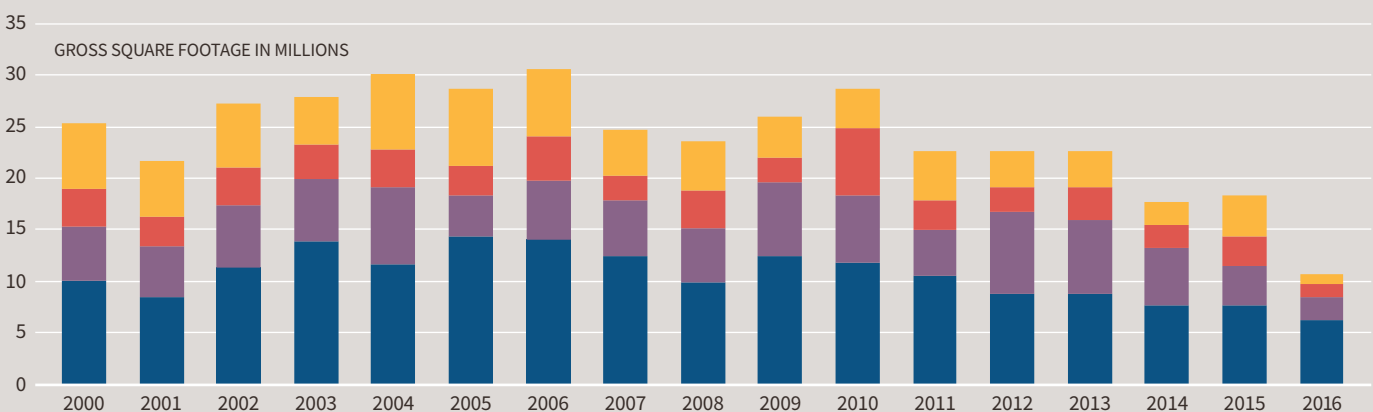
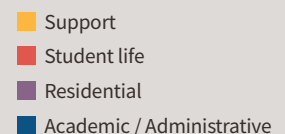
Now the next phase in the development of faculty offices is emerging, driven in large part by two trends. First, the pervasiveness of digital devices and wireless networks means that professors can, and often prefer, to work away from campus. Although no national data exist for how often professors actually occupy their offices, interviews for this study revealed that increasing numbers of faculty members are coming to campus only when they need to teach or hold office hours. Second, and perhaps more important, is that the strategic priorities of institutions—increasing student engagement, expanding the use of adjuncts for teaching and encouraging the phased retirements of tenured professors—require new approaches to faculty offices.

“There’s a growing awareness of a disconnect between the spaces universities provide and what people actually need,” said Elliot Felix, founder of Brightspot Strategy, a New York-based design consulting firm that has advised more than 70 colleges. “We’re on the cusp of people saying that maybe there are more effective ways for us to allocate and use our space while still enabling people to be productive and engaged.”

FIGURE 1.

## A Building Boom for Academic and Administrative Spaces

Between 2000 and 2010, some 180 million square feet of academic and administrative space was built at colleges and universities in the U.S., more than any other kind of space on campuses.



Source: Sightlines

## 2 THE FUTURE OF THE FACULTY OFFICE

What faculty offices will look like a decade from now remains uncertain. While the concept of open offices, with no or low partitions and row upon row of desks, spread quickly in the corporate sector and is now nearly ubiquitous—70 percent of U.S. workplaces have them—uniformity rarely prevails in higher education.

What's more, campuses are essentially minicities with unique workspace needs. That's especially true for faculty members who juggle disparate teaching and research duties requiring a mix of collaborative areas as well as private, quiet spaces. Layer on top of those demands the fact that professors share in the governance of the institution, and it becomes nearly impossible for administrators to mandate workspaces from the top down.

### NOT ONE SPACE, BUT A PALETTE OF PLACES

Faculty offices in the future are likely to include what architects and designers call a “palette of places.” This idea promotes a layout that recognizes the varying demands on faculty members and provides them with multiple workspaces without requiring any more space than the footprint of traditional offices. The plan typically includes private offices but either much smaller ones (think enough space for a desk and a chair) or unlocked offices that can be used by others when their primary occupant is gone. Instead of long hallways outside offices, there are plenty of shared team spaces with movable furniture. And the best natural light is in the shared spaces rather than being reserved for windows in private offices.

Because offices represent 20 to 30 percent of overall space at an institution, examining the future of faculty offices is “the beginning of a sea change” on campuses, said Persis C. Rickes, president of Rickes Associates, a consulting firm that works with colleges on planning and space issues.

The transition to new types of spaces for faculty won't occur quickly or easily. Interviews with more than two-dozen architects, campus planners, and faculty

members show that colleges and universities are still in the early days of defining new office plans.

What makes change particularly difficult on campuses is that office space has as much to do with the actual physical layout as it does with how people *feel* about it. Because private offices have been a fact of life for faculty for centuries, they have become part of what psychologists refer to as “place-identity.”<sup>2</sup> Having a private office connotes stature in the campus hierarchy. The bigger the office, the better its location (i.e., the corner office), the more important you are.

The discussions about the future of faculty spaces come at a critical time for higher education. A new generation of students is knocking on the doors of colleges and universities nationwide, arriving with different expectations for academic support and technology-enabled instruction than their predecessors. At the same time, the silos between academic departments are collapsing as research and the curriculum as a whole become more interdisciplinary and collaborative. And everywhere, college leaders are looking for cost savings and efficiencies. This report attempts to inform those discussions by considering these core questions:

- Why should campuses reconsider the traditional faculty office?
- What are some of the recent trends in new faculty spaces?
- What are some options for the layout of faculty offices in the future?

**“Palette of Places” is an idea that promotes a layout that recognizes the varying demands on faculty members and provides them with multiple workspaces without requiring any more space than the footprint of traditional offices.**

# WHY REDESIGN; WHY NOW?



Three developments in higher education are driving campuses to consider different approaches in designing faculty spaces.

## 1. STUDENT SUCCESS

The pressure is on colleges for higher graduation rates, better retention, and more engaged students. Only two-thirds of students who started college in the fall of 2015 returned to the same campus the following year. Some of them end up transferring elsewhere, but many drop out completely, short of a degree. Fewer than 40 percent of students enrolling at a four-year college actually graduate in four years. Even allowing an extra two years for changed majors, illnesses, and other circumstances, fewer than 60 percent graduate within six years.<sup>3</sup>

Colleges have deployed a variety of tactics over the last decade to reverse those numbers. Now, there is a greater sense of urgency: a surge in the enrollment of first-generation, low-income, and minority students is expected in the coming years—all populations who historically have not been well served by higher education.

Faculty are the linchpin in student success efforts. For students, getting to know professors outside of the classroom has been shown to improve retention, graduation rates, and even success after college. “Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement,” Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson wrote in a seminal study on the subject: “Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.”<sup>4</sup>

One way to encourage that interaction is through office hours or spontaneous discussions with professors. But research

has revealed that a significant proportion of students—ranging anywhere from a quarter to two-thirds of students, depending on the campus—fail to take advantage of office hours because they are inconvenient or professors don’t encourage their use.<sup>5</sup> One study found that students who felt office hours were held at a convenient location were more likely to attend.<sup>6</sup> But professors holed up in their offices with their doors shut often intimidate students, especially first-generation students unfamiliar with navigating the customs of college.

No wonder two out of five freshmen say that they have “never discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class,” according to the National Survey of Student Engagement, an annual poll of freshmen and seniors. Another three out of five freshmen say they never worked with professors on activities other than coursework.

A separate poll by Gallup and Purdue University of some 30,000 bachelor’s degree recipients nationwide found that graduates who had a professor who cared about them as a person and encouraged them to follow their dreams were more than twice as likely to be engaged in life and work after graduation—meaning they were curious, interested, and had a passion for what they were doing. The problem is that only 14 percent of graduates recalled having a professor who made them excited about learning and encouraged them.

Given these trends, it’s clear campus leaders must be more deliberate about creating opportunities for faculty-student interactions outside the classroom. The problem with conventional office hours is that they are passive—professors wait for students to come to them. Much as teaching on many campuses has been transformed with

active-learning techniques, so too must faculty-student interactions change, and that starts with designing better spaces for students and professors to meet.

## 2. ADJUNCTS

Since the 1970s, the academic workforce on campuses has shifted to a majority of non-tenure-track faculty, many classified as part-timers. In 1969, tenured and tenure-track positions made up nearly 80 percent of faculty. Today, fewer than one-third of professors are either tenured or on the tenure track. Of the non-tenure-track positions almost 50 percent are part-time.

The use of part-timers has accelerated in recent years, as more colleges under financial strain look to fill full-time positions with less-expensive contractors. The purpose of adjuncts has changed as well. Historically, adjunct faculty had full-time jobs off campus and were hired for their expertise in a particular subject. Today, some adjuncts are full-timers who might prefer to be on the tenure track, but the majority are part-timers, who often must cobble together a bunch of teaching gigs.

But a growing body of evidence indicates that the proliferation of adjuncts is having a negative impact on student success and outcomes. A National Bureau of Economic Research study found that a 10 percent increase in part-time faculty positions at public universities results in a nearly 3 percent decline in graduation rates. What’s more, if students have a part-time instructor, the likelihood that they will take subsequent classes in that subject declines.

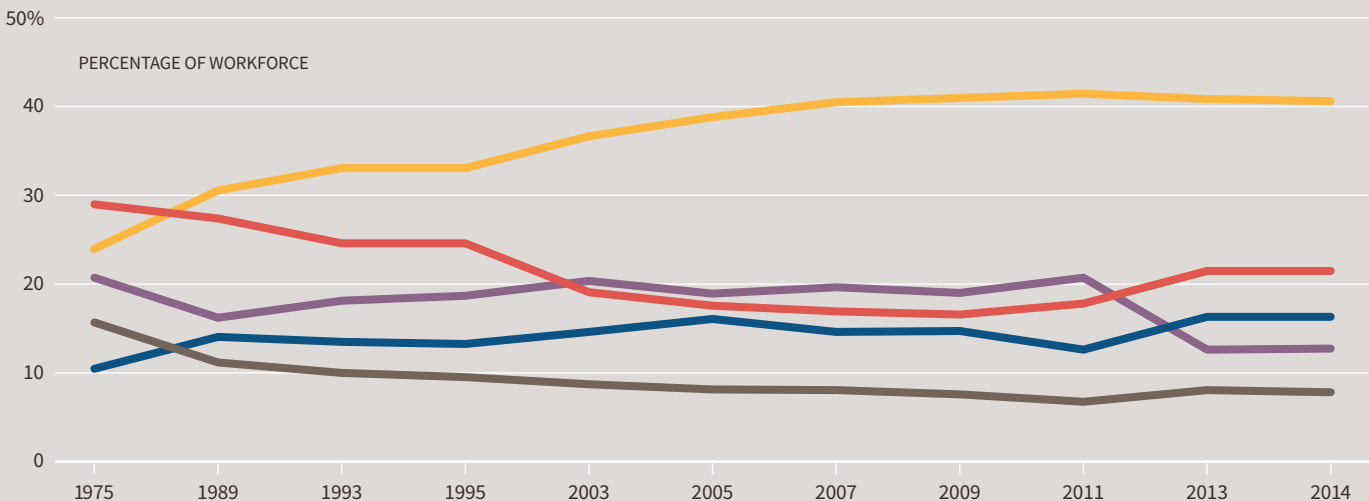
Adjuncts rushing off to their next teaching assignment don’t have time to meet with students after class. Even if they did, they often lack space to do so. Fewer than one-third of part-timers working at public research universities have access to a private office, and only a little more than half have a shared office. At four-year public colleges that focus on teaching, where faculty-student interactions are critical, the situation is similar.<sup>7</sup>

Given the importance of faculty mentors to students and the increased use of adjuncts, colleges must do more to encourage their part-timers to interact with students outside the classroom and provide them space to meet with students and other faculty members.

FIGURE 2.

### Will Traditional Offices Meet the Needs of the New Academic Workforce?

Since the 1970s, the academic workforce on campuses has shifted to a majority of non-tenure-track faculty, many classified as part-timers.



Source: National Center For Education Statistics, IpedS Data Center

Unfortunately, adjuncts are given “the space of last resort,” said Rickes, the campus planner. “More and more, the adjuncts have been marginalized as other space needs have encroached,” she said. “There needs to be an attitudinal shift around part-time faculty,” Rickes said. “The pyramid of space need has been inverted, and now it is the adjunct faculty that need that space.”

### 3. FACULTY RENEWAL

For much of last decade, college and university officials were sounding the alarm about the coming wave of faculty retirements on campuses. Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, make up a significant share of college professors and are reaching retirement age. Once those retirements came, the conventional wisdom was that college leaders would have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to “renew their faculty” and shift open positions to emerging academic fields.

But that surge of retirements has failed to materialize as predicted. The number of professors ages 65 and up has more than doubled since 2000, according to the Bureau

of Labor Statistics. The rapid graying of the professoriate in recent years is often blamed on the Great Recession, which caused many faculty members to reconsider their plans for retiring.

But research by the TIAA Institute has found that only 16 percent of professors are what the Institute calls “reluctantly reluctant” to retire, meaning they want to leave but can’t for financial reasons. Nearly half of professors surveyed by TIAA are what the Institute refers to as “reluctant by choice”—they are staying of their own volition. Only one-third of tenured faculty members over 50 expect to retire by 67. Among those who stay by choice, nearly 94 percent told the TIAA Institute that they enjoy work and are fulfilled by it.

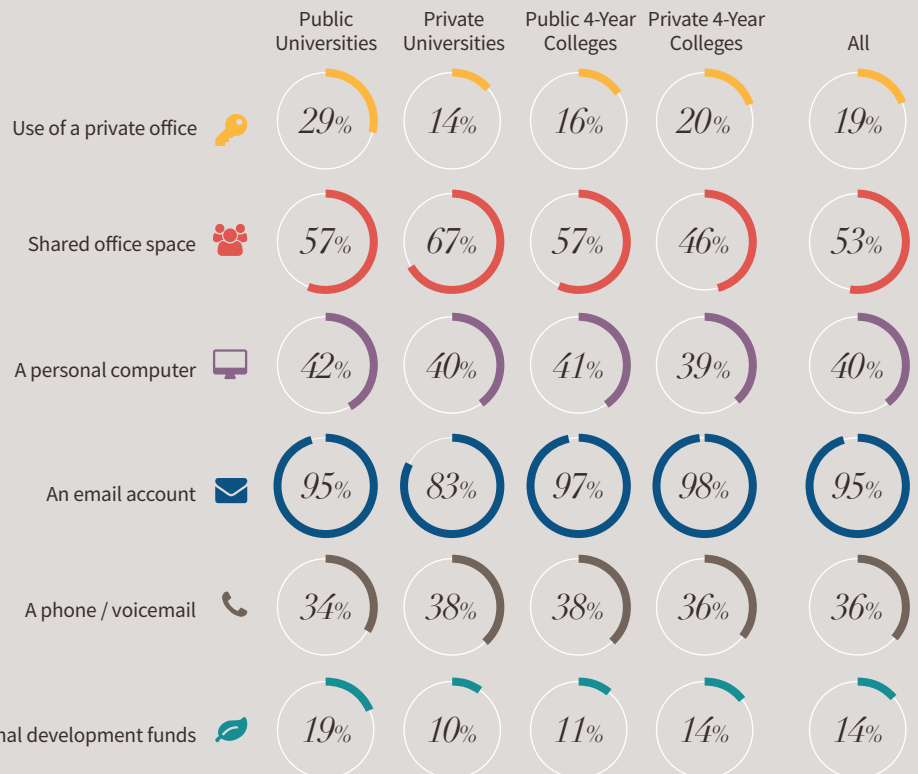
To help encourage retirement, colleges have usually focused on money, offering buyouts and other financial packages. But there is growing recognition among campus officials that they also need to deal with the psychological barriers to retirement—and for many faculty that includes giving up their offices. A private office is part of their identity and a place to go every day, and professors are reluctant to relinquish that.

FIGURE 3.

## Only 20% of Part-Time Faculty Have Use of Private Office

Fewer than one-third of part-timers working at public research universities have access to a private office, and only a little more than half have a shared office. At four-year public colleges that focus on teaching, where faculty-student interactions are critical, the situation is similar.

PERCENTAGE OF ADJUNCTS WITH THESE BENEFITS



Source: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles

One survey of more than 2,000 faculty members by the American Council on Education found that two-thirds of professors want to remain connected to their college after retirement. When asked what campuses could do to make their retirements go more smoothly, faculty said making office space available was among the top five things.

“Emeritus faculty want to be part of the life of the campus. They want to connect,” said Scott Kelsey, managing principal of CO Architects, based in Los Angeles. The challenge for college planners is to create spaces for retiring faculty but to do it without compounding another problem facing campuses, that of underused space.

### CURRENT TRENDS IN FACULTY OFFICES

Office space on a per student basis is growing faster than any other type of campus space. From 1974 to 2007, the average square footage of office space per student ballooned from 17 square feet to 43 square feet.<sup>8</sup> Although technology has reduced the need for extensive desk and shelf space, the size of faculty offices has remained relatively consistent in recent years, at around 120 square feet.

Because many institutions have generous space protocols that grant private offices to most full-time faculty no matter how much time they spend on campus, offices “remain some of the most underutilized spaces on campus,” according to EAB, a Washington-based company that consults with some 1,000 colleges. When one Midwestern university installed sensors to automatically turn off lights and air conditioning when offices were empty, the project paid for itself in one year, rather than the expected three, given how little time faculty spent in their offices.

The cost of faculty offices is one few colleges accurately account for. If the average price of construction of an academic building is \$300 a square foot that means the typical faculty office costs \$36,000. And while it might sound counterintuitive, architects and designers say an office is not always as private as faculty believe it to be because students or colleagues drop by. “When you ask faculty members where they go to concentrate, very few will tell you their office,” said Felix of Brightspot Strategy. “They go where they can’t be found.”





# FACULTY SPACES OF THE FUTURE: THREE APPROACHES

The faculty office of the future will not be a standardized space, with a design adopted by a few colleges and then copied by others. According to interviews with academic leaders, architects, and campus planners, future designs will differ greatly campus by campus, and even department by department at some institutions.

My research has identified three approaches for redesigning faculty spaces that balance overall demands for privacy, while ensuring maximum benefit for student success and meeting the needs of adjuncts and retired professors.



**“Meet students where they are” strategy** distributes faculty offices throughout academic buildings and creates huddle spaces near classrooms.



**“Third place” strategy** establishes space away from faculty offices where professors can meet with students and also provides a home for adjuncts and retired professors.



**“Layered” strategy** includes a diversity or layers of spaces, tailored to the needs of the work being done.

## DESIGN STRATEGY #1: MEET STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

Whether students engage with professors *outside* the classroom often starts *inside* the classroom. “Students quickly form an impression in class about whether their faculty member is open to a conversation or not,” said Vincent Tinto, a professor emeritus at Syracuse University who has done extensive research on student success. “Some faculty are seen as welcoming, and some not, and students will often come to a faculty member that they know they can talk to.”

Usually that happens right before or after class. In studies of office hour use, professors and students report that the times around class are, in effect, unofficial office hours. But these interactions usually happen in less than ideal spaces—in the front of the classroom, in the aisles between desks as students are shuffling in and out, or in crowded and narrow hallways outside the classroom.

The foundation of this approach is to create a series of spaces to take advantage of those moments around classes instead of having students search for professors in corners of academic buildings during pre-arranged hours. The key to this strategy is flexibility. It might include a huddle room just outside the classroom where small group discussions with professors can happen before or after class. Subsequent one-on-one conversations can move to a faculty office nearby. Under this scenario, faculty offices are distributed on different floors and in close proximity to classrooms.

Such a design would be especially useful for first-year students in helping them develop relationships with

professors that improve their chances to get more from their college experience (including a degree). But most classroom buildings on campuses are for general use. If they are reserved at all, it's for specific academic departments, not for particular groups of students.

Institutions should consider creating first-year classroom buildings designed specifically to maximize student-faculty interaction. There is precedence for this type of space: many colleges already have residence halls set aside for first-year students. First-year academic facilities would house offices for those professors who teach an abundance of first-year courses or advise such students.

"There's no rule that says all classroom and faculty spaces need to be designed to serve all undergraduates the same," Tinto said. "So the question is, how do we design faculty offices around first-year classrooms, so that in that first year, in particular, we are maximizing contact?"

In recent years, colleges have adopted so-called high-impact practices, such as living-learning communities and undergraduate research, which have been widely accepted as having a positive impact on students. Residence halls and campus centers, and even some classrooms, have been redesigned as a result. It's time to reinvent [or "transform"] faculty spaces as well, in order to meet students where they are and build a more deliberate student-centered university.

## DESIGN INSPIRATION

One potential design for meeting students where they are comes from a campus that recently had the opportunity to start from scratch: Cornell Tech in New York City.

Although it is a graduate-focused engineering school, its dean, Dan Huttenlocher, explained to me that its goals are similar to many undergraduate schools—to encourage collaboration across different groups of people, including faculty, students, and researchers. "We wanted to break down the figurative silos, but also the literal ones that often come from a building's design," he said.

Cornell Tech's first academic building, the Bloomberg Center, has no private faculty offices. Instead, every professor gets a "designed space"—100 square feet with a door they can use whenever they want but is open to anyone else when the faculty member isn't there. "They're not large and they're certainly not offices that someone would associate with prestige," Huttenlocher said.

Traditional private offices are underutilized, Huttenlocher added, and thus would have been inconsistent with the campus' goal to build a zero-energy building (which creates as much energy as it uses over the course of a year). The nontraditional design wasn't a difficult sell on campus because the building, which opened in July 2017, was largely designed before the bulk of faculty members were even recruited. "They know what they are getting into," Huttenlocher said.

Across three floors of the 160,000-square-foot, four-and-half story building, there are a variety of spaces: open offices, the private huddle rooms for faculty, and medium and large conference rooms. A conventional open office plan was insufficient, Huttenlocher said, because researchers need quiet spaces for their work, while a conventional academic office plan would be too siloed. "I like to think of what we have as the midpoint," Huttenlocher said.



MATTHEW CARBONE FOR MORPHOSIS



## CASE STUDY

# Private Offices in Collaborative Spaces

The University of Washington at Bothell is one of the fastest-growing public universities in the United States. In the last decade, the enrollment of the campus 20 miles northeast of Seattle has almost quintupled to more than 5,000 students.

To keep up with that growth, the university went on a hiring spree for new faculty members. But it quickly became evident to university officials that promising every professor a traditional private office with a window would be an impossible—and expensive—pledge to keep. “We were already bumping up against this,” said Susan Jeffords, the university’s vice president for academic affairs. “We were at a point that we needed to do something, or we’d be faced with rancor and divisiveness about who had a window and who didn’t.”

So in 2015, the university began planning for a new kind of faculty space in a building about to undergo renovation. A group of faculty volunteers were involved in the design right from the start. Their goal was two-fold: to house interdisciplinary faculty in spaces where they could collaborate and deal with a shortage of space on the campus.

Their conversations began with the extreme—an open-office plan with no walls. The group toured several local companies that had open layouts, but they concluded that such plans wouldn’t work at the university. “They wanted private space to meet with students, and some wanted quiet space to work,” said Amy Van Dyke, director of physical planning and space management.

But private offices and collaboration space would only be possible if the offices themselves were smaller. Designers put down blue masking tape in a conference room to show the size of smaller offices, one at 100 square feet and one at 80 square feet (the typical faculty office is 120-140 square feet). “We told them that if they’re willing to take an office of this size, we could take the extra space and put it into collaboration space,” said Barney Mansavage, a principal at SRG Architects, which designed the offices.

Faculty accepted the idea of smaller private offices, but they also wanted natural light there and in the collaboration space. Architects experimented with several designs before settling on one that floods the collaboration space with natural light and puts private offices with glass doors and sidelights in the center of the room. “Everyone is sharing in the daylight,” said Van Dyke.

Indeed, the best feature of the final design is that it is equitable. Every faculty member gets 120 total square feet—80 of it in a private office and 40 of it in the collaborative space. “The private space might be smaller than they are accustomed to, but they also have control over it,” Mansavage said, so they could write on the whiteboard walls and adjust their furniture and lighting.

With the growth of the Bothell campus not expected to slow anytime soon, officials are looking to copy this design elsewhere. “It’s a model for the future,” said Jeffords.



## DESIGN STRATEGY #2: THE THIRD PLACE

Under this scenario, students and faculty would interact in a “third place,” a reference to a theme in the 1999 book *The Great Good Place*. In it, the author Ray Oldenburg, lamented the loss of good public places and suggested society needed a third place—neither home (the first place) nor work (the second)—that allows people to come together to engage with each other, like coffee shops do.

Traditional faculty offices would still exist under this strategy. But faculty members would hold their office hours in a separate location, which also would serve as a gathering space and temporary home for adjuncts and retired professors.

This idea borrows from one already in use on some campuses: the course center. A study of course centers found that more than two-thirds of students who had one available at a large public research university preferred it to conventional office hours. Students viewed the course centers as more approachable than a faculty member’s private office and as places where they could stop by on the fly.<sup>9</sup>

Course centers, however, are usually temporary quarters where faculty members set up shop for a few hours, typically in unoccupied classrooms. The Third Place strategy imagines a permanent home, one made up largely of open spaces with desks where adjuncts and retired professors could also work, standing tables for small group interactions, movable walls for privacy, flexible spaces with comfortable couches and chairs for informal discussions, and a small private room or two.

One potential location for these reimagined course centers is a space every campus already has: the library. Libraries are increasingly becoming the academic equivalent of the campus center, as stacks are moved to off-campus locations, creating wide-open spaces where students gather.

A third place removes the sense of hierarchical space that often exists between students and faculty members in offices. A permanent space away from the classroom and offices promotes interaction because students feel more comfortable approaching professors in neutral territory.

## DESIGN INSPIRATION

Sabine Hall at Richland College in Dallas was completed in 2009. Inside is the Science Corner, a student tutoring and advising center surrounded by faculty offices. The faculty offices are around the perimeter of the room, with collaborative spaces in the center of the square.

A key design element is the walls of the faculty offices. From four feet above the floor to the ceiling, they are transparent glass to help maintain visual contact between faculty members and the student study area. The goal is to promote serendipitous interaction between students who are visiting the center for tutoring and advising and faculty who are in their offices.

“Students experience walls as barriers,” said Gary McNay, a principal at Perkins + Will in Atlanta, the architectural firm that assisted the college in designing the space. “Making them mostly transparent was intentional so that students can see faculty members in their offices and faculty members can easily see if students need help.”

Faculty members noticed an immediate impact on student engagement in the new space. A later study found that visits to the tutoring center and faculty offices increased by 57 percent over two years. Students who visited the center completed biology, chemistry, or physics courses at a 10 percent higher rate than those who didn’t visit and withdrew from the courses at a lower rate as well.



## CASE STUDY

## Keeping Retired Faculty Connected

About nine out of ten of retired faculty members at Clemson University have stuck around the area. Clemson, S.C., consistently ranks as one of the nation's top retirement destinations, with affordable home prices, idyllic views of Blue Ridge foothills, and state tax breaks for seniors.

The university's administration, however, has found coaxing faculty members into retirement a challenge. Like their peers at other colleges, elderly Clemson professors can be reluctant to give up their job and its trappings, including the private offices they've occupied for so long.

Such professors often express fear of "losing connection with the institution, losing connection with the department, losing their physical space to do whatever scholarly work they were doing," said Dwaine Eubanks, director of Clemson's Emeritus College.

Truth be told, Clemson doesn't want these professors to leave entirely. Far better to have them return to teach, research, mentor, and otherwise share their experience and talents. Clemson's College of Science even has a pilot Emeritus Scholars program that actively recruits retired professors to field tasks such as helping undergraduates get through calculus or giving junior faculty members tips on getting published.

The question is how to assure professors they'll still have a place on campus after vacating the private offices they've held dear. Clemson's Emeritus College, established 13 years ago to encourage retired faculty members' continued involvement with the university, long found itself facing

requests for office space that the administration could not accommodate. On Clemson's main campus, Eubanks said, "We're bursting at the seams everywhere." Clemson hopes to finally meet such demands with its new, 2,700 sq. ft., Emeritus College facility.

Opened in an administrative building in September 2017, the facility holds 11 workstations—cubicles with desktop computers, Wi-Fi access, and five-foot-high walls for privacy—where emeriti faculty members can get stuff done. It also has 33 secure lockers, each large enough to hold more than a backpack full of books and files, and a meeting room that accommodates up to 60 people. Although it's located about four miles from Clemson's main campus, in Pendleton, S.C., it's served by a free bus service between the main campus and satellite sites. Unlike most main-campus buildings, it has plentiful free parking right outside the door.

James Brannan, who retired as a mathematics professor in January 2017, said he comes to the Emeritus College to conduct research in a cubicle because working at home can be "a little too comfortable," with an excess of distractions. At the Emeritus College he usually finds himself working alone.

Eubanks said he does not expect the facility to draw professors who retired several years ago and already have "established a pattern of working from home." He predicts its use will surge at the end of the current academic year, when another cohort of professors tacks "emeritus" onto their title. He said, "The ones who are just retiring are very eager to have a space here as they relinquish their office."



### DESIGN STRATEGY #3: THE LAYERED STRATEGY

This approach is a spin-off of the previous two strategies and is a good pathway for campuses without faculty buy-in for alternatives to conventional offices or adequate room to establish a third place for faculty and students to interact.

The model includes layers of spaces, tailoring them to the needs of the work being done. The first layer consists of open spaces for students, adjuncts, and emeritus faculty. They are adjacent to the second layer, which includes a series of private spaces—huddle rooms for small groups and even smaller isolation rooms for individuals to work or make private phone calls. The final and third layer contains traditional private offices.

All these layers occupy approximately the same footprint in a building as a series of hallways with conventional private offices. Layers don't always save money or space, but they use the latter more efficiently. Think of them as the campus equivalent of WeWork or other shared office spaces that have popped up in cities around the world and where individuals, start-ups, and companies sublease space.

A variety of spaces in close proximity to each other encourages collaboration and recognizes that not everyone is doing the same job or has the same needs even if they are in the same professional role. Too many campuses start the design process for new academic buildings with the assumptions of the past: faculty get private offices and staff get cubicles or open desks.

“We should be asking, ‘Tell us how you teach? Advise students? How do you work?’” said T. Mills Kelly, an associate professor of history at George Mason University, who recently participated in planning a new academic building that adopted a version of this layered strategy. In the end, the building’s design reduced the number of private faculty offices by about 50 and shifted some 6,000 square feet to classrooms.

“The best offices are a mix of spaces that serve all human needs,” added Gary McNay, a principal at Perkins + Will, which designed the new George Mason building. “I don’t think anyone is going to design a space and faculty will immediately think, this is better. It’s going to come from prototyping, from experimenting and moving things around, and from showing what works.”

## CASE STUDY

## Finding Room for Adjuncts

Colleges' part-time instructors can sense respect—or a lack of it—just by looking around their work environment. No desk, computer, storage space, or place to have a private conversation with a student. Such conditions are common for adjunct faculty members who often work in a setting that makes them feel second-class.

The Community College of Baltimore County has managed, however, to convert a classroom on its Essex campus into a place where its part-time faculty members can feel appreciated and supported.

Refurbished at a cost of about \$8,000, the room now has seven workstations with phones, file cabinets, and desktop computers. It also features a meeting table to encourage collaboration, a lounge area with comfortable seating, and a desk off in a corner for private conversations. The room's multi-function printer stands ready to spit out materials needed for class. Instructors who need to store books or other belongings can lay claim to one of sixteen metal lockers. Bookshelves hold a small library offering guidance on how to improve teaching. A large refrigerator keeps lunches cold. A Keurig coffee machine dispenses java.

The room's design reflects its goal of "welcoming adjunct faculty to a space that is theirs," said Dallas Dolan, the college's assistant dean for faculty training and development. She said the room's sign-in book shows that it generally has been used by 8 to 14 instructors a day since opening in September.

"I really loved it from the time I came to know about it," said Raja Khreishi, a part-time chemistry instructor who previously shared "a very tiny room" with three other instructors. That room lacked furniture other than desks and chairs and "There was no space for a student to sit," she said. Printing instructional materials required a trip to the campus's print shop.

The college calls the new room a Center for Adjunct Faculty Engagement, based on hopes that giving instructors access to it will make them more effective in the classroom. It is one of two such centers that the three-campus college plans to create with grant money awarded by Achieving the Dream, a nonprofit dedicated to improving student success at the nation's colleges. A similar center is slated to open at the college's Catonsville campus by summer.

Dolan said the need for the facility became evident three years ago, when the college surveyed instructors in its English and computer information systems departments and gauged their space use. Only one in eight of the adjunct instructors who responded had access to even a shared office. Often such offices are housed in academic departments that lock up outside regular business hours, making them of little use to adjuncts who teach classes at night or during weekends. Some academic departments make workspace available on a first-come, first-served basis but limit its use to instructors in that discipline.

Academic departments continue to make such accommodations available, Ms. Dolan said. But at the new center, open all the time, "Everyone feels comfortable."

# THE PATH FORWARD

Across higher education, institutions are rethinking the fundamentals of their campuses, all in the name of student success. Much of this work has its roots in the aftermath of the Great Recession, when colleges were looking to leverage technology to cut costs. On some campuses the focus went into overdrive after 2011, when Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) prompted universities to beef-up their teaching and learning centers and in some cases marry them to information-technology departments to get courses online and reexamine pedagogical methods.

These efforts have resulted in revamped introductory courses, reorganized orientation and student advising, professors trained in active learning, new living-learning communities within residence halls, and predictive analytics to improve retention and graduation rates.

But largely off limits to this innovative mindset, yet critical to student success, are the spaces on campuses where faculty and students interact. One key reason the faculty office hasn't evolved much is that most campus officials see them as nothing more than required space in a building—a bunch of boxes on a set of blueprints.

Instead, college leaders and professors need to think of faculty offices more broadly, as spaces to encourage greater interaction with students to improve their chances of success. This paper suggests a variety of strategies and approaches that designers and architects, in consultation with campus planners, might want to take, including close-by classrooms to creating open, collaborative meeting spaces in other places on campus, such as the library.



**College leaders and professors need to think of faculty offices more broadly, as spaces to encourage greater interaction with students to improve their chances of success.**

Whatever approach campuses adopt, reevaluating the basic functions and location of the faculty office won't be easy. But based on my research, there are three important things campus leaders can do to build support for new workspaces.

First, outline the goals of new spaces, whether it's a new building being constructed or renovations to existing space. Faculty members who believe the space was designed to promote student success or increase collaboration are more likely to support the final design.

Solicit input from all constituencies including faculty, students, and the staff members who work in these areas. Focus less on the particulars of the final space and design



esthetics and instead structure questions that get at the work that needs to be done in these spaces. *Who is there (or should be)? How do they work? When do they work?* Go see actual workspaces on other campuses or outside of higher education.

Second, allow some level of personalization by encouraging different ways to organize the space. That might include a combination of shared and private offices and open spaces. Personalization can also happen within the confines of the final space. Make the placement of the furniture in offices less systematic to reflect the needs of individual faculty members. In shared spaces, allow students and faculty members to rearrange furniture in different configurations to accommodate their needs at a particular time.

Finally, discuss openly the tradeoffs in the design and negotiate with faculty members. If professors want private spaces, they might need to be smaller. If they want a window, they might need to share the space with others. If they want offices where they are less likely to be interrupted, then they could hold office hours in open spaces elsewhere on campus.

As the faculty changes in composition, with more part-timers and a generation of professors soon to retire, so should the places where—and how—they work change. On most campuses student success is now a top priority. Essential to that success is interaction with faculty members, not only to help students have fulfilling lives during college but after as well. In the future, colleges and universities must continue to improve how they work with students—both inside and outside the classroom—to create spaces where that interaction can take place.

---

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Analysis for author by Sightlines, the facilities-consulting group.

<sup>2</sup>Hauge, Åshild Lappégard. "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three Identity Theories." *Architectural Science Review* 50, no. 1 (2007): 44-51.

<sup>3</sup>National Student Clearinghouse, Snapshot Report, First-Year Persistence and Retention, June 12, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>4</sup>Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson (1987) "Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education" *American Association of Higher Education Bulletin* vol.39 no.7 pp.3-7.

<sup>5</sup>In research, the percentage of students who have reported never visiting faculty members has ranged from 23% to 66%.

<sup>6</sup>Whitney Griffin, Steven D. Cohen, Rachel Berndtson, Kristen M. Burson, K. Martin Camper, Yujie Chen & Margaret Austin Smith (2014) Starting the Conversation: An Exploratory Study of Factors That Influence Student Office Hour Use, *College Teaching*, 62:3, 94-99.

<sup>7</sup>Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Jennifer Berdan Lozano, Melissa C. Aragon, Maria Ramirez Suchard, Sylvia Hurtado. "Undergraduate Teaching Faculty: The 2013–2014 HERI Faculty Survey," Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles. 2014

<sup>8</sup>Education Advisory Board, "Recalibrating Allocation and Size of Faculty Offices," *Facilities Forum*, EAB, 2016, pp. 65-81

<sup>9</sup>Chung, Carl, and Leon Hsu. "Encouraging Students to Seek Help: Supplementing Office Hours with a Course Center." *College Teaching* 54, no. 3 (2006): 253-58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27559279>.

# Steelcase®

## EDUCATION

Steelcase Education is focused on helping schools, colleges, and universities create the most effective, rewarding, and inspiring active learning environments to meet the evolving needs of students and educators. Using an insight-led approach, we design solutions for the many spaces learning happens, from classrooms and libraries to in-between spaces, cafes and faculty offices. We have a passion for understanding how learning best takes place and how smarter, active learning spaces can help.



