

Chapter 18

The Case of a Curriculum–Driven Experiential Learning Lab for Business Students

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The chapter presents the case of collaborating to create a 21st-century learning space in the College of Business at a mid-sized comprehensive university in the Midwest (U.S.). The space is an experiential learning lab, designed for collaborative, hands-on learning to develop business acumen, innovative and integrative thinking, and communication skills. The space supports key elements of a new curriculum for business students as well as a learning space for entrepreneurship classes. The combination of the learning goals, pedagogy, and physical environment give the space its distinctiveness. This case highlights guidelines applicable to other educators considering the creation or adaptation of spaces intended for creative collaboration and experiential learning. Future directions include identifying best practices for space use, improving formative and summative assessment tools, and evaluating the extent to which the unique space enhances learning.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an example of the collaborative development and use of a 21st-century learning lab in a College of Business at a mid-size, comprehensive state university. The space is an experiential learning lab, designed for collaborative, experiential learning and innovative thinking. It supports a series of experiential learning labs that are key elements of a new BSBA (Bachelor of Science in Business Administration) curriculum and provides the learning space for the college's interdisciplinary entrepreneurship minor. The perspective taken in the case description is the view of someone in a leadership position whose primary goal is learning and curriculum advancement. That is, the case is not written from the viewpoint of a space designer, a technologist, an expert in learning psychology, or a financial supporter, but as someone who has integrated understandings of these areas into decisions about the *use* of the space. The objectives of this case study are to describe how current use of a new experiential learning lab came about, the learning goals and pedagogical aims and how they reflect emerging best practices for 21st-century learning, future plans for the evolving space, and lessons learned that may be generalizable to other educational institutions.

Since the early 20th century, traditional early childhood through high school education has operated under an efficiency of production model with a Lockean “empty vessel to be filled” philosophy and behaviorist orientation (Lillard, 2007). This has carried over into higher education, despite contemporary understandings from cognitive science and constructivists like Dewey, Piaget, or Montessori who view individuals as actively constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it (Halpern & Hakel, 2003). Brown (2005) describes constructivist learning as being “characterized by a *demand-pull* rather than the traditional supply-push mode of building up an inventory of knowledge in students' heads” (4.46). Pedagogy that facilitates this type of learning includes the use of hands-on, experiential, and problem-based learning, instructional approaches facilitated by nontraditional learning spaces.

BACKGROUND OF INSTITUTION AND COLLEGE

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) is a mid-sized, comprehensive, public university in northwestern Ohio. The College of Business has about 1,400 undergraduates in the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) program. To complete the BSBA degree, students take a set of required core courses, plus courses in a chosen specialization such as Accounting, Economics, Finance, Infor-

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