Assessment and Research in the Pilot Spring 2015 Semester

Welcome to the pilot semester of the Northwest Quadrant Active Learning Classrooms!

All spring 2015 Northwest Quadrant Active Learning instructors and students will be invited to participate in two studies designed to provide cross disciplinary results that will guide all future aspects of the ALC initiative. The first, Impact of Technology, Pedagogy and Learning Spaces on Student Learning in UWM North West Quadrant Active Learning Classrooms is conducted by the NWQ ALC Assessment committee comprised of John Berges, Deb Siebert, Kelly Kohlmetz, Anja Blecking, and Anj Petto, and joined by new committee members in spring.

The second, Critical Thinking in Active Learning Classrooms: When Course Design and Space Collide is a grant awarded by the national Professional and Organizational Development Network to Connie Schroeder of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning designed to study the impact of seven traits and five assignment factors found to provide gains in critical thinking in active learning classrooms impact their learning. This can be done through a brief, welcome letter sent prior to the first week of classes. (Please use this link for a Welcome Letter template [link inserted] that you can modify, revise, or send in advance to your class list via D2L or based on your PAWS registration).

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**NWQ ALC User’s Group**

The ALC Committee and Center for Excellent in Teaching and Learning (CETL) is hosting a NWQ ALC instructor Users’ Group on several Fridays 12:30-1:30 in NWQ ALC 1921 during the first half of the spring pilot semester 2015. The purpose of these informal gatherings is to exchange successful strategies, raise issues and share questions with other instructors and direct instructors to resources and each other. There will not be a formal program or workshop unless otherwise announced. Please join us!
How Do We Prepare Students for an Active Learning Classroom?

By Megan Haak and Connie Schroeder
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Enderis 127 Active Learning Classroom
12/04/2014
Course: ED POL 506, Thursday evenings 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Fully F2F

Megan Haak, instructor for ED POL 506 in fall 2014, taught in an active learning classroom in Enderis and questioned her students about both their expectations and reactions. Keep in mind that this classroom experience is used to prompt reflection on the space and course attributes as instructors prepare for the Northwest Quadrant ALCs. The NWQ ALCs differ in some aspects than the Enderis room discussed below. Megan has graciously shared her discussion with students about their active learning experience.*

What did students expect from the Enderis active learning classroom?
Most of the students had never heard of an active learning classroom and had no idea of what they expected. Many felt that we were in the room because it was the only room available for the class and thought perhaps we were in the room by ‘luck of the draw’.

Given that students will not be aware that they are registered for an active learning course, should they be informed in advance or on the first day? Others might argue that no specific alert is necessary.

Our recommendation is to create as much transparency as possible regarding your expectations of their role, increased responsibility for preparation for class, and clarify how the learning environment will impact their learning. This can be done through a brief, welcome letter sent prior to the first week of classes. If you choose not to inform them in advance, what are your thoughts for resetting expectations on the “first day?”

In addition, instructors may want to create a simple, five question pre-survey (recommended for every course) that asks specific questions about the learning in the space, for example:

Describe the learning space and technology.

How do you think this active learning classroom will affect your learning?

Have they ever had a course in an active learning space with moveable tables, small group seating, and a reliance on interactive learning in groups.

Have they had a course in which a significant portion of the class time was invested in interactive learning and group work?

What do they like or dislike about group work?

The answers could be used as discussion starting points on the first day. Pre-surveys are helpful if everyone does them, so building pre- and post-surveys into the course points is important and letting students know what they are worth is an incentive. If not using a pre-survey or welcome letter, how will you allot time on the first day to introduce students to the space and what it means for their learning and your course design?

What were some of their reactions to the actual space and furniture?

The students felt the active learning classroom table ‘pod’ seating provided closer proximity and led to ‘honest dialogue’ among classmates. The portability of the chairs and swivel capabilities provided by the chairs were applauded.

When asked about the chairs and colors of the chairs, students felt the colors may have led to increased engagement with the class. They loved the comfort level of the chairs and a few found the bright color of the chairs a bit distracting. The lighting in the room was commended as the dimmer switch allowed for a more relaxed and intimate setting and less fluorescent lighting was noted as a good thing to relax the atmosphere and make it less intense.

When asked why most of the students sat in the same seat all semester, they indicated it was due to comfort level and having a specific seat that was always theirs. The students indicated they enjoyed the tables with wheels for movability purposes, but a few tripped over the hinges on the locking mechanism and recommended that be changed. When asked whether assigned seating would be important all students vehemently declined having any type of assigned seating, however, a few did indicate that perhaps asking students to switch tables mid-way through the semester to know other classmates better might be a good idea.

How did Megan’s students react to the technology available?

One student pointed out that all three whiteboards located in the room were initially a bit confusing and resulted in not quite knowing where to look or which screen to look at. Another student, however, suggested she liked the placement of the screens so she could take notes during a lecture and still see the screen. Another student felt the technology in the classroom felt a bit ‘aggressive’, especially regarding the size of the room.

Some interesting student thoughts about communication…

When asked about marketing an active learning classroom to other students on campus, students recommended having information available on ‘Rate My Professor’ website to provide narratives about the classroom to other students who might be interested in taking a course in an active learning classroom. One student suggested in the schedule of classes where the course description is that the instructors should indicate the course is in an active learning classroom. Another student recommended that the use of ‘FaceTime’ for expert discussions be included in the classrooms, as the technology is available to have someone give a distance-presentation to the course.

Overall, students felt the active learning space increased their engagement, increased their level of comfort, increased their learning and most were very satisfied with the usage of the room.

*Formal assessment measures are in place for the pilot of the Northwest Quadrant active learning classrooms and will be reported summer of 2015.
Resources: Active Learning Classrooms Research and Video Collections

CETL invites you to explore our D2L collection of links on active learning classrooms and view clips of ALC spaces at institutions across the country. We have many research studies and articles that present the impact of ALC spaces and technology on student learning. We will feature a variety of these resources in each newsletter. Each spring NWQ ALC instructor has been added to our large D2L repository housing all of our active learning and active learning classroom articles and studies. You can access this repository under your D2L Home Page. Scroll down your list of courses and click on « Ongoing »—Academic Affairs, Active Learning Classroom Resources. Please contact Connie Schroeder connies@uwm.edu if you have particular resources that you need.

Learning from Links...

- **U of Delaware** [http://www.udel.edu/inst/resources/sample-problems.html](http://www.udel.edu/inst/resources/sample-problems.html)
- **U of IOWA** [http://tile.uiowa.edu/content/about-tile](http://tile.uiowa.edu/content/about-tile) (6:09)
- **Duke-NUS Medical School**
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhFGEjTOe](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhFGEjTOe)
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gW_M426V2E0&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gW_M426V2E0&feature=youtu.be)
- **Iowa State University** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ieTlfXaiC](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ieTlfXaiC)

- **Problem-based learning**
- **sample problems by discipline**
- **Overview of ALC**

- **Team-based learning Instructor Role-Criminal Justice** (4:02)
- **Video 2 - From Knowledge to Application (3:46)**
- **Video 3 - Learning to Trust the Method (3:44)**
- **Story in Human Biology Course**
- **Team-based learning in a large class (150)**
- **Dr. Kristen Hessler, UAlbany Assistant Professor of Philosophy**

- **Dr. Monica Lamm, Associate Professor in Chemical and Biological Engineering Team-Based Learning in Chemical Engineering (7:53)**

Forms, Maps, and Applications

- **General Link and Course Application Forms** [https://www4.uwm.edu/cipd/Partners/active-learning-classrooms.cfm](https://www4.uwm.edu/cipd/Partners/active-learning-classrooms.cfm)
- **Floor Plans** [https://www4.uwm.edu/cipd/Partners/upload/NWQA_LCFurnitureLayout-2.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/cipd/Partners/upload/NWQA_LCFurnitureLayout-2.pdf)
- **NWQ Map** [https://www4.uwm.edu/cipd/Partners/upload/ENTIRE FLOORNWQ-1st-Floor-Active-Learning-Location-1.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/cipd/Partners/upload/ENTIRE FLOORNWQ-1st-Floor-Active-Learning-Location-1.pdf)
Whom Do I Contact?

- **Technology/Classroom Support:** classroomhotline@uwm.edu, 229-2382
- **Ad Hoc Event Scheduling:** ROAR www.uwm.edu/roar, roar@uwm.edu
- **Website:** Matt Russell; Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), Golda Meir Library E 178
- **Course Design:** Connie Schroeder, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), connies@uwm.edu; 229-5764; Golda Meir Library E 179
- **Assessment:** Connie Schroeder, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), connies@uwm.edu; 229-5764; Golda Meir Library E 179

### ALC ROOM USE POLICIES

#### Room Set-Up

Tables should remain in their current positions for now as work is being down with the cables. All chairs should be reset to the standard configuration at the end of each class. The standard configuration for each room is displayed in a laminated floorplan in each room near the doorway.

#### Technology

Please log off the instructor computer and student laptops at the end of each class. If you are the last person to use the room for the day, please turn off all technology.

#### White Marker Board Use

Only the **EXPO BOLD COLOR DRY ERASE** markers provided can be used on the marker board paint on the walls. Do not use any cleaning solvent of your own. Contact Classroom Support with concerns.
The Code for the locked instructor console cabinet is #030820. Access it through the instructor console. Please do not share with students.

- At this time, moving the tables is not conducive to the current cable and microphone situation. This is being worked on. Please return the seating to the floor plan posted on the wall near the door in each room. Contact Classroom Support X2382.
- Markers will be stored in the locked instructor cabinet. Please return them to this location after your class.
- Please turn off the technology after you are finished with your class.
- Document cameras and a Stylus are present rooms or available through Classroom Support.
- Classroom Support will be very near at hand during the first weeks of the semester. Please call if you need assistance.
- The classrooms remain unlocked until the final class is over.
- More hallway signage is going up in the NWQ.
- The instructor touch panel will not work Mon. due to a technical issue – use the touch panel but not walk with it.
- Instructor User Group for exchanging questions, strategies, etc. in Friday Feb. 13 12:30-1:30 NWQ 1921.
- Students will log in on the laptops provided as they do on UWM computers.
- Signs in the rooms by the door direct you to contact numbers for help.

You will receive recruitment letters inviting your participation in two studies of this pilot semester. Please review the instructor consent letters in the envelope packet that soon will be placed in your classroom. A very brief PowerPoint series of slides will be sent to you AND placed on your classroom Desktop for you to show to your students as you hand out their consent letters. After signing and collecting student letters, place your own and student consent letters in the envelope and set them in the locked cabinet above the instructor console OR walk them across the hall to PASS and place in the ALC box.

Instructors often ask, how can I get students to move beyond debating a position they already held or researching evidence for a solution they assumed was best without examining multiple perspectives? The challenge to get students to “walk around the problem” before pursuing one “right” answer gets to the heart of critical thinking. Students often want to get to the answer, get it quickly, and get it right – and even leave their thinking out of it! The Association of America’s Colleges and Universities engaged teams of faculty across the United States to develop a series of rubrics. The critical thinking rubric they developed stems from the following definition:

**Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.**


How do we get students there?

One very effective learning exercise by Johnson and Johnson and used throughout the U.S. as well as here at UWM is **Structured Academic Controversy**. Through a series of steps, two pairs examine an issue from different perspectives and evidence, culminating in a consensus step that encourages them to sift through the arguments and recommend a position examined, formulate a new position, or construct a synthesis of ideas. Instead of digging their heels into one viewpoint from the start, students have to shift their point of view to walk around the problem from more than one vantage point or set of evidence. What’s ideal about the strategy is that the instructor can make it as intensive and rigorous as they wish, stretching it into several weeks or complete it in one class session. Students can be assigned pre-collected “evidence” by the instructor or find their own, depending on the time and skills the instructor want students to invest or acquire. I’ve seen and worked with multiple disciplines here at UWM in which Academic Controversy has worked beautifully. Try it out and let us know how it worked.

Find several clear steps, videos, and discussions here:
**http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/sac/what.html**
**http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/sac/what.html**

-Connie Schroeder, Ph.D.
  Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Do you have an Active Learning Strategy to share for the next Tool Box? Send your strategy to [connies@uwm.edu](mailto:connies@uwm.edu)