

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN FOR A HARVARD UNDERGRADUATE LIBRARY TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACE

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WHO USES THE REDESIGNED ROOM MOST, AND WHY

Students use it evenings and weekends for group work, plugging their laptops into the pucks and displaying their screens on the big displays.



The white boards are used so much that it was readily apparent more were needed; "white walls" were added to the room and these can be moved easily as needed.



So far, librarians use the room by displaying from an instructor's station with students following along on their laptops.



THE BACKGROUND

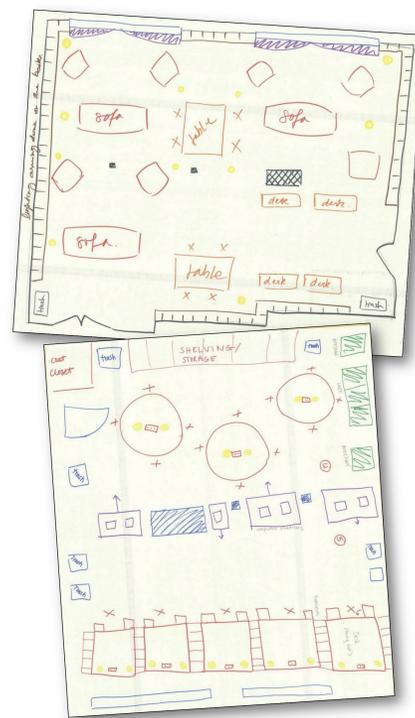
In 2010-2011, LaGuardia and Farwell Blake participated in two CLIR Participatory Design Workshops led by Nancy Fried Foster.

They returned to Harvard fired up with enthusiasm about the use of participatory design in redesigning / repurposing library spaces.

A library electronic classroom in Lamont Library, an undergraduate library serving Harvard College, needs updating; the hope is for it to be used for library instruction and as a student group study space when not being used for library classes.



THE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES



A focus group: LaGuardia facilitates a focus group of librarian teachers to hear what they want in the classroom (their needs are simple and few: a computer, projector, and mobile furniture, lots of electrical outlets).

A participatory design workshop: LaGuardia, Farwell Blake, other librarian teachers, and a senior planner from Harvard's Office of Physical Resources and Planning, conduct a participatory design workshop using the methodologies taught by Fried Foster. Undergraduates who participate are freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Workshop team members conduct students to the space to be redesigned, then ask them to draw what their ideal study and learning environment would be.

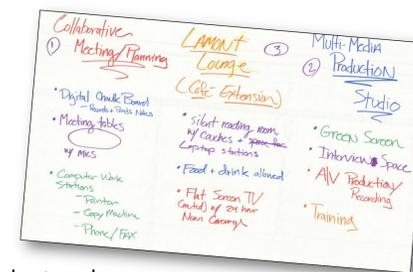
Analysis: Workshop team members individually debrief students about their drawings, then the workshop team collectively record and analyze the data from the students, developing a series of necessary and desirable features for the redesigned space, which included:

Necessary:

- comfortable, mobile furniture that can be moved easily
- numerous electrical outlets
- wireless connectivity

Desirable:

- attractive furnishings, with soothing colored walls and attractive drapes and artwork
- movable whiteboards



THE RESULTS

Here's what the redesigned space looks like:



LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE

You may design a space for one kind of use, and the users of that space may embrace it for entirely unforeseen reasons.

It's very hard to design a space with multiple uses that will make everyone happy.



In planning, it is probably best to plan for the main goals of the space use, and design according to those needs rather than trying to make everyone happy.

It's a great thing to involve campus planning staff in any redesign efforts as early as possible; that was the most important development that came out of this experiment.

Nancy Fried Foster and the CLIR Participatory Design Workshops she facilitates are amazing! Not only did the PD techniques work well, but Nancy made herself available to consult during the workshop processes.

