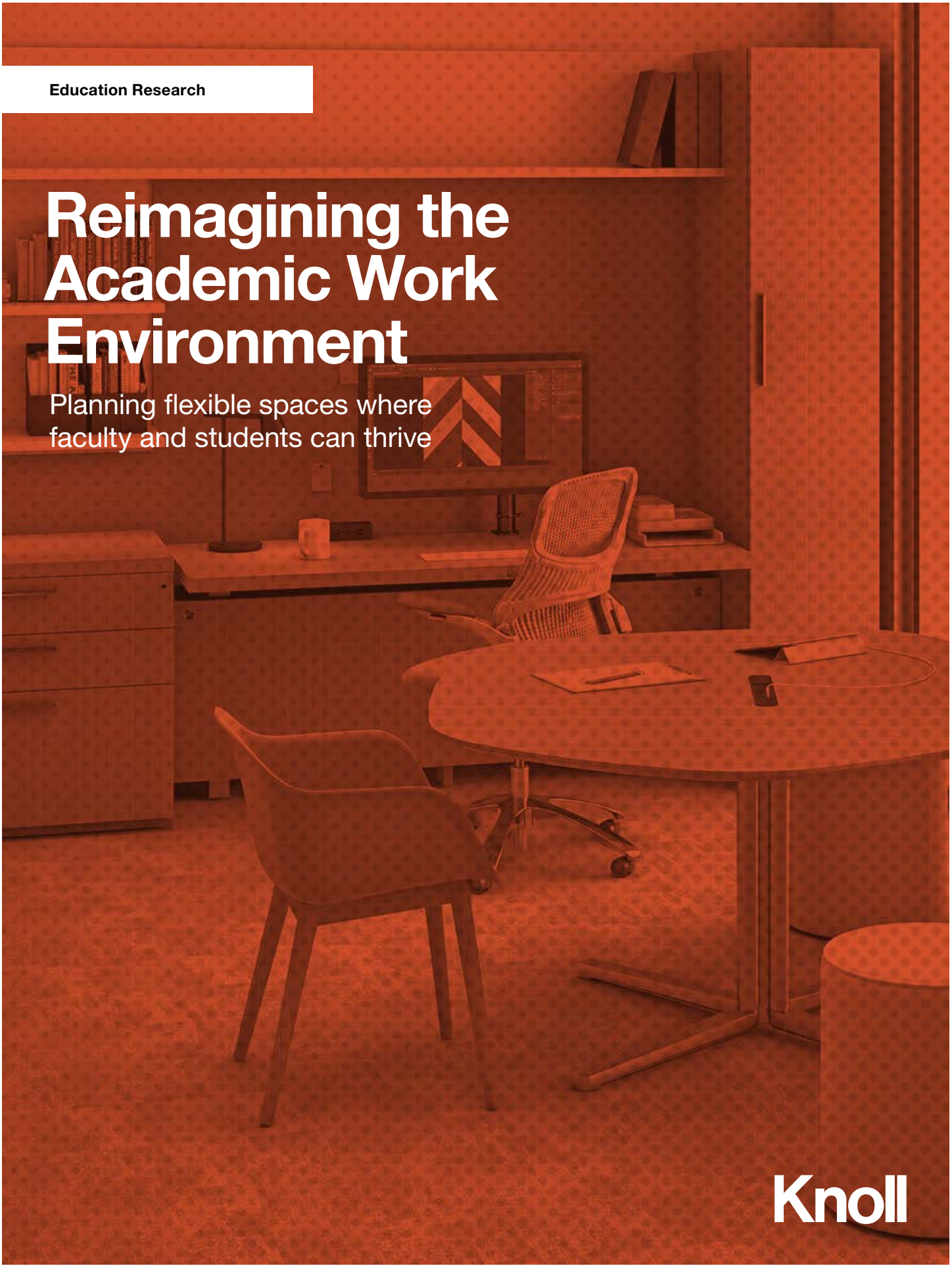
Education Research

# Reimagining the Academic Work Environment

## Planning flexible spaces where faculty and students can thrive



Knoll

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## Planning flexible spaces where faculty and students can thrive

The pandemic accelerated a shift away from traditional campus work models and toward new planning paradigms that offer greater flexibility, agility and efficiency.

Higher education institutions recognize and value the importance of the work environment for faculty and staff, as well as the amount of campus space devoted to this function. Yet moving away from the traditional private office model—typically an underutilized asset—is a complex proposition. Competing perspectives and space limitations make it challenging to change the office status quo. This white paper explores how to design and plan faculty offices and campus workspaces that align with instructor and student needs while fulfilling institutional objectives. This paper also stresses the importance of implementing change management practices in the process.

### Key Takeaways

- Office space typically encompasses the second-most square footage on a campus (after residential space) yet has one of the lowest utilization factors, creating a dilemma for institutions that want to optimize their space.
- The need for students to connect with their professors can conflict with faculty desires for quiet, private work areas for research.
- Faculty have a number of responsibilities in addition to teaching, not all of which need to be performed in a private office setting.
- New planning paradigms, including sharing offices and splitting conference and work areas, can solve space utilization issues and better serve students.
- Implementing a free address (unassigned) approach for faculty offices and administrative spaces can be done successfully with a well-thought-out strategy that includes intentional planning, piloting and iterating.
- Change management is essential to a successful adoption of new programming and workplace strategies.

## Competing Perspectives of the Faculty Office

### The Student Experience

Imagine a student who is too intimidated to attend office hours. College students are keenly aware of the power dynamic between their teachers and them. Professors are typically older, titled and powerful—attributes that can make students hestitant to approach them outside of the classroom. Students may worry that attending office hours will put them at risk of being reprimanded, dismissed or embarrassed. The physical act of walking into an instructor's office is often loaded with trepidation.

### Students Take Cues from Culture, Space and Design

Students subconsciously respond to proxemics—how space and cultural cues influence behavior. Office design, especially furniture placement, is a form of proxemics. "The arrangement of space often directly or indirectly suggests power, and the degree of equality or inequality in a relationship," according to *Psychology Today*.[1]

Office design influences whether students perceive a faculty member's office as inviting or unfriendly. Remember that these meetings have formal overtones, which makes them easy to-associate with going to a principal's office. It's no different than in corporate settings—the office atmosphere of an executive or a team manager emanates a psychological cue about openness. Furniture, layout, lighting, seating and decor collectively form an impression about the individual that resides within.

For example, a large desk in a professor's office may be used for collaborative purposes, or it may act like a physical barrier that keeps students at a distance. Visitor chairs that are lower than the professor's seat may also reinforce the notion that students are in a subordinate position. Even a spartan room may indicate that the teacher isn't invested in seeing students.

The challenge is that office hours are a crucial part of a student's college experience. Beyond providing immediate help to their students, professors offer a wealth of knowledge not covered by book learning. "You gain access to institutional resources. You gain access to a professor's network. You gain access to a professor's support for adventures and experiences that you may not even know about," points out Harvard professor Anthony Jack, on NPR's "Uncovering a Huge Mystery of College: Office Hours."[2]

### Advising on Soft Skills and Careers

Office hours are also a time when students can ask for career advice, which isn't typically covered in the classroom. A 2018 Gallup poll of 70,000 students showed that student well-being was directly tied to professional guidance.[3] "Students who say that at least one professor, faculty, or staff member initiated conversations with them about their career options expressed considerably more confidence in their workforce preparation. Similarly, students who said they often speak with faculty and staff members about potential career options are more confident their studies will lead to positive workforce outcomes," the Gallup report noted.

More importantly, office hours are a way for students to increase their overall academic achievements. Arizona State University created a video titled "Introducing FOH: Faculty Office Hours," which parodies a pharmaceutical commercial. The tongue-in-cheek message underscores the benefits of meeting with faculty. "Possible side effects of faculty office hours include seeing your professor as a human for the first time, understanding course content, increased GPA, a general sense of well-being, healthier sleep habits and improved confidence."[4]

### Impact of Faculty Office Design on Students

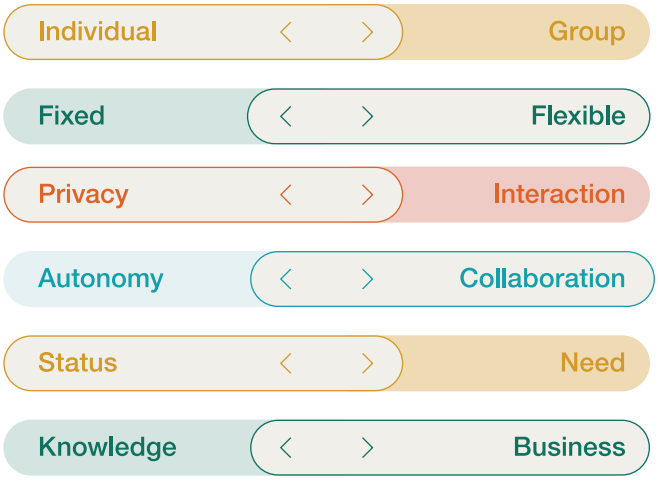
Cameron How, a 2020 graduate of the College of William & Mary with a BA in philosophy and management and organizational leadership, has always been motivated to use office hours. Even as a freshman, he saw the value of meeting professors outside of the classroom as a way to better understand a course. As a frequent visitor to faculty offices, How has experienced the way design can either inspire or dampen student-teacher rapport.

For example, How notes the significance of the seating arrangement. It makes a difference if the space feels like "an even playing field," where the student and professor are more like equals exchanging ideas. Additionally, a teacher who positions their desk lengthwise against the wall rather than dividing the room can seem less guarded. Ample lighting can also change the perception of an office: "Dim lighting can suck the mood out of a conversation," stresses How. Lastly, approachability is one of the most important features of a teacher's office.

"Personal items reveal the humanity of the professor. I can more easily connect with my teachers when there are pictures of family, pets, vacations, or framed tickets," How says. "For example, one of my philosophy professors had Minions everywhere as an homage to his kids. These mementos offer a segue into the conversation because I can point to that object and ask about it."

## Higher Education Environment Design is Rife with Conflicting Demands

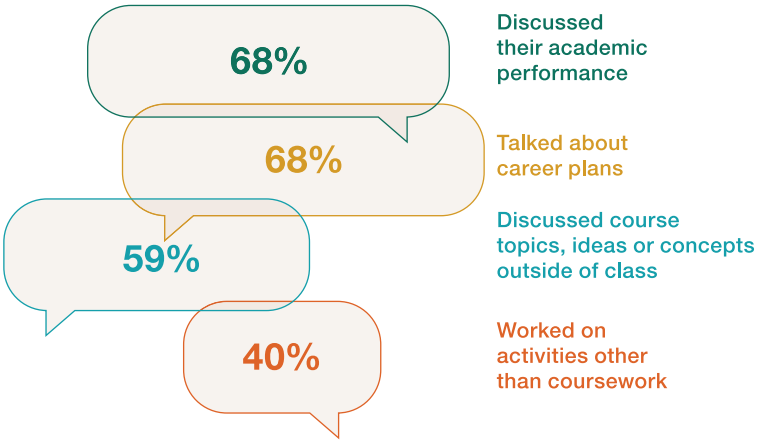
The needs of students and faculty are often in competition with institutional priorities when it comes to planning campus spaces.




Source: Loughborough University, 2009

## Student-Faculty Interaction Transcends Class Conversations

Faculty communication with undergraduates comprises much more than discussions of class topics.




Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019

Teachers often strategically decorate a permanent office to create a welcoming atmosphere. For example, Maria Cristina Santana, PhD, program director and associate professor of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Central Florida, has a travel-themed office: "I wanted to make my office look like a sitting room. There are conversation pieces everywhere. It's more comfortable

CASE STUDY

## Welcoming Students and Allowing for Expression and Personal Branding

**Dawn Edmiston, Clinical Professor of Marketing, College of William & Mary**

Dawn Edmiston's office is a lesson in personal branding. As a marketing professor with multiple teaching awards, Dr. Edmiston has intentionally created an ambiance that exudes hospitality. "My office is a physical representation of the university," she explains. "There's so much value in having someone just stop by my door. These conversations lead to new opportunities."

Edmiston is a faculty member of the Raymond A. Mason School of Business, which is located in Alan B. Miller Hall. Built in 2009 in the same Georgian style as the surrounding campus, this LEED Gold building has classrooms on the first floor and faculty offices on the third. This proximity encourages students and professors to cross paths outside of lecture hours.

"Faculty sometimes take office space for granted. But a messy, cluttered space does not exude openness. How can you have an engaging dialogue with students or colleagues if they are preoccupied by unorganized chaos in your office? An inspiring space can lead to inspiring ideas," Edmiston stresses. "I personally have a clean desk rule, so students aren't distracted by any disarray. My space is warm and welcoming because I've deliberately selected and arranged every aspect to reflect who I am as a professor and to create an environment where students feel supported."

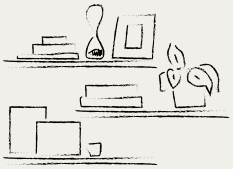
Edmiston takes full advantage of her office's position along a busy corridor. To beckon newcomers inside, she employs a suite of elements that collectively engage the five senses:

***"There's so much value in having someone just stop by my door. These conversations lead to new opportunities."***

DAWN EDMISTON
COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY

**Side chairs**
for guest seating

**Water pitchers**
so refreshments are always available



**Bookcases with mementos**
to serve as conversation starters

for students, and I feel happy and relaxed."[5] Her colleague Graham Worthy, biology department chair, has displays of animal vertebrae: "[My office] is who I am; it's where I come from. …It's not just a place you go to hide away and write."

### Faculty Needs

Research, mentor, collaborate, grade, plan, coordinate, recharge, communicate, discover—academics need space to fulfill their many daily responsibilities. This plethora of activities, however, makes it challenging for a single room to satisfy multiple purposes. How can all these tasks be accomplished within 140 square feet?

Institutions must first understand the range of activities that instructors undertake. Arthur Lidsky, president of the design firm DLC+A, presented on faculty offices in both 1991 and 2016 for the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP). Over that 25-year period, he noted that teachers require space for the following: administration, advising, classroom preparation, a "home base," meetings/conferences, personal activities, reading, research, teaching, tutoring and writing.[6]

Over the past two decades, the proportion of those tasks that need to be accomplished from a private office has been altered by the emergence of tech-enabled tasks such as email, digital publishing and video conferencing. Key changes include the following:

+ Research projects increasingly involve undergraduate and graduate students, which places a priority on spaces for group collaboration.
+ Remote collaboration, especially enabled by video calling, allows faculty to easily partner with colleagues at other institutions.
+ Online teaching has led to the advent of virtual office hours as well as the need for professional broadcasting equipment.
+ There is greater focus on student mental health, and faculty are often the first to interface with a student in distress.
+ The proportion of contingent faculty has continued to increase. Approximately 50% of all college teachers are classified as part-time, though the percentage can be even higher at individual institutions.[7]

Moreover, changing space demands, growing financial pressure and concerns about sustainability and carbon footprints have further accelerated concerns and conversations about the square footage that faculty offices command.

### Competing Functions of Faculty Offices

"Faculty offices are traditionally intended to fulfill two functions: concentration and consultation. But that's like mixing oil and water," argues Elliot Felix, founder of brightspot Strategy, a Buro Happold company. "The concentration can't really happen with open-door policies and constant interruptions. And a typical faculty office isn't big enough to meet with a group of students or collaborate with colleagues. So, it ends up failing to satisfy either purpose."

One way to optimize faculty offices for these competing needs is to create a visual boundary between teacher and student space. The back area is for the professor's individual work, with the computer desk dividing the room. The front portion is reserved for collaboration with students or other faculty, with a meeting table, chairs and a whiteboard.

Another option is to replace private offices with a variety of support spaces for specific work modes. This model is based on an activity-based design, which many corporate environments are already using. It mitigates the pressure of requiring a small room to support many tasks while providing educators with zones for specific objectives.

> *"Teachers need privacy but not isolation."*
>
> DAVID BROZ
> GENSLER

"We have found success in physically splitting the concentration and consultation functions—either adjacent to each other or distributed across a campus and beyond," adds Felix. "A shared quiet room, the library, or time at home helps faculty complete heads-down tasks. A separate conference space can better fulfill the role of office hours."

Some faculty agree that their offices would be more approachable if they were situated near where students typically congregate. Monica McLemore, a professor at the University of California, San Francisco, holds office hours over video conference apps since many of her students are commuters. Kate Szumanski, who teaches at Villanova University, moved her office hours to the library: "My office travels to where students are—office hours on the road. That's my kind of small way to say, 'Where are our students who need my services?'"[8]

"Teachers need privacy but not isolation. Conference rooms can resolve this because meetings aren't happening in a private domain," adds David Broz, education, civic and culture leader and principal at Gensler. "It's better if they are held in a space where there's proper decorum and transparency for both the teacher and the student."

### Institutional Priorities

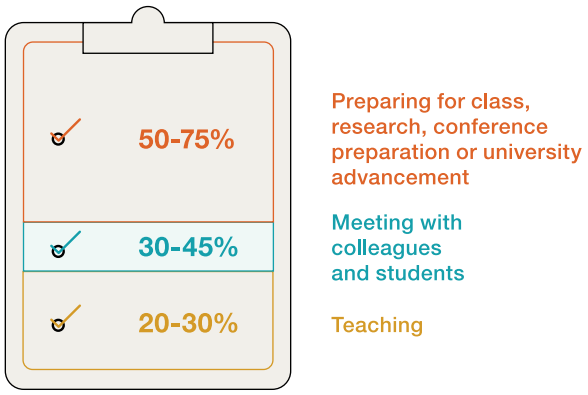
One of the difficulties of master campus planning is that it is always at a crossroads. Institutions can generally assume that their physical location not only will be in use decades down the road but also will need to expand. Leaders must weigh current programming needs against space allocation for an unknown future. Especially when staffing is linked to enrollment, it is difficult to forecast instructor spaces.

### One Size Does Not Fit All

From a design perspective, there's also no one-size-fits-all solution for faculty offices or campus workspaces. Every institution has a unique combination of academic culture, campus footprint, funding sources and strategic planning. Also, these factors vary significantly between public universities, private colleges, special focus institutions and community colleges. Quite simply, what works for teachers in terms of workspaces at one school is unlikely to translate to another school. Even within a single campus, the

## How Faculty Spend Their Days

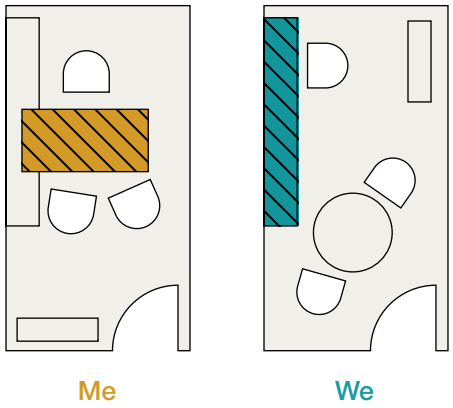
Faculty reported they spend the majority of their time outside the classroom on preparation, research and meetings.




Source: Boise State University, 2017

## Designating "Me" vs. "We" Space with Furniture Placement

Dividing the room with a desk creates a visual boundary between an instructor's individual workspace and collaboration area to meet with students or other faculty *(left)*. Positioning the desk along the wall rather than dividing the room can create a more welcoming, less guarded environment *(right)*.



## Contingent and Part-Time Workers Comprise Majority of Instructional Staff

Nearly two-thirds of instructors at degree-granting universities are part-time or contingent workers, many of whom do not have assigned offices.


Source: 2019 IPEDS HR survey component. Data compiled by AAUP Research Department. Part-time includes contingent faculty (42.9%), tenured (0.4% and tenure track (0.1%). Instructor totals exclude graduate assistants and staff without faculty status.

needs of different departments may necessitate that faculty offices are evaluated on a building-by-building basis.[9]

Yet it makes fiscal sense to assess the configuration of faculty offices. Architect Becca Cavel, associate principal, Bora Architects, found that offices accounted for 22% of space at Stanford University, 34% at the University of Utah and 20% at Portland State University (office space included faculty, departmental and administrative spaces). At all three institutions, the percentage of space devoted to offices exceeded classrooms and labs combined: 17% at Stanford, 13% at the University of Utah and 19% at Portland State University.

Because faculty office space is spread throughout a campus rather than consolidated in a single location, it can be difficult to grasp how much square footage it occupies. For example, if a school has 180 faculty members and gives everyone a 120-square-foot private room, a building with more than 20,000 square feet is needed. And that figure doesn't include corridors, restrooms and other support spaces, such as lounges. By comparison, 20,000 square feet is the average size of a commercial building in the U.S.[10]

### Low Utilization and High Percentage of Real Estate

"Faculty offices are also vastly underutilized—they are often occupied only 30 to 40% of a typical week and around 30 weeks per year," Felix points out. In fact, some studies have found utilization of faculty offices as low as 20%.[11] "From an environmental and financial perspective, faculty spaces are costly to build, heat, cool and power."

### Cultural Challenges

Maximizing faculty office square footage has the potential to generate significant cost savings and release valuable real estate. But this also leaves campus planners with many questions about how exactly to address faculty offices. For example, the open office trend isn't easy to translate into academic environments, both for cultural reasons and space considerations. Yet the need for spaces that support collaboration and project-based teamwork is only continuing to deepen, especially if schools want to offer students a peek into future workplace expectations.

"The primary challenge of faculty offices comes down to limited space—most institutions have to work with their existing square footage. But it's not only a funding issue. There's also a difference among individual universities about how interdisciplinary their culture is," notes Carol Crane, vice president, healthcare and education at Knoll. "Even if collaboration is part of the school's DNA, the way faculty spaces are distributed may not encourage spontaneous encounters between colleagues. A traditional faculty office simply isn't designed to effectively facilitate student collaboration or interdisciplinary coordination. Today, most collaboration is interdepartmental, but the trend toward corss-disciplinary buildings is one way to address breaking down departmental silos."

One place institutions can start is to carefully define what is owned space versus what is shared space. This exercise can help clarify how to shift the ratio of private to public space. Arthur Lidsky, president at DLC+A design firm, posits in his SCUP presentation:

"What is shareable, and who should share? Open office space or not? Should all full-time tenure/tenure-track faculty have an office with a window? Should all faculty offices have their own temperature controls? Should faculty offices be grouped by department, or distributed so that departments are intermixed? How important is department identity? Should the chair of a department have a larger office?"[12]

The best way to answer the following questions is to implement a workplace strategy with a change management process. This method is already used by institutions during department mergers, program expansions and rebranding campaigns. Change management allows everyone to feel integrated into and empowered by the process, which can ultimately lead to a smoother adoption of a new office concept.

CASE STUDY

## A Multifunction Office

**Derek Van Berkel, Assistant Professor of Environmental Informatics**
**University of Michigan**

**Derek Van Berkel's office exemplifies the conundrum of faculty space.** Van Berkel has a windowless private office that is roughly 14 by 10 feet. As a geographer and cartographer, he works on a powerful computer with dual monitors to produce models and simulations. Van Berkel's desk is not only positioned to face the door but also divides the room into "me vs. we" space. The meeting side of his office includes a table with chairs and a whiteboard. He has just enough room for a small bookshelf and filing cabinet.

"While the space behind my desk is more intimate, the rest is public," explains Van Berkel. "Because the majority of my students are female, I want them to feel safe and comfortable. The area near the door is clearly for meetings."

Like many faculty members, Van Berkel uses his office for a diverse range of tasks:

+ Research and writing
+ Advising
+ Office hours
+ Collaboration with colleagues
+ Meal breaks
+ Meetings with administrative staff

But his office doesn't provide enough space to fully execute his responsibilities. With a long and narrow office, even his single bookcase occupies valuable space. There's no space for a locker or coat rack. There are also not enough outlets, which means that power strips and wires create visual clutter. He even wishes he had a corner for a mini fridge so he could offer guests water or tea.

Van Berkel acknowledges that while the shift to digital research has made bulky items like bookshelves less necessary, it has not reduced the need for dedicated offices. Pen-and-paper tasks have merely been replaced by computer- and collaboration-intensive activities, which require plentiful available space.

"When we do multidisciplinary research and capstone projects, we typically have five to seven scientists working together. Even with a small group, everyone can't fit into my office comfortably," notes Van Berkel. "While faculty can book meetings rooms, there's rarely enough space or enough space at the right time."

> ***"While the space behind my desk is more intimate, the rest is public."***
>
> **DEREK VAN BERKEL**
> UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

## The Case for Flexible Workplaces

Since the spring of 2020, institutions of higher learning have reimagined their physical settings as well as their curricula in myriad ways, factoring in both in-person and remote learning and working with a wide range of the "in between." But in fact, the campus workplace had already been evolving, as leadership had worked to keep up with a shifting landscape, emerging technology and the greater mobility it brought—long before the pandemic changed the work model and population density of the campus community.

It is not uncommon to assume a primarily operational motivation for reimagining campus space. For example, the physical environment may be reworked in order to optimize real estate utilization, adapt to changing needs, control costs or reduce square footage per person, according to Carolyn Cirillo, workplace research manager at Knoll.

But there are often strategic reasons that organizations move to new physical-space models, she added. Goals might include accommodating a mobile workforce, driving innovation and creativity, breaking down departmental "silos" and improving employee engagement.

> ***"I think back to when I started out my career, and I really can't imagine doing that from home. I learned so much from the daily interactions I had with my mentors."***
>
> **ADEM GUSA**
> DUKE UNIVERSITY

In the university setting, some faculty are only on campus on teaching days, which might be one or two days a week. And post-pandemic, many institutions are allowing some administrative staff to work remotely indefinitely. Coupling existing strategic plans for flexibility with the acceleration wrought by Covid means that, just

as in other industries, an increasingly mobile workforce does not need dedicated workplaces in academia—especially in the heart of the core campus.

Additionally, as organizations around the world realized, the Covid-induced remote work experience proved that alternative work strategies can be a viable solution.

### Planning Strategies for Flexible Campus Workplaces

There are many reasons for an institution of higher learning to move toward a flexible workplace model: accessing and retaining talent, reclaiming underutilized space or fostering a university's core values, such as collaboration and commitment to workplace excellence.

The continuum of organizational and space flexibility drives choice and the user experience, according to brightspot Strategy's Elliot Felix. "For the flexible workspace in higher ed, it is helpful to understand the different dimensions of flexibility. It is about the people, but it is also about the place. When you're creating a flexible workplace, they really need to work in tandem."

+ Space Planning on Campus. Common strategies that can be used across higher education institutions, particularly where physical assets include older buildings, include making unused vacant space available to other employees or improving capacity by consolidating spaces. Flexible workplaces can lower an institution's operational expenses, and they can be more sustainable. This type of framework could also improve recruitment and retention by offering more choices to employees.
+ Bringing Change amid Tradition. Looking at a traditional setting with new eyes can sometimes be a "tough sell," especially where traditions run deep and there is the perception that change can be challenging given the diverse interests of the campus workforce. A well-researched approach that welcomes stakeholders into the collaborative process can turn strategy into success.

For example, the traditional-to-flexible workspace continuum includes the following:

+ Traditional 9-to-5 onsite jobs, where space is easy to organize and assign, but it is not very flexible or adaptable to the way that people work and live, or to accessing talent.
+ Flextime jobs, whereby the institution gives people flexible working hours and spaces, with shared space that's bookable—like hoteling or hot desk.
+ A merging of the two, with the flexibility to work from home, a coworking space, or anywhere else, enabling people to choose where and when and how they work.

### Getting Started with Flexible and Free Address Workplaces

During the pandemic, Knoll convened a roundtable of campus planners to share experiences and best practices in implementing flexible workplace strategies for faculty and administrators.

### Office Space Accounts for Largest Space on Campus

Office space surpasses residences, classrooms, labs, athletic facilities and all study and support spaces on campus.


**Other**

**5%** Support
**5%** Classroom
**4%** Library/Study
**3%** Inactive/Alteration
**2%** Healthcare

Source: Society for College and University Planning (SCUP), 2021

Panelists included Mike Carmagnola, director of project management and construction services at the University of Texas at Austin; Adem Gusa, assistant director of planning and design at Duke University; Peter Hirst, senior associate dean of executive education at MIT Sloan; and Elliot Felix, founder and CEO of brightspot Strategy, a Buro Happold company.

### Consider Workstyles, Not Just Job Functions

When planning space, a certain methodology can be considered. This can include such findings as how much time a certain "workstyle" spends in a fixed location and how much of that time is spent collaborating. Each style can have a kit of parts. Sometimes people who do a very different job have the same workstyle, and space can be developed accordingly. For example, one project manager might prefer to work primarily from home while another might prefer to be on campus, so they require different amounts of space.

For example, when the University of Minnesota considered how to reuse and convert space in a cost-efficient way, one solution was creating open shared space for faculty with a private suite. The space includes places for faculty to meet with students; faculty can both collaborate and concentrate in various available locations within the suite.

> *"As a director, I had to be first. My office was taken from the corner and put in the middle, with construction around me for a year. It was a contributor to building positivity."*
>
> MIKE CARMAGNOLA
> UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

### Recognize Personal Issues

Remember that change can be difficult for some, and workplace reimagination often involves trade-offs. So, while changing a predictable, traditional workspace and onsite schedule can be unsettling for some, the new plan can be a net positive. For example, while employees can be destabilized by not having a home base or predictability, they can also be empowered to work where and how they want.

### Plan of Action

The panel shared highlights and strategies from their own experiences of transitioning to a free address environment.

Reimagining the workplace is about giving people more choice, flexibility, satisfaction and engagement. Wherever an institution may be in their journey, some key recommendations can guide the rollout of a flexible university workplace.

*Start with a discovery phase.* Identify the people and places involved; assess needs in terms of space, IT and HR. At Duke, extensive surveys and space usage data were used in planning, according to Gusa.

*Define vision and goals.* This is a key time for recieving feedback, making adjustments and obtaining buy-in, such as MIT's focus on keeping the internal team closely involved throughout the process.

*Develop workstyles and forecast needs.* Use a holistic approach to assess how users work.

*Deliver solutions.* Leverage insights gathered in earlier phases; create the design concepts that meet the needs of various constituencies.

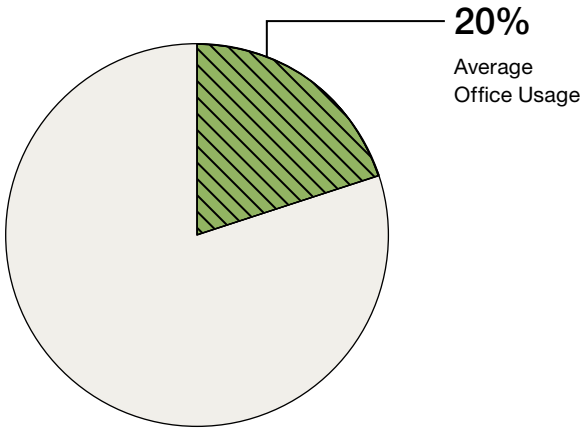
*Further distribute winning results.* Once concept and construction has been delivered, evaluate, refine and look at ways to scale up in the broader on- and off-campus community.

### Building Consensus in Your Plan

For higher education planners who aren't as far along in the process, involving campus stakeholders all along the way can help secure their support and investment. Focusing on "sellable" business aspects can help pave the way to engaging the broader workplace community and leadership. This was the strategy at the Center for Academic Medicine at Stanford University, where Promila Rastogi, director of transition strategies, used a "high touch" approach to engage and inform constituents, leading hard hat tours for interested parties throughout the multiyear process (see case study on page 15). The well-planned change management process eased the transition when it came to the actual move in, recalled Rastogi, since parties were well-informed of how the new flexible space (in which clinicians shared offices on A/B schedules) would work.

### Academic Offices are Poorly Utilized

Higher education faculty spend as little as 20% of their workday at their assigned desk.




Source: Herman Miller, 2018

### The Flexible Workplace: Terms to Know

| | |
|---|---|
| Flex Work | A company-implemented program where workers can choose to work at home or the office. Flex work often follows a set schedule (e.g., Tuesday/Thursdays onsite; Monday/ Wednesday/Friday remote). |
| Free Address | An environment with no seat assignments. |
| Hoteling | Nonreservable ("first come, first serve") desk sharing. |
| Remote Work | Working away from campus offices. This can include working from home, another campus location, a coworking space or a "third space," such as a coffee shop. |

For additional buy-in, Rastogi, along with Niraj Dangoria, associate dean of facilities planning and management, empowered individuals to each choose their own furniture layout from three available options. Scheduling and programming is left up to the individual departments, which makes accommodating schedule nuances easier when cycles may vary. Key benefits for flexible workplaces include the following:

+ Future capital and operational cost savings
+ Future-proofing the workplace
+ Investing in people and their productivity
+ Supporting future workstyles

In addition to involving external consultants and internal stakeholders, basic strategies to overcome challenges include the following:

+ Outlining cost versus benefit (the "business case")
+ Field trips to see other spaces
+ Learning from peers
+ Prototyping and iterating to test ideas
+ Piloting plans
+ Recruiting people who are ready to work in those spaces

**Converting to Flexible Workspaces Poses Some Challenges**

Campus planners warn that on the road to creating a strategic workplace plan, challenges will ensue, such as the following:

*Culture.* Hirst noted some skepticism about his MIT pilot among employees who hesitated to relinquish traditional private offices. He added that it is also about the culture that you want to create to support the organization. This is particularly relevant in academia, where being agile, innovative and creative is possible when people operate both independently and collaboratively using a goal-oriented approach.

*Leadership.* Another caution is to not discount the importance of getting the buy-in from campus stakeholders, whether faculty or administrative staff. Styles won't miraculously change with a new approach. With new norms and protocols, managers need to work differently. But once changes begin succeeding, stakeholders get excited and momentum builds.

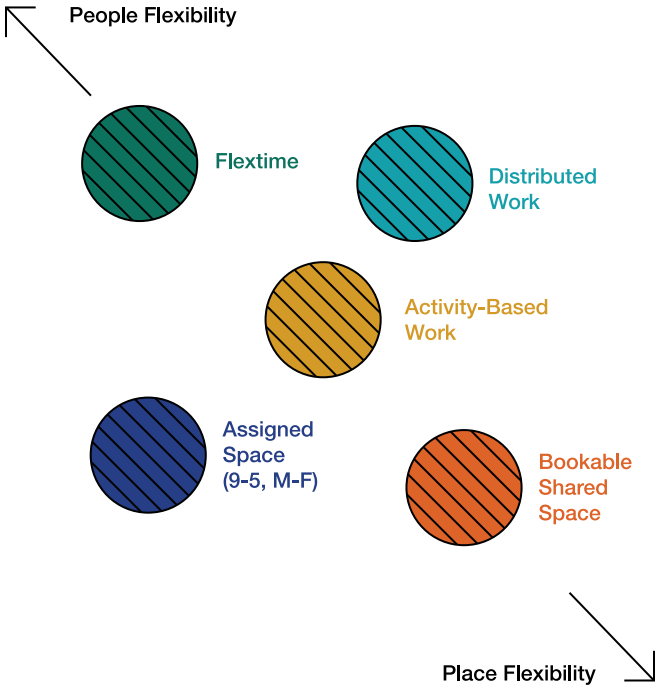
*Financial Burden.* It can also be expensive to undertake physical reconfiguration and set up the personnel procedures for integration onsite, partially remote and fully remote workers.

*Reallocation.* As Knoll researcher Carolyn Cirillo indicated, reimagining space might involve moving from traditional classrooms and lecture halls to spaces designed as studios for live remote learning or recording lectures and podcasts. These changes to the physical plant typically have to occur within the finite real estate of the existing campus infrastructure.

## The Role of Change Management

Any institution that wishes to diverge from the traditional faculty office model would do well to ease the shift. This is where change management can generate useful feedback, resolve points of contention and garner broad support. "The primary goal of

### Types of Flexible Workplaces




Source: brightspot Strategy, a Buro Happold company

stakeholder commitment (or 'change management') is to facilitate and sustain the enthusiastic acceptance and adoption of new strategies, technologies and processes," according to Deloitte.[13]

"Change management starts with an incredible vision that aligns with the institution's values and mission. Open communication, collaboration, cross-pollination and networking are part of the communication process," notes Gensler's David Broz.

In addition to a clear vision, institutions must "walk a mile in the shoes of those whose roles will change—the employee experience should be treated the same way as the customer experience," Deloitte research shows.[14] It is worth noting that employees have been conditioned to work a certain way; it's unrealistic to expect them to switch quickly and easily. Many businesses have learned this same reality when moving to open offices. When those impacted by a decision aren't consulted or even warned, acceptance of a new concept will be tepid at best.

"Any conversation about changing faculty offices shouldn't be framed as reducing square footage by a certain percent—it's about pivoting between me vs. we space," argues Broz. "If you have smaller individual offices, the saved square footage can go to collaborative areas. By rightsizing offices or moving some teachers to activity-based work zones, faculty benefit from added lounge areas for socialization and conference rooms for meetings."

A fundamental tenet of change management is to include staff in the process—an "everyone has a voice though not a vote"

philosophy. Initial input can be gathered through surveys and focus groups, which often reveal concerns at an early stage. The next step is to form a visioning committee with representatives across every faculty level, especially those "early adopters" who will champion change to their peers.

"Remember that faculty represent a large generational spectrum. A teacher is as likely to be a 22-year-old graduate assistant as an 80-year-old professor emeritus," Broz points out. "Because faculty attitudes about offices vary greatly among age, rank, and discipline, it's important to seek their input."

> ***"I like to joke that it took me a decade to get a corner office and 10 minutes in a key meeting to lose it. But I did so very willingly—because we absolutely love working in this flexible workspace!"***
>
> PETER HIRST
> MIT SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

Once the design phase begins, ongoing feedback can be gathered by presenting renderings, holding all-staff meetings and sending weekly updates. If feasible, debut a test version of the new office model that allows faculty to try out these modified settings before implementation. "Embrace relentless incrementalism to help achieve radical change—starting with a bold goal in mind and taking small steps relentlessly can build organizational capital, " recommend Deloitte advisors. If faculty feel heard and respected throughout the transition process, they are more likely to feel invested in the change.

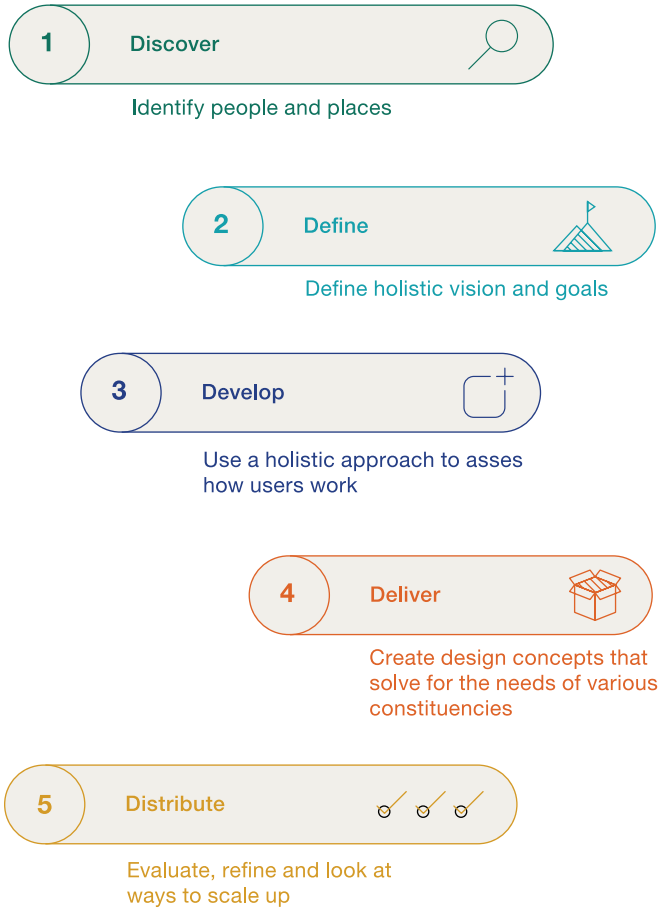
Without effective oversight, conflicting demands can lead to compromised design solutions that satisfy neither individuals nor the organization. Loughborough University found that the most successful projects adopted the following changes:[15]

+ Pilot initiatives
+ Training on use of space
+ Leadership by example
+ Effective user engagement
+ Workspace champions
+ Good dialogue and decision-making
+ Appropriate use of information and communications technology

Diane Stegmeier, founder and CEO of Stegmeier Consulting Group, suggests that obtaining buy-in for a workplace change requires a convincing business case.[16] Arming yourself with knowledge and lessons learned could increase your level of acceptance, noted Stegmeier, whose firm specializes in the usage of physical space and organizational effectiveness. She suggests the following:

+ Discard the belief that there is a "right time" for workplace change; by combining efforts with other initiatives you will slow down your approval process.
+ Anticipate the reaction of senior leaders and other stakeholders. Planning for their concerns can help you reduce apprehensions against a workplace change.
+ Make a specific request for what you need to support your proposed workplace strategy.

### Steps for Creating a Flexible Workplace




Source: brightspot Strategy, a Buro Happold company

## Looking Ahead

Campuses across the country are in various stages of—or perhaps just considering—the move toward flexible workspaces. There is no doubt that this shift can present challenges. But as the success stories of those who underwent a conversion on campus showed, it is possible to bring change to institutions that are typically steeped in tradition. What's more, it can lead to on- and off-campus benefits that will have a lasting impact by freeing up academic space on the core campus and supporting a collaborative workforce for the future.

### Design Strategies

While change comes slowly in academia, the pandemic accelerated many of the shifts that were already underway on many campuses. As a major user of campus real estate, faculty offices and administrative workspaces are ripe for change. Numerous strategies can be employed to rethink these spaces to make them functional for faculty as well as welcoming to students, whose success is contingent on close relationships with their professors. Whatever the strategies employed, the chances for success are greatly enhanced when implementation involves continuous research and change management while allowing for regular review and reiteration.

DESIGN STRATEGIES

1

**Place all transient faculty (part-timers, adjuncts and teaching assistants) at open or reservable desks.** Situate these desks in locations near natural light and amenities with multiple space options (e.g., work stations, lounge areas, huddle rooms and enclosed rooms). Ensure they have access to storage, printers, whiteboards, video conferencing and other technology.

2

**Encourage faculty to meet students in "third spaces," such as the library, unions and lounges.** Equip common areas with a variety of small tables and soft seating for casual conversations, with access to power sources and food and beverage options.

**Case Study: Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Population While Supporting Research at California State University, Monterey Bay**

Today's diverse student body comes with a variety of needs and experiences. Many students need to be coached in soft skills and institutional knowledge. A professor can make a lasting impact on a young life.

"I can take care of the subject knowledge," says George Beckham, associate professor of kinesiology at California State University, Monterey Bay, "but first-generation students often don't have the institutional knowledge. They may not know how to operate in academic spaces. They don't know the mechanics of a letter of recommendation, how to ask for help in class. Their study skills are often not as good as they can be. They don't know how to operate within those spaces."

Beckham also recognizes that not every student will reach out to him directly, so he makes it easy. In some classes, office hours are required. "It's an assignment, so they get points for coming to see us. It has the benefit that it forces each of us to make some small talk with them and get to know each other a little bit better, often leading to bigger conversations," he said.

Beckham relies on other strategies to foster connection, such as being approachable, kind and patient, which he finds is especially needed with first-generation learners.

"I think a lot of it starts within the classroom," Beckham says. "A lot of students are intimidated. They're afraid to come by," he describes. "So, I found that just spending a few minutes of every few classes just talking about the development of professional skills goes a really long way, particularly for those students."

"I want my students to get good jobs, and so those soft skills are going to help make sure that they do. We found that's really well received by employers in the area."

To support his diverse students, while also assuring that he has the necessary time and space for his focus work, Beckham employs a strategy of splitting concentration and consultation. He generally prefers to use his office for the quiet work and focus needed for his research. "The sheer number of demands on our time coming from so many different angles necessitates that we kind of retreat to our 'caves,'" he related.

When it comes to the all-important task of mentoring students, he will often meet them where they are. While most meetings take place in his office, "I can meet students at Starbucks. It doesn't matter to me," he says, as long as "I have somewhere I can lock myself away where nobody can get to me and I have all my resources."

Moreover, due to the nature of his research, which requires numerous large models and devices to test human performance and exercise, his office is also the safest location to store materials.

"When it comes to research, it takes time; it takes isolation. You have to have the space to bang your head against a problem until you figure it out. It's a lot more difficult to do that in 15-minute chunks as you're walking from class to class. By far the primary benefit of having an office is that it's somewhere I can walk away and get things done."

3

**Modestly reduce the size of private offices (e.g., from 140 to 100 square feet) and reallocate square footage for collaborative areas.** Provide touchdown space for staff before and after meetings, as well as for adjuncts with transient work patterns.


**Case Study: 90-Square-Foot Faculty Offices at Bowling Green State University**

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) is currently modernizing its College of Business, the Robert W. and Patricia A. Maurer Center. The project takes Hanna Hall, one of the oldest buildings on campus, and doubles its size with a 50,000-square-foot addition. The center is intentionally designed to support discovery-based learning.

The expansion will create an open, collaborative building filled with natural daylight. It's a stark contrast to the original structure, a late-1970s bunker with long, dark corridors. The old building also had traditional programming by floor. Students reported that they didn't feel encouraged or comfortable seeking out a professor on the third level.

With about 120 faculty and staff, it was necessary to reconsider how private offices fit into the center's new footprint. BGSU made a number of bold choices for faculty offices:

+ Reserved only for full-time teachers and upper administration
+ Reduced in size by roughly 35% to only 90 square feet
+ Feature glass fronts with sliding doors
+ Placed throughout all building levels rather than in one zone or floor

"Even departments are intermingled—an office for a marketing professor could be next to a colleague in economics or applied statistics. We also added open work areas that are not owned by any discipline," explains Kristi Peiffer, senior project manager of design. "This type of mixed programming creates collisions between faculty and students simply by walking through the halls."

To help ease the transition, office prototypes were constructed, and faculty were invited to provide feedback. Many were concerned about going from 140 to 90 square feet, but they were reassured once they could physically experience the new layout. Like touring a home for sale, this was a helpful exercise that allowed professors to envision a space for themselves. Another way to encourage faculty buy-in was through furniture. It was critical to select items that not only complemented the smaller space but actively supported educators and all their responsibilities. "Furnishings need to be a driving part of the conversation, not an afterthought," Peiffer stresses. "Look to your furniture manufacturers and see what creative solutions they have."

4

**Create a pod of open workstations, but include several conference rooms that are always available on a drop-in basis.**
Provide a mix of room sizes, work surfaces, enclosures and technology to accommodate hybrid meetings, individual heads-down work, two-person meetings, team gatherings and collaborative projects.

**Case Study: No Private Offices at the University of North Texas System's Newest Branch**

The University of North Texas System comprises of three unique universities. The first building at a new branch campus in Frisco, Texas is currently in the design phase and is projected to serve 5,000 students in the near term. To maximize dedicated student areas, the university is opting not to provide private offices for faculty in the new facility.

***"By giving our students a taste of corporate environments, we are helping them transition to future employers."***

MEREDITH BUTLER
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS SYSTEM

"There is a perception in the faculty community that an office is a must-have. But private offices can be a space hog when they are only used for a handful for hours every week," argues Meredith Butler, associate director of planning and development. "There are better ways to provide professors with workspace and storage while reallocating square footage to student spaces."

Faculty will be placed in an open office environment, which has the benefit of making them more approachable to students. The overall footprint will then include more learning laboratories and classrooms.

"It's all about enhancing the student experience. For example, if you give up four faculty offices, you can replace that square footage with a nicely sized huddle or project room. It changes the conversation when teachers understand what students are gaining," says Butler. "Frisco has also become a hub for major tech companies. By giving our students a taste of corporate environments, we are helping them transition to future employers."

5

**Ask faculty to share an office and alternate the days when they hold office hours.** Boost utilization while still accommodating privacy and storage needs by assigning more than one faculty member to a single space.

**Case Study: Private, Shared Offices in Wellness-Focused Stanford Center for Academic Medicine**

When it comes to planning workplaces in university settings, many institutions subscribe to the "one seat for one nose" philosophy. For example, a data analyst who spends 80% of their time at their desk is treated the same as a volleyball coach who spends 80% of their time on the court. The Planning and Design Team at the Stanford University School of Medicine had a different idea.

With faculty growth exceeding available space, planners were tasked with creating a new space to accommodate clinicians and researchers, who were then being housed in multiple locations, including a building deemed no longer stable for seismic reasons. Some departments had no offices at all; others had no place to collaborate.

Planners decided they would heed the lessons learned from the pandemic and implement a workplace strategy that more accurately reflected usage, overlaying it with a focus on well-being, respite and rejuvenation.

With burnout being a serious issue among the faculty, the approach very much drew upon the perspective of "How are we going to improve their quality of life?" related Niraj Dangoria, associate dean of facilities planning and management at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

Open in 2021, the 180,000-square-foot Center for Academic Medicine (CAM) will ultimately house some 4,000 people on its four floors. A wellness-focused strategy was the centerpiece of the design, beginning with the building's location, adjacent to the Stanford Arboretum, with plenty of windows to let in the light and glass walls throughout for enjoying views of nature, along with housing the offices of the newly created WellMD and WellPhD programs.

In order to attract and retain the world-class talent Stanford sought, planners decided to provide private offices to all clinicians and researchers. Enclosed spaces were also deemed critically important to manage the exponential increase in telemedicine appointments that the pandemic accelerated, rising from an average of 3,000 to more than 40,000 visits per month.

***The rub:*** Offices would be substantially smaller, and many would have to be shared. Standard private offices in CAM buildings are 80 to 90 square feet, and shared offices are 120 square feet. Comprising 70% of spaces, shared offices are planned for occupants on alternating "A/B" schedules, so they are rarely both in the office on the same day.

***The trade-off:*** While individual office spaces were compact, CAM would offer generously sized spaces and extensive amenities designed to not only streamline daily routines but also foster collaboration and community building across disciplines.

"The space was intended to create opportunities for faculty to meet, mix and mingle with peers from other departments, bringing the outdoors in as much as possible," described Promila Rastogi, director of transition strategies at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

Design, amenities and service points—including an onsite concierge, tech support and barista—are designed to improve quality of life, from the Great Room, a comfortable living-room-style setting, to the

Great Rounds, a conference area with high-end food service.

"There's a lot of natural light, which the older buildings don't necessarily have," commented Rastogi, "and while few offices have windows, extensive use of glass walls lets in light, and the lighting system reacts to the natural light as much as possible."

Numerous spaces are carved out for phone rooms and huddle rooms to accommodate faculty who prefer taking calls away from a shared space.

For departments that previously lacked dedicated workspace, having a new home—complete with height-adjustable desks, ergonomic chairs and storage—was a welcome improvement. For those who came from buildings where they had dedicated offices, compromise was necessary. But users have adapted to their new surroundings.

In fact, with its light, airy, nature-filled setting and open, amenity-filled spaces, the center has inspired future pilots with a similar flexible approach elsewhere on campus.

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**6**

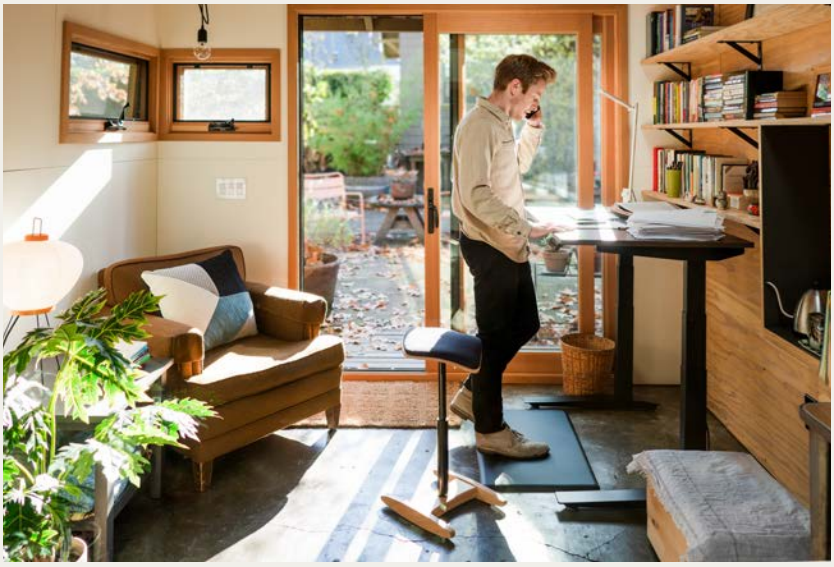
**Move to a hoteling model, where all desks or offices are reservable and shareable.** Ensure access to natural light and biophilia to create a pleasant atmosphere and support choice with a range of seating types and convenient access to power and large screens. Provide options to accommodate personal materials and daily supplies, including long-term project storage. Leverage technology to reserve spaces and monitor utilization trends.

7

**Leverage space as a service to provide short- and long-term flexibility, as well as close-to-home satellite options.** University-sponsored incubators, accelerators with corporate partners and coworking spaces run by local operators are ways to provide off-site space options for faculty and then staff without long-term lease obligations. Many provide specialty services and equipment, from studios for videos, podcasts or photography to 3D printers and workshops, as well as opportunities for community building.

8

**Offer a remote work option.** Support remote work options by offering a stipend to equip a home office with ergonomic furniture and technology.



9

**Integrate offices within a learning environment.** Leverage a flexible space plan that supports hands-on learning with close proximity to faculty offices and departmental support. Consider a modular approach that allows classrooms, studios and/or workshops to adapt to meeting and work areas over the course of a day.

### Case Study: Offices Integrated into the Learning Environment at the Rhode Island School of Design

Thomas Wedell's office is only steps away from his studio classroom. The Graphic Design Department at the Rhode Island School of Design is a learning laboratory. In addition to learning theoretical concepts, students receive hands-on training on printing press equipment, binding machines and light tables. There are also papermaking and silkscreen studios. The demands of this discipline require side-by-side guidance from faculty.

> ***"Our offices provide more teaching flexibility. I can lecture for 30 minutes in my classroom, start students on individual work and then have them rotate through my office for questions or small-group meetings."***
>
> THOMAS WEDELL
> RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Thomas Wedell has been teaching since 1993 and has been a part of many discussions about faculty office design. "We were once presented with a concept to consolidate offices onto one floor in an open concept. But that model didn't account for proximity to classrooms and labs," said Wedell. "There were also problems with visual and acoustic privacy. There was no storage or conference rooms either. Even though the faculty are role models, there wasn't space to display any new works."

The building layout situates offices near classrooms as much as possible, making them part of the learning environment. Students aren't as intimidated to meet with instructors, because offices are an extension of the teaching space. Adjacent classrooms and offices create cohesive programming that benefits both students and teachers.

"Our offices provide more teaching flexibility. They're helpful for a studio setup, especially for technical assistance," Wedell explains. "For example, I can lecture for 30 minutes in my classroom, start students on individual work and then have them rotate through my office for questions, conferences or small-group meetings."

To maximize space, full-time teachers share their office with a part-time instructor. One professor might teach Monday through Thursday while their colleague is on campus Tuesdays and Fridays. Even if their classes are on the same day, they can coordinate so their office times don't overlap.

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Thank you to the following individuals:

**George Beckham**
Associate Professor of Kinesiology
California State University, Monterey Bay

**David Broz**
Education, Civic & Culture Leader and Principal
Gensler

**Meredith Butler**
Associate Director of Planning and Development
University of North Texas

**Mike Carmagnola**
Director of Project Management and Construction Services
University of Texas at Austin

**Niraj Dangoria**
Associate Dean of Facilities Planning and Management
Stanford University School of Medicine

**Dawn Edmiston**
Clinical Professor of Marketing
College of William & Mary

**Elliot Felix**
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**Peter Hirst**
Senior Associate Dean of Executive Education at the Sloan School
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**Cameron How**
BA Philosophy, Management and Organizational Leadership, 2020
College of William & Mary

**Kristi Peiffer**
Senior Project Manager of Design
Bowling Green State University

**Promila Rastogi**
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Stanford University School of Medicine

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