Recommendations for the Provision of Common Space
The Provost's Ad Hoc Committee on Classroom and Common Space

Principles for the Creation of Effective Common Space

Objective:

Over the last decade at Western there has been a steady decline in academic building space per weighted student which placed a serious squeeze on available space with gathering spaces being eliminated in favour of instructional and office space. The current construction and subsequent renovations provide a special opportunity to reverse this trend. The Space Planning Principles described in the recently adopted Campus Master Plan lay out the ground rules for this realignment of campus space and direct that "the design of space include the appropriate provisions for common or gathering space that would allow for informal interaction/collaboration among students, faculty, postdoctoral fellows and staff".

To this end, the Provost directed an *ad hoc* committee to develop a set of principles that would guide in the creation of effective common space. The following points attempt to summarize the deliberations of this group reported in the attachment

1. Common space should be incorporated into new academic buildings and into significantly renovated academic space at a level of about 10% of the net assignable ft^2 available within the space.
2. In the design phase of construction or renovation, common space should be treated as programmable space with specific uses in mind.
3. Common space should be under the control of the Provost rather than Deans or Chairs and protected from encroachment during the inevitable call for expansion by units. The upkeep of the space should also fall under the purview of the Provost.
4. Common space should be located outside of departmental precincts so as to serve the entire community through the provision of space for intellectual exchange, fostering of interdisciplinarity, informal social space and study space. It is assumed that most departments will create their own internal community space using the "service' space allocated to them by application of the COU standards.
5. Common space should be available to serve several different communities including undergraduate students, graduate students, staff and faculty. While it is unlikely that common space in one building could serve all of these groups and needs, attempts to meet all of these needs should be addressed as common space becomes available across campus.
6. Design principles should include:
   - Centrally located
   - Moderately trafficked
   - Availability of good coffee and related amenities
   - Informal space
   - Aesthetically attractive

- Flexible furniture
- A site for displays, functions and performances
- Wireless.

The Report

Introduction

The Ad Hoc Committee on Classroom and Common Space was established in the Spring of 2007 as an advisory group to the Provost and is comprised of Duncan Hunter (Chair), Mike Atkinson, Debra Dawson, Flemming Galberg, Mark Hurley, Mark McDayter and Tamie Poepping. The group decided to begin by focusing on the characteristics for effective common space and then to proceed to the question of modern learning spaces. This represents an interim report on effective common space in general with a focus on the possibilities offered by the SLB renovations.

In the course of a number of discussions and meetings, we received the input of a fairly diverse selection of "stakeholders" including representatives of Classical Studies, History, Philosophy, Writing, the Library as well as some Arts and Humanities graduate students. While we could have cast our net wider, by this time the comments were becoming somewhat repetitious. Often the input we received from some individuals and groups conflicted with that which had been communicated by others. We also toured a number of common spaces on campus. Although we intend to continue asking about common space while seeking opinions on classrooms, this seemed an appropriate time to produce a report.

Definition of Common Space

The Provost has recommended the reservation of usable common space at a level of about 10% of net assignable space within a bulding, a recommendation that is endorsed by this committee. It is vital to draw a distinction between the important "departmental" space that each unit can create within its own boundaries and the "common" space intended to draw departments and other constituencies together. It became evident in our discussions that some individuals were actually far more interested in establishing or at least protecting, exclusive departmental space for their own constituencies and needed to be assured that application of the COU standards allowed for this possibility. There was a tendency for groups to want to "insulate" themselves somewhat: both faculty and graduate students, for example, wanted to see spaces that would exclude undergraduates, while some faculty also wished for a space that would additionally exclude graduate students. This kind of insularity, although certainly understandable, complicates the task of identifying the ideal common space and doesn't address the shortcomings relating to Student-Faculty Interaction noted in the recent NSSE results for Western.

What has become clear is that each building, and each distinct grouping of stakeholders, will present individual and unique challenges. However, an attempt can be made to provide balance across campus as renovations and constructions occur.

Aims and Function

The proposed common spaces can be said to have three broad and overlapping aims which are consistent with Western's strategic plan, Engaging the Future, and the Campus Master Plan. The first of these is simply to provide a space for intellectual engagement and exchange. The second, related aim is to foster interdisciplinarity. A third aim is to provide a variety of different kinds of study space to enhance both the undergraduate and graduate learning experience. With regard to the first aim, faculty and students have clearly articulated the need for a place where they can quietly interact with one another in a comfortable, safe, and sociable environment. Such a space would help foster community and networking. Networking and "connecting" need not be merely verbal: faculty also would like a place that could feature displays of ongoing research; this somewhat different form of communication should also assist in generating discussion, and encouraging the development of shared interests.

The creation of a truly interdisciplinary environment may be difficult to accomplish, as there is a natural tendency in academic environments for "like" to gather with "like." The perception may often be that a lack of common interests or shared values will make interdisciplinary dialogue difficult, or even undesirable. It may be possible, however, to find mechanisms that encourage the creation of an interdisciplinary community. Groups will only share a space successfully if the space itself has a purpose common to both. An example might be shared study space for undergraduates or containing mailboxes for faculty.

Another potential response to this problem is to ask units themselves to develop or imagine their own conceptions of how space may be shared and new connections established: departments might be encouraged to submit proposals outlining such collaborations when new common space is created. Rewarding departments for successful collaborations by providing them with additional common space is one possible mechanism. An additional benefit of this idea is that the development of locally-initiated proposals for common space should lead to the creation of common space "tailored" or suited to the special needs of the different groups that use it. While such tailoring should obviously not be allowed to develop in a fashion that actually *excludes* other groups, it only makes sense to acknowledge that a "one-size-fits-all" approach may not be putting the potential offered by these new spaces to their fullest and most fruitful use.

The third aim, the provision of additional study space, is a reflection of the results reported by Western Libraries' LibQUAL 2007 survey on the quality of library services which canvassed undergraduate, graduate, and faculty communities. LibQUAL particularly identified the need for both quiet and group study areas, a concern that the committee feels must also be addressed.

If these aims are to be achieved, common space must be, in a practical sense, *functional*. (For examples, see the attached Appendix). Success, in this sense, is best measured by the degree to which the space is actually used. A paramount consideration, then, is the identification of ways to draw faculty, students, and staff into the area. To this end, common space must be purpose-driven. This means that a reason must exist for students, staff or faculty to gather together within that space. Suggestions that have been offered include a location where librarians might come to assist individuals with research, additional study space for undergraduates (both group and individual), or a place for

informal discussions related to learning. The purposes that define a space, whatever they may be, need to be carefully and clearly outlined so that they are known to all: only in this way can possible conflicts over conflicting uses of the space be anticipated and avoided.

Control, Ownership, Administration and Maintenance

A vital element in the provision of common space relates to the way in which that space will be administered. In particular, this administration must be structured or set up in such a way as to protect that space from possible encroachments by individual departments and divisions. Given the premium placed upon space at The University of Western Ontario, it must be said that the "imperialist" urge is, understandably perhaps, a prevalent one.

For this reason, administration and control of the space must lie within the purview not of a single department, division, or even faculty, but rather with a "neutral" or disinterested agent (possibly the Provost). Arguably, such an agent might be said to hold the space "in trust" for its users; certainly all stakeholders must be allowed (and indeed encouraged) to feel that they collectively own and share the space, and the reality must reflect this feeling: the space must, in practice, truly be accessible to all. An additional benefit of this sense of collective co-ownership is that it will encourage all users to feel responsible for a space of which they themselves "own" a share. It is important that the space not degrade physically due to uncertainty over responsibility for upkeep. It is our recommendation that the maintenance of the area be overseen by a group such as the existing Classroom Management Group. As the amount of common space across campus increases, it will become necessary to provide for administrative support for programming for the potential multiple uses of these spaces. Administrative responsibility for the space should be within the purview of the Provost or the Provost's delegate.

Another possible means of protecting common space is to turn it into a naming opportunity: space that has been "gifted" in some sense by a (named) donor is much more difficult to usurp. At the same time, a related drawback of creating named common spaces is that this arrangement can seriously restrict the sorts of uses to which that space may be put. An administrative arrangement that ensures that common space is *truly* common to all potential users should not exclude its occasional use by individuals or groups for particular functions. While we believe that the long-term or regular reservation of space by individuals or groups should be precluded, it should be possible to book the space, or at least portions of it, on an event-by-event basis: indeed, the availability of space for special functions should probably be considered one of the prime purposes of the space. One means of executing this might be through the use of clipboards or whiteboards attached to doors, which would enable individuals to book spaces themselves. This system could be policed by the users themselves.

Configuration of Space

The placement of the common space, relative to the offices and home departments of project users, is vitally important. Common space should be dedicated space that is centrally located within units, and where the adjoining rooms will not be disturbed by the activity in the common space (and where, conversely, common activities within the space

are not restricted nor impinged upon by classes and meetings being held elsewhere). An additional feature that might make common space more attractive, and, moreover, provide a sort of "extension" in nice weather, is easy access to green spaces and outdoor settings. This notion of extensibility into the outdoors raises another important issue: while the space should be central, accessible, and probably connected in an integral way to high-traffic areas, it is important to distinguish between common space and "common crush" space, as epitomized by such features as hallways, lobbies, or entrances. While it is important that the common space be located somewhere that is already part of normal traffic flow, it is equally important that this traffic not render the space unusable.

For the internal configuration of common space, a great many possible permutations and variations are possible. In particular, it is desirable to have a space that can both be a large common area, but also include smaller, more intimate spaces. Inevitably, given the multi-functionality of most common space, some division of the area into discrete smaller spaces will be necessary. It might be possible to accomplish this in part without erecting immobile walls, with reconfigurable partitions or an arrangement of furniture. The use of reconfigurable furniture is felt to be important since different groups and individuals will wish to create their optimum layout and this can change from hour to hour, day to day and year to year. Flexible layouts should result in optimum effectiveness.

Other suggested configurations, however, involve more permanent additions, including breakout rooms and lounges. One way to manage this is to make such divisions on the basis of user-type. It appears, for example, from our discussion with several departments that separate common space is needed for faculty and graduate students versus undergraduate students. Others have suggested that graduate students and faculty must further be provided with their "own" areas. For undergraduates there seems to be need for a central room surrounded by several small breakout rooms. The breakout rooms would be equipped with study tables, have wireless access to the Internet and lots of electrical outlets for laptops. The study rooms should have glass panels so that the activity in them is visible in the main hall. This is necessary primarily for safety reasons, but also because it will assist in an easy assessment of occupancy.

Faculty, on the other hand, have expressed a need for a "faculty lounge" of some description, exclusively for the use of faculty, while graduate students have expressed an interest variously in both a lounge devoted to grads, and one that would be accessible to both graduate students and faculty. Both faculty and graduates were, however, united in their desire for a space that would provide a haven from undergraduate contact. The committee would support such proposals were these available for truly common use in a way that encouraged interdisciplinary interaction. A willingness to share space will free up departmental community space for other uses.

As noted above, information received from the library certainly suggests that additional study spaces (both individual and group) are desperately needed on campus. Ideally the spaces would have 24/7 access, particularly during the exam times. For this reason, creating space that is safe and accessible to all is important. There was also a recognition that the space needed to accommodate a wide range of uses from quiet study areas, laptop free areas (free from obnoxious clicking), noisier group study and project areas, and areas for undergraduates, graduate students and for faculty. The need to develop common learning spaces for informal discussions is very important as part of

creating an environment that supports learning inside and outside the classroom. Finally, it would also be good to create an area flexible enough to be suitable for performances and exhibitions of various kinds. It is likely that it will not be possible to accommodate all types of uses in the common space of one building, but attention should be paid to achieving a balance across campus. Possibly, however, some caution must be exercised in the way this division of common space is approached: if this element of the plan is overemphasized, we may, in the final analysis, be destroying the "common" element in common space. The aim of this space is defeated if no one ever needs, or has the opportunity, to mingle with others of different backgrounds or disciplines.

As will also be apparent from the remarks above, a number of conflicting agendas became apparent in our discussions with stakeholders. Given that this *is* common space, it may possibly be best to err on the side of larger areas designed to accommodate a heterogeneous mix of people, rather than to allow groups to parcel the space up into exclusive or reserved areas. Little is accomplished in the way of interdisciplinarity by allowing groups to continue to segregate themselves from others.

Amenities

One key theme that arose again and again in discussions among ourselves, and with stakeholders, was the need to equip the common space with some basic amenities that would themselves attract faculty, students, and staff to the area, while also making time spent there more pleasant. Foremost among the amenities mentioned was some form of high-end coffee station, and possibly provision as well for other beverages or snacks. This would probably be best accomplished through vending machines. It is important, however, that the snacks and beverages on offer be of superior quality, or people will go elsewhere to find better offerings.

Furnishings in the area should, of course, be durable and easily maintained, but they must also be aesthetically attractive and comfortable. Both hard and soft seating should be made available, to accommodate a variety of possible activities. The space should be wireless. To encourage (or even compel) faculty and staff to make use of the area, it might also be worthwhile to locate mailboxes, photocopies, fax machines, or other widely-used facilities in or near the space. Video monitors (without sound) might be present to display news, or possibly even closed-circuit videos of research presentations, on-campus performances, etc. Possibly the space should have its own dedicated web site to allow people to keep tabs on upcoming events in the space. (As an aside, our discussions with a variety of stakeholders have also highlighted the need for shower areas and lockers for cyclists and joggers. Facilities of this sort would also support continuing efforts to "green" the campus and improve the university community's work-life balance.)

Finally, the area must be aesthetically attractive. Windows, preferably large and plentiful, are a necessity. Plants, artwork, and other decorative touches similarly would "soften" the area, and make it a more attractive place for rest, reflection, and conversation.

Appendix: Successful Common Space

Successful common space can be broken down into five types of space (study, project work, social, class work, and active-living space)

STUDY SPACE (independent study)
- Quiet and bright with a scholastic aura (e.g. book stacks, reading lights).
- Individual carrels or single lounge chairs.
- Perhaps discourage noisy keyboard typing by limiting (or eliminating entirely) the available power outlets in this area. Availability of power outlets in Project Space will encourage laptop users to move there.

PROJECT/TEAM WORK SPACE (group study, team work, open discussions)
- Want small alcoves or break out rooms for group work, but keep access open and inviting through use of glass doors or panels.
- Large tables, white boards.
- Wireless access with lots of power outlets.
- Due to conflicting needs and features, this space should be separate from independent Study Space.

SOCIAL SPACE (group interactions and activities, networking)
- Public, open-concept, multi-purpose space that is programmable for various activities, along with some semi-public rooms dedicated to faculty and grad students
- Versatile and reconfigurable furniture that is easy to move.
- Point of gravitation (e.g. quality coffee machine) to draw faculty and students in order to encourage interdisciplinary networking and faculty-student contact. Perhaps also have mailboxes or other service-type facilities nearby to encourage drop-in use.
- Want to avoid space being taken over by any one group, yet instill some sense of pride in the users to ensure that it is maintained and respected. Making it programmable or bookable may ensure a changing schedule and avoid a regular group of squatters taking it over.
- Easy access to online booking (perhaps maintained by grad student) will encourage users from different departments and groups.
- Space should be away from individual offices due to noise and disruptions.
- Incorporate versatile technology, such as digital displays, projectors, and touch screens.
- Provide display space for research posters and other departmental features to encourage interdisciplinary awareness and collaborations.
- A designated place for the undergraduates, such as a club office, is desirable in order to instill a sense of belonging and pride. This also encourages more responsible behavior, including "policing" or monitoring of their area from vandalism.

CLASS WORK SPACE (classroom and extended class work)
- Adjoining open space to encourage post-lecture discussions and facilitate further faculty-student contact.

- Flexible design to enable interactive and group work.

ACTIVE-LIVING SPACE
- Availability of kitchen, showers, and lockers enables people to incorporate exercise and healthy eating into their workday.
- Mid-day exercise breaks (e.g. departmental team sports) are more convenient and time efficient.
- Encourages environmentally friendly commuting.

OVERALL FEATURES
- Overall success appears to be in the details – lots of windows, some plants, bright light, washroom access, a point of gravitation such as coffee or snacks, bright and cheery, good quality furniture, high ceilings.
- Green space – People like to be able to see (if not actually be) outside, and hence making the common space feel like an extension of the outdoors is highly appealing, particularly as the winter forces you inside.
- Today's students are techno savvy and interactions typically revolve around some form of technology; common space should be up to par with wireless access and lots of power outlets, at least, and perhaps digital displays or projectors in more public areas.
- Space can be made to feel private and contained, without closing off access or imposing mental barriers, through the use of glass dividers instead of solid physical barriers. This also encourages interaction between the spaces with movement between groups or drawing people in to join discussions or impromptu breaks.

	Types of learning spaces			
Infrastructure	**Study** Independent learning	**Project** Meetings Team learning	**Social** Interactions Networking Student-student Faculty-student	**Class work** Lectures, seminars Activities for adjoining classrooms
Transition area (Traffic and waiting; crush space)	• Built-in benches or nooks		• Small tables for student discussions	
Work area (quiet or reduced noise)	• Quiet • Bright light • Scholastic aura (book stacks) • Carrels • Single lounge chairs	• Discussions allowed • Break-out rooms/alcoves with glass dividers/panels • Large tables • White boards • Wireless; power outlets		
Open concept area (e.g. atrium, small tables, higher noise levels allowed)		• Reconfigurable tables and chairs • Wireless; power outlets	• Programmed activities • Online booking • No ownership • Point of gravitation (e.g. coffee) • Display space • Digital displays and projectors	• Area adjoining classrooms to facilitate post-lecture discussions • Tables and white boards
Classrooms			• Coax traffic to multi-purpose area to facilitate further discussions & faculty-student contact	• Versatile for interactive or group work