

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR MODERN LEARNING SPACE DESIGN

The Learning and Teaching Venues Committee at Murdoch University was tasked with developing “standards for the design of, and facilities in, existing and new learning and teaching venues, which meet the needs of a ‘contemporary learning environment’”. The committee was established following several years when no attention was given to teaching spaces, and facilities were becoming shabby. A further context for this work is a university-wide curriculum renewal aimed at reducing the number of courses and units offered. While this will result in larger class sizes, the central vision is to offer units which have more emphasis on active learning and interaction, as well as increased use of educational technology.

This presentation will describe the role of the committee in establishing a shared vision and communication mechanisms across various organisational units, and its role in developing those standards. Work started by defining some general principles about modern learning and teaching spaces:

- Facilities and furniture should enable spaces to be used in flexible ways for multiple teaching approaches;
- Teaching Spaces should be designed for interaction and collaboration;
- Tiered spaces should have wide tiers so students can collaborate eye-to-eye;
- Lecterns in all spaces should have a range of movement to allow different uses of space.
- Lecterns should be height adjustable to suit people of all sizes.
- All people in the room need to be able to control all technology in the room.
- There will be consultation with, and engagement with, all stakeholders in the design of spaces;
- The design of spaces sends a message to teachers about how these spaces can be used;
- Ensure professional development occurs before staff start using a new space;
- All spaces should have easy-to-use instructions for all equipment;
- Use existing surfaces (walls, windows, tables) for writing, rather than whiteboards;

Different equipment and furniture is needed for different sized rooms. We distinguished between Lecture Theatres (with tiered seating); Tutorial rooms (<25 students); Workshop rooms (26-50 students); Seminar rooms (51-100 students); and various laboratories. The facilities in these spaces need to be able to be used in flexible ways for different purposes. For example, the same space may be used for interactive tutorials,

group work or lectures in low-enrolment units. These may require different seating arrangements: U-shaped, in clusters or theatre style. The 800x600mm 'exam tables' and plastic chairs in existing spaces were unsuitable for this purpose, and the committee recommended that tables should be larger, and on casters for easy movement. Ideally, they should be foldable, so they can easily be removed/ stored, and curved or egg-shaped to make flow in classroom happen better. Chairs should have ergonomic functions, and be on wheels.

The committee spent much time considering how best to provide computer control facilities – lecterns. Different sized lecterns are envisaged in the different room types. Lecture Theatre lecterns are widely used and well-understood, as long as they enable height-challenged presenters to be seen. These are usually fixed. However, in smaller spaces, lecterns require a range of movement to allow different uses of space. In seminar rooms, lecterns should be configured for a standing presenter, but in smaller rooms, it is more appropriate for a presenter to be seated. In any case, some height adjustability is required to accommodate different body shapes and people with disabilities.

This presentation will describe the current state of play in the emerging learning and teaching space standards at Murdoch University.

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