Taylor Institute Learning Spaces – Qualitative Data Summary
Prepared on November 15, 2017 by Patrick Kelly

Background
Since the Fall 2016 semester University of Calgary instructors have applied to teach their course(s) in a Taylor Institute flexible learning space. The Taylor Institute Learning Space Committee meets twice a year to review applications to establish the course schedule. The TI Learning Space Committee chairs, Patrick Kelly and D'Arcy Norman have collected data from instructors using TI spaces in order to reflect on, improve and inform learning space use within the TI and across campus.

Data sources
Data were collected using an anonymous survey distributed to instructors who taught in the TI spaces (20 respondents), and qualitative feedback collected from instructors during end-of-semester and mid-semester discussions. The end-of-semester discussion provides an opportunity for instructors who have just finished teaching their course in the TI to share their experiences with the instructors who will be teaching in the spaces in the upcoming semester. These discussions provide a chance for all instructors to ask questions and provide feedback to the TI staff regarding their experiences teaching in the TI. The mid-semester discussions provide an opportunity for instructors currently teaching in the TI to share ideas, ask questions, and provide the TI with formative feedback regarding their experiences. We have held 6 discussions for approximately 69 instructors to date. The below section summarizes key themes reflected through the data collected through these surveys and discussions.

Major Themes

How the space plays a role in teaching and learning
- We see the space as a collaborator in a sense it was like coming home
- We walk into these spaces and it feels natural
- Empty spaces were the most important part of the room, allowed movement and change, and a feeling of openness
- Expand and contract the size of the room to maintain intimacy while accommodating more students when needed.
- Guest speakers can sit with the students, be part of the class
- students genuinely felt like it was their space

How the spaces impacted teaching
- flexibility and adaptability of the spaces was the most common praise
- How space conducive the space was to doing group work and team learning

- The space encouraged instructors to think about how to be more interactive by embedding more activities into their teaching
- An increase in conversation opportunity with students before and after class as the room schedule is not back-to-back classes
- The open space within the spaces is important to being able to easily walk around to each group, or even to sit and join a group in conversation
- Sharing student work easily with the technology
- Needed to model active learning to help students figure out how we used discussions, tables: group work emphasis on building community
- There's less friction to try stuff in the TI space. You can experiment and not be so afraid that it wouldn't work out.

How the space impacted student learning
- Some courses saw an improved attendance over historical records
- A higher degree of engagement as students were coming on time and more prepared for class
- Some instructors observed students come into class, sit in their groups, and are already discussing ideas before the instructor started the class
- More group work often led to deeper conversations and sharing different perspectives
- An increase in student ownership in their learning
- Technology helped students visualize concepts better (when used appropriately)
- An increase in opportunities for peer feedback
- Let the students organize the furniture to fit their learning needs
- Students need to think about sharing their work, not just what they do individually or in a private group

Some challenges
- Regained control of class when students are engaged in conversations
- Where to stand as there is no 'front' of the room. Instructors are used to have their 'spot' where they can retreat to
- Difficult to connect (eye contact) with all students on a flat floor and large class (the forum)
- Small whiteboards fill up fast
- Conducting any SoTL projects within the course/space
- The new space and technology can be intimidating the first time teaching in it (feeling that I have to use all the technology and space effectively. Have to scaffold how to use the space with the students (start small)
- 50 minute class time is too short (when you are doing stuff).
    o Feedback that it takes about 75 min or more to do case studies or other hands on activities
- Studio C is more difficult to configure for group work when there are no tables. Less working space with no tables
- It could take up to teaching 3 time in the TI to get comfortable with the space and technology.

Translating to other courses (not in the TI)
- I learned important things about course structure, outcomes and the nature of student feedback. It's changed the whole way I look at the structural approaches to learning that support a feeling of safety, creativity and engagement.
- I have students moving around the rooms more in large lectures, and do more public spaces for students' work when they are deliberating on a particular issue or concept.
- I try to do much more small group work there, too.
- I am rearranging the classroom to have group discussion tables.
- Look at older spaces differently and think what is possible in these spaces

Comparisons to traditional non-flexible learning spaces
- Not a lot of movement - persistent feeling that you're doing something wrong - the room is set up in the expectation that you will lecture.
- Students felt it was instructors space
- The spaces don't come with any kind of pre-conceptions – especially around what students are going to do with the space
- Used other instructional techniques rather than standing up
- At times students wanted a bit more lecture, not a lot though

Recommendations to university with respect to learning spaces
- Advantages of having movable tables and chairs to create a more flexible learning space
- Empty space is important
- Have Solstice units in classrooms across campus to enable wireless sharing of presentations by students and instructor
- Need space for moving around
- Space out groups so students can have a sense of privacy, not under surveillance all the time
- Skinny, long room is awkward (combined classrooms). C is good for 'circles'.