Call for Proposals: Engaging Spaces

The Engaging Spaces Committee invites proposals for the development of two active learning spaces, which will begin development/construction during the 2020-21 academic year.

Introduction

Across all disciplines and all levels within higher education, studies consistently indicate that an increased and effective use of active learning methods in the classroom improves both student learning and student success. Despite the overwhelming evidence of its benefit to students, faculty members nationwide are often reluctant to incorporate these teaching methods into their daily pedagogy. The barriers that faculty members identify for preventing proper implementation are consistent: a lack of support, guidance, and time to make the changes that have been shown to directly benefit their students. In order to eliminate these barriers, the 2019-2024 Engaging Classrooms QEP at Sam Houston State University will provide the resources, support, and motivation for full-time faculty members to integrate the evidence-based best practice of active learning in their classrooms. One component of SHSU’s mission for improving active learning is the remediation of existing classrooms into spaces that foster active learning—in a variety of modes. The best way for the university to identify and remediate these spaces is to involve the faculty who routinely teach in them, and this CFP is an opportunity for you to share your vision and to shape a learning space for instructors—both in your department and across the university—to use for engaging students and making their learning environments as active as possible.

What are Active Learning Spaces?

Active learning spaces are those that allow students to work with each other in various sizes of groups and that foster engagement through technologies ranging from dry-erase boards, to movable furniture, to computers and other digital media. Active learning can vary by discipline, so faculty are encouraged to think outside of the constraints of existing rooms on campus. Though overlap in the design and technology of each space may exist, faculty can also explore unique elements not currently found on campus.

How Should I Plan my Proposal?

A successful proposal requires careful consideration at multiple levels:

- Classroom
- Department
- College
- IT
- Facilities
- Budget
Choosing a Classroom

Faculty who submit proposals should have already identified a classroom to redesign. Though all classrooms on campus can be reserved by all departments, many are housed inside of a department's home building and are accordingly used primarily by that department. Because classrooms are scheduled up to nine months in advance, you should first begin by discussing departmental scheduling needs and the impact that a classroom redesign would have on the department and other departments that reserve the specific classroom.

Coordinating with your Department

Coordination with your department is necessary on multiple levels:

- Aside from working with your department to determine whether a proposed classroom redesign is feasible with the department’s scheduling needs, you will want to work closely with your department chair and building manager to ensure that your vision fits with the department’s needs.
- The proposed classroom must be removed from the schedule for at least one semester (and probably the summer), so short-term classroom assignments will likely be affected throughout the department.
- Future classroom planning will be affected because the home department will be expected to share the availability of the redesigned space with faculty/departments across campus; specifically, up to 25% of available class time could be scheduled by other departments.
- The department may need to help support the space once it is finished. For example, computer updates, toner and paper for printers, repairs for furniture, etc.

Coordinating with your College

Your academic dean should be involved in the process to help with the following:

- Ensuring that the proposed project doesn’t conflict with classroom projects already planned at the college level.
- Planning possible support of the space should the department’s budget fall short when repairing furniture, replacing supplies, maintaining technology, etc.
- Providing approval of the final proposal before it is submitted to the committee for review.

Planning with IT@Sam

Computer technology isn’t a requirement for an active learning space, but you might want to replace old equipment and/or purchase new tools (including, but not limited to):

- Overhead projectors and screens
- Computers for students (desktops, notebooks, or tablets)
- Field-specific technologies such as hardware or software
- Peripheral devices

Such equipment requires IT@Sam’s support and approval.
**Undergoing Review by Facilities Management**

Your proposal might be the most needed one on campus; however, an assessment by Facilities Management will need to be conducted to investigate whether the targeted classroom would be feasible for redesigning. The selected proposal will be evaluated and approved by the Facilities Management Department, which will consider the following conditions:

- The building load capacity for electrical, data, HVAC, and life safety (building age)
- Suspect materials evaluation (asbestos, lead-based paint, mold conditions)
- The effects on accessibility, temperature, and comfort that result from changing the room’s function or adding equipment
- Potential restrictions on work hours due to noise, access around the space, etc.
- Other conditions that are revealed through the review process

**Planning a Budget**

For the 2020–2021 academic year, The Engaging Spaces Committee may spend up to $150,000 to support the remediation of classrooms. The number of projects will depend on the number of feasible proposals and the scope of each project. The goal is to approve two projects: a smaller project of up to $50,000 and a larger one of up to $100,000; however, faculty can submit proposals for smaller/larger amounts. Though these funds are significant, the costs associated with remodeling rooms, purchasing equipment, updating wiring, and identifying and abating harmful materials could exceed the total available budget. For planning purposes, faculty should consider whether a proposed project fits into the “small” or “large” category; then, faculty should talk to their Chair and building manager about costs of recent construction or purchases in the department to provide a general guide for developing this proposal. Even if a proposal is for technology and furniture only (with no construction or remodeling), faculty should expect costs related to obtaining and installing these items. The Committee will work with faculty to assess whether proposed changes can be made and whether the scope of project should be modified to meet budget constraints. Final authority on whether a project can continue, even if initially approved, will lie with the Committee.

At the onset, your budget will be a general estimate. You won’t know potential costs for changing physical aspects of the room (e.g., lighting, flooring, walls, etc.) until later in the acceptance phase of the process; nonetheless, please do your best to estimate costs for items such as:

- **Hardware**—computers, printers, overhead projectors, or other electronic equipment. You can estimate these costs by looking up items in BearKatBuy—particularly in the B&H, HMI, PDME, Apple, and Dell PunchOuts. When researching hardware, check multiple vendors for the items; prices can vary significantly.

- **Furniture**—desks, chairs, white boards, tables. Furniture can be deceptively expensive. Office chairs commonly found on campus can have list prices in excess of $1,000, and classroom furniture can carry similar price tags. The HBi PunchOut in BearKatBuy will allow you to price common furniture items. For full details and furniture options, consider exploring the Steelcase product catalog and/or discussing your ideas with a sales specialist at Hbi (SHSU’s official Steelcase representative).

- **Software**—specialized programs not offered by SHSU. Licenses for software, especially if site licenses are involved, can be cost prohibitive, so explore the options that IT@Sam offers to us, and consider asking an IT@Sam technician whether special software
packages are compatible with our network and systems before building them into your proposal.

- **Supplies**—paper, pens, markers, or other daily items that will need to be stocked and replenished. As with hardware, multiple vendors in BearKatBuy sell the same items, so shop for best prices when building your budget.

When submitting your proposal, please provide the approximate count of desks, chairs, computers, or other items that you would need to fulfill your goals for an active learning space.

**How do I Submit a Proposal?**

Individual faculty members or groups containing at least one tenure-track faculty member and up to three other clinical, adjunct, and/or pool faculty are invited to submit proposals. Signed applications are due by April 9, 2020 and can be emailed to engaging@shsu.edu or delivered to CHSS room C002. Initial decisions will be shared in early May.