

Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS)
February 3, 2020
Minutes of the Meeting

These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents.

[**In these minutes:** Active Learning Classrooms and Disability; Project Proposal; Chair's Updates]

PRESENT: Mark Bergen (chair), Scott Abernathy, Todd Arnold, Keith Brown, James Cotner, Sehoya Cotner, Dave Crane, Michael Dunst, Jay Hatch, Maki Isaka, Roberta Kehne, Sandy Mand, J.D. Walker

REGRETS: Dave Hutton, Finn Schneider

ABSENT: Andrew Jenks, Abby Skapyak

GUESTS: Paul Baepler, research assistant, Center for Educational Innovation; Ellie Rogers, consultant, industry research and strategy

1. Active Learning Classrooms and Disability

Professor Mark Bergen, chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed Paul Baepler, research assistant, Center for Educational Innovation, who was present to brief the committee on preliminary data from research on the intersection of active learning classrooms and disability. Baepler noted that the physical structure of active learning classrooms can be difficult to navigate for those with limited mobility or difficulty seeing. However, he said, the most data is on students with anxiety.

Baepler explained that the study was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Selection criteria was that participants must have taken at least one class in an active learning classroom (though most had taken more) and have a documented disability. Four participants had a documented anxiety disorder of some kind. Baepler emphasized the fact that the study was very small, and stressed the preliminary nature of the data.

In the United States, said Baepler, about 20% of the population has some sort of anxiety disorder, defined as persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening. According to the 2018 National College Health Assessment II, he continued, 62.3% of students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety at some point within the last 12 months. On the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus, about 1/3 of students report being diagnosed with at least one mental health condition. In 2015, anxiety disorders accounted for about 22% of those diagnoses.

Baepler then detailed the findings from the study. For some students, he said, active learning classrooms increased anxiety. The round tables, meant to facilitate group work and social interaction, can contribute to social anxiety. However, after a couple of weeks in the classroom, students felt more comfortable with this configuration, and many liked the ability to see and talk to their classmates. For some, the group configuration helped them feel “less alone” and made the room feel more relaxing and less formal.

Participants also remarked on other aspects of active learning. The noise level in the room can hinder the ability to focus, some reported, and some found the loss of eye contact with the instructor distressing.

Some participants also reported anxiety as a barrier to going to class. For these students, motivating themselves to go to class was difficult, but once they were there they felt less alone. Jay Hatch remarked that if students find the room intimidating and that makes them more likely to skip class, that is something instructors need to address on the first day of class. If these results continue to be borne out in the study, he added, instructors should be advised on how to manage this. Bergen asked whether attendance in active learning classrooms has been tracked, and Baepler responded that he did not think it had been tracked systematically. James Cotner speculated that working in groups may compel students to attend because of a sense of responsibility to the group.

Regarding instructor interaction, continued Baepler, the news is positive. Because instructors are moving around the room more, there is no elevation to the room (requiring students to walk down to the front of the room in front of everyone to talk to the instructor) and a generally more student-centered atmosphere all contribute to positive interactions with instructors.

Students with anxiety also reported that sitting near the door is desirable. Baepler suggested that giving explicit instructions empowering students to leave the room to take a break if they need to is helpful.

Finally, students liked the flipped classroom style, as it allows them to formulate questions ahead of time rather than thinking on the fly.

With that, Baepler concluded his presentation. Members thanked him for a very interesting and informative discussion, and he departed.

2. Project Proposal

Next, Bergen welcomed Ellie Rogers, consultant, industry research and strategy, who presented a [project proposal](#) to the committee. She proposed advocating for the development of a shared definition of learning spaces or a learning space taxonomy, in order to facilitate better understanding, research, measurement, and evolution of learning spaces at the University of Minnesota. Rogers shared several examples of taxonomies from other institutions.

Since the Office for Classroom Management (OCM) owns much of the functionality, Rogers recommended that that office could take the lead in developing a proposal. CAS could help by

convening stakeholders for input and making a recommendation to University leadership. Once there are shared definitions, people will better understand the design intent of the space, which will lay the foundation for other research, she added.

Bergen asked members for their thoughts on this idea. Sehoya Cotner expressed surprise that such a taxonomy does not already exist. David Crane clarified that there are basic definitions of six different classroom types in the University's construction standards, but they do not really specify the purpose of the classroom. There is also some classification in the scheduling system, he added, but it is very basic. Hatch said that a lack of shared definitions was one of the major impediments to the work that the Academy of Distinguished Teachers subcommittee tried to do. This group discovered that departments across campus view the same kinds of spaces very differently, he added.

Brown asked whether a taxonomy would limit the ability of rooms to be flexible.

Sehoya Cotner asked what problem the committee is trying to solve with the taxonomy. Rogers responded that it is difficult to talk about and get input on things if there is not a shared language around the topic. Hatch added that a taxonomy would be useful for future planning in terms of identifying types of rooms in high demand. Rogers reminded members that Marc Partridge, University architect, had implied that a taxonomy could be helpful in capital planning and management.

Walker suggested that specifying the actual features or functional capabilities of each room could be an alternate solution. In the interest of time, Bergen suggested continuing the conversation at the next meeting of the committee.

3. Chair's Updates

Finally, Bergen provided the following updates to the committee:

- He would be meeting that night with Stephan Adair, chief of staff, Capital Project Management (CPM), who was a former student of his and who had offered to liaise between the committee and CPM.
- Professor Geoffrey Ghose, chair of the Senate Committee on Information TEchnologies (SCIT) had sent a request for someone from CAS to attend a SCIT meeting focusing on classroom technologies and budget allocation decisions. Brown informed members that he already attends SCIT meetings; Crane said that Jeremy Todd, director, OCM would also be in attendance. Bergen asked other members to let him know if they wanted to attend.
- Bergen will chair CAS again next year.

Crane distributed OCM's annual report. A member expressed a desire to discuss the security protocols in the health sciences area at the next meeting.

Bergen adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke

University Senate Office