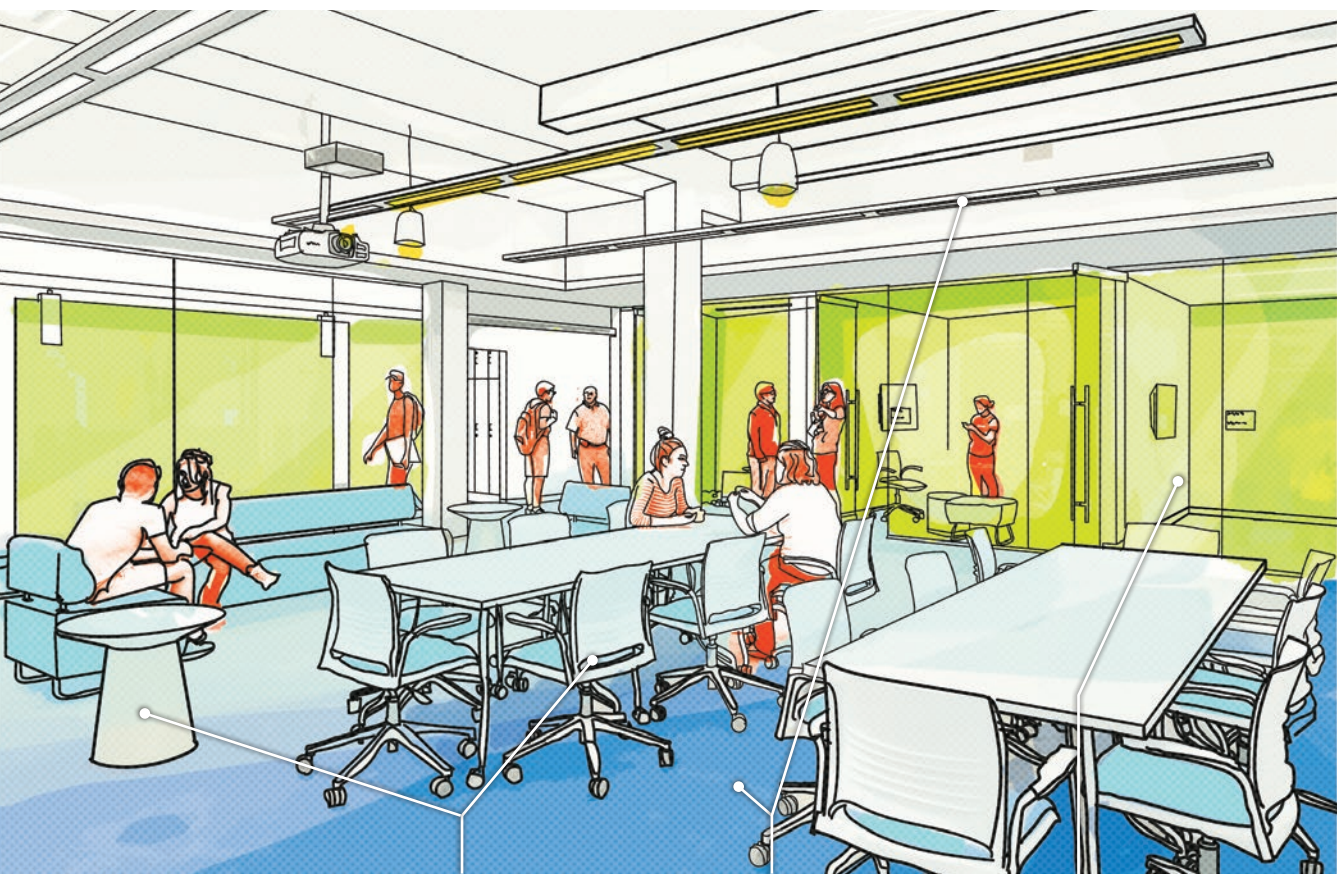


STUDY AND LOUNGE SPACE

University of Maryland | Edward St. John Learning and Teaching Center | College Park, Maryland



Project Size: 187,000 GSF
Project Completion: 2017
Total Enrollment: 41,700 students

The University of Maryland, the state's flagship public research university, offers over 300 academic programs across 12 colleges and schools. Serving more than 12,000 students each day, the Edward St. John Learning and Teaching Center fosters interdisciplinary collaboration through informal spaces that encourage cross-pollination beyond the curriculum. This environment cultivates relationships and exploration, advancing the university's mission to serve Maryland through education, innovation, and public impact.



Furniture variety, flexibility, and mobility

From soft seating to mobile tables and chairs, the range of furniture invites students to choose how they want to engage in focused study, casual conversation, or active collaboration. This adaptability supports different body types, group sizes, and energy levels.



Biophilic patterns and materials

Subtle natural cues like wood grain surfaces, concrete floors, and soft, daylight-toned lighting add sensory richness to the space, fostering calm and comfort without distraction. These details create an inviting, humanizing space for students to be creative and share ideas.



Physical, cognitive, and cultural inclusion

This space supports a range of needs through thoughtful layout and features. Clear sightlines, moveable seating, and writable surfaces enable diverse ways of communicating and learning. Students can choose between open, social areas, or quieter enclosed rooms, allowing them to regulate sensory input and engage on their own terms.

AYERS
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2025
COMPARING CAMPUSES

Spaces for Belonging

Creating inclusive, welcoming campus spaces isn't just good design—physical space is a critical component of student success and institutional resilience. For those engaged in integrated planning, this work is an opportunity to shape environments that support engagement, persistence, and human connection across the college experience.

Research shows that when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Belonging is a universal human need—the drive to feel seen, valued, and supported. On campus, it can be the difference between flourishing and falling through the cracks.

Planners, architects, and university leaders play a pivotal role in fostering this sense of belonging through thoughtful, evidence-based design choices. From creating spaces that allow students to connect over shared interests or identities to designing environments that accommodate diverse learning needs and reduce barriers, thoughtful physical design can enhance the student experience and strengthen relationships. These strategies do not require politicized language; they represent best practices for creating environments where everyone can succeed.

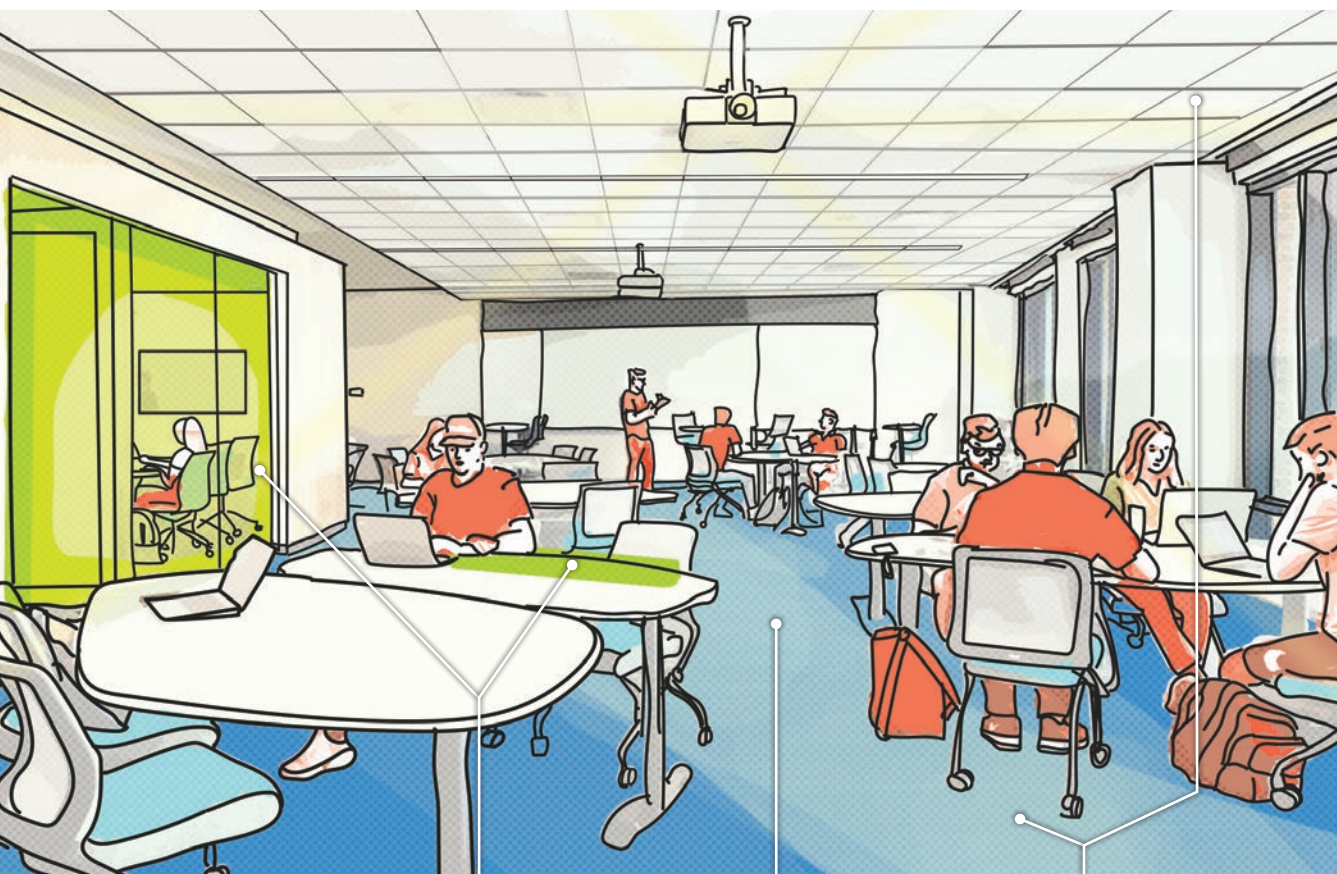
This poster offers practical, research-informed design approaches that help institutions embody their values. While these approaches may be complex to articulate, they are highly effective in promoting inclusion, connection, and belonging. Through integrated planning, we can confidently create spaces that quietly but powerfully foster these values.

Our thanks to the colleges and universities that provided information. All research and data is intended for comparative use only. Recognizing that errors are inevitable, we apologize for any inaccuracies. Concept — Jim Wheeler, Graphic Design — Margaret Zivkovich, Angi Kwak, Content — Shannon Dowling, Laura Wheaton, Jordan Rhodes, Andrew Casavant, Cassie Bair, Amanda Hodgson

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FLEXIBLE CLASSROOM

University of North Texas at Frisco | Frisco Landing | Frisco, Texas



Project Size: 133,000 GSF
Project Completion: 2023
Total Enrollment: 3,200 students

UNT at Frisco students focus on interdisciplinary, team-based learning built around real-world problem-solving with major industry partners like the Dallas Cowboys and the PGA. A robust dual enrollment program gives high school students early access to college-level, career-connected learning.



Zones for connection and retreat

Students can choose to collaborate at shared tables, focus individually, or tuck into smaller adjacent rooms for quiet study or one-on-one meetings. The space accommodates both social energy and solitary focus.



Unobstructed circulation

Participants can move freely throughout the room without barriers, promoting ease of movement and enabling engagement with peers, materials, and activities from any point in the room.



Adjustable or layered acoustic solutions

Acoustic ceiling tiles, carpeted floors, and soft seating help manage sound across the room, supporting focus and reducing sensory strain. An adjacent glass-enclosed project room provides an acoustic buffered space for collaboration without the distractions of the main classroom.

Belonging Starts With Seeing Who Students Really Are

If 100 students represented all U.S. undergraduates...

44 are employed¹

21 report a disability²

18 are student-parents³

35 are the first in their family to go to college⁴

23 are 25 or older⁵

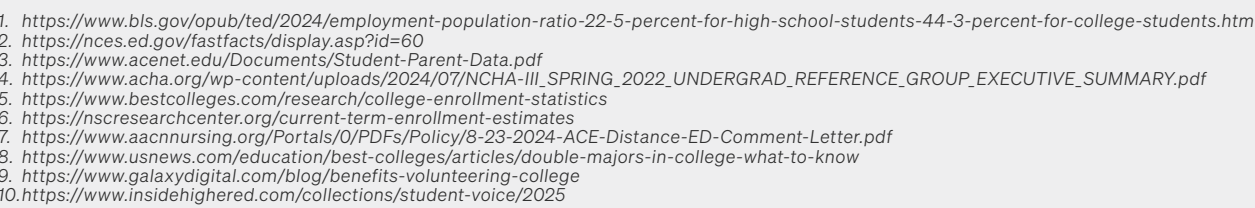
30 attend community college⁶

54 take at least one online course⁷

20 double major⁸

50 participate in at least one student club or organization⁹

32 say that having spaces for connection and belonging helps them succeed academically¹⁰



1. <https://www.bls.gov/pubs/bd/2024/employment-population-ratio-22-5-percent-for-high-school-students-44-3-percent-for-college-students.htm>
2. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=60>
3. <https://www.academydocuments.com/Student-Parent-Data.pdf>
4. https://www.acha.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/NCHA-III_SPRING_2022_UNDERGRAD_REFERENCE_GROUP_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf
5. <https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/college-enrollment-statistics>
6. <https://ncesresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates>
7. <https://www.aacnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Policy/8-23-2024-ACE-Discussion-Letter.pdf>
8. <https://www.uncc.edu/education/best-colleges/articles/double-major-in-college-what-to-know>
9. <https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/benefits-volunteering-college>
10. <https://www.insiderhighered.com/collections/student-voice/2025>

RESIDENTIAL UNIT

University of California, Berkeley | xuyun runway Graduate Student Housing | Albany, California



Project Size: 326,600 GSF
Project Completion: 2024
Total Enrollment: 45,900

UC Berkeley's student body is nearly one-third graduate students. The xuyun runway Graduate Student Apartments honor the original stewards of the land, the East Bay Ohlone people. In the Ohlone language, "xuyun" means alone or a house, and "runway" is the name of the region within the ancestral and unceded homeland of the East Bay Ohlone people that includes Berkeley. The name reflects this heritage of place while offering rare, affordable housing that supports graduate life and acknowledges the significant number of underrepresented and Indigenous students at Berkeley.



Adjustable thermal comfort solutions

A ceiling fan, operable window, and high thermal mass materials like wood and concrete work together to support passive comfort strategies. These features help students fine-tune their environment and reduce reliance on mechanical systems.



Adaptability and customization

Modular furniture lets students personalize their layout for sleep, study, or storage, making the space feel like their own. Personal touches like artwork and soft furnishings signal ownership and self-expression, reinforcing a sense of identity and comfort.



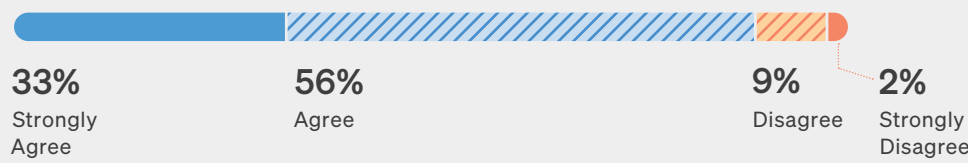
Adjustable or layered lighting solutions

Layered lighting, from overhead fixtures to a task lamp and natural daylight with a window shade, gives students control over brightness, mood, and functionality. This flexibility supports everything from late-night study to socializing with guests to restful downtime.

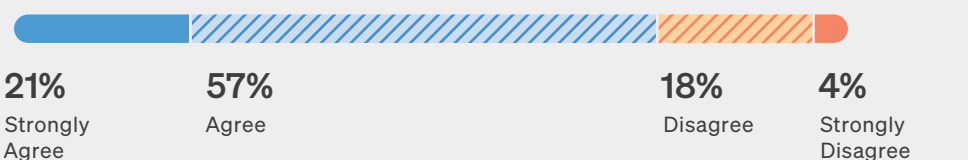
Belonging by the Numbers

When students say they feel comfortable, valued, and connected, it signals a strong sense of belonging. The National Survey of Student Engagement captures those feelings. Physical space plays a foundational role in enabling comfort and connection.

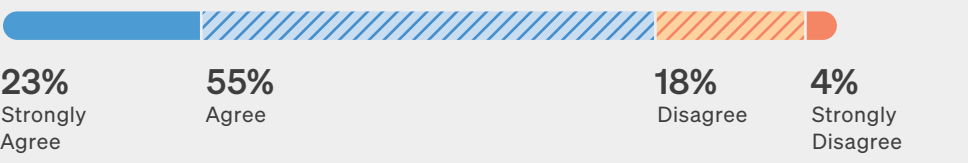
I feel comfortable being myself at this institution.



I feel valued by this institution.



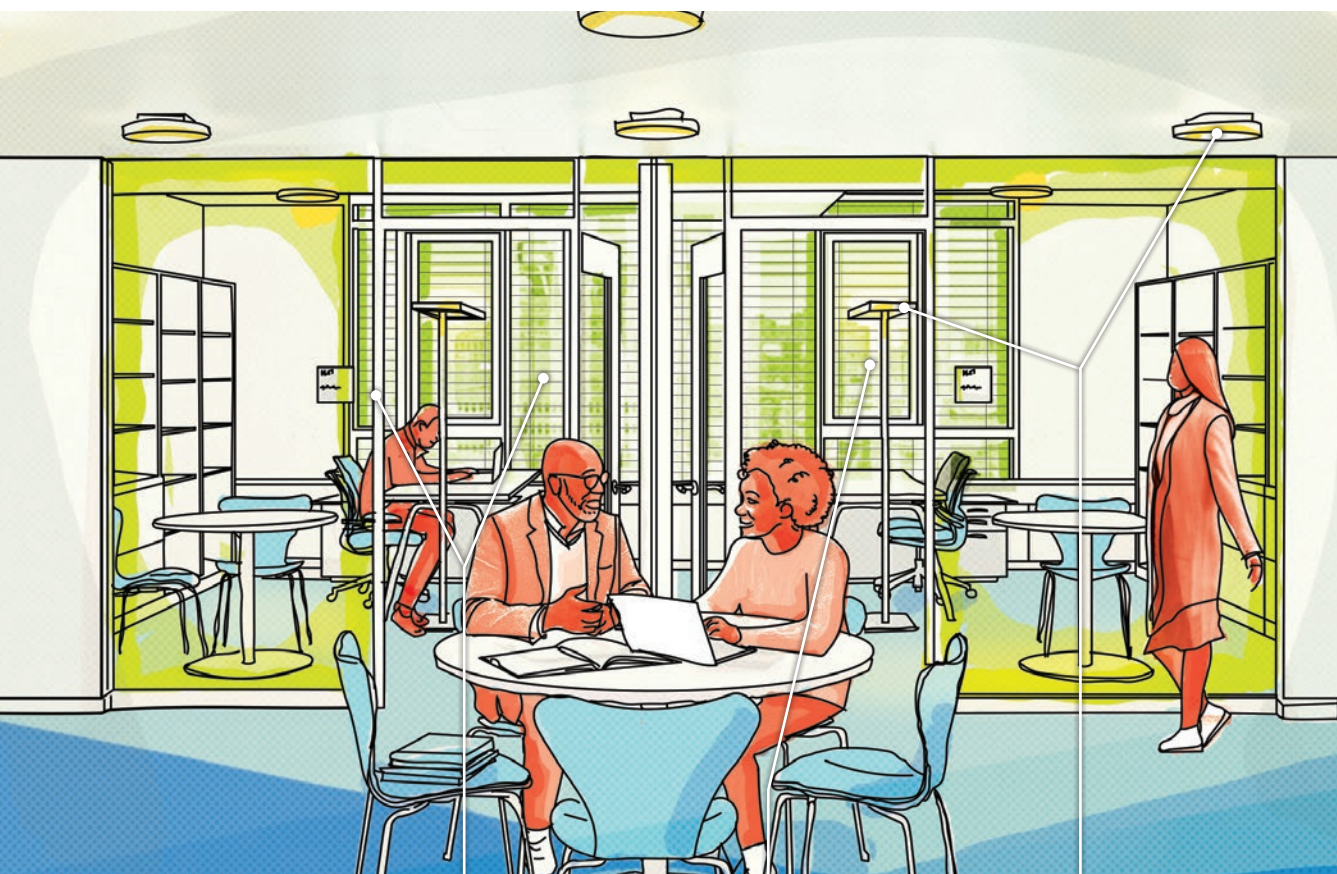
I feel like part of the community at this institution.



National Survey of Student Engagement (2024). NSSE Summary Tables - Core Survey; NSSE Interactive Reports. Retrieved from nsse.indiana.edu

OFFICE SPACE

University of Baltimore | John and Frances Angelos Law Center | Baltimore, Maryland



Project Size: 192,400 GSF
Project Completion: 2013
Total Enrollment: 3,100 students

The University of Baltimore is Maryland's only four-year Predominately Black Institution (PBI), serving a diverse population through robust graduate and undergraduate programs. With an average student age of 31, UBalt delivers career-focused education tailored to working adults and transfer students. Accessible, mentoring-focused faculty help students build the relationships and confidence needed to thrive during college and beyond.



Daylight access and outdoor views

Large windows flood the space with natural light and offer expansive city views, enhancing mood and mental clarity. Transparent interior walls promote daylight equity, allowing both private offices and shared areas to benefit from the view and connection to the outdoors.



Adjustable thermal comfort solutions

Operable windows allow faculty to control fresh air and temperature in their individual offices, promoting comfort, autonomy, and well-being throughout the workday.



Adjustable or layered lighting solutions

Overhead lighting combines with individual task lamps to create a layered system that adapts to different activities and preferences. Exterior louvers respond to sunlight, reducing glare and enhancing visual comfort throughout the day in support of focus and well-being.



Adjustable thermal comfort solutions

User-centered features like operable windows, localized HVAC controls, ceiling fans, and breathable materials help regulate temperature and sensory input to cultivate physical comfort, mental well-being, and autonomy over one's environment.



Adjustable or layered lighting solutions

Layered lighting systems with dimming, zone controls, and glare reduction increase visual comfort, reduce sensory strain, and improve circadian rhythm and mental health, especially in environments used for extended focus or collaboration.



Adjustable or layered acoustic solutions

A combination of passive and active strategies, such as absorptive materials, sound zoning, and amplification, ensures everyone can hear clearly, minimizes distractions, and supports full participation, focus, and sensory comfort.



Physical, cognitive, and cultural inclusion

Design decisions support full participation for people of all abilities, neurotypes, and cultural identities through accessible layouts, sensory-sensitive finishes, respectful signage, and well-maintained environments. Spaces support user-driven reconfiguration, allowing individuals and groups to shape environments to fit evolving needs. Infrastructure enables daily flexibility and long-term change through modular layouts, adjustable furnishings, and integrated power and technology.



Furniture variety, flexibility, and mobility

A mix of movable, multi-size, and multi-height furniture facilitates comfort, choice, and inclusive participation by accommodating diverse bodies, activities, and working styles.



Transparency and visibility

Visual openness invites participation, reduces intimidation, and helps users see others like them actively engaging in a space, fostering connection and inclusion.



Zones for connection and retreat

Spatial layouts that balance opportunities for social interaction and quiet reflection help users regulate energy, connect with others, or find calm, supporting neurodiversity, emotional well-being, and personal agency.



Adaptability and customization

Spaces support user-driven reconfiguration, allowing individuals and groups to shape environments to fit evolving needs. Infrastructure enables daily flexibility and long-term change through modular layouts, adjustable furnishings, and integrated power and technology.



Unobstructed circulation

Clear, wide paths ensure ease of movement for all users, including those with mobility aids or in groups. Circulation is more than access; it enables freedom, spontaneity, and engagement with people, tools, and information.



Accessible power and technology

A clear link exists between access to power, digital equity, and ergonomic safety; each essential for meaningful participation. Spaces should offer convenient access to charging, content, and connectivity without strain or exclusion.



Daylight access and outdoor views

Natural light and views to nature reduce stress, relieve eye strain, improve focus, and enhance mood and well-being. These connections ground users in place and cultivate a deeper sense of calm, presence, and belonging.



Biophilic patterns and materials

Natural textures, patterns, palettes, and forms increase sensory richness, reduce stress, and foster emotional connection to place, creating spaces that feel alive, grounded, and human.

OUTDOOR SPACE

Ringling College of Art and Design | Cunniffe Commons Outdoor Dining Terrace | Sarasota, Florida



Project Size: 27,900 GSF
Project Completion: 2023
Total Enrollment: 1,700 students

Ringling College of Art and Design is a highly residential, culturally diverse college where over 70% of students live on campus. With top ranked programs in art and design, a lush, walkable "creative village," and 22% of students receiving Pell Grants, Ringling fosters an immersive, human-centered experience where outdoor spaces reflect the college's values of visibility, accessibility, and hands-on learning.



Adaptability and customization

Moveable seating and modular tables make it easy to reconfigure the space for conversation, quiet reflection, or group work. The shaded structure adds comfort and usability through the day, extending the functionality of the adjacent student commons into the outdoors.



Zones for connection and retreat

This space offers a blend of social seating and semi-enclosure to support emotional regulation and social flexibility. Students can choose how and when they want to engage, whether connecting with others or relaxing on their own.

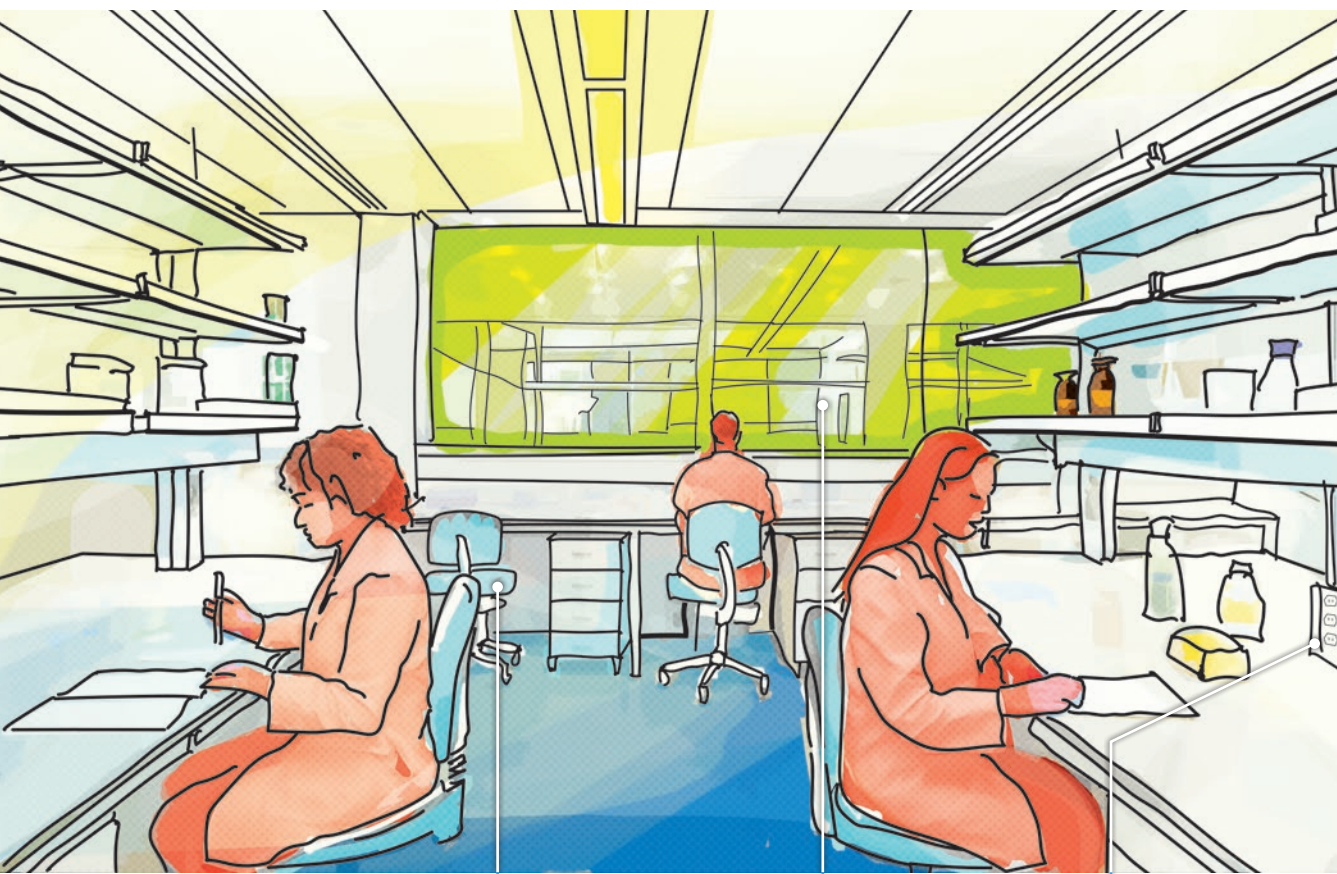


Transparency and visibility

Open railings and unobstructed sightlines maintain a sense of safety and connection to the larger campus. Students can see and be seen, contributing to a welcoming, active environment without sacrificing comfort or privacy.

RESEARCH LAB

University of Arizona | Biomedical Sciences Partnership Building | Phoenix, Arizona



Project Size: 244,700 GSF
Project Completion: 2017
Total Enrollment: 9,300 students

The University of Arizona is a top-tier research university expanding its impact through a major biomedical presence in downtown Phoenix. By embedding students in a thriving urban innovation district, it offers real-world research alongside clinicians, faculty, and industry partners. This expansion supports the university's public mission—growing graduate programs, increasing representation from underrepresented communities, and addressing urgent health challenges across Arizona and beyond.



Furniture variety, flexibility, and mobility

Adjustable seating, rolling chairs, and personal storage let researchers fine-tune their workstations for comfort and productivity. This flexibility accommodates different body types, tasks, and work preferences, reinforcing inclusion and autonomy in focused environments.



Transparency and visibility

Interior glazing between labs fosters a sense of connection across teams and disciplines. By making people and activity visible without disruption, the space promotes psychological safety, shared purpose, and a sense of belonging within a larger research community.

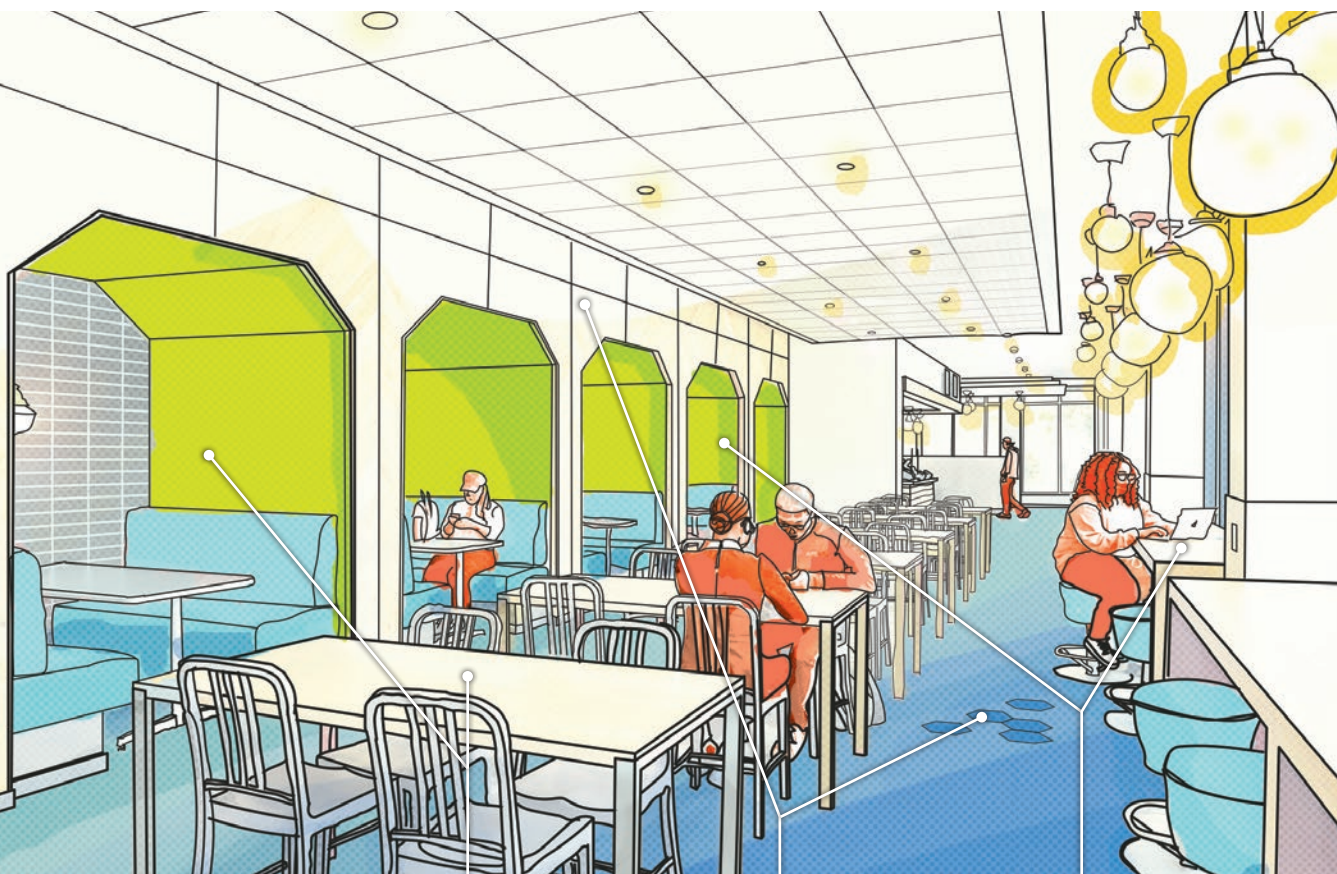


Accessible power and technology

Power and data connections are integrated seamlessly into each bench, ensuring all users can plug in tools or devices without being inconvenienced. This setup supports flexibility, equity in participation, and enables focus without barriers or bottlenecks.

DINING

Delaware State University | Tubman-Laws Hall | Dover, Delaware



Project Size: 191,000 GSF
Project Completion: 2019
Total Enrollment: 6,500 students

Delaware State University, a public land-grant HBCU, combines a historic mission to serve Black students with a growing, diverse student body including many Pell-eligible and international students. With rising enrollment and vibrant residential life in halls like Tubman-Laws, DSU supports students from their first year through graduation, fostering community and belonging throughout the academic journey.



Adjustable or layered acoustic solutions

The variety of seating options—including enclosed booths, open tables, and bar seating—naturally create zones with different sound profiles. These layers allow students to choose the acoustic environment that matches their comfort level, whether they are chatting with friends or decompressing alone.



Biophilic patterns and materials

Natural textures like wood and geometric tile patterns inspired by nature introduce warmth and sensory variety. These materials help the space feel grounded, lively, and human by offering visual interest without overwhelming stimulation.

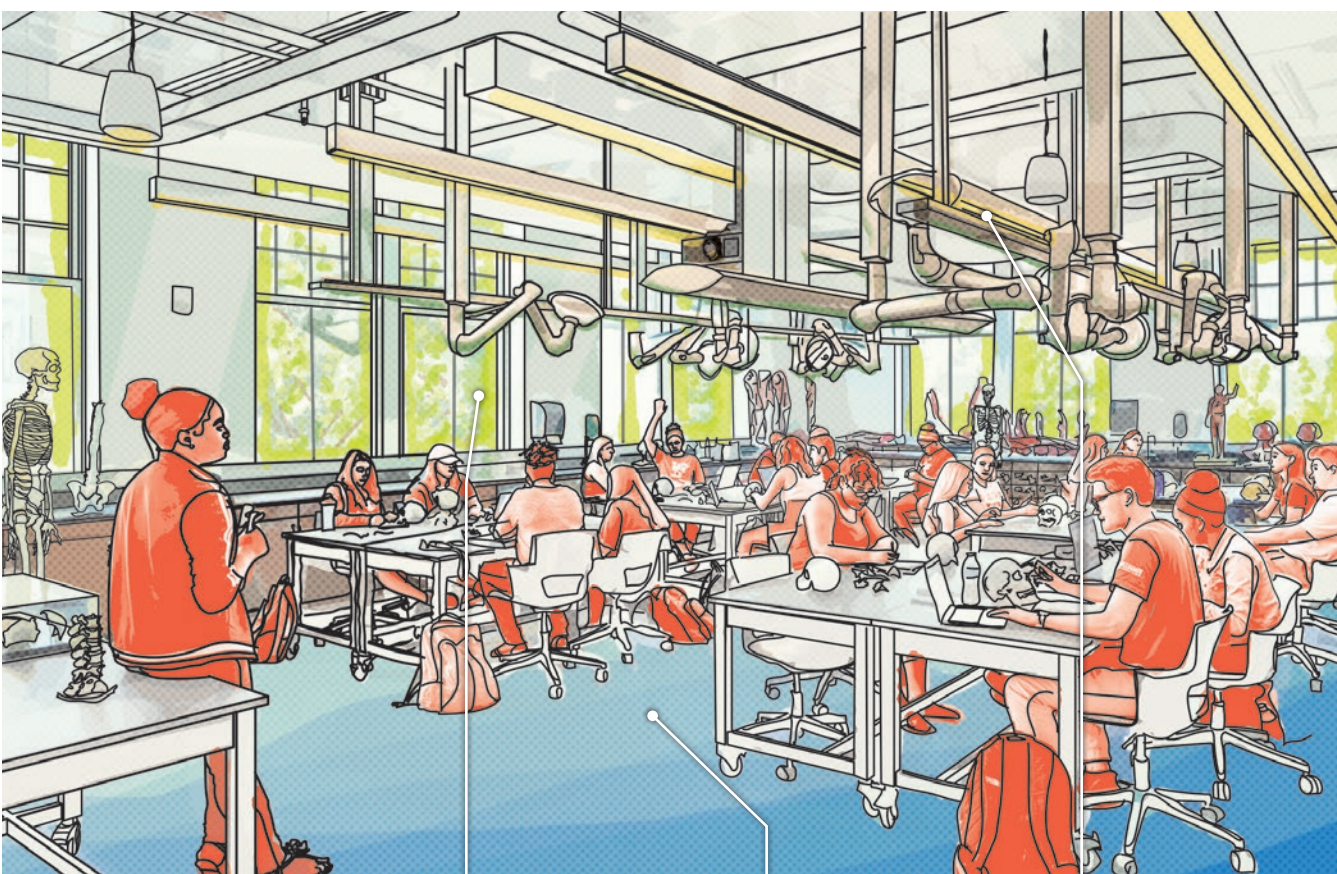


Physical, cognitive, and cultural inclusion

With multiple seating styles, intuitive circulation, and welcoming finishes, the space supports a range of physical needs and social dynamics. It's designed for everyone—whether seeking quiet, community, or a quick bite between classes—without requiring users to adapt themselves to the space.

INSTRUCTIONAL / OPEN LAB

Bowling Green State University | Moseley Hall Renovation | Bowling Green, Ohio



Project Size: 42,000 GSF
Project Completion: 2017
Total Enrollment: 19,700 students

Bowling Green State University is a public university for the public good, offering a high-impact, hands-on, minds-on education for a diverse student body that includes many first-generation, part-time, and non-traditional learners. For every dollar in state support, BGSU returns \$4.60 in tax revenue, equipping students for meaningful careers while driving regional growth and social mobility in northwest Ohio.



Daylight access and outdoor views

Generous windows bring in abundant daylight and views to nature, reducing fatigue and eye strain while promoting mental clarity, calm, and connection to the outside world.



Unobstructed circulation

Wide, clutter-free aisles support both physical safety and academic support by allowing instructors to easily reach students with questions, facilitating collaboration, and ensuring quick, safe movement in a high-tech, hands-on lab environment.



Accessible power and technology

Overhead service arms deliver power, ventilation, and specialized tools directly to each station, enabling students to safely conduct experiments without relocating. This setup supports equitable access to equipment and allows everyone to stay focused, engaged, and included in the learning experience.