

a customer story

higher education

New space enhances faculty & staff effectiveness



Mount Royal College International Education



Credits:

Kasian Interior Design
and Architecture

RGO Office Products Partnership

Workplaces often reflect the organizational chart. Big offices for big titles, smaller as you go down the pyramid, and walls and straight-line corridors between them. Anything not on the chart – places for teams, concentrated study, or one-on-one conversation – is an afterthought.

Mount Royal College, an ambitious academic institution in Calgary, Canada, wanted to test the idea that a workplace layout should be governed by what people do, not by their job titles.

The college's International Education (IE) department had grown rapidly in the 90s. Parts of the program had sprouted wherever they could find space – different buildings, even different campuses. Yet much of their work was cross-functional.

"We wanted to create a better work environment that would bring everyone

together," says Lorna Smith, department director. "We needed to remove the silos between groups, and we didn't believe we could do this by using a traditional office model."

The local Steelcase team suggested a workplace that used space strategically, tied to how IE workers actually worked.

"Traditional workplaces primarily support the formal structure of an organization and the explicit processes – what people say they do," says Robyn Baxter, Steelcase applied research consultant. "Our methodology allows designers to create workplaces that support the informal networks that allow real work to happen, what people really do."

Working closely with project architects Kasian Kennedy Architecture and Design, the Steelcase team held a strategic intent workshop with IE leadership. Through different exercises, the group uncovered

perceptions of the organization's health and dynamics.

Next, work effectiveness surveys questioned IE staff in key areas:

- work styles to determine mobility patterns
- workplace satisfaction to find out what works and doesn't work
- network analysis to learn who works with whom and the department's dynamics

Distractions and complications due to the work environment were costing each employee nearly half an hour of lost work time, every day.



Researchers also used social anthropology techniques to study the IE team at work. They shadowed, photographed, and measured, identifying patterns of interaction

and movements of people and information – critical knowledge for designing a place that support how people actually work.

The study revealed the extent of the department's communication issues:

- full-time, part-time, and project employees often barely knew each other
- communication had to be formally planned or it didn't happen
- knowledge sharing and mentoring were limited, curriculum development was slow
- staff often didn't even know who was in the office on a given day

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That understanding lead to design drivers for the new environment:

- central communal space for team building
- views into group spaces for people finding
- spaces to support diverse work processes and storage
- user control over boundaries
- work tools that make it easy to move from one task to the next
- using passageways between spaces to share information and transfer knowledge

As the new department took shape, the spaces earned names, both to explain their purposes and to make them destinations.

Reference materials and display technologies are at the Trading Post, which sits beside the Knowledge Gallery, an interactive

helped us to realize that we need to function differently," says David Wood, manager of the department's Languages Institute.

“People seem to be really proud of being able to work in this innovative and creative space.”



Post-occupancy surveys reveal a changed organization:

- 87% believe the new workplace enhances their effectiveness
- 98% are satisfied with their access to relevant colleagues
- 95% are pleased with space for formal and informal meetings
- students say the new space helps them get to know instructors better



Coaching Nook



Knowledge Gallery

The IE space is a Mount Royal showpiece. “People seem to be really proud of being able to work in this innovative and creative space,” says Judith Eifert, college vice-president, academic. “From an institutional perspective, it's a very efficient and cost effective use of space.”

“Steelcase really helped us to understand how space can be used strategically and how a well designed work environment can help organizations meet their business goals.”



The study also identified the “hub” employees at the center of most processes and decisions, and brought these central figures into the design process.

“We gained an understanding of how the organization really works from the ground level,” says Lois Wellwood, director of design at Kasian Kennedy. “Involving users is key to the success of the final design solution.”

public area. The central gathering spot is the Information Promenade. Mentoring and Coaching Nooks are places to meet one-on-one. The Campground gives part-timers and contract employees temporary workspace. Diverse spaces support different needs and work styles: collaboration and concentration, visible and private, planned and unplanned, permanent and temporary.

IE staffers feel at home. “The space is forcing us to work as an entire unit, and it has also

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