

Proposal for Collaborative Learning Space at Capilano University

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Background

The desirability of collaborative and cross-disciplinary skills and opportunities are frequent statements to be found in Capilano University planning documents, but the university does not currently possess an academic, virtual, or physical infrastructure that supports true collaboration between or across disciplines.

Some academic restructuring, possibly as a result of the General Education initiative, may provide more support for genuine inter-disciplinary opportunities, but I believe there is also a need for both **physical** and **virtual** spaces where students and faculty can come together to work collaboratively, and have access to resources that allow them to realize projects in a physical dimension.

The recent surge in community-based “makerspaces” demonstrates that there is a strong demand for such collaborative working spaces and the innovative technology they house. They are the kind of centers for peer learning and knowledge sharing that we lack on campus. Providing this kind of resource at Capilano would not only bring students and faculty working in different disciplines together, it could also provide a magnet for the surrounding community and facilitate some valuable community-building, community projects, and outreach.

Although the idea of a makerspace is not mentioned in the 2015 Strategic Implementation Plan, it could potentially fit with the establishment of an “innovation hub for learning and teaching” slated for 2017. It also fits with the Academic Plan 2014 – 2018 statement: *Accomplishment comes through collaboration. Whether in academic or co-curricular activities, collaboration is reinforced, supported, and rewarded, resulting in a graduate population well suited to the collective activities of an interdependent and connected society.*

What we’re currently doing

The Capilano Library has purchased some memberships in Zen Launchpad (<http://zenlaunchpad.com>) (“North Shore’s first accelerator and collaborative workspace”) in the lower Lonsdale area, and been piloting a trial of membership checkouts this term. This has been well received by Engineering and IDEA students, with some interest from other students despite the fact that it has not yet been publicized campus-wide. Zen has a variety of equipment such as 3D printers, laser cutters, raspberry pi’s and so on.

Cyri Jones, Business instructor at Capilano, can answer any questions about this company (with which he is involved) and has offered to give advice and help to Capilano for the start-up and maintenance of a collaborative space on campus. Zen can offer large cost savings on equipment and are currently working on such a project with the Delta School District.

Physical space on campus

The University may already have plans for the Willow Building (formerly the Studio Art Building, currently unused) but I've proposed this building as a potential space for a centre for collaboration because it's centrally located, has large, well-ventilated studio spaces, and has some existing infrastructure that might support the installation of equipment. The university community, if asked, would undoubtedly be able to add to the following usage list that the building could provide:

- Large studio spaces for group work and collaborative projects
- Flexible classroom space for 4th year of the Bachelor of Design in Visual Communication (due to begin in 2018)
- Classroom space for summer programs or community programs
- Faculty lounge / meeting spaces
- Café (or a pub!)
- First Nations usage for things like master carver workshops
- A space to showcase interdisciplinary capstone projects or term-end grad shows
- Photography studio for both table-top and larger setups; camera equipment loans
- Darkroom
- Macintosh computer lab with laptops, drawing tablets, etc.
- Equipment such as a laser cutters, a 3-D printer, a large format colour printer, silkscreening, letterpress, wood/metal-work machinery – whatever met the needs of the university community
- Not least, a reason for students to stay on campus after class hours; a creative space to hang out in

Funding

In terms of how to fund this proposal, I do not believe it would be difficult to attract a corporate sponsor to help with outfitting and renovation, especially if a donation allowed for a building naming opportunity. The Foundation office is happy to contact potential sponsors if they have a solid proposal from us and Zen Launchpad are aware of companies looking for sponsorship opportunities in this area. Some funds (around \$200,000 over four years) are available from the Bachelor of Design program for a “smart room” housing computer, print and photography equipment (which they need some curricular access to); this need for a smart room fits well into this proposal for a centralized shared space.

Other ideas are a “materials” fee of \$x per credit for all students, Government sponsorship (how many millions have they just given to Emily Carr for expansion?) and community memberships. If we work together I'm sure we can think of many more funding possibilities.

Virtual space

A virtual collaborative space is something that would be less expensive to build and could provide an immediate catalyst for cross-disciplinary work. IDEA program graduate Mustaali Raj – who was frustrated by the lack of opportunities to meet and work with other students while he was studying at Capilano – worked on a proposal for such a space for his capstone project in 2014. The project, which he named “CAPtivate”, can be perused in detail at mustaaliraj.com/captivate/. It's a very well-articulated project that won external design awards, and is worth a look. Scroll down past the initial icons to view the proposed website, or contact Carol Aitken for a 4-page printed overview of the project.

In essence, Mustaali proposed a digital space where instructors could post upcoming projects in advance of the term. Other instructors would be able to review the project, determine if their students might be able to participate/collaborate, and contact the original poster to work out timelines and other details.

A project such as this would require some funding for design and development, but it could be realized fairly quickly. It could also integrate with the Gen Ed initiative by announcing coming themes, and mapping program pathways.

Moving Forward

I'd like to invite any interested stakeholders to add ideas that enhance or expand this proposal or to provide ways in which they could use a space such as this one, and I'd like to invite Capilano administration to seriously consider the implementation of some or all of the above.

Thanks for reading this proposal.

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From Mustaali Raj's CAPtivate project

