

## Steering Committee Vision for the Newell Learning Commons

### #ReNewell

November 2014 Final Version

#### **Background:**

Since 2009, students at the University of Florida have consistently requested additional study space on campus. In fact, 16-17% of students who responded to the 2009, 2011, and 2013 SERU survey stated that an inadequate study environment served as an obstacle to their academic success. A consistent priority for the majority of students is the need for additional study related space. To alleviate this, Student Government helped obtain \$10M in funding from the State Legislature through successful lobbying initiatives during spring and summer 2014 to transform Newell Hall into a much needed, innovative learning space that will enhance the student experience for each Gator. A variety of campus constituents including two student committees were tasked with researching and compiling input from industry experts and students. The two groups spent weeks going through hundreds of documents. They also looked at facilities at other institutions for ideas of what might best serve the students of the University of Florida.

The following reflects the Student Steering Committee's findings, contributions from an additional university student committee, a student town hall forum facilitated by industry experts, input from building, construction and design experts and presentations by interested UF units as related to a creative, unique learning space. The intent is to create a

learning commons unique to the university that will meet student needs and be a national model for innovative learning space.

For several weeks, many individuals analyzed hundreds of pages of articles, literature and case studies of other institutions' cutting edge facilities to gain a better understanding of what experts claim is needed to ensure this space is successful. This information included notions of active learning, how current students most effectively learn, the use of technology in learning, spaces for learning and best practices found at other institutions. As a result of distilling this research into a workable concept, three central themes necessary to foster the creative, unique learning environment that Newell Hall will embody were discovered. These themes should be prevalent throughout each of the types of spaces. The themes are: (1) Innovation, (2) Flexibility, and (3) Accessibility. These three themes will be reflected seamlessly in spaces of four types: (1) Collaborative Space, (2) Focus Space, (3) Interaction Space and (4) Rejuvenation Space. The Newell Committee would like to emphasize that we want the themes and distribution of space to intermesh throughout the building without distinctly separate areas for each type of learning.



## **Themes:**

1. *Innovation*: Newell Hall should provide students with the most modern technology, but more importantly, equal access to that technology. Studies

find that more than 80% of students believe that technology improves their learning experience. Our goal is to make Newell Hall one of the most state of the art learning spaces in the country while continuing to use student input to determine what resources should be included. Our goal is to move away from the classroom or library feel to strive more towards a newsroom, lounge or café type environment. This new environment promotes collaboration, problem solving, interaction and rejuvenation that will empower all students to be able to innovate and succeed in their academic work. The space and technology will be state-of-the-art and will inspire students to innovate.

2. *Flexibility*: Newell Hall should incorporate variability and configurability, and provide for customization. Our research shows that the current population of students are among the most versatile learners. Therefore, to ensure that each student is able to optimize his or her personalized learning experience, the space ought to provide for a variety of options and offer easy reconfiguration/adaptation to changing needs both for current and future uses.

3. *Accessibility*: Newell Hall should be an open, inclusive environment. Students need to feel comfortable in this space to stimulate interaction. This includes offering a variety of inviting learning spaces that promote collaboration and the ability for all students to effectively use the space in meeting their learning needs and have the equal opportunity to do so. Newell Hall will be open to all majors, classes, schools, and levels of academic progression. Students should have access to public collaborative spaces, plus a variety of private (more shielded) spaces that include enough acoustic separation to allow students in these areas to concentrate

on their work without impacting the ability of others to collaborate.

### **Distribution of Space:**

Four types of spaces are envisioned. The statements below capture the heart of each type of space. Following these summary statements, more lengthy descriptions are provided.

*Collaborative: "I need to actively collaborate in physical proximity with colleagues toward a fairly specific outcome or goal, with the possible option of including additional remote collaborators with a digital web conferencing/collaboration tool. This is likely to be a planned activity with a deliverable or outcome in mind at the outset."*

*Focusing: "I need to focus on task work, with the option of working individually or in concert with one or more colleagues. There is definitely a deliverable or outcome in mind at the outset."*

*Interaction: "More collision space than collaboration or focus. I need to get some work done, but it will be less structured and I will appreciate the opportunity to have impromptu and unexpected interactions and discussions with people I know, as well as those I don't - people potentially outside of my field/classes, as well as inside. Less specific outcomes in mind."*

*Rejuvenation: "I need to de-stress, reset, re-focus, and re-energize."*

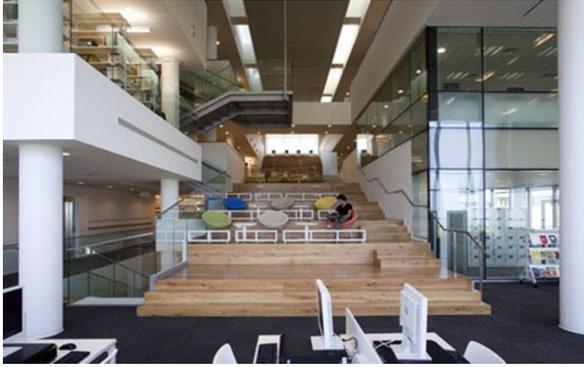
#### *1. Collaborative Learning Space*

The Committee's first priority for the distribution of this space is collaborative learning space. This is a "we space" not an "I space." It is important to note that the optimal learning group is four to eight students. The collaborative learning space should foster human connectedness and interaction. Studies find that accessible areas with informal boundaries stimulate collaborative learning. Therefore, walls are not necessary. Low

walls, transparent glass walls, or completely movable walls, with LCD/LED A/V screens that can display user content from laptops, iPads, etc. can accomplish this goal. Moreover, the mobility of furniture in the collaborative learning spaces is essential. By including furniture that is not only mobile but customizable, students can create a personalized learning space for their group. Students should have a menu of options in this collaborative space that veers from the traditional “desk-and-chair” model to provide for a personalized, collaborative learning experience. Students should have the opportunity to practice presentations and work effectively with other students in order to improve their academic performance. Available technology should enrich these engagement opportunities. This space should foster student collaboration to promote problem solving and success at the University of Florida.

The Marston Science Library “Collaboration Commons” (<http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/collaboration>) provides both a different type of learning environment for comparison and several immediate lessons learned. For example, there are never enough power outlets and writeable surfaces should be wall to wall.





## *2. Focusing Space*

Newell Hall will be collaborative in nature. However, it is important that students have the opportunity to learn independently or in a more focused way with a smaller group. This space must include variability and have a palette of place, presence, and posture options. Students should have a variety of sitting and standing possibilities and furniture should not be static. Furniture in these areas should reflect the shift to smaller technology devices, including wider arm rests, a reclining option, and soft edge tables. Hoteling, or the ability to reserve spaces, should be allowed in some areas. Though this space should provide for focused individual learning, cubicles should be avoided, and focus space with vertical displays and storage options are encouraged. The workspace in the focus spaces should include tables where a student can spread out a project and have room for active, anticipated, and archived work to provide more focused learners with the ability to organize tasks in the work area and a sense of ownership for the space when using it.







### *3. Interaction Space*

Interaction space should be central to Newell Hall and should contribute to the overall atmosphere of the building. In contrast to other study spaces around campus, Newell Hall should be a place where students should feel comfortable to talk, work together and communicate. By ensuring this space is in the core of the building, students in other areas will still feel at ease speaking up and reaching out. Utilizing a system of “room tagging” where students are able to observe what subjects are being discussed and if they are able to join in on the conversation should also be included. The space should accommodate casual interactions to foster peer tutoring and networking. Healthy and energizing food and beverage service is also essential to this area and should be presented/sold/consumed in areas that promote continued interaction. Studies have also found that artwork

displayed throughout the space will foster creativity and prevent a harsh learning atmosphere. Lastly, keeping the space open and free of walls and obstructions will make sure students in other areas will feel welcome to take a break while students socializing remember to stay on task. A fluid implementation into collaboration and individual focus spaces helps the students interact more efficiently. As part of the concept of interaction, students will routinely engage in problem solving. In order to provide support for individual or group problem solving, the planning team believes that a Genius Bar virtually presented is a viable option. This may end up being some roaming staff that assist with use of the facilities in addition to connecting to resources or may be completely virtual with librarians and others available via technology to help resolve issues. The Libraries will play a major role in the programming of problem solving. Overall, Newell Hall should be branded as an interaction space to ensure the collaborative culture is embedded into the facility.





#### *4. Rejuvenation Space*

Throughout Newell, there must be opportunities for students to step away from their focused or collaborative work and rejuvenate. Studies show that students should get up and move around every hour to maximize their cognitive ability. Having areas and activities included that will allow students to momentarily step away from their work without leaving the facility is an important aspect of Newell. In addition to the food service

being seen as interaction space, it will also serve as a rejuvenation space so aesthetics, varied seating and offerings will be important. Collaboration amongst students at the University of Florida through a town hall meeting and subsequent solicitation of input via a web site led to different options for rejuvenation spaces including areas for movement or serenity. The spaces are meant as recharging of the body and mind for optimal innovation and success. Keeping the space flexible and accessible to the other spaces empowers students to utilize these more effectively. Examples may include massage chairs and a yoga and/or meditation space.

While it's a good idea to be able to incorporate and infuse health and wellness concepts and resources throughout the Newell Hall space, for some of this equipment and activities, it may also be beneficial to have a designated room, or designated areas throughout the building, that clearly separate the learning areas from the meditation and rejuvenation spaces to allow students to really be able to benefit from learning breaks and become fully rejuvenated.





### *Building Operations*

Newell Hall is intended to be a 24/7 building.

Management of the building will be coordinated by the Division of Student Affairs, Dean of Students Office. Student staff will be onsite to manage entry by UFID only as well as general management and safety supervision. Technology in the building will be managed by UFIT. The Libraries will take the lead in programming for the virtual Genius Bar.



The Office of Undergraduate Research will be housed in Newell. Despite its name, the office serves undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of ways. Approximately 1300 square feet will be dedicated to this administrative function. Their interaction/exchange space will be shared with the Learning Commons. Their mission supports the vision of a learning commons. The committee suggests that their space be on the basement level.

The University Police Department will have a substation/kiosk area where patrol officers will station themselves periodically as their external rounds allow throughout the 24 hour open period. The committee suggests that their space be on the main floor.

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