Welcome back to McCombs. I hope you had a great break and are looking forward to the spring semester.

Let’s start the semester with some big news. I am excited to announce that in Fall 2014, the McCombs School will open two new Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs). Modeled after the classrooms at Deloitte University, Deloitte’s leadership development center in Westlake, Texas, these “team-based, adaptable and state-of-the-art learning environments” represent an important innovation in classroom design and an important new resource for the McCombs community. We are grateful to the partners and employees of Deloitte LLP and its subsidiaries and the Deloitte Foundation who helped fund the creation of these Active Learning Classrooms, through individual personal contributions that were matched by the Deloitte Foundation. (We’ve created an informational web site about the ALCs – for more info, please go to http://bit.ly/19i2RMz.) The ALCs will be available for classes based on faculty proposals, with priority given to BBA capstone courses.

A top-10 business school needs top-10 facilities, so this is exciting news indeed!

While having two new ALCs is an important step forward for us, perhaps the greater benefit is having a chance to pilot test a new approach to teaching. As we look toward the future, with the MBA program moving to a new facility in 2017 and the hope of one day renovating our current building as a state-of-the-art facility for undergraduate business education, it is exciting to be able to try out the latest in new teaching approaches that could influence our building design for the future and help sustain the value of the McCombs brand.

But as with so many good things in life, there is a catch: we are space constrained, and the only suitable location for the ALCs is where the Millennium Lab is currently located. And there won’t be room in this building to create a new space like the Mil Lab until we do the renovation.

As an interim solution, I have worked this Fall with a committee of McCombs students (acknowledged below) to make sure I understand the value of the Mil Lab and how students use it. The group has advised me toward a goal of being able to innovate with ALCs while still preserving most of the Mil Lab’s present functions, if not its present form. As we worked, it became clear that to accomplish this we would need to provide collaboration space, software support, more power connections for laptops, and some computers.

Here is a list of the actions to be taken that will help address these needs. The space changes, including the ALC/Mil Lab renovation, will occur in Summer 2014. There will be no change in Mil Lab availability until after final exams of the Spring 2014 semester.

**Collaboration Space**
- About 20% of the existing Mil Lab space will not be used for the ALCs but will instead be converted into a student collaboration space, similar to the AIM Reading Room space that was remodeled last year. It will include work tables and power.
The Mod Lab will be opened for student use between 5pm and midnight, except for the relatively few times when it is reserved for a computer-based exam. A calendaring system will be established.

The side of the Atrium next to the café will have more power added and some additional furniture installed to facilitate group work.

Additional power will be added to the GSB Event Room (the glassed-in space near the carpeted area on the 5th floor) and this area will be formally made available for student use except when reserved for other events (about half of the time). A calendaring system will be established to show when the space is available.

The carpeted area on the 5th floor above the Ford Career Center will be remodeled into a more formal student collaboration area, with power and work tables.

Additional tables will be added to the AIM Reading Room space, to better use the open space in the middle of the room.

Software and Computers

- McCombs Computer Services has implemented a cloud-based solution for software availability called mCloud. mCloud allows access to all software needed for McCombs classes from any laptop (Mac or PC), as well as tablets and even smartphones. All necessary instructions can be found at http://www.mccombs.utexas.edu/Tech/mCloud or by visiting the Swat Shop on the first floor.
- An on-line training video for mCloud is being developed and will be made available before Fall 2014. It also will be incorporated into BA 101 for new students.
- Generally, McCombs students work on laptops and our primary focus is on providing powered space to make that work more efficiently. However, we understand that a backup machine is sometimes needed. The Mod Lab provides 84 PCs and will fill that need most evenings. During the day, there are computer labs available in PCL and FAC. We are aware of the need for more machines and are looking into other possibilities for redeploying some of the Mil Lab machines.
- McCombs Computer Services is also establishing a virtual lab environment, using hosted virtual desktop services from Dell, which will be available for students in classes that require a special computing environment or software installation. More information about this technology will be forthcoming.
- In addition, the Connectivity Lab space (a hardware-based space on the first floor of CBA) is being renovated by MIS for use by students in its classes.

Additional changes

- A number of whiteboards will be placed around the various student work areas to facilitate brainstorming and group project work.
- All of the printers from the Mil Lab will be relocated around the building, where possible in close proximity to the new work areas. And a new map of printer, computer, and student work locations will be made available on-line.
- Low center dividers will be added to a number of tables to provide flexibility in individual/group use and make it more comfortable to work at a table with others.
- Laptop tables will be placed beside several of the benches that are scattered around the building.
As a reminder, we began some study space upgrades last year and the other existing study spaces in the school are unaffected by these changes and will remain available as before. These include Reliant, the AIM Reading Room, the hall tables by the escalators on the 4th and 5th floors, and the Atrium.

I hope you share my excitement about the Active Learning Classrooms. And I hope you won’t find it too inconvenient to find new places to work and collaborate. This is a big step forward for the McCombs School and McCombs BBA students, and I strongly believe that this project is the right move to continue building the McCombs BBA brand and to make sure that the McCombs School maintains its rightful place among the leading undergraduate schools of business in the nation.

Some of you may have questions about the ALCs or want additional information about the Mil Lab transition. The Undergraduate Business Council has scheduled a Town Hall for Tuesday, January 21, from 5-6 pm in GSB 2.126. I will be there to provide a short overview of the ALC plans and the other changes and to answer any questions you may have. David Burns, director of McCombs Computer Services, will also be on hand to field technology questions relating to the Mil Lab transition.

Special thanks to the Mil Lab Transition Student Advisory Committee for working hard through many meetings to make sure that student needs were understood: Jordan Costen and Michelle Moon (co-organizers), Satvika Ananthanarayan, Spencer Davis, Kayla Messamore, Ryan Morris, Michelle Patterson, Maria Rivera, and Michelle Vivoli.

Hook ’em, Horns!
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