



EDUCATION *renovation*

**HSS BUILDING UPGRADE SPARKS
LEARNING CHANGE**

*m*ention the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Building and many alumni conjure up images of tunnel-like hallways, hand-me-down furniture, and outdated technology.

For almost fifty years, HSS was a place students would go for class and immediately leave. It was never a destination.

Not anymore.

Since last fall, students have been hanging out and studying in the hallways, which have benches, wallboards, charging stations, polished concrete floors, and new LEED accent lighting. They have been buying food and eating on a dining patio, meeting in informal student work areas, and learning in an upgraded tutoring center for writing.

The HSS of today contains thirty-six classrooms with vibrantly colored furniture, air conditioning, all four walls featuring white boards and interactive Smart boards, high-definition video capability, bolstered wireless Internet, and adjustable and mobile Node chairs.



By Whitney Heins • PHOTOGRAPHS BY DUSTIN BROWN

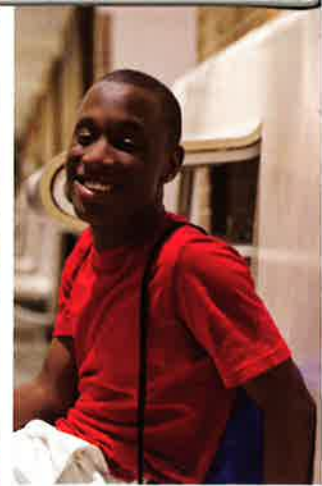
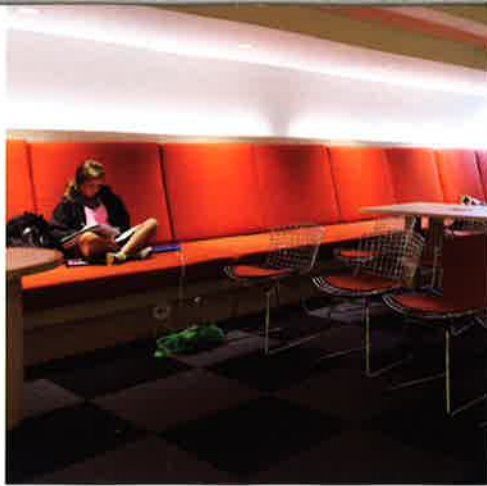
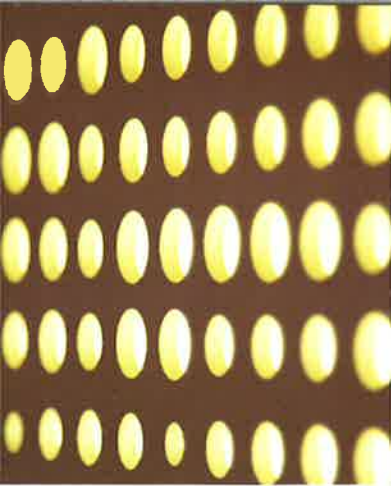
A CULTURE CHANGE


The massive makeover is not just for aesthetic appeal. It is key to changing the way professors teach and students learn.

UT is undergoing an institutional culture change favoring student-centric learning over the traditional higher education lecture—becoming one of the first universities in the country to dedicate an entire classroom building to a collaborative learning-teaching style.

“We are hoping to move from classrooms with static fronts to dynamic classrooms that facilitate student interaction and expression where faculty members are experts as well as facilitators/mentors,” says Bill Dunne, associate dean of the College of Engineering and chair of the Classroom Upgrade Subcommittee that oversaw the renovation.

The “classroom hub” building was chosen because nearly every undergraduate will take at least one course in one of its classrooms. The \$3.5 million redesign, paid for by students’ facilities fees, essentially eliminated the traditional “front of the classroom” and encourages collaborative learning.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Professor Laurie Knox teaches a writing course. ABOVE: (At left) Lighted iron grills serve as bulletin boards in the hallways. (Second from left) The new common study area on the second floor. (Third from left) Students in one of the new classrooms. (At right) Comfortable benches line the hallways.  Take a video tour of the renovated building at tiny.utk.edu/REnFS.

VALUE-ADDED LEARNING

With the rise in popularity of online learning, the change could not come at a better time.

“The Internet offers lectures, but what we offer is how to work with other people,” says Dunne. “Learning is a social experience. Sometimes that learning is accomplished through building a collective outcome or problem solution. Other times it is articulating a position effectively in a disagreement while respecting a different, but well-constructed, argument from others. So, by transforming the way we facilitate student learning, we enrich the college experience.”

The dramatic renovations were considered for multiple reasons, including demonstrating the value of campus-based learning, adapting to new student learning styles, harnessing new technologies, and creating a people-based alternative to online learning.

“The ‘brick and mortar’ university is going to persist because we are offering something better,” says Stan Guffey, member of the subcommittee and faculty scholar with the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center. “We have the added value of the collaborative learning and the social elements, which is how we operate in a professional environment.”

The culture change is helping students develop strong effective skills in communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and team building. Additionally, studies have shown that interactive learning increases information retention.

“Lectures have served as the primary instructional approach for centuries, if not millennia,” says Dunne. “Yet, they’re dominantly a one-way information flow that creates few expectations or responsibilities for students during that class time. The new classrooms support learning strategies that make the students the center of the learning expectations during class time, while challenging them to learn, collaborate, and adapt in real time.”

Some faculty are adapting their courses to a hybrid delivery format—part online, part in class. They are recording the es-

sential lecture portion of their class, often in shorter segments covering one specific point and lasting from a couple of minutes to several minutes.

Students then watch the videos before coming to class. The video delivery makes it possible for students to pause or watch particularly difficult passages multiple times. With the essential one-way information flow already delivered, faculty and students can then devote the physical class time to more collaborative efforts that reinforce the video lectures or even enable more in-depth explorations.

IGNITING THE CHANGE

Faculty learned to use the new technology and adapt teaching styles inside an HSS model classroom. They attended workshops and dialogues hosted by the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center, which targeted different disciplines and covered different learning methods such as group work, student presentations, and writing to learn. Sessions also instructed faculty with classes of seventy-five or more students on how to effectively use the new classrooms.

So far, feedback has been positive. A fall survey showed a majority of students and faculty are happy with the changes.

“I have noticed that in the newer classrooms with all the technology that the students are much more engaged with course material,” says Jennifer Fowler, mathematics senior lecturer. “They are not passive learners like they are in traditional classrooms where you are writing on the board and they are sitting and copying. You can get them to relax a little bit more.”

“The changes have been outstanding,” says Dorian Stiefel, a graduate student in political science who has taught at UT for three years. “Students say the atmosphere is more laid back and that helps them learn better.”

From now on, when alumni think of HSS they will think of color, light, and technology—and hopefully they’ll remember what they learned there, too. **UT**

