

Student Experiences in Mason's Active Learning Classrooms

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What is an Active Learning Classroom (ALC)?

Mason is reimagining learning spaces on our campuses to foster increased student engagement through active and collaborative learning. This commitment is part of our strategic plan goals for innovative learning and supporting teaching and scholarship excellence. While we currently have eleven classrooms intentionally designed to support active learning, both the Peterson Health Sciences Building and the Robinson rebuild offer significant opportunities for increasing the number of these learning spaces. As part of this initiative we have created an iterative design process that leverages feedback from faculty and students teaching and learning in these spaces. This poster highlights preliminary findings about student experiences in Mason's ALCs based on surveys from the '15-'16 and '16-'17 academic years.

Teaching and Learning in Mason's ALCs



Innovation Hall Rm 336 (24 seats)



Exploratory Hall L-102, Active Learning with Technology (ALT) Classroom (above and left)



Research Methods

An online survey was sent to all students taking a class in one of Mason's eleven ALCs near the end of fall 2015, spring 2016, fall 2016, and spring 2017. For students taking more than one class in an ALC, they were directed to focus on just one of their classroom experiences. In total, **2,077 students completed the survey**; response rates for the four survey administrations ranged from 10% to 21%. The findings presented here are based on compiled data from all four semesters.

Findings

Overall, students are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences learning in an ALC.

- 11% of student respondents rated their ALC experience as "satisfactory," and **81% rated their experience as "good" or "excellent."**
- 91% reported that they would recommend taking a class in an ALC to a friend.
- When asked about their connection to their instructor, compared to taking a course in a non-ALC, 46% reported that they felt more connected to their instructor, while 39% reported that they felt it was about the same.
- When asked about their connection to their peers, compared to taking a course in a non-ALC, **59% reported that they felt more connected to their peers**, while 29% reported that they felt it was about the same.

When asked about the benefits of taking a class in an ALC, the most frequent qualitative comments generally could be grouped into the following categories:

- Learning in these classrooms is engaging, interactive, and hands on
- Room designs feel new, innovative, open, spacious, and bright
- The technology is perceived to be strong and students positively commented about using the whiteboards
- They report more collaboration and community-building with peers
- They noted **the movable furniture supports various activities** (e.g., group or individual work, lectures)

Students did, when asked, report some frustrations, although at much lower rates. They are giving us important feedback about furniture and technology choices – some room setups are perceived as more challenging and some chairs are less comfortable and/or have less functionality. Regarding their learning, one of the most frequent comments from students is that faculty should let students know that they are taking a course in an ALC and what this means. Specifically, **they want faculty to explain to students how they will use the room to engage them differently than they might in a traditional classroom.**

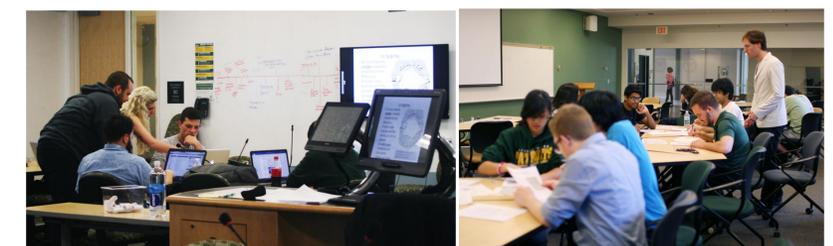
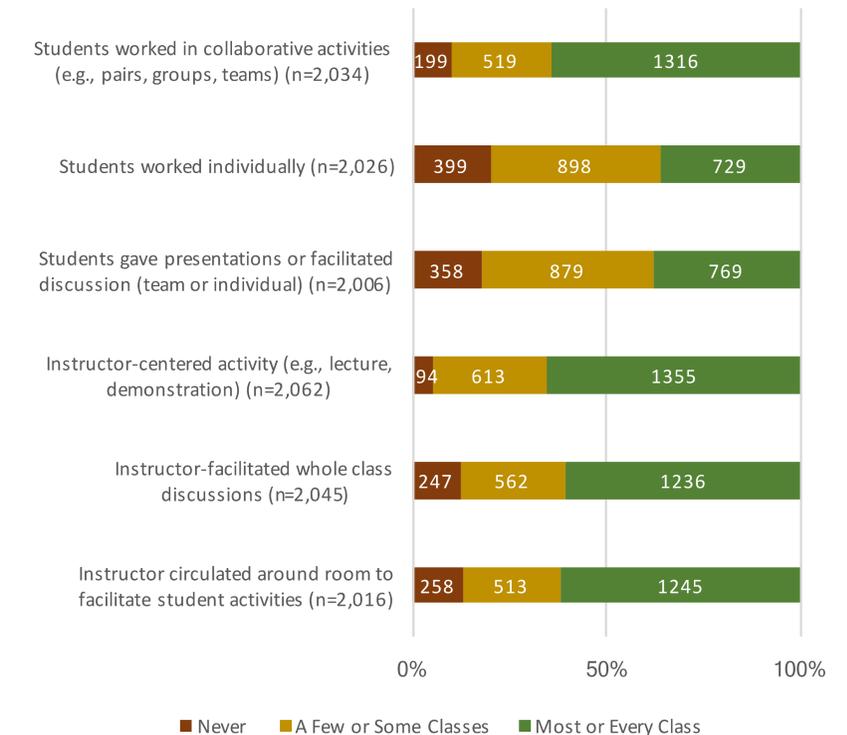
Learning Spaces on Mason's Horizon

- Peterson Family Health Sciences Building: Eight university classrooms will open in the spring of 2018
- New Robinson Hall Project: 27 new university classrooms, from smaller 24-seat classrooms to larger 72-, 90-, and 120-seat classrooms

Interested in teaching in an Active Learning Classroom (ALC)? You can request classrooms through your scheduler, see <http://registrar.gmu.edu/topics/scheduling-coordinators/>

For more information about Learning Environments at Mason, see <http://learningenvironments.gmu.edu/>

Reported Frequency of Various In-Class Activities in ALCs



Exploratory Hall L-102, ALT Classroom (72 seats)

Buchanan Hall D23 (formerly Mason Hall) (72 seats)

Future Plans and Directions

The Learning Environments Assessment Group, the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will continue our collaboration to support faculty engagement and success in our ALCs.

This year we will:

- Conduct a study to learn more about how faculty make pedagogical choices about active learning in their classrooms
- Assess the faculty and student experience, particularly as Peterson Hall opens
- Continue to provide educational development and support for teaching
- Use assessment results to inform campus planning efforts