

Designing an Active Learning Classroom for Veterinary Medicine

Asking the Right Questions

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Goals

The UMN College of Veterinary Medicine wanted to transform existing space into an active learning classroom to support existing laboratory teaching and to encourage and facilitate active learning in other courses. The space had been used for student cubicles and microscope-based laboratories. The classroom needed to be able to hold at least 104 students and displaced classes had to be able to use the classroom in its redesign. The questions below helped us focus our needs and create the plans.

Questions

What will the room be used for?

Will it be a primary classroom (used for all classes regardless of content) or used for select classes (those with a particular need or learning design)? Will other groups be using the room e.g. continuing education, meeting groups? How big are the groups that are likely to be using the room? Any distance learning? Is remote access needed? What potential uses are the top priorities? Will the room be open for students at other times of the day?

What shape and size of tables?

Will the room be used for laboratory type experiments or discussion groups? What size groups are in use already? What are likely group dynamic issues? How many tables can actually fit in the room? How much space does each student need?

Wired or wireless?

Will the wires run above or below the tables?

What collaboration tools are needed?

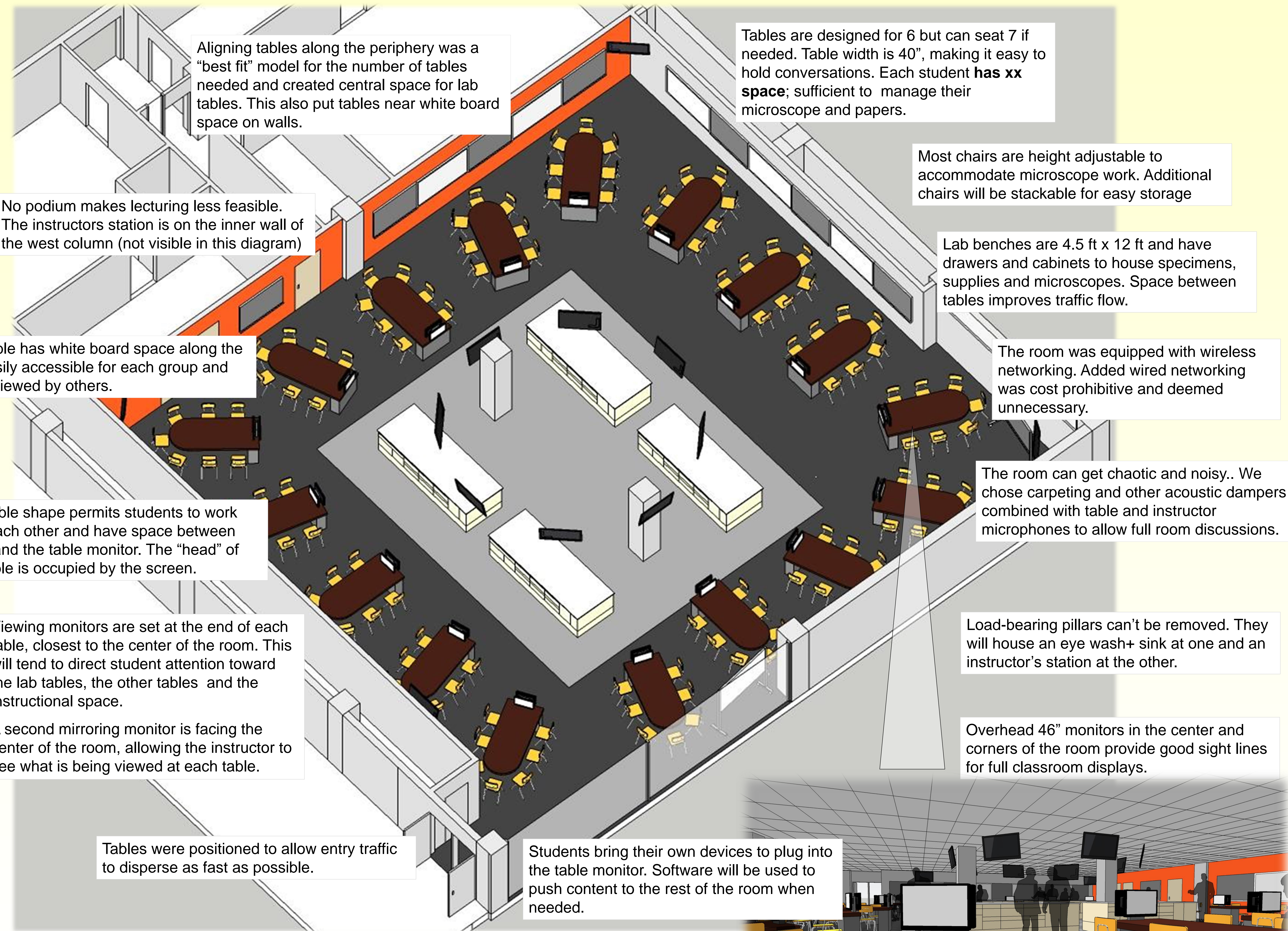
Regular white boards? Active white boards? Other? What support will be needed for the next greatest thing?

How much flexibility is needed?

Do you need the room to be used by simultaneous groups? How much effort can or will be put into rearranging the room? If two groups share the space, who controls the monitors? Can you make the space work for smaller groups with minimal effort?

What would you change?

After visiting other classrooms, what would you do differently?



Conclusions

As active learning classrooms are not yet common place and are often imperfect, we used many different resources to design ours. Asking the right questions often led to breakthrough ideas This was a major, continuous communication process among the college administration, selected faculty, University Facilities Management, the architects and the builders. The more questions we asked and answered, the more comfortable everyone felt with the final product.

