

## Active Learning Classrooms 2008-2009

### External Context

The [National Survey for Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) is a respected indicator of student engagement that is used by roughly 1200 universities across North America. Both first year and fourth year students are surveyed; results provide audiences with a sense of how a given university is perceived by both commencing and graduating students. The multiple-choice questions are aligned with five benchmarks for educational practice, which are based upon extensive educational research on [post-secondary student engagement](#):

1. Level of academic challenge
2. Active and collaborative learning
3. Student-faculty interaction
4. Enriching educational experiences
5. Supportive campus environment

### McGill Context

McGill University implements the NSSE every two years. The results indicate that McGill scores high on the Level of Academic Challenge, and does moderately well with Enriching Educational Experiences. However, there is opportunity for significant improvement in the areas of Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Supportive Campus Environment.

Several initiatives were undertaken to address these areas: In 2005, the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning was launched; in July 2006, Dr. Morton J. Mendelson was named the first Deputy Provost of Student Life and Learning; the far-reaching goals of the Task Force include enhancing undergraduate student life and learning at McGill University. The Provost's June 2006 strategic plan includes an emphasis upon a variety of aspects of the undergraduate experience. This intensive emphasis upon students has led to McGill's current self-identification as a student-centered, publicly funded, research-intensive university.

Another initiative, the [Teaching and Learning Spaces Working Group](#) (TLSWG), was formed in 2006 to create a vision for teaching and learning space development aligned with University directions and to establish teaching space standards based on sound pedagogical principles to enhance students' learning experience at McGill. In 2007, the TLSWG developed a set of [principles for designing teaching and learning spaces](#) based on the NSSE benchmarks. Since 2007, the TLSWG has worked incrementally to make renovations that promote student-faculty interaction (SFI) and active and collaborative learning (ACL). In 2009, the TLSWG took a bold step towards enhancing active and collaborative learning by funding the transformative redesign of two existing classrooms.

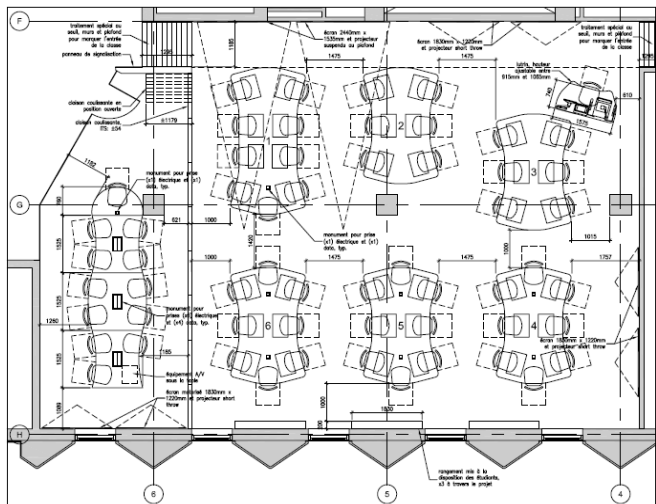
### Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs)

Two Active Learning Classrooms were created during Summer, 2009, based upon the research, planning, and extensive input from the McGill community. These two classrooms draw from SCALE-UP ([Student-Centered Active Learning Environment for Undergraduate Programs](#)) principles and classrooms established at over 40 universities across North America.

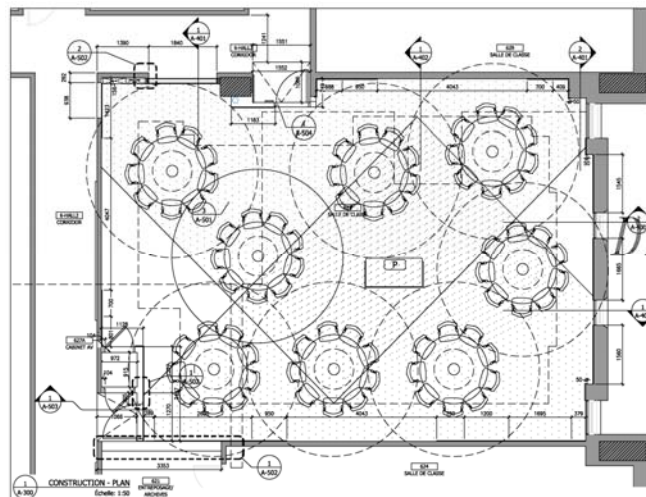
The deployment of the ALCs does not end with their construction, but rather continues through carefully planned support services to assist professors in the unique opportunities afforded by these spaces. Based in part upon visits to other universities who are successfully using similar classrooms with highly positive feedback, as well as consultation and feedback gathered from the [survey responses](#) of over 50 professors and support units who have already been involved in active learning classrooms, McGill University's teaching and support units (TLS, ICS, CCS, NCS) are collaborating to provide enhanced support to professors in the first year. While McGill has always supported instructors in their use of classrooms for teaching, the support for these new spaces include specialized one-on-one and group consultations, as well as technical support for professors (on-site, telephone and e-mail). An emphasis upon inter-unit collaboration between TLS, campus instructional technology units (ICS, CCS, NCS), and Enrolment Services has allowed those with expertise in various areas to contribute towards the success of this endeavor. In keeping with this emphasis upon transparency and collaboration, these rooms are available for use by all Faculties at McGill.

The floor plans and brief details below describe some of the aspects of these two classrooms that can contribute to students' active engagement with course content, collaboration between students, and interaction with faculty.

**Burnside 511**



**Education 627**



- Presenter (student or instructor) can show two sources
- The furniture facilitates interaction and collaboration among students
- Every student has access to a high-powered computer with specialized software
- The second seminar room can be used for breakout sessions or combined to form a larger room
- Software can be used to share screens within the classroom

- Presenter (student or instructor) can show two sources
- The furniture facilitates interaction and collaboration among students (8 round tables of 9 students)
- Students have access to 2 computers per table (plus laptops)
- Students have writing space on walls for collaboration
- Students can share their screens at their table
- Students can share screens with the entire class on main projectors

### Evaluation

There are two primary goals of the evaluation of these classrooms being undertaken in Fall 2009:

- Document the use of the Active Learning Classrooms
- Generate knowledge across the University about active and collaborative learning.

To address these aims, all willing professors and students in these classrooms will be observed during their first course. In addition, both pre-, during-, and post- course questionnaires will be given to the professors, while students will receive during- and post-course questionnaires. All professors will complete the [Approaches to Teaching Inventory](#) (ATI) to understand their conceptions of teaching. In addition, professors' course outlines and student class products will be documented.

A focus group of four courses (two from each room) will have numerous additional observations over the course of the semester. Within this group, professors will be interviewed during the semester and will have an exit interview, while students will participate in a group exit interview. The outcomes from this documentation process will inform the University community as it moves forward in the Active Learning Classroom arena.

----- URLs for hyperlinks above -----

- National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE): <http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm>  
 post-secondary student engagement: [http://nsse.iub.edu/2004\\_annual\\_report/pdf/2004\\_Conceptual\\_Framework.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/2004_annual_report/pdf/2004_Conceptual_Framework.pdf)  
 Teaching and Learning Spaces Working Group: <http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/projects/tlswg/>  
 principles for designing teaching and learning spaces: <http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/projects/tlswg/principles/>  
 Student-Centered Active Learning Environment for Undergraduate Programs: <http://scaleup.ncsu.edu/>  
 survey responses: <http://www.educause.edu/Resources/PedagogicalTechnologicalSupport/175297>  
 Approaches to Teaching inventory: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/h783327838855132/fulltext.pdf>