

# NOT YOUR AVERAGE CLASSROOM



## STUDIO 101 IS ALLOWING TRI-C'S INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES OF INTERACTIVE LEARNING.

A traditional classroom has rows of desks facing the front of the room, where there is usually a table or lectern from which the teacher delivers the lesson. It's the way classrooms have been arranged for hundreds of years.

So, if you're going to build a new kind of classroom, what's the first step? Empty everything out.

That's the idea behind Studio 101, an active learning classroom at Cuyahoga Community College's Metropolitan Campus.

Located in the Liberal Arts building, Studio 101 is a former black box theater. It's the perfect setting for an active learning classroom — a three-dimensional blank canvas with no permanent fixtures. Movable desks and chairs, whiteboards, tables and other fixtures can be rearranged in countless ways depending on the needs of a given class.

The setup allows faculty members to plan nontraditional classroom activities, encouraging students to get out of their

seats, move around the space and interact with the lesson material. It stands in stark contrast to the prevailing classroom concept entrenched in schools for generations.

"The model we predominantly use now dates to the Industrial Revolution," said Brian Hall, an associate professor of English at Tri-C and director of Studio 101. "The method of student engagement has more or less stayed the same."

Hall, along with fellow Metro Campus faculty member Brad Lipinski and reading specialist Brenda Boshela, began discussing the possibility of creating an active learning classroom space several years ago. Their discussions produced the framework for Studio 101.

**"THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS. WE'VE STARTED TO SEE THE EMERGENCE OF MORE CLASSROOM MODELS THAT PUT THE FOCUS ON THE STUDENT AND MAKE THEM ACTIVE LEARNERS, WHICH IS THE IDEA BEHIND STUDIO 101."**



### ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE LEARNING

The lecture-based classroom model often turns students into passive learners. They receive the lesson and record necessary information in notes or on digital recorders, which they then utilize to study for tests and projects that measure their retention of the information.

The trouble is that when you make students passive participants, some become less engaged in the material. Less-engaged students don't retain as much information and might not perform as well overall.

Studio 101's layout — or lack thereof — creates an environment in which passive learning isn't an option. Students have to interact and participate in order to be a part of the lesson. And often, those lessons follow some unconventional paths.

In September, Kyla Weeks' English 1010 class used the space for an escape room activity. Students had an hour to comb through clues related to Tri-C's history, solving a puzzle to "escape" from the room.

Weeks had previously tried an escape room activity with family and friends and wondered if the idea could be applied to a class lesson. She knew it would be the perfect thing to attempt at Studio 101.

"I've been utilizing Studio 101 since it opened," Weeks said. "The students love it. They don't feel confined to their desks like in a traditional classroom. It's a chance to move around and try different activities."

Most of the students in Weeks' class had never set foot inside Studio 101 prior to the escape room activity.

"I think it's an interesting idea," Michael Garner said. "It lets us get into groups and work as a team. Really not what you'd expect out of a class."

"It really feels like this was a space designed specifically for hands-on things," Jalon Tripp said. "Sometimes in class, you just want to sit down; but here, you don't want to sit down. You want to be up and moving around."

### MANY APPLICATIONS

Studio 101 opened on a limited basis for the fall semester in 2015. Since opening for full-time use in 2016, faculty at Metro Campus have been encouraged to use the space for classes, primarily via word of mouth. And there has been a response — the versatility of the space has allowed its use by classes in a wide range of subject areas.



“English has used it a lot,” Hall said. “But we’ve had math classes use it ... sociology, psychology and science classes ... even nursing classes have found it useful.”

Individual students have also found the space useful as a quiet place to study or explore creative pursuits. As you enter Studio 101, before you walk a short hallway to the black box room, you step into a room lined with wood paneling from floor to ceiling. Illuminated by soft lighting from floor lamps and outfitted with several chairs and tables, this is the study room.

“It’s a quieter place where students can come to work alone or in small groups,” Hall said. “It’s decorated in a way to make it look more relaxed, while still encouraging studying and academic work. It’s not just a hangout — it’s still a place to learn, but again, challenging the traditional notion of a classroom.”

Between the study room and the black box room is what Hall considers one of the most important features of the entire space: a glass wall.

# STUDIO 101

“For students in the study area, the glass wall opens them up to what might be going on in the black box room,” Hall said. “They see what is happening in there, and they start to realize the different ways classes can be set up. It opens them up to the possibilities.”

Studio 101 is, in the end, entirely about possibilities. Not just within its own walls, but in the way it could impact how classroom education is conducted in the future.

The traditional classroom is not likely to vanish completely. But Hall wants to see a day when active learning spaces are far more common in American colleges and universities.

**“I’M NOT GOING TO RETIRE FOR QUITE A WHILE, BUT BY THE TIME I DO, I’D LIKE TO SEE THIS TYPE OF CLASSROOM BECOME THE NORM.”**

“The students have given us overwhelmingly positive feedback — in fact, we have an entire wall of quotes from them next to my office. So this is something that resonates with them.

“If this makes learning interactive and interesting for students, I think that’s the most powerful message you can send.”