

Located in Perkins Library—Link is an expansive and flexible campus space designed to foster innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Link Environmental Identity for Duke University, 2008.

How do we make an expansive and flexible campus facility offering innovative spatial and technological approaches to teaching and learning within a library a desirable destination? In 2008, I was asked to lead the process of naming and visually branding this innovative and experimental teaching and learning center. Located on the lower level of Perkins Library, the Link project represented an important opportunity for the University to evaluate and assess decisions concerning the design of learning spaces at Duke. The original brief from the University sought to not only develop an excellent and desirable teaching space, but a space that would foster “place.” Assessing that experimentation and sense of place was a key concern for future academic space planning at Duke. Therefore, significant attention was paid to gathering data about the use of the space and the overall implementation of the project’s vision. The result of this data analysis was made publicly available as an assessment report.

(Right) Duke Link service counter and supergraphic



Link Environmental Identity for Duke University, 2008.

Developing the Link identity involved meeting and collaborating with faculty, librarians, staff, facility managers, architects, and interior designers. To work through initial and eventually final concepts, we hosted a design charrette (with free pizza) in the library. The final Link logotype appears on signage, apparel worn by staff, and the Link website. The logotype's arrow, part of the AIGA standard symbols set, points back into the "k" of Link, emphasizing knowledge, connection, and reflection. Architect Tom Kearns, FAIA, led the design of the space. For the interior architecture and interior design Kearns and interior designer Joe Rondinelli were inspired by the architecture of Charles Moore, flexible technology spaces, and retail environments. Likewise, the branding and environmental graphic design were inspired by the bold graphics of Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, who worked with Moore on several projects in the late 1960s, including Sea Ranch in California. The Sea Ranch came to be "the California architectural monument of the 1960s," in the words of the design historian David S. Gebhard.

In the published assessment of the Link, students and faculty typically singled out the "architecture and design concept" as a key element of its success.

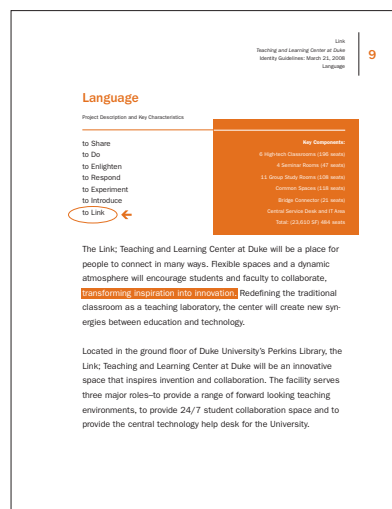
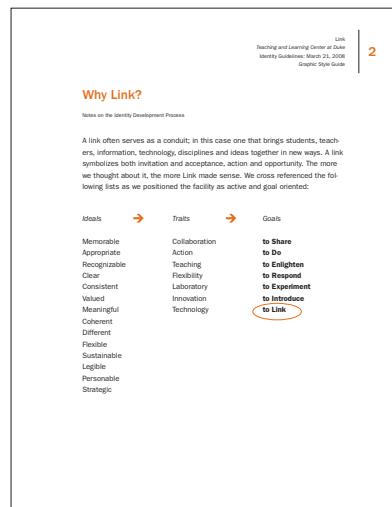
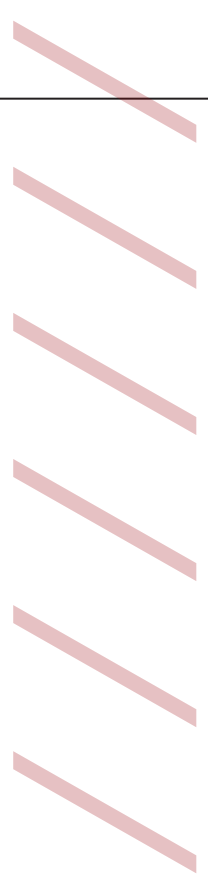
Credits—

- Architecture Firm: Shepley Bulfinch
- Principal Architect: Tom Kearns, FAIA (now of DSK Architects and Planners)
- Signage Consultant: Roll Barresi & Associates
- Signage and Environmental Graphic Designer: Anna Farrington
- Contributing Designer: Caroline Shannon, AIA
- Photographer: Anton Grassl



The Duke Link Teaching and Learning Center, which first opened in 2008 as part of a phased renovation to Perkins Library.

Link Environmental Identity for Duke University, 2008.



Assessment of the LINK Teaching and Learning Center in Perkins Library

Executive Summary

After an intensive planning, design and construction process, the LINK in Perkins Library opened as scheduled in August 2008. The vision and the design principles of the project (pg. 3) dictated, in brief, that the space should consist of:

- Excellent teaching environments
- Flexibility in furniture, infrastructure and technologies
- Support for diverse disciplines, learning styles, pedagogies
- Experimentation to inform the development of learning environments at Duke

Based on data gathered from multiple sources including student and faculty web surveys, systematic observations, analysis of service records, and staff and faculty discussions, several factors have defined the success of this ambitious project.

Elements of the Link's success

- **Architecture and design concept**
Students and faculty typically singled out these aspects when asked what they liked best about the space. The modern design and aesthetics were almost universally well received.
- **Location**
The convenient and central West Campus academic quad location as well as proximity to library resources and services were cited as key features by both students and faculty.
- **Co-location of formal and informal learning spaces and flexible classroom features**
Although not without challenges, the clustering of classrooms, group study and common study space has been viewed as a success by faculty and students. The permeable boundary between the classrooms and study spaces has resulted in tangible benefits to teaching and learning experiences.
- **Convenient access to technology, services and support**
Classroom support was a significant advantage to faculty teaching in the space. Availability of equipment for checkout at the Service Desk was also praised by both faculty and students.



Barbara Stauffacher Solomon at LAXART, May 31, 2019 (photo by Matt Stromberg for Hyperallergic). Stauffacher's bold supergraphics and use of arrows and angular forms informed our aesthetic approach to the Link's environmental graphics and identity.

Current challenges and future needs

The initial success of the LINK has created a strong foundation for future growth. However, the remainder of this academic year will be a critical time. In Spring 2009, all elements of the space should become fully operational. Use of the space for scheduled classes will also be increased, and demand for other types of use is rising and is expected to be greater than in Fall 2008. Meeting the needs of scheduled classes, accommodating ad hoc use, determining priorities for access, and ensuring continued excellence of the technology and facilities will be an increasing challenge. Specific challenges for the remainder of this academic year and beyond include:

1. Ensure that academic use remains the top priority while also accommodating some important non-academic uses and special events.
2. Provide a technology infrastructure that supports high-end users without compromising support, ease of use and reliability for baseline users.
3. Engage more faculty and courses in experiments with promising pedagogies and classroom technologies, especially those already available in the Link.
4. Develop a seamless, proactive support structure that can scale to support increased use and high levels of Service Desk traffic.
5. Improve communication and outreach about the Link's policies and features.
6. Collaborate with students to identify feasible ways to prioritize group use of group study spaces.
7. Ensure that lessons learned continue to be captured and shared broadly for the benefit of all stakeholders, including the broader higher education community.

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Assessment Committee
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Jean Ferguson, Perkins Library
Erin Nettifee, Office of Information Technology
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Cathy Carter, Arts & Sciences Facilities
Caroline Bruzelius, Art, Art History & Visual Studies
Rick Hoyte, Psychology & Neuroscience
Pravad Khasibatta, Nicholas School of the Environment
Deborah Reisinger, Romance Studies Research

I. Evolution of the LINK

For the past four years, Duke University has been intensively engaged in a classroom modernization initiative. The LINK project has been significantly influenced by several recently renovated prototype spaces at Duke as well as larger trends in higher education toward building collaborative flexible learning spaces.

Building upon the work of an Ad Hoc Committee on Classrooms (2004), Provost Lange proposed the creation of a space based on the Teaching and Learning Center concept.

The vision included technology-enhanced classrooms, group study spaces, informal learning spaces and on-site support that would promote effective teaching and learning, including collaborative work and project-based learning activities. The evolution of learning space planning at Duke was furthered by a Statement of Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning Spaces adopted by the Academic Space Planning Working Group in 2006 as well as lessons learned from renovated and prototype classrooms.

The LINK was built to create a next generation dynamic academic space to support student and faculty learning, teaching, and collaboration. Three principles guided the design of the space:

1. All learning spaces should be fundamentally excellent teaching environments with appropriate square footage/seat, good sightlines and acoustics, pleasant aesthetics, transparency, as well as lighting and control systems
2. Spaces should maximize flexibility with respect to furniture systems, teaching walls configuration, infrastructure for power, data, and information technology as well as audio visual systems.
3. Spaces should support a range of learning and teaching styles and pedagogies. The environments should allow for experimentation and the findings should be captured to inform other learning environments on campus.

Within this framework, an intensive planning, design and construction process took place under the leadership of Bob Thompson, Tracy Futney, Jim Roberts, and Ron Djuren. A large planning committee led by Ed Gomes worked with architects from SRA and technology consultants from Vantage to combine the expertise of IT staff, instructional technologists, and librarians with lessons learned from prototype spaces as well as pedagogical needs voiced by Duke faculty. Final decisions were guided by reflecting on the needs of a broad range of courses, including specific examples of technologically-intensive courses that could be uniquely supported in the LINK.

The final result consists of:

- Six classrooms: 4 with room for 20-30, 1 seating 40, and 1 seating 50

Pedagogically, learning is most effective when it is active, problem-based, and collaborative... We must provide up-to-date conventional classrooms and seminar rooms that facilitate interaction as well as dynamic spaces that facilitate collaborative discovery and learning processes... Excerpt from "Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning Spaces," Academic Space Planning Working Group, December 2006

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