

Teaching in Active Learning Classrooms with Tablet Arm Chairs on Casters

Several dozen classrooms at Carolina have been outfitted with a new generation of tablet arm seats. The casters on these chairs make them easier to re-configure during class. The tablet surfaces can be adjusted by students to accommodate individual preferences. For example, all seats accommodate both right- and left-handed students.



Instructors who have taught in classrooms outfitted with this furniture report that it encourages student interaction, makes it easier for instructors to move throughout the classroom, and reduces the time it takes to transition between lecture, small group activities, and full class discussion. Students say it is easier for them to personalize their space, to move into groups, and to establish and maintain eye contact with other students. More information on the University's evaluation of these seats is available at: <http://cfe.unc.edu/tablet-chairs-on-casters/>

Guidelines for Success

Lesson planning

In classrooms designed for interaction, students will expect opportunities to discuss course concepts with their peers. The instructional methods you decide to use and frequency will be informed by your course and lesson goals. Center for Faculty Excellence staff are available to discuss ideas for adopting and implementing active learning techniques for your course that take advantage of active learning classroom features. For more information on best practices, workshops, videos, consultations, and other resources that you can use to make the most of these classrooms, visit the [Flexible Learning Spaces Initiative website](#).

Mobile furniture

The ability to interact directly with all students in the classroom is one of the primary goals of the active learning classroom. For example, you will likely want to interact directly with students when they are working in small groups. Keeping classroom floor space clear will help you navigate tight spaces.

- Have students keep book bags and personal items off the floor by storing them in the storage bay beneath the seat and/or hung on the back of the chair.
- When you ask students to form small groups, have them pull their seats as close together as is socially comfortable.

During exams, consider using the flexibility of the seats to discourage Honor Code violations by having students arrange seats in outward-facing clusters. This and other ideas for configuring seats are available in a [downloadable PowerPoint presentation](#).

You can also use these slides to help students visualize what configurations you would like to adopt during class. Remember that students can easily move their seats to accommodate your wishes, they just need some guidance.

If your course enrollment/attendance is less than the number of seats, unused seats can become an impediment. Tablet seats on casters are easy to move but cannot be stacked.

- Consider consolidating seating arrangements by asking students to sit in certain parts of the room.
- Consider isolating unused seats in one section of each of the learning zones (e.g. ask students to first occupy seats near the front of the room).
- Keep in mind that the location of power outlets will inform some students' decisions about where to sit. Access to power is typically on a first come, first served basis. If you plan to use whiteboards installed in your classroom, you should discourage students from plugging

Whiteboards

Your classroom may also feature wall-mounted or mobile whiteboards. Shared writing surfaces provide students with opportunities to visualize their understanding and to learn from one another. They can be used to facilitate a variety of [easy-to-implement active learning techniques](#).

- Maintain access to the walls by discouraging students from plugging into electrical outlets near whiteboards.
- Establish a routine of having students erase their work at the end of class.
- Contact the [ITS Classroom Hotline](#) if you notice that there are no working dry erase markers or if the boards are dirty or broken.

Classroom technology

Additional monitors have been added to a few of the larger classrooms. They provide instructors with the ability to display multiple sources at one time, including a wireless display option that makes it easy to display content from laptops, tablets, or phones without being plugged in. Where multiple displays are available, you can opt to extend the desktop of the classroom computer across all displays.

Some flexible classrooms are equipped with at least one small power tower (similar to a power strip) that can be used to help keep students away from outlets along the walls, especially near whiteboards.

Window-based air conditioning units can make it difficult to hear in a classroom. If you are teaching in a flexible classroom with multiple window air conditioning units, see if you can turn one off and still maintain a comfortable environment.

Adjusting to the classroom

Walking into a classroom where the furniture is not laid out in neat rows can be a little unsettling initially. According to survey data gathered during the evaluation of other campus classrooms using mobile furniture, most students and instructors adjust to the feel of these rooms over the course of the semester. This is especially true when instructors and students begin to realize the instructional benefits of the classroom design.

Our evaluation results suggest that when instructors express enthusiasm about the learning environment, their students are more likely to do the same. On the first day of class, introduce students to the classroom and how you plan to use it to support your learning goals for the course. If appropriate, encourage student buy-in by letting them help you craft the policies that will govern use of the classroom. Make your expectations clear on day one and take the time to enforce them the first week to help make class norms stick.

We welcome your own suggestions for teaching in this classroom as you gain experience. Good luck!

Questions about using this classroom to support your instructional goals?

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Questions about classroom technology?

If you have any problems or questions regarding the technology in the classroom, please pick up the **red phone** that connects you immediately with someone at ITS Classroom Hotline. You can also access support resources or request an individual consultation by visiting the website hotline.unc.edu.