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Moving the Needle – Episode 44

00:00:00 Erin Hager

Welcome to moving the needle.

00:00:03 Erin Hager

Casual conversations about ways big and small to impact student learning.

00:00:07 Erin Hager

Brought to you by the faculty Center for Teaching and learning at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. I'm Erin Hager.

00:00:14 Erin Hager

Let's move the needle.

00:00:18 Erin Hager

Hi everyone.

00:00:19 Erin Hager

Welcome back to.

00:00:20 Erin Hager

Needle years ago, when I first started talking with faculty about the possibilities of asynchronous online.

00:00:27 Erin Hager

One of the things we often discussed was that online teaching requires a new conceptualization of time and space.

00:00:34 Erin Hager

It can be a little disorienting for us to think about class time or class session.

00:00:40 Erin Hager

Stretching out for a week, for example.

00:00:42 Erin Hager

It can be disorienting to think of a discussion as this slow moving experience, where folks might not respond to a provocative post for a day or so.

00:00:51 Erin Hager

Maybe faculty would miss that rapid fire peppery back and forth discussion that a traditional classroom can.

00:00:58 Erin Hager

But also, maybe they depreciate a more thoughtful dialogue wherein even the quieter students would be more inclined to participate.

00:01:06 Erin Hager

Well, today we're going to talk about another teaching environment that expands our thinking about teaching space in a similar way.

00:01:13 Erin Hager

Back in 2021, the FCTL began planning to build a high Flex learning space in the Hshsl library. As you'll hear, our guest today describe a High Flex learning space is designed so that students can choose whether they'll attend a class session.

00:01:28 Erin Hager

In person or remotely.

00:01:31 Erin Hager

Now, for those of you who have ever needed to join an in person meeting remotely and maybe felt like a neglected stepchild where you can't hear what's going on, some of the speakers are out of your field of vision.

00:01:43 Erin Hager

Folks are looking at a document that you don't have.

00:01:46 Erin Hager

Rest assured that this is not that.

00:01:49 Erin Hager

A high.

00:01:49 Erin Hager

Space is intentionally designed so that learners don't feel a difference in the experience based on where they're physically located.

00:01:57 Erin Hager

It blurs the boundaries of space so that collaboration and engagement are possible no matter where the.

00:02:03 Erin Hager

Let's meet our guests.

00:02:05 Erin Hager

Tony Delane is an IT collaboration specialist.

00:02:09 Erin Hager

He has over 20 years of experience in audio visual nine of those in higher education settings with installing conference and classroom spaces within the University of Maryland system.

00:02:20 Erin Hager

Kevin Engler has worked for the FCTL since its earliest days as an instructional designer and academic development manager, helping faculty and program directors, design and develop online courses and entire curricula.

00:02:33 Erin Hager

He's passionate about ensuring a quality learning experience for all students.

00:02:38 Erin Hager

Tony and Kevin, welcome to moving the needle.

00:02:40 Kevin Engler

Oh, thanks for having us.

00:02:42 Erin Hager

Let's just start with some.

00:02:44 Erin Hager

This term high flex, it sounds kind of kind of muscly.

00:02:48 Erin Hager

Tell us a little bit what High Flex learning is and what a high flex space.

00:02:54 Erin Hager

Kevin, do you want to start by talking us through a high Flex learning environment and then we'll get into the the technical side.

00:03:00 Kevin Engler

Yeah. So Hiflex course design is really all about giving students flexibility and how they attend and participate in classes.

00:03:10 Kevin Engler

So the term High Flex combines the words hybrid and flexible.

00:03:16 Kevin Engler

Meaning that students can choose to join in person or online in real time, and they can even interact with a course asynchronously using a learning management system like Blackboard.

00:03:29 Kevin Engler

So just to reinforce a key point, I want to make sure everybody gets this.

00:03:35 Kevin Engler

It's up to the students to choose how they engage in a course on any given day.

00:03:40 Kevin Engler

A couple of benefits of high flex design.

00:03:44 Kevin Engler

To students are that accommodates different learning style.

00:03:47 Kevin Engler

Files as well as varying schedules. Students can pick the mode that suits them best on any given day, and to pull this off, an instructor would need to be comfortable with the technology and also have a good system for managing both.

00:04:04 Kevin Engler

In person and online interactions, and fortunately we have Tony here to help familiarize folks with how they use the technology.

00:04:12 Kevin Engler

So to summarize quickly, Hi Flex is about.

00:04:16 Kevin Engler

Flexibility and inclusiveness and making sure that every student has access to the course content in a way that's best for them.

00:04:24 Erin Hager

That's.

00:04:25 Erin Hager

And I'm really excited to dive into some thinking about what that means for an.

00:04:30 Erin Hager

What that means for the students, but just so that our listeners have a more concrete picture of of what this means.

00:04:37 Erin Hager

Can you give us?

00:04:39 Erin Hager

A little verbal walkthrough of what?

00:04:42 Erin Hager

High flex rooms look like in general, and what our particular room is equipped with here at UMB.

00:04:49 Tony Delane

Certainly. So once you walk into the classroom, you'll see tables that that actually be mobile with power.

00:04:55 Tony Delane

So we can we can rearrange the classroom setting into whatever they desire, whether they want to be in a group setting or theater style classroom.

00:05:04 Tony Delane

Traditional classroom setting.

00:05:06 Tony Delane

The tables have power, so they can. Each student can sit at the.

00:05:10 Tony Delane

They, if they have their phone chargers, they can actually charge their phones at the at the.

00:05:15 Tony Delane

They can plug up their laptops at the tables and there are additional power stations around the room which we have 4 in total that.

00:05:23 Tony Delane

You know, depending on the style that we we rearrange the class that they can.

00:05:28 Tony Delane

You know, there's there's power available, so they there's no shortage of that in the classroom.

00:05:33 Tony Delane

As far as the technology is concerned, we have 286 inch displays with two.

00:05:39 Tony Delane

Cameras that that are actually have AI chips in them that frame the user when they while they're while they're speaking and they're not really necessarily framing them based on the audio, but it's more the movement in the room.

00:05:57 Tony Delane

So if a person is moving the camera kind of like.

00:06:01 Tony Delane

Within 10 seconds, square them up and make sure that the picture is right.

00:06:06 Tony Delane

We have those.

00:06:07 Tony Delane

We have one on the front end of the.

00:06:09 Tony Delane

We have one in the in the rear room. The rear room camera is going to be used the most because that's where the professor is going to be speaking in the front of the room.

00:06:19 Tony Delane

The professor has a lecture in this powered it rises up and down and we he can also put his laptop there if he if he wants to bring his own device.

00:06:31 Tony Delane

The room has it's has a dedicated PC.

00:06:35 Tony Delane

You can bring your own device and if you do bring your own device, you can connect wirelessly.

00:06:41 Tony Delane

We have that option in your.

00:06:43 Tony Delane

Can connect via HDMI cable.

00:06:47 Tony Delane

Let me let me just we their their microphones in.

00:06:50 Tony Delane

Ceiling. I don't want to forget.

00:06:52 Tony Delane

So the microphones in the ceiling and so they're not for amplification, they're more so that. So the students and the faculty who are in the class that can, they can be more hands free while they while they're collaborating. And the people on the far end can listen in.

00:07:10 Tony Delane

What's going inside the room without?

00:07:12 Tony Delane

Without there being any shortages in audio, any space of the classroom, the room has speakers. So the far end, if they do have questions or if we just want to play program audio, there's audio in the classroom as well.

00:07:26 Tony Delane

The people can talk.

00:07:27 Tony Delane

Listen and even collaborate as well.

00:07:31 Erin Hager

You know I'm, I'm remembering.

00:07:33 Erin Hager

I've been in where the meeting was happening on campus and there were people, you know, kind of zooming in and the the people on zoom feel a little bit like the stepchildren of the meeting because maybe they can't hear everything that's going on or, you know, there somet.

00:07:50 Erin Hager

Happening just outside of their line.

00:07:52 Erin Hager

Where the camera.

00:07:52 Erin Hager

Is this sounds like this setup is really designed to not let that happen.

00:07:58 Tony Delane

Correct. The way the room is set up, we can configure it any way the the professor. They can come hands free and use our use the dedicated PC.

00:08:08 Tony Delane

Or they can bring their own device and we connect them wired wirelessly.

00:08:14 Tony Delane

You know the students with, with that being said, the wireless option.

00:08:18 Tony Delane

Has a has a mode where multiple people can collaborate all at.

00:08:22 Tony Delane

So if the students, if they're doing a collaboration and the students want to tie into what's going on in the classroom, they can share their information as well, so.

00:08:33 Tony Delane

You know, the technology is constantly expanding in this room and I think as we use this, the space is going to, it's going to continue to grow.

00:08:43 Erin Hager

Gotcha. So the idea is.

00:08:46 Erin Hager

The faculty member is in the physical space. Or could the faculty member be remote?

00:08:52 Erin Hager

Is the faculty member always in the physical space?

00:08:55 Tony Delane

It it it, it doesn't have to be that way.

00:08:57 Tony Delane

So I mean, as long as they're they're on using a video platform, the faculty member can be remote and and as long as it's set up in the classroom, the students can be in the classroom and the faculty member can be remote. Or the students can be REM.

00:09:12 Tony Delane

With just the faculty member in the classroom, it's all about the bridge that we're using.

00:09:16 Tony Delane

Communicate the message.

00:09:18 Erin Hager

OK.

00:09:19 Erin Hager

Flexible, meaning anyone of the class participants, faculty members, or students could be remote or in the shared space in the library.

00:09:31 Erin Hager

And so how did this idea come to be?

00:09:34 Erin Hager

What are the origins of this?

00:09:37 Erin Hager

What drove the move toward this kind of flexibility?

00:09:42 Kevin Engler

Oh, yeah. I mean, well, I think it's a combination of circumstances cause 2021 of course is right on the heels of the the COVID change.

00:09:53 Kevin Engler

Not that high. Flex didn't precede that, but you also had the availability of lots of different technology that was available to facilitate that. And just, you know, people became.

00:10:09 Kevin Engler

Comfortable.

00:10:11 Kevin Engler

With being online and learning online not just from the student side, but also from the instructor side, I think if we had, you know, tried to broach the subject of High flex learning.

00:10:24 Kevin Engler

Before COVID among faculty, it would have met with quite a bit more resistance.

00:10:30 Kevin Engler

Now people are really open to it and really interested in it.

00:10:34 Erin Hager

That's great, Tony. As you've started getting the word out to faculty on campus, what do you notice?

00:10:40 Erin Hager

Are they excited?

00:10:41 Erin Hager

What are they curious?

00:10:42 Erin Hager

What kind of questions do they bring to you?

00:10:45 Tony Delane

Well, I think it's the questions that I'm getting is.

00:10:49 Tony Delane

What options do they?

00:10:50 Tony Delane

What? What? What is the room set?

00:10:53 Tony Delane

How how quickly they can get familiar with the?

00:10:57 Tony Delane

So I am offering orientation classes before they start their semester of learning.

00:11:05 Tony Delane

In these in these spaces, I feel like I have to lend a hand and make sure that I'm on. I'm I'm on site.

00:11:13 Tony Delane

For the beginning of these courses, just to ease them in because you know our faculty and staff, they're really here to educate the the technology can be cumbersome.

00:11:25 Tony Delane

It can be intimidating.

00:11:28 Tony Delane

And we're, you know, we, we want this stuff, but we want to make sure that it gets used in the proper way and you know.

00:11:36 Tony Delane

When it when the professor is coming to class, they can ease in and they can learn it.

00:11:42 Tony Delane

On.

00:11:43 Tony Delane

Not necessarily on the fly, but they can learn what they need and get in the rhythm of.

00:11:50 Tony Delane

Come into class and turn turn the stuff on by themselves.

00:11:54 Tony Delane

But I think that as you know, as as a professional techie myself, I would like to be on site just to make sure that they're comfortable with all the new technology that we're presenting to them.

00:12:05 Erin Hager

Yeah, I'm sure they're grateful for that.

00:12:08 Erin Hager

Once they push through.

00:12:09 Erin Hager

Learning curve of how does this work?

00:12:11 Erin Hager

Button do I.

00:12:12 Erin Hager

Where do I stand?

00:12:15 Erin Hager

What kind of learning activities and and what kind of opportunities does this technology afford faculty?

00:12:22 Kevin Engler

You know, I am thinking of examples of learning events and it draws me back to cats classroom assessment techniques.

00:12:34 Kevin Engler

It's a catalog for those that aren't familiar with.

00:12:37 Kevin Engler

That's a it's a compilation. We have a we have a book called classroom assessment techniques in the fctl library, and it's a catalogue of all kinds of learning activities that can take place in a classroom.

00:12:51 Kevin Engler

Depending on the the level of student and topics that are being presented.

00:12:56 Kevin Engler

And just about anything that's in there can probably be executed in a high flex course.

00:13:05 Kevin Engler

And I can.

00:13:06 Kevin Engler

I'll throw out a few examples, but they're all you know, things that most people I think have some experience with.

00:13:14 Kevin Engler

This is probably not new.

00:13:16 Kevin Engler

For some folks, it's just executing it in two different modalities. That may be a a little bit of a challenge.

00:13:24 Kevin Engler

So a traditional lecture or a guest speaker or student presentations can be executed in the High Flex classroom, of course.

00:13:35 Kevin Engler

Socratic seminars where a teacher asks questions to help students uncover their understanding of different topics.

00:13:43 Kevin Engler

Academic paper analysis.

00:13:46 Kevin Engler

We can use software like hypothesis and also.

00:13:50 Kevin Engler

Communicate over.

00:13:52 Kevin Engler

Zoom in a live situation.

00:13:55 Kevin Engler

Discussion.

00:13:56 Kevin Engler

They can be text based or or also live.

00:14:02 Kevin Engler

And maybe structured group activities where students can work together on projects or problem solving tasks.

00:14:09 Kevin Engler

Thinking like team based learning or a jigsaw activity.

00:14:14 Kevin Engler

Jigsaw Media, a larger project is broken up into.

00:14:19 Kevin Engler

Sub projects and then sub groups of students work on these smaller projects and then bring the whole thing together in the.

00:14:25 Kevin Engler

At the end and then on online, students can use zoom breakout rooms to facilitate the small group activities, and they can either work amongst themselves online or with in person. Students also working with online students.

00:14:41 Erin Hager

Yeah. You you said something. I just want to make sure that I understand.

00:14:46 Erin Hager

When when you have students who are in the physical space in the room, in the library and also remote, and you want to do some kind of group activity, are you limited in the sense that only students in the physical room can work with students in the Phys?

00:14:59 Erin Hager

Room and online students are paired with.

00:15:02 Erin Hager

With folks coming in remotely, or can you partner up a person who is in the physical space with a person coming in remote?

00:15:09 Kevin Engler

Yes, you can absolutely partner.

00:15:11 Kevin Engler

So you can have the way that the technology is is arranged in the capabilities of the technology. And Tony, you may be able to jump in here and add something that I may have missed, but.

00:15:25 Kevin Engler

Students that are in person can work in small groups or in teams with students that are online and, you know, vice versa.

00:15:37 Kevin Engler

And you know, to a certain extent and of course this takes a certain amount of adaptability, but.

00:15:46 Kevin Engler

Students that are working asynchronously can also interact on a certain level.

00:15:52 Kevin Engler

For example, you could have a recorded lecturer in the student.

00:15:55 Kevin Engler

Comment on that record.

00:15:58 Kevin Engler

And then, you know, be part of a A-Team project. Again, it depends on how the activity is structured.

00:16:08 Erin Hager

I was just going to say it almost seems as though like the the traditional borders and boundaries that we think about are just really disappearing in in terms of how that could happen.

00:16:19 Tony Delane

Correct. And. And we're constantly, you know, technologies constantly updating and now we have AI.

00:16:25 Tony Delane

So we're.

00:16:26 Tony Delane

You know the AI boom and you know that's that's just we're just on the cusp of, you know, learning this, this technology.

00:16:35 Tony Delane

You know, who knows what? What's going to happen beyond that?

00:16:38 Tony Delane

Because it's everywhere now.

00:16:39 Erin Hager

Yeah, yeah.

00:16:41 Erin Hager

So I guess just to now that we've sort of introduced this, this room in the space over the podcast to our listeners, how can faculty learn more?

00:16:51 Erin Hager

Can they see it in action?

00:16:53 Erin Hager

How might they request to use it?

00:16:55 Kevin Engler

The best way to reserve time in the High Flex classroom is to send a request to the Fetl e-mail account.

00:17:03 Kevin Engler

That's faculty center at umaryland.edu.

00:17:07 Kevin Engler

On the FCT website.

00:17:09 Kevin Engler

And if you can include the your best estimate about when you would need to reserve the room.

00:17:18 Kevin Engler

And there's just to let you know, there's no fee for using the room, and the room is available to any faculty member on campus. Or if you'd like to schedule a tour of the room before making a reservation, we can arrange that, too.

00:17:34 Kevin Engler

And so after you send an e-mail request, someone will be in touch with you to work out the details and also we can provide Tony, I'm saying we, Tony can provide training to use the equipment in the classroom to provide you with practice using the equipment so that.

00:17:52 Kevin Engler

Feel comfortable with it.

00:17:54 Erin Hager

We're just so grateful that you guys have taken the time to to share with us what you know about the space, how it came to be and what's there.

00:18:02 Erin Hager

And maybe we can continue this conversation after we get some pioneers using that room in a in a teaching setting to come talk about how it's worked out for them and what they learned about that process.

00:18:13 Erin Hager

Does that sound?

00:18:14 Kevin Engler

Yeah, that's wonderful.

00:18:15

Great.

00:18:16 Erin Hager

All.

00:18:16 Erin Hager

Thank you guys so much for your time and for all the work getting this together.

00:18:20 Tony Delane

You're welcome.

00:18:20 Kevin Engler

Thank you.

00:18:24

Thank you.

00:18:24 Erin Hager

You for joining us today on moving the needle.

00:18:27 Erin Hager

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