

café



Dining, Relaxing, Studying

Café spaces are sales tools for schools in the race to keep up with peers in recruiting and retaining students. The design of the space and food services are geared for the new types of connections that are expected of today's students – from collaborative group work to social interactions and solo studying. These spaces must support the learning that happens outside the walls of the classroom.

As a result, the institutional dining hall concept is disappearing as schools update old facilities and build new café spaces where the food is made fresh to order and the furniture, lighting and art are contemporary and welcoming. Food preparation in an “exhibition” kitchen is the new norm. Sustainability issues include trayless dining and no styrofoam packaging.

To support the emphasis on quick, grab ‘n go food service and the many uses of café space, offer a mix of booths and standing-height tables, as well as two-and four-person seated-height tables. Outside courtyard spaces with tables and chairs are typically included, even in northern climates.

As schools cater to a generation used to convenience and a palette of options, our research suggests that the new strategy for the café considers three key factors: community, comfort and study.

Community. Cafés are places for students, faculty and staff to gather at any time of day or night. Faculty use them to meet with peers or students. Students socialize, dine, relax, study and work on group projects. A mix of open, often loud spaces and places for quieter study is needed to meet the needs of the community at this campus crossroads.

Comfort. Students like spaces that are bold and colorful, so schools are using seating fabrics, carpeting, art and graphics to create unique, fun café spaces.

Students traditionally respond to a modern aesthetic and high-quality furniture in classrooms, common areas and cafés. They want a variety of seating and table options for the different ways they use cafés and the postural choices they prefer.

Study. The café's role as a transitional or in-between space exemplifies how learning happens everywhere on campus today. Wi-fi is expected in the café, as is access to power. But there are often not enough power outlets for today's technology-laden students and faculty.

Touchdown computer kiosks and benches are helpful for students checking class assignments and grades, communicating with faculty and getting a bit of work done on the way to and from class.

Tables aren't just for lunch trays anymore; they're work-surfaces for laptops, smartphones, books and everything else a student can load into a backpack. Consider providing mobile, comfortable seating; power access at table height; and screens that provide some privacy.

WHAT WE OBSERVED

Students are as likely to use a café for relaxation, socializing and individual and group study as they are for dining. Traditional dining halls with serving lines are being replaced by more open, interactive environments that are more residential in scale.

Gen Y students tend to graze. They consume four smaller meals daily and at nontraditional times, so café hours are longer. Teaching assistants and adjunct faculty use cafés for class prep and office hours.

Students work individually and in groups in cafés. But when they want to eat or study alone, sitting at a large table makes them feel self-conscious. Lack of power outlets is a common complaint.

Students enjoy using cafés as places to socialize and be entertained, to escape from the rigor of their academic lives.

Cafés are often a focal point of environmental sustainability, with an emphasis on sorting and recycling materials.

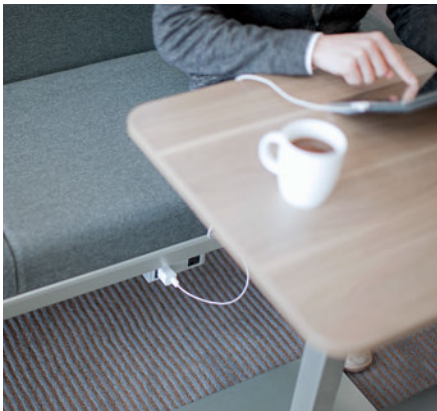
WHAT WE HEARD

“I feel like when I'm outside of class, it's a different kind of learning. It's more about learning about different types of people, and you learn by talking with them.”

Student

“I give assignments where students have to collaborate with one another... they do not pick their own partner. It allows them to have a dialogue outside class.”

Professor



An open café environment that supports dining and work allows for impromptu collaboration between students or with instructors. Regard™ supports a range of settings and postures.

LEARNING SPACES CAFÉ

Tips for Café Spaces

Cafés are used by everyone, from students and faculty to staff, visitors and vendors. They need to be welcoming spaces that work for a variety of uses, from dining and socializing to individual study and group work. A mix of spaces—quiet and loud, public and somewhat private—helps support the many ways cafés are used.

PRIVATE/ALONE

- 1 Provide small, private spaces for quiet study adjacent to larger, open cafés.
- 2 Create side spaces and nooks that allow individuals to retain privacy yet remain connected to the larger café space.

PUBLIC/ALONE

- 1 Standing-height computer kiosks or benches of small computer stations are ideally suited to students who need to quickly access technology.
- 2 Provide enough power outlets for today's heavy users of technology.
- 3 Provide seating for different postures, primarily using chairs and stools but also some lounge seating.
- 4 Provide enough seating for high-capacity work or study environments while maintaining personal space and territory for individuals.

PRIVATE/TOGETHER

- 1 Provide small, private spaces for groups adjacent to larger, open cafés.
- 2 Create side spaces and nooks that allow groups to retain privacy and work together while remaining connected to the larger café space.

PUBLIC/TOGETHER

- 1 Booths are hard to beat for group dining, socializing and studying.
- 2 Mobile, collapsible tables support many uses and store easily.
- 3 Lightweight tables can be grouped when students need to work together.
- 4 Café spaces are often used for large meetings. Stackable seating and nesting tables adapt to different room configurations.
- 5 Encourage users to stay for working, eating or socializing by supporting a range of postures and space to temporarily set out materials.
- 6 Use furniture and layout to build community and foster interaction.
- 7 Use new seating fabrics that combine stain resistance and durability with a soft feel.

Café Spaces

More than simply café spaces, these are places for community building and oases of comfort, as well as places where students study alone and with others. Faculty and staff will appreciate these spaces for meeting with colleagues, prepping for class or holding office hours with students. In addition, the applications here leverage the café's role as a focal point for the institution's commitment to environmental sustainability.

PRIVATE/ALONE

Things like large worksurfaces and access to power offer students the ability to continue their studies before or after a meal. Private spaces offer students a variety of study nooks throughout the space.

PUBLIC/ALONE

Individuals are offered a range of spaces to support work while in close proximity to others, whether for quick touchdowns or lengthy study periods.

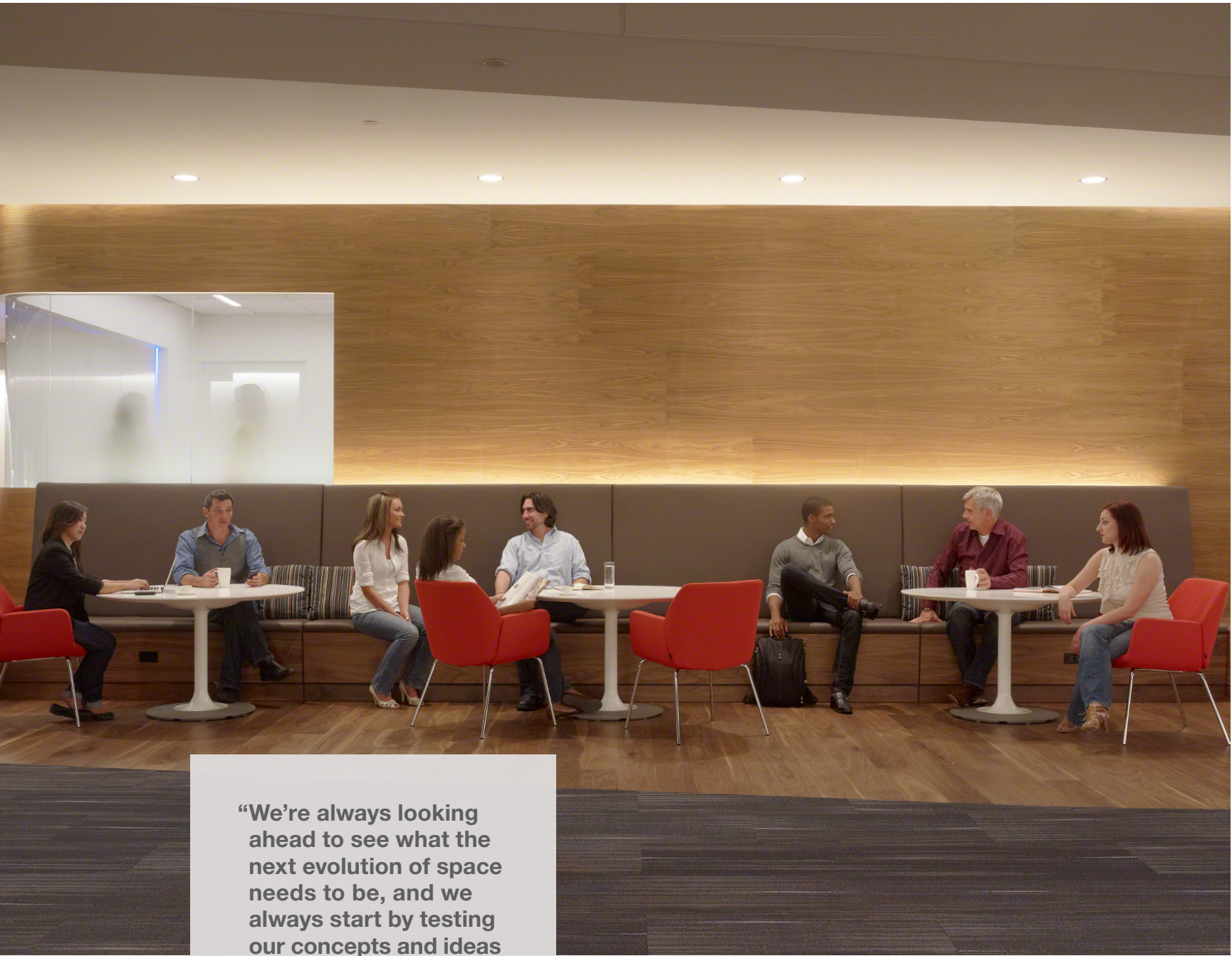
PUBLIC/TOGETHER

This café's floor plan is dedicated to building community on campus. Design social hubs within the space that are inviting and offer variety for students to choose from, including soft seating and other booth-like spaces.

PRIVATE/TOGETHER

Support group work outside classroom hours by allowing groups to meet within the café with private spaces for collaboration and group work.





“We’re always looking ahead to see what the next evolution of space needs to be, and we always start by testing our concepts and ideas for ourselves. These new spatial concepts will work for any industry and location.”

Jim Keane,
Steelcase CEO

GO DEEPER

Read about the New Third Place in 360 Magazine at 360.steelcase.com

Customer Story
Steelcase Global
Headquarters
Grand Rapids, MI

Drawing insights from our extensive research and behavioral prototypes—spaces where the company tests new theories on itself in real work environments—Steelcase reinvented the cafeteria at its global headquarters.

The former cafeteria had drawbacks typical of many corporate dining areas. It was busy in the morning for coffee, during lunch and again for afternoon breaks. At other times it was a ghost town. Furniture was designed for dining, not working, and its basement location put it out of the main traffic flow.

People move constantly from focused individual work to one-on-one meetings, project sessions to impromptu collaborations and a series of planned and unplanned interactions throughout the day, and 5 o’clock is no longer day’s end for most workers.

This understanding led to design strategies for WorkCafé, an onsite third place that combines the best of both worlds: a coffee shop vibe with the functionality of a well-planned office.

Food and beverages are available throughout the day. Focused and collaborative areas for both individual and group work are blended with areas for dining. Social and respite areas support socializing, working, networking and relaxing. Informative learning spaces help workers connect with colleagues and learn about the global company.

The space is welcoming, inspiring and well-equipped (including wi-fi, power outlets, media:scape, etc.).

People now come from across the Steelcase campus and other locations worldwide to the WorkCafé to eat, work, meet, socialize, network and relax. This space supports so many different activities that it’s become a busy intersection for Steelcase employees who are working in an increasingly global, interconnected company.

WorkCafé sets a new standard for what the cafeteria can be—and more important, what it can accomplish: a better place for people to work that enhances collaboration and innovation, attracts and engages workers, strengthens the organization’s brand and culture—and optimizes the company’s real estate investment.

[Creating an onsite third place encourages students to eat, study and socialize.](#)