

Office Space Allocation and Implications at FGCU: Faculty Perspectives

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Introduction

This paper is focused on faculty feedback regarding construction of new faculty office space in Merwin Hall and other future office space, whether in existing buildings or newly constructed ones. It outlines the implications of the current decision process on faculty ability to provide excellence in teaching, research, and service. This paper is organized into a description of the problem and background, data collection, findings, and implications. Finally, it provides tentative recommendations for balancing space and budget considerations with adequate faculty office space. This paper concludes that a rational space allocation process for planning, constructing, and apportioning faculty office space is needed and that that process must be inclusive, systematic, policy driven, sensitive to unique needs, and forward thinking.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this paper is to summarize and outline the most recent faculty feedback regarding the allocation and design of office space at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) – most immediately impacting the decision about final build-out of new faculty office space in Merwin Hall – and to outline the implications of other similar decisions in the future. This paper is limited to a discussion of faculty office space and summarizes previously gathered feedback. It is beyond the scope of this paper and faculty responses on which it is based to discuss faculty perspectives on the process by which decisions are made regarding whether or not to renovate or retrofit existing buildings in order to create new faculty offices in the first place. Anecdotal feedback that the Faculty Senate Executive Leadership has received suggests there is, as one might expect, a variance of faculty opinion about how and where to renovate existing space to create new faculty offices.

The availability and allocation of faculty office space on a university campus is not a new problem. As a finite resource, universities struggle with providing adequate space. This results in competition across all functions, including teaching, office, and programming space. Inevitably a rational space allocation process helps to clarify needs and make reasoned choices among competing interests. Like other institutions, FGCU space is increasingly limited. This problem has been exacerbated by sustained, access-driven enrollment growth in a context of repeated and substantial reductions in state funding, including the near-disappearance of Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funding for new academic buildings. FGCU has reached a time in its development when there is limited ability to meet demands for faculty office space and creative approaches are now more than ever necessary.

Background and Data Collection

FGCU faculty have been engaged in several discussions regarding space allocation for office and classroom space. These discussions have taken place in several venues, including the Safety and Facilities Committee (SFC) of the Planning and Budget Council (PBC), the Faculty Senate Planning and Budget Advisory Committee (SBPAC), the Institutional Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate (IAT), and informally through e-mail exchanges among groups of faculty who have extensive experience with the negative and/or suboptimal impacts of space limitations on faculty offices. In Spring 2012 Provost Toll charged three committees of the PBC – SFC, Enrollment and

Retention Management (ERMC) and Budget – with exploring the various issues and impacts related to space constraints, budget cuts, and enrollment growth.

As a result of this charge, SFC faculty representatives enlisted the help of faculty on the Senate’s IAT to solicit formal faculty input on how the University might make better use of office and classroom space.¹ The initial questions posed to faculty focused on the efficient use and allocation of space, as opposed to larger questions of physical size or configuration. Faculty were asked, among other things, “(h)ow can we more efficiently use office space (or, are there incentives we might consider for sharing of office space).”

Subsequent to this initial data collection effort, a decision was made to enclose the courtyard on the north face of Merwin Hall to create additional faculty office space. Initial reports received by faculty through administrative leadership in the College of Arts and Sciences indicated that the decision had been made to build shared faculty offices in this space. The perception that this decision was made before the faculty had an opportunity to fully consider the implications of shared space and participate in a shared approach to decision making resulted in a series of e-mail communications among faculty currently occupying offices in one of the modular units on the southwestern quadrant of campus. These email exchanges were directed at larger questions of priorities, office sharing arrangements, size, and configuration(s).² A SFC meeting was held on 15 June 2012 to discuss the construction of new faculty office space in Merwin Hall. In addition to the regular faculty representatives to this committee, several regular faculty attended and gave their feedback. At that meeting, the SFC recommended to the PBC that new faculty offices constructed in Merwin Hall should be of a consistent and comparatively regular size to accommodate individual faculty and not be designed as shared spaces.³ On 28 June 2012, the PBC met and deliberated on the SFC recommendations. As a result of that deliberation, the PBC formally recommended to the President’s Cabinet that the full build-out of Merwin Hall be postponed to allow the SFC time to engage the campus in broader discussion of the design of faculty offices. Subsequently, the Provost and Faculty Senate President discussed options for soliciting faculty input into the Merwin decision. The Faculty Senate President asked faculty representatives from the SFC to work with Senate Leadership to articulate faculty perspectives in a time-sensitive fashion, resulting in this document.

Findings from Faculty Feedback

The following feedback summarizes faculty perspectives from those sources noted above. Though not every individual perspective or opinion that exists or appears in the totality of the data is (or could be) represented here, the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations that follow are based on the main clusters of concern and the dominant themes (majority and minority) that emerge in the source material. The findings should

¹ The questions posed to faculty through IAT were more comprehensive than what is reported here. This paper focuses solely on those responses regarding faculty office space. For all feedback from faculty, see Appendix B: Faculty Feedback Regarding Space Utilization on Campus (also available on [Faculty Senate website](#)).

² See Appendix C for a representative sample of email exchanges. Every effort has been made to anonymize the exchanges in an attempt to keep the focus on the substance of the issue and away from particular personalities.

³ See Appendix D for summary notes from the 15 June 2012 SFC meeting.

provide some basis for moving forward with faculty office space allocation in the short term while also addressing larger questions, implications, and possible precedents of space allocation that are contained within the current decision making process about Merwin Hall.

There are two related issues that emerge in the source material having to do with decisions related to faculty office space.

- The first is a question of whether office space is shared and if so, under what conditions.
- The second is a question of physical size and layout of offices.

Shared Office Space: Faculty Feedback⁴

Academic and Scholarly Quality

Across the board, there was widespread resistance among faculty to the idea of shared faculty office space. The main concerns were that that faculty teaching effectiveness and research productivity would be at risk. Further, University planning documents establish meaningful links among growth, space, and the availability of academic programs. For example, the 2012 FGCU Master Plan indicates a need for capital resources to keep pace with the strategic growth of the university.⁵

Teaching effectiveness was a concern to faculty, who reasoned that students would be less likely to attend office hours if they knew that other faculty were likely to be present. This sentiment was not mitigated by the availability of a common, private, reservable office or conference space for faculty-student meetings, given the complications of scheduling such common space that would likely be required.

Further, there were concerns that faculty productivity and quality in other areas of faculty responsibility may suffer as well under shared office arrangements. Offices are consistently used for the purpose of writing, research, and service functions. Given the justifiably high (and, in the perception of many faculty, the increasing) demands for research and publication, faculty were exceedingly hesitant to endorse shared space for fear about the limitations such co-habiting would place on their ability to reach and maintain the University's standards of excellence in faculty performance.

The SFC echoed this concern and supported this perspective at its June 2012 meeting, when the committee recommended that, "sole occupancy faculty offices be created at the proposed addition to Merwin Hall" and "that, in the future, the PBC seek input from faculty regarding the sharing of offices" before creating shared spaces.⁶

Procedural Concerns

There were several procedural concerns noted by the faculty with respect to the prospect of shared offices. These concerns clustered in three main categories: incentives,

⁴ The concept of shared space was met with both interest and skepticism. The topic was especially relevant for those faculty who do not live in close proximity to campus and/or teach distance or virtual classes. Telecommuting and/or virtual office hours would certainly enhance the university's environmental goals, but involves larger contractual and supervisory implications than can be addressed within the scope of this document.

⁵ See 2010-2020 FGCU Campus Master Plan Update Vol. II- Goals, Objectives, and Policies; Goals 101-103 and Policy 103.3.3.

⁶ See Appendix D: 6/15/12 SFC Meeting Summary.

space allocation procedures, and implications for new faculty. Concerns over shared governance are addressed later in this document.

Incentives were widely discussed by faculty. Consideration was given to the idea that faculty might be willing to share space if there were proper incentives. The incentives discussed included stipends, parking priority, priority in selection of teaching schedules, and/or other non-stipendiary benefits. There is no clear consensus in the source material on what the proper mix of incentives might generate sufficient support for shared offices to justify their construction. The SFC concluded that a formal survey of faculty on this issue alone and directly might be needed. On the subject of incentives, however, there were concerns noted that shared office space would effectively shift productivity to home offices. This shift would then demand that individuals subsidize the costs of doing University business at home. Faculty feedback noted that any discussion of incentives relative to shared offices should also consider the need for additional computers, printers, office supplies, and computing services support for home offices.⁷

Office space allocation procedures (and/or the lack thereof) were a source of considerable concern for faculty. Currently, there does not appear to be a formally articulated and applied policy/procedure in place for office space allocation; if such a policy does exist, its existence and regular application are not widely known or understood among faculty, nor is such a policy regularly part of the planning and budgeting discussions related to space allocation. The perceived absence of such policy guidance generated considerable feedback. These concerns centered on the idea that shared faculty office arrangements create inequitable (i.e. “prime” and “sub-prime”) office space. Prime office space was generally defined as private offices (as opposed to individually occupied or shared cubicles, or other partitioned workspaces with walls unattached to the ceiling) in buildings with permanent foundations in or near the campus core. Sub-prime space was considered to be shared or individually occupied cubicles or any office space in modular structures at a remove from the core of campus.⁸

Inequities in office space allocation were tied to a range of related, negative effects. These include the potentially deleterious impacts on productivity and excellence discussed above, as well as decreased faculty morale, potential for increased resentment among or between faculty based on the perception of inequitable office space assignments, and the imputation of second-class status to faculty, programs, disciplines, and departments housed in sub-prime space. In addition to the material value and practical superiority of prime faculty office, the single-occupancy office is also widely understood as, or commonly assumed to be an indicator of, one’s place and status in the professoriate. There is often increased incidence of anxiety and feelings of inequality when some of the most visible norms commonly associated with a professor’s or instructor’s status in good standing with the institution are disrupted: for instance, having “MOD 1” or other obviously impermanent building addresses for one’s faculty office on one’s business card for years on end, or having students or members of the community

⁷ Additional concerns might also encompass questions related to occupational health and safety standards of home office arrangements, though this issue is not addressed in the source material.

⁸ As there are currently faculty occupying space in the modular structures, some consideration should be given to their unique needs, such as transportation to campus, adequate restroom facilities for faculty with young children, adequate air conditioning, vending machines quantity and quality on par with other academic buildings, and greater pest control.

encounter some faculty working in shared spaces while others work in single-occupancy space in no pattern or order that has an immediate or clear explanation that wouldn't rebound to the faculty member's discredit or demerit. In this context, faculty have concerns that occupying sub-prime office space is or will be viewed by students, colleagues (on and off campus), and members of the community as an indication that those faculty or their disciplines/programs are held in institutional disesteem or are less highly regarded than other faculty, programs and departments afforded prime office space.

Consequently, for current and future space allocation decisions, faculty desired a clear and widely understood process that is established *before* there any possible shift away from regular ("prime") faculty office space and toward the regular use of shared office space or any other office-space configuration that departs from current norms.

Some argued for criteria as a way to allocate prime space by the type of position or function served. These were positions that:

- Are at the core of the academic mission?
- Have a need for privacy?
- Require co-location of programs/departments?⁹

The faculty feedback noted that these definitions are problematic in that they contain inherent conflicts that would be apparent over time. For example, sub-prime or shared offices might well be occupied by new faculty in greater proportion than those faculty already here and occupying prime office space. As a result, new hires would likely be (or appear to be) disadvantaged in favor of existing faculty. In addition to the potential impact this dynamic could have on recruitment, over time, such an arrangement may result in unrelated groups of faculty sharing space – thereby violating other principles, such as privacy or co-location. Regardless of whether new faculty offices in Merwin Hall are shared, clear criteria and an open process for making office space allocation decisions that apply those criteria openly and consistently are essential.

Physical Size

Further discussion of the physical size of new faculty office space in Merwin was also considered. Overall, there was some agreement that smaller unshared offices were preferred to larger shared offices. However, there were many others who argued that new space should generally be built to the same size as existing offices. There are several reasons for this.

First, substantially smaller offices would establish another tier of sub-prime office space. This situation would ultimately cause the same problem as noted above, just by a slightly different route. Second, physically building smaller offices or shared "double offices" permanently memorializes what may be a temporary space allocation problem. At some point in the future, the University will again resume constructing new buildings, and new faculty office space will become available. When this occurs, FGCU would be left with a hodgepodge of small and large offices including single and double-occupancy units, further exacerbating space allocation decisions and serving as additional permanent sources of conflict and (perceived) inequity. It may be the case that this has already

⁹ There is not widespread agreement on the co-location principle. Certainly some colleges, programs, or departments may have a need for or desire to be integrated with others to promote interdisciplinary work.

occurred, as there does not appear to be any current standard for office size that is or has been consistently applied. As indicated in Appendix A, a best estimate of office size on campus finds ranges from approximately 113.9 sq ft to 235.8 sq ft.

In the case of Merwin Hall, the source material on faculty feedback and the SFC action both recognized that regularly sized offices would result in fewer available overall. Both the faculty and the SFC concluded that the new offices in Merwin Hall would not solve the space problem on campus regardless of their size. These considerations were, in part, the basis for the SFC's June 2012 recommendation to the PBC that the proposed offices in Merwin Hall should be "equitable and comparable to other existing faculty offices on campus."¹⁰

Shared Governance

The discussion over space allocation in Merwin Hall resulted in a very important conversation regarding shared governance. Shared governance is becoming increasingly important as indicated by the FGCU Faculty Senate, Campus Climate Survey, and FGCU Master Plan Policy 104.3.1.¹¹ In the spirit of these initiatives, the consensus among the faculty was that there should be a rational, inclusive, and uniform, policy-driven process for making space decisions. Further, there was a broad sentiment that whenever there are additional office spaces available as result of new construction to meet our growing student and faculty population, it would then become a prime opportunity to establish and test the application of a formally articulated and inclusive decision-making process for office-space construction and allocation. Developing, formulating, and approving such a process for office-space decisions in the meantime would also allow such policies and guidelines to inform the planning and construction of new spaces in the future, as well as decisions about which particular faculty or programs occupy what new space. Moreover, in the nearer term, the build-out of Merwin Hall presents an opportunity to apply such policies to the construction of what will most likely be the last new faculty office space that will be developed in any great quantity within the near future.

Recommendations from the PBC committee on 28 June 2012 were supportive of slowing the decision making process with respect to Merwin in order to clarify the contexts in which office space decisions are made. The PBC recommended that "the full build-out of Merwin Hall be postponed to allow the SFC time to engage the campus in broader discussion of the design of faculty offices while requisite preparation work proceeded."¹² Certainly the development of a clear policy on faculty office space allocation would appear to be encompassed by the substance and spirit of the PBC recommendation.

Implications

There are several implications related to these findings that may have relevance for future decisions, including – most immediately – the configuration of the final build-out in Merwin Hall. First, it is clear that current space decisions will establish, to some degree, the framework for future decisions. This framework includes identification of the

¹⁰ See Appendix D: June 2012 SFC Meeting Summary.

¹¹ See the [ongoing campus initiative to define shared governance](#) initiated by Faculty Senate; [the 2010 report on Campus Climate and Culture](#); and [FGCU Master Plan](#) Policy 104.3.1.

¹² [PBC Meeting June 28, 2012](#).

relevant stakeholders, the scope of possibilities, and the character of the process. Care should be taken to ensure that these decisions do not have unintended consequences. For example, what are the procedures for staff, graduate students or adjuncts for sharing office space? Should certain academic or non-academic programs have priority for newly available office space? Are certain programs more conducive to shared space? How would such conduciveness be determined? Should the central academic core be reserved for certain services or functions? Are there non-academic, support, or auxiliary programs that could or should be moved to modular structures and faculty from modular structures brought into more prime space?

The second important consideration is whether current space limitations should be permanently “built in” into practice. In other words, consideration should be given to whether or not it is appropriate to standardize office space. Alternatively, is there some value to having a set of options for prime office space size that range from small to large? Given that it is likely that FGCU will continue to face future space limitations, should a minimum/maximum size be set for individual offices?

Conclusion and Recommendation(s)

The findings in this paper, based on faculty feedback, indicate a need for a rational and clearly articulated space allocation process that addresses decisions for Merwin Hall and future faculty offices, particularly if the Merwin Hall spaces depart from the prime-office space norm. Because of the scope and complexity of the space problem, this process will likely require the involvement of additional faculty Senate teams and committees as well as those committees that report through the PBC.

Specifically the process should:

- Implement an office space allocation decision-making process that is inclusive, sensitive to the diversity of needs on campus, and takes a longer term perspective. Development of such a process should precede construction of any new office space for faculty, particularly if that office space were to be shared.
- Conduct a needs assessment that identifies office space requirements across all campus programs with some perspective on the university goals as a whole and clearly tied needs to enrollment growth, new faculty and staff needs, and planning for future buildings.
- Involve faculty through surveys or other feedback mechanisms developed and delivered through shared governance processes (this, in addition to regular governance processes established in the Faculty Senate governance system and the PBC).
- Establish clear policies and procedures for all office space allocation and size. Such policies should include, among other things, definitions for office space priorities for different classes of personnel (e.g., full- and part-time faculty; full- and part-time staff, graduate students), different types of programs (e.g., funded research, program space, centers and institutes, extra-curricular activities), and other unique needs. These policies should be developed, in collaboration with the faculty, before any change in construction practice (e.g. building shared offices instead of single-occupancy units) with respect to faculty office space is implemented.

- Address the variety of constraints, opportunities, and guidelines for more efficient use of existing space; this might include shared offices, office hoteling, or telecommuting. In any case, changes to or departures from the current practice of office space allocation must include an articulated set of guidelines, stakeholder buy-in, and other faculty contractual considerations.