Leading Interdisciplinary Research Buildings:
Emerging Best Practices

Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society

This guide draws on the insights of leaders of interdisciplinary research buildings. Participants from 11 colleges and universities came together during the first annual Interdisciplinary Research Buildings Workshop, held on June 3, 2021 and facilitated by Boston College's Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society and the Vice Provost for Research and Academic Planning. This document compiles 12 emerging best practices in leading interdisciplinary research buildings in four domains: 1) designing for success, 2) fostering a collaborative culture, 3) managing buildings thoughtfully and 4) clarifying expectations.

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Domain 1: Designing for Success

As spaces meant to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and research, interdisciplinary buildings are designed, built, maintained and adapted to meet changing needs. Incorporating multiple kinds of spaces, envisioning space needs through concrete research foci and planning for future change marks design for success. Emerging best practices for building leaders include:

1. Integrate *flexibility* and practicality through open, multi-use spaces in combination with small, private rooms and areas.

2. Identify *key research areas* to assess physical space needs and direct building design around tangible research activities.

3. Build *future flexibility* via open-ended design, potentially leaving unfinished space.

Domain 2: Fostering a Collaborative Culture

A building does not catalyze interdisciplinary collaboration and research on its own. Engaging campus and academic leaders, securing faculty involvement, purposefully crafting faculty groups and integrating with the broader campus sparks interdisciplinary innovation and fosters a campus-wide culture of collaboration. Emerging best practices for building leaders include:

1. Secure *campus-wide* support by building relationships with administrators as well as deans and department chairs.

2. Cultivate *faculty buy-in* through strategic hiring, committee involvement (e.g., space, governance and hiring) and campus-wide programming.

3. Organize building residents in *research neighborhoods*, creating clustered communities and transcending disciplines and departments.

4. Continuously ensure and promote alignment between *institutional culture, mission and aims* and building goals and processes.

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Domain 3: Managing Buildings Thoughtfully

Life inside of an interdisciplinary research building moves fast, and multifaceted leadership is needed for high-quality, high-efficiency and high-impact decision-making. Carefully crafting a role for centralized building leadership and sharing decision-making among multifaceted leadership groups represents thoughtful, purposeful building management. Emerging best practices for building leaders include:

1. Appoint a *dedicated building leader* to manage operations; oversee faculty, student and community programming; liaise with faculty and affiliated departments and more.

2. Engage campus *leadership at multiple levels* by inviting key faculty leaders as well as administrators to contribute to decision-making.

Domain 4: Clarifying Expectations

Input and involvement from across campus represents a key strength of interdisciplinary research buildings--but also a potential pitfall in creating clear and cohesive expectations for building use. Building relationships with campus and departmental leaders, specifying protocols for administrative support of building faculty and conveying clear processes for determining building occupancy helps to clarify expectations. Emerging best practices for building leaders include:

1. *Strive for consensus* with administrators and affiliated academic units regarding expectations for faculty appointments and funding.

2. Determine a *clear and singular source for providing building residents with grant administration support*; allocate this responsibility to either building or departmental staff--not both. Apply a similar principle to administrative support.

3. Specify *criteria and processes* for newly hired and current faculty to attain (and retain) residency in the building.

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Summary of Best Practices

Domain	Best Practice
Designing for Success	1. Integrate *flexibility* and practicality through open, multi-use spaces in combination with small, private rooms and areas. 2. Identify *key research areas* to assess physical space needs and direct building design around tangible research activities. 3. Build *future flexibility* via open-ended design, potentially leaving unfinished space.
Fostering a Collaborative Culture	4. Secure *campus-wide support* by building relationships with administrators as well as deans and department chairs. 5. Cultivate *faculty buy-in* through strategic hiring, committee involvement (e.g., space, governance and hiring) and campus-wide programming. 6. Organize building residents in *research neighborhoods*, creating clustered communities and transcending disciplines and departments. 7. Continuously ensure and promote alignment between *institutional culture, mission and aims* and building goals and processes.
Managing Buildings Thoughtfully	8. Appoint a *dedicated building leader* to manage operations; oversee faculty, student and community programming; liaise with faculty and affiliated departments and more. 9. Engage campus *leadership at multiple levels* by inviting key faculty leaders as well as administrators to contribute to decision-making.
Clarifying Expectations	10. *Strive for consensus* with administrators and affiliated academic units regarding expectations for faculty appointments and funding. 11. Determine a *clear and singular source for providing building residents with grant administration support*; allocate this responsibility to either building or departmental staff--not both. Apply a similar principle to administrative support. 12. Specify *criteria and processes* for newly hired and current faculty to attain (and retain) residency in the building.

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