

From Cubicles to Collaboration: New Open Workspace at UC San Diego



Submitted By:

Sheryl T. Gerbracht, CPA, MBA
 Director, IT Business Office
 Information Technology Services, UC San Diego
 (858) 534-7339, sgerbracht@ucsd.edu

Mojgan A. Amini, MS CS, Lean Six Sigma Black Belt
 Director, Process Management & Continuous Improvement
 Information Technology Services, UC San Diego
 858-534-1023, mojgan@ucsd.edu

Project Team – Core Contributors

<p>Vice Chancellor CFO Sheryl Gerbracht – IT Services, Project Lead Vince Kellen, PhD, Campus CIO Pierre Ouillet, VC-CFO Mitzy Martinez, IT Services, Administration Manager Lynn Underwood, IT Services, OCM consultant Parrish Nnambi – IT Services, Workplace Technology Gordon Hamman, IT Services, Network Technology Jeff Roeser, IT Services, Audio/Visual Technology Traci Carpenter, Operational Strategic Initiatives, Financial Project Manager Bryan Hurley, Procurement, Technology Buyer</p>	<p>Vice Chancellor Resource Management & Planning Megan Francis, Capital Program Management, Project Manager Laura McCarty, Capital Program Management, Program Manager Marjorie Brown, Real Estate, Building Manager</p>
---	---

Outside Vendors

Kristin Kelsey, Miller Hull Partnership, Lead Architect
 RT Lonsdale, Miller Hull Partnership, Project Manager
 Andrew Gilmore, G2 Facility Services
 Nick Madamba, BNBuilders, Project Manager

Introduction

To support a team-focused philosophy, UC San Diego IT Services recently completed a total redesign of its workspace to an open-office concept. The result is more than a simple remodel. The experience completely revolutionized how the department works, serves as a catalyst for other departments and positions IT as a value-added resource beyond traditional tech products and services.

Backstory: Space Crunch and a Simple Solution

Like many entities at UC campuses, UC San Diego's IT Services faced a space crunch: A growing number of people to accommodate but no increase in square footage. Plus, the office suite was not only growing stale, but hindering productivity – cramped quarters, insufficient meeting space, people spread across multiple floors, too many walls and other barriers to getting stuff done.

Meanwhile, university and department leadership realized that the very nature of work was changing. Does the modern technologist *need* a large personal workspace amidst cloud computing, easy access to wifi, and fewer and fewer documents to print and store?

From Cubicles to Collaboration

Before long, the decision was made: gut the space, completely redesign it, and go all in on the open-office concept. Walls replaced with white boards. Corner offices replaced with conference rooms. Cubicles replaced by collaboration spaces. Ego replaced by equality.

But the transition wouldn't be easy. How long would it take, and where would everyone work in the meantime? How would the workforce adapt to such a radical change?

It worked – and then some. Turns out the office remodel was just the start, as three major benefits resulted:

- Adoption of a new way of working within the department
- IT Services as a catalyst for future remodels at UC San Diego and beyond
- Addition of value added, non-technical services offered

Fostering a New Way of Working

Construction meant a minimum 12-month relocation – if everything went well. But with 400+ people to account for, it wasn't feasible to send everyone to the same facility. The majority ended up in an office park nine miles from campus, while others worked from temporary spaces on campus. Many departments were split, with a manager faced with half the team in one location and half in another.

To cope, the department radically altered its telecommuting policy, with the number of full or partial telecommuters growing from 21% to 43%. Additionally, "hotel" spaces were set up at both the office park and on-campus areas, meaning personnel had a place to sit and work while visiting colleagues.

Technology was key. Team members quickly adopted Zoom as the virtual-meeting platform of choice. During the relocation, the department conducted thousands of Zoom sessions, and came to rely on it for business operations.

Adopting a more flexible, be-on-site-with-a-purpose model did not incur any reduction in service levels or productivity. Team members warmed to the idea of being on site for collaborative purposes, and the option to work when and where they wanted when they needed to really bore in and concentrate.

Furthermore, some staff members work entirely remotely, which provides IT Services the ability to hire the best and the brightest nationwide, and provide extended support hours. CIO Kellen calls it “management by wire,” and it has proven to be a reliable method of containing or reducing costs.

Settling into the redesigned office (which occurred in November 2018) has gone well overall. But that’s no accident. Department leadership embarked on a comprehensive organizational change management program almost a year in advance. From regular newsletter updates to surveys to multiple webinars, leadership did everything it could to prepare the workforce. It even set up a mock workstation so people could judge how much space they’d have and get a feel for new equipment. All workstations are equipped with 34-inch curved monitors, task lights, docking stations, wireless keyboards selected by the employee and noise-cancelling headphones.



All staff, including the CIO, sit side-by-side in an open environment.

Architecting for Achievement and a Catalyst for Change

Department leadership had a specific purpose in mind when designing the new workspace. Says CIO Kellen, “In IT, we are constantly learning and reinventing ourselves to keep up with technological advances. We wanted to create an environment that supports that learning, which often happens when groups are working together on projects.”

The primary workspace with employee desks and docking stations is completely open. The entire staff — including Kellen — sit together in the open space. When privacy is needed, employees can take advantage of 26 “think rooms,” which are also often used for small group brainstorming sessions. The space also boasts 12 conference rooms, including a “big meet” room for larger gatherings. The suite also features informal collaborative spaces throughout the department for quick, on-the-fly meetings and discussions.

Kitchen areas boast instant hot and cold filtered water, microwaves, refrigerators, toaster ovens, coffee makers as well as spectacular view of the Torrey Pines Golf Course.



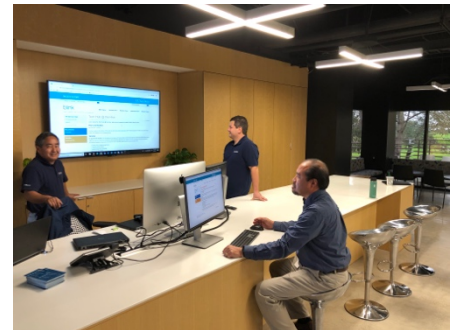
People from near and far are watching - closely. IT Services' experience is a test case for the university at large as it rethinks how space is allocated. The IT Services space is on the third floor of its building; recently, the department on the second floor started its temporary relocation while it undergoes a conversion to an open concept. Additionally, UC San Diego has begun sharing its experience with tech groups at other UCs, and will present a breakout session at UCTech.

The combination of flexible work schedules and flexible space could have profound impacts. An example is the way IT Services allocates work stations. Those planning to be at the office three or more days a week get a permanent seat. Those who come fewer than three days use unassigned hotel spaces. Therefore, IT Services can continue to add to the headcount without necessarily having to add work stations or square footage. Now extend the thought further: Can the university get to a point where it can add personnel and office space *without* having to add parking spaces?





IT Services as a Meeting Hub

When most people think of "going to IT," it's probably not with a smile: something is wrong. But IT Services at UC San Diego has flipped the script. In fact, the department has added to its service portfolio in an unusual way: it is quickly becoming a sought-after meeting host. And why not? It has some of the most well-appointed facilities at UC San Diego.

- The Tech Hub at the Hive serves as the "front door" to IT Services, and also includes a new walk-up service desk. The desk now provides live support to a customer base of 1,600 people who were previously far removed from the central walk-up desk. Since opening in February 2019, the Tech Hub has fulfilled over 400 service tickets.
- One of the most valuable assets is the "big meet" area – side-by-side rooms called Triton 1 and Triton 2 that can be used for a single large gathering or split for two medium gatherings. Among the uses so far:
 - Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt training for over 50 finance professionals from across campus
 - IT Services manager meetings (before, we'd have to rent space elsewhere)
 - Weekly yoga classes
 - One monthly sysadmin meeting for distributed IT staff
 - Active shooter training for the Business & Financial Services Office
 - Multiple working sessions for the extended project team for a financial system ERP implementation
 - Monthly project management meetings for the university's Capital Program Management office
 - Breakout sessions for the Open EdX 2019 Developer Summit hosted at UC San Diego
- A Project room, configured with 10 sit/stand workstations and two 80 inch screens, allows project teams to gather for short term or long term projects such as testing or training.
- The smaller conference rooms include large monitors, wifi and AV connections, thus making them popular meeting spots for IT projects that involve cross-campus collaboration. Campus departments come to make use of ample white boards or to use reliable infrastructure for webinars that attract close to 500 attendees.



Success Factors

Goal	Results	Outcome
Provide ample meeting space	26 “think rooms,” 12 conference rooms, and additional information discussion space	 Met
Accommodate growing staff	272 work stations to accommodate 300+ staff through flexible scheduling	 Met
Serve as catalyst for other departments	Ongoing	 Hopeful
Create welcoming atmosphere for cross-campus collaboration	IT Services has (informally) added meeting host to its service catalog	 Exceeded

Further Reading

[“A Team Sport: IT Services leading the way with collaborative, flexible work environment”](#)