



PE Large Lecture Theatres – Fall 2013

Student Data Executive Summary

June 2, 2014

In the Fall 2013 term, the Learning Environment Evaluation Project (LEE) investigated Large Lecture Theatres at the University of Lethbridge campus. This investigation was part of the larger research study conducted by LEE that investigated the effectiveness of a variety of campus teaching and learning spaces, and the first of a two-part study of large lecture theatres. This specific aspect of the research was intended to inform the planning process of the Destination Project New Academic Building.

The purpose of this report was to outline student perceptions of and experiences in the two largest lecture theatres on campus, PE250 (capacity: 299 students) and PE275 (capacity: 185 students). Student surveys (n = 577) and focus groups (n = 8) were conducted throughout the Fall 2013 term in conjunction with a) classroom observations and b) faculty interviews. The survey and focus group questions pertained to the effectiveness of PE250 and PE275 as learning spaces and included the overall perceived effectiveness, physical aspects, and technological aspects of the rooms.

All participating students generally thought of PE250 as a better learning space than PE275. In fact, PE275 ranked significantly worse on 11 of 14 survey items. This ranking was reinforced by student comments in the focus groups. Students emphasized that for their function as large lecture theatres, they were both good rooms. Student expectations about learning activities in these rooms were that classes would be primarily lecture classes. Class discussion was limited, but worked relatively well when it occurred in PE250 and not very well in PE275. Acoustics from the back half and the wings in both rooms were described as suboptimal, as students had trouble hearing other students' comments or questions. Students in PE250 liked the ceiling height and the semicircular and tiered structure of the room, which were thought to contribute positively to (a) sightlines, (b) engagement, (c) focus, and (d) interaction. The main problems with PE275 were (a) the patchy lighting and the general darkness of the room, (b) the location of the projection screen and the resulting poor sightlines to the board, and (c) the crowdedness of the room, including the single entrance/exit door. Students appreciated the thought that was put into the design of PE250, including the wood panelling and the skylights. Natural light in particular seemed important to students. In PE275, aesthetics were described as boring and the walls as too starkly white. Lastly, row spacing in both rooms was considered less than ideal. Whereas some students severely disliked the large class sizes, others were less concerned with it.

Recommendations largely pertain to the room layout. PE250 in its semicircular shape and steeper tiering seemed to boost its effectiveness as a learning space, as students reported excellent sightlines, better acoustics, and improved interaction, focus, and engagement in the room. In PE275, which is the smaller of the two lecture theatres, that was not the case. Lastly, lighting was described as an important aspect that was superior in PE250 as well. Future spaces should look to PE250 as an example for how to build an effective large lecture theatre that facilitates student learning.