



The Need for a Dedicated Space: a Wheaton Change Lab

Our State of the Art

Wheaton's curriculum and goals have always been interdisciplinary. Lately, there's been renewed emphasis on applying that pluralism in learning to produce real, tangible results.

The IMAGINE network is establishing open spaces throughout campus with the goal of empowering students and faculty from all academic disciplines to work together and make things. More recently, the WIN hub has been established as a space for innovation and social change.

We're inspired by these new facilities, programs, and paradigms. It's affirming to those students whose passions and work have always been self-guided but collaborative, visionary but pragmatic, interdisciplinary but focused. Those students have historically been deprived of spaces whose architecture and use appropriately reflect their values and goals. While our short time here has seen much progress in this area, we can do more.

Our Idea

In line with IMAGINE's and WIN's missions, we're asking for a permanent, dedicated space to serve as a conduit for ideas' and collaborations' transmission to realization; a space for creative and practical change-oriented ideas that don't materialize as fabricated things, but require a workshop nonetheless. This is a room where we can visualize projects on the wall, and keep them up for everyone to consider and contribute to; a room that is open all day and night; a room whose architecture reflects our needs; where students from all backgrounds and areas of study can collaborate to conceive of and enact *change*.

It's come to our attention that the contents of the old fiberspace will be moved to what was formerly the slide library in Watson to create a new fiber-oriented makerspace. We think the old fiberspace is perfectly positioned to strengthen the implicit ties between IMAGINE makerspaces and the new business, entrepreneurship, and social innovation programs on that same floor.

We'd be grateful if any space on campus would be dedicated to the kind of thinking and collaboration we envision and practice, but the fiber space in the old science center is ideal in its location and would require very little modification. To create the open architecture requisite to innovation, we would only need whiteboards, tables and comfortable, rearrangeable seating. We envision a space that sits at the intersection of the WINHub and IMAGINE - a space that is open in its architecture and function, physically malleable, and accessible to all students.

We recognize that Wheaton is undergoing a spatial audit to improve long-term use. The relatively short window of time before the old science center is renovated is ideal to implement a pilot program for the space we envision.

Our Involvement

We believe the Roosevelt @ Wheaton network is well equipped to implement this new change lab. We are a diverse group of students connected with myriad people and communities across campus that will use and benefit from this space. We want to embody this new emphasis on taking ideas off paper and into communities, engaging in the “bold experimentation” FDR was famous for.

As part of a larger network of thinkers and doers, Roosevelt @ Wheaton is a group of students who seek to create healthy, sustainable, empowered communities. At its core, Roosevelt is about creative, practical problem solving. During our time on this campus, we have worked hard to create spaces for discussion and collaboration around those goals– but we’re ready to do more.

For that reason, we’ve secured funding from the national Roosevelt network to cover the costs of its creation, networked and partnered with students and faculty who would benefit from the space, and dedicated the hours to ensure its design is reflective of Wheaton’s needs. Future upkeep costs will be covered with our SGA-allocated budget, along with contributions from other student groups benefitting from the space.

Our Vision

A physical space will allow us to continue working on projects without a break in momentum and better enable collaborative, creative thinking. When student groups meet in temporarily reserved rooms, no matter how invigorating and inspiring the discussion, more often than not that energy is lost as soon as it’s over: ideas and write ups come off the walls and important conversations are put on hold until next week’s meeting.

By keeping ideas and projects up on the walls, we’ll invite people to view, comment, and contribute in a way that we can’t in borrowed rooms, creating a positive feedback loop of creativity and progressive change. This offers a new continuity in our work and builds a legacy of Wheaton innovation and student activism. We want to turn discussion into action - whether in the form of a policy piece, a graphic, a research proposal or a community event.

This will be a space for diverse projects to grow from and to build on; a space to synthesize Wheaton’s maker movement with its new socially-oriented innovation programs; a hub with spokes to all these new change-oriented programs and people across campus. We envision a physical location that uplifts those members of Wheaton’s creative community whose ideas aren’t necessarily best expressed in fabrication-based makerspaces. We need a space for conceptualizing new paradigms and developing impactful frameworks. We need a Change Lab for Wheaton’s maker movement to grow beyond rapid prototyping to support enduring progressive change; to incubate projects that don’t belong on paper; to move past making new *things* to making new *worlds*.

Our Projects

Several students from various groups on campus have come together to imagine these inaugural projects we hope will open doors to new collaborations. Following are a few examples of the kind of work we expect the Change Lab to facilitate, although we hope the space will evolve in unexpected ways to enable projects we haven't yet imagined.

Campus Climate Research

In collaboration with SMART and the Dean of Students, we are analyzing data from the "Campus Climate Survey" to impart a better understanding of where, why and how sexual assault exists at Wheaton. Our goal is to continue working with staff to develop data-driven approaches to sexual misconduct policy, crowdsourced from students, in advance of this year's reconstruction of that policy.

Babe Lincoln

Babe Lincoln (BL) publishes student ideas about the "so what?" implicit in every news story. BL seeks to cultivate a varied network of voices committed to challenging paradigms, apathy, insularity, and each other. Through forward thinking, nonpartisan commentary and art, BL hopes to engage the unengaged and promote young people's ideas.

Mapping The Institution

The key to creating change in any institution is understanding who makes decisions and how—Mapping the Institution is a data-based research project intended to improve the process of future change making. We want to gather information about Wheaton and make it accessible and useful for students and administration.

Policy Implementation

Wheaton has a strong history of publication in Roosevelt's national policy journal. We've aggregated over 16 pieces that have been published over the last 10 years, and are continuing to source pieces that might not have been published despite their promise. Our intention is to use the space as a hub for continuing to gather pieces for eventual republication, highlighting Wheaton students' contributions to the public policy field, beginning a new wave of advocacy for those many policy pieces that have potential for progress, and working to build community through their implementation. Three policy pieces we'll build action-based projects on:

- *Discouraging Discriminatory College Admissions: the Case for Reporting Need Sensitivity*
- *Re-purposing Landfills: Using Biogas in place of Natural Gas*
- *Get to Work: an Employer – Transit partnership to connect the boroughs of NYC*

Open Source Curriculum Design

The price of a college textbook can preclude a student from taking not just one class, but from participating in an entire field of study. Science textbooks in particular can be upwards of \$200 or \$300 each - placing a financial burden on students. Programs like OpenStax, operated by Rice University, work to make classes and textbooks more accessible by using open source versions of popular texts. Some departments and professors at Wheaton are beginning to do the same. We want to design more comprehensive and inclusive open source programming to make class material more accessible, either through facilitating students' co-ownership of textbooks, redesigning curriculum around free texts, or by creating open source companion curricula to complement existing syllabi.

Wheaton Organize

Wheaton organize brings students, faculty and staff together to mobilize our community. In order for this movement to be an effective platform of positive change on campus and in the world at large, we need a space devoted to ensuring students from all groups are communicating with one another and collaborating on larger scale projects. Students on this campus are creative, bold and dedicated. We need a space to organize ourselves.