designing for blended learning

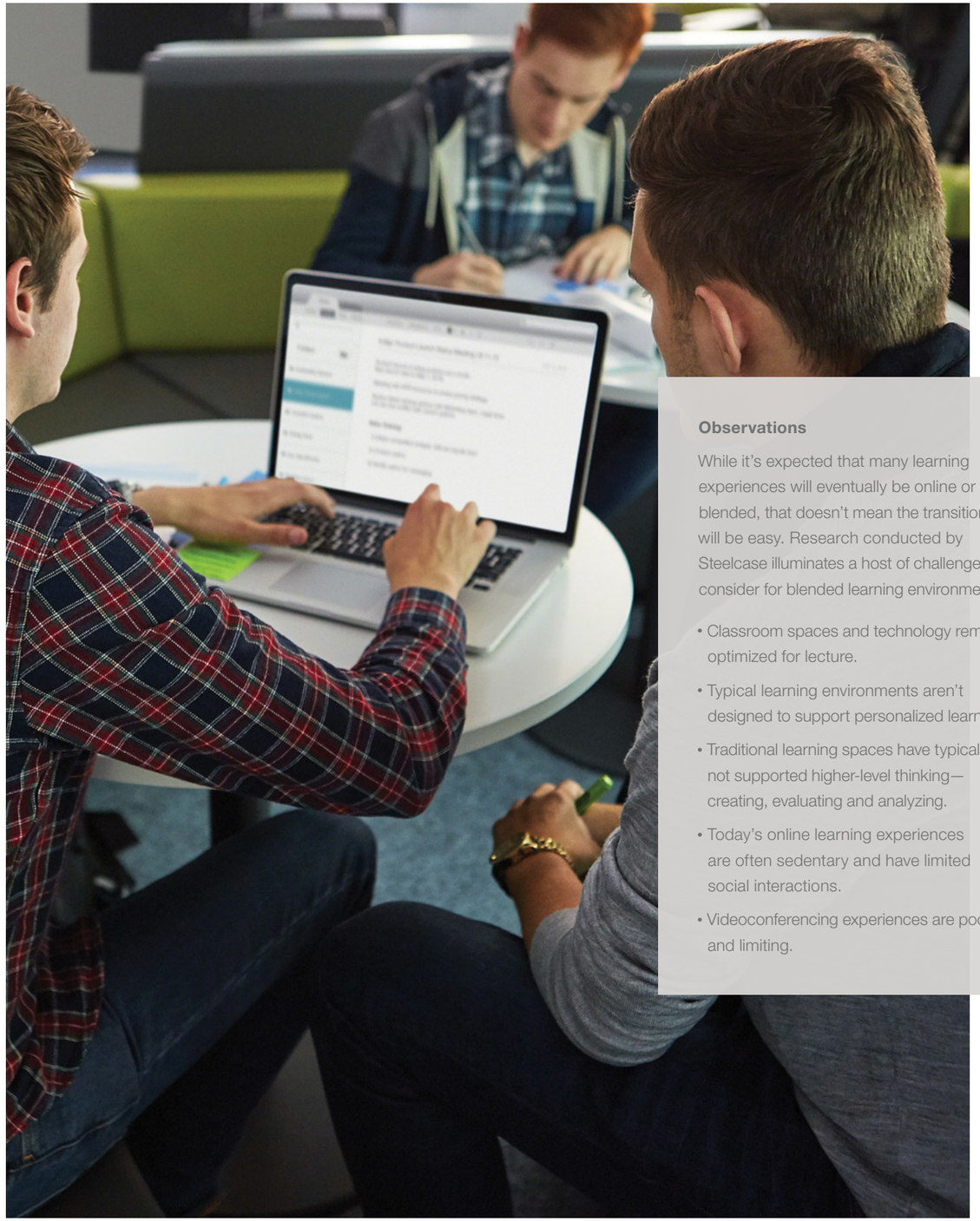
Planning

As blended learning becomes a viable solution for institutions, major shifts take place within the learning landscape. Perceptions of learning and teaching held by both instructors and students must evolve, as must physical learning environments and technology infrastructures. To help institutions navigate these transitions, Steelcase has conducted deep-dive research into blended learning and its implications for learning environments.

Based on our research, which included 60 interviews, 24 observations and school visits, four workshops, and two university collaborations, we believe that blended learning is an accelerating and irreversible trend. Yet traditional teaching practices and environments don't adequately support the array of opportunities that technology-supported learning presents. To align with the emerging behaviors of blended learning, leading institutions must concurrently rethink their strategies for campus planning, professional development and change management.

From these findings, we believe:

- Blended learning is an accelerating trend, transforming education and learning experiences.
- Blended learning enables more active and personalized learning.
- Online interactions will ask physical learning spaces to support higher-level learning.
- Formal and informal spaces are merging, encouraging institutions to rethink campus planning strategies.



Observations

While it's expected that many learning experiences will eventually be online or blended, that doesn't mean the transition will be easy. Research conducted by Steelcase illuminates a host of challenges to consider for blended learning environments.

- Classroom spaces and technology remain optimized for lecture.
- Typical learning environments aren't designed to support personalized learning.
- Traditional learning spaces have typically not supported higher-level thinking—creating, evaluating and analyzing.
- Today's online learning experiences are often sedentary and have limited social interactions.
- Videoconferencing experiences are poor and limiting.

Insights

Based on our research, we have identified six key insights to help educators consider responses to the technology revolution that is underway in learning.

Person-to-person connections remain essential for successful learning.

Despite abundant online instruction and discussion forums, many students still seek face time with their professors and each other as an important component of learning. A 2014 study undertaken by MIT showed that MOOC students learned as well as students in a traditional university course, but not as well as students taught with a blended learning pedagogy.

Technology is supporting richer face-to-face interactions and higher-level cognitive learning.

Much of the information that only teachers possessed in the past is now available to students online, challenging the old model of educators presenting content and students absorbing it. As a result, progressive educators are now leveraging technology to create a higher-impact role for themselves in their classrooms.

Integrating technology into classrooms mandates flexibility and activity-based space planning.

Classrooms designed for a teacher to lecture at the front of the room are being redefined to support self-directed work at computers, as well as collaborative projects. Individual rooms are designed with multiple zones versus a one-type-fits-all setup, and different types of spaces are being created to support a wide range of activities.

Spatial boundaries are loosening.

Flexible spaces are integral to blended learning. Classrooms with mobile furniture, wider hallways to support more activities, cafés with whiteboards, lounges with informal seating and power connections, and spaces with movable furnishings are among the fast-emerging design imperatives for effective educational environments.

Spaces must be designed to capture and stream information.

It's increasingly important that educational institutions invest in video-conferencing capabilities and spaces that meet audio and lighting needs for video content creation. With the right technology, digital and physical presences can complement each other and participate on nearly equal terms.

Pencils and pixels will coexist.

Although technology advancements will continue to revolutionize education, students and teachers haven't abandoned analog materials—and aren't expected to anytime soon. Writing and whiteboards are as useful as ever as quick, easy ways to capture information and activate cognition.