

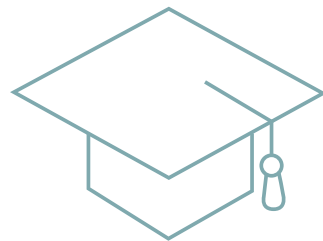
HOW iGEN USES SPACE

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Generation Z Goes to College

As higher education continues to evolve, it is critical to consider the generational changes of the students and what they need to be successful. With thoughtful planning, higher education facilities can positively impact student success and help mold our future work force. The iGen, or Generation Z, are students born between 1995 -2010. They are known for their intuitive use of technology, multi-tasking skills, and their drive for independence. As the children of Gen X, over 89% of iGen students surveyed rated a college education as “valuable” and 49% of them have taken college level classes in high school. ¹



Hord Coplan Macht was interested in gaining a better understanding of how iGen uses space in hopes of designing better learning environments to support their success.

Hord Coplan Macht (HCM) created a methodology to study the iGen student's space-use habits. Using a multi-person team, HCM worked with Colorado State University (CSU) to track student behavior in three new buildings located on two separate CSU campuses. The buildings that were observed were:

- CSU, Biology Building
- CSU, Scott Bioengineering Building
- CSU - Pueblo, General Classroom Building

These buildings were selected because of their diverse student demographics, and their variety of programs offered. Scott Bioengineering and the Biology building are on the same CSU Fort Collins campus, but on opposite sites of the 101 acre campus, while the General Classroom building is located on the other side of the state at the CSU Pueblo campus. All the buildings were designed by HCM, and were customized to meet the needs of the department. We were curious to see how the spaces within each of these buildings were utilized by students, and if there were any similarities in how the spaces were used.

Over multiple days, the HCM team walked each building for 30-minute increments mapping data, tracking where students chose to work, the number of people in their work group and their primary task (studying, socializing, etc.). HCM monitored the building from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Data gathered between after 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. was discarded, as it was determined to be an outlier. Findings were then analyzed to determine trends that will inform future designs.

DISTANCE MATTERS

1 SEVEN

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

2 SEVEN

PRIVACY IS KING

3

SOLO STUDY

4 KEY

PRIVACY VERSUS ISOLATION

5

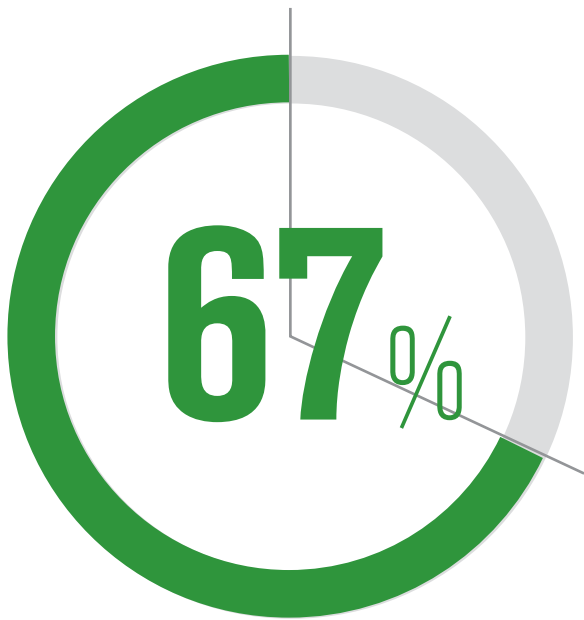
GIVE THEM A PLACE TO WRITE

6

BRING NATURE IN

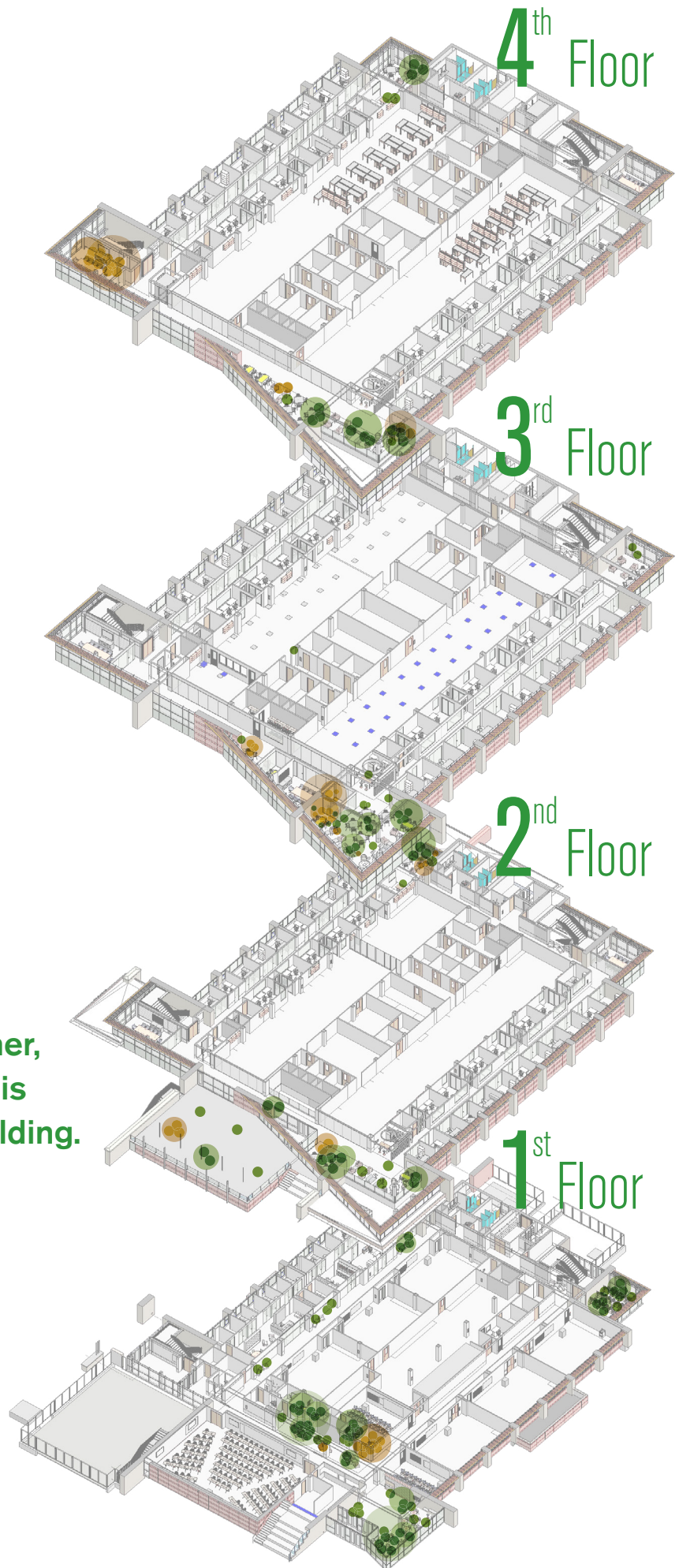
7 FINDINGS

1 DISTANCE MATTERS



Whether studying alone or together, students select study space that is close to where they enter the building.

Study spaces near the front entry were used **67%** more often than other study spaces in the building. At the CSU Biology building, large open study/lounge zones, named “Idea Areas” are stacked on all four levels at the front door. The four-story transparent entry showcases the Idea Areas as a visitor enters the building. The study areas are clearly identified and easy to find.



UTILIZATION: CSU BIOLOGY



The 1st and 2nd floor lounge spaces are interconnected with the 2nd level and overlook the first. This is repeated on the 3rd and 4th floors.

The lounge space on the 1st floor was utilized more than any floor in the building.



The private study space on the 1st floor was typically used **5.3** hours per day while the same private study room located on the 3rd floor was used only **1.7** hours per day.



Study spaces, private or open, on the 1st floor were used **13%** more than spaces on the 2nd floor. This demonstrates that the distance from the front door matters when privacy and noise levels are held constant.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Provide a combination of study environments for individuals and groups that are visible from the front door.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Consider clustering study spaces, open and enclosed, near entry doors. Students will use these spaces most, encouraging interaction and leaving the upper floors free for other program and/or specialized study space.

2

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME



Although students gravitated to the lounge and study spaces directly adjacent to the main entries, specialized study spaces drew students deeper into the building.

Study rooms with audio-visual systems or Design Studios with unique capabilities (i.e. computer software or audio-visual options, etc.) encouraged students further away from the front door. For the iGen student, “technology is expected, and it does not enhance the experience; it is the experience.”⁸ Study spaces with special technology and audio-visual systems were used **14%** more often than study spaces without those amenities.





KEY TAKEAWAY

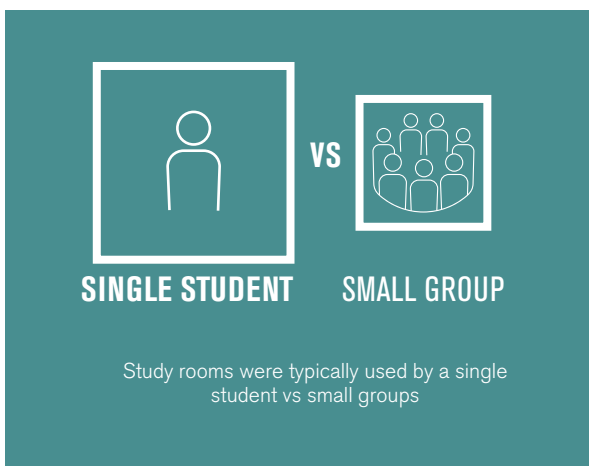
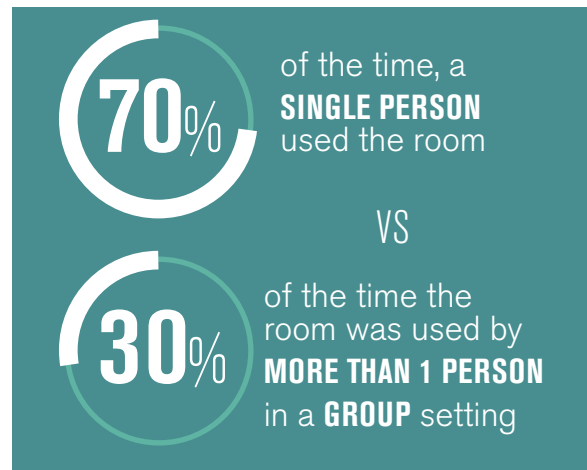
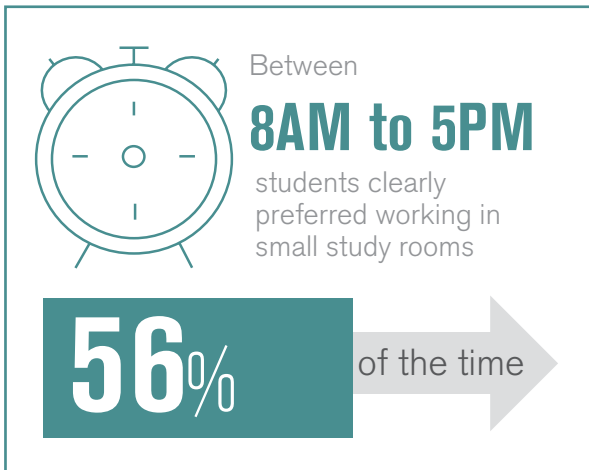
Consider providing specialized spaces and locating them adjacent to student success centers, faculty offices or research amenities. Maker spaces, state-of-the-art computer labs, 3D projection and university-specific software's are ideal opportunities for encouraging student movement.

3

PRIVACY IS KING

Enclosed study rooms are a cherished program component in today's higher education facility.

Most colleges and universities are adding private study rooms to new and existing buildings as quickly as possible. The small study room was overwhelmingly the top choice for our iGen student.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Don't go overboard on transparency, it is expensive, and students prefer a little privacy. If a fully enclosed study room is a concern, consider partial walls or simple glass partitions with a film to create a sense of privacy without surrounding the study rooms completely.



PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE SPACES

57%

prefer enclosed or semi-enclosed

43%

prefer open lounge

16%

prefer room w/more open walls

84%

prefer room w/one wall of glass

What about transparency?

Not unique to iGen, HCM research found that students do not want outsiders seeing or hearing what they are doing. Open lounge spaces with LCD screens or white boards were used **57%** less than enclosed or semi-enclosed rooms with the same technology. We observed that study rooms with three or more walls of glass were used less than study rooms with only one wall of glass; **16%** less.

4

SOLO STUDY



One of the latest trends in the 21st Century learning environment is the single-person study space.

Law school and academic libraries have been encouraging single-person study zones for years.¹ As part of this study, we tracked iGen students' preference for these spaces.

KEY TAKEAWAY

When planning future space for iGen, consider smaller student study rooms for 1-2 students in lieu of rooms that can accommodate 4-6. This will allow for more rooms in the same square footage, thus accommodating more students and increasing the building's utilization. These can be built-in or purchased as a furniture element.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Consider “cove-like” spaces which are compact, but also close to common areas, enabling students to interact for short periods of time and then move to a private environment. A cove provides boundaries while still allowing interaction.

iGen is more independent than their predecessors – turning online to research their options, interacting with others for insight, but ultimately – and more so than in previous generations – **making their own decisions.**

*Barnes & Noble College.
“Getting to Know GenZ – Exploring Middle and High Schoolers Expectations for Higher Education.”*

HCM's research found that today's student chooses private places to study alone. Solo spaces are ideal for individual creative work or can be simply a place to settle in and tackle a quick task that requires quiet or concentration.



5

PRIVACY VS. ISOLATION

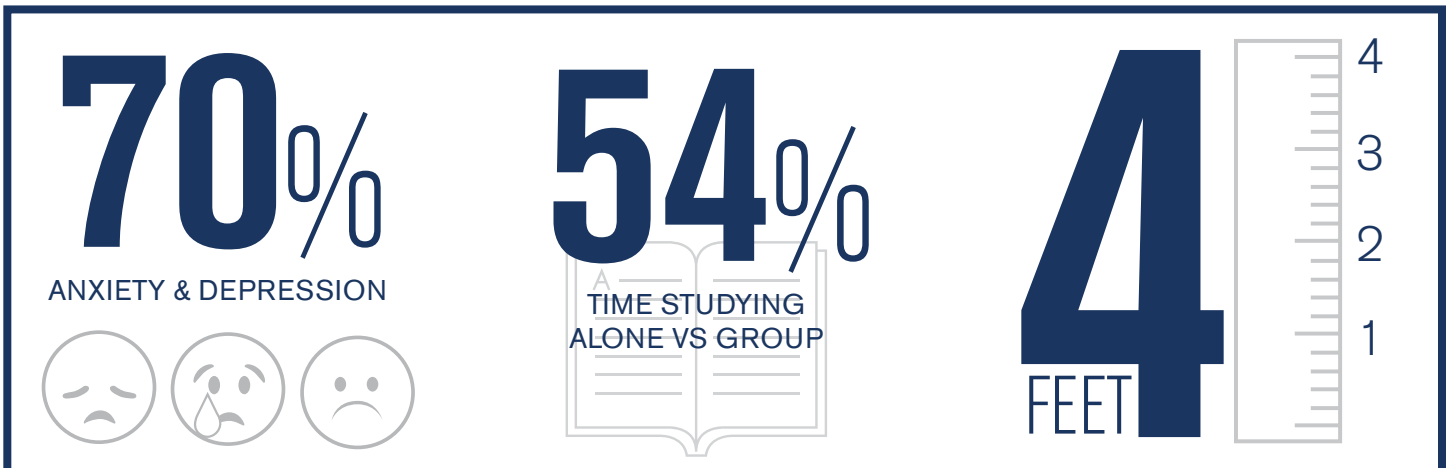
A 2018 Cigna study shows that “Gen Z had the highest score on the UCLA Loneliness Scale, the standard measurement for loneliness research.”⁷

Their millennial counterparts share everything online, but this group seems to be more private and more conscious of their “personal brand.” They have seen some of the repercussions of a life shared online, and are more careful with their online footprint than their predecessors. In a Pew research study, **70%** of respondents thought anxiety and depression were major issues among their peers.⁷

While design alone will not ‘fix’ serious mental health issues, thoughtful design can support both our physical and mental health.¹¹ Providing spaces that allow students to be alone without being isolated is important when considering the mental health concerns of the iGen student.

HCM found that students were studying alone **54%** of

the time, versus studying in a group. Research indicates that the “average acceptable social distance to a stranger is **4 feet.**”⁷ We found this to be true in our observations; a single person would occupy the entirety of a furniture grouping, regardless of distance to the adjacent person, and would not share a furniture grouping with a stranger.





KEY TAKEAWAY

Consider smaller furniture groupings and/or smaller furniture so the groupings are closer together.

KEY TAKEAWAY



Consider designing spaces that allows student to be comfortably alone, but approachable, allowing for chance encounters and interpersonal connections. We suggest seating solutions with high backs, which simulate the acoustic privacy felt in the study rooms, but are in the open.

6

GIVE THEM A PLACE TO WRITE

33%

As designers, we like the shape, color and comfort of large lounge chairs, but students prefer a work surface!

In our observations, we found that **33%** of the time students selected a location with a writing surface over one without. This reflects a need to use a variety of study tools and resources. The spaces included in our observations ranged from private study rooms to informal learning spaces for collaborative group study distributed throughout the

buildings. Various learning spaces outside classrooms can include enclosed group study rooms, customizable soft seating, and open tiered atrium seating, among others, all enabled with technology. With these options to choose from, areas with writing/work space are desired by one in three students.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Consider movable seat tables or lounge chairs with the writing tablet option. Between smartphones, laptops, and noise-canceling headphones, today's students have a variety of study tools that they need to access as they work. A work surface allows them to lay out their tools so they can be most effective.



7 BRING NATURE IN



“Biophilic design can reduce stress, enhance creativity and clarity of thought, improve our well-being and expedite healing.”¹²

The design of the CSU Biology building offers a significant amount of daylight and views to the outdoors. Additionally, the first-floor of the building was designed with a living plant wall, extensive natural science exhibits and a 3,000-gallon aquarium. Students stated that they liked the first-floor study space best, and HCM found that they selected these study areas **90%** more often than the average of the other three floors.

Research has shown that “contact with nature reduces stress, improves memory and increases feelings of kindness, happiness and creativity.”⁹ Furthermore, the “incorporation of natural and tactile materials (such as wood, natural fibers, etc.) into a space can also support mental well-being.”¹²



KEY TAKEAWAY

Architects have been using biophilic design concepts for thousands of years to connect people with nature. Recent research has proven that incorporating nature into our buildings will make us feel better by lowering our stress levels, reducing depression and bettering our overall health. Consider incorporating some of the 14 biophilic patterns from Terrapin Bright Green.¹²



Conclusions

“While design alone will not ‘fix’ serious mental health issues, it is important that we understand the social and psychological value of designing buildings to support our physical and mental health.”

- Herman Miller, Why Magazine

“Managing school stress: Why creating a school-life balance matters”



Generation Z and their Alpha Generation siblings have architects and planners on their toes with anticipation.

Their integrated use of technology and global awareness make them a fascinating generation for whom to design. Although they are connected to the world, they struggle to form deep connections with each other. They claim to prefer collaboration, but tend to study alone.

Thoughtful architecture can support their success, and a better understanding about how they work will allow architects and planners to create spaces that encourage their growth.

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ARCHITECTURE
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