

Why Makerspaces?

Makerspaces are community places that encourage, as Tim Ingold writes, “thinking through making.” As systems become more complex and difficult to navigate, makerspaces encourage practitioners to engage with systems to disseminate, tinker with, and ultimately hold a deeper understanding of them. They do this by: (1) giving access to the necessary tools to work with objects, (2) engaging in cross-domain transfers of knowledge through communal activities, and (3) empowering members to tinker and play in a low-stakes environment.

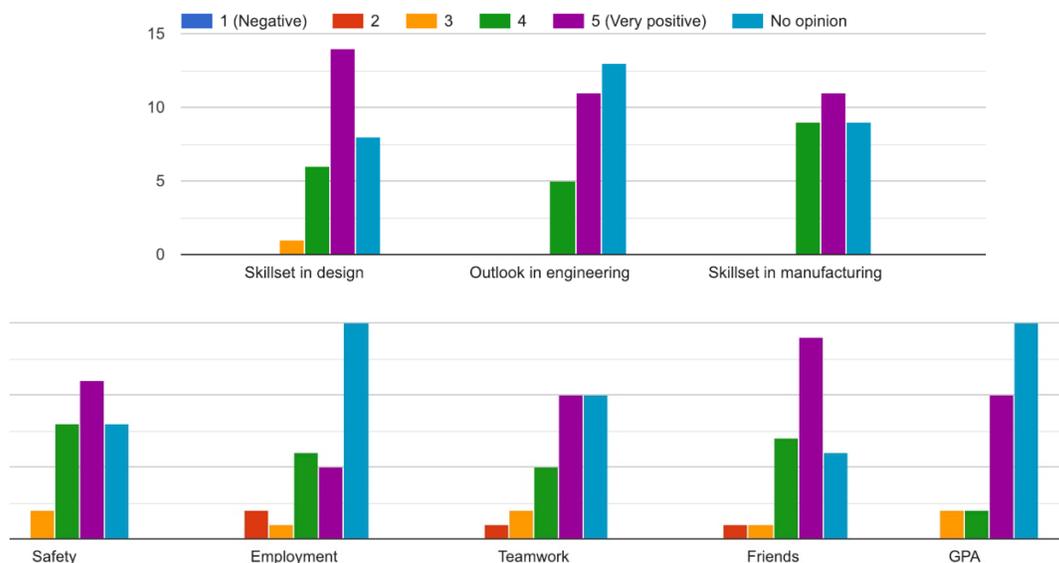
From their inception a little over ten years ago as non-profit collectives, makerspaces have begun to enter into libraries, K-12 institutions, and academia. MIT has over 20 spaces on campus they call makerspaces¹; Georgia Tech has a maker square initiative that includes the development of several new buildings solely dedicated to makerspaces²; closer to home, Indiana University has dedicated significant resources to the development and networking of makerspaces on campus³.

Idea Realization Lab Statistics

- Over 10,000 visitors since opening
- 176 community events since opening AY 17/18
- 1,018 DePaul community check-ins in October 2018

A survey was conducted Spring '18 that sought to gauge student response to the Idea Realization Lab. The survey received 29 responses, and the results are included in their entirety in this packet. Here is one interesting piece of data:

By working in the space, how has this affected your:



¹ <https://project-manus.mit.edu/mit-makersystem>

² <https://www.gatech.edu/innovation-ecosystem/makerspaces>

³ <https://www.sice.indiana.edu/about/facilities-technology/Makerspace/the-spaces.html>

Retention and Student Success

References from whitepapers on makerspaces in academia:

- “As higher education’s primary goal is to develop students into well-equipped members of society, the ability of makerspaces to improve students’ self-efficacy is encouraging.”⁴
- “Higher education academic makerspaces allow for the significant growth of campus space in support of disciplinary and multidisciplinary collaboration.”⁵

A few student responses to the question “*Describe the impact that the IRL has had on your life.*”

- “I have met so many friends in the space! In my years before at DePaul, I didn't feel like there was a set place to hang out or enjoy myself on campus. The IRL has filled that void.”
- “Made some valuable friends with upperclassmen, gave me a place to relax and feel like a space I was comfortable hanging out in, resources to help with my projects, allowed me to explore other creative skills and learn new things, good meeting place for advising/clubs/peers [..]”

Student Admissions

As makerspaces have proliferated throughout K-12 institutions, prospective students have come to expect similar resources from higher education. Makerspaces are, in a way, smart people bait. The IRL has requested data from CDM admissions on how the space impacts initial impressions of DePaul. Preliminary data has shown very positive results, but more needs to be collected. Anecdotally, we have heard from tour leaders that the IRL is one of the highlights of the tours they give on campus.

Success Factors

Survey results, stories from student workers, and advisement from professional advisory board members provide insight into what has made the IRL successful. A comment made regularly is that the *nature* of the space – its politics – are a large contributing factor. Students feel agency over the space because they see their peers running it. They feel a sense of pride and ownership over the space’s success, and as a result, it has thrived.

Meaningfully, professional advisory board members have indicated that their interest in the space is its ability to train the next generation of student leaders who can solve problems on their own. Students have noticed this, too. One student in our survey commented, “I also love how it operates—it is clearly student-led and I hope that it stays that way forever.”

Next Steps

As DePaul considers building a second maker hub on the Lincoln Park campus, it’s also worth asking: how can we build connections out to other labs on campus and integrate maker-centered values into them? Early discussions with faculty in CDM, Business, and Sciences & Health have indicated that there is willingness to run an “experiment” that standardizes certain policies, modernizes, and networks together labs on campus for all students to use. An Academic Initiative Fund proposal is currently underway to explore this possibility.

⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YKlhBb7ujwH8Monc_cf8AFBOV_eHlci/view?usp=sharing

⁵ <https://seas.yale.edu/sites/default/files/imce/other/makerspaces-and-accreditation-SCUP.pdf>