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# FDU is using its new school of pharmacy to introduce its new style of higher learning

By **Andrew Sheldon**, March 30, 2015 at 3:00 AM



Dr. Chadwin Sandifer is the assistant dean of the Fairleigh Dickinson University School of Pharmacy. - (PHOTO BY AARON HOUSTON)

It seemed impossible to walk through the halls of Fairleigh Dickinson University's new School

of Pharmacy in Florham Park without running into a smiling face and receiving a polite, “Good morning.”

If you ask Chadwin Sandifer, assistant dean for student affairs & programmatic effectiveness, it was designed that way.

“Each of our spaces has a community kitchen, a community sitting area,” he said before getting interrupted by another greeting. “That’s how these spaces were designed: to really promote that cross-collaboration between our areas.”

“Hello, again,” said another passerby as he finished.

Modernizing education was a major focus for FDU when decided to open the first new pharmacy school in the state since 1892. It decided it would do so with a look to the next 50 years, creating a technology-driven program that the school feels will be a model of higher education for years to come.

The design of the school, parts of which is still being constructed, was based largely on a recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology study on the efficiency of learning spaces. And it’s not very different from the trends companies have been implementing in their office spaces, which focus on customizability and collaboration as students work towards their master’s degrees.

But it’s still a work in progress: The school opened in fall 2012, but expansion of a new floor having just opened last August. The third floor will be open later this year.

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Still, it’s getting people’s attention: Julie Kalabalik joined the School of Pharmacy in November 2013 after teaching at Rutgers University’s pharmacy program, the only other school of pharmacy in a state long touted as the medicine chest of the world.



Julie Kalabalik

She said the school’s technology made an impression on her as early as her first interview at the school.

“The fact that they were so technologically advanced here really impressed me and made me feel that I could do more as a faculty member and further advance my teaching because I had all these capabilities,” she said. “It facilitates the learning and helps you to emphasize your points more and spend time on things that are really important, instead of worrying if my technology is going to fail me.”

From her experience, that trust and versatility has influenced the way she delivers content.

“It's really nice because everything is mobile; you get to move it around. If you want to do group activities, you can have it set up so that (the tables) are meeting each other, have them work as a group and then have them disconnect and have them talk as a class,” she said. “It really depends on how you're tailoring your class and your material.”

But Sandifer and his faculty are finding that keeping up with technology is a job that's never finished: With the first floor finished in 2012, the second last summer and a third floor that will be completed for fall 2015, Sandifer has noticed just how quickly perspectives can change.

“The students have even commented that the feel on the second floor is so different than the first floor,” he said. “When they started in 2012, the first floor was very forward-thinking: We had circular tables and a lot of group space, but now — after developing this — it might seem a little old school.”

But, from a student perspective, even the first floor is anything but “old school.”

“It was definitely different. It was kind of like a culture shock coming from a very traditional academic setting,” said Sara Bender, a third-year pharmacy student. “But I like the versatility of it. We can get a little bit of both (old and new).”

According to Sandifer, that blend of new and old is achieved through the implementation of technology.

“One of the great things about our classrooms is that they're all mic'd. Faculty members all wear lapel mics or handheld mics, so they're all captured,” he said. “All of our lectures are captured for review after the fact, if needed.”

Capturing these lectures allows for more flexibility with class scheduling, with a unique twist on telecommuting. Using microphones, a camera and a projector allow students on one campus to “attend” a class occurring at another location. It's sort of like Skyping, but it still maintains the classroom experience for students.

“We have a professor at the Teaneck campus. There's also three other students over there and six of us here,” Bender said. “So, we just sit in the middle [of the room] and [the professor] can do a three-way thing so we can see the PowerPoint, the professor cam and then the other students as well.

“We can see everything that's going on even though we're not there.”

Like most of the rooms on the campus, the classroom is multipurpose, and faculty can rearrange the furniture and use the technology to hold virtual conference meetings, Sandifer said.

It's a further extension of the customizability Sandifer finds vital to the school's success.

"I think you see in a lot of learning environments that students are the navigators. They're the ones engaging in new content, new devices and it's our faculty and our staff that have to be adaptors," he said. "We adapt to what the students are using, to some degree, but they're really paving the way with this technology."

That mentality has informed the way the school works with its students to make sure they're receiving the education they feel works best for them.

"They also told us that we had the ability to make the school work for us as well," said Katerina Hatsis, a third-year student at the school. "We've kind of been working with the staff through every step of the way and it's important to me that my voice is heard through everything."

And those attempts haven't gone unappreciated by the student body.

"Very rarely do you ever get to give feedback and have it be heard," Bender said.

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## Partnering for success

This spring, FDU's School of Pharmacy opened up its Sterile Compounding Lab, a state-of-the-art room where students learn sterile techniques for performance.

The sterile lab was made possible, in part, by business partnerships including a donation from a company that shares the school's namesake: Becton, Dickinson & Company.

"Our investment was in enabling them to build a simulated clean room environment, which is exactly how IV drugs are prepared in the hospital," said Rick Byrd, vice president and general manager of medical and procedural solutions at BD. "It gives the students a very realistic view of what to expect in hospital pharmacies and how drugs are prepared."

"Investment" is a carefully chosen word because, while the students gained the opportunity to learn on the most modern technology, there were other benefits for BD as well.

“We recognized that there could be a partnership here where we could do validation testing with them, we could learn, we could have their students provide us feedback as we developed new technologies,” he said.

Of course, it also establishes what is often referred to as a “pipeline” of talent.

“Once you become intimate with the school, you have much greater access to students and those types of relationships naturally build,” he said. “I’m really excited about having access to talent.”

Byrd sees so much potential in collaborations between private companies and academic institutions he also mentioned a desire to get BD involved with a partnership between the school and St. Barnabas.

“They are helping Barnabas with their follow up adherence for chronic disease, whether it be diabetes or potential heart failure; they’re helping them become an arm for their accountable care organizations,” he said. “Imagine a three way relationship where BD, from a technology side, can try to help save this issue and, at the same time, the pharmacy school is playing a role and then you have the health care system playing a role.

“Those types of partnerships are what’s going to be required in order to really drive costs out of health care system and improve outcomes.”

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