



Call to Preserve the Edwards Collaboration Wing Boardrooms for Student Use

Monday July 31st, 2023

via email to:

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and willoughby@edwards.usask.ca

CC: undergrad@edwards.usask.ca

To Dean Keith Willoughby and the Dean's Office at the Edwards School of Business,

As a representative of the Edwards Business Students' Society (EBSS), an organization mandated to advocate for the best interests of Edwards students, I write to you today to express deep concern regarding the recent decision to repurpose the boardrooms numbered 248, 249, 250A, 250B, 251A, and 251B in the Edwards School of Business (ESB) Building into faculty office spaces, as of July 2023. By elaborating on the student impact, I implore you to reconsider this decision and preserve the boardrooms for student use—their intended purpose.

These boardrooms occupy the Edwards Collaboration Wing on the third floor of the ESB building. As stated on the plaque located in the wing, "This space is intended to facilitate enhanced collaboration, increased engagement for group work, and flexible meeting space for students." This succinctly underscores the key negative impacts of the recent unilateral decision. Edwards preaches the concept and promise of collaboration, with programs offered by the college heavily relying on collaborative group work¹. Consequently, the availability of dedicated spaces to facilitate such work is paramount to academic success. The boardrooms have served as essential venues for students to connect, brainstorm, discuss ideas, and complete projects to meet Edwards' learning outcomes. Depriving students of these spaces will significantly hinder their ability to engage in effective group work, undermining the quality of an Edwards education.

Students' full utilization of the boardrooms has been consistently evident, seeing as, more often than not, every room is booked for the entire duration of any given school day. The removal of these spaces will not result in merely inconvenience, but a significant negative impact on students due to overcrowding and inaccessibility. Considering the rapidly-increasing intake of students at Edwards, opportunities for collaboration will be severely limited. While other spaces, such as the rooms in Murray Library, exist, they are considerably more difficult to book and have far fewer rooms available relative to the number of students wishing to access them. This necessitates the existence and outlines the importance of the Edwards boardrooms, and it compels us to urge you to consider the

¹ Dean's Message in [Edwards Thrive Magazine, 2019](#)

detrimental consequences this decision will have on students' ability to thrive academically and socially.

Furthermore, it is disheartening that this decision was made without any meaningful consultation or input from the student body. Our voices were not heard and we were left uninformed of this significant change that directly and adversely affects the educational experience we pay for. This lack of transparency and exclusion from decision-making processes is not aligned with the principles of shared governance and mutual respect.

There has been a concerning pattern of college leadership withholding information from students on this topic. Over a month has passed since the EBSS Executive Council was first informed of this matter, so there has been both abundant time and opportunity to communicate this extremely significant change to students; for example, through Edwards' regular newsletter, *The Latest*. As of the date of this letter, no efforts have been made to share this autocratic decision to students at large. Such lack of communication further exacerbates the sense of alienation and powerlessness among the student body, creating a division between students and faculty. The strained relations resulting from this decision will likely disrupt Edwards' teaching and learning environments, further hindering the experiences of both students and faculty.

Additionally, one of the boardrooms had been designated as a Prayer Room in March 2023, after several EBSS members highlighted the dire need for an accessible space to meet students' religious requirements. The Prayer Room was then proposed as a temporary solution by the Undergraduate Office, along with the expressed intent to work on securing a permanent space. The revocation of the Prayer Room is another aspect of this decision that remains unaddressed, as no further discussions or solutions have been proposed by the college.

It is crucial to note the boardrooms were funded and created specifically for student use; donations were solicited by the college for their technology and furnishings. The decision to repurpose the boardrooms for faculty office space not only contradicts the wishes of the original donors and discredits the clear impact of their generous contributions, but also sets a concerning precedent that undermines the trust and integrity of the Edwards institution as it delegitimizes established strategic priorities during the allocation of resources. Ironically, the college is now seeking sponsorships for a new collaboration space, large private rooms, quiet study spaces, and shared student club office spaces, all in the name of enhancing students' learning experience². Understandably, we are concerned by the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of removing donation-funded student spaces while simultaneously collecting donations to fund student spaces.

The rationale provided for repurposing the boardrooms was the need to accommodate increased faculty and their on-campus work requirements. However, the expansion of offices

² [Edwards School of Business - Giving to USask | University of Saskatchewan](#)

"[Design Visionary Spaces](#). To recruit and retain **the best students** and faculty for Saskatchewan and the world, **we want to create a space** and culture that fosters a **strong sense of belonging for Edwards students**. New space will increase networking and collaboration, both intentional and unexpected, among all community groups—**students**, faculty, staff, alumni, professionals, and the broader business community."

has not been identified as a priority in enhancing teaching or research at Edwards³. It is important to note that neither the USask Faculty Association's (USFA) nor the Sessional Lecturers' employment agreement requires the provision of individual or private office spaces to faculty⁴. USFA, which represents the interests of most faculty, has not highlighted this bargaining issue in recent years⁵. Faculty members can share dual office spaces, cubicles, or, as they often do, work remotely from home. In fact, a significant portion of faculty's office hours are conducted virtually and using open cooperative spaces is a recommended step towards enhancing collaboration in academic research—the other key aspect of faculty work⁶. These factors raise quite a few questions:

- Were existing office spaces in the Faculty Wing evaluated for their current usage?
- What alternatives for maximizing the use of space within the Faculty wing were explored and subsequently ruled out, and why?
- Was the possibility of repurposing an underutilized classroom space into cubicle offices or the equivalent considered?
- Were any efforts made to find alternative spaces on campus to place faculty?
- What evidence supported this matter's precedence over other issues raised by faculty and/or students?

Notably, incoming first-year students have been assigned to the Physics Building for the new Learning Communities—an Edwards activity which typically would have been held in the ESB Building. It is clear that Edwards is facing various issues related to a shortage of space, a fact that is corroborated with ongoing talk of a future building expansion. However, it is curious that college leadership feels as if they can relocate, across campus, an Edwards activity for first-year students—who happen to be, unarguably, those most unfamiliar with campus—but not make a similar decision to position a few faculty in an adjacent building.

Students require on-campus spaces to foster a sense of belonging, academic engagement, and community. The boardrooms have been an integral part of the Edwards campus experience for years, providing a central hub to gather, interact, and collaborate, and bringing a sense of comfort and freedom as a space occupied exclusively by students. Removing this dedicated space for students sends a distressing message that the needs and contributions of students are heinously undervalued at Edwards.

³ [Edwards School of Business - Giving to USask | University of Saskatchewan](#)

⁴ [Employment Agreements | University of Saskatchewan](#) - USFA and CUPE 3287

⁵ [USFA - Negotiation News](#)

⁶ [Undisciplining the university through shared purpose, practice, and place | Humanities and Social Sciences Communications](#)

Preserving these spaces for student use not only aligns with Edwards' Strategic Goals⁷ and Values⁸, the intended impact of the original donors, and the Dean's Circle funding goals⁹, but also upholds the principles of equity, inclusion, and shared governance. It is my sincere hope that, by working together, we can find a solution that meets the needs of all stakeholders while preserving the educational excellence and the student-centered collaborative environment that we and our institution take pride in.

As the elected voice of the Edwards student body, it is my responsibility to convey its needs and advocate for an educational environment that supports the growth and success of Edwards students. In line with the considerations above, I implore you to reconsider the decision to repurpose the boardrooms and, instead, prioritize the needs and well-being of the Edwards student body.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to your prompt response and the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue.

Sincerely,

Brooke Martin (she/her)

President, EBSS

On Behalf of the Edwards Business Students' Society

⁷ [Edwards Strategic Plan](#)

“Goal: To provide transformative learning experiences, Strategies: Enrich our teaching and **learning environments to position all students for success**”

⁸ Edwards Values: “We encourage a **collaborative environment** where **students**, faculty, staff, and alumni come together, leveraging their diverse perspectives, talents, and expertise in the classroom, in research, and in our community. We are committed to providing **students** and researchers with the support they need to realize their full potential.

⁹ [Edwards Dean's Circle](#) “Your membership in the Dean's Circle helps us offer students an exceptional education and experience. Supports innovative opportunities that are not in Edwards annual operating budget”. No mention of providing offices for faculty or staff.