

# **STUDENT FOCUS GROUP ON ACTIVE LEARNING SPACES**

JANUARY 23, 2017



**Office of Campus  
Learning Environments**

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## Introduction

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Near the mid-point of the fall semester of 2016, the Office of Campus Learning Environments conducted a student focus group on active learning classrooms. There were a total of 15 students who participated in this 75 minute focus group.

The goals of the focus group were to inform the students on different flat floor and tiered floor active learning classroom design options and gather their feedback on which options they most and least preferred and understand why they made these choices.

The focus group process employed team based learning pedagogy. Upon entering the room, the students were directed to sit at rectangular tables with up to 4 in a group. Then the students were asked to complete a survey, on their own, and identify their most and least preferred active learning classroom options and explain why. The completed survey was collected and the results analyzed. These pre-discussion survey results illustrated the inherent biases that the students had coming into the focus group. Next a presentation was made with floor plans, photographs and short videos of the different active learning classroom options in use accompanied by an explanation of their key attributes. Following the explanation we asked the students to discuss the different options in their group, reach consensus among themselves on the most and least preferred options and retake the survey as a group (with only one survey per group). The post-discussion results were analyzed to understand the student group's preferences after debating the merits and flaws of each option.

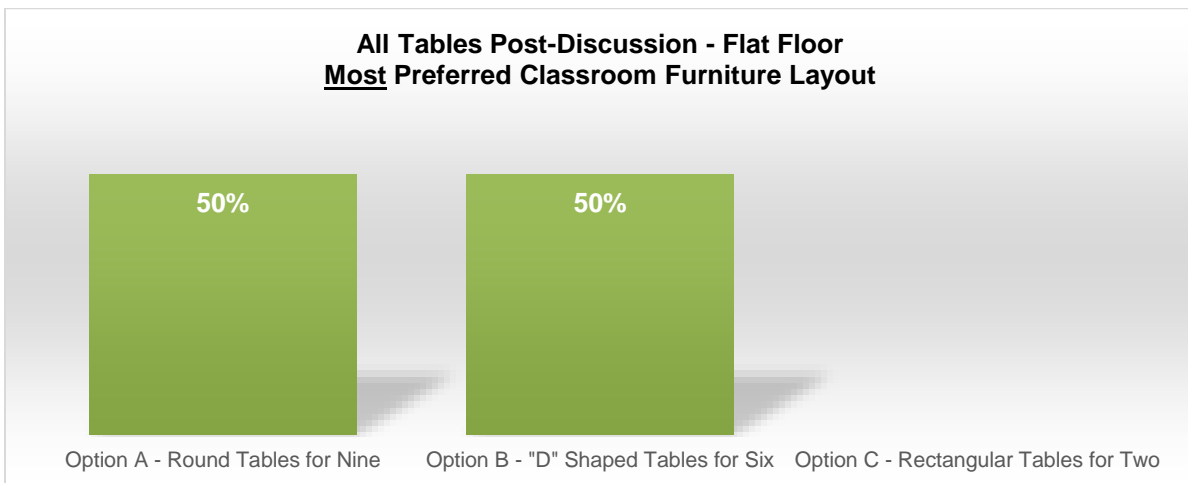
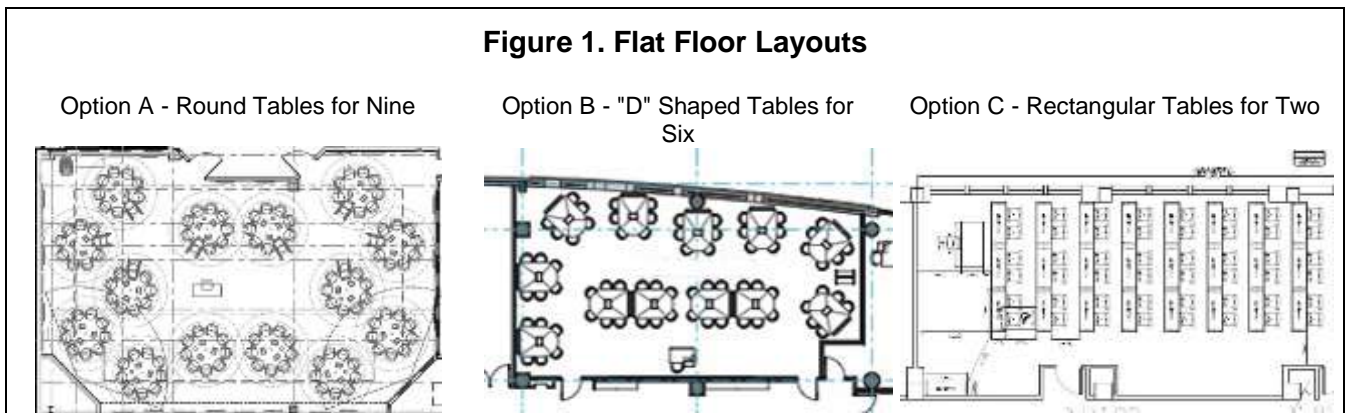
This report includes an executive summary followed by the survey questions, including floor plans of the different active learning classroom options, graphed results of multiple choice questions and responses to open-ended questions. The report is divided into a flat floor and tiered floor classroom sections. Within those sections the results are organized by table/group number and include the pre-discussion results followed by the post-discussion results.

## Executive Summary

In almost all cases the students changed their opinion between pre and post-discussion on which active learning classrooms they most and least preferred. They entered the focus group with a pre-conceived notion or bias of which layout was most preferred. Based on the comments to the open ended question their *pre*-discussion layout choice appeared to be based upon which room they felt best supported the pedagogy they were most familiar with (i.e. lecture mode) or best supported their preferred learning style.

After being informed of the features of each active learning classroom options and discussing the merits and flaws amongst themselves each student group/table was able to reach consensus on which active learning classroom layout they most and least preferred. Following is a summary of these *post*-discussion results for flat floor and tiered floor classrooms.

### Flat Floor Active Learning Classrooms



For the flat floor active learning classrooms, the student groups were evenly divided on their most preferred layout. 50% of the groups/tables selected option A with round tables of nine students as their most preferred. During the open discussion section of the focus group the students cited the following features as important to their decision:

- Instructor is centered in space
- Round tables encourage cooperation
- Supports flipped classroom

50% of the groups/tables selected option B with “D” shaped tables for six students as their most preferred. During the reporting out or open discussion section of the focus group the students cited the following features as important to their decision:

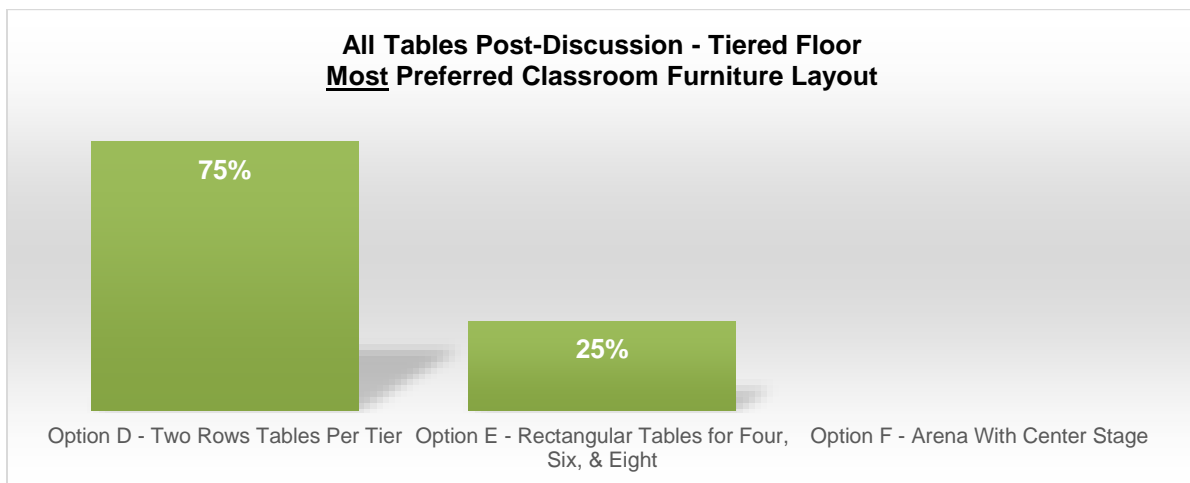
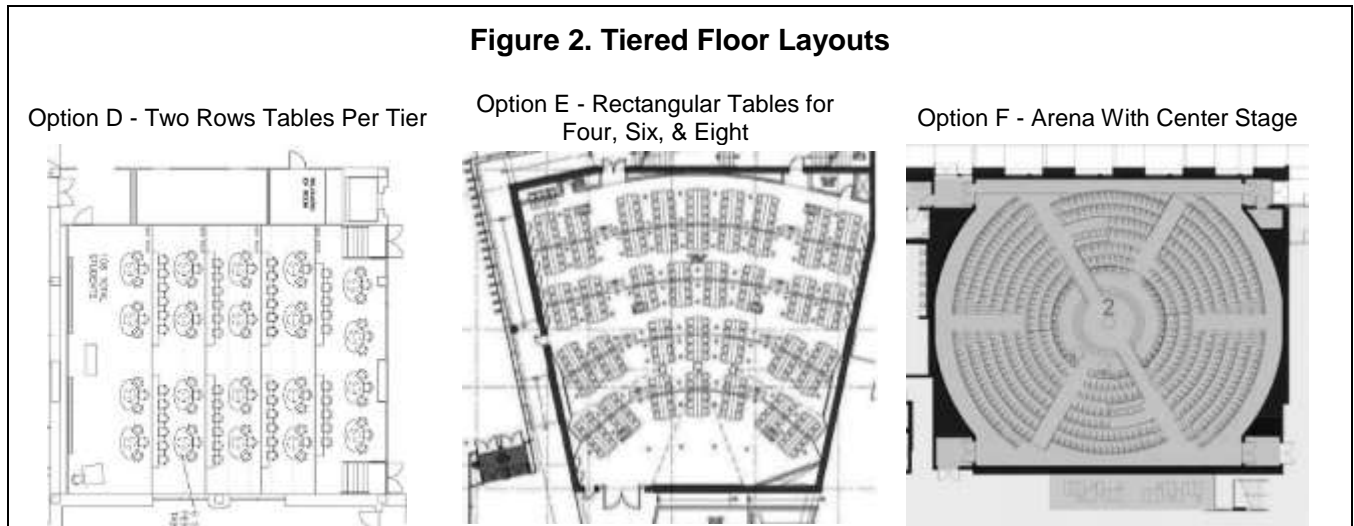
- One main teaching wall
- More personal table space compared to round table option



For the flat floor active learning classrooms, the student groups were unanimous on their least preferred layout. 100% of the groups/tables selected option C with rectangular tables for two as their least preferred. During the open discussion section of the focus group the students cited the following features as important to their decision:

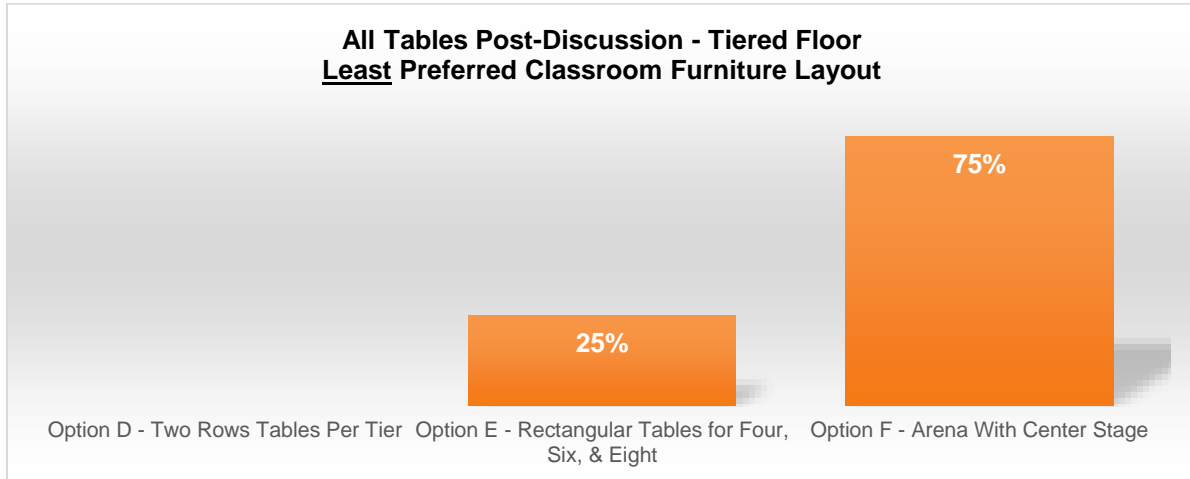
- No active learning takes place
- Instructor has limited access to students
- Same old boring layout

## Tiered Floor Active Learning Classrooms



For the tiered floor active learning classrooms, 75% of the student groups selected option D with two rows of tables per tier as their most preferred layout. During the open discussion section of the focus group the students cited the following features as important to their decision:

- Adaptability to go between lecture, group work, discussion
- Instructor access to groups
- Seamlessly switch between facing instructor and group



For the tiered floor active learning classrooms, 75% of the student groups selected option F, the arena layout with a center stage, as their least preferred layout. During the open discussion section of the focus group the students cited the following features as important to their decision:

- Lecture based
- No collaboration
- Doesn't support active learning

### **Conclusion**

After students learned about the active learning space options and discussed room attributes with their peers they made informed decision as a group on the most and the least preferred classrooms. For flat floor active learning classrooms, the students most preferred the layout options with either team tables of six or tables of nine students. They felt the team tables encouraged cooperation and supported a flipped classroom. For tiered floor active learning classrooms the students most preferred the layout option which allowed for seamless switching between facing the instructor and facing their student group. For both flat floor and tiered floor active learning classrooms the students least preferred options were layouts that inhibited movement (of instructor and students) and inhibited group/team activities.

Finally, during the open discussion section of the focus group multiple students stressed the need for the instructors to be trained on how to effectively teach in these active learning classrooms so that they spent less time lecturing and more time in student group (i.e. peer to peer) activities.

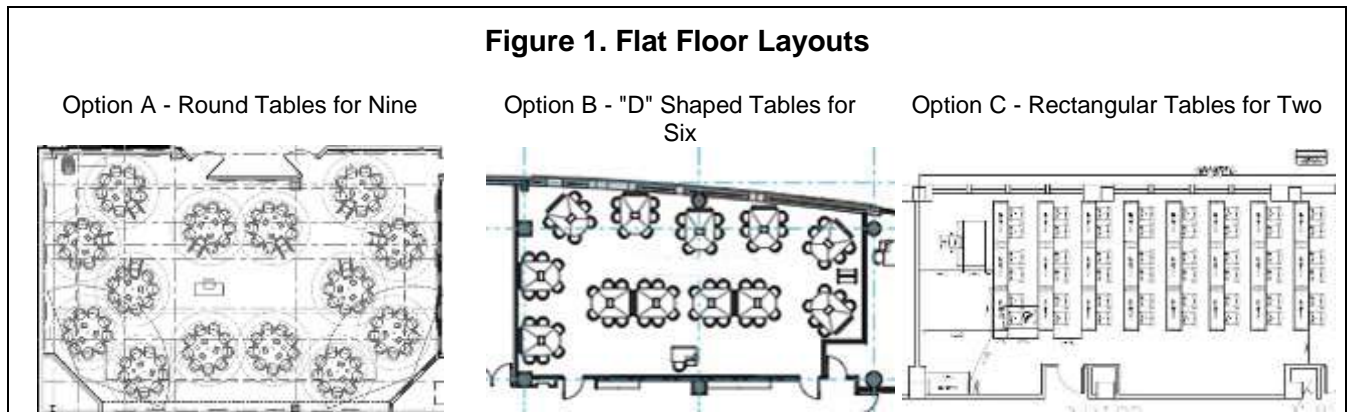


## Focus Group Survey Results

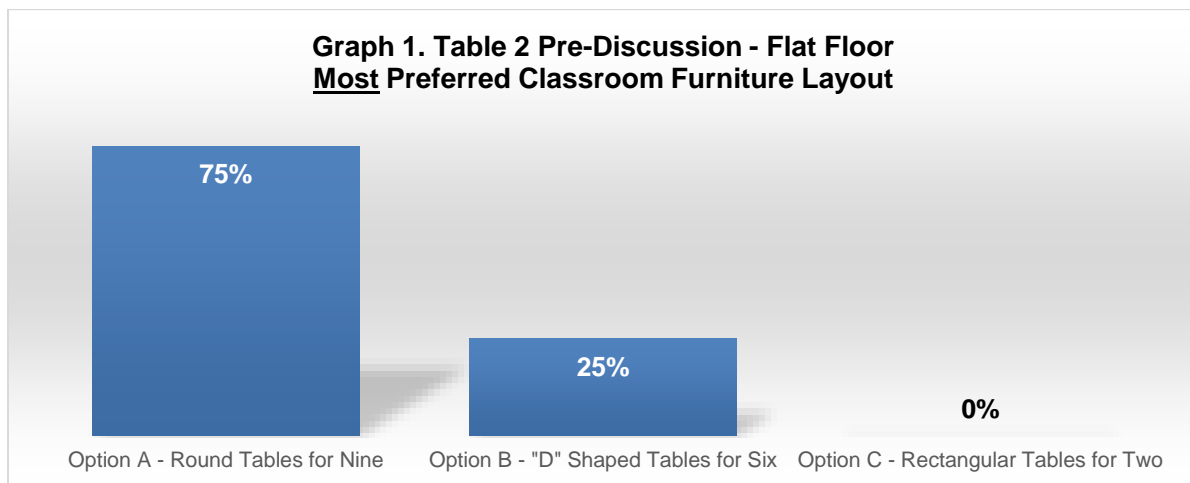
### Flat Floor Classrooms

**Table #2: Pre-Discussion Survey Results**

**Q1:** Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q1 Responses:** 4 Responses as shown in Graph 1 below



**Q1 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred.

Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine which was most preferred by 75% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"I like group discussions. It promotes social interactions, make more friends, get more ideas and work together."*

Below are comments on option B, the layout option with "D" shaped tables for six, which was most preferred by 25% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

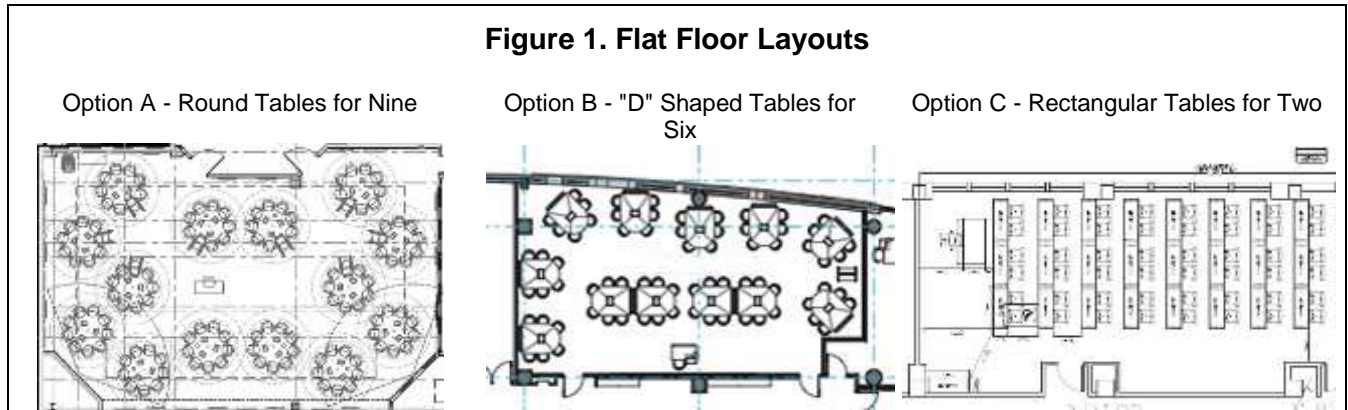
- *"More discussion based."*



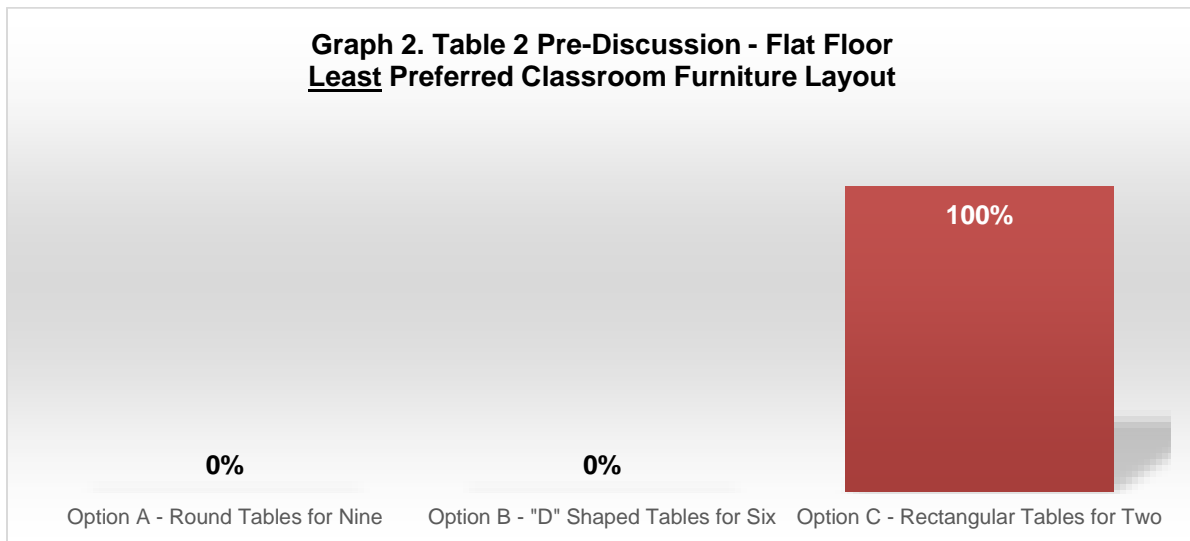
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #2: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 2 below



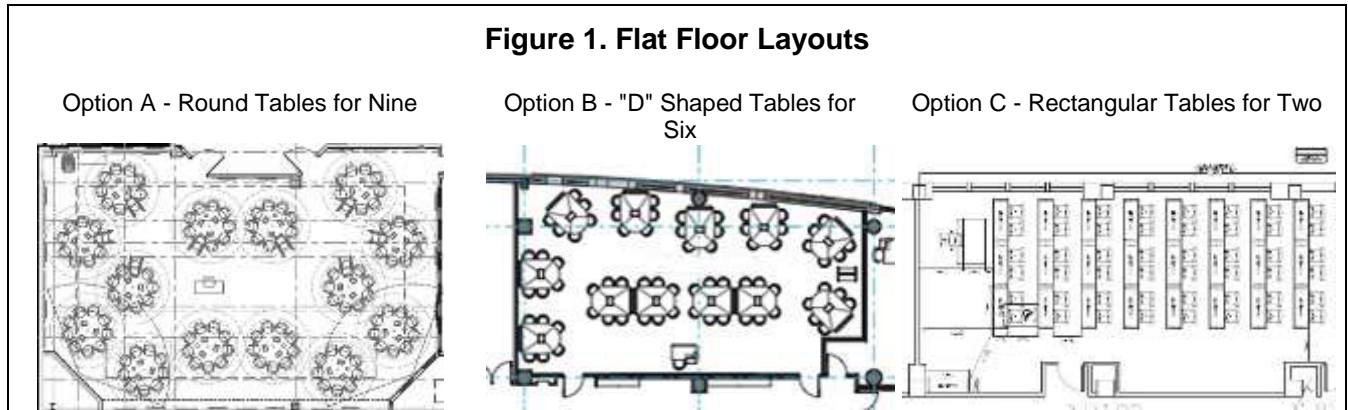
Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"None of that. Boring, drab, no one pays attention."*
- *"It's more structured and people in the back can't see that well."*

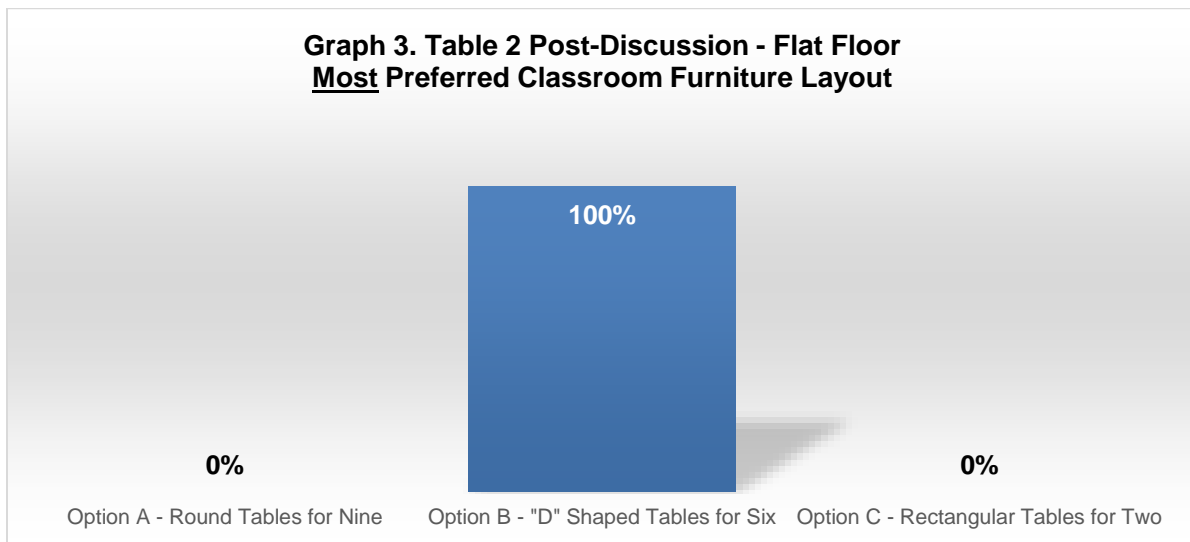
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #2: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 3 below



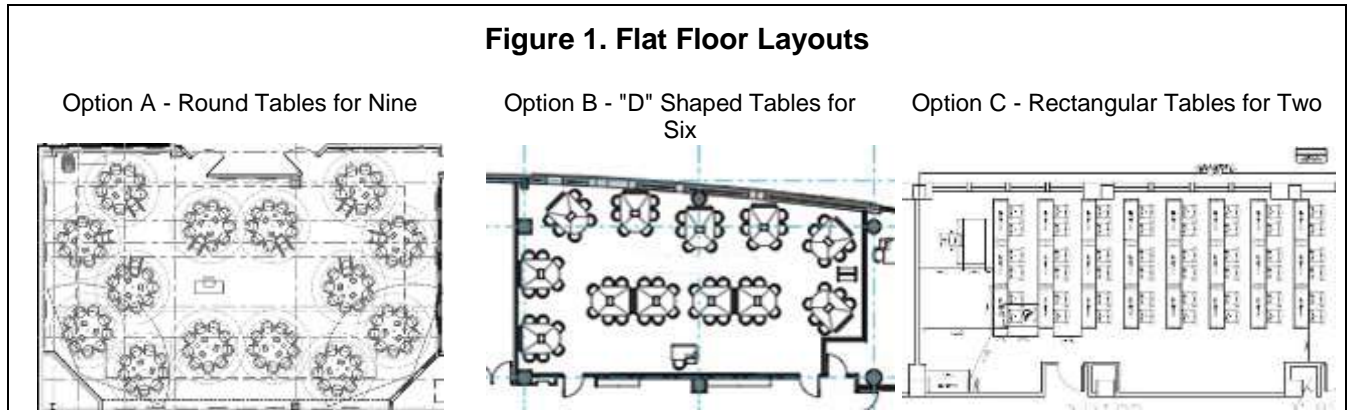
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option B, the layout option with "D" shaped tables for six, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *"Works best with 4 people per group. Collaborative / central board."*

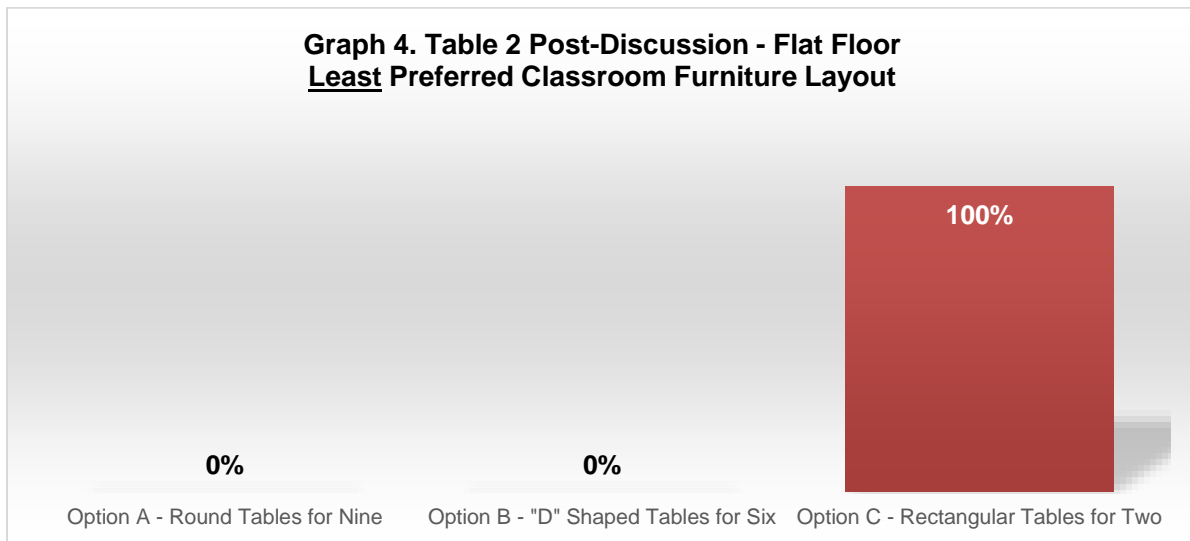
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #2: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 4 below



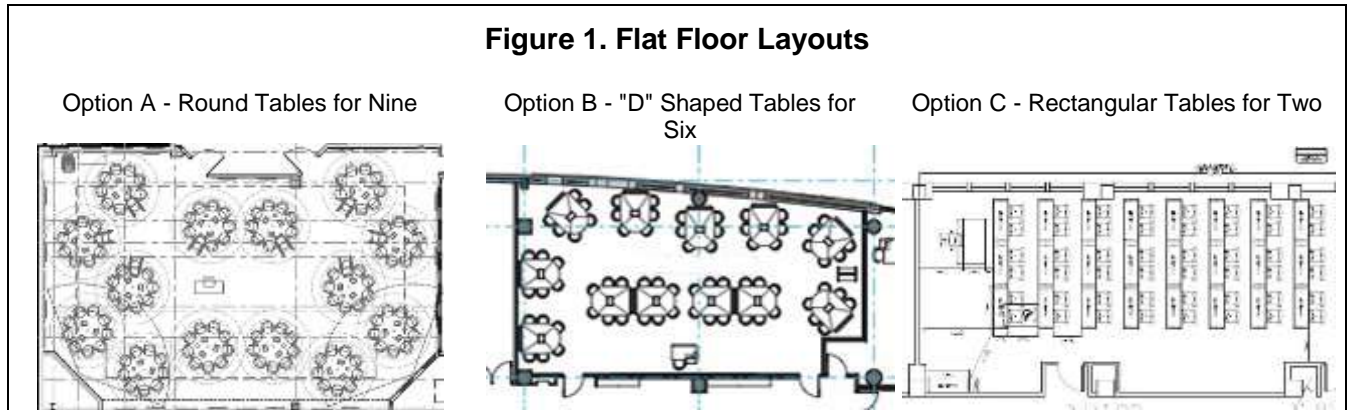
Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *"People in the back can't see."*

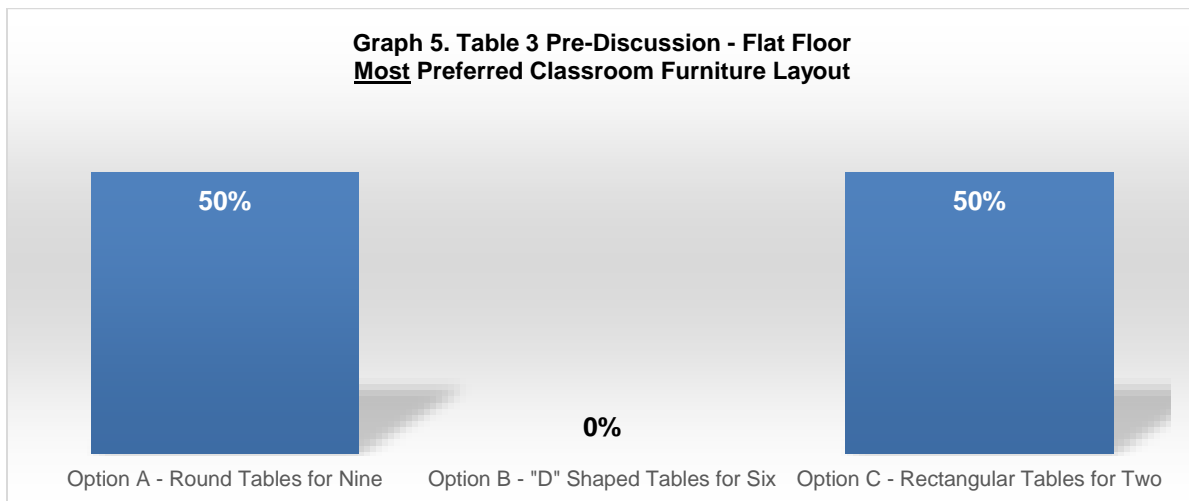
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #3: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

**Q1:** Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q1 Responses:** 4 responses as shown in Graph 5 below



**Q1 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine, which was most preferred by 50% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"I like working in groups."*

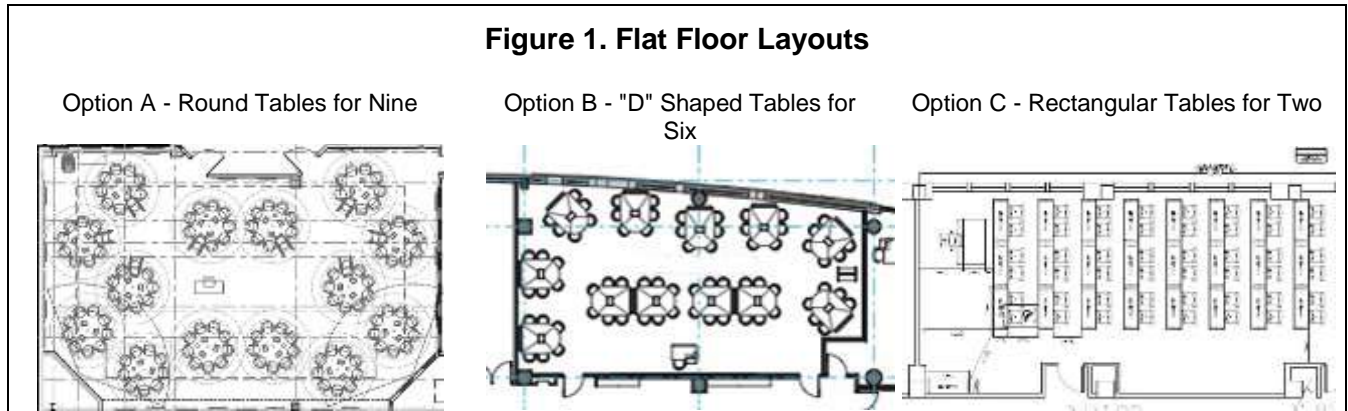
Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was most preferred by 50% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"A clear hierarchy is established, a lecture is facilitated."*
- *"There are no uncomfortable or awkward angles to view the instructor or screens."*

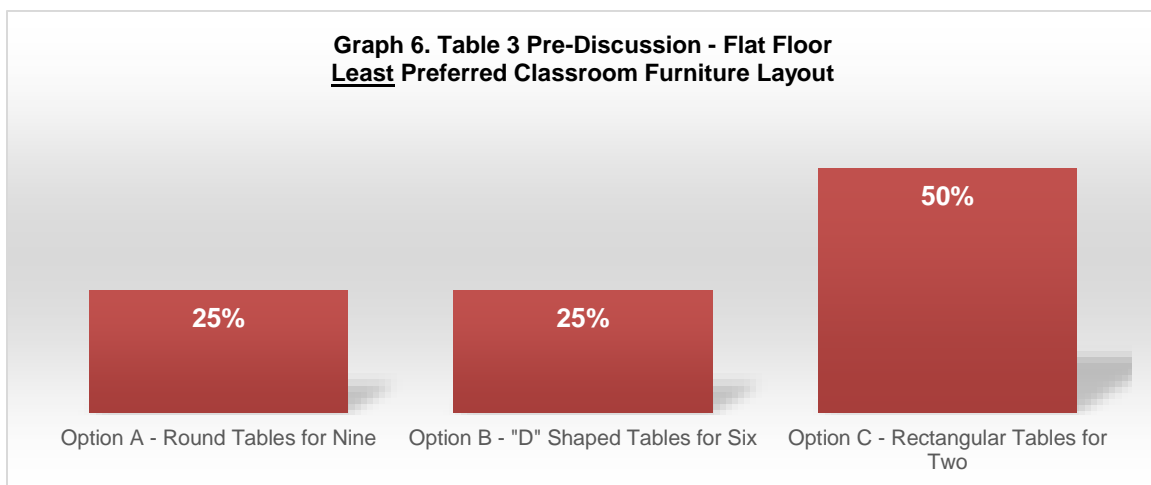
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #3: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 4 response as shown in Graph 6 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine, which was least preferred by 25% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"Some seats do not have a clear view without straining your neck."*

Below are comments on option B, the layout option with "D" shaped tables for six, which was least preferred by 25% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"It is more difficult to see the professor."*

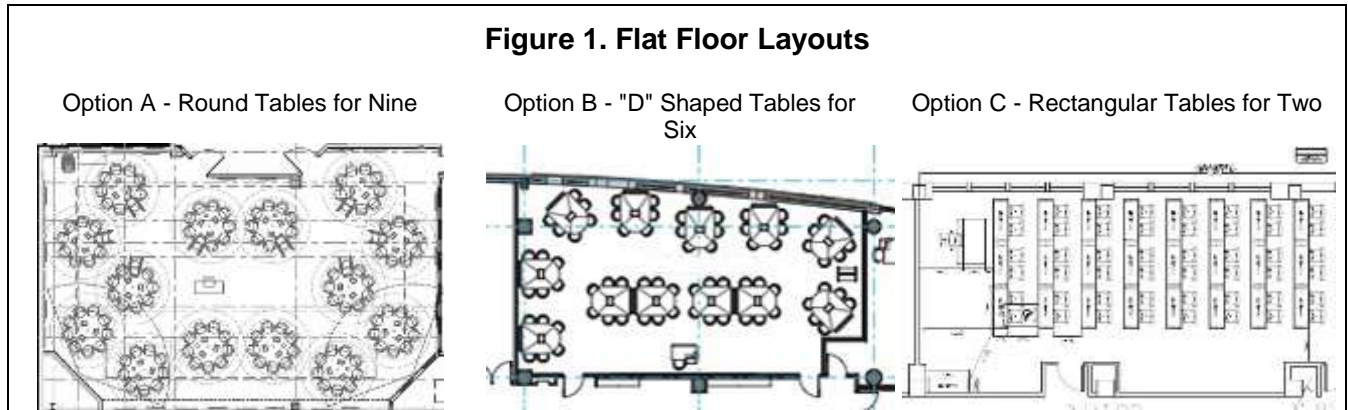
Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 50% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"Doesn't foster relationships. My experience."*

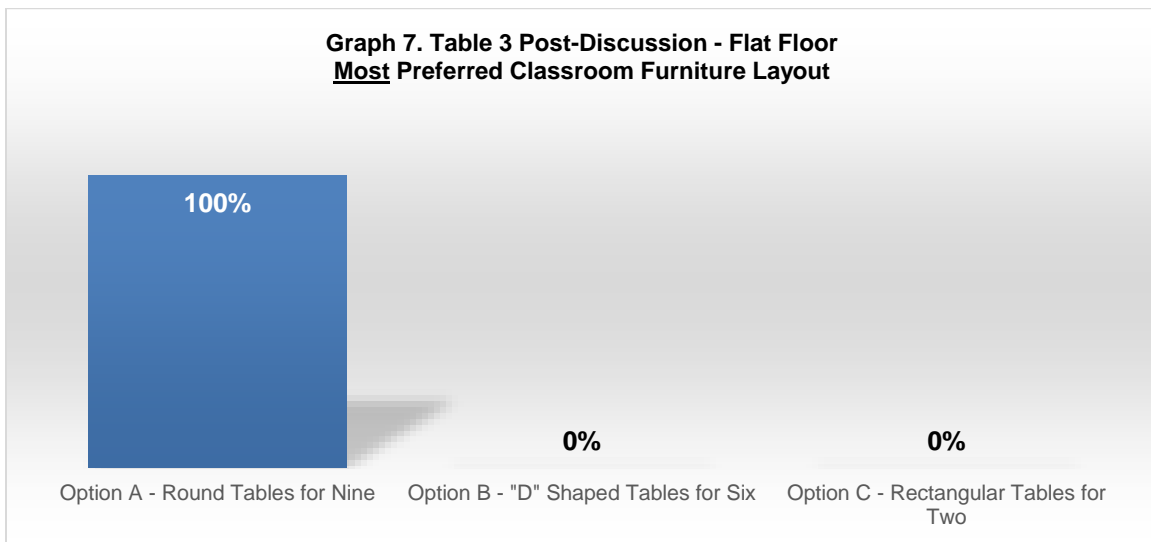
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #3: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 7 below



Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

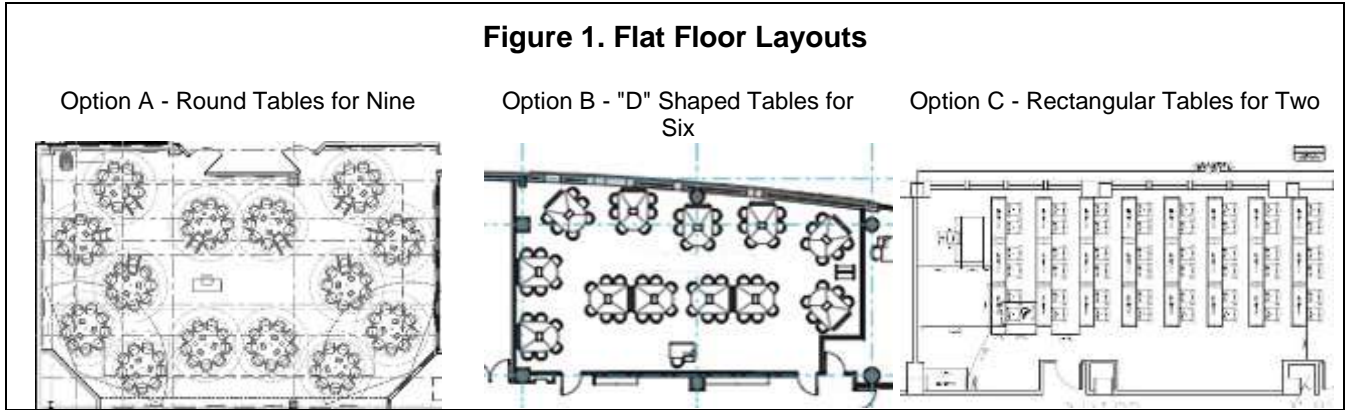
- *"Specifically set up as team work learning."*



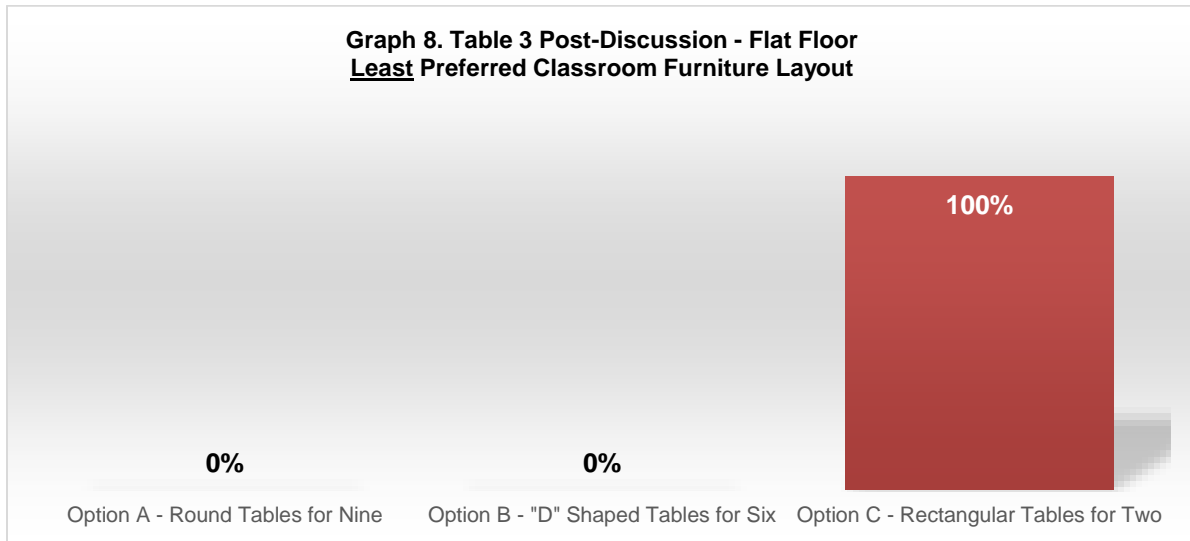
**Flat Floor Classrooms**

**Table #3: Post-Discussion Survey Results**

**Q2:** Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q2 Responses:** 1 response as shown in Graph 8 below



**Q2 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

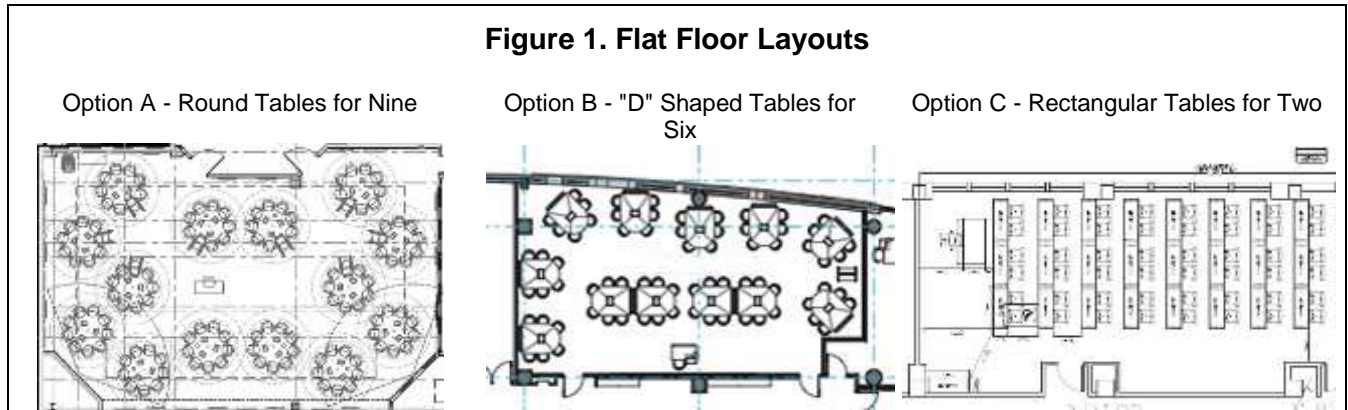
- *"Same old boring."*



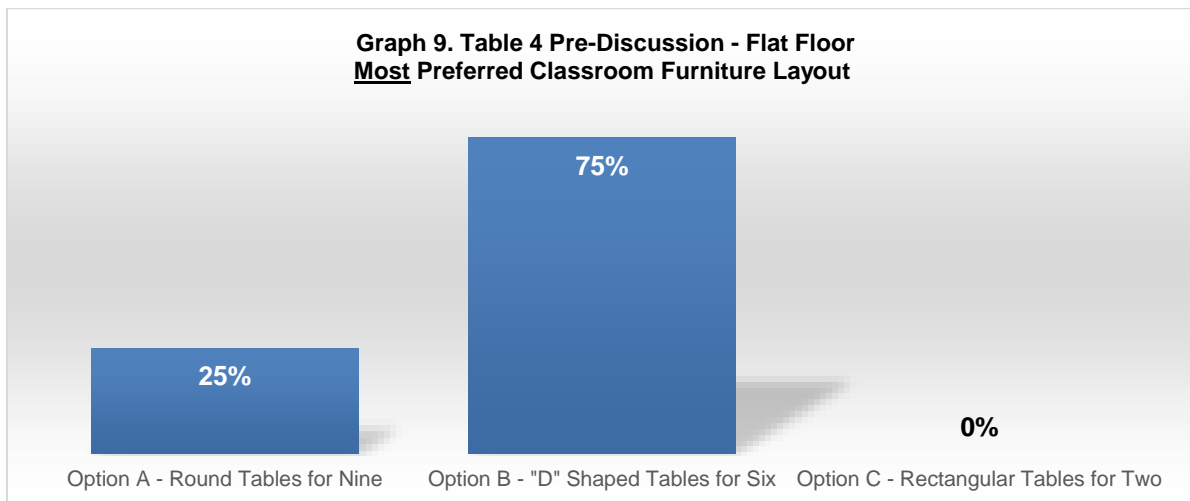
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 9 below



Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine, which was most preferred by 25% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"It seems like the most interactive and creates a better interactive atmosphere."*

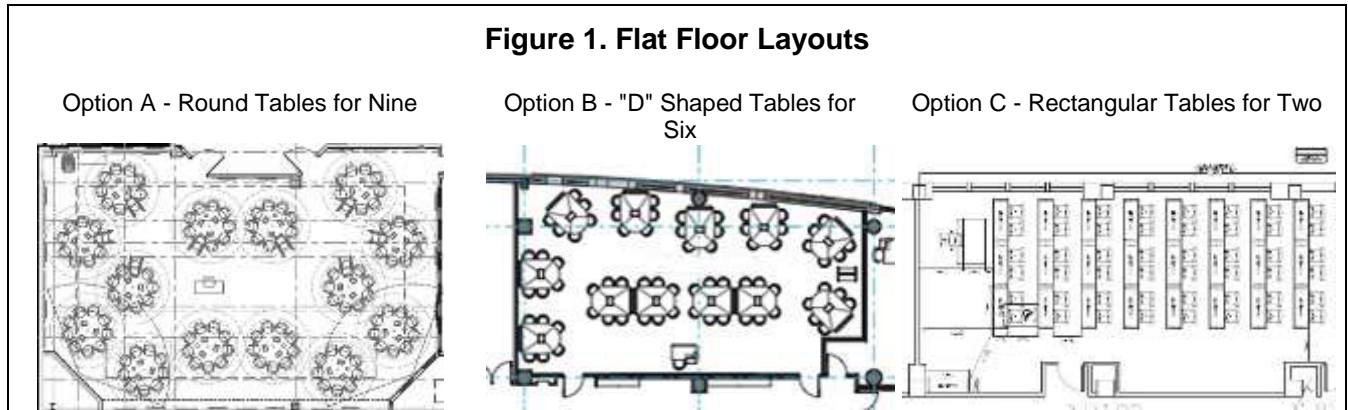
Below are comments on option B, the layout option with "D" shaped tables for six, which was most preferred by 75% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"Still encourages facing forwards & engaging, but is also intimate & allows focus."*
- *"It is open and students can easily communicate with each other."*

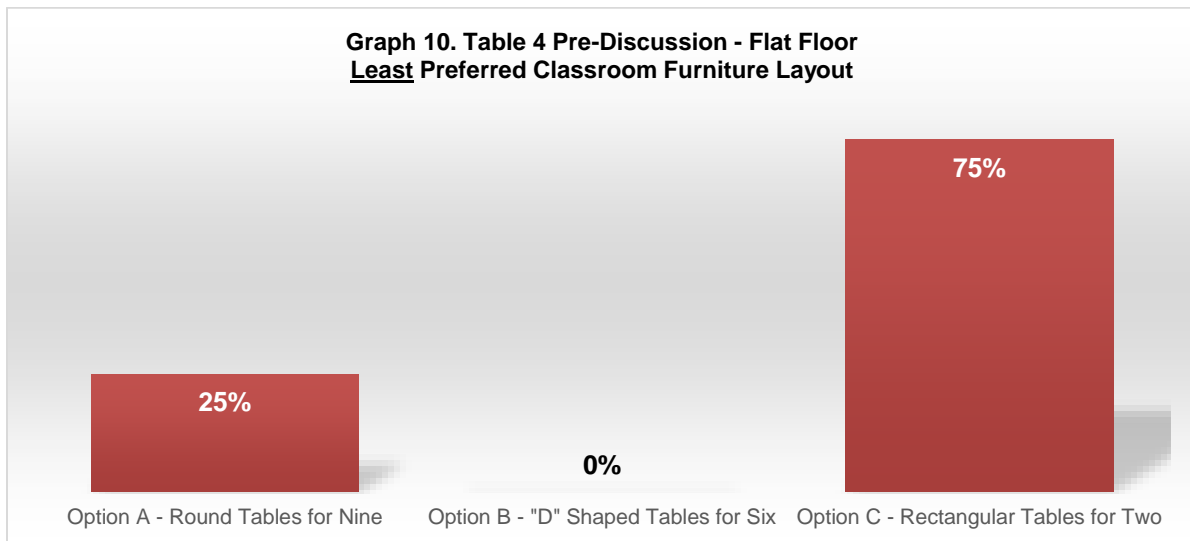
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 10 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred.

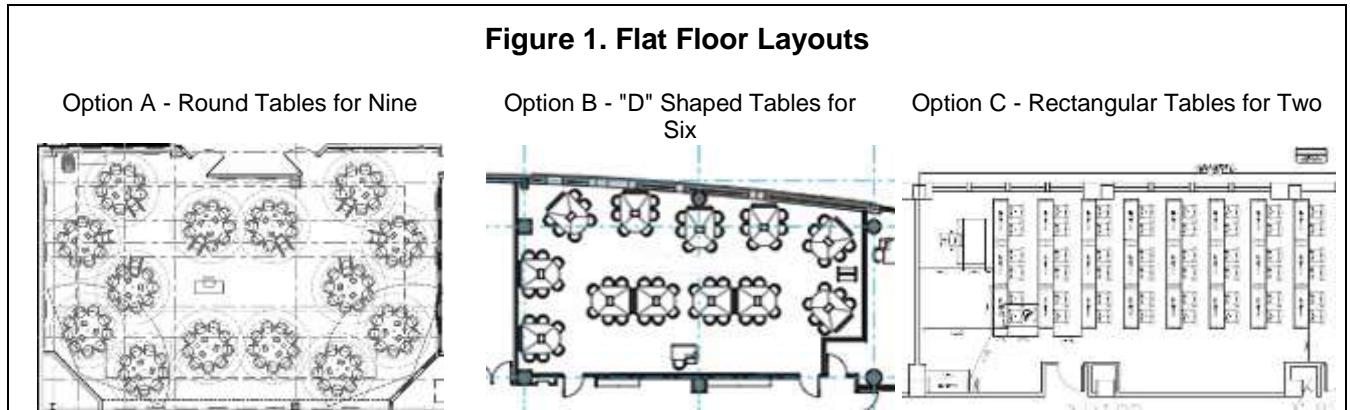
Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 75% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"This is the current type of classes we have and it's so hard to see and hear the instructor as well as the student body that participates during lecture."*
- *"Students in the back are too far from the front, don't feel engaged."*
- *"Students who sit the final row are hard to see the blackboard clearly."*

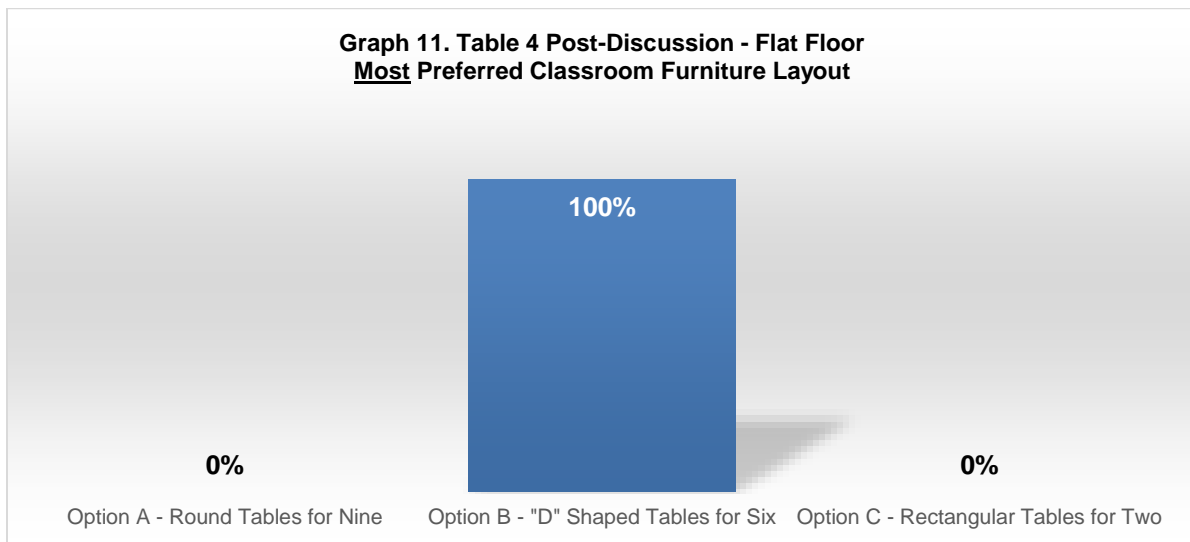
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 11 below



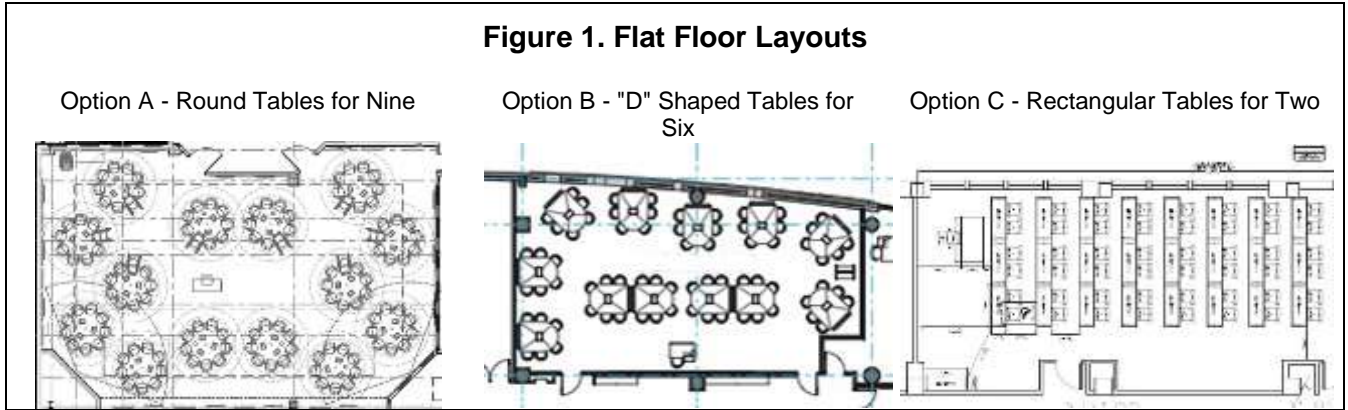
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option B, the layout option with "D" shaped tables for six, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *"Better use of space & creates more interaction."*

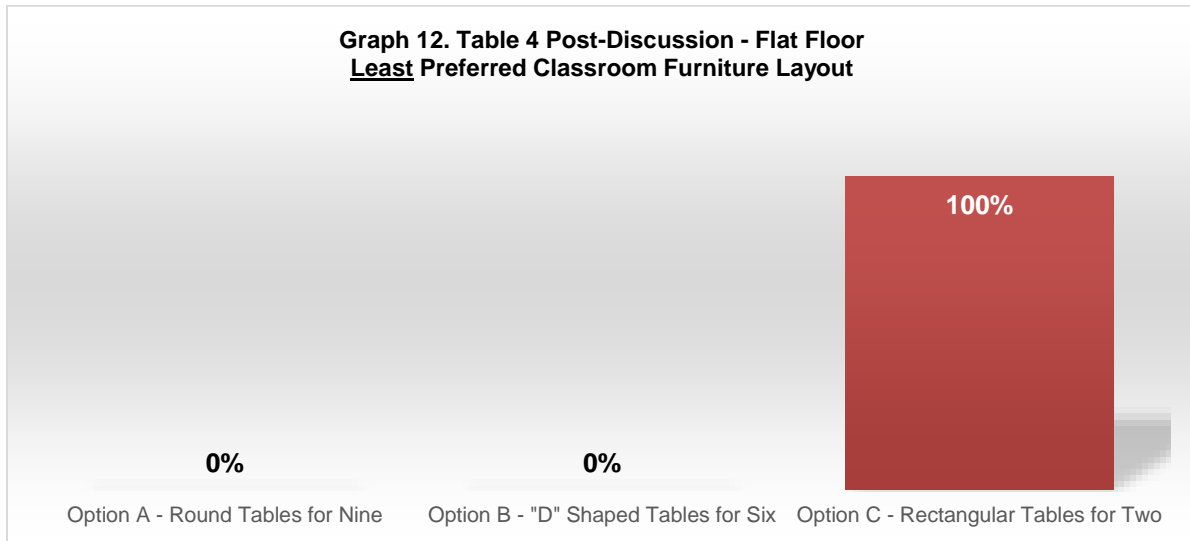
**Flat Floor Classrooms**

**Table #4: Post-Discussion Survey Results**

**Q2:** Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q2 Responses:** 1 response as shown in Graph 12 below



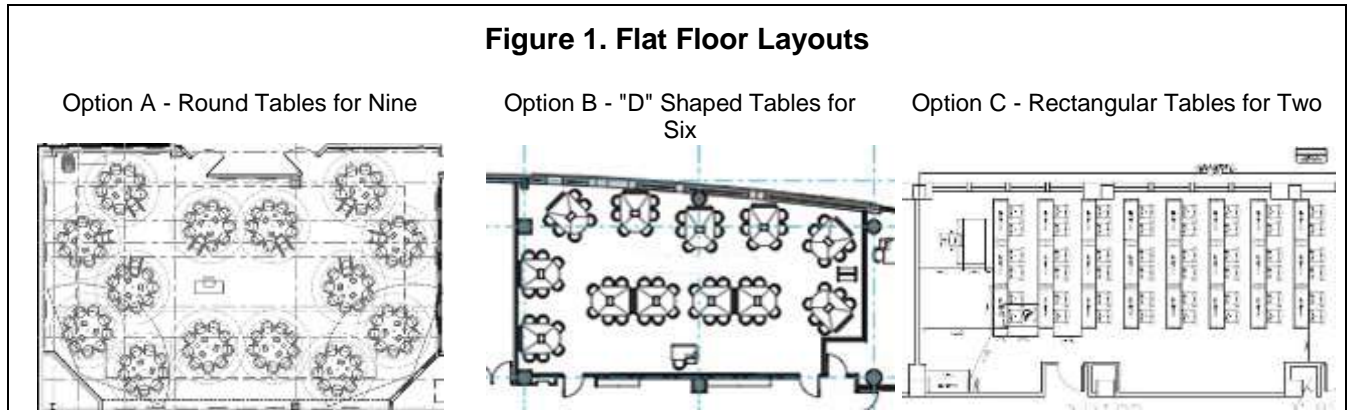
**Q2 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *“Students don’t feel engaged with professor or rest of class.”*

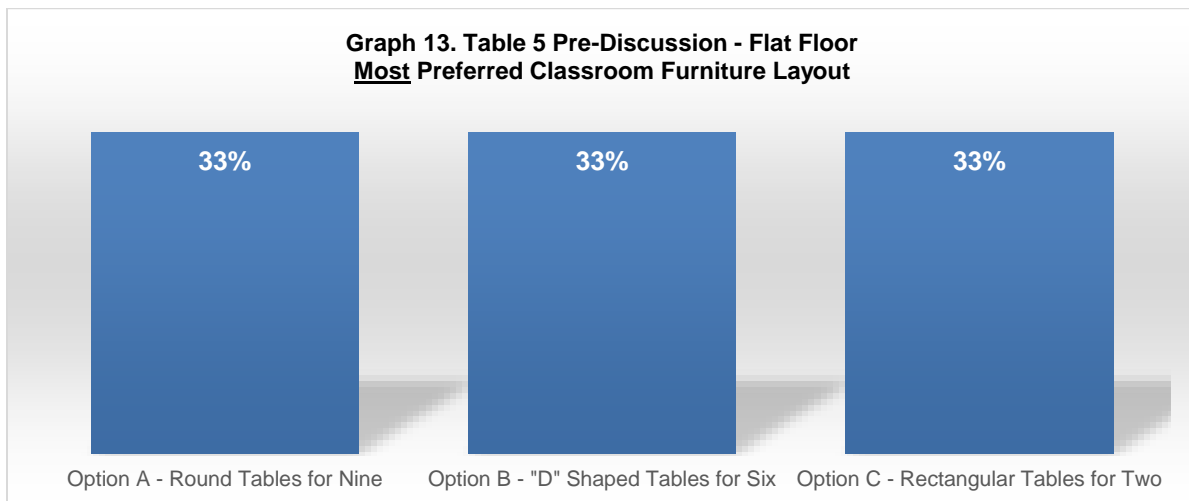
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

**Q1:** Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q1 Responses:** 3 responses as shown in Graph 13 below



**Q1 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. 33% of respondents chose option A with round tables for nine and 33% of respondents chose option B with "D" shaped tables for six as their most preferred layout option in the pre-discussion with no additional comments.

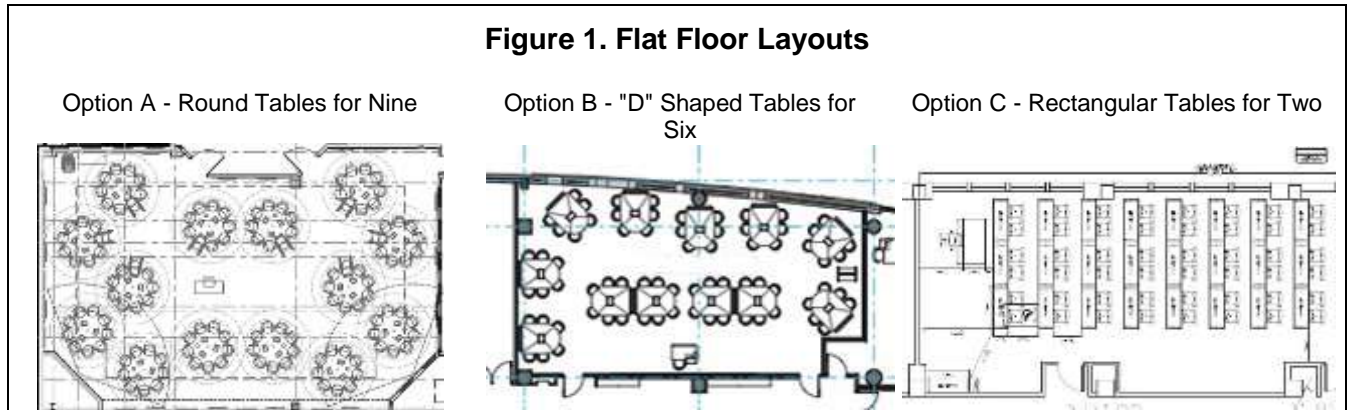
Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was most preferred by 33% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"Better visual of the activity on the screen. Multiple screens provide ease of understanding."*

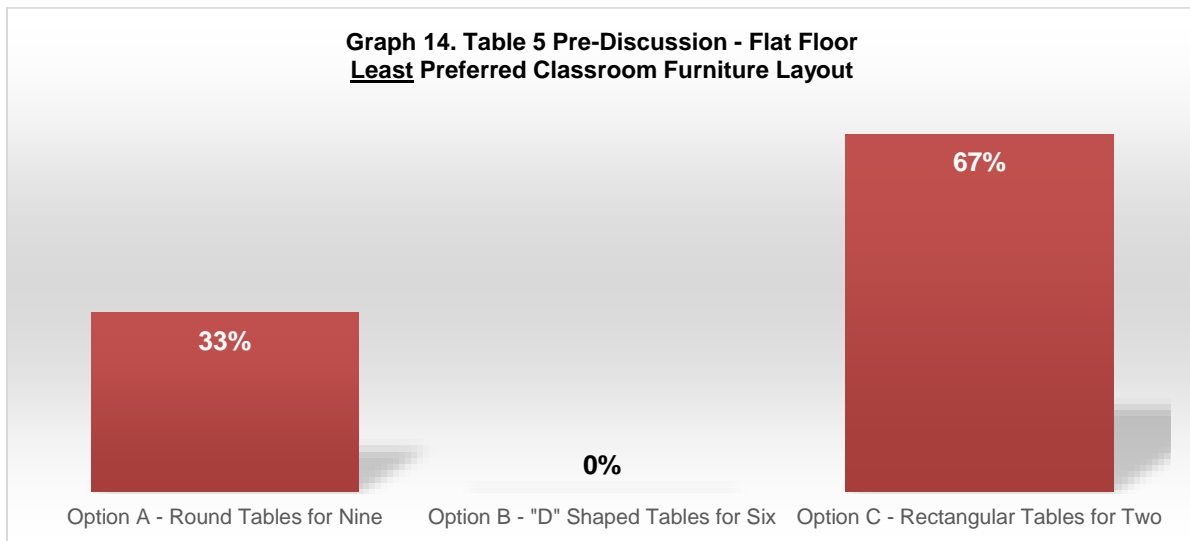
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 3 responses as shown in Graph 14 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine, which was least preferred by 33% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"Too much waste of space. Professor's voice not audible to extreme seats."*

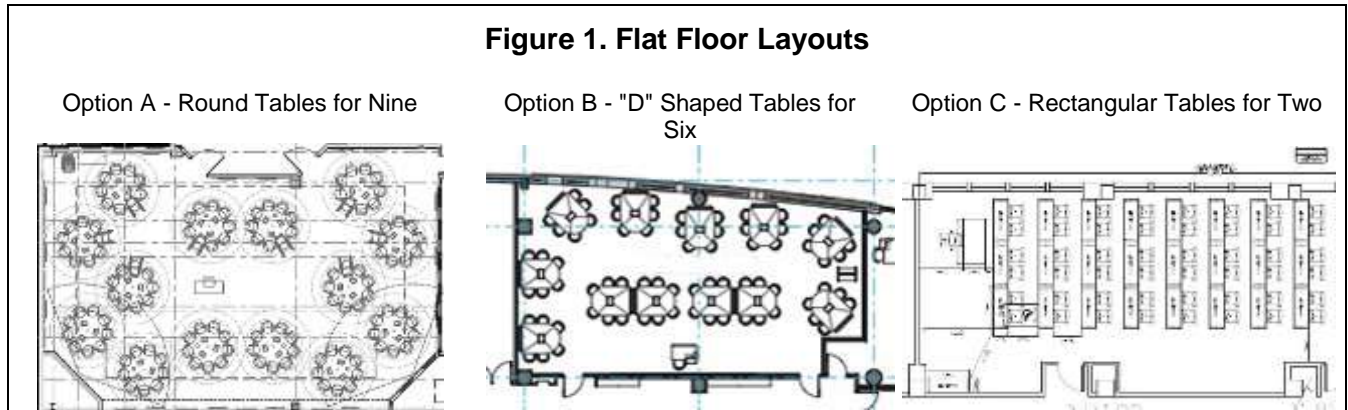
67% of respondents chose option C with rectangular tables for two as their least preferred layout option with no additional comments.



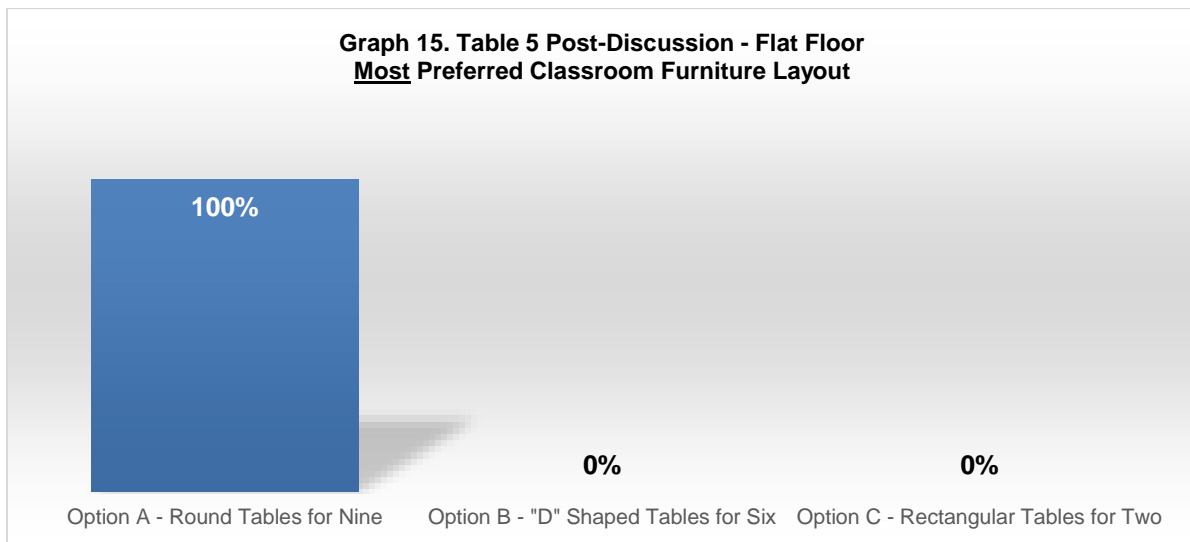
## Flat Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 15 below



Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option A, the layout option with round tables for nine, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

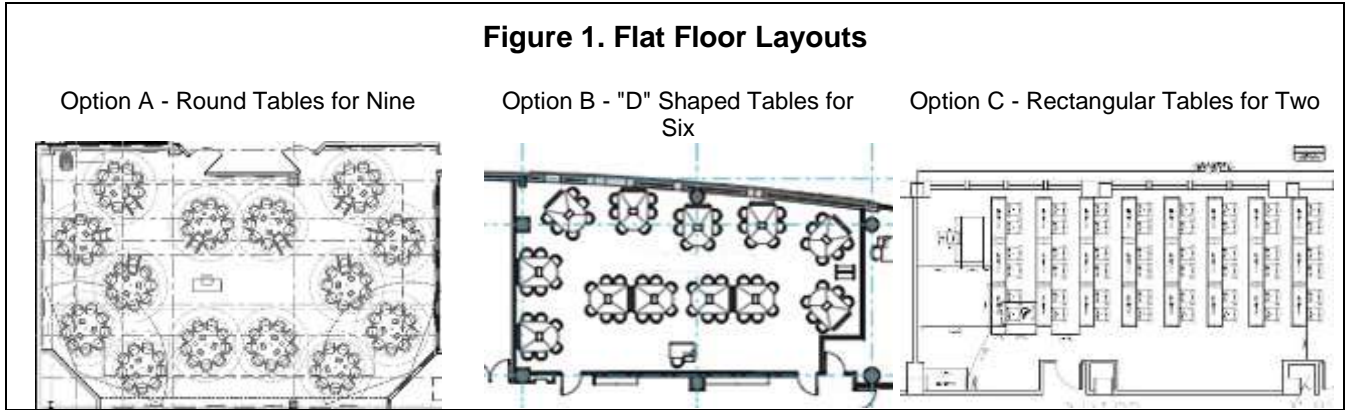
- *"Instructor is in center, active participation in group learning, individual screens."*



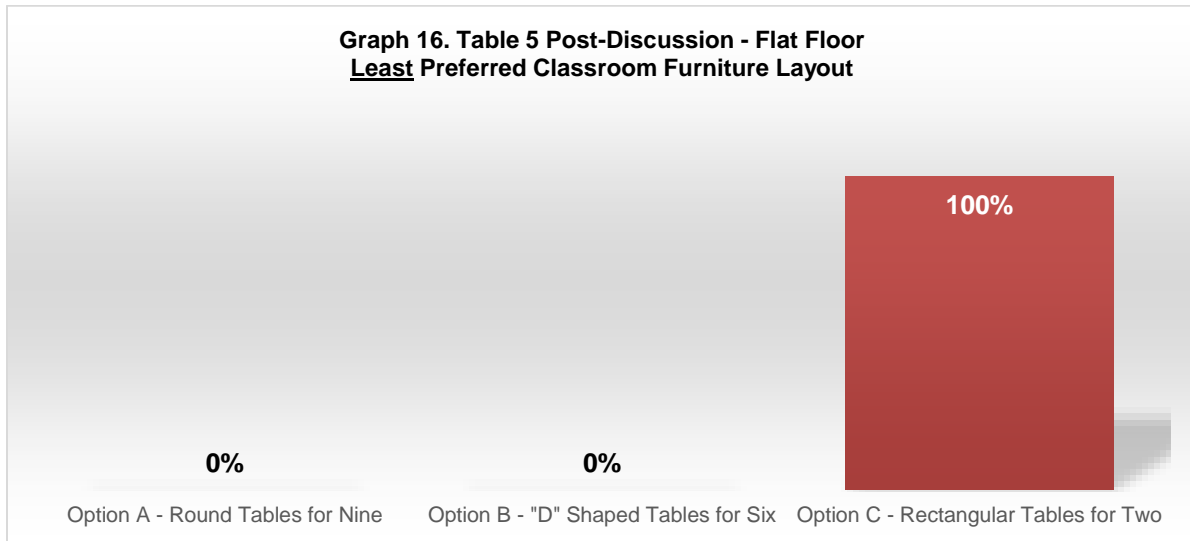
**Flat Floor Classrooms**

**Table #5: Post-Discussion Survey Results**

**Q2:** Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q2 Responses:** 1 response as shown in Graph 16 below



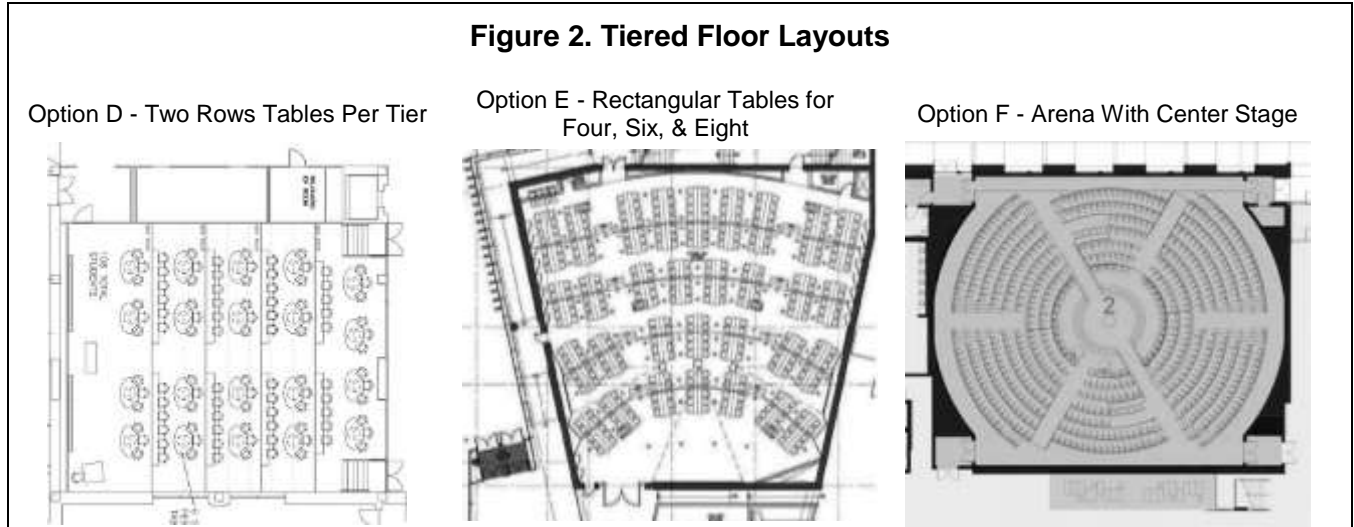
**Q2 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 1** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option C, the layout option with rectangular tables for two, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *"Already available at UIC."*

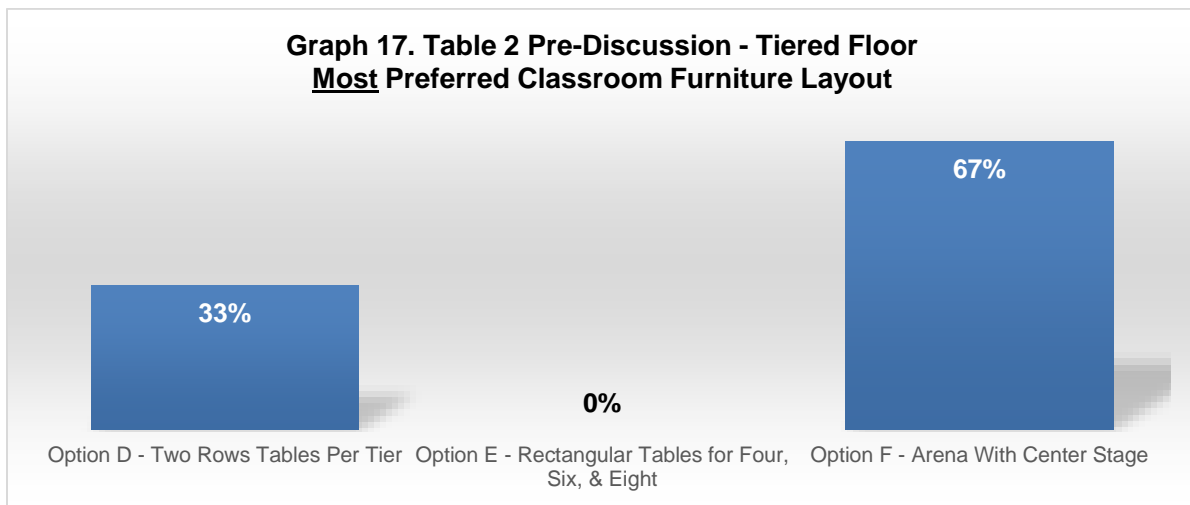
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

**Table #2: Pre-Discussion Survey Results**

**Q1:** Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q1 Responses:** 3 responses as shown in Graph 17 below



**Q1 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. 33% of respondents chose option D with two rows tables per tier as their most preferred layout option in the pre-discussion.

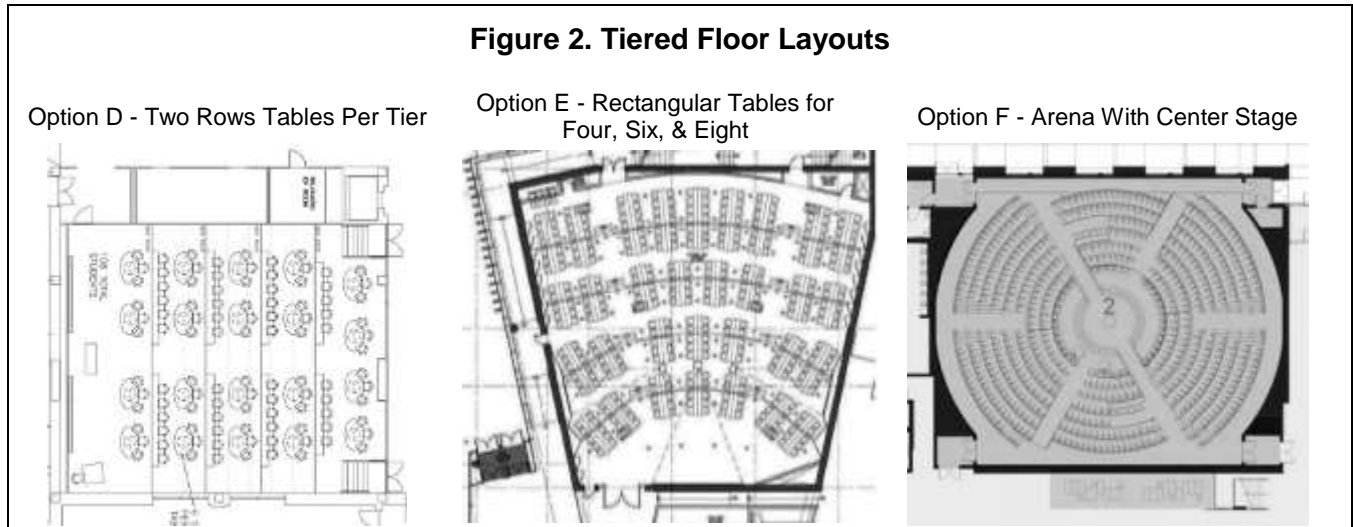
Below are comments on option F, the arena layout with center stage, which was most preferred by 67% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *“The lecturer is at the center of the lecture hall.”*

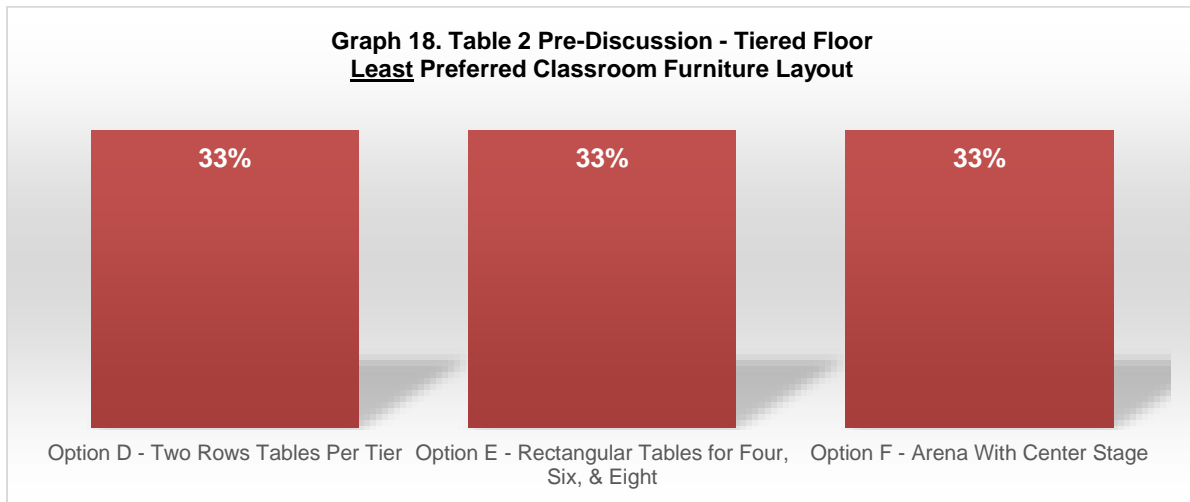
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #2: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 3 response as shown in Graph 18 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred.

Below are comments on option D, the layout option with two rows tables per tier, which was least preferred by 33% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

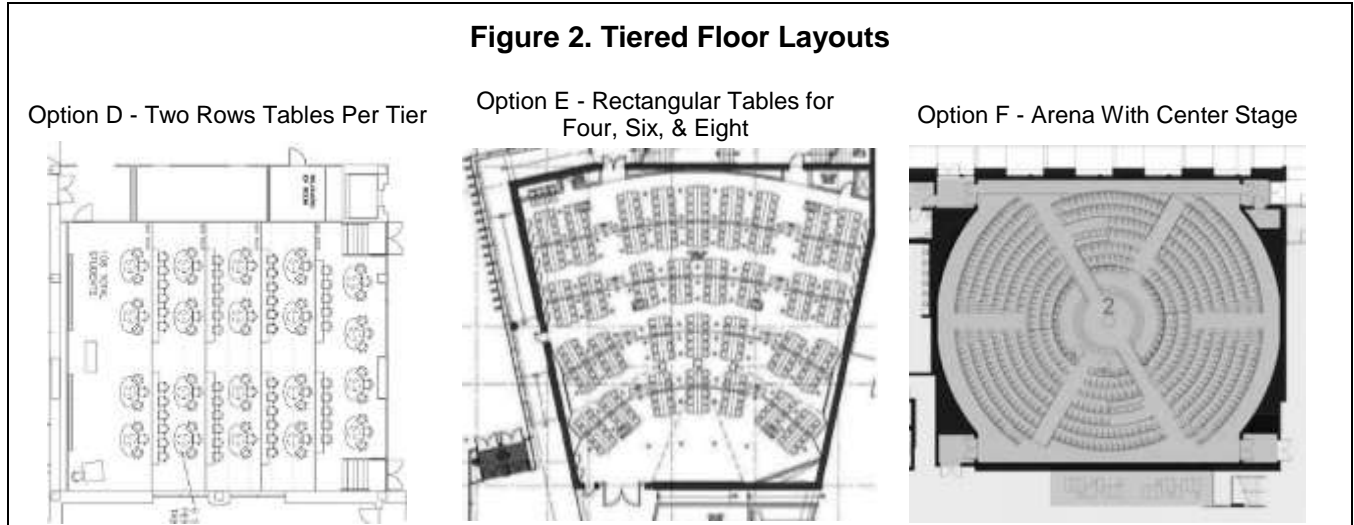
- *"It's too confusing."*

33% of respondents chose option E with rectangular tables for four, six, & eight and 33% of respondents chose option F, the arena layout with center stage as their least preferred layout option in the pre-discussion with no additional comments.

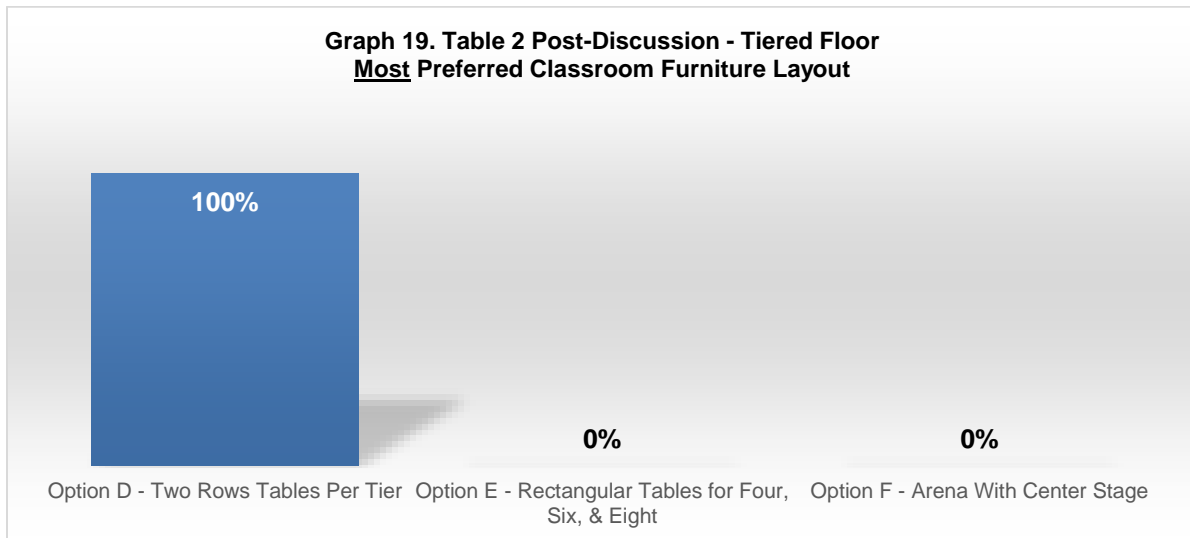
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #2: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 19 below



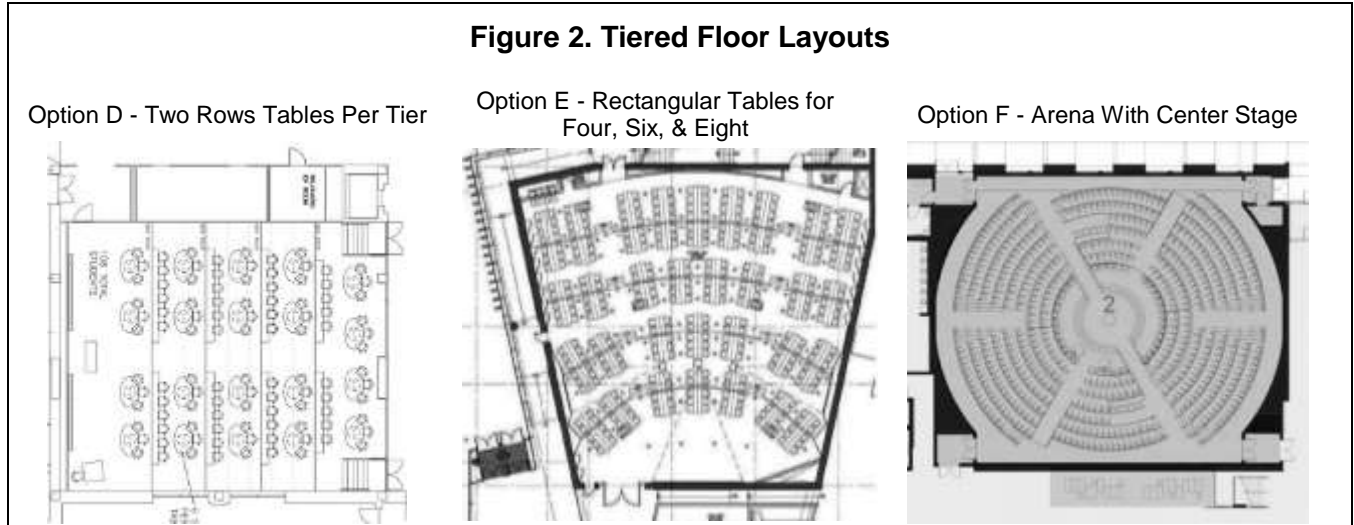
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option D, the layout option with two rows tables per tier, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *“Not as big/confusing, still provides collaborative environment, teacher can easily walk through groups!”*

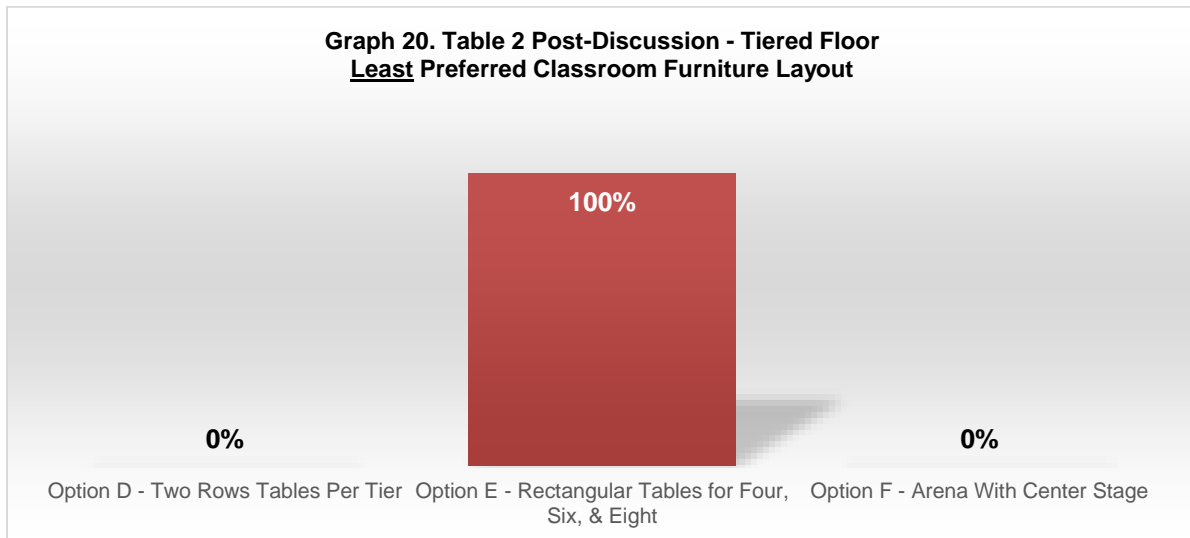
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #2: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 20 below



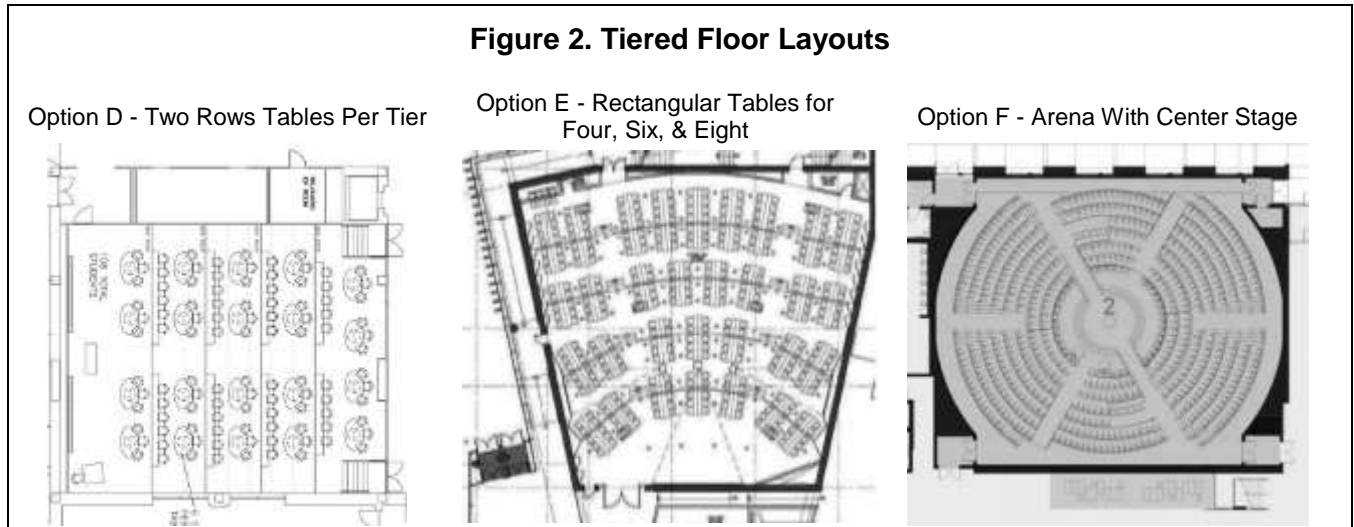
Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option E, the layout option with rectangular tables for four, six, & eight, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *“Barely know anyone in the class – doesn’t work with huge classroom. It’s huge, if someone in the back asks a question, the front people cannot see the question asker.”*

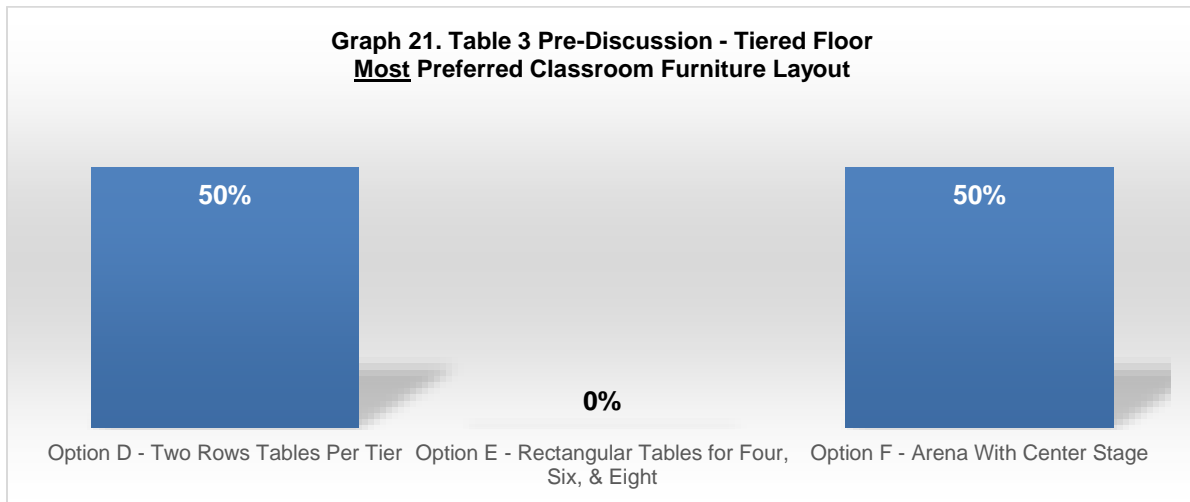
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #3: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 21 below



Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. 50% of respondents chose option D with two rows tables per tier as their most preferred layout option in the pre-discussion with no additional comments.

Below are comments on option F, the arena layout option with center stage, which was most preferred by 50% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

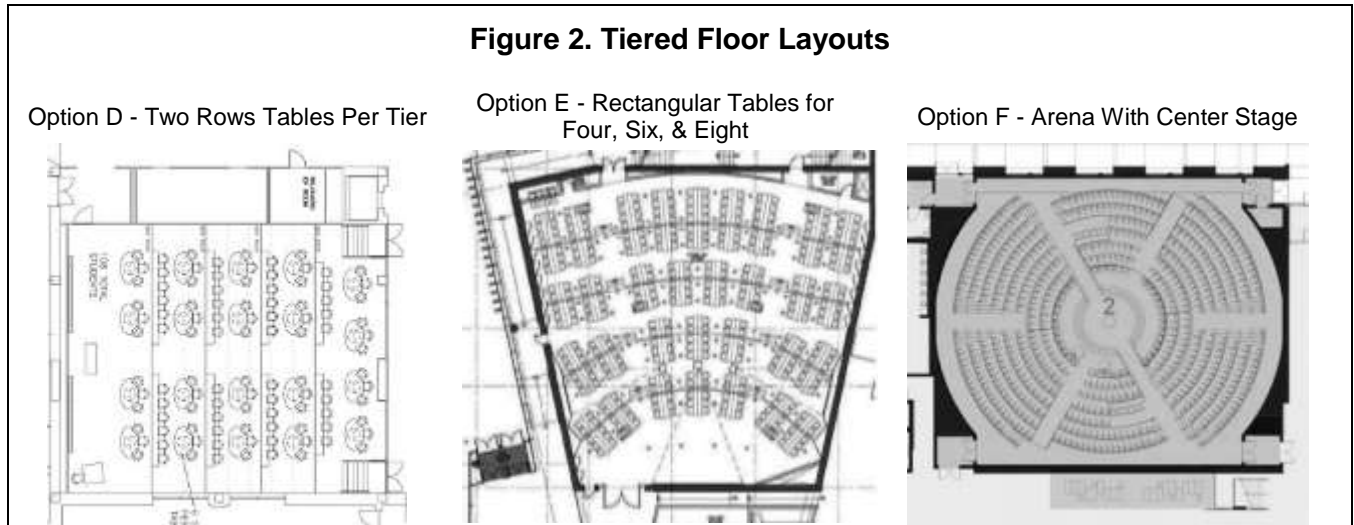
- *“The instructor and the screens have/are in clear view and it is a pretty inviting environment.”*
- *“The professor is in clear view and a lecture can take place.”*



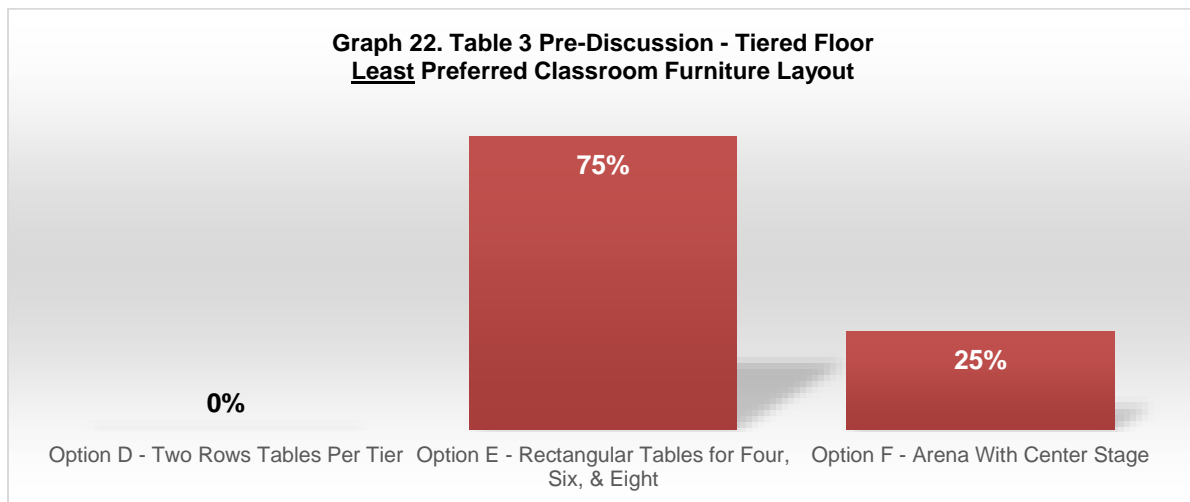
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #3: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 22 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option E, the layout option with rectangular tables for four, six, & eight, which was least preferred by 75% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *"It seems cluttered and awkward."*
- *"There exists no clear hierarchy."*

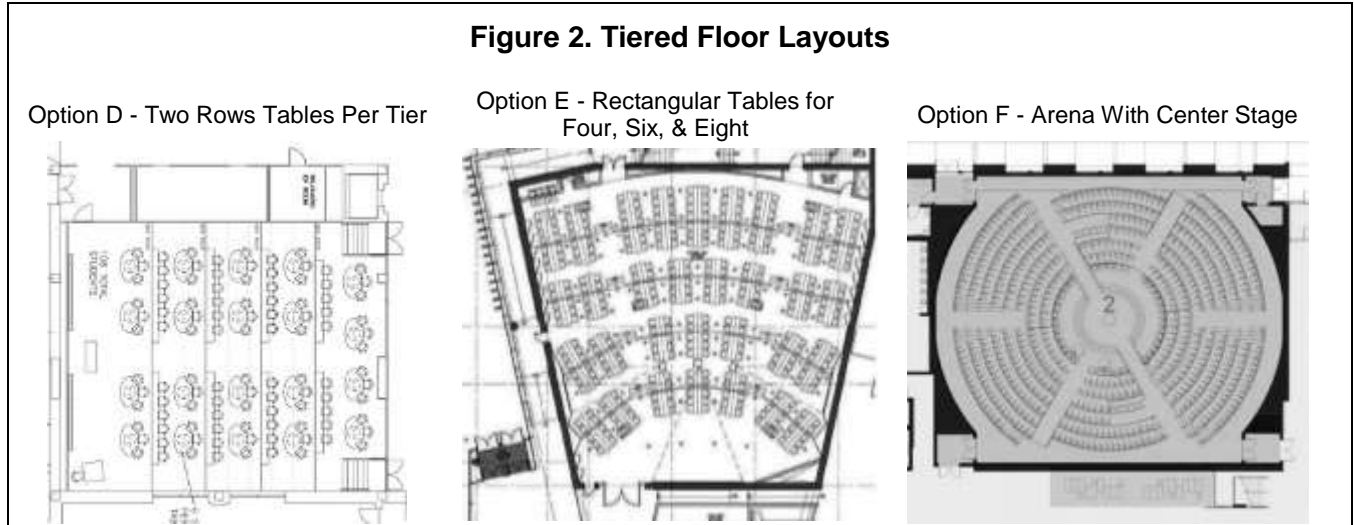
25% of respondents chose option F, the arena layout with center stage, as their least preferred layout option in the pre-discussion with no additional comments.



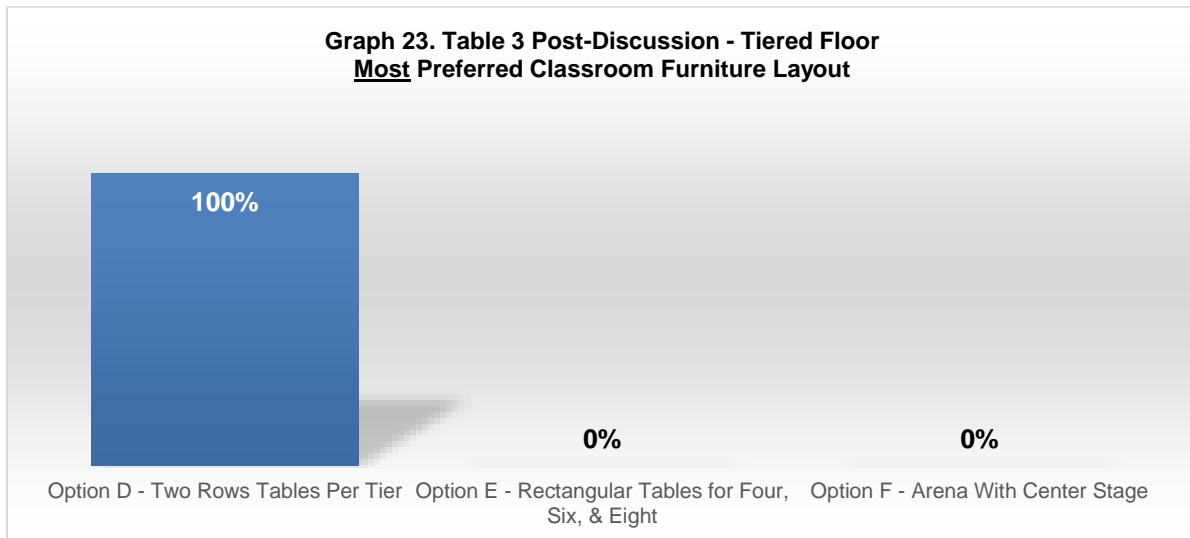
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #3: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 23 below



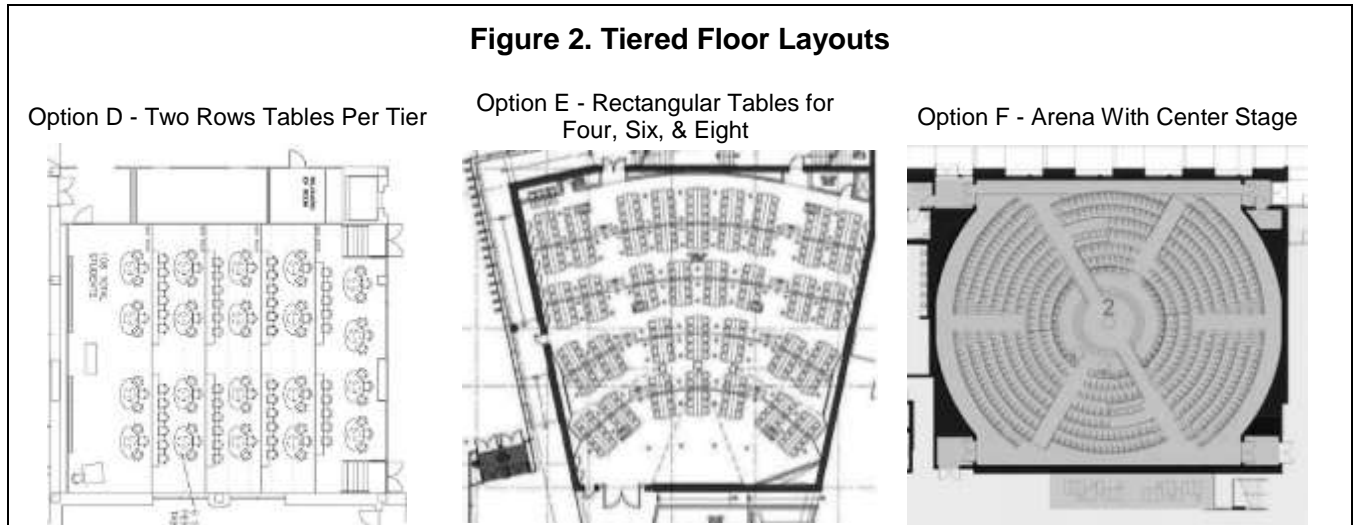
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option D, the layout option with two rows tables per tier, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *“Convertibility: lecture/group work.”*

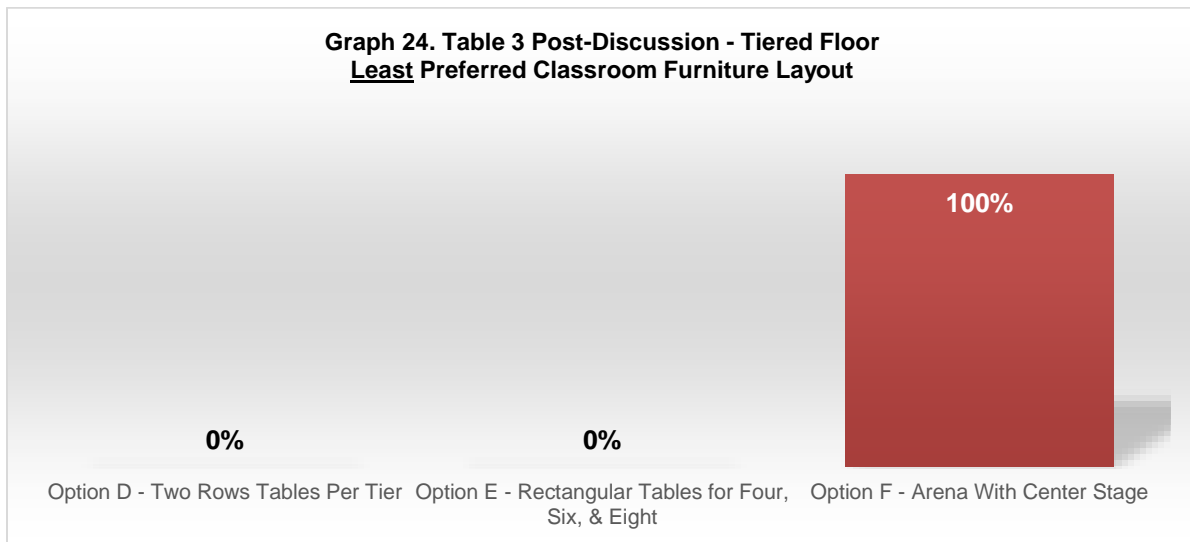
**Tiered Floor Classrooms**

**Table #3: Post-Discussion Survey Results**

**Q2:** Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



**Q2 Responses:** 1 response as shown in Graph 24 below



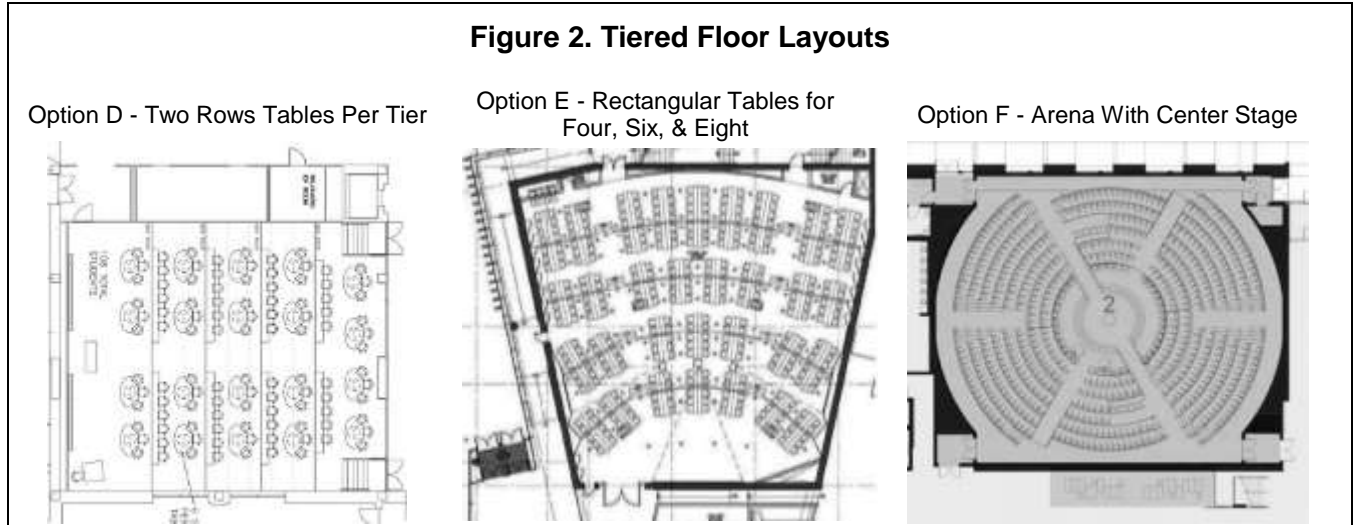
**Q2 Responses:** Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option F, the arena layout with center stage, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *“No peer collaboration, dark & gloomy, solitary.”*

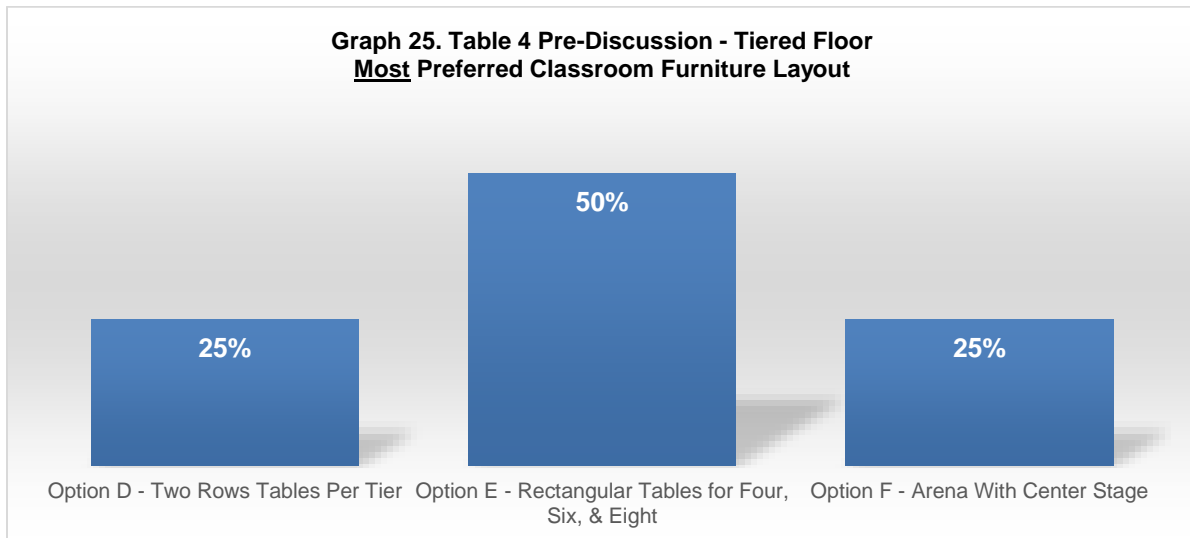
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 25 below



Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. 25% of respondents chose option D with two rows tables per tier as their most preferred layout option in the pre-discussion with no additional comments.

Below are comments on option E, the layout with rectangular tables for four, six, & eight, which was most preferred by 50% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *“You’re able to engage with other students / exchanges ideas in smaller groups. Feels like more interaction.”*

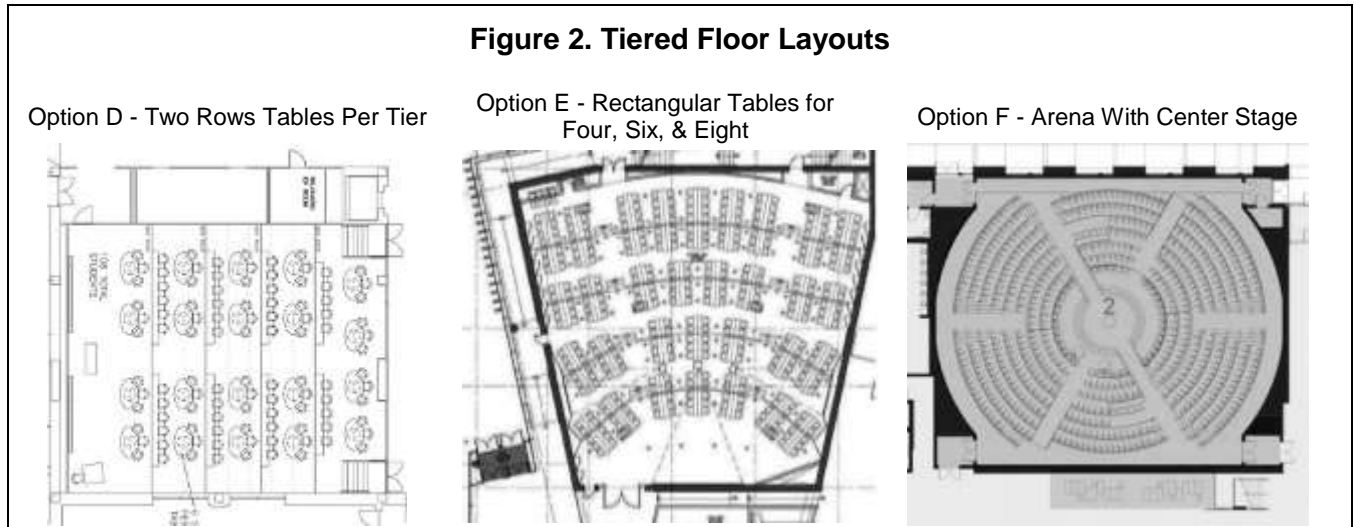
Below are comments on option F, the arena layout with center stage, which was most preferred by 25% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *“Encourages focus in a large class environment.”*

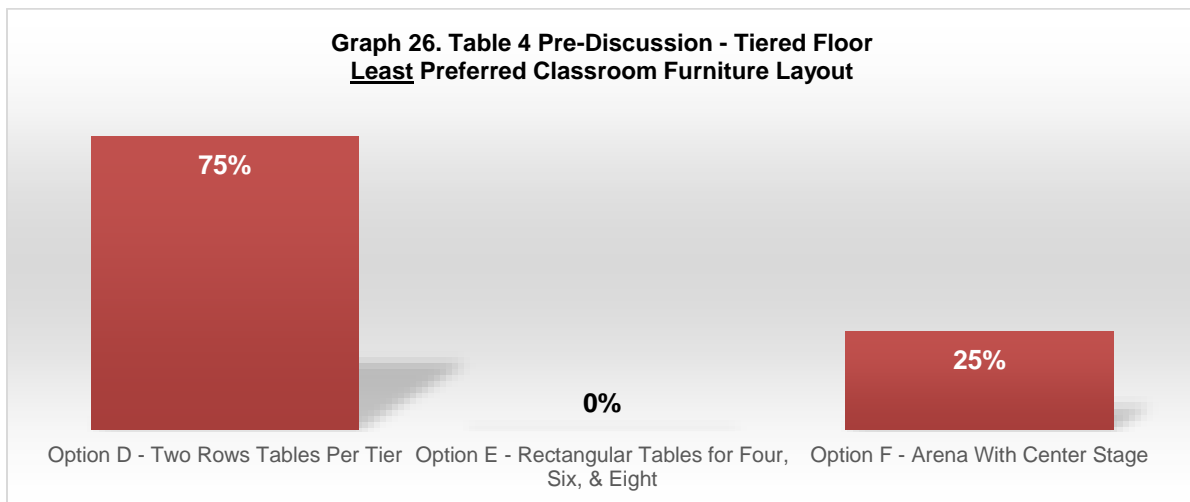
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 4 responses as shown in Graph 26 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred.

Below are comments on option D, the layout option with two rows tables per tier, which was least preferred by 75% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

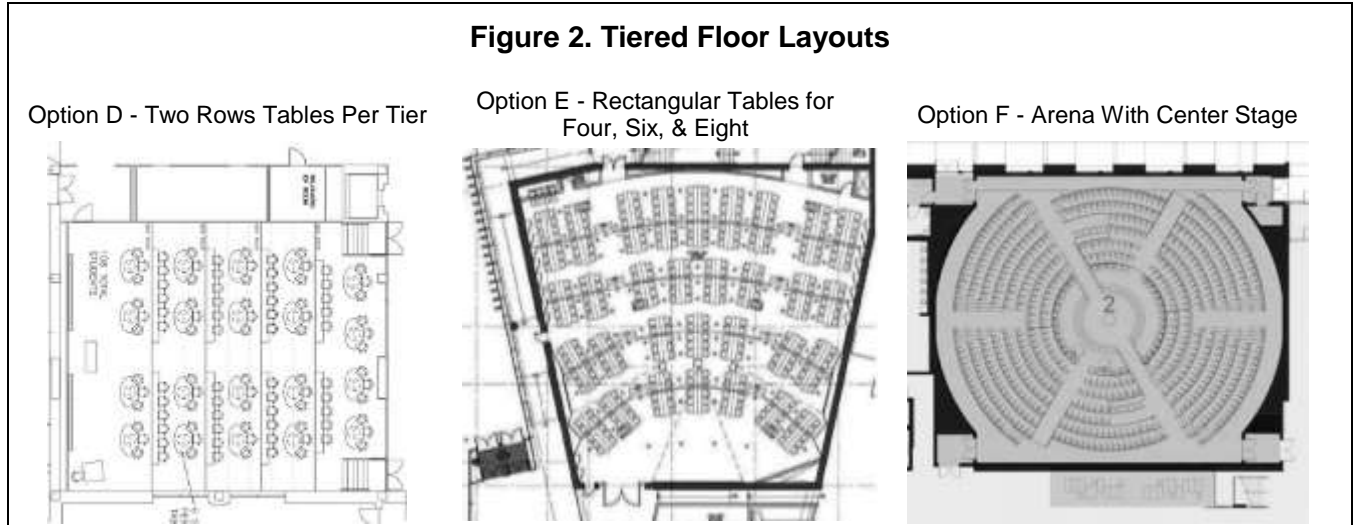
- *“I do not like how some students would have their back to students.”*
- *“Combination of tables & large classroom doesn’t make sense, distracting from learning.”*

25% of respondents chose option F, the arena layout with center stage, as their least preferred layout option in the pre-discussion.

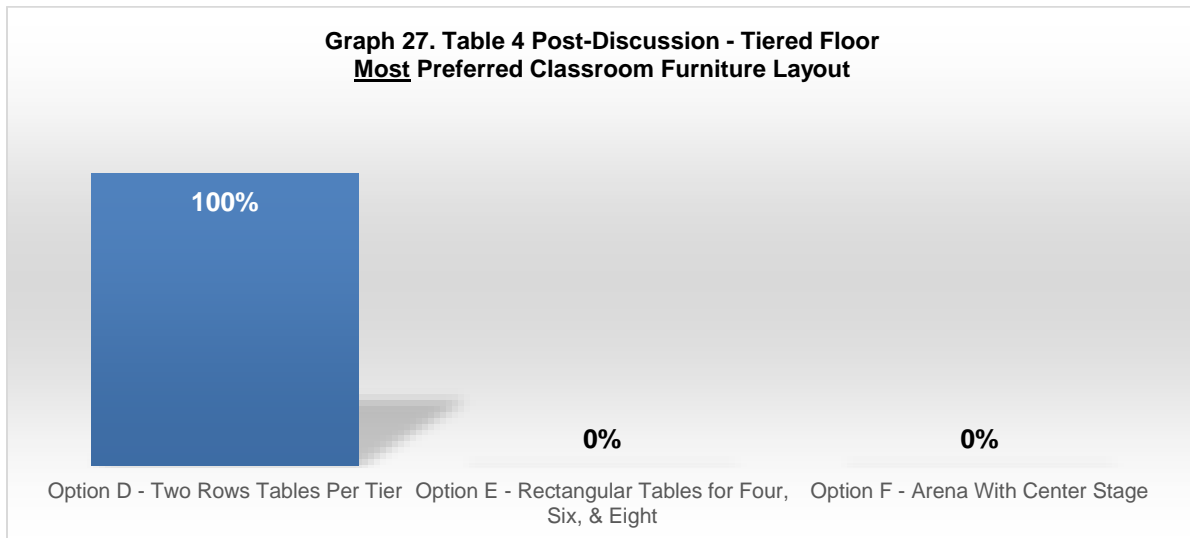
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 27 below



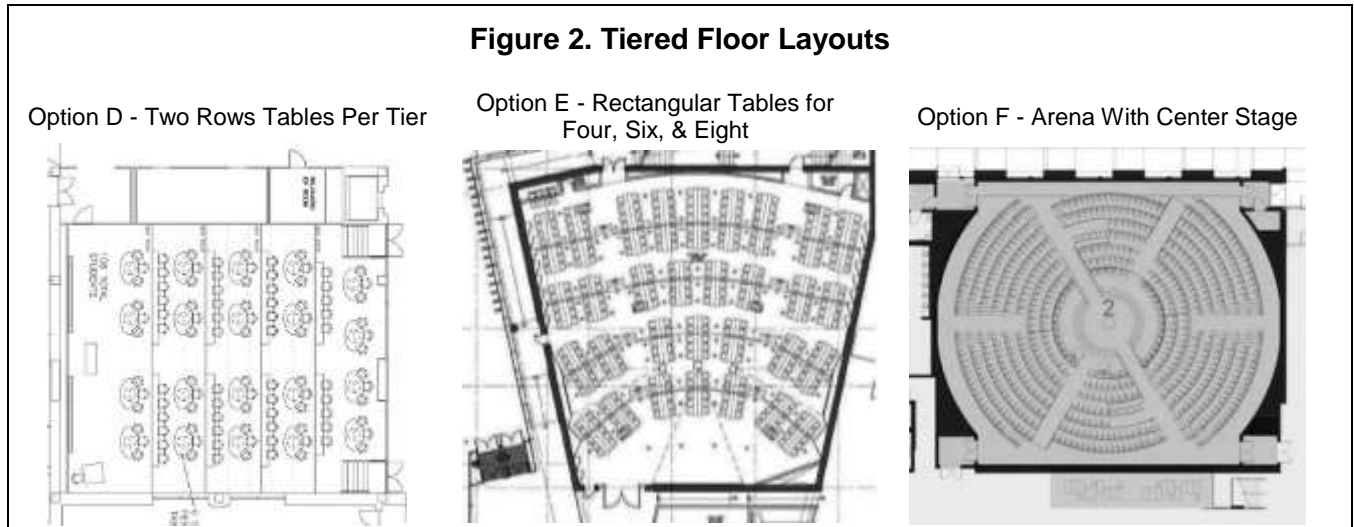
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option D, the layout option with two rows tables per tier, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- *“It allows students to engage the front (necessary in lec. hall) while also providing a good shared learning space.”*

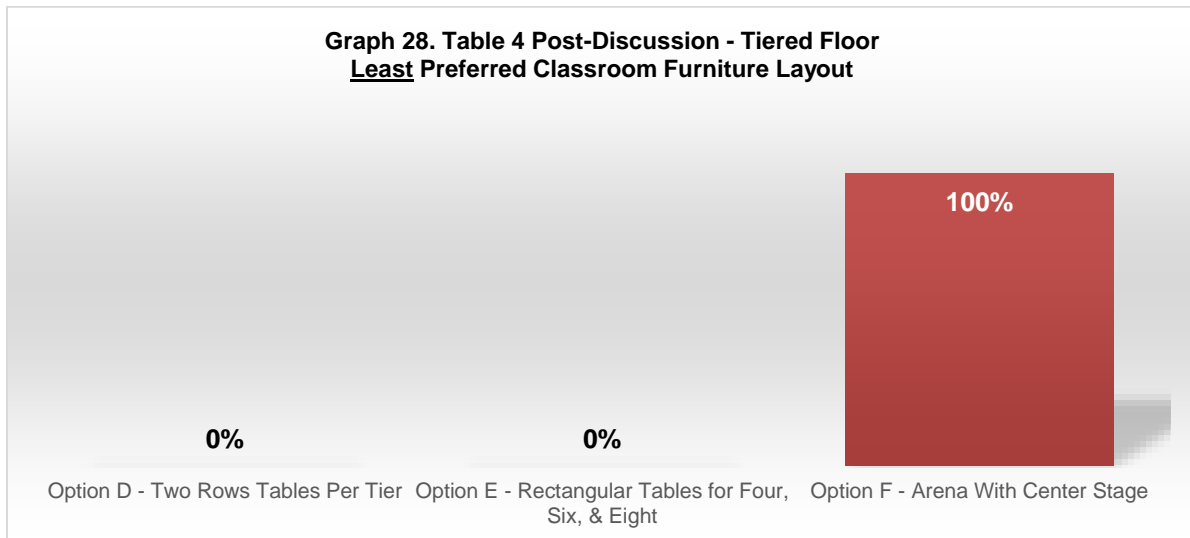
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #4: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 28 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option F, the arena layout with center stage, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

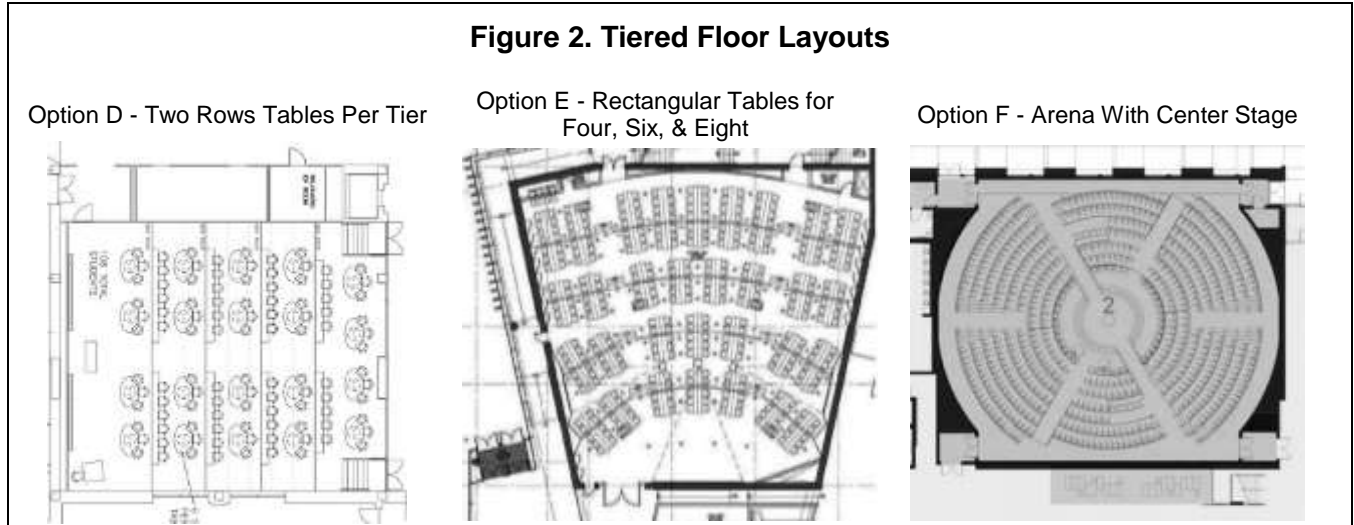
- *“Doesn’t encourage active learning.”*



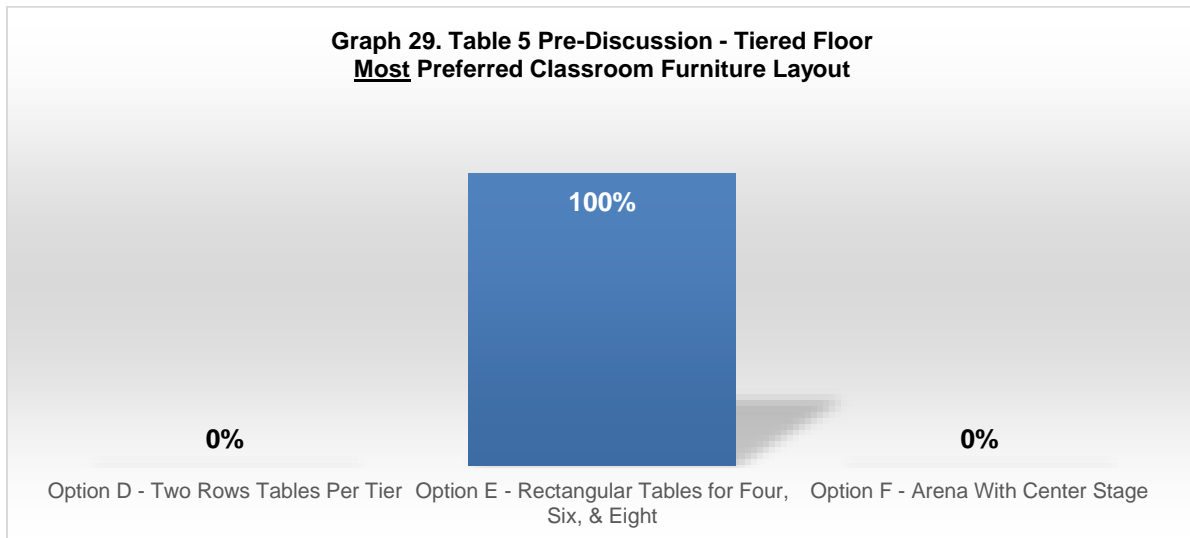
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 3 responses as shown in Graph 29 below



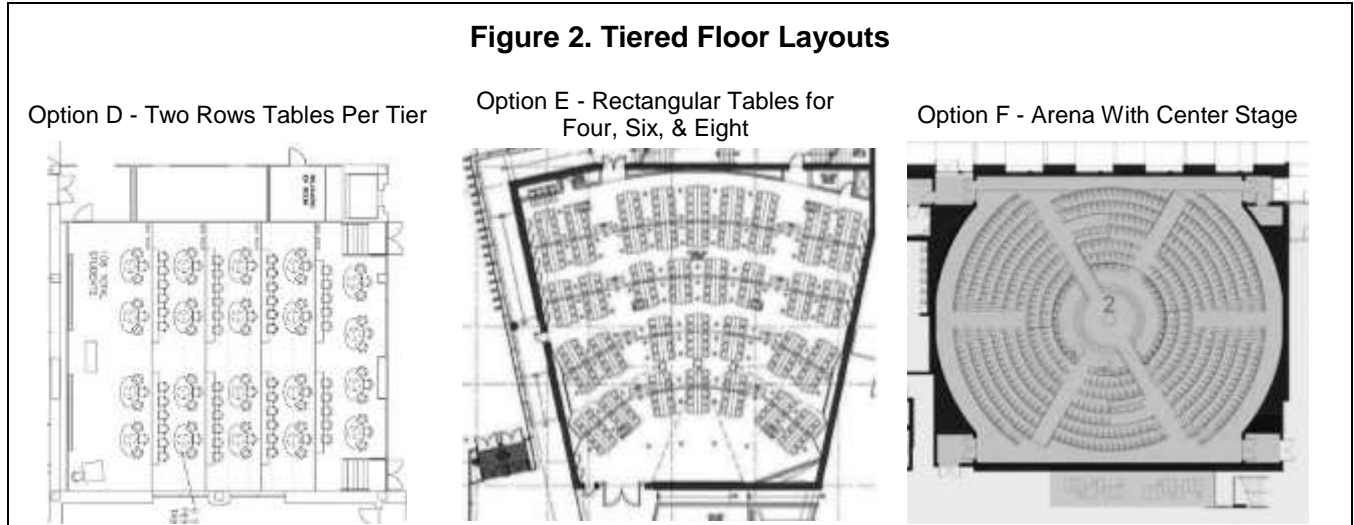
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option E, the layout option with rectangular tables for four, six, & eight, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *“Easy for lecturer to reach out to students and vice-versa.”*

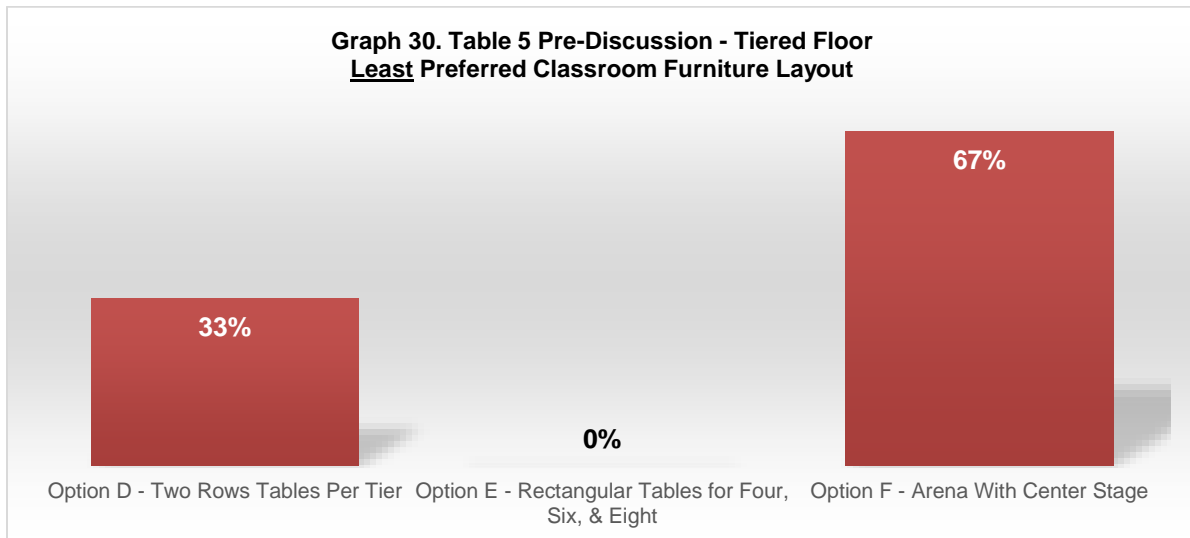
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Pre-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 3 responses as shown in Graph 30 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred. 33% of respondents chose option D with two rows tables per tier as their least preferred layout option in the pre-discussion with no additional comments.

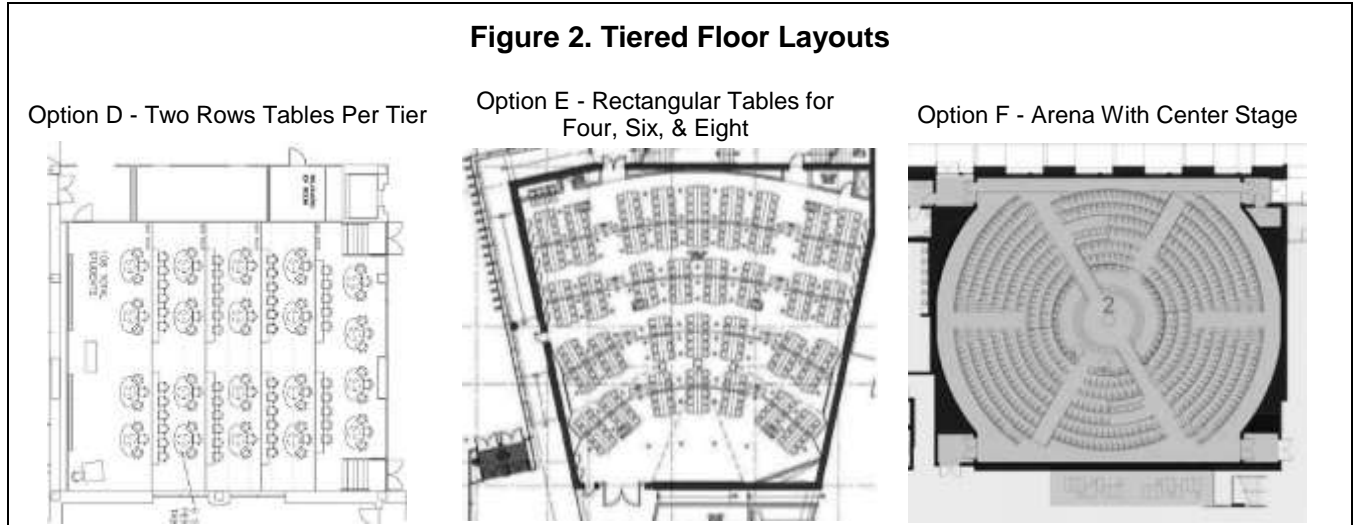
Below are comments on option F, the arena layout with center stage, which was least preferred by 67% of respondents in the pre-discussion:

- *“Although easy for lecturer to reach to the audience, it is not practical.”*

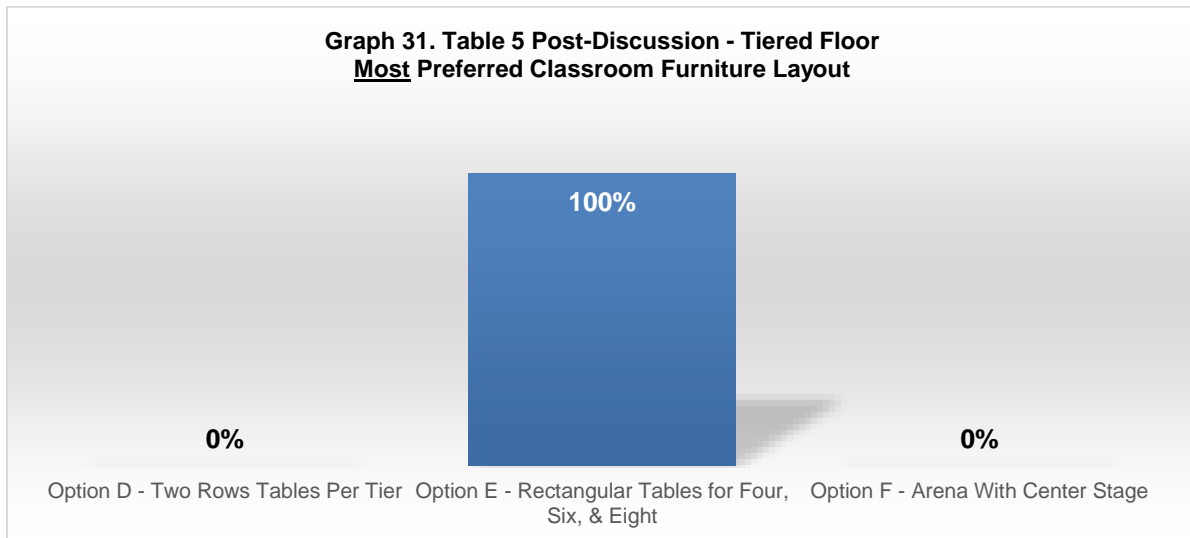
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q1: Option \_\_\_ is my MOST preferred classroom layout because:



Q1 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 31 below



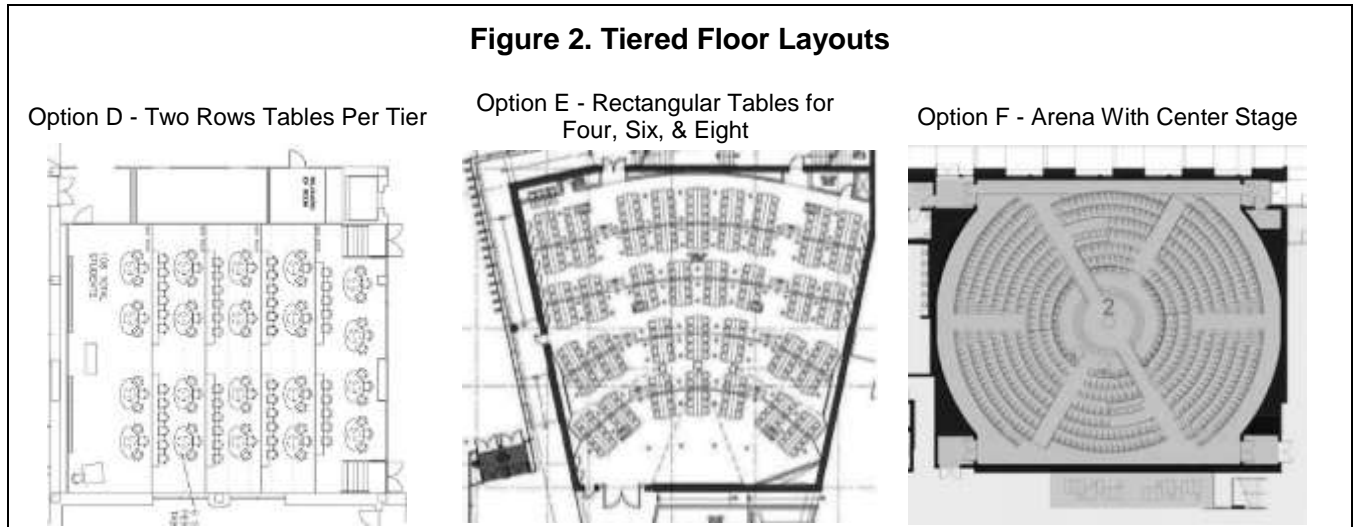
Q1 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your most preferred. Below are comments on option E, the layout option with rectangular tables for four, six, & eight, which was most preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- "1. Group interaction. 2. Learning experience is the same in all seats. 3. Individual screen."

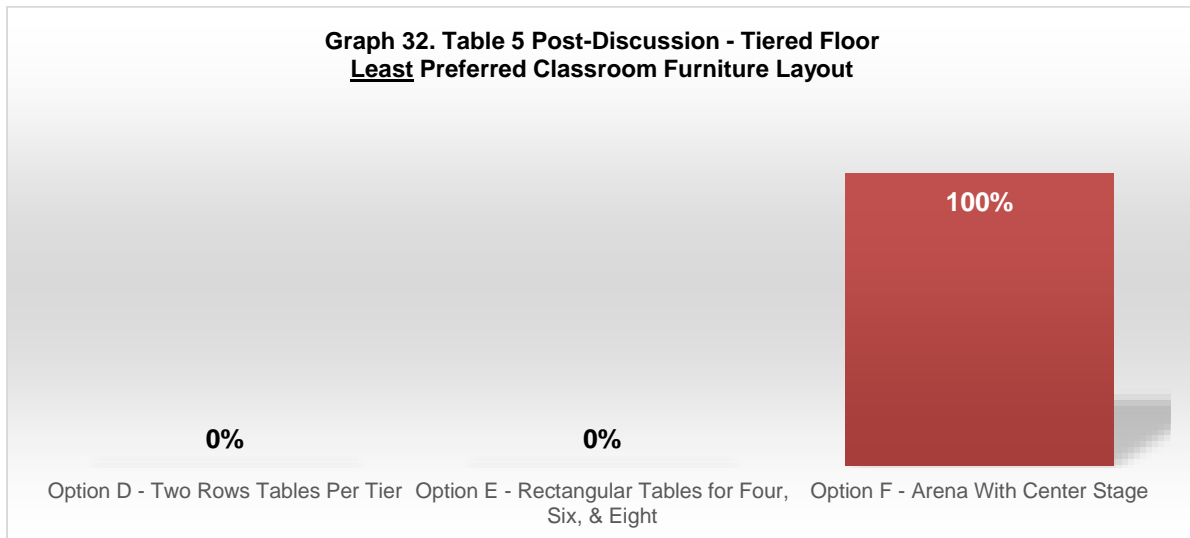
## Tiered Floor Classrooms

### Table #5: Post-Discussion Survey Results

Q2: Option \_\_\_ is my LEAST preferred classroom layout because:



Q2 Responses: 1 response as shown in Graph 32 below



Q2 Responses: Please explain why you selected the furniture option in **Figure 2** as your least preferred. Below are comments on option F, the arena layout with center stage, which was least preferred by 100% of respondents in the post-discussion:

- "1. People doesn't have the same learning experience. 2. Hard access to screen. 3. No group working."

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