



# Binghamton University, Bartle Library



**EDUCATION/LIBRARY;  
BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK**

**Topic:**  
*Collaboration*

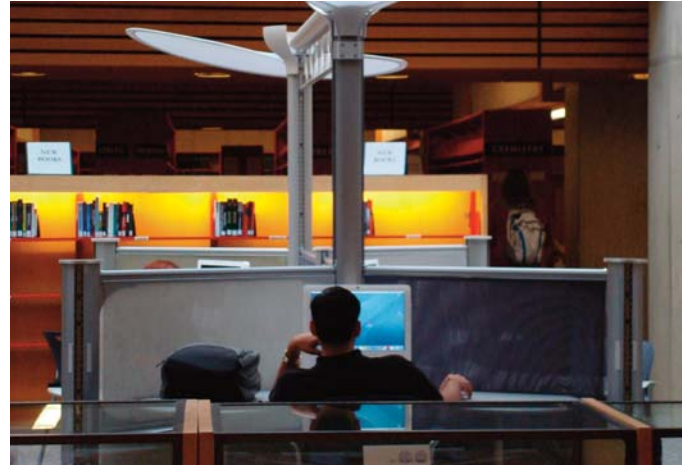
**Application:**  
*Informal Learning  
Internet/Electronic Access  
Library  
Study Carrel*

**Project Scope:**  
*150 workstations*

**Herman Miller Product:**  
*Ethospace® System  
Resolve® System  
Caper® Chairs  
Celeste™ Seating*

**Year Completed:**  
*2007*

Binghamton University wanted to create an attractive information commons in the Bartle Library, which would combine the services of the library with access to the computer lab. Resolve and Ethospace workstations with mobile Caper chairs create a progressive, collaborative space that has dramatically increased the number of students using the library.



Binghamton University's Bartle Library was a stereotypical college institution: stolid, stone, traditional. And, as with many libraries, it was designed to serve "the solitary scholar quietly studying in a little carrel surrounded by high walls to minimize distraction," says John Meador, director of Binghamton University libraries.

However, students today rarely study alone, and they don't seem to mind a few distractions, either. But distractions were few in the Bartle Library, and users were becoming scarce as well.

Meanwhile, the computer lab across campus, where students sit at long rows of tables to access the Internet or to write the papers they had previously researched in the library, was seeking a new location. In "a brilliant flash of the obvious," Mr. Meador proposed combining the two services and moving the computer lab into Bartle Library, creating an "information commons." Students could then access both library reference materials and the computers that allow them to complete their work. Not only would the arrangement be more convenient for students, but the university would also benefit from the operational efficiency of shared staff and physical space. It was a new concept for the State University of New York (SUNY) system to which Binghamton belongs.

But beyond simply relocating the computer lab, Mr. Meador envisioned a radical departure from the outdated "solitary scholar" pedagogical model. He wanted a space that was dynamic and creative enough to attract students and collaborative enough to enable them to work together. "I'm establishing an atmosphere for collaboration, for experimentation, for creativity," says Mr. Meador. "I wanted to capture the spirit of contemporary, progressive thinking."

When he saw Resolve workstations on a site visit to Emory University, Mr. Meador immediately called home. "I found the furniture," he said. This was the look he wanted: dynamic, contemporary, collaborative. Nor would he forgo the accessories—the rolling screens and canopies—despite budgetary pressure. "I wanted all that frou-frou," he says. "I wanted that futuristic image."

Bedecked with frou-frou, Resolve workstations in clusters and zig-zags look modern and edgy through the windows at Bartle Library. Ethospace workstations are strategically placed in areas with low ceilings and against walls to maximize density in the space, while similar finishes—red saddle work surfaces with dune and paprika screens and beige painted and fabric tiles—blend the two systems.



Students have responded enthusiastically to the collaborative nature of the 120-degree configurations, even removing the boundary screens to work more closely together. “We showed the librarians how to replace them,” says Janel McCandless, account representative, Sedgwick Business Interiors, a Herman Miller dealer. Students pull Caper chairs from other workstations and drag in Celeste chairs from the library in order to gather around the computer in a workstation.

But the proof of success is in the numbers. Mr. Meador has tracked a “dramatic increase in usage figures since we installed the commons.” On a recent Labor Day weekend alone, the library received 2,500 visitors. By the following October, the library had tallied its highest attendance figures ever: 186,580 visitors. “Other libraries add coffee shops to lure students,” says Mr. Meador. “We added Herman Miller furniture.”

Not only does this impress university administrators, but a vibrant space filled with the buzz of students at work is an attractive spot to bring parents and tour groups as well.

Despite such heavy use throughout grueling, 24-hour days, the library’s only maintenance issue has been the continual reinstalling of the boundary screens the students take down. More than a year after installation “I haven’t had to replace a thing, not a chair or a work surface or even the frou-frou,” says Mr. Meador. Even under such grueling conditions, Herman Miller’s 12-year, 3-shift warranty will continue to cover the frou-frou and other accoutrements for many years to come.

Meanwhile, the information commons concept is spreading throughout the SUNY system. Two additional Binghamton libraries—the Science Library and the Downtown Center—now have an information commons with the same design, layout, and furniture. And following site visits to Binghamton, several other SUNY schools are considering constructing information commons of their own.

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