



Xavier University

EDUCATION/LIBRARY;
CINCINNATI, OHIO



Topic:

*Change
Collaboration*

Application:

*Circulation Desk
Collaboration/Team
Formal Learning
Informal Learning
Internet/Electronic Access
Library
Study Carrel*

Project Scope:

7,700 square feet

Herman Miller Product:

*Ethospace® System
Resolve® System
Caper® Chairs
Celeste™ Seating
Mirra® Chairs
Avive® Table Collection
The Intersect® Portfolio*

Year Completed:

2008

When Xavier University embarked on a major capital campaign to create a 21st century learning environment, it looked to APG Office Furnishings and Herman Miller for guidance. The first prototypes have involved a highly successful renovation of the library, which is furnished in a wide variety of Herman Miller product to create open, mobile, collaborative spaces for faculty and students.



Xavier University is a small school with a big idea. It wants to become “a national model of excellence for 21st century students.” With its enviable rankings in several “best of” lists (Xavier is consistently among the top ten in US News and World Report’s “America’s Best Colleges,” for example), it would be a mistake to underestimate the university’s will and capacity to become just that.

Aided by a major capital campaign—“To See Great Wonders”—which is slated to raise \$200 million, Xavier has set about “revolutionizing the student learning experience.” The effort isn’t just window-dressing. The university is committed to enhancing traditional pedagogical models and to creating learning environments that are mobile and flexible, comfortable and welcoming, technologically smart, collaborative and conducive to community. A new 80,000-square-foot Learning Commons will be the academic heart of this endeavor, involving a renovation of the library, the co-location of a variety of academic resources, and the creation of open, mobile spaces for students and faculty to gather.

In 2006, a fortuitous meeting with Lori Gee, Herman Miller education solutions lead, put flesh on the bones of Xavier’s vision. That meeting led to a discovery process involving APG Office Furnishings, a Herman Miller dealer, and Mark Willoughby, account development manager.

“The university had been conversing for years about how to maintain our academic tradition and mission while evolving into a learning environment that appeals to current and future needs,” says Bob Cotter, associate vice president for information resources. “It was eye-opening to see how innovative Herman Miller product was, and how much expertise the company already has from working with other universities.”

Initially, Xavier decided to set up three beta sites on the first floor of the library to gauge student and faculty response to mobile, collaborative spaces. The university also decided to invest in high-quality furniture to make the environment attractive and comfortable as well as functional and durable.

First, the Center for Teaching Excellence is a “space for faculty development, to celebrate pedagogical innovation,” according to Mr. Cotter. Presently, it consists of a mix of Intersect tables and Caper chairs for large meeting and breakout sessions and a lounge where faculty from different disciplines can mingle and share ideas. The lounge is furnished with Celeste soft seating and Kotatsu tables, Caper chairs with Intersect tables, and tables from Bretford, a Herman Miller alliance company.



Second, the Information Resource Center (IRC) brings together the IT help desk, AV support services, and the library reference and circulation desks. “We’re pulling these different cultures together to create a seamless support area,” says Mr. Cotter.

Behind a circular welcome desk in the entryway, students may be directed to open Ethospace workstations in the IRC for technological support or reference help. Intersect and Avive tables allow several students to gather with staff, who also have their own Ethospace workstations with Mirra chairs. Forty-two-inch Bretford bookshelves create a minimal barrier while retaining open sightlines to the rest of the library. “The IRC staff loves the fact that everything is mobile. Nothing blocks the view, so students feel like they’re welcome,” says Michelle Sifri, interior designer, APG.

Third, the Collaborative Learning Zone is the prototypical crown jewel of the future Learning Commons. Gone are the library’s tall stacks and hardwired carrels. Its hushed, dark interior has been transformed into a vibrant open space that overlooks (and will eventually open into) a gated garden.

Pods of Resolve workstations with overhead trusses create an architectural element and a focal point in the open space. Scattered about the space are Intersect tables with Caper chairs, Kotatsu tables with Celeste seating, Bretford tables, and Intersect whiteboards. Fifty-inch plasma screens on the walls allow students to work together on presentations. Everything is mobile, and everything is wireless.

From the first day the prototypical space opened, students flocked in and began moving things around. “They intuitively knew how to use the space, which speaks to their inherent desire to work together,” says Mr. Cotter. And while the furniture is highly durable, the philosophical option was to provide beauty despite the inevitability of mishaps. “The first coffee spill on a Kotatsu table was a tragic day, but this is the kind of outstanding learning environment we’re aiming for,” says Mr. Cotter.

Overwhelmingly, however, the crisp, bright atmosphere and the beauty and mobility of the space attract students to study, to learn, and to collaborate. “It just looks right,” says Mr. Cotter, “and what helps it look right is that students are using it.”

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