



# Estrella Mountain Community College

EDUCATION/LIBRARY;  
AVONDALE, ARIZONA

**Topic:**  
*Change  
Technology*

**Application:**  
*Formal Learning  
Internet/Electronic Access*

**Project Scope:**  
*32 students per classroom;  
2 Learning Studio classrooms;  
900 square feet per classroom*

**Herman Miller Product:**  
*Resolve® System  
Caper® Chairs  
Ave® Table Collection  
The Intersect® Portfolio*

**Year Completed:**  
*2005*



To optimize the learning experience, Estrella Mountain Community College experimented with two “Learning Studios”—classrooms that integrate highly mobile furniture, technology, and an attractive use of color to create a stimulating, adaptable space. A blend of elements from the Resolve System and the Intersect Portfolio, Caper chairs, and Ave tables was part of the college’s successful solution.



What will the higher education classrooms of tomorrow look like? Arizona's Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) may have a head start on defining that vision.

EMCC, situated in western metropolitan Phoenix, is a member of the Maricopa Community College District, the nation's largest. Expanding to keep pace with regional growth, EMCC is challenged with serving a diverse student population—some tech-savvy, some juggling classes, families, and jobs, and some attending for specific job training.

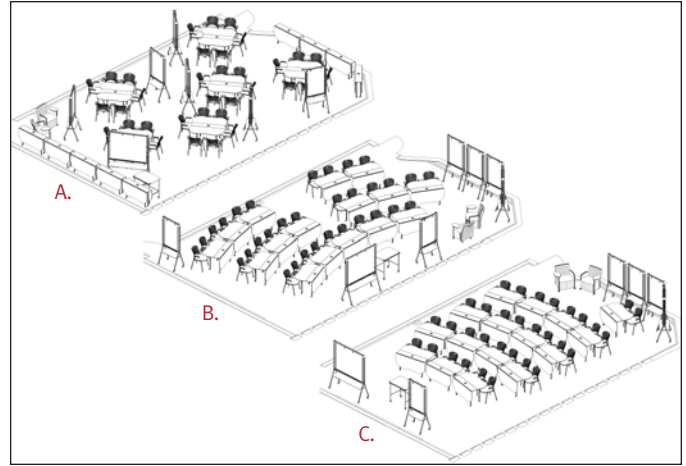
In 2005, EMCC partnered with Herman Miller and its local dealer, Goodmans Interior Structures, to rethink the classroom environment. The team set out to convert two of the college's conventional liberal arts classrooms into prototype "Learning Studios" designed to maximize the student/teacher experience.

EMCC follows three main principles in developing campus spaces: leverage of physical space; engagement of stakeholders; and a concept its leadership calls "radical flexibility," an approach that frees faculty and students to customize classroom space to meet their teaching and learning needs.

Beyond the obvious motivation to improve the educational experience, EMCC had a few added incentives. Results of a recent student focus group and survey on classroom design placed the use of space, aesthetics, and moveable furniture at the top of the list of concerns. Most importantly, the college wanted to set a different standard as it prepared to launch a significant new construction project.

The Learning Studios initiative offered the college, Herman Miller, and Goodmans the opportunity to experiment with space—including color and light—furniture, and technology. From the beginning, the studios were envisioned as active learning spaces designed to adapt easily to their users' needs at any time.

The team considered a multitude of approaches to re-imagining the modern educational environment. Elements of Herman Miller's Resolve system and Intersect portfolio, as well as Caper seating and Avive tables, provided the flexibility, mobility, and ergonomics desired to create a fluid, dynamic setting. The infrastructure was designed to accommodate adaptable lighting, ready access to electrical power, and wireless technology. Throughout both studios,



attention was given to creating a stimulating space through the use of an inviting palette of colors, textures, and finishes conducive to supporting an effective teaching and learning experience.

In terms of specifics, the Learning Studios feature tools such as wall writing and projection surfaces throughout the space; mobile teaching stations; and wireless laptop computers to open up desk space and sight lines. These and other amenities serve EMCC's radical flexibility paradigm by supporting small-group dynamics and collaborative learning.

And the reaction from faculty and students?

"The faculty provided a lot of input on the Learning Studio prototypes and once the studios were ready, they actively participated to see what worked," says E-Learning Faculty Coordinator Polly Miller. "Instructors liked the size of the classrooms and felt the openness and choice of colors helped create a relaxing, emotionally safe space. They also liked that technology was everywhere, but not in the way. They felt it fostered a very fluid environment and enhanced overall communication. Their feedback helped validate the success of the studio experiment.

"Similarly, the student reaction was very positive. Students feel 'valued' because of what the college did to improve the learning environment and as a result behave more professionally in the studio setting."

Dr. Roger Yohe, faculty director of EMCC'S Center for Teaching and Learning, adds, "The Learning Studio environment really empowers our students. In the traditional classroom model, 'don't move the furniture' is the rule. In the Learning Studios, we say, 'please move the furniture.' By enabling learners to experiment with radical flexibility, we are creating a whole new mindset."

EMCC Dean of Academic Affairs Joyce M. Jackson sums it up: "It's important to make learning spaces intuitive for faculty and students and create environments that encourage learning, collaboration, and socialization. Colleges and universities need to make a commitment to design space and infrastructure in ways that ensure student success."

EMCC is well on its way to achieving meaningful change. Its newest building project, Ocotillo Hall, includes 22 new Learning Studios designed directly from the feedback and concepts of these original prototypes.

- A. 32 students in break-out groups with computers.
- B. 32 students at computers—alternate front of the room.
- C. 32 students at computers.

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