



Georgia Tech, Crosland Library



The East Commons of the Crosland Library at the Georgia Institute of Technology is transforming the experience of the library and the services it offers. The 8,000-square-foot space includes study and research areas, presentation areas, and a café. It is completely serviced by a mix of systems and freestanding products and Convia programmable infrastructure.

**EDUCATION/LIBRARY;
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

Topic:

*Change
Technology*

Application:

*Cafe/Dining
Collaboration/Team
Informal Learning
Internet/Electronic Access
Library
Study Carrel*

Project Scope:

8,000 square foot

Herman Miller Product:

*Abak® Environments
Convia™ Programmable Infrastructure
Ethospace® System
Resolve® System
Caper® Chairs
Eames® Molded Plywood Chairs
Eames Tables*

Year Completed:

2006



In 2001, Georgia Institute of Technology began formulating plans for a facility that would become a gateway building for freshmen. It would house classrooms, support services, and social areas—and a library would be a prominent component. The library staff saw an opportunity to revamp the existing library space as the first step to creating this gateway. Ideas for a new type of library—a productivity zone that went well beyond traditional library/information commons—had been discussed for a while.

“We wanted to create a place that offered services and social opportunities, one that would develop a sense of community far different than current library experiences do,” explains Crit Stuart, former associate director for Public Services within the Georgia Tech library system and now program director for Research, Teaching, and Learning with the Association of Research Libraries.

Two critical elements led to the vision for the East Commons. The first was a group of students who provided their opinions on the characteristics of an ideal library space. Connection became a common thread. Students wanted an open environment in which they could be energized by the voices and movements of people around them, not a divided place where students would be separated from one another. Students also wanted to be connected to the outdoors. Finally, students expressed the need for connection to the ideas and work of the larger campus community.

The second was Convia, a programmable and modular electrical and data infrastructure. Library personnel were introduced to Convia through a local architect who had installed the product in his offices. This led to a trip to Herman Miller to see Convia. Recalls Mr. Stuart: “Looking at Convia required some imagination; it was so different from traditional electrical systems. But it was versatile, and I could see it had more to offer than only lighting. Space division, place making, easy transition, and suspension of data-dependent appliances were all there.”

Atlanta-based dealership CWC and Herman Miller worked with students and library personnel to shape these elements into reality. The East Commons area has taken that idea of community and connection and demonstrated it visibly in the infrastructure and furniture applications within the renovated space.

The Convia installation is a sophisticated one, but not a complicated one. Each light fixture, of which there are nearly 100, has its own connector, so each can be individually controlled. Compare this to a traditional wiring system, where every fixture would have its own switch.

With this system, any number of light fixtures—whether 100 or 5—can be controlled by one switch or 20 switches. It is completely flexible.



Flexibility extends to more than the lighting solutions. The entire space is designed for user control and change. There are no fixed walls, for example. "We didn't want to wall ourselves, literally, into something rigid and expensive to undo," says Mr. Stuart. Instead, place-making elements in the form of fabric walls hang from Convia and divide the space.

Resolve work surfaces, screens, and rolling canopies also divide space within the Commons and create study areas for groups and individuals. The mobility of Resolve products and lounge seating has proved beneficial, and interesting. "The space is different every five minutes," says CWC's Terry Whitman. "Students create little 'forts' by moving tables and chairs into the Resolve screen areas. Students are clearly involved with their environment and are able to make it work for them."

Ethospace products are used for administrative and reception areas and for printer stations. Caper chairs dot the entire space and provide the mobility and flexibility necessary for on-the-fly presentations or group study with varying numbers of students. With the help of flexible and dynamic furnishings and infrastructure, the people who occupy the library give meaning "to the moment and the space," observes Mr. Stuart.

The space has also become a place for "refreshing the mind and body," as students expressed during planning sessions. Sofas, lounge chairs, and a café contribute to a relaxed environment and provide places of rest. The café is furnished with Eames molded plywood dining chairs and Eames tables.

The experience of planning and designing the East Commons was a positive one for all involved, and a highly collaborative one. "Georgia Tech had a vision. The space had to support community, and it had to be as dynamic as the students learning within it," says CWC's Leigh Webb. "We all took our time to thoroughly explore how these ideas could translate into architecture and furniture."

It was time well spent. The flexibility of a complete infrastructure and furniture solution creates an equally flexible and dynamic environment. "Students are studying, socializing, and sometimes just hanging out. They are using technology, creating presentations, and connecting with one another. There is a buzz in this place," says Webb.

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