Over 200 students are enrolled in the University of Notre Dame’s Executive MBA program (Mendoza College of Business), attending classes on the South Bend campus and in Chicago. Program staff spent years in enclosed offices before they decided it was time to consider a more collaborative setting. Working with the university architect’s office, their attention was drawn to Resolve system.
The University of Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business prepares its students for careers in business and meaningful, productive lives in service to others. More than 200 men and women enrolled in Mendoza’s Executive MBA program attend classes on Notre Dame’s South Bend, Indiana, campus and in Chicago.

Mendoza’s Executive Education staff had spent a number of years in enclosed offices when they decided it was time to consider a more open and collaborative business setting. Working with the university architect’s office, their attention was drawn to Herman Miller’s Resolve system. “They really liked Resolve’s 120-degree configuration,” says Bret Watts, account development manager for Herman Miller, Indianapolis.

Although Herman Miller is Notre Dame’s primary furniture supplier, Resolve had yet to make an appearance on campus. But Leo Burke, associate dean and director of executive education at Mendoza, was familiar with it—he had first seen Resolve during a field trip to Herman Miller’s West Michigan headquarters. “I definitely prefer Resolve’s 120-degree design,” Burke acknowledges. “It’s much better than the more typical, ‘Dilbert’-style 90-degree workstation setup.”

Burke recalls that his senior team members supported the idea of an open environment from the beginning. But in order to convince the entire staff, another field trip was in order. So Watts, working with Julie Boynton, interiors project manager at Notre Dame, scheduled a visit to the Herman Miller Design Yard in Holland, Michigan. Word must have spread quickly, for Watts and Boynton ultimately had to charter a bus to transport 20 people, including representatives of the project’s design firm, The Troyer Group, from Notre Dame to Holland.

Once he was back at the Design Yard, Burke remembered the other aspects of Resolve that he particularly appreciated. “I liked the concept of the open, ‘backyard’ environment, the natural clusters of workgroups,” he says. “We were moving into more team-based work, and I saw Resolve as a bold, creative way to serve our customers more effectively.”
In addition to taking a more collaborative approach to their work, the Executive Education administrators had perhaps an even more pressing issue to address: They were running out of room for a growing staff. Boynton helped Burke and his team think through how Resolve could fit into and improve efficiencies within their space. Once the decision was made to proceed, Burke's entire staff relocated to a vacant classroom and the walls came tumbling down.

"I had a huge, twenty-four-by-twelve office," recalls Burke without a trace of regret. "We threw it all into the mix."

As their space was being reconfigured, Burke says the big question that lingered for staff members—many of whom had spent years in enclosed offices—was, How is this going to work? Interestingly, the weeks they spent together in the temporary classroom set-up helped prepare them for the transition to Resolve. "We were in an open and austere environment, with one person seated right next to another," Burke recalls. "By the time the redesign was finished, people were quite excited about moving back into their own workspace."

Meanwhile, Boynton and Watts were racing against a tight deadline with the installation. For the most part, things progressed smoothly and on schedule. "We had minimal problems, and Herman Miller always responded quickly to changes in the schedule," Boynton says. "I was amazed at their flexibility."

Seven weeks later, the staff moved into the new space. With its hard walls removed and replaced with Resolve, as well as a new color scheme and carpeting, this clearly was not the Mendoza administrative office of old. After an initial collective gasp, Boynton reports the vast majority of the staff was "thrilled" with their new workspaces, and delighted by the ease with which they could move their Resolve work tools around to suit their needs. And, she says, "Resolve looks great in the new space. It fits the style of the renovation. Leo wanted Notre Dame's Executive Education program to convey a more contemporary image, and I think we've succeeded."

Burke agrees. "The installation went well, and our people are very proud of the new space. Everyone enjoys great natural light from the windows now. There's no other place on campus like this." He acknowledges some adjustments were necessary regarding storage, but sees this more as an organizational issue to be addressed through internal planning. Bottom line: He's pleased with the decision to go with Resolve and the company behind it.

"During our visits to West Michigan, getting to know Herman Miller's history and its people, I liked what I saw," Burke says. "I felt a real connection between their people and ours. We share a contemporary, forward-thinking perspective."