



Butler Community College



Research shows that the more engaged students are, the more successful they are. So when Butler Community College began formulating their long-term strategic plan, one of their main areas of focus was learning spaces: how could they create environments that encourage student engagement? Herman Miller's Learning Studios provided the perfect way for them to try some innovative new solutions.

**EDUCATION/LEARNING;
EL DORADO AND
ANDOVER, KANSAS**

Topic:

*Change
Collaboration
People
Technology*

Application:

Formal Learning

Project Scope:

*20-25 students per classroom;
4 Learning Studio classrooms;
576 square feet per classroom*

Herman Miller Product:

*Convia™ Programmable Infrastructure
Resolve® System
Caper® Chairs
The Intersect® Portfolio*

Year Completed:

2008



One of the biggest challenges facing higher education today is student engagement. Study after study, including the benchmarking Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) shows that getting students truly involved in their learning is a key factor in their success.

Added to that challenge is the "new" student: the Millennials, a generation that has grown up with technology to become savvy multitaskers, social networkers, and visually stimulated learners who thrive in today's mobile world.

Such were the issues facing Butler Community College a few years ago as they formed a long-term strategic plan to not only attract students, but also create a pathway for them to succeed.

"Butler is a very forward-thinking institution, and they are continually looking for the newest and best ways to serve their students," explains Kevin Howell, of the John A. Marshall Company, a Wichita Herman Miller dealer. "So when I heard about Herman Miller's Learning Studio Research Program, I immediately thought of them."

Herman Miller Account Representative David Brite recalls that when he first talked with the Butler team, "I asked them, 'If you had a clean slate, what would you want?' And I was so pleased to hear what they listed—'more flexible furniture,' 'the best technology,' 'better lighting and acoustics,' and so on—because I knew Herman Miller could offer them everything they needed."

The Learning Studio Research Program was developed by Herman Miller after years of studies on student engagement. "The program is all about supporting new ways of learning and providing opportunities that engage students, which—research shows—helps them retain information," says Susan Whitmer, Herman Miller Education Solutions Integrator.

For example, studies indicate the more interaction students have with each other and with faculty the more engaged they are. So Learning Studios have Intersect Portfolio tables and Caper chairs that can be easily moved around, say, to form a circle, which is much more conducive to conversation than the traditional lecture-style layouts. It also leads to more question-asking, another key indicator of student engagement.

[Left] Intersect Portfolio tables can be easily moved and arranged to accommodate small breakout groups.

[Right] New ways of configuring furniture enable educators to walk around room and engage with students.



Technology support is also an important feature of the Learning Studios. Convia, a revolutionary, modular, programmable electrical and data infrastructure allows “plug and play” power access via the ceiling so students can use laptops wherever they’re sitting. And the lectern has a control board embedded in it, so images can be projected to different screens around the room, enabling students break out into focus groups and have discussions when desired.

[Left] Caper chairs add comfort and flexibility in a variety of learning spaces.

[Right] Resolve screens cut down on distractions and offer privacy in study areas.

The spaces also feature the Bretford Here™ rail system, which are large movable writing boards and screens that roll back and forth on the walls, even around corners.

As Howell points out, “Many of today’s students come from high schools that are very well equipped in terms of technology and classroom furnishings. So it’s often a step down for them when they get to colleges, which can seem a bit Spartan by comparison. Walking into a Learning Studio and not seeing yet another plain gray room is much more in tune with what they expect,” he says in reference to the contemporary look and feel of the spaces.

Butler now has four Learning Studio spaces; two General Education classrooms and two nursing classrooms, the latter made possible by benefactor Lucille Ferguson. Even the aesthetics of these rooms are based on research findings. For example, because natural elements are shown to have a positive effect on students, “We created Resolve screens using photographs of the Flint Hills, the area’s rolling prairie lands, then coordinated them with the colors in the room, which worked out really well,” says Designer Jennifer Drace of John A. Marshall.

“The technology in these spaces is just incredible,” emphasizes Whitmer. “It’s all designed to provide experiences that engage students. In the nursing Learning Studio for example, they use a high fidelity mannequin that actually responds. Believe me, no one can sit passively in this class when the mannequin is screaming, ‘I can’t breathe!’”

Of course, new ways of learning call for new ways of teaching. “We need to ensure that the teachers are successful in these new classroom settings as well,” says Tom Erwin, CIO at Butler.

But that’s what is great about a pilot program; it’s a way for people to test the waters. “Because these spaces are so nimble and adaptable, colleges can experiment to see what



kinds of things work best for particular programs," says Whitmer. "Butler, for instance may decide to take a tiered approach, where they have some rooms with very high levels of technology and support and others with limited amounts, depending on what classes will be taught there."

"We are thrilled to be part of this project," says Dr. Leann Ellis, Vice President of Academic Affairs. "What I feel is most valuable about it is that it's given us the opportunity to change the way we think about our pedagogy and how space can influence it. We have to ask ourselves: Is there a better way to deliver content? How can we best use this space and these technologies to enhance the student experience here at Butler?"

"One teacher said she liked the fact that, with the Learning Studios, there is no 'back of the room' where students can hide; the center of gravity moves all over the place," she continues. "If you (the teacher) want to walk around, you can. To me, it's just a much more relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere overall."

"The whole idea is to create spaces where students want to be; to encourage collaboration and build a real sense of community," says Dr. Gene George, executive director of research and effectiveness for the college.

"A real 'aha' moment for us was when we realized that there really isn't a huge distinction between formal and informal learning any more," he continues. "In the past, we always felt classrooms are classrooms, and everything else is whatever it is. But after we built our new student union in 2008, we saw how learning occurs in many different places and in many different ways. You see students with their shoes off, curled up on a couch talking to one another about algebra and you realize how important that informal, student-to-student interaction is in transferring knowledge. It's a social activity."

Mr. Erwin says the pilot project has taught them a lot. "We've all learned from this. Everyone has their own expectations—facilities people, maintenance, administration, faculty—and now what we need to do is come together with one common, shared vision. It's a process. The Learning Studios are giving us a chance to explore some new things and set the bar higher; they have helped us think about, plan for, manage, and support environments

[Left] Resolve workstations maximize space in small areas and can easily be reconfigured.

[Right] Freestanding furniture supports new ways of learning, creating informal, collaborative spaces wherever needed.

that engage students. The program has contributed greatly to our discussions about the teaching/learning process, and that in itself has been very valuable.”

Perhaps most telling is the reaction of one faculty member, says Mr. Erwin. “He was about to hand in his resignation, and then he saw the Learning Studios and changed his mind. ‘This is exactly the kind of environment I’ve always wanted to teach in,’ he said, ‘so I’ve decided to stay.’ And then he wrote out a five-year plan mapping out his future.”

The college is currently conducting studies of the spaces to help them make decisions as they move forward. “We’re now working from a more systematic map,” says Dr. George. “We know when we make changes in learning spaces, it affects other aspects of the institution as well. The revelations we’ve had have helped us define the bigger picture: Here’s what we’re working toward and here’s how we’re going to get there.”

© 2009 Herman Miller, Inc., Zeeland, Michigan
®  Herman Miller, Caper, Intersect, and Resolve are among the registered trademarks of Herman Miller, Inc.
™ Convia is among the trademarks of Herman Miller, Inc.
™ Here is among the trademarks of Bretford, Inc.