

a customer story

higher education

First LEED-certified campus naturally puts users first.



University of California, Merced
Merced, California



Credits:

Peninsula Business Interiors

Richard Schwarz, Project Director

Sonia Johnston, Director of
Operations and Support Services

It was a tough assignment, even for experienced university administrators: design and build a new campus that supports the changing ways students and staff learn and work, set standards for sustainability and aesthetics, accommodate 1,000 students plus faculty and staff at the start, and plan to support an enrollment of 25,000 in 25 years.

The new university, the tenth in the renowned University of California (UC) system, was sited near Merced, two hours southeast of San Francisco. A beautiful, but definitely rural, location, “there was nothing out here,” says Richard Schwarz, Project Director.

UC Merced is on the map now, though: it’s the first university in the US with campus-wide LEED certification, at the silver level.

University leaders took a sustainability perspective from the start, from site selection and development to smart buildings with lower energy usage, and of course, sustainable products. “For example, we looked at recycled content of the steel,” says Sonia Johnston, director of operations and support services. “We insisted on environmentally friendly fabrics for walls and chairs, and we standardized on tough, flexible furniture.”

Key design principles. Sustainability was part of the vision when, in 2000, university leaders shared their dreams for the new campus and Steelcase shared ongoing research it conducts on higher education. “We also shared a set of design principles with university leaders,” says Kevin Schmitzbauer, Steelcase Workplace Consultant. “Those principles reinforced and informed their vision.”

One design principle is to support the range of activities and work styles that occur in faculty offices, from individual study and research, to collaboration with peers and

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■ ■ ■ Sonia Johnston

students, to storing information. UC Merced addresses this principle with a consistent space plan and aesthetic that allowed individual flexibility.

“Each faculty member gets a private office, a certain desk, chair, storage, finishes, etc.,” says Johnston. “Some professors want a different top, or maybe additional storage. It’s easy to reconfigure anything. I can take out pieces of the product, reuse them again and again. A standards plan this flexible will continue to pay off over the years.”

Built-in flexibility. Grad student instructors are also supported as professional faculty, another key design principle. They receive unassigned workspaces and Werndl Moby storage caddies with adjustable shelves, drawers, and files.

“They get their Moby from its garage,” says Johnston, referring to the Moby’s lockable storage dock. “They take it to a workstation, or a classroom, wherever. When they’re done they put it back in the garage.” It has a business card slot to identify the owner and a letter slot “so students can drop off papers when the instructor isn’t around.” The Moby doubles as a mobile stand-up work surface. This combination of flexibility and mobility also encourages collaboration among faculty members.

Administrative offices with full Pathways® Privacy Walls are flexible, too. “The original design was solid walls with a clerestory top, but we just didn’t like it. We changed the walls to give the offices more light and a more open feeling. It was easy to change.” “These buildings are supposed to last 75 years,” says Schwarz, “yet a building’s purpose changes over the years. Dismountable walls are durable and give you a lot of flexibility.”

Sit down, talk, eat, learn. When the university opened, just one academic building was complete, the Kolligian Library. It was the site for classes, research, team projects, and more. The library spaces paid off on another higher education design principle: support for learning that goes on before, during, and after class.

“We put a lot of thought into the different spaces and how they would be used,” librarian Bruce Miller says, “but we focused on the library as a place and how it would function, as opposed to a book warehouse.” It’s light years removed from “old school” libraries with polished marble floors and

chairs screwed to the floor. None of the furniture here is fixed in place. Instead, people are encouraged to move it around. Food, drinks, and cell phones are welcomed. There’s wireless internet, and power and data ports throughout the space. “We’re as much student union as student library,” says Miller. “We have two rules. One, if you spill something, let us know so we can clean it up, and two, don’t use pizza for a bookmark.”

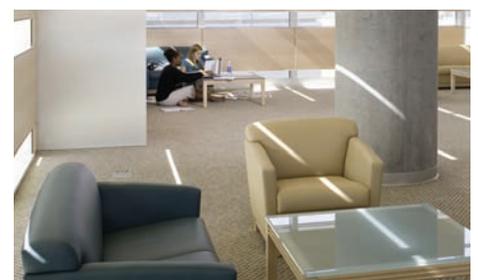
Public spaces at colleges serve as “grand attractors” and extend the learning space outside the classroom, so lounge chairs rest everywhere in the library. “The conventional wisdom is to not put loveseats and couches in libraries because people will sleep in them. We said, ‘so what?’ The students pile on them, they lay down, spread out, they work in groups. It’s remarkable how much the furniture is used.”

Many lounge pieces are upholstered in DesignTex Crypton® fabric. It’s durable and stain resistant yet offers a soft hand. “Someone made a terrible mistake with a Sharpie on one of the chairs,” Miller recalls.

(left) Miller says the college’s durability standard means “we expect the wood furniture to work for 40 years.” After a year of students studying, reading, talking, working, sleeping, and eating all over the library’s furniture, “the furniture looks as good as the day we brought it in.”

(top right) Bix and Enea seating in the Commons. “When you walk into the space, you see students filling the Bix seating first. It’s a cozy, comfortable place to sit,” says Marsha Russin, Steelcase Design Partnership sales representative.

(bottom right) The McFadden-Willis reading room in the Kolligian Library is a classic, old-school space with carrels and wooden chairs. “When people walk in, they automatically get quiet,” says Bruce Miller, librarian.





(top left) Werndl Communicators put computers at easy walk-up height in the library, and roll wherever they're needed.

(bottom left) Cachet™ chairs are “the unsung hero,” around campus, says PBI designer Theresa Coe. “It’s used in classrooms, training rooms, a whole lot of different applications. It’s lightweight, comfortable — and the students love it.”

(right) “We think we set a tone. We get constant feedback, and we’ve had nothing but good comments. If something doesn’t work, it changes. Students don’t hesitate to move the furniture around. We planned and ordered the perfect layout in the library. It looks like something you’d see in *Architectural Digest*. Yet we come in each morning and the furniture is all over the place. ‘We love it!’”



“The Crypton fabric is a light, tan color. We thought, ‘this one’s going out on the junk pile.’ But you know what? It cleaned up and it looks great.”

Group work is common on campuses today. Supporting that work style is a key in any university learning space. “We have collaborative work rooms with chairs and tables where groups from six to forty can work together. Students can do all kinds of work here.”

Everyone’s an owner. When the Science & Engineering and the Classroom buildings opened in 2006, the college employed the same design principles used in the Kolligian Library.

“We wanted to do the standards right the first time,” says Johnston. “Get flexible,

durable furniture. Use sustainable materials and products. We now have interior spaces and furniture that can adapt as the college grows and changes.”

“Everyone understood the vision, contributed to it, and collaborated to make it happen,” says Gary Reed, then VP of Sales at Peninsula Business Interiors. “It’s a partnership that pays off every day all over campus.”

“It’s all about creating an environment where the students and faculty can do their work, their study, their research,” says Miller. “We want people to take ownership of the space and help us make it work. And that’s obviously happening.”



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