

## A university department gathers its team in an innovative new workscape.



### University of California, San Diego

Housing | Dining | Hospitality  
San Diego, California

#### Credits:

Studio E. Architects, San Diego, CA  
bkm OfficeWorks, San Diego, CA

The Housing | Dining | Hospitality department (HDH) at the University of California, San Diego houses over 11,000 students, staff and faculty, so they're quite adept at organizing the living and working arrangements of groups of people. But the workspace for the department's own staff was another story – until recently.

The HDH group's nearly 600 employees were spread out across the campus, often working in "temporary" trailers for years. "We had no real headquarters for our department. To do business with us you had to go to as many as 11 different locations. We needed to bring together the backbone operations, break down the silos, help people communicate and collaborate, and make doing business with us more convenient for our customers," says Mark P. Cunningham, the department's executive director.

The solution was a new work environment with more open, collaborative workspaces

integrated seamlessly into the building architecture. The number of private offices has been cut in half, and a variety of spaces were created for groups ranging from 2 to 12 people. Overall, this new workplace has given HDH a renewed sense of departmental cooperation and teamwork.

The main furniture elements are c:scape, an innovative new Steelcase system that improves connections between people and between people and information, and media:scape, an integrated furniture and technology solution that reshapes how people collaborate.

c:scape uses a simple set of components (beam, desk, low and mid-storage, worktools, and screens) to create user-centric spaces in the open plan or private offices. Workers can control privacy without creating barriers, and the 48" high screens let HDH staffers see, and be seen by others. "It's a unique system that meets the needs of the department, and the needs of the building, too," notes Mark Nelson, an architect and project manager at UC San Diego.

The building's HVAC system provides maximum comfort with minimal energy use, and requires the furniture to be up, off the floor. That's built into c:scape's design. "Air comes in at low velocity from the ceiling, and has to ooze out into the space like heavy cream, if you will. We needed furniture that doesn't block air, and c:scape achieves that. It also creates an open workplace, it doesn't feel like a cube farm, and it has great aesthetics," says Eric Nasland, architect and design partner of Studio E Architects, San Diego.

**"It's amazing the way you can construct a community with a building and furniture"**

■ ■ ■ Mark P. Cunningham  
Executive Director

"c:scape not only met our criteria but in many ways exceeded them. It's much more friendly furniture. We can route cabling so it's hidden, and it's very open and collaborative," says DeAnn Coombs, assistant director of procurement and contracts. The surface of the desk slides

forward to reveal the connect zone that offers easy access to power, data, and cord management.

Open workplaces without high panels often lack adequate storage. “But c:scape has components that stay low and give people enough storage, and room to personalize,” notes Nasland.

HDH uses media:scape to make sharing information easy for groups of two to eight people. In any of the department’s seven media:scape spaces, HDH employees simply connect one of the media:scape pucks to their laptop, and everyone can share what’s on their computer via the integrated monitor at the table. To switch between laptops, they just touch the puck.

The large media:scape table is especially popular with large groups. “There’s something about a circular table, the easy connection. It’s packed all the time,” says Cunningham.

The combination of a more open workplace, c:scape and media:scape has proven effective quicker than even Cunningham expected. “We thought it would take six months to a year for people to embrace this new office,” he says. “It’s been just three months, and information flows faster now, and that’s a huge benefit. You see people working with media:scape and people walk by and they ask questions. We had no idea it could work this well, but it

seems so apparent now. It’s amazing the way you can construct a community with a building and furniture.”

Cunningham and his team made sure to explain the architecture, furniture, technology, and tools, and how it was all intended to



**The advantages of HDH’s open office are clear: better communication, daylight for everyone, a feeling of energy in a space that invites collaboration.**



**Employees can meet to collaborate at one of seven media:scape spaces at HRN. media:scape allows them to connect and share what’s on their laptop on a flat screen monitor that everyone can easily see. To switch between laptops, users just press the puck. “It’s booked all the time,” says Mark Cunningham.**

help people work together. “We went through a purposeful effort, brought the teams together, walked through the reasons for an open workplace, etc.”

A question came up that often arises when employees are moving to an open workplace. “What about when I need to talk to my doctor, or make a private call?” So we have designated offices for anyone to use, anytime. Just take your phone, your laptop, etc., and take your time. As a result we’ve had no issues with noise, no complaints about privacy. But we built that in, we planned for it.”

The new furniture invites change, and HDH has taken advantage of that capability. “We set worksurfaces at the industry standard, and of course people come in all sizes, so our furniture dealer, bkm Office Works, made adjustments for some people.” (c:scape offers six inches of adjustability built into the legs of the desks.)

HDH’s younger employees, “the 18-to-20-somethings like the open plan so much, they want to take down all the upper storage. We haven’t decided about that, but it’s nice to have the option to be able to do it any time,” says Cunningham.

HDH employees quickly took ownership of the space and found different ways to use flexible spaces. “You see people using the large, flat screens in media:scape for email. They’re comfortable with the openness of the facility,” says Cunningham. media:scape spaces have nicknames (e.g., “the serenity pod,” “the peace pod,” “the play pod,” etc.). Bix lounge seating and tables in booth configurations are used by groups so often, Coombs calls them “picnic tables.” The break room and building patios have become gathering sites for informal potlucks and celebrations such as birthdays and

holiday events. “When you put the right furniture in a break room, people go there, hang out, and it becomes a kind of club. It has its own vibe. The idea is to get people out of the office at lunch and spend time not working with colleagues,” says Cunningham.

“Our hopes for staff buy-in were far surpassed,” says building manager Athena Simpson. “I heard folks almost immediately praising the effectiveness of the new workplace. This furniture has without a doubt increased productivity, improved staff relations, and boosted morale.”

Coombs says the collaborative atmosphere rubs off on visitors, vendors, and colleagues from other departments. “People all the time say, ‘Oh, this is such a great environment,’ it makes them curious about what we’re doing. People in other divisions used to come in and go out of purchasing quickly. Now they ask what we’re doing and they’re more appreciative of what we do.”

The department’s neighbor on campus, the natural science department, has asked HDH if they can use the new space for prospective faculty. “We’ve never had faculty use our space before. We’ve done nothing to promote this space, but word is getting out. Other departments are constantly touring. Many outside architects. Everyone loves this space,” says Cunningham.

The success of HDH’s new workplace, Cunningham says, stems from the close relationship between the university, Steelcase, and the local dealership. “Steelcase researches and understands higher education. They want to be a part of it. bkm understands this campus and what we do. We couldn’t have gotten here without Steelcase and bkm.”

In appreciation for their efforts, HDH awarded Steelcase and bkm the “UC San Diego Vendor of the Year” award “for providing innovative product and excellent customer service beyond our expectations.”



## Products

Steelcase® c:scape® freestanding system, media:scape™ collaborative furniture and technology, Leap®, i2i®, cobi®, Move™ seating

Coalesse® Bix and Kart® seating

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Steelcase Cogent fabrics™

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## Going for LEED Gold

The new Housing | Dining | Hospitality building supports the environmental stewardship strategies of the University of California, San Diego, and it’s expected the new workplace will receive at least a LEED Silver rating, perhaps Gold. Many factors contribute to the designation, from the architecture of the building to a passive heating and cooling system, energy management technology, and green policies such as limiting printers to one per floor. Plus, HDH derives many sustainability benefits from its Steelcase furniture. A few examples:

### c:scape and media:cape

- furniture components are Silver Cradle to Cradle<sup>CM</sup> certified by MBDC with standard options and finishes
- wiring and cabling are PVC-and halogen-free, as well as RoHS compliant
- c:scape is also level<sup>TM</sup> 2 certified to the BIFMA e3 sustainability standard
- media:scape technology components are RoHS/WEEE compliant and carry the EnergyStar<sup>®</sup> rating

### cobi and i2i seating

- SCS Indoor Air Advantage<sup>TM</sup> Gold certified
- level<sup>TM</sup> 2 certified to the BIFMA e3 sustainability standard

### Leap seating

- Silver Cradle to Cradle<sup>CM</sup> certified
- SCS Indoor Advantage<sup>TM</sup> certified-Steelcase Cogent<sup>TM</sup> fabrics
- Gold Cradle to Cradle<sup>CM</sup> certified by MBDC

### Move seating

- Gold Cradle to Cradle<sup>CM</sup> certified
- SCS Indoor Advantage<sup>TM</sup> certified
- level<sup>TM</sup> 2 certified to the BIFMA e3 sustainability standard

### Steelcase Cogent<sup>TM</sup> fabrics

- Gold Cradle to Cradle<sup>CM</sup> certified by MBDC