case study

CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
THE HERBERT H. AND GRACE A. DOW COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

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Steelcase

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When administrators and faculty at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Mich., decided to build a new academic center for its College of Health Professions, they set lofty goals. They wanted a facility that would encourage active learning and help elevate CMU to national prominence as one of the top educational institutions in the country. After years of struggling to build a cohesive, collaborative program while scattered in several buildings across campus, the CMU team was convinced that a well-designed new facility was vital for achieving their goals.

Next-generation learning

Objectives

The new building for The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow College of Health Professions, a 175,000-square-foot, $50 million facility, opened in January, 2004. Prominently situated on the CMU main campus, it houses all the major components of the university's health professions program—clinics, classrooms, research labs, and faculty and staff offices—in an innovative facility designed to support interdisciplinary, collaborative exploration and learning. The building brings together CMU's health professions, neuroscience and clinical psychology programs and its many associated research initiatives and community outreach services in one technologically advanced environment that promotes learning, patient care, collaboration and discovery.

The atrium is a place to collaborate, study and relax.

"Our vision was to create a structure that would be flexible, inviting, foster a collaborative spirit and provide the latest tools to facilitate optimal student learning," says Linda Seestedt-Stanford, assistant dean of health professions and the college's project manager.

"At the same time, we wanted to reshape the way faculty viewed teaching environments. In the past, most classrooms were very lecture-focused. We wanted a building that would encourage active learning, whether it be faculty-to-student or peer-to-peer."

Central Michigan University

Founded more than a century ago, Central Michigan University has evolved into a doctoral/research-intensive public university that provides its more than 28,000 students with modern facilities and technology, faculty who are dedicated to student-centered teaching and research, and a selection of more than 200 programs at the bachelor's, master's, specialist's and doctoral levels. The university employs more than 800 full-time faculty members at its main campus in Mount Pleasant, a city of about 25,000 residents in Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

A goal: To reshape the way faculty viewed teaching environments.

Collaborative, interactive space

Situation

"Ever since health professions became a CMU college in 1997, we had been scattered in six different buildings and, as a result, our disciplines tended to operate in silos. We wanted to bring all our health-related disciplines together in one building to encourage collaboration on research, clinical programs and teaching approaches," says Seestedt-Stanford.

Planning for the new facility was extensive. Years before spade touched soil in the groundbreaking ceremony in June 2001, the CMU team—administration, faculty, purchasing and facilities—solicited outside expertise to help achieve their goals. They asked for input from other universities, and they also looked outside academia to identify recently completed state-of-the-art health buildings to visit before beginning to formalize their own requirements.

Linda Seestedt-Stanford, assistant dean, places a high value on informal collaboration with colleagues.

Bix seating provides lounge-based settings for studying between classes.

Among the resources they selected to help achieve their objectives was Steelcase and the Detroit office of the renowned architectural firm SmithGroup.

"Steelcase's contribution was essential. They applied their research on learning environments to our specific needs, and they helped us objectively look at different ideas about how to plan and furnish our interior spaces so they'd be flexible and collaborative, able to serve multiple functions and multiple users," says Seestedt-Stanford.

For example, the CMU team was originally considering built-in furniture in the computer labs and student interaction areas. Working with the team from Steelcase and Steelcase dealership Allied Office Interiors, Inc., they discovered mobility made more sense.

"When you think about it, who knows if we'll even need a computer lab in five years when so many of our students are already carrying their own laptops?

A trip to the Steelcase University Learning Center in Grand Rapids, Mich., brought to life many of the concepts that the team had been envisioning.

And what good is having a student interaction area if they can't move things around and make it their space? What good is it if they end up not using it?" says Seestedt-Stanford.

A trip to the Steelcase University Learning Center in Grand Rapids, Mich., brought to life many of the concepts that the team had been envisioning, especially for the "in-between spaces" outside classrooms and offices where valuable informal learning can take place.

Dynamic, active… and comfortable

Solution

The three major components of its health professions programs—clinical, instructional and research—occupy separate wings on either side of a large central atrium. Wireless Internet access is available throughout the facility, so work and learning can happen everywhere.

The atrium was designed as a "communication corridor." It's furnished end-to-end with Archipelago™ seating and mobile Huddleboards™, providing comfortable and adaptable touch-down places for studying, collaborating on projects, meeting with clients from the community who participate in the center's clinical programs, or even just relaxing.

Outside, courtyards provide inspiring views and places to get away for a while, without having to leave the premises.

Just off the atrium, fully visible through a glass wall, is a computer lab furnished with fence-height Pathways® Post and Beam, Universal Worksurfaces, Kick® system in a collaborative 120-degree configuration, Kart® and Sweeper seating. It's a highly flexible, heavily used space that attracts up to 7,000 student visits a week.

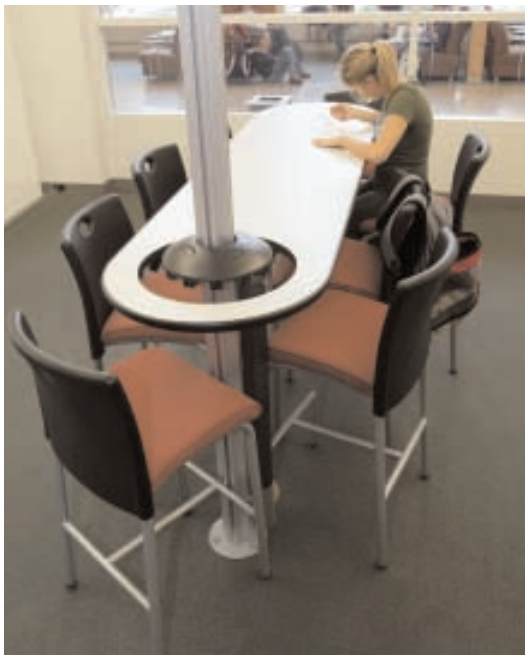
"Steelcase helped us to see furniture through a different lens and discover new product options and applications that fully supported our overall goals. They helped us think through our issues in the context of their research findings and expertise," says Seestedt-Stanford.

Universal worksurfaces, Sweeper seating and other moveable furniture make the computer lab a flexible environment for learning.

"Steelcase helped us to see furniture through a different lens and discover new product options and applications that fully supported our overall goals." – Linda Seestedt-Stanford

Classrooms and labs are well equipped with technology and moveable furniture to support a variety of learning and teaching styles.

"In the past, most classrooms were very lecture-focused. We want our students to take a more active role in their learning, with faculty acting as facilitators instead of spoon-feeding information. The furniture in the classrooms plays a big role in achieving this," says Seestedt-Stanford. "Students typically spend 1 - 3 hours in each class. They need to be comfortable and be able to move around. Static furniture too easily translates into static learning."



Post and Beam defines a touch-down spot.

A seating story

Throughout the CMU building, a broad variety of Steelcase Inc. seating products meets a broad variety of needs. In classrooms and labs, you'll find Kart chairs and stools, often teamed with mobile Ballet® and Groupwork™ tables.

Let's B® seating was the choice for a highly flexible classroom where the arrangement of furniture usually changes several times a day.

Let's B

In the second-floor hallways surrounding the atrium, Bix® seating provides comfortable booth-style enclosures for studying (or sleeping!) between classes. In the second-floor student interaction area, Sweeper seating, coupled with Martini™ tables and Huddleboards, make the space a work hub with casual appeal. Having a photocopy machine in the space rounds out its usefulness.

Archipelago

Steelcase's Leap chair, with its proven ergonomic seating technology, was selected as the task chair for all faculty offices, with Deck™ guest chairs providing a visual link to the woodwork and built-ins. Jersey® and Assisa seating was the choice for seminar spaces and faculty meeting rooms.

Leap

In administrative areas, Jenny™ seating provides for sit-down collaboration areas, while Series 9000® and Answer® workstations maximize the efficient use of space.

Kart

In addition to offering a broad breath of product to meet various needs, durability was another important factor for choosing Steelcase. Academic buildings are 24/7 facilities, and multiple users give furnishings a daily workout.

"We looked for quality that could stand up to the test of time," Seestedt-Stanford notes. "I tell the students that their kids may someday be using this same building!"

A premiere educational facility

Results

As a result of all the focus and planning, CMU's new building is recognized as one of the premiere educational facilities in the United States.

Seestedt-Stanford was invited to present a general session at a 2004 national conference focused exclusively on new science buildings. CMU was recognized at the conference as setting "a new benchmark for modern science teaching."

The Chronicle of Higher Education, a high-profile weekly publication focused exclusively on academia, featured CMU's health sciences center as its front-page feature in February 2004. No small achievement—and cachet—for a mid-sized institution in a small town surrounded by rural central Michigan.

"Without question, the building is resulting in better learning and teaching, and it's also helping attract and retain students and faculty," says Marvis Lary, dean.

Janet Sturm, an associate professor of communication disorders, came to CMU in August, 2003, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"This facility was a huge draw for me to better do all the work I want to do - teaching, research and clinical," says Sturm. "Now that I'm here, I think I'm definitely a better teacher. In my classes, I have more options. For example, being able to easily put two students together to work hands-on at a computer in the lab really helps push learning and allows me to give more

feedback. And I've used the collaborative areas in the atrium as workstations for 10 teams to think through 10 different treatment approaches, something I couldn't do in a traditional lecture hall."

The design of the building also encourages faculty collaboration, which results in better science and better teaching, says Sturm. Because there's a central atrium and faculty offices are in the connecting areas between the three wings, "the potential for collaborative work with other disciplines is heightened," she notes. "We see each other, get to know each other, interact more and can support each other's research and teaching."

Supported by this innovative new building, CMU's 2,500 undergrad and graduate health professions students now have access to the best in academics—from opportunities to engage with faculty in research to hands-on clinical experiences to learning from each other. And CMU faculty members benefit from access to the latest health sciences, neuroscience and psychology information, resources and technology, along with the opportunity to teach and learn from each other in settings that promote active learning and easy collaboration.

"It's a building designed to encourage linkages and engagement," says Dean Lary. "It's helping us in so many ways to realize our full potential. Our goals are becoming our reality."

Archipelago seating furnishes the atrium comfortably and functionally.

"This facility was a huge draw for me to better do all the work I want to do - teaching, research and clinical. Now that I'm here, I think I'm definitely a better teacher." —Janet Sturm, Associate Professor of Communication Disorders

Steelcase products used:

Answer®

Criterion® seating

Deck™ seating

Huddleboard™

Jersey® seating

Leap® seating

Pathways® Post and Beam

Series 9000®

Universal Worksurfaces

Universal Storage

Vecta products used:

Ballet® tables

Kart® seating

Turnstone products used:

Groupwork™ tables

Jenny™ Lounge seating

Let's B® seating

Kick®

Sweeper seating

Metro products used:

Archipelago™ seating

Bix® seating

Details products used:

Worktools by Details®

Credits:

Architect and Designer: SmithGroup

CMU Project Manager: Linda Seestedt-Stanford

General Contractor: JM Olson Corporation

Dealer: Allied Office Interiors, Inc.

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