



FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

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Great Campuses Don't Begin with Furniture. They Begin with Intention.

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Furniture isn't the finish line of a project. It's the beginning of every experience that follows.

Before the professor says a word...Before students open a laptop...Before the first discussion begins...The environment has already started teaching.

Without saying anything at all, the environment communicates expectations. It tells students whether this is a place to listen or participate. Whether collaboration is encouraged or independent focus is expected. Whether movement is welcome or staying put is the norm. Every space teaches. The question is whether it's teaching intentionally.

For decades, conversations about educational furniture have centered on specifications, finishes, budgets, and lead times. Those are all important considerations, but they aren't where great learning environments begin. They begin with a much simpler question. "What is this space designed to do?" Not just on opening day. Not just this semester. But throughout its life.

As campuses evolve, programs expand, technology changes, and teaching methods continue to transform, can this environment continue to support the people who rely on it every day? That question changes everything. Because once purpose becomes the starting point, furniture stops being a purchase and becomes part of the learning strategy.

Every Space Has a Job

Higher education campuses are unlike almost any other environment. Within a single day, one building may support lectures, seminars, independent study, faculty collaboration, research, student services, social interaction, and community events. A student commons may be a quiet study lounge at 9:00 a.m., a bustling gathering space by noon, and an evening event venue just hours later. A classroom may shift from lecture to collaborative learning several times before the day is over. Libraries have become destinations for teamwork as much as independent study. Makerspaces encourage experimentation. Music facilities require organization, accessibility, and protection for valuable equipment while maximizing instructional time.

Every one of those spaces serves a different purpose. Yet too often, institutions begin by asking what furniture belongs in the room instead of what the room is meant to accomplish. The question facilities leaders should be asking isn't, "What furniture belongs here?" It's "What behaviors should this environment encourage?" Because behavior is ultimately what learning environments are designed to support.

The Hidden Curriculum of Space

Educational researchers have long understood something many people overlook: The environment influences behavior.

At Marco, working alongside internationally recognized educational consultant Dr. Lennie Scott-Webber, we've seen firsthand that the most successful learning environments begin with understanding people before products. How do students move through a room? Where do conversations naturally happen? What encourages participation? What reduces stress? What helps people focus? These aren't abstract design questions. They're practical ones.

The shape of a table influences conversation. The layout of a room influences interaction. Mobility encourages adaptability. Comfort supports concentration. Choice encourages ownership.

Even subtle design decisions communicate how people are expected to use a space. The environment is constantly teaching. The most successful campuses recognize that—and design accordingly.

The Research Is Clear

The evidence is no longer anecdotal. Decades of environmental psychology, neuroscience, and educational research continue to point to the same conclusion: space influences behavior, and behavior influences outcomes.

One of the most widely referenced studies in educational design, the University of Salford's HEAD Project, found that classroom design accounted for up to 16 percent of the variation in student learning progress.

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