

ON-CAMPUS LIVING CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF EVANSVILLE

On-campus living is key to facilitating student development and full engagement in an academically focused community. While some schools prioritize maximizing enrollment, the University of Evansville prioritizes maximizing opportunities for student development.

Michael Tessier, Assistant Vice President and Director of Residence Life shares:

“Residence Life is more than just housing at the University of Evansville. The total living package can be key to having an exceptional experience. Initially, we like students to visualize and dream about ‘what you can do’ to make your on-campus residence your own. To do this we seek to provide options and flexibility.

The Trey chair is one part of the total residence experience. It gives students ideas and options about how they might like to study, hang out with friends, and get comfortable in their own room and in the hall with others. For floor meetings, it’s better than having a bunch of folding chairs or beanbags in a closet. In our most recent renovation project, we polled students about their preferences for room furnishings; the Trey chair was the most popular item by a large margin (4.35 Trey vs. 4.06 for the 2nd most preferred seating on a 5.0 scale).

The Trey chair has helped both in attracting new students to on-campus housing and in retaining students in on-campus housing. In attracting new students, there has been a lot of positive conversation about this chair. Students are talking about it-- they think Trey chairs are ‘cool’. Recently, I was with a Father and their son during an on-campus admissions tour and the Father got very excited when he saw the Trey chair. He liked how convenient and practical it is; to be both an office desk chair and a comfortable floor lounge chair. He told me that his son liked computer games and that this would be an ideal game chair for him. He shared “This alone would get my son to come here!”. We make a point to include the Trey chair in our on-campus recruiting tours. When we show sample residential rooms, we talk about the new room features, and then pull out the Trey chair. We detach it and put it on the floor, and it’s a ‘wow’ factor. It’s great to just show the chair.

In retaining students in on-campus housing, Trey (as part of the total residence hall renovation package) is having a positive impact. For the first residence hall we renovated, no one really knew what to expect. After students saw the finished & furnished building, retention turned into a waiting list issue. We had a waiting list to get into the completed building AND a waiting list for the second building long before it was finished.”

As a totally new kind of chair, they had one concern before they made the decision to purchase their first installation—potential student injuries from the latch/unlatch process...

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Michael Tessier shares:

“Our students are using the chairs and converting them up and down quite a bit. Because it’s easy to release and then snap back on, they convert the chair as often as they change what they are doing. If they are going to be at their desk then they have it in the regular position. If they want to lounge and be more informal, then they take it apart and use it at floor level. Initially, I was concerned people would pinch their fingers in the latch and unlatch process, but it’s very easy to use the latching mechanism. You just line it up and it pops into place. There is no thought involved, you just do it. There’s really no improper way to latch or unlatch.

While the Trey chair may cost more in the initial purchase than other chairs, R.O.I. concerns dissolve as the impact is certainly positive on aiding recruitment and on-campus housing retention. Campus administrators share:

“We have a waiting list to get into the buildings with the Trey chairs—this tells the bottom line to the story. So far we’ve purchased and installed over 800 Trey chairs during the past few years and we’ve been very, very pleased.

We’ve had only a few paddles break (the handle you pull up to disengage the chair from the base) but Sauder replaced those at no charge. With the quantity that we have I’m not expecting 100% perfection, but I’m darn well pleased we’ve gotten the durability and wear ability thus far and I’m expecting nothing less with the next installation that will be arriving soon.

For any additional future renovations, we would look at the Trey chair as our first option because we’ve basically standardized on it.”

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