

BEST PRACTICES CASE STUDY: WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Environmental consciousness is spreading. More and more universities are striving to do their part to help the environment. Washington University in St. Louis, MO is no exception. Washington University, a campus that holds a priority to stay clear from sending materials to the landfills, has thrived on Sauder Education's Renewability program. In fact, Jim Severine, Washington University's Assistant Director of Building Services, lives by his motto to "help the environment, save money and product longevity."

Jim has been with Washington University for 23 years. Starting out as a painter, he now runs the day to day operations in Residence Life and represents the end users of the residence halls. When he moved into this position several years ago, the University was beginning to put programs together to standardize the furniture process; evaluate the life cycle process and develop tools to make the process easy and seamless. Jim now lives by what they call a "20 Year Furniture Plan". This tool is used



to evaluate the furniture and budget for all 47 residence halls. The 20 Year Furniture Plan details for each residence hall what the furniture is, when it was purchased, the purchase price and when it is due for replacement. With this plan, Jim can easily identify and plan his budget year by year.

Renewability is a part of the 20 Year Furniture Plan. Sauder Education's lounge seating products (formerly under the Wieland name) have been the college's furniture choice for years with over \$2 million invested in the furniture because of the Renewability program. Jim Severine is very environmentally conscious and feels it is very important to try to keep materials from entering the landfills. Warranty on products is also a very important factor to consider because students don't treat the furniture like their own. They tend to have the attitude that they pay a lot of money to attend the institution so they can treat things the way they want to. Sauder Education's 25 year warranty on lounge furniture reassures Jim with the choice he made.

Furniture is recovered every 3-4 years. The 20 Year Furniture Plan identifies the pieces of furniture to evaluate on a 3-year cycle. If the fabric needs renewed, room is made in their budget. If not, the furniture is evaluated again the next year. This type of organization and planning is a best practice that many schools would be able to benefit from.

Continued on next page

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Continued from previous page

Washington University has been very satisfied with Sauder Education's Renewability program. Yes, there are less expensive products in the market, but Sauder Education has been their clear choice because they meet all three of Jim's goals: environmentally conscious, money is saved by recovering furniture vs. consistently purchasing new and the structure of the products allows for the longevity he is looking for.



If non-renewable furniture is damaged, it would go straight to the landfill and they want to avoid that. Plus, it takes much more time to replace entire pieces of chairs than it does to renew furniture. With Renewability, he just picks a fabric, Sauder Education sews it and depending on the size of the project he will hire a contractor or student workers to recover. Of course, Jim states that "renewing furniture is only as good as the installer. It is important to have an installer who understands how to do it and how the end product is to look." Jim even has

hands-on experience himself and has estimated that it takes about 45 minutes to recover a chair and an hour and a half to recover a sofa. When they have a smaller number of chairs to recover, Jim will train student workers. He is pleased with the ease of assembly and disassembly of the furniture because it saves the University time and money by being able to utilize student workers on the smaller projects.

The cost to renew furniture is a benefit of Sauder Education's Renewability program as well. Jim estimates that \$240 to recover a chair depending on fabric chosen plus labor vs. buying a completely new chair saves the University a lot of money.

In conclusion, between choosing Renewable furniture and sticking by their 20 Year Furniture Plan, Washington University has developed a solid program to effectively manage their furniture life cycle needs and budget.

Photos provided courtesy of the Washington University

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