



Jeff Weber
Principal, Studio Weber + Associates
Us™ Chair Family Design Q&A

Q. How did you begin the design process for the new Us™ chair family?

American Seating did a great job of defining the category of opportunity related to the higher education market. But the company had an additional goal to create a solution that could be used outside of the higher education arena – a product that could live well in a corporate environment, as well as within a residential setting. We embraced the demand to design a product that has broad appeal and application. We needed to create a product that could be a little more global and universal for other opportunities.

Our starting point was to get a well-rounded perspective to understand the needs of all interested parties. From the higher education subject, we looked at the university's needs, the buyer of the product, the facility manager and the student. The idea was to identify the needs for those environments and to support the human interaction in those different settings and environments.

We began by conducting research locally at the University of Minnesota. We spent several days on campus and sat in on active classrooms. We intentionally identified a variety of classrooms and learning environments. We assessed the existing seating solutions and related configurations. We wanted to understand the interaction between students and students, students and professors, and students with the tools they use. We also looked at the “new” type of learning styles and environments that are popping up at college and university campuses: non-traditional settings where students are learning, studying and interacting, like at a university coffee shop, in a dorm room or at the student union.

Q. What did you learn from your research?

We learned a number of important things. One is that the environment is very important, but that people learn in many different types of ways. Two, is that being regimented in either a fixed or a loose seating solution is counter-intuitive to learning today. Learning is dependent on the subject, the environment, and the professor's teaching style. The interaction between students, professors and the environment itself is really evolving much faster than in the past.

We noticed that the environments can be broken-down and restructured sometimes. Some environments need to be very traditional, while others need to facilitate high interactivity. Some environments are chaotic, visually and behaviorally.

With these inputs we realized that a seating solution must provide great base utility and must be instinctive thus easy to use. This seating solution must also be flexible to adapt to the ways in which people are learning. We wanted to create a product that would support the human in a health positive way, but not in an overly complex way.

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Q. How would you describe the product from a functionality standpoint?

The product functions in support of the human form and behavior. It has an organic quality, and people will notice that the product has a very fluid in form. But at the same time, the form is very simplistic. The functionality is manifested through two main approaches: A passive moving chair that is by nature flexible and utilitarian, and the second by introducing a more dynamic motion chair (which is forthcoming) that responds to the human input as the person, he or she moves, providing a greater range of postural freedom. This unique functionality transcends body types, how individuals learn, and responds to facility demands.

Q. How would you describe the aesthetics?

The aesthetic quality is very universal, simplistic and linear, which translate the many base configurations. The breadth of the base options and shell colors will help achieve the universal needs we've identified. From an aesthetic point of view, the product can live in many different environments and can be a tool for the architect and design community. For example, it can have an "inward" or "outward" personality, meaning it can be quiet and peaceful or loud and boisterous based on the aesthetic quality an architect or designer chooses.

Q. What do you think are the greatest benefits to a specifier of this product?

We set out to create a universally accepted product that could support the human form while at the same time instill function, performance and a high aesthetic quality. I think the **Us** chair family does that through its ability to transcend people, place and time. It can meet the dynamic ways in which students, professors and spaces come together to create an effective learning environment. But it's also universal enough to be used in other settings.

Q. What do you mean when you say it transcends people, place and time?

In reference to people it transcends cultures, body types, people's individual aesthetic tastes, and the way people learn, work and live. In terms of place it's about a product that appears comfortable in almost any environment, as if it's intended to be there. Time relates to the issue of sustainability...is the product long-lasting? How long is its service life? It's also about how long the product lasts from an aesthetic quality measure, and does it stand the test of time in terms of its form? Time can also be from a business standpoint: How long does it take to deploy the chairs or reconfigure them? The goal is to transcend these things and provide a level of utility for everything in between.

About Jeff Weber and Studio Weber + Associates

Jeff Weber and his product development studio, Studio Weber + Associates, have a long history focused on solving human based problems from an empathetic point of view. The output from this practice is product that embodies an intrinsically humanistic quality.

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