

MillerKnoll and PepsiCo Empower the Next Generation of Designers to Design an Innovative Student Lounge at Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design

MillerKnoll and PepsiCo empower the next generation of designers to design an innovative student lounge with in-kind furniture contributions as part of Masterclass design curriculum at Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design

The fastest way to learn is by doing. This rings true for many of us – whether we’re trying a new sport, navigating the pressure of being a new leader, taking up a hobby, or starting a new job.

The students at Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design learn by doing daily. It’s a foundational part of Founder Dr. D’Wayne Edwards’ approach to education at the first and only Historically Black College or University (HBCU) dedicated to design.

With this educational approach in mind, MillerKnoll partnered with Pensole Lewis and PepsiCo to curate a first-of-its-kind Masterclass design curriculum that covered design principles and strategies and ended in a real-life final project: design your own student lounge.

“Our design programs teach students the entire product creation process through our intensive learn-by-doing curriculum,” said Pensole Lewis Founder Dr. D’Wayne Edwards. “We’ve seen the success that comes with opening students’ eyes to new career paths in the industry and unlocking more ways they can apply their talents through real-world experiences.”

The 10-week intensive course was delivered by associates with mentorship provided along the way from both organizations. The student lounge would round out the school’s existing floorplan with in-kind product contributions from MillerKnoll and its collective of brands. PepsiCo would invest in bringing the winning design to life in the summer of 2023 featuring furniture from MillerKnoll.

Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design is located in Detroit, Michigan, and is currently in its first school year.

Setting the stage: Ensuring an inclusive and inspiring learning environment

While developing the school’s floorplan in 2021, Edwards partnered with MillerKnoll, a collective of global design brands also headquartered in Michigan, to design and outfit a cutting-edge space for students to learn, grow, and belong.

“It’s important that these students have an exceptional experience the moment they step into Pensole Lewis and we are proud to have played a role in creating this experience,” said Cheryl Kern, VP of DEI at MillerKnoll. “When we feel seen and valued, we are motivated to do our best and most creative work.”

In curating the space, the team left one room unfinished – the student lounge. The blank canvas was craving a fresh set of eyes to envision a place where students wanted to go to connect and recharge on campus. In line with the school’s education philosophy, Edwards tapped MillerKnoll and co-partner PepsiCo to ask: ‘Who better to design the space than the Pensole Lewis design students?’

Design by students for students: ‘Design your own student lounge’

In October 2022, Pensole Lewis students were charged with designing a new lounge on the campus. The student lounge would be dedicated to Kevin Carroll, one of Edwards’s long-time friends and mentors.

To prepare students for the task, MillerKnoll curated a Masterclass design curriculum that covered design principles and strategies. The 10-week intensive course was delivered by associates with mentorship provided along the way from both organizations.

Students also made the short trip across the state of Michigan to visit MillerKnoll’s Design Yard, in Holland, MI. During their visit, the future designers toured the creativity-inspiring space and met with other designers of color who shared their roles and career journey.

“The students’ spirit, dedication, and desire to learn filled us with inspiration and appreciation for our time with them and the greater MillerKnoll and Pensole partnership,” said Phyllis Aragaki, VP of Creative Studio at MillerKnoll. “The curriculum we created provided the students with a clear process and critical knowledge for the planning and designing of the space—a challenging assignment for young designers who started the class with no previous environmental design experience.”

The final project: Share your design concept

The culmination of the Masterclass was the students presenting their student lounge design proposals to a panel of esteemed judges, including Edwards, Matthew Stares, MillerKnoll SVP of Global Real Estate, Architecture and Development, and Mauro Porcini, SVP and Chief Design Officer at PepsiCo, with radio personality Angela Yee as moderator. Students shared their design concept and inspiration, research and insights gathered from Pensole Lewis students, and their design plan.

Meet the winners: Rodney Banks and Angel Buckens, “Birds of a Feather”

The winning team of designers was Rodney Banks and Angel Buckens—also known as “Birds of a Feather.” In the team’s concept statement, creating a sense of community is an element Banks and Buckens wanted to integrate into their design. Out of this goal came a unique idea that includes a time capsule of current and future students. Connected to graduation, the Pensole pencil installation will be adorned with pencils left by graduates.

“There’s not a proper place for a commencement ceremony [at Pensole Lewis] yet,” said Banks. “So we decided to include this into the student lounge where students are most comfortable...It’s just a powerful reminder that even when you leave Detroit your mark will still be left here at PLC.”

Both Banks and Buckens said they have grown a lot since the beginning of this Masterclass, such as developing thick skin when it comes to constructive criticism, as well as building self-confidence.

“I got to see myself in a whole new light,” said Buckens. “I was the quiet, timid Angel. I didn’t want to say a peep. And now I see myself in a new perspective.”

Banks and Buckens credited the MillerKnoll and PepsiCo design teams for helping them grow professionally and explore their crafts—particularly in an environment that allowed them to feel safe and supported. Banks said that from the very beginning, mentors from MillerKnoll and PepsiCo were very welcoming and knowledgeable.

“Even though I didn’t have a background in design, they never made me feel as though I was inferior in any way. They just guided me through the process and were very open to sharing their knowledge and experience.”

Buckens added that the class allowed her to know the professional side of design better, especially after being a student.

“I was just like, *wow*, this is where I want to be in the future. And they delivered everything strategically well.”

Banks is currently enrolled at Wayne State University, double majoring in supply chain and marketing. Last year he completed the inaugural Pensole Lewis Masterclass with Carhartt, focusing on apparel design.

Buckens currently works at the Kohler showroom in Birmingham, MI as a design consultant. She recently completed a master’s in Business of Art and Design from the Maryland Institute College of Art and has a bachelor’s degree in interior and industrial design.

https://news.millerknoll.com/MillerKnoll-and-PepsiCo-empower-the-next-generation-of-designers-to-design-an-innovative-student-lounge-with-in-kind-furniture-contributions-as-part-of-Masterclass-design-curriculum-at-Pensole-Lewis-College-of-Business-and-Design?utm_source=linkedin&utm_campaign=millerknoll_corporate_communications_evergreen&utm_medium=social_org&utm_content=100004011897808