CASE STUDY

AWI’s QCP Compliance Program Helps Elevate the University of Michigan School of Dentistry
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Overview

Beginning in 2018, the University of Michigan School of Dentistry began a major renovation and expansion with updates to the school’s state-of-the-art facilities. Conducted in several phases, the project included a 48,000 addition with new space for research labs, student meeting spaces, conference rooms, and offices. Additionally, the large pool of dental operatories where students hone their skills were completely redesigned to allow for more efficient patient care, and an improved ability to utilize modern dentistry equipment.

Custom millwork and casework were required throughout the facilities, and the university has very high expectations for the quality of work, as this is one of the top-ranked dental schools in the world. AWI was able to play a vital and helpful role for the woodworking manufacturer and installer through compliance programs for licensing and project certification, as well as virtual on-site inspections.

The Project

The University of Michigan School of Dentistry is one of the leading dental programs in the world. In order to allow the school to incorporate the latest developments in patient care, dental education, and research, the university approved a “Blue Renew” project that would update the facilities and add 48,000 square feet of new space.

This project has been a massive undertaking, conducted in several phases beginning in 2018 with the goal of completion in 2022. At the heart of the renovation are new entryways, common areas, dental operatories, and meeting rooms — all of which incorporate custom millwork and roughly 1,500 cabinets that were fabricated by HÄNDORN, Inc. in Grand Rapids, MI, and installed by National Specialty Contractors (NSC), headquartered in Ypsilanti, MI.
Partners in QCP Licensing:

Though only about 10% of the project was going to require QCP certification (due to the large amount of completely custom architectural woodwork), a QCP-licensed firm was the preferred choice for the client to ensure the best outcome.

Prior to this project, though HÄNDORN and NSC were AWI members, neither were QCP-licensed firms. However, both saw the possible advantages of earning a QCP license and decided to undertake the process at the same time. This dual commitment aided the process as both firms could share their experiences and offer advice to one another.

As the firms began the licensure process, they both appreciated the relationship they established with the AWI compliance team. “We were treated like a partner, not like a high school kid who got his hand slapped for not following the rules… it was about moving forward and continuing to be a professional industry,” said Seth Erlandson, president of HÄNDORN. Carl Paine, president of NSC, described it similarly, “They don’t demean the guys… they did an excellent job of making it a learning opportunity, not just a big negative or slap on the wrist.”

Both HÄNDORN and NSC were already operating according to very high standards and didn’t have to undergo drastic changes to earn their QCP licenses. Yet with those changes they’ve already seen the benefit of standing out in bids and gaining access to QCP-certified projects.

Inspections During a Pandemic:

As the project continued right through the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic, practices like on-site QCP inspections had to operate differently than usual. It might have looked funny to see an NSC employee walking through the site holding an iPad closely to different parts of the millwork, being directed by the voice on the screen on where to move next — but it worked!

The virtual inspections still allowed for the usual quality checks and in-the-moment feedback, allowing NSC to make any necessary adjustments and get approval in a timely manner. As Carl said, “It's a little different, but it’s been a good process.”

The Outcome On-Site:

Though construction still continues on some portions of the project, the 48,000 square foot addition opened in the spring of 2021 to rave reviews. As the first new building at the School of Dentistry in more than 50 years, the university wanted the space to feel modern yet welcoming, state-of-the-art yet grounded in tradition.

The work of HÄNDORN and NSC delivers on this goal beautifully. Through creative uses of laminates, veneers, plastics, and other materials, they were able to help create functional and aesthetically pleasing spaces throughout the school, and satisfy a client with demanding expectations.
From Being Hesitant to Being Fans:

Like many firms, both HÄNDORN and NSC have a team of experienced woodworkers who know their craft well and have worked for years without having outside certification of compliance to AWI Standards. This understandably led to hesitancy by both firms when undergoing the process for QCP licensing. Individuals worried it could just be more red tape, past standards didn’t always make sense to some of the woodworkers, and there’s the basic human desire not to conform to what seems like someone else’s standard. However, both firms understood the potential for advancement by being QCP licensed and decided to dive headlong into the licensure process.

“I saw the opportunity to formalize things and help my team continue to be more professional,” said Seth. The incorporation of AWI standards into daily practices has been able to enhance both the finished product and HÄNDORN's feeling of accomplishment by meeting the most stringent standards and being more integrated into the AWI community.

“In my opinion, becoming QCP licensed is kind of that final step into really embracing that community, those standards, and then formalizing into your process,” said Seth.

By adhering to AWI standards and practicing the QCP project certification process, it allowed HÄNDORN to switch away from their previous internal processes of using possibly subjective opinions to determine the acceptable quality of work. It has allowed everyone on the team to have a shared commitment to achieving the same goals. They still have the freedom to be creative, yet decisions are made quicker on the manufacturing side, leading to fewer mistakes, quicker processes, and better revenue. Plus, it makes training easier because, again, there’s a well-defined and shared standard and process everyone is working toward.

NSC has had a similar experience. They wanted to set themselves apart as a premier contractor adhering to high-quality standards. “Becoming QCP licensed made us as a company be held accountable…we changed across the board to meet or exceed AWI standards, not just a one-off project here and there,” said Carl. They also put in more stringent quality control checking after becoming QCP licensed, because, as Carl said, “we don’t want to be fighting for GCs; we want GCs fighting for us because we bring that much value to the table.”

Though QCP licensure began as a requirement for HÄNDORN and NSC to win the University of Michigan School of Dentistry project, they both appreciate what it means for the future of their businesses. The bid process has become easier because they can compare like to like, they’ve both seen benefits to the internal culture of their companies, and they have a seal of approval that opens up access to projects that specify QCP certification.
Are You Ready To Register Your Architectural Woodwork Project?

Learn everything you need to know about registering your woodworking project for QCP Certification.

Visit awiqcp.org/project-registration to get started.