

Tyler Architecture Studio Culture Policy

This document represents the outcome of a series of discussions held between students and faculty of the Temple University Architecture Department between 12th February 2007 and 7th December 2007. The process culminated in two studio review panel sessions with student and faculty representation – one on March 26th and one on April 9th – in order to finalize the document for adoption as department policy.

Introduction

The faculty and students of the Temple Architecture Department support the continuation of the design studio as a central focus of the architecture curriculum. It provides opportunity for peer learning, support and inspiration and brings enjoyment to students working together in a relatively unstructured environment.

However, the excessively long working hours sometimes demanded of students by both faculty and themselves, competitiveness, lack of time management skills, and an overvaluing of a single end product may result in over exhaustion, isolation from non-architecture students, constricted range of studies, an overwhelming sense that studying architecture demands sacrifice and dedication and a reduction in the capacity of students to learn.

In order to address these issues and build a healthier studio culture, the department proposes the following:

1 Core Objectives and Values

1.1 The Temple Architecture community is a diverse group of individuals (students, faculty, and administrators) with a wide range of experience and a common goal of excellence. It is essential that diversity of views, a move towards independent thinking, and individual goals be recognized.

1.2 The core objective of the design studio is that it be a learning environment in which a culture of mutual respect and collaboration between faculty and students and students and students prevails. Emphasis should be on what is being learned in the process, not only on a final product. It should aim at developing the relationship between thinking and making and give value to a range of processes, skills and products.

2 The Review

The final review can be a productive asset of the design sequence. However, if viewed as the singular culmination / highlight of a design studio and as an evaluation tool means that students tend to put all their energy into producing for this single event. This often results in work that is undeveloped throughout the semester and students who are usually over exhausted, unable to present themselves or their work adequately and unable to learn from reviewers' comments. By transforming the culture of the review, the culture of the design studio as a whole is likely to change:

2.1 Change the term 'jury' to the term 'review'. 'Jury' implies that students are on trial, 'review' that their semester's work is being re-viewed, looked at with fresh eyes.

2.2 Change the expectations of the final review so it is an exhibition of what the student has learned, including rough work, not only a final product.

2.3 Not everything can happen at the final review; its current function should be distributed across a number of events e.g. the final hand-in (for evaluation purposes) and final review could be staggered. If evaluation happens before a final review, the review changes its function to a feedback (learning) one. Alternatively, final reviews could happen before the end of a semester and a studio require a self-evaluation or resubmission of work thereafter.

2.4 Structure student – student reviews to encourage peer learning throughout the semester.

2.5 Structure reviews throughout the semester, as part of the feedback loop, not as the presentation of finished products. Project expectations should be accompanied by student self-evaluation and students should be encouraged to make their own notes at reviews.

2.6 Reviews can be structured to assist in feedback to students and can include a range of formats: student-student reviews, faculty-student desk crits, group pin-up and group discussion, formal reviews, etc.

2.7 Students need to be assisted in learning what the nature of criticism is, how to learn from it, and how to give constructive criticism; that it is not just about a critic liking or not liking the work, but more about what an outside eye sees in it and how this can become part of their design process.

2.8 The ‘culture of the critic’ is very often a negative one. An experience of such a critic is inevitable. Students should be assisted in interpreting negative criticism such that it is part of the learning process.

3 Pacing

3.1 There is a great deal of lost time across the semester, given that students tend to only work towards the end and towards the goal of the final review. Students tend not to value work completed before time, and there tend to be a value given to the heroism of the sleepless night.

3.2 Pace a studio, building requirements successively, ensuring that students progress from ideas to making, in structured stages. Design should be understood as more than the creative idea, and ideas developed into the material realm.

3.3 Studio work can be cumulative. Faculty-student discussions can include discussions of earlier works or phases to provide insight of the process.

3.4 Value should be given to a range of strengths, encouraging a range of students to be valued, develop and mature. Pacing a studio, requiring different kinds of products at different stages will assist in this.

3.5 Studios should not demand product relentlessly, but make time for thinking, development of ideas and critical reflection as well as production.

3.6 Pacing should assist students with essential time management skills.

4 Studio grading

4.1 Grades should be distributed across the semester. Coordination of the grading process needs to occur across studio sections in any given year but grading system should be derived from the structure of the studio.

4.2 A studio course goal should be to avoid the perplexity associated with grading and help students recognize the value and goals of a design education.

4.3 Temple Architecture students value their cultures of competition and sharing, but recognize the difference between comparison of grades and individual assessment. Student self-assessment should be encouraged so that students can learn to see their strengths and lesser strengths.

4.4 Studio grading should include rubrics or other devices that allow measured feedback including comments. The objectives of this should be transparency in the goals of the studio and clarity and articulation on the part of studio instructors.

5 General

5.1 Mechanisms to facilitate interaction between years should be developed. These include all school design charettes, mentoring of junior students by senior students, senior students as reviewers of student work in junior years.

5.2 The co-ordination of required course hand-ins and reviews across the semester should be undertaken to ensure that these are staggered. Dates of reviews for all years should also be coordinated to enable students to attend each other's juries and to ease plotter room pressures.

5.3 As a community we value our disciplinary dialog. For students, there is the excitement and seriousness of the development of ideas within the community of architecture students.

However it is important to recognize how and when to balance this: for example, classes outside of architecture are as important as those within as is involvement in other university activities. Schedules of department courses do not coincide with other university activities and it is important to recognize and value of participation of architecture students in other student activities.

5.4 As the practice of architecture changes, it is important to recognize shifts in the nature of subject matter of a studio. Most importantly, it is important to recognize the impact of other course work and the potential for integration of related subject matter in the design studio. It is important to also recognize the role of collaborations between disciplines and within the design studio as part of the process of learning.

6 Over tiredness

6.1 Students need to be alerted to the dangers of over tiredness. Students should alert each other to situations when they should not drive without being a danger to their own lives and those of others. They should not drive when sleep deprived.

7 Documentation

7.1 This policy should be given to all students on admission as part of their student handbook and a copy should be included on the program website.

7.2 This policy should be given to all studio instructors as guidelines for how to run a studio.

7.3 All studio syllabi should contain the 'Core Objectives and Values' statement above.

7.4 Studio culture discussion notes should be archived and kept in the department files.

8 Implementation

8.1 Studio coordinators are charged with starting each academic year by discussing studio culture issues that pertain to the particular year and studio with their faculty. Discussions of relevant issues should be encouraged through the semester.

8.2 The role of individual faculty members as role models should be considered. Faculty are not always aware of studio habits/practices and comments that encourage isolation and over-production.

8.3 Faculty assignments and studio coordination should recognize the importance of faculty-faculty mentoring.

8.4 Course syllabi should factor in student peer learning activities such as 1) student pre-review of work to anticipate critique issues, 2) written student-student critique and 3) self-assessment of critical comments in formal review sessions focusing on what is said about work, its drawbacks and potential.

9 Assessment

9.1 Dialog between students, between faculty, and between students and faculty are an important component to developing and measuring studio culture. Productive dialog (in addition to griping) should be encouraged.

9.2 A studio culture committee of students and faculty should be formed. The charge of the committee is to develop a yearly forum as follows: 1) student issues will be brought up through AIAS; 2) after a set date, the committee will meet to discuss and organize the issues, a focused theme for discussion will be announced (such as what does a Temple Architecture graduate look like); 3) a date for a discussion forum with a facilitator, a panel of students and faculty, and feedback from the audience will be set; 4) feedback will be noted, summarized, and acted on accordingly.

9.3 Particular questions about studio culture should be developed by AIAS and faculty to be included as part of assessment on the CATE forms.

9.4 The studio culture document should be revisited and updated biannually.

10 Statement on Diversity *(Added to original document, May 2010)*

10.1 In the spring of 2010 the department sponsored a panel session to address issues that center on diversity in the education of architecture students. Planning was undertaken by a group of students and faculty and the panel session entitled “The Future of Us” consisted of Temple Architecture faculty, students, and alumni. The session was well attended by students, faculty, alumni, and other members of Philadelphia’s professional community. Discussion topics included career paths in architecture, identity and mentoring, and diverse learning. Feedback from the students about the session was very positive and resulted in a second session to craft a definition of diversity which reads as follows:

Temple University is a large public urban university with a population of students, faculty and staff considered diverse by a number of standards. The Architecture Department is reflective of the University. Diversity is found in terms of measurable identifiers such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and socioeconomics.

But these measures only begin to explain who we are. Other identifiers such as age, experience, range of nationalities and cultures add to the richness of the department. As such, we are committed to cultivating an environment that celebrates our differences and recognizes the importance of our collective identities in the creation of a rigorous academic environment.

In the Architecture Department we endeavor to accommodate, respect and broaden a person’s individual and collective identity a) by encouraging participation in University wide curricular extra-curricular activities b) through a department curriculum that exposes learners architectural dispositions and values and c) by supporting different learning styles. This is important to the future of the architectural community and serves to strengthen the profession in society.