



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS

STUDIO CULTURE: STORIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

A Product of the 2015-2016 AIAS Advocacy Advisory Group

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WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Studio Culture is a topic that has been studied by the AIAS for over a decade now. Over the years we have attempted to define it, redesign what we thought it was, write guidelines for preparing studio culture policies, and spread awareness about all the negative things that have led to a need for these policies. After all of these efforts, it has come time to take a new approach, a celebratory one. It is time to celebrate how studio culture has defined itself among students, faculty, and professionals alike, all across the country and the globe. It's time to talk about what makes it unique, just slightly different in the mind of every individual who experiences it, why they love it, and how it helps them. Studio culture is an ever changing presence in architectural education and the profession, and it is important to talk about how greatly it impacts our lives, not only in the classroom or the office, but on a day-to-day basis.

“...WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE, JUST SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT IN THE MIND OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL WHO EXPERIENCES IT...”

While studio culture encompasses a wide breadth of subtopics, the advisory group would like to share with the public and the architecture community, a sample of some of the interesting responses we've gotten from interview questions, surveys, and discussions that we held with students, alumni, professors, and professionals.

Throughout the year, each member of the committee conducted interviews with people from schools, offices, or their local communities. We encouraged each other to think outside the box, talk openly about positive and negative elements of the profession, and report information back to the group.

In reviewing the responses we've collected, we have narrowed them down to a select group of questions and discussion topics that displayed great enthusiasm about our research on studio culture and our desire to share our findings. We hope that reading through this document will give you insight into our work and inspire you to start discussing studio culture in your architecture or design circle.

*“STUDIO CULTURE CAPTIVATES EVERYONE –
IT EXPANDS BEYOND THE REALM OF
ARCHITECTURE AND EMBRACES THE
PUBLIC WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS”*

WHAT IS STUDIO CULTURE?

“The collective set of ideas and actions by a group of people, typically students or coworkers, that are influenced by their education, goals, peers, current events, and communities”

-Marissa Gray
Drexel University



“Studio culture can only evolve when people become aware and motivated to improve the current situation.”

-Rashidat Momoh
Mississippi State University



“As we think about trying to figure out ways to spark these conversations between students, faculty and professionals, we should consider the positive intentions behind studio culture so that all parties can share ideas to move forward and ensure a good learning environment and later a fruitful and enjoyable career.”

-Joel Jassu
University of Memphis



“To me, studio culture is the set of ideas and actions for students, faculty, and staff to go by, in order to work symbiotically toward a common goal and an educational atmosphere.”

-Michael Kemner
University of Hartford



STORIES

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE A SERIES OF RESPONSES TO VARIOUS QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS ABOUT STUDIO CULTURE, AS WELL AS RELATED SURVEY RESULTS FROM AIAS FORUM 2015.

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH YOUR SCHOOL'S STUDIO CULTURE DOCUMENT/POLICY?

-  Not aware of its existence
-  Know of it, but don't have access to it
-  Know of it, but have not read it
-  Know of it, and have read it



“MANY STUDENTS ARE UNAWARE OF THEIR SCHOOL’S STUDIO CULTURE POLICY, BUT THOSE WHO ARE AWARE TEND TO ENSURE FURTHER COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND FACULTY REGARDING STUDIO CULTURE MATTERS MOVING FORWARD”

-MARISSA GRAY
DREXEL UNIVERSITY

HOW INTEGRATED IS YOUR SCHOOL'S FACULTY WITH YOUR STUDIO CULTURE?

-  Nothing beyond class time education
-  Minimal communication outside of class
-  Consistent communication outside of class
-  A true part of the studio



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WORK IN THE ‘STUDIO’?

“Architecture students don’t attend the traditional twice weekly class with desks and a blackboard – the studio becomes the heart of its unique curriculum as a place for students to collaborate, challenge each other’s ideas, and learn from practicing professionals who serve as faculty.”

-Holly Henderix
Looney Ricks Kiss

“My favorite part about studio is it teaches you to listen to others, whether a professor, classmates, community, or world culture, and respond in creative ways to a variety of problems.”

-Jennie Himler
Drexel University / BRR Architecture

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR STUDIO?



-  My classmates in my design classes
-  People in the same design year as me
-  People sharing my same studio space
-  Everyone in my architecture program

“Working in the studio represents a specific intent to inspire or invite creativity and productivity. Though much of the same work can/may be accomplished in a non-studio setting, the choice to create/join a studio, or simply the act of traveling to a ‘studio’ setting to accomplish the tasks, evidences a desire for the space, energy, and openness that the studio culture suggests.”

-Marie Ruisard
Drexel University / Voith & Mactavish Architects

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WOULDN'T CHANGE ABOUT THE RIGOR OF AN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION?

"I wouldn't change the iterative process. It is so important to work on the same problem over and over, an architecture project is never actually done. It is truly never finished. The rigor of working on a problem from many different sides, as time consuming as it is, is what should not change about architecture. Work will always be there since projects are never over, that just doesn't mean you stop working on it."

-Jenna Wandishin
Temple University Alumni

"The friends you make in architecture are unlike any that you will ever make, you go through the same problems with 30 other people, and it is amazing what you can accomplish."

-Student
Drexel University

"It is demanding, but I would not have it any other way. The continuous feedback and scheduled critics, push you to be the best that you can be. Professors and peers challenge you to want more from yourself as a designer and thinker."

-Taylor Knoche
University of Pennsylvania Alumni

"I still believe that the registration exam should not be taken until after three years of practice experience. There needs to be a level of maturity, knowledge and practical experience that must be attained before an individual can be expected to consistently serve the public as an architect."

-Barbara A. Field, FAIA
Georgia Tech Alumni

WHAT MAKES YOUR STUDIO AN INCUBATOR FOR GOOD DESIGN?

“A curriculum in architecture is very unique because of projects like these – architecture students don’t attend the traditional twice weekly class with desks and a blackboard – the studio becomes the heart of its unique curriculum as a place for students to collaborate, challenge each other’s ideas, and learn from practicing professionals who serve as faculty.”

-Holly Henderix
Looney Ricks Kiss

“Urban studio culture is looking outward. Students are constantly looking around the city sketching buildings. Education takes root in precedent and architectural history.

Studio Culture in Costa Rica was more about nature, and by being surrounded by nature, students become more sensitive to the natural versus built environment.”

-Esteban Beita, Professor
CUNY City Tech & NYIT Manhat-

“Lots of people dedicated to the same thing at the same time in the same place. I think when positive conversations happen about work and what work means, studio culture is at its best. I think it’s at its worst when negativity or conflict arise due to workload or clashing personalities.”

-Jacob Lotkowski
Drexel University

HOW CAN WE BETTER EDUCATE THOSE OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL ABOUT OUR “STUDIO CULTURE”?

“I think we need a good, well written TV comedy/drama about what we do and how we do it.”

-Barbara A. Field, FAIA
Georgia Tech Alumni

“Invite others in, Greater contribution/involvement in university activities”

-Student
University of Texas at Arlington

“Engage in your community, work with a local design collaborative or non-profit to gain exposure with people outside of the field.”

-Marissa Gray
Drexel University

“Video(tape) it! Document it and show it somehow in a formal way for the school.”

-Student
University of Texas at Arlington

“Visibility is key. The profession of architecture is no longer a collection of jealously guarded secrets, but rather an open, collaborative process. Firms/studios need to engage with the public, with their clients, and with each other in a more transparent and flexible fashion. What we do is a beautiful art, but if no one can see it, no one will appreciate nor understand it.”

Marie Ruisard
Drexel University / Voith & Mactavish Architects

IS THE CURRENT LEVEL OF INTENSITY FOR ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION NECESSARY?

“I think it is. Architecture is an intense profession, and I feel like it would be doing the world a disservice by making architecture school less intense.”

-Emily Turner
Mississippi State University

“I think our level of intensity is good to have but I also think it can be way more stressful on the students than it should be at times. So no I do not think it is necessary at all times.”

-Garrett Yelverton
Mississippi State University

“I'm not sure. I think it sometimes hinders creativity but on the other hand it's hard for me to see an appropriate alternative to the fast paced environment the architecture school promotes.”

-Asher Paxton
Mississippi State University

“Yes. The things that we, as architects, are asked to do require an incredible amount of thought, detail, and contemplation. This field is intensive, so the education of those entering the field need to be properly trained and ready.”

-Student
Mississippi State University

WHAT ARE SOME VITAL ELEMENTS OF FIRM CULTURE? HOW ARE THEY DEVELOPED?

“Firm culture is a lot like studio culture in that we continue to utilize our firm studio as a place to collaborate as design teams and no one works alone; you have to learn to work efficiently with a lot of different types of people with different skill sets.”

-Holly Henderix
Looney Ricks Kiss

“Studio culture found in school is vital to the personal development of every student. The critical thinking and analytical skills learned through daily conversations in studio transfers directly to their participation in the professional workplace. Having the confidence to ask questions and the ability to approach problems like a designer can only be learned by growing within a studio culture.”

-Julianne Peters
Philadelphia University Alumni / Hellyer Lewis, Inc.

“Firm culture is developed primarily by the principles/partners of a particular firm, and employees tend to take cues from those creative directors. What becomes most important is the shared responsibility and the sharing of knowledge that results from that. An unwillingness to offer help or advice on an issue represents a disinterest in the success of the firm as an entity. There can be no individuals in a firm, for we are all working for the success of the studio.”

-Marie Ruisard
Drexel University / Voith & Mactavish Architects`



HOW HAVE THE ACADEMIC STUDIO AND THE OFFICE STUDIO TIED TOGETHER IN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

“One of the key things that tied together academics, studio culture, and professionalism for me at the University of Memphis was the focus that the Department places on engaged scholarship opportunities. Engaged scholarship projects are those that present students with a real world design problem and an opportunity to immerse themselves in in a local community partnership to propose solutions.”

-Holly Henderix
Looney Ricks Kiss

“As a B.Arch candidate at Drexel University, I am able to experience a seamless transition from working in a studio environment for class to working in my firm’s open office studio. The means and methods of the work, and most certainly the communication, changed, but the idea that I am always part of a team working towards the same goal is always there. This sense of community is just one reason why I am ecstatic to be developing my career in architecture.”

-Marguerite Hollander
Drexel University / MGA Partners

“Personally, I believe the value in experiencing both a studio culture and a firm culture results in not only benefiting from both environments, but also in realizing the setbacks and shortcomings of each. The ability to identify specific issues which still exist in both architectural academia and the architectural profession gives young architects the opportunity to draw constructive conclusions on the field as a whole and move forward with the intent of improving it.”

Marie Ruisard
Drexel University / Voith & Mactavish Architects

WHAT ADVANCEMENTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN THE ARCHITECTURE COMMUNITY (EDUCATION OR PROFESSION) IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

“Within the education sphere, diverse opportunities such as co-ops, certificate programs, and dual degree programs, are more and more important to evolve and stay relevant in an ever changing working and living world. We live in a world, where technology and advancement is happening at every second. Architecture needs to invest in the next generation of designers and architects to leverage the power of design and the impacts that architecture can bring to the built environment..”

-Taylor Knoche
University of Pennsylvania Alumni

“BETTER PAY, AND A MORE CONCRETE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TECHNICAL SKILLS LEARNED IN SCHOOL TRANSLATED TO THE WORK PLACE”

-STUDENT
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

“To make the study of architecture more accessible and less expensive. I think that an architectural education can produce a person with extraordinary insight, equipped with the tools to initiate change not only in the physical environment but through political action or service in our core cultural and governmental institutions.”

-Simon Tickell
Drexel University Professor

HOW HAS YOUR ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION BENEFITED OR IMPROVED YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE?

“Of course it has. Perhaps, most important to me, has been problem solving skills and understanding of how to see all sides of a situation. At the time I went to Georgia Tech I got a pretty traditional architectural education, a “Renaissance Man” approach. I am well grounded in the arts, history, mathematics, physics, structures, materials, methods, as well as engineering and design.”

-Barbara A. Field, FAIA
Georgia Tech Alumni

“THE EDUCATION HAS MADE ME MORE CONFIDENT, EXTROVERTED, AND CURIOUS.”

-IAN GROHSGAL
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

“TIME MANAGEMENT, CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS, WORK ETHIC.”

-JACOB LOTKOWSKI
DREXEL UNIVERSITY

“It has made me aware of pervasive issues in the urban environment that I was ignorant towards before, so in a way my architectural education has made me more receptive towards change. I have also learned to stand up for my designs/ question/ evaluate why one option is better than another.”

-Meghan Higgins
Temple University Alumni

WHAT MAKES UP THE IDEAL WORKING, HEALTHY STUDIO ENVIRONMENT?

“Windows. Provide dedicated space while maintaining a collaborative nature. Windows. Provide breakout space and space to relax. Windows. Provide comfortable temperatures. Windows. Oh, and windows.”

-Jillian Tomaselli
University of Hartford

“SUN SHINE AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN BOTH GRADE LEVELS AND MAJORS.”

-RON WASSMER
UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

“Studio culture is paramount in the formative years of all who experience it. In any profession in which the studio is regarded as the creative realm, how you learn to interact with classmates and co-workers in a studio setting can make or break the rest of your education and/or your career.”

-Marie Ruisard
Drexel University / Voith & Mactavish Architects

“I think a healthy studio environment requires many conditions but the two most important things are communication and transparency. In a positive environment both students and teachers need to be comfortable and clear when expressing their ideas. When an environment has both there is less confusion and a stronger form of collaboration can be achieved between students and between the student and professor.”

-Trevor Li
Drexel University / OSK Design Partners

HAS YOUR WORKLOAD CAUSED YOU TO CONSIDER LEAVING YOUR ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM?

“At this point, I’m in too deep. But the workload, in my opinion, is an unrealistic reflection of the profession. It’s discouraging at times.”

-Nicholas Fucci
University of Hartford

“I’ve definitely considered it. There are times when it becomes too overwhelming, especially when finding a balance between multiple classes that require more time than available in one day. I just keep reminding myself to push through.”

-Michael Kemner
University of Hartford

“Absolutely. In having a few years of firm experience, I’ve noticed an unparalleled difference in my level of stress and anxiety. ”

-Ron Wassmer
University of Hartford

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND ON NON-ARCHITECTURE RELATED HOBBIES IN A WEEK?



- I don't have any non-architecture hobbies 
- < 5 hours/week 
- 5-10 hours/week 
- >10 hours/week or at least some every day 

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED A CONFLICT BETWEEN A PROFESSOR IN STUDIO? HOW WAS IT HANDLED?

“Naturally, there is going to be conflict with a studio professor, especially when there are errors in communication. One professor in particular, instead of explaining himself, would throw tantrums and tell our graduate studio class that we should consider a change in career, because we would never make it. As a studio class, we felt sabotaged and abandoned by our professor. Luckily, the Studio Culture policy that our school has in place, specifically sets expectations for student-to-faculty and faculty-to-student behavior. In bringing our concerns and qualms to the correct people, they reviewed the conduct on the part of the professor. The Department of Architecture deemed his behavior unacceptable in an academic setting, and told him not to return as a professor. We all felt that it was handled appropriately, and urged the administration to keep these aspects of the Studio Culture Policy in place in any future reviews and revisions.”

-Michael Kemner
University of Hartford

“Naturally. But with the proper protocols and procedures in place, it was handled as it should have been. It’s reassuring that my school takes its Studio Culture Policy seriously, and that it is posted throughout the various studios.”

-Nicholas Fucci
University of Hartford



WHILE WORKING TO MEET DEADLINES, ARE YOU MAINTAINING HEALTHY EATING HABITS? (IE: NO FAST FOOD, ETC)

“I try, then it becomes impossible. The idea of taking time away from studio to go grocery shopping shouldn’t be stressful, but it is.”

-Jillian Tomaselli
University of Hartford

“Not really. Considering I commute an hour, one way, to school, it’s difficult to find time to eat anyway, let alone find healthy food on-the-go.”

-Laura Bedus
University of Hartford

“Absolutely not. I don’t even know what a healthy eating habit is.”

-Nicholas Fucci
University of Hartford

“For someone who prides himself on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, it is particularly difficult to stick to this, especially as projects pick up and the final deadline approaches. My healthy eating goes out the window to put my focus on my studio project.”

-Michael Kemner
University of Hartford

WHAT MAKES STUDIO CULTURE EVERLASTING IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE IT?

“Studio culture is paramount in the formative years of all who experience it. In any profession in which the studio is regarded as the creative realm, how you learn to interact with classmates and co-workers in a studio setting can make or break the rest of your education and/or your career.”

-Marie Ruisard
Drexel University / Voith & Mactavish Architects

“I would say that you’re forced to become family with everyone that you’re around and you choose to be with them as a community through thick and thin regardless of whether you want it or not. And that is exactly what you do with family.”

-Serena Abouchar
University of Oregon

“Studio culture becomes embedded into your everyday lifestyle, it changes the way you live. After experiencing long hours, insane interior climates, rigorous professors, and a lot of fun times with the same group of people, you get used to that family-collaborative feeling. Many of the values and work habits you develop during that period are ones you live by for the rest of your life ”

-Marissa Gray
Drexel University / Hellyer Lewis, Inc.

“TALKING TO STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN A GREAT EXPERIENCE, IT GIVES A WHOLE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE CURRENT STATE OF ARCHITECTURE AND WHERE IT CAN GO FROM HERE”

Over the course of a year, the advisory group spoke to a myriad of students and professionals who gave studio culture a brighter voice. Many students felt that their schools had a very positive and thriving culture, that would continue to flourish in the absence of a studio culture policy. Preparedness for professional practice and ability to converse with faculty outside of a studio environment were among the top aspects that students felt their culture gave them. Professionals that we spoke with were very impressed with the level of knowledge and talent that recent graduates were entering the workplace with, and how seamlessly they were integrating into the office culture.

Overall, studio culture is in a great spot, and it will only get better from here. We want to encourage everyone to talk with their classmates, professors, and bosses to continue the trend in an upward motion.

“STUDIO CULTURE HOLDS THE ARCHITECTURE WORLD TOGETHER, IT GIVES EVERYONE INVOLVED A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHER’S FUNDAMENTAL BEING.”

THANK YOU

A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OF THE STUDENTS, FACULTY, PROFESSORS, PROFESSIONALS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS, AND FRIENDS WHO HELPED US PUT THIS TOGETHER. WE WISH YOU THE BEST IN FURTHER IMPROVING AND ADVOCATING FOR YOUR STUDIO CULTURE.



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A Product of the 2015-2016 AIAS Advocacy Advisory Group

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