American Institute of Architecture Students

Faculty & Student

Studio Culture Survey Results
The American Institute of Architecture Students released two surveys in the Fall of 2019; both were aimed at identifying root issues of and feelings behind Studio Culture among the two groups of people who deal with it the most and who handle it together: students and faculty. These results were tallied up in early 2020 and have been graphed within this document; there were 55 student survey respondents and 32 faculty survey respondents. They serve as the basis for the Learning and Teaching Culture Project and the work that the team will complete this year.

The primary intent of this project is to develop and distribute a Model Learning & Teaching Culture Policy Document that improves the lifestyles of students and teachers who experience the sometimes harsh but almost always rewarding environment of architecture school. The name change takes the emphasis off of exclusively Studio and can apply to all classes within an architecture school. It also documents a progression towards asking what students and faculty can do for each other to make the environment a positive one, as opposed to a traditional list of “demands” or conditions that don’t place or misplace responsibility. This interdisciplinary and inter-collateral team was brought together in order to mitigate bias and create something that can be endorsed or supported by the allied organizations that make up our profession.
Survey Demographics:

Over 70% of the faculty respondents teach at least one studio class. Other members of faculty that answered help make the survey results a good mix among faculty and administrators.

77% of students surveyed are above year 2, which lends credibility to the survey results. The spread of students across different year levels is almost ideal.
Existing Culture Awareness:

QS2: Do you know what a Studio Culture Policy is, and do you know where to find your school’s?

- Yes: 58.2%
- I know it is, I don’t know where to find it: 34.5%
- No: 7.3%

92.7% of students know what a Studio Culture Policy is.
This is great news, and means that efforts of this Project Team should highlight accessibility to and awareness of Learning & Teaching Culture Policies.

QS3: Is Studio Culture formally discussed at your school? (i.e. a Town Hall or presentation of the Policy)

- Yes, regularly: 5.0%
- Every once in a while: 60.0%
- Never: 35.0%

Almost every student surveyed attends a school were Studio Culture is not formally discussed.
This Project Team should also emphasize the importance of discussing Studio Culture regularly - not just prior to an accreditation visit.

QF3: Does your school have and abide by a Studio Culture Policy?

- Not Sure: 3.1%
- No, we do not have one: 12.5%
- Yes we have one, but we don’t mention it often: 46.9%
- Yes we have one, and we refer to it frequently: 37.5%

Over 80% of faculty are aware of their school’s Studio Culture Policies, but almost 50% admit that the policy is not referenced frequently.
Only 50% of students feel that their existing Studio Culture outlines a positive lifestyle.

A Model Learning & Teaching Culture Document portrays an ambitiously healthy and positive culture such that the environment and its inhabitants are always striving to reach it.

On the other hand, 71.9% of faculty feel that their existing Studio Culture outlines a positive lifestyle. This indicates a slight disconnect in terms of what is considered “positive”, and what expectations are.

62.5% of faculty feel that the reality of academic life matches what is outlined in the Studio Culture Policy. Supplementary Guides for students and faculty that discuss best practices for “walking the walk” should help this percentage increase for the better.
Struggles:

QF6: What are the top three issues your students struggle with most in their architectural education?

QF7: What are the top three issues you struggle with most while teaching?
Topics to Include:

QS5: If you do have a Studio Culture Policy at your school, what is the most important topic it covers?

physical and mental health

time management/amount of work

physical studio facilities

Teacher :: student relationships

Respect & other values

Positive student :: faculty relationship

Freedom of expression

Mental & physical health

Communal collaboration

Physical resources

QS6: An ideal Learning & Teaching Culture Policy would

protect

Prevent

Workload > life

Unrealistic pressure

Physical resource damage

Poor mental health

Unhealthy habits

Destructive competition

Negative student :: faculty relationship
Enforcing Studio Culture:

QS7: How do you think Studio Culture Policies can be successfully enforced?

- On a national level (by the collaterals) 9.3%
- They can’t, they should be aspirational and discussed frequently 9.3%
- All of the above 5.6%
- By a school committee made up of students 11.1%
- By school administration 13.0%
- By a school committee made up of students and faculty 51.9%

More than half of survey respondents agree that **a school committee made up of students and faculty** is the best way to enforce and monitor Studio Culture. Evaluating the feasibility of the Model Document and how it is referenced and revisited will be a big part of our work.
Current Student Workload:

QS8: Roughly how many hours a week do you dedicate to studio work?

- 55+ hours: 18.4%
- 40-55 hours: 28.6%
- 25-40 hours: 38.8%
- 10-25 hours: 14.3%
- 0 hours: 18.6%

Over 46% of students spend over 40 hours a week on studio work. This compares interestingly with our survey from 2015, in which students indicated that, on average, they spent 32 hours a week in studio.

QS9: Estimate how many times a week you skip or forget meals due to studio work:

- 7+ times: 16.3%
- 3-7 times: 18.6%
- 1-3 times: 40.5%
- 0 times: 18.6%

81% of students miss meals due to studio work. This is slightly more than our 2015 survey which indicated that 75% of students miss meals due to studio work.
Setting Expectations:

QF8: Please list 3-5 behaviors you expect of your students that help make class a positive and productive environment:

- Be timely and engaged
- Eager to learn
- Encouragement of others
- Professional attitude/behavior
- Respect

- Encourage and engage
- Open-minded
- Positive attitude
- Organization
- Professionalism

#timeliness
- Willingness to speak during discussions
- Exchange of ideas
- Collaborative
- Collegiality
- Professionalism

#prepared
- Commitment
- Consistent progress in projects
- Curiosity
- Curiosity
- Intelligence

#collaborative
- Be open-minded and respond to others
- Be kind
- Be respectful
- Be genuine
- Be human

#curious
- Be prepared
- Preparation
- Prepared
- Prepared
- Prepared

#engaged
- Sharing
- Sharing
- Clear directions
- Constructively critical
- Open-minded and responsive

#accessible
- Transparency
- Trust
- Care
- Availability
- Open
collegiality
- Empathy
- Encouraging
- Encouraging participation
- Fair, transparent, and equitable assessment
- Fairness
- Fairness

#knowledgeable
- Professional knowledge
- Professional knowledge
- Professional knowledge
- Professional knowledge
- Professional knowledge

QF9: Please list 3-5 behaviors your students can expect of you to help make class a positive and productive environment:

- Open-minded
- Positive attitude
- Organization
- Professionalism
- Professionalism

- Be organized
- Be transparent
- Be kind
- Be respectful
- Be generous

#other
- Take risks
- Take ownership of their education and learning
- Understand the reading material
- Use the library, at most institutions it is an underutilized resource
- Be human

#attentive
- Be open to students suggestions and comments of how to make the class work better for their needs
- Open-minded
- Professionalism
- Professionalism
- Professionalism

#knowledgeable
- Be kind
- Compassion
- Be empathetic
- Encouraging
- Encouraging participation
- Fair, transparent, and equitable assessment
- Fairness
- Fairness
- Flexibility
- Give clear feedback on course performance
QS10: What is one thing you wish faculty knew about your experience attending architecture school?

How hard we push for our projects to reach a certain level without any help sometimes. My other classes have work as well, and it is difficult to complete everything fully for studio and non-studio courses. While studio is an important class, there are other aspects of an architecture students life including other classes, work, and extracurriculars. That students have other classes outside of studio that also take up a significant amount of time. That I was able to accomplish all of my work and excel in studio and other courses because I told myself to go to sleep each night, try to eat healthy, and get moderate exercise while in school. I had straight A's in studio during my undergrad and was still able to take care of myself. When I wasn't able to always get enough sleep, exercise, or eat well, I could see the negative impacts on my mental health and how that made me feel less able to participate in all classes and coursework. Materials and prints add up quickly. Students shouldn't be spending $500+ on a single project let alone a semester. A lot of students have to balance studio work with work for other classes/minors and jobs off campus. Life is about more than just architecture! It’s important to be involved in the community. How truly stressful it is not only on me but my loved ones. Just because a school is relatively affordable compared to other schools doesn’t mean students don’t have to work in order to afford it. Technical courses are not inferior to design studio. We have other classes and jobs. Studio is NOT the most important thing going on. And is NOT acceptable to skip other classes to afford it. We celebrate differences. We have other classes that also require work so not all time can be committed to just studio work.

We differ from students who are not in architecture. It is not and should not be the same way it was when they were in school. Just because faculty suffered when they were in school does not mean that students should put all other things that run their health. I wish they knew that school today is not the same as it was in their time. I wish they would adapt to today’s culture and shift their expectations to today’s relevant matters. I value my mental health more than my studio grade. Architecture faculty are not held accountable for their apathy and perpetuation of toxic studio culture and overworking. Engineer discrimination! I work two jobs to afford school. I wish you would understand that working isn’t a choice for me, and I can’t just quit because they tell me to focus more on studio. Poor habits seen as standard or expected. Overextending guilt about taking breaks from studio, that I feel guilty not using every waking minute to work on studio, even when I cannot think straight and need to take a break. Anxiety about scheduling breaks, spending time with friends, extracurriculars, etc. I loved my experience. I don’t think I had a situation where I needed to use or refer to it. The workload that all the other classes expect. Sleep and mental health. A professor shouldn’t recommend his/her students to skip lunch/dinner time, sleep less and care about other class work less for focusing more on studio especially when half the student body has no idea about that. Students health story: aaron tosic. Students health story: (advising an anorexic student to skip lunch/dinner time, sleep less and care about other class work less for focusing more on studio especially when half the student body has no idea about that). Architecture is constantly evolving. The way it is taught should evolve accordingly.

Most of our faculty pretend we don’t have day jobs and set unrealistic time constraints. It’s harder than they think. Students need to work during school to afford classes. We need communication. While I love the workload and late nights, there are points where I need to take time for myself to stay sane, so there might be a day when I do not perform as well, but that does not mean I am any less of a student than my surrounding peers. The level of sacrifice their teaching policies have inflicted. The undue stress they cause by indirectly forcing unhealthy work flows. They know all of our unhealthy habits of all nights. Assurance would be very helpful. Positive words not necessarily a critique. The stress and overwhelming responsibilities sometimes. Many people of our age group are still trying to learn who they are as a person, so helping to lead them into a positive direction would help improve students mental health and future within the field of architecture. I still have a lot of guilt. Pushing students beyond their physical and mental limits doesn’t make them stronger. It alters their outlook on school and the practice in a negative fashion. The biggest benefit of our program is the large ouch for interdisciplinary learning and exposure to not only design based projects but also a strong passion for Building Sciences which I think is the biggest upside to our department. We volunteer heavy with the downtown and towns in our area. I wish that my faculty would essentially just advocate for students and their needs more in general. I feel that there is a thick barrier of separation between students and faculty that should be more transparent. I wish they told us in advance what we need to complete. Work is just thrown at architecture students with no warning, so we often have to cancel plans. It is very hard to plan out my weeks. As a commuter, sleep is super important. There are many dangers when it comes to sleep deprivation and commuting. How valuable it has been when studio professors spend class time after reviews to chat with us individually and discuss the successes/failures of my project then during the critiques. A good human check-in!

The enormous amount of effort and dedication put into work. That is the only way you can sacrifice something (sleep, social life, club commitments, other classes, etc). It is honestly not possible to do it all, which I feel like some faculty members believe is possible (and react with disbelief when we say so.) studio is not our entire lives. The ebbs and flows of workloads of other classes. We have other classes that also require work so not all time can be committed to just studio work. I have other commitments. It can be overwhelming.

Students need time to dedicate to doing not studio related things. Having time for this ultimately makes more well rounded students. I wish they told us in advance what we need to complete. Work is just thrown at architecture students with no warning, so we often have to cancel plans. It is very hard to plan out my weeks. A lot of stress. I feel that my mental health is more important. There are many dangers when it comes to sleep deprivation and commuting. How valuable it has been when studio professors spend class time after reviews to chat with us individually and discuss the successes/failures of my project then during the critiques. A good human check-in!

Lack of community acceptance, importance of equity vs equality. I wished I could get critical feedback and mentoring.

QF10: What is one thing you wish students knew about your experience teaching architecture school?

Passionate. That teaching is only about 30% of what we’re expected to do for the university, we have research and service requirements that occupy 70% of our time. Studio requires that we adapt our teaching styles to the learning style of each student, which is very demanding. Student experiences and expectations are not cookie-cutter. While I may seem that students are not treated equally, they are treated fairly (that is hard for students to understand). my passion for the discipline. That we definitely don’t do it for the money. Dedication and time is taken.

That it can always be better. As a career advisor, I encourage students to research practice. I do my best to share my knowledge to benefit students in their pursuits.

How much I enjoy the interaction with students and how much that interaction keeps me ”young” and intellectually stimulated. It is hard work.

It’s not in their best interest for me to “tell them what to do” I see in my students only possibility. Each one has the ability to shape the world around them. Come prepared to learn and participate in your own development.

That I enjoy doing it. Personal dedication to teaching architecture in studio and beyond.

Education should be taken very seriously, and can be very costly. Don’t waste anybody’s time.

There are solid pedagogical reasons for the parameters I establish.

How much enjoyment I get in seeing students succeed!

Difficulty of addressing varying skill levels and engagement among the students that my expertise is not restricted to the courses I teach.

That I am here to help in a positive way. Listen and learn so you don’t repeat the mistakes we have all made prior.

That we should just as much of their emotions and feelings as they do, and take that times the number of students we have in a class.

I genuinely want them to succeed and will go to great lengths to empower them, but I also have high expectations for them.

How strongly I desire to make this class the best experience they have had yet and care about giving them skills they need to succeed.

That I work just as hard as they do to help them succeed. That professors do more than teach & their plates are often very full. Students health story: aaron tosic. Regardless of the specificity of the assignment or studio project, I try to approach my role from a holistic point of view - interweave many facets (technological, historical, cultural) that I think allows for productive dialogues with a broad range of students.

That I continually learn. I think they know but that I always have their best interests in mind.

Not every survey taker wanted to answer this question, but those who did answer frequently mentioned that even though the work is difficult, there is a lot of passion. There is also a yearning for understanding and a willingness to understand. It will take more inferences and discernment from the team to determine what prevents these conversations from happening.