

needs and room-by-room definition. As the speculative office place emerged, students began more and more to reconceptualize the workplace as their predominant space-planning exercise. They evaluated material performance and workstations as kits of interchangeable parts. This exercise developed into corporate contract design. Design students learned about product information from manufacturers, and they studied the history of furniture and styles. As the lighting industry matured and our habitation evolved into a “24/7” existence, the study of general lighting expanded in complexity and specificity to include task lighting, accent lighting, and mood-enhancing lighting. Lighting specialists emerged. As the science of acoustics became more sophisticated, acoustical specialists emerged. As the realm of interior design grew from residential to include commercial and institutional, students found that a subjective response to the individual client became complicated, and that they needed to respond objectively to a more general, anonymous public. Collection of objects for social status began to give way to reimagining broader cultural meanings. “Theming” of interior space (and architecture) became more emotive and experiential. Students found it possible to take a cross-disciplinary approach to branding environments when the rise of marketing eclipsed personal taste in corporate culture. Students are increasingly computer literate, and this literacy is affecting definitions of and behaviors in both physical and virtual space. Many students are “nontraditional”—the average age of entry is often older than 25, and for many, the interior design degree is a second degree. Most students continue to be career oriented, desirous of employment in a design field and committed to making a contribution to the quality of life.

While the student comes to his or her educational experience often older, computer literate, and desirous of design, it does not seem that the student comes more sophisticated nor mature in the realm of design. Students still need awareness raising, instruction in research methodology, and studio experience to transform information into innovation. Students initially seem to need hands-on instruction before gaining the independent resourcefulness necessary to the designer. Even with life experience, students need introduction to the vocabulary of design in order to express their ideas and to collaborate with others. While students need to be opened to new ways of thinking, they also seem to continue to need confidence to address the complexities of most situations.

WHAT STUDENTS EXPECT FROM EDUCATION

Design programs are on point to be state of the art conceptually and technologically. Students want to be up to date with the information they are learning. They also want to be challenged to be innovative. Most of them expect technological training as well as creative work. One student says, “I want to have practical skills when I graduate, but more than that, I want my school to value experimentation, new methods of working and new design ideas.”²⁹ Students seek a demanding arena in which to question, learn, produce work, and discuss ideas.

Many students are looking for a broad exposure to allied design disciplines—industrial design, graphic design, furniture design, fashion design, and architecture, as well as an education in interiors. “As the benefits of a well-designed environment become increasingly apparent, a need for a strong practical and abstract training will surface. I think there will be a move away from strongly ‘segmented’ professions and many design-related fields will start to overlap. The designer will become increasingly accountable for his/her design decisions—and thus form a new emphasis on social and environmental factors.”³⁰

Student evaluations commonly review the promptness, professionalism, and depth of knowledge presented by instructors. Students also speak to the inspirational and motivational nature of the teaching. They find encouragement, constructive criticism, and confidence testing to be pedagogical challenges. They also expect that the critique and feedback process will deliver a truthful measure of strengths and weaknesses in the maturation of the designer. Students require that teachers be both educators and practitioners. They thrive on conversations in and out of the classroom. For students, teachers also serve as mentors, and provide portfolio review, recommendations, advise on placement, and in some cases, career counseling.

Students also want to have a clear understanding of the position of the program. They expect an interior design program focusing on residential design to provide grounding in the necessary areas to render them knowledgeable to begin practice. Students in interior design programs expect cooperative experience during their school years to balance the practical with the creative.