

### **Design Studio Culture Policy**

University of Oregon Department of Architecture

The first architecture school in the United States to abandon the competitive beaux arts model, the University of Oregon Department of Architecture champions a collaborative studio work environment. The 1923 University Catalog asserts the department's emphasis on "honesty of thought and expression, and the stimulation of a spirit of cooperation." We remain committed to this approach, one that simultaneously respects individuals' intellectual freedom and the need for a congenial studio community. While our attitudes and aspirations are diverse and responsive to the changing circumstances of the architecture profession, our design studio culture policy reflects and affirms several enduring principles.

#### **Creative collaborative engagement**

Studio learning should be rewarding, exciting, interactive and spirited. Shared studio projects become common ground for open discussion and creative design exploration. We encourage all studio participants to offer constructive criticism and exchange opinions, knowledge, techniques, and experiences. In the intermediate level of our studio sequence, students with different types and levels of experience are grouped together so they can both teach and learn from one another.

To support peer teaching and encourage a spirit of sharing, studios are graded on a pass/no pass basis. This reduces competition and promotes a culture of mutual support and collaboration. Studio instructors conduct individual exit interviews with students and document their evaluations of each student's performance in written assessments that address both process and product. Students have the opportunity to evaluate design studio faculty. Through this evaluation process, we promote honesty while working to improve the success of future studios and the growth of individual students and faculty.

Every student admitted to the program has the opportunity to succeed, and, if successful, a guaranteed place in the program until graduation. There are no gates or internal application processes designed to reduce the number of students graduating. Students assume responsibility for meeting all design studio performance expectations and take an active role in their own development as designers by maintaining a portfolio of design work and responding to the feedback from their studio instructors.

#### **Sensitivity to context**

We celebrate the architect's capability to improve human conditions and environmental quality. In the design studio we understand the context of our endeavors as complex, where physical, ecological, social, and cultural concerns demand acknowledgement, and where diverse stakeholders deserve a voice. Studio projects explore many kinds of places and building types while addressing the individual and collective needs of the people for whom architecture is created. With two campuses, one in Eugene and one in Portland, and numerous study-abroad and off-campus opportunities for studios, we are committed to exploring meaningful approaches to architecture in diverse physical and cultural contexts.

#### **Comprehensive design integration**

In founding the School of Architecture and Allied Arts, Ellis F. Lawrence envisioned the study of architecture and related arts in close association. We remain committed to high standards of tectonics and beauty, to understanding how works of architecture are assembled, while exploring the meaning of craft in the context of increasingly sophisticated practices and technologies that characterize contemporary society. We are pragmatists and idealists, viewing design as a form of research, with

innovation the consequence of tenacious studio exploration and continuous dialogue. We seek design excellence without dictating a specific aesthetic or ideology.

Our studio culture is based on a tradition where studio teaching serves as the primary means of integrating a wide range of meaningful design issues—cultural, behavioral, environmental, contextual, technological, theoretical, economic, political, and professional—necessary for meaningful design solutions. All tenure related faculty teach studios so students are exposed to a diverse knowledge base of the faculty and can therefore develop a more comprehensive vision of practice. We value the lessons we learn and the contributions we make to the university community through design studios built upon interdisciplinary collaborations.

## **Studio content**

### Sustainable Design

All studios should incorporate methods for enabling students to address sustainable design. As a participant in the *2010 Imperative*, the department endorses the need for “all projects [to] be designed to engage the environment in a way that dramatically reduces or eliminates the need for fossil fuels.”\*

### Integrating the Real and the Ideal

Studio investigations that draw from the conditions of particular sites and the needs of the people who occupy them help us to understand diverse constituencies and places in all their richness. The department encourages approaches to design-based learning that engage students in meeting the needs of real communities and learning from the world.

### Human Scale and Activity

We encourage studio projects that include the development of spaces of appropriate human scale and that support clearly articulated human activities. Our concern is not only buildings but the spaces around and between them so as to ensure legibility and identity throughout the built environment.

### Design Portfolios

Students learn to create a portfolio in the last studio of their introductory design sequence (ARCH 384, 682 and 683, IARC 384, 584) and are expected to maintain a portfolio documenting work in each studio until graduation. Students are encouraged to develop an edited version of their academic portfolio for job searches and applications for graduate schools and scholarships.

## **Studio pedagogy**

### Experimentation with New Methods and Media

We encourage speculative, innovative approaches to studio education as well as new design methods and media that may prove effective in addressing contemporary needs and concerns.

### Diversity of Approaches

We support a diversity of approaches to studio instruction and offer a broad range of studio experiences. Faculty teaching studios are encouraged to introduce and support student interest in diverse approaches to design. Students are encouraged to bring forward and take interest in approaches that are new or unfamiliar.

### Collaborative Design

We believe that design studios should promote collaborative learning experiences that prepare graduates for professional teamwork.

### Involvement with Others

We value the involvement of other disciplines, outside professionals, and client representatives who contribute knowledge and alternative perspectives to our design investigations. We also encourage students to take a design studio in an allied discipline and faculty members to consider team teaching design with colleagues from other programs at the university and at other institutions.

### Challenging Every Student

With small class sizes and extensive contact hours, design studios provide an ideal forum for both shared learning experiences and individualized instruction. The studio learning experience should challenge every student at an appropriate level, supporting student strengths and helping remedy weaknesses.

### Involving GTFs and TAs in Studio Teaching

We consider graduate teaching fellows and teaching assistants to be critical members of the design studio community. Many will become future design teachers.

### Interactive Reviews

We view reviews as learning experiences that foster open two-way dialogue between students and reviewers. Students should be active participants in the reviews of their peers. Faculty members who are new to the department are encouraged to experiment with the "Oregon review" format: An Oregon review resembles a poster session in which all students simultaneously exhibit their work while invited reviewers meet with individual students or student teams at pre-arranged appointment times. In this kind of review there are several scheduled critique discussions taking place concurrently, and students generally have more than one discussion over the course of the review. Between their scheduled critiques, students visit the exhibits of other studios, participate in one another's critiques, engage in informal discussions about projects, and present their work to visiting friends and professors.

## **Studio administration**

### Working in the Studio

Every member of a design studio should be accessible and participate actively in the studio community. Work related to studio objectives is expected to take place in the studio during regular meeting times and, when necessary, at other times when informal interaction is emphasized. It is essential that studio participants respect the property of their peers and the university and maintain a professional work environment that supports the creative pursuits of all studio participants.

### Time Management and Reasonable Workloads

As members of active learning communities, students enrolled in studio are entitled to an appropriate balance between design studio and their other curricular and extra-curricular responsibilities. Design studio education should address time management strategies that help students achieve success in all areas. If studio meetings outside of scheduled class times are needed, they should be developed with sensitivity to the needs of all studio members.

### Student Evaluations of Studios

Evaluations by students help faculty gain insight into their effectiveness and identify ways to improve teaching performance. Instructors should arrange for all students to have the opportunity to complete the department's quantitative and written studio course evaluation forms.

### Exit Interviews and Student Performance Evaluations

A private exit interview and written evaluation of student performance delivered to the student and placed in the student's file are essential for providing consistent feedback and documenting student

progress toward fulfilling degree program requirements. The exit interview is an opportunity for both student and faculty member to review the student's progress and to develop an individualized strategy for addressing any weaknesses.

Maintenance of the Design Studio Culture Policy and Evaluation of its Implementation

This policy statement and the effectiveness of its implementation will be reviewed at least every two years in open forums that invite the participation of all students and faculty members.

\*From the 2030 Challenge, [www.architecture.2030.org](http://www.architecture.2030.org)