

STUDIO CULTURE POLICY

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Introduction

Studio based learning is at the core of an architectural education at Rensselaer. It is where knowledge is gained, design skills developed, and a variety of techniques and technologies explored. Research, analysis, and speculation; aspirations and criticisms are integrated into the work dedicated to developing design abilities while critically engaging matters of cultural, design and professional significance. The values learned in studio become the guiding principles for professional conduct.

Studios are fundamentally about synthesis. Knowledge, skills and information from fact-based descriptive or analytic courses are integrated with critical and cultural perspectives to provide the platform from which the creative enterprise of the studio proceeds. The objective of the studio is not only to creatively engage problems, but also to develop the design skill by which the developing knowledge and experience of the student can be brought to bear on the definition and resolution of the issues under consideration.

Studios provide a variety of learning modalities, from informal conversations, to formal presentations, individual critiques, short exercises and longer design projects. They require both individual and team-based work. They integrate research, leaning by doing and making, iteration, experimentation, and trial and error frequently employing multiple solutions in order to develop a critical perspective and become increasingly independent designers and critical thinkers. Studios reward initiative, creativity, and risk-taking. They are focused on matters that do not have single fixed solutions. They engage both internal faculty and external experts in reviews of the design work where presentation and communication skills are honed and where student's capacities to reflect on and respond to constructive criticism are developed.

Studios are pedagogical laboratories and beg investigation into techniques, forms, programs and performances that are continually evolving. Studio is a place of optimism, where faculty members construct opportunities to learn, to mature in awareness and in the capacity to design. Studios provide the opportunity to imagine and create with optimism and the confidence that architecture (design) matters, has consequence and can make a difference.

Studios are models for professional conduct. The high faculty-to-student ratio of the studio enables weekly one-on-one critiques as well as meaningful group discussions and ensures a high level of social interaction. Effective studio culture depends upon a respect between the faculty and students and relies on open sharing of work and thinking with a willingness to give, receive and respond to constructive criticism. Central to the success of this manner of working is the dialogue among students within and across studios, within and across classes. It is essential that this conversation take place in a climate of mutual respect and support and with recognition for a diversity of views, backgrounds, values and perspectives. The ability to constructively engage in critical peer-to-peer conversations about the work is the foundation of professional life.

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In support of a vibrant studio culture:

Studio Setting

Studios are furnished and equipped work and learning places, dedicated to students for work during and outside of scheduled studio hours. They are shared spaces and should promote both faculty student interaction and student to peer learning. Studios are open to faculty and students from other studios and invite circulation and observation without distracting those working in them. It is expected that all participants show greatest respect for their peers, the faculty, and for the facilities. Each student registered for studio will be assigned an accessible studio workplace with a complement of studio furniture and access to the institute network, computing infrastructure, peripheral devices and the Internet. The School will insure that studio spaces and furnishings are comfortable, safe, clean, convenient, well equipped, and in good repair. Studio faculty will supervise how students set up furniture with respect to didactic purpose, communication, access, and life safety.

Collaborative work

Studios provide an opportunity to work and learn collaboratively. Faculty should provide ample opportunity for teamwork and collaborative learning. Diverse opinions, points of view and approaches are welcome and supported.

Experimentation and Risk-Taking

Studios provide a place where it is expected and safe for students to take risks with their work, push the limits of what they believe they can do by experimenting with design methods, means and materials with the support of the faculty and peers.

Multiple Modes of Learning

Studios provide a place to combine, compare and experiment with different techniques, tools and methodologies of learning and working ranging from the engagement of computational strategies, to physical model making, and drawing. Particular approaches may be the subject of a specific studio. However, an accommodation for the critical development and use of multiple methods is expected.

Time Management

Studio provides an opportunity to develop healthy and productive time management skills and work habits. The faculty recognizes that students have other courses and lead rich lives outside the studio. The projects and workload should reflect this understanding. Students should recognize that having made the choice to study architecture, there is an expectation that they will devote a significant amount of quality time to their work. Each semester architecture faculty teaching the same student cohort will review and coordinate studio and non-studio course content and due dates.

Syllabi and Attendance

All studio and course syllabi and project descriptions will contain specific information regarding project requirements, field trips and due dates. Faculty should, a) establish reasonable time frames and expectations for the completion of design projects, b) carefully monitor progress and be willing to modify requirements and due dates, and c) be conscious and respectful of demands on student time from other courses and activities. Studio faculty and students are expected to be in studio during scheduled contact hours and should use the studio for work during non-studio hours. Faculty must include contact information on all studio handouts and have a clearly stated policy regarding availability to meet with students outside of studio time either by having posted office hours, or by appointment.

Assessment

All studio syllabi must specifically state how student work will be assessed, i.e., by indicating both the criteria and the percentage value for each studio component. Grade evaluations are confidential and should be provided in a timely manner. At or near mid-semester faculty should provide students with an evaluation of their performance and progress to date. At that time, students in danger of receiving a grade of D or below (C or below for graduate students) should receive a warning letter, a copy of which goes to the student's academic advisor. These grades should also be reported to the Institute's Early Warning System (EWS). The School of Architecture has both an ombudsperson and a formal process for appealing grades that is applicable to every course and design studio. The details of this process are available to every student.

Reviews

Pin-ups and reviews are open. Students and faculty from other studios are encouraged to attend any review. Students are expected to attend and participate in their own studio's pin-ups and reviews as important didactic events in an architectural education. Critiques are expected to be directed to the design work, products or process and should be respectful, meaningful and constructive.

Lectures and Events

Public lectures and events provide access to speculative thinking and leading practices in the profession and its related disciplines. They create a reference for discussion in the studios and seminars, and contribute to the culture of the school. Participation is required for students enrolled in a design studio.

Advising

Each student is assigned a faculty advisor and is expected to meet with that advisor at least one time each year. Advisors should be familiar with the degree program requirements and available at any time by appointment to discuss progress, assist in developing plans of study, make recommendations for registration, review portfolios and provide academic and career guidance and advice.

Student Leadership and Involvement

Student organizations provide important opportunity to develop leadership skills, represent the student voice and contribute to the culture and policies of the School. Participation in the AIAS, NOMAS and other Institute wide student organizations and initiatives is encouraged. School committees have student members and together with student representatives elected from each class and program and officers of AIAS and NOMAS comprise a Dean's Student Advisory Committee.