UNDERSTANDING BEGINNING DESIGN EDUCATION: A SURVEY OF CURRENT PRACTICE

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The practice of building is millennia old and parallels the development of modern society in both creating and addressing environmental and social issues. The challenges of contemporary practice require more efficient strategies in order to successfully address long-term environmental, economic, technological, and societal issues. Technological innovation has too long sustained lackadaisical comfort at the expense of precious resources: both those of the planet and of communities. A new approach is needed.

One of the largest hurdles that designers face when incorporating any new approach in practice is to communicate its value to both the client and to the community in order to justify its cost and enlist the active commitment of the end users to enable long-term success. Architects must be able to both identify and communicate the value of environmental and social sustainability in order for a building to thrive over its lifetime. In the same way that contemporary practitioners can learn economically and environmentally effective strategies from traditional, vernacular buildings, today’s educators can learn strategic practices through an examination of forces that shaped historic models of architecture education and critically examine how to translate or transplant these in contemporary times.

There is no one way to approach beginning design curriculum. The curriculum is established based on the overarching pedagogy of the individual institution; and each program consists of an array of faculty that collectively determine a shared vision for the program. However, a few common characteristics are shared across many programs: forward thinking about how technology is influencing the built environment, exploration into design as a broader (not just as it directly relates to architecture) discipline, and consideration of how students’ ethics and values relate to the design process. Changes in any programs curriculum must keep in mind that beginning design education is the foundation to students’ entire design practice, both academically and practically. Academic education is the driver of change in practical application. It is in academia that students have the most opportunity to explore and discover how design can positively impact society. By teaching design thinking, allowing for diverse expression, and exploring social equity, graduating students should be able to challenge the historical norm of the profession in order to push the quality and innovation of design to create a healthier and safer future for society.