2014

Structuring an Interdisciplinary Studio: a study between the disciplines of Art and Design

Dawn Haynie
Georgia State University, Shaynie@gsu.edu

Recommended Citation

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Abstract

Many Interior Design programs emphasize an interdisciplinary approach among traditional disciplines of design. They utilize both community and business partners to provide real-world opportunities for students. Often these design challenges integrate the practice of interior design with other construction industries; but more recently, developers are integrating art, and its associated programming, into their projects. Art as a discipline is distinct from Design; thus structuring a studio environment that facilitates greater exchange and communication should be studied.

This past year, six students from different disciplines – interior design, graphic design, and photography, came together for a unique studio. They were asked to conceptualize, develop, budget, and construct an exhibit for a local developer. The student's design challenge was to create an exhibit that not only described the building's historical significance and the developer's marketing efforts for re-branding/repositioning, but to do so in a way that was more conceptual than literal so the space could host outside events for the local art community. The instructor's challenge was to structure a studio that fostered each student's individual creativity as they negotiated the challenges of working in an interdisciplinary team.

For Phase I, each student worked independently generating conceptual ideas for the exhibit, and then the students communicated and critiqued each other's ideas based upon their own experiences and discipline specific knowledge. For instance, Interior Design students commented on circulation and life safety as necessary for an event space; Graphic Design students commented on communicating graphically the building's historical significance for informative marketing; and the photography student commented on expressing these ideas metaphorically.

For Phase II, students worked together to develop three distinctive schematic designs for presentation to the client; they communicated these ideas as a design team; and they resolved the client comments into a single design project. For each student, differences in the design process became evident as they tried to work together as a team, specifically within the different disciplines and among the tools used for design development and presentation. Distinctions were noted between not only analog and digital methods of development but in the types of software. Subsequently, students learned to work collaboratively, often integrating various techniques from the other disciplines into their own processes.

For Phase III, students devised a schedule to collectively construct the exhibit by the end of the 16-week term. Notably, students were required to work outside of their discipline for

some portion of the construction. As a result, students were most challenged by the documentation of their work, and all its technicalities, necessary for construction.

As an important approach to design education and specifically to the current trends in practice that lean towards an interdisciplinary approach, the structuring of a studio course, which allows for open communication, greater understanding and exploration, becomes critical to insuring our students success in future practice. As a result of this studio structure, students gained insight and perspective from one another's discipline specific knowledge, each student expanded their own design language, and they learned greater communication and negotiation skills.

References
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Summary of the Abstract
Given trends in practice that lean towards an interdisciplinary approach, structuring a studio course, which allows for communication and exploration, is critical to insuring our student's success.

Image 1
Exhibit resulting from the Interdisciplinary Studio of Art and Design students