Studio Culture Policy and Process
November 16, 2015

The Tulane School of Architecture fully supports the studio-based model as central to the curriculum for architectural education and relies on the studio to provide and promote a healthy environment for creative and engaged learning. The design studio is an open environment for the fostering of creativity and engagement in the design process, promoting exploration, innovation and intellectual advancement, and supporting a culture of critical inquiry, collaboration, community engagement, stewardship, professionalism, civility, and wellness among students, faculty and administration.

Critical Inquiry

The design studio establishes the environment for the pursuit of knowledge with respect to the discipline of architecture, involving creative, intellectual and critical development. The design process is a reflexive process of individual creative thought and exploration met with collective critical feedback through dialogue among students and faculty. The open nature of the studio environment encourages consideration of a broad range of design possibilities pursued with rigor, analysis and experimentation. In studio, the design process is open and accessible for the benefit of all, inspiring discussion, innovation and critical exchange. In turn, the open exchange of ideas fosters a creative and critical community engaged in the advancement of knowledge with the highest academic and professional standards.

It is vital to the discipline of architecture that its students are encouraged and have the capacity to engage the world broadly. Design studio benefits from the influence and integration of information from broader studies both within the School of Architecture and beyond. Reciprocally, methods of creative engagement and critical analysis developed in studio become applied to the learning of materials in other courses as well as the world at large.

Collaboration

Architecture is fundamentally a collaborative enterprise and a social art. It requires effective forms of communication and the ability to consider and negotiate varying points of view working toward a common desired goal. An increased capacity for effective creative exchange is developed as a part of the critical dialogue in studio among students and the faculty.

Intrinsic to healthy collaboration is sensitivity for diversity of perspective, opinion, values and methods. Design studio requires a developed sense of respect, professionalism and mutual support among students and faculty. Open and thoughtful communication that respects all parties involved benefits the collective environment and the individual. Competition, while fostered and necessary to the enterprise, does not supplant the centrality of the peer-to-peer learning process, nor should it ever compromise a supportive community of trust.

Studio is also a nurturing environment for social development, camaraderie, and the opportunity for interaction among multiple levels of students. A robust studio environment fosters a sense of personal responsibility, respect and integrity. Students and faculty are expected to uphold the university's honor code, which states that students are the author of their own creative work and extends to respecting the property of others. It is the obligation of all to preserve the integrity of a mutually supportive learning environment.

Stewardship and Community Engagement

Stewardship reaches beyond the walls of the studio to address issues of environmental and cultural sustainability. Studio acts as a supportive platform for community engagement, public scholarship and applied research in the field. Through design/build and related activities, students and faculty acquire additional skills, awareness and a developed sense of personal and professional responsibility. The respect for personal, cultural and intellectual diversity extends to the community at large.

The requirement of two semesters of Public Service within the undergraduate curriculum, and the extensive involvement with community-based work at the graduate level as well, affords a unique opportunity for students to exercise their creativity and professional skills within the context of real world issues and real "clients" in the community. These new experiences require students and faculty to draw from a reservoir of good will among themselves and with the diverse groups they serve through the work. This has become a distinctive signature of the Tulane School of Architecture, and the "culture" involved in this enterprise is highly influential during the formative stage of development for young professionals in the program.

The discipline of architecture requires a developed sense of awareness and responsibility with respect to one's environment and one's community. Given this, the studio is a reflection of how students and faculty participate responsibly and collectively in the shaping of their context. Studio presents multiple opportunities for developing the capacity for responsible engagement.

Professionalism

The architecture curriculum provides the foundation for a lifelong professional practice in design. As preprofessional degree candidates, students are expected to comport themselves in a manner commensurate with the professionalism of the field in which they are training to practice. Interactions between students—and between students and faculty—should be characterized by mutual respect, courtesy, and consideration. Students are expected to be mutually supportive and to contribute positively to a constructive educational and creative environment by being good stewards of the relationships, processes, and physical spaces in which they are engaged in creative work.

Civility

Students are expected to act as good citizens of their studio environments. Behavior conducive to creating a civil studio environment includes honoring personal boundaries, respecting personal and school property, and maintaining a volume level in studio that allows all students to work productively. Students are responsible for keeping individual and group work spaces clean, safe, and sanitary and are expected to be aware of how their individual work spaces affect students and faculty working with them and nearby. Each student should maintain her or his individual work space in a manner that contributes positively to the creation and maintenance of a constructive studio work environment as a whole. All students should take equal responsibility for maintaining group work and meeting spaces in both studios and classrooms. Students are asked to listen to music through their earbuds in studio. Common workspaces throughout the school are reserved for clean projects; model making is limited to studio desks.

Balance/Health/Wellness

Studio culture is primarily the result of the collective desires and attitudes of the student body. To maintain a healthy studio environment and studio culture, students, faculty and administration must support and nurture student life beyond studio. Maintaining a balance between work in design studios and work for non-studio courses relies on student initiative with the support of faculty and administration. The faculty and administration are expected to respect and support the outside interests and activities of the students while helping to establish healthy patterns of work and time management with clear requirements and schedules reasonable for the demands of the discipline. Students are expected to pursue a balanced and healthy lifestyle with respect to

their overall university experience in the midst of their commitment to the rigors of their studies and to support one another to that end.

NOTES ON PROCESS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The school engages in frequent and ongoing conversations on Studio Culture. Individual design studios address the issue in direct and indirect ways ever semester. For example, studio faculty discuss issues of time management and work/life balance in the context of deadlines, pacing, and the development of professional skills that characterize effective work in any academic or office setting. The student governments frequently provide excellent feedback to the administration on issues (large and small alike) that can improve the environment for healthy studio work and interactions. Although there are many avenues for such feedback, many of the most important conversations take place either with the Associate Dean of Students or with the Student Affairs Committee, which is chaired by the Associate Dean. Numerous improvements have been made to the facilities in Richardson Memorial Hall over the past six years, many of which are directly tied to a continual process of improvements in the student's working environment. In addition, when there are concerns coming from faculty and the administration, there is a vehicle for informal exchange around these concerns between student leaders and the administration.

Responsibilities of the faculty, responsibilities of the students, responsibilities of the administration
A team of faculty and students will confer within the Student Affairs Committee to review the Policy annually, determine its efficacy and applicability, and ensure its implementation. Revisions to the current policy will be discussed by the team with the common goal of maintaining a healthy studio environment that supports the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experiences.