

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: A PROFESSIONAL SPONSORED DESIGN STUDIO EXPERIENCE

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A continuing theme in design education is the strive to deliver meaningful course content which builds on current pedagogical attributes, supports growth, and prepares students for professional challenges. Professional programs also have the added dimension of meeting the performance criteria established by accreditation standards. Furthermore, the growing number of entry level design positions being filled has increased the need for design management skills in working professionals seeking advancement, (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). With relatively few people in organizations with design thinking heuristics expertise, design firms should seek innovative measures to ensure the growth of their employees, (Sato, 2009). Understanding these are multidimensional issues, the investigators developed a studio project which serves as a case study addressing the following research questions.

RQ1:

Can the study engage students, faculty, and professionals in a meaningful way?

RQ2:

Would transforming the design studio: a) enhance student learning outcomes, b) provide professional development for industry professionals and, c) exceed the minimum performance criteria assigned in the accreditation standards required for the course?

The case study used a mixed method approach incorporating theories derived from work-based learning (WBL) and experiential learning (EL), within the framework of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). WBL explores the role of the designer and how Universities can provide opportunities which allow professional development through interactions with design programs, students, and faculty. EL explores the process in which knowledge is gained through the transformation of experiences. SoTL examines questions related to student learning, learning conditions, higher level learning to improve the classroom and advance the body of knowledge, (Franzese & Felten, 2017).

The design professionals developed the study, in concert with the professor, and led the process for this area of expertise. Each student was provided a unique paradigm requiring research of various demographics, issues governing building code, and universal design considerations. Throughout the six-week period assigned for this project, it was determined there would be three specific opportunities for students and the professionals to engage. These were: project kick-off, mid-project reviews, and final presentations. The design firms' vested interest in sponsoring the project was realized through the professional development for the junior designer in addition to building relationships for future internship opportunities. Project rubrics, observational studies, and surveys were used to assess student learning outcomes and study efficacy.

The information gained from this unique experience of a joint delivery and assessment process emphasized the value of non-linear education in enhancing student learning outcomes and indicates the importance of the relationship between higher education and professionals in the workplace. Understanding the business context in which design professionals operate and the importance of effective communication across disciplines is central in the development of students in professional design programs, (Norman &

Jerrard, 2015). Upon end of course reflection, student course evaluations and dialog between the professionals and educators, research question one and two were supported.

While this was a pilot study, with limitations, the investigators look forward to the sharing of ideas to leverage future opportunities. It is evident through this experience that institutional effectiveness can be enhanced through the development of programs which include longitudinal outcomes assessment, curriculum development and faculty development, (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). It is our goal to advance design education through these types of learning experiences.

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