

CIDA's Future Vision establishes priorities for interior design education

In November 2006, the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) brought together a high-powered gathering of articulate designers, educators, and industry leaders with a wide range of expertise. The purpose: to inform the next generation of educational standards for the Council for Interior Design Accreditation.

Creating a vision of the future is a daunting task in an era of overwhelming information and rapid change. The challenge increases when the focus narrows to identifying the most significant forces shaping the future of the interior design profession and specific implications for interior design education. Setting priorities from among those implications is an even more difficult charge.

So, how did CIDA approach the task? Well, first an abundance of reliable information about the future was gathered and distilled into a readable and thought-provoking piece titled *Interior Design Trends and Implications*¹. This document was provided to a group of thought leaders who were able to analyze potential implications from visionary and distinct points of view. These individuals were then convened for a day and a half facilitated session to answer the question, "what does the future hold for the interior design profession and graduates of interior design programs?"

This, in a nutshell, is how Future Vision accomplished the synthesis of a huge amount of information into succinct priorities for developing the next generation of standards for interior design education.

As can be imagined, Future Vision featured lively, rich, and, at times, heated discussion. Not surprisingly, participants did not always share common views, despite sharing a common goal for rigor in the interior design profession. It was interesting, therefore, that participants had little difficulty establishing future priorities for interior design education. Agreement was quickly formed around certain elements that would best prepare interior design graduates to be successful in the future.

2006 Future Vision

(*denotes CIDA Board of Directors)

From interior design practice:

Shashi Caan, Shashi Caan Design Collective, New York, NY; **Allan Guinan**, Figure 3 Network, Toronto, ON; **Beth Harmon-Vaughan***, Gensler, Phoenix, AZ; **Keith Hooks***, Hooks Design + Architecture, San Francisco, CA; **Cary D. Johnson***, Gensler, Chicago, IL; **Pam Light**, HOK, Los Angeles, CA; **Rachelle Schoessler Lynn**, Walsh Bishop, Minneapolis, MN; **BJ Peterson**, Peterson Arce Design Group, West Hollywood, CA; **Joseph Pettipas***, HOK Canada, Toronto, ON; **Ken Wilson**, Envision, Washington, DC

From industry and related:

Bill Black, National Director, Strategic Business Solutions, Haworth Canada, Calgary, AB; **Janine James**, President and Creative Director, The Moderns, New York, NY; **Cathy L. Hendricks**, Executive Director, Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, Austin, TX; **Georgy Olivieri***, Vice President, Architecture and Design, Haworth, Chicago, IL; **Samantha Sannella**, President and CEO, Design Exchange, Toronto, ON; **Susan Szenasy***, Editor in Chief, Metropolis Magazine, New York, NY

From interior design education:

Barbara Anderson, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS; **Tim Cozzens**, Columbia College, Chicago, IL; **Betsy S. Gabb***, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE; **Denise Guerin**, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN; **Sooz Klinkhamer**, Kwantlen University College, Surrey, BC; **David Matthews**, Ohio University, Athens, OH; **John Weigand***, Miami University, Oxford, OH

¹ *Interior Design Trends and Implications* by Katie Sosnowchik and Cindy Coleman, September 2006 is available at www.accredit-id.org/updatestrendsdoc.html.

The end result of Future Vision was well worth the considerable endeavor: a ranked list of the most important features of interior design education to prepare graduates for entry into the profession in 2009 and beyond. The Future Vision priorities themselves tell a story about a dynamic era for the interior design profession and the challenges that lie ahead.

Priorities (in rank order)

The ideal graduate will need to be able to...

1. Think critically.

The increased complexity of the world impacts interior design with a greater need for rigorous examination of problems and knowledge-based thinking in the search for solutions. Today's students are challenged when tackling problems, finding it difficult to take them apart and develop solutions. Knowledge of other fields, anthropology, sociology, sciences, technology, and the liberal arts provides a basis for synthesis to arrive at reasonable and justifiable positions. Critical thinking is the synthesis of broad knowledge, logic, craft, creativity and innovation, significance, and relevance.

2. (tie) Apply the design process and engage in a creative approach to problems.

The unique characteristic of the interior design profession is the use of the design skill set. Interior designers identify complex problems that tie together humans and the built environment and present creative solutions. However, interior design needs to demonstrate a more rigorous methodology or process, supported by research, driven by interest in the value proposition, and engaging a broader framework of holistic thinking. It is essential for interior designers to be highly analytical, with problem identification skills and the ability to synthesize information for effective application.

2. (tie) Address the triple bottom line of sustainability, which encompasses economic, social, and environmental impacts.

Environmental responsibility, in particular, is becoming a norm in everyone's lives, as the global ecological crisis is a widely accepted reality. This presents an opportunity to move beyond an expectation to do no harm and be solution drivers, given the interior designer's accountability for the interior environment's impact on individuals and the long-term viability of the planet. Every design decision must be weighed within the parameters of social context, sustainability, and the bottom-line impact of business economics. Designers must be prepared to demonstrate value using performance-based outcome measures.

3. Design from deep functional knowledge of human behavior.

The urgent need for attention to behavioral science is prompted by changing demographics (especially the aging population), generational shifts in values, cultural diversity, and increased emphasis on spirituality and the search for meaning. Technology and physical security issues will be continuing influences on human needs

in the design of interior space. Most of all, interior designers must be able to respond knowledgeably to differing needs of diverse populations.

4. Have a broad worldview and consider a global perspective as the context for interior design.

Globalization and the resulting cultural diversity have created a shift from a North American-centric world to a world requiring significantly greater global and cultural awareness. While the traditional liberal arts academic experience encourages a global perspective, education is enhanced by opportunities to travel, go to galleries, and read widely. Graduates should have had opportunities to engage, either in reality or virtually, with other cultures to form a broad worldview encompassing intercultural awareness. There is recognition of increased emphasis on visual communication in a technologically connected world of many languages.

5. Be a thought leader in the profession and their community, effectively employing communication skills in the process.

Interior design provides value that must be clearly communicated by graduates with self-confidence and a sense of their own competence. Leadership ability is demonstrated by a sense of purpose, willingness to advocate, and communications skills including public speaking. Collaboration, consensus building, and courage complete the array of leadership characteristics.

6. (tie) Apply research methods and integrate findings into the design process.

The demand for evidence based design and an expectation of identifiable, measurable outcomes drive the need for the interior design practitioner to effectively use a range of research methods. The ideal graduate has the capacity to use research methodology that incorporates discovery, integration, application, evaluation, documentation, and dissemination.

6. (tie) Innovate and generate intellectual capital.

The value proposition of interior design is in the idea and owning the knowledge. In addition to research ability, the ideal graduate has a thorough understanding of methodology that leads to innovation. This requires development of creative right-brain thinking, integrated collaboration, multidisciplinary approaches, and the ability to extrapolate and synthesize.

7. Reflectively integrate knowledge and experience.

A meaningful apprenticeship is a valuable part of the overall educational experience. To be meaningful, the student-apprentice must be involved and engaged in a comprehensive experience of real-world interior design practice that helps develop design thinking. The value of reflection might best be realized with a pause between undergraduate and graduate education to allow time for integration of knowledge and experience.

8. To collaborate.

In today's complex world, interior designers must respond to the demand for value and performance by being able to collaborate with individuals both inside and outside the discipline. Understanding who to collaborate with and when, and understanding multiple disciplines and problem solving approaches, leads to a more integrated and effective design process.

9. Understand and embrace a professional identity.

A professional interior designer employs design thinking as a way of knowing, understands the ethical premise embodied in practice, and is an engaged, curious person with self-confidence and the ability to work well with others.

The all-encompassing outcome of Future Vision is that the Council for Interior Design Accreditation is well prepared to engage the community in dialogue leading to quality standards for interior design education. The above priorities, so well articulated and rich in content, provide a springboard for the next phase of standards development. In 2007, surveys and other methods of gathering community input will lead to consensus around meaningful standards that reflect quality interior design education in 2009 and beyond.

The visionary leaders who contributed their time, expertise, and thoughtful consideration to the question, "what does the future hold for interior design graduates?" are merited with this significant accomplishment.