Research-Informed Curriculum Design in Architecture

A Symposia on
Transitions, Employability and Professional Identity:
A Case Study in Architecture

Ulster University, Belfast, 04 September 2012
Transition

‘...the Oxbridge notion that if a student needs anything more than a library, a room and a weekly tutorial he or she was wrongly selected in the first place.’

Transition

‘Failure to establish meaningful and effective transition for undergraduates can lead to academic underachievement. The importance of aiding students’ transition into higher education is reinforced by appreciating that undergraduates are likely to arrive with learning strategies suitable to school and college life, which are less effective in university environments…’

Surface Learning & Deeper Learning

‘In general, it is postulated that the study processes used by a student during learning will be related to both the amount learned, and the quality of (this) learning.’

Biggs, J. (1979). Individual Differences in Study Processes and the Quality of Learning Outcomes, 
*Higher Education*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Student Learning, (Jul., 1979), pp. 382

Marton, K. and Saljo, R. (1976). On qualitative differences in learning: I - Outcome and process, 
*British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46: 4-11.

Facilitate student engagement as co-creators in research and learning;

Actively engage students with learning that addresses the ‘transition’ issues that are common to first year undergraduates;

Develop a peer-reviewed curriculum development process that will involve both Architectural education and Architectural practice;

Enhancing (employability prospects) through embedding of considered ‘employability skills’ in the first year Architectural curriculum
Students as co-creators

*Key recommendations for academics and practitioners:*
commitment to first-year students being co-designers of their own learning experiences...and recognising the need to provide regular opportunities for first years to make an input into their own learning and first-year curriculum

‘I think some teachers... are so focused on getting stuff done that they don’t pay attention to their students, who I think are the most valuable resources in a classroom.’


‘Asking students to talk about their education is so simple that – whether we are teachers, parents, researchers, or policymakers – we inevitably forget to do it.’

Employability

Professional Identity

Architectural Competition
  • project-based learning
  • working with Architects

Student Engagement

Student Transition

Collaborative Research
  • confidence & skills
  • deeper learning
Employability advice

The suggestions and advice offered to students by the sample of graduate recruiters can be grouped under three broad headings:

• exploration

• analysis, reflection and development

• investigation, preparation and presentation
Employability advice

The suggestions and advice offered to students by the sample of graduate recruiters can be grouped under three broad headings:

- **exploration**
  - direct engagement with recruiters

- **analysis, reflection and development**
  - collaborative workshops & reflective blog

- **investigation, preparation and presentation**
  - communication, representation & professional presentation
‘[During] the TRANSITIONS project I have learnt a lot about myself and have challenged myself and pushed what I believe I am capable of to the limits...

I have gained an abundance of valuable experiences through this project, such as questioning how I feel about the course, looking at and improving my employability skills to help build my career in architecture, working alongside professional architects and hearing their views and opinions on our work and how we may better it...and all the drama and excitement that came along with it!...

It has really inspired me to look for opportunities in my spare time or over the summer etc to try and gain a little bit more work experience with an architecture firm or small business.’
'Looking back at first year and this project in general, I can say with firm belief that working with architects in first year was the biggest 'eye-opener' to me in regards to working towards becoming an architect.

[Once] we were able to collaborate with architects [I] realised the distinct differences...between being a student of architecture and being in practice... This information helped me...better understand what it means to BE an architect rather than just studying architecture.'
‘Presenting to a panel was by far the most nerve wracking experience of first year, but in my opinion it was the best experience we could have had in first year. I soon realised whilst speaking to the architects about the project was that confidence, eye contact and being able to engage a client using various techniques is as vital as the scheme itself.

I appreciate the opportunity given to work with architects and I felt this project was a total success in learning about clients, presentation, group work and professionalism...we need more projects such as this one, where we can take a step away from a 'normal' brief and learn in an alternative way... I look forward to be able to take part in such a project in second year.’
The whole class seemed to enjoy the friendly competition and it also introduced the idea of what it would be like for presenting your work in real practice and competing for the job

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[The project] gave me the confidence to present professionally and looking back I feel this was one of my strongest moments of the year. I will take everything I learnt from this experience forward as it will be vital when considering employment in the future.

Getting to interact with these professionals and the experience of getting to present to a client are experiences that I feel offered the most important skills we could learn in terms of enhancing our employability skills to date, because no matter how good at architecture you may be, if you cannot speak confidently about your work and sell yourself as an individual you will get nowhere.’