Studio Culture Statement

In addition to the School's Learning Culture Statement, the SoA has developed a similar statement of principles in respect to the particularity of the studio. The School of Architecture's learning culture is broad and overarching and grows out of the School's full range of activities. Both the graduate M.ARCH and the undergraduate BA in Architecture programs of study are organized around the series of architecture design studios. The architectural design studio's project-based pedagogy and its centrality within the curricula mean it serves as a compounding element in relationship to the larger learning culture. But while it is central to the School's work, it is not the center and while both programs of study are organized around the studio sequence, studio is not the singular focus.

Organizing a studio is itself a design project. The studio head is not, however, the solo designer; designing the studio is a collective project created, managed, and assessed in real time by all the participants - faculty and students. Each studio collective has to work collaboratively to define the goals and objectives and plan the studio workflow in a way that optimizes all the resources and energies. The studio head provides the framework and explains the performance criteria, but a successful studio draws on the strength of the studio's collaborative nature to lay out the work. Reviews of the studio's progress towards its stated objectives should be an on-going project and dovetail with the critique of the student work. And at the end the studio organization itself should be assessed in exactly the same way the student work is assessed. A healthy studio culture will sustain an environment of free-ranging inquiry, mastery of diverse skill sets, meaningful engagement with the discipline, and the development of critical thinking. A healthy studio culture also supports the continuous growth and development of the faculty right alongside the students.

Project-based Pedagogy

The history of architectural education has been organized around the idea of learning by doing. The design studio here at Clemson is organized similarly; around a question, an issue, a challenge, or a project. The effort is non-hierarchical, non-linear, free-wheeling and open-ended. Project-based learning is built around the work of doing but the experiential aspect also requires a reflective and critical approach. And it requires commitment to the process of learning.

Curiosity

Studios are fueled by the spirit of exploration and driven by curiosity. And curiosity, if it is to be productive, is neither idle or passive, but pro-active. Curiosity produces the opening questions that are usually framed as why? or why not? While curiosity grows out of some mostly inscrutable place deep in the imagination the work to answer the question will quickly move towards models that are open to discourse.

Teaching

Every member of the studio collective - students and faculty - is learning. Every member of the studio collective is then also teaching. Teaching in the studio environment is omni-directional and constantly rebounding. Although faculty, critics, and various experts can bring important resources to the project, students offer vast reserves of information and deep knowledge of their own. Learning flows in many directions and so does the teaching.

Collaboration

The design studio at Clemson is, first and foremost, a collaborative learning environment. Collaboration means that faculty, students, adjuncts, critics and various expert consultants are all joined together in the pursuit of an idea. Inquiry driven by curiosity or need or desire will forge a unique learning environment within which each participant's role is vital. Each studio member has an obligation to support an atmosphere of teamwork and sharing.

Respect

Studios depend upon the willingness of each member to enter into the on-going studio discourse with the expectation that their input will be heard and considered. A successful collective effort demands that absolute and unequivocal respect be extended in every direction and that no one ever feels their active participation is discounted. Ideas are tested through consideration, discussion, and even argument but each point of view gets an airing. Listening is one of the key measures of respect.

Engagement

The pursuit of an idea in a collaborative venture demand that each and every participant be fully engaged with the topic and with the momentum of the studio work. To be engaged requires active participation and a willingness to search, challenge, and critique. To be engaged also demands that all studio members be present and participating fully. Faculty and students are expected to be present and working during the entire studio session.

Authority

The studio's work is grounded in a measured respect for authority. Vernacular traditions, oral history, stories, technical knowledge, specialized skill sets, and experience all have ways of slowly assuming some notion of authority. But the studio's task is to carefully scrutinize claims of authority to determine if these settled views retain relevance. It's perhaps the most difficult paradox of studio culture to both grant some measure of authority to an idea, practice, or notion while at the same time testing it critically for its continued relevance.

Critique

The studio is not a machine for teaching, it is a machine for learning. Learning through inquiry is reliant on continual critical examination and evaluation. The critique is one of the tools by which the question at hand is continually reframed, questioned, and brought back into the work. Critiques and reviews foster critical engagement with work as a way of moving the project forward. The critique is an important moment in the studio pedagogy because the work 'on the wall' has the capacity to open up the studio question through exchange. The objective of the critique is to couple work with discourse about the work to produce something entirely new. It is an exercise that is multi-directional, potent, and absolutely reliant on full engagement by the studio participants. It is the ultimate collaborative studio product.

Assessment

Clemson's Academic Regulations provide clear explanations of the university's course credit and grading systems. A single letter grade will be assigned for the final evaluation of the student's work and the grading scale is described unambiguously in the Academic Regulations. The studio calls on so many diverse skill sets
and areas of knowledge that the hyper-reductive grading system, while mandated, is limited in its range of response. Thorough assessment of effort and outcomes should be both broad and deep to capture to be helpful. Feedback is most helpful when it is frequent, supportive, and candid. Assessment is part and parcel of the overall studio discourse and the feedback loop serves all the studio participants.

Balance

Finally, the design studio's significant credit load and its role as a synthesizer of many strands of architectural study mean it has special place within the curriculum. But the studio, while an organizing element, is not the sole focus of the program of study. Knowledge and ideas developed through other courses and experiences fuel the studio inquiry and must be afforded room and energy. A fertile studio learning culture recognizes the need for time devoted to thinking and working across many fronts. And most importantly, a rich studio culture demands that all the participants maintain a healthy balance between the work of the studio and the work of living fully in the world. The well-being of the studio hinges on the well-being of the participants.

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