

**Design Cultures and Cultural Norms at IU: A reflection  
at the request of Elizabeth Boling.**

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I am a computer scientist by training, but I worked for some years off-and-on as faculty at the Institute of Design (ID) – *née the New Bauhaus*– in Chicago. My role there included the Design and instruction of courses in Artificial Intelligence and Design, Intelligent Products, Computer Applications in Design, and Computer-Supported Design Processes, as well as Design Thesis advising. Before working at ID, I worked at the Institute for the Learning Sciences at Northwestern University, where I Designed large-scale social simulations for learning applications. I left ID to pursue an opportunity to work for Donald Norman at Unext LLC in Deerfield IL, designing software to support an online MBA program. Now, I am employed at the School of Informatics here at IU, where I am working with Prof. Marty Siegel to construct a program in Human-Computer Interaction Design (HCI/d), a program that emphasizes Design skills as a key emergent value of the HCI community.

In what follows, I limit my comments to learning environments. The differences in attitudes between Designers and Scientists about what constitutes research is a whole other topic.

**Activities and expectations**

The students I have now are quite different than the ones I had at the Design school. For one thing, the Design school students are older, in general. ID is only a graduate school.

Many of the students have considerable work experience. The core skills of the Design students include typography, the expert use of graphics programs such as Photoshop, and Illustrator, communications, and knowledge of production values. GREs are not a good predictor of success at the Design school. In my experience, the students are often self-motivated and are more often than not able to bring projects to completion with little structure. Public presentation and critique is the main teaching technique at ID and the students are used to exposing their work to faculty and peers early and often.

The students I have now in the School of Informatics in general have far better GRE scores than the Design school students. Their language skills are much better, as is their knowledge of technology, including programming and Computer Science. Their ability to construct coherent arguments is far superior. Their ability to construct working prototypes of software products is a core competency. On the other hand, my new students have fewer skills of visual language, and are even less accustomed to the idea of sharing work-in-progress. These students seem to have grown up with the idea that their work is done individually, is seen only by themselves and the professor, and is only purposed to receive a grade. Such a culture can never work for Design pedagogy. Probably, such a learning culture isn't effective for any pedagogy, but it does scale well.

### **Physical spaces**

I'm not sure which comes first, the physical space or the culture, but I am certain that they are intrinsically related. My inventory of physical spaces at the School of Informatics includes

- Very nice offices for Professors

- Conference room

- Small offices for Assistant Instructors

- Usability lab
- Computer labs
- Small rooms for student collaboration
- Inadequate lecture theatre

My inventory of physical spaces at the Design school includes

- Shared spaces for Faculty
- Studio spaces for students
- Large and small collaboration spaces
- Minimalist spaces
- Gallery-like spaces
- Re-configurable spaces
- Executive education spaces
- Periodicals room
- Machine Shop
- Darkroom
- Computer lab
- Inadequate lecture theatre

In Figures 1-5, I share photographs of a recent trip to ID I took with my colleague, Marty Siegel.

### **Activities and Interactions**

The principal learning-related activities at the School of Informatics are

- Lectures
- One-on-one advising
- Assignment fulfillment and grading
- Thesis research
- Team-based projects, sometimes

The principal learning-related activities at the Design school are

- Public critique
- Workshops
- Prototyping – physical, appearance, and behavioral
- Ethnography
- Collection

## Classification

### **Bare essentials**

I am uncertain what are the bare essentials that can produce a capital “D” Design culture. I suspect that all of the following are essential:

- Culture of collaboration
- Design methods
- Public critique
- Wall space for public display and discussion
- Places to spread out work
- Divergent and convergent thinking
- Collection

### **Cultural capital**

At IU, cultural capital comes from

- Publishing, peer-reviewed
- Grants
- Teaching, sometimes
- Service, sometimes

At the Design school, cultural capital comes from

- Style and urbanism
- Interactions with Elite business society
- Teaching
- Communications and production values
- An emerging notion of Design research
- Publishing, invitation



Figure 1. View from the Institute of Design (ID)



Figure 2. Student Studio Space at ID



Figure 3. Student Studio Space at ID



Figure 4. Student Studio Space at ID



Figure 5. Periodicals Library at ID