UMass Amherst Studio Culture Policy

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Overview

The UMass Amherst Department of Architecture has a vibrant and engaging studio culture that emphasizes mutual respect, professionalism, and shared responsibilities among students, faculty, administrators and practitioners. This 2023 Studio Culture Policy builds upon this tradition and seeks to foster an environment of mentorship, collegiality and shared governance. The Studio Culture Policy is defined by its place within the contexts of the University's mission and values, as well as the Department's mission and philosophy.

Department Mission

The mission of the Department of Architecture is to provide an accessible, intellectually rigorous design education that firmly grounds students in the art and science of the built environment. The interdisciplinary, collaborative program embraces spirited, socially progressive, and environmentally responsive design. As New England's first and only public architecture program, the faculty and students engage the region in integrated teaching, research, and outreach.

Department Philosophy
The Department strives to instill in our students the spirit of inquiry and professionalism. Its primary goals are: to develop each student's problem solving abilities, to prepare him/her to deal responsibly with the complexities and ever changing issues of the built environment, to help each student understand and express their individual creativity and, to give all students skills needed for entry level positions in the profession.

The program teaches concept-based design: Students approach their work with the understanding of concept as the generating force behind design from the early stages of development through the later more detailed tectonic stages. Conceptual strength is ultimately the strongest basis for addressing the full range of theoretical and practical concerns. The program strives to create a positive learning environment in which all students can discover and develop their own process and design methodologies.

**Studio Environment**

The Department believes in and supports the value of the design studio model. Design studios hold vast potential as models for the integration and application of learning. Few other disciplines have courses with such direct one-on-one interaction between faculty and students, whereby students receive immediate feedback on their work. Studios are great places for students to get to know each other and form friendships. The studio model offers tremendous potential for creative discovery, exploration of ideas, critical discussions, and intellectual risk-taking.

Faculty who teach studio are expected to inspire students to learn, to engage students in critical thinking, to bring forward their particular expertise, to convey a sense of optimism about architecture, and to practice good time management. In addition to individual design projects, the Department values team and group projects at every level of design research and development.

The Department supports and encourages interdisciplinary activities through which students can acquire a broad range of skills and experiences in order to become effective designers, and advocates for a quality built environment.

**Time Management**

The Department supports its students and faculty in leading balanced lives. The nature of studio coursework is time consuming, therefore it is essential to examine the critical aspect of time management.

Students are encouraged to work intelligently and efficiently, not necessarily longer, in a studio. Rational use of time in developing work habits is encouraged. The “tradition” of all night work is discouraged, as an indication of poor planning. As studios are open for extended hours, this temptation may exist, but the result is generally counterproductive. Set your due dates for studio
projects a day before reviews so that you are fresh for your review and your peers. Develop equations for how much time you think it will take versus reality.

The Department values all the courses in its curriculum. Students are encouraged to distribute their efforts proportionately to all academic courses. The Department makes efforts to avoid conflicting deadlines for courses that it offers. Deadlines for courses not maintained by the Department of Architecture must be handled individually.

**Studio Space**

The physical studio is an inclusive space for all students. This means that students are responsible for keeping their workspaces clean and in good condition as well as being mindful of the needs of their peers. When spending long hours in the studio, students should make sure to take breaks, get some sleep, and reach out to CCPH for 4 free visits per semester.

Studio aims to create an environment that is conducive to learning and promotes healthy learning and working habits. Students and faculty actively work to create an environment that promotes a healthy studio culture in which education does not jeopardize mental and physical health. Students are encouraged to work with their professors. Mutual respect among students means respecting the boundaries of others. Be mindful of how loud you are; keep your desk area clean; do not spill over into other spaces; create a culture of respect and inclusion.

Each studio should maintain a well ordered and constructive working environment by keeping trash picked up, neatly storing projects, and looking out for the security of the studio. Recycling of paper, cardboard and chipboard is mandatory - use the appropriate containers. Each individual studio class is responsible for the condition of the studio. Students must act in the interest of the collective good and clean up. At the end of the Fall semester the studios must be cleaned, and work stored and/or well organized. At the end of the Spring semester all work must be removed, the studios must be broom cleaned.

Do not cut directly on desktops. Mark your name on your desk and stool. Grades will be withheld for students whose studio area is appropriately cleaned and/or whose desks are damaged beyond normal use (in which case, students will be required to repair desk).

Establish a late-night buddy system-- avoid working alone! Students are advised to use the University escort service. Do not drive tired (Have a friend on campus? Crash at their dorm. Or, if you are in the studio late at night– wait until morning so you can take the bus.) Protect your eyes: use the 20,20,20 rule. After 20 min on the computer look at something 20' away for 20 seconds.

**Grades**
The Department acknowledges the value of design intention and process as well as design product. Studio assignments will be graded not only on the concept and ideas in projects, but also on the quality of drawings, models, verbal / written presentation and how well project's concept and ideas have been expressed in designs.

The Department encourages students to understand studio-based learning as a unique and valuable pedagogical model which promotes open-ended questions, for which there may be no “right” or “wrong” answers. Grades are one measure of a student's performance in studio. Criticism, advising and counseling are considered integral to a student's studio evaluation.

**Reviews and Critiques**

The desk critique, or “crit”, is a traditional unique component of design studio, a one-on-one dialogue between the student and studio instructor which acts as a form of critical feedback on both the student process and product in addressing assigned design problems. As a follow-up to the desk crit, the student is generally expected to more fully explore and test these options and suggestions by revisiting his or her solution. This process of revisiting and revising alternative solutions, a recycling of ideas, is generally considered to be essential to the design process.

The studio instructor will generally critique the quality of the student's process of investigation and ability to reflect on his or her own process of designing and employing design strategies and thought processes. Faculty may employ this method of teaching in individual ways, some on a daily basis, and some more occasionally in deference to more general group discussions, but a general rule is that a student not present in studio during studio hours will not receive desk critiques.

Design studio reviews and critiques are essential elements of studio pedagogy, enabling and promoting interaction between students, faculty, and outside visitors. Reviews are simultaneously a means of assessing student work and an opportunity to facilitate discussion of greater issues and relationships and should be seen as a unique learning experience in which a wealth of knowledge and experience is disseminated, and not as individual evaluations. Public presentation and exhibition of design studio work is essential to studio pedagogy, and vital for the development of effective verbal communication skills. Reviews may take on different formats.

In general, students and faculty alike are expected to arrive on time and remain engaged as active participants throughout the review process. Students should be prepared for the clear and coherent presentation of their work and be prepared to discuss both their work and the work of others in the studio. Dress professionally. Participate – peer input is valuable and complements the discussion, and sketch.

Instructors are responsible for informing invited outside reviewers about the expectations communicated to the students for the project to be reviewed, and the expectation that reviews will
reflect the Department's commitment to studio culture policy.

Thoughtful and respectful dialogue, debate and discussion are expected during all reviews and presentations. Students are highly encouraged to attend all levels of final reviews to enrich their exposure and learning experience.

**Documentation and Collection Work**

At the end of each semester, each student is required to submit digital documentation of work from the semester, including, but not limited to: photos of all models and 3-D work and high resolution scans or digital copies of all process sketches and finished drawings. Documentation should cover the project's evolution as well as its final representation. Grades will not be issued until the work is submitted. In addition, selected projects will be collected and retained by the Program and may be used for accreditation purposes, marketing, program publications, websites, etc.

**Diversity**

The Department supports active and open dialogue in the studio, an environment in which diverse life experiences and opinions are shared. A culture of mutual respect and open inquiry supports a life-long learning process that begins in architecture school. Everyone is unique – respect different goals, opinions, stylistic preferences, process, and strategies. Show courteous behavior and respect gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliations of peers.

**Plan for Implementation and Maintenance**

This policy is a working document for the BS Architecture, Master of Architecture, Master Design, off-campus programs (eg., Yestermorrow, Mt. Ida, Boston), and on-line programs/courses. The Department will sustain and nurture a studio culture vital to the student experience continuing to embrace new technologies and new spatial configurations. The policy must continually reflect changes while maintaining the integrity and professionalism that characterize the study and practice of architecture. The policy will be reviewed and revised on a regular basis, to maintain and further develop working principles for achieving the balance and integration of diverse goals and perspectives of the University, and the Department. A task force, made up of student leaders and faculty, will work to maintain and develop the policy through review sessions each year, from which emerge annual recommendations forwarded to the faculty for review and implementation.