

STUDIO CULTURE POLICY

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Prepared by the Architecture Representation Committee
in consultation with AIAS and NOMAS

History of Studio Culture Policy from the AIAS Studio Culture Task Force Report

“As studio culture sets the framework for architect learning and collaboration, the act of creating that culture must be conscious and continuous. This report is a welcomed first step to creating an even better studio where all can create and learn, flourish and grow.”

– Ava Abramowitz, Esq.

Beginning in 2000, the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) established the first Studio Culture Task force, in an effort to study contemporary architectural education.

In 2002, the task force published *The Redesign of Studio Culture*, capturing the results of the task force research and offering a call to action, focused on the values of optimism, respect, sharing, engagement and innovation.

At the 2003 National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) Validation Conference, AIAS successfully advocated for a thirteenth condition of accreditation, entitled “Studio Culture.” Condition 3.5 of the 2004 NAAB Conditions for Accreditation requires schools to have a written policy regarding the culture of their studio environment.

Finally, in October of 2004, the AIAS held a Studio Culture Summit to open the dialogue on this issue to a national community of students, educators, practitioners and related experts. The results of this summit are published in *The Studio Culture Summit: A Report*.

Five years after the initial success of these advocacy efforts, the AIAS launched a review effort to re-assess the impact of the studio culture dialogue in schools across the country. As a working group of the 2007-2008 AIAS Accreditation Review Conference (ARC) Task Force, the second AIAS Task Force on Studio Culture was convened. The results of this multicollateral review and assessment effort of the studio culture initiative provided the foundation of this report and catalyzed the series of recommendations contained herein.

*Note: AIAS publications on studio culture are available for download: www.aias.org/studioculture

The Studio

Studio based education is intense and both physically and emotionally taxing. Taubman College is committed to a positive and respectful learning environment through the encouragement of the fundamental values of optimism, respect, sharing, engagement and innovation between and among the members of its faculty, student body, administration and staff. Key to a healthy and productive learning environment is the establishment of an efficient daily routine that balances the well-being of the individual student with high academic standards. Taubman College encourages students and faculty to appreciate these values as guiding principles of professional conduct throughout their careers.

The studio-based learning environment was carried through from traditional European education and has been adapted by most American architectural programs. This model of teaching is recognized to have excellent impacts on student development of critical thinking, design thinking, and learning by doing—all of which are essential characteristics of the architectural practice.

Policy

The Taubman College department of Architecture at University of Michigan integrates the studio learning model across the diverse curriculum offerings, not in studio alone. In order to encourage the beneficial aspects of the studio learning model, faculty and students alike must abide by a consistent set of policies.

Everyone in the studio environment must work together to encourage open dialogue, respect, optimism, collaboration, engagement, innovation between faculty and students, and hands-on learning pedagogy or learning by doing.

Taubman College encourages students and faculty to appreciate these core values while participating in the studio environment. Personal safety, well-being, productive learning, and spatial respect is everyone’s responsibility.

Visiting Reviewers

We understand the importance of visiting professionals as reviewers; their perspective provides great insight for students on their projects. However, we stand by our Studio Culture policy and extend its intentions to outside reviewers. It is important that visiting reviewers appreciate their position as mentors and experts in the field—as the significant aim of reviews is to support student dialogue and learning. By asking faculty to distribute our Studio Culture policy to outside reviewers with their studio briefs, we will continue to have productive conversations in reviews, Studio Culture Policy even when our faculty is not the primary critic.

Diversity and Social Equity

Taubman College has pursued policies and initiatives aimed at making the college a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment for students, staff and faculty. These efforts must be matched by students and faculty in the studio environment to encourage a confident space for students to honestly and openly share their experiences and ideas regarding diversity as it relates to architecture and the society in which we operate as designers. These include: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, national origin, (dis) ability, characteristics of group identities, equity, and inclusion. We encourage students and faculty to examine these topics in their work, and increase awareness and innovation in their work both academically and professionally.

Health, Wellness, and Counseling

Academic excellence requires personal wellness. At Taubman College, we are committed to supporting the whole student. A healthy body and mind are the foundation necessary for effective learning and development. We have a broad support system here at the University of Michigan, and in our department, find resources on the website at: taubmancollege.umich.edu/architecture/students/student-life/health-wellness-counseling

Design is a Process

Remember that architectural design development in the program is about a process and not the end product alone. We encourage students and faculty to develop their process and expand student knowledge by encouraging idea development, research, making, collaboration, and open-ended questions. The studio-based learning model is not centered around a right or wrong answer; the greatest value of your education at Taubman College is the growth of your ideas to address a variety of design fundamentals.

Time Management

As you work within the previously mentioned process of design, you may find yourself losing track of a balance in your life and work. Taubman college encourages students and faculty to maintain a balanced life, and to hold each other responsible for setting reasonable expectations on both yourself and others. We understand that everyone has a different flow, and work habits vary among creative thinkers—for this reason we maintain the 24-hour operation of the building.

The purpose of 24-hour access is not to encourage the tradition of all-nighters in the studio. It is to again reinforce that students and faculty are capable of developing their working method, on their own schedule, and productive design results flourish when Studio Culture Policy we learn good time management techniques.

Course Impartiality

Taubman College architecture department distributes student learning throughout our curriculum with equal value. No faculty or student should encourage an unequal distribution of academic effort by setting conflicting deadlines, or requirements outside of regularly scheduled meeting times for courses.

Reviews

The studio review and critique process is an essential part of the studio-based learning pedagogy. Reviews promote interaction between students and their peers, faculty, and visiting reviewers. The review setting is an important way for faculty to assess student work, and for students to assess their work amongst peers. This dialogue should not be viewed as a negative critical investigation of student progress, but rather a chance to learn from the wealth of knowledge between reviewers and students. The opportunity to present and communicate student ideas through presentation and exhibition is a valuable skill for architectural practice and promotes a greater learning opportunity than a private submission. To be respectful of your peers, both students and faculty should arrive completely prepared for the review, at the set time, and be ready to engage in the review throughout the designated time. Remember that time-management is critical to present your best work, with a coherent presentation.

Students should not arrive to present their projects in reviews having not slept the night before. Encourage your peers, students, and faculty to reflect the school's commitment to a respectful studio culture and environment. Reviewers, peers, and visiting critics are dissuaded from unwarranted derogatory criticism. Consider that the greatest learning is a result of thoughtful, courteous discussion from all participants.

Analysis of Studio Culture Policy

The culture within the studio will always be a living, changing, shifting environment. The policy in place must also continue to reflect these changes while still maintaining the objectives of respect, optimism, professionalism, awareness, collaboration, and innovation. The Studio Culture Policy will be reviewed and revised every four years, with the input of student leadership from all levels, faculty, and staff of the college.