

**Kimball Office Work Group Report:  
*Sustaining Interior Design Education***

by

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The Kimball Office Work Group was challenged to develop recommendations and strategies to increase the pool of qualified interior design educators. The following report documents our work completed to date and includes an issue statement, the situation, preferred vision, challenges, and strategic recommendations. This report is the culmination of our thinking, discussions, and output and prepares the profession for implementation of strategies to resolve this issue. The work is only made possible by the generous support of Kimball Office and its corporate interest in sustaining Interior Design Education in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.

**Issue Statement**

To increase the pool of qualified interior design educators whereby sustaining Interior Design Education.

**Situation**

There is a critical shortage of qualified interior design educators to sustain the future of interior design education. This fact is documented by survey data collected and analyzed by the Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC) and the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). Further, the shortage of educators impacts the entire interior design profession and the advancement of its stakeholders, including design firms, clients, industry partners, associations, individual practitioners, future students, and academic institutions.

Reasons for this shortage include: (1) aging and retirement of the baby-boomers who are now the senior, experienced faculty in many institutions; (2) increased number of students interested in interior design as a profession (while numbers are documented, it is surmised that an increased awareness of interior design is created by societal indicators from global environmental concerns to HGTV); (3) institutional growth within interior design programs to respond to increase in student demand and, therefore the need for more faculty to teach more students; and (4) newly developed institutions or programs to respond to the increase in student demand, and therefore the need for more faculty to teach more students.

Over the last two years, leaders in the profession have initiated discussions about the shortage, reasons for the shortage, and its potential impact on practice and education. These leaders include members of the CIDA Board; the Issues Forum; discussants at NeoCon panel presentations; and officers, panel participants and members at IDEC's

Annual Conferences. Equally, the shortage of interior design educators has been the topic of several articles in *officeinsight*, ARIDO's *Dimensions*, and the *Journal of Interior Design*.

The K-Group studied the facts and figures presented in various documents and firmly believes the interior design profession has reached an education crisis brought on by the shortage of qualified educators. Unfortunately, most practitioners and leaders in the profession remain unaware of this shortage and its impact on the future of the interior design profession. And yet, we must draw from these very practitioners to deepen the pool of qualified educators. We must inform the entire profession and its stakeholders of this shortage and provide opportunities for them to contribute to the solution.

### **Preferred Vision Statement**

Our preferred vision is that interior design stakeholders mutually invest resources of time and money to ensure the future of the Interior Design profession by providing an appropriate number of qualified educators via the foundation of robust education.

### **Challenges to Reaching the Preferred Vision**

We identified four challenges in reaching this vision. The result of our discussion of these challenges became our strategic recommendations.

**Challenge 1.** There is insufficient knowledge and communication exchange among stakeholders, i.e., practitioners, educators, students, graduate students, industry, professional organization leaders, clients and friends of the profession, resulting in the following:

- a. There is little knowledge among practitioners about the shortage of qualified ID educators.
- b. There is lack of data dissemination and a vehicle to share such documentation in reaching the non-believers or those who are unaware.
- c. There is lack of knowledge about the financial impact of the ID educator shortage on all stakeholders.
- d. There is continued development of silos among associations, school curricula, ID schools, profession, etc.
  - Need for industry/practice firms giving feedback to education and vice versa on product delivered to the workplace.
  - Need for sustained communication around critical topics.
  - Need for critical discourse between practice and the academy; there is a messy dialogue around theory and practice, which seems to underlie a gap.

**Challenge 2.** There is insufficient knowledge and communication about Interior Design Education as a Career, resulting in the following:

- a. The practitioner-educator career path often is not discussed or presented as a career choice in first-professional degree programs.

- b. Graduate education frequently is not discussed as a stage in the practitioner's career path (regardless of intended result of advanced degree, i.e., to teach, to specialize, etc.).
- c. There are few interior design practitioners with advanced degrees because the first professional degree is generally a bachelor's degree. However, the M.Arch. is common in architectural education; therefore, many architects have advanced degrees and can be hired by institutions that require an advanced/graduate degree to teach.
- d. Practitioners lack clarity on what graduate education is, e.g., specialization, more studio courses, only interior design topics covered, etc. They lack knowledge about the flexibility of graduate education.
- e. A graduate ID degree is not valued by design firms, i.e., little or no increased pay for those who earn an advanced degree, no knowledge of what an advanced degree can bring to the firm, etc.
- f. Practitioners lack knowledge of how to access graduate programs.
- g. Practitioners are unaware of how to make a move to education including where to go for consistent information about graduate programs and what questions to ask, how to identify potential mentors, and what is available in financial assistance.
- h. Practitioners generally lack awareness and understanding of nuances in teaching positions
  - Lack of clarity on different types of positions and qualification/credentials expected for the different positions and institutions.

**Challenge 3.** Institutional (colleges and universities) roadblocks exist that are both perceived and real, resulting in the following:

- a. Lack of institutional valuing or accepting of a diverse education team that includes a number of degree types, i.e., bachelor, master, and Ph.D. and diversity and depth in interior design practice.
- b. Inequity in facilities such as dedicated studio space, workshops, computer equipment for all majors when compared to allied professions such as architecture and landscape architecture.
- c. Too many students for the number of faculty (full-time and part-time) hired to run the program.
- d. Addition of many part-time faculty who only teach, do not contribute to scholarship, do not contribute to program administration and engagement, and who must be supervised by full-time faculty to maintain consistency.
  - Yet, there is great value in hiring practitioners as part-time faculty; there must be a balance and there is often more than half of the faculty as part-time.
- e. Perception that recruiting students is unnecessary due to current demand; but if recruiting does not continue, there may not be high ability students nor a diversity of student enrolled.
- f. Equality for ID educators within academia in terms of pay, workload, grant money available, etc.

- g. Emphasis on object over design thinking as part of CIDA evaluation criteria

**Challenge 4.** There are perceptions and myths about interior design held by the public and related design community. These were identified as:

- a. The public and related design community lacks a common understanding of what interior design is and its complexity.
- b. False perceptions of interior design have been created by media, such as HGTV.
- c. The belief that educators' pay/salary is significantly inferior to practitioners (perception and myth).
- d. There is a general belief by the public and some interior design practitioners that one teaches because one cannot practice.
- e. There is a belief among educators that practitioners don't want to leave design business.
- f. There is a real lack of demographic diversity within interior design practice and education, which results in several outcomes:
  - Interior designers are believed to serve only elite clients.
  - There are few ethnic, socio-economic classes, race, or cultural role models for students or practitioners.

### **Strategic Goals**

Two overarching goals were reached after analyzing the situation and challenges. These goals guided and shaped our specific recommendations and tactics that follow. We all agreed on two assumptions: that a studio-based educator must have interior design practice experience prior to teaching and that the optimum for an interior design practitioner to become a qualified interior design educator is obtaining an advanced degree, yet realizing that other paths might exist to becoming a qualified interior design educator.

**Strategic Goal 1.** Promote interior design education by developing ways for practitioners to reach students via classroom teaching and other learning opportunities.

- a. Identify diverse credentials of interior design educators that fit institutional needs, i.e., making a case for honoring diverse credentials of degrees and experience.
- b. Develop and disseminate information about methods by which interior design practitioners can contribute to the body of knowledge via scholarship, which is a responsibility of an educator.
- c. Develop and disseminate information about accessible and appropriate graduate programs that prepare practitioners to teach and earn advanced degrees required by some institutions.
- d. Create relationships/opportunities among students, educators, and practitioners that foster understanding of students' needs, educators' needs, and practitioners' needs and the abilities of all.

**Strategic Goal 2.** Develop a communication plan for practitioners and all stakeholders to learn about the lack of qualified interior design educators, careers in higher education, and graduate education opportunities. This communication plan should address various levels of awareness, interest, and actions. It should also cover multiple visual and verbal venues including on-line, print, presentations, and dialogue

### **Recommendations**

**Strategic Goal 1.** Promote interior design education by developing ways for practitioners to reach students via classroom teaching and other learning opportunities.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that credentials for several types of interior design education positions be identified and developed via an IDEC White Paper. The positions we suggest and qualifications or required credentials to be developed include:

- the practitioner-educator to teach in part-time interior design education positions
- the practitioner-educator to teach in full-time, non-tenure track interior design education positions
- the educator to teach in full-time, tenure track interior design education positions

Suggested Steps:

1. Invite a team of approximately seven educators and practitioners; team represents diverse types of educational institutions and practitioner educators including: public research, public teaching, private for profit, private non-profit, practitioner who teaches part-time, and practitioner who teaches full-time
2. Collect and analyze credentialing data
  - a. What credentials institutions actually require, i.e. how big is this problem
  - b. Institutional accreditation credential requirements, i.e. North Central, Southern, (see CIDA list)
  - c. Number of faculty in interior design programs compared to numbers in allied fields within Colleges/Schools (is there equity?)
  - d. Other research necessary as determined by the team
3. Team chair outlines major points for the White Paper, circulates to team members, accumulates comments, and determines team meeting time and location
4. Team meets to write the White Paper; 2-3 days (parts assigned ahead of time based on comments to outline)
5. Send White Paper for comment to about 10 people that include the KOWG, administrators, faculty from all types of institutions, practitioners.
6. Revise paper based on comments; get team approval
7. Submit to IDEC BOD for member comment period and subsequent BOD approval

8. Publish, disseminate via approved Marketing Plan and present at NeoCon June,2009

**Recommendation 2. We recommend** that course(s), methods, and materials be developed to teach ID practitioner-educators ways to contribute to scholarship (both research and creative performance).

Suggested Steps:

1. Produce/develop a call for a minimum of three courses to be developed by institutional teams. Disseminate to educators from Nov 08-Jan 2009
2. Selection of a minimum of three courses by Jan-Feb 2009
3. Winners develop courses and submit for blind peer review and subsequently to IDCEC for approval. Feb-May 2009
4. Disseminate via the marketing plan. June 2009

**Recommendation 3. We recommend** existing graduate education programs and courses be identified, developed as an information source, and then be disseminated and promoted to practitioners to create awareness among practitioners of advanced interior design education opportunities, i.e., types of degrees, value of a graduate degree, types of programs, resources required and available, etc.

Suggested Steps:

1. Call for a team of educators and practitioners from diverse backgrounds. Sept – Oct, 2008
2. KOWG reviews and selects team. Dec 31, 2008
3. Team will collect and analyze data from existing graduate programs and courses to determine accessibility, delivery, and content. Jan-Mar 2009
4. Team meets to determine adequacy of content and accessibility and develop information to be disseminated via the ID Education Web site. June 1, 2009
5. Team encourages institutions with existing resources to advertise to practitioners
6. Team shares information compiled and encourages institutions to collaborate for the development of accessible and appropriate graduate programs

**Recommendation 4. We recommend** five strategies to create and advance relationships, opportunities, and understanding of needs among students, practitioners, and educators over the next five years.

**For Immediate action**

1. Offer national conference dialogues by leveraging existing national industry conferences for 1-day events where undergraduate students, graduate students, practitioners, and educators would have joint sessions around given topics. Examples of

special topics may include: social responsibility, triple bottom line of sustainability, innovation, and collaborative work environments.

Rationale: There may be existing/emerging trends where practice and clients' needs are explored in open dialogue sessions and provide opportunities for research collaborations. This opens up the opportunity to look at the topics as a practitioner and introduce the perspective and potential of developing teaching opportunities.

Timeline:

2009, 2010 Conferences such as those organized by IDEC, NeoCon, IIDA, ASID, IDC, ARIDO, IDEX among others.

### **For Immediate Action**

2. Include interior design educational careers within undergraduate Interior Design Career Days across North America.

Description: This is a 1-day event held in large cities, regions, and states/provinces where students and other participants gather to hear and question career opportunities in Interior Design. In addition to careers in practice, interior design education will be featured.

Rationale: Practitioners and students would have an opportunity to learn about career opportunities in Interior Design as an educator. This may lead to other academe and practice partnerships. In addition, faculty members, officers of student organizations and local IIDA, ASID, IDC and collaborating organization chapters, plus HR representatives of A/ID firms are presently organizing such Career Days.

Timeline:

Initiate in 2009

### **For Two-Five Year Action**

3. Create Academe and Practice Partnerships

Description: Partnerships may take several forms. One could be co-instruction where an educator and practitioner work together in a studio environment. A second form could be a research fellowship program within a firm where an academic faculty or graduate student would partner with a practitioner on research for a project.

Rationale: A partnership augments the lack of staff and there is a reciprocal learning experience between the educator and the practitioner allowing new ideas to be reached by all. It also supports getting the practitioner into the academy and having educators see current ideas/work in the practice environment. Information could be shared with all stakeholders once demonstration projects are completed.

Suggested Steps and Timeline:

Year 1: Development of the contacts and proposed work methodology

Year 2: Demonstration project

Year 3: Documentation and white papers/articles

Year 4: Dissemination and wider acceptance to publications targeting both academic and practitioner audiences

**For Three-Five Year Action**

4. Create and offer a Summer Boot Camp

Description: A Summer Boot Camp would be a 3-5 day session where teams of educators, key senior and mid-career practitioners, and students would collaborate on a topic or issue that combines theory, research, and practice. This camp would rotate among regions each year. This is intended to be an intense and highly-immersive learning experience, with reporting through the press.

Rationale: The practitioners and graduate students would teach as well as the academics, and then students and practitioners would see models for education careers as well as get a rich experience.

Suggested Steps and Timeline:

Year 1: Development of the contacts, proposed topic and work methodology, invitations dispensed

Year 2: Offer Boot Camp with record and documentation

Year 3: Preparation of articles, video output and white papers

Year 4: Dissemination and wider acceptance to publications targeting both academic and practitioner audiences

**For Three-Five Year Action**

5. Develop Centers of Excellence within Academia

Description: Within selected graduate programs, Centers of Excellence would be created related to a content strength of the program. The Center would bring together researchers, scholars, graduate students, related industry professionals and practitioners. Organizationally, a director (might or might not be faculty) would be designated. Members could be faculty, staff, graduate students, and interested partners.

Rationale: The Center would advance knowledge and content. There are opportunities for funding not always available in departmental budgeting. It augments curriculum for classroom projects and graduate study. It is a robust recruitment vehicle. It connects research with implementation, and builds from a collaborative platform. It offers a flexible structure, and it puts into place a feedback loop that is responsive and enabling a faster turnaround time for realization of expended knowledge.

Suggested Steps and Timeline:

Year 1: Organize a 2 day visioning session with potential and interested contacts—  
Group shares and documents models

Year 2: Campus Specific Centers for Excellence Developed—using networking and model

- Year 3: Continue refinements, receive funds and approval
- Year 4: Operations underway
- Year 5: Disseminate to wider audience

**Strategic Goal 2. Communication/Marketing Plan**

**Recommendation 5**

- a. We recommend** that a communication plan be developed for stakeholders to learn about ID education as a career. This includes awareness of the current issue (crisis) and the potential solutions, and providing access to the solutions while promoting the value of education as a career.
- b. We recommend** incentives be communicated by identifying the value and uniqueness that practitioners and educators each bring to the profession, the value of and incentives for graduate education, and potential funding pools for developing financial packages for new educators.

*Background for Communication Plan regarding incentives:*

A common way to envision the plight of increasing the pool of qualified interior design educators might be to start with the uniqueness and value of the academic role, trying to convince the field that graduate education has value and then to answer the question, “How am I going to pay for it?”

Taking a slightly different tack, we want to start with the value and uniqueness of the practitioner role and then show (1) how that role translates to academic uniqueness, (2) how both enhance, and are enhanced, by graduate education, and (3) how such a step adds value to the individual and field. While funding graduate education is seen as a barrier, it needn’t be. There are pools of financial resources to tap when one initiates returning to graduate school and later when one seeks support for a study.

Examples of information to include:

**1. Value and Uniqueness’s of Practice and Academic Roles**

<u>Practitioner (where now)</u>	<u>Academic (where to)</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking and market relevancy</li> </ul>	Theory and market research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Trends (i.e. sustainability at cubed power; innovation— design thinking-alternative thinking: restorative spaces, special populations, etc)</li> </ul>	Feed and nourish practice w/ design research idea exploration theory interpretation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Converting ideas into practice</li> </ul>	New seeing, bringing into

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|--|---|
| “Making it happen in the built Environment”                            | consciousness, attune studio thinking/doing   |
| • Design Criticism—“back to the drawing board”                         | Design crits—building student discernment..need to know problem and different views   |
| • Client growth/support/satisfaction                                   | Build social, anthropological, scientific, aesthetic, business understanding base & strong communication skills<br>Professional growth/support and information accounting |
| • Interior expertise and perspective among different team perspectives | Interdisciplinary opportunities in academic culture   |

**2. So You’re Questioning Why Graduate Education?  
What to expect and find...**

- Profit from advanced education in a variety of ways—  
Individual advancement, new avenues of work, new profit centers
  - Build on the “why” of your thinking and doing through research, theory and design exploration
- Respond to your curiosity and hunger to understand anew
  - Know “mind-shifts” are positives and desired
- Pursue an area of focus that you don’t have time for in practice
- Advance what we know to make it happen in the environment, giving practice more ammo to do their job and to give academics new ways to explain, see and improve interior designers for the future
  - Add to the world’s and field’s body of knowledge
- Find, see, and make new professional connections and alignments

**3. Funding Need not be a Barrier to Graduate Education  
(May be presented as pie graph in different proportions)**

While some personal funds are needed,  
Expect or Seek Assistance from

- University Departments\*

Graduate programs often provide financial assistance through  
Graduate Scholarships  
Graduate Teaching Assistantships  
Graduate Research Assistantships  
Project Assistantships

\*Programs want you as a graduate student. They expect to provide some support. Ask about opportunities. You may need to apply to receive them or they may be part of an offer to have you attend.

Funds might vary from \$1,500 to \$15,000 or more. Teaching assistantships typically cover tuition plus a monthly stipend and provide opportunities to learn to teach.

- Interior Design Associations

Association Foundations might have scholarship funds for practitioners returning to graduate school. Check with colleagues.

- Firm/Corporate Business

Some firms/businesses support employees returning to graduate programs for advancement and will pay a % of costs. Ask.

- Industry Support

Increasingly manufacturers, real estate, and other clients/partners are interested in supporting practitioners who return to graduate education.

**For support of a design research study/project,  
Seek additional assistance from:**

- University Graduate Fellowships

These might cover travel, attending conferences to present papers, or cover costs of collecting information and completing the project

- Private Foundations or Individuals

Your topic might be of interest to private foundations or individuals. Work with the University's Foundation, the department and adviser to secure how private funds may be given and then passed along to your project.

- Faculty Adviser Contacts

c. **We recommend** the creation of venues for dialogue among stakeholders to create awareness, interest, and solutions to the issue. These include roundtables, workshops, collaborative partnerships, speaker's bureau, and on-going operations such Applied Brilliance Conference, large firm roundtable, student career days, etc.

Note: We see all communication have a 'brand' that relates to the issue; that the message be portrayed in a strong visual manner, such as a graphic representation or hand rendered image rather than densely written text.

### **Continuing the Work**

The Kimball Office Work Group realizes that there is no direct supervision of this project. IDEC agreed to accept the administration of the grant money from Kimball Office, liaison among K-Group members, management time for the Retreat, etc., which has taken some of their resources. While very willing to contribute at some level, there must be buy-in from other interior design profession stakeholders and resources to continue this important work. Therefore, we developed the final recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 6. Operations, Management, and Administration**

- a. **We recommend** that the issue and subsequent recommendations/work plan be "owned" by the combined efforts of the IDEC Board, the Kimball Office Working Group, and support from IDC, ARIDO, IIDA, ASID, **members of the academe, industry partners, and clients.**
- b. **We recommend** that the K-Group remain in place through September 2009. The K-Group is responsible for the "sustaining interior design education work effort." The outcomes will be reported to IDEC and Kimball. The majority of the work effort will be completed in 1 year. At that time, the K-Group will review progress and put into place mechanisms that will ensure the success of the stated preferred future.
- c. **We recommend** that an agreement be brokered by the K-Group with IDEC on administrative needs to ensure a home for such items as development and use of a Web site (or development of pages for an existing Web site), use of survey and research tools, i.e., SurveyMonkey, administration time, conference calls, team meetings, receipt of marketing/communications plans, implementation of budget and accounting, etc.

