

# Innovative Teaching Manual

## PROJECT TITLE

Consumers' Perception of the Interior Design Profession: The Impact of Shelter Magazines

## AUTHOR

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## PROJECT LEVEL

Fourth Year

## ABSTRACT

This project addresses seniors' transition from school to work, preparing them to encounter clients with a very different attitude about design than that which they became accustomed to during their academic career. Issues of professional status become more important to students when linked to an analysis of the value consumers place on design, and ultimately the level of compensation consumers deem appropriate to design services rendered. Market rates for services are, in the main, established by the market, by the consumer, and consumer perception of the field governs its acknowledgement of interior design as a profession worthy of respect and a level of compensation accorded other professions.

Utilizing the technique of content analysis, students engage in research which enables them to discover some of the sources of the public's perception of the interior design field. Using the 1990 Definition of Interior Design as a model, they compare and contrast language found in magazines to the language established by the major design organizations as indicative of the designer's role in shaping the built environment. In so doing, students bring themselves up to date relative to the profession's progress toward achieving full professional status, and acquire the evidence necessary to forming their own judgement of that progress.

In closely examining a wide range of vocabulary utilized in describing and explaining interior design, students expand their own arsenal of verbal communication skills, rejecting imprecise, hackneyed and cliché-ridden language and adopting a more serious, analytical and professional means of communicating their design ideas.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding of the importance of periodicals as sources of consumer information/misinformation relative to the role of the professional interior designer in shaping the built environment.
2. Analysis and evaluation of the language used in periodicals to explain project concept and to describe the synthesis of processes and products manifested in completed installations. Students compare the language of magazine writers to their own attempts at communicating verbally about a visual discipline.
3. Development of a vocabulary which emphasizes the serious, professional nature of interior design practice.
4. Recognition of each designer's responsibility to promote the continued progress of the profession's acceptance as a profession.

## CRITERIA

The Definition of Interior Design was created and published in 1990 to reinforce public perception of interior design as a serious profession, and of qualified practitioners as professionals. The language utilized in the Definition includes ten forceful verbs: the professional interior designer analyzes, integrates, formulates, develops, presents, prepares, collaborates, administers, reviews and evaluates. These words contrast sharply with those often used to describe designers' activities in magazine articles read by consumers, in which designers choose, collect, shop, find and mix things that they favor, prefer, like, love or adore. With flair, inspiration and an unerring sense of style, they change, redo, freshen-up and transform space, and help each client to realize his/her dream. The use of the verbs contained in the Definition is rare, and our potential clients are educated about the field not in the terms defined by design professionals but in language which publishers deem as effective for selling magazines.

In her article "How does the public perceive interior designers" (IS, 5/96, pg. 162), Judith Hastings FIIDA observes that the profession has "done a poor job of enlightening John Q. Public about the value of interior designers." The ASID REPORT last year changed its name to ASID PROFESSIONAL DESIGNER "to more effectively promote professionalism in interior design" (Kathy Ford Montgomery, ASID President. 9/96, pg. 2). As we educate future professionals, we must make them aware of consumers' misconceptions about the field by guiding them in discovering the sources of those misconceptions. Students will then be better equipped to develop strategies for reshaping public perception of the field.

## PROCESS

The real concerns which seniors have over their future livelihood serve to motivate enthusiasm for this project, which in the end rewards diligence with a real sense of discovery. Students complete the project individually, although working in teams is a possibility. Research, analytical and writing skills are each employed and developed, as are presentation planning and execution in the student's approach to reporting his/her conclusions. The project assignment which follows below provides the process in further detail, including the content expected in presentation.

This project has been used to fulfill part of the requirements of a senior capstone seminar, but is also appropriate to a professional practice course which addresses issues of professional status, design fees, and the roles of other professionals with whom interior designers collaborate.

## EVALUATION

### GRADING CRITERIA INCLUDES

1. The scope of the research. Did periodicals studied represent the full range of publications which address interior design issues? Were articles examined addressed to a wide range of readers? Did articles focus on a wide range of project types?
2. The quantity of data collected. Were sufficient examples recorded to form a valid conclusion? Was all of the data reported pertinent to the conclusion?
3. The quality of the project report. Was data presented clearly and effectively? Were conclusions appropriate to the data, and presented in a forceful and compelling manner?

## PROJECT LENGTH

Intended as a full-semester assignment, this project can coexist with other student projects.

## PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

### Research Project

#### The Portrayal of Interior Design/Interior Designers In Periodicals

1. THE RESEARCH QUESTION - How are interior designers and the services they perform characterized in magazine articles directed to consumers? Are interior designers portrayed as individuals "qualified by education, experience and examination to enhance the function and quality of interior spaces for the purpose of improving the quality of life, increasing productivity, and protecting the health, safety and welfare of the public?" (from 1990 DEFINITION)
2. RESEARCH FOCUS - Magazine articles published and available to the general public during a single month of the last year will be examined toward determining the impact of their content on consumers' perception of the interior design profession. Issues which are published bimonthly or quarterly may be included, since they are available to readers during the month under study. While articles examined will be limited to those published during the month chosen by the researcher, the sources should be as broad as possible, representing the full spectrum of "Shelter" writing. Articles intended for a variety of readers, from homemakers to design professionals, should be included in the study.
3. RESEARCH APPROACH - Employing content analysis, researchers will examine and analyze the text of articles, focussing on:
  - a) words used by magazine writers in describing and explaining tasks performed by interior designers. What verbs are employed to define design activity? Do designers *develop an effective solution* or *dream up a dazzling scheme*? Do they *help clients by designing* or *help clients design*? Do they *advise* or merely *suggest*?
  - b) words used by designers, directly quoted in articles, in describing or explaining what they do. What verbs do designers use to define their activities?
  - c) the frequency with which these words occur. Are some verbs used more than others? Does the consistent incidence of any verb or type of verb create a pattern which might influence the perception of the reader in evaluating the value of interior design, of the services rendered by interior designers?
4. THE RESEARCH REPORT - Results of the investigation will be reported in a format selected by the researcher, and will include:
  - a) Data indicating the use of the ten verbs contained in the 1990 Definition
  - b) Data indicating the incidence of verbs used by writers and by designers
  - c) Discussion of any patterns of verb-use discovered, e.g. by a publication, relative to a target audience, relative to project type (residential/commercial)
  - d) Summary of findings leading to a statement of conclusions on the impact of vocabulary used in magazines on the public's perception of interior design.