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“Declining Pool of Interior Design Educators” - Interior Design Profession Engages in Roundtable at NeoCon 2007

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During NeoCon, educators and practitioners from leading interior design programs and firms attended the Kimball Office sponsored panel discussion on the Call for Action—a discussion on the declining pool of interior design educators. Panelists included Susan Szenasy, Editor of Metropolis, Eileen Jones, Principle of Perkins+Will and Branded Environments, Laura Smith, Associate with Perkins+Will, Eric Wiedegreen, Past President of Interior design Educators Council (IDEC) and Professor/Department Chair at Florida State University, and Cary Johnson, North Central Regional Workplace Leader with Gensler, Board Member of Council on Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), and Past President of International Interior Design Association. Georgy Olivieri LEED AP, MBA and President GO Initiatives moderated the panel.

Panelists and educators passionately shared their view on the topic of the declining pool of interior designers and other related issues. Members of academia have experienced this issue firsthand with few practitioners choosing education as a career, interior design professors retiring, and lengthy recruiting periods for replacements taking up to two years. There are not enough replacements because many practitioners don't have advanced degrees necessary to teach. The industry does not provide financial or advancement incentives for people to further their education before entering the practice or for practitioners to later secure advanced degrees to teach interior design. There are simply not enough educators to teach the next generation of interior designers.

While educators are well aware of the situation, it was shocking to members of the interior design profession who attended the session. Leaders of major interior design firms said that this was the most important program they had attended in years. They shared that they had no idea of this potentially devastating situation.

Nila Leiserowitz, Principal and Managing Director of Gensler stated " I have to admit, those of us in practice are not aware of the grave situation regarding the declining pool of interior

design educators. During the panel discussion and dialogue, we witnessed the reaction of educators who have experienced this problem firsthand. It just doesn't seem to have surfaced to interior design professionals, yet... This was the most important session I have attended in years and I feel the timing was perfect." Furthermore, Nila adds, "We need to analyze our existing curriculums in order to raise the educational bar one bar higher. This will support the goals of CIDA, NCIDQ and our clients."

Design practitioners now realize the gravity of the problem and the need for their contribution towards finding solutions.

The Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) recognizes the dilemma inherent in a profession requiring greater complexity that is also experiencing a lack of appropriately qualified faculty members. Holly Mattson, Executive Director of CIDA shares that "In order to meet quality standards for interior design education in 2009 and beyond, interior design programs must have the capacity to deliver the distinct body of knowledge required to practice."

The purpose of the dialogue was to surface new ideas to affect solutions. The first issue discussed was how to further legitimize the important contribution of the still young profession of interior design. We also talked about value creation for interior design clients, linking design to business results. It became obvious in our conversation that interior design education and practitioners must collaborate to address the serious need for educators. One of the actionable suggestions was to facilitate direct conduit between leaders in interior design practice and education to implement research to gather factual data complimented with action steps necessary to replenish the pool of interior design educators.

Based on the panel discussion and seriousness of the situation, Kimball Office, the event sponsor is continuing their support by funding a study to further define the problem. Jane Kucko, President of IDEC stated Kimball Office's rising to the forefront in addressing this critical issue is commendable and will be key to providing solutions.

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