Graduate Programs in Interior Design

Current Program Status

Submitted by Susan Ray-Degges on behalf of the IDEC Distance Learning Network Strategic Initiatives’ Grant Members:
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3/16/2009

The members of the IDEC Distance Learning Network submit the following Strategic Initiative Final Report on the data collected of the existing graduate programs and course offerings in interior design in United States and Canada.
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**Strategic Initiative:**

**Strategic Direction 1: Advancement of Interior Design Education**

IDEC is the leader in supporting and promoting excellence in interior design and interior design education.

*Objective 1.A.* Promote graduate education to advance the profession.

*Objective 1.B.* Encourage the practicing professional to enter the field of education.

**Project Goals/Objectives:**

The goal of this Strategic Initiative is to collect relevant data regarding possible graduate school offerings that provide nontraditional delivery models that will encourage the practicing professional to enter the field of higher education.

**Project Outcomes:**

- Develop a comprehensive database of existing graduate program offerings in interior design – *complete (please see attached spreadsheet labeled graduate programs)*

- Identify “hybrid” graduate program models accessible to practicing professionals who already have substantial commitments to their careers and families – *programs have been identified, key faculty members at three universities have been contacted for interviews to develop a clear picture of how the programs are delivered online (please see “Follow-up Phone Interviews” on page 11)*

- Identify “hybrid” graduate program models outside of interior design that are successful in delivery – *Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) has been success in offering a variety of graduate level programs through distance learning to “…meet the emerging needs of …professions and to target professionals seeking education for career advancement and career change” (Moxley & Maes, 2003, p.1). Please see the attached Moxley & Maes (2003) article.*

- Summary Report to be provided to IDEC and to IDEC President-Jane Kucko and IDEC Past President-Eric Wiedegreen for presentation at NEOCON 2008 – *did not meet this proposed deadline.*
Strategic Initiative Final Report

Data Collection Process

Content analysis was completed on data collected from the IDEC web site graduate student link to “Interior Design & Related Graduate Programs” (IDEC, 2004) and an online review of web sites identified as having graduate programs for interior design or related disciplines. The online review was completed to identify current information on graduate program offerings listed on the IDEC web site and to identify additional graduate programs that were available as individuals often use the internet to locate or search for graduate school information. Using the model of the “Interior Design & Related Graduate Programs” on the IDEC web site, an updated comprehensive data base of 57 programs was created from this information (see attached spreadsheet labeled Graduate Programs 2009).

An online survey instrument, “IDEC Strategic Initiatives Grant,” was deployed to primary contacts at 57 universities during June and July 2008, a second wave was deployed in September 2008 to increase the number of universities represented in the survey results. There was a 26 percent response rate to the survey instrument with 15 different universities participating in the online survey. The online survey included questions addressing degree offerings, curriculum delivery methods, admission standards, degree completion time length, number of tenured and non-tenured full-and part-time faculty, graduate population demographics, facilities, finances, and institutional type.

Follow up phone interviews were completed with faculty members of programs that offer online graduate degrees to define successful applications of distance learning that could be implemented by other interior design programs.
Initial Content Analysis of Graduate Programs

Graduate Programs by IDEC Region

Total Graduate programs offering advanced degrees in the discipline of interior design (MS, MA, MFA, MIA, MSD, MID, MSIA, DDes and PhD) in the United States and Canada (N=57).

- **Pacific West (16%; n=9)** – Arizona (1), California (3), Oregon (2), Utah (1), Washington (2)
- **Southwest (12%; n=7)** – Colorado (1), Louisiana (1), Oklahoma (2), Texas (3)
- **Midwest (28%; n=16)** – Illinois (2), Indiana (3), Iowa (1), Kentucky (1), Manitoba (1), Michigan (3), Minnesota (1), Missouri (1), Nebraska (1), Ohio (1), Wisconsin (1)
- **South (21%; n=12)** – Alabama (1), Florida (3), Georgia (3), North Carolina (1), Tennessee (1), Virginia (3)
- **East (23%; n=13)** – Massachusetts (3), New York (6), Pennsylvania (2), Rhode Island (1), Washington, DC (1)

Graduate Programs Offered Through “Hybrid” Distance Learning Options

Based on the final content analysis, only three universities were found to offer “hybrid” online graduate programs. These programs included University of Missouri-Columbia (MS and PhD), University of Nebraska-Lincoln (MS Interior Design), and Savannah College of Art and Design (MA Interior Design).

Information collected on the IDEC Strategic Initiatives Grant Online Survey found that on-site, traditional course delivery was the primary method for offering graduate coursework. Colorado State University’s graduate program offered a combination of traditional graduate courses on site with some online course delivery and they indicated that they were planning on moving all graduate program curriculum delivery online during 2009. Other programs that used a combination of tradition onsite and online course delivery included Oregon State University, California State University, Lawrence Technological, and University of Missouri.
Advanced Degrees By IDEC Region and Degree Title

Reviewing the information on advanced degrees in interior design provided below clearly indicates that there is a need to increase the number of Post Professional educational options across United States. One challenge that individuals may encounter if they are search to locate a graduate program is the diversity of names associated with the interior design discipline. While MA, MS, MFA, and PhD are considered “traditional” titles for programs it would be advantageous if undergraduate students were educated on the options that would be available to them once they complete their baccalaureate degree.

Number and Titles of Advanced Degrees
In the discipline of Interior Design by IDEC Region in the United States and Canada.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Professional</th>
<th>Post Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>MFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South west</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals For All Regions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Last updated January 15, 2009)

Degree Title Designations:

- MA Masters of Art
- MFA Masters of Fine Arts
- MS Masters of Science
- MSD Masters of Design
- MID Masters of Interior Design
- MIA Masters of Interior Architecture
- MSIA Masters of Science in Interior Architecture
- PhD Doctorate of Philosophy
- DDes Doctorate of Design
Great Plains IDEA – a Model for a “Hybrid” Distance Learning

Another type of “hybrid” distance learning graduate initiative that could be considered is for existing graduate programs to participate in an established distance learning consortium such as the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) or consider formulating “interior design consortiums” that will allow practicing professions/graduate students to have access to faculty across the country via internet-based courses.

The Great Plains IDEA, started in 1994, is a multi-state consortium that shares distance internet courses and programs at the graduate level (Great Plains IDEA, 2007). The consortium, created by academic deans, allows programs to make alliances with like programs to offer graduate programs that a single institution is unable to meet because of a small number of faculty or limited graduate student population. With the combined efforts of programs, students can enroll at a member institution and take courses at other member institutions via internet-based courses.

As suggested by Moxley and Maes (2003),

“[W]e are about the business of reinvention—of knowledge, of people, of cultures—and we should devote some of our attention to reinventing the enterprise of higher education. The Great Plains IDEA was conceived during a favorable climate for innovation, and given the current financial and competitive environment, it is recognized by university leaders as a model for the future… As you look across the nation, …almost every year for the last decade…the largest and fastest growing segment of the population that wants higher education experience are people already in the workforce. The only way that they’re going to get it is through a distance-learning model. And this model is perfect” (p. 9).

Current universities participating in the Great Plains IDEA includes Colorado State University, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, Texas Tech University, Michigan State University, University of Missouri, Montana State University, University of Nebraska, North Dakota State University, Oklahoma State University, and South Dakota State University.

If interior design programs that offered advanced degrees could coordinate their efforts with other programs, practicing professional returning to college would have access to the expertise of faculty across the country resulting in a higher quality learning experience not only for that individual but the faculty member and the institution.
Survey Results

It is important to recognize limitations of this study. The sampling frames, Interior Design & Related Graduate Programs (IDEC, 2004) and an online search, used to establish the data base for interior design graduate programs may not have revealed all university programs that currently offer graduate coursework in interior design. There was a 26 percent response rate to the survey instrument with 15 different universities participating in the online survey. Of the academic programs participating in the study, 48 percent are housed in a publicly funded university, 35 percent are land-grant universities, and 17 percent are private universities.

**Degree Types.** When asked to identify what type of graduate degrees offered, 45 percent of the respondents identified MS, followed by MFA and PhD (19.35%), the remaining degrees were identified as MA (10%) and MID (3.23%). These results mirror the numbers generated by the content analysis of interior design graduate program web sites that clearly identified MS as the dominant, post-professional degree followed by the MFA. While the responses were low for the MA, this may reflect programs that did not participate in the study or an MFA may be an alternate degree.

**Program Degree Options.** Graduate interior design programs were asked to define their program’s area of emphasis, based on the following definitions:

- Post-professional - focus on beginning research methods, design research, and possibly teaching methods.
- First-professional - curriculum is a combination of baccalaureate and advanced-level professional studies, and may include some initial exposure to research and teaching; student typically does not have an undergraduate degree in interior design.
- Ph.D. – defined as a post-baccalaureate degree awarded upon completion of at least three years of full-time specialized study, together with a major research contribution to the discipline that demonstrates independence as a scholar. The degree culminates with a formal dissertation.
- Non-thesis program.
- Thesis program.
- Other - self defined by participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program’s Degree Options</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-professional</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-professional</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-thesis program</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis program</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Thesis</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 In addition, some schools further identified that they offer a MA First-Professional degree requiring a thesis project and a MA Post-Professional degree requiring a written thesis.
Program Research/Academic Focus. Using the program focus areas identified on the “Interior Design & Related Graduate Programs,” (IDEC, 2004) programs were asked to identify the research-focus areas for their program. Three focus areas dominated the responses from the participating graduate programs. Sixty-seven percent of the programs identify Interior Design as one of their research focus areas, 58 percent of the respondents identified Human Environmental/Environment & Behaviors, and 50 percent identified Sustainable Design. Thirty-eight percent of the programs identify Design Methodology, Theory & Criticism and Student Driven-Individualized Studies in Interior Design. Closely following as a program research focus areas were Design Education, Designing for Special Populations, and Accessibility/Universal Design, all at 33.33 percent. Additional academic focus areas identified in the opened ended question for this section were Interdisciplinary Approaches, Building Design and Construction Processes, and Historic Interiors. A complete listing of research focus areas is provided in the table below in descending order of ranking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Research/Academic Focus Areas</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Interior Design (66.67%)</td>
<td>• Culture &amp; Design (16.67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sustainable Design (50.00%)</td>
<td>• Design Technology (16.67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human Environmental/Environment &amp; Behavior (58.33%)</td>
<td>• American Design &amp; Culture (12.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interior Design - Individualized Studies (37.50%) (programs identified this option allowed students to select a focus area in consultation with the faculty)</td>
<td>• Architectural Studies (12.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Design Methodology, Theory &amp; Criticism (37.50%)</td>
<td>• Interior Design w/Commercial track (12.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Design Education (33.33%)</td>
<td>• Interior Design w/Healthcare &amp; Inst. track (12.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Designing for Special Populations (33.33%)</td>
<td>• Interior Design w/ Residential track (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accessibility/Universal Design (33.33%)</td>
<td>• Facility Planning and Management (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aging (29.17%)</td>
<td>• Textiles (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• History, Theory &amp; Criticism (29.17%)</td>
<td>• Learning Styles (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human Factors (25.00%)</td>
<td>• Historic Preservation (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional Practice (25.00%)</td>
<td>• Material Culture (8.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visual/Graphic Communications (25.00%)</td>
<td>• Human Ecology (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Digital Media (20.83%)</td>
<td>• Interior Product Design (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interior Architecture (20.83%)</td>
<td>• Interior Design w/ Hospitality/Retail track (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lighting (20.83%)</td>
<td>• Museum Studies (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interior Design Preservation &amp; Conservation (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumer (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sacred Geometry (0%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Program Facilities. Programs offer a variety of physical facilities to support a student’s graduate school experience. Depending on the academic focus of the academic program, many unique lab settings were provided. These labs include computer labs with the necessary software to support research, plotting labs, textile labs, digital fabrication labs, and lighting labs. Other support spaces provided to graduate students include graduate student office/studio spaces, material libraries; and wood, model, and metal shops. In addition, some campus settings provide
research centers that allow graduate students the opportunity to conduct collaborative multidisciplinary studies.

To support the financial needs of graduate students, 32 percent of the programs identified fellowships as one of the primary resources available, closely followed by tuition waivers and scholarships/assistantships at 30 percent, and grants at 23 percent.

**Curriculum Delivery.** Programs were asked to identify the curriculum delivery method used for their graduate program. As identified by the content analysis there are a small number of programs moving forward to offer interior design graduate degrees online. The responses also indicate that one graduate program anticipates moving to online course delivery. Data results indicated that traditional, on-campus delivery (60%) continues to dominate curriculum delivery for interior design graduate programs. Over a fourth (26.67%) of the programs responding indicated that they used a combination of online and onsite curriculum delivery techniques. As identified by the content analysis there are a small number of programs moving forward to offer interior design graduate degrees online. Results from the survey indicated that ten percent of the programs primarily used online curriculum delivery methods in their graduate program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Program Delivery Method (n=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onsite/Online Combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other $^1$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$Program is planning to switch to all online course delivery in 2009

**Program Admittance.** Admission standards for enrolling in graduate programs included undergraduate degree requirements, grade point average (GPA), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. Additional program entrance requirements were also reviewed. Most graduate programs required graduate students to have completed a bachelor’s degree in interior design or a related degree (91.67%). Program GPA requirements were required by 67 percent of the programs ranging from a cumulative GPA of 2.5 to 3.5. Some programs used both GPA and GRE scores as a deciding factor for student acceptance into the program.

Seventeen percent of the programs require the GRE for students to be admitted into their graduate program. Of those programs requiring GRE exams, scores ranged from 450-500 on the verbal exam, with some programs requiring a 1200 cumulative score (550 verbal, 550 quantitative, 4.0 analytical writing). Of the programs requiring GRE scores, respondents indicated that GRE exams were not required at the master’s level but required for those students pursuing a Ph.D. When examining TOEFL scores, only 38 percent of the participants indicated
that their program used TOEFL results as a determining factor for program admittance. For the programs using TOEFL results, scores for admission into the program ranged from 550 to 600 on the written test, and 213 on the computer-based test. Some programs have additional admittance requirements, including 2-3 years of professional interior design experience and a design portfolio.

**Graduate Program Duration.** Survey participants were asked to identify the projected time length to successfully complete a graduate degree. Program duration varies across program type, level, and student’s educational/professional background. Participants of this study indicated that program duration was typically 2 years in length at the master’s level (48%) and 3 years in length for Ph.D. programs (24%).

**General Demographics.** Graduate programs were typically supported by approximately four, tenured, full-time faculty and three, non-tenured, full-time faculty. The number of tenured full-time faculty ranged from 1 to 10 members, while non-tenured full-time faculty ranged from 1 to 7 members.

Based on the survey results, females dominate the student body for interior design graduate programs. Nineteen graduate programs identified that 50 percent or more of their graduate student population was female, while two graduate programs identified that 50 to 69 percent their graduate student population was male.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9%</td>
<td>3 - programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19%</td>
<td>5 - programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29%</td>
<td>5 - programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39%</td>
<td>1 - program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49%</td>
<td>2 - programs</td>
<td>1 - program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59%</td>
<td>1 - program</td>
<td>2 - programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69%</td>
<td>1 - program</td>
<td>2 - programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>3 - programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89%</td>
<td>3 - programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-100%</td>
<td>9 - programs</td>
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</table>

While examining the diversity of the graduate students enrolled in interior design programs, international graduate students ranged from 5-70 percent, Asian/Pacific Islander represented a range of 2 – 27 percent, Hispanic graduate students ranged from 2 -10 percent, African American graduate students ranged from 5 – 20 percent, and Caucasian graduate students ranged from 20 – 100 percent. There were no American Indians identified in the graduate programs participating in the survey.
Follow-Up Phone Interviews to Programs with Online Graduate Programs

Phone interviews were completed with faculty members at three universities offering online graduate degrees to identify and define successful applications of distance learning. Savannah’s College of Art & Design offers a MA, University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Interior Design Program in the College of Architecture offers a MS, and the University of Missouri’s Department of Architectural Studies offers a MS and PhD.

Course Delivery Methods. All three of the online graduate programs utilize the Blackboard course delivery system. Course content is disseminated through various avenues including power-point presentations, podcasts, Wimba, and Wiki. These asynchronous components replace most “live” interaction. Discussion boards were consistently identified to be one of the most successful components of the online course delivery process. As a result of the heavy use of discussion boards, students are able to develop a strong community of learning as well as develop a professional network that, in some instances, span beyond the boundaries of the United States and Canada. Only one online graduate program required students to come to the campus in the summer for a week-long seminar. This “live” component of the online program allowed the graduate students to dialogue with each other, attend graduate seminars for three to four days, and make connections with faculty to serve as possible committee members.

To ease the access of tradition materials, most students purchase course textbooks and materials online through Amazon or other online bookstores, but have the option to purchase through the campus bookstore. Additional reading materials are posted online as Word documents or PDF files. The library, at one institution, has been willing to post reserve books electronically if the books are owned by the library.

Program Duration. Time lines for completing an online graduate degree varied across the three universities. The MA program in Savannah takes one year to complete (3 classes per quarter); University of Nebraska and University of Missouri online graduate students take approximately 3 years to complete a MS; and the PhD at the University of Missouri will typically take 3½ years. One faculty member remarked that “those students with a strong design background would move through the program more quickly.”

Challenges and Benefits. Each program had unique challenges in deploying an online graduate program. First and foremost, faculty must realize that online course delivery cannot replicate “in-person” graduate courses. Next, during the initial development of online courses many faculty continued their standard teaching load with no compensation. Also, as programs move to an online environment there needs to be a sufficient volume of online courses available to the students. Lastly, avoid admitting students into a program that do not have the expertise or drive to succeed in an online environment.
While there are challenges with the development of online programs, there are positive benefits for the programs and the students. Savannah College of Art & Design was able to develop a distinctive theory based online MA program, while enhancing their traditional MFA program. The University of Nebraska Interior Design MS program has received praise from their university for providing a financially inexpensive master’s level degree and the University of Missouri’s PhD program has the distinction of being the only online PhD program currently offered in the United States. One faculty member said that online programs are “very rewarding if you are interested in working with the best and brightest graduate students! It allows the faculty member to grow professionally as well!”

Graduate students also benefit from the online course program delivery. Perhaps the greatest benefit can be seen in the wide breadth of students that participate in the online programs, no longer limited by a physical location, students engage in daily interaction with graduate students from across United States and Canada. The online course delivery of a program provides options for those individuals considering career changes or individuals that are considering positions in higher education to stay in their current employment while pursuing an advanced degree. Online graduate students found their online work to be intellectually challenging. Assignments they completed demonstrated improved writing skills and vocabulary as well as more thoughtful discourse on topics. One faculty member suggested that the online learning environment can allow those students that do not actively participate in a traditional graduate course work the opportunity to digest and process information in an asynchronous learning environment and effectively post and communicate online with their peers. One final benefit and perhaps most important is to “empower [graduate] students to take control of their educational learning process.”

Suggestions for a successful online program. Four main areas were identified to make an online graduate program successful. These include faculty course load, graduate student admission, course management systems, and course offerings.

Faculty Course Load. Faculty involved in online programs need to support online course delivery. Explore options for faculty to be compensated financially or have a reduced teaching load for online course development. One faculty member stated it will take “3 times more work…so plan accordingly.” Untenured faculty should be protected and not allowed to teach online courses or advise graduate students until they have tenure.

Graduate Student Admission. Allow admission into a graduate program once a year, so that a cohort can remain together and develop a stronger online graduate community.

Course Management Systems. Faculty suggest working with the campus information technology (IT) department to formulate the best ways to present, organize, and deploy different forms of information. Regardless of the type of course management system available on a campus, acknowledge the constraints of the system. Faculty typically “pack” too much information into
an online course. As a result faculty will need to refine and streamline information into discreet units.

Course Offerings. As an online program curriculum is developed, faculty should: 1) look at the number of courses they will need to offer to support the students that will enroll in their online program and 2) review online courses that may be available from other disciplines on their campus that could be integrated into the program (i.e., research methods, statistics, ergonomics). If interior design graduate programs from other universities could bring their expertise to the table, online graduate courses could be shared across universities to allow programs to build off of each other’s strengths.

Summary

Results of the data presented in this document clearly indicate that there is a need for programs to explore new methods to deliver graduate education in interior design. The three programs reviewed for this document share challenges and benefits they have experience along with suggestions to other programs considering online course delivery. Various models have been proposed in this discussion and suggest that with limited resources and a decreasing pool of qualified graduate faculty, collaboration across and between programs would be advantageous for the discipline.

Final Report Submitted by Susan Ray-Degges on behalf of the IDEC Distance Learning Network Strategic Initiatives’ Grant Members:
Linda Nussbaumer
Carolyn Sockwell

Works Cited:


