

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS

# TOWARD AN EVOLUTION OF STUDIO CULTURE

A REPORT OF THE SECOND AIAS TASK FORCE ON STUDIO CULTURE

*Lessons Learned, Best Practices and Guidelines  
for an Effective Studio Culture Narrative*



# TOWARD AN EVOLUTION OF STUDIO CULTURE

A REPORT OF THE SECOND AIAS TASK FORCE ON STUDIO CULTURE

*Lessons Learned, Best Practices and Guidelines  
for an Effective Studio Culture Narrative*

American Institute of Architecture Students  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
[www.ias.org](http://www.ias.org)

The AIAS is a 501(c)(3) organization headquartered in Washington, DC. The AIAS mission is to promote excellence in architecture education, training and practice; to foster an appreciation of architecture and related disciplines; to enrich communities in a spirit of collaboration; and to organize students to combine their efforts to advance the art and science of architecture. The AIAS serves almost 7,000 members enrolled in accredited and non-accredited design-based programs as well in community colleges and at the high school level. There are more than 140 AIAS chapters worldwide representing the United States and its territories, Canada, Mexico and other countries. The AIAS provides several member programs and benefits including design competitions, member discounts, workshops, publications, conferences, and more. To learn more about AIAS programs, services, membership or how to support the AIAS, visit [www.ias.org](http://www.ias.org).

© 2008. All Rights Reserved.  
American Institute of Architecture Students, Inc.



# contents

HISTORY	05
INTENT + METHODOLOGY	06
DATA COLLECTION	
<i>2007 Administrators Survey on Studio Culture</i>	09
<i>2008 AIAS Council of Presidents Survey on Studio Culture</i>	19
TASK FORCE FINDINGS	
Peer Reviewed Policies: Successes	25
Peer Reviewed Policies: Opportunities for Improvement	26
Ten Best Practices, Guidelines and Recommendations	27
Summary	28

## 2007-2008 AIAS STUDIO CULTURE TASK FORCE

In Fall 2007, AIAS President Andrew Caruso convened the second AIAS Task Force on Studio Culture as a working group of the AIAS Accreditation Review Conference Task Force. Over the course of six months, a holistic and rigorous assessment of the Studio Culture Initiative was conducted, the first of its kind since the establishment of the studio culture condition in 2004.

The AIAS expresses its gratitude for the generosity and passion of the following volunteers in this effort:

---

Andrew C. Caruso, ASSOC. AIA, LEED AP  
2007-2008 President  
Chair, 2007-2008 ARC Task Force and 2007-2008 Studio Culture Task Force

### **AIAS**

Kate Bojsza, Assoc. AIA\*\*  
Daniel Brown\*  
Jacob Day+  
Larry Fabbroni+  
Evan Lapore\*  
Sarah Salem\*

### **AIA**

Marion Fowlkes, FAIA\*  
Jeff Potter, AIA\*  
Kate Schwensen, FAIA\*\*  
RK Stewart, FAIA+  
Randy Buyers, AIA\*

### **NAAB**

Sharon Matthews, AIA+

### **ACSA**

Geraldine Forbes\*  
Jean Gardner\*  
Sabir Kahn\*  
Micheale Pride+  
Kim Tanzer, AIA\*\*

### **NCARB**

Michael Bourdrez, AIA\*\*  
Kin DuBois, FAIA\*  
Bill Miller, FAIA\*  
Gordon Mills, FAIA\*  
Andrew Prescott, AIA+

### **GUEST**

Ava Abramowitz, Esq.+

---

\*Studio Culture Policy Review Participant

+Studio Culture Task Force Working Group

Special thanks are extended to AIAS staff Kate Debelack, NAAB Associate Executive Director, Cathy Ryan, AIA, Russell Schutte, and Matt Pitzer for their assistance with the policy collection process and data analysis. Additionally, we thank the ACSA staff for their assistance in coordinating the 2007 Administrators Survey.

# TOWARD AN EVOLUTION OF STUDIO CULTURE

A REPORT OF THE SECOND AIAS TASK FORCE ON STUDIO CULTURE

*Lessons Learned, Best Practices and Guidelines  
for an Effective Studio Culture Narrative*

---

**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.*

---

## HISTORY

Beginning in 2000, the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) established the first Studio Culture Task force, in an effort to study the 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-asses 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 multi-collateral 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](http://www.aias.org/studioculture)

# intent + methodology

## TASK FORCE INTENT

Over the past five years, much progress has been made toward the integration of the studio culture initiative into the academic context. **The task force selects the following items as cause for celebration:**

- Inclusion of NAAB Condition 3.5, “studio culture”
- Creation of initial studio culture policies at many schools across the country
- Improvements in culture of the studio environment, as cited by students, faculty, and administration
- New opportunities for collaboration and dialogue about shared responsibility within the studio environment
- Broader and more holistic understanding about the nature of educating future architects and designers

While the task force notes successful improvement in many of these areas, the review process uncovered opportunities to strengthen these successes and evolve the studio culture dialogue into an even more effective and holistic initiative.

## TASK FORCE METHODOLOGY

### Phase I: Data Collection

Beginning in 2007, the AIAS collected 44 studio culture policies from the NAAB. This collection of documents represented 100% of policies submitted as part of the accreditation process as of September 2007.

Additionally, the Studio Culture Administrators Survey was conducted for the first time in the history of the studio culture initiative, and the results of this effort have informed (and are included in) this document.

Lastly, the AIAS also surveyed its members, particularly the leadership of many of its chapters, regarding issues of studio culture. This information has also been included.

### Phase II: Policy Review

Beginning in January 2008, four working groups with cross-collateral representation (AIA, ACSA, AIAS and NCARB) were convened to review and assess studio culture policies that were submitted as part of the NAAB accreditation process. [Note that the NAAB is comprised of appointees of each of the four other organizations.]



Representatives for this process were appointed by leaders of their respective organizations, and were invited to create diverse representation as measured by the following characteristics:

- Prior participation at the 2004 Studio Culture Summit vs. new voices and perspectives
- Equal representation from each of the collateral organizations in “member” and “chair” roles
- Diversity of academic/professional experience as related to degree types, geography, race, ethnicity, and gender

Policies were distributed across the four working groups (11 policies/group) to prevent any conflicts of interest with group members, as well as to provide a diverse range of program and degree types.

Studio Culture Policy Review Groups were given the following charges relative to the 11 policies selected for their review:

- Identify common responses and/or methods of responding to studio culture goals and the NAAB criterion
- Identify common strengths of policies

- Identify common opportunities for improvement of policies
- Identify the range of issues presented/addressed in policies
- Identify exemplary policy characteristics as models for excellence in policy creation, distribution and maintenance
- Compare drafted policies to original goals and intentions of the studio culture documents

The chairs of each of these working groups (one representing each of the collateral organizations) captured the discussion, analysis and recommendations of their groups in a summary report.

### **Phase III: Analysis and Future Vision**

The third phase of the review process engaged additional leadership from across and beyond the collateral organizations to analyze findings to-date and to envisage the future evolution of the studio culture initiative. The additional participants in this group were also selected based on the characteristics identified earlier in this document.

The chairs of the Studio Culture Policy Review Groups remained engaged in the third and final phase of the Studio Culture Task Force process. In this capacity, they brought forward the summary reports of their prior working groups for comparison, analysis and vetting by the larger collective.

The work of the 2007-2008 AIAS Task Force on Studio Culture culminated with the authoring of this report.

This group was charged with the following objectives:

- Review successes of the original studio culture initiative and suggest opportunities for future growth as related to the initial goals/vision
- Highlight lessons learned/ best practices and/or recommendations for policy creation, implementation and maintenance as clarified through the review process
- Provide visionary thought about the evolution of “Studio Culture” into an even more holistic, forward-thinking and empowering discourse by which to consider the broader implications of our design culture on current and future professionals

# data collection

## 2007 administrators survey

Beginning in 2007, the AIAS launched the first Studio Culture Administrators Survey. This survey was the first effort to collect uniform data from administrators at schools across the country, relative to the studio culture initiative. The results are summarized below.

Special thanks are extended to Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) for its assistance in communicating this survey opportunity to their membership during the four week survey period.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The initial baseline data established by this first study represents a fairly broad population of respondents from accredited schools of architecture, and in almost all cases, responses were provided by the highest level of program administration.

The study reveals that NAAB Condition 3.5 (adopted in 2004) was, in almost all cases, the impetus for drafting formal studio culture policies at programs across the country. These policies were largely created between 2005 and 2007, typically during a authorship period of less than one year.

A significant majority of respondents cite that the studio culture policy has facilitated a more supportive environment within their program. The policy produced -- and more importantly the process undertaken to draft the document -- was seen by administrators

as useful to the program. Additionally, almost half of administrators cite positive improvements as a result of studio culture policies.

While the study notes many successes of the initial studio culture initiative, self-reported responses reveal several opportunities for further development. For instance, the majority of policies do not contain assessment methods to measure success, and many lack specific recommendations focused on improving the existing culture.

The study also provides a series of open-feedback opportunities related to the unique process by which policies were created and implemented at various institutions. These responses provide a spectrum of possible approaches and perspectives.

2007 Administrators Survey on Studio Culture: General Statistics

---

- 28%** of all accredited architecture programs participated in the administrators survey
  - 98%** of participants were Deans, Directors, Heads or Chairs of programs at the Full, Associate, or Assistant level
  - 91%** of participants' programs currently have an official studio culture policy
  - 39%** of participants have a policy that was reviewed in this process
- The AIAS took a significant step forward in understanding the continued impact studio culture movement with the initial collection of this baseline data.
- Over one quarter of all architecture programs accredited by the NAAB participated in this survey, and as such, provide a solid baseline for future comparison. We feel this sample to be fairly representative of schools across the country, and the integrity of the data to be sound, given that 98% of respondents were at the highest level of program administration (top responses: 21% Dean, 59% Director/Head/Chair).
- Additionally, it is encouraging to note that 91% of participants' programs currently have studio culture policies, and 39% of respondents have had their unique policy reviewed as part of this process. It is not surprising, therefore, that the data of this survey supports the findings of the policy review groups.

- 68%** cited NAAB Condition 3.5 as the primary reason for creating a policy
  - 15%** (minimum) are unfamiliar with AIAS publications on studio culture
  - 89%** developed their policy in less than 12 months
  - 56%** of policies were implemented between 2005 and 2007
  - 62%** do not include methods to assess the policy's efficacy
  - 44%** of policies do not make recommendations to improve the existing culture
  - 47%** do not include mechanisms for revision of the policy
- The creation of the NAAB Condition 3.5 has clearly influenced the drafting of formal studio culture policies at programs across the country. These policies were largely created between 2005 and 2007, although 9% report having policies before the 2002 academic year, 6% between 2002-2004, and 12% first implemented a policy in the 2007-2008 year. 9% indicate that they have no current studio culture policy.
- Additionally of note, 89% of schools, the vast majority of participants, developed their entire studio culture policy (“from first meeting to approval of final draft”) in less than 12 months. 12% report a 0-3 month process, 38% 3-6 months, 18% 6-9 months and 21% 9-12 months. Only 12% report the process lasting 12-18 months.
- As a living, collaborative document, effective studio culture policies should contain both specific strategies for improvement and assessment mechanisms. It is the intention for these documents to evolve over time and in response to the collective needs of a community.
- According to the *2007 Administrators Studio Culture Survey*, however, 62% of policies do not contain assessment methods to measure success. Moreover 44% of policies do not contain specific

		recommendations focused on improving existing culture.
91%	claim that the PROCESS of crafting a studio culture policy was useful or very useful to the program	The survey also asked administrators to comment on the effectiveness of the studio culture policy in several ways. It is of note that 91% of respondents state that the PROCESS of crafting a studio culture policy was useful to the program (32% Very Useful, 59% Useful), and 86% also feel that the POLICY is useful to the program (18% Very Useful, 68% Useful).
86%	claim that the POLICY is useful or very useful to the program	
85%	feel that the studio culture condition has been successful or very successful in fulfilling its mission to create a supportive environment within the program	Respondents confirm that the studio culture condition has facilitated a more supportive environment within their program (9% Very Successful, 76% Successful).
68%	have not created assessment tools or feedback mechanisms for studio culture	While the study confirms the achievement of this original mission, the studio culture policies have not been applied to the studio environment with the full range of possibilities. For example, 68% of respondents have not created feedback mechanisms to address studio culture, and 68% have missed the opportunity to use their studio culture policy to communicate the unique studio experience at their institution to prospective students.
68%	have not used the studio culture policy as a way of communicating a unique studio experience to prospective students	
47%	claim that a studio culture policy has positively or very positively affected their program	Additionally, almost half of participants cite positive improvements as a result of studio culture policies (12% Very Positively, 35% Positively).

**74%** report that their studio culture policy was most useful as a “statement of core beliefs”

Additionally, respondents also cited that it was most useful as:

- 65%** establish standards and expectations
- 53%** discussion forum
- 44%** stating overall goals
- 41%** contract/agreement between parties
- 21%** define strategies for improvement
- 18%** highlight areas for improvement

**53%** claim that a studio culture Policy has not significantly affected their program in any way, **yet of these respondents:**

- 84%** do not use the studio culture Policy to communicate the program’s specific studio experience to prospective students
- 80%** do not have assessment tools or feedback mechanisms for studio culture
- 74%** do not include mechanisms to assess the policy’s efficacy
- 53%** do not include mechanisms for revision of the policy
- 42%** do not make specific recommendations to improve the existing studio culture



*“The Studio Culture Policy requirement is a compelling one. It declares that schools must take a position about respect for the learning environment, which is essential and inspiring for all involved. The requirement that schools must develop an annual process for monitoring and developing studio culture is a very positive one.”*

*-Administrator Respondent*

2007 Administrators Survey on Studio Culture: Policy Creation Techniques [Range of Responses]

---

*NOTE: The following list only reveals common responses to the question asked. They are selected to demonstrate the range of common responses, and **DO NOT** imply endorsement or approval of the responses.*

**Please describe the process by which your policy was developed.**

Faculty initiative and faculty vote.

The previous policy was distributed to the Architecture faculty, student representatives (one elected representative per studio year level, 1 through 5, and graduate), and AIAS [chapter] officers. All were encouraged to share the policy with other students. Comments were solicited. Over the summer, revisions were made and the revised policy distributed over email. At the beginning of the fall semester, the “near final” policy was distributed again. Minor final editing was done, and the policy was adopted, distributed to all students, placed on the Dept. website, and included in the APR.

(Faculty committee with student representation) + (AIAS committee with faculty representation) + (precedent study) = studio culture policy

A task force of student representatives and the faculty representatives developed the framework, then it was reviewed separately by the faculty and student representatives. The final draft

incorporated the comments and was presented and voted on at a faculty meeting and a school-wide meeting of students.

They put together two surveys, one for faculty and one for students and recent alumni.

We met as an architecture faculty to decide how to address the new requirement of a studio culture condition for accreditation, as part of general strategic planning for the further development of the school. As part of a series of strategic sessions, a task group of students, faculty and administrators, with some periodic input from both university administrators and regional architects, was formed. The studio culture policy was then created, merging existing studio usage policies with new goals that were inspired by the national studio culture initiative.

The policy was developed as a result of weekly meetings between program coordinators, faculty and students. These meetings were open to the entire student body. To facilitate the discussion a blog was established to give students another venue to express their issues. After many months of dialogue a final document was formulated and consensus achieved.



**How successful has the studio culture condition been in fulfilling its mission to create a supportive environment within the program?**

It's still evolving. I haven't seen in our program or other programs that I have visited this condition as an agent of change.

We need more time to learn how to use the policy effectively and assess its impact.

Getting faculty buy-in is still problematic -- many students also [don't] seem to bother reading the policy, and as such desired "peer pressure" is somewhat nominal in some studios.

We decided that "Studio Culture" was too narrow and exclusive of the array of courses that are impacted by studio. AIAS might consider broadening its definitions.

Students and faculty need to sign policy each semester, which means they need to revisit it afresh twice a year.

The policy is important as a benchmark, but it has not been successful yet at creating as supportive of an environment as should exist. For example, students

are more unwilling than faculty to curtail some of their all-night work habits that lead to problematic presentations, faculty are less than willing to embrace alternative design studio review formats that may be less confrontational or less engaging to the students present than would be hoped for.

The policy probably does more to help curriculum committee discussions about effective teaching than anything.

**Describe your program's assessment tools or feedback mechanisms for studio culture.**

Annual review by curriculum committee and student organization. Semester-by-semester "retrospectives" that are designed to debrief students and faculty members concerning issues encountered over the term.

The Studio Culture Committee has developed a survey instrument, which is collected and reviewed.

**What are the greatest weaknesses for the studio culture criterion?**

It really needs to be about the totality of the learning environment and lose the emphasis on the “studio.” Requiring continuous assessment and revision is an excellent idea.

Trying to define a culture with language.

It needs to go beyond the writing of a policy. There needs to be demonstrated evidence that it is an active instrument and its affects on the program should be measurable.

Policy statements in themselves do not modify behavior.

I’m not convinced that a policy statement is the best way for many schools to go about empowering a community to make meaningful, lasting improvements in studio culture.

Very little way to ensure faculty compliance.

NAAB may not recognize the complexity of the issues that impact studio culture.

There is some resistance to the studio culture policy/idea in general among

faculty, and some indifference on the part of some students. It is a challenge (a good one) to keep the annual reflective thinking that the studio culture requirement outlines going. This is not necessarily a negative thing, but a culture shift that will evolve and improve over time.



*“The formal articulation of this policy has been successful in the sense that it allows students, faculty members and the administration to refer to a published document in discussing what is required from each group in order to maximize the benefits of the studio experience.”*

*-Administrator Respondent*

**What are the greatest strengths of the studio culture criterion?**

Unfreezing the situation -- made us rethink our habits in light of the learning environment they in the end create.

It forces programs to address aspects of architecture student life that go beyond academic performance.

An ability for communal understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all parties.

It helps to raise awareness among students, faculty and design professionals about the importance of studio culture in the preparation of design professionals in the quality of life in the academy.

To make explicit the role of the studio in the education of our students and to make clear that studio culture can be improved and made more effective in support of the education of our students.

It institutionalizes a policy of civility, tolerance, professionalism and fairness.

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

Our approach was to set a standard, an ethic, for personal conduct among faculty, staff and students.

The policy is a statement of rights. The implementation report accompanying it is full of recommendations - 40 pages of recommendations.

The entire policy is about mutual respect and communication. The policy affirms the tenets of respect and communication. It provides vehicles for conversation, discussion, and conflict resolution.

We are working on greater integration between the requirement to consider and address studio culture – which some people are actively interested in – and celebrating/embracing studio culture as the basic educational philosophy of the place.

This is an important initiative, and it is worth continuing and expanding upon.



*“Schools need to invest significant time in drafting, communicating, and evaluating policy effectiveness such that feedback can further inform the development and implementation of studio culture policies as a tool.”*

*-2007-2008 Task Force*



*“We are working on greater integration between the requirement to consider and address studio culture and celebrating/embracing studio culture as the basic educational philosophy of the place.”*

*-Administrator Respondent*

# data collection

## ***2008 AIAS council of presidents survey***

At the 2008 AIAS FORUM convention, the Council of Presidents were offered a shortened survey on the issue of Studio Culture. This survey was the initial effort to collect data from student leaders at schools across the country for the purpose of comparison to administrator feedback. The results of the abbreviated survey are summarized below.

---

### *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

---

The respondents included in this survey represent one third of all AIAS chapter leaders from across the country. Of these participants, nearly forty percent are leaders from schools that participated in the 2007 Administrators Survey and one third of their schools had a policy document peer-reviewed during this process.

This study begins to define differences in the understanding of the Studio Culture initiative for students, as compared to administrators. For example, significantly less student leaders reported that their school had a studio culture policy, when compared to administrators. Only half of student respondents cite feedback opportunities within their institutions for studio culture, and almost half of respondents report that student inclusion in the creation of the policy was poor.

Despite these challenges, more than half of the student respondents cited the studio culture policy was useful in establishing a statement of overall goals

for the program and/or institution.

The study also attempts to understand the level of familiarity current students have with issues of studio culture. In many cases, communication was a significant concern. This was demonstrated in the need for greater awareness within the school of the process for creating the policy and its implementation, as well as the general knowledge of the studio culture initiative and related documents.

An open feedback opportunity provided additional insight about the student perception of the authorship, implementation and implications of the studio culture initiative within their unique institution.

Of particular note, given the volume and rate of change in the student community, one may begin to understand the awareness gap among the student community. This issue should be carefully studied and addressed.

**33%** of all AIAS Chapter Leaders participated in this survey (including non-accredited schools)

**39%** of participants were from schools that participated in the Administrators Survey on Studio Culture

**34%** of participants have a policy that was reviewed in this process

The survey collected responses from a significant number of AIAS chapters across the country, including those of non-accredited architectural programs. From these participants, an initial comparison can be made to the data of the 2007 Administrators Survey, as at least 39% of participating schools were represented in both survey opportunities.

Additionally, the comments of student participants support the findings of the peer-review process. This is to be expected, as over one third of respondents had their specific policy reviewed in the evaluation process.

- 59%** of participants report that their school has a studio culture policy.
- 50%** report that there are on-going feedback opportunities for studio culture within the school.
- 40%** described student inclusion in the creation of the policy as “poor” to “very poor”
- 29%** (maximum) indicate that they are familiar or very familiar with AIAS Studio Culture publications
- 55%** report that their studio culture policy was most useful as a statement of overall goals
- Additionally, respondents also cited that it was most useful as:
- 45%** statement of core beliefs
  - 41%** social contract
  - 41%** established standards
  - 28%** highlighted areas of concern
  - 24%** discussion forum
  - 21%** defined strategies
- A significantly smaller number of students report their school having adopted a studio culture policy: 59% of students as compared to 91% of administrator respondents. (27% of student respondents report no policy and 14% report a policy in progress. )
- It is also of note that only half of students report that studio culture, as implemented in their institution, has ongoing feedback opportunities.
- A large population of students, although not the majority, report that student inclusion in the creation a studio culture policy was poor (20% very poor, 20% poor, 53% well, 7% very well).

2008 AIAS Council of Presidents Studio Culture Survey: Additional Responses

---

*NOTE: The following list only reveals common responses to the question asked. They are selected to demonstrate the range of common responses, and **DO NOT** imply endorsement or approval of the responses.*

**Please describe the process by which your policy was developed.**

It was created through faculty in the college of Architecture in collaboration with graduate students at the university.

The document was established by faculty and we (AIAS) are in the process of rewriting it.

Students and faculty met in several forums to discuss matters pertaining to studio culture. Results were filtered through several committees to finalize policy.

Brought forward by students, committee then formed by faculty, currently being written (4 students, 1 admin, 2 faculty).

Tenured professors barely communicate with students, and then they write their policy.

Teachers and students came together to determine the best direction for the school to head towards. They discussed goals, skills, and concerns.

As each draft was written by our studio culture committee, it was archived

so that students could see its progress. We have a short overview as well as a comprehensive policy.

**In what ways can the policy be a more useful tool for your school?**

Students need to be more aware that there is a policy w/ additional reports, etc. for students review.

Students need to understand it more fully and also participate to a greater extent in its creation. Once this happens it can be a standard for all interaction.

Exposure. Not many people know of the existence of the policy so a mere posting of it in heavy circulation areas will be good for getting the message out.

As trends and expectations in design itself change, so should the education. The policy in studio culture should be a guide.

Outlining goals and expectations for students in an intense learning environment. Defending rights of students not to be overwhelmed by course schedules and extraneous project pursuits just for the sake of weeding out.



The policy could better consider the wide range of students and interests, and anticipate various complex problems awaiting in the workforce.

By more clearly defining our program and what we stand for.



*“Teachers and students came together to determine the best direction for the school to head towards. They discussed goals, skills, and concerns. As each draft was written by our studio culture committee, it was archived so that students could see its progress. We have a short overview as well as a comprehensive policy.”*

*-Student Respondent*



*“The evolution of studio culture is framed as a support document FOR studio, rather than directive TO studio, always nurturing the unique mission of the particular institution. At the same time, there is a need for the NAAB Criterion -- and general implementation of Studio Culture -- to be much more intense, collaborative, specific and informative.”*

*-2007-2008 Task Force*

# task force findings

## *Peer Reviewed Policies: Lessons Learned*

As of September 2007, 100% of the policies submitted as part of the accreditation process (44 policies, in total) were collected and evaluated by four peer review groups. Members of these groups offered diverse representation, and included educators, practitioners, and students. Ultimately, the reports of the four groups shared consistent observations and recommendations related to the policies reviewed. Their findings are included below as “lessons learned” from the first iteration of studio culture policies.

---

### *SUCCESSFUL STUDIO CULTURE POLICIES ACCOMPLISHED THE FOLLOWING:*


---

- 1 engaged faculty, students and administrators in dialogue about the nature of the educational experience, in relation to respect, optimism, sharing, innovation and engagement
- 2 encouraged the participation of all stakeholders, simultaneously, to create a culture of open dialogue on these issues, rather than silo-ed discussion and “faculty versus student” revision
- 3 constructed a clear understanding of shared responsibilities between faculty, students and administrators including issues of mutual respect, health, time management, etc.
- 4 integrated and enhanced the specific culture of the broader institution as a critical component of a unique approach to architectural education
- 5 expanded studio culture efforts into a “narrative” versus “policy.” In doing so, some narratives more successfully reflected the unique voice of the school and its constituents.

## COMMON OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

---

- 1 General lack of rigor and spirit in addressing/relating to original intentions of the studio culture initiative (See *The Redesign of Studio Culture* and *Studio Culture Summit: A Report*)
- 2 Policies are generally too limited in scope, focusing on rules and regulations rather than broad, inspiring and conceptual statements about the unique learning environment
- 3 Assessment process for policies to evolve, adapt, and grow relative to measures of success are lacking or absent
- 4 Method of developing, communicating/disseminating, and maintaining policies among the student body needs explicit clarification and robustness
- 5 Means and methods of continued, diverse stakeholder participation at all phases of process needs explicit clarification in policies
- 6 Gaps exist between student and administrative perspectives, including awareness of the policy and related documents, and the role of the policy within the program

 “It is important to differentiate what “Studio Culture” is in concept versus what it is as a rule. Evolving the nature of this initiative focuses on the conceptual development of this culture.”

-2007-2008 Task Force



## 10 Best Practices, Guidelines and Recommendations

- 1 Studio Culture narratives should have a much broader and robust “life” within their institution, other than their inclusion in the Architecture Program Report (APR) and review by the NAAB.
- 2 Creation of a Studio Culture narrative should be seen as an opportunity for self-reflection, assessment and growth. Schools should “find their own collective voice” through this process.
- 3 Studio Culture narratives should evidence cultural phenomena that are experiential/performance-based. “Rules and regulations” are neither experiential nor performance-based.
- 4 Studio Culture narratives should relate student educational experiences to the institution’s broader learning cultures and pedagogical identity, as well as recognize larger support networks and resources available to students throughout the larger institution.
- 5 Broader focus should explicitly describe the relationship of the studio environment to the integration of practice settings and cross-disciplinary educational environments.
- 6 Studio Culture narratives should reveal the relationship of the studio experience to “everything else” students can and should engage as part of their academic and curricular experience.
- 7 Studio culture narratives should be accessible in language and format to their audience (concise, engaging, actionable, tangible), with particular recognition that the audience may include prospective students unfamiliar with design education.
- 8 The model and format of policies -- particularly for an audience of individuals who think and communicate graphically -- should be strongly considered as an opportunity to organize, clarify and reveal a particular studio/educational culture. Consider additional media to craft and communicate a Studio Culture narrative.
- 9 Studio Culture narratives may wish to relate broader contemporary issues or values within the profession and higher education to the particular approach toward academic instruction and exploration.
- 10 Specific and explicit focus should be given to the institution’s development of professional and leadership capacities by way of their studio culture. This includes development of competent leaders and successful team collaborators.

# summary

The 2007-2008 review of the Studio Culture initiative revealed many successes. Indeed the task force notes many ideas to celebrate, including the increased opportunity for shared dialogue on these issues. Most importantly, the first iterations of studio culture policies have provided a thoughtful foundation on which to build even more rich, holistic and well-rounded narratives that fully reflect the original intentions of the Studio Culture initiative, and also the unique identity of each institution.

Additionally, the AIAS and its Board of Directors recognize the success of previous years in preparing the architectural community to both broaden and deepen its investigation of these issues. It is their intention that what began as a discussion of “Studio Culture” may eventually evolve into a larger discussion of “Design Culture,” establishing a seamless, quality-driven and healthy experience from one’s beginning in the academy to his or her distinguished accomplishment in practice.

Among many questions uncovered in the review process, the task force puts forward the following items for further consideration as the “Studio Culture”

initiative continues to evolve:

- “Culture,” by its very nature reflects values of a community. The studio culture initiative should help schools to codify these values in pursuit of a visionary culture.
- Schools have cultures beyond “studio” culture, and diversity exists within the ecosystem of these cultures. Architecture schools must strive to be an active and conscientious participant in this cultural ecosystem, rather than remaining isolated from the larger culture of the academic institution.
- Studio culture should strive to leverage, yet healthfully balance the camaraderie and “pride in rigor” that architecture students usually exhibit. This is a unique, advantageous and a valuable asset of architectural education, distinct from many other disciplines on campus.

The AIAS remains committed to supporting schools in the evolution of Studio Culture. It is the hope that this document provides needed clarification and peer-reviewed recommendations to advance these issues.



American Institute of Architecture Students  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006

[www.aias.org](http://www.aias.org)

The AIAS is an independent, non-profit,  
student-run organization.