

# A Beginner's Mind

**PROCEEDINGS  
21st National Conference  
on the Beginning Design Student**

**Stephen Temple, editor**

**Conference held at the  
College of Architecture  
The University of Texas at San Antonio  
24-26 February 2005**

# A Beginner's Mind

## PROCEEDINGS

21st National Conference  
on the Beginning Design Student

Stephen Temple, editor

College of Architecture  
The University of Texas at San Antonio  
24-26 February 2005

Situating Beginnings  
Questioning Representation  
Alternative Educations  
Abstractions and Conceptions  
Developing Beginnings  
Pedagogical Constructions  
Primary Contexts  
Informing Beginnings  
Educational Pedagogies  
Analog / Digital Beginnings  
Curriculum and Continuity  
Interdisciplinary Curricula  
Beginnings  
Design / Build  
Cultural Pluralities  
Contentions  
Revisions  
Projections

*Offered through the Research Office for Novice Design Education, LSU, College of Art and Design, School of Architecture.*

**Copyright 2006 University of Texas San Antonio**  
/ individual articles produced and edited by the authors

Printed proceedings produced by Stephen Temple, Associate Professor, University of Texas San Antonio.

**All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.**

Published by:  
University of Texas San Antonio  
College of Architecture  
501 West Durango Blvd.  
San Antonio TX 78207  
210 458-3010  
fax 210 458-3016

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Temple, Stephen, editor

A Beginner's Mind: Proceedings of the 21st National Conference on the Beginning Design Student /  
edited and compiled by Stephen Temple

1. Architecture - Teaching 2. Architecture - Design 3. Design - Teaching

**ISBN 0-615-13123-9**

## Transfer students – The “other” beginners

TRACI SOOTER  
Drury University

For a variety of reasons, some economic, others philosophical, the number of non-traditional transfer students entering undergraduate schools of architecture is growing every year. Each school of architecture is faced with the challenge of either placing transfer students somewhere in the curricular track based on an individual evaluation or providing a program for this group of students that addresses their lack of formal training without discounting their informal experiences.

Transfer students can be a diverse group in many ways but more particularly in age, and experience. The demographic of these students can range from traditional sophomores changing their major to parents in their forties changing their lives. Adults entering the program may have backgrounds as diverse as nursing, general contractors or full time parents. This group of non-traditional students has the potential of enriching the studio culture with not only the advantage of age (and hopefully maturity) but with a diversity of experiences.

At Drury University we offer a summer program to transfer students that allows undergraduate students to complete the first year of Architecture courses during the summer and then places them in the second year curriculum in the fall semester. This program acknowledges that the transfer student may have completed certain courses that fulfill course requirements but it does not acknowledge the maturity or life experiences the student may possess.

Throughout American schools of architecture you will find that both individual placements into a curriculum and summer catch-up programs are used. It is most common, however, that if a school of architecture offers a summer program to transfer students it is not advertised. Most school web pages simply state that transfer students should be interviewed and evaluated on an individual basis. Disclosure of these programs is then made during the interview. Such is the case at Drury University. This is an economic strategy. The belief is that if we advertise and promote a transfer program we will be promoting an increased number of students intentionally attending less expensive institutions for a period of time then transferring in to our 5 year BArch in the second year. Our transfer program is not intended to promote a planned or strategic transfer but to make available a reasonable option to the person who has discovered his or her calling a little later than most, a limited, accelerated alternative to a 5-year lock-step program.

The transfer “program” at Drury University is relatively young. It began in the summer of 2002 with seven students. The pedagogical approach to the curriculum was as it is today, nearly identical to the curriculum and projects presented in the fall and spring semesters to the traditional students. As the approach and projects change in the fall and spring semesters so do the projects in the summer transfer “program”. The only difference between the two programs is the speed at which they are delivered. My students fondly call the summer program “Speed Architecture”. They do benefit from the luxury of focusing solely on architecture during the summer because they do not have the typical distractions of the school year: other courses, jobs, parties and school activities.

This group of students tends to be more mature, focused and very eager to excel. They are typically thoughtful and reflective. The work of this group tends to be at the upper end of expectations. They handle the projects and work load often better than their fall counter parts. As they are transitioned into the mainstream of the studio sequence they do perform well and

seem to adjust to their younger peers. But are we challenging this group to work up to their full potential?

In our beginning approach to preparing this group as architects, do we ignore the potential maturity, experience and diversity by sending them through the same first year curriculum we apply to traditional students or should we rethink the curricular pedagogy for this potentially enriching group of future architects?

If we acknowledge the diversity and potential of this group then how do we create a beginning curriculum that is appropriate to varying educational and experiential levels?

Where do we begin? To answer the question of where to begin with the education of transfer students we must first characterize who they are and what are their experiences. Characterization of the non-traditional student is not a simple matter. As stated earlier, the demographic of these students can range from traditional sophomores changing their major to adults with backgrounds as diverse as nursing, general contractors or full time parents.

The statistics of Drury transfer students to date look like this:

	2002	2003	2004
<b>Women</b>	3	3	2
<b>Men</b>	4	6	3
<b>Age</b>	20-40+	20-38	20-24
<b>Married</b>	0	2	0
<b>Art/arch study</b>	4	5	1
<b>Const. exp.</b>	2	1	0
<b>Non-related life exp.</b>	7	9	5
<b>Non-related study</b>	3	4	4
<b>Retention</b>	5	6	2
<b>Major / Profession</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Music</b>		1	
<b>Art</b>		3	2
<b>Math</b>			1
<b>Agriculture</b>		1	
<b>Political Science</b>			1
<b>Engineering</b>	3	2	1
<b>Architecture</b>	2		
<b>Construction</b>	1	1	
<b>Computer Science</b>		1*	
<b>Nursing</b>		1*	

\*Student had 2 careers

Of the students who have matriculated each year from this program, 70% of them are within the top 10% of their class. This suggests that not only does their diversity of experiences have the potential to enrich the studio culture but they are also enriching the studio with their abilities.

This group can produce leaders. Each of the 3 transfer groups, while relatively small, has had at least one person who has held an office in AIAS or a campus student organization. The majority of the group however becomes unofficial peer leaders or role models. Maturity, experience and self-confidence are most likely the reason for these leadership roles.

Sixty percent of this group is still in the program. Most of the students who are no longer in the program left for personal reasons, marriage, babies, etc. The summer 2002 group will graduate in May of 2006. I have interviewed each of the students that have gone through the summer program. Each of them are either happy with their educational experience or are afraid to tell me other wise.

To shed a more honest light on the educational experience of a non-traditional student I look to myself. I was a non-traditional student at Drury University. At the age of 32, after a Bachelors degree in Marketing and a career in General Contracting, I began the 5-year BArch program at Drury University. At that time there was no program or placement for non-traditional students. I started my architectural education in Arch 100 sitting next to the 18 year olds. In retrospect even the exposure to youth was a good learning experience but I probably would have benefited from a curriculum that acknowledged my experience.

I cannot discount my experience in the non-bending educational track, it lead me to where I am today. I began to discover my role within the studio and my future career during late nights filled with constant questions about size and application of materials. From this experience I realized that I had something to offer students and made the decision to teach. However, I wonder if I might not have come to the same conclusion if I had a different educational experience.

Eventually I transferred to Washington University in St. Louis to their 3-year MArch program for students with non-related Bachelors degrees. This program celebrates and promotes the diverse backgrounds of their graduate students. It is a rich program that I believe we can look to as a model to begin to rethink our approach to educating non-traditional undergraduate students. In the new model we should celebrate the diversity of undergraduate non-traditional students in Bachelors programs and promote the possible enrichment they have to offer the traditional studio.

To look at a graduate program as a model for the undergraduate program we are discussing we should remember that there is a distinct difference in the students. The non-traditional undergraduate student does not have a bachelor's degree and they must fulfill the requirements of the first degree just as a traditional student would. Not only are they typically dealing with adult loads from life, family, house, debt, but there are also very few non-traditional students that can avoid general education requirements and the load they place on the student.

Although this group has additional loads upon them, they also have valuable experience they carry with them. These adults whether they realize it or not have had great exposure and experience with space. Most 18-year-olds arrive at a school of architecture with the spatial experience of a 10x12 bedroom as their entire universe. They have never been responsible for any space outside of their bedrooms. They have not had to plan a living room for conversation or entertainment; they have not had to function in a kitchen; they have not had to work effectively in an office.

The non-traditional student on the other hand typically has at very least had an apartment if not a house as opposed to a dorm room. Again the dorm room is just another reinforcement to the universe is a 10x12 space. Laundry for the dorm room student suggests that the task of doing laundry happens "somewhere else" and you can just forget about them even considering that there is anything mechanical happening in their universe.

These spatial considerations are not the focus of a beginning design course but I believe that having those spatial experiences make the non-traditional student more spatially advanced than the traditional undergraduate student. It is not by chance that during my interviews with the

transfer students they all mentioned the 3-dimensional project from the beginning course. It would be natural to talk about the project in which you were most comfortable or successful. It is also very rare that as I move them into the design of a building that I get gigantic personal spaces and neglected public or functional space.

I have no clear solution as to how to redefine this program. I know that there is value in beginning with basic principles of design but I have not resolved the question of how to craft a curriculum that challenges this group in a more effective way educationally while recognizing that these students will arrive with very different levels of experience.

In the summer of 2005 I will incorporate a seminar which will focus on spatial experiences. I intend to evaluate this group of students in their approach and attitudes about space as they are influenced by their life and educational experiences.

From the perspective of a non-traditional student, I understand the frustration of being slotted into a non-bending educational track that discounts life experience. I believe we should define the potential and create a curriculum that taps, supports and promotes the maturity and experience of this group.

It is my hope that through discussion and inquiry that we can develop a "program" that provides a more suited education to non-traditional undergraduates that not only enhances their educational experience but promotes their diversity and enriches the studio culture.