Finishing School and Playing a *Round*: Overlap, Integration, and Shifting Responsibility

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To mark an edge is to describe at least two conditions – a beginning references that which has just ended and a finish always another beginning. Cycles of learning are *rounds*, full of repetition and often overlapping: the new beginning starts before the finishing is complete. For these reasons we find it impossible to speak of our finishing year as anything except a link in a repeating pedagogic procession – a *round* that allows our students to begin their next chorus in the company of the last. Our finishing is marked only by the unique position in which the student begins to understand him/herself: already at the beginning of the profession, both inside and outside the academy. The three characteristics that mark this progressing period of overlap and transition are:

1. The clear transference of educational responsibility from school to student

2. Conscious understanding, on the part of the student, of a design process formulated by the student that directly responds to pedagogical goals of the school.

3. A sense of integrity, excellence, and independent responsibility, demonstrated through the students' work that transcends both individual desire and the collective curricular goals of the school.

During the final year in the architecture program the three goals above are accomplished through the following means:

1. The first through fifth year pedagogic sequence is condensed and repeated within a short 'practice run' design project, and the final terminal project.

2. A terminal project is conducted with the collaboration of four team members: the student, a professor from within the department, a practicing architect from outside the university, and a topic specialist who acts as advisor.

3. The act of integration that the final year imparts to the student is paralleled through the multi-mentor system referenced above. In this case, the students must
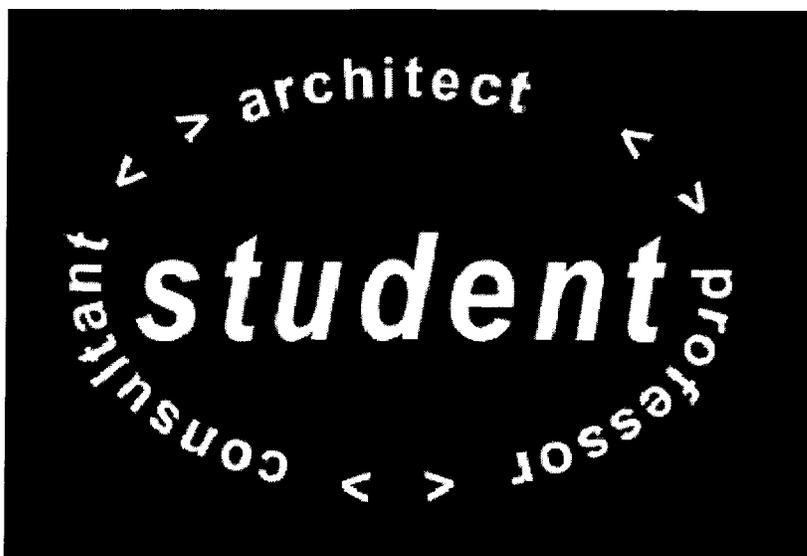
organize/coordinate a balance between the process they have learned, their own ambitions, and the external influences represented by the various mentors who act as advocates for different facets of the design process.

The heart of our pedagogy lies with the team teaching structure that the School of Architecture has evolved. This structure has different applications for the beginning, middle and end of the student's career at UL Lafayette. At our school team teaching indicates a commitment to an inclusive educational process. The basic structure of our teaching repeats, but is used as one of the many variables in our established curricular and pedagogical framework. This paper examines what happens between the lines and at the edges of this framework. We believe that the overlap and transition of the structure, 'the *round*', is essential to our schools' success and formal structure. A focused discussion of these overlaps as the means and the transition as the primary learning vehicle, might lead to a critical analysis that is essential to any school as it struggles to continuously develop the most relevant way to educate architects in today's fluid and transitional world.

THE LARGER PICTURE: PEDAGOGICAL *ROUNDS* AT THE SCALE OF THE SCHOOL

'Throughout the architecture curriculum there is a consistent combining of the conceptual and thematic design practice as well as the teaching of the practical involved with the profession. The integration of practice and education goes hand in hand with these ideas followed by the school.' Recent Graduate'

...this format is very helpful to the students and brings a unique perspective and enhanced sense of realism to their design.' , Local AIA Advisor

Our program is based on a pedagogy that strives to build a clear understanding of the multiple influences that can affect design and to foster the skills that will lead to mastery of the discipline of design. The fifth year team approach is the logical conclusion to a program committed to exploring integrative learning and teaching through team teaching. All design studios are taught with a team of at least two faculty members. Through multi-disciplinary foundation studios, team teaching in studio, and a concerted on-going effort to integrate support courses into the studio, we continue to teach design as an act of inclusive mediation. Each studio overlaps learning objectives and themes with the previous years experiences; and, each design task is part of a continuous thread that builds upon the last in preparation for the next. What is introduced in one course is later developed and applied, along with the collective of past information the student is expected to know. We attempt to transparently and diligently remind students of, not only what they are learning but also, the different modes of knowledge

through which they have learned. For example, in the middle of the sequence, at the transitional period between the foundation studios and professional education, the third year design studio acts as the mediator and evaluative tool. For example, support courses including programming, material technology, site analysis and graphic communication have been introduced to the student, and are included as pattern for expectations of the third year design project. Programming is directly related to the studio by integrating the final project as the programming and pre-design phase of the next semester's design problem. In this manner, skills, thinking processes, and related support information are integrated into the studio sequence. As the skills increasingly overlap the responsibility continuously shifts to the student.

Our first year program tries to reflect the needs of new students in their transition to an educational experience that is predicated on active learning. The *round* begins with individual voices as students are asked to struggle with the first great shift in responsibility from reaction in high school to action at the university. This transition is also marked by integration as the foundation year teaches architecture students with industrial design and interior design students the fundamentals of thinking. Common life experiences are drawn upon to teach a common conceptual basis for designing. The overlap introduces our students to an integrated, inclusive process of design education – one that integrates vertically from past experiences and to future possibilities, as well as horizontally within the school .

Second through forth years are the loudest choruses of the *round*, as each of these years overlap and build on the previous. The integration and overlap are engaged through processes explained above, and are exemplified by the yearly short ideas competition. Each academic year starts with a short competition between all disciplines in the second and third year studios. The competition is tries to use a shared project as a way to abstract individual solutions to larger ideas. Students are given, essentially, a beginning design task with dimensional and representational limits, but a very personally driven and open ended brief. In this way, students are reminded of the processes learned in first year and are encouraged to integrate as much recently acquired information into a first year task in the name of more overt competition. The chorus really becomes clear when the 60 or so winning competition entries are assembled together as a single installation in the main public space of our building. The competition acts as a yearly reminder of the goals of the complete pedagogy as they divert into the more pragmatic and seemingly unrelated professional skills required by a school of architecture. The *round* continues as students are asked to evaluate abstract ideas with increasingly more concentrated skills and support information. At another level the 1st year students undertake the same competition but carry it over most of the semester. Competition is used as a mean to continuously questioned process, concept, and proposal.

THE WHAT: FIFTH YEAR *ROUND*, THE OVERLAP BETWEEN AN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL CHORUS

'...[the school believes] that the education of an architect goes beyond school and that with each project the education begins again.' Recent Graduate

'For the practitioner, this is an exhilarating and re-energizing creative stimulus from the daily routine of practice' , Local AIA Advisor

At the fifth and finishing year of our education, the school strives to re-introduce and review the complete set of criteria and learning objectives of the previous four year sequence. It is essentially a year of conclusion and review of the academic *round*. Necessary skills, access to support information, and thinking processes have been introduced, and integrated into the *round* at previous years. The academic *round* is ending. Individual voices are asserting themselves as the students are finding their own voices.

Students are reacting to their academic training. As the academic *round* is ending, the professional *round* is becoming louder. Students focus on applying their education to larger, more complex, and, in their view, 'more professional' issues. The school addresses this condition with the folding together of academic and professional educations. At the edge of the overlap, the School of Architecture has developed the 'Integrated Thesis Team'.

The team consists of a diverse and integrated group of academics and professionals. The expansion of team teaching to include members outside of the school is the unique condition that allows our thesis studios to expand the educational potential for our students beyond the School of Architecture and into 'the real world.' The Terminal Studios are conceived as a forum where design can act as a medium to increase cross-disciplinary interaction as well as call upon the student to act as mediator. Students are placed at the center of an integrated team that consists of an architecture professor, a practicing architect, and a specialist in the student's chosen field of inquiry. We see terminal design studio as a device to encourage the integration of a students' developing design attitude through the articulation of an architectural thesis and the testing of that thesis through sustained engagement with multiple viewpoints.

Our two-semester, Terminal Design Studio (ARCH 409/410) is the fulfillment of a five-year pedagogy crafted for students to become active editors of their own education. From the first year through the fifth, team teaching is used to emphasize a creative and dynamic educational environment. Through team teaching, we create a learning environment that rises above the individual personality. We strive to create situations where the

students are not in a passive relationship with a 'teacher' who is always correct, but rather dynamic situations where they must integrate multiple views in the process of developing their own. In the fifth year, this team notion is expanded beyond the school of architecture to include both practitioners and other relevant advisors. Before our students leave the school, they are responsible to listen to, interpret and edit a great range of input in the process of developing their own creative vision. This unique studio condition is the direct result of the school's active engagement with the local professional community and a commitment to team teaching.

As our graduates prepare to enter the profession, they are put in a position to test their ability to integrate multiple influences. It is in the overlap of these sometimes conflicting influences that a student will discover relevant questions, solutions and ultimately a voice. We believe that a complex understanding of conditions provides greater vantage and will always produce more relevant and responsible architecture than the application of a prescribed preference for either the theoretical or the practical. To this end, the Terminal Project exists within the edges and, as such, has a greater probability to initiate a dialogue between the student's past experiences and their imminent future. This dialogue is in the margins, always negotiating the extremes; it is what we hope will form the basis of a career.

THE HISTORY: PAST EXCLUSIONS, AND THE COMMITMENT TO INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES

'The thesis process caused [me to realize] the value of tapping into as many resources as possible in order to achieve the greatest potential that can come from a project. In addition, there needs to be a balance of ideas taken from those resources.' Recent Graduate

'...[the school] recognized the long standing need of the practicing architects to better integrate the real world components of the practice of architecture into education. Likewise ... the practicing architect [benefits] from a more meaningful exposure to the talented faculty and students' Local AIA Advisor

The fifth year integrated team program started May 1989, approximately thirteen years ago. Before that, for a number of years the School of Architecture and Design invited local architectural practitioners to review the fifth year students' thesis projects at the end of the spring semester. A series of awkward incidences occurred where a local architect would either speak lengthily on a tangential issue or find faults in the student's work regarding 'real world' issues. This left the student and the faculty in an embarrassing situation. Both the academy and the profession were forced into defensive posi-

STUDENT —————————————————————
Social Rehabilitation in Medellin Columbia

ARCHITECT —————————————————————
Local AIA Member

CONSULTANT —————————————————————
Director Latin American Studies, UL Lafayette

PROFESSOR —————————————————————
Architecture Professor
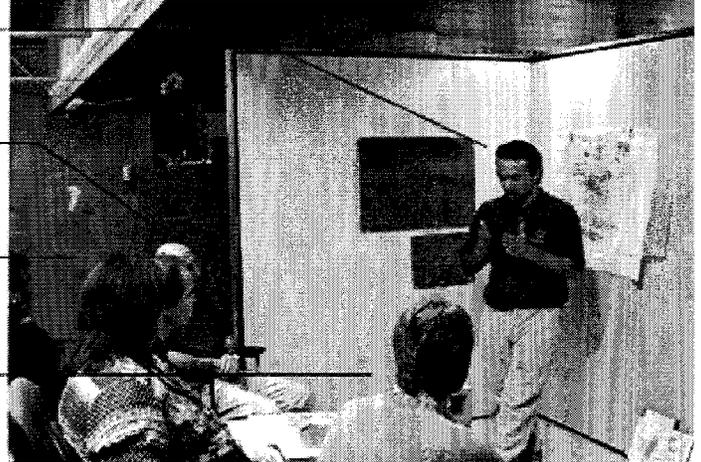
tions. In our yearly pedagogical review many faculty did not want to continue inviting local architects for thesis reviews.

Because of the school's strong relationship with the local AIA chapter, and the faculty realizing the benefits of professional input, the integrated team system was instituted. Instead of eliminating the architects from the final thesis review, we decided to engage them in working with the students during the entire process rather than just criticizing them at the final review. Because the thesis students were having problems developing relevant programs, a consultant who specialized in the field of their thesis project was also engaged in addition to the practicing architect for the next year.

The following year, students were required to find a consultant who could help develop a program for their thesis project and provide the student with thesis specific information not normally available to a student of architecture. Examples of consultant pairings last year include a thesis regarding class struggle in Medellin Columbia paired with the Director of the Latin American Studies as a Consultant, a thesis engaged in local Cajun Culture was paired with a renowned scholar and Professor of Cajun History, and a jazz museum project was paired with a jazz performance faculty member in the School of Music. Through our strong connections to the local AIA chapter, the school was able to provide an architect for each student to complete the team. Each year a pool of local Architects is formed and the Architect chooses a thesis student to work with whom they feel they can inform. Now, when the team reconvenes for final thesis presentations, the relationship is one of support instead of confrontation. The students learn a great deal from working with the architects, and the architects enjoy the new relationship with the students.

In 1990, the school submitted this process to the state licensing board to provide continuing education credit for the architects involved. The board approved the School giving 3 hours of HSW continuing education credit to each architect involved, making them responsible for review of health, safety, and

welfare with each project. This program has grown and evolved into an inclusive, diverse, and adaptable set of relationships.

THE HOW: THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIFTH YEAR

'I feel more comfortable with the idea of the profession . . . It was incredibly exciting to see the two [education and profession] mesh together, which is ultimately what architecture is about.' Recent Graduate

'This professional advisor program is another component of community and offers a wonderful venue for the profession to play a meaningful role in the education of the students.' Local AIA Advisor

In the fall semester of their fifth year (ARCH409), students and faculty assemble a mentoring team relevant for each thesis. For the first two-thirds of the fall semester, the team remains embryonic: one student / two faculty. To begin their thesis investigation, each student develops a theoretical scope of inquiry and a preliminary set of goals. Each student comes to the semester with at least three sites that have been researched and documented the previous summer. The nascent team decides upon a final site and thesis statement. Once the site and thesis statement have been established, the team then grows for the remainder of the two-semesters. The student is paired with, and then begins to meet one-on-one with a practicing architect. This relationship with the practitioner is balanced with an additional advisor from the university, who has particular programmatic or cultural relevance to the thesis being studied. The increase in complexity of the studio structure allows the experience for the student to become much more dynamic.

The Team starts by assisting the student in the research and production of a 'program book'. The bound program book consists of: Thesis, Site, Code & Use Analysis, Precedent Investigations, and Appendix. All research, conclusions, analysis, and appendices begin to integrate the information gathered

from this larger group of advisors and influences. This book provides the structure for the team dynamic as well as for the design process.

The last third of the fall semester and the entirety of the spring semester (Arch410) are devoted to the development of a comprehensive architectural project. The student therefore leads an integrated team of experts that brings together a wide range of expertise and unique voices. In this manner the student's process, from initial notion to thesis criteria through all phases of design, delivers a substantially developed and comprehensive building solution. The process acts as a smaller *round*, with the chorus building with complexity, within the larger *rounds* of a five-year educational sequence. At the edges and overlaps of the thesis process, students are forced to integrate all voices and take ultimate responsibility for the design solutions.

The complete team comes together at all mid-reviews and at the final thesis review. The team sits alongside the jury and is able to question design decisions as well as support the student. The student becomes the point of resolution between perspectives that are, at best, variant but often at odds with each other. Reviews rise above simple critiques of the student's design solution to rich conversations between many professionals as each party tries to figure out why their advice has been mediated into alternate forms – at the center of these discussions is always the student and his or her work.

THE WHY: THE VALUE OF DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED STUDIO, AND HOW IT COMPLETES THE *ROUND*.

'The project became an on-going hands-on activity involving the integration of creative ideas with substantial architecture that can function efficiently in reality.' Recent Graduate

'This Program truly demonstrates a creative initiative to bring the academy and profession together with great benefits and understanding for both.' Local AIA Advisor

Our School is dedicated to an open and pluralistic principle of team teaching. Our terminal design studios take the basic pedagogic attitude of the school and bring it to its logical conclusion by calling upon the student to be team leader and consequently become the active ingredient in his or her own education. Students are put in the position of orchestrating the outcome, identifying the edges and overlaps and finding their voices. Our notion of integrating is equal part introduction and equal part initiation, bringing them together into a logical *round*, and through this shifting responsibility from both the academy and the profession to the initiate.

The inclusion of the local professional community is a direct attempt to avoid the polemical relationship that can occur when practitioners are invited merely as tolerated guests at the final review. Instead of insulating the academy by excluding the contributions of the professional community, we embraced this struggle as an opportunity for a richer educational experience for the student. Value is found by not only asking for final comments regarding professional concerns, but engaging the profession throughout the design process. The integration is similar, but opposite to the shift that happens from high school into the academy. We set the stage for the student to sing.

Our fifth year program has the additional condition of engaging a large number of local practitioners as active educators. By sharing the role of teacher with both the student and the professional community, our faculty strives to create an environment that does not draw sharp lines between practice and educational opportunities. Our goals in the fifth year studio are as much to infuse our local professionals, as it is to enthuse our graduates.

The final year of our program re-describes the heuristic, personal, and process-driven thinking that our first year introduces. The final project calls upon the students to integrate these core ideas and to develop their own attitudes towards architecture and design as a place from which EACH may begin their professional internship. As the student engages the multi-mentor system the dynamics of the profession are pre-described. We try to leave our students with an understanding that they must both make their world and live within the world, that there are both possibilities and probabilities, and that architecture occupies the overlap between finishing and beginning, the academy and the profession, theory and practice.