

Architecture Design Studio: A new option for high school education

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As a volunteer instructor at Rio Rancho High School (RRHS), I observed the need for a different learning environment to better accommodate courses based around design principles and exercises. As a teaching assistant for an Introduction to Drawing course at the University of New Mexico School of Architecture and Planning, I realised there is a deficiency in design education, or a complete lack of exposure to design and aesthetics, in high-school students entering design programmes. I became in-trigued as to how new students made the transition from a traditional high-school environment into a university or advanced design programme. I realized work habits in the studio are different from a typical, lecture-based programme. Studio formats take into consideration how students work and learn, not simply what the student learns. The studio model can also be modified to fulfil a school district's standard requirements.



The work done over two years with the UNM School of Architecture, the Institute for Environmental Education, and Rio Rancho High School Dimensional Design Studio has resulted in a change in the drafting programme into a comprehensive design curriculum that encourages individual responsibility and self-analysis, and group interaction and cooperation. The programme utilises state-of-the-art technology for research and design development. Students are encouraged to present their work and engage in discussions with peers and instructors.



Students, from 14 to 18 years old, work together to develop solutions to complex design problems and programming issues. They also work as peers, helping each other with design problems or with CAD program questions. I have found that students as a group develop faster when they are given the opportunity to learn from their peers.

The programme is still in existence, and students from this programme have gone on to design programmes across the US. There has been interest in reinstating the partnership with UNM SAAP and seeing the programme mature and expand.

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