

[illegible]

Writing in landscape architecture's design education is generally confined to courses like design theory and history and used in presentation of final design ideas along with students' graphics of a designed project. In design studios students are not generally required to submit written work and most presentations, if not all, are oral. Since writing is not systemically incorporated in studios, it is a requirement that displays issues of grammar and correctness, comprehension, expression and organization. While writing is an important means for communicating to real or hypothetical clients, it is not "seen as a tool for learning or engaging in the core activity of landscape architecture, the production of designs". [1] This poster displays in an infographic the results of implementing writing strategies in a design studio in landscape architecture at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. A design studio in summer 2013 had a 'traditional' approach and was used as the control group. This studio was compared to a studio taught in spring 2014 that implemented preparatory writing exercises including supervision, coaching, critique and rubrics borrowed from the Writing Learning Community Course "Beyond the Term Paper: Integrating the Teaching of Research and the Teaching of Writing" that I attended during fall 2013 and winter 2014. The results show that in the studio with writing exercises the average number of grammatical errors decreased by 70% and the complexity factor (lexical density) of their writing assignments by 15%. The readability of texts (Gunning-Fox index) improved slightly and the sentence structure, in general, incorporated more nouns and verbs than pronouns and prepositions. The implementation of these strategies maximized the spatial opportunities of the studio environment by promoting group discussions as well as individual consultations and demonstrated that writing can play a valuable role in design process skills.

## References:

[1] Martin, Roger et al. 1996. Writing in the Design Disciplines. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

--Associate Professor César Torres-Bustamante

## **Beyond Project Description: Writing in Design Studios**

In Landscape Architecture design studios, writing has little resemblance to the traditional or term paper from other disciplines like composition, literature and other English courses. While the design studios outcomes emphasize the creativity and design ability of a project, writing is reduced to an unchecked box in the submission requirements list. In other disciplines like economics, instructors agree that students produce writings that are “mediocre, regurgitative and uninspired” [1] with no evidence of writing and critical thinking.

This presentation will report on collaboration with a writing instructor to implement three strategies to improve students’ writing (and thinking) process: assignment design, clarification of the appropriate audience for the paper and responding to student writing.

Assignment design highlights similarities between the writing process and the design process: both have series of steps that for classification purposes are taught as series of discrete linear steps. Experienced writers use a recursive approach [2], and the design process also moves freely back and forth among its parts. Nevertheless students approach the writing process in a linear sequence presuming that after each step is completed they can move on the next one without ever returning to the previous ones. Additionally, in most of the cases the writing component of a final presentation in a design studio is poorly listed as a description or summary of the design concept. Assignment [re]design asks for a recursive and revisable process that turns “shitty first drafts” into “terrific third drafts” [3], in addition to specific instructions that shift from description into argumentation, from listing of parts into justification of ideas.

Students also face difficulties when there is no apparent audience for whom they are writing: it is assumed that student’s writing informs a reader who is generally less knowledgeable, and in fact students are writing for an instructor that is certainly more knowledgeable, placing the student in a fictitious and problematic situation. Expert writers “think about audience early in the writing process whereas novices don’t” [4], so an early definition of audience will assist students in defining the genre and purpose of their writing.

Finally, the feedback from instructors is the tool that students use to improve their thinking and writing, and students need also an opportunity to rewrite. Generally these opportunities are not given or the instructor emphasizes surface errors instead of focusing of argument and analytical issues.

## References:

[1] Cohen A and J Spencer. 1993. Using Writing Across the Curriculum in Economics.

[2] Dougherty, B. 1984. *Composing choices for writers*. New York: McGraw-Hill

[3] Lamott, Anne 2005. "Shitty First Drafts." *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

[4] Bean, John. *Engaging Ideas: A professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Wiley.

--Associate Professor César Torres-Bustamante