• Paper / Proposal Title:
Making It Work: How architectural attributes impact the productivity of design students

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• Abstract
This research aims to understand how the indoor environment impacts human productivity by focusing on a niche subject group - university design students. While workplace design is a widely investigated topic for understanding productivity among the creative class, research that examines work environments for college students is limited. What environmental attributes do students identify as the most conducive or detrimental to their ability to effectively engage in design work? This study appropriates a qualitative approach to investigate, utilizing anonymous online surveying and in-person interviewing strategies. The participants are undergraduate students at a private American university who are enrolled in one of five design degree programs: environmental and interior design, communication design, fashion design, design studies, or interaction and industrial design. The programs share one building. The online survey asks participants to share their experiences of working in the building, and how various environmental factors relate to those experiences. The questions prompt consideration for the role of architectural attributes, including (but not limited to): air quality and odors, lighting, acoustics, comfort, spatial arrangements, and furnishings. The interview questions are designed to learn about participant work preferences and how the environment has enhanced or hindered their ability to be productive. The interviews included building tours where participants were asked to identify physical locations and features they relate to their experiences. NVIVO was used to code the descriptive and
photographic data collected through the survey and interviews, and used to identify themes among the shared experiences. Technical knowledge concerning the design of the built environment was used to formulate conclusions. Preliminary data suggests that distinct environmental attributes support effective work environments for design students. The attributes include customizable spatial arrangements, accessible yet secure work areas, lighting, acoustics, and perceived indoor air quality. These findings are expected to evolve as the study progresses towards thematic saturation.

This research reveals what undergraduate design students need to be productive in work spaces on campus. This knowledge can be used to design more supportive environments for design students, and to evaluate the adequacy of existing spaces. The long-term goal of this study is to discern the attributes of effective work environments for design students from those for design practitioners; we should not assume that they are the same.

• Authors Biography (200 words each):

Erin Kennedy is in her final year of studies in the field of Environmental and Interior Design at Syracuse University, with key interests in design research, workplace design, and how interior environments impact human health. Outside of the world of design, some of Erin’s academic interests include human geography, sociology, and how each of these disciplines can be used to investigate the impact of the spaces we live in. Erin is passionate about applying her creative talents in whatever ways she can find to envision and create designs that contribute to improving and supporting positive human experiences. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with friends and family and experimenting in forms of creative expression. In the future, she hopes to work for a progressive design firm that is committed to social and environmental sustainability, human-centered design, and making contributions to both the local and global community.

Jody Nyboer, PhD is an Assistant Professor at the School of Design, Syracuse University. She teaches design studio- and lecture-based courses for both the Environmental + Interior Design and the MFA Design programs, and also transdisciplinary design courses including Creative Problem Solving. Nyboer’s range in research and teaching reflect the diversity of her academic disciplines and professional experience. Her research is best defined by formalized studies concerning design, teaching, and creativity and include investigating the relationship of school architecture and creative instruction, creative workplaces, space planning and creative behavior, the relationship of course methods on the creative ability of learners, and how online methods of critique impact the learning experience of Generation Z design students.