

TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE YOUR EDUCATION AND DESIGN JURIES LESS STRESSFUL

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No one needs to tell you that being an architecture student isn't easy. Watching friends take off evenings and weekends while you slave away in studio certainly reminds you of how much time and energy you must devote to your architectural studies. You probably have occasions when you can't help but wonder how or why you got yourself into this situation, and how much better off you might have been if you had chosen another major.

Architecture is undoubtedly one of the most stressful disciplines in the university. For one reason, the requirements of any architectural curriculum are usually extremely rigorous, allowing little flexibility for choosing courses outside the major. For another, the sheer amount of time you spend in studio far exceeds the time other students spend in all their classes on campus. The studio scene itself is wrought with pressure. Problems with noise, crowding, lack of privacy, competition among students, and the uncomfortable feeling that your instructors may appear unannounced at any time contribute to this tension. All-nighter marathons during the weeks before a project is due also exacerbate the stress levels. And finally, the culmination of the term's work, the design jury itself, is also fraught with fear and anxiety.

During the past six years, I have been conducting research on what students, faculty, and practicing architects think about design juries and trying to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of design education. To date, over 800 individuals across the country have participated in this research, either through surveys, interviews, observations during jury sessions, or diaries. In a nutshell, my research has uncovered many serious problems. Students express a high level of dissatisfaction with juries, and they seem to learn relatively little from them. Many students are literally burned out by the time the jury arrives, and the criticism received goes in one ear and out the other. When it's over, they simply go home and crash, forgetting most of what they might have learned when they wake. Does this sound like you--or anyone you know?

Students need not suffer from the jury experience. All too often I have heard quotes like "I was crucified," and "My project was ripped to shreds." Most students and many faculty believe that juries are in need of reform, and I am pleased to report that a few innovative alternatives to design juries have been tried at a handful of schools. For the most part, whether they are called "reviews", "critiques", or "juries", student work is evaluated in almost the same fashion from school to school. As long as cur-

rent techniques continue to dominate our design educational curricula, it is important to know how to reduce stress in design juries and in architectural education. Here are a few tips to help:

1) Begin by telling yourself that you're not going to knock yourself out working hours on end right before your project is due. Learn the art of budgeting your time, a very practical skill which is all but ignored in architectural education, but which is all too crucial in architectural practice as well. Being able to budget your time is truly a prerequisite to reducing stress. If you can't master your own schedule, you're letting others dictate it for you.

Find out as many deadlines as soon as possible. Plot these dates on a calendar for the entire semester or quarter and update it frequently. Post this calendar near your studio desk, and don't lose sight of it! Then, for each week, list all the tasks you need to accomplish in order to meet those major deadlines. Break down large tasks into smaller, do-able ones, and plot these on a more detailed weekly calendar each week of the term. Lastly, for each day, make up a list of specific tasks, following up on the weekly calendar, and do each in order of priority. Make sure your list is realistic and that you can in fact finish what you set out to do.

Set up a work schedule that reflects your bodily rhythms. Some of us reach our peak productivity times early in the morning, others in the afternoon, evenings, or at night. Take the most advantage of when you are at your peak. You might also try accomplishing the task which you least want to do first. In this manner, you'll be less likely to procrastinate. Stay in control of your calendar, even as the final dates of the project arrive. Also, allow as much time as possible (most students need at least a week or two) for the final production of your design project.

2) Don't fall for the all nighter syndrome. Getting plenty of sleep during the nights before a jury can help your performance at the jury immeasurably. If your project is due on the same date as the jury itself, consider adopting a policy as a class that all projects must be turned in to your instructor at least one day ahead of time. Go home, relax, and arrive at the jury well rested. You'll be surprised at what a different experience the jury can be when you aren't forcing yourself just to stay awake.

3) Similarly, try to eat as normal a diet as possible, especially around jury time. Design students typically become junk food junkies right before juries, and all the caffeine and sugar consumed does wonders for your state of mind and your physical stamina!

4) Learn how to relax, not just around jury time, but throughout the term. Look over a few books on stress reduction and buy them, keeping them handy in studio and at home. Collect materials from your university's counseling center: you pay for these services but few students take advantage of them. The most

useful sources for your purposes are those which feature specific techniques for reducing stress, like learning how to breathe, identifying your stress points, and practicing relaxation techniques. Here are a few suggestions which can help you relax:

-Make a face. Scrunch up your face into an exaggerated mask, tightening your facial muscles. Hold it for three seconds, then relax. Repeat. Try the same for your neck, your shoulders, and your hands.

-Take your mind off the stress, even if only for a minute. Imagine the place where you feel most peaceful and relaxed. Keep a picture of this place on your studio desk, the refrigerator door, a mirror, or any place else where you're likely to see it. When you feel stress coming on, glance at this image.

-Think positive thoughts. Don't focus on the negative. Tell yourself you'll do well at the jury. Instead of saying to yourself, "I blew my last jury, so I'll blow this one too." Remember, if you believe in your project and think it is the best you could do, that's what really counts. As some students have told me, "When you go for a job interview, you take your portfolio, not your report card!"

-Give yourself the gift of time. Every week, treat yourself to a bonus hour or two; indulge yourself in something strictly for fun. For instance, put on your favorite music, and sit back and relax, or take a bubble bath. Spoil yourself. Don't feel guilty; you owe it to yourself to have a good time once in awhile.

-If you're angry or had a jury which went poorly, write your feelings in a notebook. Don't worry about what you say, and don't show it to anyone. Keep writing until you have nothing more to say. If it makes you feel better, dramatically destroy what you've written. Stomp on it, shred it, or crumple it up. These symbolic acts release anger and pent-up stress.

Learn from the experiences of students who not only excel in their design studies, but are also able to stay in control and relaxed. I'm working on a book for design students dealing with issues raised in this article as well as others, and I would enjoy hearing from you. Your questions, comments, and suggestions are welcome. You may write to me at the School of Architecture, University of Illinois, 608 East Taft Drive, Champaign, IL 61820.