

Interior Architecture in Australia and Canada

Part Two: A Comparative Study of the Development of University Education for Interior Designers/Architects

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Abstract

This paper is the second in a series of comparative studies between education and practice in Canada and Australia. The similarities in the educational structure at universities within Australia and between Australia and Canada causes concern as we find ourselves in a global competitive market place. It is paramount that interior design education directs industry, and not be dictated by short-term industry demands. For this to occur, national educational bodies need to examine their existing programs in respect to one another, develop a distinctive approach in what they teach, and develop better communications with industry in order to ensure the sharing of valuable knowledge gained through project work.

Keywords

Interior Design Architecture Canada Australia Post Graduate Education Life-long Learning

Education and Continual Professional Development in Australia and Canada

Canadian Undergraduate/Graduate Education Courses

Canada and the United States share the credit for the maturation of formal education, CPD and standards for *Professional Interior Design Status*. According to Smith (1987), the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts in 1904 offered the first Interior Decorating course; its name was changed to the Parsons School of Design in 1940. Other private schools followed suit soon after. The first university interiors program was established in the mid-1920s at the University of Washington in Seattle. In Canada, the University of Manitoba established the first Interior Decoration Diploma in 1938, and changed it to a four-year degree in 1945. However, it was "...not until the 1960s and 70s, a time of rapid expansion in higher education, that both graduate and undergraduate Interior Design programs became more common in ...universities throughout North America. One of the earliest doctoral programs

with an Interior Design focus was offered in the mid-1960s at Florida State University. The University of Missouri graduated its first doctoral candidate in 1972. The University of Tennessee established its multi-disciplinary doctoral program with an emphasis on environmental factors in the early 1970s” (White and Dickson 1994).

The University of Manitoba offered the first Canadian post-graduate program in 1994. They offer a Masters of Interior Design, a Masters of Facility Management by distance, and an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. The faculty is currently developing a program in teaching, research and service for planning and design of sustainable human environments, involving the resources of all five programs in the faculty and other units in the university, in collaboration with the municipal government. Their research activities involve *The Canadian Institute of Built Environment Design* and their *Partners Program*. Table 1 outlines undergraduate/graduate degrees¹ operational in Canada in 1998. Currently four degree programs in Interior Design exist, with approximately 130 graduates annually.

Table 1: Canadian Undergraduate/Graduate Interior Design Programs

This table shows when and where Canadian programs were established. It indicates the number of annual undergraduates completing degrees and graduates enrolled. There is a notable difference between number of programs offered in Canada and Australia.

Institution	Interior Design Course Established	Undergraduate Duration 1998	1998 Numbers
Kwantlen University/College ² Surrey, BC	Diploma est. 1970s Degree est. 1991	4 years full-time/equivalent	20
Mount Royal College ³ Calgary, Alberta	Diploma est. 1970s Degree est. 1998	4 years full-time/equivalent	35 (est. grads in 2001)
Ryerson ⁴ Toronto, Ontario	Diploma est. 1950s Degree est. mid-1968	4 years full-time/equivalent	60
University of Manitoba ⁵ Winnipeg, Manitoba	Diploma est. 1938 Degree est. mid-1945 Masters est. 1994	5 years full-time/equivalent	16 5 enrolled, no graduates
			Annual estimated graduating undergraduates: 130 Total enrolled graduates 1998: 5

Source: Author

¹ Although 23 diploma and four degree programs exist across Canada in Interior Design; only the degree programs were included as relevant to this study.

² Klinkhammer (1998), the Head of the Interior Design Program at Kwantlen provided information. The degree program is in partnership with University of British Columbia.

³ McFarlane (1998), Head of the Interior Design Program at Mount Royal provided information.

⁴ Kelly (1998), Head of the Interior Design Program at Ryerson provided information.

⁵ Cox (1998), Dean, Faculty of Architecture and Acting head of Interior Design, University of Manitoba provided information. The Interior Design degree is changing to a three year Environmental Design Bachelor, shared by four professions with options in the last three semesters towards professional specialty in either Interior Design, architecture, landscape architecture and city planning. Followed by a two year professional masters in each discipline. Interior Design will retain its' research masters.

Australian Undergraduate/Graduate Education Courses

The first Australia Interior Design program started in 1942 at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Melbourne. RMIT's and subsequent programs started teaching primarily decorative courses. They were taught in technical colleges, and students were trained in how to apply materials and finishes. The seventies boom in Interior Design practice influenced these programs. Professionals demanded that graduates being employed in Interior Design and Architectural practices had more knowledge of structures, technical skills, and were educated to deal with complex issues in design.

The majority of programs offered remained in technical schools until a government policy in the late-80s transformed a number of technical schools into universities of technology. At this time Interior Design degrees sprang up in most of the states. Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were each offering two degrees by the late 90s. Australia offers nine undergraduate degrees, big in comparison to Canada's four, considering a ten million person population spread (Canada being the largest). The majority of programs that started as three-year diplomas in the sixties/seventies became four-year degrees with honors by 1997. This trend supports the international education standards of Interior Design/Architecture.⁶ Table 2 depicts the undergraduate degrees available in Australia. Annually, Australian universities average 265 Interior Design graduates. RMIT introduced the first Interior Design masters and doctorate in the mid-90s. Subsequently, the University of South Australia and Curtin introduced Interior Design Masters programs.

Table 2: Australian Undergraduate/Graduate Interior Design Programs

This table shows when and where Australian programs were established. It indicates the number of annual undergraduates completing degrees and graduates enrolled. The difference between number of programs offered and graduates in Canada and Australia is notable: although the population in Canada is ten million more, they have 170 less graduates than Australia.

Institution	Interior Design course Established	Undergraduate duration 1998	1998 Numbers
RMIT Melbourne, Victoria	Diploma est. 1942 Degree est. late-1970s Masters est. mid-1990s	4 years full-time/equivalent 1 year full-time/equivalent	45 12 enrolled, 8 graduates
Swinbourne ⁷ Melbourne, Victoria	Degree est. 1997	4 years full-time/equivalent	30 (est. grads in 2000)
University of Technology ⁸ , Sydney Sydney, NSW	Diploma est. 1975 Degree est. 1979	4 years full-time/equivalent	40
University Of New South ⁹ Wales Sydney, NSW	Degree est. mid-1970s	4 years full-time/equivalent	40 (est. grads in 2001)
Queensland University of Technology ¹⁰ Brisbane, Queensland	Degree est. 1987 Grad. Dip. ID est. 1990 MBE (Research)	3 years full-time/equivalent 1 year full-time/equivalent	45
Griffith University Brisbane, Queensland	Associate Diploma est. 1980 Degree est. 1997	3 years full-time/equivalent	20

⁶ Although approximately five diploma and four degree programs exists across Australia in Interior Design; only the degree programs were included as relevant to my study.

⁷ Keen (1998), Head of the Interior Design Program at Swinbourne provided information.

⁸ Verghese (1998), Head of the Interior Design Program at UTS provided information.

⁹ Stephens (1998), Head of the Interior Design Program at UNSW provided information.

¹⁰ Franz (1998), Head of the Interior Design Program at QUT provided information. [

University of South Australia Adelaide, South Australia	Certificate est. 1964 Degree est. 1983 M Arch. & M Design	4 years full-time/equivalent	25
Curtin University of Technology Perth, Western Australia	Degree est. 1989 Masters est. 1998	4 years full-time/equivalent	20
Northern Territories University Darwin, Northern Territories	Degree est. 1996	3 years full-time/equivalent	5 (est. grads in 2001)

Annual estimated
graduating
Undergraduates 1998: **265**

Source: Author

Underpinning of Undergraduate Education

The North American adoption of the Bauhaus style of design education in the 1940s is explained by Droste (1990). The arrival in the States of Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius in 1937 brought to architectural schools the “New Bauhaus”. These founders had a pervasive influence on architectural education. Interior Design programs offered in Architecture schools in North America and Australia were strongly influenced by this Bauhaus education model. Many Architectural/Interior Design schools adopted the Bauhaus style of studio-based teaching across North America. The Bauhaus model of studio-based learning, which is still used today, is evident in the programs affiliated with architectural schools. The education philosophy was based on three key areas:

- An understanding of material and developing craft training to express the intrinsic qualities of the materials. Students were encouraged to develop a concern for purity and simplicity of form and appreciate the properties of materials, colour and texture.
- The theoretical exploration of design would be discussed at length in a studio forum.
- The integration of theory and practice as a fundamental principle [Droste, Magdalena: 1990]

Design schools at universities do not promote themselves by their philosophy in design, nor do they differentiate themselves from other similar programs by offering a focus on a specialised field of interior design practice such as tropical or environmental sustainable design. When researching the number of interior design degree programs in Australia, it is interesting to note that not one university commented on an area of specialty. For prospective students to select from the various interior design programs available within Australia, it seems their choice would be influenced primarily by geography. The risk of lowered standards is increased due to competition between Australian universities for international full fee paying students. These universities may be forced to relax their standards in order to remain within the education market, as they find they are competing with international and/or national universities that may be far less rigorous academically than their own. Schools may gain a competitive edge through better national promotion of their approach to interior design education and their particular areas of strengths and specialties.

Current Debates in Formal Education

There is debate in the industry regarding the university’s role in the education of Interior Designers. Through practice demands, the boundaries of design education are becoming narrower, asking the educator to deliver graduates for production—which has a short shelf

life¹¹. Schon (1988, p. 98) raises an interesting question "...can the prevailing concepts of professional education ever yield a curriculum adequate to the complex, unstable, uncertain and conflicting worlds of practice?" Henderson (1985a p183) suggests that "the multiplicity of voices in design education is due to the confusion in the design world in general. Boundaries between disciplines are regularly crossed by practitioners from other fields. As the fight for turf - employment, new projects, etc. - intensifies, the blurring of these boundaries will also intensify. The academy inevitably, becomes another battleground". The demand by industry for education institutions to produce graduates that meet their current needs is irresponsible, and assumes education should take on the role of training rather than taking on the role of exploration and challenging current practice by looking at the broader picture.

Current information in the industry is gained primarily through project-based learning. As firms guard this information closely, it is not fed back into education or to other members of the design community. This experience is hidden in order to gain competitive advantage in the industry. What practitioners don't recognise is that this hoarding of information results in everyone reinventing the wheel, and therefore, limits industry advancement of a body of knowledge. In education, without this valuable resource of information, educators can only rely on their own experience and research. The very thing that practitioners want graduates to know—*up to date knowledge*—is actually being withheld from them. Most professional Interior Designers have little time to publish their material. Schon (1983) recommends collaboration between researchers and practitioners to publish findings on projects, to augment the stylistic information that proliferates the Design industry. It is no wonder that students orient themselves to stylistic approaches to Interior Design, as there is little in the way of published literature of substance. Practitioners must see a way through this competition for the advancement of Interior Design.

Conclusions and Further Research

The last 20 years have heralded an immense change in the profession internationally, touching all areas of the developing world. Swift changes in building occupancy, re-engineering of businesses, and changes in life-working patterns have made Interior Design a more active area with a need for better-educated specialists in interior building design. Due to increased work in the area, the profession has gained momentum and influence. With demand steadily increasing for specialists in Interior Architecture. Rapid changes in commercial interiors, be they retail, offices or health-care, give scope for research and practice that has not been there in the past. CPD, graduate education and improved undergraduate education are now available for individuals.

There are a lot of similarities between the two countries in terms of professional development, such as: the underpinning of undergraduate education, population rise, building booms and busts, and cultural and social basis as British Commonwealth countries. Differences of note are: Canada is further ahead in the development of graduate education and research, and has higher standards for gaining and maintaining professional Interior Design status. Australia

¹¹ The battle between a more generalist education and one that will turn out a person who can work the moment they start their job.

offers a better individual design identity and a strong multicultural design base with their work in, and immigration from, South-east Asia.

A body of knowledge in the field will empower the profession. In Australia, much needed research has started in the region, with a handful of educators doing their Ph.D.s in the country in the past five years. Educators and practitioners need to think about how to assist Interior Designers to capitalise on the vast opportunities opening in the field and how individuals will cope with and continue to grow in this exciting new world. Education has started to respond to these changes by providing more flexible programs and distance education, involving CPD and offering post-graduate degrees in partnership with industry. However, unless practise is willing to 'share' industry experience with education bodies, the information provided at CPD level will remain singularly focussed.

Universities also need to analyse what they teach and identify an area unique to either their region or specialise in an area desperately requiring research within design practice.

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