

INNOVATION

How
will
designers
return
to
the
studio?





REFRAMING INDUSTRIAL DESIGN EDUCATION FOR THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Reflecting on the experiences of learning and teaching industrial design over the past year, now is the time to rethink and reframe the educational environment with new perspectives. To help us gather a broad range of insights, we asked a diverse group of academia stakeholders

ranging from undergraduate and graduate students to teaching practitioners and full-time educators about their experiences and their vision for design education in the post-pandemic era.

What teaching practices (including modalities) did you find important in advancing design education during this past year of the pandemic? How will you build upon them as schools move forward into the post-pandemic era?

“So how did we get through 2020 and still teach, learn, and practice design? First, we didn’t forget to play and have fun. We looked at the virtual format as a new tool or toy to figure out and explore. Students helped to create creative ways to engage with the class, the project, and the world beyond the screen. Did online teaching and learning have its limitations? Several. Were there mistakes and failures? YES! (What design process doesn’t?) Yet, the studio delivered some surprisingly good projects. **It always amazes me, if you trust in the next generations and let their creativity and curiosity be the moving force, there will never be limitations to what we can accomplish.** We even developed ways to create a virtual Rube Goldberg machine just to prove that people restrict themselves with their own closed mindsets.

With all of that being said, is this the new normal? I would ask what is normal. We will build on our experiences during this time of isolation to master another tool to integrate into our toolboxes. **Just imagine using the tools of the future mixed with being fluent in ‘human’ to create better people for the world through design. Isn’t that why we are in design and design education?”**

—Owen Foster, co-founder/director of SHIFT and
Aether Global Education

"As we move into academic life after the pandemic, we will emerge into a different space in the teaching studio, one more closely aligned with the 21st century design industry. Our students will have to navigate as design ninjas in an environment that is both IRL (in real life) and URL, constantly and effortlessly evolving and shifting—which needs to be integrated into course learning objectives so that our institutions can support this shift with resources. We have learned that our students can thrive as they work at home with simple hand tools, easy-to-find materials, a laptop, a tablet, and an inexpensive 3D filament printer. Is this perhaps the mobile 'shop' of the future? Could students own an institution-provided mobile personal 'design and build' kit that supports creative thinking and making? Did we outgrow the costly and inefficient static shop and studio space on campus?"

There are more evolved ways to do kinesthetic learning!

By integrating mobile flexibility into all aspects of students' education, we will truly prepare them for their future life in a rapidly changing creative world. Exposing students to fabrication workflows with exterior services will better prepare them for the reality of working in a design studio. **We as educators need to push our institutions to shift the flow of funding toward flexible technology solutions that are placed in the hands of students.** This will support a new teaching/learning paradigm, which we can continue to evolve and create and support moving forward."

—Leslie Speer, IDSA, founding chair, product design, MICA

ID students, educators, and practitioners. What do you anticipate will be important skills in ID education as we move into the post-pandemic education environment?

"COVID-19 has greatly influenced the way people communicate in both work and life. Within the field of industrial design, it has redefined the way designers conduct user interviews. Consequently, post-pandemic ID education needs to reemphasize and reflect on the importance of one fundamental skill, communication, which has greatly evolved in the context of the virtual world. Addressing questions such as: How can we effectively attract and keep interviewees' attention by redesigning the key touchpoints of the interview process? How can we facilitate highly engaging conversations through modified discussion guides and suitable interactive online platforms/software? How can we build trust with the interviewees through virtual ice-breaking exercises and purposefully capture both qualitative and quantitative data from virtual interviews?"

More consideration needs to be added into the virtual interaction process, and the same is true for post-pandemic ID education. We need to not only be more empathetic, respectful, and patient with our students (and interviewees) but also add an extra humanity-centered layer to consider their current situations. **It is going to take more effort, more commitment, and more time to understand people and focus on humanity-centeredness to adapt to the post-pandemic environment with heart.**"

—Sheng-Hung Lee, IDSA, researcher at MIT AgeLab, designer at MIT xPRO, and vice chair at IDSA Boston

"I hope the days of boring line-ups of people with similar background, race, and sex are gone. Minority students deserve representation during their education, and now that mostly everyone is connected through the internet, designers are only a message away. More than that, we have all seen proof that leading with compassion rather than competition creates more resilient programs and people. This upcoming generation of students will no longer be motivated to go to schools solely based on a high ranking or to tolerate a competitive studio culture. As students, when the pandemic moved our studio spaces online, we did not wish for a low retention rate to motivate us; we wished for supplies and support. The universities that provided Wi-Fi, laptops, licenses and more were the ones many of us wished we went to. **We have all learned that it is not about who is the best but who can show their best**, not through hot sketches on the wall but through the supportive environment we all crave as humans."

—Dasha Florov, S/IDSA, 2021 ID graduate

What opportunities do we have to address diversity in ID education building on what you learned this past year? What would you like to see in the future post-pandemic?

"The pandemic magnified problems in ID education, such as the lack of diversity. This comes as no surprise since ID education feels like a pay-to-win system. As an incoming freshman, I remember spending nearly \$3,000 on the required Wacoms and supplies in the first week. This turned away many minority students. I cannot imagine what being a new ID student is like in 2021. The same expensive supplies I bought three years ago likely seem a whole lot more expensive due to the current economy. **Due to the unnecessarily high opportunity cost to step foot into an ID program, classrooms are often made up of students from very affluent backgrounds**—those not much affected by the economic downturn or at all. Going forward, I hope that universities make the tools required to access a design education within reach for students of any background."

—Diego Almaraz, S/IDSA, 2021 ID graduate,
San José State University

What are the takeaways? The truth is, no one knows yet the full extent to which the pandemic has changed ID education. We recognize that we do need to pay attention to the questions being raised, listen to each other, and work together. After all, this past year has proven that how we learn and teach can be done quite differently in ways we never dared envision (namely, teaching an industrial design studio online). We shouldn't ignore that the needs of institutions, educators, and students have shifted and holes in the system have been magnified. As we move forward, we must strive to create solutions that will make ID education more inclusive, more diverse, more responsive to the

humans design serves, restoring the avant-garde of radical thinking, teaching, and doing that used to characterize it.

Action item: In this spirit, please pick a question and share your response with us on Twitter or send us an email. Follow us on Twitter @academia360_ID and join the conversation using the hashtag #ACADEMIA360_ID.

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