

EDUCATIONAL DESIGN CENSUS V2.0

A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE LOOK INTO WHO TEACHES I.D.

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What is the make-up of industrial design (I.D.) faculty in the U.S.? How diverse are they in terms of gender, ethnicity, background, and experiences? What types of degrees do I.D. faculty have and where did they earn them? Those are the fundamental research questions that drive this ongoing research. This rationale is based on the notion that being taught by diverse faculty and being exposed to a wide variety of role models, might support increased diversity amongst design students and future young professionals. Currently there is inconclusive data (if any) available focused on the demographics of industrial design educators. In response the research team pursued the “industrial design education census”, which is now in its second round of data collection. The first iteration revealed unexpected patterns in the career paths of design educators. For the second iteration the research team added qualitative interviews to a revised survey in order to uncover further details. Our goal of this research is to craft a series of best practices for the purpose of achieving greater diversity in students, faculty, and ultimately in the design profession.

Keywords: Diversity, Educators, Tenure, Barriers, Mentorship

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal from the very beginning of this investigation has been to seek best practices to grow diversity within the profession of industrial design. Reputable sources including the Harvard Business Review (Gompers and Kovvali, 2018), Forbes (Strauss, 2018), and the National Science Foundation (Bichsel and McChesney), have expressed the numerous advantages of cultivating a more diverse workforce, including the correlation of diverse teams with innovative practices. Additionally, design is by nature a collaborative act and this collaboration is made stronger when teams are supported by a diversity of expertise and lived experiences. While the student body changes annually, the research team has been curious about the element of design education that is consistent year after year: the instructing faculty. The question that initiated this inquiry was: does the diversity of the teaching faculty create an impact on the level of diversity of the student body?

In 2021, the team of researchers made, distributed, and shared the results of their initial survey. Information gathered from this survey led to the first-ever published demographic data about industrial design educators in the United States. While the team uncovered meaningful insights, they recognized the potential in continuing the research. Therefore, it was decided to improve the survey, striving to increase the number of responses, and engaging with industrial design faculty through interviews. In this paper the results, implications, and next steps are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the broader impact of diverse faculty, the team investigated numerous publications on diversity in the educational workspace as well as various efforts to support underrepresented and under-supported populations. Frank and Fearless (Parker et al., 2018), a publication which followed a program designed to support Australian faculty from lecturer to associate professors, documented many of the struggles that are unique to women in academia. The study revealed that women have a higher chance of being derailed by family commitments in contrast to their male counterparts. It also disclosed that many women utilized a leadership style that was less likely to be valued or recognized by their peers and superiors. To fight against these trends, the Australian program championed three responses. The first was to bring in male and female guest speakers to talk candidly about their experiences of going through the tenure and promotion process. The second was to provide portfolio feedback sessions for female tenure-seeking faculty who were constructing their dossier. The third intervention was an outcropping of the first two initiatives: many of the guest lecturers and portfolio reviewers became mentors to the younger female faculty during their advancement process.

Broadening the research team's understanding, Step Up and Lead for Equality (KSA, 2023) stressed that economic and civic prosperity both hinge intrinsically on educational opportunity. The impetus for this study was a response to the loss of low skill, well-paying jobs from the 1970s to the 2020's. As a result, the middle class shrunk by 23% and created vastly different outcomes for low-income students and students of color. These demographic groups, in turn, experienced additional barriers to education including lower acceptance rate to higher education institutions, low levels of degree attainment, and inferior college experiences relative to other institutions. The degree of dissimilar college experiences occurred not only in elevated student to teacher ratios, but also in lower participation in study abroad, fewer opportunities to engage in capstone projects, and less access to undergraduate research.

The Feminization of the Department Chair (Kibria, 2023) revealed a rarely discussed trend. In this paper, the author pointed out a disturbing dichotomy. On one hand, women, especially women of color, are generally underrepresented in full professor and top administration roles. On the other hand, and despite such inequalities, women are well represented in the role of academic department chairs. Using the department chair role from the University of the Sacred Heart as a base line, the study revealed that the essential responsibilities of the department chair have more than doubled in the past 25 years. Specific aspects of these responsibilities are more deeply felt by female department chairs who spent more time, compared to their male peers, on tasks such as student advising, faculty mentoring, and local committee work. It was also noted that service burdens are especially hard for faculty of color who face added pressure to serve on diversity and inclusion initiatives. To make matters more challenging, many of the chair's contributions in a contemporary context are considered "unpromotable tasks" that receive little to no credit in promotion and merit evaluations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The original survey, conducted in 2021, was modified by reducing the number of questions asked by 30%. Several questions were also reworded to make them more inclusive. For instance, questions about disability were expanded to include those that are outwardly apparent, such as limited mobility, and those that are unseen, such as dyslexia or diabetes. This was largely a response to the outcomes of the first survey, where none of the respondents reported having a disability. Furthermore, the research team took a more involved stance with the distribution of the survey. In addition to disseminating it on the LinkedIn platform, faculty from over 30 schools were personally invited to participate. While this might have created some bias due to the nature of the team's network, it drastically increased the number of responses.

While many of our prompts were streamlined, the data collection was expanded to include qualitative interviews. Each interview was limited to thirty minutes and provided the team with the opportunity to more accurately understand the individual journey that each faculty experiences throughout their career.

4. RESULTS

In the second round of the Industrial Design Education Census survey, conducted in 2022, 61 responses were gathered, which more than doubled the first year's numbers. Of the respondents, 54.1% identified as male and 45.9% identified as female. None of the respondents identified as non-binary. The racial breakdown was 72% white, 8% Hispanic, 2% black, and 15% Asian, with 3% opting not to answer.

Of the faculty surveyed, 13 were adjunct or visiting professors, 18 non-tenure track, 10 assistant professors, 13 associate professors, and 7 were full professors. Notably, almost half, 49.1% of the faculty in this data set, are in a non-tenure track position.

The six qualitative interviews offered vastly different employment journeys. Two were industry converts who pursued an advanced degree specifically with the intent to teach full time. The young faculty adjunct didn't formally apply to the position and was hired directly for their prototyping expertise. The visiting professor sought out the position because teaching fuels their business and their business experiences fuel their teaching. The international PhD was especially interested in research and its potential for positive social impact. And the seasoned adjunct professor viewed moving from institution to institution as an opportunity to invest into continual growth.

5. DISCUSSION

Even though the experiences of each person interviewed were varied, some trends did emerge: growth, learning, and the opportunity to make a positive impact draws people to teaching. Hiring faculty who bring with them a range of experiences and a desire to create a positive impact in the next generation of designers are key to a strong education. Despite this aspiration and after two years of study, the data

strongly suggests that there is a notable lack of racial diversity amongst industrial design faculty in higher education. This results in the majority of today's I.D. students lacking the fundamental influence from the very populations that industrial designers are tasked to serve.

With the large amount of non-tenure track faculty responding this year, the impact that this role has on the education of industrial design is clear. In some instances, these appointments are by the nature of the institution, select private colleges. In other instances, these appointments are the nature of the employment line offered, such as term faculty or temporary teaching roles at public institutions. The data is starting to reveal additional details in the public institution vs private institution debate. The team learned that women, who responded to the survey, were more likely than men to earn their terminal degree from a private institution.

It is common for tenured or tenure-track faculty to start as adjuncts, similar to the concept of a test drive. However, many teaching appointments and hiring practices are not consistent. On one side of the spectrum, there is an invitation and a fast track to teaching, while on the other side, there is an intensive series of interviews and student body lectures that are mandated precursors to gaining employment. Among the tenure track respondents, more women were pre-tenure while most men were post-tenure. Tenured faculty are responsible for assessing, not only incoming faculty candidates, but also promotion and tenure packages. This readily translates to the majority of hiring and promotion decisions across the country being largely influenced by men.

The data has also shown a trend of the increased mobility of women in their teaching career in contrast to men. The percentage of women who have worked in 2 or less institutions was 16% while the percentage of men who worked in 2 or less schools was 32%. Oppositely, the percentage of women who have worked in 3 or more schools was 29% while the percentage of men who worked in 3 or more schools was 23%. This suggests that women consistently face the additional burden of multiple relocations as they navigate a career path in higher education.

6. CONCLUSION

In the course of running this survey our team has been at the forefront of discovering numerous unexpected and highly interesting results. At the same time, the data has suggested trends that many have long held to be true. Amongst the respondents to the survey, the majority of industrial design educators are both white and male. Knowing this, we are drawn back to the questions of: How can we support and boost diversity among industrial design faculty? While this research has made major strides and uncovered new information, it was decided to revise and repeat the survey in 2023 with the additional intent of gathering qualitative data by engaging platforms such as the world café round table at the IDSA Education Symposium during the 2023 International Design Conference (IDC).

In these interactions, the team seeks to answer questions such as: Did current faculty feel represented by their faculty when they were in school? What are the impacts of the tenure process? Do faculty have industry experience? And what are the demographics of each faculty member's students?

7. REFERENCES

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