



The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers
in higher education

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Examples from Australian universities

Melbourne 2030: Infusing Design Research into a Student Project

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Broad discipline area:

Architecture and Building

- Industrial Design & Interior Design

Year level:

- Honours and Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma

TRN strategy:

- Design learning activities around contemporary research issues

Teaching and learning context:

- Assessment (Assignment)
- Real world learning/work integrated learning
- Group/team work
- Research activity

Brief description of the initiative:

Background

What will Melbourne be like in the year 2030? What sort of new products and spaces, services and systems will be needed to cope with a population expected to number 1,000,000 more residents than today, where one person in four will be over 65 (up from one in nine)? Australian Bureau of Statistics projections suggest there will be fewer babies being born, people living longer and more people living in single-dwelling households. By making design students aware of social research issues and methods, they are empowered to be problem solvers able to meet the needs of the demographic shift in society. This subject is based on the Victorian Government Department of Infrastructure planning document, entitled Melbourne 2030, which aims to control the development of the built environment of Melbourne.

This Honours and Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate level subject, entitled *Melbourne 2030 - Demographic Shift*, takes the hitherto untested combination of Industrial Design and Interior Design students. In 2006 - 2007 there were about 40 - 50 students who were divided into eight mixed-discipline teams and assigned the challenge of re-developing a railway station along the St Kilda railway line. The skills of each of the design professions are needed as the teams collectively design better waiting rooms, bike lockers, vending machines, public toilets and other public services than could be achieved by the separate disciplines acting alone. This subject

has been developed by a team of five members of staff (including design theorists and design practitioners currently working in industry) over the last four years and advances the position that designers need to work in multidisciplinary teams and should draw upon social research in order to design more appropriately for the needs of the ageing society.

The design practitioners speak to the students about the manufacture, the design, the construction and the design object, while the academic discusses research issues that will impact upon the design process, such as how people respond to designs, and what other designers have done in the past. The students learn that consideration of a design space goes beyond the practical. Staff take on the role of the Senior Designer and allocate each student a responsibility just as would happen in a real design job – Project Manager, Research Manager, Communication Manager, Presentation Manager, Design Manager. One of the successes of this subject is that graduates have an increased awareness of each other's profession and so can speak a common design language when they do secure employment in multi-discipline design companies. The academics involved in this unit consider it a triumph that Industrial Designers have often left the course to work as Interior Designers or engage in post-graduate degrees in the opposing discipline area. Student feedback indicates the students enjoy the opportunity to put a social message behind their design piece. Students also report that the assignment had practical benefits, such as being a design item that they can include on their resume. The student design projects were exhibited in public and have been published in design journals. Graduate students who have undergone the subject in previous years give workshops and assess current students.

This initiative is part of the HDG411/511 Honours Research subject, which is undertaken by students in the combined Bachelor of Design (Industrial Design) Honours and Bachelor of Design (Interior Design) Honours programs and Graduate Certificate of Design and Graduate Diploma programs.

Research and Entrepreneurialism

The teaching of sustainability at the Faculty of Design is entrepreneurial in many ways. Reflecting industry expectations, Industrial Design, Interior Design and Product Design Engineering students at Honours, Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma level have been taught together in multidisciplinary groups with teachers from all disciplines. The four members of staff involved have been encouraged to develop Units of Study which respond to National Research Priorities and associated Priority Goals (as defined by the Australian Research Council). For this reason the themes of the Studios have been “the environmental impacts of tourism” in 2003, sustainable workplace design” in 2004, “the efficient and sustainable use of water” in 2005, “sustainability at Swinburne University” in 2006.

For further details:

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